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## FUNDING INTERVENTION TO GIVE FARMERS ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

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Department:  
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## FUNDING INTERVENTION TO GIVE FARMERS ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Samuel Kgatla

**T**he Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) together with Land Bank launched a R1,2 billion Agro-Energy Fund in Pretoria on 29 August 2023. The agricultural industry was given a financial boost from government to mitigate the effects of loadshedding on farming operations and food production. DALRRD will contribute a grant portion of R500 million to the fund, matched by a loan portion of R710 million from the Land Bank.

The blended finance initiative aims to finance alternative energy solutions, particularly focusing on energy-intensive agricultural activities like irrigation, intensive agricultural production systems, and on-farm cold chain operations. The persistent challenge of loadshedding in the country has cast a shadow over growth and profitability in various sectors, with agriculture being no exception. The Agro-Energy Fund is designed to provide support to all agricultural producers and agri-businesses in South Africa, ranging from smallholders to large-scale and mega commercial farmers. The fund will remain available until the allocated funds are fully utilised.

Large-scale farmers will be able to apply for funding of up to R1,5 million for renewable energy sources including solar energy, biomass and biogas plants, through the Agro-Energy Fund. Medium-scale farmers can apply for grant funding of up to R1 million, while small-scale farmers can apply for funding up to R500 000. A simplified application process allows farmers to apply through the Land Bank, they will be required to present a business plan and a plan for the alternative energy source upon application.

Furthermore, applicants also need to have an environmental licence and approved licence from the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA). The primary focus of the Agro-Energy Fund will be on dairy farmers, piggeries, poultry, all irrigated commodities and agro-processing.

Deputy chairperson of the Land Bank, Mr Andrew Makenete, mentioned that they were delighted to be in this partnership with DALRRD, adding that the partnership is important because it is going to provide energy security to make sure that farming continues uninterrupted even during loadshedding hours.



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Minister Thoko Didiza said the new fund would follow a blended finance model, where farmers can apply for a grant and an additional loan to finance their purchases of alternative energy sources. “The agricultural sector has suffered a lot from loadshedding and that is why we felt it prudent to provide solutions to enable food production and minimise production interruptions, particularly for producers who rely solely on electrical energy. This fund will run parallel to other existing financial instruments that are designed to support farmers. It will enable the bank to contribute to building resilience against energy shocks in the sector which have negatively impacted productivity and profitability in farm operations,” she said.



Deputy Chairman of Land Bank, Mr Andrew Makenete during the Agro-Energy Fund briefing.



Mr Tinyiko Rikhotso, Chairman of Land Bank during the launch of AEF.



From left DALRRD Minister Didiza, DDG Mehlomakulu and Chief Director Elder Mtshiza during the launch of AEF.

## BRICS COUNTRIES COMMIT TO CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Ndivhuwo Thenga

**T**he agricultural sector is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change owing, in part, to it being a major water consumer through the irrigation of crops. The sector is also vulnerable to changes in water availability, increased water pollution and soil erosion from floods and increased evaporation. Under-resourced, small-scale and smallholder farmers are particularly vulnerable owing to their lack of capacity to adapt to climate change.

As the current chair of BRICS, South Africa was mandated to coordinate work on the “Reduction of the negative impact of climate change on food security and adaptation of agriculture to climate change” in collaboration with the other four member states. As part of the implementation of the BRICS Action Plan: 2021–2024, South Africa hosted the Climate Resilient Agriculture Seminar at Euphoria Golf and Lifestyle Estate on 9 August 2023.

The seminar was part of the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture programme and was chaired by Mr Dipepeneng Serage, Deputy Director-General: Agricultural Production, Biosecurity and Natural Resources Management.

South Africa has a diverse climate, ranging from dry summers in the south-west to arid with summer rainfall over the north-eastern parts of the country. “Climate variability and climate change pose a major threat to the South African agricultural sector. The country is facing with weather-related risks such as droughts, dry spells,

heatwaves, floods, frost, hailstorms, and crop pests and diseases that are expected to increase in both frequency and intensity owing to the anticipated climate change. Research has shown that the South African climate is heavily influenced by the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which has three distinct phases: the El Niño phase, the La Niña phase and a neutral phase,” said Dr Litha Magingxa, President and CEO of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC).

According to Dr Magingxa, climate change threatens the livelihoods and sustainability of most farmers in this country, with smallholder farmers being among the most vulnerable. Climate change calls for a concerted effort to fight human-induced climate change caused by ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

The ARC supports the entire agricultural sector through its research and technology transfer activities and capacity development initiatives. Several new crop cultivars were developed by the ARC that have increased the productivity of farmers—both commercial and subsistence and seek to respond to some of the challenges introduced by climate change. From a livestock perspective, the ARC has also been involved in many breeding schemes over several years aimed at improving the productivity of the livestock sector and developing technologies to help farmers deal with challenges relating to climate change.



Some of the MECs of Agriculture in the country and FAO representatives during the BRICS Commission on the state of Agriculture in the country.

Cont.



BRICS delegates, FAO representatives together with Chairperson on Land Reform Portfolio Committee, Nkosi Mandela and the Director-General Mooketsa Ramasodi during the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture held in Limpopo.

“The current agri-food system is fragile and not delivering. It is prone to changing and variable climate, and the current global pandemics and geo-politics have exposed it. It is not delivering because levels of malnutrition are still prevalent at their highest levels. The sector is not delivering the required nutrition and health outcomes,” said Professor Tshildzi Madzivhandila, CEO of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN).

Against the background of the theme, he suggested possible catalytic solutions and actions. This is a synthesis of FANRPAN-related policy briefs categorised in five broad areas. There is a need to minimise food losses because between 30% and 40% of food is lost or wasted post-harvest. Solutions should be co-created with the users, data-driven and context-specific. To deal with the impacts of climate change and disasters, governments must support the establishment of community food reserves and not only grain reserves. They must also ensure that both smallholders and commercial farmers have access to agricultural risk insurance and adaptive social protection (ASP) packages.

Governments need to invest further in research and innovation to transform the agrifood systems. Research funding should not only rely on donor funding and producers must be encouraged to adopt and invest in climate-smart technologies and practices. “We need to build resilient food systems across Africa through the co-creation, co-implementation and co-assessment of food, agriculture and natural resources programmes and policies that are both evidence-based and developed in partnership with state and non-state role players because an enabling environment is fundamental,” concluded Prof Madzivhandila.

The ministers of agriculture also signed a joint declaration in which they welcomed the outcomes of the 27<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) held in Egypt under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and called for the provision of means of implementation for developing countries to enable them to

reduce the negative impacts of climate change on food security by enhancing the adaptive capacity and resilience of people, food and agricultural production systems.



Cultural dancing group during the grand opening of the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture.



Exhibitors from Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) showcasing a variety of products at the BRICS meeting.

## YOUNG NORTH WEST WOMAN'S POULTRY BUSINESS A "CUTT" ABOVE THE REST



Ms Chade Groenewald and her husband with the employees.

Tshepo Diale

**M**s Chade Groenewald is one of the female farmers who are mastering their own craft. She is the sole director of the Cutt Agriculture (Pty) Ltd, which is a registered legal entity, engaged in successful poultry production. The farm, which is primarily a poultry enterprise, is situated in Madibeng Local Municipality, Bojanala Platinum District Municipality in North West.

The Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) leased the farm to Ms Groenewald for a period of 30 years, which began on 24 May 2019 which was acquired through the department's Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS).

Ms Groenewald received R14 million financial support from DALRRD through the Land Development Support programme (LDS) in 2020, which she used to build two new broiler houses with carrying capacity of 40 000 each. She further renovated an old broiler with a capacity of 40 000; purchased a generator and some production inputs; and used some funds for operations and management services.

Cutt Agriculture has so far created eight permanent jobs, employing six males, two females) and six interns from the University of Pretoria and TUT (for experiential training). The project produces 180 000 birds per cycle and supplies Sovereign Foods retailers under an off-take agreement.

Ms Groenewald also farms with small stock comprising 33 goats and 20 sheep.

Talking about where her passion for farming started, Chade said that growing up, she always had a passion for animals and at the age of seven she started her own rescue haven for dogs that were abandoned or hurt. "I would take care of them and when they were fine and healthy, I would take them to the SPCA to be adopted. Unfortunately, back in the day becoming a veterinary doctor was not a cool thing to do if you were a female and my parents' interests were for me to become a doctor or a lawyer," she recalled. As a result, she chose to study law but her love for nurturing and caring for animals never died.

In 2015, she won two great awards: the Youngest Female Entrepreneur and the Best Female Commercial Farmer. "I was only 29 years old at the time, and I was already an experienced commercial farmer competing against well-established female farmers and winning the award blew my mind because it was my first competition and I thought I was just going as a first-timer experience. I thought I would probably win in the next competition because of the vast number of female farmers in the industry," she added.

Asked how she juggles family and work she said that her husband is her biggest supporter and this makes her world much easier. Her sons also assist at the farm on weekends and school holidays, but her husband assists her with the day-to-day activities.

Ms Groenewald also indicated that she only takes in female interns who wish to do experimental training to gain experience and to complete their courses because women in this so called male dominated industry always have to shout louder for their voices to be heard and work harder than the males just to be recognized, even though farming is about nurturing and women were born nurturers.

"I inspire and motivate all the woman whom I can connect and work with because together we can support and encourage each other to achieve great success without feeling threatened by our male counterparts," she concluded.



Ms Chade Groenewald.

## SUNFLOWERS, A BOOMING BUSINESS FOR A LIMPOPO FARMER



Healthy looking Sunflower from Thabitha's farm in Northam.

“ I am passionate about farming and I will continue to work hard. The government has done a lot for me, and I will never disappoint them. You are going to see more progress the next time you visit. ”

**G**rowing up in a family in love with farming, seeing her parents planting tomatoes, cabbage and sugarcane motivated Thabitha Chauke to also work on the soil. She saw her parents successfully planting vegetables and decided to follow in their footsteps. Currently, Chauke farms with sunflower, sorghum and cattle production on Portion 6 and 7 of the Farm Kaalvlakte 416 KQ in Northam, Limpopo. The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) visited her farm last month to find out how her farming business was progressing on the 1 200-hectare commercial property she was allocated by the department in September 2022, as part of enhancing and creating opportunities for women in agriculture.

The project is one of the land reform farms from DALRRD, which she applied for on several occasions before finally receiving it. Thabitha was awarded the farm on a 30-year lease from the department. She is currently facing water challenges, however, despite the challenges, her passion continues to drive her to achieve results. Thabitha was farming on a 14-hectare-land before moving to the bigger property.

On her first harvest, Thabitha managed to harvest 500 tons of produce from the 500 hectares she had planted. After harvesting, she managed to buy cattle, connect sewerage infrastructure and put some money aside to continue paying her five permanent workers and expand the production of sunflower.

“I am passionate about farming and I will continue to work hard. The government has done a lot for me, and I will never disappoint them. You are going to see more progress the next time you visit,” she told officials during the visit.

Samuel Kgatla



Thabitha Chauke is one of the best female farmers in Northam.

Rodney Musikwa, one of the workers, said that his life changed since he started working on the farm. He said that he was now able to support his son with food and school fees.

Siggibo Mfuywa, a DALRRD Director from Waterberg District, mentioned that the department had embarked on a process of assessing all the farms to check their economic viability and access to the market. Thabitha's project is one of the identified farms. “We have supported her with production inputs and mechanisation. We will continue to support farmers who are always willing to work and we are proud of Thabitha's progress since she moved to the farm,” he said.

## MINISTER DIDIZA DELIVERS ON HER PROMISE TO SUBSISTENCE PRODUCERS

Samuel Kgatla

**T**he Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Ms Thoko Didiza, showed that action speaks louder than words when she delivered on her promise to supply agricultural inputs to subsistence producers of Gqubeni Great Palace in Mqanduli, King Sabata Dalindyebo Local Municipality in Eastern Cape on 14 August 2023. This is part of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development's implementation of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) initiative.

Minister Didiza initially visited the community on 10 March 2023, and she returned to deliver on the promise she made during the Biosecurity Awareness Campaign she undertook with subsistence producers. During her initial visit, she handed over farming equipment which was not enough for all the subsistence producers. The minister reaffirmed her commitment to serving the people of the country and the constitution by bringing services and much-needed support to the subsistence producers. A total of 433 beneficiaries each received a water tank, fertiliser, garden tools, including fork spade and a wheelbarrow.

Ms Nokhaya Vayeke, one of subsistence producers who is a maize farmer, thanked the department for the support and assistance they gave her and others. She had previously received seeds, garden tools, and fertiliser from the department. "The government has given us seeds, fertilisers and other support. We thank the government because now we can feed our families with the maize we are producing. We still need a tractor to help us plant more," she said.

Chief Dalisizwe Dudumayo of Amatshomane said that he was delighted by what the government was doing for them and, as chiefs, they appreciate it. "I am pleading with you to take care of what the government has brought for us. As a chief, I need to see the value for money. The people who are going to receive these things are those who have registered for them. People must work the land and produce more food," he said.

Minister Didiza told the beneficiaries that what they are seeing during the handover of agricultural inputs are answers to the questions they asked earlier in March. "We must thank all the people who fought for the freedom that we are enjoying today. Our government listens and comes up with answers. It is important to not forget where we come from. The relationship between the government and the chiefs is important in improving the lives of the people in communities. I urge farmers to consider starting with local markets," she concluded.

On behalf of the land claimants, Mr Eric Ralepelle said that he was happy that they have received a title deed from government

after lodging the claim in 1998. "We are grateful for what the government has done for us as Batlhabine. We have a lot of plans for the farms and we are going to make sure that everything goes well. These farms will create more employment and will not be forced people to travel to Gauteng for employment," he said.

Minister Thoko Didiza thanked the chief of Batlhabine Ba Mogoboya for allowing the department to host the handing over ceremony on his land. "Today, you are the real owners of the land and you are no longer just workers. It is important for communities to appreciate that what was taken away from our forefathers and mothers was brought back by the government. We are trying to improve the lives of our people and owning land really means something," she said. Furthermore, the minister encouraged learners to study agriculture to become specialist in the sector.



Minister and deputy minister standing with some beneficiaries of agricultural inputs from DALRRD.



Some of the agricultural inputs received by subsistence producers of Mqanduli.

## GREAT PARTNERSHIP LEADS TO BUMPER MAIZE HARVEST



Workers were part of the bumper harvest day at Nkondlo in Eastern Cape.

Samuel Kgatla

A viable partnership between the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and Grain Production Commercialization Partners (GPCP) resulted in a successful harvest of yellow maize at Nkondlo Village near Ngcobo in Eastern Cape on 18 August 2023.

The celebration of the bumper crop harvest of over seven tons per hectare on 10 750 hectares of communal dry land was attended by Minister Thoko Didiza at the invitation of the Dalasile Agri-Park Founder and Chairperson, Mr Yanga Dalasile.

This season marked a record potential output of 77 000 tons of yellow maize, 3 978 tons of wheat, 2 664 tons of soya beans, 1 321 tons of oats and about 754 tons of Japanese Radish and dry beans. The maize produced has been sold in some of the big supermarkets in Eastern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. The GPCP also export soya beans to China.

Partners involved are DALRRD, GPCP, Aah Zanengqele Secondary Agricultural Cooperative, Dalasile Agri-Park Pty LTD, Ukhanyo Farmer Development, Afro-Saint Business Consultants, Luleka Mbethe Investments and Rural Agro-Industries and Financial Initiative (RAFI) Pty LTD.

Agricultural machinery manufacturer John Deere has also invested over 15 million in agricultural mechanisation, which includes tractors and implements to the communal farmers whose entire production takes place on communal land. The project comprises of 55% youth and 52% women. During the 2022/23 production season, the partners employed 5 539 workers (Permanent and seasonal) with an additional 1 507 to be employed over the harvest period (from May to September).

Minister Didiza was also joined by the Eastern Cape Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR), Dr AB

Zuma Local Municipality and partners. DALRRD has assisted the partnership with mechanisation, production inputs, soil preparation and storage facilities.

Mr Dalasile praised all the partners and government for walking with them. "I want to thank everyone who is involved and this just shows that together we can do more to feed our families and others in the community. We have been working with DALRRD and DRDAR. We have commercialised the communal land as you can see during the harvest," he said.

Minister Didiza congratulated all the partners and mentioned that DALRRD will see how it can contribute immensely to the partnership. She encouraged the farmers to look after the mechanisation bought by the department. "We must take ownership of our things and it does not matter whether they were bought by government or one of the partners. I came to see whether what I was told is what is on the ground. We will continue to support you if work hard to feed your families and the nation. I want to see progress when I return to this area," she concluded.



Minister engaging with the maize farmers during the mega harvest day.

## DDG MOYO PRESIDES OVER NARYSEC RURAL DEVELOPMENT GRADUATION CEREMONY



*Ms Nthabiseng Sekgobela from Mpumalanga was one of the NARYSEC certificate recipients.*

Samuel Kgatla

**T**he Deputy Director-General (DGG): Rural Development in the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Ms Thandi Moyo, presided over the successful National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) graduation ceremony of 266 participants held at the Olive Convention Centre in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, on 16 August 2023.

This initiative was undertaken by NARYSEC in partnership with the Wholesale and Retail SETA (W&RSETA).

The programme started with 400 youth participants from Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, North West and Northern Cape. A total of 266 young people completed the skills development programmes in Small Business Operations and Small Business Finance during the 2022/2023 financial year.

The W&RSETA funded the entire programme with a total of R9,984 000,00; and a further R3 000,00 per month was paid as a stipend to the participants for four months, of which R1 000,00 was for registration of businesses and buying of start-up business tools. The W&RSETA was also responsible for the contracting and payment of various public technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges for the implementation of the skills programmes. As part of the training, the NARYSEC youth were provided with temporary employment opportunities for four months.

The collaboration between NARYSEC and the W&RSETA will be formalised further through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the W&RSETA has committed to do similar projects with DALRRD over the next three years.

One of the graduates, Ms Nthabiseng Sekgobela, from Mpumalanga said that she cannot wait to showcase what she has learned. "Any achievement in education does not come easily, and we worked hard for these certificates. I want to thank our government for walking with us throughout the whole period," she said.

DDG Moyo encouraged the graduates to go and make a difference and contribute to the economy of South Africa. "We want to see you changing your lives and fighting unemployment in the country. This is an important moment and milestone achievement for our NARYSEC graduates," she told the gathering. Young people are the leaders of tomorrow and the government is trying by all means to capacitate the youth so that they can become better leaders in the future. The NARYSEC Programme continues to change the lives of young people," she added.

In conclusion, she said that previous graduates are already contributing to the economy by creating employment opportunities.

## THE INTERNATIONAL CARTOGRAPHIC CONFERENCE 2023



The conference was attended by cartographers, geospatial scientists who shared information and latest developments in cartography and geospatial planning and information management.



Rony Moremi

The Deputy Director-General: Spatial Planning and Land Use Management, Clinton Heinmann, said that the link between the ICC 2023 and the UNGGIM: Africa is that both platforms focus on geospatial information and better use of technology for spatial planning and geographic sciences.

The Chairperson of the UNGGIM: Africa and Director: National Spatial Information Framework, Maroale Mimi Chauke, said that the aim of the of the 9th Session of the UNGGIM: Africa was to deliberate on matters relating to national geospatial information management in pursuit of having the geospatial data ready to deliver the SDGs. "Resolutions will help African countries to work towards strengthening their geospatial information management," said Mimi.

Siyabonga Mdubeki, Deputy Director-General: National Geomatics Management Services, said that the conference provided an appreciation for cartography, advancement of information handling and the extent of the uses of geospatial information, including with regard to climate and disasters. The next ICC will be held in 2025 in Vancouver, Canada.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), in collaboration with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and the South African National Botanical Institute, showcased what South Africa can do in the geospatial arena through a geospatial information hub to support SDGs. The hub is a repository of geospatial information that can be used at national, provincial, district and municipality level.

DALRRD also has a geospatial portal where all products and services can be accessed. The department produces topographical maps that are used by schools as well as specialised maps such as aeronautical maps, which are used by pilots.

The International Cartographic Association hosted the International Cartographic Conference (ICC) 2023 on 13–18 August 2023 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in Cape Town, Western Cape. The conference was held under the theme: "Smart Cartography for Sustainable Development". Delivering the keynote address, the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, said that the theme underscores the critical role that mapping and spatial information can play in the collective journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The conference brings together cartographers and geospatial scientists to share information and latest developments in cartography, and geospatial planning and information management, respectively. For the first time since 2003, 33 countries out of 54 African countries participated in the conference. In 2003, the conference was attended by only four African countries.

The United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management: Africa (UNGGIM: Africa) held its 9<sup>th</sup> session parallel to the ICC.

## DALRRD PRESENTS ON HOW IT REACHED THOUSANDS OF DESTITUTE FARMERS DURING PANDEMIC



ESRI User Conference Welcoming Plenary 10 July 2023, Sand Diego ICC.

### Keitumetse Moticoe

**T**he Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) provided support to a total of 108 468 farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown from 2020 to 2021 through the Presidential Economic Stimulus initiative (PESI).

A presentation done at the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) User Conference in San Diego ICC, USA, showcased to an international audience how the department was able to reach the farmers during the height of the pandemic by using ESRI software and mobile and web applications.

The ESRI User Conference (UC) is a cornerstone of the geographic information system (GIS) community, having attracted over 18 000 attendees in 2023 from nearly every commercial sector, government organisation, and non-profit fields across the world.

The department has had an ESRI License Agreement (ELA) for more than 15 years and has been using it for spatial analysis, map production, report production, land audits, surveying and dashboards.

A team from DALRRD undertook a trip from 10–14 July 2023 to present a paper titled, “ESRI mobile apps driving SA Digital Transformation” and discussed the work that was done for the PESI. This follows an abstract submitted to the ESRI Conference Committee that they endorsed and invited the team to present at the conference.

The team comprised of Clinton Heimann, Deputy Director-General: Spatial Planning and Land Use Management; Mr Stephanus Minnie, Director: Spatial Planning and Land Use Management in the Free State; Mr Mfanafuthi Gama, Director: Spatial Information Services at National Office and Ms Relebogile Goitsemodimo, a Control Geographic Information Technologist at Spatial Planning and Land Use Management in the Free State.

According to Mr Minnie, “The purpose of the User Conference is to create a platform where the users of the ESRI suite of products (desktop, mobile and web applications, software, and services) meet to share the work they are doing, to celebrate each other’s successes and to engage with ESRI technical staff, in order to demonstrate new technology and trends that will solve some of the complex work that the users encounter in their daily operations.”

When outlining the content of their presentation, Ms Goitsemodimo said, “The presentation outlined how the department was able to reach thousands of destitute farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 by using ESRI software, mobile and web applications, in particularly Survey 123 and ESRI dashboards.” She said it enabled them to develop survey forms and questionnaires and a link was shared to access the forms.

These platforms provided real-time results in the form of downloadable datasets and reports, and are displayed on real-time maps, on bar graphs, pie charts and in tables. ArcGIS Dashboard was also created and used as a monitoring and evaluation tool. The dashboard provided real-time information that could be used by decision makers,” she explained.



Ms Relebogile Goitsemodimo displaying the PESI poster at ESRI Map Gallery.

## POLYPHAGOUS SHOT HOLE BORER: A TINY BEETLE THAT CAN BRING DOWN BIG TREES



The Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer Steering Committee members discussed the status of the pest, surveillance and control of the PSHB and clarified the mandate of all the stakeholders.

Rony Moremi

**P**olyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) is a tiny beetle, less than 2mm long, but can cause significant damage to trees if left uncontrolled. “We may not be able to speak about the largest man-made forest in the City of Johannesburg (COJ) in the next ten years if the polyphagous shot hole borer is not controlled, especially in suburbs where there is high density of trees,” said Adelaide Chokoe from the City of Johannesburg (Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo). Ms Chokoe added that this was because most of the trees in the old suburbs of the COJ are reproductive hosts of the beetle.

The PSHB’s reproductive hosts (Trees in which the beetle can reproduce) include, Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), Trident (Chinese) maple (*Acer buergerianum*), Boxelder (*Acer negundo*), Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*). Non-productive hosts are trees which even if the PSHB were to infest, it would not be able to reproduce. These include trees such as Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), Pride of De Kaap (*Bauhinia galpinii*) and Butterfly orchid tree (*Bauhinia purpurea*).

Adelaide was presenting a report on the status of the PSHB in the COJ during the Steering Committee meeting on PSHB held at the Western Cape Disaster Management Centre from 2 to 3 August 2023. The aim of the meeting was to get a report on the status of the pest, discuss surveillance and control of the PSHB and clarify the mandate of all the stakeholders.

The beetle was discovered in 2018 in the COJ. The affected regions are Region B, Parktown North and surrounding areas, Region E, Sandton and surroundings areas and Region F, Johannesburg CBD and surrounding areas. Adelaide reported that the city had thus far removed 200 trees in two regions, and it was re-greening, by planting more trees, more than 12 000 ornamental trees have been planted throughout the COJ in the 2022/2023 financial year. Indigenous trees have been used as replacement for the trees that have been destroyed by the PSHB.

The PSHB in the Western Cape was detected in Somerset and half of Stellenbosch. Limpopo is the only province that has not reported detections of the beetle. The PSHB is a quarantine pest for South Africa, and it is regulated in terms of the Agricultural Pests Act, 1983 (Act No.36 of 1983).

According to control measures R.725 of 13 August 2021 under the Agricultural Pest Act (APA), 1983 (Act No.36 of 1983), no user of land shall remove any infested reproductive or non-productive host plants listed in the regulation from affected areas to non-affected areas without authorisation in the form of a permit, unless the plant is certified free from the PSHB.

The committee reported that there is no chemical registered for the control of the PSHB and warned members of the public to avoid using unregistered chemicals that may be harmful to their health. “We had cases of severe poisoning because of illegal buckets placed in Somerset,” pleaded Debbie Muir from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE).

Dr Maanga Rambauli from DALRRD Directorate: Policy, Norms and Standards suggested that a national central reporting system should be developed to enable the public to report detections of the beetle. Currently, each municipality has their reporting systems. The City of Cape Town has a reporting system and the COJ has a WhatsApp group as a reporting platform. Debbie Muir from DFFE reported that DFFE was developing a database for an online system.

Mosidi Jennifer Kolokoto from the National Disaster Management Centre presented a procedure to be followed before classifying the PSHB and the committee agreed that any municipality that wants to declare the PSHB a disaster must follow the disaster management procedure. Other decisions taken at the meeting were that the regulations should be simplified to make it easier for the public to understand the reporting process in the control of the PSHB.

DALRRD has procured 1 500 traps and lures for monitoring the PSHB in the farms in all provinces of South Africa. Traps will be placed and serviced by its inspectors.

“If you see it, report it”, is the message that the Steering Committee sends to the members of the public to avoid further spread of this tiny beetle. The public can report to the registrar on 0800 205 005 or [phytomatters@dalrrd.gov.za](mailto:phytomatters@dalrrd.gov.za).

## VELDFIRE SEASON WARNING TO FARMERS

Mercia Smith

There are fears that 2023 could see one of the most severe fire seasons, according to Mr Erich Thabo Stoch, Chairman of the Northwest Umbrella Fire Protection Association. One of the reasons for this could be the abundant rain during the summer month, that resulted in a high biomass fuel load. An increase in invasive plants is also a cause for concern as they increase fuel load, which exacerbates the intensity and heat of fires, making it more difficult to prevent and dangerous to control.

In North West, recent veld fires have caused serious damage across the province leading to the destruction of between 10 000 and 20 000 hectares of grazing land and maize fields in Ventersdorp. An early estimate of the damage puts the figure around R50 million. In the Potchefstroom area, fire destroyed thousands of hectares of farmland, damaged fence lines, poles, kraals and six water sources, including water tanks. Mr Stoch also lamented the destruction of cattle in the fast moving wildfire.

Veld fires in KwaZulu-Natal's Impendle District left livestock farmers without grazing land, that is according to Mr Reginald Molefe, a small-scale farmer in Stoffelton who relies on his livestock for a living. He says the veld fires destroyed all the grazing land and he has had to buy feed for his livestock. Although he managed to buy hay a few times, he could not sustain the costs, which subsequently led to the death of four cows owing to malnutrition.

Fires mostly start at night because of people being reckless. They then spread to other areas.

Landowners are urged to join local fire protection associations (FPA) and associations members to be prepared for any veld fire outbreaks. "The Veld and Forest Act 101 of 1998 is not being adhered to and the consequences are dire for livestock, grazing land, crops, property and human lives. The lack of strategic firebreaks leaves us vulnerable to the uncontrollable spread of these devastating fires," stated Mr Stoch.

The North West Umbrella Fire Association has put in place a programme where community members will be trained as community resilient officers in an effort to combat veld fires and help them manage fires in their area.

The aftermath of a wildfire requires rehabilitation of the burnt area while soil erosion and damage by invasion of exotic plant species can also take place.



The fire that ravaged the Rooipoortjie area on the outskirts of Potchefstroom.

