



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM
AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Reflecting on the April / May 2022 KZN floods - One year later

It is just over a year after the KwaZulu Natal coastal area and surrounding areas were hit by the devastating floods that occurred between April and May 2022. The floods resulted in the loss of lives (443 deaths and at least 48 of those lives still unaccounted for) and livelihoods, damage to critical infrastructure such as roads, schools, and health centers, disruption of services and displacement of people. Research data has shown eThekweni Metro to have been the most severely affected in terms of households destroyed and people affected. Mr Dhesigen Naidoo, a Climate Change Adaptation Lead at the South African Presidential Climate Commission, as well as Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Security Studies have classified the April floods as obvious and violent sign of climate change.

The impact of the April 2022 floods was felt across all functional sectors of the economy, including the natural environment. Detrimental environmental effects included soil and bank erosion, river bed erosion, siltation or landslides. These effects often cause damage to vegetation and pollutants carried by flood waters can impact on water quality, habitats and flora and fauna. The floods compromised the integrity of the natural environment, and the quality of the ecological support functions. The damage to sewage treatment infrastructure led to the closure of most Durban beaches due to concerning levels of E. Coli being present in water. The beaches also experienced high volumes of plastic and other forms of pollutants that had been washed down by rivers.



Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/nBN7XSVndgj4AwrW9>

Response interventions were implemented by government to assist in restoring services and supporting communities that had been severely affected. The response was implemented in a three-phased approach: immediate humanitarian relief, stabilization and recovery, reconstruction and rebuilding. In order to build a climate adaptive and resilient province, KZN EDTEA was tasked with implementing programmes that promote climate change education and awareness, accessible early weather warning information and ecosystem-based adaptation. Climate Change community awareness events have been conducted in a few districts (iLembe, eThekweni, Umgungundlovu) and the Transformative Riverine Management Programme implemented to tackle the issue of waste management and control of invasive alien vegetation in river systems. There are also efforts to mainstream climate change into IDPs and SDFs of municipalities that are supported through the development of Climate Change Response Plans.



Figures 1& 2: Community members from uMzinyathi Area, Ward 108 of eThekweni Municipality, attending a climate change awareness workshop hosted collaboratively by EDTEA, eThekweni Municipality and Ikhayalemvelo Cooperative

The Presidential Climate Commission has emphasized that whilst the province continues to need relief and support from the 2022 floods, it is imperative that medium to short term goals focus on building resilience. Strengthening climate governance in KwaZulu-Natal will help the province to achieve climate resilience through climate smart spatial planning, climate resilient infrastructure, investment in improving the integrity of the ecological infrastructure. Community-based smart and accessible weather early warning education must be rolled out particularly in vulnerable communities such as informal settlements. The early warning education must be supported by a well-developed response system to improve responsiveness during and post disaster.

It is of vital importance that the province uses the lessons learnt from the devastating April / May 2022 floods to build back better given the projected increase in natural disasters (floods, droughts, heat and coastal hazards) associated with the changing climate.

References:

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