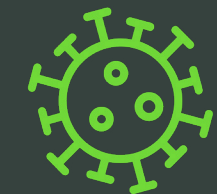


Our community, Our safety

A practical guide for disaster preparation and response



ASIVIKELANE
VOICES OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS



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1. The role of Asivikelane in disaster management

Asivikelane is a coalition of grassroots organisations working across South Africa to amplify the voices of informal settlement residents about basic services.

Asivikelane means *'Let's protect one another'* in isiZulu.

Hosted by IBP South Africa, Asivikelane promotes dignity, agency, and better living conditions for

informal settlement residents, ensuring their needs are prioritised in local government planning and spending.

We believe that by training residents, documenting evidence of their on-the-ground experiences of service delivery, and using that data to provide evidence, residents can engage more effectively with government on budget and service delivery system problems.

Asivikelane brings together informal settlement residents, municipal officials, civil society partners, training colleges and oversight institutions to create multi-stakeholder hubs that tackle service delivery challenges. Each hub focuses on a particular issue, such as water, sanitation, solid waste management, repairs and maintenance of infrastructure, or disaster management.

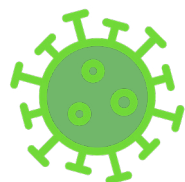
Hub participants co-design and implement sustainable solutions to service delivery problems and their underlying budget challenges. A Disaster Management hub supports informal settlement residents seeking to build resilience against the impacts of disasters. We also help residents to identify what infrastructure is needed to prevent or mitigate disaster damage.

At the heart of this work are Community Facilitators and community partner organisations, who play a critical role in supporting and advancing community resilience.



Asivikelane plays an important role in influencing Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and municipal budgets to ensure that disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness are adequately planned and funded. The Disaster Management Act requires municipalities to incorporate disaster management planning into their IDPs.

Common disasters and hazards



Disease outbreaks

Flooding can contaminate water supplies, leading to outbreaks of diseases like cholera, diarrhoea, and respiratory infections. Existing poor sanitation and lack of clean water worsen health risks.



Flooding (seasonal and extreme)

Heavy rains cause rivers to overflow, inundating homes.



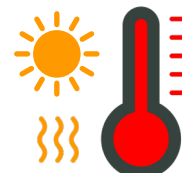
Fires

Unsafe electrical connections, paraffin stoves, candles, and overcrowded housing all contribute to the risks of fires.



Mudslides and erosion

Settlements built on unstable slopes face land-slides during heavy rains.



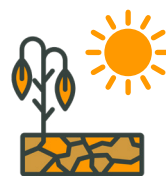
Heatwaves

Increasingly severe because of climate change.



Electric shocks from pylons

Faults along power lines can cause high electrical currents to flow through pylons, which can shock or electrocute people on the ground.



Drought

Prolonged periods of abnormally low rainfall lead to water shortages, crop failures, and environmental stress.



Climate stress

Climate change is changing weather patterns and heating our planet which affects both health and livelihoods.



2. Disasters and the risk to informal settlements

Disasters, both natural and man-made, affect large parts of our country, but the scale and severity of their impacts are often unevenly distributed. Some communities are hit harder when disasters strike, because of their location, housing and infrastructure challenges, and people's social and economic circumstances.

People living in informal settlements are often the most affected. Many settlements are overcrowded, have poor infrastructure, such as no proper roads or stormwater drains, and

their access to basic and emergency services is limited. These vulnerabilities increase their exposure to flooding, fires, strong winds, storms, heavy rainfall, and other hazards. These disasters can damage homes and belongings, disrupt livelihoods, and cause emotional distress, injuries and even loss of life.

Children, the elderly, and people with disabilities are at even greater risk during disaster emergencies.



Early warning saves lives!

Stay informed during severe weather. Monitor official weather and emergency updates from:

- Your local municipality.
- Disaster Management.
- South African Weather Service.

Do not:

- Spread misinformation.
- Share fake alerts.
- Ignore evacuation instructions.

VERIFY. INFORM. SAVE LIVES!

3. The role of community when disaster strikes

When a disaster happens, the people in your community are the first to respond. For this reason, it is important to work together to build awareness and strengthen disaster preparedness as a community. Being prepared as a community can reduce the impact of disasters and protect lives.



Create community-based early warning systems: This help communities to monitor, respond to, and rapidly share information about approaching disasters widely to reach all residents. This may include:

- Receiving warnings from official sources (South African Weather Service, municipality, Disaster Management).

- Monitoring for risks (heavy rainfall, rising river levels, fires, etc.).
- Passing those warnings quickly to everyone in the community (WhatsApp groups, sirens, loudhailers, door-to-door, community leaders).
- Knowing what actions to take when a warning is issued (evacuate, move belongings, avoid flooded areas, sandbags etc.).

To support the development of a disaster risk assessment, conduct community mapping, and a create response plan for your community:

- Share emergency contact numbers widely.
- Identify and map important community resources, infrastructure, and safe places to shelter during emergencies.
- Identify who in the community is most vulnerable, such as older persons, children and people living with disabilities.
- Develop clear steps for evacuation, temporary shelter, and communication during emergencies.
- Identify a disaster champion and/or volunteers in your settlement/community to assist with disaster preparedness and response activities.
- Build strong partnerships with local government, NGOs, churches, local schools, early childhood development centres and emergency services.



4. The role of your ward councillor

Your ward councillor is an important link between your community and local government. They play an important role in helping your community prepare for and respond to disasters, as well as recover afterwards. Their responsibilities include:

• Communication and coordination

- Acting as the first point of contact between residents and the municipality.
- Reporting the disaster to municipal disaster management teams and ensuring a rapid response.

• Mobilising support

- Coordinating relief efforts such as emergency shelter, food and water distribution.
- Working with NGOs, faith-based groups, and community organisations to bring assistance.

• Advocacy for residents

- Representing the needs of affected residents in council meetings.
- Pushing for resources like drainage improvements, fire hydrants, or relocation support.

• Community awareness and preparedness

- Helping educate residents about disaster risks and safety measures.
- Encouraging community disaster committees or volunteer groups.

• Monitoring and reporting

- Keeping records of damages and losses to inform municipal recovery plans.
- Ensuring accountability in how relief resources are distributed.



Asking NGOs for help

For large scale incidents such as fires and floods, Disaster Management can request assistance in the form of donations from local businesses, NGOs, and individuals through radio announcements, newspaper articles and social media posts. Donations can be financial or can provide practical aid in the form of food, water, clothing and blankets, and even sanitary products and children's toys. Disaster Management is responsible for the facilitating, collecting and distributing of these donations.



5. Floods

Residents of informal settlements are especially vulnerable to flooding because their homes are often built in low-lying or unsafe areas with poor drainage, and the structures themselves are not strong enough to withstand heavy rains. Limited access to proper infrastructure and emergency services can worsen the impact.

During a flood:

- Switch off electricity or unplug all appliances.
- Move to higher ground and avoid walking or driving through floodwaters.
- Evacuate to the nearest shelter according to your community plan (church, municipal hall, etc.).

FLOODING PREPAREDNESS TIPS

- **Elevate homes:** Build houses above ground level using bricks, pallets, or sandbags to raise the structure and reduce water entering during floods.
- **Improve drainage:** Dig small trenches or channels around homes to direct rainwater away.
- **Keep drains clear:** Regularly remove rubbish and debris from community drains and pathways to prevent blockages.
- **Use sandbags:** Place sandbags at doorways and vulnerable spots to block water entry during heavy rains.
- **Plant vegetation:** Grow grass or plants around homes to reduce erosion and help absorb water.
- **Avoid building in flood zones:** Avoid settling directly next to rivers, streams, or on steep slopes.
- **Create a community flood watch:** Work together to monitor rising water levels and alert neighbours early.
- **Safe storage:** Keep food and valuables in waterproof containers or on high shelves. Make copies of important documents and give them to someone you trust.
- **Emergency pathway:** Identify and maintain safe evacuation routes to higher ground.
- **Emergency kit:** Prepare a small grab bag with essential documents, medication, and a change of clothes, including something warm and rainproof.
- **Work with authorities and NGOs:** Engage with local government or aid groups to request drainage improvements, flood barriers, and disaster response training.



6. After a flood

Early reporting can reduce the impact and destruction caused by floodwaters. It is vital to contact your ward councillor's office **and** your local Disaster Management Department as soon as possible after the flood and provide the following information:

- The number of people directly affected.
- The addresses of affected households or the location of the settlement.
- Point person for the settlement/community and their phone number.

Provide as much information as you can to Disaster Management so that they can respond appropriately. The information you provide will:

- Help them understand what has happened so that they can complete a *disaster incident relief report* and provide emergency relief.
- The *disaster incident relief report* will then be referred to the Department of Human Settlements, the Department of Electricity and Energy, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), and the Department of Social Development.
- Help these departments conduct their own assessments and provide support within their areas of responsibility.



7. Fires

Fires pose one of the greatest risks to safety in informal settlements. If a fire breaks out, you should immediately alert neighbours, evacuate to safety, and call your local fire department.

The priority is saving lives, not property.

- **Raise the alarm:** Shout to alert neighbours. Make sure children, older people, and residents with disabilities are also alerted.
- **Evacuate quickly:** Use clear escape routes and take only your emergency grab bag. Don't risk your life trying to save your belongings.
- **Call Emergency Services**
- **Contain small fires if you can do so safely:** Use buckets of water, sand, or fire blankets – but only if the fire is manageable. And never throw water onto a grease or oil fire!
- **Never re-enter a burning home:** Once outside, stay out. Wait for trained firefighters.

FIRE PREVENTION TIPS

Safe cooking practices

- Cook outside or in well-ventilated areas.
- Never leave stoves or open flames unattended.
- Use sand or a fire blanket to suffocate a grease fire; never try to extinguish a grease fire with water.

Use safer fuels

- Use gas stoves with proper regulators over paraffin stoves.
- Store paraffin, petrol, and gas cylinders safely, away from heat sources.

Proper candle use

- Place candles in sturdy holders away from curtains and bedding.
- Extinguish candles before sleeping.
- Never leave candles unattended.

Electrical safety

- Do not overload plugs or use illegal, faulty, or makeshift electrical connections.
- Report faulty wiring to community leaders or NGOs.

Create firebreaks

- Leave small gaps between homes where possible to slow the spread of fires.
- Clear rubbish and vegetation that can fuel flames.

Community fire watch

- Organise neighbours to monitor for fire hazards.
- Share responsibility for quick response.

Emergency readiness

- Keep buckets of sand or water nearby.
- Have a plan for evacuating children and elderly quickly.

Educate children

- Teach them not to play with matches, lighters, or stoves.

Work with authorities and NGOs

- Participate in fire safety workshops.

If there is a fire, report it immediately.

**EARLY
DETECTION
CAN SAVE
LIVES!**





8. After a fire

Report the fire to your **ward councillor** and the **Fire Department** as soon as possible and provide the following information:

- The number of people directly affected.
- The addresses of affected households or the location of the settlement.
- Point person for the settlement/community and their phone number.

They will inform Disaster Management who will respond, assess the incident, and complete a *disaster incident relief report* so that emergency relief can be provided.

In the case of fires:

- Report the incident to the nearest police station and obtain an affidavit.
- Go to the nearest Fire Station to get a Proof of Fire Report if Fire and Emergency Services were called and responded to the fire.
- The *disaster incident relief report* will then be referred to the Department of Human Settlements, the Department of Electricity and Energy, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), and the Department of Social Development.
- These departments will conduct their own assessments and provide support within their areas of responsibility.



9. Electrical fires

Every year, electrical faults cause house fires, which often lead to property damage and even loss of life. It is essential to be alert for signs that your home might be at risk for an electrical fire.

How to spot an electrical fire risk in your home

If you notice any of these warning signs it is important to act immediately by calling a licensed electrician to come and inspect your home's electrical wiring.

- Burning smells coming from plugs, switches, appliances, or wiring.
- Sparks when plugging in or unplugging appliances.
- Flickering or dimming lights, especially when appliances are switched on.
- Warm or hot plugs, switches, sockets, or extension cords.
- Discoloured, cracked, or melted sockets/plugs.

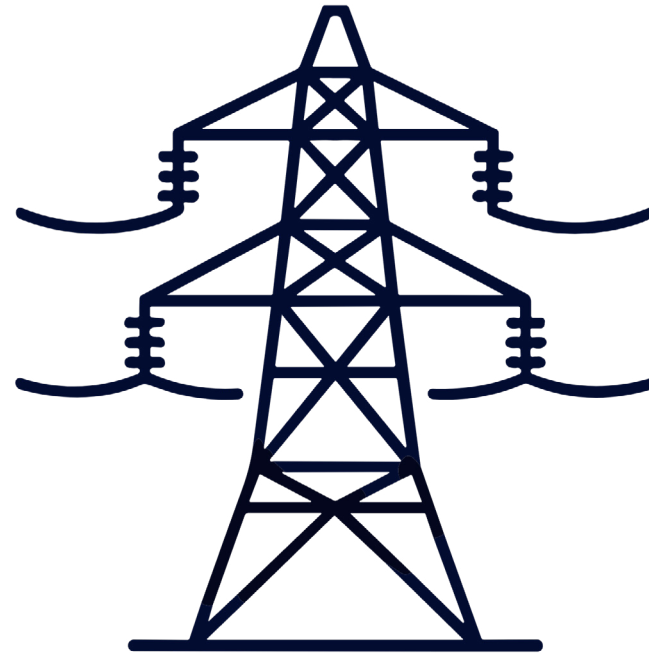
- Buzzing or crackling from switches, plugs, or electrical boards.
- Frequent tripping of electricity or circuit breakers.
- Loose wires, exposed wires, or damaged cords.
- Overloaded plugs or extension cords with too many appliances connected.
- Electrical shocks or a tingling sensation when touching appliances, taps, metal structures, or plugs.

ELECTRICAL FIRE PREVENTION TIPS

- Do not use faulty sockets or outlets – such as worn-out sockets or sockets that have not been properly grounded – and avoid loose or exposed wires that can spark.
- Do not install bulbs with a higher wattage than recommended for lamps or light fixtures, as these can cause the fixtures to overheat and cause electrical fires.
- Do not rely on extension cords for permanent use – appliances, particularly those that draw a lot of power, should be plugged directly into outlets. Extension cords should be used only temporarily.
- Do not neglect proper wiring installation or maintenance – old or overloaded wiring can overheat and ignite fires.
- Do not make illegal electricity connections – they are dangerous, unlawful, and can easily result in fires, injury, or death.

10. After an electrical incident

- Keep everyone away from the affected area.
- Immediately report the incident and any injuries to Emergency Services.
- Report the incident to the Electricity and Energy Directorate.
- Do not try to reconnect electricity yourself.
- Wait for qualified technicians before entering the affected area.
- Follow municipal procedures before reconnecting electricity.



11. High-voltage powerlines

It is extremely dangerous to build shacks next to or under high-voltage powerlines and pylons. Electricity can cause severe injury or death. A fault anywhere along the powerline, even one far away, can cause high electrical currents to flow through the pylon and can shock or electrocute a person who comes into contact with it. Children in particular should be warned about the dangers and should never be allowed to play close to pylons.

Metal is a very good conductor of electricity, and it is dangerous to build shacks constructed

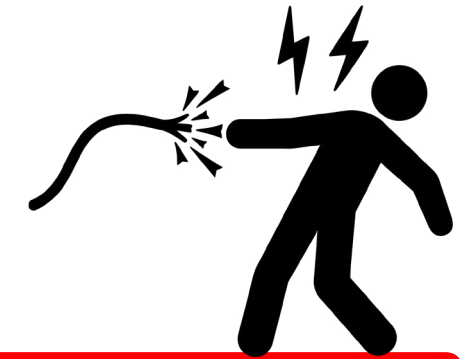
with corrugated iron sheets under high-voltage lines or pylons. Electricity can jump or arc from the power lines to the shack. The height of pylons also means that they are often struck by lightning, creating a high-voltage surge that may also flash across the shack. Lightning strikes can be deadly.

People can even be shocked if they walk barefoot under a high-voltage line in the rain. During wet conditions, the power line might pass an electrical current into the ground. Although these currents may only feel like pins and needles under your feet, touching any metal, like a washing line or sheet of corrugated iron, allows more electricity to pass through your body, which can be fatal.

Do not climb pylons. If people climb pylons and touch the power lines, they risk electrocution. Falling from high pylons can also be fatal.

Water and electricity do not mix! Just like metal, water conducts electricity. Water under power lines and pylons is extremely dangerous for residents and can cause electrocution.

You cannot tap power from high-voltage lines. These lines carry electricity at extremely high voltages so it can travel long distances efficiently. Before electricity can be used safely in homes, the voltage must be reduced at substations and transformers. Connecting directly to a high-voltage line can destroy electrical appliances and is likely to cause serious injury or death. This makes illegal connections extremely dangerous, and you should not use them.



POWERLINE SAFETY TIPS

- Never connect electricity illegally.
- Never build structures beneath powerlines or within servitudes.
- Keep metal structures away from powerlines.
- Teach children about electrical dangers and keep them away from powerlines and pylons.
- Do not fly kites or place long metal objects near powerlines.
- Report damaged powerlines or electrical infrastructure immediately.
- Stay well away from fallen powerlines, electrical cables, and damaged electrical equipment.
- If flooding occurs near powerlines, move away immediately. Water conducts electricity, and even contact with water where live power lines have been submerged can cause electrocution.



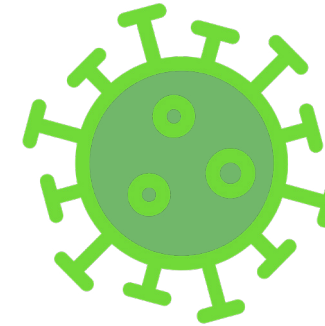
What is a utility servitude?

A servitude is a legal safety zone beneath and around power lines. It allows the electricity company or their contractors to inspect, maintain and repair the lines safely. To protect people and ensure access for maintenance, homes and other structures, even high trees, are not allowed to be built within the servitude.

The width of the servitude depends on the voltage of the power line. For a 132 kV line, the

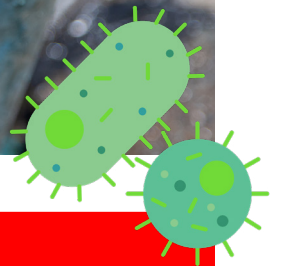
servitude extends 16 meters on each side of the pylon, making the total width 32 meters. This distance ensures people and buildings are kept at a safe distance from the line.

When people build homes under power lines, technicians cannot access the poles, which can delay repairs and leave customers without power for extended periods of time.



12. Disease outbreaks

Poor sanitation, a lack of clean drinking water, and flooding can cause outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea and respiratory infections. These can spread quickly through crowded communities.



DISEASE PREVENTION TIPS

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before preparing food and after using the toilet.
- Boil or treat water if you are unsure it is safe to drink.
- Store drinking water in clean, covered containers.
- Keep food covered and heat it thoroughly. Avoid eating food that has been left exposed or prepared in unhygienic conditions.
- Stay up to date with vaccination programmes where available.
- Dispose of rubbish safely to reduce pests.
- Clean communal areas regularly.
- Seek medical attention early if anyone develops severe diarrhoea, vomiting, high fever, difficulty breathing, or signs of dehydration. Infants and small children need urgent care as they can dehydrate quickly.
- Follow advice from health authorities and community health workers, and rely only on official information.
- Report suspected outbreaks to the nearest clinic or health facility and cooperate with screening or awareness campaigns.



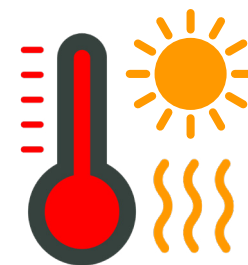
13. Mudslides and landslides

Mudslides and landslides can occur after heavy rainfall, placing homes and lives at risk. If a mudslide or landslide occurs, you should:

- Move immediately to higher, stable ground.
- Stay away from riverbanks, steep slopes, and unstable ground.
- Do not attempt to cross flowing mud or debris.
- Follow evacuation instructions from emergency officials.
- Warn and check on neighbours if it is safe to do so.
- Report damaged homes to your ward councillor or Disaster Management and follow the normal disaster reporting procedures for assistance.

MUDSLIDE PREVENTION TIPS

- Avoid building homes on steep slopes.
- Plant grass and vegetation to reduce soil erosion.
- Keep drainage channels free of rubbish.
- Watch slopes for signs of movement, such as cracks in the ground or leaning trees.
- Report unstable slopes to your ward councillor or municipality.
- Divert stormwater away from homes where possible.
- Avoid damaged roads, unstable ground, and returning home until authorities declare the area safe.

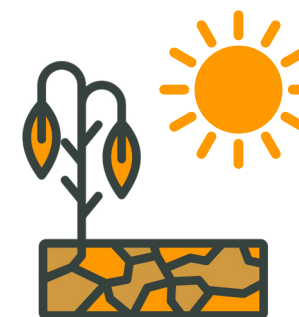


14. Heatwaves

Heatwaves can cause dehydration, heat stroke and heat exhaustion, particularly among children, older persons, and people living with chronic illnesses.

DEHYDRATION PREVENTION TIPS

- Drink water regularly, even when not thirsty.
- Wear a hat and sunscreen when outdoors.
- Keep homes well ventilated.
- Stay in the shade during the hottest part of the day; rest and avoid strenuous outdoor activities during these hours.
- Never leave children or animals inside parked vehicles.
- Store drinking water for extremely hot days.
- Wear lightweight, light-coloured clothing. Light colours like white reflect heat while dark colours absorb heat.
- Check in regularly on elderly neighbours, children, and people living alone.
- Seek medical attention immediately if someone becomes confused, faints, or has a very high body temperature.



15. Droughts

South Africa regularly experiences droughts. Droughts reduce available water for drinking, cooking, washing and food production. During a drought, you should:

- Use water sparingly, avoid wasting water when washing, and encourage family members to save water.
- Prioritise water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene.
- Follow municipal water restrictions.
- Report water leaks immediately.
- Store drinking water safely.

DROUGHT PREVENTION TIPS

- Repair leaking taps and pipes, and report water leaks immediately.
- Collect rainwater.
- Reuse grey water for gardens.
- Use buckets instead of hoses.
- Plant drought-resistant vegetation.

16. Where to find support for victims of disasters

- When **Disaster Management** receives reports of incidents such as floods, fires, mudslides and other emergencies, they will assess the damage and needs of affected residents.
- The **Department of Human Settlements** provides immediate shelter to victims and coordinates disaster response. They can also relocate affected communities and help to rebuild homes.
- The **South African Social Security Agency (SASSA)** provides temporary financial and non-financial assistance in the form of cash, vouchers, or other items.
- The **Emergency Housing Unit (EHU)** receives requests for Emergency Housing from ward councillors and Disaster Management. Emergency housing kits can be applied for with a sworn affidavit from the police station and a letter of motivation from your ward councillor confirming the incident.



- **Social Relief of Distress (SRD)** responds immediately to a crisis to provide essential care items to vulnerable people. It may provide food parcels, relief vouchers, uniforms, blankets, hot meals, dignity packs, sanitary products for menstrual hygiene, and other support.
- **Ward councillor's office / Ward Committee member** acts as a key contact between residents and the municipality, helps report incidents, confirms incidents where required, and supports communication with affected communities.
- **Fire Department / Fire and Emergency Services** responds to fires and emergencies; issues proof of fire reports where applicable and supports emergency response after incidents.
- **South African Police Service (SAPS)** assists affected residents by taking their statements and providing sworn statements (affidavits) after fire incidents and supports official reporting where required.
- **Electricity and Energy Directorate** sends qualified technicians to assess electrical safety, support reconnection processes, respond to damaged electrical infrastructure, and help prevent further electrical hazards.
- **Health authorities, clinics and community health workers** support disease outbreak prevention, screening, awareness campaigns, treatment referrals and official health advice.
- **Local municipality** shares official emergency updates, coordinates municipal services, supports disaster reporting, and helps implement safety measures such as water restrictions or infrastructure repairs.
- **NGOs, businesses, faith-based groups, churches, schools, and community organisations** can support relief efforts through donations, shelter, awareness activities, training, and community-based assistance.

17. The role of disaster management centres

National centres provide strategic leadership, provincial centres coordinate and support across the province, and municipal centres implement disaster management at the local community level.

National Disaster Management Centre:
Provides national leadership, policy direction, coordination, and support for disaster risk reduction and disaster response across South Africa.

Provincial Disaster Management Centres:
Coordinate disaster management activities within their provinces, support municipalities, and ensure provincial preparedness and response efforts are aligned with national policies.

Municipal Disaster Management Centres:
Work directly with communities to identify risks, coordinate preparedness and response activities, manage local emergencies, and support recovery efforts after disasters.

Disaster management center numbers:

CAPE TOWN:
021 480 7700 /
080 911 4357

JOHANNESBURG:
011 375 5911

TSHWANE:
107 /
012 310 6400

NELSON MANDELA BAY:
041 501 7900

KNYSNA:
044 302 8911

BUFFALO CITY:
043 743 7118

MANGAUNG:
051 409 9600

ETHEKWINI:
031 361 0000

ASIVIKELANE 2.0 | The hub model

Asivikelane's new model for government engagement As Asivikelane enters our fourth year, the way we operate is shifting. **Asivikelane 2.0** will be built using multi-stakeholder platforms (hubs) focusing on specific service delivery problems. We hope to replicate this multi-stakeholder approach across other metros throughout South Africa. Hub participants will work together to find solutions to service delivery issues and underlying budget challenges.



While some things will change, the heart of Asivikelane will remain the same. Asivikelane will continue to:

- Build the capacity of informal settlement residents to engage the government on service delivery issues.
- Empower residents to engage the government using this capacity, data, and diagnostics.
- Collect service delivery data from residents.
- Use this information to diagnose service delivery and systems problems.



National emergency numbers



EMERGENCY

112

POLICE

10 111

AMBULANCE

10 117

Poison Unit

0861 555 777

**Health outbreak
hotline**

0800 029 999

**SASSA call
centre**

0800 601 011

**Gender-Based
Violence hotline**

0800 428 428

**Suicide Crisis
helpline**

0800 567 567



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Co Impact



DBSA
DEVELOPMENT BANK OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
Building Africa's Prosperity



Co-funded by
the European Union



EW SETA



BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation



2030 NDP



german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT



giz
German Development Cooperation



International Budget Partnership
SOUTH AFRICA
Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO