

FREE STATE'S DISASTER MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES HAILED



FREE STATE PROVINCE



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The disaster – though in undesirable ways – put to the test the readiness of the Free State Provincial Government to respond to crisis as affected families scrambled for any form of intervention. Decisively led by Premier Sisi Ntombela, the provincial government matched the pace of the flood as it hit the ground running to reach out to distressed families.

Ntombela and her MECs rushed to the disaster-stricken town on the same day to be with the community during the time of their greatest need. All relevant provincial departments contributed to the provincial government's integrated interventional approach to ensure optimisation of resources and consolidation of efforts.

Provincial Government Director of Corporate Communications Setjhaba Maphalla said Ntombela and her entire cabinet were driven by the principles of the provincial government's Operation Phethisa, which "recognises the oneness of government in breaking down the departmentalisation of service delivery".

"It is about building the Free State we want," said Maphalla, adding that Operation Phethisa was also about the development and implementation of early warning systems, monitoring and evaluation of service delivery systems.

From the moment the first report of the Jagersfontein disaster was logged at 06:40 last Sunday, the provincial Emergency Medical Services (EMS) team demonstrated their capabilities to contain highly demanding situations with professionalism, communication and advanced skills.

According to the EMS's preliminary report, the EMS Station Manager in Jagersfontein notified the EMS Xhariep District Manager, LJ Basson, that the sludge dam wall at the mine had burst, and that the road entering Jagersfontein (R706) from Bloemfontein was covered by the mudslide, which was traveling at an alarming rate, and many community members had been badly affected.

The District Manager responded by activating the EMS Disaster Management Plan, which was followed by a media alert on the floods. The R706 road between Jagersfontein and Bloemfontein was closed at the R704 (Trompsburg) crossing.

Moreover, the Free State College of Emergency Care came on board to assist with advanced search and rescue skills, divided in different teams to cover the south, north and central locations.

In addition to the Free State EMS and College of Emergency Care, other role players in the joint mission included VR Med, ER24, Forensic Pathology, SAPS diving unit, SAPS K9 Search and Rescue, One Life 911, SARZA, SP-CA, SANDF Air Force, Rocket HEMS, SAPS Mounted Horse Unit, Lugsteun (drone support), Free State Provincial Traffic and others.

On Sunday alone, over 80 patients were taken to various hospitals, namely Albert Nzula Hospital in Trompsburg, Diamant Hospital in Jagersfontein, Medi-Clinic as well as Pelonomi Hospital, both located in Bloemfontein. Patients were classified as stable and had no life-threatening injuries. Only one person, a man, was declared dead.

Through the Premier's attuned and people-driven leadership, the provincial government facilitated the relocation of affected families to safe facilities in Bloemfontein and Fauresmith, a bill that is footed by the mine and not taxpayers. Additionally, the province identified four suitable sites on which to build temporary structures for affected residents whose homes were knocked down by the flood.

"We are waiting for sites to be cleaned up so that the technicians can access the houses so that structural assessments of houses can be done. We have engaged with other departments like Home Affairs and SASSA to help people with their identity documents and birth certificates. Some of the victims are learners. So, working with the MEC for Education, we will be taking them to hostels so that their studies are not interrupted,"



Free State Premier Sisi Ntombela and her MECs rushed to the disaster-stricken Jagersfontein to ensure that the affected community received immediate aid.

Ntombela explained.

A thorough impact assessment found that the main Eskom substation in the area was dysfunctional because of the tragedy. This left the entire town without electricity, while water entity, Bloem Water, also struggled to operate in the area.

Following on the example set by Ntombela, technicians moved expeditiously to switch on the lights, and Bloem Water sent out water tankers to provide water to the community as the water treatment plant was inoperable due to power cuts.

Initially, the water entity had dispatched three mobile water trucks to the disaster area. Bloem Water had to contend with challenges with the water treatment plant as well as the waste water treatment plant which was covered in sludge.

As soon as the plant was operational again and most areas started receiving normal water supply, two of the water

trucks were withdrawn from the area, with the remaining one servicing Charlesville, which was still disconnected from water supply.

At the time of print, the water treatment plant was still covered in sludge and the Kopanong Local Municipality together with the Department of Water and Sanitation were hard at work to clean the plant.

A calamity of this impact was bound to disrupt schooling in the area.

Three schools were directly affected, namely, Jagersfontein and Boaramello combined schools, as well as St Laurens Primary. The disaster culminated in the schools registering low attendance rates for reasons that included water and electricity cuts, loss of belongings and trauma.

The Free State Department of Education has put all affected pupils in a safe shelter and is arranging catch-up lessons for them.

Premier orders search for missing man

The Premier of the Free State Sisi Ntombela returned to the disaster-stricken Jagersfontein on Friday to assess progress made by government in an attempt to rebuild the livelihoods of people who were affected by the collapse of a mine dam wall, which led to houses, cars and other belongings being swept away.

The Premier met with some community members of Itumeleng, and upon her interaction with them, she was informed about 70-year-old Shadrack Williams who has been missing

since the day of the disaster.

In a statement, the Office of the Premier said "the community and Mr Williams' grandson believe that he may have been washed away by the mudslide.

"The matter was then brought to the attention of the emergency services, who have activated the search and rescue team in this regard.

"This brings the total number of the unaccounted-for persons to two, including 50-year-old Mrs Mantele Mokgatle."

Jagersfontein Tragedy ruins hundreds of lives but help is at hand

President, Ministers and Free State Premier rush to the disaster scene to offer immediate aid to the victims

On Sunday, September 11, 2022, residents of Jagersfontein were woken up by a different kind of noise. First, a whistle-blower was heard warning the sleeping community to rise and get out of their houses, a message repeated across the town. Soon thereafter, smashing sounds were heard as floods from the burst mine dam made catastrophic contact with people's residences and tore through the community, flattening the town's infrastructure and destroying nearly 170 houses.

Upon hearing news about the disaster on Sunday, Free State Premier Sisi Ntombela and several members of her provincial cabinet rushed to the scene of the tragedy. On Monday, President Cyril Ramaphosa, accompanied by Human Settlements Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi, Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation David Mahlobo and Public Enterprises Deputy Minister Phumulo Masualle visited Jagersfontein and met with the affected families and community members at the Jacob Zuma Hall in Fauresmith.

The President then proceeded to the disaster site to get a first-hand look at what transpired.

Ramaphosa committed his government to assisting the affected families with housing and belongings. The President said he will be provided with a weekly report to keep track of how fam-



President Cyril Ramaphosa and Human Settlements Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi on a walkabout to assess the damage caused by the collapse of the mine dam in Jagersfontein.

ilies are being assisted.

Ntombela was on Tuesday joined by Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe in a meeting with the victims in Bloemfontein where food parcels, clothing and other basic necessities were handed out.

Counted in the disaster's trail of devastation is the loss of human life, a missing elderly man and woman as well as massive damage to property. The floods further displaced 243 residents and put a halt on teaching and learning in the area.

Communication was also badly affected as the power station and network tower were washed away by the mudslide. Additionally, more than 1000 hectares of grazing land have been destroyed, with the SPCA reporting that over 700 animals were saved and at least 500 died.



Jagersfontein is a small mining town located 110km southwest of Bloemfontein. It falls under the Kopanong Local Municipality, which is part of the Xhariep District Municipality.

An eyewitness who also suffered great losses from the floods, Lindiwe Noga-be, recalled the events to *Sunday World*: "There was someone shouting that people should get out of their houses in the early hours of Sunday. Although the voice was not so clear, the owner of the house managed to go out in her pyjamas to see what was going on. She saw that something was coming down from the mine and immediately called on the neighbours to wake up and escape."

Nogabe added: "They managed to go out and the front of the opposite houses completely collapsed. I think that is what eased the pressure so that our

house would not fall. It, however, got inside the house and when we opened the door later, sludge almost pushed us out. There was just a lot of it inside the house."

For other residents, a disaster this size is enough to make them fear for the future. One such resident is Linkeng Mphetola from one of the unaffected houses. Mphetola, like many other residents, including the Kopanong Local Municipality mayor, said it has always been an open secret that the mine posed a serious threat to the community, but added that she did not have even the slightest imagination of houses being smashed down by a furious sludge flood.

"I am ready to leave this place. I just want to be sure who I will be staying with because I don't know what will happen next. I mean, the area is covered with the sludge from the mine. What if we are inhaling chemicals that will cause us TB in a few months?"

The Free State Provincial Government has speedily responded to the health concerns raised by the community by instituting tests to determine if the sludge contained any agents that could be toxic to human beings.

In a statement, the provincial government said the chemical assessments also included "affected river systems for levels of heavy metals and other chemicals, which if present in quantities beyond the allowable threshold may be harmful to both humans and animals".

Premier Ntombela leads recovery efforts

Many people might have only heard of Jagersfontein this week as it dominated headlines for disastrous reasons, but the mining town is not new to the history pages of the country and the world. Jagersfontein holds the record for the discovery of the biggest diamond ever found. Linked to this historic find were the second and eighth largest rough diamonds, which were also discovered in the town. Furthermore, Jagersfontein was the second town in South Africa and the first town in the former Orange Free State to have electricity and running water.

The town's incredible history has, over the years, been contrasted by poor human and infrastructural development, dropping Jagersfontein into a pool of the poorest towns in the country. However, in the aftermath of last Sunday's calamity, residents of the area will have to tap into that rich heritage as they look for resilience to rebuild their lives. The town has turned into a ghost town as residents were forced to vacate their homes.

With the inspirational Sisi Ntombela as their leader, these affected families will be rebuilding from a place of encouragement

and unconditional support.

From the first day of the disaster, the Premier has remained on the ground with the victims, partaking in their grief, facilitating interventions, conducting impact assessments and spearheading efforts to rebuild the besieged town.

To make sure that she doesn't miss even the smallest detail, Ntombela accordingly established a communication protocol through which she has been receiving daily reports from all stakeholders about developments in the town so that her government can craft effective interventions. The Office of the Premier has also made use of an integrated communications approach, leveraging digital technologies and traditional broadcasting platforms to share updates and spread messages of hope.

Speaking during one of her regular visits, the Premier reassured residents that the reconstruction of their lives and livelihoods was central to her administration. "We have identified sites. However, there is no infrastructure installed, which poses a challenge of time. Nevertheless, we will be accelerating installing the water and sewer infrastructure as well as electricity," stated the Premier.

Free State health MEC Montseng Tsiu, left, Premier Sisi Ntombela, Tina Liau, Office of the Premier, Chief of Staff Manko Buffel and a member of the emergency services.



Ntombela understands that rebuilding the flooded town has to go beyond the replacement of physical structures.

Reconstruction also means reigniting the willpower of those affected. Preaching hope to victims, she said, "God's grace is bottomless. Truly, we have to thank God as the people of Jagersfontein, for we have seen Him with our own eyes. All earthly things shall come to pass, but God's mercy is still with you. In your mind you may be thinking, I used to have furniture but now I lost it. But now is the time to start afresh. We are rebuilding Jagersfontein."

Ntombela also called on members of the community to stop spreading fake news about the disaster, saying such misinformation caused unnecessary panic.

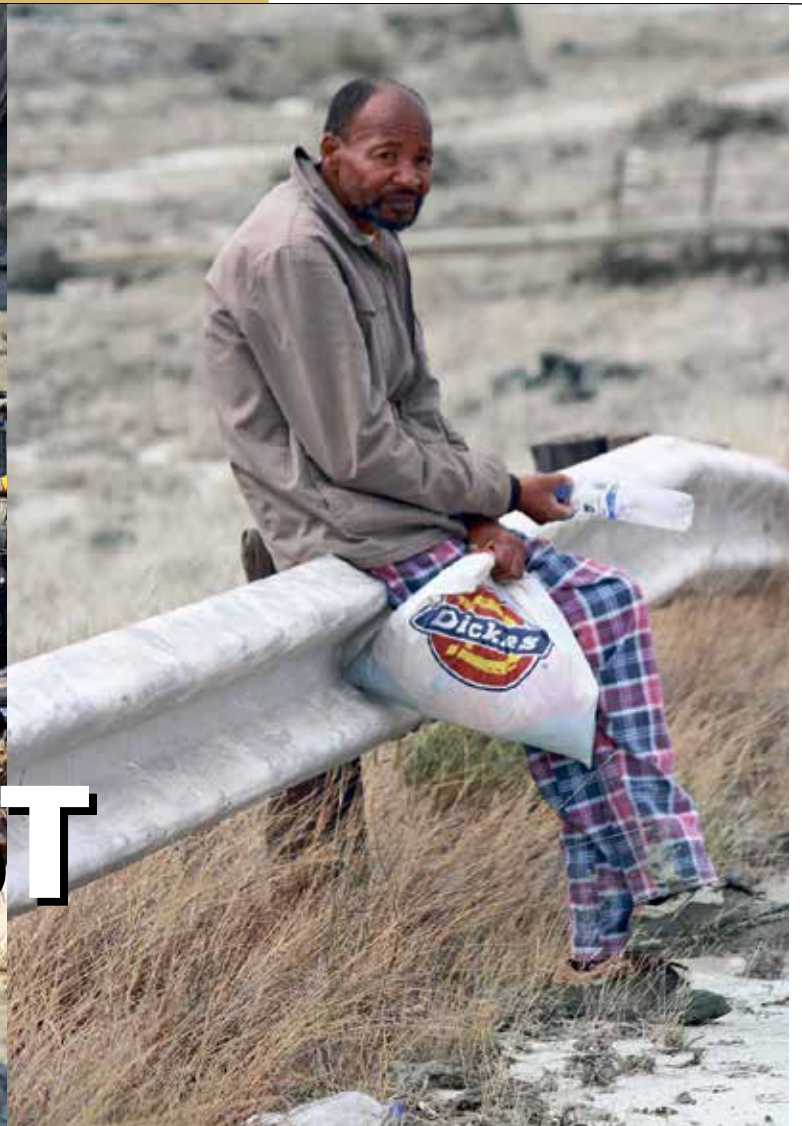
Instead, she urged all residents to play their part in building the Free State they want, starting first with the reconstruction of Jagersfontein.

"We are committing to support and assist the affected families with all that we have. Our primary focus now as the provincial government is the wellbeing of the residents. We are a government of the people, by the people, and ours is to help our people when they are in distress," she said.

According to the Department of Human Settlements, bidders will be invited to showcase Innovative/Alternative Building Technology (IBT/ABT) housing solutions in order to fast track a permanent solution to rehouse displaced Jagersfontein residents.



THE UNSUNG HERO WHO LOST EVERYTHING



Thediso Masiya raised the alarm, warning neighbours to run, saving countless lives

The Free State Department of Social Development has set up a food and clothing bank, which also welcomed other essential items such as food, water, mattresses, blankets, and sanitary towels, among others. The Department's social workers and community development practitioners have also been on the ground, since the advent of the disaster assisting with the evacuation of the victims to safe areas and visiting their respective shelters to provide them with much-needed psychosocial support.

Again, the Department headed the profiling of affected families, so that both government and its social partners can provide tailored help to them. One of the beneficiaries of the Department's intervention is Tshediso Masiya, who, together with other distraught families, was moved to a shelter in Bloemfontein at the cost of the mine, Jagersfontein Developments.

Tshediso Masiya's story is not only of victimhood but heroism. He will be remembered as one of the vigilant watchers who raised the alarm to alert his neighbours to run for their lives as soon as he smelled danger.

"I lived in the street facing the mine dam. So, I was the first person to see it coming and I warned my neighbours to leave their houses," he reported, adding that he had hoped the flood would lose momentum along the way. "In fact, I thought it was just a minor thing that would just stop. But when I realised that it was coming towards the residential area, I realised it was serious."

Masiya's house was among the first to be annihilated by the might of the flood.

Masiya worked for the Kopanong Local Municipality as a driver and was booked for early retirement due to his ill-health. His heroic act saved many lives on that fateful morning, a human achievement that makes up for the fact that he lost everything he worked for in the flood.

The loss is too painful for him to bear.

In a voice dipped in sorrow and a memory haunted by the recency of his misfortune, Masiya revealed that his belongings were all swept away by the flood, leaving him with nothing but pyjamas to his name.

"As I am speaking to you, I am only left with the clothes that I am wearing, which I also borrowed because I was still in my pyjamas all along. All clothes, furniture and my two cars were swallowed by the flood," he said.

Masiya, who is still traumatised by the personal losses he suffered, reported having trouble accepting what happened. Nonetheless, he thanked the provincial government for providing accommodation and counselling for victims, saying it went a long way in mitigating their trauma. "I feel better for the moment after talking to the counsellors. But when I am alone everything comes back," he stated, reporting trouble sleeping and mild nightmares as some of the psychological effects of the man-made disaster.

Another resident who is at the shelter is Molefi Sephaka, a young chef from Jagersfontein who came to the Bloemfontein shelter with his mother. Sephaka appreciates the assistance from the provincial government and its various departments, such as social development and health. "We are receiving food and shelter, and at least we can sleep safely. There are social workers helping with the trauma. Representatives from the Department of Health have also been coming here to do check-ups and bring medication to the sick," he said.

Sephaka, who has been at the shelter since Monday, said his biggest prayer is the recovery of his parents. "I just want my parents to be fine. I have seen the impact of this disaster on them, and it hurts me deeply. They can't sleep at all. It's the same with other victims as well. You can see them having flashbacks when they talk about what happened. I have seen some men break down, and you know that when a man is crying, the pain cuts really deep."

Displaced victims will remain sheltered and cared for by the provincial government and its social partners, until their safe return can be guaranteed.



Free State Premier, Sisi Ntombela with victims of the man-made disaster at Jagersfontein receiving much-needed aid, such as food and blankets, from humanitarian organisations.

Humanitarian organisations, state deliver immediate aid to victims

It was all hands-on deck in the Free State this week in the wake of the disaster that left a trail of misery in Jagersfontein which saw Premier Sisi Ntombela and her entire cabinet spring into action.

A temporary food and clothing bank were immediately established, as humanitarian and relief organisations, which included the SA Red Cross and Meals on Wheels joined in delivering basic essentials such as mattresses.

The SA Red Cross delivered food parcels and 80 mattresses and activated the delivery of 250 additional mattresses. The provincial government says the profiling of affected families from the affected areas in Jagersfontein, Fauresmith and those placed in Bloemfontein is in progress.

A total of 500 meals have thus far been delivered to the community and 300 food parcels dropped off at the food and clothing bank by Meals on Wheels.

The provincial government has also

hailed SA Red Cross and Gift of the Givers, which "have also been of great assistance with trucks loaded with bottled water, blankets, mattresses, clothing, hot meals, food for cooking, hygiene items, sanitary towels and diapers".

The Al-Imdaad Foundation is also on board to assist with essentials, according to the provincial government, which thanked the organisation for also providing food, blankets, clothing and school uniform.

The South African Social Security Agency was assisting with profiling affected people for the Disaster Relief Grant. The provincial government added that provincial social workers were also on the ground "and have been visiting the victims at their respective shelters to provide psychosocial support".

The Department of Home Affairs has also been activated to assist those who lost their identity documentation, said the Office of the Premier.

Sludge damaged 164 houses in Charlesville and Itumeleng

Tests to be run to assure the safety of residents and their animals

HUMAN SETTLEMENT

The total number of houses damaged by the sludge is 164, the provincial government reported yesterday.

The government said 51 houses were damaged in Charlesville while 113 were also affected in Itumeleng. There are currently four alternative sites which have been identified for the building of temporary structures.

“We are waiting for sites to be cleaned up so that the technicians can access the houses so that structural assessments of houses can be done. The Department of Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA) and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) have promised to run tests in order to give a clear indication whether there are any

materials that could cause harm to human life,” the Office of the Premier said.

ENVIRONMENT

“DESTEA has issued a NEMA Section 30A directive to Jagersfontein Developments Pty (Ltd), which provides for a person to be issued with a directive permitting them to carry out a listed or specified activity, without obtaining an environmental authorisation, in order to prevent or contain an emergency situation or the effects of the emergency situation. This directive will allow the company to start with the rehabilitation of the infrastructure and affected environment.

“DESTEA, together with DWS (Department of Water and Sanitation) and DFFE, are conducting chemical assessment of the sludge and the affected river systems for levels of heavy metals and other chemicals, which if present beyond the allowable threshold may be harmful to both humans and animals.”

The provincial government said DESTEA scientists are also conducting



Sludge entered and covered homes in the affected area, and up to 164 house suffered damage as a result.

toxicology studies of dead fish species along the affected river systems to assess cause of death, “and any other interventions will be developed depending on how the rehabilitation process unfolds on the ground”.

WATER AND ELECTRICITY

The main Eskom substation was affect-

ed by the disaster, which left the whole area without electricity. The wastewater treatment plant was also covered by sludge, and as a result Bloem Water was unable to operate its plant. However, the entity dispatched water tankers. Water and electricity were subsequently fully restored to the area.



The sludge could be dangerous to both humans and animals, and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment is running tests.



Scientists are conducting tests to ensure that the level of chemicals and heavy metals in the sludge is not harmful to humans and animals.

Dam burst sees local school attendance drop to below 50%

A calamity that has had such a far-reaching impact was bound, in one way or another, to disrupt schooling. Three schools were directly affected by the floods, namely, Jagersfontein and Boaramello combined schools, and St Laurens Primary.

The disaster culminated in the schools registering low attendance rates for reasons that included water and electricity cuts, loss of belongings and trauma.

However, the Provincial Department of Education has engaged all relevant stakeholders to encourage parents to allow children to return to school.

The provincial government reported that on Monday and Tuesday, pupils' attendance was adversely affected with all three schools registering below 50% attendance.

On September 13, the Free State Department of Education held several meetings with relevant roleplayers, which included school management

teams, school governing bodies and teacher unions to address the poor attendance crisis.

The Department also engaged Bloem Water to help fill all jojo tanks at the three schools, and by the end of business on Tuesday, all tanks were filled.

The Department also supplied schools with generators to help address the issue of electricity and water supply. At both Jagersfontein Combined and Boaramello Combined the boreholes have been restored.

- On Wednesday, September 14, Boaramello Combined School registered an attendance of 792 out of the total of 870 pupils.

- At St Lawrence, 214 out of 301 pupils also started attending classes again.

- Jagersfontein Combined saw 280 out of 570, which is very low in comparison to the two other schools.

- Thirty pupils out of 77 who were placed in Bloemfontein were returned on Tuesday, and 26 of them were

placed at the Olien Hostel in Fauresmith, while four were placed at the Jagersfontein Combined Hostel.

Preliminary reports indicate that the number may change as the provincial government verifies numbers daily.

The education department has reported that more than 109 pupils at Boaramello are victims of the disaster, with 40 pupils at St Lawrence also affected by the disaster, while Jagersfontein Combined School saw 19 pupils directly affected by the tragedy.

Teachers, too, did not escape the wrath of the tragedy.

At Boaramello, six teachers and two voluntary food handlers were directly affected while St Lawrence and Jagersfontein Combined School saw one teacher and a food handler affected respectively.

The Free State Department of Education has placed all affected pupils in a safe shelter and is arranging catch-up lessons for them.

Free State Provincial Government would like to acknowledge with appreciation the following organisations, businesses and institutions for their individual and collective contributions in assisting the community of Jagersfontein:

- Free State Emergency Medical Services, Free State College of Emergency Care, South African Air Force, South African Police Services Diving Unit, Mangaung Metro Municipality Fire Services and Delta Scans.
- Ruan Cloete: Medical & First Response Nova Galaxy, National Control Room, SARZA, ER 24 medical services, VR Med medical services and Rosepark Hospital Response Unit.
- The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), Gift of the Givers, NDS, NDA, Home Affairs, SA Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, Organised Labour, Free State Organised Business, Al-Imdaad Foundation, Vodacom, Old Mutual, Icebag Group and Shoprite.