

# NEWSLETTER

## ***Amplifying Citizen Voices:***

## Empowering Dialogue, Fostering Representation, and Driving Meaningful Action in 2025

By DDP Team



ABOVE: DDP Executive Director, Dr Paul Kariuki

## DIRECTORS NOTE

### **Dr. Paul Kariuki, Executive Director of the DDP**

Throughout our democratic journey, citizens have played a critical role in driving change. Movements like #FeesMustFall and grassroots service delivery protests show the power of collective action to influence policy and hold leaders accountable. These examples highlight why DDP's theme this year, "***Amplifying Citizens Voices,***" is so timely and necessary. We must continue to support mechanisms that elevate these voices: digital platforms, civil society organisations, community forums, and youth engagement initiatives. By doing so, we foster a culture of transparency, inclusion, and responsiveness in governance.

At DDP, we are committed to creating spaces where citizens—especially youth and marginalized groups—can reflect, speak out, and act. Strengthening democracy is not just about election cycles; it's about everyday participation, connection, and advocacy. Over the past months, DDP has organized a range of impactful initiatives, including community dialogues, leadership workshops, policy discussions, and civic engagement programs—all aimed at strengthening democratic participation. These events have provided vital platforms for citizens to voice their concerns, share experiences, and collaborate on solutions that drive meaningful change.

Through this edition, we reflect on *these engagements, their impact, and the conversations* they have sparked in our communities.

# FORUMS

## Post-SONA Forum



ABOVE: Dr Paul Kariuki delivering the opening speech at the 2025 SONA Forum

The 2025 Post-SONA Forum, held on February 20, brought together experts, policymakers, and civil society representatives to critically assess this year's State of the Nation Address (SONA). Discussions centred on the government's proposed policies and their alignment with the country's pressing socio-economic challenges.

A key takeaway was the consensus that the address offered little new, reiterating past commitments without clear action plans. Many attendees expressed concern over the lack of concrete solutions, particularly in tackling economic instability, unemployment, and service delivery backlogs.

Two critical gaps stood out: the absence of a strong focus on education reform and gender-based violence (GBV). With ongoing crises in the education system, including poor infrastructure and declining literacy rates, many felt it deserved greater priority. Similarly, the persistent scourge of GBV remains inadequately addressed, leaving communities vulnerable and advocacy groups calling for stronger commitments.

Watch the full forum [here](#).

Dr Paul Kariuki, Executive Director of DDP, opened the 2025 SONA Forum by introducing the theme, "Amplifying Citizens' Voices."

He emphasised the importance of creating inclusive spaces for public dialogue and reaffirmed DDP's commitment to empowering citizens through strong partnerships and expert-led engagement.

At DDP, our work is rooted in ensuring that every voice is heard. That's why we brought together women MPs, women in media, governance, and various sectors of society—to make sure women's voices are amplified in every corner. Our commitment to closing the gap of inequality goes beyond International Women's Day; it's a daily mission to support and see women thrive in all spaces.

— Statement from Dr Kariuki's opening address at the Women's Day Forum

## International Women's Day Forum

On Friday, March 7, the DDP, in partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, hosted the Women's Forum 2025, a platform dedicated to accelerating action toward gender equality.

Hon. Nontobeko Nothemba Boyce, Speaker of the KZN Legislature, stressed that gender equality requires collective action and inclusive dialogues to dismantle patriarchy. She urged women to be politically informed and proactive in overcoming systemic barriers.

Dr. Devi Rajab, Chairperson of the DDP Board, highlighted the importance of understanding global political shifts in advancing gender equality. She commended the KZN Legislature and DDP for providing a platform to address critical challenges facing women.

Watch the full forum [here](#).



ABOVE: Hon Nontobeko Nothemba Boyce, Speaker of the KZN Legislature



ABOVE: DDP Chair, Dr Devi Rajab

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIALOGUE

The DDP, in partnership with the Constitutionalism Fund, has been at the forefront of hosting impactful community dialogues across KwaZulu-Natal, fostering civic education, democratic participation, and social justice.

## Empowering Local Communities



On 28 January, we gathered at the Vulindlela Zone in Pietermaritzburg for a transformative dialogue on local governance, problem-solving, collaboration, and accountability.

Special guests included Councilor N.E. Majola and Mr. Nkosinathi Gambu, with coordination by Sphamandla Mhlongo and facilitation by Njabulo Togane.



On 4 February, we continued our efforts at the Pietermaritzburg Center, focusing on empowering Ward Committee members through discussions on governance, transparency, and effective community engagement.



On 24 February, we hosted a Civic Education Dialogue, equipping citizens with knowledge to actively participate in governance.



**Jewel Thabile Mbhele**  
Ddp makes difference in our community

[Comment on the DDP Facebook page](#)



**ABOVE: DDP Associate Facilitator, Thabile Mdhuli, with delegates**

## Promoting Electoral & Civic Education



On 5 March, Swinton College became a hub of knowledge as the IEC educated attendees on the importance of voting and democracy, while the Labour Department provided insights on employment. Facilitated by Thabile Mdhuli, this dialogue sparked crucial discussions on South Africa's future.



On 12 March, we took our Civic and Electoral Education dialogue to Bergville, reinforcing the importance of democratic participation at the local level.



At KwaMashu G Hall, associate facilitator Sanele Hadebe (Youth Inter-Active) led discussions highlighting that active participation ensures government accountability, transparency, and inclusive representation.



**ABOVE: DDP Program's Manager, Sphamandla Mhlongo, with delegates**



# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIALOGUE

## Disaster Preparedness & Social Justice

On 8 March, at eNkanini Hall in Cato Manor, facilitator Shakespear Baleni led a dialogue on disaster management during floods, equipping communities with preparedness strategies to reduce reliance on municipalities.

Continuing the engagement, on 18 March, we gathered at the Chatsworth Youth Center for the DDP Social Justice Initiative, celebrating Human Rights Month with a focus on government accountability, citizen advocacy, and social activism. Facilitated by Buhlebuyeza Motseme, the session reinforced the power of collective action in driving meaningful change.



ABOVE: DDP Associate facilitator, Shakespear Baleni, with delegates at the dialogue in Cato Manor

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*Many of us are struggling to find opportunities after graduating, feeling overlooked and unheard. This event gave me hope. It reminds me that my voice matters and that we can push for real change in our communities together.*

-Delegate at the Youth Indaba

*Attending the DDP event was helpful! Discussions on government accountability and citizen advocacy helped me understand my rights and the power we have in working together. I feel more confident in using my voice to drive change.*

-Delegate at the DDP dialogue

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ABOVE: DDP's Mbalenhle Mkhize at the first Youth Indaba In UMngeni

## Youth Engagement & Advocacy

On March 20th, the DDP hosted an inspiring Youth Indaba in Howick, Umngeni Municipality, in partnership with the Umngeni Unemployed Graduates Forum (MUFG) and the Municipality.

This was the first of three conferences dedicated to strengthening youth voices through advocacy and civic education.





# Youth Engagement & Advocacy

The conference aims to engage 100 young people aged 18 to 35 years old, inclusive of all genders and races. Participants will be drawn from various sectors, including:

- Education sector (Universities, Colleges, and TVET Colleges)
- Young professionals
- Youth out of school and unemployed youth
- Young people from civil society
- Youth from different political parties

This initiative is a significant step towards empowering the youth and fostering a culture of active citizenship and socio-economic development in KZN.

**Theme:** Strengthening Youth Voices through Advocacy and Civic Education

**Duration:** March – June 2025



ABOVE: Cllr. Lamula from Ward 01, Cllr. Zuma from Ward 12 with Thobani Zikalala From Bonfire Center

## EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH WORKSHOPS

The DDP continues to drive impactful conversations through a series of workshops, equipping stakeholders with knowledge and tools to foster accountability, justice, and good governance.

### Strengthening Social Justice Initiatives



ABOVE: Delegates at the SJI Inception Workshop, held at the DDP office

The inception workshop for the second phase of the Social Justice Initiative project by DDP was a key event in promoting human rights and civic engagement. The Executive Director welcomed delegates and partners, introducing the project concept and discussing implementation strategies, risks, and opportunities. The project uses a multi-method approach, including mapping research, community dialogues, capacity-building workshops, and radio talk shows to educate the public.



### Amplifying Voices for Justice



ABOVE: DDP Associate Facilitator, Gugu Kunene addressing participants

DDP hosted an impactful Journalism Workshop, facilitated by Gugu Kunene, that focused on the essential role of journalists in promoting human rights and fostering community dialogue.

Watch [here](#) to understand how journalists can amplify voices for justice.

# EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH WORKSHOPS

## Advocating Against Corruption to Strengthen Accountability & Transparency



ABOVE: DDP facilitators and delegates at the anti-corruption workshop in Durban

On 11-13 March, in partnership with the Enhancing Transparency and Accountability programme and co-funded by the European Union, DDP held anti-corruption workshops in Richards Bay and Durban. These sessions brought together civil society leaders, traditional leaders, councillors, and community representatives to explore corruption beyond financial misconduct—highlighting issues like sextortion and gender power dynamics.

Participants discussed culturally sensitive topics, such as the practice of gifting chiefs, and the exploitation women face through demands for sexual favours in exchange for opportunities. These conversations are part of a broader research initiative aimed at understanding how gendered corruption differs in urban and rural KwaZulu-Natal.

### Workshop Objectives Included:

- Creating inclusive dialogue spaces around gender and corruption
- Assessing differing perceptions in rural vs. urban contexts
- Gathering firsthand accounts of sextortion to inform policy
- Documenting insights for an upcoming research paper
- Developing advocacy messaging for public awareness and policymaker engagement

According to an attendee ***“this workshop opened our eyes to the often-hidden dimensions of corruption, showing us that it’s not just about money, but also about power and gender. While we still have a long way to go as a society, the DDP is leading the way in addressing these issues, empowering us to take meaningful action toward a more accountable future”.***

## Understanding Contemporary Politics

On 13 March, the DDP, in collaboration with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung South Africa, hosted a thought-provoking workshop on Contemporary South African Politics.

The workshop, facilitated by Prof. Mngomezulu, fostered critical discussions on the current political dynamics in South Africa.

As the event concluded, participants had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of contemporary political issues and engage with experts.



ABOVE: Prof. Mngomezulu, Director at CANRAD

# STORIES OF CHANGE: IMPACTING LIVES, INSPIRING ACTION

Through these stories, we highlight how DDP has made a meaningful impact on individuals and communities, empowering them to drive positive change and shape their own futures.



**ABOVE: Nonkululeko Hlongwane-Mhlongo**

Nonkululeko Hlongwane-Mhlongo was given a powerful platform to speak at the Electoral Commission Civic and Democracy Education: Thought Leadership Youth Summit. Addressing young leaders from the Uthukela District, she explored the crucial role of political parties in promoting democracy between elections, a topic that resonated deeply with attendees.

Thanks to DDP's commitment to civic education and youth empowerment, the summit became a space to deepen understanding of the electoral process and strengthen collaboration between the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and political youth formations.

This platform not only allowed Nonkululeko to contribute to important conversations but also empowered young people to take an active role in shaping their communities, showing how DDP's work is enabling youth to be at the forefront of sustaining a thriving democracy.



**ABOVE: Xoliswa Tumi Jwili**

Xoliswa Tumi Jwili, DDP Associate, says that “I believe my true calling is to give back to the community. For me, service to humanity, without a doubt, is the best work of life.

Being part of DDP has given me a unique opportunity to live out this calling through two of my greatest passions: law and community development. Working on the ground with people—engaging, educating, and empowering—has been nothing short of fulfilling. Witnessing the impact of our work in legal awareness, capacity building, and access to justice has been a true honour.

This journey has also been one of personal and professional growth. I've sharpened my legal mind, acquired new skills, and learned deeply from the communities we serve and the colleagues I work alongside.

Ngingaba yini ngaphandle kwe-DDP? Truly, I can't imagine this path without the platform DDP has provided.

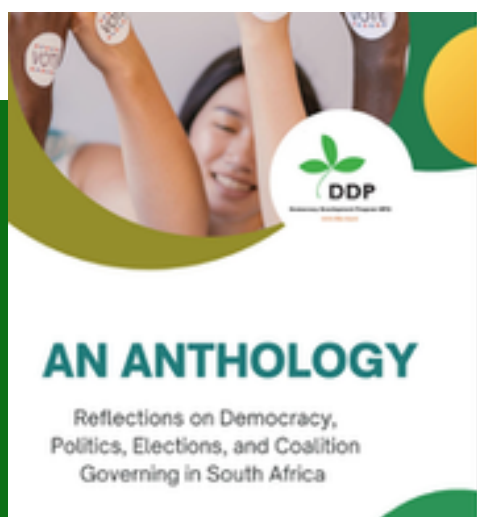
The improvements to the website and the new DDP database software have further empowered us as Associates. Access to resources and information is now more streamlined and efficient—making it that much easier to do impactful work in the field”.



# STAYING CONNECTED: MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEW RELEASES

Since January, we have actively engaged the public through five radio interviews with DDP Associates and two national media features, amplifying discussions on governance, democracy, and social justice. Our Associates have appeared on stations like **Siyathuthuka 97.6 FM, Inanda 88.4 FM, and Vibe FM**, covering key topics such as GNU Sustainability, the 2025 State of the Nation Address, social justice, local government elections, and human rights.

Nationally, DDP Executive Director Dr Paul Kariuki was featured on SABC News, discussing South Africa's social cohesion project, and provides weekly expert analysis on Voice of the Cape (VOC) every Thursday at 12:35 PM.



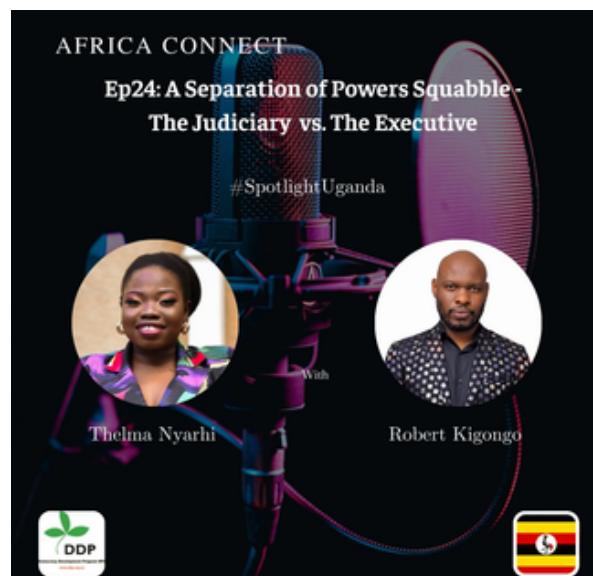
The DDP is proud to present its latest anthology, ***Reflections on Democracy, Politics, Elections, and Coalition Governing in South Africa***.

This collection brings together insightful contributions from esteemed authors and series editors, capturing the defining moments of the 2024 South African elections and the formation of the historic Government of National Unity.

Download your free copy [here](#).



We are proud to share that DDP's work is featured in numerous news publications across the country. These features highlight the impact of our efforts in promoting civic education, dialogue and community development.



**Voices of the People** is an interactive online campaign that puts citizens at the heart of the conversation. Through thought-provoking questions, we invite the public to share their perspectives on pressing issues, capturing their insights through reels and vox pops.

In addition to these conversations, we continue to expand our digital engagement through our two podcasts: **Africa Connect** and the **DDP Podcast**. These podcasts feature in-depth discussions with experts, activists, and community members on key topics shaping democracy, governance, and social change, across the continent.

# BIDDING FAREWELL

As Menzi Ntaka's internship with DDP comes to a close, we bid him a fond farewell and express our heartfelt thanks for his contributions to the team. Reflecting on his time at DDP, Menzi shared:

***“My experience at DDP, while short, was nothing short of amazing. I was able to learn a great deal and put my skills to the test, which has given me more confidence. The team treated me like family and was always willing to answer any questions I had. I wish I could continue working with DDP, as they have impacted me more than they know. The organization plays a vital role in giving ordinary people a voice to speak on the issues that affect them. Citizens are not only empowered with information on how to hold those in power accountable but they are also allowed to sit down with policymakers and people in power—to work together for change.”***

Menzi, we will miss your energy, creativity, and dedication. Thank you for being part of the DDP family. We wish you all the best on your journey ahead!

## CONCLUSION

As we continue our journey through 2025, the DDP remains steadfast in its mission to amplify citizen voices and promote active participation in shaping a more inclusive and accountable society. Through community dialogues, empowering workshops, and media engagement, we aim to create platforms where diverse perspectives are not only heard but acted upon.

Together with our partners and the communities we serve, we are building a stronger, more democratic South Africa, one conversation at a time.

***Stay tuned for our upcoming Youth Indaba Conference and Community Dialogues.***

***The DDP helps communities grow stronger by encouraging active participation and supporting fair political processes, making sure every voice matters in building a better future.***

**-Facebook Comment**



**ABOVE: Menzi Ntaka, former Comms Intern**



**ABOVE: The DDP team with members of the KZN Legislature**

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