



Publication: Zululand Observer Monday - Main
Title: District on a mission to end water supply crisis
Publish date: 19 Sep 2022
Page: 2

Reach: 9323
AVE:R 33773.74
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District on a mission to end water supply crisis

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IN a bid to address water challenges and put an end to community protests, King Cetshwayo District Municipality has set aside R500-million to resuscitate water infrastructure, construct new projects, and drill boreholes in various areas.

This was revealed by District Mayor Thami Ntuli in an exclusive interview with the Zululand Observer on Thursday.

Ntuli said the district municipality now plans to insource certain services that are provided by private contractors.

"This half-a-billion rand budget is just a drop in the ocean. Resuscitating and renewing old infrastructure needs a lot of money which we do not have, which is why we resolved to insource services such as plumbers," said Ntuli.

"When we took over last year, we inherited many challenges. The biggest one was about 500 employees, working under WSSA, who lost their jobs.

"We discovered that the working relationship between the municipality and WSSA was much cheaper when compared to the new service provider. Even the scope of work was much bigger than the new one.

"These workers were residents of this district. We took a resolution to do something to assist them, as the country faces high unemployment.

"There was no budget to address the problem, but we had to come up with a plan to find the money, so we strategised to reduce the payment of overtime for our employees by hiring more.

"Initially, even a general worker would claim for overtime of up to R30 000, which was draining the finances. We have now hired 340 of those [retrenched WSSA] employees, some of whom are working under Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) projects and are earning much better than before," said Ntuli.

Water tankers

He further explained that another challenge was the abuse of private water tankers. He alleges that some were selling water to the community



King Cetshwayo District Mayor Thami Ntuli Photo: Vusi Dlodla

“We had to come up with a plan to find the money, so we strategised to reduce overtime paid to employees by hiring more”

and in return claiming an exorbitant amount of money, while people lacked water.

"To address this, we came up with a solution to buy water tankers. We bought 10 this year, and already had forty, and we have hired 42 drivers. We have, thus far, invested about R90-million in various water projects around the district.

"Some of these projects are still under construction, while others have been completed and handed over to the community.

"We have decided to interact with communities, to find out if they are happy with their new projects. We do this because we need quality infrastructure that will solve water problems for the community.

"If they are unhappy, we instruct our employees and contractor to rectify the mistake before handing it over to the community," he said.

Ntuli explained that the municipality has thus far received positive feedback from communities.

"There are many water projects under way in Mthonjaneni, uMfolozi and in uMlalazi. Soon we will be

handing over those projects to the communities.

"These projects will reduce the use of private water tankers, and in turn help us save money and bring stability to our finances. We want to insource all repair and maintenance services, and only use private contractors where the need arises," said Ntuli.

He further revealed that his municipality has suspended some employees regarding unfinished water projects.

"Our approach is that those who lied to us and said they had completed the project must face consequences.

"There will be a time when we initiate a skills audit and when we institute a forensic investigation because, in some instances, officials tell us there are 14 communal water tanks in a certain area, only to find there are only five.

"I have already approached the Municipal Public Accounts Committee and councillors to verify these issues, and I will personally go to these areas to investigate because we want to serve residents with dignity and respect.

"We also believe we are not the only people with solutions, but we see it as imperative to interact with the community we serve," said Ntuli.

Other projects

Ntuli said KCDM's focus is not only on water provision, but that they are also focusing on Local Economic Development.

"Under uMthonjaneni Municipality, we handed out goats and farming materials to various co-operatives. We did so to enable those co-operatives to fend for themselves. We did the same in Madlankala.

"We will hand out seeds, and, at the same time, want people to have water so they can plant and irrigate their crops.

"We plan to give out goats in February, as we believe people can make a living out of goat farming. We plan to link them with Asia where they can sell their goats," he said.

Ntuli urged communities across all racial groups to be part of the municipality. "We want to support programmes of interest to everyone."