



The community during a previous protest in Pienaar.

Construction solution a reality

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MSOGWABA - Residents are still in the dark about the start of construction at Msogwaba Primary School, pending a speedy resolution over land between the community and the City of Mbombela Local Municipality.

It has now been over four months since work at the site of the new school was expected to start, but there is still no answer.

This resulted in the disruption of teaching and learning at 14 schools last week. Parents took to the streets demanding answers.

They believe that the new school will help address issues of overcrowding currently experienced in primary schools in the area.

Learners were also forced to join in the protest. Grade 12 pupil, Sifiso Qwabe* related the events. "Some people came to our school last week and called us to the assembly shelter where they told us to go home. They said we would hear from them when schools would be open again. They threatened to force us out of school if we didn't obey," he said.

Cases of intimidation have been opened by various teachers following this. "A principal opened an intimidation case after receiving calls from a private number. The caller threatened his life if he didn't close

his school," reveals Capt Jabu Ndubane, spokesperson for the Pienaar Cluster.

She added that two women, aged 31 and 32, were arrested in connection with public violence.

Mr Gerald Sambo, spokesperson for the Department of Education, said the department approved the building of the school with the department of public works a while ago. Sambo said the building was supposed to start in January, however, issues between the municipality and the community had caused the delays.

Mr David Nkambule, spokesperson for the department of public works concurred with Sambo's sentiments. "As a department, we work with other ones in the building of infrastructure. What normally happens is that the relevant department shows us the site, confirms their budget for that infrastructure.

"We then advertise the tender and appoint the contractor after which we approach the municipality which then introduces the project-steering committee to us. This committee includes the municipality and the important stakeholders from the community. From our side, we have followed all the processes and we are ready to implement the project, but we cannot do so without a project-steering committee," explained

Nkambule.

He added that the role of the above-mentioned committee includes the appointment of sub-contractors during the course of the project.

Mr Joseph Ngala, spokesperson for the City of Mbombela, said the lack of a ward committee in the area had caused the delays of the project. "This particular ward does not have a ward committee, which means that the municipality, through the office of the speaker, has to identify community structures to form part of the steering committee," he said.

On Tuesday Speaker Cllr Mandla Msibi told *Mpumalanga News* that he, the chief whip and the mayor of Mbombela had taken a decision to solve the matter by approaching the traditional leader of the area to give them 10 names from various community structures so that the needed project-steering committee will be in place.

"After we have received the names from the chief, we will then give the list to the ward councillor who will then forward them to the department.

"We will advise him to do the project handover to the contractor as soon as possible, probably before the end of the week," concluded Msibi.

* Not his real name.