

Agriculture Department fails to address sector challenges

By Noko Masipa MP – DA Member on the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

House Chairperson,

The annual performance planning is the one opportunity a year provided to the Department by law to reflect and conduct a systematic review process of the past year's performances and provide plans and budgets for the year ahead. The process also allows the Department to apply corrective measures where it has failed the people of South Africa.

Once the Department has completed the assessment, it is supposed to draw a list of key performance indicators that contain specific, measurable targets with timelines that needs to be achieved within the allotted budget. Where there are fiscal constraints, the Department must crowd in the private sector to assist.

However, the Department of Agriculture continues to use the same generic performance planning and budgeting. This generic approach is stopping the Department from effectively implementing a blended finance programme, while the new budget strategies fail to respond to the simplest non-scientific SWOT analysis.

The budget tabled of R17.3 billion does not address the new and worrying external emerging threats and other institutional weaknesses such as animal diseases, plant pests, or Onderstepoort Biological Product (OBP) institutional failures.

The Department remains underfunded on biosecurity. The foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in 2011 cost the agriculture industry about R6 billion. The country lost its FMD free status, which was later regained in 2014. In 2019, the country again lost its FMD free status, and the outbreak cost the economy an estimated R10 billion. While the industry was preparing for the reinstatement of South Africa's FMD free status, another 56 cases of FMD occurred across the country. Why then are we having annual plans that do not respond to the agriculture challenges?

The Eastern, Northern, and Western Cape provinces have just experienced one of the worst locust outbreaks. The Department demonstrated a lack of planning capacity – some key members of the locust control team have been left unpaid, insufficient pesticide was supplied, and the Department provided the locust control team with poor quality protective clothing and spraying equipment.

Furthermore, the OBP is failing our farmers. Farmers complain constantly about the lack of vaccines at the OBP. From 1 June, horses need to be vaccinated and there is still no indication that the OBP will be able to supply the African Horse Sickness vaccines.

The development of poor performance plans to correct poor service delivery is nothing new with the ANC government. The ANC government's corruption and lack of planning shine through the ANC government's institutions. Instead of planning and building institutional capacity, the ANC government opted to destroy those institutions. The comrades have done the same with their own organization by creating fronting parties and keyboard warmongers. These fronting parties have enabled greedy comrades to eat and ignored serving the South Africans. That's the ANC for you. Many organs of State have collapsed.

While this augurs well for certain comrades, it does not bode well for the country. The widening gap between the rich and the poor keeps complicating the situation.

President Ramaphosa listed seven priorities for the 6th Administration during his 2019 State of the Nation Address, including infrastructure rollouts, specifically in network industries like communications, freight and water transport, improving energy security through stabilising the electricity supply and food security.

The poor maintenance of the ports and the rail and road infrastructure are exacerbating the already high food inflation and threatens food security. Although these issues do not fall under this Department, the industry wants to see collaborative responses from State organs to address food security and skyrocketing inflation. But we know that the ANC government does not care about the vulnerable.

Let me be very clear chair, DA leader John Steenhuisen toured Ukraine. He did so because he cares about young people, the economy, the farmers, food security and worries about the increasing unemployment rate. This important trip was met with sceptics from pro-Russian keyboards belligerents who have never set a foot in Ukraine let alone battle zones. It is important to highlight that the long-term effects of Russia's war in Ukraine are yet to be felt. The ANC's quiet diplomacy on Zimbabwe has produced hunger, unemployment, and xenophobic attacks.

The DA plans to do everything in our power to fight poverty, hunger, and unemployment.

Recent surveys by Dr Kandase Cloete, and Youth Capital and Dialogue respectively found that:

- One in five farmers want to exit farming in the next decade; and
- Young people have to choose between eating and looking for work.

It is unacceptable that this Department fails to address these challenges.

The DA government in the Western Cape has responded positively to these emerging challenges. The Department of Agriculture has recently formed an MOU with an agriculture commodity group to fill the void of fiscal constraints, development of emerging farmers and support with extension services. Through the Department's innovation, it has introduced agro-processing on wheels to assist emerging farmers who want to process their products before selling to the market.

This is something a capable State does in response to challenges.

In conclusion, the master plan that was signed off today was never presented to Parliament, except to the members of the ANC study group. A dangerous precedent is being set of reducing the portfolio committee members of this house to a rubber stamp role of the ANC cadres' study group. Programmes such as AgriParks, Farmers Production Support Unit (FPSU), AgriBEE and Blended Finance failed to produce the desired results because the annual budget plan and policies were never aligned nor supported these plans. In the process, ANC cadres were allowed a free looting ride. While the DA supports the State's collaboration with social partners and private sector leveraging to transform and grow the economy, we don't support the haphazard ceremonial plans that mean nothing to our farmers.