

SA Cities Network committed to building a better Msunduzi

LEOGANG LECHUBA

The Witness article, "City cash woes piling up", which appeared in your newspaper on September 24, refers.

The South African Cities Network (SACN) wishes to put forward the following points of clarity in terms of the key issues raised in that article.

The first point of clarity is in terms of the benefits and value of the SACN and its specific contributions to the Msunduzi Municipality. SACN is an established network of South Africa's largest cities, including the Msunduzi Local Municipality. The SACN was formed to assist cities to navigate the complex social, economic, financial, infrastructural and governance challenges confronting them while addressing the legacies of spatial injustice and exclusion.

The SACN's approach is an all-of-society approach where it listens and facilitates knowledge co-creation, learning and innovation through partnerships among cities and all stakeholders, supporting the mandate of local government to deepen democracy.

Like many municipalities, Msunduzi faces several social, economic, environmental and systemic planning challenges. Much is also changing in the external context in which cities are operating; not least, the impacts of the ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic have been a severe shock to urban economies and compounded structural problems. The most vulnerable people most acutely felt its effects.

SACN, over the years, has offered the Msunduzi Local Municipality access to its peer-to-peer learning platforms among cities and partners, facilitated partnerships between

cities, local and international development partners, and provided programmatic support.

Through this work, the SACN has identified three key focus areas where it has offered additional support to Msunduzi going forward.

■ **Assisting Msunduzi to reimagine itself through a long-term City Development Strategy (CDS) Process** — cities need to have long-range strategies to deal with their growth and development within the context of rapid urbanisation in South Africa and throughout the continent, coupled with a resource-constrained environment. Cities that adopt an integrated and long-term approach to development will have more effective and sustainable outcomes.

■ **Facilitating dialogue be-**

tween the municipality and its key stakeholders through an all of society and whole of government approach. Cities are developed not only by municipalities but with key civil society, business and intergovernmental partnerships. Enhancing relationships and partnerships are vital to addressing critical issues faced by the city.

■ **Assisting to position the municipality on the provincial and national urban development map and the agenda of critical institutions overseeing these processes.** Given Msunduzi's strategic location, the city should be leveraging its comparative advantage and playing a much more significant

role provincially and nationally. This is critical to ensure that provincial and national funding opportunities are maximised for Msunduzi's recovery and to place it on a sustained growth path.

The second point of clarity refers to the financial obligations of Msunduzi towards SACN given the fiscally constrained environment it finds itself.

The SACN, through its work and partnership, is aware of Msunduzi's challenging financial position and has continued to provide SACN services to the municipality. Furthermore, in the presentation provided

on September 23, SACN indicated that while it is a non-profit which is accountable to its council, made up of mayors of its participating cities, support to cities is its core mandate and it would like to continue to support Msunduzi even without a financial contribution in the immediate term.

It is also essential to clarify that both the SACN and Salga (SA Local Government Association) share a common objective of facilitating sustainable urban development and urban spaces' efficient

and effective functioning. Salga sits on the governance board of the SACN and informs and supports its work to drive effective and efficient local and national development.

SACN also sits on the Salga working group dealing with urban development. It reports on its various activities, informs and supports the work of the working group to drive effective and efficient local governance and development in cities. SACN provides value to cities specifically in terms of convening a network of cities, a knowledge base on local government, peer to peer learning, partnerships, advocacy and direct programme support.

Lastly, as an organisation representing a network of cities in both metropolitan and local municipalities, we consider the suggestion that we are an exclusive "boys club" unfortunate and misleading.

Our mission is to build better cities through co-created knowledge with cities, partners and industry experts, sharing best practices and disseminating knowledge widely to all sectors of society. It is patently and objectively untrue that SACN is a boy's club. The persistent state of fragility in the municipality is a concern. It has weakened its shared vision between the city and its citizens, including business associations, academia, civil society and communities.

To restore the social compact, the municipality needs to develop a vision that is shared by all its citizens. SACN is committed to assisting Msunduzi Municipality in its recovery process and reimagining a new paradigm.

Lebogang Lechuba is the communications and marketing manager for SA Cities Network.

