

News24

## **Merging municipalities will escalate problems: opposition parties**

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### **City Press**

Opposition parties this week warned that amalgamating struggling municipalities with other municipalities would lead to bigger problems and would not necessarily be a solution to deal with financially non-viable municipalities.

Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Pravin Gordhan said a third of all municipalities were not financially viable and another third was at risk, hence his proposals for redetermining municipal boundaries – which would possibly see some municipalities be disestablished.

But political parties came out strongly against the Municipal Demarcation Board's draft redetermined boundaries for municipalities and accused the board of basing decisions on politics in the run-up to the local government elections next year.

The new boundaries, which affect 30 municipalities, would mean that the country's 278 municipalities would be reduced by 11. This holds serious consequences for service delivery to residents in these towns.

But the public still has a chance to object to the new demarcations before it is finalised when it is published in the Provincial Gazettes of the affected provinces.

Western Cape municipalities aren't affected.

The new demarcations include the merging of Tlokwe (Potchefstroom) with Ventersdorp in the North West.

Tlokwe performed well and received an unqualified audit in the 2013-2014 financial year but problems such as the unauthorised spending of R235 million and irregular spending of nearly R27 million had been flagged.

Ventersdorp got an adverse audit opinion for two consecutive financial years.

Democratic Alliance member of Parliament Kevin Mileham said that amalgamating dysfunctional municipalities (or incorporating a dysfunctional municipality with a barely functioning one) was not going to address the problems of financial sustainability, maladministration and corruption.

Gordhan, who welcomed the new demarcations, said it would help to possibly reduce the number of non-viable municipalities.

Mileham, however, claimed the board had made its determinations “based on political considerations rather than objective standards”.

Chairperson of the board, Jane Thupana, rejected this and said all legal processes were followed.

“The fact that only 30 municipalities were affected out of the minister’s proposed 90, showed that we followed our own criteria for redetermination of boundaries.”

Inkatha Freedom Party MP Mkhuleko Hlengwa said that the decisions of the board could not be taken seriously.

“The board still has to prove that it operates above politics. Doing this just before the elections, only muddies the water further. Struggling municipalities don’t need new boundaries, they need more capacity.”

Hlengwa also said that the country would place itself on a dangerous, slippery slope if municipalities were just thrown together.

“We could end up with municipalities the size of provinces with equally big problems.”

According to EFF MP Abinaar Mathleko, combining municipalities would not solve the problems of service delivery because a proper strategy for service delivery was still not in place.

“This is rather about the ANC government having made their calculations before the local elections. They want to balance the numbers in an attempt to soften their upcoming defeat in next year’s election. It is ultimately the people who suffer and do not get proper services.”

The Financial and Fiscal Commission said in a submission to the treasury that amalgamating municipalities would not necessarily lead to better revenue bases for municipalities because struggling, poor municipalities – especially in rural areas – usually border other poor municipalities.

The organisation Municipal IQ also said in a statement that joining municipalities would not necessarily make a dent in poverty and poor service delivery.

This is how some of the new municipalities could look for the 2016 elections:

» **Eastern Cape**

Gariep and Maletswai municipalities become one municipality.

» **Limpopo**

Makhado and Thulamela municipalities become one .  
Modimolle and Mookgopong municipalities become one.

» **Mpumalanga**

Mbombela and Nkomazi municipalities become one.

» **Northern Cape**

Mier and //Khara municipalities become one.

» **Free State**

Naledi municipality becomes part of the Mangaung Metro.

» **Northwest**

Tlokwe and Ventersdorp municipalities become one.