

MEDIA STATEMENT

For immediate release

Friday, 24 March 2023

SALGA calls for adoption of emergency pre-emptive and risk-reduction measures following Port St Johns heavy downpours and flooding

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has noted with concern the heavy downpours that have left Port St Johns and surrounding areas in the Eastern Cape in a tale of destruction and is calling for the country to adopt emergency pre-emptive and risk-reduction measures to deal with heavy floods and effects of climate change.

The torrential rains saw cars being swept away, the destruction of infrastructure, houses, recreational facilities and businesses. The South African Weather Services (SAWS) has issued an Orange Level 6 Warning of disruptive rain expected in the Port St Johns, Nyandeni and Ngquzani areas in the Eastern Cape.

The Port St Johns heavy rainfall and floods takes places against the backdrop of a active national state of disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act of 2002 to coordinate response on the recent floods which engulfed Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Northern Cape, and North West early this year.

SALGA believes that government needs to relook the fundamental issues gripping the country's disaster management which have a potential of rendering it ineffective. Disaster response requires urgent and well-coordinated action by national, provincial and local government. Currently, the country is not geared to take mitigative measures to avoid huge loss of life and damage to infrastructure upon receiving warnings about potential disasters. It is not enough to inform the communities to be alert about potential disasters. There is an urgent need to put measures in place to protect infrastructure, e.g. establishing embankments, flood protection berms, hydrological settings etc.

While SALGA acknowledges the efforts of the National Joint Flooding Coordinating Committee (NJFCC) led by the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), Provincial Disaster Management Centres (PDMCs) to bring all the sector departments and parastatals to support municipalities affected by floods, SALGA notes with great concern the challenges faced by municipalities to respond rapidly to the state of emergency and disasters due to lack of capacity, resources and severe limitations of risk reduction strategies to strengthen disaster preparedness measures.

As the reality imposed by climate change rears its ugly head, SALGA believes that disaster management funding arrangements must be overhauled and be geared towards supporting municipalities to implement measures to prevent and mitigate potential heavy rains accompanying. This should include capacitating municipalities to implement emergency pre-emptive and risk-reduction measures.

SALGA further for communities to work closely with relevant authorities to ensure everyone's safety and for sector departments, partners, civil society and private sector to work in partnership with municipalities towards improving interventions to enhance disaster risk prevention and response actions.

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