

PROFILE OF
MAYOR COUNCILLOR OBED THEMBINKOSE MLABA

Councillor Obed Mlaba, Mayor of the eThekweni Municipality, came to local government in '94, during the democratisation process of local government. Mr Mlaba was initially appointed Chair of the Council's Executive Committee during the '95 / 96 municipal year and elected Metropolitan Mayor in July 1996.

In 2000, after the local government elections, Mr Mlaba was elected the first Durban Unicity Mayor, a position that brought with it the added responsibility of Chairing the Executive Committee.

Mr Obed Mlaba holds an MBA in Strategic Marketing Management from the UK-based International Management Centre. Prior to his work in the public sector, Mr Mlaba gained extensive business experience in the fields of human resource management, industrial relations, business development and marketing.

Mr Mlaba has worked for such industry giants as the South African Breweries and South Africa's largest electricity provider, Eskom. During his tenure as Manager of Business Development at Eskom, Mr Mlaba introduced the concept of strategic planning and visioning to the organisation, a relatively new concept in 1994. A strategic planning exercise, involving representatives from all of Eskom's operations and systems from management to shop floor, was instrumental in repositioning the organisation for its transformation and future growth and development.

Mr Obed Mlaba's belief in and passion for development, peace and harmony between nations of the world is borne from his own personal experiences of dehumanising discrimination and exploitation at the hands of the oppressive apartheid Regime.

The insidious apartheid laws and the effects these laws had on the allocation of resources impacted on his life early on. The Bantu education programme saw the

demise of Inchanga Combined School in the late '50s when the Roman Catholic teachers defied the authorities by refusing to teach Bantu education. Government retaliated by withdrawing its subsidy.

Nevertheless, the school and its teachers made a deep and lasting impression on Mayor Mlaba.

Mayor Mlaba has fond memories of one teacher in particular, The Reverend Father Mavundla, who motivated his pupils to attain a good education, "because," the good Reverend wisely advised, "the country shall be free one day and shall need you guys".

Neither did the Reverend neglect the broader political context in which his pupils were growing up that would later confront them with many challenges. Pupils were creatively conscientised about the struggle for liberation through the lyrics and activism of the legendary greats of music - luminaries like Hugh Masekela and MamaAfrica, Miriam Makeba, the icon of peace and freedom of all people rallying against the evils of racism.

These musical influences, and visits to his father at Durban's Dalton Road Men's Hostel, were to shape Mayor Mlaba's love and participation in music and football while at school playing for Estcourt United and throughout his university career where he played in the jazz band, the Varsity Jazz and Variety Cast Group comprising 25 singers and stage actors.

While men's hostels were intended only as a repository for African migrant labour, the social and cultural fabric of traditional African culture was brought to the hostels and 'remixed' and 'reworked'. The mining hostels of Natal were the birth place of isicathamiya music in the 30s, made internationally famous by the Ladysmith Black

Mambazo, and home to legendary football clubs like African Wanderers and Bush Buck Rangers, among others.

While the apartheid system forcefully controlled the activities of black South Africans, perhaps the apartheid government did not understand the significance of dance and music as a means of retaining a people's cultural roots and, therefore, their identity and, music and dance, as an expression of defiance, as well as a survival strategy for long, painful separations from family and loved ones.

It was during these visits to his father that Mayor Mlaba experienced the effrontery of the 9pm curfew imposed on Africans and the indignity of police searches for the infamous 'dompas' or pass permit and arrests if an African was found walking on the streets past curfew or without his pass.

Encounters like these and the hardships endured by black South Africans on a daily basis, prompted thoughts of leaving South Africa. Instead, however, Mr Mlaba continued his studies at the University of Zululand, obtaining a Bachelor of Social Science, Social Work, becoming active in civic organisations and pursuing a career in business.

Since the democratic elections in '94 and his tenure as Mayor of eThekweni, the municipality has seen many changes for the better. The face and viability of the City have changed and improved dramatically.

Since '94, the City has shifted its economic and business focus to serving people better and providing them with a better quality of life. The eThekweni Municipality has one of the best business plans in the country which has been hailed by President Thabo Mbeki. This is evident in the City's 2020 vision based on the Long Term Development Framework, which is a city-wide mission statement and includes viable socio-economic

and tourism oriented strategies.

Mayor Mlaba says: "to achieve what Durban has attained so far, is an embodiment of what everybody has done successfully. It had to be a collective effort coupled with community participation in the process of developing the integrated development plan (IDP).

Presently eThekweni Municipality is run as a government with a focus on service delivery and as a business entity striving for profits to ensuring sustainability and an improved quality of life. Mayor Mlaba values IDP principles. He says the Council is focusing on three areas, namely the human and skills development sector, creation of linkages between those who benefited previously and those who did not and lastly economic development.

The City has its own treasure trove of assets and a number of companies are involved in property development and expansion like Moreland and Toyota.

"I think Durban is behind the rapid economic and investment growth rate of KwaZulu-Natal. There are a lot of other initiatives that the City is linked to such as the Area Based Management project driven by the European Union in Cato Manor, the iTRUMP, the South Industrial Basin, Inanda-Ntuzuma & KwaMashu (INK), and the KwaXimba development," says Mayor Mlaba.

eThekweni Municipality has also focused on bringing to previously disadvantaged areas through the strong regeneration campaigns in KwaMashu and Umlazi with the development of two shopping centres. The City has adopted an aggressive attitude towards growth and several new projects such as uShaka Marine World, River Horse Valley, the Gateway area and Umhlanga Ridge, and the two Casinos are having positive effects on growth. In fact, economic growth has been recorded virtually across the board, and Durban is the only centre where manufacturing is growing.

"Decision making in Durban involves management, political leadership, staff and

communities and I think this is a God given miracle for our City that everyone is able to join hands in fostering the spirit of togetherness and unity," concludes Mayor Mlaba.

Awards Bestowed on Mayor Councillor Obed Mlaba

- 1S A Top 300 National Companies Award. Mayor Councillor Obed Mlaba nominated as one of SA's Top Mayors 2001/02.
- 1Black Management Forum, Special Award for Extraordinary Leadership.
- 1Institute for Local Government Management, Service Excellence Award.

1P M R Awards

- 1Most Pro-Active Mayor in SA Best Cities (Community Upliftment Category).
- His Worship The Mayor Councillor Obed Mlaba - Mayor of Durban. Third overall.
- Individual in KZN Political Environment Who Has Done The Most To Achieve Goals for the Year. His Worship the Mayor Councillor Obed Mlaba - Mayor of Durban. First overall.
- Most Pro-Active Mayor Doing The Most For His City. His Worship The Mayor Councillor Obed Mlaba - Mayor of Durban. First overall. (Diamond)
- Most Pro-active Mayor in the Province. Outstanding. First overall. (Diamond)

- 1Best City Substructure, eThekweni Municipality. Highest rated Municipal Structures (stable & organised). First overall. (Gold 2005)
- 1Best Cities, eThekweni, Tourism and Environmental Care. Second overall. City management. (Silver 2005)

Awards Bestowed on the City of Durban, eThekweni

- 1MDP award for Best Practice on Urban Maintenance attributed to the City of Durban during Africities 1998.
- 1African National Congress Achievement Awards - 2000 - Z K Mathews Award.
- Presented to Durban Metro for the best Performing ANC Councillor. By the President of the ANC - Thabo Mbeki.
- 11Department of Agriculture and Environment Affairs, Cleanest Town Competition, 2003, Category A.

PMR Awards

- 1Cities offering best Management, Administration, Services to Business. Joint second overall. Durban.
- Lifestyle, Tourism, Environmental Care. Durban. Second overall.
- Substructure (Municipal Structure is Stable and Organised) Durban eThekweni.Municipality.
- 1Vuna Awards, Municipal Performance Excellence Awards, 2003. Best Achieving Municipalities in KwaZulu- Natal.
- Vuna Awards, eThekweni Metro - Provincial Second Runner up KwaZulu- Natal Province, 2003.

- Vuna Awards, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. Category A No.1 - National. Municipal performance Excellence Awards, 2004.
- Vuna Awards , eThekweni Metro local Municipality. Recognition for being a contestant in the National Municipal Performance Excellence Awards, 2003.
- SALGA - Honorary Award of Participation - ICT Internship Programme - eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality - for outstanding contribution to the promotion of skills development in the Local Government, 2004.
- 1Best Cities, eThekweni, Cities offering the best lifestyle. First overall. (Gold 2005)
- Best City Substructure, eThekweni Municipality. Highest rated Municipal Structures (stable & organised). First overall. (Gold 2005)
- Best Cities, Most Pro-active Mayor Bringing About Social Upliftment in the Province: City population 1m+. Joint third overall.(Silver 2005)
- 1Best Cities, eThekweni Municipality - City Management. Very good. (Bronze 2005)
- Best Cities, eThekweni Municipality - Social care. Third overall. (Bronze 2005)
- Best Cities, eThekweni Municipality, local councils contributing most to social upliftment: Second overall. City population 1m+.(Silver 2005)
- Best Cities , eThekweni, Tourism and environmental care. Joint Second overall. (Silver 2005)
- Best Cities, eThekweni, Tourism and Environmental Care. Second overall. City management. (Silver 2005)
- **1AIU - IGSRP - ISOCARP.** Award for Excellence. To Durban Metropolitan Council 2005. For the creative approach to integrated local economic development of Cato Manor, one of the most depressed areas of Metropolitan Durban. The valuable lessons learnt from this experience now form the basis for other urban redevelopment initiatives in South Africa. International Society of City and Regional Planners.

