

## **Profile of the Sedibeng District Municipality Executive Mayor, Mahole “Sy” Simon Mofokeng**

**18<sup>th</sup> August 2009**

**CHILDHOOD:** Comrade Mahole Simon Mofokeng was born on a farm 50km away from the small town of Reitz, in the Free State Province where he was raised until the age of 14. His parents were farm labourers and he was exposed to the exploitive hardships that typified their lives. The injustice made him politically aware at a young age.

Because the nearest black primary school was too far for a child to walk, he only enrolled at the age of 11. Notwithstanding, the boy made rapid progress, helped by night schooling from his father which saw him soon promoted two grades.

The young Mofokeng made a striking impression on all who met him. A former teacher, Mr. Peter Selebano said he was a “brilliant youngster”, forecasting for him a career as a medical doctor or lawyer.

His grandmother, conversely, saw him as a humble young boy who resembled the king – a future leader. Interestingly, both predictions - the brilliance coupled with humility came to be as Mofokeng’s life unfolded. Even so, at times upon first meeting him, some were apprehensive and interpreted his apparent humility as a sign of weakness and softness. Here too Mofokeng’s career would prove them wrong and that more can be achieved with kindness.

More times than he can recall, the boy Mofokeng and his young farm friends were badly harassed and even beaten up by older white boys. The brutality only made him more determined to see righteousness prevail in his world.

**COMMUNITY WORK:** Comrade Mofokeng immersed himself in community work. He co-founded and served as a trustee for Sebokeng Community Trust, which managed the Lebohang-Naledi Centre in Zone 10, Sebokeng for the physically handicapped.

He was also instrumental in negotiating the donation of the land where the centre is situated with the then Western Vaal Metropolitan Sub-Structure.

Comrade Mofokeng is known for assisting even ordinary citizens address personal challenges.

### **PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL/POLITICAL MOVEMENTS**

**AS A STUDENT:** He participated in student politics at the Seanakwena Secondary School, where he was appointed SRC head in 1979. He continued his tertiary studies by studying part time with Technical College of South Africa (Technisa), where he obtained National Technical Certificate Part Four (NTC 4) in Industrial Chemistry, which gave him a credit to further his studies with Vaal Technicon where he obtained National Diploma in Chemical Engineering.

Mofokeng further studied Strategic Leadership course with Wits University, and Municipal Management course with University of Pretoria.

**AT SHOP FLOOR, 1981 - 1984:** Mofokeng found work with Sasol II in Secunda, and set about recruiting workers to the then FOSATU affiliated trade union, CWIU. This coupled with the open stand he took for worker rights upset management and he was fired along with 6500 other workers. Besides recruiting workers to join unions, he was accused of inciting a stay-away on the 6, 7 and 8 October 1984. The protest was against SASOL management's refusal to recognize the trade union and the SANDF occupation of the Vaal Triangle Townships.

**1985 – 1987:** In 1985 Mofokeng was employed by NATREF Oil Refineries in Sasolburg, again became active in the union and recruited workers. Clashes with management ensued and in 1987 they went on strike. The authorities, aided by factory sponsored vigilante groups, assaulted the striking workers; some were detained and others killed. Mofokeng was dismissed along with 3000 others. The charges were for demanding salary increases and participating in the bargaining agreement, deemed an illegal strike. Management subsequently took back workers considered "victims of circumstances". Comrade Mofokeng however, perceived as an instigator, was not among the pardoned.

In 1988 Mofokeng was employed by the then AECI which was already highly unionized. Then in 1989, along with 2000 workers he went on a two months wild cat strike in protest against factory racism.

At the time only white workers got opportunities to further their studies. However hard work and the pressure Mofokeng put on management rewarded him in 1991 with a 3-year full time, full pay scholarship to study Chemical Engineering at the then Vaal Triangle Technicon.

**PARTICIPATION IN THE UDF:** In 1985 Mofokeng became an active member of the then BCM aligned Zamdela Youth Congress, (ZAYCO) and was elected Political Commissar. That same year ZAYCO adopted the Freedom Charter and became an affiliate of the United Democratic Front (UDF).

In 1986, the ANC in exile planned to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soweto uprising of June 16 by calling for an overthrow of the apartheid state through insurrection. The apartheid regime responded by declaring a state of emergency and detaining all known activists including those in Zamdela. Comrade Mofokeng and four comrades who had escaped arrest made arrangements to keep the home fires burning. Zamdela township was divided into five sections and each comrade was assigned underground duties.

In April 1988, comrade Mofokeng together with Comrade Mashome, Machel and Fetz attracted police attention while carrying out a political task. Machel got arrested and Fetz fled to Qwaqwa where the police arrested him. Mashomi went into hiding and later left the country to join Umkhonto We Sizwe in exile. Comrade Mofokeng remained in hiding in Zamdela.

In the same year he participated in the launch of the defiance campaign at Wits University which saw the public display of the flags of all banned organizations followed by rolling mass action of defying apartheid laws country wide.

With the increased security risk, comrade Mofokeng moved to Sebokeng in 1988 where he was elected labour officer for VAYCO. He later joined the Sebokeng branch of the ANCYL when it was re-established.

**ANC UNDERGROUND:** In 1987 he was recruited to an ANC underground cell by a comrade known as Banda (former member of POTWA) later killed by the security police in Soweto.

In return Mofokeng recruited three others to the Zamdela based cell and they formed cells in the Free State. Cascar Mokitlane, former ANC deputy chairperson in the Free State, who subsequently became MEC for Education in the Free State Provincial Legislature, was recruited and appointed head of the Qwaqwa based cell.

In 1988 he participated in the ANC internally organized teleconference linked up to Lusaka at a secret meeting near Ellis Park in Johannesburg. The objective was to discuss Constitutional Guidelines for the New South Africa. A plan was also mapped for the internal support of the Harare Declaration.

With the un-banning of the people's organisations he became active in the ANCYL branch in Sebokeng then graduated to the ANC branch.

**ANC SEBOKENG BRANCH:** In 1993 the ANC Sebokeng branch was paralysed by internal divisions. Mofokeng, in his third year at university, was requested by the ANC in the greater Sebokeng to help rebuild the branch. Thanks to time management skills and self discipline he was able to comply while studying and he was appointed Scribe or Acting Branch Secretary.

Comrade Mofokeng and his team (the Interim Branch Committee) were mandated to deliver on two immediate challenges:

- Rebuild the ANC branch on the ground and bring back members previously demoralised by faction fights. Prepare a campaign for the 1994 elections. As Branch acting Secretary Comrade Simon was the Branch Elections Coordinator for the greater Sebokeng, a task today executed by 11 BET Coordinators.
- Rebuild the ANC to prepare for branch AGM post 1994 elections.

Mofokeng's success was such that Sebokeng had the highest voter turnout and the highest number of ANC voters in Gauteng. At the branch AGM in July 1994 he was elected Branch Secretary, a position he occupied until he was elected Deputy Regional Secretary in 1995 with the establishment of the first Regional Executive Committee (REC).

**REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:** Since his election to the REC in 1995 Comrade Mofokeng has been the longest serving member and until the regional Conference in 2004 he was the longest serving member of the Regional Office Bearers, both as Regional Secretary and Deputy Regional Secretary.

Because the Regional Secretary's Office is responsible for organisational development, the Sedibeng Region (previously Vaal Region) of the ANC has been commended by both Provincial Executive Committee (PEC) and National Executive Committee (NEC) as the best performing throughout the period Mofokeng held the Regional Secretary's Office.

**ELECTIONS 1999:** The Vaal Regional Conference in 1998 revealed divisions in the ANC at both regional and provincial levels and the prevalence of factional tendencies. The NDR was under threat because little was being done to prepare for the 1999 elections. The PEC was

disbanded and the GILC was appointed to run ANC affairs in the province. Comrade Simon Mofokeng was appointed by Head Office, the province, and the GILC to unite comrades and set up elections structures. He was tasked with building BETs in branches and the Regional Roving Team. The results were such that the ANC obtained the highest votes in Gauteng Province from the Vaal.

**ROOTING OUT FACTIONALISM:** At that time the very existence of the ANC in Gauteng was threatened by factionalism. In a subsequent meeting with the National Office Bearers Comrade Sy was the sole PEC member to fearlessly and frankly volunteer an analysis of the demon of factionalism. This enabled the leadership to come up with an effective course of action.

However Mofokeng and his family lived in fear of their lives. He was determined to save the soul of the ANC from itself, but he was twice chased out of ANC meetings at gun point while he held office as regional secretary. In addition his family received threatening telephone calls. Significantly he was the only ANC member in the province to denounce “the monster of factionalism”. Many secretly agreed with him but were afraid to tackle it head on.

**PERFORMANCE IN COUNCIL:** After completing his studies, Mofokeng was sent for further training in Germany then appointed Shift Manager by the then Polifin (AECI). The ANC once more requested he avail himself as ward councillor candidate for the 1995 elections. A disciplined cadre, forgoing a career in chemical engineering, he heeded the call.

All in all Mofokeng served 12 years in council, 10 of which working as a directly elected ward councillor. An International Independent Research organization wrote a letter to Emfuleni Council commending the council on its success in turning the economic situation around in Emfuleni (Vereeniging / Vanderbijlpark). The area experienced the growth from GGP of -3.5% in 2000 to a GGP of 2.65% in 2004. The LED, Tourism and Development Planning Portfolio headed by comrade Simon Mofokeng facilitated the presentation of a discussion document on: **Emfuleni Local Municipality’s Overall LED Strategies** at the LED Symposium on 21 – 22 June 2005. On the 21 September 2006 after he had left the council executive, Mofokeng was interviewed by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) to outline the Emfuleni Strategies as contained in IDP documents starting from 2002/2003 IDP to then.

During his term as the MMC for LED, Tourism and DP Mofokeng managed to attract investment into ELM of more than R2billion, leading to the creation of over 15000 new jobs. While this was just a drop in the ocean given the levels of unemployment, it was none the less an historic turn because since the mid 80’s job shedding had blighted the area.

IN addition Mofokeng translated the ANC local government elections 2000 manifesto theme: **creating jobs where we stay** into reality by lobbying investors to build Shopping Malls in black townships. This contributed to the creation of jobs, converting townships from labour camps to CBDs in their own right.

**ELECTIONS 2004:** The election campaign was lagging behind in 2003 until the province appointed comrade Sy Mofokeng as LET Coordinator for Emfuleni. From that moment elections work gained momentum to the point that the ANC started making inroads into opposition wards.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2006:** Removed from the Mayoral Committee in 2005, Comrade Simon led the ANC elections campaign in Emfuleni as LET Coordinator. Through his efforts the ANC attained 82%, the highest ever since elections 1994.

**IMVUSELELO:** Even though he was not rewarded with a senior position in the council he continued to serve the movement with dignity and respect. He was one of the few members of the REC always available for deployment during the Imvuselelo campaign.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SDM:** In February 2007, Comrade Mofokeng was appointed Executive Director for Corporate Services at Sedibeng District Municipality, a position he occupied until he was elected Executive Mayor in 2008.