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HOUSING

Bloekombos residents want to be relocated to De Novo

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THREE years after settling on a piece of land in Bloekombos, Kraaifontein, residents live in waterlogged homes and travel a distance to get drinking water.

More than 500 families moved onto pieces of land – now known as Covid-19, Social Distance, Nkandla and Castro – and established several informal settlements at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Zizipho Qukula said every year her family prayed for no rain.

"It's hard waking up to a pool of water inside the home. Sometimes we have to wake up in the middle of the night to scoop the water out so that we don't drown inside the house. This year's winter was the worst we've had to endure."

Qukula and other community members said they would like authorities to move them to a nearby area called De Novo.

Earlier this month, a mother and her two children, aged 13 and eight, died after their shack caught fire.

A spokesperson for the family, Thobisa Sijaka, said due to bad roads, the firefighters could not get access to the area.

She said the family would not be able to bury her sister, Pinky and her nieces as they were unemployed and could not afford to pay for DNA testing to identify the bodies.

"We are grateful to community members who helped douse the flames. But we appreciate that they are also facing financial challenges and will not be able to help us bury our family members. We appeal to anyone to help us to bury them by next Saturday".

Community leader Nontshebe Mphomani highlighted flooding, lack of electricity supply and drinking water, poor roads, fires and unemployment as the major challenges the communities were faced with. "We appeal to authorities to move us to a better area close by."

For three years, the community had relied on water tanks brought in by the City after the intervention of the South African Human Rights Commission.



RESIDENTS of the Covid informal settlement endure living in waterlogged homes during winter. | **LEON LESTRADE** African News Agency (ANA)

But Mphomani said there was no scheduled time for the water tank, and those who were at work, often missed it.

"There's now a mushrooming business of selling the water by unemployed people who collect it in large containers," he added.

Another community leader, Linda Tito said they had appealed to the National Department of Human Settlements to find a piece of suitable land for the residents after their requests to Sub-council 2 officials were "ignored".

"We asked that some people should

be moved to De Novo, but that land is apparently owned by the Department of Public Works," said Tito.

Ward councillor Siyabonga Duka said the City was aware of the Bloekombos challenges and was busy trying to address the state of roads and would also provide electricity supply.

The National Department of Human Settlements has embarked on a "rigorous" intervention process which includes identifying informal settlements in flood prone areas and developing relocation plans.

Spokesperson Nozipho Zulu said, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI), as the custodian of national state-owned land, was in the process of transferring 1,500 hectares of land for human settlements development in various provinces and a total of 539 hectares had already been released to the Housing Development Agency for human settlement development in the 2022/2023 financial year.

In March, the Department gave the City of Cape Town R111 million for the upgrading of informal settlements

in Khayelitsha.

Zulu said the funding was an additional allocation under the Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant (ISUPG) to address the relocation of the PRASA line informal settlements and the 16 informal settlements without basic services.

The City's acting Mayco Member for Human Settlements James Vos said no correspondence was received from National Treasury opposing retaining R61m of the funding, and the money has been consequently allocated to "appropriate contracts" for informal settlements upgrading, which will be implemented in the new financial year.

Vos denied the City was formally requested to relocate the Bloekombos residents. "While the City and other organs of state regularly notify any occupant of such land of the dangers of flooding, both in terms of safety and health during our winter rainy season, the City does not have the land reserves, nor the financial capacity to relocate such occupants, almost all of which are residents on the land without the consent of the landowner, to more suitable land."