

**Budget Vote Debate 24**  
**Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries**  
by  
**Hon. M Hlengwa, MP**

13 May 2015

Honourable Speaker,

Our country is teetering on the edge of a major crisis in the agricultural sector, yet to many it seems the urgency to stop this from taking place has not translated into practical action steps from our government.

The mass food shortage that is gripping the country is not being adequately addressed because too much of the "things will improve" rhetoric has been fed to us, yet the crisis mode still stands. The fact that farmers continue to struggle to produce crops, especially during times of drought, is indicative of the failure of government to capacitate our farmers.

3 percent of South African farmers produce 95 percent of the country's formal food sector yet the actions from this government do not aim to help but actually add more strain on these farmers. Uncertainty over land reform, labour discontent as well as polluted and over-extracted water resources are some of the issues that need to be dealt with urgently.

There are said to be over 2 million subsistence farmers in the country and they need greater support. We need to get back to basics when it comes to subsistence farming - this includes reintroducing it in schools and at clinics, as these used to be the hub of agricultural activities.

Cooperatives and smallholder farming are other catalysts for improving our food security but also boosting our economic development.

Other methods of getting urban dwellers involved in agriculture could involve rooftop farming; the utilisation of city structures to accommodate the production of agricultural produce. We need to find innovative ways in our modern environment to blend agricultural activities with our lifestyle as this has the potential to alleviate the pressure that is placed on our farming community.

In rural communities, Agricultural Advisors used to assist those who had land but did not necessarily know how to farm and showed them what methods to use to get the best results - this is no longer the case. Now the rural farming areas receive no guidance and this has resulted in job losses occurring and many people migrating to the cities to look for work, some unwillingly. With that in mind, the capacity of Agricultural colleges needs to be expanded, so that they can not only train up and develop skilled individuals for the agricultural sector, but also to produce expert advisors on how rural communities can get back into farming on a large scale.

The Marine Living Resource Fund needs a complete overhaul in terms of mandate and where its location within the department must be revisited. The fund does not want to associate with the department or the Minister and they operate completely on their own and this needs to change; we cannot have an entity of the department acting as if they are their own department without accountability.

With such renegade entities within the department, it is distressing that more is still spoken on what is to be done and less on how the specific challenges will be addressed. Enough sugar-coating - we need to hear the way forward without running from responsibility and giving us constantly failing land reform projects.

The challenges facing farm workers must take centre stage on governments' agenda, because farm workers' rights are human rights and we dare not fail in protecting those rights.

In supporting this budget vote the IFP asserts that political will must be translated into political action.