

CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

National Fire Service Indaba 2026

Thuto Makolomakoe

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is experiencing an increase in both the frequency and magnitude of disasters. This challenge is further compounded by the significant loss of experienced firefighters to international markets, particularly in the Middle East.

Recent incidents highlight the complex and evolving risk landscape we face, with the likelihood of similar or greater risks in the future.

Capacity building and continuous training remain critical mechanisms to ensure preparedness, resilience, and operational effectiveness.

OVERVIEW

The Growing Risk Landscape

- ❑ South Africa continues to face increasing climate-related disasters, including floods, veld fires, and urban fire incidents.
- ❑ Infrastructure strain, urban density, and climate variability are intensifying fire risks.
- ❑ A significant number of experienced firefighters are seeking employment abroad, creating a skills gap.
- ❑ Without structured intervention, this skills gap will continue to widen, reducing municipal response capacity.



OVERVIEW...Cont

Recent Disasters:

- Lillian Ngoyi Street (Bree Street) Gas Explosion
- Eastern Cape Floods
- Mpumalanga and Limpopo flash Floods
- Western Cape Veld Fires, and more

These incidents demonstrate the urgent need for strengthened institutional capacity and improved training frameworks.



STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE ON CAPACITY BUILDING

“Preparedness is not an expense — it is an investment in resilience.”

Capacity building must move from being reactive to being institutionalized and proactive.

Training is not a once-off event — it is a continuous strategic process.



METHODS CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building requires:

- Better recruitment strategies.
- Sustainable retention strategies.
- Structured and transparent career progression pathways.

Benefit - These measures will enhance institutional stability and improve operational efficiency by retaining experienced personnel for longer periods.



METHODS TRAINING

Training must:

- Align with current local and international standards.
- Be delivered by qualified and experienced training personnel.
- Be supported by well-equipped and modern training facilities.

Benefit - Improved training directly enhances knowledge, tactical response, and operational effectiveness during incidents.



STANDARDIZATION

A well-structured training system is fundamental to the success of Fire and Rescue Services.

Consider a model where:

- ❑ Each province has a fully equipped training facility.
- ❑ All facilities are regulated by a central authority.
- ❑ Oversight includes finances, staffing, equipment, accreditation, and compliance, will be adhered to by the delegated central authority.



STANDARDIZATION...Cont

This would result in:

- Increased recruitment.
- Standardized training methodologies.
- Uniform competency output.
- A centralized and standardized firefighter database.



DIRECT IMPACT

Appropriate and high-quality training will improve:

- Firefighter confidence (on and off scene).
- Scene approach methodologies.
- Firefighter safety.
- Operational efficiency.
- Career development pathways.
- Capacity building.
- Personnel retention.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposed 3 - Pillar Implementation Model

1. Recruitment & Retention

- Targeted recruitment campaigns
- Improved working conditions
- Structured mentorship programs
- Continuous professional development.

PROJECT DRIVERS

Provincial and Municipalities

2 years

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Standardized Training System

- One accredited training center per province.
- Central regulatory oversight.
- Nationally aligned curriculum.
- Competitive salary benchmarking.

PROJECT DRIVERS

National and Provincial

2 – 3 years

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Infrastructure & Equipment Investment

- Modern firefighting technology.
- Simulation-based training tools.
- Digital firefighter database.
- Equipment life cycle management systems.

This model will ensure sustainability rather than temporary improvement.

PROJECT DRIVERS

National and Provincial

3 Years

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

If implemented, we can expect:

- Reduced incident-related fatalities.
- Increased firefighter retention rates.
- Standardized national competency levels.
- Strengthened municipal disaster resilience.
- Better Response Methods.



CONCLUSION

South Africa cannot afford to continuously lose institutional knowledge while disaster risks increase.

The time to institutionalize structured capacity building is now.

If we invest strategically in our firefighters today, we secure community safety for generations to come.

While this transformation may require time, a structured and well-executed initial phase will position the sector for long-term success.



CONCLUSION...Cont

Investing in training will enable exponential growth and long-term sustainability within the Fire Services sector. Strengthened training systems will also contribute significantly to retaining expertise and institutional knowledge.

To achieve this, the following must be prioritized:

Improved firefighter retention strategies

Expansion of accredited training institutions

Investment in modern firefighting equipment

Competitive salary packages and improved benefits



THANK YOU

