Peo
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EASTERN CAPE GRAIN HARVEST PROJECT ACHIEVES SUCCESS THROUGH COMMERCIALISING VILLAGE FARMING

Plentiful supply: Qhamane Mzobotshe, showcasing abaundant bags of maize

Harvest Day beneficiaries

Ramokone Teffo

As part of its robust approach to commercialise grain production in high potential areas across all districts in the province, the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR) in the Eastern Cape identified the Lufafa Village of Ntabankulu Local Municipality for its vast fallow land to host Harvest Day on Wednesday, 5 July 2023.

Grain harvest season is a strategy the department uses to focus on the agro-processing value chain that is localised and implemented through the District Development Model. As a key economic driver projected to improve the GDP and expand the agricultural economy, in this instance grain production, it inspired an initiative of this ilk centred around catapulting village farmers into commercial farming to not only eradicate food insecurity, but for them to financially benefit from the entire agro-processing value chain.

Expecting a return on investment of 3 800 tons of maize from the allocated 28 529 ha and financial support of R142 million, DRDAR got a lot more than it bargained for, thanks to favourable weather conditions that saw local farmers maximising their planting activities, leading to a significant increase of 30 117,9 ha planted.

Qhamani Mzobotshe, an exemplary local farmer who had his very first Harvest Day on a 750 ha farm that he shares with 200 other farmers, reported, “At Qhamani Nande Farm, we have so far employed seven permanent workers and up to 100 seasonal casual workers. During this harvest season, we have managed to supply six bags of yellow maize that is already processed to each deserving household around the village.” Qhamani receives seed, fertiliser and herbicide inputs from DRDAR.

Mzobotshe’s enterprise is set to yield 4 500 tons of grain, which he will commercialise through trading with his usual local grain retail partners: TWK Agri, PSP Traders, EG Feeds and township tuckshops.

Harvest Day was created to celebrate and showcase the primary production from Lufafa Village and provide a platform from which secondary agro-processing initiatives can be launched.

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PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA LISTENS TO SEKHUKHUNE RESIDENTS' SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES

President Cyril Ramaphosa in the middle singing a national anthem during the Limpopo Imbizo

Samuel Kgatla

President Cyril Ramaphosa interacted with residents of Sekhukhune District Municipality rduring the Eighth District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo held in Limpopo on Friday, 14 July 2023. The imbizo was held at Ga-Motodi Sports Complex with Cabinet ministers and deputy ministers accompanying the president. In all districts countrywide, the DDM is based on a "One District, One Plan" approach in which all three spheres of government and representatives of civil society jointly plan development.

The Presidential Imbizo serves as a platform for citizen engagement and development, fostering collaboration and cooperation between the government and its people. President Ramaphosa has made it a priority to engage with communities throughout the country, recognising the importance of their input in shaping policies and programmes.

At the imbizo, communities had an opportunity to speak to the president on key service delivery issues. Communities in the district are affected by loadshedding, different degrees of poverty, limited access to tertiary institutions, illegal mining, crime, poor infrastructure, constant water shortages, unemployment and inequality. Farmers also raised issues of access to land and market access as the main concerns affecting them.

Community members in Ga-Motodi had an opportunity to speak to President Ramaphosa

Thoko Didiza, Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development said that there is an undertaking to have a workshop in the district at which farmers would be sufficiently informed about marketing their products and market access.

President Ramaphosa said that the DDM is an integrated planning model for cooperative governance, which seeks to ensure an integrated, district-based, service delivery approach to fast track service delivery.

"People must hold the administration to account. Government wants to end stealing of money earmarked for services. I heard and accepted all the challenges faced by communities. I promise you that all problems will be attended to promptly. Government has set aside billions of rands to address the chronic water shortages in Sekhukhune and elsewhere in the country," he said.

The imbizo at Ga-Motodi Sports Complex was preceded by the president's visit to the R37 Steelpoort-Driekop Interchange Road Project. The ninth and last Presidential Imbizo will be hosted by Eastern Cape.

DALRRD Minister responding to some questions asked by farmers in Ga-Motodi

PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LAND BILL

The community came prepared to share their views about the Protection and Development of Agricultural Land Bill

Community members supported the Bill but also encouraged the government to provide more land for farming

Rony Moremi

"We are losing high value agricultural land to mining, urbanisation and informal settlements, land where our great grandfathers used to farm has been turned into shopping malls and informal settlements," lamented Dr Manketsi Tlhape, interim Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.

Dr Tlhape was speaking at the public hearing on the Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land (PDAL) Bill on 2 July 2023 held in Modimolle, Limpopo. Other public hearings in Limpopo were held in Tzaneen and Jane Furse. These public hearings will be conducted in all nine provinces between 30 June and end of September 2023.

"I like this Bill because it will bring changes to agriculture," enthused Winnie Octar from Lephalale. She supported the Bill but also pleaded with the department to provide them with land to enable them to farm on a commercial scale. Buti Japie Tau from Sedibeng Farmers' Cooperative also supported the Bill and requested the department to provide them with more land.

As part of the democratic process before any law is enacted, the legislature (parliament) involves citizens by allowing them to express their views through public hearings and written submissions. One of the aims of the Bill is to address food insecurity by preserving land to comply to Section 27(1) (b) of the Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land Bill and to provide a fair and balanced approach. The Bill also aims to promote the preservation and sustainable development of agricultural land. Once the Bill is enacted into law, it will apply to agricultural land within South Africa including land used for commercial, smallholder and subsistence farming.

The Bill was introduced in parliament and referred to the portfolio committee in 2021. Dr Tlhape said the Bill aims to entrench regulatory measures of high potential agricultural land and promote a balanced approach in the use of agricultural land.

This Bill was proposed because the subdivision of Agricultural Land Act (SALA), 1970 (Act No. 70 of 1970) did not provide for the management of agricultural land as a concurrent function between the national and provincial spheres of government.

"We are here because currently there is old legislation that deals with Sub-division of Agricultural Land Act (SALA), 1970 (Act No. 70 of 1970) which prohibits the sub-division of agricultural land without the permission of the Minister of Agriculture and is only applicable on privately owned land. It also does not take into consideration state land, communal land, and land under traditional leadership," said Dr Tlhape. She added that this caused conflict on cooperative governance because SALA did not take into consideration provincial and local government. The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA), 2013 (Act No. 16 of 2013) and the Spatial Development Framework at provincial level are not aligned and this poses a challenge on agricultural land.

The speaker of Modimolle-Mookgophong Local Municipality, Councillor Regina Molokomme, said they had challenges with the SPLUMA. She advised that traditional leaders should be consulted whenever there is development of new laws regarding land so that they do not think that the government will expropriate land from them.

The hearing was attended by farmers' organisations and cooperatives such as Sedibeng Farmers' Cooperative, Mokopane farmers, Bakwena Poultry and Abattoir, and Lephalale Business Forum. Participants pleaded with the portfolio committee to assist them with getting land for grazing of their livestock and more land for farming.

Most residents in Waterberg District Municipality supported the Bill, however they pleaded with the government to speed up the land reform process and the communal recognitions such as the permission to occupy the land (PTO).

Deputy Minister Skwatsha celebrates Mandela Day with a donation of agricultural implements to Siphumelele Secondary School

Learners at Siphumelele secondary School in Hazyview as they commemorate the legacy of the former President Mandela

Mphahlela M Rammutla

Isaac Tshabalala, a Grade 12 Learner at Siphumelele Secondary School in Mpumalanga was in good spirit when his school was chosen to host a Mandela Day celebration event.

This came as the world celebrated Mandela Day on July 18, in honour of the former president and global icon Nelson Mandela. The global community joined together to dedicate 67 minutes to helping the less fortunate at the Siphumelele Secondary School in Hazyview, Mpumalanga The Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Mcebisi Skwatsha was joined in celebration by the Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Reginah Mhaule, MEC for Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs, Busi Shiba, and Member of Parliament (MP) Desmond Moela.

Sizwe Sambo, another excited Grade 12 Learner at Siphumelele said, “We are very grateful because today we are the chosen ones. We have a greenhouse now and we will be helping in the planting and taking care of the new greenhouse.”

Deputy Minister Skwatsha and the provincial department have donated a well-structured greenhouse with an irrigation system in place and 4 000 seedlings of various plants. In addition, the deputy minister handed over five wheelbarrows, five spades, five rakes, five hose pipes, slashers and a watering can to the school to support the production of vegetables.

In his keynote address, Skwatsha cautioned the learners and members of the community to heed the teachings of Nelson Mandela. “It is for this day that we remember that former president once said it is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor and that the child of a farmworker can become the president of this great nation,” said Skwatsha.

The deputy minister and other dignitaries used their 67 minutes to paint the inner walls of the school classrooms , the outer wall of the kitchen and to plant seedlings in the new greenhouse.

Isaac Tshabalala, who is also a Grade 12 learner, said, “This day shows that we are important, we have different organisations present, and they have contributed a lot at our school. Our school was often overlooked, it is great that now we are recognised.” “The deputy ministers and MECs brought different institutions that can link us to opportunities and bursaries to study further after our matric. I would like to study agricultural science or animal science, noting that the Department of Agriculture has donated the greenhouse and other materials, it shows that things are going to be easy. We will be doing practicals within the school yard, he added.”

Residents of Hazyview in Mpumalanga during the Nelson Mandela Day celebration

THE PERISHABLE PRODUCTS EXPORT CONTROL BOARD

Citrus fruits getting ready for export at the Durban Port

Ndivhuwo Thenga

South Africa is a major producer and exporter of agricultural products to markets in various regions of the world. Many citizens do not know who is responsible for the facilitation of the movement of these products from the farmers to their destination across the globe. The Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB) is South Africa's official perishable produce export certification agency. It is an independent service provider of quality certification and cold chain management services for producers and exporters of perishable food products.

Established in 1926, the PPECB has delivered required quality services to the perishable products industry for over 95 years, which helped enhance the credibility of the South African export certificate and bolstered the export competitiveness of South Africa's perishable product industries. These industries include vegetables, fruits, flowers, and nuts.

As a national public entity, the PPECB is constituted and mandated in terms of the Perishable Products Export Control Act, 1983 (Act No. 9 of 1983) to perform cold chain services. The PPECB also delivers inspection and food safety services assigned by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) under the Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990). The European Union (EU), a trade bloc comprising 27 members, recognises the PPECB as an approved third country under the European Commission Regulation 543 of 2011. Of utmost importance is that this agreement recognises the South African inspection systems as equivalent to that of the EU inspection bodies, and therefore, ensures less frequent checks at the port of entry into the EU.

The PPECB renders five critical services to the agricultural industry. They are:

- Cold chain management. This is a continuous movement of fresh chilled or frozen products, from the production area to the market, through various storage and transport mediums, without changes to optimum storage temperature and relative humidity.
- Product inspection services. Through a mandate from DALRRD, the PPECB has been delivering end-point inspection services on perishable products destined for export since 1991. Inspectors, stationed across South Africa deliver consistent quality inspection services on over 200 product types at more than 1 500 locations. As South Africa's official certification agency for perishable export products, the PPECB's impartial and independent services reduce risks for both producers and exporters.
- Food safety services. It is the responsibility of the board to ensure that Food Business Organisations (FBOs) comply with the standards regarding food hygiene and food safety of regulated agricultural food products intended for export. It fulfils this role by conducting Statutory Food Safety Audits across the country. These audits focus on worker hygiene, use of plant protection products and traceability together with good agricultural practices. Oversight is maintained by conducting unannounced audits on certified facilities.
- Laboratory and analytical services. The PPECB's Laboratory in Centurion, outside Pretoria delivers analytical services which include mycotoxin analysis, fats analysis, dairy testing and maximum residue level (MRL) testing of pesticides in various products (grain, feed, fruit, vegetables, cereals, peanut butter and spices). Apart from mandatory services like mycotoxin analysis on groundnuts for the export industry, the laboratory also delivers a range of services to the South African user pay sector.
- SAMSA accredited services. The PPECB has been appointed as a third party to act on behalf of South Africa Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) to provide verified gross mass assessment service to shippers transporting agricultural products to export markets.

PPECB stakeholders include exporters, logistical service providers, producers and pack houses, cold stores, importers and buyers. The board of this agency is appointed by the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. It is chaired by Mr Clive Garret with Dr Charlotte Nkuna as his deputy. Mr Lucien Jansen is the chief executive officer, and the chief financial officer is Mr Johan Schwiebus. Mr Moeketsa Ramasodi, Director-General of DALRRD also serves on the board's Audit Committee and has been there since he was the Deputy Director-General: Agricultural Production, Health and Safety.

ESILEHENI COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTING TO CREATION OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Mercia Smith

Esileheni community members came to listen to Deputy Minister Mcebisi Skwatsha when he visited Ladysmith.

The Esileheni community lived on the 3 000 hectare farm situated on the N11 from Ladysmith to Newcastle, in the Alfred Duma Local Municipality since the middle 1800s and for generations they lived a rural lifestyle, practising subsistence farming.

On 19 December 1995, Mr Qunqota Khulu lodged a land claim with the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights in compliance with Section 11(1) and 2(1) of the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act No. 22 of 1994). Mr Khulu lodged the claim on behalf of Esileheni people who were forcefully removed from the farm, currently known as Gelegenfontein farm. The property is locally known as Esileheni, meaning the place between two hills—one shaped like a decorated head of a woman and the other like a bald head of a man.

Currently, there is a mix of the originally dispossessed people, descendants of the originally dispossessed people and tenants of the farm. Since Mr Qonqota Khulu, the original lodger of the claim, has passed away, Mr Thokozani Mbhense has been elected by the community to be the chairperson of the Madumelana Trust and to act on their behalf in this land claim.

According to an investigation done by the Regional Land Claims Commissioner in KwaZulu-Natal, 46 households were affected by the forced removal. All claimants opted for land restoration.

Mr Jan van der Westhuizenz, who became the owner of the farm in the late 1920'sassured Madumelana Khulu that he would never be removed from the farm. The agreement was marked by pinning down a rock on the land as proof. The rock still exists on the property today.

It was in 1940 when the farm was sold that the problems began. Through the selling and re-selling of the farm, Madumelana Khulu's family was served with an eviction notice in 1958. They were given three days to vacate the farm. Qongotha Khulu had to walk his cattle to Mahlabathini for days and he lost most of his cattle during this arduous journey.

Today, some claimants are leasing out their portions of land. Cattle of the leaser are grazing together with cattle of the claimants.

They built an office where all the business of the farm is managed. Later, they built a community hall that can be hired out for weddings, conferences, and meetings. The hall can accommodate 120 people. Furthermore, the claimants registered two companies, namely Esileheni Pty Ltd and Izimbiwa Pty Ltd. The former focuses on cropping and managing livestock and the latter on the mining of the quarry and forestry. Timber is sent to Vryheid for producing printing paper.

Through these ventures, employment was created for 32 people who are also beneficiaries of the Esiheleni claim. Trench and Bulk Blasting Company will be offering bursaries for the period of study for a career in the mining sector.

This project is a good example of creating job opportunities, income generation, skills development, and capacity building.

Ms Neli Magubane from DALRRD in KwaZulu-Natal gave Deputy Minister, Mr Mcebisi Skwatsha a safety jacket as a gift.

The quarry that is on the farm can be mined for high quality quarts

LIMPOPO FARMERS RAISE CONCERNS WITH DALRRD

Deputy Minister Mcebisi Skwatsha engaging with farmers during the Pre-Imbizo at Ga-Motodi

Samuel Kgatla

Limpopo farmers, Communal Property Associations (CPAs) and farmers' organisations expressed their grave concerns with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) during the ministerial engagement sessions at Batubatse Primary School in Ga-Motodi, Fetakgomo Local Municipality on 13 July 2023.

The purpose of the pre-imbizo engagement was for the department's leadership, led by Minister Thoko Didiza and Deputy Minister Mcebisi Skwatsha, to discuss with farmers, farmers' organisations and CPAs about their challenges and for the department to seek solutions. The discussions were part of the build-up for the massive District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo that took place in the Sekhukhune District.

Some of the key points raised by farmers include land claims, land allocation, access to land, difficulty in obtaining water rights, loadshedding, livestock theft, lack of knowledge about farming, lack of support from government, market access, unavailability of tractors, and delays in land claims. Moreover, farmers also complained that the livestock theft cases were not taken seriously by the police.

Deputy Minister Skwatsha encouraged the farmers and farmers' organisations to be patient with the government. "We are always prepared to work with all stakeholders to improve things in the sector. Government has done a lot for the people of South Africa and it is still going to do more," he said.

The minister reiterated that although government was dealing with a lot of land claims, some delays were caused by disputes from the claimants. "This is a problem facing not only the claimants in Sekhukhune, but the whole country. It is better to hire a tractor rather than to wait for the State to offer you. Market starts from next door and it is important for farmers to know how to plant and sell their products. Knowing your market before planting and ensuring quality is crucial if you want to make it in the sector," she added.

"If we plant the same thing then the market is obviously going to become narrow. Government cannot help all the farmers, but it becomes simple when farmers start something and ask for assistance. Farmers must work closely with their children or young people. We will take the issue of mobile extension services raised by farmers. We need to have marketing workshops to address many concerns regarding the issue of market access and quality standards," concluded Minister Didiza.

DALRRD Minister Thoko Didiza talking to the farmers of Ga-Motodi in Limpopo

Deputy Minister Mcebisi Skwatsha during the Pre-Imbizo engagement in Ga-Motodi

DALRRD INTERVENTION MAKES BEEKEEPING VIABLE FOR YOUNG NORTH WEST FARMER

Jabulani Malinga

Bakang Bee Farm Enterprise

Bakang Mohotlheng is an energetic farmer with an intent to contribute and produce honey for the entire community of North West, create jobs for the locals in his area and groom budding farmers. Bakang hails from the Kaalpan region in NorthWest and considers himself fortunate to be a young farmer as he recognises that not every young person has the opportunity to venture into the field.

He started his bee farm in 2020 with the help of his family members who gave him guidance and financial support that helped him buy beehives and assisted him during harvesting and packaging. He reserved a special mention for his father, whom he said has been crucial in the developing stages of the business. The business is named Baki Bee Farm Enterprise. Its core business is to keep bee colonies for pollination and breeding, with the aim of producing organic honey, comb honey and wax to sell to retailers, independent businesses and individuals. “I harvest twice a year in June and September then sell the honey for R150 to R180, depending on the kilograms being bought”, said Bakang.

Baki Bee Farm Enterprise presently has 25 beehives installed in farms around Kaalpan. Bakang said that the business heavily relies on traditional harvesting methods, which reduces the amount of honey harvested. “The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development assisted me with five conventional beehives, which have assisted a lot. Since the intervention from the department, we now have an increased harvest of 10kg per Langstroth super frames,” gleefully said Bakang.

As a person who is still building a profile in the farming industry, Mr Bakang Mohotlheng of Baki Bee Farm Enterprise understands that no man is an island. This is why he calls in favours from neighbouring farmers when needs be. He teams up with other beekeepers to make sure that he has enough supply of honey to meet the market demand.

The good relations he has with other beekeepers enables him to borrow some of the equipment he does not have yet. One of the beekeepers borrows him the extracting machine during harvest time. The machine enables him to extract more super frames within a very short time and therefore, he produces more clean and pure honey for the market.

“I participated in the North West beekeepers competition, which was hosted by the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. I came in third and received an award for my efforts. That has encouraged me to work even harder and kept me pushing,” he concluded.