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KwaZulu-Natal Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) MEC Thulasizwe Buthelezi has attributed poor water supply in the province's municipalities to the councils' failure to maintain and upgrade their water infrastructure.

Tabling the KZN department's budget at the KZN Legislature, Buthelezi said the bulk of the province's municipalities were not setting aside adequate funds for the maintenance and upgrade of water infrastructure.

"Unfortunately, 41 municipalities, representing 75,9%, budgeted between zero percent and four percent for repairs and maintenance. Despite the failure to meet the recommended eight percent, it is further worrying that some of these municipali-

ties still fail to spend the budgeted amounts in full by the end of the financial year.

"The total expenditure for repairs and maintenance across the province has decreased from 79% in the previous financial year to 73% in the current reporting period. This reflects poor budgetary focus during the adjustment budget, as well as inadequate planning for repairs and maintenance, which must be addressed," he said.

While some municipalities, particularly the province's rural municipalities, did not have the funds to maintain their water infrastructure, Buthelezi said they should utilise the municipal infrastructure grant (MIG).

"Municipalities have been encouraged to take advantage of the

amendment in the conditions of the MIG to include refurbishment and to apply for using a portion of MIG for repairs and maintenance.

"This will improve the repairs and maintenance budget and expenditure to align with the benchmark going forward. With the support of the municipal infrastructure support agent (Misa) and the Cogta infrastructure unit, municipalities will improve their business plans to comply with the requirements for using a percentage of MIG for infrastructure refurbishment and the development of an infrastructure maintenance plan," he said.

Buthelezi tabled the department's budget at a time when the province's traditional leadership were expressing unhappiness over what they viewed as the provincial gov-

ernment's failure to involve them in programmes.

Given that the KZN Cabinet has taken a resolution to do more for the province's traditional leaders, Buthelezi said, Cogta had an obligation to address the traditional leaders' concerns.

"When you stated that traditional leadership would be a priority in your government, we understood your call to mean that we must enhance the status, dignity and role of amakhosi in the province.

"Within less than 60 days since assuming office, we have ensured that all departmental programmes aimed at job creation and skills development are also extended to amakhosi.

"For the first time in 20 years, the EPWP has been extended to benefit

the traditional councils under amakhosi," he said.

Further, the department would utilise its amakhosi rural economic development programme to support the traditional leaders.

"The amakhosi rural economic development programme is designed to harness this potential by promoting economic activities in traditional communities.

"Through this programme, we are working to create sustainable livelihoods, reduce poverty, and promote rural development in a way that respects and builds upon our cultural heritage.

"To achieve these objectives, we have earmarked funding worth R30 million in the current financial year," he said.

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