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**Author:** BOMIKAZI MDIYA



**ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT:** At the Thomas River police station in Cathcart, one rondavel is used as a community service centre and the second, which was an office for detectives, is vacant. Picture: SUPPLIED

# Police stations falling apart, inhabited by squatters, livestock

**Plans in place to fix some offices but others have long wait**

**BOMIKAZI MDIYA and MKHUSELI SIZANI**

While the province is being strangled by the grip of crime, Eastern Cape police stations are falling to pieces.

Government had previously promised upgrades and new premises, however the Dispatch this week found charge offices and holding cells occupied by squatters and police using buckets to flush toilets because they had no facilities or running water.

Last year, police minister Bheki Cele flagged Eastern Cape police stations as the worst in the country, and a "health hazard", but nothing has improved.

Out of 199 police stations in the province, 70 received a poor rating and 106 were rated fair. Just nine police stations were rated as good and 14 as excellent.

The Dispatch visited police stations throughout the province and found shocking cases of neglect, disrepair and vandalism at some sites.

## Ngqamakhwe Police Station

A renovated structure meant to serve as a police station in the Amathole district has been vandalised and taken over by homeless people who live in the holding cells.

The area around the station is surrounded by a putrid, knee-deep swamp, filled with floating excrement and other debris.

Police work in prefab buildings with no functioning toilets.

One of the occupants said: "I have been living here for a year. I am homeless and unemployed."

Amahlubi traditional council member Vuyani Ndube said it had been more than two decades since the contractor that renovated the police station disappeared.

"We have been waiting for the police station to be completed. Our officers work in dilapidated temporary structures," he said.

The toilet is broken. Police make use of the bucket to flush with a note attached saying: "Please leave the bucket outside so that the next person is able to get water to flush."

Mangombov Village community policing forum member Vuyani Ndungane said: "The state of the station affects its functioning. We are faced with a lot of crime taking place and many street thugs roaming."

Eastern Cape police spokesperson Col Priscilla Naidu said police were aware of the situation



**UNHYGIENIC CONDITIONS:** A female bathroom in the Ngqamakhwe temporary police station has a broken toilet and uses black plastic bag as a sanitary bin. Picture: SUPPLIED



**FINDING REFUGE:** Homeless people have occupied one of the vandalised Ngqamakhwe police station buildings. Picture: MKHUSELI SIZANI

"Plans to build a new police station are already under way," she said.

## Mdantsane Cluster

The Mdantsane cluster police station is opposite the Mdantsane flying squad in Unit 1. Its gates, however, are permanently chained shut with no guards on site.

According to public works, it was built in the mid-1970s and was renovated at cost of R28.7m in 2017.

Disabled 72-year-old Davis Tyalo from Mbekweni sells *smileys* (sheep heads) there.

"I have been robbed three times and I lost my pots and gas stoves. Hawkers don't feel safe here. We must call the Inyibiba police station in NU14 to help us."

He said the closure of the police station had left dozens of residents with no police services.

"This police station was built about four to five years ago but is still closed.

"The residents of Khayelitsha, Unit P, Mbekweni and Xamkwana were supposed to be served by this police station," Tyalo said.

Due to the lack of policing, residents formed an anti-crime task force in 2017.

Task force member Siyabulela Naka said: "Police say we are taking their jobs. We fight off crime and rely on donations."

## Bluewaters in Kwelerha

At Bluewaters police station in Kwelerha, the Dispatch found staff cleaning the yard. Some were trying to chase away snakes.

The police station operates from an old farmhouse and is far away from the villagers. Two blocks of the police barracks have been abandoned and are overrun by snakes

One of the cleaners said: "We have already killed three snakes. In summer they are even inside the police station. The barracks is full of them."

## Tyefu in Ngqushwa

Nonyameko Mei of Rura village said women and children were not safe. She blamed the situation on poor police services.

"There is nothing to show that there is a police station here. There are not even road signs directing you to it and the road is poor.

"I went to the police station last month to lay a charge but it was closed.

"There was only a cellphone number at the gate which people have to call when they need a service.

"I called but the female officer told me she was not at the station because she feared for her safety," she said.

Local activist Mlondozi Mankeya said: "We have four police stations in Ngqushwa and their service is poor. They are Hamburg, Peddie, Mpekweni and Tyefu stations.

"Tyefu is the worst police station I have ever seen. It is about 25km away from the villages it serves and is dangerous to go to."

Provincial police spokesperson Warrant Officer Majola Nkohlhi said: "Human resource challenges affect most police stations, especially those that are in rural areas such as Tyefu.

"During the evenings, when members are either attending to a complaint or conducting routine patrols, they lock the police station as it is too risky to leave one member manning it. The management is in discussion with the municipality for new signage."

Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (Popcru) provincial secretary Xolani Prusente said the conditions at rural police stations were getting worse.

"In Tabase police station, rondavels are used as a barracks and a zinc building as single quarters. The station uses pit toilets and water tanks are empty.

"The fencing was left incomplete and there is no gate. One of the police vehicles is standing on bricks.

"Zamuxolo police station in Mount Fletcher has no water and the borehole is broken. The barracks is broken, vandalised and occupied by sheep and goats. Police have to use their cellphones because there are no landlines.

"Some stations operate in rondavels or farmhouses. At the Thomas River police station in Cathcart, one rondavel is used as a community service centre and the second, which was an office for detectives, is vacant because the detectives moved to Cathcart."

He said police needed to take responsibility for the problem.

"As long as the SAPS shifts the blame to the department of public works, these police stations will remain the same," Prusente said.

National public works spokesperson Thami Mchunu said: "The department is building Hankey police station for R121m. The scheduled completion date is February 2024."

Naidu said the Majola police station in Port St Johns was being prioritised.

"Construction of a new building is in progress. The project is scheduled to be finalised in July 2024."

Naidu said there was progress improving six rural police stations that were in an appalling condition.

"The building of deep rural stations: Huku, Ntamonde, Mdeni and Tabase [Ngqunge] is being handled by the national head office with Tabase [Ngqunge] now being fenced in preparation for construction.

"The building of Moyeni police station has already started. A temporary park home will be erected this financial year for Majola.

"Mdeni, Huku, Ntamonde and Tabase are in the planning and design stage and scheduled for execution in 2025/2026 financial year.

"A temporary station will be built for Tafalehashe and a fully-fledged station is scheduled for 2025/2026," she said.

Naidu said progress might appear slow in some stations, as it was handled at national level where a priority list was submitted by each province.