

21ST CENTURY MAYORS MUST ACT LOCALLY – AND GLOBALLY

South African cities and towns, like their global counterparts, face the super-sized challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality, and it is the 21st century mayors that must lead the charge. They all face historic imbalances that need attention, increasing constraints on existing resources due to new arrivals and a growing population. This is at a time of a depressed global economy.

Local government sits at the forefront of these challenges. Under the Constitution, local government must provide democratic and accountable government for local communities to promote social and economic development. It is a key role player in the country's developmental process.

But the challenges need not be a reason for despair and doubt. Canadian journalist Doug Saunders provides a critically needed progressive and optimistic narrative about the future of cities. His story is rooted not in statistics but in some of the stories of the two billion people – a third of humanity – currently moving from rural to urban areas.

He also maps the world in terms of "*arrival cities*", the places where new migrants end up, pointing out that these migrants are not passive victims. They are opportunists, taking a gamble on the future in an urbanising world. They are humanity at its best, not worst. It is with this positive, albeit realistic, understanding that they approach the challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality. They need to create jobs, especially for young people. They must keep up with a growing population and ever-changing labour market dynamics.

It is worth noting that most of the residents in South African cities and towns spend more than half of their income on transportation to and from work, and approximately 60 percent of those families are low-income earners who live in informal settlements or on the periphery of our urban core. It is critical that all these challenges are dealt with proactively.

Recently, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs confirmed the 2022 Local Government Summit which served as a platform for mutual learning, transfer of good practices for and an opportunity to find long lasting solutions to challenges facing local government in the spirit of the Intergovernmental Relations Act. At the said 2022 Local Government Summit, President Ramaphosa said: "*...As we work to promote local economic development, we need to consider the role of the District Development Model. We need*

to ensure that this integrated, multidisciplinary approach to government planning and implementation must translate into local economic development that changes lives at a household level. We need to ensure that mayors and councillors are deeply involved in the promotion of local economic development...Mayors and councillors need to drive the process from start to finish.”

This comes roughly 10 months since the local government elections which presented huge changes in our nation and these changes are radically altering and elevating the role and responsibility of city mayors in tackling issues of climate change, social cohesion, and migration. These changes are in addition to the functions, powers and responsibilities of mayors that are clearly defined within the relevant laws relating to local government as well by the resolutions passed by Council, these are not exercised in a vacuum.

Diplomacy: navigating the global stage

It's no secret that today's mayors are stepping up to the top level of "high politics" and have become leading voices in some of the most important global debates. This is in large part due to their tangible track records in governing large cities as well as their boldness in building direct diplomatic bonds between global cities. You just need to think of the likes of New York, Taipei, Sao Paulo and Paris.

To manage this growing set of relationships more effectively, cities and their mayors are increasing their capacity to conduct their own international missions. It's a phenomenon that could be called “*diplomacy*”, an expanding propensity of cities and towns to develop the necessary mechanisms to autonomously navigate foreign relations on their own.

New York provides one such example. Former mayor Michael Bloomberg established an Office for International Affairs to centralise the city's management of relations with consular missions. He also used his Office for International Affairs to manage international outreach, covering investment promotion, security exchanges, and initiatives such as the Climate Leadership Group (or C40), an organisation made up of 58 of the world's major metropolises.

As mayors around the world have repeatedly signalled in recent years, they are the leaders with their ears closest to the ground. Their administrations are ultimately responsible for the trash being collected, the urban land being allocated, or the municipal transport being redesigned. Born out of necessity to maintain local law and order, it is in cities that you can see the most pragmatic approaches to service delivery, such as public-private partnerships or innovative financing

schemes. Global urbanisation is the dominant trend in world today, and it means that the economy is evolving into a network of trading cities. From climate change to economic growth to counter-terrorism, cities and city leaders are demonstrating their growing assertiveness as autonomous diplomatic units. Bloomberg has been called the CEO of Cities. In the near future we may think of mayors as quasi-presidents of cities.

As cities assert their experiences and leadership on the world stage, new mechanisms are emerging, with innovative networks already in place: inter-city task forces; city-to-city development coordination; climate action and disaster relief; multi-city education; and IT hubs. Many of these experiments in *diplomacy* result in direct benefits to participating cities in investment, technology, talent, and reputation.

As such, mayors must act as leaders of society, and together with their fellow councillors, they need to set a bold agenda on economic development of the cities and towns they lead. They must carry out their civic and ceremonial duties which extend well beyond officiating at council meetings or other municipal proceedings to providing leadership, promoting positive relationships, and modelling good governance.

South African cities and towns must be ready to go global. They need to develop a trade strategy that focuses on research and development, and on tourism and services to improving our competitiveness, and driving investment opportunities globally which are as important as getting potholes filled. Mayors must understand their role of being coordinators, facilitators and drivers working with a coalition of industry players, university leaders and research and development (higher education is a huge export industry for the city) to create a bigger and bolder local government sector. Yes, it's a daunting set of tasks but this is what it means to be a 21st century mayor and residents deserve no less.

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About the CBE:

The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) is a Schedule 3A Public Entity that reports to the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure. It is a regulatory body established under the Council for the Built Environment Act 43 of 2000 (the CBE Act) that coordinates the following six Councils for the Built Environment Professions - Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Engineering, Property Valuation, Project and Construction Management, and Quantity Surveying – and through memoranda of understanding these include Town and Regional Planning, Land Surveying, and Environmental Assessment Practitioners.

The CBE was established for the purpose of instilling good conduct within the Built Environment Professions, mobilising transformation in the Built Environment Professions, protecting the interest of the public and advising the South African Government on Built Environment related issues.

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