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DEBT CAMPAIGN

## Msunduzi collects R100m in just 3 weeks

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THE Msunduzi municipality has collected R100 million in an aggressive debt collection campaign which saw officials disconnecting businesses and government entities and naming and shaming those that were in arrears.

"We do not have a consolidated figure at the moment, but at the last count, we had collected R100m in cash," said the acting municipal manager Nelisiwe Ngcobo yesterday.

"The money is for rates, but we are disconnecting everything because of the new policy of consolidated billing.

"Many people have been ignoring their water and rates account and only paying for electricity," she said.

The city is owed R1.2 billion for rates and has a total debtors book of R5.5bn.

Yesterday, the city announced that the focus of the campaign would shift to residents who have outstanding payments.

Ngcobo said it was concerning that so many people were not paying for the services but were able to make payments when their services were cut.

She said the city wants to deal with the issue of non-payment.

"We will ring-fence the money that is generated from collections (payment for service).

"We plan to use the money to buy new meters that will be installed," she said.

Ngcobo said she was not concerned about the threats of legal action following concerns that some of the businesses were disconnected unfairly and maligned by the naming and shaming.

"Many of these businesses were sent notices.

"To date, the only buildings that have been reconnected (without payment) are the schools that fall under Public Works department.

"The Public Works department has said they will be making the payment and if the payment has not been made by the end of the month we will be going back there to disconnect," she said.

Ngcobo warned residents to also get their accounts in order as they are next on the list.

Councillors said they welcomed the debt collection drive.

ACDP councillor Rienus Niemand said the move was very important for the financial survival of the city and called for the campaign to be intensified.

"The irony is that all these measures are prescribed in the credit control policy.

"The administration had not implemented it as is required by law.

"A pure dereliction of duty.

"The administration is still illegally allowing people in specific wards to continue stealing water and electricity with no action being taken.

"The losses are in turn subsidised by the paying public through unfair additional tariff increases.

"The practice is immoral, illegal, corrupt and detrimental to the city and is condemned by the ACDP," he said.