Keynote Address

10th National Agricultural Research Forum Plenary
and
1st Inaugural Meeting of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Forum (AFFRF)

by
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on

Governance and Leadership for effective and impactful R&D in Agriculture: challenges and opportunities

At the
Saint George Hotel and Convention Centre

8th October 2015
Introductions and observance of protocols (to be updated based on participants)

The Chairperson of the National Agricultural Research Forum, Mr Hugh Campbell
Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Forestry Research Forum (Prof. Collin Dyer and Dr Ronald Heath, respectively)
The Chief Executive Officer of the Agricultural Research Council, Dr Shadrack Moephuli
The NARF Steering Committee Members
Members of the National Agricultural Research Forum
Members of the Forestry Research Forum
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

It gives me great pleasure to be afforded this opportunity to address a gathering of some of the best minds and brains responsible for championing research and technology development that drives growth and competitiveness for the agricultural forestry and fisheries sectors.

I want to first start by congratulating South Africa, and in particular your active participation, for hosting a successful XIV world Forestry Congress held on 7 – 11 September 2015 at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre, Durban. The success of this congress is attributable largely to your contributions and participation in seeking solutions to reversing forest degradation and deforestation. It is hoped that out of this congress we have learned innovative approaches for managing and sustaining our forest resources and forest products.

Last year as we gathered here, we had just emerged as a country from national elections, and the government quickly committed itself to implementing the National Development Plan - Vision 2030 that poses the following challenges for the sector:

- Improved land administration and spatial planning for integrated development with a bias towards rural areas;
- Up-scaled rural development as a result of coordinated and integrated planning, resource allocation and implementation by all stakeholders;
- Sustainable land reform (agrarian transformation);
- Improved food security;
- Smallholder farmer development and support (technical, financial, infrastructure) for agrarian transformation;
- Increased access to quality basic infrastructure and services, particularly in education, healthcare and public transport in rural areas;
- Growth of sustainable rural enterprises and industries characterised by strong rural-urban linkages, increased investment in agro-processing, trade development and access to markets and financial services—resulting in rural job creation.

I am repeating these from last year’s message simply because we are duty bound to deliver on these as the sector, and as we gather from time to time we need keep these on the radar.

In the 2015/16 – 2019/20 DAFF Strategic Plan, our Minister, the Honourable Senzeni Zokwana outlined his vision for the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sectors as “…catalysts for radical socio-economic transformation, food security for all, creation of one million decent jobs by 2030 and significantly increasing the contribution of these sectors to the GDP”. Clearly, you can see that this vision is perfectly aligned to and is informed by Vision 2030 of the National Development Plan (NDP) that calls for an inclusive rural economy wherein: “…rural communities should have greater opportunities to participate fully in the economic, social and political life of the country. People should have access to high-quality basic services that enable them to be well nourished, healthy and increasingly skilled. Rural economies will be supported by agriculture, and were possible by mining, tourism, agro-processing and fisheries…better integration of the country’s rural areas, achieved though successful land reform, job creation and poverty alleviation”

This vision places agriculture at the centre of rural economic activities and our Agriculture Policy Action Plan (APAP) amply elaborates on a set of specific key catalytic interventions of unlocking growth potential among key industries as specified in the
NDP, and research and innovation is a critical cross cutting intervention that this forum must use, amongst others in setting performance targets.

An increase in agricultural productivity requires greater application of science, technology and innovation, which demonstrated its game changing role for agricultural revolutions in Europe, Asia and Brazil supported by business orientation to make the investments in agricultural research profitable and sustainable. However ladies and gentlemen, science on its own will not be able to play its game-changing role without proper governance structures and proper planning to ensure that research add value to the attainment of government objectives of eliminating poverty and inequality as outlined by the National Development Plan.

Several development initiatives recognise this fact, for example the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) proposes that the best means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, in particular MDG1 (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger) and MDG 7 (ensuring environmental sustainability) is to support agricultural research; whilst the InterAcademy Council Panel report on realising the promise and potential for African agriculture (2004) advocated for building agricultural research excellence as a basis for impact-oriented research and knowledge generation to put African agriculture on a sustainable path. In our own environment we align ourselves with these strategic positions through the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Strategic Framework (formerly named Integrated Growth and Development Programme, IGDP) and indicate that investment in innovation is critical for supporting growth in the sector, and strategic collaborations will be deepened with the private sector in order to build research capacity within the sector. This is our posturing and bold statement of intend, and as we move forward we need to strengthen our partnerships.

I would like to assure you of DAFF’s commitment to supporting Research, Innovation and Development as key drivers for the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector. We are of the view that sustained spending on research and technology development will yield an increase in agricultural productivity, food security, poverty reduction and economic growth. This commitment we offer against the background that government invested 3.0% of total national government appropriation for 2012/13 period, thus translating to R29.4 bill expenditure. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and
Fisheries (DAFF) accounted for R1.1 bill of this figure – excluding the provincial expenditures. In our own report we released last year, Agricultural R&D expenditure for 2010/11 period amounted to R1.216 bill – accounting for 0.074% of total value added (institutions surveyed are DAFF, Provincial Departments of agriculture, Science Councils, and higher education institutions). What these data are saying is that as a country, and in particular the AFF sectors, we are under performing given our target at least 2.5 % to 3.0 % of gross domestic product (GDP).

We have responded to these challenges through the establishment of the Research and Technology Fund to promote investment in research and create an enabling environment for public-private partnerships. The Research and Technology Fund was created as a vehicle for the sector to implement research strategies and agenda within the sector (National Agricultural Research Strategy, the National Forest Sector Research and Development Strategy and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Agenda), and to address sector challenges requiring science based solutions such as:

- Maintaining the competitiveness of the sector for commercialization and foreign;
- Degradation of natural resources associated with climate change;
- Low productivity by the small holder farmers; and
- Policy and institutional arrangements which inhibit growth and development of the sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great joy for me to announce that today we are officially launch the Research and Technology Fund, and I therefore invite you to join me for the launch of the Research Fund.

**Policy issues**

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa 21 years ago, an underlying principle for virtually all government policy is to bring the previously excluded black community into the mainstream economy through job creation and entrepreneurship. Macroeconomic reforms have stabilised the economy, but notable problems of high unemployment and poverty still remain.
We know that the current South African agriculture is highly dualistic with a small number of commercial operations run predominantly by the white farmers and large numbers of subsistence and smallholder farms run by the black farmers. The problems and opportunities are quite different for each group. Agricultural reform continues with a series of measures to address past injustices including land redistribution, agricultural support programmes to disadvantaged farming communities, and a broad based programme of economic empowerment of the black population in the agricultural and food sector.

Therefore, facilitating economic integration between small and large-scale commercial units is another policy challenge. The ability of the commercial sector to respond to increased market opportunities will ultimately determine the extent of gains we realise from global trade liberalisation. Farming policies need to be conducive for the adoption of quality and productivity improvements for this sector to become more internationally competitive and exploit its export potential.

**Partnerships**

My Department seeks partnerships with fora of clearly defined goals, objectives and functions, while recognising the varying and complementary roles played by different stakeholders. The Department values a body like the NARF, and hence the support we provide through the Secretariat (i.e. personnel, operational funds, office space and equipment). I would, therefore like to take this opportunity to re-affirm my Department’s continued support for the NARF. In this regard, DAFF will strengthen the NARF, NFRF and NAFRF as well as the Apex body to fulfil their mandates as stipulated in their TORs.

We must also ensure that the South African agriculture is not an island, but that it is part of, and benefits from the international best practices. To ensure that we are integrated with the regional and global research systems, we are a member of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and the Centre of Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Africa (CCARDESA), memberships which were taken to create opportunities for the National Agricultural Research System to access global public research outputs generated internationally.
and share expertise with the international research partners to strengthen the National Research System. We are also a member of the CAB International, a not-for-profit science-based development organisation which provide information and apply scientific expertise to solve the environmental and agricultural related problems. We need to maximise our participation and ensure South Africa derives maximum benefits from these partnerships.

The Department recognises the need to consult and build consensus on research issues, and to ensure that research priorities are relevant for the sector. Therefore structures such as the National Agricultural Research Forum (NARF), the Government Agricultural Research and Development Action Group (GARDAG), the National Forestry Research Forum, and the Aquaculture and Fisheries Research Forums (still to be formed) remain important and valuable consultative platforms for sector research and development.

The farmers are custodians of the soils, while policy makers should provide an enabling environment for farming to thrive. The challenges lies on the fact that while the population is changing and the climate changing, the arable land for agricultural production in not increasing, which then requires that “more should be produce using less”. It is research and innovation that can provide new knowledge for increasing the potential of the available arable land. Farming is a business, therefore it should be knowledge based which becomes possible when research and innovation are strengthened and the communication gap between farmers, researchers, training institutes and businesses should be bridged. Ladies and gentleman research outcomes should be packages in a manner that make business scene for the user.

The Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme and the Science Agenda for Africa recognise the need for proper governance mechanisms to ensure that science is supported and lifted to the strategic level at the political and the operational level. It is also important to establish safe guards against risks and assurances for the wellbeing, social, and economic benefits created through investment in agricultural research and development. The government has a role to play to ensure that technology generated through investment in research and development is useful to catalyse agricultural development.
In the same way ladies and gentlemen agricultural research in South Africa requires proper structures to link the operations in research and technology development with the strategic level on the leadership. In order to ensure that the National Agricultural Research Forum is strengthened, the Agricultural Policy Action Plan called for the creation of governance structures for research and development in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sectors.

The creation of research forums in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sectors would enable the creation of the Apex Body for research and development which will be a link between the sector and government. I am pleased to announce that the National Forestry Research Forum was launched on the 6th October 2015. I believe that the creation of the National Forestry Research Forum would ensure that forestry research remain relevant to the needs of the forestry sector and also benefit from those who could not be reached in the absence of the forum. It is my aspiration that the fisheries sector would also make the necessary arrangements to ensure that an Aquaculture and Fisheries research forum is established.

The availability of the Apex Body would ensure that research planning for the sector is conducted on a strategic level with inputs from the sector, to ensure that value addition, efficiency in resources allocation and utilisation. The creation of the Apex Body should not be seen duplicating available structures, but be seen as a way to bring the research stakeholder closer to government, which will strengthens research discussions in government management forums such as the ITCAFF and the CEOs Forum.

It must be strongly emphasized that the application of science and technology in agricultural research for development plays a pivotal role in effectively addressing the challenges of sustainable socio-economic development. There is abundant empirical evidence that agricultural research has been associated with improvement in incomes and poverty alleviation/reduction. The more than one million hectares of land that must be put under production in South Africa will require deployment of appropriate technologies and systems to make the land productive, thus allowing us to feed this nation. For all the stables in this country, and the regions, including the key industrial
crops I implore you to find well adapted varieties and breeds to allow farmers/producers to achieve improved livelihoods.

It is also a reality/known fact that Inadequate and poor investments in, and support for strategic research will fail to bring about the expected economic development benefits and lead to damage to the environment and ultimately human health.

It’s a sad reality that we will never get all the resources (financial) we need to pursue or sectoral research agenda given that the there are many competing needs and priorities on the public purse. Sadly, there are strong arguments to the effect that investments in agricultural research and the application of science and technology to development have not had the desired/anticipated levels of impacts in eliminating hunger, reducing extreme poverty and creating wealth especially in developing countries like South Africa. This charge we need to confront and proof the angels of doom wrong. We have no choice whatsoever, but to rapidly build and strengthen our capacities (human and institutional) for innovation to effectively respond to the demands and challenges facing the society and markets.

We need to build impact-oriented, knowledge and development research for our conditions? It is my view that we still need to take lessons from the recommendations of the InterAcademy Council Panel on realising the promise and potential of African agriculture (2004). The panel argued, rightly so that establishment of advanced centres of agricultural research excellence is key to innovations to for improving production and productivity; and, in our case faced with challenges of turning smallholders into productivity must ensure that productivity is market linked.

The former DG, in her message to this forum, implored the NARF to:
- Identify and define relevant technologies for improving agricultural production and food security;
- spell out unambiguously national agricultural research programmes and interventions to support the competitiveness of the sector;
- Lead the process research priority setting and provide a good assessment of the necessary elements of an agricultural research agenda.
It is my expectations that as you gather here today you will also take stock of your achievement in this regard, and also reflect on the nature of R&D programme the sector needs in order to leap-frog in the realm of double digit growth and accelerated employment envisioned in Vision 2030.

To this new forum (Apex Body) I charge with the following responsibilities:

- Champion and lead the research priority setting process in the AFF sectors
- Create an effective platform for exchange of ideas and knowledge to enrich sectoral planning
- Sieve through and synthesize the myriad government plans and emerge with a responsive R&D plan for the sectors
- Advise the Department on viable research-based policy options
- Establish a professional recognition and reward system distinguished individuals (scientist, researchers, and innovators) and institutions in the sector linked to the National Science and Technology Awards run by the NSTF.

The Agri-Parks are moving from just being a concept to practical implementation – what are the innovative and technological solutions can this Apex Body with its constituents (agriculture, forestry and fisheries) contribute to this process and make the agri-parks viable, successful and sustainable

It is my firm believe that our collective efforts in pursuing a common research agenda in the sector will unlock the potential and create the change in agriculture, forestry and fisheries everyone talks about.

The mobilisation of the intellectual resources and capacity of government (both at national and provincial), nongovernmental organisations, farmers/producer organisations, universities, and the private sector (agri-business) is key for the success of the research forums in the AFF sectors, and I wish these fora success in executing their critical mandate, in partnership with the Department.

Thank you for your attention.