



## agriculture & rural development

Department:  
Agriculture and Rural Development  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

The Mercury (page 5)  
20/06/19

# Farm families evicted to make way for mines

Lindile Sifile

WHILE the mineral resources ministry has released a draft charter to address disparities in the industry, farming communities in KwaZulu-Natal are facing evictions with some houses being demolished to make way for mines.

Thousands of families from about 22 farms around Danhauser, near Newcastle, are to be relocated with at least three families already having had their houses demolished and their gravesites tampered with. This while the community is trying to come to an agreement with Ikwezi Coal Mine about their future in the area.

Ikwezi, which was granted mining rights in 2012, has had to put a hold on its operations pending the finalisation of the relocations.

Meanwhile, Njabulo Hadebe's family of eight were forced to find refuge with other relatives after their home was flattened by a bulldozer in March. This contradicts the draft mining charter recently prepared by the mineral resource ministry and which is open for public comment until July 27.

## Exhumation

Hadebe's voice shakes in anger as he points out the rubble that is the remains of his home of 28 years. Two of his neighbours suffered the same fate and the area is being cordoned off. Notices of exhumation have been nailed to dozens of the community's graves awaiting relocation.

Ikwezi apparently bought the farm without the dwellers' knowledge.

"My family never agreed to move because this has been our home since 1968 and we have ancestors buried here. One day they (police, sheriff, Red Ants and a bulldozer) came to flatten the house. They even assaulted my grandmother. My eight family members are now scattered all over for shelter," said Hadebe, 28, of Kliprand.

Three other families were removed in September after they accepted the houses the company gave them.

A court battle is also brewing in

Empangeni, some 300km away from Newcastle, where eight villages, from Fuleni and Somkhele, are taking a mine to court in August for the damage to their properties allegedly caused by blasting, said Billy Mnqondo from Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation.

The villages are located about 10km from the mining operations.

The community of Kliprand held its meeting on Saturday where they elected a forum to represent it in talks with the mining company. They demand to be compensated for damages to their properties before relocation negotiations start.

Ikwezi general manager Duan de Villiers did not want to comment on Monday. He asked for questions to be sent to his Johannesburg office before an interview could be scheduled.

Community activist Lucky Tshabalala said they felt let down by the government after the eviction order of three families was granted by the Pietermaritzburg High Court.

"We are not saying we are against mining. We just want the proper procedures to be followed and that begins with consultation with the hosting communities. In our case there was no consultation. We just saw people's houses being demolished," said Tshabalala.

Oxfam, an advocacy group, has been providing the mining-affected communities around Newcastle with legal advice. The organisation's Thembinkosi Dlamini said it was key to take on the Newcastle cases as these were synonymous with issues faced by hosting communities in rural areas around the country.

"With the coming of mining, a lease or outright sale of the land would be concluded between the farm-owner and the mining company without taking into account the perpetual rights of the farm dwellers.

"The new owners quickly declares them unlawful occupiers and moves to forcefully evict them from the land.

"This off course is illegal, but labour tenants are mostly poor people and largely uneducated to take this fight to the court with a great prospect of success," said Dlamini.