



**Address by the Sedibeng District Municipality Executive Mayor, Cllr. Mahole Simon Mofokeng at the on the 22 April 2010, at the Regenesys, Johannesburg**

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A lot has been written and said about leadership in the country, and a lot still remains to be written. I will in this discourse, make an attempt through the **Sedibeng District Municipality Experience**, address myself in an anecdotal manner, to the leadership challenges that faces our political sphere in the region and the country as a whole. In the main, I will seek in the entire discourse, base my input on my personal experiences as well as institutional memory and my interaction therewith.

Some of you may be aware by now that I am currently the Regional Chairperson of the African National Congress in Sedibeng. I am into my second term as the Regional Chairperson of the ANC and into my second year of the five years as the Executive Mayor of the **Sedibeng District Municipality**, which comprises of the three constituent Local Municipalities, the Emfuleni, Lesedi and the Midvaal.

This is the role fostered on me, 17 months ago due to the resignation of the previous incumbent as a result of defection to a rival political party.

**Challenges facing Sedibeng during the past three years:**

**Environmental Degradation of the Vaal River System**

You will agree with me that there are as many challenges that I am expected to deal with and address from time to time as you will not be able to count them.

I will take you through the environmental degradation of the Vaal River System as one of these many challenges that tested my visionary leadership in my application of some of the rare qualities of leadership

Three years ago, in the 2007, just after my election to the Chairmanship of the **Region of the ANC**, becoming the political head after hard fought electoral process, the greatest challenge arose out of the blue, attack from the left field as baseball scribes are bound to say: **The Vaal River is contaminated.**

This hit the press with such force, that one was led to believe that the entire system was on the verge of collapse. Before I seem to be trivializing the matter, perhaps I need to pause here and provide a perspective of the picture of the **Vaal River** I am talking about.

The river Vaal as it passes through **Sedibeng District Municipality**, from **Heidelberg** in **Lesedi Local Municipality** to **Emfuleni Local Municipality** through **Midvaal Local Municipality**, as a result of its depth and width, provides the only navigable part of the river in its travail from **Mpumalanga Province** all the way to the **Northern Cape Province**, to join the **Orange River**.

On its banks, as it passes through the **Gauteng Province**, it offers a picturesque area, which is characterized by world class hotels and high end housing with magnificent river frontage. The upscale housing settlements, can shame the best that the **Cape Town Waterfront** can offer, probably the highest priced land in **Gauteng** province.

These properties are also surrounded by some of the most pristine golf courses in **Gauteng**, with natural farming and a rustic atmosphere to boot. The river in its splendor, offers the **Gauteng** province with all year round water sports and game fishing as it is perennial.

The area around **Vereeniging** and **Vanderbijlpark** forms the integral hub for Industry in the Gauteng province. To that end, before I begin to sound like a tourism brochure for **Sedibeng District**, the Industrial growth and development in the area, lends itself to mischievous spillages by unscrupulous industrialists.

As if that was not enough, **Sedibeng District Municipality** is home to the highest number of low cost housing which was built under the RDP housing provision throughout the entire country. With the advent of provision of low cost housing and creation of settlements that were not there, the impact on the sewer and water reticulation was huge.

This caused spillages of raw sewer into the feeder streams into the **Vaal River** system, thus escalating the outcry from our communities.

The extent of press coverage, nationally, provincially as well as local, presented a “**Besoedeling van die Rivier Omgewing**” the nature of which was irreversible and beyond repair, the nature of which would take nature two hundred years to repair.

Suffice it to mention, the matter has been resolved, the green scorpions are in place, the water quality of the **Vaal River** has never been healthier, plantanas are flourishing, the fish are at their most plentiful, biodiversity is at its best balance for years now. For the un-initiated, plantana frogs are an indicator for clean and healthy water environment.

The above could not have been possible, without visionary leadership within the given timeframe.

With singularity of purpose, driven by a commitment to provide the best possible solution to this huge challenge and project, demanding of political will and Municipalities that often did not see issues in the same light, the development of a turn-around strategy was critical.

The amount of wheeling and dealing to develop a common vision, driven by a passion to save the only landmark that set us apart from the entire **Gauteng Province**, in a politically charged environment where all the constituent local municipalities were punting themselves as the best peanut in the packet, did not lend itself to quick response, the common vision of the **Sedibeng District Municipality**.

Together with the buy-in of all constituent local municipalities, was a condition for the involvement and funding from the provincial and national government for the project.

It is in turbulent times like these, where self interests of participants come to the fore, where simple solutions are made deliberately complex to achieve personal glory at the expense of the common good of all. It is at times like these, that one had to resort to holding one on one meeting with all if not most of the members of the task team on the water degradation of the Vaal.

Painstakingly studying the extent of the problem, determining what each of the members of the task team would do if they had the final say. At this stage of the contact, members would speak candidly and frankly of their proposed position. This assisted a great deal in establishing what made each of tick.

The bottom line would be, when each of them was asked to identify areas in which they were prepared to compromise. A variety of responses from all task team members would reveal a common ground which would form the basis for plenary discussions. The antagonistic nature of the previous engagements at plenary always gave way to conciliatory and almost quick resolution of the matter at hand.

Leading the charge, we have as a collective, both political and government, been able to drive the project to its successful execution, albeit through very difficult times and intensive engagements.

It is the measure of this success, which saw a very posh and high-end, estate development is growing on the banks of **Vaal-dam**, mushrooming and is being snapped by affluent citizens of our country, seeking investment and peaceful havens for their retirement. For indeed, in the environment where prime estate and land in a beautiful and laid back environment, the area in the **Sedibeng District Municipality**, on the **Vaal**, is still the world's best kept secret.

This is made so, if one was to factor the scarcity of land in all the cities in **Gauteng Province**. There is no more land in and around **Joburg** as well as in **Pretoria**. The roads can no longer cope with the traffic volumes, the Gautrain will serve only as a stop gap measure in easing the traffic congestion in **Gauteng**. **The South** is the way to go.

### **Service Delivery Protests**

Having taken you through the battle for the protection of the Vaal River, I take this opportunity to share with you what you might have seen, read about and heard over your various media systems in our country, the so called service delivery protest in our Region during the current period.

I refer to them as the so called service delivery protests because, our investigations lead by various state agencies have proven that many of them were politically motivated, in contrast to the reasons for which they would protesting, service delivery concerns.

In the past four months or so, we have witnessed the upsurge of the so-called service delivery protests in the **Sedibeng District Municipality**. These protests have been prevalent in the **Mpumalanga Province**, for the last two years. The reasons raised during these protests ranged from

contaminated water to no water available for communities in that province.

As has been a common trend in our communities, copycat protest started all over the place, from areas as well serviced as **Soweto** in the **Joburg Metro**, and **Kwathema** in **Ekurhuleni Metro**. Sedibeng District Municipality could not have been an exception. What with the rich history of protest in the mould of the anti-pass campaign that led to the **Sharpeville Massacre**, fifty years ago. Who can forget the **Rent Boycott of 1984**, which led to the **Delmas Treason Trial**.

Suffice it to mention, that as a result of the **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre, the 2010 FIFA World Cup** programme in Sedibeng, a climate of expectancy of financial windfall was perceived. A group of businessmen started in earnest to fan the fire, creating spurious allegations of economic exclusion from the perceived windfall. Their calling card being that there is wanton corruption and fraudulent transactions conducted by the Municipality including myself.

The fact that the ANC was preparing for an **Elective Regional Conference**, whereat the leadership of the Region was to be elected, did not reduce tension, to the contrary, it had the effect of dousing a blazing fire with petrol. Allegations of mismanagement and cronyism were bandied about.

This was done in an attempt to garner votes for the elections. Unholy alliances were fomented; marriages of convenience were the order of the day. Promises were made to so-called supporters; deals were brokered on the premise that I would be removed as the Chairperson of the Region.

It is yesterday's history, that I was again elected the **Chairperson of the Region**, I still remain the **Executive Mayor of Sedibeng District Municipality**, and the face of **Sedibeng** when challenges and protest marches are directed at the **Municipality**, irrespective of how spurious and unfounded the reasons.

It must be confirmed that indeed there is a large reserve of funding set aside for the development of **Sharpeville** in particular and **Sedibeng District Townships** in general. It was this reserve that created expectations in these groupings that they would want to have access to. It was the fuel that fanned the protest fires; these groupings were promised access to this kitty if they had succeeded in changing the leadership of the Region.

Suffice it to mention, that in spite of the service delivery protests, **Sedibeng District Municipality** has been found by the **Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs** in their October report

to be one of the few municipalities in the country that has discharged their service delivery objectives.

Over 95% of the entire households in the District and its constituent local municipalities are provided with clean water, electricity, water borne sewerage, refuse removal on a weekly basis as well as other services. There are no bucket systems in **Sharpeville**, where the protests seemed to have been severe. There is a deafening silence in Sharpeville, Sedibeng and most of the areas in the country where these protests were the order of the day.

This would presuppose that there has been a miracle, which saw to all the issues being resolved over night, or that indeed the reasons for the protests were not what they presented to be.

It is in the light of the preceding challenges, and a few others that I will later in this discourse show with proof beyond reasonable doubt of the challenges that were posed to the leadership of the **Region**, District Municipality were placed under, so that this esteemed gathering here will be able to make its own conclusions.

## **Ambassador of Clean Audits Award**

I feel proud and humbled to share with the fruits of the good leadership qualities, the leadership qualities whose principles cannot be compromised. I sharing with you one of the aspects that raises a good leader among the few, more especially in the leadership capacity that I currently occupy, that of being the Executive Mayor

**The Sedibeng** District Municipality has been receiving Clean Audits for four consecutive years. We have not and did not pay a player where a plumber was required, nor did we pay a baker when a builder had to be paid. These are some of the few secrets that many of our counter parts are not aware of.

We have accounted for every penny of public funding that was entrusted to us. We did this in the face of our revenue base was removed, the **Regional Services Levies**.

It is the maturity and the nature of the leadership that can pull this exceptional task. In recognition of the sterling job, **Sedibeng District Municipality** has been awarded the role *of “Ambassador of Operation Clean Audit Award”* by the **Minister for Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs**.

We take this award seriously and we will defend it for many years to come. Contrary to the notion and perception of rampant corruption and fraud, as protesters sought to portray the **Municipality**, the **Auditor General** is not influenced by populist sentiments, the books must balance, we have to account, and we did.

It is the ability and demand of leadership, to lead from the front, selfless in purpose, selfish in their commitment to the vision; Passionate in their belief on the correctness of decisions taken under very trying times, on which great success is guaranteed for attaining set objectives.

Big business does not suffer fools easily. They will do a careful analysis for their potential area of investments. At the same time, there is no doubt, that over the years, Johannesburg has been the centre that attracted most investments in the entire country, let alone in **Gauteng Province**.

The leadership qualities that keep me sustained, pay off in many ways that one would not even be aware of. Some of these are visible while others are just felt.

I am here referring to some of the many of these benefits which were among other, brought by the advent of our four consecutive audit reports which was not lost on the business sector.

Having had done their environment scan, **Heineken International**, **Coca Cola International** as well as the Home Improvement giant, **Makro** decided to inject an investment into the **Sedibeng District** well over a R 1.2 billion to set up production plants and one of the biggest warehouse in the area.

This did not only come as a result of us being declared the *Ambassador of Operation Clean Audit Award*, but also as a consequence of intensive engagements with the Business sector as a major stakeholder of the Municipality. Sustainable jobs are being created as we speak, job retention strategies have been put in place, and it is all systems go. No less than three thousand jobs have been created as a result of these investments.

### **Leadership in Turbulent Times**

***Effective leaders resolve tangled conflicts and calm turmoil, writes Tao Te Ching.***

There is no doubt that the picture that I have painted above, clearly points to turbulent times. I have to admit it as such. The translation of an ancient Chinese goes something like this, *“May you live in interesting times.”*

Great uncertainty is, of course, more than just interesting. When the world seems to be changing around us, most people find that distressing and depressing as well. What does leadership have to do with this?

### **Everything!**

Leaders reduce uncertainty. They make the world clearer and less ambiguous. There are two basic ways to do this. One way is for the leader to tell people what to do and what not to do, and to enforce those orders with rewards or sanctions.

Finally leaders have to define and administer consequences-rewards or punishments for correct and incorrect, for desirable and undesirable actions. This does not make the situation less ambiguous, as long as the leader gives direction and ensures compliance.

The Vaal is today a picture of peace and calm, on both the political and the local government front. The perceived doom and gloom painted by unrest during the month of February and March this year has evaporated like morning dew at the advent of sunrise.

This calm came as a result of the values shared by the leadership and the communities we lead. Values we share as the entire communities of **Sedibeng**, tells us what is right and wrong. Beliefs on the other hand, are

summaries of cause and effect; they remind us what is likely to happen when we act in certain ways.

When people have shared values to guide actions, commonly held beliefs that outline consequences of actions, and clear standards of behavior, the way they act will be far more predictable than when such values, beliefs and norms are absent. We did not have to tell our communities what actions are wrong or right, correct or incorrect. We worked with our followers to develop clear shared values. It is those values that guided our behavior, and not our orders as leaders.

We did not simply impose values that define the communities' culture. We derived these values in collaboration with our communities, with recognition of the communal context.

To make **Sedibeng** work, followers were made not only to share the common values, beliefs, and norms that determine correct action. They were empowered to act, take ownership of the vision going forward; they took responsibility for their actions. It is as a result of the above, that the **Sharpeville Concerned Residents**, who were vocal leading up to the protest actions, are now the champions leading the development of Sharpeville.

As a husband and a father, I am prone to leaving things behind me in the house for my wife to clean up after me. Without fail, countless times she

reminds me, "My Home Economics teacher taught us that everything that is not where it is supposed to be, is dirt" she laments, God bless her heart. "There is a place for everything and everything in its place" she follows up in quick succession.

If a priest is forever found in a brothel, it raises questions of correctness of this behavior. Why this trend? The question arises, why this detour? One might ask. It is in the light of expected behavior from the leadership of this country and the world, that it is expected to act in an exemplary manner.

What with the country and our communities needing answers to questions that concerns them. The leadership is expected to behave in a manner that is beyond reproach, with integrity. Denialism is the order of the day, it does not help to bow and genuflect to the Constitution, whilst our conduct leaves much to be desired. Our communities can no longer be fooled.

Going back to the challenges that faced Sedibeng and my leadership through the years I have alluded to; suffice it to mention, that there was and still is a financial windfall for the development of the entire **District of Sedibeng**. Communities are hoping and positioning themselves to catch some of this fortune. Some of the projects are on their way to completion.

It is the nature of the abundance on the feeding trough, which the true nature of the animal comes to the fore. With this amount of money literally

being thrown about, it is still amazing that not even a single member of the councillors or members of the Mayoral Committee has been compromised by a scandal to suggest there is some tomfoolery.

This is made so as a result that even at the outset of my ascending to the Office of the Executive Mayor, I made it clear, without any ambiguities, that I will not take the fall for anyone's shortcomings, neither do I expect anyone to go down as a result of my shortcomings nor inequities. Avoid scandal and controversy at all cost was our motto.

The vigilant press in the country has gone beyond their call of duty to do a cursory "Lifestyle Audits of Leaders" in the province and the country. To this end, some people have been found wanting. Some people have been found with their hands in the cookie jar, whilst some investigations have come out with nothing. None of my colleagues, me, neither has the staff in Sedibeng District Municipality been found wanting.

It is in the light of the above, the number of huge projects that are envisaged in the Sedibeng District, the four consecutive Clean Audits from the Auditor General, the speedy resolution of problems which were thought to be above our ability to deal with, that I can safely say, we have provided **Leadership beyond Reproach**.

This principle of leadership, that requires that we avoid negative publicity, going beyond mere accountability, being beyond scrutiny from the most critical of our critics, puts us a cut above the rest. This is the same culture that **Sedibeng** has fostered over the years.

The fact that we provided the highest number of Low Cost Housing in the country as a whole, distributed the houses to their owners without a single scandal, speaks volumes of the values that drives the leadership of **Sedibeng**.

The critical component of one's successes in highly charged environment is the choice of a good team that has the ability to be great. It is common practice in leadership position to choose to be surrounded by your own friends. The problem with this approach is that advises from this area are no more than groupthink.

You get advice from yourself. I chose a team from a diverse group of excellent individuals, who have a bus load of varied talents, with a high level of emotional intelligence, complementing each other in times of crisis. I could not afford to have cheerleaders as my core, which would applaud at every move I made, lest it be found by children that the Emperor, in his attempt to show his best garment, was naked.

It is this group of contradictory core, who at the middle of the night would be exchanging messages and debates on the best way to carry out some of the many tasks. It takes a lot of energy to keep up with this lot. For it is sad in jest, “A lawyer no matter how brilliant, who represents himself in court, has a fool for a client.”

**Brothers & Sisters**, in broad terms, given the example of my current leadership capacities, leaders and in particular those who have a passion and love for what they are doing, they should have, among others, the following qualities:

- Understand policy of the organisation and institution at which you are deployed and be able to apply it under all conditions in which you find yourself. This includes an appreciation of the country and the world we live in, of the balance of forces, and how continually to change this balance in favour of the views that you share;
- Constantly seek to improve your capacity to serve the people. You should strive to be in touch with the people all the time, listen to their views and learn from them. You should be accessible and flexible and not give yourself the status of being the source of all wisdom;
- Win the confidence of the people in their day-to-day work. Where the situation demands, you should be firm, and have the courage to explain

and seek to convince others of the correctness of decisions taken by constitutional and authoritative structures, even if such decisions are unpopular.

You should not seek to gain cheap popularity by avoiding difficult issues, making false promises or merely pandering to popular sentiment;

- Be above reproach in your political and social conduct - as defined by our moral principles - and through force of example, act as a role model to all your subordinates, colleagues, comrades, friends and young people alike. Leading a life that reflects commitment to the strategic goals of your leadership, including not only being free of corrupt practices. It also means actively fighting against corruption.

Some of you may be asking themselves questions about among other, what keeps me going and what sustains me given all the above and some of those areas that I may have not been able to raise.

You will be surprised to hear that in all the above, it always motivates me every day, waking up in the morning knowing that I am going to serve the community of Sedibeng. It makes me feel special and honoured at all times. This is something that basically sustains me as a leader.

**In conclusion**, I wish I could take all the credit for the discourse above, however, I am part of the collective that provides vision for the **Sedibeng District Municipality** and the **ANC in the Region**, the fact that I am in the main, “The First Amongst Equals” does not in itself shine the spotlight on me, I do admit to having to shoulder a lot of the blame when things go wrong.

As a passing short, I look forward to some of the future leaders sitting here today, to come and pick up the baton of leadership as we take this our beautiful country and **Sedibeng District Municipality** to greater heights.

**I thank you**