

Improve rural farmers' support through public private-partnerships

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

Honourable Chairperson,

Honourable Minister and Members of Parliament,

Molweni,

Chair, I stand here today representing the aspirations of small emerging farmers in rural areas. They have lost their dignity. These farmers are faced with low yields, financial distress, lack of water and poor support from your department. Their debts are piling up and there is no help.

The past failures of your department give us little hope. Justice Mabena and Vhembe Villagers are some of the victims of your department's failures.

Justice Mabena from Gauteng sold his butchery to buy a 16ha plot. He farms ONLY 1 ha of the 16 ha because of the lack of water. Poor quality soil meant more money on fertilizers to achieve decent yields. His proceeds from the sale of a butchery went towards the drilling of boreholes, input costs and fencing of the property. No support was received from your department.

Vhembe villagers from the Masoma irrigation scheme are also facing difficulties due to failing support. 53 Farmers farm on 79ha, where each member is allocated 1 ha of land. These farmers share one set of poorly functioning irrigation. The extension officer of your government claims their problem is poverty and old age. One day, an official from your department arrived on this farm. He randomly selected 3 farmers and planted some oranges for them. He promised to come back for training, however they never saw him again.

The problems faced by these farmers are everywhere, however the DA-led Western Cape government used these challenges to innovate. Due to the limited CASP fund allocation from DAFF, the DA-led government engaged the private sector and partnered with them to improve support to these farmers.

This support included technical, financial and extension services. The DA government initiated the first blended finance options, which we referred to as the public private partnership model.

This model has helped emerging farmers with pooled funding, technical expertise, cultivars and market access. Beneficiaries of this model are now thriving farmers. Since then, other models such as Hortfin and PALS were developed.

Oom Ray Koopstad, who cannot be here today, is one of the beneficiaries of the model supported by the PALS programme. He said I must tell you Minister; public-private partnership is an ideal support mechanism.

Other commercial farmers are developing great partnership models with their workers and previously disadvantaged individuals, but they need the support of a blended finance model.

The President, during SONA, announced the R3.9 billion support for the black farmers. We have learnt that sadly, the support has been suspended because some department officials misused the funds. Our farmers are struggling. This must stop.

The CASP and other funding allocation in your budgets are not going to help you achieve your objectives. A proper public private partnership, that is incorruptible, is required to solve the funding gap for the emerging farmers. The DA-led Western Cape has proven successes and is prepared to work with you.

Here are our quick tried-and-tested tips to turn things around in your department:

- Collaborate with private sector; don't treat them as enemies;
- Improve extension services capacity; and work with commodity groups for technical support;
- Address water rights with your counterpart minister; and,
- Conduct proper rural profile to ensure the provision of correct support.

Thank you.