GhIE
GHANA INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERING

POSITION STATEMENT

Engineering Solutions for Transforming Urban Stormwater Management in Ghana

Following the Flood on 29 June 2026 in Accra

30 June 2026

When the Rain Falls, the City Stops. It Doesn't Have To.

A statement from the Ghana Institution of Engineering on the flooding of 29 June 2026

The morning of 29th June, 2026, Accra woke up under water again. Families watched the floodwater climb their walls. Traders saw a year's savings float away in minutes. Children couldn't get to school, workers couldn't get to work, and somewhere in the chaos, drivers abandoned their cars in the middle of roads that had become rivers.

To everyone who lost something today, whether a home, a livelihood, a sense of safety, or worse, the Ghana Institution of Engineering says, simply and sincerely: we are sorry, and we see you. We thank the NADMO officers, the fire and rescue teams, the security agencies and the ordinary neighbours who waded into the water to pull others out. That courage deserves better than to be needed again next rainy season.

But we have to be honest with the country, because pretending otherwise costs lives.

This was not a freak of nature. The weather service has been warning us that Accra is now so fragile that as little as 30 millimetres of rain can flood large parts of the city and yet June routinely brings three to five times that. When a city drowns at 30 millimetres, the problem is no longer the sky. The problem is us, and the way we have built and run our city.

Five problems, one flood

It is tempting to blame the rain, or the drains, and leave it there. The truth is harder. Five failures stack on top of one another, and each one makes the next one worse.

1 **First, we planned badly, for decades.**

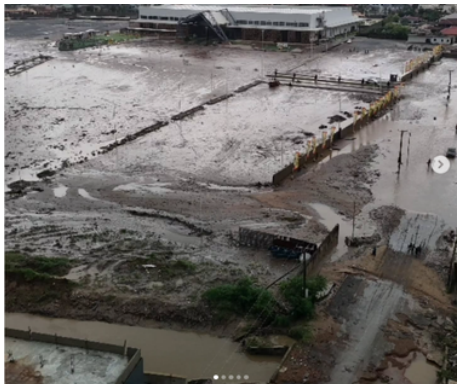
We built homes, shops and roads over the wetlands and waterways that used to soak up the rain. The water hasn't gone anywhere; we simply took away the places it used to go. As our own leadership has admitted publicly, we have done things the wrong way for thirty, forty years. We are, in effect, manufacturing the flood risk faster than any drain can carry it away.

2 **Second, we choke our own drains with waste.**

A gutter packed with plastic and silt cannot carry water, no matter how well it was built. And here we must be honest about a problem in our own homes: in many communities, household waste collection has broken down. Where established collection contracts have been disrupted or cancelled at the assembly level, pickups that once came reliably now come rarely or not at all, and families are left paying tricycle operators steep fees to cart their rubbish away. When that fails too, the waste ends up where it always ends up, in the nearest gutter or drain. It then becomes a cruel cycle: the flood disrupts collection further, the rubbish piles higher, and the next rain washes it all straight back into the drains. We are quite literally drowning in what we have nowhere to put.

The flood disrupts collection.
Rubbish piles higher.
The next rain washes it all back into the drains.

A cruel cycle
we must break.



3 Third, our road drainage has failed.

Where the drains beside our roads are broken, silted or simply missing, and where culverts are too small or blocked, the water has nowhere to go but across the carriageway. And where roads are poorly graded, they shed their own runoff straight onto the lower-lying homes beside them. That is why the same places flood every single time: the N1, the Kasoa stretch, the Tetteh Quashie underpass, Spintex. These are not acts of God. They are gaps in design and maintenance.

4 Fourth, we have built directly on top of the water's path.

Kiosks, sheds and entire structures now sit on our walkways and over our waterways and drains. They block the flow, and the people living and trading in them have nowhere to put their waste, so it goes into the very channels the structures are already obstructing. And nobody checks. This is where weak enforcement stops being an abstraction and becomes the reason the water has nowhere to go.

5 Fifth, the whole system was built to do the wrong thing.

Our drainage was designed to rush water downstream as fast as possible, which only overwhelms whatever is downstream, ignores what's happening upstream, and stores nothing along the way. We have built almost no capacity to simply hold water and release it slowly, which is one of the cheapest and most effective things we could do.

Put plainly: bad planning creates the danger, weak enforcement lets us build over the water's path, a broken collection system fills the drains with waste, failed road drainage floods our streets, and a flush-it-downstream model holds nothing back. Any honest solution has to deal with all of this at once. Fixing one and ignoring the rest is how we have ended up here, year after year.

A clarion call: enforce the law, and teach the citizen

We could do every single thing in this statement, build the ponds, fix the drains, restore the collection, and still flood, if we leave out the two things that hold all of it together: enforcement and civic education.

Ghana does not lack laws. We have planning law, building codes, sanitation by-laws, buffer-zone rules. What we lack is the will to enforce them, consistently, on everyone, regardless of who they are or who they know. Kiosks rise on walkways overnight. Structures go up on waterways in plain sight. Drains are paved over and waste is tipped into gutters, and the question that haunts every flooded street is the same: who was supposed to be checking, and where were they? Enforcement that comes only after the flood, in the form of demolition and grief, is not enforcement. It is mourning.

And enforcement alone, without an informed public, simply becomes an endless cycle of building and demolishing. That is why we call, just as urgently, for the reinstatement of real civic education, in our schools, our markets, our radio stations and our communities.

A generation has grown up without being taught, plainly and repeatedly, that a drain is not a dustbin, that a waterway is not a building plot, and that what one household throws into a gutter floods a neighbour's home downstream. People protect what they understand. We have stopped explaining, and we are paying for it in water.

So this is our clarion call to Government and to ourselves: enforce the codes we already have, without fear or favour, and rebuild the civic education that teaches Ghanaians why those codes exist. Engineering can carry the water. Only enforcement and an informed citizenry can keep the path clear for it.

None of this is new to us. On 21 May 2026, just five weeks before today's flood, GhIE formally submitted a detailed policy brief to the Ministry of Works, Housing and Water Resources, Transforming Urban Stormwater Management in Ghana: A Decentralized, Nature-Based Framework for Flood Resilience. Everything below is drawn from that work. What follows is not a wish-list; it is a practical plan, broken into what we must do now, what we must do this year, and what we must commit to for the long haul.

RIGHT NOW: the next 72 hours, and the rest of this rainy season

The job today is to keep people alive, get the city moving, and stop the disasters that usually follow our floods: fire, electrocution, and disease.

1.Keep the rescue going, and find everyone. Hold the NADMO, military, police, fire and assembly teams in place at the worst-hit spots: the Tetteh Quashie and Spintex underpass, Weija and Mallam, the N1 and Kasoa corridor, Achimota and Abofu, Odawna, Adabraka, Kaneshie and Madina. Confirming who is hurt or missing, and getting people out of low-lying homes, comes before everything else.

2.Cut the power before it kills. Today's floods already forced emergency shutdowns at Mallam and Achimota and a fire at Odawna market. ECG and GRIDCo should switch off power in flooded zones before someone is electrocuted, and the fire service should sit ready near the markets, where flood and fire now arrive together.

3.Open the chokepoints today. Send excavators and desilting crews to the big bottlenecks, above all the Odaw and Korle system and the Odaw outfall, which keep backing water up into the city, and to the blocked road drains and culverts on the routes that flooded this morning. With more rain forecast within the day, every metre of cleared drain matters.

4.Clear the rubbish from the gutters before the next downpour. Mobilise the assemblies, the waste contractors and community labour to pull solid waste out of the main drains now, while everyone can see why it matters. And say it plainly to the public: throwing waste into a drain is not a small thing. It is a danger to your neighbour's life.

5.Tell people clearly what to do. Use radio, TV, WhatsApp and community centres with simple, specific advice: stay off flooded roads, never drive into a submerged underpass, keep away from the Odaw, lift your valuables and documents to higher ground, and stay home if you safely can until it passes.

6.Write down what happened, properly. Map and record the damage and any casualties over the next three days. We have failed to document past floods well, and that failure has let everyone forget. What we record now becomes the basis for relief, for compensation, and for the works that must follow.

THIS YEAR: the next 6 to 18 months

This is the window to turn today's anger into something built and funded, and to show real, visible progress before the 2027 rains arrive.

7.Fix the Odaw and Korle system as a national priority. Commission an independent review of the Korle Lagoon restoration works and the Odaw outfall to get to the bottom of the bottlenecks that now flood the city even in the dry season, and tender the repairs within this window.

8.Treat road drains as part of the flood fight. Bring the Department of Urban Roads and the Ghana Highway Authority formally into the response. Audit, rebuild and clear the roadside drains and culverts on the roads that flood every year, and make proper drainage, together with a budget to maintain it, a condition of every new road. A road built without a working drain is just a future flood channel.

9.Restore reliable waste collection, and enforce sanitation by-laws. Get established collection back on a dependable schedule in every community, so that households are not forced to choose between costly informal collectors and the nearest gutter. Pair it with real enforcement against dumping in drains and waterways, and against the kiosks and structures obstructing them. This is a problem we can actually solve, but only if we treat collection as an essential service and enforcement as a standing duty, not a seasonal campaign.

10.Make new buildings carry their own water. Adopt a National Post-Development Runoff Control Policy, so that no new development sends more water downstream than the bare land did before it was built. It is one of the most effective flood tools in the world, and it simply makes developers responsible for the water they create.

11.Stop building in the wrong places, and mean it. Halt construction on waterways and wetlands, remove illegal structures sitting on top of major drains, ban full-plot paving, protect the buffer zones along our waterways, and actually enforce the planning law we already have. This is the hardest step, because it touches powerful interests and uncomfortable permits. It is also the one that matters most, because no amount of engineering can save a city that keeps building over its own rivers.

12.Start showing what works. Launch pilot nature-based projects, things like rain gardens, bioswales, soak-aways, small detention basins and smarter retrofitted drains, in the fast-growing areas where the water is worst: Ga East, Adenta, Kasoa, Weija and Spintex. Let Ghanaians see the solution working in their own neighbourhoods.

13.Build places for the water to wait. Identify and create detention and retention ponds across the city's catchments, the open spaces and basins that hold stormwater during a downpour and release it slowly afterwards, instead of sending it all crashing downstream at once. This was a central proposal of our May policy brief, and it is among the cheapest, fastest ways to take the peak off a flood. Existing low-lying open land, parks and reserves can be designed to flood safely and on purpose.

14.Put one body in charge. Right now, responsibility for stormwater is scattered across a long list of agencies whose maps don't even match the way water actually flows. Create catchment-based planning units with the real power to coordinate them. You cannot defend a city neighbourhood by neighbourhood when the water doesn't respect any of those boundaries.

FOR THE LONG HAUL: 3 to 5 years and beyond

The goal here is to change how we build and run our cities for good, so that Accra stops rebuilding the same disaster every single rainy season.

15.Change the basic idea of drainage. Stop trying to flush water away as fast as possible, and start catching, slowing, storing and soaking it in close to where it falls, all across the catchment, including a permanent network of detention and retention ponds that hold the peak and release it gently. Work with the water instead of fighting it downstream.

16.Build flood sense into every permit. No building approval and no road in Greater Accra should be signed off without asking what happens to the water. Make flood resilience a normal part of planning, so the city stops quietly creating new risk with every signature.

17.Make every roof a small reservoir. Adopt a National Rainwater Harvesting Policy that requires rainwater harvesting in new buildings and rewards those who retrofit. In a city as dense as Accra, it is one of the few things that genuinely works upstream, and it gives people water in the dry season too.

18.Grow a real maintenance culture. Hand communities a stake in keeping their own drains clear, support local businesses to build and maintain this infrastructure, and fund drain and waste maintenance as the essential public service it is. Every system we build will fail without it.

19.Pay for resilience before the disaster, not after. Treat this as climate adaptation, tie it to Ghana's SDG commitments, and put financial protection in place so that recovery is faster and less ruinous each time the water rises.

A word, finally

We have stood here before, after June 3, 2015, after 2020, after the floods of earlier this June. Each time we mourn, we promise, and we move on until the next rain. GhIE has done its part, again and again, most recently just five weeks ago. The engineers have written the reports. We know exactly why the city floods and exactly what to do about it.

Ghana does not have a knowledge problem. We have an action problem. Today's flood was not caused by rain alone. It was caused by how we plan, how we enforce our own laws, how we collect our waste, how we build and drain our roads, and how we move water through our city. Every one of those is within our power to change. We are simply choosing, year after year, not to.

We say this not to score points, but because we are tired of being right about something so painful. GhIE stands ready, today, to work with the Ministry of Works, Housing and Water Resources, the Greater Accra Coordinating Council, the assemblies and every relevant agency, to turn these words into drains that work and lives that are protected.

The plans are written. The warnings have been given. What we need now is the will to act, before the next rain falls.