



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: 033-3559300 or 0832340475

Fax: 033-343 8255
Toll-Free: 0800 000 996
Email: Nalini.Dickson@kzndard.gov.za

SPEAKING NOTES BY KZN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT MEC, MR THEMBA MTHEMBU AT THE MEET AND GREET GATHERING WITH DEPARTMENTAL STAFF

FRIDAY 10 JUNE 2016

VENUE: CEDARA AUDITORIUM

Thank you for coming here to meet me your second MEC in the past two years. Fortunately, the way government is structured there may be changes in leadership, but the work continues.

There is a separation of activities, as MEC I carry the political mandate of the department, but you carry out the operational and administrative mandate and that means continued service to our people.

Former MEC Cyril Xaba did a good job, he laid the ground work and I am here to build on that. Comrade Cyril did a lot of work and he needs to be applauded. Having been the chairperson of the Agriculture Portfolio Committee since 2009, I know your challenges, the Department has been like a car that has overturned a number of times. We are here today to put that car back on its wheels, bang out the dents and point it on the road forward.

We have a road map and our roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. They are from the Manifesto of the ANC as the ruling party as well as from **government's mandate** as informed by the National Development Plan, the New Growth Path and the Agricultural Policy Action Plan. Our overarching guidance comes from the South African Constitution.

All the above gives us continuity and this is what we are here to achieve. We are here to ensure a better life for our people in a united, free and democratic and non-racial South Africa. We cannot be free if the majority of our people continue to be shackled by poverty.

What informs our service delivery in the light of the mandates I have mentioned is understanding the terrain within which we operate. Agriculture is a sector within the South African economy and that economy was built by the colonial masters around the mining industry alongside that of agriculture. It was not organic to the material conditions within our country, but a colonial imprint that was imposed upon us. Today we are dealing with the structural defects of that imposition in the form of massive poverty and a highly unequal society. This is what we have to address as we work at the coalface of service delivery.

So it is very important for each and every worker in the agricultural sector to have an understanding of the political economy of South Africa and the political economy of agriculture. This is what I would like every worker to understand. To go back to my analogy of putting the car on the right path, if we know our terrain, we will understand very clearly what is expected of us.

To me this means that all of us in the Department must become agricultural activists. I would like every worker to see their role as a campaigner for social change within the agricultural arena.

In our case as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, it means that we have a special responsibility to work towards food security and ensuring that no one goes hungry. We are currently particularly challenged on this front by rising food prices so our focus going forward has to be on growing agriculture so that food can be cheaper. Last week we had the Ratings Agencies assess our credit worthiness and the statistics released by Stats South Africa reported that in the first quarter of this year our economy contracted by 1,2%. One sector that contributed to that was agriculture. These are the things that we as workers in the Department need to know and that includes all of us from the lowest to the highest level.

As a department, we also have the tough mandate of rural development. I call this tough because despite significant progress since attaining our freedom, people living in rural areas remain the poorest of the poor. They too have the right to taste the fruits of freedom.

For all of us working in this Department it means that we have to double our **efforts to implement government's rural development strategy to fight poverty** and unemployment in the rural areas and improve the living conditions of our people. Our work in this regard has a number of spin offs. One of these is that it

will cut down on urban migration. If we see the informal settlements in eThekweni, Pietermaritzburg and Mhlatuze it means that somehow and somewhere in the rural areas we are failing.

Now that I have painted the broad picture, let me get down to specifics. I will start off by telling you who I am so that you understand what we can expect from each other as we move forward. At heart I am an activist, as you have heard from the details on my background, presented by HOD, Dr Mkhize.

Earlier I mentioned that as a member of the KZN Legislature since 2009, **I've** had the honour of being the Chairperson of the Agriculture portfolio Committee for the past seven years. So I do know the Department well and I do know how many times the car has overturned. I have been impressed with the recent progress that you have made. At the last Portfolio Committee meeting we heard about the progress with regards to monitoring and evaluation of the Department. As I said, I am here to build on the ground work laid down by former MEC Xaba.

Also, as a worker with strong ties with the Union movement, I understand the uncertainty over the matching and placement process. I have asked the HOD to prioritize sorting this out so that you all know your roles and responsibilities and we can get on with the task at hand. I want this sorted out as speedily as possible. To me, that is the delivery of services to our people. I may be a unionist, but I will not allow my relationship with the workers to compromise service delivery to our beneficiaries on the ground.

All I want from you is performance - for you to do your jobs as civil servants and paid workers of government. You will not be doing this for me, but for the people we serve.

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 the poor. It must be to the child-headed household 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.

We have the programmes within the Department to achieve these goals, all that is needed is for us to work with commitment and dedication in implementing these programmes as a service to our citizens.

Coming from a working class background and as an activist and a unionist, I am a humanist as well. I believe in treating each other in the workplace and the people we serve with integrity, respect and dignity. This means creating a culture where you look forward to the next day at work.

It also **means that there is no place for corruption and wastage. Taxpayer's** money that is in government coffers must go to service delivery. We are public servants or servants of the people, we are in our jobs to serve the people and not ourselves.

I would like us to venture forward by doing the very best that we can to fulfil our mandate by being agricultural activists for change. To have meaning as a Department our actions must be underlined by treating each other and the citizens we serve as fellow humans – with integrity, respect and dignity. This means doing our very best for Mama Mhlongo from the deep rural areas near Eshowe, which hardly features anyone's radar to the advanced farmers in Underberg. All of them must have a sense of belonging to one agricultural family and all of them must feel our presence as a Department.

I am confident we will be able to achieve this change by building on everything that you have done **for this Department. We don't want to dwell on the** negatives, but rather dwell on the positives that have been achieved and get on with what needs to be done. With these few words, I just want to say hello!