



## agriculture & rural development

Department:  
Agriculture and Rural Development  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

*Asiguqule ezoLimo zibe isikompilo lethu*

### **Opening address by the honourable MEC Themba Mthembu on the occasion of Departmental Strategy Plan**

Head of Department, Dr. S.F. Mkhize

Our Special guests invited to enrich our Strategy Plan

Representative of organized labour and

All Officials forming part of this Strategy Plan

Thank you to each and every one of you for being here at this five-day departmental gathering to review and map out a strategic focus and new ways to deliver on our mandate for agriculture and rural development in the Province.

Many of you may be questioning why this meeting is necessary. Others may say that a strategic focus already exists in the form of the Agrarian Transformation Strategy. Some cynics may say that we have another MEC with yet another strategic plan.

To place this gathering in context and why it is necessary, let me take you back to the very first time I addressed the staff on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016 in the Cedara Auditorium. At the time I made the observation that the Department had undergone several changes in both MEC's and HOD. I used the analogy of a car that had overturned a number of times and said that all we needed to do was to put that car back on its wheels, bang out the dents and point it on the road forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the past four months has made me realise that sorting out this vehicle that is KZN DARD is not so simple. Bear with me as I continue with my analogy to make a point. Not only do we have a car that has somersaulted several times, our vehicle is an old model. We seem to be an engine running on spark plugs. This is technology that is fast becoming obsolete and soon there will be no garage with the spare parts or know-how to service it.

We need to change this vehicle that is KZN DARD into a fuel injected model. We need to modernise it, fire up its cylinders and make it more efficient. We are here to look at how this can be done. I will return to this point.

The other purpose of this gathering is to make sure that our fuel injected vehicle with all its cylinders firing is heading in the right direction.

There are the maps as to our roles and responsibilities in the form of such documents as the Manifesto of the ruling party, the NDP, The Provincial Growth Plan and the Constitution. There are more specific guides including the Province's Poverty Eradication Master Plan and the Radical Socio-Economic Transformation Model or RASET.

However, maps and guides are useless if we did not understand the terrain in which we operate. To extend this metaphor, if we do not understand the signs we could be travelling on the wrong path and delivering at the wrong door.

So the other important aim of this gathering is to really focus on the shifting socio economic and political terrain within which agriculture operates and understand it well so that we are certain that the strategies we have or intend putting in place are effective service delivery tools.

Even more, we need to respond to the cries of our people in the rural areas who are saying to us that 22 years into a free and democratic South Africa, their lives have not changed. They are still struggling under the yoke of poverty, inequality and unemployment. We need to talk about these triple challenges and look at how we can be effective in changing the lives of a far greater number of our people, than we are doing at present.

Over the past months I have come to realise that the Strategy for Agrarian Transformation has not been an effective service delivery tool. This could be because the situation on the ground has changed or because the Strategy is being applied incorrectly. One of the exercises we will be conducting over the next few days will be to get to the root of this issue by doing a critique of the Strategy.

With the assistance of our guest speakers and facilitators we will analyse the terrain in which we operate to come up with adjustments that are responsive to the material conditions on the ground. We will look at what needs to be done to address the persistent structural defects of our agricultural economy. Ladies and gentlemen, it is really worrying that after two decades of freedom black women and children remain the face of rural poverty. The agricultural landscape has remained largely untransformed. White commercial farming dominates the agricultural economy and poverty persists among black rural communities.

According to the introduction of the KwaZulu-Natal Poverty Eradication Master Plan - twenty eight percent of all KwaZulu-Natal citizens live in extreme poverty, and a further 29 percent live in absolute poverty. At least 32.9 percent are food deprived and KwaZulu-Natal has the highest gender based poverty incidence and the second highest level of rural poverty in South Africa. Umkhanyakude, Umzinyathi, Zululand and Sisonke have the highest poverty levels in the country. Rural poverty is a challenge we have to address. Our strategy going forward has to effectively address growth and development in rural municipalities to create opportunities for unemployed youth so as to stem the tide of people moving to the urban areas.

Ladies and gentlemen, so far I have painted the broad brushstrokes of why we are here. Let me get down to specifics.

To return to the point of firing on all cylinders. In the June meeting with Departmental staff, I said that having been the chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Portfolio Committee, I knew the department well and understood its challenges. I have to admit that I was wrong. Since becoming MEC

I have come to realise how much Members of the Portfolio Committee do not know about the Department. Yes, we were provided with thick dossiers of documents, some very clearly cut and paste jobs. In retrospect I realised that this amounted to nothing more than the obfuscation of facts.

Since being in the Department, I've been on a journey of discovery to find out what did I miss while being on the Portfolio Committee. This involved scrutinising our current systemic delivery regime, the policies underpinning delivery to our people and the institutional culture that is deeply imbedded in the Department. What I found was an engine that was not firing on all cylinders. People working in silos and a lack of alignment within the Department. Service delivery seems to be at the level of ticking the boxes, to a lack of a sense of urgency and an absence of performance at optimum level.

This must form part of discussion this weekend, how can we fire up our engine and deal with levels of despondency.

- How do we motivate each other to really care about serving our people?
- How can we care enough to become passionate about eradicating poverty and become activists for change and creating a better world for our people?
- How do we move beyond seeing our work in the department as merely a technocratic exercise to one of genuine service delivery. We work under an ANC government and the Party manifesto clearly states, that we are a Caring Government.

One way to inject enthusiasm is for our plans going forward to take into consideration the discussion and debates currently underway around issues of food security, climate change and the role of small-holder farmers. There is interesting research being conducted in our universities on poverty as well as on agriculture and rural development. One of our facilitators at this workshop Dr. Donna Hornby, was recently involved in a conference on Rethinking agriculture in South Africa. We have a range of speakers who I am certain will challenge our conventional thought and will force us to begin thinking out of the box. We need new ways of seeing our environment and new ways of responding.

An essential aspect of our work is to be constantly engaged with the communities we serve. I have been involved in extensive stakeholder consultations over the past weeks. There have been meetings with Amakhosi in the province through the House of Traditional Leadership. Discussions revolved around the most effective ways for the department to assist in various agricultural activities both with subsistence (food security) and small holder farmers with commercial interest. It concerns me that many of the Amakhosi I met and other stakeholders did not feel our presence as a Department. We have to be more visible and make our presence felt at the coalface of service delivery.

From the statistics mentioned earlier we are well aware that women and youth represent the face of poverty in rural areas. They have to be the cornerstone of our service delivery going forward. I have met with youth and women in agriculture through their organisations, Women in Agriculture and Rural Development [WARD] and Youth in Agriculture and Rural Development [YARD].

I have also met with all the principals of TVET Colleges' teaching agriculture in the province. We have agreed on collaborative efforts and placements of students for both in service trainings and in agricultural projects. I have also met with UKZN

faculty for agricultural studies. We have a MOU with them and their students study at Cedara College but we need to expand on our MOU to incorporate a number of other areas of collaborations which I intend the department to pursue. In fact, this reminds me that as a Department we have signed a number of MOU's. Most of these merely exist on paper. We need to ensure that these agreements work for us and result in a host of collaborative activities.

During this Strategic Planning session there is going to be a panel discussion focussing on an overview of partnerships among strategic stakeholders, particular our academic institutions. This will feed into our discussion on how we can make the most of our partnerships to enhance agriculture and rural development in our Province.

From what I have said so far, I am certain that you now know the general direction in which our strategic plan must flow. To help shape the discussion and to formulate a workable plan let me add more meat or should I say vegetables to the broth. Here are more specific details on what we need to focus on over the next two years and incorporate into our strategic plan going forward.

1. **Food security** has to be the over-arching focus of the Department. Consequently, the revival of the directorate responsible for food security in the province would have to be done immediately. This directorate must be adequately funded to equal the task of driving this programme. The defunct mushroom programme directed at poorest households will have to be revisited.
- 1.1 Our Department has to work towards ensuring that no household goes to sleep hungry and that nutritious food is affordable and available to our people. We are challenged on this front by rising food prices. Meat, fruit and vegetables that provide essential proteins and vitamins are viewed as luxuries in most households. We know from health Experts that as a result of not getting adequate proteins and vitamins one in five children suffers from malnutrition and learning disabilities. The well-being of future generations of our children will be compromised if we do not find a way to provide nutritious food for the poor. We must look at nutrients and see how this determines the type of food we produce. We need to look at how we can measure our success according to the healthy foods we produce, perhaps assessing the nutrients in crops can be a more specific measure of our success. Will we be able to work out how much protein and vitamins we are producing as opposed to what we had to import? This is certainly food for thought in our deliberations.
- 1.2 If we are to address the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment it is imperative that we change the way we do farming and that we see food as a health and a social justice issue before it is a business. This is why we need to go back and vigorously pursue the one home one garden and also one household one hectare plan. This can be extended to one household, one fruit tree or more. Our plans going forward must incorporate the extensive growing of a diversity of food crops including indigenous crops and fruit trees. We can build in a project where Arbor Day for the Department can revolve around the planting of fruit trees. Talking about trees, there is a need to consider the categorisation of our agricultural space. How do we balance forestation and food crops. I know that Professor

Modi has an interest in agroforestry and these are the issues that we must discuss here as well as in debates going forward.

2. Related to the above, is **the revival of seed and mechanisation programmes** for subsistence farmers. A system where people are taught to conserve seeds after harvesting must be developed and our people must be taught these skills through our extension services. This will ensure that there is future self-sufficiency with less or no reliance on government. We can build into the plan the development of nurseries in each district or municipality. This will also lessen the reliance of seed distribution.
  - 2.1 There are certainly sentiments being aired that distributing seeds and scoops is going back to former failed systems and the big question is how do we keep control? A fault previously is that we measured inputs rather than outputs. Our concern was on how the budget was spent so we accounted for how many seed were distributed, the quantity of fertilizer distributed etc. Going forward we also need to measure our outputs. The focus has to be on whether there is value for the money spent. For example whether a maximum number of jobs has been created or crops produced. In this way we can continuously assess our programmes and see what needs to be done differently to get better results in accordance with our mandate.
3. **Mechanisation assistance** has to continue, for the time being to assist subsistence farmers. We need to look at ways to collaborate on mechanisation with the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform through the Agri-Park programme. A modernised fleet management systems needs to be developed around the mechanisation programme by the Department's Agricultural Development Services (ADS). This will assist the Districts to manage tractors through local offices meant for mechanisation. That fleet management system must have security systems to prevent abuse of tractors, oil and implements which was a problem in the past.
4. **Working with Amakhosi and municipalities** we are going to revive dip tanks and fencing of all grazing lands in villages. This intervention will encourage our people to continue with stock farming especially of cattle and goats. It will also allow the youth to go to school rather than having to looking after animals. This programme must be budgeted for the next budget cycle of the department.
5. There is a need to establish a **"New Generation of Agriculturists and Commercial Farmers"** with a specific focus on youth and women. We want to be aggressive on this programme in terms of funding and giving technical support to young farmers. There are already youth and women who are passionately involved in commercial farming who need to be propelled to higher levels of commercial activities. This will help break the glass ceiling of a white racial dominated commercial farming sector. Some of our youth in particular must be encourage to be involved in various agricultural value-chains up and down stream such as seeds, fertilizers, machinery and related businesses as well as the development of agricultural products.

- 5.1 **Targeting the youth** is critical because of the ticking time-bomb of youth unemployment. Skills must be taught and jobs created along the agribusiness value chain. Faced with an ageing farming population we also need to grow our next generation of farmers. More funding of projects by the department has to be directed to this sector [youth and women]. To this end, I am reviving the Directorate for Youth and Women. For now, whilst this directorate is being re-established in our organogram, that function is going to be absorbed as a special project in the Ministry.
6. **The Planting season** cannot just be a mere formality without concrete programmes to make people of KZN geared towards ploughing and supporting them to plant. The Ploughing season must be an ongoing activity throughout the year. For example, the beginning of the year is the bean ploughing season, July represent potato ploughing and in September the Maize ploughing season begins. We also need to commemorate and highlight the different planting seasons and the harvesting seasons as well. This will help educate our communities on reasons for losses and opportunities to celebrate good harvests. The strategic plan must have an implementation programme for this new focus of multi-season ploughing, with comprehensive awareness programmes around the crops during the different planting and harvesting seasons. To ensure the importance of these events, municipalities and Amakhosi must be invited to play a central role. The aim is to uplift farming at a local level and the key focus of a specific planting season would be to assist our people and emerging commercial farmers to develop their expertise around specific crops.
7. We have to **revisit the current 50/50 policy** for funding of aspirant farmers who need assistance for farms acquisition. The policy, in its current form, is a hindrance to fast tracking the entrance of the previously disadvantaged into full commercial farming. This is in light of the fact that the State assistance remains fixed at 50%, no matter the value of the asking price. It is also against the background that Black people have in the main had no security. Banks tend to decline them as they pose a risk for business loans. If we want to build a new generation of farmers, our policies must facilitate that objective rather than posing a hindrance.
8. **Partnerships** will continue to remain at the core of our activities. In this regard, we need to convene an agricultural summit in the province and delegates would include commercial and small-holder farmers, farm workers, youth and women. We need to break the chains that divide role players in agriculture and build bridges to grow the agricultural economy in the Province. Such a summit will have to confront all the difficult questions across the divide and resolve them for the progress of the Province. The summit could come up with a Transformation Charter. An area worth exploring, especially in regard with our graduate placement programme, is to offer commercial farmers an incentive scheme for taking in and training unemployed graduates.
9. This department has a tough mandate for **Rural Development**. It is tough precisely because the lot of the rural poor has not changed, 22 years into

our democracy. The department has not been aggressive on this mandate and there is massive underdevelopment in the rural areas of our province. I will not accept lip service coming from this branch but a strategy that speaks to material conditions on the ground and one that takes into consideration the texture and social make-up of rural KZN. This component needs more development studies specialists than agriculturalist per se.

- 9.1 **Alignment:** Rural development is an overarching coordination of different developmental facets of the rural communities beyond just agricultural interventions but pulling together other departments and agencies into the overall development programme. Strong intergovernmental alignment is a key element.
- 9.2 One of the huge task is **to arrest urbanization** by ensuring that we revive rural towns and their economic activities by pulling together all role players and various line departments both provincially and nationally so that job creation is realized. Harnessing people's economic activities from agriculture and other various economic engagements is at the centre of rural development. Promotion of entrepreneurial aspirations and innovations from the rural youth falls squarely in our coordination mandate as rural development.
- 9.3 An important facet in all of this is the development of the **Agri-Parks**. Embarrassingly, KZN is lagging behind in this regard. This is all the more painful as the Agriculture Departments are key custodians of this project. We talk about alignment of different government departments for the success of Agri-Parks, yet shockingly there is no alignment within our own department. ADS and Rural development appear to be working in silos. We have to get going on immediately on championing the establishment of Agri-Parks and getting them off the ground. We must come up with an aggressive plan to facilitate the building of Agri-Parks. This plan including the Department's rural development strategy must be in tandem with the Provinces, Radical Agrarian Socio-Economic Transformation Model known as **RASET**. It is exciting to have a model championed by the Provincial Government that links agriculture and agro-processing to socio-economic transformation. We need to ensure that RASET is implemented for the betterment of our people by ensuring that programmes are infused with agriculture projects and that we play our part in the radicalisation and transformation of the markets and the agriculture food value chain.

Let me re-iterate that Rural Development is a complex terrain there has to be change and development within the context of organised social formation under traditional authorities. This presents an exciting opportunity to come up with an innovative rural development strategy which will inform a clear cut implementation plan. A Deputy Director General will be appointed, within the Department shortly to ensure that there is leadership in this regard.

## **10. Changing of mind-set about agriculture in the province**

- 10.1 We must change the mind-set about agriculture in this province and inspire the youth in particular to adopt a receptive attitude about agriculture. I am going to meet with the MEC of Education to discuss partnership with the schools in the province offering agricultural subjects. Working with our institutions of higher learning such as UKZN, Mangosuthu University of Technology, University of Zululand and our TVET Colleges, we are going to develop a programme to support the teachers in these schools through training and retraining.
- 10.2 Officials, in the Department, who do not possess agriculture as a field of study must be encouraged to make use of short courses that our own Colleges are going to develop. Everyone must have a basic minimum knowhow of agriculture as a speciality in order to have a full appreciation of the environment under which they operate even if it's in finance, Corporate Service and other non-core functions.
- 10.3 Every departmental official starting from level 09 up to the HOD level must be ambassadors of agriculture. Our Officials will adopt two schools in the province as part of their social outreach job to at least visit them twice or more in a year to promote and inspire learners about agriculture. They must have sessions with learners and promote agriculture as an activity and career options available within the agricultural space. Clear reporting on this social outreach by our officials must be developed by the Monitoring & Evaluation Unit. UKZN is going to produce an easy-to-read manual in this regard. Related to this, would be the promotion of healthy, nutritious eating with this information spreading from the learners to reach communities. The department must develop simple, easy to read pamphlets for our officials to use on their visits. At every imbizo or project launch a desk with all of the above information must be available to give to our people.
- 10.4 The Ministry will have a budget for bursaries allocated to students pursuing agricultural studies. With HRD, my office will work on the allocative criteria so that there is a clear standard of awarding. The department must make available an internship budget for graduates in different fields spread all over the department from local offices, districts and head office. Workplace experiential training is an important feature for this government and contributes to employment. This must be made available as from the beginning of 2017.
- 10.5 We need to revive Agricultural Expos and we can engage with the Royal Agricultural Royal Show in this regard. I am reminded of the colonial roots of the Royal Show, but the concept of Agricultural shows goes a long way to promoting a culture of farming. Mandela Week in July can be used for Farmer Expos and Farmer Days. Within that week our high schools can be invited to agriculture career exhibitions organised by Institutions of Higher Learning and Agricultural Colleges. Farmer organisations will be invited to be part of the programme and engage with learners on different aspects of agricultural careers in the sector. These Expos can be arranged in each



district working with Amakhosi and the local municipalities. ADS and our Colleges can work on an implementation plan for this programme.

- 10.6 All of the above communicates a message that we need an activist-driven department. This department must make a serious contribution to people of KwaZulu-Natal. This province must go back to its glory days as an agricultural province. That culture of conceiving of our land as a representing our wealth must be revive. My emphasis on the youth in particular as a new generation to instil and invest on in various forms is born out of the experience that "*Zibanjwa zisemaphuhu*" [catching the bird whilst they are fledgling]. I implore all of you to walk with me in this vision and be foot soldiers in the implementation of this new focus. We owe it to ourselves to impact decisively on the agricultural landscape of our province.
- 10.7 The ruling party has complained about poor communication by various Departments on the work they do to change the lives of our people. As a result, they have directed that 1% of the total Departmental budget from next year onwards be earmarked for communication and marketing to showcase the work we do. This to be implemented and my office will be central in external communication working with internal communication.
- 10.8 These new focuses requires change management from all the managers. A culture that is prevailing in this department that is devoid of urgency must end now. Despondent managers who cannot go beyond the call of duty in doing their work must end. The above objectives cannot be achieved in a lazy environment and where management is divided into groups of opposing sides. We need a change management culture and I will not tolerate anyone standing in the way of a new focus or frustrating it through technocratic means of whatever kind.

## **Conclusion**

If we are to tackle the challenges of poverty, unemployment and the high levels of inequality that exist in our society then the priority of that service must be to the poorest of poor. It must be to the child-headed households, and to the women in the rural areas who are struggling to eke out a living from their small plots of land so that they can feed their children. It must be to the unemployed youth in the rural areas who have given up dreaming of a better life. It must be to the subsistence farmers who love the land but who desperately needs help in making a living from their farming. Every employee must internalize these social realities of the province and the empathy drawn from it must be translated into an enthusiasm to change our people to the better. Our jobs must not just be about ticking the box of activities completed and working for compliance sake. We must all be the soldiers going to war against poverty and hunger.

We are holding this Strategy Planning session at the end of 2016. This means that the outcomes that emerge has to be implemented immediately. We only having two years before the end of this 5th administration in 2019. There has to be robustness in the implementation of the plans and programmes without fail with no excuses and delaying tactics from anybody. This Strategy Plan must give meaning and content to the details I have outlined. Every Official of this Department is called upon to passionately roll up their sleeves over the next two

years, and work towards the realization of the goals that we are going to set for ourselves. Always remember that you are not doing it for me, nor for the HOD but for our people. Your ultimate role working for government is service delivery.

As I said earlier we have a road map as the department, our roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. We have the ANC manifesto as the ruling party, which sees food security as a number one priority. There is Government's National Development Plan, New Growth Path, Nine Point Plan, Agricultural Policy Action Plan, and our own Agrarian policy. Our overall guidance comes from the South African Constitution. Discerning these policy frameworks is important for us in discharging meaningfully our responsibilities in changing people's lives through agriculture and rural development.

We want to make agriculture in this province part of our people's heritage. Our people must live and breathe agriculture both in the rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Hence the new strategic theme "Senza ezolimo isiko mpilo lethu."

I am appealing to all of you to make use this Strategy session. Use it as a means of focussing on the people we serve and re-charge your engines. Participate in the discussions and in the various commissions and make your meaningful contributions to put content to the strategy. I am confident that we can emerge from these five days with a quality product that will see the Department as a leader of agriculture and rural development in KwaZulu-Natal. Let me wish you luck in your deliberations!