

# ANC's rural communities need better information in fight against corruption

THE African National Congress's (ANC's) bold comment last week that voters at grassroots level should ask questions about the spending of state money in the project to upgrade President Jacob Zuma's private residence in Nkandla, speaks volumes about access to information in parts of the country. The ANC's core rural constituencies remain largely insulated from the raging debate that has excited the chattering classes and political elites alike.

Evidently the public outcry over the R246m of state expenditure at Nkandla has not been enough to rattle the ANC and force the party to recall Mr Zuma. There has been no Occupy Uthuli House or Occupy Union Buildings.

Of the scandals that have rocked Mr Zuma's administration, the Nkandla investigation is unique, because the plundering of

state money happened not only on Mr Zuma's watch but, literally, in his own backyard.

Critics have cautioned that SA is unlikely to eradicate the scourge of corruption and its effect on the livelihood of the poor if grassroots communities are not deliberately engaged as part of the struggle.

Last week Public Protector Thuli Madonsela was planning to make a condensed version of her Nkandla report available in the form of a fact sheet that would have been written in a language familiar to most South Africans, without the jargon and complex terms. But her spokesman, Oupa Segalwe, says the project has been canned as the office of the public protector is satisfied with the media coverage of the final report, Secure in Comfort, released last Wednesday.

The inability of grassroots communities to gain critical information on major political

developments is epitomised by the struggles of most of the country's 75 licensed community radio stations, which are underresourced. According to the National Community Radio Forum, they reach about 5-million listeners in the most rural parts of SA.

The Government Communications and Information Systems

department has established itself as the source of authoritative content for community media.

This means the first authoritative comment most community radio stations would have received after the Nkandla report's release was Justice Minister Jeff Radebe's half-truth that "no public funds were used in building the private

residence of the President".

Mpho Raphahlelo, head of Botlokwa Community Radio in Ga-Machaka, Limpopo, says the station's reporters rely on mainstream media for content; and on the Nkandla report they have sourced commentary from local ANC politicians.

Thomas Mokgaje of Modiri

FM in Delareyville in North West says its reporters rely on Google for news content. "It is difficult to explain this content and what it means because we do not even have resources to call in on political analysts." A local doctor with a political background often provides analysis.

Other stations such as Khanya

Radio in Butterworth, Eastern Cape, do have capacity to get comment from the ANC and opposition leaders. Khanya news editor Elethu Mpiki says academics from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University also avail themselves to discuss major news stories.

Political analyst Steven Friedman says the growing number of

service delivery protests show people feel strongly about corruption. The problem is that corruption is, in the main, framed solely from a middle-class perspective. "This means the people in townships and shack settlements are being denied the truth they need to be active citizens." stones@bdfm.co.za

## Police minister provides glimpse into state's likely take on scandal

Continued from page 1

Max Sisulu, calling for a full repayment plan to be tabled in Parliament. Ms Madonsela recommended that Mr Zuma make arrangements to pay back the money spent on nonsecurity items at his Nkandla residence.

Furthermore, the DA called on Mr Zuma to dismiss implicated ministers from the Cabinet.

Mr Mthethwa himself was implicated in Ms Madonsela's report for improper conduct and

maladministration after he failed to apply his mind, according to the public protector, when declaring Mr Zuma's residence a national key point. Ms Madonsela's report found that he should have "provided better executive leadership" over assessing the extent and cost of the Nkandla project.

The report recommended that Mr Zuma reprimand the ministers involved for the "appalling manner" in which the project was managed. Mr Mthethwa is among Mr Zuma's closest allies and so is

Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi, who drove the interministerial task-team process.

"We are quite clear, there are inaccuracies in that report," Mr Mthethwa said yesterday, speaking at an ANC media briefing on the party's election manifesto.

He would not be drawn further on the inaccuracies, but said the government would highlight these areas when it responded in full. "We will respond because it is a serious matter for us," Mr Mthethwa said.

Mr Mantashe said last week that areas of disagreement with Ms Madonsela's report included what should be done with the costs of the relocation of the kraal, the chicken run, the visitors centre, the swimming pool and the amphitheatre.

Ms Madonsela listed these items as undue benefits to Mr Zuma and his family, and recommended that he make arrangements to repay the costs thereof.

Prof Gutto said aside from jurisdiction, turning to the courts

would also "over-politicise" the matter. "Who is the complainant?"

"I don't think it is a route that is possible. What would the review do? Courts don't investigate."

Ms Madonsela's report and that of the interministerial task team were "incomparable" as the ministers were implicated in the matter themselves, Prof Gutto added. "In this case, the ministers are the wrongdoers, you can't have the wrongdoers investigating themselves," he said.

Defence Minister Nosiviwe

Mapisa-Nqakula, who along with Mr Nxesi and Mr Mthethwa had headed the interministerial probe into the project, said the ministers "took full responsibility" for the upgrade of the president's residence. "It is important to acknowledge that long before this report, we had our own report."

She said suggestions that the ruling party sought to undermine the office of the public protector "is not matched by the record of the ANC". With Paul Vecchiato marriann@bdfm.co.za