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Rabelani Dagada: Holding Jozi's purse strings

Local government remains a "noisy" space, especially in Gauteng with a settling-in of new power-sharing configurations underway. Nonetheless, work must continue and a new name popped up on Bloomberg's last week (www.bloomberg.com) in relation to the nerve-wracking prospect of a credit downgrade; by Johannesburg's Member of the Mayoral Committee for Finance, Rabelani Dagada - an academic-turned-politician - who is now tasked with the challenge of raising finance for the country's economic hub. This Personality of the Month considers Dagada's background and how it might come into play in dealing with the challenges he, and Johannesburg faces.

An academic turned politician

Dagada described himself as an "Academic, Consultant, Policy Analyst and Politician" (www.politicsweb.co.za). This is useful in explaining why his Twitter handle (twitter.com) suggests that he is a man busy with arguably too many tasks, including stopping illegal dumping and looking into the functionality of clinics.

Little wonder though as Dagada deals with the mammoth task of raising R2.5bn for Johannesburg - a task that has led him to draw the conclusion that investors are already treating the City as "junk" status and turning his attention instead to the DBSA as a more affordable source of finance.

Dagada is shooting for Mayor Herman Mashaba's ambitious growth target of 5% in the next five years (from a current rate of 2% between 2008-14, www.bloomberg.com), already recognising "If we get downgraded to junk, our ambitions can't happen" - Moody's currently rates Johannesburg at Baa2, the second-lowest investment-grade level. In addition to securing another rating, Dagada is planning to enhance revenue collection (with estimates of R4bn of under-billing, especially of smaller businesses), as well as keeping debt at no more than 45% of a R55bn budget (currently sitting at 31%, www.bloomberg.com).

Dagada was born 45 years ago in Alexandra although spending much of his youth in Limpopo before simultaneously attaining a Master in Education (in computer-based education) from the Randse Afrikaanse

Universiteit, as well as a Master in Commerce from Wits (in information systems), followed by a PhD from Unisa (in information systems) (en.wikipedia.org). Dagada's academic career included time spent at Wits Business School, UJ, Unisa and the Vaal University of Technology, as well as being a Policy Fellow at the South African Institute of Race Relations (en.wikipedia.org).

An ICT focus, apparent from Dagada's studies, as well as 2008 ICT Visionary and 2015 IITPSA Fellowship awards and various publications as well as philanthropic work and entrepreneurial projects (en.wikipedia.org, rabelanidagada.co.za, www.politicsweb.co.za, theofficeofrabelanidagada.org) may well prove to be useful in addressing the systems, including billing, that are blamed for Johannesburg's revenue under-collection .

Dagada's self-described "reluctant" entrance into politics becomes apparent when considering he was included as a parliamentary candidate for the DA for 2014 elections, followed by a PR councillor appointment to Johannesburg's Council in June 2014, with Dagada competing against Herman Mashaba as the DA's Mayoral candidate this year (en.wikipedia.org, www.politicsweb.co.za). In the latter development, it became clear that Dagada has broad political ambitions "If we, the educated black intellectuals, don't actively join politics, we may be labelled betrayers in many years to come by historians. We should deliberately swell the ranks of the DA in order to strengthen multiparty democracy" (www.politicsweb.co.za).

Unlike Mashaba then, Dagada had some exposure to local government, but like Mashaba, Dagada is not without controversy. His sympathetic views on Israel (ww.sabreakingnews.co.za) and membership of Afriforum (motivated by his critique of BEE outcomes amongst other issues, www.politicsweb.co.za), have brought him into the line of fire of the ANC and other critics (www.iol.co.za, www.iol.co.za).

Given this it is unlikely that Dagada's comments last month will be the last that make headlines.

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