



Local Government Election 2006: What are the Issues?

Forum Date	15 February 2006
Venue	Holiday Inn- Elangeni, Durban
Guest Speakers	Representatives of the ANC, IFP, DA, NADECO, ACDP and the UDM

Introduction

Political fora are an integral part of our core activities aimed at creating a platform for dialogue and debate between leaders, experts, academic and civil society. These debates seek to advocate accountability and public participation among other things.

On the 15 February 2006, DDP held a political forum in the run up to the second local government elections on 1 March 2006 with the purpose to create a platform for dialogue and debate between political leaders and potential voters. It was essential to conduct a forum of this nature due to the immense tensions and unhappiness over the snail pace of service delivery at the local level. Communities across the province and nation wide have been protesting and demonstrating against the lack of delivery. It was attended by over 130 people representing about 40 different organizations.

Six political parties (ANC, IFP, DA, NADECO, ACDP and the UDM) sent representatives to the forum. Parties were allowed space to display their party paraphernalia and also afforded the opportunity to answer questions from participants. Parties were briefed prior to the event as to the topics that they should cover and this helped keep the

discourses focused on the real issues as we head towards the local government elections. There was active participation from the audience who raised relevant and critical questions for all the parties. An information resource book was produced that included all the party manifestos as well a critical comments from various newspapers.

Briefing

Prior to the local government elections on 1 March 2006 the public was overwhelmed and inundated with promises of improved livelihoods and service delivery. It is indeed very true that there will be no democracy without improving the well-being of the people. It is of paramount importance that the needs of the people are attended to.

The critical question that political parties were expected to answer to their potential electorates during the forum was **‘what are the prominent local issues’?**

The follow up questions were:

- Have these issues, as identified and raised by the various political parties, have an appeal or value to the ordinary people?
- Do the issues reflect upon the needs, feelings and aspirations of the masses of the people?
- Who decides what the real issues are?
- Who sets up the agenda for the delivery of those issues?

Issues

Different political parties converged in this political forum to discussed issues that continued to affect the overwhelming majority of the people in this country. An array of issues emerged out of the robust discussion:

- Improved primary health services
- Provision of better and quality houses
- Provision of water and electricity
- Land re-distribution
- Turning the tide against corruption & Crime
- Strengthening local economies

- Fight against HIV/AIDS
- Equal representation of women in local government
- Fight against gender based violence
- Promoting good governance
- Capacity building for councilors
- Construction of more reliable roads

These issues are very critical to the ordinary South Africans. Over the past few months, ordinary people countrywide have been trying to send a clear message that 'enough is enough'. This message came out very loud in the form of uprising as fed-up communities took to the streets in various parts of the country to vent their anger at the snail pace of service delivery. According to the Biannual Government Performance Barometer shows that 48% of South Africans are unhappy with the performance of the country's 284 municipalities. This means that almost half of the electorate is disillusioned with the performance of municipalities.

Meeting the needs and aspirations of the people should be at the apex of the political agenda. The future of our young democracy is bleak without addressing the needs of the poor.

Concluding Remarks

More often than not, political parties do not see eye to eye in matters that relates to the civil society, however in this forum, almost all the parties shared the same sentiment that there is an urgent need to improve the lives of the people. And this dream could only be realized through accelerated service delivery efforts. It becomes apparent that leaders need to work diligently and accountable to ensure that the needs of the people are met. Issues that emanated from the forum included among other things views on: accountability, good governance, corruption, gender violence, gender balance, HIV/AIDS, service delivery and the compilation of the party lists.