



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

KZN Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
Private Bag X9059, Pietermaritzburg, 3200

Enquiries: Nalini Dickson
Tel: 033-3438254 or 0832340475

Fax: 033-343 82551 not
Toll-Free: 0800 000 996
Email: Nalini.Dickson@kzndard.gov.za

CLOSING SPEECH BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE SUMMIT FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

6th August, 2015

Durban, South Africa

Director of Ceremonies

Executive Director of the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research & Development in Southern Africa (CCARDESA), Professor Timothy Simalenga

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Representatives of International Development Agencies and Regional Non-Governmental Organisations

Government representatives

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be associated with this important regional milestone: the Youth in Agriculture Summit for Southern Africa organised by the Centre for the Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA).

As you have heard during the duration of this summit, agriculture remains a key driving force for economic development in the SADC region.

Presently, most inhabitants of the region rely on agriculture directly or indirectly as their main source of livelihood. Most are small-scale farmers operating within the informal sector of the economy and many of them barely make a living as they toil the land.

Two out of three inhabitants of sub Saharan Africa are under the age of 25 and 40% of the total unemployed in the region are youth. The majority of the unemployed some 70% live in rural areas.

The challenge for all of us is to deal with rural poverty and give our youth hope. We can do this by ensuring that agriculture fulfils its potential to become a catalyst for economic growth as well as food and livelihood security.

One of the ways this is being addressed is by looking at how we grow our future farmers. In other words, how do we stimulate an interest in farming among our young people.

Here in KwaZulu-Natal, we have implemented a Strategy for Agrarian Transformation. A key aim of the strategy is to get young people involved in farming. The other is to unleash the potential of small-scale farmers. The basis of this strategy is the recognition that agriculture is both science and business. We want young people to see that there is more to farming than just toiling on the land, that it can be exciting and innovative.

To our young delegates present here today, I want to say that you have enormous potential for innovation and risk-taking. We want this potential to be unleashed in the pursuit of growth and development in rural areas, particularly in the small-holder agriculture sector.

I want to thank the CCARDESA for organising this Youth in Agriculture Summit, it is not only a timely event, it has set out to explore the business, scientific and innovative side of agriculture. I am sorry that I could not be with you for the full duration of the summit. I understand from the organizers that there was robust discussion and active participation in the different sessions. You also discussed the following very interesting themes:

- Farming as a business-towards addressing poverty and unemployment for youth.
- Digital agriculture: ICT revolution in agriculture, trade and markets.
- Mechanization, agro-processing and precision agriculture: the role of youth in innovations and agribusiness solution.
- Climate smart technologies in agriculture: training and innovative solutions for future agricultural practices.
- Livestock, forestry and fisheries value chain and markets: opportunities for agribusiness.
- **Training and case study on agribusiness.**

I was particularly interested in the session you had known as a Hackathon where Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experts worked together to generate ICT solutions for specific farming problem. I understand the word hack to mean, gaining unauthorised access to computer systems and the second half **of the word "athon," comes from the word marathon. However the organizers** assured me that in this case the hackathon referred to the technical art of trying things out in order to understand how they work and how the solutions can be applied for positive development. During the summit, the hackathon was aimed at working towards creating functional ICT solutions to meet agricultural challenges in the SADC region.

I urge CCARDESA to tell us more about these hackathons. Perhaps we can use this to stimulate the generation of ideas in our farming colleges and schools. Please make this information available as well as the proceedings of the summit.

I am sure this event has created a great opportunity for networking, and we hope to see more interaction and exchange of ideas, building on the foundations

already built. We hope that other stakeholders can hold hands with CCARDESA to sustain the momentum of what has been initiated during this summit. I am reliably informed that countries in the region and partners outside the region are already engaging with CCARDESA to see how best to chart forward the issue of engaging the youth in agribusiness initiatives.

Ladies and gentlemen:

This Summit has also come up with a declaration about outlining the way forward in engaging the youth in agriculture. All of us, including those within the government sector need to engage with this declaration and see how best to incorporate it into our youth programmes.

The potential for job creation in the agricultural sector is high. We need to see our youth as entrepreneurs, taking advantage of opportunities in the agriculture value chain. Five years from today, we want to hear the success stories about youth involvement in agriculture. We want to see young farmers among the future generation of millionaires in our region.

Let me once again applaud CCARDESA for having taken this initiative to engage young people as important stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

I thank you!