

# Library 'dying a silent death'

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A MULTIMILLION-rand community library in Barkly West remains closed after renovation work, which was supposed to commence last year, apparently never started.

The Inasee H Moshoeu Community Library closed its doors in 2016 after the roof collapsed in May that year.

Community members said that the library, which was built at a cost of R11.8 million, has been gathering dust and is becoming a white elephant.

The Northern Cape Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, in response to an article published in the DFA in September last year, said that it had taken a decision to close the facility to ensure the safety of the community.

The founder of Building A Future, a community service provider, Irene Fitzi, said that while it appeared as if action was being taken after the article was published, the matter has since "died a silent death".

"Following the publication on the matter in the newspaper, the department sent a four-person delegation in November 2017 to respond to the issue. Following a response from the department, which stated that they do not have a facility to use as an alternative library, I offered that my centre be used," said Fitzi.

"The department responded by giving four boxes of books from the library which were to be used in my centre. I made it clear that I did not have any shelves to put the books on. They promised that they would take the shelves from the library and put them in the centre. They also brought computers and desks from the library. The computers were, however, left without an internet connection and are currently just collecting dust."

Fitzi added that she has since then continuously tried to get hold of the responsible parties at the department, but with no luck.

"I have, since they left everything in the centre, tried to get hold of someone in the department to enquire about the way forward. What is also bothering me is that they have told the pupils in the area that the centre is a temporary library. The children are looking at me for answers on why there is no internet to conduct their school work. I have sent several e-mails and made phone calls to get clarity on the matter but have not received



Picture: Soraya Crowie

any feedback."

Fitzi said that there was an overwhelming demand for reading material from the children in the area.

"The children fill up the centre to read. They have gone through the books and are asking for new material. I have run out of reasons and excuses to give them on why there are no new books supplied," she said.

Concerned community members said that the department is neglecting the needs of their children.

"This library cost millions of rands to construct. It is a beautiful building but now it is just taking up space. It is of absolute no use to the community. We cannot comprehend why the department constructed such a building, which is now becoming a headache to the people as it serves no purpose," they said.

Others added that pupils are struggling with not having access to technology and books.

"Each town has a library which is supposed to assist the pupils with their school work. The children in this are being deprived as they have to travel to Kimberley or pay for information they need to do their school work. This will also impact on the pass rate of the schools in

the area.

"Children also cannot even research available career choices or research different institutions of higher learning. Their lives end right here in these streets."

Department spokesperson, Conrad Fortune, said that there is still no indication when the library will reopen.

## Functioning

"We view the functioning of libraries as a matter of importance. The process of the renovation of the Barkly West library is with the Department of Public Works, who is the custodian of government property," said Fortune.

"It can also be confirmed that the tender was advertised and all due tender administrative processes must be concluded before a contractor can be appointed to start with the renovations. An assessment was done, but due to the fact that the tender is not finalised and closed as yet, we are unable to divulge the estimated costs of the damages as per the assessment report."

"At this moment we are also unable to indicate when the library will be reopened."

"We would like to profusely apologise to the community of Barkly West for the inconvenience caused due to the closure of the library."

Fortune added that the department has worked hard to provide library services to communities in the Northern Cape.

"Libraries are the core or the centre of communities, where community members, parents and children gain access to government information, gain access to newspapers where jobs are advertised and where pupils and students can gain access to information on the internet that can improve their studies."

"Through our libraries programme, we also promote social cohesion and nation building because there is no restriction on who gains access to libraries."

"As a department we are committed to promoting a culture of reading and strive to ensure that we have community-based libraries, hence we have opened two libraries in the John Taolo Gaetsewe district and one in Petrusville and a library in Ritchie will be opened soon," said Fortune.

The Department of Public Works could not be reached for comment.