

# Hundreds of men, women and children eat, sleep and scavenge at this KZN landfill

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Every day, thousands scavenge at the New England landfill site in Pietermaritzburg, with some even choosing to live on the dump. Picture: Bongani Mbatha African News Agency (ANA)

Durban - Poverty and unemployment in Pietermaritzburg has led to a dramatic increase in the number of locals and foreigners who have made the Msunduzi Municipality's dump site their home.

The New England Road landfill site has hundreds of people - including infants and children - living in makeshift plastic shelters on the site.

They spend their days scavenging for food, and looking for cardboard and other material to sell. According to the waste pickers, they chose to live on or near the landfill because of exorbitant transport costs. The number of people living on or near the site had increased year on year, said groundWork's waste campaign manager Musa Chamane.

About 3000 people work at the landfill site, while hundreds live on it.

Chamane said groundWork had spoken to the municipality about the dangers waste pickers were exposed to.

"The best way of managing waste is to have a Materials Recovery Facility, where waste pickers work to recover and sort recyclable materials, rather than them working on the dump site," he said.

Chamane said that in 2007 when groundWork started, there were about 120 people living along the river, next to the dump, but the numbers had increased over the years.

“At the beginning, in 2007, there were mainly South Africans living there. Now there are more foreign nationals, mainly from Lesotho, living near the dump. They are a divided community, constantly fighting because of language and tribalism,” he said.



*Picture: Bongani Mbatha African News Agency (ANA)*

He said the competition among those who lived there and collected waste was also fierce.

Chamane said there were also locals who chose to live on or near the dump, as their homes were too far from the city centre, adding that pleas for them to move had fallen on deaf ears.

Ward councillor Sandile Dlamini described the situation as “desperate”.

“I have lost count of how many times I have reported the problem and no one is addressing the issue.

“I estimate that there must be 1000 people there daily. Only about 200 of those go home each night. About 800 remain overnight on the dump or very close to it,” said Dlamini.

The Mercury visited the site recently and found several small, makeshift shelters, in which people were living.

There were also shacks that stood much taller, made of wood and plastic.

Just outside the landfill site, others have built shacks on the banks of the Msundusi River that runs through the area. Young men were seen sitting near the entrance to the site, waiting for the trucks that off-load waste.

They jump up on to the trucks as they drive in, without waiting for them to stop, and start searching for “valuables”. It’s a dangerous scramble, as they often get injured during the stampede.



Picture: Bongani Mbatha African News Agency (ANA)

“I am one of the hundreds of people that live here,” said a man, who declined to be named. He said he was originally from the Swayimane (Wartburg) area and moved to the site more than a year ago.

“I collect waste, but I did not have the R22 needed to travel daily, so I decided to stay here and only go back home when I have made enough money.

“Many people are also facing the same situation and have either moved into the landfill or are building shacks just outside the dump.

“There are small children. I’ve seen some in school uniforms and infants in their mother’s arms. There is everything inside, there is even a tavern,” he said. Another man, dressed in clean clothes, said he lived in Imbali township, outside Pietermaritzburg and only came to the landfill when he has transport money.

“I only come here to look for things to sell and for food that has been thrown away so I can feed my children,” he said.

A community member from Sobantu township said they were concerned about the situation, especially about the people who choose to build their shacks at the banks of the Msundusi River.

“They are likely to be washed away if the river gets flooded.

“Another problem is the drinking and fights. Regularly, we see police vehicles rushing over there.”

**The Mercury**