

Imbali's housing projects in shambles

THOBANI NGQULUNGA

THE government has admitted that housing projects in Pietermaritzburg are in a shambles, after a team of lawmakers and officials visited sites and listened to residents' grievances yesterday.

The delegation was led by the chairperson of the national portfolio committee on human settlement, Nomhle Dambuza, accompanied by her provincial counterpart, Jeff Vilani, local mayors and municipal and department officials.

They toured several sites in Imbali.

They were appalled to see the conditions of the houses built near the hostel in Imbali. People complained that the houses are sold by councillors and they do not know when they will be evicted, so they are not paying for services.

Their sentiments were echoed at Phase 4, Unit 13, Imbali, where two contractors have left the project incomplete because the municipality has not paid them.

Residents have moved into the houses even though they have not been completed.

Said a resident, "I paid R17 000 for my RDP house and now I have been told that I would have to move out because they say I am staying there illegally."

Dambuza said, "We are going to have to go back and sit down with the province to figure a way to tackle these problems because they have been going on for a long time."

She assured the residents that someone will have to answer for the incomplete projects because the national government allocated a budget for them.

"The minister of human settlement has set up a special investigating unit that deals with these problems and they will be sending a team to come and investigate," she said.

The officials were not happy that ward councillors and certain municipal officials were not present on the tour to answer residents' questions.

"We are going to have to summon these officials to give explanations to the people," said Dambuza.

She promised the residents a full report-back.

The national spokesperson for the SA National Civic Organisation, Dumisani Mthlangane said, "This is a failure of government to do its job."

"We find a situation where two contractors abandoned the project because they were not paid after they had begun to do the work."

He said the quality of work needs to be monitored because building "wire-wall houses" is wasteful expenditure.

IN COURT: Bank's ex-CEO, ex-MEC and cronies accused of R19 mln fraud

Land Bank charges pile up

PRETORIA — Former Land Bank chief executive officer Philemon Mohlalane appeared briefly in the Commercial Crimes Court in Pretoria yesterday with three others accused of embezzling R19 million from the AgriBEE scheme.

Mohlalane, former Gauteng Housing MEC Daniel Mofokeng, Khutso Mosoma and Matuba Maponya appeared in court on five counts of fraud and money laundering.

They were released on bail of R40 000 each and the case was postponed until May 3.

The four were arrested by the Hawks on Tuesday.

At the time, Hawks spokesman McIntosh Polela said they allegedly transferred money from the AgriBEE fund to a firm



Appearing in court yesterday (from left) were former MEC Daniel Mofokeng; Philemon Mohlalane, former CEO of the Land Bank; Matuba Maponya and Khutso Mosoma.

of attorneys. This money was then allegedly used to buy houses and cars, rather than to fund the struggling small, medium and micro enterprises for which the money was intended.

National Prosecuting Authority spokesperson Mthunzi Nkomo said the four allegedly committed the offences between Oc-

tober 2007 and January 2008.

He said it is possible that further charges will be brought. Limpopo Provincial agriculture spokesperson Kenny Mathivha said the department filed numerous charges related to misrepresentation with the Hawks last year.

The Democratic Alliance's

Limpopo leader, Desiree van der Walt, said the Hawks in Limpopo told her yesterday the charges were laid against Mohlalane by the Limpopo agriculture department.

The board of the Limpopo Agricultural Development Corporation appointed Mohlalane CEO last June after he had been

axed from the Land Bank after about two months in the position.

The appointment came after a forensic report by PricewaterhouseCoopers apparently uncovered many irregularities.

The board appointed him over 22 other candidates, apparently without consulting provincial agriculture MEC Dipuo Letsatsi-

Duba or Limpopo premier Casel Mathale.

The *Polokwane Observer* reported in November that an investigation by an external auditing firm found that Mohlalane did not pass matric and that his degrees from universities in the United States are bogus.

Mathivha said: "It's a litany of so many things that we are looking at."

He said he does not know when the matters related to the Limpopo Agricultural Development Corporation would be brought to court.

Van der Walt urged the provincial agricultural department to institute civil proceedings against Mohlalane to recoup what he was paid of his R1,4 million salary. — Sapa.

IFP, DA protest choice of ANC trio

NALINI NAIDOO

OPPOSITION parties reacted with shock that disgraced Msunduzi Executive Committee (Exco) members who were stripped of their power, are on the comeback trail.

The names of former Msunduzi mayor Zanele Hlatshwayo, deputy mayor Mervin Dirks and Exco member Themba Zungu have been proposed by ANC members as candidates for councillors in the forthcoming local government election.

Nkosi Bongela Mdlleshe, the Inkatha Freedom Party's shadow minister for co-operative governance, said the nominations make a mockery of clean governance. The IFP is committed to choosing candidates who will enhance clean governance, he added.

"Although ANC members have a right to choose whom they want, it must be remembered that these people have a blemished record: they were removed from their positions," he said.

Mdlleshe said the situation indicates the ANC's lack of interest in ensuring that local government works smoothly and without maladministration. He added that there is nothing to stop these former members fighting to get their old positions back.

Mark Steele of the Democratic Alliance said the situation says a number of things about the ANC's attitude to voters and its commitment to accountability.

At its manifesto launch, the ANC had claimed it wanted councillor candidates who are committed to service delivery and accountability. "Their words mean nothing or they believe the voters are such fools that they will overlook the track record of the previous ANC-led Msunduzi Exco ... this is political arrogance on a grand scale," Steele said.

KZN BEAD PROJECT: 'DREAMS FOR AFRICA CHAIR' JUDGED SA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL OBJECT

IT'S official — the *Dreams for Africa Chair*, made at Hillcrest's Aids Centre Trust (HACT), is the most beautiful object in South Africa.

The chair received the accolade at the Design Indaba 2011 in Cape Town after the public was asked to choose the item it considers to be the most beautiful from 10 objects, including a stunning couch created by Caversham-based Ardmore Ceramic Art. The entries were selected for the competition by magazine editors and displayed in the Design Indaba arena.

A spokesperson for HACT — an NGO that helps and supports people who are infected/affected by HIV and Aids — Claudia Krumhoff, said: "We were so motivated by the positive reaction visitors showed towards the *Dreams for Africa Chair* ... it provided a platform to tell our story and share the purpose of our journey."

The chair was created by 160 women from the Valley of 1000 Hills, who came together in 2009 to create a legacy of hope. Eight weeks later the women of the Woza Moya income-generation project finished their creation.

It has been sent around South Africa and overseas and people from all walks of life are invited to sit in it and



Woza Moya's 'Dreams for Africa Chair' was voted the most beautiful object in South Africa at the Design Indaba in Cape Town.

PHOTO: MATTHEW WILLMAN

share their dreams. "We document the journey photographically and invite people to be part of it," Krumhoff explained. "This creates such

a beautiful sense of unity and togetherness, reflecting the true soul of South Africans."

Paula Thomson, craft co-ordinator at Woza Moya, added:

"Winning this award means so much to all the beadworkers involved and celebrates ... the craft and talents of traditional Zulu beadwork ... Design In-

daba is such an important event for us, and now winning means we will get next year's stand floor space for free, which will lighten the fi-

nancial burden and ensure our participation next year."

For further information visit www.dreamsforafrica.org.za — Arts Editor.

Legal blunder puts delicate KZN grasslands under threat

STEPHEN COAN

SCORES of farmers in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands have been given permission by the KZN Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Rural Development

Department to plough up virgin grasslands. But if they do they could be breaking the law.

In what looks to be a major legal blunder, agricultural extension officers have been advising farmers that they can plough up

to 100 hectares of virgin grassland without environmental authorisation on the basis of a Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Cara) permit only.

This appears to be a misreading of the legislation as environ-

mental authorisation is still required in terms of the National Environmental Management Act (Nema).

Eighty permits to break virgin land in KwaZulu-Natal have been issued since August 2010. This is for a total of 3 876 hectares, of which 579 hectares are in irreplaceable mistbelt grassland, while the bulk is in sensitive biodiversity areas.

The granting of such permits could prevent the province achieving its stated conservation goals and targets.

If the ploughing goes ahead — and in some cases it already has — it will have a dramatic impact on the dwindling populations of endangered oribi and wattled crane, as well as other grassland species of fauna and flora.

It is understood the agriculture department has frozen the issuing of permits and is telling farmers they will require environmental impact assessments (EIAs).

The department has also asked farmers who have begun ploughing on the basis of a Cara permit to stop.

The KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (KwaNalu) is to send a letter to farmers advising them that they should not plough virgin ground as there may well be a need for an EIA.

"They must make sure they have complied with all aspects of Nema," says Robin Barnsley, president of KwaNalu.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has been aware of the problem for some time, according to Andrew

Blackmore, head of integrated environmental management. "We have been working with the department of agriculture to bring clarity to the system and to ensure that the EIA regulations are applied," he says.

A meeting was held yesterday with representatives of a number of organisations, including the KZN Crane Foundation, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, the Botanical Society, and the KZN Conservancies Association to discuss the issue and plan a constructive way forward.

Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Rural Development was approached for comment but none had been received by the time of going to press.

Matat gives Shiceka 21 days

JOHANNESBURG — Residents of Matatiele protested against the incorporation of the area into the Eastern Cape yesterday, the local Mass-Action Organising Committee (Maoc) said.

Spokesperson Mandla Galo said core to their demands is to force Co-operative Governance Minister Siceko Shiceka to release the results of the 2008 referendum, in which he said 87% of the residents voted in favour of Matatiele being reincorporated into KwaZulu-Natal.

"People are saying 'enough is enough'," he said, adding that the community will remain peaceful in its mission to be reincorporated into KwaZulu-Natal.

"We will demonstrate that violence will not solve problems. We believe in engaging politically and legally," he said.

In a memorandum directed to Shiceka the community wants the minister to table a report to the cabinet on the referendum result.

It also wants the introduction of a constitutional amendment bill to allow Matatiele and its rural surrounds to be incorporated back into KwaZulu-Natal.

Shiceka has been given 21 days from yesterday to respond to the memorandum, failing which the community will direct its concerns to President Jacob Zuma.

Matatiele is one of the cross-border areas that were incorporated into other provinces in 2005. They included Merafong, which was incorporated into North West from Gauteng.

Residents in Merafong staged violent protests against their incorporation into North West and were finally returned to Gauteng. — Sapa.

Red tape at root of student strike

SPHUMELELE MNGOMA

LECTURES at the Howard College campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban have been suspended by the university as illegal protests by students continue.

University spokesperson Nomonde Mbadi said damage to property continued yesterday. She added that the student representative council (SRC) has stipulated that negotiations will

take place only if the police, who have been monitoring the situation, are asked to leave the campus.

"Management is committed to discussions with students in a peaceful and constructive manner. But we are extremely concerned at the damage and destruction to property and investigations are continuing. Any student found damaging university property will be dealt with in accordance with the uni-

versity rules," said Mbadi.

The SRC has called for a media briefing tomorrow.

One of the SRC leaders in the central branch, Simphiwe Mkhize, said he could not delve into the issues that have led to the strike until the briefing.

However, he said, a big frustration for students is the burdensome process involved in acquiring financial aid, which he said has been designed by the university to restrict certain students.

While the National Student Financial Aid Scheme has officials assigned to process applications, Mkhize said, the university also employs people to administer the fund, which ends up prolonging the process.

Another gripe involves what is referred to as the "robot system", which is designed to monitor the students' progress. Students who fail are downgraded from green to yellow and then to red, meaning expulsion.

'Tax elite to fund free studies'

JOHANNESBURG — The SA Students' Congress wants the government to introduce an education tax on all who earn "top-notch" salaries to fund free education.

Sasco president Mbulelo Mandlana yesterday told a press conference the education system is intransigent, adding, "The elite whose

conspicuous consumption is such that it can "enjoy sushi from the bodies of naked women" should be heavily taxed to fund free education."

The congress plans brief protests on all campuses as part of its Free Education Campaign today and tomorrow. — Sapa.

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