

# Address by Local Government and Housing MEC Maite Nkoana-Mashabane at the launch of the Limpopo Provincial Disaster Management Advisory Forum

**05 August 2005**

Programme Director;  
Honourable mayors and municipal managers;  
Various representatives of our Provincial Departments;  
Heads of Municipal Disaster Management Centres;  
Representatives from SALGA;  
Representatives of various private sector organizations;  
Role-players in the Disaster Risk Management in the Province – including churches;  
NGOs and tertiary institutions;  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

If there is one certainty in life, it is the fact that disasters will always be with us if development initiatives are not aligned to safety precaution measures. From biblical times when Noah had to build the Ark to save humanity up until the shack fires which continually decimate our informal settlements – the truth is that these phenomena, whether natural or man-made, will forever remain part of humanity's history.

As the world experiences global warming and the consequent climatic changes, nature in itself is bound to also undergo changes. Often these changes are unpredictable and the most vulnerable is our communities – the poorest of the poor – have to pay the ultimate costs. However, it must be said that it is not only the poor who feel the negative impact of disasters. All of us are also affected when Mother Nature turns ugly against her children.

I am certain that all of us in this hall agree that the devastating Asian tsunami which recently hit many south-east Asian countries has shaken the world out of its comfort zone and brought to our urgent attention the need to prepare ourselves better in order to mitigate against the impact of disasters on our people.

Many would also agree that it was only after the sea-quake that many countries – the developing and the developed – realized that, indeed, we share a common earth, and a common destiny, and that we would all need to work together in order to develop better strategies to soften the heavy blows that disasters often unleash on humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen;

[back to top](#)

It must be said that not all disasters can be prevented but the impact or losses thereof can be reduced. It is up to all stakeholders, particularly the government, to ensure that adequate policies and plans are put in place in order to respond swiftly and gather enough resources to embark on post-disaster reconstruction. We have to

move away from rigid disaster management towards a more proactive programme of disaster risk management. And this, ladies and gentlemen, requires all of us to work together. While the key entity in this whole process should be the state, it is a known fact that we, as government, would not be able undertake this mammoth task by ourselves. The private sector, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and tertiary institutions all have to be mobilized to play a pivotal role in the process.

That is the reason why in 2002 the government passed the Disaster Management Act. This Act calls for an increased commitment from all stakeholders in the prevention and mitigation actions which will reduce the probability and severity of disastrous events by incorporating these actions into policies, plans and projects of all involved in disaster risk management.

As the Province of Limpopo, we are in the best position to understand the need for such a pro-active approach in disaster management. The floods that affected Mozambique and parts of this Province in 2000 taught us valuable lessons in this regard. The epidemics of foot-and-mouth and cholera which occurred in the past five years also gave us many valuable lessons. And the current drought that is being experienced in the Province (and the country) has also left us with much important experience which we will surely use to minimize the effects of future climatic changes.

[back to top](#)

Friends;

These common hazards have taught us that we cannot afford to sit back and only react when the damage is already done. They have taught us that disaster risk management is not an event, rather it is a continuous process which requires constant monitoring and reviewing – even when there are no disasters. They have reminded us of that old English proverb which says, “prevention is better than cure”. We cannot be caught off-guard; that will result in too high a cost for our people. In short, ladies and gentlemen, our experience of disasters in the Province and the country has taught us that nothing beats effective planning.

It is our firm belief that the Disaster Management Advisory Forum which we are launching today with our stakeholders will assist us in mitigating the impact of disasters. Because it is a Province-wide consultative body, it will also help us develop disaster risk management of which all relevant players will have made an input into.

Before we introduce the members of this important body, it will be worthwhile to go into a brief history of how we got to this juncture today. It must be remembered that this Province was in the past divided into several homelands or Bantustans. Each of these Bantustans had their own Acts on how they dealt with disasters. There was also the Civil Protection Act, a reactive response piece of legislation which applied to the TPA. This obviously created problems as there were too many laws governing how the Province’s disasters were being tackled – in the process causing many people their lives and livelihood.

In 1996, the Province set up its own Provincial Disaster Management Committee guided by the Civil Protection Act. After the 2000 floods, the Provincial Disaster Management Relief Fund was established to assist those affected by the disaster.

[back to top](#)

In 2003, the Parliament promulgated the Disaster Management Act which came into force as of April 2004. Provinces and municipalities had two years to start full implementation of this Act. It is this Act that calls for the establishment of a Provincial Disaster Management Advisory Forum and other crucial disaster risk management organs such as the Provincial and Municipal Disaster Management Centres.

This Act also provides for the setting up of Inter-governmental structures to deal with disasters. One such structure is the Inter-governmental Committee on Disaster Management – comprising of Cabinet members working with disaster management, MECs dealing with disaster management and members of the municipal councils. This body, which I have been appointed to, is accountable to Cabinet and must regularly update Cabinet on the co-ordination of disaster risk management and make recommendations on issues related to disaster management.

This appointment means that the work of this Provincial Disaster Management Forum is not only to the benefit of the people of Limpopo – but the entire country. The advice and recommendations made within this Forum would be used by the national government to design and implement pro-active disaster management strategies. I would like to say to those appointed to the Forum: yours is a crucial task – we trust that your work will help safeguard our communities against disasters and, in instances, where we cannot warn our communities in time about the disaster, mitigate the impact of those common hazards.

It is also our trust that the establishment of the Advisory Forum will help accelerate the setting up of Disaster Management Centres in Districts and municipalities. We believe that if we do not assist local authorities in undertaking this task, ours will be an incomplete job. Already the Vhembe and Capricorn Districts have established their own Disaster Management Centres. We believe this move will greatly assist this Forum. We will assist the Waterberg District with an amount of R4 million to set up its own Centre in this financial year. We are engaging other Districts on how we can expedite the processes in their areas.

Ladies and gentlemen;

We must stress that our municipalities will need to play a vital role in this Forum. To do that, they will need capacitation. We call on municipalities to have people dedicated to disaster risk management so that they are better able to deal with disaster. Disaster management has to be made a priority within local government. It needs to be incorporated into the municipalities' Integrated Development Plans so that it becomes part of the work of the municipalities. Crucially, another challenge that faces the effective implementation of the work of the Forum will require that municipalities are adequately funding the Disaster Management Centres. Municipal Disaster Management Centres need to have proper equipment and personnel need to be well-trained so that they are able to act decisively when faced with disasters. We believe the work of Project Consolidate will assist with some of these points.

Ladies and gentlemen

The establishment of this Provincial Disaster Management Advisory Forum is a milestone for this Province. We believe that with this type of body providing us with advice and recommendations from these wide-ranging experts, Limpopo will be a better, and a much safer place, for all our people.

I, therefore, in terms of the powers vested in me through Disaster Management Act wish to officially declare the PDMAF officially launched.

Thank you.