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ADAPTATION

How KwaZulu-Natal can benefit from India's flood management innovations

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INDIA's successful strategies in flood defence and management offer valuable lessons for KwaZulu-Natal.

KZN Public Works and Infrastructure MEC Martin Meyer highlighted several key areas where the province could potentially benefit from adopting India's innovative approaches.

Meyer recently participated in a high-level political forum panel discussion as part of the Kerala Urban Conclave programme in Kochi, India. The programme included engagements by ministers, mayors and councillors on urban development, sustainability and growth drivers.

The MEC led a delegation that included officials from the KZN Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, the KZN Office of the Premier, and eThekweni Municipality Mayor Councillor Cyril Xaba.

Meyer said they were in Kochi to engage, not only to learn but also to share their experiences of building more resilient infrastructure and infrastructure that can meet the modern demands.

During his address, Meyer said the climate is changing at an accelerated rate, changing how people interact with nature and their environment.

"Here, at this vital conclave, we ask: how do we plan our cities, and how do we build our infrastructure to meet these needs. We must build in a way we can say to each other, 'I see you,' but also say to Mother Nature, 'we see the divinity in you,'" Meyer said.

"So let this conclave start this new direction in how we see our infrastructure, how our urban spaces allow us as people to interact with each other, with nature and with our living spaces."

Sharing KZN's experiences in recent years, Meyer said the province was plagued by natural disasters like floods, tornadoes, wildfires (veld fires), which meant that talking about resilient planning, resilient communities are over; now is the time for action.

"Nations like India and South Africa, states like Kerala and KwaZulu-Natal, need now to see each other, take hands, share our knowledge, and start to build better," Meyer said.

"This includes not only sharing best



MAYOR Cyril Xaba (right) advocates for innovative urban planning to enhance service delivery in eThekweni. | ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY Facebook

practice with our modern technology but also with our traditional knowledge, knowledge that has been around for centuries; here you call it tribal...we call it traditional leadership.

"We have started this journey in looking at flood defenses, something we have never planned for, but we have already learned from our friends in Kerala that it is not only (about) using technology, but (also about) using what nature gives us — our mangroves, the breeze from the ocean, and the natural and renewable materials around us — to plan better, build better and be better."

Meyer added that areas where KZN could potentially benefit, based on India's successful application, include:

1. The use of natural existing resources like mangroves as a means of advancing flood defences.

2. They also showcased how they monitor and manage rivers that flow through several of their communities.

3. They also showcased alternative building methods, including in the context of saving homes and lives, which involves constructing in a manner that allows flood waters to flow beneath residential structures, which mitigates a scenario where floods wash away many homes.

Addressing the gathering, Xaba

called for enhanced urban planning to accelerate service delivery and foster liveable conditions for vulnerable communities.

The mayor also highlighted rapid urbanisation and recurring disasters as one of the issues that must top the agenda of cities.

He noted that rapid urbanisation has driven migration to urban areas, often leading to settlements in undeveloped zones that increase disaster vulnerability.

"Cities must therefore reassess their approach to informal settlements and work towards creating habitable environments," Xaba said.

He also highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing for overcoming service delivery challenges, noting considerable technological progress in some developing cities.

"By learning from each other, we can harness technology to boost quality service delivery and improve the ease of doing business," Xaba said.

The mayor also discussed technological innovations with fellow mayors for enhancing water, sanitation and waste management services.

He also inspected the City's industrial waste treatment, recycling, and disposal methods at a local landfill site.