

# Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform is only growing its own interests

By Annette Steyn MP - DA Shadow Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

House chairperson

*“Failure to furnish reasons, failure to act rationally, failure to act reasonably, failure to hear an affected person”* - the words used by Judge Norman Davis after the court ordered the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform to sell land to Mr David Rakgase. This, after a 17-year battle with the State, where the State one-sidedly decided to change the lease contract from an option-to-purchase agreement to a lease agreement without the option to purchase.

This paternalistic relationship of keeping farmers dependant on the state is the story of many black South African farmers. In fact, Mr Rakgase believes that the Department is actively sabotaging black farmers.

Let me tell you about another farmer, Mr Vuyani Zigana from Kokstad. He was appointed as *“caretaker”* of the farm, Groove Park, in 2012. Suddenly, after 5 years on the farm, he received a call from an official to inform him that he must apply for a lease agreement. Nothing wrong with that. But the farm was already earmarked for someone else, apparently a friend of said official. This, after Mr Zigana has poured blood and sweat into the farm, ploughing back his little income to upgrade the infrastructure and to try and make a living.

But it did not end there. In December last year, the Department sent the sheriff to confiscate Mr Zigani’s animals and charge him with trespassing. He tried his best, writing to and phoning the Department, but the only answer he got was that he was now stepping on the toes of the official and that this official had the power to remove anyone. This case went to court, but the Department keeps missing court dates, so delaying the case in the hopes that Mr Zigani would run out of money and patience.

Still, it continues. The people of Gwatyu have been struggling to acquire security of tenure on the land they have toiled on for generations - first under the Transkei Bantustan authorities and now under the ANC government under the stewardship of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. In 2016, the Minister at the time, Gugile Nkwinti, promised to register the CPA after the community had been struggling to legally get registered since 2014. After many commissions and reports, this still has not happened, and all kinds of manure gets dished up when we ask questions about this.

This is the Department that is tasked to ensure redress of land reform, but if you look at the number of court cases that the it loses, it is clear that the purpose of this Department is to ignore current legislation and to ensure that connected cadres eats at the trough. A lot of time and noise is spend on the constraints of the Constitution, but very little is said or done about corruption and the total disregard of current legislation.

This situation also holds true for the agriculture side of the Department.

It was made clear during the recent allocation of the so called Covid-19 agricultural support. The goalposts kept moving and qualification requirements were changed, making it very difficult to hold the Department to account.

Minister Thoko Didiza promised to give full details of the lucky few who received the R1.3 billion Covid-19 assistance, but very little information has been provided to date. A presentation in the North West legislature however, showed that 55 government officials were under the beneficiaries in North West.

Chairperson, I ask the Minister to provide the full details of all the beneficiaries of this support package. The details must be of such a nature that we could visit these farms and see for ourselves what the support were and who benefitted. With a budget cut of R1.9 billion for the programme dealing with food production, we must ensure that every cent counts.

Lastly, it might just be my years of dealing with fabricated stories from this Department, but when the Minister appoints an advisor who has been the Chief Director: Legal Services when we saw a swimming pool staged as a fire pool, I must wonder, what more in this Department needs covering up?