

## **Lenz70: Civic Activism, Community Memory and the Power of Grassroots Action**

The Lenz70 campaign offers powerful lessons for civic activism and community organising in Johannesburg today. Marking seventy years of Lenasia's existence, the campaign transformed what could have been a narrow historical commemoration into a vibrant, community-led process of reflection, participation and renewal.



Lenz70 demonstrated that community heritage is not passive nostalgia. Instead, it can be an active civic force. Through school anniversaries, sporting events, religious gatherings, arts festivals, book fairs, exhibitions and public conversations, residents reclaimed their shared history and placed it firmly in the present. These activities fostered a deeper understanding of Lenasia's origins under apartheid, while affirming the dignity, resilience and creativity of the people who built the community despite injustice.

Crucially, Lenz70 was not driven by large budgets or institutional control. There was no central fund, no bank account and no top-down structure. Activities were self-organised and self-financed by local organisations, volunteers and small businesses. This decentralised model highlights a critical lesson for civic movements across Johannesburg: communities already possess the resources, skills and networks needed to mobilise, when trust and collaboration are prioritised over bureaucracy.

Another striking feature of the campaign was the emergence of a new generation of civic leaders. Young organisers, artists, educators and activists played visible roles across sectors. Their leadership reflects a shift away from party-political identity towards issue-based engagement, community wellbeing and practical problem-solving. This mirrors a growing frustration with political dysfunction and reinforces the importance of independent civic formations that place residents, not parties, at the centre.

For the Joburg Crisis Alliance, Lenz70 reinforces why local heritage matters in struggles for accountability and good governance. Communities that understand their histories are better equipped to defend their rights, demand transparency and resist exclusion. At the same time, the campaign did not ignore internal challenges:

inequality, social fragmentation, migration, and political division remain real fault lines. Acknowledging these tensions is essential if civic activism is to be inclusive and forward-looking.

As Johannesburg approaches another local government election, Lenz70 reminds us that democracy is sustained from the ground up. When communities organise around shared memory, culture and lived experience, they build the social capital needed to hold power to account. Civic activism rooted in community heritage is not a luxury – it is a necessity for rebuilding trust, solidarity and a sense of shared urban belonging.

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