

SALGA's Election Strategy

The following article is an edited version of the memorandum submitted by SALGA to the MINMEC meeting of 8 September 2000. The memorandum aims to inform MINMEC of SALGA's Elections Strategy.

The SALGA Elections Strategy comprises two main focus areas.

Part one of the strategy relates to the Record of Understanding that SALGA entered into with the IEC. Part two represents SALGA specific issues regarding the elections and the period immediately after the elections.

Record of Understanding between SALGA and the IEC

The Record of Understanding between the two organisations identified specific issues that SALGA should interrogate in order to assist the IEC in successfully delivering the upcoming local government elections. For this to occur the following exercises needed to be undertaken urgently with the necessary vigour:

Voter education for councillors

It has been agreed that SALGA would conduct voter education for all councillors in the country. In order to fulfill this role SALGA has secured funding from the National Democratic Institute (NDI). A manual to be used in the training of councillors on the new electoral system has been finalised with the assistance of the Local Government Project, Community Law Centre at the University of the Western Cape. Two workshops will be held in each province starting from 18 September until 5 October to familiarise councillors with the new electoral system. The Community Law Centre will conduct the workshops in concert with SALGA and NDI will be responsible for all logistical arrangements. The workshops target all councillors in the country.

Infrastructure provision

SALGA agreed that it would assist in facilitating the use of municipal infrastructure by the IEC in delivering the elections. SALGA has advised all municipalities to avail their facilities to the IEC and has encouraged them to pass council resolutions to this effect.

Personnel mobilization

Due to the uncertainty that existed at the time of the Record of Understanding as to whether the IEC is going to use volunteers or paid staff for the upcoming local government elections, SALGA agreed that in case the IEC needs to use volunteers it will

assist in the recruitment of volunteers from municipalities.

Voter registration

SALGA agreed that it would assist in the voter education in general by mobilising youth to register for the elections, through mass media campaigns as well as to ensure that provincial departments of local government provide funding to provincial local government associations. It was noted that Provincial Departments of Local Government in Kwazulu Natal, Western Cape and Mpumalanga have provided funding to our provincial associations for mass mobilisation and voter education.

Mass media campaign

In the Memorandum of Understanding the IEC invited SALGA to participate in the IEC's communication working group, which is a subcommittee made up of representation from various partner institutions including SALGA, Demarcation Board, GCIS, the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the Department of Home Affairs.

Through participation in the communication working group, SALGA has contributed to the formulation of an elections communication strategy, which is now being implemented. Some of the positive outcomes of the working group include an undertaking to consult with each other in making public statements and offering mutual support in mobilising different sections of the population. For instance, SALGA and the IEC undertook to request municipalities to send election related messages through the use of their billing systems.

Issues, specific to SALGA

Apart from the provisions contained in the Record of Understanding with the IEC, SALGA has also identified specific issues, which will contribute to the successful delivery of the elections.

Establishment process

The establishment process of new municipalities represents one of the most critical areas of SALGA's focus. With the co-operation of the Demarcation Board, SALGA has started to organise monthly meetings where

all stakeholders in the establishment process participate to ensure that the process is monitored very closely.

Capacity building for new councillors

Preparations for the Core Councillor Training Programme, which will be conducted immediately after the elections, have been completed. The training of trainers programme has been finalised in June 2000 and the Materials Development has also been completed. SALGA is now ready to ensure that the new councillors who will be voted into office sufficiently understand the new system of local government.

Labour relations

Activities within the labour relations unit in the run-up to the elections will concentrate on encouraging that transfers of employees into the new municipalities are effected with minimum difficulty. In addition to this SALGA will develop policies and negotiate collective agreements on uniform policies within the field of human resources management such as conditions of service, categorisation of municipalities, performance management systems, employee benefits, retrenchment policy and placement of staff. These policies will assist in bringing parity amongst local government employees.

Mass mobilization

To define its role in communicating the elections SALGA put together a communication strategy for the organisation. A major aspect of the strategy focuses on activities that have to be undertaken during the period leading to the elections.

The planned activities include radio, television and printed promotions, conferences, public and media relations, media releases and press conferences.

In line with the strategy, media schedules for radio and print campaigns were prepared for the period of August until the elections. However, implementation of the communication strategy is being hampered by current financial constraints. In the meantime SALGA is in the process of deploying its limited resources to ensure maximum contribution towards the success of the elections.