



Botswana Climate  
Change Network

Empowering communities for meaningful climate action

**21 February 2025**

**Gaborone, Botswana**

## **STATEMENT ON FEBRUARY FLOODING CRISIS**

The Botswana Climate Change Network (BCCN) expresses deep concern over the ongoing flooding crisis experienced across the country, which has affected areas including the Greater Gaborone area and the Boteti, Ghanzi, Moshupa, and South East Districts. These floods have resulted in widespread disruption, human displacement, loss of property, and serious risks to human safety. Official government statistics at the end of the day on February 20th report the displacement of over 1,000 people so far. UNICEF Botswana also reports that over 600,000 students are experiencing learning disruptions due to school closures. As civil society, we stand in solidarity with the affected communities and call for urgent systemic reforms to prevent future disasters of this magnitude.

This event is a disaster that is both natural and unnatural, driven by a combination of climate-induced extreme rainfall and preventable human-made vulnerabilities. The heavy rains experienced in Gaborone, over 113 mm in a single day on February 19, 2025, exceeded the city's typical monthly rainfall average, overwhelming urban drainage systems. However, while extreme weather events are increasing due to climate change, the severity of this disaster is also the result of inadequate urban planning and worsening land degradation, all of which have amplified the impact of this event.

The flooding in Gaborone has caused significant and widespread damage, affecting both residential and commercial areas. Road infrastructure and residential and commercial buildings in low-lying areas such as Block 8 and Broadhurst have been severely flooded, and we expect damages to run into millions of pula. Many residents have reported water entering homes, causing loss of property and rendering their living conditions uninhabitable.

We commend the government's swift response in closing all schools until conditions improve, recognising the danger posed to students and staff, and efforts by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to deliver rapid recovery in affected areas. Businesses have also suffered extensive damages, with many struggling to operate due to water damage, stock loss, and power outages. We thus commend the business community through Business Botswana for its immediate response to the current and future climate-induced crises by commissioning the Private Sector Disaster Response Fund. Beyond the immediate damage, the long-term economic consequences of the flooding are profound. The flooding has placed immense pressure on Botswana's emergency response systems, which have been slow to react due to long-standing institutional weaknesses.

## **This is NOT Just a Natural Disaster**

Extreme rainfall is only part of the story. The flooding catastrophe is a direct result of years of inadequate disaster risk planning, urban mismanagement, and land degradation, all of which have amplified the impact of this event. While climate change has intensified rainfall patterns, our failure to proactively address urban and climate vulnerabilities has turned what should have been a manageable event into a full-blown crisis.

### **1. Failure of Disaster Risk Planning and Reduction**

Gaps in the implementation of a modern disaster risk reduction framework have contributed to the country's vulnerability to extreme weather events such as this. The National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2013–2018) expired years ago, and no publicly accessible updated framework has been implemented, despite the country's commitments under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030). Disaster risk reduction funding remains critically low, even though Botswana loses approximately \$353 million annually due to land degradation<sup>1</sup>, equivalent to 3.2% of Botswana's GDP.

The risks of flooding were well known but not adequately prioritised. The 2022 National Disaster Management Evaluation<sup>2</sup> explicitly warned that Gaborone lacked the infrastructure to handle extreme weather events, yet no substantial action was taken to mitigate these risks. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) remains underresourced, leading to slow and ineffective responses to disasters. Shortcomings in adequately financing real-time flood monitoring systems and early warning mechanisms mean that Botswana were left vulnerable with no means to anticipate or prepare for the crisis.

### **2. Limited Municipal Infrastructure and Urban Planning**

Gaborone's municipal infrastructure has failed catastrophically in the face of this flooding. The city's drainage system is outdated, inadequate, and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of water. Roads and stormwater channels were designed for a climate of the past, without consideration for increased urbanisation and changing weather patterns. Despite numerous reports highlighting these deficiencies, necessary upgrades are yet to be made.

Urban expansion in Gaborone has ignored flood risks entirely. Drainage systems in low-lying areas remain clogged, neglected, or improperly maintained, leading to extreme levels of waterlogging. Poor zoning regulations have allowed construction in flood-prone areas, worsening the scale of damage. These urban management failures are not new, yet they continue to be ignored at the cost of human lives and economic stability.

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<sup>1</sup>ELD Initiative Botswana Report, 2023, [Online](#)

<sup>2</sup>Evaluation of national disaster management strategy and planning for flood management and impact reduction in Gaborone, Botswana, 2022, [Online](#)

### **3. Land Degradation Has Increased Flood Risk**

Beyond poor urban planning, Botswana's land degradation crisis has significantly amplified the severity of flooding. The country's natural flood absorption capacity has been severely compromised. Over 36.4% of Botswana's total land area is classified as degraded<sup>3</sup>, meaning that rainfall runs off rapidly instead of being absorbed into the soil, leading to faster and more destructive flooding.

The replacement of deep-rooted native grasses with woody invasive species has altered the way water moves through ecosystems, further reducing flood resilience. Sediment loads in Botswana's rivers have increased, reducing the carrying capacity of major waterways and making rivers more prone to overflow. This land degradation has removed natural flood buffers, increasing the likelihood of extreme flood events like the one currently unfolding in Gaborone.

#### **A Testament to the Urgency of the Loss and Damage Fund**

The current flooding disaster, whose impact has been felt across the country, is not just a local crisis. It is part of a much larger global conversation on loss and damage, the concept that climate-vulnerable nations like Botswana are experiencing real, measurable economic and non-economic losses directly due to climate change, despite contributing the least to global emissions. This event is a clear example of how climate change is driving extreme weather events that disproportionately impact developing countries with limited infrastructural and financial capacity to respond.

COP 29 delivered much-needed progress towards delivering an operational Loss and Damage Fund to provide support to countries battling climate-induced disasters like this one. Botswana's experience highlights why the urgency to operationalise this fund cannot be overstated. The cost of recovery from flooding (infrastructure damage, economic losses, and social displacement) places immense strain on the already constrained national budgets of low-GDP developing countries. We cannot continue to bear the undue brunt of climate change without meaningful support from those most responsible for historical emissions.

The devastation in Botswana echoes similar cries across Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Island States, buttressing why access to adequate, timely, and grant-based loss and damage financing is non-negotiable for climate justice. The Loss and Damage Fund must not simply remain a political commitment on paper but a fully functional and accessible mechanism that delivers support where it is most needed. Delays in operationalisation mean more lives will be disrupted, more communities will continue to be displaced, and more long-term economic setbacks for countries like ours that are already struggling to adapt to climate change.

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<sup>3</sup> UNCCD Land Degradation Report, 2023, [Online](#)

## **Call to Action**

This disaster should serve as a wake-up call for our legislators, urban planners, and developers, as well as environmental protection regulators. Botswana cannot afford to repeat these mistakes. The government must immediately update and enforce a National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy that aligns with the Sendai Framework (2015–2030). Disaster response funding must be increased, and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) must be fully resourced to provide real-time flood monitoring and modern early warning systems.

Immediate urban flood mitigation measures must be implemented. The Gaborone City Council (GCC) must launch an urgent flood mitigation plan, including the upgrading of stormwater drainage systems and the removal of obstructions from existing waterways. Illegal construction in flood-prone areas must stop, and flood zoning regulations must be strictly enforced. Sustainable urban planning policies must be adopted, including nature-based solutions such as permeable pavements, green corridors, and urban wetlands.

Land degradation must be addressed as a national emergency. Botswana must invest in attaining its commitment to restoring 45 million hectares of degraded land to prevent further loss of natural flood absorption zones.

Botswana is at a crossroads. This flooding crisis is a warning: climate change is intensifying, and unless we address poor disaster management, failing infrastructure, and worsening land degradation, these disasters will continue to escalate. The government and the business community must work together with civil society to implement real solutions, backed by science and data, not reactionary policies that only address crises after they occur. Botswana must invest in climate resilience, sustainable land management, and urban planning reforms, or we will face even greater disasters in the future.

In the build-up towards COP30 in Belem later this year, we make our emphatic call to the global community for loss and damage financing mechanisms that are equitable and responsive to the real-time on-ground needs and realities of frontline nations like ours. Without this, vulnerable nations will continue to be trapped in this cycle of disaster, response, and recovery without the resources to build real long-term resilience.

BCCN stands ready to support all efforts towards more meaningful climate resilience. We cannot wait for the next disaster. Action is needed now.

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