

Imvuselelo to keep ANC relevant to voters?



By [Thabani Khumalo](#)

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Politics is a game of perception. It is all about selling hope to a people. Yet political parties are so poor in managing perception, public opinions, attitudes, expectations and behaviors of their leaders, members, and potential supporters.

This challenges political parties to communicate to their respective target audiences with a clearly defined brand image. As a result it has become commonplace to speak of political branding. Political branding is about managing perception, and in politics perception is what really matters to keep membership and attract new followers.

Political brands go through various stages of evolution in their life cycles and often may need to be restructured, reworked, repositioned, revitalised, relaunched or rejuvenated to strengthen their own positions, to rally their supporters, to garner further support and, perhaps, to intimidate their opponents. These are done in response to current challenges or in anticipation of changes in the political markets. Such changes happen not only for political brands which may be struggling in the market but also for brands that are doing well but would like to do better.

The ANC's Imvuselelo campaign

ANC president Jacob Zuma has recently launched the Imvuselelo campaign, which aims to recharge the ANC brand, strengthen its position as a mass-based political brand, boost numbers of party members ahead of the 2012 centenary celebrations and respond to the challenges of service-delivery protests.

Like all political parties, the ANC emerged 98 years ago as a response to specific political challenges and social developments faced by oppressed and exploited masses. The ANC continues to frame itself as the party to lead political transformation, social change and economic prosperity, and deliver a better life to all citizens. Therefore it needs, from time-to-time, to understand and align itself with its stakeholders' concerns, challenges and aspirations, and to adapt with people, time, and place.

ANC brand principles

Since its inception, the ANC policies were driven by clear vision, principles, history, traditions and approaches. All its programmes were based on the principles of "mass democratic movement".

The "mass" component of the mass democratic movement was rooted in the view that the masses were the major vehicle for the national democratic revolution, rather than great individuals.

The "democratic" component emphasised democratic principles and practices which were decided through debates and discussions. Power within the ANC was decentralised to grassroots levels through meetings, mandates, consultations and representations, and all was done to encourage mass mobilisation, broad participation, effective representation, inclusivity, collectivism and human solidarity.

"Movement" referred to the massive support the ANC's leadership, programmes and campaigns were enjoying among various sectors of the community, namely unions, academics, youth, women, traditional, church and civil society leaders. It is within this context that the ANC has promoted inclusive and participative approaches through its vision of "A better life for all", which is driven by its mission "Working together we can do more".

Timing of the Imvuselelo campaign

The ANC's brand revival, through the Imvuselelo campaign, has come at a time when political parties are bracing themselves for the 2011 municipal elections. The pre-election period challenges parties to convince voters that their brand vision, values, principles, convictions, and aspirations are solutions to their challenges and aspirations.

Again, the ANC is currently faced with damaging challenges that demand appropriate and immediate interventions.

It is my guess that the country's citizens are fed up with rumours of ANC's internal power struggle between the nationalists and communists, and reports of an ill-disciplined youth league. Corruption and the growing tide of dissatisfaction about slow pace of service delivery add to the list of challenges.

The challenge facing the ANC is to give meaning and life to the Imvuselelo campaign - by empowering its members to understand that they are the ambassadors of the brand. They need to live, support, and deliver the brand values. Or else the launch will be understood as another publicity-generating activity in response to service delivery protests and ahead of the 2011 municipality elections.

Whether the Imvuselelo campaign will keep the ANC's brand evolution process mass-based and relevant to voter needs, it remains to be seen.

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