

Without basic support systems, agriculture cannot support economy

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Note to Editors: *The following speech will be delivered today during Parliament's debate on the State of the Nation address and is under embargo until delivery.*

Honourable Speaker

Alan Weinstein once said that *"Listen to a man's words but give his actions more value before you give respect."*

Honourable Speaker, the President's speech reminded me of a young black farmer, Mr. Whernit Dirks, who purchased a 400 ha farm through the Land Bank with the intention to commercialize it. A year later, his farm was hit by a three-year drought. He struggled to honour his yearly bank instalments. The Land Bank initiated the process to repossess his farm.

The DA Western Cape Department of Agriculture provided him with grant whilst GrainSA supported him to fight off the effects of drought.

However, as the damage from the drought worsened, he wrote to your Deputy Minister, Mcebisi Skwatsha, seeking help. Nothing came of it. Minister Skwatsha not only failed to reply to him but essentially ignored his email and messages.

Mr. President, the response received by Mr. Dirks from your Ministers' provincial offices here in the Western Cape was as follows: *"Due to the fact that you bought your farm privately, we cannot assist you with anything."*

In your SONA speech, you highlighted the importance of public private partnerships, but the truth is your Ministers do not believe in this essential economic building block. The lack of accountability among your Ministers has left farmers without help or recourse. Yet no one is held to account for the mess.

The good news is that the DA-led Western Cape governments understand the importance of public private partnerships. They value implementation and accountability. It is through this approach that the province has been able to keep comparatively low unemployment when compared to other provinces in the country.

The DA's WC government has set a good example on how to support emerging farmers through public private partnerships. The President's new consensus, which embraces the DA's policy suite, borrows from the WC government's tried and tested red tape reduction, which has been a key initiative in driving investment in the province. Mr President, you don't need 100 days to reach consensus; what you seek to achieve is already being implemented here in the WC.

Without basic support systems at policy and infrastructure levels, the agriculture industry will not be able to deliver on its food security mandate, reforms and economic growth. The cadre deployment animal has to be cut from the head in order to deal with cadres who are only motivated by accumulation, debauchery and crass materialism.

Mr. President, I fully agree that government does not create jobs; instead it is businesses that create jobs.

The lack of reforms in land ownership in rural areas is a big stumbling block towards the meaningful participation of private sector in creating jobs.

Mr. President, the truth is that nothing is happening towards reforming land ownership in rural areas. Yet no one is held to account for the mess.

For businesses to invest meaningfully in rural areas, they need security of tenure. Our people in rural areas migrate to the cities for opportunities leaving villages richly endowed with land because they cannot use the piece of land for economic benefit.

Mr. President, you mentioned that the country needs well-run ports to export their produce to overseas markets. This is a basic function of a capable state. That your government has failed to fulfill this function, and Comrades are still settled in their cushy jobs, is an indictment on your leadership.

Father Lapsly, a man who lost both his arm during the struggle against apartheid, stated the following at the State of the Nation of People's Voice; *"majority of South Africans believed by voting for the ANC, a better life will be delivered for all God's people, today the opposite has happened. Today, apart from the corrupt who are still walking free millions of us are still disillusioned, angry and frustrated. Many are worse off than they were under the apartheid."*

While the DA welcomes your invitation for public private partnerships, the corrupt and incompetent cadre remains a hindrance to realizing this country's full economic potential.

Mr. President, you rightly mentioned that horticulture has significant potential in driving job creation. Still, you failed to mention the livestock sector, which easily contributes 50% of the total value of agriculture in terms of turnover.

Both the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and Onderstepoort Biological Asset (OBP) are failing the livestock industry. There are no vaccines. Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) vaccines are being sourced from Botswana. Farmers are at their wit's end because of the shortage vaccines. Yet no one is being held accountable for the mess.

National Treasury approved R500 million for ARC to build a new FMD vaccine plant. It is alleged that R100 million was used to upgrade offices, build a toilet and a new canteen for the CEO. Yet no one is held accountable for the mess.

The previous board of OBP hired a capable CEO with knowledge of vaccines. However, while he was busy trying to fix the institution, a new board came in and he was allegedly made to face frivolous charges. The failing of OBP is a threat to animal health and the livestock industry. Your ANC cabinet is mum about it. It is about time that private sector is allowed to produce and distribute vaccines.

In conclusion, we welcome the public private partnership approach, but it is important that the non-performers, the corrupt and dead wood in your ANC cabinet are dealt with to enable a realization of South Africa's full economic potential.

I thank you.