

Speech notes by Ross Purdon (MPL) Rural Development and Agrarian Reform Budget Vote

Hon Speaker

Hon Premier

Honourable Members

All our guests in the gallery

Good afternoon to you all.

If this budget that has a 12% increase is to mean anything to those that it is intended to support, this department, its leadership and officials will all have to drastically change their attitude and commitment to their cause and to that of rural development and agrarian reform.

Our platteland/rural areas and former homelands are literally dying of poverty and unemployment. Land reform for all intents and purposes benefits very few beneficiaries directly and the only people who benefit are consultants, contractors and those who award dubious contracts to them.

Beneficiaries of rural and land reform projects are left largely to their own devices.

There is a shameful shortage of skilled extension officers who can provide the desperately needed training in sustainable agricultural production.

Those that are designated as beneficiaries of land reform are not given ownership or adequate support so we see commercial enterprises acquired by the state going out of production. This has a catastrophic knock-on effect in poor rural communities.

Recapitalization projects are used to loot the state and departmental coffers and don't deliver anything near what is intended.

Beneficiaries do not have the skills, expertise or inclination to maintain existing infrastructure let alone establish new infrastructure.

In fact, I will give the MEC a complaint from a commercial farmer who is experiencing the stripping of his neighbouring farm's infrastructure by the neighbouring beneficiary and his own infrastructure is also being stripped causing severe strain between these neighbours.

One of the biggest reasons for this is that land ownership is not transferred to the beneficiaries and they have no real stake in the land and its productivity.

The department's management of HR and related recruitment strategies are hopelessly inadequate and training institutions are not providing fit and proper candidates who can become examples in good governance and extension support.

The lack of properly trained and suitably skilled officials has also negatively affected the department's attitude towards and the prioritization of land care.

Soil erosion in some parts of our province is criminal. Land/soil is a finite resource and once lost is gone forever, yet we allocate less and less funds and attention to this program. NO LAND, NO PRODUCTION, NO FOOD!

A matter of really grave concern is the reduced budget for the management and control of livestock diseases.

Without adequate animal handling facilities, dipping infrastructure, internal and external parasite control measures, the poor people living off the land will continue to be poor and marginalized. We hear a chorus of cries for help in this regard yet we turn a deaf ear to them.

An example that my colleague saw at Fish River where the majority of cows in a herd had no teats and couldn't suckle calves, these cows are for all intents and purposes barren as they are unproductive, they conceive, give birth but their calves starve to death...

This is as tragic as it is cruel. The government and the department are failing miserably at their responsibility in this regard and are not transferring the necessary skills and support.

The reduced target of head of livestock to be treated for disease and external parasites is catastrophic as disease can wipe out our livestock, wool and mohair economy/industry with devastating consequences.

The lack of farmer support for developing farmers as per the report is an indictment on the department and the inability to spend the allocated budget is not only criminal, it is a blight on the MEC, HOD and all SMME's and this actually requires the direct intervention of the Premier.

The critical shortage of veterinarians and inadequate budget for veterinary products has become a refrain from the communities and this committee that voters will punish this government for. Uzakubona!

The Bizana abattoir! No report about this department is complete with a dishonourable mention of this monument to ineptitude and careless government, yet nothing gets done to fix it, lihlazo!

This report quite rightly also highlights the deficiency in research and technology development as well as agricultural economic services and of course the perennial

challenge of insufficient budget and even more deficient outcomes at our FET and higher learning institutions for agriculture.

The state of Fort Cox as an institution and its management continues to be a real dilemma despite the long overdue legislative intervention that promised much and delivered little. The truth is that the ANC has allowed our agricultural colleges to collapse.

Lastly, rural development coordination which has been "outsourced" to the ECRDA remains the Achilles heel of this department.

MAGWA and MAJOLA still don't produce any marketable tea!

KHANGELA continues to be a cash cow for connected people and companies such as SAFE and BONO HOLDINGS at the direct expense of the intended beneficiaries.

The exposes in this regard by my colleague, Athol Trollip over the past 12 years, our recent portfolio committee report and that of Special assignment - have meant nothing as the Beneficiaries remain nothing more than labourers whilst neighbouring farms that partner with ethical organizations such as the Sundays River citrus cooperative go from strength to strength.

The board and management of Khangela are nothing short of a disgrace and will one day get their comeuppance.

What I can't understand is why the MEC won't intervene despite saying he would in December 2014.

This is not your baby MEC, it is Max Mamase and Zoleka Capa's so why are you raising this illegitimate child and allowing it to be so badly abused under your care?

The DA cannot support this budget under the current status quo.

There is a saying that the definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different outcome.

The DA is not MAD!
SIBHADLILE!

Thank you.