



Publication: Sowetan - Main
Title: Villagers and pupils stranded as rain floods bridges
Publish date: 10 Feb 2023
Page: 8

Reach: 71797
AVE: R 222806.40
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Villagers and pupils stranded as rain floods bridges

Scores of people, including pupils, were trapped in their villages yesterday morning as the overnight downpour flooded nine bridges connecting them to town.

People from 20 villages around Mpumalanga's Nkomazi municipality were severely affected by heavy rains which started two weeks ago, killing two people, and worsened on Wednesday night. This saw almost 1,000 pupils not being able to cross bridges that would normally link them to various schools in other villages and Malelane town.

Lex Holman, who owns Malelane Super Spar and Inkwazi Mall (in Malelane), said he had to operate his business with 26% of staff as many workers were trapped in their villages.

"Taxis and buses are not operating, hence the town is empty and some businesses are closed as some of the people come from those affected areas.

"We employ about 300 staff and most are from the east side of Malelane, which is your KaMhlushwa, Boschfontein, Schoemansdal, Mzinti and more villages, and those ones could not come to work because of flooded bridges.

"We now have about 80 staff members who are mostly managers and supervisors. We are lucky there have not been huge damage because around midnight we had about 300ml of rain pouring straight for about six to eight hours, something we have never had for about five years and now the rivers have started swelling," said Holman.

Also, bridges connecting villages to Komatipoort and

'700 learners cross a makeshift bridge on a daily basis'

the R571 linking the Lebombo border post and Mozambique and Mananga border to the kingdom of eSwatini were flooded too.

Yesterday, the Nkomazi municipality warned parents in affected areas against sending their children to school.

"It is bad and that is why we [officials] can't even reach some of the communities and we only rely on councillors who send us pictures of the damage caused to infrastructure.

"We are working with community members in moving those living in low-lying areas to high places for now as the rain continues. We are warning the community not to cross the flooded bridges," said municipal spokesperson Cyril Ripinga.

Parents in Khulubuse village in Schoemansdal kept their children at home as their bridge had collapsed.

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People must be cautious and not risk their lives



Pupils cross a rickety makeshift bridge to school in the Nkomazi area

The bridge was built by the community with wood, mud and wires some time ago out of desperation.

Khulubuse resident Suzman Gama told Sowetan that about 700 pupils crossed the bridge every day.

"We built the bridge after years of asking the municipality to build us a proper one but they kept making promises. We actually need schools this side because having 700 children crossing this bridge everyday is a problem," said Gama.

Cooperative governance and traditional affairs spokesper-



Workers and pupils were left stranded after water flooded a bridge to town in Nkomazi. /PHOTOS/ MANDLA KHOZA

son Lindiwe Msibi said they were still quantifying damages and also trying to help those who need immediate help.

"Scores of houses are flooded with water, hence we are calling for the public to be cautious and not risk their lives, and also report to their councillors if they need help. This afternoon we are holding a joint operation committee

meeting at Malelane to get a clear picture of the situation from members of the community on the ground.

"The issue of bridges has been a problem for years and that will form part of the discussions because we are having all stakeholders, including departments of education, public works and police in that meeting," said Msibi.