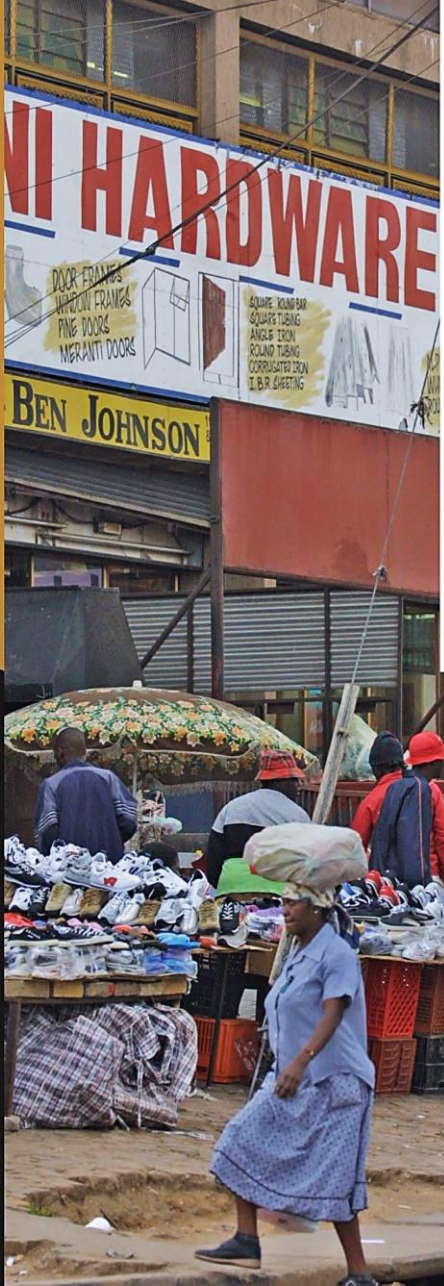
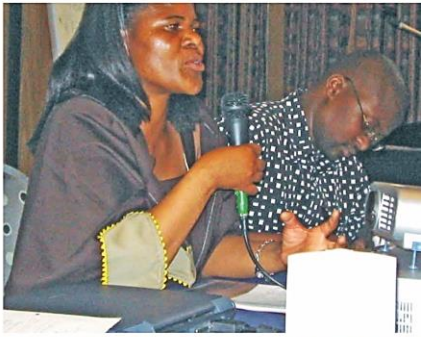
The "I" Stories

Councillors Speak Out

City of Johannesburg







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CHARLES STEWART
MOTT FOUNDATION

Contents

Acknowledgements 3

Foreword: *Amos Masondo, Executive Mayor, City of Johannesburg* 4

Overview 5

FINDING OUR VOICES **11**

Champions of democracy 12
Shirlyn Ipeleng Serobatse

Women's work crosses political boundaries 14
Patricia Brugman-Richards

Participating as equals 16
Mmatlou Salphina Mulauzi

Together we can make a difference 18
Johanna Mabosha Mohulatsi

The tapestry of my life 20
Maleselo Julia Kubu-Gololo

Use your influence to correctly benefit others 22
Nandi Mayathula-Khoza

EMPOWER A WOMAN, EMPOWER A NATION **25**

Fulfilling my purpose 26
Cathy Seefort

Empower a woman, empower a community 28
Christina Fortuin

When dreams become reality 30
Sinnah Ramakhula

Sharing what I've learnt with my community 32
Dudu Chili

Working together to make a difference 34
Cecil Ndlovu

Reflections on the life of a woman 36
Patricia Lion-Cachet

Contents

A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE **39**

Life out of the shell 40
Java Sinah Gwebu

Learning from the past to create a better future 42
Virginia Tiny Volker

My journey continues 44
Sophie Bethiwe Msiza

I know what I do counts 46
Shirley Ancer

It's about knowing where you come from 48
Madika Elizabeth Mabaso

A challenge around every corner 50
Advocate Thembalethu Nyambe

Putting people first 52
Takalani Amos Matoma

Positive leadership requires positive action 54
Jeanette Agnes Putsoa

WORKING TOGETHER FOR POSITIVE CHANGE **57**

Have you say – participate! 58
Setswakae Margaret Mokale

We all have a role in creating change 60
Sara Ouma Mashigo

From shop steward to community steward 62
Ngwane Petros Kunene

A problem shared is a problem solved 64
Constance Bontle Bapela

Above and beyond the call of duty 66
William Malesela Chuene

Speak up, be heard, make a difference 68
Nomaswazi Phyllis Mohlala

Acknowledgements

This publication is part of pilot project on Gender, Communications and Local Government embarked on by the City of Johannesburg and Gender Links in 2004/2005.

It brings together the views and voices of course participants on their experiences in local government as seen through the "gender lenses" that they acquired as part of the 10–module, continuous learning course that spanned an eight month period. The vibrancy of these voices, which is the heart and soul of this publication, is a tribute to the richness of these experiences.

Councillor Nandi Mayathula-Khoza, the Speaker of the City of Johannesburg, Head of Councillor Training and Capacity Building Shirlyn Ipeleng Serobatse, and the Multiparty Women's Caucus at the City of Johannesburg played a leading role in designing and driving the programme.

They worked closely with Gender Links Executive Director, Colleen Lowe Morna and Professor Sheila Meintjes of the Political Science Department at the University of the Witwatersrand who co-facilitated most of the modules.

Sally Shackelton from Women'sNet provided IT training. Kubi Rama and Janine Moolman facilitated the writing workshops which led to this publication and Janine Moolman edited the book. Mothibi Mohomane and Susan Tolmay provided programme support.

The project and this publication have been made possible through the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

What the Councillors had to say about the Gender, Communication and Local Government Project:

"[The module on transformative leadership] was most relevant in addressing how women can become agents of change."

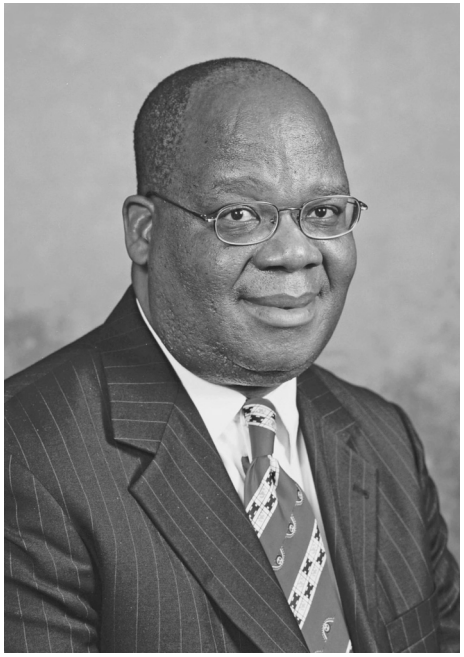
"It's not about sex, but about capability, understanding the purpose and being effective."

"The story I wrote for the first time made me feel like flying in the sky."

"[Writing] made me feel important because I [realized] I could write a story about myself."

"I learned and enjoyed every piece of information given. I feel empowered with rare skills."

Foreword



This book tells the stories of individual Johannesburg councillors serving the public in a vibrant and dynamic local government environment. It offers an insight into the role played by councillors in the context of a municipal authority that has been transformed from a racially defined Apartheid municipality, which benefited the white minority, to one that today seeks to serve all its citizens equitably. It therefore outlines the challenges that face the City of Johannesburg in turning freedom and democracy into reality.

The 'I' stories: City of Johannesburg Councillors Speak Out provides a window into the lives of South African men and women who are the foot soldiers of local democracy in action. This book bears testimony to the courage, determination and tenacity of councillors who work towards bettering our society.

At the beginning of compiling these unique stories, many councillors where reluctant to share them saying that their lives were "ordinary". Yet when one reads these stories, it is obvious that their lives are anything but ordinary.

The honesty with which the councillors share their sometimes painful stories is remarkable. Many admit to being "thrown in the deep end" and struggling to come to terms with the communities' expectations of them. What is even more remarkable is that they all persevered. For some, the costs have been great; one councillor speaks of her house being torched; another of the strain of working in a community in which people felt there was no hope; and another of the pain of witnessing the death of parents as a result of HIV/AIDS, leaving their children orphaned.

The 'I' stories: City of Johannesburg Councillors Speak Out also highlights the fact that the road for women councillors in particular has not been an easy one. We must, however, acknowledge the many male colleagues who have been supportive of all efforts to encourage women's leadership in all structures of government. Equal representation of women and men is an idea whose time has come. Any resistance to this concept only highlights the need for the Johannesburg multi-party Women's Caucus to intensify the work that it has begun. Through this structure, we are beginning to understand that gender equality is both about changing the attitudes and empowering women.

Malibongwe!

Amos Masondo
Executive Mayor
City of Johannesburg
September 2005

Overview

Local government is a key sphere of gover-nance for citizenship participation and service delivery, with a critical role to play in promoting gender equality. Johannesburg, or Egoli – the City of Gold – is a microcosm of both the potential and the challenges for advancing gender equality in a vibrant, modern city that is also bedevilled by high levels of crime and unemployment.



Councillor Maqanda at the Gender Links training Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Who lives in Johannesburg?

The population of the City of Johannesburg increased from 2 640 541 in 1996 to 3 225 810 in 2001. While women make up 52 percent of the total population of South Africa, they also constitute 50.2 percent of the City's population. This is an increase from the past, when men constituted the majority of the City inhabitants as a result of the migrant labour system under apartheid.

A disproportionate number of new entrants into the City are now women, and most of these are young women. There is a slightly higher proportion of women with disabilities in the City than men: 3.9 percent women compared to 3.5 percent men.

Key gender challenges in local government

- *Governance:* In South Africa, while national elections are held on a Proportional Representation (PR) basis, local elections are based on a mixed PR and ward system. While women at local level have fared well in the PR system (as they have at national level) they have not fared as well in the ward system, although this has been improving (see table below). Following the 2000 elections women constituted 28.2 percent of local councillors.

Progress made by South African women in local elections

	Ward	PR	Average
1995	10.84 %	27.9 %	19 %
2000	16.9 %	38.1 %	28.2 %

Source: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA)

In the period leading up to the 1999 elections, the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) and the Gender Advocacy Project (GAP), lobbied both to retain the mixed system (against the possibility of a shift to a constituency

system) and for a legislated quota. The ANC supported the idea of a 50 percent quota for the PR seats, but faced resistance from opposition parties who argued this limited the choice of parties and of voters.

The lobbying effort resulted in the Municipal Structures Act (1998) changing the system in the 1995 elections from 40 percent PR and 60 percent ward to equal numbers of both in the 2000 elections. A clause in the Act states that: "Every party must seek to ensure that fifty percent of the candidates on the party list are women and that women and men candidates are evenly distributed throughout the list."

For the 2005 elections, the ANC has pledged to implement this provision, both for ward and PR councillors. A key issue will be the extent to which more women are elected on ward seats, and also the extent to which women participate in decision-making positions within local government, including on ward committees.

Gender disparities are also apparent within the administration of local government. Women are over-represented among clerical workers, and are scarce in the professional and technical categories. The Women's Budget found that close to half of all women in local government are in clerical positions, 25 percent were labourers and 15 percent professionals. It is estimated that women constitute about 10 percent of managers in local government.

- ***Procurement:*** Local government procures a range of services from a variety of contractors from catering to construction. Local government as a client can play a role in promoting businesses that are owned by women and who employ women.

- ***Crime and security:*** Women are the main victims of domestic violence and sexual offences. Municipalities are responsible for street lighting which has safety implications for women and girls.

- ***Environment and health:*** Women are disproportionately affected - as victims, because they perform the majority of the tasks around the home, and as those who provide care for the sick. Public health care facilities are often inaccessible. The reproductive health needs of women tend to be poorly serviced.

- ***Water and sanitation:*** Women bear the burden of providing potable water and sanitation, but are often not consulted in the provision of these services. The 1996 census showed that over 51 percent of South Africans used flush or chemical toilets; 32 percent pit latrines; five percent a bucket; and 12 percent had no bucket facilities.

- ***Land and housing:*** Although men and women are theoretically both eligible for housing and land subsidy support, these services are invariably registered in the names of men.

- ***Electricity:*** and the lack of it, have major implications for women, both with regard to security, and fuel for cooking, heating etc. Most of the tasks for which energy is used daily in the household such as cooking, washing etc are generally regarded as a woman's duty. Electricity is the safest fuel. It saves women the time of collecting fuel outside the home. It can assist in small scale, home-based income generation projects, eg sewing, bread baking. Improved lighting contributes to improved security. Local government is responsible for the provision of electricity to households, schools and clinics in its area. Electricity is only profitable for the municipality if consumers pay their bills. This has led to some informal settlements not being electrified.

The use of pre-payment metres has helped to resolve the problem, but sometimes consumers find ways of bypassing the metres. Studies show that the level of skill required for this means that the culprits are often not the poorest or least educated citizens (Annecke 1997:20). In general, electricity take up has not been as high as expected because it is still an expensive form of energy for the poorest sectors of society.

- ***Health:*** Women's health is often narrowly interpreted to be concerned with reproductive health. While this is important, women are also often responsible for the health of the family and are the main care givers in society.

- ***Transport and mobility:*** The multiple roles of women mean they must often take several short trips in a day, often on routes that are poorly serviced and dangerous. Women often require travel outside peak hours and to alternative destinations than men. For example domestic workers need to get to the suburbs at the very moment that men need to get to the city for work.

- ***Privatisation of services:*** Typically where billing services are privatised, more women's jobs are at stake. Where basic services such as refuse collection, provision of water and electricity are privatised, it is mainly women who have to spend extra time doing unpaid labour.

- ***The informal sector:*** Over half the traders are women, who tend to be most concentrated in the lowest paying "survivalist" sector.

- ***Integrated planning:*** Despite all the above, women tend to be ignored in local development and planning. Yet they stand to benefit most from the effective provision of services such as water, fuel, transport, recreational facilities etc.

- ***Lack of gender disaggregated data:*** The absence of gender disaggregated data in key Council documents, such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) suggests a lack of appreciation of the importance of collecting, analysing and reflecting on gender-specific dimensions of development (van Donk, 2004).

Why this book?

Recognising the dearth of information on the experiences of local government councillors, and indeed the gendered dimensions of this sphere of government, this publication presents the stories of men and women local government councillors at the City of Johannesburg.

The publication is part of a broader project on Gender, Communication and Local government undertaken by the City of Johannesburg and Gender Links. The project aimed to enhance the gender analysis and communication skills of leaders at local government level.

Whose voices?

The 25 profiles contained are about the experiences of local government councillors, as written in their own words, from a gender perspective. Twenty-two of the profiles are by women and six by men. Two of the contributors belong to the Democratic Party and the remainder to the African National Congress (ANC).

Breakdown of contributors

Party	Male	Female	Total
ANC	6	20	26
DA	0	2	2
Total	**6**	**22**	**28**

Some of the local government councillors who contributed to the publication have been as one puts it "serving their community" for over 20 years. They have been participating in community and civic structures; working as shop stewards; health workers; teachers and in other capacities.

For many, their entry into local politics has been "by accident." One councillor says she "never planned to do what I am doing now." Others describe it as a natural progression from their informal work as community builders to the more formal and structured arena of local government.

Being thrust into these roles, however, has not been without challenges. Talking about her shock at being elected, a councillor says: "I felt sick for a whole week: frightened, yet excited at the thought of what lay before me." Another says: "Initially I did not have a clue of what was expected me…"

"We need support"

Interestingly, many speak about the strategies they have devised to assist them to come to terms with the expectations that both their communities, and government structures have of them. "I deal with each piece of paper or query only once: reply, action, and move on."

Many councillors mention the important role played by the Speaker and the City of Johannesburg in building their capacity and training them. Without this support, they argue, they would find it impossible to fulfill their functions. Education and training is frequently mentioned as an empowerment tool that has helped them come to grips with their demanding positions.

One councillor writes about how much an introductory course in Zulu has helped her communicate better and improved relationships with residents of her ward. Another speaks of about how his exposure to gender training has changed his mindset. "If I had not made this shift, my work as a local government councillor would have been all the more difficult as we operate as a *kgotla* (gathering/meeting of equals)."

Councillors also mention the support and encouragement they receive from each other. Women councillors in particular share positive experiences of their participation in women's caucuses and structures that support their development. The recognition of spaces to address women's strategic concerns and which cut across party lines, is recognised by a number of contributions. One councillor captures this when she says: "Through the multiparty caucus I learnt that the problems that women face in our society cross all political boundaries."

HIV/AIDS devastates our communities

Cutting across party lines, gender, class and economic divides, the impact of HIV/AIDS on communities is a theme that recurs in many of the profiles. Councillors share stories about their work to assist and support families and children infected and affected by the pandemic. It is a struggle. The lack of resources to train, support and assist home-based care workers is highlighted as a critical issue for South Africa's impoverished communities. The delivery of services to communities already grappling with increasing numbers of children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS and child-headed households takes on new and literally life-saving meanings.

The overburdened health care system; inadequate transport; lack of information on how to access state social grants and insufficient support for survivors of domestic violence compound the social crisis caused by HIV/AIDS. Councillors argue that public participation is key if the pandemic is to be curbed. "One of the things that local government can do to assist communities is to provide practical training for existing volunteers such as counselling, home-based care skills etc so that their skills can be used to build their communities," says one councillor.

The importance of community responses to the pandemic is also highlighted. Whether it is the older women who support a mother through her loss of a child, or the group of unemployed men who volunteer to help carry a coffin to a graveside, the social capital of communities is invaluable.

The "boys club" still operates

Despite the commitment by the City of Johannesburg and the South Africa more broadly to gender equality, pervading sexist attitudes and stereotypes remain an obstacle towards achieving women's equal participation and representation.

Women councillors share their experiences of the "boys club" and the "men in suits" who meet only after hours, not considering the reproductive responsibilities their woman counterparts have. They speak about "juggling home, family and council work" and trying to prove that they are just as capable, just as effective and just as good at what they do. Others warn against falling into the trap of trying to prove that women are good enough: "We need to learn to say 'no' and not feel guilty about it."

One councillor relates how the leader of a community group who were protesting against slow service delivery refused to engage with her. Instead, he arrived at her office and said: "We will not be led by a woman!" Her solution was to listen and reason with him logically. "I treat men as equals" she says.

Women councillors emphasise the need to recognise that their experience of leadership and of government is qualitatively different to that of men. "We bring something unique to government and have a different leadership style to that of men. We are not just tokens, but a power to be reckoned with." But it is not only men who support the "old boys club". One councillor speaks of her distress at the "pull me down syndrome" she has experienced at the hands of other women.

It is when experiences like this are shared and made public that we become aware of how insidious patriarchy is; how it operates to use both men and women to maintain unequal power relations.

Looking to the future

While the experiences shared by the councillors are sometimes painful and sad, they are also stories of victory. Each profile celebrates the tenacity and determination of the people who serve their communities.

As the third local government elections since our country's freedom approaches, gender equality is high on the transformation agenda. The ANC has proposed a 50/50 representation of women in decision-making, a move mirrored at the continental level through the African Union.

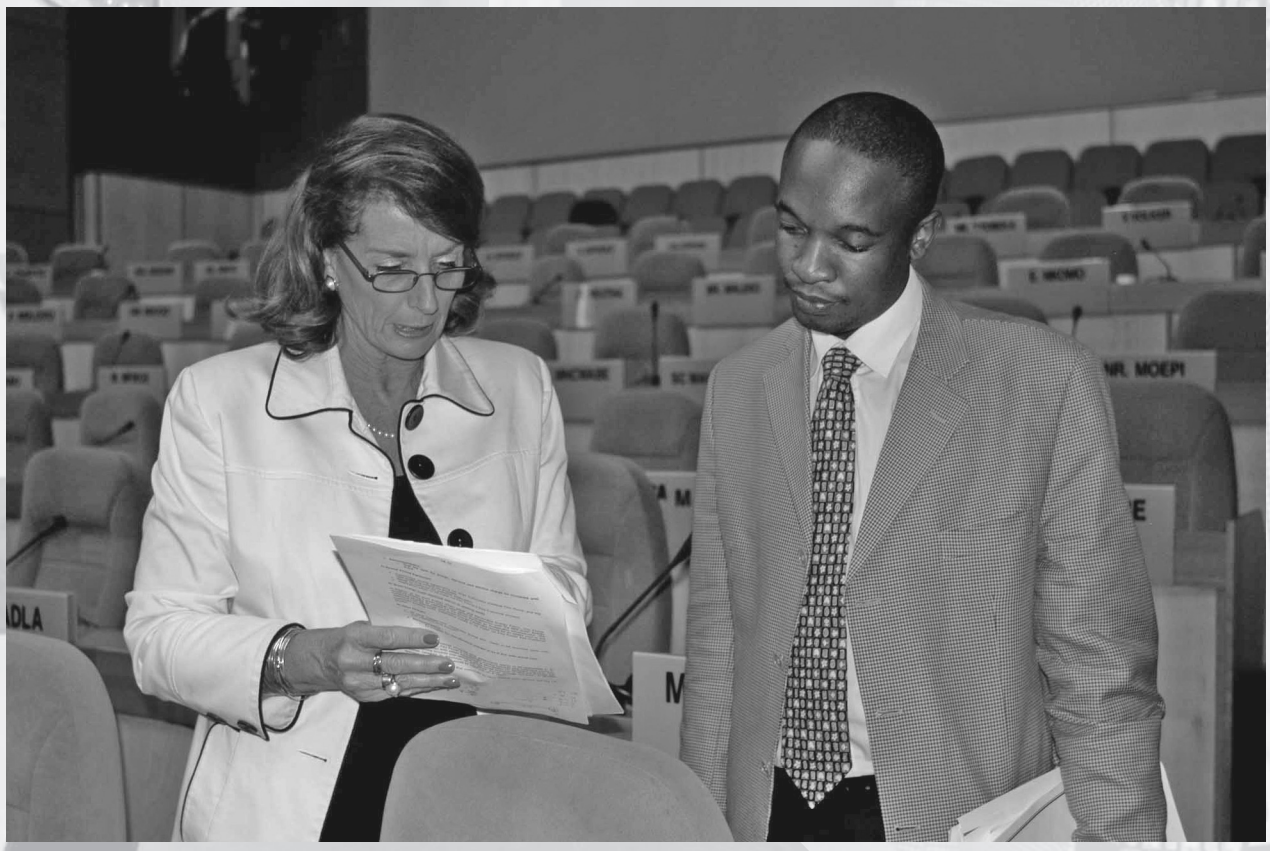
South Africa has is one of only two countries in the SADC region to have met the target of 30 percent women's representation in decision-making.

Speaking about their priorities for the upcoming election, most councillors say they will work towards ensuring more women are elected. They have embraced the 50/50 call and are actively working towards this goal. When herstory is finally told, we will look back to accounts like this to help us piece together the change that daily unfolds before our eyes, and that will one day make it possible for all women and men to realise their full potential.



Photo: GCIS

Finding our voices





NAME:
Shirlyn Ipeleng Serobatse

POSITION:
Head Councillor Training and Capacity Building, City of Johannesburg

"The councillors are dynamic, strong-willed, and committed individuals."

Champions of democracy

By Shirlyn Ipeleng Serobatse

My name is Shirlyn Ipeleng Serobatse. I am the single mother of a nine-year old, a sister to two, and the Head of the Councillor Training and Capacity Building Programme at the City of Johannesburg.

My middle name, Ipeleng, means "be proud of what I am to you." It is ironic that this name does not even appear on my identity documents. "Ipeleng" is so much part of who I am, but does not form part of my official identity.

My primary function at the City of Johannesburg is to lead and direct capacity building and training for local government councillors. This involves assisting councillors to enroll with tertiary institutions through the Councillor Subsidised Education Policy as well as organising seminars and briefing sessions on issues of concern identified by the councillors themselves.

I believe that the councillors I work with at the City of Johannesburg are proud of the breakthroughs I have helped them achieve through my work with them.

I began working in local government in 1990, employed by the then Soweto City Council to design youth development programmes that targeted out of school youth. During that time I grew professionally as I learnt to demonstrate confidence, initiate, set goals, explore and maximise my potential. Inspired through my work with the youth programme, I enrolled for a Masters Degree in Education.

After a few years I moved to the Reconstruction and Development Unit where I worked as a Community Participation Specialist before moving to the Planning and Urbanisation Department as the Manager of the Social Development Unit.

In 2001 I moved to my current position. I find my work very rewarding especially when I see how, through capacity building and training, local government councillors are empowered to deal with the challenges they face. Each councillor is unique. They are all dynamic, strong-willed and committed individuals.

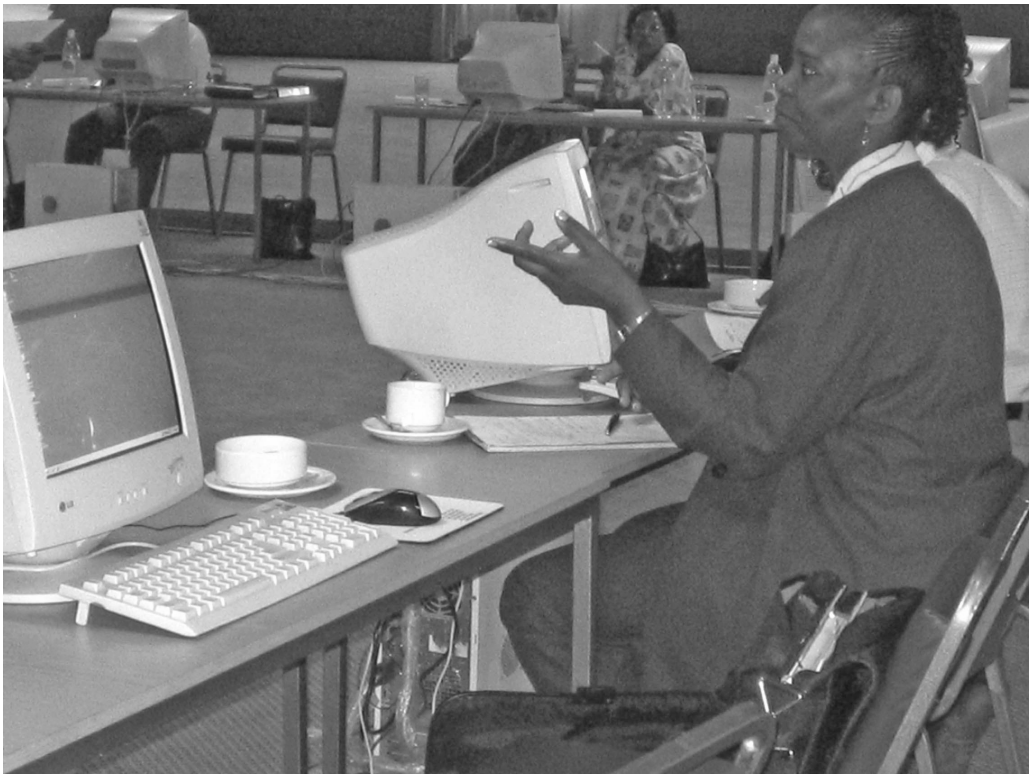
The training provided by Gender Links has been invaluable to all of us who participated.

Making input into the drafting the Gender Policy for the City of Johannesburg has been a highlight of the training for all involved.

The benefits of the training for the councillors I work with are numerous. The deeper understanding they have gained in terms of their gendered roles as local government councillors has been a privilege to witness. Most encouraging is the wholehearted manner in which the councillors have embraced the call for 50/50 representation between men and women in the upcoming elections.

Sometimes I sit and wonder what my grandfather would have to say if he could see me now. Ntate was not an educated man, but a great philosopher. The values he taught me shaped me tremendously. He instilled in me a great desire to achieve and would always remind his grandchildren that "ga Serobatse ga go feiliwe" – there is no failure in the Serobatse family.

The councillors at the City of Johannesburg are also a family. It is through them, and local government councillors like them across the country that ordinary citizens are truly able to participate in our democracy.



Getting to grips with technology at the Gender Links training Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



NAME:
Patricia Brugman-Richards

AGE:
60

PARTY:
DA

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 88

"Being a woman councillor meant I had to deal with stereotypical attitudes from my male counterparts."

Women's work crosses political boundaries

By Patricia Brugman-Richards

When people meet me for the first time and find out that I am a councillor at the City of Johannesburg, the first question I am asked is how did I become involved in politics? My answer is always: "By accident."

I had never planned to do what I am doing now. I had been a professional nurse my entire working career – general nursing in Durban, midwifery in Johannesburg and then overseas for a camping holiday which stretched into two years away from South Africa. While an application for citizenship in Canada was underway I returned home where I worked in the Cardio-Thoracic Unit and then led the Trauma Unit at Johannesburg Hospital.

Shifting my focus to community health, I spent eight years travelling throughout Gauteng. At first I undertook health visits to primary and secondary schools. My work involved educating young people on health issues ranging from contraception, HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, adolescent health and life skills.

I moved to head up the Primary School Feeding Scheme in the Vaal Triangle. This involved visiting rural schools and informal settlements. My work hours meant that I had the time to get more involved in community politics and I became the Chairperson of our local Residents Association, a position I held for many years. In 1994, I was nominated to stand for local government in my community.

My first 10 months in office led me to believe that I could make a difference. At first it was only in making up numbers. As an independent councillor it became apparent that I would have no power or influence on my own as I was regarded as the "new kid on the block." Being a woman meant that I had to deal with stereotypical attitudes from my Afrikaans male counterparts, but I pushed on nevertheless. By the end of those 10 months I had gained their respect and was wished good luck for the next elections.

In 1995 the Democratic Party (DP) approached me to stand in the elections. It took me three months to sign up. As an Independent I had learnt to network and stand up by myself and speak out in public forums. However, this did mean that I lost out on some positions because I did not know the "rules of the game" –

not having the weight of a party behind me.

Being part of a political party I had the privilege of interacting with many strong and equally independent women who had cut their teeth in party politics. The men in the party recognised their value and treated them accordingly. Once I had signed up it felt that a weight had been lifted and I had found my political home.

I was fortunate to be part of a caucus which comprised many strong minded women: women who could hold their own in any debate. I benefited from being in a group where my beliefs and principals were shared.

I soon joined a group of professional women and learnt about public speaking, presentations and acquired many other skills. Participating in any caucus brings with it the opportunity for learning – including how to (and how not to) chair a meeting. Through the multiparty caucus I learnt that the problems that women face in our society cross all political boundaries.

Of course there were some draw backs, the most obvious being that if one puts forward an idea for change – no matter how good it may appear to be – it is not always accepted.

I became involved in gender issues with the establishment of a gender desk at the Randburg civic. I was part of a council committee that discussed gender concerns and drafted a gender policy for the Northern Metropolitan local government. I also represented the DA at various forums including one in which women from various levels of government were asked to share their experiences of being in government. I represented local government while Thenjiwe Mtintso, an ANC member of parliament, represented national government

A key issue that emerged from this forum was the way in which men in government undermined their female counterparts – the men in suits still held their own meetings and networked with each other. Meetings were held after hours as most of the men in local government had other work. While this was convenient for them, women had to adapt and juggle their many priorities. They had to either leave meetings early or not attend due to family commitments.

This was simply not feasible. I made the decision to give up full time work, ensured that I did not neglect my other commitments and learnt to prioritise. Going on a time management course has also benefited me. Dealing with all the paperwork and e-mails has been an enormous challenge. My strategy is to deal with each piece of paper or e-mail only once: reply, file, discard /delete.

I have enjoyed the past 10 years in local government. However there have been times when I have become frustrated at some decisions made in the Johannesburg Council. A major source of concern which I deal with in my work on the Health Committee is how slow and inept the fight against HIV/AIDS has been.

While there are sufficient clinics, hospitals and schools in my community, densification means that these services are now being stretched to their limits. This is compounded by people from other communities accessing these services as they are insufficient or non-existent in their own communities.

I am currently the ward councillor for ward 88 comprising the suburbs from Northcliff to Emmarentia. There are over 50 000 residents and many expect you to be on call 24 hours a day. I am not afraid to speak out, and have gained even more confidence through working within my party's new structure the Democratic Alliance Women's Network (DAWN), and within the Multiparty Women's Caucus at the City of Johannesburg.



NAME:
Mmatlou Salphina Mulauzi

AGE:
47

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 95

"I recognise myself as a woman, a mother and also a leader."

Participating as equals

By Mmatlou Salphina Mulauzi

I remember the day I was deployed to be the ward councillor of ward 95 in Diepsloot. I was so shocked when I was voted by a majority of 49 percent. I felt sick for a whole week: frightened, yet excited at the thought of what lay before me.

I really do not understand why I was that afraid. I have been in leadership positions for a long time. I think it was the fear not knowing what was expected of me.

But as time went on, and I came to terms with my work as a ward councillor, I realised that perhaps my biggest challenge was maintaining contact with my constituency.

I have faced many obstacles put I my path by my male colleagues because I am a woman. I remember once when a community group organised a march against poor service delivery and the leader of the group came to my office and said: "We will not be led by a woman!" He went on to tell me that he would make sure that I would not finish my term of office – he was so outraged that the community was being represented by a woman!

But despite it being an uphill battle, I remained in office where I had to constantly confront the negative attitudes of some of the men in my community. But this made me a stronger person and today I feel confident enough to take them on. I recognise myself as a woman, a mother and also a leader – and this is the way that most members of the community view me as well.

Being aware of how conservative some men in my community are, my approach is to deal with them as equals. I try to educate them on why it is important that women are given equal opportunities. This attitude has paid off. Today, many more men come to me for advice than they did before.

I think that we need to elect more woman councillors in Diepsloot as this will help change the mindset of the conservative men in the community. They need to know that women are equals and can work just as hard and be just as effective as men.

I have made every effort to encourage women to participate as equals, even when this has meant that I have been unpopular with some male members of the community.

During a building project I proposed that a woman be appointed the community liaison officer. This was badly received by the male contractors who argued that women were too "weak" to carry out this important function.

I believe that it is important that women support each other so that we can feel confident enough to stand up and make our views known. This is something that I have done consciously throughout my term as a local government councillor. Seeing women I have mentored over the years come into their own has been extremely rewarding. I remember one woman who went from not being able to attend a meeting without her husband or able to call someone up on the telephone to working at the City of Johannesburg. All she needed to get to this place in her life was some encouragement and support.

Women local government councillors need particular kinds of support because our experience of local government is different to that of men's. We need to learn to say "no" and not feel guilty about it. We must recognise that we determine our own priorities and accept constructive criticism without getting defensive.



Councillors discuss the draft gender policy Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



NAME:
Johanna Mabosha Mohulatsi

AGE:
62

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 91

"My work as a ward councillor means that I am available to my community at all times – so I am always at work."

Together we can make a difference

By Johanna Mabosha Mohulatsi

I clearly remember the day I made the realisation that my ideas and opinions are important and have value. That day changed my life and so began my journey to where I am today – a local government councillor in ward 91.

One day while watching my siblings play I thought about how many parents never bothered to find out what their children's opinions and concerns were. Rather we were constantly told what we should or should not do and how to behave. I felt trapped in an environment I did not understand and began to see the importance of discussing my experiences with other children my age, to get different perspectives. Since then I have spoken my mind and stood up for what I believe in. This has been an important trait in my work as a councillor.

Born in Sophiatown in 1943 my family and I later moved to Kgalatsane a rural area in the North West Province where my father was from. I am the eldest of five brothers and three sisters. When I was 19-years old I moved to Johannesburg after I obtained my Junior Certificate (Grade 10). I worked as a domestic worker and studied part time.

The fact that domestic work takes place in the private spaces of the home makes it difficult to monitor the rights of domestic workers. This is one of the reasons that there is insufficient data on this sector. This affects the extent to which workers (the majority of whom are women) are afforded the protection available to others in the labour market. High unemployment levels has led to a lack of job security for workers in this sector, many of whose rights are violated on a daily basis because of unfair labour practices.

Having worked as a domestic worker myself, I saw the importance of educating women about their rights and the obligations of employers to them. After the African National Congress (ANC) was banned in the early 90s I began working with domestic workers to do exactly that. While basic conditions of employment were in place, many domestic workers were, and still are afraid to complain when their rights are violated because they fear they might lose their jobs.

My work led to being nominated as a local government councillor in 1994. I felt

power as a woman and I accepted the nomination because I thought I would have the platform to raise issues of the disadvantaged, especially domestic workers.

In 1995, I was elected as a proportional representative (PR) councillor for the ANC. After the 1999 elections I became a ward Councillor for ward 91 in Sandton, in Region 3. My work as a ward councillor means that I am available to my community at all times – so I am always at work.

When I became a councillor I realised that I needed to empower myself and I began furthering my education. I studied Public Administration through Technikon South Africa and I continued with Ethics Management, Political Education, Municipal Finance and Management, communications and numerous other courses provided by the Speakers Office. This included courses on gender equality and information technology, amongst others.

My second term in office has been very rewarding. I believe that I understand my community when they express their problems and concerns. An important lesson that I have learnt as a ward councillor is to always tell the truth, and never to resolve community issues before getting their suggestions. I do not pretend to know something if I do not, and when I promise to come back for their input, I always do. I never make a promise that I cannot fulfil.

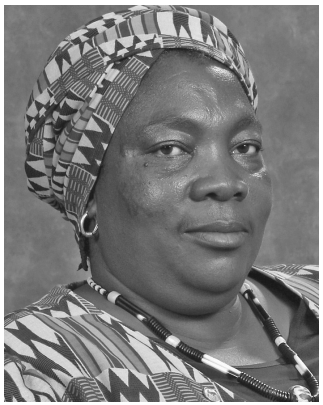
I believe that local government councillors are at the forefront of communities dealing with the impact of poverty and HIV/AIDS. In my ward, we have formed a core group of volunteers that participated in workshops on HIV/AIDS awareness and who have begun working in the community. The group has identified individuals and households affected by HIV/AIDS as well as child-headed families within the ward.

The group of volunteers are mainly women and youth. Men always want to know what's in it for them before they commit themselves. I think that women, because they are caring, patient and concerned, are willing to help without demands. It is through the women of my community that I have come to value the importance of public participation because it is they who work through sharing information and doing their bit for the community.

One of the things that local government can assist communities with to encourage public participation, is to provide practical training for existing volunteers such as counselling, home-based care, etc so that their skills can be used to build their communities.

My time as a local government councillor has given me the opportunity to broaden my mental horizons. In the upcoming local government elections my priority is to campaign for 50/50 representation and encourage women to believe in other women and nominate them for leadership.

Together we can make a difference.



NAME:
Maleselo Julia Kubu-Gololo

AGE:
51

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR, acting ward 7

"I treat members of my community as my brothers and sisters – I share their concerns and understand their desire for a better life."

The tapestry of my life

By Maleselo Julia Kubu-Gololo

Looking back on my life I'm amazed that I'm able to see the tapestry of where I began and how I ended up as a proportional representative (PR) local government councillor in the community of Ivory Park.

I believe in myself and my dreams; have learnt from my mistakes and have set personal goals that I work hard to achieve. My vision is to see that children are cared for and that those who are affected by HIV/AIDS are supported by their communities to deal with their trauma. I want to live in a community that has removed the stigma from HIV/AIDS, a community that works together for the good of all.

The first section of the tapestry of my life began with my joining the nursing profession in which I remained for 16 years. A difficult marriage meant that I had to move from the Northern Province where we lived and where I was completing my nursing diploma to Johannesburg, while my children stayed with their paternal grandmother. My husband was living and working in Johannesburg, but was not sending any money home to help me raise the children.

I came to Johannesburg and lived with my husband in Tembisa and began working at Rand Mutual Hospital. It was then that my husband began abusing me. I thought that if I brought the children to live with us things would get better, but they did not. I eventually left my husband and moved to Diepkloof, Soweto.

Life as a single mother working shifts at the hospital was difficult and I requested a transfer to Baragwanath Hospital – closer to my home – and worked as a phlebotomist. As a single parent, life was sometimes hard, but I persevered and despite some hard knocks raised my children.

These experiences have shaped the way I respond to my communities' concerns today. I believe that it is essential that women have skills that empower them and make them financially independent. I encourage women in my ward to attend training programmes – even in non-traditional skills like plumbing and bricklaying. I remember that I would not have been able to survive had I not been able to care for myself and my children through my own income.

I became involved in a union while working at Rand Mutual Hospital in 1979. In 1993 while working at Baragwanath Hospital, I joined the Nursing Health Union and the Democratic Nursing Union of South Africa. So I really I became involved in politics without being aware of it.

In 1993, I moved to Ivory Park, an informal squatter area just outside Tembisa. I later joined the African National Congress (ANC) and became involved in community-based programmes. I was elected as a section committee secretary and later on I became a branch executive member.

My work in the community included being involved in the establishment of Hlokomelang Setsaba, an NGO active in home-based care and the establishment of crèches for disadvantaged children and AIDS orphans. In 1999 I was nominated to stand as a councillor for the 2000 elections. When the results were announced I couldn't believe it; but I was certain that this was the beginning of yet another part of the tapestry of my life.

During my time as a councillor I have attended a number of training programmes that have given me the skills to assist my community including IT training and primary health care training. My work has included responding to a variety of needs within the community including providing personal counselling, trauma counselling and contributing to support group discussions.

I have arranged for counselling sessions for women who are in abusive relationships to be held twice a week. In addition to the counselling, women are also encouraged to equip themselves with skills to gain independence from their abusive partners.

As in many South African communities, HIV/AIDS has a major impact on my community. As local government councillor, I see the devastation it causes daily – to communities, to families, to individuals. I know of one family in which both parents died of AIDS; not having any relatives, the orphaned children had to be taken to a home, where luckily they received care and education.

I believe my greatest strength as a councillor lies in building trust in and amongst the community that I serve. I am logical in my way of thinking; but am also compassionate. I treat members of my community as my brothers and sisters – I share their concerns and understand their desire for a better life. Patience and tenacity, hard work and open mindedness to except criticism – whether constructive or not – has helped build my character, and developed in me a sense of self worth.

But of course it has not always been smooth sailing. I have sometimes been surprised by the attitudes of some women towards me. I still struggle to understand the "pull her down" syndrome that so many women appear to suffer from.

But the tapestry of my life would have looked very different if it were not for the amazing women in my life who have served as role models to me. They include my mother who instilled in me the values of hard work and sincerity, Albertina Sisulu, Mayethula Khoza, fellow councillor, Sinnah Ramakhula for her strong will and faith in others and Tata Mandela. All these people came from different backgrounds but have worked hard to be where they are today and towards creating a society in which everyone is equal.



NAME:
Nandi Mayathula-Khoza

AGE:
43

POSITION:
Speaker of the City of Johannesburg

"Do what you are expected to do with credibility."

Use your influence to correctly benefit others

By Nandi Mayathula-Khoza

When still a young child I vowed that I would make some contribution to improving the quality of life of people, and women in particular, in any community that I served. This conviction has stayed with me throughout my life. It is kept alive by the memory of my parents who instilled in me and my siblings the values of hard work, commitment and perseverance.

Born and raised in Soweto, I've always had a calling to serve my community. My political activism began when I was 14 and participated in the 1976 youth uprisings in Soweto where we protested against inferior Bantu education and the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Our actions were part of the broader struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa.

In 1977 I had to leave the country for Swaziland due to police harassment of my family. My father's political activism also meant that it was not safe for us to remain in South Africa. During my stay in Swaziland, despite being advised not to register as refugees due to our young ages, I maintained close links with comrades in exile and played the role of courier with underground activists within South Africa. After obtaining a BSc degree and Diploma in Education from the University of Swaziland, I returned to South Africa, when both my parents died.

I became involved in the establishment of street, block and defence committees and participated in public protests against illegitimate municipal leaders and poor or non-existent service provision and in the broader struggle for freedom. Little did I know that I would later be deployed by the ANC as a municipal councilor in 1994 and 1995, and as Mayor of the Greater Johannesburg Metro's Southern Local Council (Soweto) in 1997.

I accepted the nomination because I believed that I had something to contribute and that the freedom we fought for and attained would only have true meaning if everyone's needs and aspirations were represented in legitimate structures of government.

As Mayor I represented the municipality in official local and international functions. I also worked closely with communities to ensure their participation in the municipality. One of the most exciting and humbling experiences I had was to chair a council meeting that deliberated on the development of Soweto and surrounding communities.

I particularly enjoyed meetings with women's groups in Soweto and surrounding areas. We organised information-sharing meetings and training sessions which empowered them to establish income generating projects such as dress-making, child care, baking, handcraft. While we discouraged them to establish projects that perpetuated socially constructed roles of women, it was difficult to change their mindsets.

Most of these projects impacted positively to the lives of women who could now put a plate on the table for children and husbands to eat, but some of the projects were not sustained due to dependency, need for quick gain, and lack of commitment by some women. Overall though, the projects contributed to the vibrancy of the communities as well as to the participation of women in productive work and community politics.

While I enjoyed my role as a Mayor, the challenge was that it was a ceremonial position that was too limiting, but I didn't pay too much attention to the position, I instead, carried out many developmental functions.

But despite the non-sexist, non-racial and democratic character of the ANC, being one of the few women in a leadership position amongst a sea of men has not been easy. I remember when I gave birth to my second child in 1994, when I was already serving at the ANC Johannesburg Region, I was referred to, by one of the male comrades as a "child-maker" who had to occasionally excuse herself from meetings to care for a sick child or had to bring her "disturbing" children to the meetings.

My colleague(s) failed to understand that women can carry out multiple roles in society. These include the reproductive role, the productive role, the community managing role as well as being active in community politics.

The "double or triple shift" that women work is not easy. It is essential to allocate quality time to fulfill our many functions. Time management, goal setting and follow through have therefore always been critical for me to carry out all my roles efficiently.

At the Municipal Council many of our male comrades have genuinely been supportive of women's leadership and considered us as equals. However, there are those who have sexist attitudes and remain major obstacles to women's effective participation in governance and the empowerment of other women in the community. However, instead of putting us off, fighting these attitudes has made us stronger and more committed to the struggle for gender equality as enshrined in our constitution.

It is now 10 years since my deployment to local government, as a councillor, a Mayor and a Speaker. I am thankful and indebted to the African National Congress for my growth in the process. All these roles were totally new to me but I accepted deployment in order to make a contribution as part of a collective, in improving the quality of life of our people.

This sphere of local government has been at the coalface of service delivery. I believe that local democracy is deepening as people participate in developmental local governance through ward committees and other community structures. However, much more still needs to be done to improve ordinary citizen's quality of life. Johannesburg faces complex challenges such as unemployment, poverty, social and economic development, urbanisation, migration and inequality.

I also believe that there are some gender specific issues that can be addressed most effectively in local government. These include the need to engender integrated development plans, performance systems, budgets and incorporating gender indicators and targets in all local government policies and programmes. This will help to monitor and evaluate the impact of local government on the lives of men and women, and to measure progress made towards gender equality. In essence, gender should be mainstreamed in all aspects of municipal life.

In order to realise democratic and representative leadership, to raise the political legitimacy of local government and to advance the course of gender equality, local government elections need to yield equal representation of ward and proportional representation ie party list councilors. However these men and women councilors must have what it takes to serve the community through local governance.

They must be able to implement policy decisions that will impact positively on the lives of people, demonstrate strong political leadership to the communities we serve, and provide democratic, equitable and accountable local government to the community of Johannesburg.

There have been many highlights for me during my time as Speaker of the City of Johannesburg. These include contributing to the development of policies, systems and rules which have promoted good governance through the Rules, Ethics and Public Participation Committees which I chair.

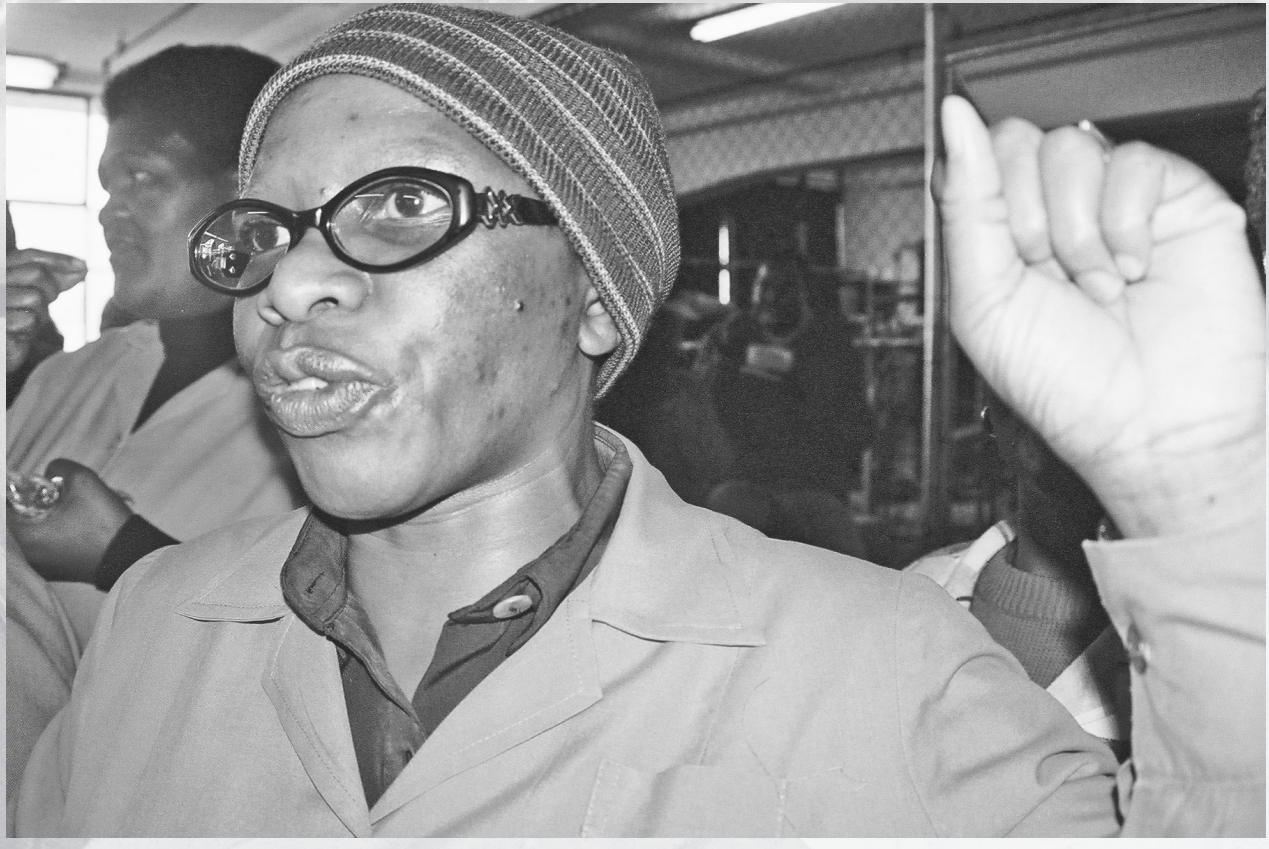
I also chair the Women's Caucus which has been instrumental in placing gender and women's development on the agenda of the Council. The Caucus' objectives include working for equal representation and participation of women and men in Council; the promotion of women's social and economic empowerment throughout the city as well as the prevention of gender based violence.

My advice to current and future women councillors is that we should do what we are expected to do with credibility. As long as we have the conviction that what we are doing is for benefit of the community we serve, we cannot go wrong.



Martha Seolane shares her experiences of gender violence Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Empower a woman, empower a nation





"I create a better world through my work as a local government councillor."

NAME:
Cathy Seefort

AGE:
52

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

Fulfilling my purpose

By Cathy Seefort

Awoken by the smell of smoke, I rushed to the scene of yet another fire in the informal settlement in Claremont. All around me, residents were trying to save what was left of their few belongings. For many it was too late, they lost almost everything. It was March 2001 and I was a PR Councillor in the City of Joburg deployed to region 4.

As the sun made its way above the horizon, residents gathered together. The shock and disbelief on their faces told many stories. But they were also angry. Tempers flared as some of the community wanted to mete out their own form of justice to those who had started the fire. The situation grew tense.

"Bring them, we want to kill them!" These words filled the air as the three men who started the fire were brought before the community. I saw sticks, rod irons spades, forks and panga's; some had rocks in their hands. They had gathered weapons and put them ready for action. I knew I had to do something.

I stood in front of the three men and spoke to the community, their agitation growing by the minute. "Please … we don't want any more killings. One of us has already lost their life in the fire." The air was filled with tension. Every so often someone would rush at me and I would scream at them to stop, still with the three behind men me. After 20 minutes the police arrived and took the men away.

Who would have thought that my position as ward councillor would mean that I would be wearing so many hats? I have played the role of peace keeper; teacher, social worker, police officer, marriage, pension and probation officer, housing assistant, maintenance officer, environmental officer, sewerage spill identifier, roads agent and even taxi permit consultant!

I have been involved in local government for over 20 years. I cut my teeth as a ward councillor in Noordgesig as an Independent Councillor and was the first woman representative from this area to be elected onto the South Western Management Committee a statuary body of the then Johannesburg City Council.

I had only one thing on my mind – I would make a meaningful difference in my community. I knew we all aspired to better lives for our children and ourselves.

It was essential that the entire community be involved. Every street had a representative who participated in rent and ratepayers associations. It is to them who I owed my success. In 1987 I was re-elected with an overwhelming majority.

Noordgesig was not untouched by the civil unrest of the late 80s and early 90s. A boycott against paying for municipal services had support in the community and many saw me as the enemy. On March 11, 1992 the day of a massive stay away, my house was gutted by fire from a petrol bomb.

Fortunately, sensing how volatile the situation was, we'd not been home. I moved back home and lived for eight months in a house that had two-thirds of the roof burnt out. I had done nothing wrong and I was not prepared to run away. Community members who supported me were intimidated and for a while no one wanted anything to do with me.

But things got better and eventually returned to normality. What could have been a turning point in my life deepened my understanding of the plight of people and gave me a deeper understanding of the real fight for democracy.

In 1994 I moved out of Noordgesig and became a representative on the newly formed Interim Local Council. After much soul searching I joined a political party.

In the 1995 local government elections I stood as a Proportional Representative councillor for the Northern Metropolitan Local Council. I returned to the Northern Metropolitan local government as a PR Councillor. This time was for me was marked by much learning – both from other councillors and through our own experiences.

I had to deal with different issues: housing remained a critical issue but I also found myself dealing with poverty and unemployment in the disadvantaged areas as well as other complaints from the more affluent suburbs.

I was re-elected as a PR Councillor to the City of Johannesburg in 2000. Emphasis on gender training has provided new opportunities for woman councillors who always worked in a male-dominated environment and had to always and fight to get things done.

I am part of the Multiparty Steering Committee where the determination of women clearly shows that we have an important part to play in democracy. We've made concerted efforts to ensure that every department engages with its budget in a gender sensitive way.

Another important shift is the support and capacity building provided to local government councillors. I have been equipped with the skills which have assisted me in dealing with the gangsterism in my community.

One of the many capacity building programmes I attended is a beginners' course in Zulu. Imagine if all those years ago, when the informal settlement was burning, I could shout: "Thulani! Ngimameleni! Asifuni ukubona abantu abantu befa kanje! (Keep quite! Llisten to me! We don't want to see people dying like this). Would the situation have been resolved more quickly?

The memory of that day has remained with me. I know one thing with certainty: that my purpose has been and still is, to create a better world. I do this most clearly through my work as a local government councillor.



NAME:
Christina Fortuin

AGE:
49

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"Women's empowerment translates into the improved circumstances of their immediate families and communities more broadly."

Empower a woman, empower a community

By Christina Fortuin

Your name is called out as a successful candidate for the first democratic elected local government in South Africa. Group of 1995, Wow! What does this mean? The excitement in the air is unbelievable, a woman from Westbury in Council … and a Coloured nogal! People in Westbury could not believe that I had been elected to this important position within the African National Congress (ANC).

My name is Christina Fortuin and I am 49-years young. I am always initially taken aback when I have to talk about myself. Because it is only when I talk about myself that I am able to reflect on my achievements. It was a surprise when I first passed my Local Government Certificate course at Technikon RSA. This was the first time that I had been in a formal learning environment since I'd left school just over 20 years ago. Juggling my studies – not having completed my matric – while raising my two girls and dealing with Council work, made it real challenge.

And it did not stop there. I went on to complete a Public Management Certificate course in 1999, a Programme in Electronic Commerce at the Graduate School of Business Leadership at UNISA in 2003; as well as courses in E-Strategy, E-Marketing, E-Systems and Technologies, E-Financial Management and E-Entrepreneurship. I realised how important education was and encouraged those around me to gain more knowledge, as I was doing.

My father, George Fortuin, and the Anglican Church nuns at St. Joseph Home in Sophiatown nurtured my first encounters with community work. I joined the civic organisation that my father was part of and the nuns encouraged me to do voluntary work at old age homes and hospitals and to participate in clean-up campaigns in Westbury.

I am presently in my second term of office in local government. My first term was very exciting – I moved forward into the unknown without much knowledge about how Council works. I had to quickly come to terms with the technicalities of my work with committees and also working with people from very different backgrounds.

It was a precious time in my life. I opened my mind and heart to all of the experiences that were to come my way – including two study tour visits to the United States and

Britain for the Waste Management Programme and Parks Department.

However, my most memorable project was in 1998, when I arranged to take 15 children to a Reconstruction and Development project at Malvern Primary School for computer classes. The children were from Westbury, a community in which many young people have no direction, or the opportunities to fulfill their dreams.

While the classes were free, we had to raise funds for transport to and from the venue. This proved to be difficult as Westbury is a poor community. Nevertheless, we persevered and the children were able to complete the course.

At the end of the course the children were presented with certificates at a special dinner in the Mayor's parlour at the Council chambers which was also attended by the parents. It was the first time that any of them had entered the Council. I felt so proud, yet humbled.

In 2004, a library and recreation centre was built by a woman contractor who then found sponsors to establish a computer centre in the old library. I was proud to have been on the tender committee that awarded her the contract.

In Westbury it is the women who are primarily the heads of households. Insufficient social support for them compounds the problems of unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS and alcohol and drug abuse. Many feel as if they are the "forgotten people". Through my work I have assisted many people obtain child and maintenance grants. I have also helped young people access part-time work through programmes of the Department of Public Works.

My priorities for the upcoming local government elections are to lobby for women to learn how to tender for local government projects. In the past, women did not get the opportunities to tender – they were not supported by financial institutions and the Council was dominated by white male officials who did not understand the importance of providing support and encouraging women's economic empowerment.

Today, the Council has approved a procurement policy through which women are given more opportunities to tender for contracts. We recognise the value in this as when women are empowered; the results are felt at many levels. Women are the backbone of communities, their empowerment translates into the improved circumstances of both their immediate families and their communities more broadly.

Being a member of the Tender Committee this has been one of the most difficult concepts to get across to Council officials. But I will carry on fighting, and I hope eventually win the war and continue to make a meaningful contribution to the upliftment of my community.



NAME:
Sinnah Ramakhula

AGE:
67

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"I am a business-minded councillor who goes out to look for better opportunities for others."

When dreams become reality

By Sinnah Ramakhula

I now know who I am, writing my story is like unwinding a long play record on a gramophone, winding, changing the needle, winding…

I am Sinnah Ramakhula. I love my name because it carries many memories in my life: Sinnah was my father's aunt and I am named after her. There is something great behind the name.

I was born in Orlando East in November 1938, the second of my parents' daughters. My parents moved to rural Disake in Rustenburg. My paternal grandfather, Mosala William Huma, was the first teacher in the village and the adviser to the village chief. I attended school here until I was 13-years old, at which point I went back to Johannesburg to live with my maternal grandparents. In Disake I learnt all things young girls in rural areas should know – about stamping mealies, drawing water from the well, making a fire, ploughing, weeding, and how to preserve food for the winter.

The values of discipline and working hard were taught to me. They remain integral as I encourage my constituency to work hard and use the opportunities provided to help themselves and not to wait for handouts.

I completed my education in Johannesburg and witnessed the forced removal of communities from Sophiatown to Meadowlands. It was a painful time for us all and I remember wishing I could do something to change things, but I couldn't. I studied hard and dreamt of one day influencing decisions in my country. My dream came true and now I am a local government councillor, actively participating to bettering my community.

Today I am one of those who implement decisions to provide social grants to the poor, bringing services to the people. But my character has been strongly shaped by my experiences in Sophiatown. I remember shopping in Martindale Road where we bought penny bread pasela crumbs. People who lived in Sophiatown, New Clare Western Native Township and Coronationville will know exactly what I am talking about!

In 1962 it was our turn to be forcibly removed from the Western Nation Township

to Moroka (Rockville). I had just completed a teacher's course at Wilberforce Teachers Training College.

I was a teacher in Soweto for 15 years and took an active interest in my learners, beyond their academic lives. I knew those who came to school in winter without shoes, those who pretended to be studying in class during lunch time when they really had no lunch to eat. I would visit their houses and help by referring them to social workers for assistance.

In 1975 I began studying full-time for a social work degree which I completed and then worked as a social worker at the Rietfortein Hospital. I was the first black social worker at the hospital. I felt proud of my achievements.

I continued with my studies, obtained a post graduate Higher Diploma in Advanced Social Work and became the first black social worker to work at the Red Cross and then at the South African Institute for Medical Research on the HIV/AIDS Programme. My work meant traveling the country, training trainers on HIV/AIDS education and counselling. The Hillbrow HIV/AIDS Clinic and Soweto Township Clinic were started with through my initiative and that of other colleagues I worked with.

Today I am the Social Investment Manager of the National Economic Education Trust. In 2001 I was elected as a proportional representative African National Congress (ANC) local government councillor in the Henry Ntsele branch of Region 2, ward 93, Midrand.

The skills I acquired from my time teaching, being a social worker, as well as from my Masters degree in Business Administration have been invaluable in my community work as a local government councillor.

I have encouraged men and women to form consortiums and to tender for available business opportunities. I am a business minded councillor who goes out to look for better opportunities for others. I have a particular interest in supporting elderly woman and have assisted them with identifying marketing opportunities for the sewing products they produce as part of the consortium I helped them establish.

My ward consists of people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Unemployment, lack of proper housing, HIV/AIDS and other social problems appear sometimes to be getting worse. But projects including counselling and home-based care for households affected by HIV/AIDS; as well as the construction of affordable houses are underway and are helping ease the burdens of the poor in my community.

Young women are also encouraged to study at tertiary institutions and to take up careers women had not traditionally participated in. I have encouraged a culture of community sharing and support. For example, when there is a death in the community, resources are often shared and families supported with arrangements. Recognising that many are not aware of the processes involved in purchasing property, I have also developed relationships with banking institutions, to share information with community members on bonds, loans and other issues.

I am proud to be a councillor today to effect changes that I could not before. The helplessness I felt in past has been overcome and replaced with hope for my people today.



NAME:
Dudu Chili

AGE:
64

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"Women bring something unique to local government. We are not just tokens, but a power to be reckoned with."

Sharing what I've learnt with my community

By Dudu Chili

My term as a local government councillor has empowered me beyond description. I have been able to use the assertiveness and confidence I've acquired as a councillor to address the needs of my community.

But getting to this point has not been easy. My father was a polygamist; my mother the second of three wives. In total there were eight children. My parents' difficult marriage resulted in my mother leaving my father's home in rural KwaZulu-Natal. My brother and I returned with her to Johannesburg where she was from. Despite being pressured by my father she refused to go back and their marriage ended. In spite of this, I loved my father dearly and was deeply affected by his death years later.

In addition to my brother and I, my mother had two other sons. My relationship with my half brothers was difficult to say the least. Despite their bad treatment of me, my mother always supported them and I believe, preferred them over me because I was a girl. My brothers were allowed to play with their friends and enjoy their childhood, while I was relegated to doing the housework and preparing food. I was very unhappy.

Yet as I look back at those times today, I realise that they have shaped me beyond measure. I am a strong independent woman and this helps me in my work as a councillor, which is very challenging. I think that it is important that cultural beliefs do not work to discriminate against girl children so that they too can have the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

After finishing a teachers' course I began working and helped my mother run the household. Finally I felt as if I were accepted in my family. But my half brothers' jealousy destroyed this. One day, after I'd bought my mother some kitchen furniture, my half brother, in a fit of rage and jealousy, started breaking them. I was devastated, particularly as my mother did nothing to stop him and stood by and watched as he destroyed the things that I had worked so hard for. He told me to leave and never come back, and my mother said: "Dudu leave before he hurts you."

I packed a few things and left the house. I have not been back since. After staying at a friend of my mothers' for two weeks, I found a place to stay. In all the time, my

mother never came to see me, and I was never invited back. While I missed my family, life went on; I was married and had children of my own and my relationship with my mother improved.

While life may have been hard, I am grateful to my mother as my experiences assisted me greatly when I joined the Federation of Transvaal Women, an affiliate of the United Democratic Front. I co-ordinated the women's projects and would also provide support to political prisoners and assist those who had to leave the country.

In 2000 I became an African National Congress (ANC) proportional representative councillor, working closely with the ANC Constituency Office in my ward. I rose to the challenges presented to me and took up my responsibilities with gusto, believing that I could contribute positively to my community.

I am a member of two portfolios: the Community Development Portfolio and the Petitions and Public Participation Portfolio. The Petitions Portfolio responds to petitions brought to the Council by community members. Using the channels provided to participate in the governance of their community, residents submit petitions for a number of reasons, ranging from the need to put in speed bumps on streets where children are known to play and may be in danger from traffic, to petitioning against the closure of public spaces.

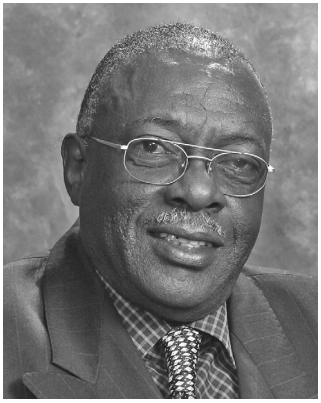
Council meetings are very interesting because it is in this forum that final decisions are taken on the council budget, by laws, rates and service delivery. In my ward, which forms part of Sandton, concerns over service delivery are not as pressing as in other less developed wards. A concern though, is the provision of adequate and strategically located housing for the many domestic workers and gardeners who provide services to the affluent suburb of Sandton.

My priority for the upcoming local government elections is to support my women colleagues to ensure that a 50/50 gender balance is achieved. Women played an important role in the struggle for our countries' freedom and are capable of doing the same work that men do. We bring something unique to government; have a different leadership style to that of men and I believe, are able to offer our communities insight into their concerns, not necessarily shared by men.

We are not just tokens, but a power to be reckoned with.



Local government councillors at a training workshop Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



NAME:
Cecil Ndlovu

AGE:
57

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 14

"We can use our constitution and the rights of men and women it enshrines as a point to move forward."

Working together to make a difference

By Cecil Ndlovu

I have come to believe that as men we must be prepared to learn and educate each other about the important role women have in our communities. Having been raised in a very traditional family, in which I was taught that the man is the head of the household and therefore makes the rules, this realisation, has changed the way I see the world.

If I had not made this shift, my work as a local government councillor would have been all the more difficult as we operate as a *kgotla* (gathering/meeting of equals).

I was born in September 1948 in near Sophiatown to a traditional family of five boys and two girls and also four other siblings from my fathers' two other wives.

Life was difficult and my father strict with us children. After finishing my Junior Certificate (Grade 10) I worked as a storeman, then a messenger and filing clerk at a law firm in Johannesburg. I later began working as a trade union organiser and became the General Secretary of the Black Allied Workers Union.

When I left the country to study in Germany, I had no idea that I would be gone for so long. I had just married and had ideas of a future with my wife. But this was not to be. I spent 23 years in exile.

Upon my return to South Africa in 1996, I began participating in local community policing forums. It was my involvement in these structures that put me on the path which led me to local government. I became a local government councillor in 2000.

Because of my traditional upbringing, I always believed that women had their "place". I remember a heated discussion about women at the Beijing Conference on Women where I argued that it was wrong for these women talking about *all* women's needs when ordinary women could not speak for themselves and were not consulted. To this day, I am still concerned about whether women receive the training and support they need to participate fully in public life.

The other challenge is that men are scared of women's increased participation in public life that has previously been considered a man's domain. There is a need for

work to be done with men so that they can see that every one has a role to play in transforming our societies. It is essential that we work with men to change their mind sets.

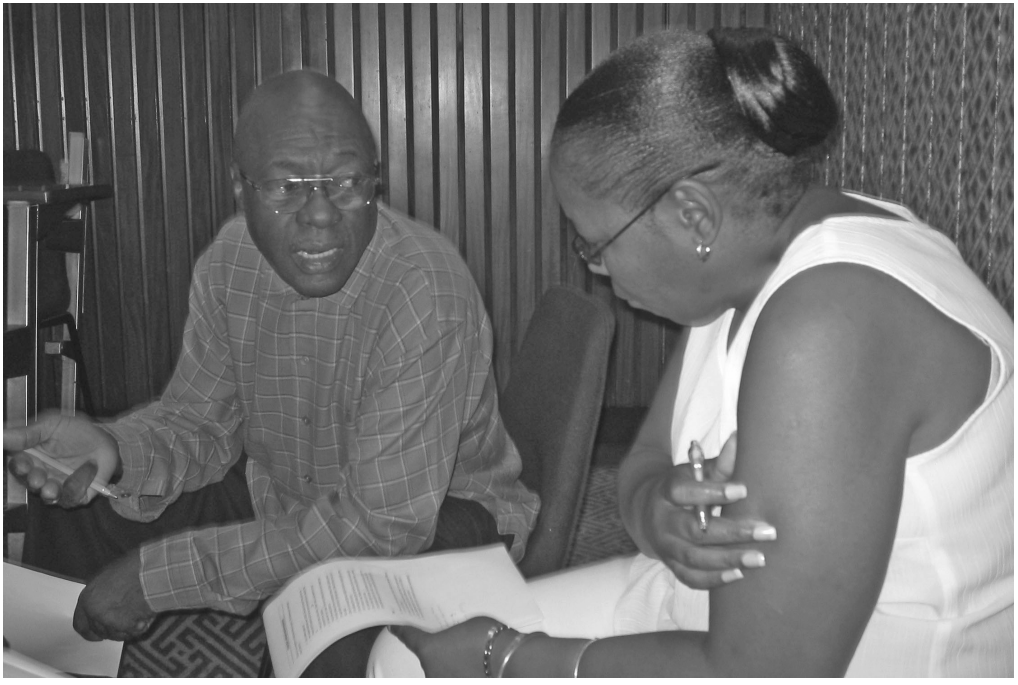
In my work as a local government councillor I often find myself in situations where I have to educate men about the importance of listening to women's specific concerns and issues. This is difficult as sometimes in meetings, many men refuse to even listen to what women have to say as they believe that they should not even be present in the meeting, but should rather be at home, according to them "where they belong".

The other problem is that when women are in majority, they tend to dominate and close the door to men's participation. When men are the majority, they do the same. I think that this is because neither group knows how and if they can work together. I am certain that if we could concentrate on how to address our fears of the unknown, we can overcome our differences and achieve common goals.

I recommend that these issues be discussed in all areas of life from our homes to our communities, and at every public gathering. We can use our constitution and the rights of men and women it enshrines as a point to move forward.

Of course, doing this is easier said than done, as working in and with communities has its own challenges. My work as a councillor has taught me that one of the most important issues that have to be addressed if our citizens are to fully participate in the governance of our country, is that of rights education.

If citizens know their rights they will be in a better position not only to demand them, but also to participate in processes which result in the realisation of their rights. For me, local government is strategically positioned to do this.



Councillors debate the City's draft gender policy Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



NAME:
Patricia Lion-Cachet

AGE:
62

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"I do not accept only one label. I am a complete person with many facets and complexities."

Reflections on the life of a woman

By Patricia Lion-Cachet

I am not in the habit of being reflective. In fact if it was not for this task assigned to me I would not have spent the time looking at the road already travelled. Now that I have been obliged to take the time to look back I feel an empathy with the words uttered by Cecil John Rhodes on his death bed, "So much to do and so little done …"

A number of years ago (the exact number I choose not to remember) I was born female. This one fact determined, and to a large extent, dictated both my role in society and my status.

I don't regret being a woman. I rejoice in the fact that I am both woman and mother. I have given life to two wonderful children who have blessed me with four grandsons. What I do resent about being a woman is the fact that our role as woman and mother dictates that we retire from the mainstream of society and the labour market to concentrate on the rearing of children. This idea has been seized by men as a reason to relegate us to second class citizens, subservient to them. What modest achievements I have attained have been despite the fact that I am a woman and against the general trend that relegates us to domesticity.

I do not accept only one label. I am a politician but I am also a mother, grandmother, concerned citizen and church member. I am a complete person with many facets and complexities.

My early life was spent on the move as my father was involved with the United Nations in Palestine. Shortly after my father returned to South Africa to take up a position in the Smuts government, the Nationalist Party took over the reins in parliament. My father remained in the political wilderness until he fought for and won a seat for the old United Party. We moved twice thereafter – first to Cape Town and then Johannesburg, where I spent a rather predictable and steady school career.

My mother was, and still is, a tremendous influence in my life. She was not a career woman and was always a wife and mother who saw her role as that of giving encouragement and stimulation to her three daughters. She remains the pivot around which the family rotates.

After school I did a business course and entered the labour market as a personal assistant to the local Chief Executive Officer of a shipping line company. I also undertook the duties of Public Relations Officer and Publicity Manager.

I also continued helping my father in his election campaigns – he served in Parliament from 1950 until 1966. That was when I met my husband and we were married.

We ran a tourism company together and had two children – Chad and Roxanne. I devoted myself to their upbringing and eventually became the secretary at their school.

When the children went to boarding school and university I felt entitled to "do my own thing" so to speak, whatever that turned out to be. In 1988 I took up a seat in the Johannesburg City Council after I was elected as a national councillor in a ward in the south of Johannesburg. I suppose this was natural having grown up in a political house hold for so many years.

My political aspirations were not to one day be Prime Minister. I wanted to serve and make a difference in my ward. I wanted to instil in people a pride in their area and their community. I tried at all times to acknowledge where an effort had been made.

Later – from 1994-1999 - when I was in the Provincial Legislature, I became aware of another concern – the need to work together as a combined force (of formerly foes) in the interest of the people of our country. My focus in the legislature, being on the Finance and Economics Committee, was to become proficient in the budgeting processes - monitoring expenditure, correct procurement practices and the proper apportionment of the capital expenditure. It was an exciting and stimulating time. I could see the impact of decisions on the ground.

By this time, the African National Congress (ANC) had gained power and for a brief time we all worked for the betterment of the country. There was a wonderful spirit of co-operation and mutual respect and the only criteria was that our actions be in the best interests of the people of South Africa. Unfortunately this did not last long. The National Party (NP) began haemorrhaging voters, and as many know, continued to lose its support base and was eventually consumed by the ANC.

Well before the amalgamation of the parties I had left the NP and joined the ANC. My belief then and still is that it is only through the ANC that there is any prospect of progress. Since December 2000 I have been an ANC proportional representative councillor in Johannesburg where I continue to serve on the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee with tourism as a specific interest and responsibility.

I have been privileged to have the most wonderful and supportive husband for 40 years without whom I am sure I would not have managed to achieve what I have.

Throughout this period I have not only been a politician but have also been engaged in other activities. Through my Council duties I became Deputy Chairperson of Tourism Johannesburg, and was offered a seat on the South African Tourism Board. I also later became the Deputy Chair of the Gauteng Tourism Authority. Through these positions I have travelled all over the world – and that has only served to strengthen my belief that we live in a wonderful and beautiful country.

I also played a part in the management of the Rand Show governing body, the National Exhibition Centre. My service over several years was recognised when after celebrating 100 years of the shows' existence I was appointed the first woman president.

Fulfilling the duties of these positions has not always been easy, as for a woman it is much more difficult to do things alone. Sometimes it is not safe to drive to meetings alone at night; other times the mere fact that one is a woman sometimes means that you are relegated to less important responsibilities. In some cases your duties as a wife and mother have to be weighed up against your other responsibilities and inevitably you find yourself up against the rigidity of the male preserve.

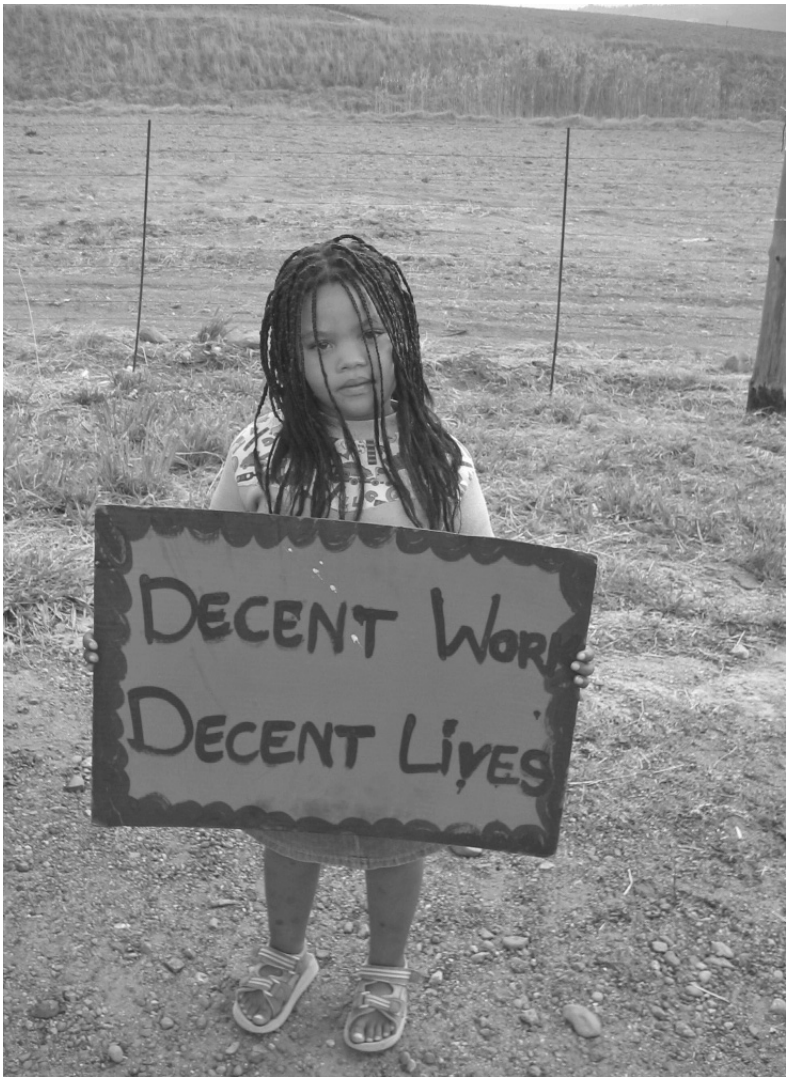


Photo: GCIS

A better world is possible





NAME:
Java Sinah Gwebu

AGE:
54

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 76

"I believed that I should get out of the shell that kept me in a particular space as a black disabled woman."

Life out of the shell

By Java Sinah Gwebu

On the morning of 22 April 1987, another chapter of the lives of the women of Alexandra Township unfolded. As the co-ordinator of the Alexandra Women's Congress, my colleagues and I were staging a sit-in at the Alexandra Municipality offices against unfair budgetary allocations between the black township and white suburb municipalities.

"You are all arrested! You women are misbehaving. You are supposed to be at home cooking for your husbands!" shouted the security officer to the group of us in the office. "Misbehaving" … I was furious! He dare reduce our action to women misbehaving!

We made international news that day as a BBC journalist who happened to be passing by saw the commotion and interviewed us before we were arrested.

My name is Sinah Gwebu and I was born in Middlefontein near Nylstroom in Limpopo Province.

In 1980, when living in the Alexandra township, I joined the Nchabeleng Detachment Group – who were fighting against the apartheid regime. My comrades were supportive of me and did not consider my disability an obstacle; but believed and supported my contribution to our work.

A year after my husband and I married, a shooting incident led to his becoming paraplegic. You can imagine how difficult it was for the two of us – each with our own disability – living in a community which had no facilities for disabled people. Many disabled people did not even know their rights.

We both felt strongly that something had to be done to assist disabled people and established a self-help association to improve the quality of life for people living with disabilities in Alexandra.

While working with the association, I remained active in the broader struggle for women's political emancipation. I believed that I should get out of the shell that kept me in a particular space as a black disabled woman and take as many of my sisters

as I could with me. Elected as the Deputy Secretary of the Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA), I focused my energy on establishing a women's wing of the DPSA at provincial level.

I represented the DPSA on the National Women's Coalition (NWC) and formed part of the group who drew up the herstoric Women's Charter which we argued, should guarantee effective equality. I eventually became the Deputy Secretary of the NWC. These were empowering times, when the solidarity shown between women served to strengthen us in our struggle for equality.

In 1987 my work with the Self Help Association for the Disabled received recognition when I was named the runner up in the Sowetan Community Builder of the Year Award, in the women's category. I continued my involvement in civic structures and non-governmental organisations and became the chair of the Alexandra African National Congress (ANC) Women's League, a position I held for three years. I also served on the board of the Agisanang Domestic Abuse, Prevention and Training (ADAPT) project, and was the first chairperson of our local Education Training Unit.

In the 2000 local government elections I became the ward councillor for ward 76 in Alexandra. This was a difficult time for me as I lost both my husband and a daughter that year. I had to work hard as a single parent with a disability, who was also taking care of my grandchildren, to prove to the male councillors and others that I could deliver.

My involved in the Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign in 2004 has been a highlight for me. I organised a series of activities in Alexandra. These included a human chain, a seminar on the band role of men in ending gender violence, the launch of posters dealing with sexual harassment at schools, a 'soccer against HIV/AIDS' tournament and a day of "herstory" where women survivors of violence shared their experiences.

Gender violence is a major problem in Alexandra. This is often made worse by insensitive police whose attitudes are not helpful or supportive of women survivors of abuse. Often men use the excuse that it is their culture that demands that "women know their place" and that they are subservient to men. Through my work, and the support of the community, we urged the Alexandra Police Station to establish a domestic violence desk, which, with the assistance of Business Against Crime, now is staffed with a social worker, district surgeon and co-ordinator. The desk has assisted many survivors of violence.

Throughout my work as a councillor I have been conscious of the support of people in my community, including my two granddaughters, Tinyiko and Siphiwe and the administrator at region 7, Tytus Motau. My work and that of other councillors is also supported by the Speaker of the City of Johannesburg. It is thanks to all of these people that I can say that I am out of my shell.



NAME:
Virginia Tiny Volker

AGE:
46

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"My passion and commitment as a local government councillor are resources that I give to my community."

Learning from the past to create a better future

By Virginia Tiny Volker

I have picked up the spear left by my late mother and, like her, work hard to make a better life for our children – both my own and those of my community.

I do this through my work in Eldorado Park where I have been a local government councillor since 2000. My passion and commitment to serving my community are what led me to accept the nomination to stand in the elections.

My vision for a better future stems from my own life's difficult past. I saw my mother, a domestic worker, only once a month. Back then I did not even know that she was my mother. While I did not question her love for my sister and I, our relationship was difficult because we did not even speak the same language. We spoke Afrikaans (the language of our foster parents) while my mother spoke Tswana. Despite this, we had a deep and special bond.

My mother's aunt and her husband were our foster parents. We lived with them since birth as my mother's employer did not allow her to keep her children with her. Both my foster parents were unemployed and to make ends meet my mother would bake and sell vetkoek, wash clothes for people in the neighbourhood and sell "Bantu beer." My biological mother's meager income would also assist us.

At one point we found ourselves with nowhere to live after the landlord evicted us. Fortunately, other accommodation was found. I remember going to school hungry. We would wrap our feet in plastic bags to keep them warm as we walked through the long grass from Kliptown to Pimville where we went to school.

When I was 14-years old my biological mother died, leaving my foster mother with my sister and I and an eight-month old baby sister. Life became even more difficult. The subsequent upheaval of the 1976 uprisings disrupted the education of many young people, myself included. In addition, our impoverishment meant that I had to find work to help out at home. While looking for work I was told to marry a man as old as my foster mother. I refused. I was devastated. How could I be expected to do that? I guess my foster mother thought that if I married him there would be one less mouth to feed. Later I got a job and while I worked, I continued studying to obtain my matric.

I did eventually marry, although my life remained a struggle. My husband was a violent abusive man. He once forced me to sleep outside in the rain. He would swear at our children and beat me in front of them and my mother with whom we lived. She could do nothing – she too was afraid of him. I would draw on the support of the older men and women in the community, who would try to speak to him and get him to change his ways.

Our financial problems continued. In 1990 my foster mother died and the bank threatened to repossess our house as the payments were in arrears. It was at this point that I started to look at life differently. Alone by this time, I negotiated to get my home back and became involved in the civic organisation in Eldorado Park. Fortunately, I obtained my matric and found stable employment which improved my financial situation.

My work in the civic structures led me to join the African National Congress and I became actively involved in the community work that was being undertaken. The violence I continued to witness around me – between men and women and between men themselves, led me to initiate a "gun free" campaign. The campaign was targeted specifically at reducing gangsterism in the community – an issue that today still haunts Eldorado Park.

Eldorado Park is an impoverished community. My work as a local government councillor means that I witness first hand how it is that poverty contributes to the abuse of women and children. Living in depressed conditions, many men use alcohol as a way to escape their realties; then beat up their wives when they feel their positions are being threatened. My own experiences have helped me counsel families in which violence has become a normal way of life.

It is unacceptable that there is insufficient support for women who are experiencing abuse in my community. The one shelter that exists is far from enough if one considers how many women are in abusive relationships. However, the police and a trauma centre are also doing what they can to improve the situation.

I believe that local government has a key role to play in providing assistance to women. All sectors of society – from faith based organisations to schools and other structures – need to join together to create more awareness of the problem, and also to provide support to women who need it. More places of safety need to be established that will also empower women with skills they can use so that they can become independent from their abusive partners, and are able to leave violent relationships.

Poverty has also contributed to low levels of self-esteem and self-worth amongst the residents of Eldorado Park. Many do not believe that they deserve any better; others believe that there is nothing they can do. Their feelings of helplessness cause them to lose interest and not take the initiative to change their circumstances.

Despite this, I believe that there is hope. If we work together as concerned community members and use the resources – both human and social – provided through local government, we can make a difference. My passion and commitment as a local government councillor are resources that I give to my community. If we believe that we can change our lives for the better; and do not stop working towards that goal no matter how difficult things may appear to be, the experiences of my life and those of many women in my community today need not be the experiences of our children.



NAME:
Sophie Bethiwe Msiza

AGE:
65

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"The time for us to publicly engage in dialogue around our particular concerns is long overdue."

My journey continues

By Sophie Bethiwe Msiza

Today I tell the story of my journey from Delmas to Brakpan, to Swaziland to Chicago and back to Johannesburg. I am a woman councillor in the City of Johannesburg municipality and strive to make a difference in people's lives as a politician, mentor to the community and advocate for women's health issues and ending abuse.

I grew up knowing poverty. As a 12-year old girl, I would I sell peanuts, oranges and sweet potatoes to mineworkers at a beerhall to make money to pay school fees. I did well at school and when I was 14 was awarded a book for coming first in my class. The book was entitled "Florence Nightingale". It inspired me to become a nurse.

I received a bursary to continue my secondary education. All us girls had to do domestic sciences instead of history, mathematics and physical science. A friend and I did not accept this and insisted we also do mathematics and science. We ended up doing them – but on top of the other seven subjects which meant we had nine subjects! But it was a victory nevertheless.

At 17, my nursing career began at Pretoria General Hospital. Around the country women prepared for the historic march to the Union Buildings. But we could not show solidarity as at the hospital we were told that we would be dismissed if we participated in the pass boycotts and were not allowed to participate in public meetings.

Following our marriage in 1966, my husband left South Africa for Swaziland in 1969. I followed in 1971. My arrival in Swaziland marked the beginning of my journey. Here, I experienced loneliness, uncertainty, fear, confusion and the pain of having left my country. But I took advantage the benefits my circumstances offered. I applied to become a naturalised a citizen, got a permanent job and was given the opportunity to improve my education. I grasped every chance to reach the highest level of education and eventually obtained a doctorate in public health.

While in exile in Chicago, I became a member of Shalom Ministries – an ecumenical Christ-centred, covenant community of women and men. Here I felt at home with my personal commitments to a ministry of justice, peace and a world of security and safety. In 1995, after the first free elections in South Africa, I took the founder of

Shalom Ministries Dr Claude Marie Barbour, to a brief visit to the Trauma Centre in Cape Town. So began the work – through Shalom Ministries – of healing from the traumas of our violent past when we returned to Chicago.

I remained in exile for 20 years but did not forget my roots. Returning home had its own challenges. It was hard to be accepted by those who fought apartheid within the country. But things changed with time. Upon my return I moved to Johannesburg and became a member of the then ANC North Eastern Branch. It was then that branch members requested me to stand as a candidate for the local government elections in 2000.

My life experiences resulted in a deep sense of justice that that helps me as a woman councillor. I am articulate, have good judgment and apply myself to work with my community to solve problems. My strengths lie in a love and appreciation of humanity, which drives me to be of service to the community, especially to women.

It saddens me that women in South Africa still experience discrimination and have limited access to information that could contribute to improving their lives. Women remain minorities in many workplaces and many remain in unskilled work with low levels of income.

Most women in my community are unemployed and have no opportunities to become economically active through income generating projects. It is my passion for humanity that helps me in my work with women survivors of violence and those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The empowerment of women is a responsibility of government, and as a leader in my community, it is my responsibility to engage with women and together, to address their concerns.

As a councillor I have the opportunity to attend public gatherings where I voice my concerns and make input to local government structures. Through the Speaker's office, I volunteered to represent women councillors in the City of Johannesburg because the time for us to publicly engage in dialogue around our particular concerns is long overdue.

My level of education has empowered me and I believe has added value to my performance as a leader in the local government arena. I am able to work and set achievable goals with the members of my constituency. I am committed to making a difference in my ward. We hold regular meetings, discuss problems openly and also work with and network with other wards to learn from them.

After many years of experiences, reflections and studies, I remain firm in my convictions of justice, peace, patriotism and faith. My journey continues…



NAME:
Shirley Ancer

AGE:
69

PARTY:
DA

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"While a political party is not a welfare organisation, a local councillor needs to care for and have empathy for people."

I know what I do counts

By Shirley Ancer

"We'll collect all the 'itchy balls', keep them in Myra's garage and when the Nationalists come in we'll throw the balls at them."

Now while we didn't really know who or what the Nationalists were, we did somehow know they were 'baddies' against whom we – the girls of Sivewright Avenue in Doornfontein – were ready to defend our street. We would use our only weapons – the seeds of the plane trees, other wise known as "itchy balls", if we had to.

Needless to say our defence was not strong enough and the "baddies" won, for a while at least as the National Party came into power with a minority of votes but a majority of parliamentary seats.

I was not interested in party politics when I was younger, but I do remember how as children loved elections. Our school was used as a polling station once and we were all thoroughly caught up in the excitement of the day.

As a teenager my involvement in Jewish youth movements meant learning about socialism, capitalism, the proletariat, the importance of working the land, the dignity of labour, equal rights for all people and the idealism of the kibbutz movement. I had a fascination with the kibbutz and after spending six months on one after I had matriculated, I thought I had found an ideal life for myself.

The idea of doing one's best for one's community and not only for one's self, a value instilled in us by my parents has had a tremendous impact on me. It is this value that guides my work as a councillor. While a political party is not a welfare organisation, a local councillor needs to care for and have empathy for people and remember that all individuals should be treated with dignity and respect.

On my return to South Africa I became a volunteer leader in a youth movement and worked as a secretary while studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree through the University of South Africa (UNISA); still determined to return to Israel to live on a kibbutz. However, when I met Bernard, whom I married in 1964, my plans changed and I became a teacher.

I was fortunate to teach at high schools in many different communities. This brought me into contact with many interesting people who had a great impact on my life. I learnt much about different cultures, religions and attitudes of the people that make up South Africa. Most importantly I learnt that we are all equal.

Apart from my formal teaching I participated in a number of other activities including teaching typing to a group of women in the evenings and being a member of the Black Sash Saturday Club. I taught literacy to domestic workers in centres of concern and volunteered at the Social Work Department of the General Hospital and through the Union of Jewish Women helped run a crèche in Soweto. We supplied food and drinks, equipment, toys and books for the children at the crèche. My involvement in these community programmes stretched from the 70s until the 90s.

Those were busy and challenging times: from teaching to working with various outreach projects of the Union of Jewish Women and tutoring English at the University of the Witwatersrand, I learnt many life lessons during this time.

Something that struck me was that among all the people I had encountered, no matter what race or religion, the young women in the 60s and 70s seemed under the influence of their community's outlook of the world. They were protected and sheltered from the outside world – in their futures their roles were to be wives and mothers. Those who wanted to study and have careers other than as secretaries, teachers or nurses, had many obstacles to endure; including the attitudes of their families and community.

Bernard and I raised our children to be independent, questioning and thinking people. They are also compassionate, caring people. My youngest son became the chairman of a Democratic Alliance (DA) branch and as a result I became more active in the party. I was persuaded to stand for the DA as public representative in the 2000 local government elections.

My first year as a councillor was very challenging. I spent many hours away from home and my family and the late night meetings were difficult to adjust to. As a woman I battled to juggle home, children and my council work – not to mention the fear of getting home safely late at night!

I am still amazed at how many people in the 21st century still believe that politics are not for women. It makes me realise how much work we still have to do to educate South Africans to accept that women are equal to men and we can be of great benefit to the country.

Becoming a local government councillor has been a huge learning curve for me. I certainly have gained a great deal from this experience and I hope that I have contributed beneficially to our country. I believe that to help people live a better life, to improve the quality of life for as many people as possible is to fulfil some of the aims of the Democratic Alliance.

I remembered this on Saturday, 9 April 2005 when the Nationalist Party took the formal decision to disband. I thought back to that day in 1948 when we planned to fight the Nationalist Party with 'itchy balls'. We had beaten the baddies.



NAME:
Madika Elizabeth Mabaso

AGE:
52

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"My priority as a councillor is to emphasise projects that develop women's potential."

It's about knowing where you come from

By Madika Elizabeth Mabaso

My life has given me many experiences. I have lived in rural and urban areas. I have known hunger, despair, elation and pride. Raised by a single mother with five children, I know what it means to go without, to sacrifice and work hard to achieve one's goals. But throughout my life's journey the one thing that I have always kept with me, that has helped me throughout my life, is the knowledge of my roots … I know where I come from.

As a young girl, I was thin, quiet and shy, sensitive to loud noises and I hated the darkness. I was also my grandmother's favourite because she claimed to know exactly when I was born as she was present at my birth. While she could not read or write, her memory was beyond reproach. When asked when I was born she would respond: "Elizabeth was born in that prosperous year when most of the people reaped too much mealies."

After living with my mothers' sister, Marupene in Dipateng when I was 14, my mother took me back home to Ramatjoe, our dusty, lonely and poor village in Limpopo Province to take care of my three sisters and brother. My mother worked as a domestic worker in Pietersburg, 80 kilometeres away.

We only saw her once a year, over the Christmas holidays. This made me so sad and angry because I knew that her boss was able to see his children every day, yet my mother was not allowed to see us more than once a year!

As a local government councillor today I am acutely aware of the difficulties that child-headed households experience, and do not hesitate to do everything I can to assist children in these situations. When I look at the single mothers in my community and remember what my mother experienced I can see that things are somewhat better today. The availability of social grants, feeding schemes at schools and greater attention to the establishment of crèches all contribute towards easing the many burdens that single mothers have.

I faced many challenges as I grew up. On the one hand I wanted to be with my friends, enjoying my childhood, but on the other, was a parent to my four siblings during my mother's long absence. I fetched wood and drew water with elderly women who

would constantly grumble that they were not paid to help me in my mothers' absence. I cooked, washed and cleaned our two-roomed mud hut and made sure that my siblings were attending school.

Getting an education was a huge struggle. We would walk the three kilometres to school, leaving at 6am and returning at 6pm, most often on empty stomachs. Many children would drop out of school during the year because it was simply too difficult.

After completing my schooling, I began working at a nearby primary school and was assisted by the school principal to obtain a bursary to attend a teacher's training college. Upon completing my teacher's course, I taught at a primary school in Duiwelskloof, before moving to a school in Ooghoek, also in Limpopo Province.

I married in 1978 and moved to Soweto where I began teaching at Thabo Senior Secondary School, a position I held for 25 years. I continued with my studies and obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree with Vista University, and later acquired a Higher Education Diploma with the University of South Africa (UNISA).

During my years as a teacher I joined the National Education Union of South Africa, which later became the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). I was elected the first Secretary of Motlana branch. I joined the ANC Women's League and reduced my involvement in SADTU as I worked to build the Women's League. I have been the chairperson of this branch of the league since 1998.

Currently I am the Deputy Secretary of the ANC Branch Executive Committee and am on the Regional Executive Committee of the ANC Women's League in Gauteng.

Many people have made sacrifices which have helped me where to get to where I am today. Now it's my time to do the same. My experiences as a teacher, a unionist, and a community worker have equipped me with skills that I use to help develop my community.

In my work in the Women's League we reach out to poverty stricken families. I am comfortable in reaching out to those who need help because I still remember what it was like to be hungry and go without. I can relate because I have been in the same situation.

My role as a local government councillor is to be there for members of my community and assist wherever I can – even if all I can do is listen and try to find solutions to problems together.

My priority as a councillor is to emphasise projects that reduce women's dependency on government grants and develop women's potential. Members of the ANC Women's League in our branch believe that I am a kind-hearted woman but I always say no, "it's a matter of knowing where one comes from."



NAME:
Advocate Thembalethu Nyambe

AGE:
45

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"Development is a process, not an event."

A challenge around every corner

By Advocate Thembalethu Nyambe

I have done many different things in my lifetime. I worked on the mines during the 70s as a sports and recreation officer and then as a welfare officer. The 80s saw me as a member of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) where I eventually became an official. Beckoned by big business, I became a taxi owner; and now, I am a proportional representative local government councillor in the City of Johannesburg.

While these activities may seem to be far removed from each other, they all have one thing in common: they have each presented me with challenges that have shaped the person I have become today.

My name is Advocate Thembalethu Nyambe. I was born in September 1960 in the Eastern Cape village of Engcobo. My early years were spent in rural areas tending cattle and sheep. Difficulties at home meant that I could not continue my education after High School, so I looked for work.

Part of my work as welfare officer on the mine where I was employed was to deal with the married quarters – where miners' wives lived with them. Domestic violence between couples proved a major problem and I often had to intervene; helping families deal with conflict in ways that did not involve violence. I learnt a lot during my time at the mines. A major lesson was that women should be treated with respect and equality.

This has helped me a great deal today, especially as domestic violence is rife in my constituency. The conflict resolution skills I acquired during my time as welfare officer have been invaluable to me in this sense.

My involvement as an active NUM member during the 80s was fraught with many arrests and charges laid by the police as we fought for workers rights. Meeting procedures, public speaking and negotiating were some of the skills I developed during this time. Back then I did not think that I would be using these skills in service to my community as I do now.

I live in a community called the Poortjie informal settlement, situated in the south of Johannesburg. When I started working here as an activist of the African National

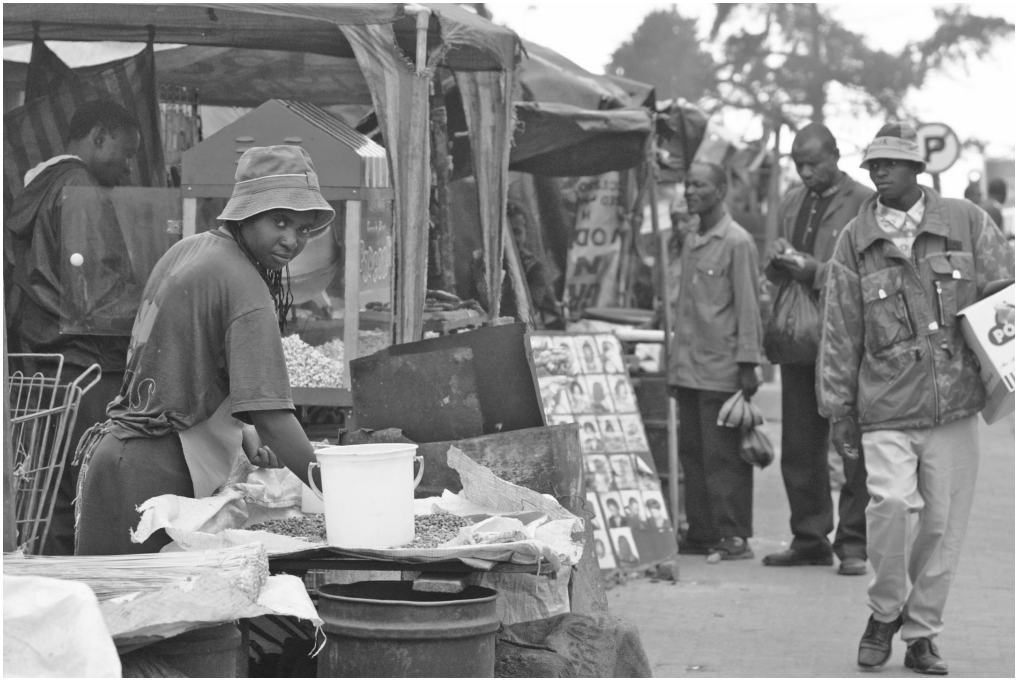
Congress (ANC) it was very impoverished. We had no electricity, sanitation, health facilities, roads or running water. Firm in our belief and commitment for a better life, we established a civic organisation and slowly things began to change for the better. Today the community boasts electricity, schools, a clinic, tarred roads, a multi-purpose centre, a hospice, and water taps in each stand.

Our perseverance taught us that that development is a process, not an event.

I became a councillor in 2002 and have continued working for the development of the community I was elected to serve. We still face challenges including insufficient housing, unemployment and HIV/AIDS. A critical issue is home-based care in the community. Care givers do not have sufficient support, resources or training. This impacts on their ability to care for those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS.

I am married to Eunice with three handsome boys – Olwetu, Mandilakhe and Esona. My wife is the pillar of my strength. She has been with me and supported me through many difficult times. I dedicate all my achievements to her.

The challenges of my life have led me to where I am now. I have learnt many lessons and acquired many skills that I will take with me wherever I go.



An informal trader at work

Photo: GCIS



NAME:
Takalani Amos Matoma

AGE:
36

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward Councillor, ward 59

"Women's empowerment has a ripple effect on society and should be a major thrust of developmental work."

Putting people first

By Takalani Amos Matoma

I was born during a time of struggle when every day was a battle for survival. Ironically I was born in the township of Vereeniging, which means "wake up and do it for yourself." And this is what many of us who grew up in this generation did.

My involvement in politics started at a young age through the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in my capacity as chairperson of my school council. After passing matric I moved to Johannesburg to look for work as financial problems prevented me from studying further. Over time I became a member of the branch executive committee in the Joubert Park branch of the African National Congress.

I have been active as a party member since 1990 and have been involved in a number of civic projects including dealing with housing issues as a member of ACTSTOP - an organisation that worked specifically around assisting people who were evicted. Today housing problems persist, especially in the inner city of Johannesburg where many residents are not aware of their rights as tenants, or of the rights of their landlords. My work as a ward councillor in the inner city ward of Joubert Park, has given me first hand experience of this.

My experience in local government over the last 15 years has given me insight into the specific concerns that women have. These include access to health services and proper housing as well as increasing women's opportunities and skills so that they can participate in the business sector. Their empowerment has ripple effect on society and should be a major thrust of developmental work. Interventions need to be made at all levels of government, not only at local government.

There are six women members of the ward committee in Joubert Park and their contribution to the improvement of the ward has been invaluable. A large number of the street traders selling food and vegetables in Joubert Park are women. Recognising the need to support their income generating activities, the ward committee has proposed an upgrading of the old stalls the traders currently work from.

Joubert Park is strategically positioned for trade as it is a key junction for both local and national road and rail transport routes. This can be capitalised upon to encourage both women's economic empowerment through trading, but also to stimulate

economic growth in Joubert Park itself.

Responsible for the delivery of basic services like water and sanitation, it is important that local government policies and programmes reflect the needs of the people it serves. For example it is essential that while pricing policies are fair and operate to recover costs, they must also promote competition and protect consumers.

A major concern for me is the high levels of violence against women, and more recently what seems to be an increase in the numbers of men who are killing their wives and children. It is important that services that assist men who are unable to deal with conflict without resorting to violence are provided.

The fact that many men hold women in low regard fuels violence against women. This is why programmes addressing gender violence must also target men. The longer women are oppressed, the more difficult the transformation we are working towards will be to achieve.

My priorities for the upcoming local government elections will be to empower those of the community who have had little opportunity to improve their circumstances. I also believe that it is essential that more women be elected as ward councillors.



Sheila Meintjes talking about South Africa's Domestic Violence Act Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



NAME:
Jeanette Agnes Putsoa

AGE:
40

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"Women must recognise the power they have as a part of the electorate."

Positive leadership requires positive action

By Jeanette Agnes Putsoa

One of my earliest memories is being taken to live on the farm with my grandmother. My father was a bus driver and mother, a domestic worker who lived with her employees in the city.

I joined the other 12 children my grandmother was already taking care of, including my elder brother and cousins. The many children in my grandmothers' care meant that none of us could get as much individual attention as we would have liked. Although I was very young, I remember feeling sad to see my mother's pain at having to send her children to live elsewhere, not being able to see us everyday.

We only saw our parents during December for Christmas, over the Easter holidays and at funerals and weddings. As a child I felt lonely and neglected, I missed my parents terribly. But there was nothing to be done.

Today, as a single mother I am concerned about not being there for my children. Often my work as a councillor means that I have to attend meetings in the evenings, leaving my daughter alone at home when her brother is not there. A colleague has proposed that we establish a child-care programme for councillors, so that single parents can attend meetings in the knowledge that our children are well taken care of.

Support should also be provided to grandmothers and older women who are taking care of their grandchildren and extended families, including those who have been affected by HIV/AIDS. I know that my own grandmother needed much more support than she got when she was taking care of us.

One of the biggest challenges of our times is the increasing numbers of AIDS orphans and the burden of care this places on older women especially. Many are not educated and do not have the skills to provide the necessary care for those infected with HIV. The financial demands of taking care of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS are also great and their pensions most often are not sufficient. It is important that these issues be addressed at the local level through ward committees and community participation in public meetings.

I have always participated in taking up issues that affect my community. During the trial examinations of my matric year, a local newspaper reported that one of our teachers had allegedly raped a standard six scholar. We were outraged. We met as matric scholars and sent a delegate to the teacher to ask him to meet with us in the school library. He did not show any remorse and we threatened that we would write to the Department of Education, boycott classes and not sit for exams unless he resigned. The pressure we put on him forced his resignation.

The fact that sexual exploitation and violation of girls in our schools continues to this day is an indictment on our society. The problem is that while many community members are aware of the situation, many do not speak out and the issue remains hidden.

My participation in the "Making schools work" project as a local government councillor has given me the opportunity to engage with teachers and parents on this issue. We have found that many girls do not report what is happening – either to their parents or to the authorities for fear of the consequences. It is my dream to open a parenting centre which will educate parents about their rights and provide them with skills that will help them to respond to issues that affect their children more proactively.

Education is essential for advancement. Completing my matric was one of my greatest achievements. However, I could not continue with tertiary education as I fell pregnant and had to find work. My first job was at a restaurant where I worked for an extremely exploitative employer. My co-workers were afraid to challenge him for fear of being fired. Things got worse and I contacted a union organiser with the General and Allied Workers Union, who called our employer to enquire about worker's conditions. This was the start of my political conscientisation.

I was called by my employer to a meeting in which I was accused of being a member of the then banned African National Congress (ANC). I realised that my life could be in danger and I denied the accusation and left the office. I took annual leave and never went back.

After working part-time from home for a while I found other permanent employment. After going on maternity leave, I was told not to return. I could not believe it! I was later told that I could come back at which point we began organising under the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa.

I was elected the shop steward and never looked back. I learned more about the ANC and workers' politics and continued to serve until I was elected as a senior shop steward with two male colleagues.

I began participating in local politics and was elected into the Branch Executive Committee of Moletsane where I served as a secretary and was re-elected to the same position for five years. I also served in various structures including as the first woman chairperson of the Tlholohelo Primary School Governing Body, on the Local Projects Coordinating Committee which ensured the implementation of projects of the municipality as well as on the ANC Zonal Committee as the first woman chairperson and secretary.

I was elected as a local government proportional representative councillor (PR) in 2000. The role of councillors is not only to solve community members' personal problems, but also to ensure the proper implementation of programmes and projects at local government level. I believe that if any project is to be successful, the input and participation of community members is essential.

I love my work and perform my duties with passion. I believe that I have not diverted from my dream of becoming a social worker as my work allows me to assist my community in a variety of ways.

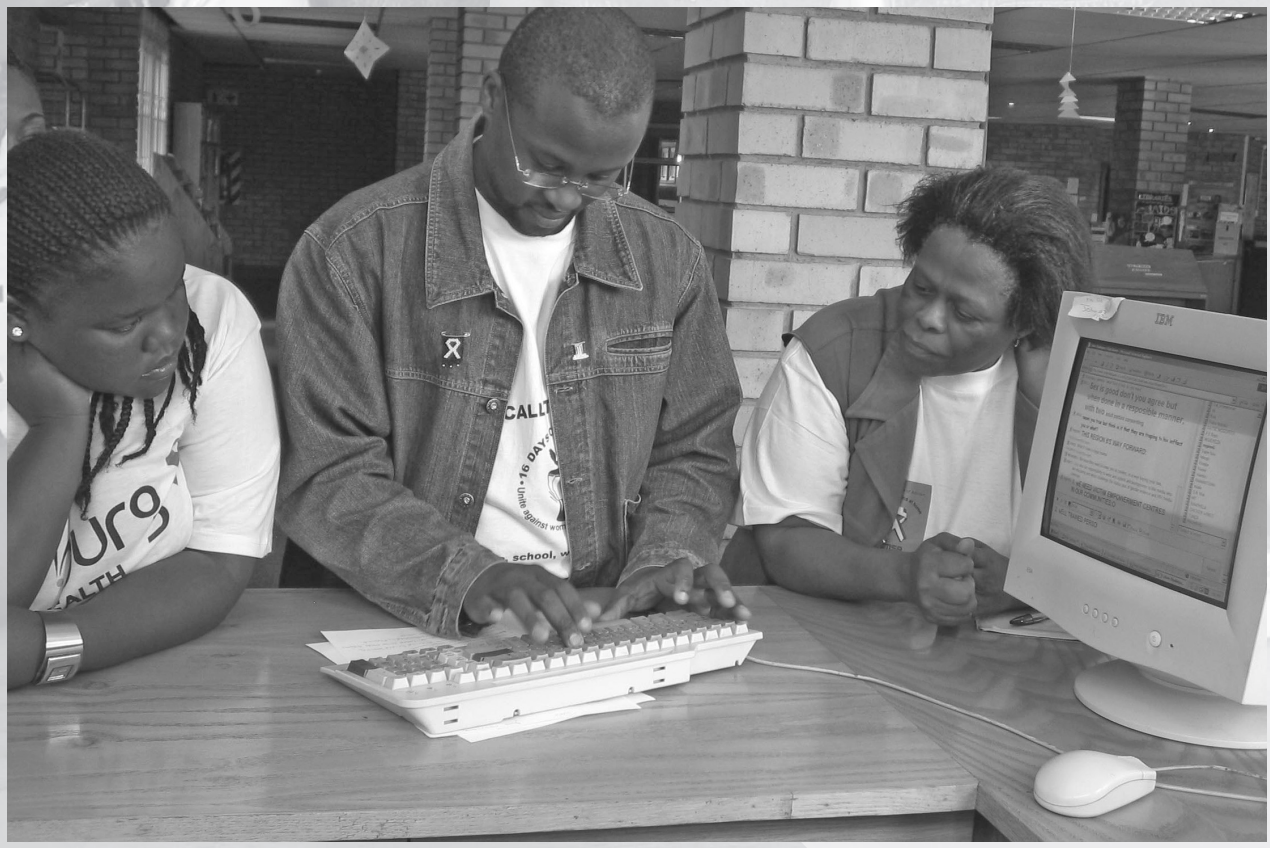
I have learnt that people admire leaders who fulfill their promises and pay attention to the detail. Things like being punctual, well-informed, referring queries to the relevant places and admitting when one has made an error are all signs of a good leader. Other characteristics include listening to the concerns that people have and consulting them when making decisions. This is the kind of leader I believe I am.

Women must recognise the power they have as part of the electorate. They must use their power and make their voices and concerns heard in the upcoming local government elections.



Early morning shopping in Johannesburg Photo: GCIS

Working together for positive change





NAME:
Setswakae Margaret Mokale

AGE:
63

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"Being a responsible citizen means participating in all democratic processes of government."

Have your say - participate!

By Setswakae Margaret Mokale

In one way or another everybody is consciously or unconsciously involved in politics. All our actions contribute towards creating the kind of society we live in – actions we take in our homes, communities and in our countries.

My name is Setswakae Margaret Mokale, born and raised in Alexandra Township, a teacher by profession – for 30 years.

In 1998 I was invited to join an organisation called Growth for Children's Potential where I was employed as a community worker. I would visit the primary schools in Alexandra and identify pupils to attend Saturday school classes at Roedean and St Mary's Schools. I worked with this organisation for one-and-half years, until it closed.

I have always considered myself a child-centred person. It is for this reason that I remain involved in education. For the last three years I have voluntarily offered my services to pupils with behavioural problems at Pholosho Primary as I believe that I have the skills to assist them. Education is the key to success; with it we develop self confidence and a belief in ourselves and our abilities.

In 1999 I became involved in local politics after the successful resolution of a housing problem I was experiencing. The assistance I received inspired me to take up the challenge to do what I could to work with and assist my community.

In January 2001 I took office as a proportional representative councillor for then Democratic Party. Going from being a teacher to a councillor was a frustrating experience. I had to read thick volumes of documentation littered with abbreviations of which the meaning I did not know; familiarise myself with the different portfolios; what they represented and how they functioned. It was a steep learning curve. But I persevered.

I believe that everybody is driven by a passion for something and that we are rewarded when we work towards that passion. I know that I feel happy and consciously free when I have helped someone solve a problem. Indeed, nation building, facilitating mind-set changes, youth development, information sharing – all these will help contribute towards building a united South Africa and a deepening of our democracy.

My work means that I am very involved in my community and their struggles. I once came to the aid of a woman in my ward whose son had died while he was in prison and she had no money to bury him. Together with two other women, we asked businesses and individuals in the community for donations to help with the funeral. We were also assisted by another councillor.

The support of the community was phenomenal! From the priest, to the man who lent us his van to take the young men who volunteered to assist at the cemetery and the elderly women who supported the women through it all; everyone pulled together to help.

Being a responsible citizen means participating in all democratic processes of government. It means working together to end poverty, address the impacts of HIV/AIDS and building a better life for all.

Unemployment, lack of housing, poverty and HIV/AIDS affect us all and require a joint and united response at community level. Women in particular experience these issues in ways that are not the same as men. Some may say that women bear the brunt of these problems. Yet it is also women who have the least support at the community level. The delivery of social services to communities needs to be more active to assist women and women to be empowered to help themselves.

Education is one tool that can be used to do this. Our involvement in politics as citizens of our country and members of our communities, means that we must continue doing what ever we can to improve our circumstances.



Education is critical for women's empowerment Photo: GCIS



NAME:
Sara Ouma Mashigo

AGE:
53

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"I see myself as promoting the growth and development of our country."

We all have a role in creating change

By Sara Ouma Mashigo

I first became involved in community issues in 1992 when an incident that took place in front of my house forced me into action. While looking after my last born one day, the sound of screeching tyres made me rush to my front door.

As I got there I saw the car come to an abrupt halt. It had narrowly missed two children who were playing on the street while their parents were at work. I thought of the many children like them who had no one to take care of them during the day.

I sprung into action and established a crèche to care for children whose parents worked all day. I looked for funds and turned a garage into a crèche where the children could spend their days under adult supervision. One thing led to another and I became involved in civic matters in my community before moving into local politics and joining the African National Council (ANC).

I was on the ANC candidates list as proportional representative (PR) councillor for the 2000 local government elections. When a colleague resigned in 2002, I was asked to take the position of PR councillor in the City of Johannesburg. I accepted because I am passionate about improving the quality of life of my community and see myself as promoting the growth and development of our country.

It was difficult when I first became a councillor and was confronted by pressing issues like residents not paying for services. Trying to find solutions, we raised funds and called block meetings in the community to which we invited service providers such as Johannesburg Water and Eskom to come and educate people about why paying for services was important.

The level of local government is important for communities because it is closer to them than provincial and national government. It is at this level that the impact of HIV/AIDS, poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, poor health and poor service delivery is most strongly felt. If addressed at the local level, a better life will be within reach of all South Africans.

But the reality is that HIV/AIDS, poverty and unemployment hit women hardest. It is mostly they who have to maintain homes and families. To deal with this, projects

that target women specifically have been implemented by the City of Johannesburg. These include a sewing and baking project as well as an agricultural project that is spearheaded by unemployed women.

Drug abuse has also increasingly become a problem. I am often asked by mothers especially for advice and help to deal with their children who are drug users. I have arranged for groups of women to meet with a social worker who is able to assist them and give them practical advice.

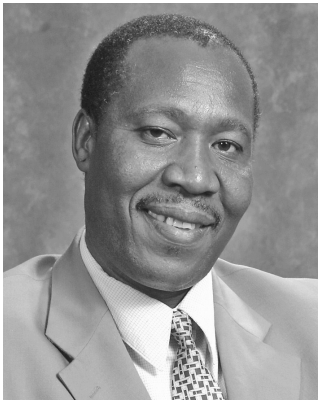
I have been fortunate enough to work with men in my community who have started speaking out against violence against women and children. They have begun to speak to other men in the community about what they can do to change things.

Regular lectures are held at which experts address community members on critical issues facing the community. One such lecture was about the role of men in ending gender violence and the need for a community response to ending violence against women.

I believe that women can participate fully at every level as equals with men and that more women should occupy more prominent positions in all levels of government, especially local government. An obstacle though, is the absence of a clear policy which directly addresses women's specific needs.



Women share their experiences and provide mutual support to each other Photo: Gender Links



NAME:
Ngwane Petros Kunene

AGE:
46

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 15

"If we work together we can transform our communities into places where our children will confidently realise their rights."

From shop steward to community steward

By Ngwane Petros Kunene

Among the many lessons I have taken from my time as a shop steward in the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), is the lesson that one has to fight for one's rights. It is this lesson that has been guiding my work as a local government councillor.

My initiation into politics came at an early age. I remember being 10-years old, living in KwaZulu-Natal when two men addressed us early one Sunday morning at a church service. They warned us against the *"Amaphekulazikhuni"* or freedom fighters who they said were dangerous and not to be trusted. I was too young to understand why they were there and what was going on.

After matric I moved to Johannesburg from Mpumalanga Province where my family had moved to. In 1994 while working in Booysens, I was approached by a colleague and asked to join the union. He said that the union would help us fight for our rights. I remembered my grandfather always telling me that we should not let people walk all over us. After I joined the union I became a member of the technical team that advised the shop steward on various issues and eventually was elected as a shop steward myself. I have not looked back since.

My involvement in NUMSA gave me the opportunity to represent the union and also to participate in industrial negotiations. It was during this time that my leadership skills began to develop. I participated in civic movements, joined the African National Congress (ANC) and eventually became a ward committee member before I took office as a ward councillor in December 2000. December 2005 will mark my fifth year in this position.

My work as a local government councillor has made me realise the importance of empowering communities to understand the way local government works. Through local government programmes people are able to contribute to the development of their communities directly. In addition, they are able to define what their own areas of priority are, especially in terms of the delivery of services such as water, housing, clinics etc.

It is essential that we improve and speed up the delivery of basic services including

water, electricity, housing, infrastructure and recreation. Unless we are able to provide people with these basic services, they will not be able to realise the rights they have.

Of equal importance is to respond to the particular needs of various groups in society and to create an environment in which all community members are able to have access to and benefit from resources. For example, unemployment, especially amongst middle-aged women, is very high in my ward. Local government is strategically placed to develop skills building programmes to equip these women with skills they could use to generate an income.

From my own experience in local government I believe that government is doing a great deal to promote respect for all citizens as well as to promote gender equality. Despite this however, men still dominate senior positions, although there is evidence that this is changing as more women are taking up key positions.

There is also a need for support from all sectors of society to make sure that women and men are given a fair chance to show they can make a difference. As a leader I've learnt that one needs to respect women who must be given the opportunities to express themselves on issues that concern them. All women need to be treated fairly and with respect, especially the disabled and the aged.

My priorities for the forthcoming local government elections are to create equal opportunities for job creation and to allow equal participation of men and women in job creation programmes. There is also a need to develop training programmes that would advance women to senior positions.

I also plan to encourage and empower young women to take up careers that are not necessarily traditional like secretarial or administrative work, but for example, engineering. In my community 10 women have graduated from a plumbing course I assisted them enroll for. Others are involved in carpentry and bricklaying programmes. They plan to use the skills they acquire to start their own businesses and create jobs for people in the community.

We need to continue fighting for and protecting our rights in our communities. If we work together we can transform our communities into places in which our children will confidently be able to realise their rights.



NAME:
Constance Bontle Bapela

AGE:
43

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 108

"There is power in collective action."

A problem shared is a problem solved

By Constance Bontle Bapela

I was born in Alexandra in January 1962, the first born in a family of five. My parents were staunch Christians, my father being the first black man to be appointed as an Apostle in our church.

It's sad to think how the apartheid regime even used our religion against us. When I became involved with the student association while at school I remember the police harassing my mother … asking how such a child – and a girl no less – from such a good Christian home, could be getting herself into trouble.

My grandfather Samuel Hlatshwayo was a great man – people orientated, always putting others first and a generosity that made him popular with those less fortunate. I think that I inherited this from him, as this is what guides me in my work as a local government councillor in ward 108, in Alexandra, north of Johannesburg.

I did not make a conscious decision to join the struggle. Rather, the harsh conditions we lived under in Alexandra, meant that I had no choice but to join those who were fighting for a better future. I have strong memories of the peri-urban police who would come knocking at our doors at 4am looking for house pemits.

At school I participated in the Congress of South African Schools, Alexandra branch. Our main challenges were corporal punishment and the fact that subjects we were taught did not prepare us for future demands. We were not being prepared to be entrepreneurs but to be obedient and punctual employees. I also participated in the Alexandra Youth Movement and Alexandra Women's Congress.

I learnt two important lessons during this time. First, that there is power in collective action and second; that it is essential that those who will be affected by your actions, be consulted.

Today in my work as a councillor, I see this in practice as I ask my colleagues for assistance and we complement each others strengths and support each other. As the saying goes: a problem shared is a problem solved.

My activism during 80s resulted in me being detained. My release in December 1988

did not come easy. Only after a hunger strike that lasted for two weeks and our embarking on "Operation *Phambana*" (which means madness), were we released. "Operation *Phambana*" had us burning our mattresses and blankets and undertaking other acts of defiance against the prison authorities.

I draw strength from my time in detention as I know that I have been through tough times, but have emerged in one piece. The slogan "freedom in our lifetime" saw me through times when my morale was low, as others were released from prison before me. My belief in this dream kept me positive and keeps me persevering in the challenging work as councillor.

In 1995 I was elected as a proportional representative councillor for the African National Congress (ANC). Initially I did not have a clue of what was expected me, but after an orientation course conducted by the Council I soon felt equipped to carry out my functions in my community. It was a learning curve and challenging time for us new councillors. As PR councillors, our work was sometimes difficult. We were primarily a resource to ward councillors who would seldom call us to their meetings.

In 1998, after the passing of a ward councillor, a colleague and I were seconded to take care of his duties. I learnt a great deal during this time. During the local government elections of 2000, I was elected as the ward councillor without any problems.

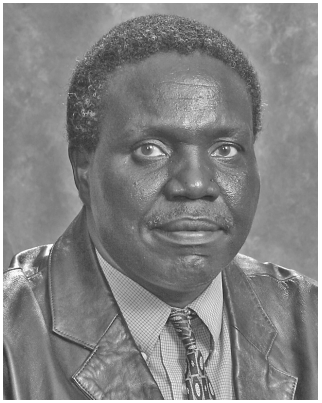
What demanding times those were: residents were frustrated and began building shelters on land they did not have permission to use; others were not paying for rates and services yet still insisted on service delivery to them. We worked with the community to find solutions. I remembered what I had learnt as a student activist: get input from the people who are affected by your actions.

Working in local government is a challenge that requires men and women who are determined and work on the ground. There are many challenges and resources are limited, but you have to soldier on, believing that your work makes a difference to the lives of ordinary people.

Sometimes you have to make decisions that appear to others to be the wrong ones. Concerned about the health hazards posed by a factory dumping food products that had expired – which residents would scavenge in the hope they would find something to eat – I assisted community members write a petition to the Council to prevent the dumping from continuing. The Council ordered that the factory be closed, which meant that some residents lost their jobs. This was a hard decision, but it had to be done for the good of the community.

The support and training that local government councillors have received from and through the Office of the Speaker have been invaluable in terms of developing our ability to perform to the best of our abilities. It is important that councillors receive support and assistance with our work. The more equipped we are, the better we will be able to serve our communities.

The slogan "freedom in our lifetime" still holds true … we create the freedom every day.



NAME:
William Malesela Chuene

AGE:
64

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 92

"I have begun interacting with my female colleagues in a qualitatively different way."

Above and beyond the call of duty

By William Malesela Chuene

As the pre-interim local government arrangement was being negotiated towards the end of 1994, little did I anticipate being thrown in the deep end of local politics.

When the African National Congress (ANC) Edenvale / Modderfontein branch nominated me as one of its three representatives in Council, I was stunned and wondered what my experience in Council would bring.

The first council meeting arrived and I was elected as the co-chairperson of the non-statutory councillors grouping. So began the real challenge of my political career. I was brand new to local government and had to rely on people who were not necessarily supportive of my ideological position to show me the ropes.

It was not all smooth sailing. One particular experience tested my mettle as co-chairperson and emphasised the importance of having the backing of one's party when one has to make controversial or unpopular decisions.

After a five year break, I returned to local government in January 2001 as a councillor at the City of Johannesburg. It took a while to get used to the way things worked in such a big institution.

On the morning I started my term of office, I was officially introduced to the community I was to serve. Not everyone however was as enthusiastic as I was as there were community leaders who had also contested the ward and had lost in the elections. I knew I had to use the opportunity presented to tell the community what I had to offer.

My speech included discussing sensitive housing issues and I invited the community to support me in trying to find a solution to these problems. But past experience had made the community sceptical of new leadership and the meeting was disrupted. Getting past this was difficult and there were fears that this part of the ward would be ungovernable. But I persisted in my attempts to show the community I had good intentions and eventually received their full backing.

One of the highlights of my time as local government councillor is an intervention

I made which prevented the eviction of a community in Tsutsumane village. The civic organisation that was representing residents in the negotiations relating to rent payments hit a stalemate and the company administering the housing units decided to get a court order to evict the residents who had not paid up.

After being requested by the soon to be evicted residents to intervene on their behalf, I negotiated with the company to allow the payment of rent over a period of time and they suspended the eviction. While these are special cases and not necessarily a local government competency, the reality is that community members look to local government councillors to solve their problems. If one is committed to changing things for the better, you will gladly help and go above and beyond the call of duty.

Since my participation in the Gender Links programme I have a gained a deeper understanding of the call for the 50/50 representation of women in ward committees and the City of Johannesburg's policy on the appointment of women at all levels of Council structures.

I am no longer merely following a directive, but rather have begun interacting with my female colleagues in a qualitatively different way. I know they are my equal partners, are equally competent and deserve equal treatment in all respects.

My priorities for the upcoming elections therefore are to work towards the 50/50 representation of women and to be part of the positive transformation that is taking place throughout Council in terms of gender equality. I will also support women's skills training to ensure that more women own their own businesses and participate fully in the economy. I will support fair practice at Council level, including the structure and timing of meetings which should consider women's multiple responsibilities.



Informal traders make an important contribution to the City's economy Photo: Gender Links



NAME:
Nomaswazi Phyllis Mohlala

AGE:
61

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
Ward councillor, ward 67

"I have come up against a 'boys club' that excluded and marginalised me and undermined my contributions."

Speak up, be heard, make a difference

By Nomaswazi Phyllis Mohlala

I will never forget how brightly the sun shone on the day my family arrived back in South Africa after three decades of exile. It was May 31, 1991. When I left home I was a student, and here I was returning as a wife with three children. In some ways I felt like a foreigner in my own country.

Upon my return to South Africa I became involved in the African National Congress (ANC) local structures and was asked by my branch to stand for the local government elections. I immediately accepted the challenge and believed that I had much to contribute from my experience of other African countries where I'd spent my years in exile. But at the time party members did not know me and I was not elected.

I worked hard to gain recognition and when one of our candidates resigned in 1995, I assumed her position as a proportional representative councillor of the ANC. In 2000 I was nominated as a ward councillor, and have been serving the communities of Lourentzville, Yeoville, Bellevue, Bellevue East, Berea, Upper Houghton, Killarney, Forest Town, Parktown East and Parktown West. At the end of my current term of office in 2005, I would have served my country as a councillor, for over eight years.

I have learnt that without patience, passion and compassion it is almost impossible to work at this level of government. One occupies so many different roles at different times, ranging from assisting families to place their children at schools, to counselling them during times of grief.

An experience that stands out in my memory is the death of a 75-year old woman's daughter who had a year old baby. Not having any money to bury her daughter, and left with the responsibility of taking care of her granddaughter, the community and I helped with the funeral costs. A week later, the old woman died, leaving the child alone. I was emotionally bereft as I had buried my own husband a mere four months earlier.

Being a councillor is not easy. Sometimes one is forced to take decisions that make you unpopular and which can put you in danger. I remember once, when I was trying to assist a group of people deal with an unscrupulous landlord he threatened to shoot me if I continued "interfering." Eventually the police had to escort me home.

I am also sometimes asked to intervene in family disputes, although I try my best not to get involved in personal matters. I once had to make the difficult decision of advising a woman who received a disability pension to move into a home for the disabled – her boyfriend was abusive and would take all her money and spend it on alcohol. I believed that she would be better off there; away from her partner.

The fact that there are not enough shelters that women can go to, to escape abusive relationships is very problematic. Another problem is that many women do not know their rights and are not aware of the Domestic Violence Act. This is an issue that I take very seriously as a councillor and I do my best to educate women in my community about the options they have available to them in terms of the Act.

My most difficult experiences as a local government councillor have been when I've visited families and found young children taking care of their parents who are infected with HIV/AIDS. Some of the children are as young as six and eight-years old – they have no one to care for them while they have the burden of caring for their parents. These children then become more vulnerable and are in need of protection.

Instead of being able to live the carefree lives of children, many have become the care-givers to their own parents. It is heart-breaking to see children in this position. But there are times when I am called upon for other reasons. Once I was asked to help someone find their pet cat. I received the call at midnight and could not believe my ears when I heard the request!

I am the only woman ward councillor in the region in which my ward is situated. I have experienced great prejudice because I am a woman and come up against a "boys club" that excluded and marginalised me and undermined my contributions. No matter how good a proposal or important an issue I raise, I am opposed by my male counterparts. When responsibilities are allocated, they nominate each other ignore me.

It is difficult to work in these conditions, but I believe that men need to change their mindsets and accept that women also have a contribution to make. I have had to speak up, and make my voice heard and opinions count. I have developed the confidence to stand up to them and make my contribution to building my community.

My exile experience has played an important role in my ability to do this. Back then there was no time to lick your wounds and no one to turn to when in need. I became accustomed to walking rough roads with nobody to hold my hand. Today I regard myself as a very strong, confident and accommodating woman – thanks to comrades who never treated me with tender hands. I have also learned that as women in council, we must stand side by side with other women councillors and fight for our space against these men. We must walk tall even if we are short. While our country has gained liberation, the women's struggle for equal rights has just begun. We are now preparing for our local government elections. My priorities are to make sure that women achieve their goal of 50 percent representation, not only as PR, but also as ward councillors. This can only be achieved by women uniting and working harder than before.

I have started an inner-city women's tourism project through which women will be able to sell their skills to the local and international market. The women in the project are empowered through skills training that will build them as social and business entrepreneurs. I believe that if women are financially strong, many doors, including that of business, will be opened for them. I will also make sure that there are good crèches to look after these women's children to enable them to participate in other activities.

My slogan is "*Phambili nabo Mama, watinta umfazi watinta imbokodo uzokufa*": forward with women, you touch a women you touch a rock beware you will die. You educate a women you educate the nation.



NAME:
Nomaphelo Maqanda

AGE:
51

PARTY:
ANC

ELECTION TYPE:
PR

"The majority of our people will benefit if basic services such as health are managed at a municipal level."

The struggle for a better life...

By Nomaphelo Maqanda

I was born Nomaphelo Maqanda - the last born of seven children – in eNqandu, a village in Willowvale in the Eastern Cape. I have been engaged in the struggle for a better life for myself and my people for as long as I can remember. This is my story…

My father was the principal head of a local higher primary school in our village when he met my mother and they married. I remember staying with my brother, Zola who was teaching at a local primary school some 30 kilometres away. I finished my secondary education in 1972 at Nqabara Secondary School.

But let me share a story with you first.

It was a cold morning in 1960 and I was six-years old, standing next to my mother, holding on to her hand tightly. The apartheid security police arrived with a truck packed with men from our local village and stopped outside my home. My elder brother Silindile hid behind the ceiling of our home's main house. We thought they had come for him. One of the village men in the truck shouted out and appealed to my mother, "Gasela siyacela ujonge intsapho zethu, asazi lamadoda asisaphe" (Gasela, please look after our families in our absence as we do not know where these men are taking us to).

By this time, my father had died, leaving my mother with us children to raise on her own. Life was hard, but fortunately there was some livestock and my mother could still grow mealies and vegetables from the land to feed us.

I later continued my education at St John's College in Umtata, and fell pregnant during my first year at high school. At the time I was living with my mother and three sisters at Ngangelizwe Township. My mother worked as a domestic worker to get money to pay for our education. Life was remained a struggle and I remember once being detained in Umtata at three o'clock in the morning for not having a permit to live in Umtata.

This experience demonstrated to me the importance of defending our freedom and the struggle for a better life for all South Africans. Having to have travel documents to go anywhere in the country limited my freedom of movement. I wondered why

I, a citizen in my own country could not freely appreciate its beauty and all it had to offer.

My political activism deepened during my training as a student nurse at Baragwanath Hospital in Gauteng. As student nurses we attended numerous meetings, sometimes convened by University of the Witwatersrand students. I later joined The South African Social Health Organisation (SAHSO) led by comrades such as Dr Rafik Bismilla, Dr Wallabh Dasoo and others. Together we undertook community outreach programmes including assisting the Grasmere informal settlement deal with a cholera outbreak.

Despite our activism against the state, we were compelled to join a nurses-employer association. Later, I joined the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), a public sector workers trade union. I continued to conscietise nurses about the need to be actively involved in trade unions and the broader people's struggle for the political and economic emancipation in our country. I salute the workers and members of NEHAWU with whom I worked and who helped me deepen my understanding and analysis of the workers struggle in South Africa.

In 1997 I was appointed as the national organiser for the social welfare sector of the union which included both government and private welfare institutions. Together with other COSATU affiliates and the NEHAWU president, we undertook an educational tour to Havana, Cuba. Cuba's good health delivery system, despite the country's exclusion from the broader international community is a lesson to us all. Unfortunately, I was the only woman in the eight-member delegation.

My experience of women in management and leadership positions at the hospital I worked at was not positive. This was brought into sharp focus during a workers strike in 1993. It was a time in my life. I had lost my mother in 1991 at the hospital. Her death was as a result of the bad health delivery system in the country at the time. During the 1993 strike I also experienced the sudden death of my beloved five-year old daughter.

In November 1999 the African National Congress (ANC) appointed me as a local government councillor in the then Eastern Metropolitan Local Council. During this period, I led an HIV/AIDS committee with other councillors and officials. I also served on the Land and Finance Portfolio Committees. I was re-elected in the 2000 elections for the City of Johannesburg as a proportional representative councillor, a position I hold to this day. I serve as the Deputy Chairperson of the Public Safety Portfolio Committee of the City, comprising emergency management, including fire and ambulance services, metropolitan police and disaster management services.

I believe that the majority of our people will benefit if basic services such as health, housing, local transport etc are managed at municipal level. The delivery of these services affects communities directly and it is municipalities who are closest to communities.

The City of Johannesburg is engaged in an ongoing process to ensure gender mainstreaming of services. For example, the city has established a multi-party women's caucus and a Section 79 Gender Committee is due to be established to play an oversight role on these issues. These processes are significant because local government has a history of skewed skills levels and integration amongst men and women.

Redress must include equal representation in areas of administrative management and political leadership of municipalities. The 50/50 campaign must be implemented. Women and men working side by side will ensure a more efficient and practical service delivery system to all our communities.

Gender Links is a South African NGO that is committed to a region in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of public and private life.

"In 2030 Johannesburg will be a World Class City with service delivery and efficiencies which meet world best practice. Its economy and labour force will specialise in the service sector and will be so strongly outward oriented that the City economy will operate on a global scale. The strong economic growth resultant from this competitive economic behaviour will drive up City tax revenues, private sector profits and individual disposable income levels. This will ensure that the standard of living and quality of life of all the City's inhabitants will increase in a sustainable manner."


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CHARLES STEWART
MOTT FOUNDATION


Joburg