

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MRS BONGIWE SITHOLE-MOLOI, DURING THE NCOP DEBATE ON PROVINCIAL PLAN TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON 25 AUGUST 2020**

**Honourable Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces; Hounorable Mr A Masondo**

**Chief Whip of the NCOP; Honorable Mr SJ Mohai**

**Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development;**

**Chairperson and members of Portfolio Committee;**

**Members of Provincial Executives;**

**Delegates from the Provinces;**

**Civil Society;**

**Directors General for the Departments of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development**

**Head of Departments and CEOs in our sector;**

**Ladies and gentlemen . . .**

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds rapidly in South Africa, people in KwaZulu-Natal are adapting to a new reality and the magnitude of the impact that this pandemic has on them and their livelihoods. Now that we are on Alert Level 2 as announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa that all restrictions on inter-provincial travel will be lifted. Accommodation, hospitality venues and tours will be permitted according to approved protocols to ensure social distancing. Restaurants, bars and taverns will be permitted to operate according to approved protocols as to times of operation and numbers of people. There is clearly no doubt that there is going to be an increased demand on food production and security.

Honourable members, the masses of our people's social conditions are not getting better because of rising unemployment, poverty and hunger, and therefore cannot wait any longer for us to turn the tide. The whole country is depending on the agricultural sector to ensure that there is sufficient food to feed the nation and creation of employment opportunities.

The economic crisis presented by COVID-19 means more people have joined the millions of hungry and unemployed, with recent statistics by the International Monetary Fund

(IMF), indicating that, I quote, “South Africa’s unemployment rate is forecast to be 35.3% in December 2020.”

Honourable members, the sector has the opportunity to exercise its potential to create employment opportunities with the beginning of the planting season in October.

Generally, COVID-19 has an impact in the overall agricultural sector demand-side in South Africa and abroad, with a ripple effect on food prices and agricultural markets. The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty and disruption of economic growth. In addition, food distribution channels have experienced disruptions from transport interruptions and quarantine measures, which has caused an impact on staple commodities.

In dealing with the effect of the pandemic amongst those that are vulnerable in our society, We have prioritised the budget so that more focus can be on food security. This reprioritisation sees our intervention in food security increasing from the current allocation of R10, 7 million to R40 million.

As the province, during these tough times presented by Covid-19, we have taken an initiative to supplement social relief grant by collaborating with the Department of Human Settlement and Department of Education to promote one-home-one garden vegetables and fruit trees and for school gardens as a long-term solution to food security; respectively.

Finding ways of scaling up organic, permaculture and conservation farming programmes as part of an urban agriculture concept and promotion of food security within the urban and peri-urban areas of our province. Furthermore, I have also directed that similar projects be piloted in each local municipality within the province.

Honourable members, as the province of KwaZulu-Natal, we have taken the following steps to ensure that the sustainability of food production. Following the pronouncement by the Minister of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development to support smallholder farmers through a COVID-19 Relief Scheme, the response from farmers far exceeded expectations, however, a significant number of applications were disqualified owing to non-compliance with stipulated criteria.

I am pleased to announce that the province was allocated R99,7 million to support 2 812 smallholder farmers across the province of KwaZulu-Natal. About 1 222 of these farmers are woman constituting 43, 5%. Commodities prioritized for support include poultry, livestock, fruits, winter field crops and vegetables. Furthermore, government through the national department distributed over 40 000 Personal Protective equipment (PPE) in a form of masks for farm workers through farmers unions in the province.

Honourable Members, farm workers and dwellers have emerged as one social cluster that is hardest hit by famine during this COVID-19 lockdown period due to no income, which has resulted in dire shortage of nutrition in their diet.

This prompted the government of KwaZulu-Natal to intervene by forming a private public partnership with African Farmers Association of South Africa (AFASA), which resulted in 70 beasts slaughtered in an effort to ease famine by boosting their protein intake.

Amid the COVID 19 pandemic, the ADA extended a helping hand to assist two poverty-stricken communities in Mkhuze and Jozini by donating food vouchers to enable the beneficiaries to go and buy essentials at BOXER supermarket. A total number of 400 vouchers were issued to the needy families at a value of R500 each.

To ensure the safety of our employees at ADA and DARD, we provided PPE for all staff members to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Honourable Members, I am glad to report that during this time of Covid-19 lockdown period, our laboratory at Cedara became and continues to be the centre for the production of 70% alcohol hand sanitizers. Honourable Chairperson, the Department has been able to produce more than 20 000 hands sanitizers in 250ml containers, which are distributed to other departments in KwaZulu-Natal, the needy and the farmers, in particular.

The Department is in the drive to revive indigenous knowledge through the propagation of plants that grow in our natural environments and have been serving human kind as food and medicine in almost all cultures for generations.

Honourable members, our Department was inundated with requests from traditional healers and herbalists for us to test the medicinal and nutritional properties of the indigenous plants. We have since established a programme called **Mazibuye eMasisweni**, which applies modern scientific tools to enhance indigenous knowledge and preserve our heritage. The Premier of KwaZulu-Natal unveiled a new departmental mission to reposition the analytical laboratory as a Centre of Excellence and Innovation, where “indigenous traditional healing methods and African medicine that is offered as a possible solution to many opportunistic diseases, can be tested. This, we are doing in partnership with various stakeholders in our community.

The Department is in the drive to revive indigenous knowledge through the propagation of plants that grow in our natural environments and have been serving human kind as food and medicine in almost all cultures for generations.

In closing, COVID-19 has devastated families, livelihoods and created a new normal. It is upon us to roll up our sleeves, pick up hoes and till the land. Let us work together to build the nation. Ingakho KwaZulu-Natali sithi, “Phez’komkhono”.

I thank you.