



KZN AGRICULTURE MEC HONOURS AGRI ENTERPRISES INVOLVED IN FOOD SECURITY

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The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development successfully hosted the inaugural Phezukomkhono Female Entrepreneur Awards at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban. Through these awards, the department's MEC, Mrs. Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa, has aimed to recognise the invaluable contributions of women in the agricultural value chain, rewarding them for their crucial roles in sustaining their families and driving the province's economic growth. Among the esteemed dignitaries who graced the ceremony with their presence include Her Royal Highness Queen Nomzamo Zulu, and Inkosi Sifiso Shinga, and the Chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal House of Traditional and Khoi-san Leaders.

Speaking during the awards ceremony, MEC kaMadlopha-Mthethwa said, "We have conceptualized these awards to acknowledge the efforts and contribution of women, young women, senior citizens and women with disabilities in the agricultural sector through food security, job creation, economic growth and poverty alleviation. In actual fact we are saying their important roles in the sector is valued and let's encourage them to do more."

KaMadlopha-Mthethwa said she firmly believed that programmes aimed at empowering women, bridge the gender gap in food security, adding that they also need land for cultivation. "Firstly, the awards we are using to recognise women's efforts in agriculture in KwaZulu-Natal, are an intervention to address the past imbalances enforced by the legacy of racial inequality, which continues to impact land tenure access and opportunities for rural development, particularly for women.

Although gradual progress has been made in land redistribution and acquisition, with the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development transferring 5.3 million hectares of land since 1994 through the Pro-Active Land Acquisition Strategy, the majority of land ownership or transfer remains largely in the hands of men. The Food and Agriculture Organization (2015) reports that globally, less than 2 percent of land is owned by women, who produce between 60-80 percent of food in rural settings.

The MEC has reiterated her call to the traditional leaders to release land for rural women to engage in agricultural activities. During the budget vote last year, the department allocated R16.5 million to support projects owned or operated by vulnerable groups. Currently, the department is has a target of 59 women-owned projects and 39 youth projects in various agricultural interventions.

The total prize money for the awards, which comprised the best female worker, best subsistence producer, and best entrepreneur in agronomy processing, amounted to R1.6 million rand, with the expectation that it will contribute to strengthening their agricultural enterprises.

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