



agriculture & rural development

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agriculture
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PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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KZN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (KZN DARD) MEC, MR THEMBA MTHEMBU'S SPEAKING NOTES FOR A MEDIA BREAKFAST ON THE DEPARTMENT'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2017/18

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Editors, Journalists and Representatives of Media Houses

You are here as our guests this morning because of the words of our latest Nobel Literature Laureate, Bob Dylan, who said, the times they are a changing. As Government we have to be responsive to change if we are to improve the lives of our people, especially the poorest of the poor.

2016, with its devastating drought, brought home the fact that the climate is changing. Food prices have shot up and our food security remains under threat. Just this week agricultural economist, Dr Tracy Ledger released her book, titled: "An Empty Plate: Food, Politics and social justice". I haven't had a chance to read the book as yet, but Ledger seems to tackle the root of the matter. She describes food insecurity as the biggest social challenge that we face as a country. According to the blurb of the book, Ledger analyses the state of the South African agri-food system and looks at such issues as to why is it that food prices are so high that millions of South African families go hungry. Why are the people that produce our food – farmworkers – among the most insecure of all? Why do high levels of rural poverty persist while corporate profits in the food sector keep rising? And, how did a country with a constitutional right to food become a place where 1 in 4 children are so malnourished that they are classified as stunted?

Ledger says her book is a story of what is possible if we reimagine our society and build a new system on the foundation of solidarity and ethical food citizenship.

This is what the KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZN DARD) aims to achieve - a foundation of ethical food citizenship. Over the past months the Department has been involved in an intensive review process to focus on how we respond to the shifting environmental, political and socio-economic terrain that we operate within. I am happy to report that we have

emerged with a comprehensive strategic plan to change the way we will be doing agriculture in the Province. More importantly, this plan seeks 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 continue to struggle under the yoke of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

We would like to share this vision with you so that as the media, you become our partners in promoting agriculture, food security and rural development. Together we can all respond to the changing times and help make a difference in our people's lives.

Let me assure you that the plan presented here today is based on engagements and dialogue with different stakeholders. More importantly it is based on gaining an understanding of the political economy of agriculture, food and rural development.

From engagements over the past months with Amakhosi, the municipalities, farmer representatives, various stakeholders and the communities, it became clear that the Department was largely invisible. There was a lack of adequate engagement with various stakeholders. Our aim going forward is to make ourselves more visible, to engage more and this is why we have come up with the slogan – "Let's Make Agriculture our Culture."

Moving forward, **Food security** is to become the over-arching focus of the Department. Consequently, this will lead to the revival of the directorate responsible for food security in the province. The directorate will be adequately funded to equal the task of driving this programme. The Department's defunct mushroom programme directed at poorest households is also being revisited.

KZN DARD will work towards ensuring that no household goes hungry and that nutritious food is affordable and available to our people. We are challenged on this front by rising food prices. 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. Ledger in her book traces the link between childhood malnutrition and violence in later life. So you see the well-being of our nation will be compromised if we do not find ways to provide nutritious food for the poor. 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 business.

In this regard, we are looking at nutrients to 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? Research, especially collaborative research with other institutions will form an important part of this programme.

The Department is going back to vigorously pursuing the One Home One Garden and also One Household One Hectare plan. We want this to extend to one household, one fruit tree or more. Our plans going forward aims to incorporate the extensive growing of a diversity of food crops including indigenous crops and fruit trees. We plan to build in a project where Arbor Day for the Department can revolve around the planting of fruit trees. Talking about trees, we will be looking at the categorisation of our agricultural space and how do we balance forestation and food crops.

There is not going to be a one size fits all approach. Instead, budget planning and agricultural production will be district and municipal sensitive. It will take into consideration poverty disparities and District Competitive Advantages.

Related to the above, is the revival of seed and mechanisation programmes for subsistence farmers. The Department has adopted a clear approach that commercial and subsistence farming are not mutually exclusive. We cannot pit one against the other as both are equally important. This viewpoint was confirmed by one of our speakers at the Department's Strategic Planning session in November. Ms Shereen Motala from the HSRC spoke of other African countries where the support of subsistence farmers brought about large scale upliftment to local economies and even contributed to those country's GDP's. While the Department will work directly with subsistence farmers we are contemplating developing an agency that will largely be concerned with commercial farming. There is a plan to collapse all our entities such as ADA and Mjindi Farming into one and commercial farming will become the domain of this new single entity. The details of this new arrangement are being worked out and will be communicated to you when completed.

A system where people are taught to conserve seeds after harvesting will be developed and our people will 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 want to build into the plan the development of nurseries in each district or municipality. This will also lessen the reliance of seed distribution. The development of seed banks will also form part of a collaborative research programme.

There has been sentiments aired that distributing seeds and scoops and assisting farmers with mechanization will repeat past failures, where there was a lack of control. A fault previously was 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 will be measuring 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 and the effects on the local economy.

Mechanisation assistance will continue, for the time being to assist subsistence farmers. We will be looking at ways to collaborate on mechanisation with the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform through the Agri-Park programme. A modernised fleet management system will also 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. The fleet management system will have security systems built around them to prevent abuse of tractors, oil and implements which was a problem in the past.

Addressing food security means that equal attention has to be paid to both cropping and Livestock Production. KwaZulu-Natal has huge potential for livestock development in most parts of the province. In fact, more than 50 percent of the cattle in the province belong to communal farmers who only contribute about six percent to the revenue generated by the livestock industry. Agricultural economists in the Department say that if this contribution can be lifted by a mere 25 percent, the industry would generate an additional R2,5 billion for the KwaZulu-Natal economy. There is confidence that the Province has the potential to produce enough meat for KwaZulu-Natal's own consumption and to export to other provinces and even beyond the boundaries of South Africa.

Livestock development will with effect from the 2017/18 Financial Year receive a fair share of budget allocation as opposed to the past when there was a budget bias towards crop production. Programmes to be supported will include cattle, indigenous goats, piggeries, indigenous sheep, wool sheep, indigenous chicken, broilers, layers and aquaculture farming. We are going to look at breeding oxen, donkeys and mules and even going back to using oxen for ploughing.

Programmes to support cattle production in particular will include breeding and selection; the promotion of One Local Municipality One Grazing Camp and the improvement of grazing camps. There will also be an intense focus on the promotion of Primary Animal Health.

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 look after animals.

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 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 encouraged 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.

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 will also focus on growing our next generation of farmers. More funding of projects by the Department will be directed to this sector [youth and women]. To this end, I am reviving the Directorate for Youth and Women.

We will be revisiting the current 50/50 policy for funding of aspirant farmers who need assistance for farm 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.

Partnerships will continue to remain at the core of our activities. An agricultural summit in the province will be held and delegates will include commercial and small-holder farmers, farm workers, youth and women. We need to break down the high wall that divides role players in agriculture and build bridges to grow the agricultural economy in KZN. 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 with regard to our graduate placement programme, is to offer commercial farmers an incentive scheme for taking in and training unemployed graduates.

KZN DARD has not been aggressive on its Rural Development mandate. As I said in my introduction, 22 years into our democracy the picture of our rural landscape has not changed. Wealth is still represented by the dominance of white commercial farmers and poor black communities remain the face of rural poverty. This branch of KZN DARD will be drawing up a comprehensive 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.

Rural development is an overarching coordination of different developmental facets of the rural communities beyond just agricultural interventions. There has to be a pulling together of other departments and agencies into the overall development programme. We want to format what will be known as an Agriculture and Rural Development Council for the Province, where we will draw together all the different stakeholders in this arena.

An important facet in all of this is the development of the Agri-Parks. We are working on an aggressive plan to facilitate the building of Agri-Parks. This plan including the Department's rural development strategy will be in tandem with KZN Cabinet's Radical Socio-Economic Transformation model – also known as - RASET and the Province's Poverty Eradication Master Plan.

Our aim going forward is to change the mind sets about agriculture in the province and this is where we need buy-in from the media.

We must change the mind set about agriculture and inspire the youth in particular to adopt a receptive attitude towards agriculture. I will continue the work of the former MEC in engaging 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. There will also be an alignment of courses so that students can progress from TVETs to attending Agricultural Colleges and Universities.

The Ministry will have a budget for bursaries allocated to students pursuing agricultural studies. The Human Resource Development Unit and the Ministry will work on the allocative criteria so that there is a clear standard of awarding. The Department will 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.

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 know-how 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 Services and other non-core functions.

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 will be developed by the Monitoring & Evaluation Unit.

UKZN and the Department are going to produce easy-to-read manuals and pamphlets, promoting agriculture for distribution. Related to this, would be the promotion of healthy, nutritious eating – part of our food security programme. Information will be decimated through schools with learners taking the information home to their families and communities. A desk with all of the above information will be available to distribute to our people at every event organised by the Department.

This is also an area that the media can think about getting involved in. For those of you who operate in the urban environment, there is huge scope for urban farming. In fact, as part of our strategic plan we intend developing a very intensive urban farming programme. This will be earmarked at reviving the township economy and aggressively addressing poverty and unemployment.

As part of our drive to make agriculture our culture, we will be reviving Agricultural Expos and we plan to engage with the Royal Agricultural Royal Show in this regard. I am well-aware 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. Agricultural Development Services (ADS) and our Colleges will work on an implementation plan for this programme.

All of the above communicates a message that we need an activist-driven Department that continuously strives to respond to the changing times. Currently a change that is of concern, is the decline in agriculture in the Province. According to Statistics South Africa agriculture in the Province has dropped by 6,3%. We will be interrogating and unpacking this decline – why did this happen? Is it because of the drought or changes of policies or are there other factors at play? We will be constantly reviewing and assessing our terrain so that we can adapt our strategies to material conditions on the ground.

Finally, these new ways of doing agriculture requires a certain type of governance within the Department. There will be no place for corruption. We cannot say that we are engaged in uplifting the poor when we are stealing from the poor. This is why we welcome the Presidential Proclamation that the Special Investigation Unit will be probing corruption within the department. We will cooperate fully with this investigation.

Now that we have held a strategic session to deal with the core functions of the Department, the next step will be to deal with issues of governance. As a Department, we need to think very carefully of what kind of governance and structure we would require in order to give effect to our strategic plan. In January, we will be holding a session on governance and corruption to lay the basis of how we are going to work going forward.

To sum up, our focus is going to be on the most vulnerable members of our society – the poor and to tackle food insecurity that has been described as the biggest social challenge that we face. For this to happen, agriculture has to become part of our people's heritage. We want our people to live and breathe agriculture both in the rural, semi-urban and urban areas. At the same time we want agriculture to contribute to the GDP of the Province, hence our plan to have an entity that concentrates on commercial agriculture. With this all-embracing mandate to fulfil, we need you as the media to help us make agriculture our culture in this Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

I thank you