

---

# A Green Voters Guide

to the

## South African Local Government Elections 2016

---

### Quiz your Councillor !

The local government elections have come and gone. In the past few weeks, your new municipal or metro council has been given the serious task of managing the local municipality. How well they pay attention to the environmental justice issues that affect you and your community will depend, in part, on your active participation as a citizen.



**What is the role of local authorities  
when it comes to decisions that impact on your  
environment?**

In South Africa, local government is often seen as the poor cousin of the more politically significant national platform. But the recent local government election has put a spotlight on the importance of local government. It is here where performance trumps ideology, and where voters may be more inclined to vote with their heads than their hearts.

Even so, most candidates are affiliated to national-based political parties and will want to, or be obliged to, implement their particular brand of political ideology at the local level. This may not be so easy in the increasing numbers of municipal councils that will be governed by coalitions. The potential instability of such coalitions makes it even more important for us – as citizens – to hold our local councillors to account for the decisions they make in our areas, with our money.

The constitution guarantees everybody the right to “...an environment that is not harmful to her health and to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures...”. This guarantee is

entrenched within a range of national policies and laws, some of which fall to local authorities to implement. Local government can also enact and enforce by-laws.

The intersection between national legislation and local implementation depends on good co-operation between the different spheres of government. But for the ordinary citizen, it can be quite confusing. If, for example, your local authority is not properly treating sewage because it cannot raise the funds for the necessary upgrades, is that a local issue, a provincial issue, or a national issue? And what can you do about it?

A recent study, 15 Years Review of Local Government, published by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) highlights some of the fractured coordination between the three tiers of government. Political parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) lament the fact that municipalities have an oversight function at local level but often very little operational control (Kevin Mileham, personal communication).

Large differences in capacity and financial stability between South Africa's 226 municipalities are another cause for concern. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) blames these differences on an unequal division of revenue from national treasury, saying, "The manner in which municipalities are funded reproduce the structural and spatial inequalities that existed under apartheid. Affluent areas which are predominantly white continue to receive better services as opposed to underdeveloped areas which are predominantly black". In fact the EFF's local government manifesto would be completely unworkable without first changing the constitution which defines the powers given to the different spheres of government.

The DA wants a new local government funding model that is sustainable and does not overburden local ratepayers. The African National Congress (ANC) recognizes the problem, but argues that it can be solved by proper implementation of the current system of cooperative governance. However, even where there are strong and relatively progressive national policies in place – such as for the provision and use of water – the number of service delivery protests that relate to issues and resources indicate just how broken the system is.

**Now that elections are over,  
it's time for you to ensure that your councillor delivers!**

To help you with this important job, we have covered a handful of topical environmental justice concerns, and tried to unpack some of the key issues at stake.

---

## Energy



Energy is central to any household. We need it for transport, radio and TV, cooking, heating and lighting. Energy does not have to come in the form of electricity, but for most of us, electricity is the easiest, most flexible, cleanest and cheapest form of energy in the home – and we rely on our municipalities to provide it.

But in South Africa, about 90% of our electricity is generated by **burning dirty coal**. So the convenience of electricity comes with serious problems. Air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions are obvious ones. Other impacts from mining and burning coal include water pollution, the destruction of natural habitat and the health and safety of mineworkers.

### **We all know we should be moving towards a low-carbon economy based on renewable energy. But what do the politicians say?**

Almost all of political parties in South Africa say that they see the transition to renewable energy as fundamental to a sustainable future. But how does this translate into reality at the local level?

A situation where there are a photovoltaic (PV) panel and solar water heater on every roof in the country is technically possible and financially feasible. Not only would this obviate the need for more dirty coal-fired energy and horrendously expensive nuclear power-stations, but it would also place household energy security firmly in the hands of the householder. However, it is not clear that any of the major parties are willing to give citizens this much control over their own lives!

While the African National Congress (ANC) government has overseen the addition of over 4 000 MW of [renewable energy](#) capacity in less than four years, their priority is still to support large-scale installations, rather than “people’s power” – and sadly, any carbon-emission advantage gained by the new renewable stations will be wiped out when the two new coal-fired stations, Medupi and Khusile (9 500 MW in total) come on line.

The ANC’s liking for coal is shared by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Unfortunately the citizens of Mpumalanga Highveld have to [pay with their health](#) – they live in an area which has amongst the poorest air quality in the world.

A few years ago, Eskom’s load-shedding saw householders rushing to buy off-the-shelf renewable technologies, such as PV panels and solar water heaters, but few local authorities promoted, enforced or offered incentives for renewable energy installation.

For example, one incentive would be if residents were able to sell their spare solar electricity back into the municipal grid. But this is constrained by municipal by-laws and Eskom’s monopoly, in turn supported by government (ie. tax-payer) [bailouts](#).

One of the smaller parties, the United Democratic Movement (UDM), wants to promote and incorporate all viable options for electricity generation at a household or community scale. Municipalities argue that if they encourage households to be more efficient or generate their own electricity they face a drop in tariff income. The UDM leader, Holomisa, however points

out that as electricity is the lifeblood of an economically active society, any loss of revenue to municipalities will be more than offset by the rise in economically active communities.



- Do you see moving to a low-carbon economy based on renewable energy as fundamental to our city's future? How do you see this happening?
- Do you think that municipalities have a responsibility to encourage households to become more energy efficient or generate their own electricity?
- Do you think that Eskom's monopoly on energy generation is preventing municipalities from promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions?
- Are you afraid that by encouraging households to be more energy efficient or to generate their own electricity, the municipality will face a drop in tariff income? Is there a creative solution to this problem?

---

## Solid waste

Removing and safely disposing solid waste is a municipal responsibility. How well our municipalities are doing can be measured by the piles of plastic bags, cans and bottles that pollute and deface our veld, beaches, parks and streets. But we citizens are not blameless, either. We are the ones that throw away the stuff that the packaging industry thinks we can't live without.



In reality, waste is not “disposed of” at all, but merely removed from our bins and streets and taken to the local dump, hopefully downwind and out of sight, and left to slowly decompose. This decomposition results in emissions of methane (a potent greenhouse gas) and in a potentially toxic cocktail of liquid that has to be prevented from polluting our groundwater.

The proper management of solid waste dumps is a skilled and critically important job, and needs to be adequately funded. Even better, solid waste should be separated and the recoverable materials sent for recycling.

Where you live the streets may be clean and the household waste that you put into your wheelie-bin may be collected, like clockwork, once a week. But in many areas in our towns and cities neither wheelie-bins nor regular collections are the norm. Frustrated households dump their waste on street corners, where it is left to the wind, rats and stray dogs.

Municipal workers in some rural Mpumalanga municipalities refuse to collect waste that includes disposable nappies, citing the health risk. As a result, piles of used nappies litter the veld and water-courses. They can take up to 450 years to fully decompose.

### **So, how will our politicians ensure that our neighbourhoods are clean and safe?**

The Democratic Alliance (DA) in the Western Cape is preoccupied both with identifying and managing landfill sites that are at or near to capacity, and setting and managing waste reduction targets, which include the use of recycling. They cite the outsourced Malmesbury landfill operation in Cape Town as an example of innovative and sustainable waste management.

An important innovation in landfill management is the extraction of the methane they produce, which can then be burned to generate electricity. But by law, no one is allowed to generate electricity without Eskom's permission – and at the price they determine, generally making this kind of technology economically unviable. Allowing Eskom's monopoly to continue carries many hidden costs.

Congress of the People (COPE)'s manifesto mentions recycling but doesn't give any details. The African National Congress (ANC)'s manifesto, on the other hand, mentions refuse removal, but nothing about how they intend to deal with the growing mountains of waste.

A healthy environment means a healthy community, says the United Democratic Movement (UDM), which pledges to ensure the integration of proper environmental practice into its daily operation as well as into planning and project management. According to a UDM spokesperson, waste reduction and recycling must become the number one priority for every

council..... “In the long-run there simply isn't enough space, infrastructure or resources to sustain the current rate at which landfill sites are used and expanded.”



- How do you intend improving waste collection in your area?
- What plans do you have to encourage recycling?
- Waste-pickers play a valuable role in recycling waste; how can the municipality support them?
- What steps have you taken to ensure there is no litter in your area?
- Landfill sites are dangerous, smelly and add to greenhouse gas. What are your plans for reducing the amount of solid waste that gets dumped?

---

## Water and sanitation



The current drought has brought the critical need for water to be well managed into sharp focus. South Africa's storage dams are currently, on average, less than half full and Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Des van Rooyen has [declared](#) all but one of the nine provinces as “drought disaster areas”.

On paper at least, the ANC government identifies water as a critical resource for economic development. Their Five-Point Plan for water and sanitation includes:

- \* Maintaining and upgrading existing water and sanitation infrastructure
- \* Building new dams and developing ground water
- \* Improving water quality
- \* Developing smart technologies for water and sanitation information management
- \* Ensuring an enhanced and integrated regulatory regime such as water-use licensing.

**Delivering water to your tap  
and dealing with the resulting wastewater  
is ultimately the responsibility of your local authority**

### Water

Since coming to power in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) government has given access to water to more people than the entire population of Sweden! They claim that currently 90% of households in South Africa have access to water. The poor also benefit from free basic water.

For the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), who promise piped water into every household, this is not good enough. The EFF state that water will be free to the poor and elderly.

Most local authorities buy bulk water and manage its treatment and distribution. The price you pay is only partly based on how much it costs to deliver water to you. As with electricity, **it's a political decision**, based on how much revenue the local authority needs to earn, and to what extent it is prepared to subsidise the careful consumption of small-volume users with punitive charges levied to wasteful large-volume users.

Households also ultimately pay for water they don't receive – water leaks cost the country an estimated R7 billion a year. It is the municipalities responsibility to fix these leaks, but the national Department of Water and Sanitation plans to assist. The idea is to train 15 000 artisans and plumbers to fix leaking taps in their communities. The programme was officially launched in Port Elizabeth in August 2015 with an initial intake of 3 000 trainees.

Although local authorities are responsible for providing citizens with safe and affordable water, their job is made more difficult if national government does not secure our water resources. For example, large swathes of the Mpumalanga Drakensberg are covered by pine and eucalyptus plantations. Each of these trees soaks up about 25 litres of water per day, the same amount that the Water Act guarantees for each citizen!

National government is also responsible for protecting rivers, wetlands and aquifers from pollution, but the picture does not look very rosy. [Acid mine drainage](#) poses an increasing pollution threat. New water use licences are being granted to mining companies at an alarming rate, and with little foresight by government. And, despite the appallingly poor performance of so many wastewater treatment plants, there seems to be little urgency from national government to provide the necessary finance and skills to solve the problem.

## Sanitation

According to the United Democratic Movement (UDM) ‘A necessary part of any strategy for saving water is the acknowledgement that South Africa is a water scarce country, thus incentives for conservation, as well as penalties for wastage and pollution must be in place and enforced’.

But the crazy thing is, between 30% and 40% of South Africa’s world-class, treated drinking water is **flushed down the toilet**. Your local authority is responsible for managing this end of the water use cycle – collecting wastewater, treating it to the legislated standard and releasing it back into the environment.

Sadly, too many local authorities are simply not up to the job, and we’re not booting them out when they mess up. A recent [independent survey](#) of sewage treatment in 72 towns found that one-third did not meet effluent specifications. Towns in Mpumalanga performed the worst (of 13 treatment plants tested, only 4 passed).

The ANC is proud of the fact that since 2002 it has increased access to basic sanitation services from 62% to 79%.

On the other hand, the EFF claim that the local government system represents “...the highest form of incompetence, unresponsiveness, inability to provide basic services such as clean water, primary health, sanitation, refuse removal and other important functions within their jurisdiction.” They state that their People Municipality will oversee the abolition of bucket toilets and pit latrines and replace them with a flushing toilet in every household.

The DA argues that people are focusing on the wrong end of the sanitation process. They want to concentrate first on upgrading sewerage works, and then on laying the pipelines to the toilets, to ultimately deliver toilets for all.

Unfortunately, party manifestos are short on practical detail. Providing dignified sanitation for all needs serious investment in skills and infrastructure, and a willingness to explore innovative solutions. Engineering constraints make [water-borne sanitation impossible](#) in some areas.

Money is also a consideration. For a population of around 3 million, the City of Cape Town’s investment in water and sanitation infrastructure in 2014/15 was over R895 million. The target for 2015/16 and 2016/17 is R1 273 million and R1 521 million, respectively.

Simply providing every household with a flush toilet will bankrupt local governments and take water away from where it can be used productively. On the other hand, simply ignoring



the looming crisis, exacerbated by rapidly growing cities, is to risk violent “poo protests”, sewage spills in the streets and contamination of underground water.



- We can't afford to flush drinking water down the toilet. Do you have a solution to wasting this precious resource?
- What do you intend to do to radically reduce water leaks in our area
- How will you work with national and provincial government to provide your constituency with safe and affordable water?
- Is it good planning to allow households to use as much water as they like, as long as they pay for it?
- How will you ensure that the sewage works in our area meets effluent specifications?
- What is your plan to provide dignified sanitation for all?

---

## Land Use

While much has changed in 20 years, most South African towns and cities still bear the imprint of apartheid spacial planning characterised by dormitory “townships” for the poor on the edges of town. The environmental footprint from this inefficient (and brutal) use of land is **massive** – daily commuting uses fossil fuels and pollutes the air, service provision is wasteful, and densification is difficult to encourage.



Local authorities are responsible for managing how land within municipal boundaries is used. They are also responsible for restricting inappropriate land use – for example dwellings in flood-prone areas, buffer zones between residential areas and industrial areas, etc. This is typically managed via “zoning”, where areas are allocated as residential, business, industrial, recreational, environmental, etc.

**Conflicts invariably arise over competing uses of urban space and managing the conflicts is a political process.**

**How well do your local authorities deal with these and whose interests do they represent?**

The Democratic Alliance (DA) aspires to prioritising spatial integration and urban planning to build an inclusive city. But they don’t seem to be getting it entirely right in Cape Town, where the council has been taken to task over its plans to sell off a large part of the Phillipi Horticultural Area for housing development. The vegetable-farming area lies above a valuable aquifer and provides employment for many. The council’s proposal to sell the land goes against its own independent evaluations, its urban edge demarcation, the provincial government’s classification of the area as “agricultural”, and very vocal objections from citizens.

In official-speak, the DA’s approach is to provide good quality services for businesses and investment, which in turn will create jobs and benefit the poor. However, opponents to the scheme could be forgiven for thinking that council decisions are driven by a corrupt and cosy relationship with business chasing after short-term profits.

Economic Freedom Fighter (EFF) Western Cape chairperson, Bernard Joseph alleges that “the municipal local government is corporatised” and accuses municipalities of behaving like companies – fixated on attracting investors to the city and providing services only to people who can pay for them.

Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, EFF national spokesperson argues that unemployment perpetuates the lack of basic services to the poor, and that the neo-liberal state structure must change through nationalisation, where government advances the scale of industrialisation and job creation. On the other hand, it is likely that the EFF’s nationalisation programme will see private capital evaporate, leaving less money for local municipalities. (Chris Mann, “EFF speaks the language of fantasy”, Mail and Guardian, 24 June 2016).

The EFF is also in a rage about informal settlements. “Africans live in proximity to rats, pigs and rubbish, with no basic services,” says Ndlozi. The party proposes to abolish all informal settlements and demarcate housing stands on available municipal land – or to appropriate land (without compensation) if necessary.

The African National Congress (ANC) takes a gentler line – but also more realistic, given the multiple responsibilities for housing, overlapping between local, provincial and national spheres of government. The ANC proposes to enhance the capacity of municipalities to accelerate the upgrading and integration of informal settlements and to deliver on their promises by strengthening national and provincial support to local government.

Forward-thinking General President Bantu Holomisa of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) confesses that “Long-term infrastructure development plans are required that integrate public transport, better housing and new residential developments, in order to address the current skewed population distribution, as well as prepare for future growth in the population.” Sadly, the UDM does not control any municipalities.

It’s not only the influence of business and the leverage of the economically powerful that lead to conflict. Witness the attempts of Johannesburg and Cape Town metros to build a coherent integrated public transport system. Not only did this cause often violent conflict with taxi operators, but also with the lumbering bureaucracy that is Metrorail. As Gauteng Transport Member of the Executive Council (MEC) Ismail Vadi said, the technological challenges behind an integrated public transport system are not the problem, “...but to get all the different operators to integrate with us, it's a bit of a challenge." Just a bit?

Another area where citizens’ local interests have come into conflict with the “national interest” is in mining. Land around the village of Xolobeni in the Eastern Cape holds a significant titanium deposit, but attempts to mine it have been fiercely resisted by many in the local community. On a recent visit to the village, the Deputy Minister of Mineral Resources, Godfrey Oliphant, told an angry crowd that the titanium did not belong to them, but to the people of South Africa, and that the government, not the community, would make the decisions. “Don’t appropriate power to yourselves,” he said.

It is estimated that some 1.6 million people live in informal settlements next to mine dumps (Mariette Riefferink, Federation for Sustainable Environment, personal communication). On the Witwatersrand, people living next to old mine-dumps suffer wind-blown radio-active dust and contaminated water. The actual gold, of course, has long gone.

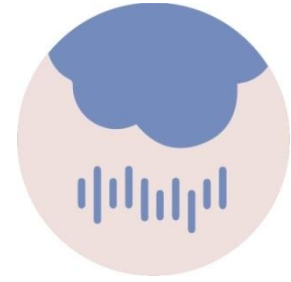


- Daily commuting causes traffic jams, wastes fossil fuels and pollutes the air. How do you plan to reduce the inefficient movements of people around the city?
- How well does the council deal with conflicts arising over competing uses of urban space, and whose interests does it represent?
- In your opinion, who should decide how a piece of land is used or zoned –national, provincial or local government – or the people living on it?
- What system do you have in place to monitor land use so that people desperate for a place to live don't have to be evicted off land that is unsuitable for habitation?

---

## Climate Change

Global warming is affecting South Africa's weather patterns and predictions are that changes will become more pronounced over the next decades. The specific predictions are complex and couched in uncertainty, but there is general consensus that average temperatures will increase, particularly over the interior of the country. Changes in rainfall patterns are less certain, but it is likely that the western parts of the country will become drier and the central and eastern parts somewhat wetter. Shorter rainy seasons and an increase in severe weather events (droughts, floods, storms, tornados, etc.) are also likely to be part of the change.



The agricultural sector is obviously the most directly affected by climatic changes and it poses problems for rural economies, but, as we have seen with the current drought, the knock-on effects are felt in urban areas too, particularly with rising food prices.

**National government is responsible for laws and policies to reduce carbon emissions. But local authorities are responsible for limiting damage due to natural events.....by enforcing building codes; controlling settlement in unsuitable areas; maintaining roads, bridges, and other lines of communication; maintaining water supplies and waste removal; etc.**

The African National Congress (ANC) acknowledges that local authorities have a central role to play in adapting to a changing climate. But they don't say what this role is. Under the ANC's rule, municipalities will work more closely with provincial and national government to develop their mitigation and adaptation measures. You decide whether this is a good or bad thing!

The Democratic Alliance (DA)'s manifesto promises a lot, and by way of example, showcases its state-of-the-art Disaster Risk Management Centre in the City of Cape Town, by implication suggesting that such centres will be rolled-out in any other municipalities it governs. On the other hand, the actual words "climate change" do not appear anywhere.

The Economic Freedom Front (EFF) promises that no pothole will last more than 48 hours. Unfortunately, the kinds of floods we can expect may well wash the entire road away, unless they have already met another promise to "...construct and maintain storm water systems to avoid all forms of floods and heavy rains which might destroy infrastructure." However, there is no real evidence that their vision integrates the kind of disaster management that may be needed.

The United Democratic Movement (UDM) insists each local government must have its own disaster management strategies in place, with rapid response systems to coordinate movement or evacuation when necessary.

But, adapting to climate change requires much more than ensuring flood-proof infrastructure and effective disaster relief systems. A truly resilient urban or rural community will be one where relationships and support structures within the community are good, and where relationships between citizens and authorities are open, honest and productive.



- How ready is the municipality for the challenges of climate change?
- How do you intend to minimise damage caused by natural disasters and climate change?
- What disaster relief strategies do you have in place
- How do you envisage this community becoming resilient in the face of climate change?