

Village services are just as bad

 By [Paddy Hartdegen](#)

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When it comes to service delivery there are many news reports of protesting residents lining the roads, setting fire to tyres, throwing stones at passing vehicles, looting shops and stoning police vehicles.

Many of these protests end in tragedy as happened with Andries Tatane who was shot and killed by police during a protest at Ficksburg in the Free State.

Protestors are generally portrayed as rampaging, unemployed hooligans with nothing better to do than make trouble.

But there are other strange stories around this beautiful country of ours - stories that are enough to leave you shaking your head in disbelief.

20 years of pleading for water

Take, for instance, the story of the people of Mountain View outside Tzaneen in Limpopo. For more than 20 years they have been pleading with their ward councillors and the Tzaneen municipality to send them a water truck every week or so because they have no water nearby.

They have pleaded with the council for a communal tap, but that just hasn't happened. Finally, for a few months last year, water trucks arrived at Mountain View village and the residents cheered up thinking finally, a solution had been found.

But a couple of months later the trucks stop coming, so it was back to square one for the villagers. Meanwhile, across the main road from the village, hidden behind a large thicket of indigenous bushes, there is a broken pipe that pumps water into the hills all day. For many years the pipe has been broken and leaking and during that time the villagers have just helped themselves to whatever water they can. They troop down to the pipe and fill 25-litre containers to keep them going.

Some of the women, such as Joyce Matita, says that she heads for the broken pipe at about 3.30 in the morning (mainly to beat the queue), because the water flows so slowly it takes at least half-an-hour to fill one container.

She says that some women take lunch-boxes with them for the day because they know they will be there for hours. Matita says she is very scared of going into the bushes early in the morning or in the evening because many women have been raped there. She says others have been murdered or badly beaten as well.

She says that it can take up to three days to fill 30 of the 25-litre containers. The Tzaneen municipality says that it does not

have a responsibility to supply water to the residents of the village and the municipal spokesman, Neville Ndlala referred all media enquiries to the Mopani District Municipality.

Naming and shaming

Meanwhile residents in North West have their own set of problems. The road between Koster and Lichtenburg in the North West province was supposed to have been upgraded more than four years ago but it still has not been repaired because the contractors allegedly keep fleecing the North West's Department of Public Works.

The problems started when a company called Kaulani Civils was awarded a R208-million contract to rehabilitate the road. But the work was allegedly badly done, so Kaulani Civils was kicked off the job and the Public Works Department then appointed Down Touch to do the work. That was apparently not the right solution either because the contract with Down Touch was cancelled for some reason or another. Down Touch and the Department eventually reached an out-of-court settlement and Down Touch walked away with R27-million.

Then, earlier this year, Tau Pele Construction was awarded a R72-million contract to finally complete the upgrade. So the original contract value of R208-million has now escalated to at least R300-million, and the work is still not done and it won't be until at least February or March next year.

It's not just small provinces that are suffering at the hands of errant contractors. This week, the eThekweni Council decided to cancel contracts worth R55-million because of shoddy workmanship or a failure to complete the work that had to be done.

Now the eThekweni municipality is considering naming and shaming the contractors for their non-performance, which eThekweni says is contributing to the serious service delivery backlogs in the region.

A list of errant contractors was presented to the finance and procurement committee recently and it listed some of the problems:

- Umkhumbi Plant Hire and Civils was awarded a R6,3-million contract for freeway maintenance on Newlands East and Newlands West Drive, Mandela Road and Phoenix highway. However, the report says the company failed to do the work properly and abandoned the sites even though it had been paid in full.
- Another contract with Shikani Trading was to upgrade roads in KwaMakhutha worth R5,5-million. The job started and was progressing reasonably well when things suddenly started slowing down and on inspection it was clear the work had been done haphazardly, adjacent properties had been damaged along with the municipal infrastructure below ground level. Shikani abandoned the site but this did not stop that company from being awarded another contract worth R2-million to upgrade gravel roads at Folweni or a further R3,5-million contract for upgrades to Thasoso, Mvunge and Mkhandeni roads also in Folweni. Yet again, Shikani failed to complete the work and then informed the roads department that it was withdrawing from its obligations because it did not have any money left and penalties were being imposed.

Clearly there is a lot more behind the countrywide lack of service delivery and most of all it shows that taxpayers are being fleeced while municipal officials make promises that "it will be better soon".

If it's not better after 19 years, what makes anyone think it "will all get better soon" as public officials keep telling us?

ABOUT PADDY HARTDEGEN

Paddy Hartdegen has been working as a journalist and writer for the past 40 years since his first article was published in the *Sunday Tribune* when he was just 16-years-old. He has written 13 books, edited a plethora of business-to-business publications and written for most of the major newspapers in South Africa.
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