



**agriculture,
forestry & fisheries**

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Speech by Mr Senzeni Zokwana, MP

Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Visit to the University of Fort Hare

Date: 5 April 2018

Venue: Alice, Eastern Cape, South Africa

The Honourable Minister of Higher Education and Training;
The Premier of the Eastern Cape Province;
MEC for Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform;
The Executive Mayor;
The Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare;
Traditional Leaders;
Academics, students and leaders from colleges of agriculture and other training institutions;
Government officials;
Industry representatives;
Distinguished guests; and
Ladies and gentlemen.

Let us first remember and honour the memory of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Mother of our Nation, who was born in Bizana and who sadly passed away on 2 April 2018.

We are gathered here today to explore and engage in the endeavor by University of Fort Hare to expand on the scope of training offered in support of agriculture.

This engagement happens when the latest data from Statistics SA, pertaining to the gross domestic product (GDP) shows that agriculture had by far the largest growth. The South African economy grew by 1,3% in 2017, exceeding National Treasury's expectation of 1,0% growth.

The strengthening economic activity in 2017 was partly driven by the agriculture industry, bouncing back from one of the worst droughts in recent history. A bumper maize crop and recovery in other agricultural commodities saw agriculture production rise by 17,7% in 2017 compared with 2016. In the fourth quarter of 2017, a rise in the production of animal products saw the agriculture industry continue its buoyant performance, recording a 37,5% quarter-on-quarter rise in production. However, we are still experiencing drought in the Western Cape and parts of the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape.

Ladies and gentlemen, the sector however is still facing other immense challenges:

- Climate change, with the further implications of floods, droughts, changes in water supply, soil erosion and variation in the distribution patterns and prevalence of pests and diseases;
- The growth in population;
- Skills shortages;
- The changes in consumer needs and preference; and
- The shifts in the global economy and the markets.

The National Development Plan has identified agriculture as having a potential to create a million jobs by 2030. For the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sector to grow and realise these potential jobs, support from academic and research institutions is of paramount importance. It is critical to acquire the knowledge to meet the ever evolving challenges such as adapting rapidly to climate change, reduced access to natural resources, narrowing agricultural biodiversity, inadequate participation in globally competitive markets and emerging threats from transboundary pests and diseases. Outbreaks continue to pose challenges to the sector's ability to export animals and animal products. Recent outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza have severely hampered the productivity of the poultry industry.

The other challenge is on Food Controls in South Africa which have of late received increasing attention. In particular, the outbreak of Listeria which has been associated with processed meat products. The Department in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Trade and Industry are working together to strengthen the current regulatory controls over food.

These efforts will hopefully restore domestic and international consumer confidence in the South African food industry which has been on the decline since the source of the Listeria outbreak was announced.

It is my considered view that the solutions to these outbreaks lie in research and development and to this effect – academia has to play a leading role in finding solutions.

The department is acutely aware of the serious shortage of veterinarians in the country, especially in state veterinary services and research. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) standard recommends one (1) veterinarian per 100,000 livestock units. The South African ratio of 1:300 000 falls short of this recommendation.

Furthermore, the skewed distribution of veterinary professionals, especially in rural provinces, remains a key challenge for South African Agriculture. Whilst the rural provinces require access to a range of veterinary services to support livestock production and livestock trade, the unavailability of accessible and affordable animal health care services remains a key constraint. To address this challenge, the Department embarked on the implementation of two programmes, namely Primary Animal Health Care and Compulsory Community Service (CCS). CCS is a programme in which newly qualified veterinarians and those registering to practice veterinary medicine in South Africa, are contracted to work for government for a period of one year. Since the inception of the programme in 2016, a total of 376 veterinarians have been deployed. These veterinarians are deployed to needy communities to provide the necessary veterinary service that is in dire need in these communities.

The implementation of the Primary Animal Health Care programme has seen the distribution of mobile veterinary clinics and support vehicles which have been distributed across the country. These vehicles, as demonstrated and being displayed here today, are fully equipped to deliver the primary animal health care services needed in our communities, including performing operations such as sterilizing of dogs. We are proud that we have been able to conduct veterinary services that would not have been able to be delivered had it not been for these mobile clinics. It is envisaged that, funds permitting, we will acquire more of the vehicles to distribute them further.

Moreover, with all these interventions, there is still a need for more veterinarians in the country. The University of Fort Hare has approached the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries for support in establishing a second veterinary faculty in the country, and it is on the basis of this that I am here to engage with the University on its proposal and be appraised of the developments in this regard. It must be noted that

the competency of approval and accreditation of a faculty of veterinary sciences lies under the Department of Higher Education and Training. My role is to provide the necessary advice on technical issues as the technical competency of veterinary science rests under the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

As a result of this visitation and feedback from the technical team within DAFF which will provide the necessary advise to me on the readiness and ability of the University of Fort Hare to accommodate a faculty of veterinary sciences, and after assessing all the other submissions from other Universities and Provinces made to DAFF regarding this subject, I will be able to provide the necessary recommendation to the Department of Higher Education and Training. I will also discuss this proposal with the South African Veterinary Council.

Furthermore, in an effort to address skills shortage and transformation challenges in the aquaculture sector, the University of Fort Hare has proposed to establish a Department of Aquatic and Marine Sciences (DAMS) at the East London campus. This new Department aims to offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses while also serving as a research station for aquaculture. The DAFF, aquaculture division, is willing to offer support towards the establishment of the DAMS. It is our view that the establishment of DAMS will support the Oceans Economy on skills and capacity building.

DAFF will collaborate with the University in establishing/running aquaculture projects. Since there are only two aquaculture experts, DAFF officials can offer lectures on a part time basis. When the University encounters challenges that hinder the development of the DAMS, the matter can be escalated to DAFF, aquaculture division and the relevant unit can assist in unlocking challenges faced.

I cannot overemphasize the role our industry and stakeholder partners should play. I am therefore, urging all the industries present here to join hands with us to realise our goals as a country. Government alone cannot achieve this. We need you to avail resources in our pursuit of public private partnerships to grow the sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Department is willing to support, maintain and strengthen the current partnership with industry and training institutions as we seek to overcome the challenges of food security, unemployment, inequality and poverty.

In closing, food security will only be achieved through interlinkages between government programmes; the agricultural and agro-processing industry; retail sector, the research, training and academic institutions and civil society.

Thank you , Ndiyabulela