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Public Works deputy minister touch base...

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The national department of Public Works has today announced it would help repair at least three of the 10 bridges in the rural villages of Madibeng Local Municipality, North West, damaged and washed away by floods during heavy rains towards the end of last year.

Public Works deputy minister, Hendrietta Bogopane Zulu, committed during her two-day visit to Mafikeng that the project to built community bridges in partnership with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) would be rolled out immediately after the provincial has identified the worst affected locations.

It is expected that villages of Madidi and Hebron near Mabopane would top the list after the bridges swept away by heavy floods made impossible for residents, especially pupils from crossing to the other side of their village visually impossible during rainy days.

With regards to the eight other bridges, the prospects of immediate repair continue to look bleak because of lack of funding.

“It is going to be real challenge but we have to look for funding elsewhere to repair some of the bridges because the serious danger they pose to the motoring public.

“Our current budget for roads is overstretched already and we still have a massive backlog of road maintenance to do,” said provincial MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport, Mahlakeng Mahlakeng.

The “500 Orange Brigade”, the local Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) job creation initiative by the provincial department to help rid Mafikeng streets of the filth is set to get a short in the arm in an additional 400 beneficiaries.

Impressed by Mafikeng Revitalization concept using labour intensive methods, Bogopane Zulu said over and above the additional recruits her department would also consider launching a “Food For Waste” project in Mafikeng.

This she said would encourage residents not to dump litter and refuse but rather to collect their own household waste at appropriate centres in exchange for food. The project is said to have succeeded in Northern Cape.

*Meanwhile, "illegal" occupation of state properties, delayed payments, alleged tender rigging and disempowerment of local property owners and developers took centre stage during a separate meetings between stakeholders and Bogopane-Zulu.

She was adamant that there was no legal recourse for culprits who lay claim to "what does not belong to them" in spite continued to defiance by such tenants of orders to vacate state properties.

Likening as "fraud" the illegal occupation of state property, Bogopane-Zulu also expressed concern at the failure by provincial department of Public Works, Roads and Transport to "act firmly against culprits".

It is estimated that about a third of public servants in Mafikeng occupy state houses and apartments illegally while many other properties are understood to have fallen into private hands over the years under the watch of provincial department of Public Works.

Of serious concern, is that most properties are neither recorded nor even traceable in the asset register of the provincial department.

"It does not make sense for any individual to illegally occupancy a state house and when threatened with eviction, 'suddenly challenge' us to look for alternative accommodation on his behalf," she said.

Bogopane-Zulu said government would only be obliged to seek alternative accommodation for established communities on a portion of land, in an event a decision is taken to locate them elsewhere

"We have considered such cases before when a squatter areas developed on land earmarked for a particular purpose, or a portion of land occupied is considered not suitable for residential purposes," she said.

Mahlakeng's thread of a mass eviction of illegal tenants from state houses in Mafikeng was put on hold year last on advice from his internal legal advisors.

He told Bogopane-Zulu that he was informed alternative accommodation for the culprits ought to be sought first before culprits could be evicted.

"I have always shared the views expressed by the Deputy Ministers on this particular matter and I am now seriously considering moving ahead with the plan to evict, starting here is Mafikeng.

This is very serious. I am aware of one of our houses converted into a guest house which I find very strange indeed," he said.

Bogopane-Zulu also hinted that legislation was on the cards to put a moratorium on the disposal of state houses including land.

"We are aware of some people who took advantage of the transition in 1994 who took

and now claim ownership of properties and land which belonged to the former homelands ,” she said.

Bogopane Zulu said government was in the process of finalising plans to reclaim such properties and that members of the community would also be asked to “blow the whistle” on such culprits once all the systems have been put in place.

She said government was in the process of making amendments to some of the CIDB requirements criteria stifling the prospects of emerging contractors

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