National Workshop: SLAG, LRAD, Commonage and SPLAG

Opening Remarks by the Deputy Minister, Mr TW Nxesi MP

18-19 March 2011, Birchwood, Boksburg

[ALTER PROTOCOLS AS REQUIRED]

- Programme Director
- Director-General, DDGs and Senior Managers and Staff of the Department
- Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In presenting these opening remarks to you, I also bring you the greetings and best wishes of our Minister who will join you tomorrow.

Tasks of the workshop

You have an important task ahead of you over the next two days. Your job is to critically review important sub-programmes and aspects of the land reform programme – mindful that this is one of the priorities of government. You need to analyse the history of the implementation of these programmes.
You need to debate the lessons learned and you need to apply these insights to current policies and practices.

The programmes that you are analysing and discussing in this workshop were devised to facilitate the core tasks of land reform: restitution, redistribution and land tenure reform. As the Concept Paper shows we have already learnt many lessons since 1994 – bitter lessons born out of failure and limited success in some cases. Some of these lessons include the following:

- The need to do our homework, and properly research each case from a technical and economic point of view to ensure that it is viable and sustainable.

- The need to shift from an approach that says transfer as many hectares as possible in the shortest possible time, to one that says: we need to ensure productive and sustainable agricultural outcomes.

- From the outset, in every case, we have to capacitate and support each beneficiary. We have learnt that there is no point in transferring land unless proper training and other resources are in place to make the venture a commercial success.

Don’t hold back. If you see problems, highlight them for scrutiny and debate. [Let me rephrase this – as politicians, we don’t talk about ‘problems’ – rather we talk about ‘challenges.’] So if you identify challenges, let us then problematize the challenges and collectively address those challenges.

I think I need to mention one of the challenges: corruption. As a movement and as a government we have said that a priority is to combat this scourge. Last year our Minister invited the SIU (Special Investigations Unit) into the Department to investigate widespread allegations of wrong-doing. Obviously the programmes that you are discussing – involving grants and large sums of money – will be a prime target for corruption. Perhaps this is an area the workshop could reflect upon. If you see structural problems which allow corruption to take place, then highlight them so that we can begin to tighten up on procedures and make it more difficult for corrupt individuals to prosper.
We also need to send a clear message out. In bringing in the SIU – South Africa’s elite investigations unit with an impressive track record of convictions – the Minister is signalling that time is running out. Effectively we are saying that if you steal from the poor, the long arm of the law will catch up with you.

**Context**

Let me then say something about the broad political context in which you have to operate:

- First, we have said that rural development is one of the five priority areas of government.

- Government has adopted an Outcomes Based Approach to delivery with the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform being responsible for Outcome 7, namely, the establishment of “vibrant, equitable and sustainable rural communities and food security for all”.

- More recently, in the state of the nation address, President Zuma declared 2011 the year of job creation.

So when we debate and analyse the sub-programmes over the next two days, it must be done in relation to the broad objectives I have outlined. In other words we cannot afford to work in silos anymore – we need to constantly refer to the bigger policy picture and work together towards those objectives.

On a lighter note, of course we are likely to see silos in rural or agricultural settings – grain silos. So silos are a good thing – for storing grain – but not for working in. We have to strive to join up the dots linking the various programmes of the Department and we have to relate these to the broader mission of the Department and the government.

**Key principles**

There is another key principle I wanted to mention. As a government and as a Department we have said that we need to consult with our people and not simply impose programmes from top down. That is why we talk about
stakeholder councils and social mobilization – because it is vital that the people affected by our programmes and the beneficiaries – take ownership of those programmes and play a lead role in their own development. We need to build this in to our discussions. We want to hear what the beneficiaries are saying. We want them to tell us the challenges they face – and yes, indeed, we need to listen to ‘the problems’ they experience – and especially when they are perceived to be coming from the side of the Department.

In the recent FES workshop – Farm Equity Share schemes - it was encouraging to see the preparatory work that had been done in this respect. Every single beneficiary involved in the FES scheme was consulted; further, every household involved was profiled, and a report prepared which depicts the needs analyses of these households. This report will be shared with the various government departments, in the spirit of the Outcomes Based Approach, in order to ensure that development takes place in rural areas.

Linked to this is the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and projects. That is the only way that – scientifically - we can gauge the impact – or lack of impact – of programmes. You need to speak about the relevant M and E processes in place, and review them if they do not assist you.

Equally of course we want to know when there are successes. It was important therefore to include in the Concept Document a section dealing with best practices from the provinces. A former minister – not in this department – who was very adept at getting his message across to the media – used to say: “In politics, silence is not always a virtue.” So when you celebrate a success, contact the Department’s Communications Department to assist – so that a broader audience also gets to know what is going on.

The question we must answer today is how can our sub-programmes more effectively contribute to achieving the objectives of agrarian transformation, including:

- sustainable agrarian reform
- de-racialisation of the rural economy for shared and sustainable growth
- democratic and equitable land allocation and use across gender, race and class; and
- strict production discipline for guaranteed national food security?
Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we are all aware that land reform has not always produced the intended results.

It is, therefore, imperative that we find more pragmatic solutions for land reform, and that this be done in conjunction with all the relevant role players, starting with ourselves. This workshop thus serves as a forum for you to raise firstly, your views on the individual sub-programmes, and secondly how they can assist in achieving the land reform objectives.

The Vision of the Department

If, as we believe, the land is central to national liberation and future development, a number of questions must be posed and debated:

- How do we unlock the economic opportunities within agriculture for disadvantaged and emerging individuals and communities?
- Who should be the beneficiaries of the land reform?

As a minimum, as part of a broad strategy for rural development, we need to do the following:

- secure the position of farm workers and farm dwellers against evictions and improve their lives;
- revitalize subsistence agriculture in the former ‘reserves’ (‘tribal homelands’);
- rapidly promote black commercial agriculture; whilst mindful that white commercial agriculture will continue to play a crucial role in ensuring food security.

Do we have the tools in place to carry out this fundamental agrarian reform, or are we tinkering with these challenges?

Going forward, we believe that the Recapitalisation and Development Programme will address some of the challenges such as poor support to beneficiaries, and is designed with the following objectives in mind:

- to ensure increased production and food security;
- to graduate small farmers into commercial farmers;
• to create employment opportunities in the agricultural sector; and
• to promote capacity building through training and mentorship.

The programme is centred on strategic partnerships, mentoring and co-management. I encourage you to study the Red Meat Value Chain Pilot project, which is currently being piloted together with Bloemfontein Abattoirs, this serves as a flagship for the Recapitalization and Development programme.

Role of the state in agrarian transformation

Clearly the role of the state is crucial here – for which we need not apologize. If we look to history the South African state has always played a central role in structuring property, race and class relations in the countryside – hitherto to promote white farmers as they competed with their black counter-parts for labour, land, water, grazing rights, other resources and markets. In the past white farmers looked to the state to solve their problems. Herein lie the origins of the Land Bank, the 1913 Land Act, various large-scale irrigation schemes etc. The interest of white farmers also heavily influenced transport planning (to get their produce to market) and tax and pricing policies.

Are there any lessons in this history to assist us to support small and subsistence farmers in our current context? We need to debate these issues.

But one thing we can say definitively: today no one should expect the ANC government to apologize for using state power to address the agrarian question and to restructure property, class and race relations in the countryside. In this regard we need firm resolute and decisive action by the state to stave off the alternative of piecemeal land invasions.

In 2012 the ruling ANC will be celebrating its centenary. Historical accounts indicate that the imminent imposition of the 1913 Land Act that dispossessed the native Africans of their land and livelihoods was the trigger or tipping point that led to the formation of the South African Native National Congress in 1912.

It is inconceivable that after a century of struggle, and after 17 years of democracy, social relations in the countryside can continue to mirror the values of segregation and apartheid. The broad mission remains to restore land, human dignity and respect to all South Africans. As the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform we must always remember that this remains our core mission.
Concluding

Let us remind ourselves of why we are here as a Department. Looking at the bigger picture, the Minister has said recently that it is a privilege to be doing what we do. What is land reform and restitution? It is a massive attempt to put right a historical wrong. Our job, as a Department, is to restore the land – and with it the dignity – of people that have been dispossessed and systematically oppressed and exploited over centuries. In so doing we seek to address a central task of South Africa’s national democratic revolution. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are in the frontline of the struggle to transform South African social relations in the countryside and to build a truly non-racial, non-sexist and equitable society.

I wish everyone a productive meeting, and encourage you to participate fully in finding solutions to the way forward.

I thank you.

Glossary:

- SLAG – Settlement Land Acquisition Grant
- LRAD – Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development
- SPLAG – Settlement Production and Land Acquisition Grant