

MEET OWEN BECKER,

DMISA'S DEPUTY PRESIDENT FOR 2018 TO 2020



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Owen Becker, DMISA's deputy president for 2018 to 2020 is currently the manager for Disaster Management at Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, situated on the east coast of Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. It includes the towns of East London, Bhisho and King William's Town, as well as the large townships of Mdantsane and Zwelitsha.

Disaster Management Journal spoke to Becker to find out what made him choose this particular career field. "I was interested in the medical field and provided voluntary first-aid at soccer matches and in the casualty unit at the Frere Hospital on weekends and during school holidays. During National Service I underwent further training as an infantry medic, joining the East London Ambulance Service was a natural career path to follow", said Becker.

He completed various courses in ambulance emergency care, fire services, safety, leadership and management in the ambulance service and was promoted to leading ambulanceman, ambulance officer and training officer within a short period of time. "The almost five years as a training officer was fulfilling as it allowed you to develop the capacity of others so that they could reach their potential," added Becker.

He elaborated, saying, "Exposure to large incidents and simulations made me question the 'silo approach' and the lack of coordination and resulted in me applying for the first full time Civil Defence officer post in the East London Municipality in July 1987.

The biggest influence on his career thus far was the extent of loss and suffering that occurs because people lack knowledge and skills and his desire to help them to overcome this disadvantage is his greatest motivator. "The fact that the local level is where the potential to make a difference is the greatest, attracted me to the local government sphere and has kept me there for more than four decades," stated Becker.

We asked him about the mentors that helped shaped his career to which he answered, "The unconditional love of God inspires me every day. My father taught me integrity and to stand for what I believe in, the fire and ambulance chief, Captain 'Bill' Kenny and the ambulance head, Theunis Barry, encouraged me to further develop my passion to motivate others to reach their potential.

When asked what motivated him, Becker said, "My growth in the disaster management field has come from hundreds of colleagues and academics, who are too many to name without

fear of failing to mention significant contributions, who have unselfishly shared their knowledge, advice and encouragement and continue to do so."

He continued, "I joined the Civil Defence Association of South Africa in 1987 and have been honoured to share in its transformation to a professional body, known as the Disaster Management Institute of Southern Africa. I have held posts on the Algoa Regional structure and have served as a national councillor from 1995 to 2004 and again from 2008 to present. I was elected to the Executive Committee in 2012 to present with the portfolio for Training, Skills Development, Standardisation and Tours and in 2018, I was elected as Deputy President for the 2018 to 2020 term of office."

"DMISA has played a huge role in providing knowledge and direction that has equipped me for the task. The Management Course in Civil Defence was developed by members of the association in conjunction with the University of South Africa and provided a solid base in the 1980s."

"DMISA was again instrumental in the partnership of Technikon SA, Wisconsin and Cranfield Universities that presented the United Nations course that brought South Africa in line with the International approach to managing disaster, in the late 1990s."



Owen Becker, DMISA deputy president and DMISA president Mduduzi Lancelot Nxumalo

GLOBAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 2019

A GUIDED TOUR

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (Sendai Framework) emphasises that risk is everyone’s business – explicitly identifying the need for all-of-society and all-of-State institutions’ engagement. Past Global Assessment Reports (GARs) presented the now-accepted wisdom that managing risk does not equate to fire fighters, first responders and civil protection authorities managing the consequences of realised risk. Risk must be understood in much broader terms – contextually and temporally. Previous GARs also emphasised that risk is a function of more than simply hazard, that disasters are not natural but a product of the interaction of often naturally occurring events and human agency. We define these events as disasters when people suffer and things we care about are damaged or lost.

Risk and the context of hazard, exposure and vulnerability

This puts the onus on all of us to understand the nature of risk – that death, loss or damage (impacts that define a disaster – that are the disaster) are a function of the context of hazard, vulnerability and exposure. The Sendai Framework exhorts us to reduce risk by avoiding decisions that create risk, by reducing existing risk and by building resilience.

The Sendai Framework translates those messages into ones that can be used in the real world:

- Risk is everyone’s business: “While the enabling, guiding and coordinating

role of national and federal State Governments remain essential, it is necessary to empower local authorities and local communities to reduce disaster risk, including through resources, incentives and decision-making responsibilities, as appropriate.” (Para. 19f)

- Disasters are not natural: “The present Framework will apply to the risk of small-scale and large-scale, frequent and infrequent, sudden and slow-onset disasters caused by natural or man-made hazards, as well as related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks. It aims to guide the multi-hazard management of disaster risk in development at all levels as well as within and across all sectors.” (Para. 15)
- Risk is a function of the decisions we take and how we consume, which then shape the world around us: “Business, professional associations and private sector financial institutions, including financial regulators and accounting bodies ... to integrate disaster risk management, including business continuity, into business models and practices through disaster-risk-informed investments.” (Para. 36c)
- Understanding and managing risk is everyone’s business and integral to the success of all 2015 agendas: “Disaster risk reduction requires

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

GAR

Global Assessment Report
on Disaster Risk Reduction

2019



an all-of-society engagement and partnership” and “Civil society, volunteers, organised voluntary work organisations and community-based organisations to participate, in collaboration with public institutions, to, inter alia, ... advocate for resilient communities and an inclusive and all-of-society disaster risk management that strengthen synergies across groups.” (Paras. 19d and 36a)

The Sendai Framework tells us that the risk landscape has changed, that it is complex, that we have perhaps been slow to realise this, and that we have a lot of catching up to do. In calling for engagement of all stakeholders and integration with policy on climate change, development and risk financing, the Sendai Framework identifies that risk and disasters are part of a complex set of human systems that operate at different scales and along

The annual conference and journal provide disaster practitioners with current information on the trends, case studies and best practice in the field of disaster management.

“I see DMISA playing an ever-increasing role in ensuring that personnel in the field of disaster management have the knowledge, skills and experience to reduce the exposure to loss and suffering from disasters by building resilient and sustainable households and communities.”

“This must be based on the following pillars:

1. The development of partnerships with the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), South African Local

Government Association (SALGA), academic institutions and other professional bodies

2. A dynamic scope of practice that informs the capacitation of disaster management personnel
3. A Code of Conduct that protects the vulnerable that we serve
4. A Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme that ensures that the skills of personnel are in line with ‘best practice’.

“All indications are that climate change will result in more frequent and more severe disasters. Mitigating this risk can only be achieved when everybody takes responsibility for what they have control over.

Disaster managers must provide leadership and coordination. We must ensure that they have the capacity to achieve this.”

“At the age of 61 years, I completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Disaster Management and am currently working on my Masters that seeks to answer, “What are the competency requirements of a disaster management practitioner at Local Government level?”

“With the grace of God, I intend to teach and mentor for many years after I officially stop working. I challenge everybody to learn something new every day and don’t give up until you are satisfied with the answer,” concluded Becker. 🇳🇷