

2023 BUDGET VOTE SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MRS ZOLEKA CAPA

Honourable Chairperson

Members of the Portfolio Committee

Minister Thoko Didiza

Deputy Minister Mcebisi Skwatsha

Honourable members

Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed an honour to address you today as we table the Budget Vote 29 of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.

Chairperson, honourable members, this budget vote comes at a time when our country is experiencing an unprecedented power crisis, which has a destabilising effect on all our communities.

Our rural communities who are still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are now impacted by the electricity crisis, which has added to the hardships experienced by people who already carry a disproportionate burden of poverty, unemployment and limited access to information and communication technology.

While our government is working to address these challenges, the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development, working closely with provincial governments, municipalities and traditional councils, must strengthen its role in alleviating poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment in rural areas. To this end, the department is spearheading several initiatives aimed at uplifting the standard of living in rural areas and improving conditions on the ground.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a threat to food security and nutrition, it also poses greater challenges to the poor and most vulnerable sections of our society. The Climate change phenomenon is characterised by, among others, extreme weather conditions that could have resulted in the recent flooding in Komani in the Eastern Cape, which saw the displacement of hundreds of families, and many other natural disasters.

The country experienced flooding due to heavy rainfall during early February and March this year. Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal were badly affected. Crops and infrastructure were damaged and farmers experienced loss of small stock due to drowning. The two affected provinces requested a sum of R307 million with Mpumalanga requesting R297 million and KwaZulu-Natal requesting R10 million.

The department is implementing programmes to address the impacts of climate change on the agriculture sector in compliance with the national and sectoral legislation. Over the past few years, our country has recorded increasing climate variability and climate change generated disasters that have resulted in the socio-economic implications and have negatively affected our country's economy and the livelihoods of people and farming communities.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Integrated Rural Development Sector Strategy (IRDSS) and the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) put rural infrastructure development and skills development at the centre of rural development and rural economy.

Chairperson, the IRDSS which has been approved by the minister, after consultation with all sector departments and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), will be tabled in Cabinet for adoption and approval. The objective of the IRDSS is to create a multidimensional and cross-sectoral instrument to guide planning, implementation and reporting

on rural development initiatives and programmes in an integrated and coordinated manner, through the District Development Model.

The strategy acknowledges that rural development is a transversal function and cannot be executed successfully without collaboration amongst a variety of social partners and the participation of rural communities.

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Chairperson, investment in infrastructure can play a crucial role in supporting rural communities in several ways. It can help to create jobs, stimulate economic growth, and improve the quality of life. The department has completed 440 infrastructure projects at a cost of more than one point seven billion rand (R 1 707 382 633), contributing to the National Infrastructure Plan (NIP) in the previous financial year. In the 2023/24 financial year, the department will be implementing 83 infrastructure development projects in Farmer Production Support Units (FPSUs); Fencing and Animal Handling facilities.

Chairperson, the poor state of rural roads and the inaccessibility it causes to rural communities continues to be one of the primary impediments to optimal economic productivity and access to services.

Last year, the department commenced with the Rural Roads Programme, which prioritises village access roads, farms and FPSUs that support small-scale farmers. Through this programme, the department will deliver eleven (11) farm access roads, nine village access roads and eight FPSU access roads, with a budget allocation of over R300 million in the 2023/2024 financial year.

The department has committed R21 million as part of the partnership with the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), to construct the Dikidikini Bridge and access roads in Ntabankulu Local Municipality under Alfred Nzo District Municipality. The Dikidikini Bridge will connect two villages and allow

school children access to primary and high schools, and economic activities between two districts, Alfred Nzo and O.R. Tambo.

In the Free State, the department is upgrading the Sediba Bridge in Thaba Nchu and paving the road in Mangaung at a cost of R18,7 million. In Limpopo, the construction of both the Komape and Moletji pedestrian bridges is expected to be completed by end September 2023.

The construction of the Mtentu Bridge in the Mkhambati area by the South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL) has already created job opportunities for the locals, and it promises to create more. Several households and graves are currently being relocated to make way for the proposed road. Once completed, the Mtentu Bridge will be the highest in the continent at 223m, and the Msikaba Bridge will be the third highest in Africa at a height of 194m.

Chairperson, we must ensure that our people in rural areas do not get left behind as the world moves further into the information and communication technology (ICT) age. The department is collaborating with the Department of Transport and SANRAL, using the SANRAL Vala Zonke Pothole App, to allow for the capturing of rural roads into a live database accessible to key stakeholders undertaking road maintenance and repair. The App allows for capturing: Details of capturer the GPS location, the type of road, a pothole and a picture. This initiative will further support efforts to ensure that rural communities' benefit from the use of technological advancement in society and the services available for roads maintenance.

ANIMAL VELD MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME AND CURBING ANIMAL DISEASES

Chairperson, many of our farmers have suffered losses as a result of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in parts of our country. In response, the department is rolling out a series of mitigation and intervention measures, which includes the construction of 20 new dip tanks to the value of R18 million and the refurbishment 56 dip tanks at a cost of R17 million in KZN, along with 142km of fencing.

RIVER VALLEY CATALITIC PROGRAMME (RVCP)

Irrigation is critical for agricultural production as signified in the National Development Plan (NDP). The department is implementing the River Catalytic Scheme, which provides agricultural irrigation for communities. Projects that have recently been completed include the Bushbuckridge Irrigation Scheme in the eHlanzeni District, providing 35 kilometres of irrigation canals to the value of R50 million.

In Western Cape, the Ebenhaeser Irrigation Scheme, comprising of 52 kilometres of bulk water pipeline and pumps, brought 257 hectares of land under irrigation for 170 small-scale farmers and the local farming community in the West Coast District, thus enhancing the quality of their crops and facilitating access to markets.

In Mpumalanga, the department will construct the Malelane/ Nkomati Irrigation Scheme, which would comprise the refurbishment and installation of 2 200 hectares of drip irrigation at a cost of R87m, to benefit small-scale sugarcane farmers. In Eastern Cape, construction of an irrigation scheme of 14 hectares of arable land on the Mbashe river around the Mvezo Villages under Amathole District, Eastern Cape, costing R7,3 million.

REVITALISING RURAL DEVELOPMENT – SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROJECTS

Chairperson, the Mkhambati area's development potential is a critical part of the Eastern Seaboard Smart City Development Initiative that is led by our sister department COGTA and managed by the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agency (MISA). This beautiful region, blessed with high biodiversity value and scenic beauty, has enormous potential for growth and prosperity.

In addition, the Mkhambathi Multipurpose Centre seeks to address the challenge of the people of Mkhambathi, spending more than R160 return fare when seeking access to government services or offices. The facility will primarily be housing government departments including Health, Home Affairs, Social Development, Agriculture and the South African Police Service. It is an initiative of DALRRD, Local Municipality, Traditional Authority and the community. The budget amount is R24 million.

Furthermore, the agricultural potential of the Mkhambathi area is enormous, and if fully utilised, it can assist the community to be self-sufficient, ensure food security, and generate income through community involvement in both subsistence and commercial farming. The Sappi Forest in Mkhambathi is an example of a big economic activity in the area, creating job opportunities for locals.

The area is also rich in tourism potential, which can be fully realised with significant infrastructure investment. Despite the inherently valuable natural resources, tourism within the municipal area is deemed underdeveloped. The Mkhambathi Nature Reserve is currently the only tourist facility that is attracting tourists. Mkhambathi is believed to hold significant tourism and forestry potential.

Its proximity to the sea also opens a wide range of commercial prospects, such as fishing, food security, and life skills. However, any future development in this area should be guided and away from the sensitive and priority biodiversity areas. The construction of capital works and construction of a Memorial Centre and Doringnek Youth Centre in Zuurberg will be completed by end March 2024.

Chairperson, last month I had a consultation with the Ingquza Hill, O.R. Tambo District Municipality's traditional leadership and religious leaders in Eastern Cape, to seek the involvement and contribution of the local leaderships in the rural safety concept. The scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) was central to our engagements.

As a result, the O.R. Tambo District Municipality and Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development have been tasked to work

with the local leadership in facilitating the establishment of a safety forum in the local community. We are planning to roll out this initiative in other areas as well.

Chairperson, my visit to Ingquza Hill, was sparked by the brutal killing of five members of the same family who were shot dead in the middle of the night in their home in Lusikisiki on 6 March 2023.

During my engagement with the surviving family members, neighbours and the community, I made a commitment to support them in whatever way I can to fight crime and GBV through the Rural Safety strategy.

NATIONAL RURAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS (NARYSEC)

Chairperson, we are all aware of the devastating impact that unemployment has on communities, especially the youth. The NARYSEC programme aims to capacitate unemployed rural youth in various skills and to facilitate their transition to meaningfully contribute toward vibrant, equitable and sustainable rural economies.

NARYSEC has been a lifeline for many rural youths who have used the skills and training they acquired to lift themselves and the communities out of poverty by starting businesses and finding employment.

Since 2010, approximately 17 000 youth from rural areas have been trained and acquired skills through NARYSEC. In the 2023/2024 financial year, an additional 4500 youth will be trained through the NARYSEC programme.

Seven hundred (700) of these youth (60% female and 40% male) from all provinces commenced their training yesterday, Monday, 8 May 2023 at Dunnottar Military Base, Nigel in Gauteng. These youth will be trained and linked to economic opportunities in plant and animal health, agricultural manufacturing and maintenance, coding and robotics, construction, hospitality and traffic management.

Chairperson, honourable members, the department is implementing this programme in partnership with the South African Defence Force, The National School of Government (The NSG), National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), AgriSETA and National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC).

The department is working with public and private institutions that will provide them opportunities into the job market, whilst others will be opening their own businesses with the support of NYDA, South African Army, Department of Small Business Development and the Agriculture Business Chamber, amongst others. In addition, the discussions with John Deere and other partners such as the Ukhanyo Farmer Development (UFD), to enhance access to quality machinery and equipment by black farmers, seek to ensure continued production and commercialisation.

As I conclude, chairperson, honourable members, it is my hope that our plans and collaborative initiatives will bear fruit to make rural areas economically viable and safer for all our people, especially vulnerable women, youth and children.

ENKOSI!