KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT HON. MRS THEMBENI KAMADLOPHA-MTHETHWA ON THE OCCASION OF WELCOMING OF ASSISTANT AGRICULTURAL PRACTITIONERS AND AGRICULTURAL GRADUATES YOUTH PROGRAMME FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

DATED: 31 MARCH 2026
VENUE: SIBUSISIWE COMMUNITY HALL, MANDENI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Ukubingelela
Mphathi woHlelo
Acting HoD Dr Fikile Qwabe
Agribusiness Development Agency
EXCO and MANCO Members
Assistant Agricultural Practitioners
Beneficiaries of the Unemployed Agricultural Graduates youth Programme
Farmers
Abazali
All protocol observed

Without airing my personal concerns publicly, as a mother myself, I sometimes pity the plight of bringing children into a world that can be harsh and unkind.
The sad state of our children often finds them facing hardships and resorting to crime and social ills such as substance abuse, forced by circumstances to head their homes. Despite having the right qualifications, they are without jobs. Some of the youth find their applications overlooked in favor of illegal immigrants due to lower pay.

Not long ago, the country's sorry state of unemployment rate among youth in the Quarter Four (or Q4) of 2025 was revealed at 43 percent and 10.3 percent of unemployed young people between the ages of 15 and 34. What is of more concerning is that the number of unemployed graduates has doubled since 2008, meaning that in that year the figure was 5 percent. I am sure I speak for many when I say not enough has been done to turn the tide against unemployment, particularly affecting the youth. We do feel your pain.

However, without claiming to be the solution or the panacea and without overpromising more than the Department of Agriculture can deliver, we are today fulfilling a commitment I have made to finding deployments for our unemployed graduates and finding employment for the extension assistants.

Ngokwezibalo ze Statistics South Africa zakamuva ziveza isithombe sokuthi bangu 31.4 wamaphesenti abantu abangasebenzi e South Afrika, kulesosibalo intsha ingu 4.9 million engasebenzi. Abanye babo abasebenzi ngenxa yokuthi sebawucinga baze bakhathala, baduba, bakhathala. Abanye baphethe izicucu ezifanele kepha lutho ukuqashwa kanti abanye babo bazitshwa ngabomu ukuze kufakwe abokufika. Lapha eMandeni nje uNdunankulu uMhlonishwa u-AT Ntuli useze kaningi eqhuba umkhankaso othi 'Ongangeni ngesango uyafohla' njengoba izindawo zamafemu akhiwa ngosizo lukaMntwana wakwaPhindangene asegcwele abokufika njengamanje. Bakhishwa imihla namalanga kepha babuya ngokushesha. Okuxakayo wukuthi imithetho yakuleli ikubeka ngokusobala ukuthi umuntu wokufika osebenza kuleli yilowo onamakhono ayimvelakancane kuleli. Thina ke njengoMnyango besikubeke kwabasobala ukuthi lamathuba asilethe lapha namuhla azotholwa abakuleli kuphela.

Angiphinde ngikhulume ngalendaba evele ezinkundleni zokuxhumana ukuthi abasebenzi bethu bayagwazelwa ukuze kuqashwe izingane. Nginesiqinisekiso ukuthi nonke lapha ngaphansi kohlelo I Assistant Agricultural Practitioners ne Unemployed Agricultural Graduates Youth Programme, akekho noyedwa owenzelelwe kwinhlolokhono. Kuyasijabulisa ukuthi nilapha nathi namuhla, futhi ningazisoli ngalokho ngenxa yezinkulumo ezikhona kwi social media. Sizishaya isifuba ngokuthi uhlelo lwethu beluvulelekile. Othole isikhala inhlanhla yakhe parasite kanzima kanti ongatholanga akazame nangokuzayo. Izinhlamba enithukwa ngazo, ezinye zazo ezibhekiswe kithina njengomnyango ngeke zisithene amandla ekutheni siqhubeke sifukule intsha yakithi.

Kuthe ngesonto eledlula sihalalisela abaphothule izifundo zabo emakolishi i-Owen Sithole College of Agriculture nase Cedara, sibathwesa imiyezane, kwaba khona abafaka unyawo lwedada bethi 'Welcome to the real world of unemployment'. Nginesiqinisekiso ukuthi nina enikhona lapha ezinhlelweni zombili nisho okuhlukile ngoba niqashiwe futhi abanye benu kusukela ksasa ngoLwesithathi seningabasebenzi boMnyango.

Ngiyazi usuku lwenu as AAP noma ama unemployed graduates kepha ngiyathanda ukuthi ngisike elijikayo ngabasebenzi boMnyango ngomkhuba okhula ngesivinini wokungaphendulwa kwalabo abafaka izicelo zomsebenzi. Sesikuqaphelile ukuthi abantwana abaningi bakhala ngokungaphendulwa kwezicelo zabo ngemuva kokufaka ama applications: awoxhaso noma owomsebenzi. Ngiyaninxusa zikhulu zami ikakhulukazi kwaNdabazabantu ukuthi ningagcini ngokubhalela abaphumelele kuphela kepha nabangaphumelelanga badinga ukuthi bazi ukuthi zihambe kanjani izicelo zabo, bengathuki sebebona ezinkundleni zokuxhumana noma ezindabeni ukuthi emathubeni ababefake izicelo zabo sekuphothulwe kwaze kwaqashwa.

Uma sesibuyela odabeni lwentsha nemisebenzi, kuyasijabulisa ukuthi abafundi bethu abasaphumi nezicucu nje kuphela ezikuhlomulisa ngezindlela ezindala zezolimo kepha iphuma icijiwe ngokwamakhono esimanjemanje efaka ezobuchwepheshe. Abanye basebenzisa I Artificial Intelligence noma i-AI ukuchelela ngama drones, ukuhlonza izifo nokukhulisa imikhiqizo. Kubalulekile ke nani ukuba nisebenzise ulwazi olunzulu eniluthekelwe emakolishi ukulekelela abalimi.

As a policy directive, I have mandated this department to prioritise and equip young people. I am pleased to report that 133 young men amd women have been placed on farms under the Unemployed Agricultural Graduates Youth Programme, and 109 Assistant Agricultural Practitioners, 34 of whom started employment late last year, further illustrate that we are serious on our commitments made during the Strategic Plan Session earlier this month. We have dedicated 2026 to supporting our youth engaged in agriculture, and I am pleased that we are fulfilling our promises today. These two programmes form part of many youth initiatives that we believe the youth can see Agriculture as an important sector capable of transforming the lives of young people for the better.

Uhlelo lwama Assistant Agricultural Practitioners noma lwabaluleki bezolimo lungumgogodla wezolimo. Iningizimu Afrika ishoda kakhulu ngalensiza njengoba sintula ama extension officers okwenza ukuthi basebenze ngaphansi kwenkulu incindezi yokululeka abantu abangaphezulu kuka 1700 esikhundleni sika 250 umlimisi noma umeluleki ngamunye. Kuyishwa ke ukuthi sintula abantu abamqoka kangaka kulomkhakha ekubeni kuyibo abaphathelene nakho konke okuthinta ezolimo. Loluhlelo lokuqasha abangu 109 luyingxenye yemizamo yokuvala leligebe. Siyethemba ukuthi nizobamba iqhaza elikhulu ukubambisana nabanye abeluleki ukulekelela kwizinselelo esibhekene nazo nokuthi nizoyibamba ishisa. Sizoqinisekisa ukuthi minyaka yonke siyaqasha. Siyabanxusa abanye ukuba babe ngaphansi kwezinhlaka ezifanele ukubonakala ukuthi babhalisiwe ngaphansi kwe professional body yabeluleki. Inhloso yethu enkulu wukuthi umeluleki ngamunyei abhekele isigceme esisodwa emphakathini.

Amakolishi ethu agcina ukufundisa esigabeni se National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 6, kepha ke udaba lomnyamgo wezemfundo kuzwelonke okumele siqinisekise ukuthi abafundi

bethu bakwazi ukufaka izicelo zomsebenzi njengama Agricultural Advisor agcwele njengoba njengamanje abafundi abafunde emakolishi ethu amabili eCedara nase OSCA baphoqeleka ukungema njengama Assistant Agricultural Practitioners.

CONCLUSION

Silindele lukhulu kunina njengezisebenzi ezintsha zomnyango. Siyafuna ukuthi nibe yingxenye yezisombululo ezinkingeni esibhene nazo njenfomkhakha wezolimo. Ukukha nje phezulu, sibhekene nengwadla yesifo samatele nezinye izifo ezihlasele imfuyo, nezilwanyana ezidla izitshalo, siphinde sibe nezinkinga ezibheke nabalimi abangakwazi ukukhiqiza ngendlela efanele ngenxa yokuntula ulwazi, siphinde futhi sibe nenkinga yokuswela izimakethe. Sinethemba elikhulu ngani ukuthi nizokwenza umahluko omkhulu ekusizeni imiphakathi yethu yabalimi abazilimela nje ukuxosha ikati eziko ukuphilisa imindeni yabo. Kusukela ksasa ziphatheni njengabasebenzi bomnyango esilindele ukuthi baziphathe kahle, basize imiphathi ngendlela enenhlonipho, baphathe kahle nempahla yenkampani efana nezimoto nama devices ngendlela enobuqotho.

Ngiyathokoza