

Empty promises for the Cloverdene community

The Cloverdene community, which comprises of more 100 people including women and children, were excited at the news of the allocation of land but their joy was short-lived when they became aware that their new homes will be shacks. Their new homes were built unashamedly by the 'red-ants' using corrugated iron of destroyed shacks.

The leader of the Cloverdene community, Willie Madalane explains: "Our lawyer had informed us that when we move to our land we would have access to basic amenities such as tap of water and toilet for every family. However, a day before we moved in, the office of Housing in municipality told us that there was a land that has been identified in Gabon (Daveyton). We were told that we will occupy that land temporarily. When we arrived there on Saturday, we found the 'red-ants' building shacks with old rusted corrugated irons that were used for shacks".

According to Madalane their lawyer also told them that the Ekurhuleni municipality would built them two bedroom shelters, but they found out that it was not so when they moved it. "Most of the shacks are one room, you are lucky if you have two rooms. The shacks do not even have windows, it's like they were built for pigs to stay. After we moved in to the new land, we went a month without sanitation. We were then installed only five toilets to cater for more than 100 of us. Having access to water is still a problem to this day; we walk about a kilometre to get it. We tried to install water taps ourselves but the plumber demanded at least R350 from every house, which is an option even more expensive for the poor like us," Madalane remarked.

It appears that the Ekurhuleni municipality officials have just dumped the community in their new land and only to abandon them. A member of the community says that the official who was co-ordinating their relocation can't even recognise the leader of the community nor remember that he ever handle their case. No wonder there is sluggishness which results in the municipality not being able to fulfil its promises. Another challenge for the community is that the relocation affected their children who attend school. After the relocation to Daveyton, most of the kids still had to continue attending school in Cloverdene because there were no prior arrangements made to accommodate them in Daveyton schools. Some kids had to drop from school because their parents (mostly single moms) cannot afford to pay R400 transport cost for their kids to continue attending school in Cloverdene. Therefore, the community feels that the municipality did not take into account their rights to be compensated when they moved them away from work stations and schools. Meanwhile, there is restlessness amongst members of the community because they are not even registered as legitimate occupants of their new land. They feel that anyone could come and claim the land from them since the municipality have refused to give them documentation as proof of their legitimacy to stay in their allocated land.

The Cloverdene community who once lived in the open veld near Albert Luthuli Extension 5, Benoni, have chosen to fight their struggle differently. They don't intend going on the rampage blockading streets and burning tyres to get the attention of the authorities at Ekurhuleni municipality. Instead they say they will remain loyal to their cause and keep on engaging their municipal authorities whilst at the same time praying to God with the churches as they demand their rights. The leader of the community adds: "This struggle is so personal to me; I could liken it to a calling or a ministry. I qualified for an RDP house long time ago, but I choose to deny myself all the privileges until that same RDP offer is afforded equally to all my community members that are in the same struggle with me". The Cloverdene community have approached ESSET to continue to mobilise support for them especially amongst the church fraternity. The community is intending to seek an audience with relevant authorities at Ekurhuleni municipality to ensure that their demands are listened to and addressed.

ESSET and few churches have been walking along with the Cloverdene community in their fight for justice against their eviction and confiscation of their possessions. After hearing about the plight of the community, ESSET mobilised the churches and organised a prayer service for them. The community was supported by ESSET and the church as the community took the Ekurhuleni municipality to court, in a case which the community won. Churches that have been involved in the struggle of the community included; *the Methodist Church in Southern Africa, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, the Gauteng Council of Churches, United Congregational Church in Southern Africa, Lutheran Church of Southern Africa, Outreach Community Church, Ekurhuleni Ministers Fraternal.*