

Slowly slumping into squalor

JANINE MOODLEY

THE Sea Cow Lake and Kenville areas have become shadows of their former selves.

The suburbs have nine informal settlement communities and about 10 000 formal residents.

The general decay is evident. It has also experienced its fair share of protests, xenophobic attacks and illegal electricity connections.

Some residents have said it was once likened to the more plush suburbs of Durban North and Westville.

When the POST visited recently, mounds of rubbish were strewn on several pavements and taxis blocked the roads as they were being washed.

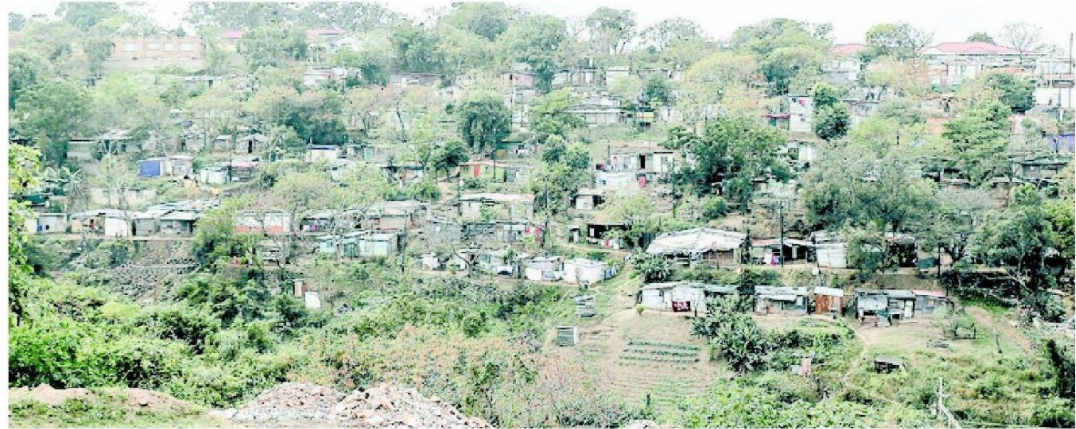
A man urinated in public, unmoved that others were on the road.

Resident Ashok Saikoolal said despite the litter and decay, many of the residents refused to leave the area.

"I feel heartsore to see how these areas have transformed over the years. Informal dwellers have occupied the D'Moss area, between the northern sewer works and Gumtree Road.

"This was a roosting area for numerous species of birds and the conservancy was also home to varying plants and animals, notably the mongoose and a large troop of vervet monkeys.

"It is disturbing that prime environ-



SHACKS in the Sea Cow Lake area. | Leon Lestrade African News Agency (ANA)

mental land is being stripped of most of its beautiful and indigenous trees and shrubs as shacks are appearing at an alarming rate, but what can one do? Regardless of what has happened, this is a place we love. Relocating is not an option."

It is believed the first group of informal dwellers invaded the conservancy about 20 years ago.

A fellow long-time resident, who declined to be named because he had been attacked in the area at gunpoint, said he tried to sell his home, but no one wanted to buy it.

He said makeshift homes were built in front of his home and his power supply had been interrupted on numerous occasions due to illegal connections.

"We hardly get visitors. No one wants to come here as garbage is thrown all over the place and the roads are in a pathetic condition.

"Added to that, we are often left without electricity because the connections are tampered with. The city needs to pull its socks up and provide people

with housing."

Ward councillor Bobby Maharajh said an overhaul of the areas would be a slow process that required "out-of-the-box" thinking.

"Yes, it will cost a packet, but money needs to be invested to uplift our communities."

Rico Euripidou, an environmentalist at groundWork, said litter and waste, both material and bio-human, was an indicator of a systemic failure to address serious environmental and service delivery issues.

"Not surprisingly, poor and peri-industrial areas seem to suffer the highest burden and are often the most impacted. Poor waste management – ranging from non-existent collection systems to ineffective disposal – is likely to cause air pollution, and water and soil contamination."

Dangerous substances from degrading waste, added Euripidou, placed a further strain on the health of urban dwellers and the environment.

The city had not commented at the time of publication.