

■ INVASIONS

Self-appointed 'indunas' lead land grabs

Residents citywide live in fear for their safety as property prices plummet

SE-ANNE RALL

se-anne.koopman@inl.co.za

POLITICAL infighting and self-proclaimed indunas are believed to be behind a spate of land grabs taking place across the city. In Chatsworth, Westville, Clare Estate, Cato Crest and Isipingo, police have had to be on guard in hotspots as shacks are erected in the twilight hours only to be broken down later by members of the Land Invasion Unit, metro police and the city's security company.

Residents in the affected areas say they are at wits' end as their property prices are plummeting and they fear for their safety.

For a 58-year-old woman, the invasions have massively impacted on her life.

The woman, who asked not to be named for fear for her safety, said shacks began sprouting up just metres away from her home 16 years ago.

"Now the settlement is so huge and there is nothing that can be done about it," she said.

The woman said she often had confrontations with the local "induna" who acts as a local estate agent, selling off pieces of land to those wanting to erect their shacks in the area.

"When we contact the police or security companies, we are told that they are busy and won't be able to come out to us. We're basically at the mercy of the invaders. They come in and out of the area with groups of people. Even when we tell them that this land belongs to the state, we're told that the land belongs to no one. I live alone and I've lived here for so many years. Where will I go now?" the woman asked.

She said in recent weeks there had been attacks carried out on people in the community who had tried to stand up to the "induna".

"These men are armed. There are often shootings in the settlement. I just hide whenever I hear the gunshots," she said.

The woman said over the years, several of her dogs have been poisoned by those wanting to come on to her



MARIANNRIDGE invaders carry materials to build shacks on vacant land in Pinetown.

| LEON LESTRADE African News Agency (ANA)



SHACKS have mushroomed next to houses in Chotoo Place, Malabar Hills, in Isipingo.

property.

In Bellair, residents have to contend with power outages as more and more shacks mushroom in the area and illegal connections squeeze the electricity supply.

Earlier this week, residents in Bonela expressed concern about the number of newly erected shacks.

In Cato Crest, residents wake up to filthy roads which often follow a night of shack building.

In the build-up to elections, residents saw hundreds of people moving into the area to chop down trees and bushes. At least 35 shacks were built, however following a court order obtained by the city, the shacks were torn down.

This then led to protests taking place every other day. Metro police

have been stationed in Cato Crest for the past two months, however despite a heavy police presence the protests continue.

Many residents in the area say they have no other option but to sell their homes.

In other areas, residents claim that rivalry between past and present councillors have left them to suffer. They believe that when a ward is won by a rival party, the former ward councillor then uses land invasions as a ploy to make the area ungovernable for the new councillor.

The municipality has conceded that the issue of land invasions is not going to end soon.

The eThekweni Municipality spokesperson, Msawakhe Mayisela, said the city's resources to tackle the



CATO Crest newcomers mark plots after they invaded a piece of land in the area earlier this year. | DOCTOR NGCOBO African News Agency (ANA)

problem were stretched to their limits.

"We have a unit that is dedicated to dealing with this issue and we need to allocate financial resources. There are shacks mushrooming everywhere. We're sitting with a case where homes are devalued as a result of land grabs," he said.

Mayisela said there was still a mindset that Durban was where the jobs were.

"So you find many people coming from rural KwaZulu-Natal and other provinces in search of jobs. The reality is those people are then left without shelter. They then join forces with those invading land," he said.

He said there were more than 200000 people needing housing, and despite the city having already provided free housing, there were still those who lived in transit camps.

Mayisela said it was also costing the city financially to keep acquiring court orders to bring a halt to land invasions.

"The demand for housing has outstripped the supply. We cannot provide housing for everyone overnight," he said.

The municipality, according to Mayisela, were in the process of purchasing land to build more homes. The land, he said, would need to be serviced with amenities such as water, sanitation and electricity.

KZN police spokesperson Captain Ngobile Gwala said land invasions affected most communities.

"We're appealing to landowners to make sure that they safeguard their piece of land in order to prevent

people from erecting their illegal structures. If the owner of the land has opened a case of trespassing, the police will arrest those who are found to be committing such an offence," she said.

Gwala said if there was an eviction court order in terms of the Prevention of Illegal Eviction and Unlawful Occupation Act, police officers would escort those who would execute the court order to monitor the situation.

"Arrests are being made of all suspects who failed to adhere to the court order. We're also appealing to community members to make sure that they embark on legal and peaceful protests," she said.

KZN Human Settlements and Public Works MEC Peggy Nkonyeni, said: "We have established an anti-land invasion unit within the Department of Human Settlements working together with the eThekweni metro.

"In instances where there has been an invasion on land that already has plans for it to bring about projects to enrich our communities, we engage the community through the stakeholder engagement committee. We're also embarking on roadshows to educate our communities about government land and plans in place to use such land.

"This is coupled with our intensified programme of building better quality houses for our people while at the same time equipping them to have skills which will allow them to feed themselves. Everyone who deserves a shelter should be given one, but after following due processes."