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New bridge ends years of isolation for Folokwe community

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THE Eastern Cape MEC for Transport, Xolile Nqatha, recently officially handed over a newly constructed Bailey Bridge to the community of Folokwe in Elliotdale.

The bridge brings long-awaited relief to residents who, for years, have struggled to access schools, clinics and local markets, especially during the rainy season when river crossings became treacherous or completely impassable.

Nqatha said the bridge is one of 19 Bailey Bridges that the Eastern Cape Department of Transport has con-

structed over the past year in flood-prone areas across the province, as part of ongoing efforts to restore mobility and strengthen resilience in rural communities.

"This investment forms part of the government's broader commitment to connect rural communities and build safer, more inclusive infrastructure networks. By investing in durable, climate-resilient infrastructure, we are not only reconnecting communities but also reviving local economies and restoring dignity. Every bridge we build is a bridge towards opportunity," said Nqatha.

He added that as the effects of climate change continue to threaten

road infrastructure, particularly in rural and low-lying areas, the department remains committed to developing adaptable, long-lasting solutions that safeguard mobility and livelihoods across the province.

"This is another milestone — we have just handed over a bridge to these communities at a cost of no less than R20 million. Working together with members of the National Defence Force and the National Department of Public Works, this project is another example of restoring the dignity of our people. They will now be able to link villages more easily and access education, health and other social services. The communi-

ties here have expressed great relief, as this bridge will help improve their living conditions," Nqatha said.

He further noted that before the bridge was built, it had been difficult for residents to access essential facilities or travel to neighbouring areas. He also expressed appreciation for the community's cooperation during the construction process.

One of the beneficiaries from the Folokwe community, Mzayifani Dalindyabo, said residents were very happy because they had faced great challenges before. "Our children will now be able to cross this bridge safely, even during rainy days. It will make things much easier for us."

The leader of the area, Chieftaincy Nophazamile Gwebindlala, said their situation had been very painful because, in order to get help, they were forced to cross the river.

"When it was full, we had to sit next to it so that we could help our children cross safely, or make sure they did not try to cross when going to or coming from school. This is a great achievement, and the department took only a year to complete it," she said.

She added that although they are happy, they still appeal to the government to fix their roads because they continue to struggle when it rains.