



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by

Hon. Tina Joemat-Pettersson

Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

on the occasion of the 2010 World Food Indaba (World Food Day) at
the South African Reserve Bank

PRETORIA

14 October 2010

Programme Director,

Mrs Sizakele Zuma in absentia,

Honourable Premier of Gauteng: Ms Nomvula Mokonyane

Honourable Minister of Agriculture from Brazil: Mr Jeroen de Lijster

The Executive Mayor of Tshwane: Dr Gwen Ramokgopa

Honourable Ambassador of Brazil, Mr José Vicente de Sá Pimentel
representing Mrs Márcia Lopes, the Brazilian Minister for Social
Development,

Director-General of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and
Fisheries: Mr Langa Zita

Country Representative of the Food and Agricultural Organisation
(FAO): Ms Rosebud Kurwijila

Distinguished members of the Academia

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

All protocol observed!

Good morning,

Today we celebrate World Food Day – accentuating the 31st anniversary of the World Food Day commemorations and the 64th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 1945.

The aim of this day is to reflect on and heighten public awareness on the world food problem and strengthen solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty. The right of everyone to have access to adequate safe and nutritious food is a fundamental right. This right to be free from hunger was reiterated by Heads of State and Governments during the World Food Summit in 1996.

Programme Director, last month, world leaders met at the United Nations to evaluate progress made towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals in a call that addressed the need for a world without hunger. The world leaders realised that the progress made towards the MDG goals was not enough, and a great deal more still needs to be done. The world looked at food production sectors, i.e. agriculture, forestry and fisheries, for answers.

You will recall that at the height of the global food crisis, at the June 2008 FAO meeting in Rome, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki Moon, declared a green revolution. This time, it has become very clear that the world is looking at Africa for solutions.

Poverty levels

It is two years later and the world has an estimated 1 billion hungry people. It is an absolute shame that in our country we have over 2,8 million households experiencing seriously inadequate access to food [Stats SA, GHS 2009]; with over 72% of this population group residing in rural areas.

This therefore calls for a well-defined rural programme to curb food insecurity in these dwellings. The country is experiencing the highest rates of income inequalities in the world, with the richest 10% of the population receiving almost half of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the poorest sharing among themselves only 3,3%.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

The constitution refers to food security in the bill of rights which states that every citizen has a right to access to sufficient food and water and that the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the realisation of this right.

Section 2 of the Constitution further states that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services. Learning from challenges created by the recent global economic crisis, the National General Council wisely analysed the recession and concluded that the orthodox one-size-fits-all policy approach was not a solution.

Since this country and other developing states have managed the crisis better than developed economies with their rigid formulas, it is evident that South Africa needs to develop its own policies suited to its own circumstances. This should include policies that address high levels of poverty, job losses and the growing inequality among our people.

Vulnerable Workers

Policies that government is looking into will, among others, be targeted towards improved performance, rural development, promotion and strengthening of cooperatives and the development of labour markets. It is therefore important that we address issues of vulnerable workers through social dialogue in order to strengthen both equity and growth.

Food security

The benefits of cooperatives are not only limited to potential for economic growth and job creation, but also extend to food security. Through value chain activities, food and especially fresh produce acquires a longer shelf life for easy transportation and market access to communities that require food.

The sustainability of departmental cooperatives will be driven through market-linked primary agriculture production. Through the provincial and district Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Task Teams

(FSNTT), we will link up with the Department of Basic Education's National School Nutrition Programme for easy access to markets, including the rural hospitals and correctional facilities.

Food production, accessibility and affordability

From October 2008 to October 2009 the cost of basic food basket increased by R35 (10%) to R376 in nominal terms. There is also a trend of increasing rural and urban prices of the same food basket. It is unacceptable that the poor in the rural areas should have to pay more for food, further exacerbating their situation. We need properly defined and efficient food distribution systems in the country.

Programme Director, South Africa has always relied on food imports to meet wheat and meat requirements. The import of agricultural products has increased by 40% over the past five years. This therefore calls for a robust investment in efforts to enable the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries to meet domestic food requirements.

Water for agriculture

South Africa is a relatively dry country compared to countries such as Brazil and India. Our agro-climatological situation is different, albeit with a slight advantage in that certain types of produce can be produced in different parts of the country throughout the year. With

proper planning and production support, we have the potential for efficient domestic production all year round.

Research and Development

Research and technology development to support production at household level is paramount for household food production and massification of production for trading purposes. Our research should address high input and production costs to mitigate against the high cost of the final product.

Better food production can be boosted by research and development through reliable and accurate data, improved production methodologies, improved genes for both livestock and horticulture as well as market data.

Programme Director, a Stats SA analysis of the annual average Producer Price Index recorded in the year 2002 (13,5%) and 2008 (14,5%) showed that these years were among the highest. These two years experienced food price hikes which caused an alarming food security crisis situation. We therefore need to intensify support for subsistence and smallholder food production and link them to markets for sustainability.

Transformation and capital investment in infrastructure

The food crisis presented an opportunity for increased investment in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Countries are on the lookout for markets to satisfy their local consumption. This demand has increased investment in arable land, potentially making this sector attractive. It opens up opportunities for profitable joint ventures, equity share schemes and BBBEE partnerships to flourish, at the same time ensuring equitable distribution of wealth.

Climate change and global warming

Agrometeorologist Johan van den Berg recently published a map that shows the change in annual rainfall for a selection of weather stations in South Africa from 1960 to 2006. Van den Berg's map shows rainfall decreased in the coastal area from the Western Cape to KwaZulu-Natal and rain proliferation trends showing in some inland areas. This seems to confirm that the coastal areas are getting drier while the interior is getting wetter, which is the opposite of the trend predicted by climate change models for South Africa.

While this 46-year observation by Van den Berg is clear, this does not mean the trend will continue for the next 40 years. Some models seem to exaggerate the real effect of climate change. Therefore, our policy position advocates for intensified mechanisation, technological advancement, better production practices to increase yields per hectare, and recycling of natural resources such as water harvesting and the making of compost.

Other social issues

Unemployment

Industrialisation has made the rural economies less efficient than formal employment in other sectors in supporting livelihoods. This has made employment one of the key determinants for food security because it gives people purchasing power. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey conducted by Stats SA in October – December 2009 indicated a slight quarterly decrease of 27 000 unemployed persons. Still, the unemployment rate remained at 24,5% of the potential economic active population. For jobs to be created, agriculture, forestry and fisheries must begin to absorb this labour in accordance with the targets agreed through the performance agreement system.

Promotion of healthy living

Improving nutrition should be dealt with at household level through home-based education in the production of nutritious crops, meal planning and correct preparation methodologies to prevent food nutrient loss before it is consumed. Integral to nutrition education is the enhancement of the household's ability to preserve food for a long period, which in turn will ensure its availability for consumption.

Food security and sovereignty

With the crop production figures for maize finalised, it can be concluded that there is more than enough maize to supply the

population and alternative markets. Indeed, government has prioritised food security, and has partnered with other agricultural and health institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), UNICEF, and other stakeholders to improve existing food security initiatives.

Agribusiness and agroprocessing

There is a need for investment in processing home-based produce to be consumable within the area of their production. In addition, more efforts should be made to invest in research which seeks to improve the quality of indigenous food. By ensuring that there is investment in agroprocessing infrastructure in the rural areas we will contribute positively to the rural economy. Small agroprocessing plants will inversely provide employment for rural communities and also spark interest in agriculture.

Success will depend on partnerships with the private sector through platforms such as the current discussions on the sector plan – the Integrated Growth and Development Plan.

Objective of World Food Day Indaba

The objective of this World Food Day Indaba is to have a national dialogue that will help us to strengthen food accessibility and food security for all South Africans. It should cover such important issues as:

- i) Food production and trade
- ii) Nutrition security
- iii) Social safety net and food emergencies and
- iv) Food insecurity information

These broad strategy objectives are coordinated through the Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Task Team, which comprises all the abovementioned social cluster departments.

Having shared all of this with you, ladies and gentlemen, one might think this seems to be a perfect plan to deal with the challenges at hand. However, another question one might ask is where are the countries' deficiencies. This platform we've created today is to ensure that we have this dialogue to share insights into what should constitute the food security programme moving forward given the complexity of our situation.

The outcomes of these deliberations will be an agreed framework for an integrated food security programme to eradicate hunger and food insecurity in South Africa. The discussions today were compelled by the realisation that hunger and food insecurity will never be eradicated through food production alone with out inter-linkages with other government programmes, the agri-industry, the agro-processing and the retail sector, the research based institutions, the NGOs and civil society.

Countries with similar economies to ours, such as India and Brazil, have managed to reduce the levels of income inequalities and have reduced hunger down to zero levels. We should ask ourselves what is that they have that we don't have. I would say we have what it takes to accomplish their success.

For example, we have the National School Nutrition Programme, which has a budget of R3,6 billion. This budget is spent in the rural areas and forms an integral part of the rural economy. Food products are procured through the commercial value chain and small-scale producers are not participating.

Therefore, the development of our country's food security policy and food security legislation will engage our attention as we move forward so that we may show our commitment to food security as it is one of the priority areas for this administration.

Programme Director, in closing, I would like to thank my colleague from Brazil for making time to attend this Indaba. South Africa will surely learn from the Brazilian model. This also reminds us that we are not alone in all our endeavours; we have friends in the world.

I thank you!