



## agriculture & rural development

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### **SPEECH BY KZN MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MR CYRIL XABA AT THE WORKSHOP ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROVINCES DISTRICT LAND COMMITTEES (DLDs): A NEW APPROACH TO LAND REFORM AND GROWING AGRICULTURE**

Deputy Minister for the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform Honourable Mcebisi Skwatsha

Members of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature

District Mayors

Representatives from Agricultural Organisations

Representative for SALGA KZN

Program Director

Acting HOD, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Senior Officials from National, Provincial and Local Government.

#### **Introduction**

A criticism often levelled at government is that we have the best policies and proposals but that these are not being implemented. Our meeting today is about action. It is about implementing a proposal from the National Development Plan (NDP) and that is, the launch of the KwaZulu-Natal District Land Committees.

The establishment of District Land Committees is a bold and new approach to the way we do business. It is a “bottom-up” integrated approach that will address issues of speeding up the land reform process, growing the business of agriculture and above all addressing poverty in the rural areas.

It is an approach that sees different levels of government coming together – national, provincial and local to implement the plan. Above all, it seeks cooperation from the commercial farming sector, organised agriculture as well as representatives of local communities. The aim of setting up District Land Committees, is to work in cooperation and partnership to share knowledge and skills and grow the agricultural sector. I am grateful that representatives from organised agriculture and Salga are here to contribute their inputs.

The Launch of District Land Committees and getting them working is important. If we do not do this we will be failing our people particularly, the most vulnerable members of our society – the rural poor. My task this morning is to outline the purpose of why we are establishing District Land Committees. Other speakers will present the details on the roles, objectives, implementation and mechanisms of how the District Land Committees will function.

### **The Legacy of the 1913 Native Land Act**

To give our meeting context, we need to look at the backdrop of land dispossession in South Africa. One of the toughest tasks that the new democratic government had to tackle when it took over power in 1994 was to reverse the legacy of the 1913 Native Land Act, which left only 13 percent of the land for Black occupation.

Government is the first to admit that the process has been slow. This is why President Jacob Zuma in the ANC’s January 8th statement made speeding up land redistribution a priority. In 1994, government had set itself the target for land distribution of 30% of white owned agricultural land by 2014. The goal was of the 82 million hectares of white owned agricultural land about 25,4 million was set for redistribution. By March

2013, only about 7,3 million hectares were delivered - that is 8,9 percent of the total agricultural land. To speed up the process, the NDP proposed the establishment of District Land Committees to identify 20% of farming land by 2030 – this is an estimated 14,9 million hectares. The National Development Plan has proposed various models of land acquisition and redistribution to speed up the process.

## **Ensuring Land Productivity**

Government, however, is well aware that the challenge going forward is not just about redistributing land. It is also about land reform and not diminishing the amount of land available for agriculture. This is to ensure that South Africa remains globally competitive.

We have been on a learning curve over the past twenty years and an uncomfortable truth is that the face of poverty has not changed. It still remains an issue. This is why the NDP has emphasized the need to integrate rural areas into mainstream economic development. A central tenet of the NDP is that land reform must be geared towards ensuring agricultural development and inclusive rural economic development.

We have witnessed the failures of land reform projects and have acknowledged that this was due to insufficient post settlement support. The KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in line with the NDP and the Provincial Growth Strategy has in its new approach to Agrarian Reform, proposed strategies for post-settlement support. The District Land Committees form a fundamental aspect of this strategy.

Another lesson learnt is that agricultural land that has been re-distributed does not always end up being farmed. All agricultural land is valuable if we are to grow our economy and ensure food security in this country not only for our children, but our children's children. This is why government moved from awarding land on a grant system to a leasing system known as PLAS or the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy.

## **PLAS – The Proactive land Acquisition Strategy**

Previously, individuals were awarded grants for land acquisition based on a sliding scale. The maximum grant amounted to approx R438,000 per individual. With escalating land prices – the collective grants amounted to less than the purchase price of the land being acquired

To increase the funds being approved – large groups of individuals were being formed so that the final amount approved would be proportionate to the total number of individuals. The magnitude of these groups brought in consequence, many challenges, complexities and conflict.

Further, where the final approved grant amount (as a collective) was still insufficient, individuals approached banks for assistance through loans. These loans were often high and the only form of deposit was the grant awarded by government. The loans in most instances, led to farms being repossessed as the individuals could not service their debt.

In the face of this challenge PLAS or the leasing system was implemented with. Government as the ‘owner’ of the land. In this way, there is more control in access to land. Measures can be implemented when leasees under-perform, and the land can be re-allocated if need be. Individuals can commence on a small-scale farming and graduate to large-scale based on their performance.

PLAS was initially implemented in 2005, on a ‘limited’ scale. However, it was only until 2010 that all projects were to be acquired under this mechanism. From 2005 to early 2010 there were 56 projects covering 37,549 hectares in KZN.

From April 2010 to date with PLAS fully implemented there have been 168 projects launched covering 108,077 hectares. This means that there are a total of 224 projects covering over 145,626 hectares and these are projects that the District Land Committees will have to monitor and support. There is no doubt that more projects will get underway with this system. DLC’s will become a fundamental part of the process in land identification, acquisition, transfer to beneficiaries as well as the initiation of land reform projects and post-transfer support.

This is because DLC's are in the best position to ascertain important information regarding the land in each district such as who it is owned and cultivated by, what it is used for, who is under-using their land or whether there are absentee landlords or the land is part of a deceased estate. This information can then play a key role in determining which land is available for redistribution.

At a district level land reform projects can be integrated into local development plans, they can be monitored and supported. They are mechanisms that allow the beneficiaries to participate in the process and have a voice. Above all they will ensure that all land reform farms are 100 percent productive and help establish sufficient numbers of new black farmers.

## **Conclusion**

As the National Development Plan tells us: "DLCs can address the core problems of inadequate cooperative governance of land and the great disparity in land ownership and access that characterised South Africa. DLCs have the potential to build social cohesion, tap into community's social capital, optimize available resources and strengthen rural development and rural economic transformation.

I have outlined in broad brushstrokes the purpose of District Land Committees. The other speakers will go into the nuts and bolts of how they will operate. There is a lot to absorb but we have no choice as we have the very important task ahead of translating policy into action so that we ensure equitable land reform, agricultural development and inclusive rural economic growth.



MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development in KwaZulu-Natal, Mr Cyril Xaba addressing the stakeholders at the workshop on the Establishment of the Provinces District Land Committees



Deputy Minister for Rural Development and Land Reform, Mr Mcebisi Skwatsha delivering the closing address at the workshop