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KWAZULU-Natal (KZN) is taking proactive steps to safeguard its public infrastructure against the escalating threat of climate change, with the MEC for Public Works and Infrastructure, Martin Meyer, announcing a strategic partnership with India to enhance building resilience and flood defences.

This initiative comes in response to the devastating flood damage exacerbated by global warming, which has left numerous government buildings, particularly schools and clinics, in a state of disrepair.

Meyer, who assumed his role after last year's elections while speaking at Independent Media offices in Rosebank recently, highlighted the urgency of the situation.

"We have now done a lot of work speaking to other agencies from other countries to say how do we build to withstand this type of climate change because climate change is here to stay no matter what we do," he said.

The province has been severely impacted, with the 2022 floods causing such extensive damage that the current budget is still struggling to address.

According to Meyer, a key aspect of this new approach involves a shift from simply rebuilding to constructing with resilience in mind.

"So we have also tried to, when we rebuild or repair those schools, to build in such a way that it can withstand the damage it may cause," Meyer explained.

This marks a departure from previous policies where damaged structures were rebuilt to the same specifications in the same vulnerable locations, often leading to repeat damage in subsequent storms.

Meyer said KZN was actively exploring innovative solutions,

including robust flood defences.

"We have never had to build like that before... We are also looking into flood defences. How can we build defences on our rivers and oceans to make sure that we go through those floods and don't damage our infrastructure?"

India has emerged as a crucial partner in this endeavour, due to its extensive experience in managing tropical climates and flood challenges.

"We have recently gone to India and we have learnt quite a lot from what they are doing in flood defences," he said.

"Because India is a more tropical country than us, they are much more used to this type of climate than we are."

The collaboration is already concrete, with "final signatures on the deal" now in place.

KZN will soon dispatch engineers from its department to India for specialised training.

"We are going to send engineers of our department to India to learn from them how to do it and then they will come back and build here," Meyer confirmed.

The partnership is further bolstered by India's willingness to co-share costs, a gesture stemming from both nations being part of the BRICS alliance.

Meyer emphasised the value of learning from countries with similar socioeconomic contexts:

"We take a firm stance when we learn about these things from countries that are on the same socioeconomic level as India."

Beyond flood defences, India will also provide expertise in addressing another critical issue for KZN, pit toilets.

"They have made headway when it comes to that," Meyer added, acknowledging India's progress in this area.

Meyer also highlighted internal efforts to foster local innovation.

"We are also working closely with our tertiary institutions in KZN. We are saying to students that they must come up with African born solutions," said Meyer.

KZN's Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is responsible for maintaining schools, hospitals, clinics, and other government buildings. However, the province's vulnerability to climate change has severely strained its resources.

"One of our biggest challenges we are facing in KZN is that the province is the hardest hit of all nine provinces when it comes to climate change," Meyer said.



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