**Poor government interventions worsening already devastating impact of KwaZulu-Natal floods**

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**Democratic Alliance KwaZulu-Natal**

**Introduction:**

It has been more than a month since the disastrous KwaZulu-Natal floods which cost the province lives, homes and left the public and private sector with a R25 billion infrastructure bill.

Once the full picture of the devastation emerged, it quickly became apparent that the Provincial Government and eThekwini Municipality were not capable of dealing with the disaster.

Every day since then, the Democratic Alliance in eThekwini, the province and parliament, has fought to get answers for residents and affected communities, and to ensure that government follows through on its promises.

Regrettably, it is increasingly clear, with every day, that there is little coordination when it comes to government efforts to provide aid. Instead, officials and politicians are at war with each other. KZN Premier, Sihle Zikalala and eThekwini Mayor, Mxolisi Kaunda are missing in action and KZN’s communities are becoming restless.

Moving forward, it is critical that government has a concrete intervention plan and that the people of KZN are not left to suffer any further while their human rights are violated.

Below is the DA’s status report of what has or has not been done by the three spheres of government when it comes to the crisis facing our province.

**The real state of KZN:**

**Finance:**

Despite an assurance from President Cyril Ramaphosa - that National Government would contribute R1 billion from its contingency reserve in National Disaster Relief Funding to a flood-ravaged KZN - the province will not receive any money and will instead have to reprioritise its already tight budget to cover the amount.

KZN’s Finance MEC, Ravi Pillay, has also confirmed that the provincial government will have to re-prioritise its budget to find the R1 billion over the MTEF, over the next three years, in order to deal with the damage. The effect on KZN’s people when it comes to service delivery will be enormous.

Why did national government declare a state of disaster if it is not prepared to release disaster funds?

**CoGTA**

***Water infrastructure***

On the 11th of May 2022, KZN COGTA MEC, Sipho Hlomuka addressed the media advising that most water resources (rivers) in eThekwini had been found to have significantly high percentages of water contaminants (mainly E.Coli from faeces) due to raw sewer spillages. This as a result of infrastructure damage to water treatment works.

Umgeni Water also confirmed that two aqueducts, which supply raw water into the Durban water treatment plant, had been damaged. This meant the supply into the city had to decrease to avoid a shortage.

At the same time, Hlomuka tried to do damage control by saying that despite this, supply had been slowly restored in most regions around the City. The inner West Region has improved from 30% to 85%. Outer West Region, from 45% to 70%. The Central Region, from 45% to 80%. The southern region, from 15% to 80% and the northern region, from 40% to 45%. Essentially, there are still a large number of people in KZN who do not have water.

**Five months before water is fully restored:**

In a recent media interview, eThekwini Deputy Mayor, Philani Mavundla detailed the challenges, saying that damage to the waterworks infrastructure in the oThongathi area alone, could take up to five months to address and to restore the tap water supply. Currently, water is supplied to the community via tankers, which is irregular at best and unsustainable going forward.

He also stated that while plans were in place to supply water to areas such as uMlazi, the whole of Durban is facing a serious water challenge. This is aggravated by Umgeni Water infrastructure also being damaged, exacerbating water shortages.

Umgeni Water has also been vague and evasive in providing answers as to the true nature of the damage, the costs and when water will be restored.

The Deputy Mayor has stated that it is impossible to estimate the cost of the damage to water infrastructure at the moment.

**The economy:**

KZN’s already fragile economy has not escaped the wrath of the floods, with the majority of the 1 152 businesses situated in eThekwini’s floodplain severely affected. With industry and business damaged and forced into closure, eThekwini has projected estimated losses of R737million to the GDP since 14 April 2022.

According to PWC’s analysis, business disruptions will add additional pressure to elevated consumer and producer price inflation.  Manufacturing and transport combined account for 45% of eThekwini’s economy and 30% of the provincial economy. These are the two sectors that will feel the biggest negative impact on activity in the short- to medium-term.

**Infrastructure damage:**

According to preliminary data from eThekwini, the sectors affected most are manufacturing with estimated damages of R431million, agriculture with R12.6m, construction with R18m, wholesale and retail at R46million and warehousing and logistics at R33million.

According to the eThekwini Mayor, the municipality is currently engaging the Provincial and National Government on support for affected businesses, including SMMEs. Yet, to date, there have been no concrete proposals made by any sphere of government, leaving businesses unable to plan when and how to rebuild.

Some of the biggest GDP contributors in the country, including South African Breweries, have suffered damages amounting to hundreds of millions of Rands. The country's biggest beer maker, SAB, has stated that repairs will cost around R700-million.

According to Business Day, Toyota SA Motors (TSAM) will scrap the vehicles that were flood-damaged at its Prospecton factory south of Durban. The number of vehicles is believed to be around 4 000.

There is a very real concern that businesses may start to look elsewhere due to the current situation in eThekwini and the province.

**Human settlements:**

Nearly 14 000 homes were destroyed and more than 40 000 people displaced during the floods. The provincial department has had to reprioritise its 2022/23 budget to the tune of R500 million in order to make up for the non-provision of national government assistance.

While there remains the issue of massive housing backlogs in the province, those displaced during the floods are also a priority. The Premier promised to build emergency houses for these victims yet people in areas such as Yellowwood Park and Reservoir Hills are still living in community halls while waiting for temporary accommodation.

Meanwhile, in eThekwini many are still waiting for someone to assess the damage to their homes. The municipality is expecting Councillors to do this which they are simply not equipped to do.

Officials have also confirmed that the national department is unable to provide KZN with additional relief funds from unspent entity budgets, as previously indicated by the Minister. This is because the department must first await its audited financial statements of the previous financial year which will only be available in September.

The bottom line is that poor communication between officials of national treasury and the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government has resulted in KZN failing to access disaster funds on time.

**Education:**

The Provincial Department of Education reported that about 72 schools in KZN remained inaccessible for both pupils and teachers. It also said that about 630 schools were affected by the disaster with 124 being seriously damaged.

KZN Education MEC, Kwazi Mshengu has said preliminary figures indicate that about R442 million would be needed to fix the affected schools and replace the damaged educational supplies as well as equipment, but that the amount could still increase.

While there has already been a provincial legislature oversight programme, with inspections of affected areas, this has not been sufficient or specific enough when it comes to education. There are some 1 050 schools in eThekwini alone and KZN’s Education portfolio committee needs to schedule oversight visits to - at the very least – those that are worst affected.

The committee also needs to visit schools that are housing displaced citizens to see what is happening with regards to getting teaching and learning going again.

There are claims that at least 100 schools are being used for shelter despite COGTA’s feedback during a post-flood briefing that there is only one. This requires urgent clarification by the DoE.

**Health:**

According to KZN Health MEC, Nomagugu Simelane-Zulu, around 85 hospital and clinic facilities in the province were destroyed during the floods with damage estimated at R200million and still climbing.

While the extent of the damage varies, the MEC admitted that there are clinics that cannot function at all and have had to close down. The DoH will not receive any funds from National Treasury and will instead have to reprioritise its own funds.

The effect of this on KZN’s people cannot be under-estimated and is set to have long term consequences for patients needing medical care.

**Transport:**

With R6 billion now needed to rebuild the provinces road infrastructure, and with a budget of R12.4billion – this department will see half of its entire budget redirected to fixing damage caused by the recent floods.

There is a critical imperative for transport links to be repaired urgently, including rail to ensure the free flow of goods. We are already seeing the severe effects of rail disruption between Durban and Johannesburg on the delivery of jet fuel, which is costing international airlines an additional R1.5 million per flight.

Yet there seems to be no plan or timelines on when these roads and railways will be repaired.

**The real state of eThekwini:**

Apart from the floods, eThekwini residents suffered a secondary disaster – the lack of political leadership in the form of an absent Mayor who was unwilling or unable to lead response efforts in the face of disaster. This included a lack of water and electricity in the immediate aftermath of the flood.

The Executive Committee has only met three times since the floods, despite the DA writing to the Mayor requesting that EXCO meet every day to receive a status report from officials. This appeal was ignored. This has left a leadership void in the city over this period.

The response to those communities without water has been dismal. The time taken to reconnect water supplies and the inability of the city to effectively provide auxiliary water services to those affected has been shocking.

Today, more than a month later, many communities are still without water and are no closer to knowing when they will receive it. Tanker schedules are also nonexistent, which have led to protests across the city in recent weeks. Local Councilors are bearing the brunt of this anger as there is no transparency or communication to Wards about the work being done by the municipality.

KZN has received extra tankers from national DWS, COGTA and the army, as well as hiring some of its own – yet still the system is not working.

eThekwini is now facing a sewage crisis which will lead to an outbreak of water borne diseases if not arrested urgently. Numerous waste water mains and treatment works are destroyed and work has not yet started on a single one.

The National Department of Human Settlements has also confirmed that no private sector dwellings, where income is more than R3 500, will be assisted with home repairs or vouchers. This is unacceptable as it excludes the vast majority of homes and is in fact below governments own minimum wage measurement of roughly R3 700. This will have devastating consequences for the uninsured, particularly those that have received government housing.

eThekwini's Communications have also ground to a halt. Call centres and their Whatsapp line are functioning at a fraction of what they should be, leading to growing frustration and anger within communities.

There are 89 venues that are housing displaced people across eThekwini. They have limited food security and in many cases it is unclear where they will go from there. The municipality claims that these people are being fed and cared for but in many cases, they are not.

The question that needs to be asked it: Where is KZN’s disaster control centre located? This still remains a complete mystery.

**National Parliament’s role in the disaster:**

The DA believes that the President was right to intervene and declare a National State of Disaster on 18 April 2022 even if it was a desperate attempt to regain some form of control of the situation. It was also the right move given that the Provincial State of Disaster, gazetted by the Premier on 13 April 2022, had no material effect on coordinating a satisfactory response to the floods.

Equally concerning was the inability of both the South African Police Service (SAPS) and South African National Defense Force (SANDF) to launch immediate arial search and rescue operations. This, apparently due to no operational SAPS helicopters in Durban being available and flood damage having been sustained at 15 Squadron base. The DA is led to believe that SAPS helicopters had to be flown in from Pretoria and the Eastern Cape. This led to a serve delay in the response by rescue personnel, which may have cost lives.

The DA does, however, pay tribute to the incredible effort made by SAPS, SANDF, Metro Police, emergency service providers and ordinary members of the public, many of whom risked their own lives to rescue those trapped by rapidly rising flood waters.

At the outset of the disaster, the DA requested an urgent portfolio committee meeting on 16 April 2022 of both the Parliamentary Committee for Local Government and Traditional Affairs and the Parliamentary Committee for Water and Sanitation. This so that Members of Parliament could engage respective Ministers and officials on the crisis affecting KZN and eThekwini.

While an initial interest was shown by both ANC Chairperson’s, the DA’s requests were subsequently turned down. This was a complete dereliction of duty by both committees.

On 26 April 2022, a Joint Sitting was held in Parliament with the President and KZN’s Premier present, yet there were no concrete proposals put on the table and no direction given. No financial aid commitments were made – apart from the so-called R1 billion mentioned by the President while in KZN the previous week – and no plan of action was tabled. Still today, no actions have come from that Sitting.

**Ad hoc committee:**

Prior to the President’s address, Parliament agreed to a motion by the ANC Chief Whip that an Ad hoc committee comprising of Members of Parliament from the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) be established. This was supported by the DA. However, the first meeting of this committee only took place on Friday, 13 May 2022 – a full month after the disaster and more than two weeks after the joint Sitting. There has been no reasonable explanation for this, other than some feeble excuse around smaller parties not giving a name to the Speaker.

The DA has made it clear to the committee that urgently needs to get out and on the ground and be seen by residents. We are also insistent that the committee sit in eThekwini - and not virtually or in Cape Town. We cannot wait for officials to brief the committee first and then, sometime down the line, start visiting disaster areas, which is what has been suggested.

The mandate of the committee is broad and far reaching and includes;

* Engaging relevant departments and entities to assess the impact of the disaster and relief measures by Government
* Overseeing the response and implementation of Government relief measures and;
* Working with communities to facilitate oversight.

The DA is deeply concerned that, to date, Parliament has done none of this despite spending already taking place and the promise of “real-time audits” by the President.

The DA also believes that it is critical that the committee meets with the Provincial Government and eThekwini Municipality to understand what their plans are to mitigate the disaster given that, to date, any interventions have been entirely unsatisfactory.

As already stated, the DA is deeply concerned by the lack of funding being made available by National Government. A National State of Disaster, should normally see a release of funds from the contingency reserve fund as well as departments.

However, it remains unclear exactly what is being made available - except for the promise by the Deputy President that national government will make up for any shortfall.

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