

## THE KZN FLOODS: MEETING THE KEY CHALLENGES OF RAPID URBANISATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE – APRIL 2022

Within 3 days, the floods that devastated the coastal region of KwaZulu-Natal over 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> April had caused, at an official count, nearly 12,000 houses to be partially or totally destroyed. At least 440 people, the vast majority of them in the eThekweni metro, lost their lives. The people most severely affected by such severe weather events live in informal settlements and rural areas, with little or no infrastructure and protection from the elements.

Such severe weather events are symptomatic of climate change. We are experiencing erratic cycles of flooding and drought, both of which have devastating consequences on those members of our society who have the least means to provide for their own protection. While our country provides subsidised housing, backlogs continue to grow -



not only for housing. Our towns and cities are economic drivers, and they fuel the rapid urbanisation that has seen informal settlements grow continually in size and numbers. Even after the injection of Covid-19 disaster funds into, most informal settlements lack the most basic standards of water and sanitation.

When disaster strikes, our authorities are reactive. The public perception of disaster management is a supply of emergency food, blankets, and perhaps a tent.

Why is the Department of Human Settlements prioritising disaster relief funding after the event, when these severe weather events are inevitable? The only uncertainty is “when.” Effective disaster management begins with good planning. BESG has undertaken several pilot projects, some of which developed into ongoing programmes, to develop resilience among poor communities and households to severe weather events:

- Our ***Livelihood Security Programme*** responds to the impact of flooding and drought on household water and food insecurity through training in water conservation, harvesting, and recycling; homestead food gardening and nutrition training; and household budgeting.
- Our work on ***Climate Change Adaptation***, which won a Mail and Guardian Greening the Future Award for Social Innovation, develops household and community skills to manage stormwater and strengthen informal dwellings for a fraction of the cost of a subsidised house that they cannot access.
- Our ***Emergency Housing Programme*** has periodically assisted communities in providing support to their most vulnerable members through early identification of households at risk and providing housing solutions before disaster strikes.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for government in responding to disasters in vulnerable communities is an inability to communicate, engage, and navigate community dynamics. Patronage plays a dominant role in the provision of state support in the form of access to basic services and housing. It is the ability of civil society organisations such as BESG to work in the most difficult social terrain that led the National Department of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, to reach out to us to help them during the Covid-19 emergency. While the dominant narrative is of service delivery protest, BESG’s working philosophy that is shared by our community partners is, ***“No development for us, without us.”***

