**Minister Thokozile Didiza: Debate on the State of the Nation Address**

15 Feb 2022

Speech by Angela Thokozile Didiza, MP Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development: SONA 2022

Madam Speaker,
President Ramaphosa,
Deputy President Mabuza,
Honourable Members

“There are moments in the life of a nation when old certainties are unsettled, and new possibilities emerge. In these moments, there is both the prospect of great progress and the risk of reversal. Today, we are faced with such a moment. The path we choose now will determine the course for future generations” President Ramaphosa, 10 February 2022 Mr President, I decided to quote from your speech when tabling the State of the Nation Address last Thursday. You reminded us of how, when faced with enormous challenges, we must respond, appreciating that whatever decision we take has implications for future generations.

In June 2019, when you tabled the State of the Nation Address following the Provincial and National elections, none of us anticipated the emergence of covid-19 in the following year and the devastation it would cause to human life and economies across the world. This challenge called for leadership and consensus on the response measures in our society to save lives and livelihoods.

Indeed, the old certainties were unsettled; new possibilities emerged as we rebuilt the nation from the scourge of covid-19. The use of ICT and reorganization of work intensified across the world.
In solidarity with one another, we contributed financial and non-financial resources to Solidarity Fund to save lives and livelihood. The consultations you undertook with political parties, civil society and coordination amongst spheres of government showed possibilities of how the nation can work together to address its challenges.

Mr President, the Social Compact you spoke about is the heart of our economic recovery efforts. The development of Masterplans across various sectors of our economy brings together industry-specific relevant stakeholders to agree on what is needed to grow our economy inclusively and prioritize employment.

The agriculture and agro-processing Master plan, which we will conclude by March 2022, working with business and organized agriculture, has identified specific issues that we need to address if this sector grows inclusively and boosts employment opportunities in rural South Africa.

We must appreciate that in a society of higher poverty levels, inequality and low growth, getting agriculture going is critical for various reasons. These include:

In general, growth in agriculture is two to three times more effective at reducing poverty than an equivalent amount of growth generated outside agriculture. The advantage of agriculture over non-agriculture in reducing poverty is largest for the poorest in society and ultimately disappears as countries become richer. Growth in agriculture in reducing poverty can also extend to other welfare outcomes such as food insecurity and malnutrition.

Among various interventions we will focus on, is the challenge of managing animal disease, which is critical for human health and safe meat for our consumers. The team of experts from industry, academia and the department has already given us their preliminary report on areas of improvement. The possible partnership on animal vaccine development without compromising the state capacity for such vaccines is critical. This is useful not only for the already established commercial farming subsector but many black farmers that aim to increase the livestock herds and commercialize.

Honourable members, our agricultural sector is export-oriented. We export about half of what we produce in value terms. In 2021, amid challenges at our ports and unrests in some provinces, government, business, and labour managed to work collaboratively to ensure the continuous flow of the export products. The statistics we have for the first eleven months of 2021 show that South Africa’s agricultural exports reached a record US$11,5 billion (Eleven point five billion dollars). This speaks to the large agricultural production of the past year and the social compact approach to facilitating exports.
Mr President, you spoke of the ports infrastructure, which is critical for agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and automobile industry. We are engaging with Transnet and organized agriculture to respond to the near term congestion challenges and long-term strategic intervention that boost the efficiency of our ports.

In our endeavors to assist farmers’ produce transportation challenges we concluded the Mkhunze rail siding to support small-scale farmers for the transportation of their sugarcane by rail to Felixton mill.  This project is assisting about 1 900 Makhathini small-scale sugarcane farmers who are struggling to transport their produce after Tongaat Hulett Sugar stopped the transportation subsidy.  Working with Transnet and this commodity development organization, we made a good stride in completing a road to rail initiative for this farmer.

Honourable members, we have also not shied away from complex land access challenges for the new black farmers. There is work underway to ease land access. Similarly, we have agreed that there is a need for better working conditions for our workforce and ensure tenure security for all.

We have commenced the process of engaging our Traditional Leaders and their Communities on ways in which we can unlock the development opportunities in their areas while at the same time ensure that customary tenure systems are legally secure. Our intention to hold the Land Summit last year may have been delayed, however Provincial consultation led by Deputy Minister Skwatsha working with Deputy Minister Bapela of COGTA, have enabled us to get necessary inputs that are of value in concluding this matter.

Mr President, despite the challenges of the Covid 19 Pandemic, the commitments you made in 2020 and 2021 have been achieved, and some are nearing completion.

You announced in 2020 that government would release 700 000 ha of agricultural land to individuals and communities. Mr President, almost all of these properties have been release except the Gwatyu farms that require resolution. I wish to thank the Portfolio Committee for have undertaken an oversite in Gwatyu early this month. I hope their visit will also assist in finding solution to this matter.
Public works have released land for Restitution and agriculture, as we saw in Tafelkop farms which were in the hands of the State handed over to the small farmers

TRAANCA Land that the then tri-cameral parliament earmarked in the Northern and Western Cape has been released. The outstanding land transfers will continue to be prioritised.
Communal land identified for development by traditional leaders and their communities have been released as per application to the Minister
Honourable Members, the Agriculture and Land Development agency will be finalized in March 2022. The agency will collaborate with relevant agencies to leverage expertise and resources to support farmers.

Honourable members, the Presidential Employment Stimulus has been implemented, and 51 000 beneficiaries were the recipients of input vouchers. The temporary suspension of PESI vouchers in January was to address the overcharging of farmers by input suppliers. To ensure value for money as a state and protect farmers from being ripped off the value of their farming inputs.
Mr President, the hemp and cannabis Masterplan has been discussed at NEDLAC. Work stream on the industrialization of these commodities has advanced and resulted in the call for the application of permits for Hemp.

In the past two years, SAPRHA has been issuing licenses for research into cannabis plants for medicinal purposes. This research will enable the amendment of one of the legislation in health and thus open a way for large-scale commercialization in our country.

Madam Speaker, social compacts of different forms have worked in the past, and they can work today. The bold decisions that the women’s movement of our country took 30 years ago during the negotiations that ushered in a democratic dispensation are ample. Their quest for a non-racial, non-sexist society propelled them to move beyond their comfort zones and forge a coalition to give a voice South African women and further develop the Women’s Charter for effective equality. This choice by women of our country laid a firm basis for the Equality Clause in our interim and final constitution. The Women’s charter for effective equality laid the foundation from which gender-responsive policies and legislation were drafted and enacted to improve the journey for the emancipation of women in our country. This consensus then determined the course for today and the future generation of women.

I thank you