

Recurring extreme climate events in KwaZulu-Natal and other parts of the country signal an urgent overhaul of South Africa's Disaster Management System

As South Africa braces for severe weather conditions in KwaZulu-Natal, North-West, Mpumalanga, the Free State, and other regions in the coming days, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) is calling on municipalities, provincial and national disaster risk management stakeholders to heighten preparedness and response efforts.

This urgent call comes as communities continue to grapple with the devastating aftermath of recent floods and mudslides, which have left hundreds displaced and 29 people dead. These recurring extreme weather events-floods, wildfires, hailstorms, droughts, and tornadoes are no longer isolated incidents but an alarming trend, demanding a proactive and well-coordinated disaster response system.

The Crisis in South Africa's Disaster Management System

The recent disasters in KwaZulu-Natal and other parts of the country have exposed critical weaknesses in South Africa's Disaster Management System, including:

- **Inadequate funding** for municipalities to implement disaster risk reduction initiatives.
- **Poor coordination and communication** among local, provincial, and national stakeholders.
- **Limited community involvement** in disaster preparedness efforts.
- **Outdated forecasting models** that hinder early warning systems.
- **Insufficient monitoring and response capabilities**, leaving municipalities overwhelmed.

Recognizing these challenges, SALGA hosted the Local Government Disaster Management Indaba last month in Ekurhuleni, bringing together disaster management professionals and key sector stakeholders. A unanimous consensus was reached: South Africa urgently needs a fundamental restructuring of its Disaster Management System.

A Call for a Proactive Approach to Disaster Management

Currently, municipalities lack the financial and human resources required to effectively mitigate and respond to disasters. This is further exacerbated by fragmented coordination between municipal, provincial, and national disaster management teams. As extreme weather events increase in frequency and intensity, the country must shift from a reactive to a proactive disaster management model.

To address these challenges, SALGA is strengthening its support for under-resourced municipalities through targeted capacity-building programs and strategic advocacy. The organization remains committed to mobilizing all relevant stakeholders to ensure a more coordinated, well-resourced, and effective disaster response framework.

SALGA's Call to Action: Strengthening Readiness & Community Vigilance

In response to the growing threats posed by climate-related disasters, SALGA will convene both national and provincial Emergency Services and Disaster Management Working Groups on Wednesday, 12 March 2025. These meetings will focus on action plans and the state of readiness of municipalities to ensure they are equipped to handle impending extreme weather conditions.

Additionally, SALGA urges communities to remain vigilant and to heed official weather alerts and disaster warnings issued by authorities. Community awareness and preparedness play a crucial role in minimizing loss of life and damage to property.

Cllr. Mluleki Nkosi, Chairperson of SALGA's Emergency Services and Disaster Management Working Group, emphasizes the urgent need for systemic reform:

"Our current disaster management system is reactionary; we respond to disasters only after they occur. We must urgently transition to a proactive model that mitigates the impact of disasters through preparation, risk reduction, and early response mechanisms."

While SALGA extends its deepest sympathies to the individuals and families affected by the recent floods, we urge Municipal Disaster Management Teams and all relevant stakeholders to expedite ongoing relief efforts to safeguard lives and livelihoods. Additionally, all municipalities must remain on high alert and proactively prepare for the extreme weather expected to impact various parts of the country in the coming days and weeks.

"The time for action is now. South Africa cannot afford to continue reacting to disasters—it must build a resilient, well-coordinated, and future-ready disaster management system that safeguards communities before disaster strikes," says Cllr Nkosi

Ends.

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For media inquiries:

Tebogo Mosala | Email: tmosala@salga.org.za | Mobile: 084 666 7699