

RESPONSE TO THE DEBATE ON THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, PRESENTED BY MEC PAUL MASHATILE, AT THE GAUTENG PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE, 28 NOVEMBER 2017

*The Honourable Speaker of the House and the Deputy
The Honourable Premier of Gauteng
Members of the Executive Council from Gauteng
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Members of the Legislature
Distinguished Guests
Members of the media
Ladies and Gentlemen*

As it is often stated, local government is a sphere of government that is closest to the people. This sphere is constitutionally mandated to provide services to residents in an equitable manner. It must also ensure that citizens become active participants in the development of their communities.

It is therefore critical that municipalities have the requisite capacity to execute their mandate. Given the history of neglect and uneven development especially in the historically black townships, the capacity of municipalities differ with some like Metros being able to deliver on their mandate as compared to smaller municipalities.

It is against this backdrop that other spheres of government are providing hands-on support to municipalities. As COGTA, we are seized with coordinating the support that government provides to municipalities in our province.

Honourable members, during the preceding year, local government in Gauteng saw an improvement on especially the financial side with most of our municipalities receiving unqualified audit opinions. This positive development that was as a result of our consistent push through Operation Clean Audit, was also followed by some of the rating agencies giving accolades to the City of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni as recognition of the excellent work they were doing. CoGTA continues to provide support to all municipalities to ensure that they do not regress to adverse findings by the Auditor General.

During the same period, a process to merge the Randfontein and Westonaria Local Municipalities gained momentum leading up to the local government elections. Working together with CoGTA National, the affected municipalities and other role players, Gauteng CoGTA out in place structures including a Political Steering Committee and technical workstreams to ensure that the merger process is implemented successfully for the benefit of the residents of Randfontein and Westonaria.

Various challenges including financial notwithstanding, efforts were made to not only get buy in from all stakeholders but also to achieve the objectives we set ourselves. Today our province can proudly talk of a new municipality - Rand West City Local Municipality - having been established and this is due in no small measure to the consistent work that COGTA was seized with all along since the merger was first mooted.

Madame Speaker, as we worked on the merger, we also did not lose sight of the challenges that other municipalities like Emfuleni and Merafong were faced with. Hence as the provincial government, we set up dedicated teams that provided hands-on support to the municipalities in distress so as they do not collapse and as a result, people get

prejudiced in as far as service delivery is concerned. This is still work in progress but we are confident that these municipalities will turn a corner.

The implementation of the Back-to-Basics Programme has contributed to our municipalities strengthening their institutional capacity that allows them to continue delivering services to our people. Through this Programme, municipalities have built systems to ensure internal controls, prudence in spending and continued communication with residents. We are currently implementing Phase 2 of the Back-to-Basics programme to consolidate the gains that we have and continue making.

In the recent past our province has been prone to disasters of one kind or the other. As COGTA we have taken steps during the year under review to strengthen our disaster management and response capacity and thus include acquiring premises in Midrand for our Provincial Disaster Management Centre. We are also working with our counterparts internationally in training and capacitating our emergency services officials in order to improve our response readiness. Already, positive results are showing and the requests from other provinces for assistance and guidance from our officials bear testimony to what we have and are achieving. Work is continuing to build capacity in order that our province is capable to deal with any eventuality in as far as disasters are concerned.

Honourable members, even though there is a small number of traditional leaders in our province, matters pertaining to our people living in areas under the jurisdiction of institutions of traditional leadership were given attention. CoGTA put in place training and other capacity programmes so as the leadership in those areas are equipped with the requisite skills to provide leadership in the development of those communities.

Since within these areas, we have both the democratically-elected representatives and traditional leadership, tensions arise at times and CoGTA has been ready and available to assist in not only quelling these tensions but also providing guidance in how these two systems should coexist without compromising service delivery to our people.

Given that traditional leaders are custodians of our culture and traditions, CoGTA has been working with the institutions of traditional leadership in our province and other role players like the CRL Commission, municipalities and law enforcement agencies to ensure that traditional initiations are conducted within the legal framework and those who conduct them are certified to do so. We are already seeing positive results as less and less of those who attend these initiation schools get maimed or lose their lives. CoGTA continues to be involved in this matter so as criminal and other devious element do not exploit our traditions for their nefarious ends.

Working together with municipalities and guided by our Global City Region vision, CoGTA will continue providing hands-on support to the local sphere of government. We are also consolidating partnerships with other players like civil society and the private sector to ensure that municipalities work. We are confident that we will succeed.

I thank you all!