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*From left: Sisanda Matshotyana and Sisipho Ntlangeni came to the post office on 2 August to withdraw money and found it unable to assist them because of the electricity cut-off. Photographed by Thapelo Matlala*

## Makhanda Post Office electricity cut off

**By Thapelo Matlala**

The Makhanda Post Office's electricity has been cut off by the municipality, leaving dozens of people unable to collect parcels or receive their social grants.

Grocott's Mail was reliably informed that the South African Post Office (SAPO) leases the building from a private individual, who had allegedly not been paid rent by SAPO and who therefore had stopped paying for electricity. The municipality allegedly disconnected the electricity on 25 July.

The SAPO was placed under provisional liquidation six months ago and is now in business rescue. Grocott's Mail visited the Makhanda Post office this week and met dozens of frustrated residents who were unable to collect parcels or social grants.

Sisipho Ntlangeni said she was disappointed to find the Post Office closed and suggested that as the Post Office has their contact details, it would have been better if customers had been informed of the closure on their phones. It was fruitless and disconcerting "for someone who comes from far like me", to visit the Post Office and find it closed, Ntlangeni said.

Makhanda SAPO employees took the decision to report for duty even though they cannot provide any services without electricity, saying they wanted

to explain the situation to customers and not leave them in the dark.

Rhodes University lecturer Shepi Mati visited the Post Office on 28 July but found it in darkness and was unable to collect his parcel. "There is no telling when the electricity will be restored. So I have no idea when I will get my parcel", Mati said.

David Mpangiso (68) was agitated after being informed that the Post Office could not pay out pensions without electricity. He left the Post Office furiously and asked "So what am I going to use to get home? My car doesn't have petrol."

Nokuzola Mendele (49) said that she had been trying to collect her payment for working on the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) since 25 July. She said the Post Office must be closed because it could not perform what it was meant to do and was terrorising the emotions of Makhanda residents.

She said even when the Post Office had electricity, there were other problems with the service. "In January, I was here on the 25th after being paid from EPWP, and I was told there is no money to pay me". Mendele says she was told to wait for other customers to arrive and deposit money, and only then would she be paid. Mendele added that she was supposed to get R2500, but she had to wait all day to receive her money. She says in the morning, she was given

R1000, and after some hours, someone came to pay for their license – from that payment, she was given R800, and she had to wait again to receive the remaining R700.

She concluded by saying, "It is sad because there was a time I couldn't receive my salary and had to come the following month because the post office didn't have money"

Residents of Makhanda now face a long drive to Bhisho, Gqeberha, or Port Alfred if they want to use the Post Office. The Post Office was a useful government service, especially for many pensioners who do not have experience using ATMs.

Anoosh Rooplal and Juanito Damons, the business rescue practitioners, said in a statement on 25 July that they would try to generate an alternative plan to rescue the SAPO from collapse before the end of November 2023. Rooplal and Damons said they believe "there is a reasonable prospect of rescuing the SAPO" using the already allocated R2.4 billion funding from Treasury in the medium-term budget, an additional R3.8 billion to recapitalise the SAPO, and if there is support from suppliers, unions, and the government.

Grocott's Mail sent questions to Makana Municipality, which were not answered. SAPO spokesperson Suzi Khumalo would only say that the Post Office is currently under business rescue.