

ANC's municipal success story

STEVE TSHWETE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY: PROUD RECORD OF EXCELLENT SERVICE DELIVERY

» Democratic Alliance acknowledges it is one of best performing in country.

Eric Naki

It is rare in post-apartheid South Africa for residents and the opposition to express satisfaction over service delivery by a public entity, but all are happy at Mpumalanga's Steve Tshwete local municipality, where service turnaround is 48 hours with zero potholes.

"We don't compromise on service delivery, we stick to our 48 hour turn-around undertaking," said Steve Tshwete's executive mayor Diphala Motsepe.

His municipality received a clean audit during the 2019/20 financial year from the auditor-general (AG) – one of many such achievements in the last 20 years. The leadership boasted about a 98% revenue collection.

Even in the 2018/19 financial year, the municipality's books were clean, with just a few queries from the AG's office which were quickly attended to and corrected.

"In 2019/20 we managed to achieve a 100% audit outcome of which we are proud. Our biggest gift is the response of the residents, who pay for the services rendered to them," Motsepe said.

When a municipality run by the ANC is acknowledged by the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) as one of the best performing in the country, you have no reason to doubt the truthfulness that.

The DA concurred with Motsepe and municipal manager Bheki Khenisa about efficient service delivery.

DA's caucus leader Johann Dyason said the ANC delivered



SITTING PRETTY. Steve Tshwete local municipality executive mayor Diphala Motsepe, front, and municipal manager Bheki Khenisa are proud of their achievements. Picture: Nigel Sibanda

because of pressure from them.

"We are one of the best municipalities in the country. They make a couple of mistakes, but those are quickly rectified. As the DA, we put pressure on the municipality and we will fight to keep it like that and to ensure people's money is spent on people," Dyason said.

Hendrik Niemann, DA ward 14 councillor, praised the financial management of Steve Tshwete, saying that the municipality had been able to invest a whopping R350 million in the bank, which was rare in SA municipalities.

But he was concerned that the municipal public accounts committee was chaired by the ANC instead of the opposition, as was

a tradition.

Motsepe said they respond to residents' complaints – including burst water and sewage pipes and blockages, electricity faults and potholes – within 48 hours.

But they even tried to make it 24 hours for a pothole to be repaired.

"We don't compromise on service delivery here at Steve Tshwete," Motsepe said.

He attributed the success to good teamwork and an excellent top management structure led by Khenisa.

"We walk together in whatever we do. We make sure there is no political interference, we don't want political tension to hinder service delivery," he said.

We walk together in whatever we do

The municipality received a good report from the AG for its upgraded infrastructure.

They took the advice from the AG to heart and corrected any audit shortcomings to ensure they don't feature in future AG reports.

On the advice of the AG, the municipality migrated its whopping R10 billion asset register from Excel to automation, making it easy to access and monitor at the press of a button.

The municipality conducted data-cleansing to remove all hindrances to service delivery and improved financial controls to be in line with audit standards and Public Finance Management Act stipulations.

"We don't sweep anything under the carpet here. We resolve all matters raised by the auditor-general 100% so that we can improve

our financial management performance," Motsepe said.

Khenisa strongly believed they were reaping the fruits of foresight of previous post-1994 leaders who inculcated a culture of payment for services by all rate-payers, including residents, businesses and government entities.

They reached out to the private sector to work with the municipality to contribute to deliver services and grow the local economy. The private sector participates in local economic development and empowering of small enterprises.

The bigger business – particularly the mining houses – had come to the party and participated in housing delivery.

Old infrastructure had been a huge headache in the municipality, with regular leaks, but that's in the past. A programme to replace asbestos piping with PVC was undertaken and was ongoing.

"We saved water since we changed to PVC. Maintenance is key to us," Motsepe said.

The municipality was showered with accolades by the AG for its infrastructure upgrade.

According to Khenisa, the sealing of roads was done every year. He said while National Treasury required that 8% of the roads budget should go to maintenance, the municipality spent 6% of their budget on maintenance and the rest to build new roads.

The municipality, which had a population of over 300 000, was the fastest growing in Mpumalanga with a 4.4% population growth, of whom the majority were migrants.

But the DA's local political head, Morgan Bruiners, was concerned about the neglected and derelict Nasaret Stadium which was repaired at a cost of R500 000.

"They have a security company to guard this stadium day and night, but it is a white elephant," Bruiners said.

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Disgruntled residents complain about lack of jobs

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For many residents of Steve Tshwete local municipality, service delivery is not a problem. But the lack of jobs is a big issue.

The complaints of many residents interviewed had nothing to do with mainstream municipal service delivery issues, but a common cry for jobs.

The evidence of unemployment could be seen in the numerous young people roaming the streets and some sitting idle in Mhluzi, Nasaret, Rockdale and Extension 24 and other townships.

"We have no problem with service delivery here. What we

need are jobs," said Tholakele Mahlangu, 36, an unemployed mother of two.

She lived on the grants of her children, aged nine and 16 year, in an RDP house in Extension 24.

After her partner was jailed, she had no option but to look for employment, but she had no joy.

"The municipality does not give us jobs, they give it to their friends and family members," Mahlangu said.

Mahlangu submitted her CV at the municipality but no response was forthcoming.

Other youth like Banele Menyuka, 26, and Njabulo Nhlenyama, 25, were in a similar position.

"There are no jobs here. We

don't know where to complain," Menyuka said.

Nhlenyama said municipal services were good but "we have been waiting for jobs that don't come".

Joblessness was exacerbated by the closure of several nearby mines, including the Optimum Mine allegedly looted by the Guptas, and two power stations.

The closures left a trail of suffering, poverty and resulted in an increase in crime levels in various communities in the district.

According to executive mayor Diphala Motsepe, Steve Tshwete Municipality had a 17% unemployment rate with about 50% of the youth unemployed.

The rural municipality has a population of 339 000 people.

The municipality claimed to have done their best to create jobs through local economic development projects and maintenance works, but the closure of several coal mines nearby worsened the unemployment situation in the area.

The case of Nasaret resident Miriam Tarmohammed appeared to be an isolated one. This grandmother has double trouble on her doorstep.

She endures the stench of a regular sewage spill outside her kitchen entrance.

Every time it was fixed by the municipality, the sewer would burst again every two to three

months.

Also, despite being a destitute, unemployed woman, she was told she does not qualify for an indigent rebate because she is "CEO" of a crèche she was running on her premises.

She initially had eight kids attending but the number dropped after the outbreak of Covid last year because many parents could no longer afford the R600 monthly fee.

As a result, her monthly income dropped from R3 000 to the current R600 for one remaining child.

When approached for comment, the municipality undertook to investigate both Tarmohammed's complaints.