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Active Citizens Movement
Submission to IEC Review Process on Local Government Elections 2021

Introduction

As a civil society structure which was formed in 2016, we represent the interests and aspirations of a diverse group of citizens from all sectors of society, across primarily KZN and other parts of South Africa. Over the last 5 years we have participated in a variety of activities and issues of national significance (including gender based violence, climate change / environment, poverty alleviation, Covid-19 and Vaccination discussions, youth concerns) and have taken the lead on various campaigns such as exposing corruption (through the Orange Mask Campaign), supporting whistleblowers and Defend our Democracy. In this regard we have built up alliances with other civil society structures nationally.

In the lead up to the 2021 local government elections, we have vested interests in the processes leading up to the elections as well as the outcomes, as these impact on our members and the broader citizenry, and it is in this context that we make the following submission to the IEC Review process on the Local Government Elections (LGE) 2021 .

Political and National Context within which LG elections are to be held

While we appreciate the challenges that currently exist regarding Covid 19 regulations that have been put into place primarily to protect citizens, we believe that the situation on the ground regarding local government nationally is very dire in terms of poor governance, lack of service delivery capacity and ongoing corruption. We therefore believe that the elections need to be held, in order to bring in new and more credible, accountable leadership at local government level and to improve service delivery which has been further eroded due to the impact of Covid 19.

The now chronic inability of councillors and other local government officials to be accountable to the citizens of South Africa is most unfortunate and has led to further deterioration of the local government sector. One of the main challenges that exist in the current system is the cadre deployment approach employed primarily by the ruling party, the ANC which enables the appointment of largely unqualified, unskilled persons who are not equipped to deal with local government matters. The proportional representation method, through which persons are appointed to a "list", despite not being qualified, needs to ideally be overhauled and revisited in favor of a system where candidates standing for elections must service a region and be held directly accountable by the people of that region, in terms of service delivery.

Their election, re-election and eligibility to stay in office must depend on whether they have actually served in any leadership role with distinction or have credible experience in municipal and local government matters. This may require major amendments to the various legislation that currently govern the management of local government elections, systems and processes.

Given however the proximity of the LGE in October 2021, we are mindful that this is a longer term project, and we will be engaging with our partners in terms of proposing further amendments to the existing legislation.

In the interim, we wish to suggest the following measures be put in place, to ensure a successful LGE outcome.

Proposed Measures and Processes for LGE 2021

1. Ensure that political parties and independent candidates contesting the elections are supported by the IEC and other structures with regard to the dissemination of their election manifesto to the broader citizenry, through radio, tv, print and social media platforms, over and above the campaigning conducted by candidates. This will alleviate the need to host large political rallies, which could become super spreader events and also ensure that the electorate can make informed choices. This should be done in all the major official languages.
2. Provide opportunities for voters to engage with the candidates online or through other means where questions can be posed to them and responses provided.
3. Enable and facilitate political literacy and voter education platforms, which allow for information dissemination that provides information that is necessary for voters to be aware of.
4. Explore and implement (if possible) an electronic or socially distanced system of voting that protects voters from being in contact with each other and thereby reducing the risk of contracting Covid 19.
5. Conduct Lifestyle audits of candidates that are standing for elections.
6. Monitor possible acts of intimidation that may take place and impact on the outcome of the elections.

We will be happy to engage further with the Review committee on the above suggestions, as and when required.

Issued by

Ms. Yashica Padia (ACM Acting Chair) and ACM LGE 2021 Sub-committee
14 June 2021