

OUR VIEWPOINT

WILL NEW MEC STOP THE MUNICIPAL ROT?

A **NOTHER** day, another headline about another ailing KwaZulu-Natal municipality. Yesterday, we carried a story on page one about the state of the uMgungundlovu District Municipality, which is so precarious that municipal manager Dr Ray Ngcobo said they had to dip into their conditional grants to be able to meet their staff salary obligations.

He acknowledged that this is not the correct

procedure to follow. But it seems that desperate times called for desperate measures.

The municipality is owed a massive R600 million from its customers and is hamstrung by a culture of non-payment for services like water. And chief among the defaulters is once again the provincial government in the form of the Department of Education, which owes money for water used by local schools.

We recently ran a story about Msunduzi complaining that the Department of Public Works owed it money too. The culture of non-payment will not be easily remedied. It's become the default position of many of the poor, and if government gets away with it, how can it be enforced?

There are also mechanisms available to those who doggedly won't pay, even if they can afford to pay something, to simply reconnect their water

supply if it's cut off.

Like many municipalities around the province, uMgungundlovu needs a hero or two to step in and help solve some of its critical problems. With the admission that the municipality has experienced a "huge deficit" in its budget for three years in a row, it's clear it hasn't got the capacity to clear it itself.

Do we dare hope the new MEC for Co-operative

Governance and Traditional Affairs, Siphon Hlonika, will fare better than his predecessor Nomusa Dube-Ncube, under whose watch municipalities declined to the levels we see at Msunduzi and the like? (She has been rewarded for her efforts at Cogta with the post of new MEC for Economic Development and Tourism.)

Some say time will tell, but others believe we're running out of time. Fast.