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Act against these looter builders now

Public works minister Sihle Zikalala tweeted on Friday: "We can no longer tolerate this tendency of projects being halted due to construction company incapacities."

Zikalala had just visited the R232m correctional service centre in Parys, Free State, that was left unfinished by NJR Projects, the contractor.

ANC benefactor Edwin Sodi's company had the tender terminated for poor performance, but he had already pocketed R130m on the incomplete project.

The Development Bank of Southern Africa, as the implementing agent, awarded the contract to upgrade the prison facility in 2018 and the deal was terminated in February with only 40% of the work done.

The project, whose stalling was exposed by this newspaper last month, is just one of many that Sodi left unfinished, pocketing millions of rand of public money despite failing to deliver the service.

Sodi is not the only one. Today we report on numerous schools in Gauteng whose upgrades have been left unfinished by contractors for various reasons.

Nancefield primary school, for example, was meant to have 28 new classrooms, five grade R learning areas, sports facilities, sports field and other amenities. For months the buildings have been standing incomplete.

Vandals have begun stripping away some of the infrastructure while pupils have been crammed in rented mobile classrooms for a year.

The government has already spent at least R56m on the project. The contract must now be re-advertised for a new firm to hopefully finish the work.

This project is one of at least 10 schools that have been left unfinished or abandoned in Gauteng in the last five years, according to the provincial infrastructure department.

Zikalala is correct to say this tendency must no longer be tolerated. Its impact on community development is devastating. It happens because too often there are no consequences for businesspeople who greedily take on work they have no capacity to deliver.

If Zikalala is to be believed, we must start seeing action against unscrupulous operators who loot the public purse while leaving a trail of destruction behind them.

