

DDP Executive Director: Dr Paul Kariuki



Dr Paul Kariuki holds a Ph.D. in Administration from the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). He is the Executive Director of the Democracy Development Program (DDP), a national not-for-profit organization and think tank based in Durban, South Africa. Moreover, he is a research fellow at the School of Management, IT, and Governance, UKZN. His research interests are in public

governance, digital transformation, public participation, elections, electronic governance, local government, migration, cybersecurity as well as monitoring and evaluation in the public sector. He has published research articles in peer-reviewed journals in these areas of interest and co-edited several books on various themes. Furthermore, he is a guest reviewer of several journals in Africa and abroad.

After being with DDP as Programs Manager for more than a decade, in 2019 he assumed a role of an Executive Director taking over from the founding director of the organisation Dr, Rama Naidu. His vision for the organisation is working with citizens from all walks of life to deepen the practice of democracy in South Africa while promoting active citizen engagement in public life to hold those in leadership accountable, embedded with growth and sustainability.



“Civil society is an essential pillar of any thriving democracy. It is the voice of the people. I’m passionate about the sector because it fulfills its socialization function by allowing citizens to form and seek membership in organizations that work for their interests. The formation of these organizations engenders a more robust associational life, fostering social cohesion and inclusion and the consolidation of democracy in society”.

Growth and sustainability, forms a huge part of his vision for the organization in ensuring that the work of the organization does not get stale and boring. With his vision, we have seen so much growth in the organization in terms of the role of DDP in the civil society sector.

a. Working with the media

The organization works to put its work in the public eye hence, the continuation of the community radio program, increased political analysis by DDP staff on big media houses like the SABC, eNCA, Newsroom Afrika, voice of the Cape radio, the monthly blogs that are published by some DDP staff on News24, the Daily Maverick and on the DDP website. All these form part of growing the name, the reach, and the footprint of the organization.

b. Working with municipalities

The organization has developed quality partnerships with municipalities across KwaZulu Natal who appreciate the work of the organization and would like to see communities in their jurisdictions empowered with information and activated as active citizens to co-govern with their local leaders. The mutual understanding between the municipalities and DDP is key to sustainable partnership, that is premised on the principle of co-creation of communities of hope despite the socio-economic and political challenges in the country.

c. Working with political parties

Political parties are an important pillar of any thriving democracy. They play a critical role in deepening democracy in South Africa. The DDP has maintained its impartiality whilst working with all political parties in promoting and strengthening multi-partyism. The relationship between DDP and the parties continues to grow from strength to strength each year as the organization invests in strengthening capacities for political parties to engage with their constituencies. The organization offers targeted workshops to political parties to enhance their own internal organizational capacities to thrive in a dynamic political context. Moreover, the organization creates opportunities for the parties to engage with citizens from all walks of life to share their vision as well as providing answers to their questions. As a result, political parties have

continued to gain confidence in engaging with citizens and being held accountable for their decisions and actions.

d. New niches of work - Migration, Parliamentary Advocacy and OSF

The DDP has identified new niches of work that are critical for our democracy. Migration and social cohesion building in our country presents an important opportunity for the organization to address the challenge of xenophobia that have plagued the country for the last two decades. Through its intervention, the DDP is confronting the challenge head on, mobilizing civil society to work together in addressing the root causes which trigger xenophobic violence.

On the other hand, the organization is deepening its work with young people from all walks of life, mobilizing them to participate actively in politics and make their voice heard. The organization has developed relationships with young people across KwaZulu Natal from diverse backgrounds including youth leadership at the institutions of higher learning, bringing them together regularly to explore possibilities that will lead to young people gaining agency and co-creating a future filled with hope despite their present socio-economic challenges that most of them are facing.

In its parliamentary advocacy work, the DDP has gained opportunity to work closely with the KwaZulu Natal Legislature, particularly the COGTA portfolio committee and the Women Caucus. The relationship is premised on the principle of enhancing public participation in parliamentary work. Members of parliament have a responsibility to engage with the electorate regularly. The DDP has nurtured a sustainable partnership with the Women Caucus of the KZN legislature bring the Caucus closer to the public through ongoing community-based dialogues and capacity building initiatives.

In the next 5 years, the DDP will continue growing its footprint throughout KwaZulu Natal and South Africa as a leading civic organization, providing critical civic leadership in all areas of its work. To realize this growth, we intend to continue nurturing and strengthening the existing institutional relationships across the country through partnerships with like-minded organizations and institutions (academic and non-academic), deepening the practice of democracy in the country. We see a mobilized, broad-based civil society that is vibrant and activated to ensure our hard-won democracy is nurtured, defended, and protected from every form of threat.

At the same time, the organization aims to be among the leading think tanks in the country as knowledge producers in the areas of political parties strengthening, civic leadership, migration and social cohesion building, youth and women participation in politics, voter, and democracy education as well as parliamentary-societal engagement. This growth will be

underpinned by an increase in funding from a range of donors, locally and internationally to ensure continuity of the programs and organizational long-term financial sustainability.