



**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY MINISTER DIDIZA DURING THE NATIONAL WATER AND SANITATION SUMMIT ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE: An Agriculture perspective**

**THE HONOURABLE THOKO DIDIZA, MP  
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
18-19 February 2022**

***Honourable Ministers,***

***Distinguished Delegates,***

***Ladies and Gentlemen***

Today we meet as different stakeholders in this water summit in order to reflect on water resource management in the context of climate change. This is an important step for our country following the Glasgow UN meeting on Climate change where parties were assessing progress that globally we have taken in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Our response to climate change requires all of us to make contributions that will help us adapt in the changing climate by designing adaptation strategies that will mitigate the impact at the same time ensure that we reduce the drivers that propel climate change.

In 2017 at the meeting of the Conference of Parties held in Bonn agreed on decision 4/COP 23 on the "Koronovia joint work on Agriculture" which requested the SBSTA and SBI to jointly address issues related to agriculture .

The decision identified the following elements :

- Modalities for implementation of the five in session workshops on issues related to agriculture and other future topics that may arise out of this work;
- Methods and approaches for assessing adaptation, co-benefits and resilience;
- Improved soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility under grassland and cropland as well as integrated systems including water management;
- Improved nutrient use and manure management towards sustainable and resilient agriculture systems;
- Improved livestock management systems;
- Socioeconomic and food security dimensions of climate change in the Agricultural sector.

**Programme Director**, we are all here because we are all concerned with water. To quote from Jacques Yves Gousteau – *'We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one'*. I would like to add that the water cycle has implications and effects on all sectors, especially on agriculture, food security and people who depend on agriculture as a livelihood. Therefore, my extension to the quote is that the cycles of water, life and food security are actually one.

This Summit therefore has to reflect on how we balance our competing needs for water use while at the same time develop strategies that conserve and manage our water resources. All of these have to focus on climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation strategies.

South Africa is a water scarce country; it is the 30<sup>th</sup> driest country in the world. South Africa covers an area of 122 081 150 hectares of which approximately 14 million hectares (13%) is cultivated land. It is estimated that 1.6 million hectares (1.3%) is under irrigation where about 50 000ha is located in the previous homelands and is allocated to smallholder farmers.

Agricultural activities are directly dependant on the availability and quality of natural resources, particularly land and water. Water plays a central role in agriculture where irrigation is by far the largest single user of runoff water in South Africa at 60%. Globally, agriculture accounts (on average) for 70% of freshwater withdrawals.

In recognition of the importance of irrigation to the agricultural sector, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development developed the Irrigation Strategy for South Africa in 2015. This Strategy focuses on the revitalization of irrigation schemes, expansion and development of irrigated areas and water management on farm.

### **Scope and benefits of irrigated agriculture in South Africa**

Irrigated agriculture contributes over 30% of the gross value of the country's crop production. Irrigation is essential for the South African fruit industry which ranks amongst the most important export commodities with about 90% of the country's fruit and wine are produced under irrigation. More than 50% of fruit produced is exported including citrus, pome and stone fruits, table grapes, wine etc. This contributes to the 2.4% contribution of agriculture to the South Africa's GDP. I therefore opine that if irrigation is expanded to other irrigable land as articulated in the National Development Plan, our sector contribution to the GDP will be greatly enhanced.

It is not only agricultural exports that benefit from irrigation. South Africa consumes most of its locally produced vegetables. By producing 90% of the country's vegetables, irrigation is essential for ensuring a healthy diet for the nation. Without getting into details on primary agriculture and irrigation, I summarise ladies and gentlemen that primary agriculture uses water to produce food, feed and fibre and all of these sustain us.

In addition, nearly 60% of the total value of agricultural production is used as raw materials in secondary industries, such as processing plants. The South African food processing industry contributes about 14% to the country's GDP and contributes significantly to job creation in the industrial sector. Much of this comes from irrigated agriculture. Thus the impact of agriculture on the other sectors in terms of the forward and backward linkages is

considerable, with the impact of irrigated agriculture being relatively large.

### **Water Resources Management and delivery mechanism in relation to agriculture**

Government has identified the need for rural communities to participate fully in the economic and social life of South Africa. One of the areas identified to actualise this need is the Smallholder irrigation schemes. These schemes have the potential to make significant local socio-economic impact by contributing to improved food security, poverty alleviation and increased employment and in many instances, they are the main economic activities in their areas.

Our Department, has for several years been supporting the revitalization of smallholder irrigation schemes and expansion of irrigated areas through various infrastructure programmes such Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP) and Ilima/Letsema. This revitalisation is inclusive of the Vaalharts in the Northern Cape, Makhathini Scheme in KZN, Taung and Disaneng in the North West, Qamata in the Eastern Cape, Prieska in Limpopo and many more will assist with broader participation of smallholder farmers and commercialisation of their business operations.

Our land reform projects of the Department will also seek to ensure that pro-active land acquisition is fully focused on acquiring land that is suitable for irrigation and the land has water rights to ensure sustainability of our sector. The Land Care Programme and other such departmental initiatives will address the protection of soils and in some instances address soil suitability for irrigation. Increasing soil organic matter content and ensuring the implementation of conservation agriculture is also expected to assist in water retention and better water use.

Scarcity of water also compels us a sector to also explore water-use efficiency strategies to ensure that the little that we have as a sector is used efficiently. To this effect we have embarked on the following initiatives to address this issue, this includes the establishment of rainwater harvesting and grey water reuse techniques in various communities in the country, the use of earth observation to determine the extent of the areas under irrigation, support to the development of a software based Decision Support System to provide both generic and site-specific risk-based irrigation water quality guidelines for South Africa, the development of infield rainwater harvesting on small plots as well as the development of standards and guidelines for improved efficiency of irrigation water use from dam wall release to root-zone application. This is not an exhaustive list.

We look to the support of the Department of Water and Sanitation to provide bulk water supply and distribution as well as ensure successful agriculture production. We strongly encourage that the water sector through DWS to ensure that our black farmers have equal access to water resources.

### **Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation**

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our life times, a burden to all countries, particularly the developing countries. It is a common cause that effects of climate change are having and will have an impact on the environment, the economy and society. In response to our commitments to the Paris Agreement, we need to implement Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plans. From an African perspective, right back from the AU Common Position on Climate Change of 2009, the Cairo Declaration, Windhoek Declaration on Enhancing Resilience to Drought and other commitments we are implementing the Nationally Determined Contributions. Africa is pursuing pro-climate investments and public-private partnerships to address the NDCs. In South Africa, the agricultural sector is implementing sector commitment plans. Mainly through our Climate Smart Agriculture and other conservation strategies. We recognise that water systems have over time become very complicated and therefore the sector has to factor in future focus of adaptation. In recognition of the impact of weather in our sector, we issue periodic Agrometeorological Advisories to ensure that our farmers are aware and can prepare for any eventuality reflected in such Advisories.

The sector is also promoting the use of indigenous breeds and cultivars in our production systems. This matter was topical in our discussions with the sector when we consulted on the future of our food systems in preparations for the UN Food Systems Summit. Those breeds and cultivars that are adapted to our conditions and can conserve water are important for the sustainability of this sector.

### **Support for Resource Poor Farmers**

It has come to my attention that the Department of Water and Sanitation plans to cease its progressive current Resource Poor Farmer Support Programme. This concerns me greatly as this support assisted farmers by subsidising the payment for water tariffs, there needs to be discussion between the DWS, my Department and the National Treasury to address this matter urgently. It is important to intensify the gains made by our resource poor smallholder farmers in this area and measures to sustain and improve such gains remain

important. This has a direct impact on water resource management and transformation in this sector.

The implementation of the Water Pricing Strategy needs to be thoroughly discussed and understood between all affected sectors. The DWS has to take into consideration that water is a primary input to agriculture and with other inputs required for agriculture production, increasing the price of water would affect production, food security and food prices. Careful consideration on removal of caps for water must be done by the DWS in consultation with the agriculture sector as this will impact food production, food availability and food prices.

In my engagements with farmers, I have been requested that the DWS has to engage in consultation with a view of considering a different method to cost recovery especially during disasters such as drought as this could also severely impact our farmers. I think this is a proposal worthy of consideration as we work towards building forward a resilient sector affected by the effects of climate change.

Programme Director, the current allocations currently in the hands of black farmers is a source of concern. Before outlining my concerns, it is important to note the cooperation that my Department has had from DWS in addressing water allocation in our sector. Currently, it is estimated that only 5% of the over 60% of South Africa's water that is used in the agriculture sector is used by black farmers. This is a source of concern as we are in the process of transforming and uniting the agricultural sector. It is important that we fast-track the water allocation programme to address this matter. Our Department is committing to assist as and when required.

We may also while thinking of better strategies to ensure better allocation to consider while allocating water to these farmers, to implement policy parameters that would incentivize smallholder farmers to be able to afford rates until such farmers are commercialized. A cursory glance at our statistics reveal that smallholder farmers are not able to pay for water use charges in many instances.

Programme Director, the other emergent issue in terms of irrigation water is the quality of water. Water pollution has the potential to introduce a plethora of water borne diseases into our food system. With the current food security challenges in our country, it is important that while we pursue our objectives of ensuring food access and availability, we do not then introduce food safety risks into our production through water. All stakeholders need to collaborate to addressing this issue.

We note with concern that there are mines that are closing their operations due to a variety of reasons. We look forward to participating in initiatives to enable the reuse of water for agriculture purposes. Furthermore, we are acutely aware of the possibilities of reskilling some of the ex-employees of these mines in re-using this water for agriculture purposes. I am aware that there are research programmes to ensure safe use of mine water and the Department will continue to support and take opportunity of such initiatives.

In my analysis of the National Water Act I have established that this law takes cognisance of existing lawful use. I am aware that cultural use of water is not recognised by the Act. As we review this Act, we should take into consideration cultural use of water and other new developments in the horizon. The recognition of use of water by traditional communities to grow food has to be considered as cultural use and an existing lawful water use. This way more food could be grown in the rural areas, especially by women, people with disabilities and the youth.

## **Conclusion**

In collaboration with Department of Water and Sanitation, the DALRRD is committed to contribute in addressing water challenges impacting the sector, relating to water pricing, water quality and water allocation.

Finally, I want to assure you of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development's cooperation and support. We look forward to more proactive and cooperative actions and solutions to address government's imperatives and ensure South Africa's economic and social development objectives are met.

I thank you.