



## PROCUREMENT SYSTEM REFORM FOR INFRASTRUCTURAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN KWAZULU-NATAL.

**LONDEKA T.M NXUMALO**

Research Specialist: Research & Public Policy  
Moses Kotane Research Institute



EARTH



WATER



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KwaZulu-Natal experiences recurring heavy, erratic rainfall and flooding. The most recent occurrences include April 2022, January 2024, June 2025, and most recently, January 19th 2026, which have caused extensive damage to public roads, buildings, bridges and drainage systems (Sefolo, 2024). KZN infrastructure was built before climate change was predicted, but flooding was considered in the urban planning. The adverse effects of climate change on public infrastructure reveal significant shortcomings in the implementation of urban planning policies and challenges in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities. The provincial government has attributed this to the ageing, poorly maintained infrastructure of local municipalities, where service delivery occurs. In contrast, local municipalities point to budget constraints and a lack of municipal capacity and technical skills, which pushes municipalities to outsource urban planning (Todes & Mngadi, 2007). However, an underlying driver of this vulnerability is the government procurement system, which is slow, non-responsive to climate resilience goals (SDG11: sustainable cities and communities), and prone to corruption within public administration and externally through the prevalence of construction mafias. Therefore, the KZN government must reform its procurement processes and reduce its heavy reliance on consultants by capacitating internal staff to build sustainable, resilient public infrastructure and ensure accountability for service delivery.

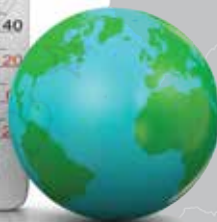
## What is the Issue?

The current physical structure cannot sustain the growing pressure for road use, population growth, urbanisation, informal settlements and climate change in the province. There is a backlog in both building new infrastructure and maintaining the existing infrastructure needed to provide basic services. The procurement system offers businesses opportunities to bid for government services, thereby creating employment, but it has been recognised as an underlying driver of weak infrastructure. The failure to practise risk-informed urban planning has left KZN's roads and buildings, often poorly designed, with weak, unmanaged drainage systems and a lack of, or low levels of, flood-control mitigation mechanisms. The absence of these measures significantly contributes to severe flooding and endangers community safety. Robust waste management systems are needed to ensure the safety and resilience of public infrastructure during climatic variability, specifically flooding in KZN. The current procurement system is often characterised by:

- Delayed procurement slows maintenance and emergency repairs.
- Reactive, short-term contracting ignores climate resilience and life-cycle costs.
- Inexperienced or politically connected contractors are often selected, producing poor-quality outcomes.
- Corruption and extortion by construction mafias undermine project delivery, especially in municipalities (Johnston, 2024).

## Relevant Policy

The government procurement system policy responsible for maintaining public infrastructure is the National Treasury Standard for Infrastructure Procurement and Delivery Management (SIPDM). It provides a framework for planning, designing, executing, tracking, and monitoring infrastructure projects (Department of National Treasury, 2015). This policy, implemented through the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), ensures efficient and effective supply chain management for infrastructure procurement and delivery (Republic of South Africa, 2003). However, these policies do not sufficiently incorporate mechanisms for climate-smart, resilience-based procurement systems needed to address climate impacts. Furthermore, there is a lack of integration of climate risk assessments into procurement processes, limited guidance on incorporating sustainability criteria in infrastructure design and delivery, and weak alignment between national policy frameworks and local-level implementation. These gaps constrain the ability of municipalities to proactively respond to climate risks and undermine the long-term sustainability and resilience of public infrastructure systems



## What are the Policy Options

The provincial government should not do away with procurement systems, as they create employment opportunities for entrepreneurs, particularly black-owned businesses. However, it should consider adopting risk management guiding frameworks to reduce reliance on external consultants, capacitate internal staff, and fill vacancies for better accountability and reliability. The following strategic pathways are recommended to improve the processes:

1. Reform Disaster Procurement System: Streamline approval for post-disaster repairs under stricter transparency rules.
2. Introduce Resilience-Based Procurement Standards: Integrate climate risk assessments into all infrastructure procurement.
3. Strengthen Municipal Capacity and Oversight: Establish a Provincial Procurement Review Board to audit high-risk tenders in vulnerable areas.
4. Combat Procurement Corruption: Involve community stakeholders in oversight of tender processes and contractor performance.
5. Adopt climate-smart solutions and policy interventions in public works contracts.
6. Revise policy turnaround times for procurement processes: appointment, service delivery, and payment of service providers.
7. Impose a climate-smart clause for eligibility to bid.
8. Publish contract performance results for transparency and openness.
9. Introduce independent anti-corruption units to address corruption in the construction sector.

## Conclusions

The failure to maintain infrastructure in flood-prone areas of KZN is not a technical issue but a lack of proactive climate governance. Therefore, the province can reduce disaster impacts and improve service delivery by reforming its procurement system, which has caused delays in maintaining public infrastructure, ignored climate resilience and life-cycle costs, and contracted short-term service providers at prices below industry experts' recommendations. This presents a great opportunity to fill posts and capacitate staff in urban planning.

## References

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