

Budget Vote 29: Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

Speech by Thandeka Mbabama MP, DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

Honourable House Chair,

It is an open secret that the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development is dysfunctional in the majority of its sections and entities. My focus will only be on Land Reform and Rural Development.

In October 2021, amid much fanfare, the Minister announced that 896 farms - cumulatively comprising 700 000 hectares - would be redistributed under lease. At a briefing to the Portfolio committee, the number of farms mysteriously but unsurprisingly decreased to 627! As usual, the public has not been updated on how many of those farms have actually been redistributed to date and whether the department has supported the new lessees with training, recapitalisation or any other services that would see them succeed as promised. Looking at the current budget, I have serious doubts that any support has been forthcoming from the Department. Minister this is not good enough.

A large chunk of the South African population is desperately crying out for land. In my mind, they should instead be lamenting the ineffective internal processes and policies of land reform in the department and crying out for those to be expedited as the problem is to be found there.

It is the current government that is sitting on over two million hectares of State land that should be redirected to qualifying people. Over and above the two million hectares, the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights has 6853 (six thousand eight hundred and fifty three) unresolved old order claims and 14000 (fourteen thousand) new claims submitted after the closing date of 1998.

In total, these two figures give us 20,853 (twenty thousand eight hundred and fifty three) outstanding claims. How many additional hectares would this add to the people crying out for land? The largest land claim both in terms of number of hectares (twenty-five thousand) and capital outlay is the Kramer Family Trust claim in Hankey in the Eastern Cape which was submitted in 1996. It is still not settled or finalised, twenty seven years later! Minister this is not good enough!

To add insult to injury, the Land Claims Commission which was conceptualised as an autonomous institution at its inception is still under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. This handicaps the Commission in its ability to optimally fulfill its function. It is in effect a section within the Department and this affects its budget, which in turn affects approved headcount. Even its role has been affected in that the Commission is now tasked with post finalisation activities that should fall under the ambit of the Department itself.

Given this setback, it is estimated that at the pace and budget the Commission is working at, it will take approximately twenty years to finalise the 6853 old order claims. Minister, this is not good enough!

In 1994, the ANC election manifesto (ANC 1994: 19-20) said that

“A national land reform programme is the central and driving force of a programme for rural development”.

It also said that -

“the programme must be demand-driven, must aim to supply residential and productive land to the poorest section of the rural population and aspirant farmers.

It also said that –

“As part of a comprehensive rural development policy, it must raise rural incomes and productivity, and must encourage the use of land for agricultural and other productive or residential purposes”

Where are we today?

"Citizens of rural communities across the country who are fighting for their land rights are outraged at the government's treatment - likening it to apartheid and colonization." That is reported as one of the key points that came out of the Land Conference in a Press release dated August 2022. This captures the sentiment out there.

There is no clear policy direction for the implementation of Land Reform and Rural Development under the present government.

A DA government would:-

- 1) Set out clear policies and laws governing Land Reform and Rural Development
- 2) Fast track the autonomisation of the Land Claims Commission and
- 3) Initiate, populate and finance a comprehensive backlog reduction strategy over 5 years
- 4) Lastly update the public on progress bi-annually on this critical initiative

The Democratic Alliance gets things done!