

THE NEW AGE

TURNING HOSTELS INTO HOMES



Getrude Makhafola

Harmony Gold and the Department of Corporative Governance and Traditional Affairs have struck a deal to tackle housing problems in the province. Under the terms of the deal, abandoned mine hostels at Harmony-owned mines will be converted to family units and rented out.

The project is being piloted in Welkom, where Harmony Gold's Masimong Mine has been closed down. The empty, formerly men-only hostels are being revamped and turned into one, two or three-bedroom family apartments.

The six blocks of apartments have 486 units in total. Each block has 75 units. A supermarket, bank, post office and a business centre will soon be established on the premises for the tenants' day-to-day needs. A taxi rank is also in the pipeline.

The mayor of Matjhabeng municipality, Sebenzile Ngangelizwe, said the municipality saw fit to use existing infrastructure and approached the mine owners through the department. "When mines close down like this one, hostels are vandalised and people steal materials to build shacks. We thought these structures could be used profitably and ease the housing challenges facing us," he said.

Ngangelizwe said such projects would also help prevent shantytowns from flourishing next to abandoned mine hostels.

Mamosa Machite is proud to have a place of her own, albeit as a rent-paying tenant. "I couldn't afford to buy a house or rent one in town. I applied for an RDP house two years ago but it's usually a long wait. I was told about these projects by an official at Matjhabeng municipality and applied. I am so proud to finally have my own place," she said.

The 29-year-old mother of one pays R700 a month for her two-bedroom apartment. Machite had been staying at her parents' house in the nearby Thabong township.

Another tenant, Lucas Malejwane, pays R1200 for his three-bedroom apartment. Malejwane said he would be able to live with her two children, who live with his mother. "This is beautiful, kind of a dream come true. I have a place my children will call their home," he said.

Co-operative governance and traditional affairs MEC Oilly Mlamleli handed over house keys to new owners on Thursday. She used the occasion to promote the culture of paying for

services. "People must learn to pay. The apartments have prepaid cards for electricity and water separately which can be topped up at the office next to the units. If you do not pay you do not get services," she said.

Mlamleli said the project will be entered into the national housing awards next year. "The housing backlog is huge in this province and many mines have been closed down, especially in this area. This project has seen 12 local small companies being involved in the revamping of the hostel, creating 3000 jobs for locals."

The department had invested a "significant" amount of money in the project and wanted to see more people who could afford low-cost housing benefiting, Mlamleli said.

[Source: <http://www.thenewage.co.za/mobi/Detail.aspx?NewsID=49148&CatID=1018>]