



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MEC CYRIL XABA AT THE KZN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT'S SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARDS FUNCTION TUESDAY, 12TH MAY 2015 DUBE TRADE PORT, DUBE CITY

Program Director

Acting HOD

Senior Management of the Department

District Managers for Agriculture

State Veterinarians from the Districts

Clients from Participating Districts

Members of the Provincial Batho Pele Forum

Our Special Guests the finalists for the Service Excellence Awards

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today's function is one of the most important events in the Department's annual calendar. We exist as a government Department for no other reason but to serve the citizens of our province.

The finalists here today must be congratulated as they are setting the benchmark for the kind of service that each and every one of us in the department must aspire to.

Let me remind you why it is important that we follow the Batho Pele principles and put people first. A rallying cry during the fight for freedom

in this country was that the majority of the population were tired of being second class citizens. As government in a free South Africa, we have the responsibility to ensure that our people are no longer treated like second class citizens and get the dignity and respect they deserve.

President Zuma addressing civil servants earlier this year, stressed that “We should always remember that effective public administration is not a privilege in a democracy but a fundamental right.”

This right had been reinforced in 2000 when countries signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Countries including South Africa accepted an obligation to put people, especially the poor, at the center of development in the 21st century.

As the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in KwaZulu-Natal, this is precisely our mandate according to the National Development Plan and our own Provincial Growth Strategy. We have to put the poor at the center of development and grow the rural economy.

In this regard we are entering a very exciting phase that will demand a whole new way of how we operate as a department. It will put our Batho Pele or people first skills to the test and it will demand more of us.

Let me elaborate. The Department now has a new strategy for agrarian transformation in the province with the aim of growing the agricultural sector and creating jobs. In the strategy, we recognize that this can be done by creating an environment that will enable poor emerging farmers to move from subsistence to commercialized farming.

The new approach sees farming as a business and sets out not only to work with other government sectors but with commercial farmers and commodity organizations. To facilitate this, it means that the Department as a whole will have to operate with greater efficiencies and effectiveness and we will have to observe that golden rule of business that says the customer is king.

A process of re-structuring has been started that will allow the speeding up of service delivery at a local level. In the new structure, the Department has done away with regional offices. There will now be a direct line from head office, responsible for policy coordination, control and reporting, down to the district offices where implementation and comprehensible services are rendered. This means that there is no unnecessary blockages from decision makers to implementers and there is a shortening of procedures.

The district offices which are at the coalface of service delivery will offer a comprehensive service and will deal collectively with subsistence farmers to small-scale farmers to commercial and cooperative businesses.

The Department will cascade down general advisory services right down to local municipal level where there will be specialist agricultural advisors including agronomists, agricultural economists and engineers. These specialists will be supported by a comprehensive administrative service at the district level.

In the new structure, the District Manager will be the implementing agent of the Department and will have to take responsibility and be accountable for any service delivery hitches. In other words, as the person responsible for overall service delivery in the area, the buck stops with him or her.

Underlying all of this is self-reliance and a system to empower both communities and staff to take more responsibility. Projects have to follow business models. This means that they will be assessed by whether they are viable, sustainable and cost-effective before they are considered for implementation.

These changes will mean a revitalization of how we apply our Batho Pele principles. In future, planning processes at all levels of the Department - from Head Office down to the local level will have to involve engagement with communities; show how the activity will improve service delivery and ensure that people come first.

The Department's new strategy to turn agriculture around in this Province means that we have to do things differently. We have to be professional, skilled and caring in our approach. As former Minister in the Presidency for the National Planning Commission Trevor Manuel once said, "Humility to the poor is the greatest attribute of a civil servant.

Going forward, Batho Pele must involve everyone at KZN DARD making a conscious attempt to have a positive attitude and embrace the concept of ensuring service delivery. Such principles as consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, openness and transparency must become embedded in all our minds. This is because the adage that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link holds true in this context. We need the combined effort of all our staff if we are going to change the lives of the poor and grow the rural economy.

Once more I congratulate the finalists of the Department's Service Excellence awards and thank you for leading the way in service delivery

excellence. By next year, we must have many more entrants from across our different units vying for these prestigious awards.

One of the Batho Pele principles is to encourage innovation and to reward excellence, I call on senior managers to ensure that there is a conducive environment to enhance the capacity of staff to deliver good services. We must not only practice Batho Pele in terms of the public but towards each other. Treating each other with respect and dignity makes for a productive work environment.

On Friday I deliver the Department's Budget speech, which sets out our activities for the next financial year. I am confident that working together we will achieve our service delivery targets. As the author, Booker T Washington said, "Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way."

Like the finalists here today, we must all aim, as civil servants, to find our own levels of excellence to ensure the democratic dream of all our citizens for the chance of a better life.