WHEN THE RAINS COME: ARE WE READY?

Why environmental protection is key to building resilient communities

Every rainy season reminds us of nature's power. While rainfall sustains agriculture, replenishes water resources and supports ecosystems, it can also expose communities to flooding, erosion, landslides and infrastructure damage. The difference often lies not in the rain itself, but in how prepared we are.

As Kenya approaches the rainy season, the return of rainfall presents both an opportunity and a reminder: **preparedness must begin before the rains arrive.**

Rainfall is essential to our environment and economy. It replenishes water sources, supports agriculture, restores ecosystems and sustains livelihoods. However, when rainfall is intense or prolonged, it can also bring challenges such as flooding, landslides, soil erosion and damage to infrastructure, particularly in areas that are environmentally degraded or poorly prepared.

The Kenya Meteorological Department provides regular weather forecasts and advisories to support planning and early action. Staying informed and responding to official guidance is therefore an important part of preparing for weather-related risks.

*Heavy rainfall during the 2024 long rains triggered landslides and soil erosion in several parts of Kenya, highlighting the importance of protecting fragile landscapes and catchment areas.*The message is simple:

How we prepare for the rain can make a significant difference in how we experience its impacts.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS OUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

Flood preparedness does not begin when water starts rising. It begins with how we manage our environment every day.

Healthy forests, wetlands, riverine ecosystems and catchments play a natural role in regulating water flows. They absorb and slow down excess water, reduce surface runoff, stabilise soils and help protect communities from some of the impacts of heavy rainfall.

On the other hand, degraded landscapes, deforestation, encroachment on wetlands and riparian areas, soil degradation and blocked drainage systems can increase vulnerability to flooding and erosion.

This makes environmental conservation and disaster preparedness two sides of the same coin.

Protect Our Wetlands

Wetlands act as natural water storage areas, helping to absorb and regulate excess water. Protecting them from pollution, degradation and encroachment strengthens their ability to provide this important environmental service.

Maintain Vegetation

Trees, grass and other vegetation help hold soil together and reduce the speed at which rainwater flows across the land. Protecting existing vegetation and restoring degraded areas can therefore contribute to healthier and more resilient landscapes.

When appropriately managed, increased rainfall can create favorable conditions for tree planting, vegetation regeneration of degraded landscapes and replenishment of water resources.

Keep Waterways and Drainage Systems Clear

Blocked drains, rivers and streams can prevent water from flowing safely, increasing the risk of flooding. Proper waste disposal, particularly avoiding the dumping of plastics and other waste into drainage systems and waterways, is a simple but important action everyone can take.

Heavy rainfall can wash improperly disposed waste from Streets, homes and open areas into drainage systems, rivers wetlands and other water bodies. Blocked drainage can also worsen localized flooding

Protect Riparian Areas

Riverbanks and other watercourse buffers provide important protection against erosion and help maintain healthy waterways. Avoiding encroachment and protecting these areas helps communities and ecosystems cope better with heavy rainfall.

While wetlands naturally absorb and store excess water, extreme rainfall can place significant pressure on these ecosystems, underscoring the need for their protection and restoration.

NETFUND ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE CHECKLIST

Before the rains intensify, ask yourself: What can I do?

1. Clear drainage systems

Remove plastic waste, silt, leaves and other debris from drainage channels around homes, institutions and communities. **Do not dump waste into drains, rivers or streams.**

2. Protect natural buffer zones

Avoid encroachment on riverbanks, wetlands and other sensitive areas that naturally help regulate water.

3. Practice soil conservation

Use measures such as terracing, contour farming, mulching and maintaining ground cover to reduce soil erosion and runoff.

4. Prepare households and communities

Know safe routes and areas to move to if flooding occurs. Secure property where possible and keep important emergency contacts accessible.

5. Stay informed

Follow weather forecasts, alerts and guidance from the Kenya Meteorological Department and relevant local authorities. Early information can support early action.

FROM PREPAREDNESS TO LASTING ACTION

Resilience is not built overnight and it does not begin when disaster strikes.

It is built through the decisions we make every day: **how we manage our land, where we dispose of waste, how we protect wetlands and waterways, whether we restore degraded ecosystems and how we prepare our communities for changing weather patterns.**

Every action matters.

A community that protects its environment is better positioned to withstand environmental pressures. A household that keeps its surroundings clear of waste contributes to safer drainage. A farmer who adopts soil conservation practices helps protect the land from erosion. A community that restores degraded landscapes invests in its own long-term resilience.

As the rains come, let us not only ask, **"Are we ready for the rain?"**

Let us also ask:

"Have we protected the environment that protects us?"

Because resilient communities are built long before the first drop falls.

Building resilient communities begins with recognising that **environmental conservation is not separate from disaster preparedness it is part of it.**

A MESSAGE FROM NETFUND

"Environmental conservation is one of our most effective strategies for strengthening resilience to climate extremes. By restoring degraded ecosystems, protecting natural water buffers and keeping our waterways clear, we can reduce environmental risks and help protect both nature and human lives. Preparedness begins with individual responsibility and collective action."

National Environment Trust Fund (NETFUND)

Stay informed. Stay prepared. Protect the environment.