

BECOMING A CANDIDATE

FOR

MAYOR & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

IN SOUTH AFRICA

Resourcing a New Generation of Local Government Leaders



THABO SIZO MAHLOBO

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THABO SIZO MAHLOBO

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to:

Nation Builders

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer my deepest thanks and gratitude to:

My wife, Nthabiseng Mahlobo, and our Children for their tireless work helping me streamline my thoughts and turning this dream into a reality.

My late mother, Rebecca Masoka, who gave me an early experience of love as a parent and helped me develop my vocabulary and writing skills, I discovered recently as I went through her note books that she loved writing

My Inlaws, for their unconditional love and consistent support towards my family.

Our TNE AGRI Group and Graduate School Of Key Influencers (GSKI Team) for laying down their lives daily for the cause of Christ and advancing the Kingdom of God.

My financial partners, thank you for your support towards this dream and for helping me turn it into reality.

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12 GOVERNANCE QUOTES

1. “Local government does not fail because communities complain too much, but because leaders prepare too little.”
2. “Governance is not about holding office; it is about holding responsibility for the everyday dignity of people.”
3. “When capable citizens withdraw from local leadership, incompetence does not hesitate to step in.”
4. “Infrastructure is not just concrete and pipes—it is a moral statement about how much a community is valued.”
5. “Power without accountability breeds decay; authority with stewardship restores trust.”
6. “The strength of a municipality is not measured by speeches, but by systems that work long after leaders leave.”
7. “Local government is where democracy becomes personal—where policy meets potholes and leadership meets reality.”
8. “Ethical leadership is not proven in public ceremonies, but in private decisions over public resources.”
9. “A city is not rebuilt by elections alone, but by leaders who govern faithfully between them.”
10. “True leadership begins when a citizen stops asking who is in charge and starts asking what they are responsible for.”
11. “Local economies grow where governance enables people, not where power controls opportunity.”
12. “The future of South Africa will not be rescued nationally if it is neglected locally.”

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Preface

When the Streets Speak

I did not set out to write a political book.

This book was not conceived in a party meeting, a policy conference, or an election-season strategy room. It was born **on the streets**—on broken roads, deepening potholes that have become permanent landmarks, collapsing pavements, abandoned buildings, failing infrastructure, and in the quiet but growing frustration of ordinary people who feel unseen, unheard, and increasingly betrayed.

Recently, I returned to my hometown, **Newcastle**, in northern KwaZulu-Natal. What I encountered unsettled me. The city that once held promise—industrial strength, economic diversity, strategic location, and immense human potential—now felt weary. Not because its people had lost hope, but because the systems meant to serve them had failed repeatedly.

Everything that appeared to be repaired seemed to break again. Maintenance felt episodic, not systematic. Accountability felt distant. Leadership felt absent. On social media, the complaints were raw and relentless. On the ground, the conversations were painful and deeply personal. People were not asking for miracles or grand promises; they were asking for **the basics**—roads that work, lights that stay on, water that flows, refuse that is collected, and towns that are safe, clean, and functional.

What troubled me most was the realisation that this experience was **not unique to Newcastle**.

Across South Africa, similar frustrations are echoing through municipalities large and small. In **Johannesburg**, residents are grappling with crumbling infrastructure, water shortages, electricity instability, and decaying inner cities. In **Tshwane**, governance instability, service delivery breakdowns, and leadership uncertainty have eroded public trust.

In **eThekweni**, repeated floods, infrastructure collapse, and allegations of corruption have exposed the cost of weak planning and poor accountability. From smaller towns to major metros, communities are asking the same question in different accents and languages:

How did we get here?

In response to these failures, new forms of civic expression have emerged. Movements such as **March and March**, **Operation Dudula** and other community-led initiatives—however contested, complex, and sometimes controversial—reflect a deeper reality: when formal systems fail, people will organise themselves. These movements are symptoms of a vacuum—a **vacuum of effective local governance, credible leadership, and responsive institutions**.

I have written before about Newcastle. I wrote *Rediscovering Newcastle as a City* to reimagine its future. I later wrote *Invest in Newcastle 2035* after returning from Israel, positioning the city as a potential innovation district—leveraging its airport, mining sector, steel industry, textile manufacturing, and strategic geography. More recently, I reflected again in *Now Is the Time to Rebuild Newcastle*, confronting the hard truths that must be faced if renewal is to be real and sustainable.

Yet standing there this time, the gap between vision and reality felt heavier. That weight followed me back to Johannesburg. I could not sleep. My spirit was restless—not angry in a political sense, but deeply troubled in a **leadership and governance sense**. I kept asking myself a simple but piercing question: **How did we allow this to happen—again and again, across so many municipalities?**

In that restless night, a clear thought—almost a mandate—settled in my heart:

“Write a book titled *Becoming a Candidate for Mayor and Local Government in South Africa*. “

Not because I was seeking office.

Not because I was campaigning.

But because I realised something critical:

South Africa does not only have a service delivery problem.

It has a leadership preparation problem at local government level.

As we move toward the **2026 local government elections**, thousands of people will present themselves as councillors, committee members, mayors, and public representatives. Some will be sincere but unprepared. Others will be ambitious but misaligned. Many will not fully understand what local government is, how it is structured, what its constitutional mandate entails, or how power, responsibility, and accountability are meant to work together. Too often, people enter local government without a deep grasp of:

- Governance versus politics
- Oversight versus administration
- Authority versus service
- Power versus responsibility

This book is written for **a new generation of local government leaders**—young men and women, professionals, entrepreneurs, faith leaders, community builders, and ordinary citizens who feel the weight of declining towns and cities and are asking, *“What can I do beyond complaining?”*

It is also written for those who may never stand for office but want to **understand local government well enough to participate meaningfully**, hold leaders accountable, and partner constructively in rebuilding communities.

This is not a book about party politics.

It is not about slogans, factional battles, or ideological noise.

It is a book about:

- **Leadership**
- **Governance**
- **Responsibility**
- **Values**
- **Competence**
- **Service**

At its heart, this book argues a simple but profound truth:

Strong nations are built through functional local governments.

- When municipalities work, communities thrive.
- When local leadership is ethical, infrastructure lasts.
- When governance is values-based, economies grow locally.
- When citizens participate, democracy deepens.

I believe deeply that South Africa can build **smart, sustainable, and dignified local communities**—communities with reliable infrastructure, vibrant local economies, safe neighbourhoods, and opportunities that allow young people to see a future without having to leave home.

But this will not happen by accident.

It will require:

- Leaders who understand governance before power
- Servants who value responsibility over position
- Systems that outlive election cycles
- Partnerships between government, business, churches, NGOs, and communities
- Citizens who move from complaint to contribution

This book is therefore both a **mirror and a map**.

A mirror—so we can honestly confront where we are.

A map—so we can intentionally chart where we must go.

If Newcastle stirred this book, **South Africa requires it**.

May these pages resource, equip, and awaken a generation willing to take responsibility—not for political gain, but for the **future of our cities, towns, and communities**.

The streets are speaking.

The question is not whether they are loud enough.

The question is - *Who will respond?*



Introduction

Why Local Government Is Everyone's Business

Local government is the closest form of government to the people—and yet, it is often the least understood.

For most South Africans, government is experienced not through Parliament or national debates, but through **water that flows (or doesn't), roads that work (or don't), refuse that is collected (or ignored), lights that stay on (or go off), and neighbourhoods that feel safe (or unsafe)**. These everyday realities are shaped largely by local government.

When local government works, life works.

When it fails, frustration becomes a way of life.

And yet, despite its importance, local government is frequently treated as an afterthought—both by those who vote and by those who stand for office. Many enter local government without a clear understanding of what it is, how it is structured, what powers it holds, or what responsibilities come with leadership at this level.

This book is written to address that gap.

South Africa is approaching a critical moment. The 2026 local government elections are not just another cycle in a democratic calendar; they are an opportunity to **reset how we think about leadership, governance, and responsibility at community level**. They are an opportunity to raise the calibre of people who step forward to serve—not because they are politically loud, but because they are **competent, ethical, and grounded in values**.

Local government is not meant to be a political battlefield. It is meant to be a **service platform**. A space where planning meets people. Where policy meets pavements. Where budgets translate into better living conditions.

Unfortunately, over time, local government has become associated with:

- Corruption instead of care
- Power instead of service
- Short-term fixes instead of long-term planning
- Political loyalty instead of public accountability

This has eroded public trust. Many citizens have withdrawn into silence, cynicism, or constant complaint—believing that participation makes no difference.

But withdrawal is not neutral.

When capable people disengage, spaces are left open for incompetence, abuse, and decay.

This book challenges a dangerous assumption: that leadership is only for politicians.

Leadership belongs to those who are willing to take responsibility.

Whether you aspire to become a councillor, mayor, committee member, or simply a more informed and active citizen, understanding local government is essential. Democracy does not end at the ballot box; it lives or dies in how **communities participate between elections.**

This book is therefore designed to be practical and accessible. It explains:

- What local government is and where it comes from constitutionally
- How municipalities are structured and categorised
- Who does what within councils and administrations
- How people can position themselves to serve responsibly
- Why values-based leadership matters more than ideology
- How communities, churches, NGOs, and business can partner with local government

It also confronts difficult realities—crumbling infrastructure, crime, corruption, illegal activities, unmanaged migration, abandoned buildings, and weakened local economies—not to despair, but to **propose alternatives rooted in responsibility, collaboration, and long-term thinking.**

At its core, this book is an invitation.

An invitation to move from:

- Anger to action
- Complaints to competence
- Observation to ownership
- Criticism to contribution

It calls for a new generation of local government leaders who understand that **governance is not about position, but stewardship**; not about power, but service; not about politics, but people.

South Africa does not lack policies.

It lacks prepared leaders at local level.

If communities are to be rebuilt, cities renewed, and towns restored, it will not happen through national speeches alone. It will happen through **capable, grounded, and values-driven leadership where people live**.

Local government is everyone's business.

The question is no longer whether things are broken.

The question is: **Who is willing to be resourced, prepared, and ready to rebuild?**

In the chapters that follow, we begin by laying the foundation—starting with a clear understanding of what local government is, why it exists, and how it is meant to function within South Africa's constitutional democracy.

Only then can we meaningfully answer the deeper question:

What does it truly mean to become a candidate for mayor and local government in South Africa?

Chapter 1

What Is Local Government in South Africa?

Local government is not an accident of history, nor is it a secondary layer of governance. In South Africa, local government is **constitutionally entrenched**, deliberately designed, and fundamentally important to democracy, development, and daily life.

To understand how one becomes a candidate for mayor or local government, one must first understand **what local government is, why it exists, and what it is meant to do.**

Local Government as a Constitutional Mandate

South Africa's system of government is built on **three distinct but interdependent spheres**: national, provincial, and local government. These are not hierarchical in the traditional sense; they are meant to **cooperate**, support one another, and operate within clearly defined responsibilities.

Local government exists because the Constitution recognises a simple truth: **people's lived realities are local.**

Where people live, work, commute, trade, worship, and raise families is where governance must be most visible, most responsive, and most accountable.

Local government is therefore not merely an administrative convenience—it is a **democratic instrument** intended to:

- Bring government closer to the people
- Enable meaningful public participation
- Deliver essential services efficiently
- Promote social and economic development
- Build sustainable communities

The Developmental Role of Local Government

South African local government is explicitly described as **developmental**. This means municipalities are not only responsible for delivering services, but also for **actively shaping the economic, social, and spatial future of communities**.

Developmental local government seeks to:

- Integrate service delivery with long-term planning
- Address historical inequalities in infrastructure and access
- Promote inclusive local economies
- Improve the quality of life of residents
- Create environments where people and businesses can thrive

In simple terms, municipalities are not meant to merely maintain towns and cities—they are meant to **develop them**.

This is where many misunderstandings arise.

Local government is often judged only by what is broken, without an appreciation of the **breadth and depth of its mandate**. At the same time, many who enter local government underestimate the responsibility they are assuming.

This gap—between mandate and understanding—has proven costly.

Why Local Government Matters More Than We Think

For most citizens, local government is the most tangible expression of the state. It is local government that:

- Determines whether streets are drivable
- Ensures water and sanitation are available
- Manages refuse removal and environmental health
- Oversees local planning and land use
- Maintains public facilities and community spaces

When these functions fail, trust in government erodes quickly.

Yet when local government functions well, it often goes unnoticed—because **functionality feels normal**, while dysfunction feels personal.

This reality places enormous responsibility on those who lead at local level. Councillors and mayors are not distant figures; they are **custodians of daily dignity**.

Local Government as a Site of Leadership, Not Politics

One of the most damaging misconceptions is that local government is primarily about politics.

In truth, local government is about:

- Decision-making
- Resource allocation
- Oversight and accountability
- Planning and prioritisation
- Ethical stewardship of public funds

While political processes influence who gets elected, governance determines **how well communities function after elections are over**.

This is why leadership at local government level must be grounded in:

- Competence
- Integrity
- Service
- Long-term thinking

Without these, even the best policies collapse into chaos.

Municipalities as Spaces of Partnership

Another overlooked aspect of local government is that municipalities **do not govern alone**. They are meant to operate within a broader ecosystem that includes:

- Communities and residents
- Businesses and entrepreneurs
- Civil society organisations
- Faith-based organisations
- Traditional leadership structures (where applicable)

Effective local government creates **platforms for collaboration**, not competition. It enables others to contribute while providing direction, coordination, and accountability.

This is especially critical in a context like South Africa, where resources are constrained and challenges are complex.

The Leadership Question

Understanding what local government is leads us to a deeper question:

Who should lead it?

If municipalities are meant to shape development, protect dignity, and steward public resources, then leadership at this level cannot be accidental, transactional, or purely political.

It must be:

- Prepared, not improvised
- Ethical, not opportunistic
- Accountable, not insulated
- Visionary, not reactive

This book is written because too many people enter local government without this understanding—and too many capable people stay away because they assume local government is “not for them”.

Both assumptions are dangerous.

A Foundation for What Follows

This chapter establishes a foundation:

Local government is not small governance.

It is **foundational governance**.

To become a candidate for mayor or local government is not simply to seek office; it is to accept responsibility for the **well-being, development, and future of communities**.

In the next chapter, we will move from purpose to **structure**—unpacking how municipalities are categorised, formed, and differentiated, and why this matters deeply for leadership, planning, and accountability.

Only by understanding the structure can one responsibly step into the system.

Proceeding forward begins with understanding.



Chapter 2

Understanding Municipal Structures and Categories

Leadership in local government requires more than passion for change—it requires **structural understanding**. Many well-meaning leaders enter municipal spaces without fully grasping how municipalities are categorised, why they are structured differently, and how those structures shape power, responsibility, and decision-making.

This lack of understanding often leads to frustration, misplaced expectations, and ineffective leadership.

To become a responsible candidate for mayor or local government, one must understand **the architecture of local government**.

Why Municipal Structure Matters

Municipal structures are not arbitrary. They are designed to:

- Reflect population size and density
- Account for economic capacity
- Balance urban and rural needs
- Enable coordinated service delivery
- Promote developmental planning

Understanding these structures helps aspiring leaders:

- Know where authority begins and ends
- Understand what level of government does what
- Avoid overpromising what municipalities cannot deliver
- Work effectively with other spheres of government

Structure defines **scope**, **scale**, and **strategy**.

The Three Categories of Municipalities

South Africa recognises three categories of municipalities, each with a distinct role and governance model.

Category A: Metropolitan Municipalities

Metropolitan municipalities govern large urban areas with:

- High population density
- Significant economic activity
- Complex infrastructure systems
- Integrated urban economies

These municipalities combine all local government functions within a **single authority**. There is no district municipality above them.

Metros are typically responsible for:

- City-wide planning
- Integrated transport systems
- Large infrastructure networks
- Complex service delivery systems

Leadership at metro level requires:

- Advanced governance capacity
- Strong administrative coordination
- Long-term strategic planning
- High levels of accountability

Metropolitan leadership is not about visibility—it is about **systems management at scale**.

Category B: Local Municipalities

Local municipalities govern towns and surrounding rural areas. They:

- Operate within district municipalities
- Deliver services at a localised level
- Focus on community-scale development

Local municipalities are closest to residents and often feel pressure most intensely.

They deal directly with:

- Local roads
- Community facilities
- Basic services
- Local planning and zoning

Many of South Africa's service delivery challenges are concentrated here—not because the mandate is small, but because **capacity is often stretched**.

Leadership at this level demands:

- Practical problem-solving
- Community engagement
- Strong oversight of service delivery
- Deep understanding of local realities

Category C: District Municipalities

District municipalities:

- Cover large geographic areas
- Encompass several local municipalities
- Provide coordination and shared services

They are designed to:

- Support weaker local municipalities
- Promote regional planning
- Deliver bulk services where appropriate
- Drive district-wide development strategies

District leadership must think **regionally**, not locally. The role is not duplication, but **coordination and support**.

Where district municipalities function well, local municipalities are strengthened.

Where they do not, fragmentation and inefficiency follow.

Why This Distinction Is Critical for Candidates

Many aspiring leaders misunderstand where they are standing.

A candidate for:

- A **local municipality** must understand district relationships
- A **district municipality** must understand coordination, not control
- A **metro** must understand integrated systems and scale

Without this clarity:

- Leaders overreach
- Accountability blurs
- Communities are misled
- Trust erodes

Understanding municipal categories protects both the leader and the public.

Urban vs Rural Governance Realities

Municipal categories also reflect South Africa's spatial inequalities.

Urban municipalities often face:

- Infrastructure strain
- Informal settlements
- Congestion and migration pressures

Rural municipalities often face:

- Sparse populations
- Limited revenue bases
- Infrastructure backlogs
- Long distances and service delivery costs

Leadership must therefore be **context-sensitive**. What works in a metro may fail in a rural district. Governance is not one-size-fits-all.

Structure as a Leadership Discipline

Understanding municipal structure is not a technical detail—it is a leadership discipline.

It teaches:

- Humility about limits
- Wisdom in collaboration
- Clarity in planning
- Responsibility in decision-making

A leader who understands structure governs with realism.

A leader who ignores it governs with assumptions.

Preparing for the Next Level

Before one asks, “*How do I become a mayor or councillor?*” one must first ask:

- What type of municipality am I serving?
- What is its mandate and capacity?
- Where does authority reside?
- Who are the partners I must work with?

These questions shape effective leadership.

In the next chapter, we move from structure to **function**—examining the **powers, duties, and responsibilities** of municipalities, and what they truly mean for those who choose to serve.

Structure sets the stage. Responsibility defines the role.

Chapter 3

Powers, Functions, and Responsibilities of Municipalities

One of the greatest sources of frustration between communities and local government is **misunderstanding**—misunderstanding by citizens about what municipalities are responsible for, and misunderstanding by leaders about the **weight and limits** of their authority.

To become a credible candidate for mayor or local government, one must move beyond slogans and ask a more demanding question:

What exactly am I responsible for if I am elected?

Leadership without clarity becomes noise. Governance without understanding becomes negligence.

Why Powers and Functions Matter

Municipal powers and functions define:

- What municipalities **must** do
- What they **may** do
- What they **cannot** do

When leaders promise what municipalities have no authority to deliver, communities are misled and trust is broken. When leaders fail to deliver what municipalities are mandated to do, the result is dysfunction, decay, and anger.

Understanding powers and functions protects:

- Communities from false expectations
- Leaders from overreach
- Institutions from collapse

The Core Mandate of Municipalities

At the heart of local government is **service delivery**—not as a technical exercise, but as a matter of dignity.

Municipalities are primarily responsible for **basic services** that directly affect daily life. These include:

- **Water supply** – access, quality, and reliability
- **Sanitation and sewage** – public health and environmental safety
- **Electricity distribution** – where assigned
- **Local roads and stormwater** – mobility and safety
- **Refuse removal and waste management** – cleanliness and health
- **Environmental health services** – inspections and compliance

These are not optional extras. They are **non-negotiable responsibilities**.

When these fail, communities suffer immediately.

Planning and Spatial Responsibilities

Beyond services, municipalities carry powerful planning authority. This includes:

- Land-use management
- Zoning and development approvals
- Spatial development frameworks
- Building control and compliance

These functions shape:

- Where people live
- Where businesses operate
- How cities grow or sprawl
- Whether communities remain divided or integrated

Poor planning creates long-term damage that lasts generations. Good planning quietly creates opportunity.

Leadership at local level therefore shapes the **physical and economic future** of communities.

Local Economic Development (LED)

Municipalities are not businesses, but they play a critical role in **enabling local economies**.

This includes:

- Creating an enabling environment for investment
- Supporting small businesses and informal traders
- Providing infrastructure that supports commerce
- Facilitating partnerships with private sector and civil society

Local government cannot create jobs directly at scale—but it can **remove obstacles** that prevent businesses from growing.

The difference between thriving towns and stagnant ones often lies in how municipalities understand and exercise this role.

Community Services and Social Infrastructure

Municipalities also oversee:

- Community halls and facilities
- Parks, recreational spaces, and cemeteries
- Libraries and cultural facilities (where applicable)

These services may seem secondary, but they play a vital role in:

- Social cohesion
- Youth development
- Community identity
- Quality of life

Leadership that neglects these spaces neglects the **social fabric** of communities.

What Municipalities Are NOT Responsible For

Just as important as knowing what municipalities do is understanding what they **do not** do.

Municipalities are generally **not responsible** for:

- Education (schools)
- Health services (hospitals and clinics)
- Policing (except municipal policing where established)
- Social grants

These fall primarily under national or provincial government.

However, municipalities are expected to **coordinate, cooperate, and create enabling conditions** for these services to function effectively within their jurisdictions.

Wise leaders do not compete with other spheres of government—they collaborate.

Oversight, Budgeting, and Accountability

Municipal leadership carries significant responsibility over:

- Budget approval and oversight
- Monitoring expenditure
- Ensuring compliance with laws and policies
- Holding administration accountable

Councillors and mayors do not manage daily operations—that is the role of the administration. Their role is **oversight, direction, and accountability**.

When political leadership interferes in administration, systems break down.

When leadership fails to exercise oversight, corruption finds space.

Power Without Responsibility Is Dangerous

Municipal power is real. It controls:

- Land decisions
- Procurement processes
- Service priorities
- Development direction

Without ethical leadership, these powers can be abused.

Without competence, they can be wasted.

Without accountability, they can destroy trust.

This is why becoming a candidate for local government is not a casual decision—it is an acceptance of **public trust**.

The Leadership Test

Every aspiring local leader should ask:

- Do I understand the powers I seek to hold?
- Am I prepared to be accountable for outcomes?
- Can I distinguish between political ambition and public responsibility?

If the answer is unclear, preparation must come before participation.

Setting the Ground for Governance

Understanding powers and functions prepares us for the next essential layer: **people**.

Municipalities do not function through structures alone—they function through **roles, relationships, and responsibilities** assigned to individuals within council and administration.

In the next chapter, we will unpack **who is who in local government**—from councillors to mayors, speakers to municipal managers—and why understanding these roles is critical for anyone seeking to serve effectively.

Power defines authority. Responsibility defines leadership.

Chapter 4

Understanding Roles, Authority, and Accountability

One of the most common reasons local government fails is not the absence of policy or legislation, but **confusion about roles**. When political leaders interfere in administration, when administrators overstep into politics, or when councillors misunderstand their responsibilities, governance breaks down.

Effective local government depends on **role clarity**.

For anyone aspiring to become a councillor, mayor, or local government leader, understanding who does what is not optional—it is foundational.

The Two Sides of Local Government: Political and Administrative

Local government operates through two interdependent but distinct components:

1. **Political leadership (Council and its structures)**
2. **Administration (Municipal officials and staff)**

These two must work together—but they must **not replace each other**.

- Political leadership provides **direction, oversight, and accountability**
- Administration provides **execution, management, and implementation**

When these boundaries are respected, municipalities function.

When they are blurred, corruption, inefficiency, and conflict thrive.

Councillors: Representatives of the People

Councillors are elected representatives of the community. They do not work for the municipality—they **serve the public through council**.

There are two main types:

- **Ward councillors**, elected directly by communities
- **Proportional representation (PR) councillors**, appointed through party lists or electoral processes

Key responsibilities of councillors include:

- Representing community interests
- Participating in council decision-making
- Approving policies, by-laws, and budgets
- Exercising oversight over the executive and administration
- Communicating council decisions back to communities

Councillors are **not administrators**, contractors, or service providers. Their authority lies in **governance**, not operations.

The Speaker of Council

The Speaker:

- Presides over council meetings
- Ensures council functions according to rules and legislation
- Upholds ethical conduct and discipline among councillors
- Protects the integrity of council processes

The Speaker is not an executive authority but a **custodian of democratic process**.

Without a strong, impartial Speaker, council meetings collapse into disorder, factionalism, and paralysis.

The Mayor or Executive Mayor

The mayor is the **political head** of the municipality. Depending on the type of municipality, this may be:

- A mayor with delegated powers, or
- An executive mayor with significant executive authority

Key responsibilities include:

- Providing strategic leadership
- Representing the municipality publicly
- Overseeing the executive committee or mayoral committee
- Ensuring implementation of council decisions
- Driving service delivery priorities

A mayor does not manage municipal staff directly. The mayor **leads politically**, sets direction, and ensures accountability—not daily operations.

The strength of a mayor is measured not by visibility, but by **institutional stability and delivery**.

Mayoral Committee Members (MMCs) or Portfolio Heads

MMCs or portfolio councillors are assigned specific areas such as:

- Infrastructure
- Finance
- Community services
- Economic development

Their role is to:

- Provide political oversight within their portfolios
- Monitor performance
- Recommend policy and strategic decisions to council

They do not manage departments. They oversee them on behalf of council.

Where MMCs confuse oversight with control, governance deteriorates.

The Municipal Manager: Accounting Officer

The Municipal Manager is the **head of administration** and the accounting officer of the municipality.

Responsibilities include:

- Implementing council decisions
- Managing municipal staff
- Overseeing finances and compliance
- Ensuring lawful and effective administration

The Municipal Manager reports to council—but operates independently of political interference in daily management.

A strong, professional Municipal Manager is essential for stability. Where this role is politicised, municipalities become dysfunctional.

Senior Management and Officials

Directors and senior managers oversee specific departments such as:

- Engineering services
- Finance
- Planning
- Community services

Their role is technical and professional. They:

- Execute policy
- Manage staff
- Deliver services

Political leaders must respect the professionalism of administration, while officials must respect political oversight.

Oversight Committees and Accountability Structures

Municipalities also have oversight mechanisms such as:

- Municipal Public Accounts Committees (MPAC)
- Audit committees
- Ethics committees

These structures exist to:

- Monitor expenditure
- Investigate irregularities
- Promote transparency
- Protect public resources

When these structures are weak or ignored, corruption flourishes.

Why Role Confusion Destroys Local Government

Many of the failures seen in municipalities stem from:

- Councillors awarding tenders
- Mayors interfering in appointments
- Officials responding to political pressure
- Oversight structures being undermined

This creates:

- Legal risk
- Financial collapse
- Loss of public trust
- Service delivery failure

Leadership maturity is demonstrated by **respect for boundaries**.

A Leadership Checkpoint

Every aspiring candidate should ask:

- Do I understand my role—and its limits?
- Am I prepared to govern rather than control?
- Can I hold others accountable without interfering?

If not, preparation must precede participation.

Preparing for the Journey Ahead

Understanding who is who in local government prepares us for the next crucial step: **how one enters these roles**.

In the next chapter, we will unpack **how people become councillors or mayors**, the electoral pathways available, and what it truly means to stand as a candidate in South Africa's evolving local government landscape.

Role clarity is the backbone of effective governance.



Chapter 5

Becoming A Councillor or Mayor in South Africa

Aspiration without understanding creates disappointment.

Preparation without clarity creates confusion.

For many South Africans, the idea of standing for local government feels distant, complex, or reserved for “politicians.” Yet the pathway into local government is **clearly defined**, constitutionally protected, and increasingly accessible—especially with recent reforms that have opened space for **independent candidates**.

This chapter explains, in practical terms, **how one becomes a councillor or mayor**, and what that decision truly entails.

Local Government Is Entered Through Elections, Not Appointments

Unlike administration, which is appointed based on professional criteria, **political leadership in municipalities is elected**.

This includes:

- Councillors
- Mayors and executive mayors
- Speakers and committee chairs

You do not apply for these roles—you are **chosen by the electorate or council**, depending on the position.

Understanding this distinction is critical.

The Electoral Framework at Local Level

South Africa’s local government elections operate under a **mixed electoral system**, designed to balance direct community representation with proportional inclusion.

This system allows for:

- **Ward-based representation**
- **Proportional representation (PR)**
- **Independent candidates**

This framework ensures that communities are represented geographically while also reflecting broader voter preferences.

Pathway 1: Becoming a Ward Councillor

Ward councillors are elected **directly by voters** in a defined geographic area (a ward).

Key features:

- You stand for election in a specific community
- You must live in or have strong ties to that ward
- Voters choose you directly on the ballot

This pathway requires:

- Deep community engagement
- Credibility and visibility
- Understanding of local issues
- Ongoing presence, not seasonal campaigning

Ward councillors carry a heavy responsibility—they are the **first point of contact** between communities and council.

Pathway 2: Proportional Representation (PR) Councillor

PR councillors are allocated seats based on the proportion of votes a party receives.

Key features:

- You are placed on a party list
- Voters do not vote for you directly
- Your accountability is both to council and your party

This pathway requires:

- Internal party processes and nomination
- Political maturity and discipline
- Understanding of collective leadership

PR councillors play a crucial role in balancing representation and ensuring council functionality.

Pathway 3: Independent Candidates

Recent electoral reforms have expanded opportunities for **independent candidates** to contest local government elections.

Independent candidates:

- Stand without political party affiliation
- Contest ward seats directly
- Are accountable primarily to voters

This pathway demands:

- Strong grassroots support
- Organisational capacity
- Financial and logistical preparation
- Clear values and credibility

Independents must work harder to build trust—but they also enjoy **direct legitimacy** from communities.

From Councillor to Mayor: How It Happens

Mayors are not elected directly by the public in most municipalities. Instead:

- Councillors elect the mayor from among themselves
- The outcome reflects council composition and alliances

To become mayor, one must:

- First become a councillor
- Build trust and credibility within council
- Demonstrate leadership, competence, and stability

Mayoral leadership is therefore not only about popularity—it is about **governance confidence**.

Eligibility Requirements: Who Can Stand?

To be eligible to stand for local government:

- You must be a South African citizen
- You must be registered to vote
- You must not be disqualified by law
- You must meet nomination requirements

Beyond legal criteria, there is a deeper requirement:

readiness to serve with integrity and competence.

The Cost of Standing for Office

Standing for election is not cost-free.

It requires:

- Time and energy
- Emotional resilience
- Financial resources
- Family and community support

Candidates must prepare for:

- Scrutiny
- Criticism
- Opposition
- Pressure

Those who enter unprepared often burn out or compromise values.

Why Standing for Office Is a Leadership Decision

Becoming a candidate is not a career move—it is a **leadership decision**.

It requires:

- A clear sense of purpose
- Understanding of governance
- Willingness to be accountable
- Commitment beyond elections

Those who stand merely to win often struggle to govern.

A Moment of Self-Assessment

Before standing, ask yourself:

- Why do I want to serve?
- Am I prepared to be accountable?
- Do I understand the system I am entering?
- Can I serve without losing my values?

If these questions are uncomfortable, that is a sign of maturity—not weakness.

Preparing for Leadership, Not Just Elections

Elections open the door—but leadership determines what happens next.

In the next chapter, we move from **process to preparedness**—examining the inner work required before holding office: character, values, competence, and calling.

Because **who you are matters as much as what you win.**

Office is temporary. Leadership is tested daily.



Chapter 6

Leadership Before Office - Are You Ready to Serve?

Before a person holds office, they hold **influence**.

Before a title is given, **character is already visible**.

Before power is exercised, **values are tested**.

One of the greatest mistakes in local government is assuming that leadership begins **after election**. In reality, leadership begins **long before the ballot box**—in preparation, posture, and personal discipline.

This chapter confronts a difficult but necessary truth:

Local government does not fail first in systems; it fails first in people.

If South Africa is to rebuild its towns and cities, the question is not only who is elected, but **who is ready**.

Leadership Is Not a Position

Holding office does not make one a leader.

Leadership is revealed in:

- How one responds to pressure
- How one treats people without power
- How one handles resources not their own
- How one makes decisions when no one is watching

Office amplifies what already exists.

If integrity is weak before office, it collapses under authority.

If discipline is absent before office, it erodes governance.

If humility is missing before office, arrogance takes over.

Local government does not need louder leaders—it needs **grounded ones**.

The Inner Work of Leadership

Preparation for local government must include **inner work**, not just public ambition.

This includes:

- Emotional maturity
- Self-awareness
- Conflict management
- Ethical clarity
- Resilience under criticism

Local leadership is demanding. It exposes leaders to:

- Public scrutiny
- Community anger
- Political tension
- Institutional pressure

Those who are internally unstable often become externally destructive.

Values-Based Leadership in a Broken Environment

Local government operates in environments where:

- Corruption is normalised
- Shortcuts are rewarded
- Integrity is tested daily
- Pressure to “play along” is real

Values-based leadership is not theoretical—it is **costly**.

Leaders must decide in advance:

- What they will not compromise
- Where they will draw boundaries
- How they will respond to unethical pressure

Those who decide **after** entering office often decide too late.

Servant Leadership at Local Level

Local government leadership is not about being served—it is about **servicing systems and people**.

Servant leadership means:

- Listening before deciding
- Prioritising community over self
- Protecting public resources
- Empowering professionals rather than controlling them

Servant leaders do not seek visibility; they seek **functionality**.

Cities thrive when leaders serve systems well.

Cities decay when leaders serve themselves.

Competence Matters as Much as Character

Good intentions cannot replace competence.

Local government leadership requires:

- Understanding budgets
- Reading reports
- Interpreting policy
- Asking the right questions
- Holding administration accountable

Incompetent leaders become dependent on officials—or manipulated by them.

Preparation includes:

- Learning governance frameworks
- Understanding financial oversight
- Building policy literacy
- Developing strategic thinking

Competence protects integrity.

Calling vs Ambition

There is a difference between **calling** and **ambition**.

- Ambition seeks position
- Calling accepts responsibility

Ambition asks, “What can I gain?”

Calling asks, “What must I carry?”

Local government is heavy. It carries:

- Broken infrastructure
- Frustrated communities
- Limited resources
- Complex histories

Those driven purely by ambition often leave damage behind.

Family, Community, and Support Systems

Leadership does not happen in isolation.

Before entering public office, one must ask:

- Is my family prepared for scrutiny?
- Do I have mentors and accountability?
- Do I have emotional and spiritual support?

Many leaders collapse not in council chambers, but at home.

Preparation includes **protecting one’s household**, not sacrificing it.

A Readiness Checklist

Before standing as a candidate, ask honestly:

- Can I lead without being liked?
- Can I withstand pressure without compromising values?
- Can I say no to unethical requests?
- Can I work with people I disagree with?
- Can I remain accountable even when powerful?

These questions do not disqualify—they **prepare**.

Leadership Is a Stewardship

Local government leadership is not ownership—it is **stewardship**.

You do not own the budget.

You do not own the municipality.

You do not own the position.

You are entrusted—for a season.

Those who understand stewardship leave institutions stronger than they found them.

Preparing for the Next Step

If leadership readiness is the foundation, the next question is **governance practice**.

In the next chapter, we will examine **governance, ethics, and accountability**—and why without these, even the most passionate leaders become part of the problem they once opposed.

Because **character gets you elected, but governance keeps communities alive**.



Chapter 7

Good Governance, Ethics, and Accountability

If leadership readiness answers the question “Who am I before office?”, governance answers the question “How do I lead once entrusted with authority?” Many municipalities do not collapse because of a lack of plans, policies, or laws. They collapse because **governance is weak, ethics are compromised, and accountability is avoided.**

This chapter confronts the uncomfortable reality that **poor governance destroys even the best intentions.**

What Governance Really Means

Governance is often misunderstood as bureaucracy or compliance. In truth, governance is about **how decisions are made, how power is exercised, and how resources are protected.**

Good governance ensures that:

- Decisions are lawful and transparent
- Resources are used for their intended purpose
- Authority is exercised responsibly
- Systems outlive individuals
- Public trust is protected

Governance is not about slowing things down—it is about **doing things right, consistently.**

Ethics: The Invisible Backbone of Local Government

Ethics are not enforced first by law—they are upheld first by conscience.

In local government, ethical leadership means:

- Refusing personal benefit from public office
- Avoiding conflicts of interest
- Declaring relationships and interests honestly

- Treating procurement and appointments with integrity
- Resisting pressure from political, business, or personal networks

Corruption rarely begins with grand theft. It begins with:

- “Just this once”
- “Everyone does it”
- “I’ll fix it later”

Ethical decay is gradual—but its consequences are devastating.

Accountability Is Not Optional

Accountability is the price of public trust.

Local government leaders are accountable to:

- The Constitution and the law
- Council and oversight structures
- Communities and voters
- Institutions of audit and review

Avoiding accountability weakens institutions. Embracing accountability strengthens leadership.

A leader who fears accountability often has something to hide.

A leader who welcomes accountability has something to protect.

Oversight: Governing Without Interfering

One of the hardest leadership disciplines is **oversight without control**.

Political leaders must:

- Set direction
- Approve policies and budgets
- Monitor performance
- Demand explanations and corrections

They must not:

- Award tenders
- Manage staff
- Interfere in procurement
- Influence appointments unlawfully

When leaders interfere in administration, governance collapses.

When leaders neglect oversight, corruption fills the vacuum.

Balance is the mark of maturity.

Procurement, Budgets, and the Temptation of Power

Municipal budgets and procurement systems are among the most abused areas of local government.

This is because they involve:

- Large sums of money
- Discretionary decision-making
- Political pressure
- Business interests

Ethical leadership requires:

- Respecting procurement processes
- Protecting supply chain integrity
- Refusing kickbacks and favours
- Ensuring value for money

Public money must never become **private opportunity**.

Consequences Matter

One of the greatest weaknesses in failing municipalities is the absence of consequences.

When:

- Irregular expenditure has no follow-up
- Poor performance is tolerated
- Misconduct is excused
- Investigations go nowhere

Then dysfunction becomes normal.

Leadership must restore the principle that:

Authority without consequences is abuse.

Transparency Builds Trust

Communities lose trust when decisions are hidden, explanations are vague, and leaders disappear after elections.

Transparency means:

- Explaining decisions honestly
- Sharing information openly
- Engaging communities regularly
- Reporting on progress and failure

Trust grows when leaders tell the truth—even when the truth is uncomfortable.

Ethical Leadership in a Corrupt System

Many leaders enter local government with good intentions and are overwhelmed by a broken system.

Ethical leadership in such environments requires:

- Courage to stand alone
- Willingness to be unpopular
- Strength to resist normalised wrongdoing

- Long-term vision over short-term comfort

Integrity may cost relationships, positions, or popularity—but it **saves institutions**.

A Leadership Mirror

Every aspiring local government leader should reflect honestly:

- What lines will I never cross?
- Who will hold me accountable?
- How will I respond to pressure?
- What legacy do I want to leave?

Governance is tested not in speeches, but in decisions.

From Governance to Rebuilding

Strong governance creates the conditions for renewal. Without it, infrastructure decays, economies stall, and communities lose hope.

In the next chapter, we turn from internal leadership discipline to **external reality**—examining how towns and cities can be rebuilt, infrastructure restored, and dignity returned through intentional, accountable local leadership.

Because governance is not an end in itself.

It is a **means to rebuilding communities**.



Chapter 8

Rebuilding Broken Cities and Towns - From Decay to Dignity

Cities and towns do not collapse overnight.

They decline slowly—through neglect, poor maintenance, short-term thinking, and leadership that reacts instead of plans.

When residents complain about potholes, broken lights, unsafe streets, abandoned buildings, and failing infrastructure, they are not merely expressing inconvenience. They are responding to the **erosion of dignity**.

Local government is the frontline institution responsible for reversing this decline.

This chapter focuses on **rebuilding**—not as a slogan, but as a disciplined, practical, and leadership-driven process.

Understanding Urban and Town Decline

Most failing municipalities share common symptoms:

- Infrastructure that is repaired repeatedly but never fixed properly
- Maintenance budgets that are sacrificed for emergency spending
- Reactive leadership driven by crises rather than plans
- Weak asset management and poor data
- Short political cycles overriding long-term needs

Rebuilding requires leaders who understand that **infrastructure is not just concrete and pipes—it is the backbone of economic and social life**.

Maintenance Is Leadership Discipline

One of the most overlooked failures in local government is the absence of a **maintenance culture**.

New projects are celebrated.

Maintenance is ignored.

Yet cities and towns are sustained not by ribbon-cutting, but by:

- Routine inspections
- Preventative maintenance
- Asset management systems
- Budget discipline
- Skilled technical teams

Leaders must learn to ask:

- What assets do we have?
- What condition are they in?
- What will it cost to maintain them?
- What happens if we don't?

Ignoring maintenance today multiplies costs tomorrow.

Rebuilding Infrastructure With Purpose

Infrastructure should serve people and economic activity—not political visibility.

Rebuilding priorities must focus on:

- Roads that enable movement and trade
- Water and sanitation that protect health
- Electricity that supports households and businesses
- Public spaces that restore safety and pride

Leadership means **prioritisation**, not pleasing everyone at once.

When everything is urgent, nothing is strategic.

Reviving Town Centres and CBDs

Many South African towns and city centres are hollowing out:

- Businesses leaving
- Buildings abandoned
- Crime increasing
- Informal activity unmanaged

Local government must play a convening role in:

- Revitalising CBDs
- Enforcing by-laws fairly
- Reclaiming hijacked or derelict buildings
- Creating mixed-use, safe, and accessible spaces

A functioning town centre signals confidence.

A decaying one signals abandonment.

Safety, Cleanliness, and Order as Foundations

Communities do not flourish in chaos.

Rebuilding requires restoring:

- Clean streets
- Functional lighting
- Visible enforcement of by-laws
- Orderly public spaces

This is not about harshness—it is about **predictability and safety**.

Where there is order:

- Businesses invest
- Families stay
- Tourism grows
- Communities regain pride

Lawlessness drives away opportunity.

Planning Beyond Election Cycles

One of the greatest barriers to rebuilding is short-termism.

Infrastructure lasts decades.

Election cycles last years.

Leadership maturity is shown when:

- Long-term plans are protected
- Projects are completed across administrations
- Institutional memory is preserved
- Politics does not erase progress

Rebuilding requires leaders who can think **beyond their term**.

Community Participation in Rebuilding

Communities are not obstacles to development—they are partners.

Effective rebuilding involves:

- Consulting residents meaningfully
- Communicating constraints honestly
- Mobilising community pride
- Encouraging local stewardship

When people feel ownership, vandalism decreases and care increases.

Participation is not a checkbox—it is a strategy.

The Cost of Not Rebuilding

Failure to rebuild leads to:

- Economic stagnation
- Population decline
- Increased crime
- Social frustration
- Loss of investor confidence

The cost of neglect is always higher than the cost of action.

Leadership That Restores Dignity

Rebuilding cities and towns is not about perfection—it is about **direction**.

Leaders who restore dignity:

- Fix basics consistently
- Communicate clearly
- Act decisively
- Protect public assets
- Serve without spectacle

Communities do not need saviours.

They need **reliable leadership**.

Setting the Stage for Local Economies

Infrastructure and order create the conditions for economic life—but they are not enough on their own.

In the next chapter, we turn to **local economies, business, and alternative models**, exploring how municipalities can enable entrepreneurship, support local value chains, and unlock economic participation without becoming businesses themselves.

Because **cities are rebuilt not only by infrastructure, but by livelihoods.**



Chapter 9

Localization - Creating New and Alternative Local Economies

Infrastructure restores dignity.

But **local economies restore hope.**

A municipality can have good roads, working lights, and clean streets—and still remain poor if its local economy is weak. Service delivery alone does not sustain communities. **Economic participation does.**

This chapter addresses one of the most misunderstood roles of local government: its responsibility **not to run businesses**, but to **enable economic life.**

Local Government Is an Enabler, Not an Employer of Last Resort

One of the most damaging assumptions in South Africa is that government must directly create jobs for everyone.

Municipalities are not designed to be:

- Employers of last resort
- Owners of businesses
- Permanent providers of income

Their real role is to **create conditions where economic activity can thrive.**

When local government confuses control with enablement, economies suffocate.

What Makes a Local Economy Work

Healthy local economies are built on:

- Reliable infrastructure
- Predictable regulation
- Fair enforcement of by-laws
- Access to land and trading spaces
- Functional markets and value chains

Local government influences all of these.

Where rules are clear and fairly applied, businesses grow.

Where processes are slow, corrupt, or inconsistent, businesses leave.

Supporting SMMEs and Township Economies

Small, micro, and informal businesses are not marginal—they are **central** to local economies.

Municipal leadership can support them by:

- Simplifying licensing and compliance
- Providing safe and serviced trading spaces
- Integrating informal traders into planning
- Ensuring access to basic services
- Avoiding harassment and arbitrary enforcement

Informal does not mean illegal.

Unmanaged does not mean unimportant.

Smart municipalities **formalise without suffocating**.

Local Procurement as an Economic Lever

Municipal procurement has immense economic power.

When used ethically and strategically, it can:

- Support local suppliers
- Grow emerging businesses
- Retain value within communities
- Build local capacity

This requires:

- Transparent procurement processes
- Fair access to opportunities
- Supplier development without patronage
- Separation of politics and business

Local procurement must empower communities—not politically connected elites.

Alternative Economic Models and Innovation

Traditional economic models alone will not solve local unemployment and inequality.

Municipalities must become **platforms for innovation**, enabling:

- Cooperative models
- Community enterprises
- Local manufacturing and processing
- Agri-processing and food systems
- Green and circular economies

These models thrive when municipalities:

- Provide space and infrastructure
- Coordinate stakeholders
- Reduce red tape
- Partner with business, NGOs, and academia

Innovation is not about technology alone—it is about **new ways of organising value**.

Reviving Industrial and Economic Zones

Many towns have:

- Old industrial sites
- Underutilised land
- Abandoned factories
- Declining business districts

Local government can play a catalytic role by:

- Repositioning economic zones
- Improving access and services
- Attracting anchor investors
- Supporting clusters rather than isolated projects

Economic revival requires **intentional planning**, not wishful thinking.

Youth, Skills, and the Local Economy

No local economy can thrive without investing in its people.

Municipal leadership must:

- Align economic plans with skills development
- Partner with training institutions
- Create pathways for youth participation
- Support entrepreneurship as a viable option

Youth exclusion is not only a social risk—it is an economic loss.

Why Corruption Kills Local Economies

Corruption is not only a moral failure—it is an economic one.

It:

- Distorts markets
- Discourages investment
- Rewards inefficiency
- Punishes honest businesses

Ethical governance is therefore **pro-business**, not anti-business.

From Dependency to Productivity

Sustainable local economies are built when communities move:

- From dependency to productivity
- From extraction to value creation
- From survival to sustainability

Local government must support this transition—not undermine it.

Leadership That Thinks Economically

Aspiring mayors and councillors must ask:

- How does our local economy actually work?
- Who creates value here?
- What is blocking growth?
- How can government enable rather than dominate?

Economic leadership is not about slogans—it is about **systems thinking**.

Preparing for Community Partnership

Strong local economies cannot be built by government alone.

In the next chapter, we explore **the role of communities, churches, NGOs, and civil society**, and how collaborative governance can unlock social capital, rebuild trust, and strengthen local leadership.

Because **economies grow where people work together with purpose.**



Chapter 10

Co-Creating Local Solutions with Communities

Local government does not govern in isolation.

It governs **within communities**, alongside people, institutions, and networks that already carry social trust, moral authority, skills, and presence.

One of the greatest mistakes of failing municipalities is the belief that **government alone can fix everything**. One of the greatest strengths of thriving municipalities is the understanding that **governance is a shared responsibility**.

This chapter explores how communities, churches, NGOs, faith-based organisations (FBOs), and civil society are not competitors to local government—but **critical partners in rebuilding towns and cities**.

Why Government Alone Is Not Enough

Municipalities operate under real constraints:

- Limited budgets
- Capacity shortages
- Expanding service demands
- Complex social challenges

Expecting local government to carry every burden alone leads to:

- Burnout of institutions
- Unrealistic public expectations
- Centralised failure
- Community disengagement

Effective leadership recognises that **governance is strongest when it mobilises others**.

Communities as Assets, Not Problems

Too often, communities are treated as:

- Complaining audiences
- Protest groups
- Obstacles to development

Yet communities hold:

- Local knowledge
- Social networks
- Informal leadership
- Cultural legitimacy

When engaged meaningfully, communities:

- Protect infrastructure
- Support maintenance
- Co-create solutions
- Hold leaders accountable constructively

Participation is not disorder.

Exclusion is.

The Strategic Role of Churches and Faith-Based Organisations

Churches and faith-based organisations are among the most **present, trusted, and resilient institutions** in South African communities.

They:

- Exist where government offices do not
- Serve people government systems often miss
- Carry moral authority and social trust
- Mobilise volunteers and resources

Local government leadership that ignores faith communities **misses a powerful development partner.**

This is not about religious control—it is about **social collaboration.**

NGOs and Civil Society as Delivery Partners

NGOs often:

- Innovate faster than government
- Reach marginalised groups
- Pilot solutions at community scale
- Bring specialised expertise

Municipalities can strengthen impact by:

- Partnering rather than duplicating
- Contracting transparently
- Sharing data and planning frameworks
- Supporting proven community initiatives

Where partnerships are based on trust and accountability, service delivery improves.

From Consultation to Collaboration

Many municipalities consult communities—but rarely collaborate with them.

True collaboration means:

- Involving communities early in planning
- Sharing information honestly
- Clarifying roles and limits
- Co-designing interventions
- Measuring impact together

Participation that is cosmetic breeds cynicism.

Participation that is meaningful builds ownership.

Social Compacts and Local Partnerships

Successful municipalities often formalise collaboration through:

- Social compacts
- Community forums
- Sector partnerships
- Local development accords

These platforms:

- Align priorities
- Reduce conflict
- Pool resources
- Build shared accountability

Leadership at local level is as much about **convening** as it is about deciding.

Youth, Women, and Grassroots Leadership

Many of the most active leaders in communities:

- Hold no formal title
- Are women, youth, or volunteers
- Lead from necessity, not ambition

Local government must:

- Create pathways for inclusion
- Recognise informal leadership
- Support grassroots initiatives
- Avoid elite capture of participation spaces

Leadership that ignores grassroots energy isolates itself.

When Partnerships Go Wrong

Partnerships fail when:

- They are politicised
- They lack clear roles
- Accountability is weak
- Resources are captured
- Communities are used symbolically

Good leadership protects partnerships through:

- Transparency
- Clear agreements
- Mutual respect
- Shared evaluation

Trust is built slowly—and destroyed quickly.

A New Model of Local Governance

The future of local government is **collaborative**.

Not government versus community.

Not politics over people.

But governance with society.

This requires leaders who are:

- Secure enough to share power
- Wise enough to listen
- Disciplined enough to coordinate
- Humble enough to learn

Preparing for the Hard Conversations

Collaboration does not eliminate conflict—it **manages it constructively**.

In the next chapter, we turn to some of the hardest realities facing local government: **crime, migration, law enforcement, and social stability**—and how leaders can respond with firmness, fairness, and humanity.

Because **order and compassion must coexist if communities are to thrive**.



Chapter 11

Security, Illegal Immigration, and Social Stability

No community can thrive without safety, order, and belonging.

No local economy can grow where fear, lawlessness, and disorder dominate daily life.

No local government can succeed when residents feel abandoned—forced to compete for space, jobs, housing, and services in an environment that appears unmanaged.

Across South Africa's cities and towns, **unmanaged and illegal immigration has become one of the most visible and emotionally charged pressures on local government.** It intersects directly with crime, housing, informal trading, service delivery, and social cohesion. Ignoring it has deepened resentment. Exploiting it has fuelled division. Mishandling it has weakened the rule of law.

This chapter addresses the issue directly—not with slogans or scapegoating, but with **clarity, courage, and practical governance alternatives.**

Why Security and Immigration Are Now a Local Government Issue

While immigration policy and border control fall under national government, **the impact of illegal immigration is felt most acutely at municipal level.**

Local governments deal daily with:

- Overcrowded informal settlements
- Hijacked and illegally occupied buildings
- Strain on water, sanitation, electricity, and waste services
- Unregulated informal trading
- Rising community tensions
- Perceptions of unfair competition for jobs and housing

When these realities are left unmanaged, communities do not blame abstract systems—they blame **local leadership.**

This is why security and immigration cannot be treated as distant national issues. They have become **local governance challenges**.

Illegal Immigration and the Collapse of Order

Illegal immigration becomes explosive not simply because people cross borders, but because **systems fail to manage presence, legality, and consequence**.

When:

- Documentation is absent or ignored
- Laws are selectively enforced
- Buildings are occupied unlawfully
- Trading happens without regulation
- Criminal networks exploit migrants and locals alike

Then the rule of law collapses—and communities lose trust in the state.

This vacuum creates space for:

- Criminal syndicates
- Human trafficking
- Drug networks
- Labour exploitation
- Vigilantism and mob justice

Local government cannot afford neutrality in the face of disorder.

Law Is Not Negotiable

A central principle must be stated clearly:

Compassion cannot replace the law.

And the law cannot be suspended in the name of sympathy.

Illegal immigration is illegal—not immoral, not emotional, not political—**illegal**.

Leadership requires the courage to say:

- The law applies to everyone
- Borders matter
- Documentation matters
- Occupation of property must be lawful
- Trading must be regulated

Failure to uphold the law harms:

- Citizens
- Legal migrants
- Refugees
- Businesses
- The most vulnerable

Lawlessness benefits only criminals and exploiters.

The Cost of Inaction: Why Communities Are Angry

Community anger does not emerge in a vacuum.

Residents see:

- Hijacked buildings operating without consequence
- Foreign nationals dominating informal trading without permits
- Local businesses collapsing under unfair competition
- Housing lists ignored while buildings are occupied illegally
- Law enforcement absent or compromised

When law-abiding citizens feel abandoned, **anger turns inward**, often erupting against migrants rather than against failing systems.

Leadership must confront this honestly:

Unmanaged illegal immigration fuels social instability—not because people hate foreigners, but because systems have failed to govern fairly.

Firm Enforcement Without Xenophobia

South Africa must reject two dangerous extremes:

- Xenophobic violence
- Governance paralysis disguised as compassion

Local government leadership must model a **third way**:

firm, lawful, consistent enforcement—without hatred or abuse.

This requires:

- Enforcing by-laws without discrimination
- Acting against illegal occupation regardless of nationality
- Closing undocumented businesses fairly
- Working with Home Affairs and SAPS
- Protecting whistle-blowers and law enforcers

Law must be applied **consistently**, or it loses legitimacy.

Alternatives: What Local Government Can Actually Do

Illegal immigration cannot be solved by slogans. It requires **structured local responses** aligned with national law.

1. Reclaim and Regularise Urban Space

Municipalities must:

- Identify hijacked and abandoned buildings
- Work with courts to reclaim them
- Convert them into regulated housing, shelters, or workspaces
- Prevent criminal syndicates from controlling space

Unregulated occupation is a security risk—not a housing solution.

2. Regulated Trading Zones and Enforcement

Instead of chaos:

- Designate legal trading spaces
- Require permits and compliance
- Enforce health, safety, and tax rules
- Remove illegal operators consistently

This protects:

- Local traders
- Legal migrants
- Consumers
- Municipal revenue

Informality without rules breeds conflict.

3. Local Law Enforcement Capacity

Municipalities must strengthen:

- Metro police where applicable
- By-law enforcement units
- Joint operations with SAPS and Home Affairs

Law enforcement must be:

- Visible
- Professional
- Uncorruptible

When enforcement disappears, criminality fills the gap.

4. Data, Registration, and Cooperation

Local government should:

- Maintain accurate data on occupancy and trading
- Cooperate with Home Affairs on documentation drives
- Support lawful regularisation processes
- Report and act against undocumented operations

Chaos thrives where data is absent.

5. Protecting Communities and Preventing Vigilantism

Local leadership must:

- Communicate clearly with residents
- Act visibly against illegality
- Prevent mobs from becoming law
- Condemn violence unequivocally

When communities see the law working, they **stop taking it into their own hands.**

Human Dignity Without Anarchy

Upholding the law does not mean abandoning humanity.

It means:

- Respecting due process
- Protecting women and children
- Preventing exploitation
- Refusing collective punishment
- Acting with restraint and professionalism

But dignity cannot be used to justify disorder.

There is no dignity in lawlessness.

There is no safety without borders.

There is no compassion without accountability.

Illegal Immigration as a Governance Failure

Illegal immigration becomes explosive when:

- Borders fail
- Documentation fails
- Enforcement fails
- Political courage fails

Local government cannot fix borders—but it **can fix order**.

Strong local governance:

- Reduces criminal opportunity
- Restores fairness
- Protects lawful residents and migrants
- Rebuilds trust in institutions

The Leadership Test of Our Time

This issue tests leadership like few others.

Local leaders must ask:

- Am I willing to uphold the law when it is unpopular?

- Can I protect communities without promoting hatred?
- Can I act decisively instead of issuing statements?
- Can I restore order without abusing power?

Weak leadership hides behind silence.

Strong leadership governs.

Stability Is Not an Accident

Social stability is built daily through:

- Visible enforcement
- Consistent governance
- Clear communication
- Fair treatment
- Courageous leadership

People do not demand perfection.

They demand **order, fairness, and action.**

Setting the Stage for Responsible Leadership

Security and stability are not ends in themselves. They create the foundation for:

- Investment
- Jobs
- Community life
- National cohesion

In the final chapter, we turn to the individual—how concerned citizens become candidates, how leadership responsibility is embraced, and why this moment in South Africa’s history demands **prepared, courageous, and values-based local government leaders.**

Because the future of our cities will not be decided by ideology—but by **who is willing to govern when it is hardest.**

Chapter 12

From Citizen to Candidate - Taking Responsibility for the Future

Every generation is tested by the condition of the spaces it inherits.

Some respond with anger.

Others withdraw into apathy.

A few decide to **take responsibility**.

This chapter is about that decision—the moment when a concerned citizen recognises that **complaint without contribution is no longer enough**, and that leadership, even at great personal cost, becomes a moral responsibility.

South Africa's local government future will not be determined only by laws, structures, or elections. It will be determined by **who is willing to step forward, prepared and grounded, to serve**.

The Shift from Observation to Ownership

It is easy to point out what is broken.

It is harder to accept responsibility for fixing it.

The transition from citizen to candidate begins internally, when one moves from:

- *“They must fix this”* to *“What is my role in restoring this?”*

This shift is not about ego or ambition. It is about **ownership of place**—a refusal to abandon one's town, city, or community to decay.

Leadership begins when people stop outsourcing responsibility.

Why Many Capable People Stay Away

One of South Africa's quiet crises is not only bad leadership—but **absent leadership**.

Many capable people do not step forward because:

- They dislike politics
- They fear reputational damage
- They are concerned about corruption

- They value privacy and family stability
- They believe “nothing will change”

These concerns are valid. But withdrawal has consequences.

When principled, competent people stay away, leadership spaces are filled by:

- The unprepared
- The opportunistic
- The compromised

The cost of absence is paid by communities.

Courage Is a Leadership Requirement

Standing as a candidate requires courage:

- Courage to be scrutinised
- Courage to be misunderstood
- Courage to lose popularity
- Courage to stand alone when values are tested

Local government leadership is not glamorous. It is often thankless, difficult, and emotionally demanding.

Those who seek comfort should not seek office.

Those who seek contribution must count the cost.

Building Credibility Before Campaigning

True leadership is recognised **before** elections.

Credibility is built through:

- Community involvement
- Consistent service
- Integrity in small matters
- Reliability over time
- Listening more than speaking

Communities trust leaders who are present when there are no votes to gain.

Campaigns amplify credibility—they do not create it.

Preparation Is a Moral Obligation

Aspiring candidates have a responsibility to prepare.

Preparation includes:

- Understanding municipal structures and functions
- Learning governance and oversight
- Developing policy literacy
- Strengthening ethical clarity
- Building emotional resilience

Unprepared leadership is not neutral—it is harmful.

If one is not willing to prepare, one is not ready to serve.

Independent Thinking in a Polarised Environment

Local government leadership requires:

- Independent judgment
- Ability to work across differences
- Resistance to factional pressure
- Commitment to institutional integrity

Whether one stands through a party or independently, leadership maturity is tested in:

- How one navigates alliances
- How one handles disagreement
- How one prioritises community over loyalty

Cities are governed by cooperation, not slogans.

Leadership as Stewardship, Not Possession

Local government office is temporary.

Community impact is lasting.

Stewardship means:

- Protecting institutions
- Strengthening systems
- Leaving municipalities better than you found them
- Preparing successors, not gatekeeping power

Those who see office as ownership damage institutions.

Those who see it as stewardship build legacies.

A Call to a New Generation

South Africa does not need louder leaders.

It needs **prepared, ethical, grounded ones.**

This is a call to:

- Young people who refuse to inherit dysfunction
- Women who lead quietly but powerfully in communities
- Professionals who understand systems
- Faith leaders who value integrity
- Entrepreneurs who understand enablement
- Citizens who love their cities enough to serve them

Local government renewal will not come from the centre.

It will come from **communities reclaiming responsibility.**

Every reader must answer this honestly:

If the future of my town depended on people like me stepping forward—would it survive?

If the answer troubles you, that may be the beginning of your leadership journey.

Conclusion

The Future Will Be Decided Locally

South Africa's future will not be rescued by distant speeches or national policies alone.

It will be shaped—day by day—by what happens **where people live**.

It will be decided in towns where roads are either maintained or ignored.

In cities where public spaces are either reclaimed or abandoned.

In municipalities where budgets are either protected or looted.

In councils where leadership is either exercised with integrity or surrendered to dysfunction.

Local government is not a peripheral arena of leadership. It is the **engine room of daily life**.

Throughout this book, one truth has emerged clearly:

Local government does not primarily fail because of a lack of laws or frameworks. It fails because of a lack of prepared, values-driven leadership.

South Africa has a strong Constitution.

It has robust legislation governing municipalities.

It has defined structures, roles, and systems.

What it lacks—too often—is leadership that:

- Understands governance before power
- Accepts accountability before authority
- Embraces stewardship over entitlement
- Thinks beyond election cycles
- Serves communities rather than factions

The decline of towns and cities is not inevitable.

It is the result of choices—made or avoided.

And renewal will also come through choices:

- The choice to prepare before standing
- The choice to govern ethically when pressured
- The choice to collaborate rather than dominate
- The choice to rebuild rather than abandon

This book has not argued for political alignment. It has argued for **leadership alignment**—alignment with responsibility, integrity, competence, and service. If South Africa is to reverse decay, restore dignity, and unlock local prosperity, it will not begin with who wins elections. It will begin with **who is willing to lead well once elected.**

The question facing this generation is no longer whether change is needed. That is obvious.

The real question is this:

Who will take responsibility for making it happen—locally, consistently, and with integrity?



Epilogue

If Not You, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?

Every generation inherits cities, towns, and communities shaped by the decisions of those before them.

Some inherit flourishing places.

Others inherit broken systems.

What defines a generation is not what it inherits—but **what it chooses to do with it.**

This book was born from frustration—but it ends with conviction. The conviction that renewal is possible. That leadership still matters. That communities can be rebuilt. That local government can work.

But only if people are willing to stand—not for power, but for responsibility.

You may never become a mayor.

You may never sit in a council chamber.

You may never stand as a candidate.

But you cannot afford to remain uninformed, disengaged, or silent.

Democracy requires participants—not spectators.

Governance requires stewards—not critics only.

Communities require leaders—not saviours.

If you do choose to step forward—to stand as a councillor, mayor, or local government leader—then do so prepared. Do so grounded. Do so with your values intact.

History is not kind to those who saw decay and chose comfort over contribution.

May this book not only inform you—but **stir you.**

Because the streets are still speaking.

And leadership still matters.

A NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANIFESTO

Foundations for Responsible, Values-Based Local Leadership

This is **not a political manifesto**.

It is a **governance covenant**.

A baseline of non-negotiables that every local government leader—regardless of party, position, or ideology—should commit to.

1. Functional Basics First

- Reliable water, sanitation, electricity, roads, and refuse removal
- Maintenance before expansion
- Dignity before ambition

2. Ethical Governance

- Zero tolerance for corruption
- Clear separation between politics and administration
- Transparent decision-making and procurement

3. Accountability With Consequences

- Oversight that works
- Performance that is measured
- Misconduct that is addressed

4. Competent Administration

- Professional municipal management
- Merit-based appointments
- Respect for technical expertise

5. Community Participation

- Meaningful engagement, not token consultation
- Platforms for collaboration
- Respect for community voice

6. Safe, Clean, and Orderly Communities

- Fair enforcement of by-laws
- Reclaimed public spaces
- Partnerships for safety

7. Enabling Local Economies

- Support for SMMEs and informal traders
- Ethical local procurement
- Infrastructure that supports business

8. Long-Term Planning

- Development beyond election cycles
- Protection of institutional memory
- Continuity over populism

9. Partnerships With Society

- Collaboration with business, NGOs, churches, and civil society
- Shared responsibility for development
- Collective problem-solving

10. Stewardship Over Power

- Leadership as trust, not entitlement
- Institutions stronger after your term
- Communities better than you found them

A Final Word

Local government does not need more noise.

It needs **better leadership**.

If this book helps prepare even a handful of leaders to serve with integrity, competence, and courage—then it has done its work.

The future will be decided locally.

The question is: **who will rise to the responsibility?**

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Other Books by Thabo Mahlobo:

- 1.The New Economy
2. Why You Should Become the Bank
3. Awaken the Entrepreneur in you
4. Awaken the Financial Genius in You
5. Marketplace Calling
6. Daddy, Please Come Home!
- 7.Sthandwa Sami, Please Come Home!
8. Rediscovering Newcastle as a City!
9. Rediscovering Mangaung as a Great City!
10. The Water is Ours!
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12. I LEAD LEGACY
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14. Moving Forward
15. Awaken the Investor in You
- 16.Awaken the Digital Genius in You
- 17.Just Write!
18. The Greatest Wealth Transfer in South Africa
19. Daddy is Home!
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Becoming A Candidate for Mayor & Local Government in South Africa

South Africa's future will not be won or lost in national offices alone—it will be shaped in municipal councils, town halls, and communities where daily life unfolds.

Born out of deep frustration with deteriorating infrastructure, failing accountability, and lost potential in once-thriving towns, this book is a clarion call for responsible citizens, professionals, faith leaders, entrepreneurs, women, and youth to step forward and serve.

Rather than political noise, this book focuses on leadership, governance, and stewardship. It demystifies local government by explaining how municipalities are structured, how power and responsibility are allocated, and how ordinary citizens can prepare themselves to serve effectively—whether as councillors, mayors, officials, or civic partners.

Blending constitutional insight, practical governance frameworks, ethical leadership principles, and community-based solutions, Thabo Sizo Mahlobo offers a values-driven roadmap for rebuilding local government from the ground up.

This is not a party-political manifesto.
It is a leadership handbook for nation builders.

If you believe:

- Local government must work
- Communities must participate
- Integrity must return
- Cities and towns can rise again

Then this book is for you.

The work of rebuilding South Africa begins locally—and it begins with leaders who are willing to take responsibility.



Thabo Sizo Mahlobo is a Husband, Dad, Nation Building Strategist, Innovator, Wealth Creator and Community Investor .

"He is passionate about developing ' Smart and sustainable homes and local communities' He helps families, local businesses, governments and communities develop blueprints, frameworks and alternative solutions to live fully and bring sustainable local economic development. "



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