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LIMPOPO MIRROR

# Local community start to fix Mphephu Resort

*But government warns that it is illegal to do so, saying that they may get to it in the next three years*

By Maanda Bele

**For the past two weeks, more than 50 community members from across the Nzhelele valley have been meeting at the abandoned Mphephu Resort to start cleaning up and renovating the place, adamant about restoring it to its former glory and getting it operational again. However, the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET) is adamant that the department did not give anyone permission to restore the resort.**

The Mphephu Resort had once been the pride of Nzhelele, but in February 2021, heavy rains caused significant damage to the infrastructure. No-one bothered to repair the damage and the resort has been left neglected ever since.

When *Limpopo Mirror* visited the resort last week, one of the volunteers, who was busy cleaning, said that the reason she went there every day was because she was hopeful that, once the resort started operating again, she would get a job there. "It has been very difficult to find a job. Here is a place than we can renovate that might offer us work later. I am volunteering here because I am unemployed and I want to work. As you can see, I am not

lazy," she said while scrubbing the pavement near the swimming pools.

Mr Phathutshedzo Mukhaninga, who seemed to be the leader of the group of volunteers, said he was glad that so many people had heard his call to restore the resort to its former glory. "For years now, the government has been telling us vukuzenzele (to get up and do it yourself), and now we are busy doing it ourselves. We are almost done with the cleaning up and renovations and if all goes well, this resort will be opened to the public again by December this year. We are very grateful for the community members who are volunteering to help us revive this beautiful heritage of ours," he said.

Local residents seemed to be uncertain about the ownership of the Mphephu Resort, whether the Mphephu-Ramabulana royal family or the LEDET, who is currently in charge of the resort, owns it.

The Mphephu-Ramabulana royal family's spokesperson, Mr Ntsieni Ramabulana, clarified the matter. "The Mphephu Resort is an asset of the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism. The royal family has for a while been calling on the government to resuscitate the Mphephu Resort because of the obvious economic benefits

it offers to the area. We would like to know what the department's plans are with regard to the resort. While we understand the community's anger and frustration, we should at all times work within the confines of the law. We urge the government to urgently engage with our community to resolve this matter," he said.

The MEC for LEDET's spokesperson, Mr Callies Matlala, said the department had not given anyone permission to renovate the Mphephu Resort. "We were informed that there were people who were renovating the Mphephu Resort. We immediately engaged with the Mphephu Traditional Council to ascertain what was happening, and they also confirmed that they were not aware of such activities. The department is a government institution and does not promote lawlessness in the community."

Matlala said the LEDET had requested the Limpopo Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) to conduct a conditional assessment. "The recommended conditional assessment will not take more than 12 months to be finalised. Therefore, for the rehabilitation project to be concluded [as] satisfactory and of good quality, it will take approximately 36 months to complete, subject to budget availability," he said.