



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MR CYRIL XABA'S SPEAKING NOTES AT THE MEETING WITH LIVESTOCK FARMERS AS PART OF THE DROUGHT INTERVENTION PROGRAMME MAYVILLE, DURBAN 21 NOVEMBER 2015

I am well aware that the voices of the agricultural sector within government has not been sufficiently heard on the drought. This does not mean that in KwaZulu-Natal we have been silent or inactive.

We are facing the worst drought ever. It is a progressive natural disastrous occurrence that threatens the fabric of our society.

This situation has caused unprecedented damage to crops, livestock and wild animals. It also poses a serious threat to human lives. It requires all human kind to stand together; to develop means to withstand its effects. I have no words to describe this situation.

Against this background, I have convened this meeting to share with you our drought mitigation plan.

We have called for the national government intervention because the magnitude of this situation exceeds our ability to cope with its effects relying on our own resources.

This has precipitated an integrated multi-sectoral process of planning and implementation of measures aimed at mitigating the severity or consequences of this calamitous situation. At the head of this mission is President Zuma and Premier Mchunu.

We have not even started invoking recovery and rehabilitation measures as yet. We are still coping with mitigation (reducing the effects) and relief measures. Notwithstanding that, we are looking ahead – we are developing proactive plans, where we can, to assist us to deal with this situation much quicker than we have been able to deal with it. We were caught unawares, our farmers were caught unprepared, but despite that the Province has been able to swing into action.

Having sorted out the logistics and put systems in place, **the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZN DARD) can now announce the roll out of a R114 million drought lifeline to farmers in the province.** This relief scheme is part of the Department's ongoing response to the crisis.

The intervention will see the bulk of the relief going to subsistence and small-holder farmers, with commercial farmers also benefitting.

*R60 million will be for the procurement of inputs for livestock and water harvesting.

*R45 million for the scooping of 75 dams and the rehabilitation of 62 boreholes across the province.

* R9 million for an aggressive de-worming campaign. When livestock become under-nourished they carry a lot of worms. De-worming stock will reduce stress to the animal and will ensure that feed is used efficiently.

The lifeline subsidy will be on a sliding scale and will be capped. Subsistence and small holder farmers will get a hundred percent assistance. There will be an 80% subsidy for medium sized farms and 20% for large commercial operations. The subsidy will be for essential feed, multi-vitamins and dips. It will also go towards water harvesting inputs such as jojo tanks, troughs and pipes.

Farmers will have to register to participate in the scheme and they will get the subsidy once they make purchase of any of the above items, through recognised suppliers that are on the drought database. There will be KZN DARD officials at the outlets to provide assistance and do the record-keeping to ensure that there is no abuse of the system. The scheme will run for three months. A widespread communication campaign will be carried out to inform farmers about the scheme and how they can participate with it. I, as well as officials from the department will be meeting with farmers.

The first being this engagement with the livestock associations, and beef and dairy commodity organizations, the purpose of which is to share with you in detail how the scheme works and how the livestock farmers can access assistance.

As I said at the outset this R114 million intervention is the latest in KZN DARD's ongoing response to the devastating effects of the current drought.

As a department, we have also been proactively looking for money within our own budget to throw a lifeline to farmers battling against the ravages of the drought.

Our efforts received a boost last week when National Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mr Senzeni Zokwana announced that 20% of the CASP and Ilima/Letsema conditional grants can be reprioritised for drought relief.

Minister Zokwana stipulated that this lifeline is to assist subsistence and small holder farmers by way of providing livestock feed, water reticulation support for food production and stock watering support. KZN DARD's contribution will be directed at subsidizing production inputs for all farmers, including those within the commercial sector, albeit on a sliding scale.

Our ongoing response to the drought

Let us not forget that many districts were already feeling the effects of the drought in 2014. At that time certain districts were more affected than others.

KZN DARD joined the provincial application to National Government for those districts to be declared drought disaster areas. In June last year The Harry Gwala District was devastated by fires as a result of the dry conditions and KZN DARD also successfully applied for and distributed funds to all affected farmers, who had lost livestock as a result of the fires.

Drought disaster declarations are for a limited period as there is hope that the rain will eventually fall and that the situation will change. When the November 2014 declaration lapsed at the beginning of this year, the situation had not changed. KZN DARD submitted more paperwork towards the Provincial application for a second declaration. However, by June it was clear that all 11 districts in the province were receiving less than normal rainfall and were in a severe drought state. The Province then made an application for all of KwaZulu-Natal to be declared a drought disaster area.

While these processes were ongoing, as MEC of Agriculture and Rural Development, I endeavoured to always stay in touch with farmers on the ground and maintain regular contact with organised agriculture and commodity organisations.

In February, shortly after the announcement of the closure of the Umzimkhulu Sugar Mill, I met with the sugar industry. As a result of that meeting, the department reprioritised its budget and made R14 million available for drought relief to that sector. The money was for replanting sugar cane due to root mortality as well as to help provide for job retention and financial relief.

Earlier this year KZN DARD also drew up a drought intervention scheme, that was sent to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) for approval. The scheme is being implemented with the roll-out of the R114 million.

So you can see that our focus has always been on the drought and the desperate plight of the farming community. It was hearing about and seeing livestock dying that prompted Minister of Rural Development and land Reform, Mr Gugile Nkwinti and I to confer on making State land available for grazing. As a result of this discussion both departmental teams are identifying grazing land for use in the different districts.

In my many engagements with farmers I have been speaking about the need to off-load excessive cattle. I know that this is difficult, but we have reached a situation where the breeding herd is dying and farmers may not have cattle left to start re-building when the rains start again. It is important to ensure the survival of a few highly productive animals to be able to grow the herd again after the drought.

I have also asked the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to drop some water into the farmer's jojo tanks and troughs as they go around distributing water to communities.

With regard to the drought and own programs, we've had to make cutbacks. Under our new Strategy for Agrarian Transformation, the Department had planned to implement 144 communal estate projects throughout the province. The aim of these projects are to empower farming cooperatives on communal land to become self-reliant and run sustainable commercially viable operations. The ravages of the drought has meant that the number of hectares under cultivation on these communal estates will have to be reduced. The plan was to put 28 201 hectares of communal land under cultivation. Depending on rainfall patterns for the rest of this planting season we may end up planting fewer hectares. Instead of maize we are also encouraging farmers to plant short season cultivars and alternate crops such as beans and soya.

The drought is a reminder that climate change has become a reality of life in South Africa. We have to learn to adapt and find ways to mitigate against these adverse weather conditions. One way of doing this is to practice better crop management or conservation agriculture. We urge all farmers to do same. It is a matter of farming with nature and not against it. The KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, through our district offices and extension services are available to advise and assist farmers on conservation farming both crops and livestock.

Managing the drought or for that matter any hazard is not solely the responsibility of Government. As the Provincial Motto for Disaster Management states: it is "everybody's business." We all have a responsibility to save water so let us all play our part in mitigating against the effects of the current drought.

I have proposed that the departmental disaster management team be augmented to make provision for the involvement of the non-governmental actors, organized agriculture, technical experts, organized local government, traditional leaders and technical experts.

The Team will meet regularly and remain seized with the matter of drought. This will include amongst other things:

- To guide the development and monitor the implementation of measures aimed at mitigating the effects of the disaster;

- To guide the raising of awareness and the dissemination of information on disaster management;
- To propose measures that could assist government to reduce the risks of disasters that have hitherto visited the farming community;
- To propose measures for a rapid and effective response to drought;
- Post disaster recovery and rehabilitation;
- To reduce the vulnerability of the subsistence farmers;
- To monitor progress with regard to interventions; &
- To liaise with the Provincial Disaster Management Team.

The Departmental Disaster Management Forum will be replicated at the district level as well, to bring representation closer to the farmers themselves. This then represents our way forward.

Thank you...



MEC for KZN Agriculture and Rural Development Mr Cyril Xaba greeting livestock farmers



Livestock, Beef, Dairy Farmers and other Commodity Organizations
at the drought intervention event at Durban



MEC Cyril Xaba addressing Livestock, Beef, Dairy Farmers and other Commodity Organizations
at the drought intervention event at Durban