

LEETO LEADS FROM ALL FRONTS

May 11, 2012 | Filed under Latest News, Previous news | Posted by editor



Voice for voiceless ... The mayor of Lejweleputswa is focused on helping women, children, and the poor

Lejweleputswa District Municipality mayor Mathabo Leeto has worked her way through civic and political structures with the aim of lifting women, children and vulnerable groups from the morass of oppression and poverty.

When people ask Lejweleputswa District Municipality mayor and ANC regional chairperson Mathabo Leeto to describe herself, she does not hesitate to say that she is first and foremost a Christian.

According to her, the values she has learned from being a Christian have provided her with strength in her journey as a politician and brought her to where she is today.

“Growing up as a child in the apartheid era, we were exposed to poverty, oppression, and abuse. The only way to survive was to believe in a higher power that can hear us when we pray and believe that He would make a way for us.”

Born and raised in Allanridge near Welkom, Leeto entered politics in the mid-80s.

“I entered into politics because I needed to make a difference. I realised that people, especially black people, were oppressed and not liberated. The laws of the country were not giving everybody equal rights.

The Weekly

“What motivated me were the roles that were supposed to be played by women in society and also in politics. I entered into politics because I wanted to be part of a collective that would ensure that the national democratic revolution was realised and that would ensure that women are treated like any other human being. There would be no discrimination or abuse against women, children, and the poor.

Leeto believes her poor background motivated her to help others. “I am from a poor family. That is why I understand how it feels for a person to go to bed without food, without financial resources to go to school. It is the reason why it pains me to see people suffer,” Leeto explained.

Her early involvement in politics saw her serving as the secretary of the Nyakallong Civic Association from 1992 to 1995. She is currently a member of the National Executive Committee and National Working Committee of the South African National Civic Organisation.

She has for long been an active member and respected leader of the ANC Women’s League, starting with her election as a branch chairperson of Nyakallong in 1993. In 1994, she was elected as the regional chairperson of the ANCWL’s Goldfields region.

During 1996, Leeto was elected to the ANCWL’s Provincial Executive Committee and served in the Working Committee. She was elected as the deputy chairperson of the ANC Lejweleputswa region in 2006 and became the chairperson of the region in 2008. She is currently a provincial treasurer of the ANCWL in the Free State.

Her involvement with local government started in 1995 when she became a ward councilor and the deputy chairperson of the Allanridge Traditional Local Council. In 1996, she became the chairperson of the executive committee.

Leeto was elected executive mayor of Lejweleputswa District Municipality in 2004 and thereafter became the executive mayor of the Matjhabeng Local Municipality. She also served as the provincial chairperson of the South African Local Government Association and in the local government Water Sector Education and Training Authority.

In 2010, Leeto was redeployed as Lejweleputswa mayor. She said it bothers her that the district has not formulated a comprehensive strategy to build and position the economy of the area.

“The district’s economy used to rely on mining. My vision for the district is to diversify the economy of the region and make it less dependent on mining.

“Business people are concerned about the buying power in the district. We will only be able to develop if we work together as a district, local municipalities, government departments and private sector. Therefore, we are planning an economic development summit, where all these sectors will be involved to discuss how we can turn the situation around.”

Leeto added that growing unemployment is also a concern for her. “When the president delivered his state of the nation address, he committed a huge budget that will be focused on employment in the country and as the district we have to come up with ways and means so that our people can benefit.”

One of the ways the district municipality intends creating jobs is the establishment of a call centre.

“So far, Harmony mine and IDT (Independent Development Trust) are involved in the project. The plans are developing rapidly, but the community will be informed at the right time when the processes have been finalised.”

The Weekly

Because women and children are her passion, Leeto has also set her eyes on expanding an NGO she helped to establish. The Imbokodo Foundation aims to empower women by equipping them with leadership and business skills. “Those of us who were able to get the opportunity of occupying these strategic positions must be able to empower women achieve their dreams.”

According to Leeto, attaining 50/50 representation in the ANC does not suggest that women no longer have challenges facing them. There are still challenges of abuse, rape, and oppression.

“We need to change the stereotypes surrounding women. Not only in men, but there are still women who do not support women because they believe that they do not belong in leadership positions.

When asked about the factional battles within the ANC in the province, Leeto said in-house disagreements are not a foreign tendency in the movement.

“When you follow up on the memorial lectures conducted by the president regarding the 12 presidents of the ANC, in those lectures you would pick up that there were always contestations. Contestation of positions in the ANC is not something new. That is why we have conferences – to state our different views and agree on a way forward.

Leeto added that the problem is not differences in political views, but ill-discipline and opportunism. “The sad part is that people are putting forward their own interests, they behave as if when you want to elect a new leader you have to go public instead of going to the branches of the ANC to elect a new leader. It is unfortunate that some members are not patient enough to make sure their issues are raised within the structures of the organisation.”

She urged communities to continue having confidence in the ANC, despite differences in the current leadership squabbles.

“Let our people not concentrate on the negative that is being portrayed about the ANC, but rather get involved in shaping the future. I am sure a lot of people would agree with me when I say there has been a lot of progress since 1994.”

Leeto described premier Ace Magashule as a servant of the people.

“The Lejweleputswa District Municipality is impressed by the work done by Comrade Ace Magashule, because of the integration between provincial and local government was non-existent. If you are a leader, it is not normal to be liked by everybody, especially when you are decisive. I believe that the economy of this district will be revived under the stewardship of the current premier.”

She has been nominated as a candidate for the regional chairperson in the ANC. If chosen, she will be the first women to serve in this position for a second term.

[Source: www.theweekly.co.za]