

The Weekly

HOUSING DEBACLE FURORE

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Chairperson of the portfolio committee weighs in the saga involving incomplete houses in Brandfort.



Addressing housing challenge ... The chairperson of committee on Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs, and Human Settlements, Oly Mlamleli

Free State ANC Women's League deputy chairperson and chairperson of the portfolio committee on Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs, and Human Settlements in the provincial legislature has slammed contractors who abandoned scores of incomplete houses in Brandfort.

Oly Mlamleli was part of a delegation made up of members of her committee that descended on the small Southern Free State town of Brandfort that has been plagued by housing challenges for years.

Upon entering the township, one is greeted by abandoned incomplete RDP houses that have seemingly been dumped by the contractors. The community found that there were several causes of the housing debacle. They include lack of building materials, non payment of contractors and staff as well as incompetence by some contractors.

On Wednesday, the committee conducted an oversight visit to the area and met with the contractors to find a solution to the problem.

Mlamleli said some of the houses were built by different contractors who either abandoned them after completing the foundation while other structures were left without roofs. "The houses were supposed to be completed in November."

Brandfort resident Lerato Tlala is one of the many people who are affected by the housing problem. The housing department employed contractors to build her family's house but they only completed the foundation.

Now, this family of eight has to share a corrugated iron shack at the back of the property which once held the promise of a proper house.

The Weekly

“They began building the foundation last year around March and then stopped. I don’t know why they stopped building.”

The house of Johannes Francis on the other hand has a complete structure but does not have windows and a roof.

Francis lives with three other people in the house and is still waiting for the construction to be completed.

“They did not tell us why they stopped building. I just heard rumours saying that contractors were not paid. I’m not even sure if that is the truth.”

Francis mentioned that neither the Department of Human Settlements nor municipality has communicated with them about the problem.

Another resident Mojalefa Kopano said he woke up one morning and found the contractors had left the site where they were building his house.

“The contractors said they were not getting paid and so stopped coming to build the house.”

Kopano does not know the construction company that build his house and cannot speak to anyone about the problem.

“They began building my house last year and left it like that. It does not have windows and a roof. We have also found those houses that were built with red bricks, others with the grey stone and the prices of the houses differ in value.”



Seeking decisive intervention ... Community members calls on the provincial government to speedily intervene.

Mlamlleli said there was a good chance of some of the houses collapsing because they are built with low quality bricks.

“Some of the community members concerned about the problem told us that they entered into private negotiations with contractors to plaster their houses. This is to make sure that the houses do not collapse.”

The Weekly

She was miffed about the inconsistent service rendered by contractors to different home owners. According to Mlamleli, the contractors' actions have a potential to spark protests by community members who feel they have been short-changed.

She bemoaned the fact that the community was only involved by the municipality in the initial stages of construction and not during the implementation phase.

“Some of the houses were unoccupied by the people and we do not even know whether the people are still living in Brandfort or not.”

She rubbished suggestions by contractors that they did not have adequate building material insisting that it has been provided by government. She found material belonging to contractors unused near the stadium, right opposite the house that ANC stalwart Winnie Madikizela Mandela used to occupy during her exile. The house was recently declared a heritage and still needs renovation.

“What hurt us the most is that the house of Winnie Madikizela, the woman who fought for our liberation, the mother of all South Africans, was in a horrible condition. It was dirty, no construction had begun and the house is still in the condition it was when we left it.”

The committee will investigate allegations by contractors that there was a lack of timeous payment to enable them to pay their staff.

One of the construction owners building houses in Brandfort, Zigama Mbele, said that some of the houses were incomplete because the department was unable to pay them. He said that most construction companies are waiting for the next financial year to continue with their work. Mbele could however not explain why some companies ran out of money and others managed to complete the houses. He refused to comment further on the matter.

Mlamleli, however, insisted that the construction companies that failed to complete the project will be investigated.

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