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The South African Government confirms collaboration with organized agriculture on land reform

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Report Highlights:

The South African Government through the Deputy President confirmed collaboration with organized agriculture on land reform at a land summit on August 23 and 24, 2018. The seminal land summit that was organized by *Landbouweekblad* in collaboration with AgriSA, showcased current successes of land reform in South Africa. The Deputy President motivated farmers to continue to work hard, invest in their farms and increase production while he extended the government's hand for collaboration to ensure that more and more South Africans enter the sector through organized and systematic access to land for productive use.

The Land Summit

On August 23 and 24, 2018, Post attended a land summit that was organized by *Landbouweekblad* in collaboration with AgriSA in a small town to the north of Pretoria called Bela-Bela. *Landbouweekblad* is the oldest and largest agricultural publication in South Africa and AgriSA the biggest of South Africa's four organized agricultural organizations representing the majority of the estimated 35,000 commercial farmers. The idea of the summit was to showcase successes of land reform that are not always present in the public domain. As a result, the summit brought together some of South Africa's best minds as far as land reform and the broad transformation of the agricultural sector is concerned. More than 500 attendees listened to 65 speakers presenting 65 workable examples of transformation in the agricultural sector of South Africa. These success stories in land reform included revitalized communal areas, transformed family farms, visionary farm-worker projects, positive mentorships and successful partnerships to establish previously disadvantaged farmers.

One example of positive transformation in the agricultural industry was presented by Mr. Kleinjan Gasekoma, the emerging farmer who became South Africa's Cattle Farmer of the Year in 2015. This farm worker's son started looking for a farm while he was working in the parcel section at Pretoria railway station way back in 2001. In 2003, Kleinjan and 25 other people started farming on a farm near Amalia, under the government's Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) program. In 2007 he applied to the government to acquire a farm and received permission to rent a farm of 1,233 hectares. After many setbacks he met commercial farmer Cois Harman.

When Cois got involved as mentor, the farm was not well developed. Cois identified all the problems and drew up a business plan, which was presented to the government with the aim of getting finance. When Kleinjan received finance after two years, he was able to start developing his farm. Cois and Kleinjan planned the farm meticulously and built fences, crushes, a dam, herding kraals, watering points, covered lick trays and stock handling facilities sufficient for 350 head of cattle. Cois monitored Kleinjan's progress throughout and assisted in terms of the budget and purchases for the farm. "Cois' advice meant a lot to me. Whenever I wasn't sure of something I would phone him," said Kleinjan. "I love farming. I get income throughout the year and I can take care of my family. We have worked very hard to become commercial farmers and felt honored to be South Africa's first black Cattle Farmer of the Year".

The Deputy President of South Africa, Mr. David Mabuza, also addressed the summit. In his address the Deputy President reconfirmed the historic mission of the African National Congress (ANC)-led government of creating a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa in all its manifestations. He reiterated that the leadership of the ANC and government are clear that the implementation of land reform measures must not result in social fractures and racial polarization.

Repeating assurances given by President Cyril Ramaphosa, he added that the land reform processes pose no direct threat to the agriculture sector and the economy as a whole.

"Everything we do will be done within the confines of our constitutional framework. As the ANC, we will not support 'land grab' processes intended to undermine the economy and the work of the agriculture sector." Mr. Mabuza said.

He motivated farmers to continue to work hard, invest in their farms and increase production while extending a hand of collaboration with government to ensure that more and more South Africans enter the sector through organized and systematic access to land for productive use. He added that government will safeguard the estimated R460 billion (about US\$35 billion) worth of investment in agricultural assets so that it can be leveraged to increase investment in the sector.

“We are resolute in protecting the sector to prevent any contraction and threat to food security. Farmers must continue to produce without any fear as land reform is not about destroying production. Instead, it is about expanding new horizons and possibilities to double our production capacity, especially where land has already been restituted and redistributed. As the ANC leadership we value commercial agriculture as a backbone of our economy and food security.” He added.

He said that as government, they will prioritize investment in agriculture infrastructure to scale up production and continue to sustain South Africa’s position as one of most food secure countries on the continent and the globe. According to Mr. Mabuza the government will work closely with the agriculture sector in developing and implementing a package of post-settlement support measures to enhance productivity of restituted land as well as communal land under the custodianship of traditional leaders. He emphasized that the immediate focus will be on government owned land. Government will prioritize land under the ownership of the state, including unused and under-utilized state land and ensure that this land is redistributed and put to productive use.

He said that for the past 24 years, the government has sought to address land reform through a myriad of legislative processes in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. However, there is an acknowledgement that the progress the government has made on land reform has not been at a desired speed. Similarly, there is an acknowledgement that where land restitution has been effected, not all of that land has been put to productive use. He said that these are facts that exist against a background of poverty, high unemployment and growing inequality. These challenges are prevailing notwithstanding all achievements the government has made since 1994. He warned the audience that this path is not sustainable.

He concluded: “As the ANC-led government, we carry on our shoulders, a heavy burden of delivering with speed on the aspirations of our people. Failure to meaningfully resolve the land question can easily lead to instability and unintended consequences. Therefore, collectively as government and the agriculture sector, we have no choice but to approach this matter with an appreciation that we are in this together. We must engage in discussions and rigorous debates to refine our best options to resolve our problems. At the end, we need to come up with solutions that will bring redress and take our country forward. We are clear as the ANC and as government that all of this must not undermine the productive use of the land.”

The farming community has hailed the land expropriation speech of the Deputy President as a step in the right direction. AgriSA’s President, Mr. Dan Kriek, welcomed the speech and said it closed a gap of uncertainty that had crept in since the announcement of expropriation without compensation. “We welcome that government have taken leadership now and actually tell the agricultural sector what their plans are, because for a long time, since December and afterwards, we said that the President must take us into his confidence and tell the agricultural sector where they are heading with this,” Kriek said.

This first land summit was welcomed by all the participants as being seminal, positive, inspirational and insightful. The summit concluded that to continue implementing successful land reform in South Africa the agricultural sector needs increased government support, access to finance and guaranteed private property rights.

Following the land summit, Deputy President David Mabuza signed a cooperation statement with South Africa's four agricultural organizations on August 27, 2018. The four unions representing farmers from different sectors of society, namely: AgriSA, Transvaal Agricultural Union (Tau-SA), African Farmers' Association of South Africa (AFASA), and the National Farmers Union of South Africa (NAFU-SA) pledged to address current problems with land reform, such as post-settlement support for new farmers and a lack of trust and accountability. A summit will also be held in November where the four organizations will present a national development strategy for the agricultural sector.