



KZN DARD AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION INDABA 2024

"Agriculture is the only vehicle upon which KwaZulu-Natal government can overcome poverty and ensure food security to each and every household," that's according to the province's Premier, Honourable Thamsanqa Ntuli making a clarion call to the extension practitioners and advisory services at the Durban's Olive Convention Centre on Tuesday, 20 August 2024. About a thousand extension practitioners and advisory services including officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in KwaZulu-Natal, graced the Agricultural Extension Indaba with their presence at the annual event aimed at capacitating extension officers with cutting-edge technological practices.

They also presented their new research findings and advances in the agricultural sector.

The Indaba is dedicated to strengthening the province's Agricultural Advisory Services and it serves as a platform for knowledge-sharing, enhancing frontline service delivery and fostering service excellence in farmer support.

Speaking at the event, Agriculture and Rural Development MEC, Honourable Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa hailed extension officers for their role as frontline services that also help rural communities with their expertise to ensure food security.

She said, "Extension Advisory Services play an important role in improving food security, farmer development and providing technical support to rural farming communities. The productivity and sustainability of the agricultural sector depend on the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of Extension and Advisory Services.

To this end, it's worth noting that it's because of these men and women that the sector contributes about four percent to the KZN Gross Domestic Product (GDP)."

As part of this initiative, the Human Sciences Research Council has conducted the National Food and Nutrition Security Survey (NFNSS) commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). The survey's findings which offer insights into the current state of food and nutrition security in KwaZulu-Natal, were officially handed over to the provincial government led by Honourable Ntuli.

KwaZulu-Natal Premier, Honourable Thami Ntuli, pronounced critical evidence-based measures aimed at addressing food security risks in the province. The announcement comes against the backdrop of socio-economic factors such as severe hunger and poverty and shocks such as the devastating effects of the floods, socio-political unrest and global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, which have exposed vulnerabilities in food access and distribution.

Addressing the gathering, Premier Ntuli said deliberate interventions the province will take are informed by research and are scientific-based. He singled out the Agriculture Department as part of the main driver of the economy and as a solution to unemployment.

"The latest figures by Statistics South Africa show that the unemployment rate has increased by 0.6% from 32,9% in the first quarter to 33,5% in the second quarter. The expanded unemployment rate increased by 0.7% to 42.6%. These employment losses were observed mainly in the formal sector (down by 77 000), the Agricultural sector (down by 45 000) and private households (down by 18 000)" said the Premier.

Honourable Ntuli revealed that the finding of the HSRC survey confirms the province's worst fears that it is faced with unemployment and if left unchecked, it may lead to instability. "The Agricultural sector must provide solutions to our unemployment rate, especially for women, youth and the vulnerable groups."

Stats SA reports that unemployment affects mostly young people who are disengaged from the labour market and are not building on their skills through education and training," said Honourable Ntuli.

Speaking about the report, kaMadlopha-Mthethwa said, "We need to sit down and strategise on how we are going to take it forward because our aim is to see KwaZulu-Natal being green, producing vegetables and fruits and livestock that can assist everyone within the sector and also to export, if possible."

The report revealed that the levels of food insecurity varied across Districts. It further says that 17 percent of the household in the province suffer from severe food insecurity, while 4,3 percent suffer from severe hunger. Severe food insecurity was more prevalent in Zululand District, where 35% of the households were severely food insecure.

Presenting the report headed by the HSRC's Professor Thokozani Simelane, the National Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development's Dr Jemina Moeng said Zululand, uMkhanyakude, uMzinyathi and Harry Gwala Districts ranked amongst worst affected by food insecurity. Dr Moeng pointed out that despite these Districts having relatively high levels of access to land, they have low participation of households in farming activities, "The Department invested over 81 million over this study. We then reprioritised three districts in each province so that provincial governments can then deploy their resources accordingly using evidence-based data. Zululand leads in terms of its massive land in KwaZulu-Natal, but is actually ranked 7th in terms of land usage. That's a big challenge because it's the most dire District in the province."

While South Africa is considered food secure at a national level, recent data from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) highlights that some pockets of food insecurity remain prevalent in various regions. This has underscored the importance of precise, district-level data to inform targeted interventions by government departments.

It has thus, recommended the following:

- Promotion of domestic food production to ensure food security at household level
- A focus on employment creation through the agricultural sector;
- Investment in food markets and food banks at fruit and vegetable markets close to vulnerable households in all districts;
- Land redistribution and restitution with a rezoning strategy for land under traditional authorities so that some can be reserved for agricultural production;
- Protecting extremely poor households from seasonal hunger through assistance in particular months of the year (mostly January and June);
- Improve household nutrition through continued interventions like breastfeeding promotion, managing acute malnutrition and benefits of consuming nutrient-rich foods and dietary diversity, as well as guidance on food preparation and meal planning;
- Enhancing food Safety: Informal traders and small businesses that trade in agricultural products need assistance to help them improve the quality of their services through quality assurance and extend the lifespan of their products. COVID-19 has irreversibly transformed human perception of food and food safety. As a result, people have realized the importance of consuming safe and healthy food, not only to boost one's immune system but also to prevent the spread of diseases.











