



LAND DISPUTE: Hamburg residents are fuming following the government’s announcement that their land would be sold for development purposes. Picture: MICHAEL PINYANA

Hamburg families distraught over state ‘takeover’

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Land development plans at Hamburg that were drawn up by the Eastern Cape department of public works are being disputed by 33 local residents, who say the land is theirs and cannot be sold by the government.

In a document seen by the Dispatch, the department plans to lease and develop 33 properties identified for “revenue generation”.

Families who spoke to the Dispatch said they feared losing their land after the department informed them that on Thursday it start selling and develop the land.

Mziyakise Makhubalo, secretary of the Hamburg residents committee, said confusion over the land ownership stemmed from two changes of government — when the Ciskei government took over in 1961, and again in 1994 when SA became a democratic state.

“We were living in the village but the apartheid government

moved our forefathers away from the land.

“Now there is vacant land where our village once stood, which the department is saying is theirs.”

He said families without title deeds had hand-written receipts to prove ownership to the sites.

“Only a few people have title deeds. When our families moved here they were given receipts and old people said this was their proof of ownership. This land has a long history. There are family graves here and we want to be given a chance to stay on this land. This is the land of our forefathers that the department wants to sell.”

The villagers have been in dispute with the new government for years.

The Dispatch has seen letters written by community leaders saying the land was theirs and calling on the authorities to talk with residents and engage with the issue.

Makhubalo said: “We had a community meeting last week

and we are fighting through our lawyers. We have signed a petition.

“We wrote to the department in 2018 and they stopped the sale.

“There are many families who will be affected by this. We wanted to use the land for grazing our cattle.”

Zama Ngqula said: “People are being threatened and victimised by the department. The department is saying the biggest part of Hamburg is their land, and we disagree. It is our land.”

He said some of the families have lived on the land for 100 years. “My family has been living here since 1926. We protested and stopped the sale of this land in 2018.”

Ngqula said they were told the land was earmarked for “development” but no details were provided.

Ngqula said: “Some people were born here. We have plans with the land. We have livestock, we have tractors and we want to develop that land for agriculture and we are capable

of developing it.”

Public works spokesperson Vuyokazi Mbanjwa said the department was the rightful owner of the land and was disposing land through long term leases of between 20-30 years.

The land was obtained by the former South African Development Trust prior to 1981 for the consolidation of the then Ciskei, she said.

“With the dawn of the new democracy the land became South African state land and confirmed vested provincially on 22 December 1997 in terms of Item 28(1) to Schedule 6 of the constitution by the then minister Derek Hanekom of the department of land affairs [now rural development and land reform].The Title Deeds of the properties were subsequently endorsed to the province by the deeds office in King William’s Town.”

She said the department has no record of formal land claim and can only deal with legal documents as filed in the office of the surveyor-general and the deeds office.