**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1527**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER [No 15-2021 SIXTH PARLIAMENT]  
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**1527. Mr K P Sithole (IFP) to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development:**

1. What challenges are faced by small-scale indigenous farmers in the Republic during the COVID-19 pandemic;

(2) whether her department has provided disaster-specific relief to the specified farmers as was done for other economic sectors during the pandemic; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?  **NW1730E**

**THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT:**

1. Although agriculture was declared as essential service, smallholder production activities were negatively affected in the sector as they struggled to access their fields during initial lockdown period. There were post-harvest losses because of agro-logistics challenges experienced by farmers. Many smallholder farmers experienced loss of income and were also unable to prepare for the next planting season. There were reduced availability and access to extension services particularly during levels 5 and 4 of lockdown. There were other challenges such as:

* Closure of input dealerships and temporary hike in input prices in the first two months of lockdown as well as challenges in travelling to purchase inputs due to movement restrictions during lockdown levels 4 and 5. This included the massive congestion at the Durban port as Cape Town was considered the epicenter of the pandemic from around April to end May/early June 2020
* Lack of transport/slow processing of permits impeded the ability of workers to get to work in the first months of the outbreak of the pandemic and the general misinterpretation of disaster management regulations by law enforcement agencies
* During levels 5 to 3 of lockdown, almost all types of informal markets where smallholder farmers supply their farm produce were closed, including those that trade in cooked / prepared food. Informal food traders were not allowed to operate during the hard lockdown without permit and distribution plans for the perishable foods already harvested); & even when they were eventually allowed to operate, the customer base was significantly reduced.

(2) Yes. The Department provided disaster-specific relief to farmers. The Minister of Agriculture of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development secured funding of R1.2 Billion to assist smallholder farmers during April and May 2020. The fund was able to assist about 14 400 distressed smallholder farmers due to COVID-19 pandemic. A further R1 billion was allocated to the Department from the Presidential Employment Stimulus Initiative (PESI) to assist about 74 626 subsistence farmers who were not considered for the R1.2 Billion COVID-19 Relief. The Department is still implementing the R1 billion PESI intervention through e-vouchers.