



Free State MEC of Agriculture Oupa Khoabane with Sebenzi Zokwana, the national minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

# Agriculture is a smart career move

By The Mail Reporter

**Free State** - The Free State MEC of Agriculture Oupa Khoabane on Tuesday, 28 June 2016, embarked on youth outreach programme to speak to the youth about many career opportunities that exist within his department.

He was accompanied to the Agricultural Demonstration Centre in Gariiep Dam by Sebenzi Zokwana - the national minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

"Today's initiative emanates from African Youth Charter which defines empowerment as building of knowledge and education through raising awareness campaigns, capacity and skills building sessions," said Khoabane.

"This is a platform we create for our young people to access the quality education and capacitate themselves to move our country forward through specialisation and entrepreneurship in areas of aquaculture and agro-processing," he added.

The MEC explained that the centre focused more on aquaculture which is a scarce skill and was not accessible to a young black child during apartheid.

"It is an area of priority for our government as it has potential for growth, to contribute to the economic growth,

job creation, and food security for our country. The fact that aquaculture sector is at its infancy stage, it is also crucial to expose our young people to the great opportunities that government offers so as to enter into this space," he said.

His department was responding to the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 which clearly highlights the role youth can play in the country's advancement.

Furthermore, Khoabane indicated that Aquaculture was one of the sectors that could contribute towards conservation of fisheries resources which are currently plateauing and in some instances declining at an alarming rate.

"Through the effective implementation of aquaculture we can ensure access to fish products and thus supplement the shortfall on the demand for fish products. We need young people to own fish farms as well as fishing companies," said the MEC.

"It is up to the youth of today to focus on real or critical issues like the youth of 1976, hence I appeal to our youth to look at this sector and seize the opportunities that are presented to them. The stats shows that South Africa lack fish vets, young fish farmers and fisher men. As government we can only create good and productive environment to the youth, but it is up to them to take up challenges," he continued.

"All generations have contributed a lot in the development of the society by defining the mission of their generation. The youth of 1976 defined the mission of their generation. Women were previously not allowed to hold any political leadership. Young lions of 1976 to 1986 turned the South African street their parliament and they knew the mission of their generation. But today young people are burning, destroying schools and libraries - how do you justify that?" he asked.

Khoabane further said that Free State government was assisting a number of young people to pursue their studies across the world in countries such as Belarus, China and Russia - most of them are going to study Agriculture as well as Aquaculture, Vet services.

"Agriculture plays a major role in the development of our country's economy and it is up to the youth of today to participate in the development of the economy by taking this opportunities. In life, we need a farmer three times a day in order for the human being to survive," Khoabane said.

According to Minister Zokwana, United Nation Food and Agriculture Organisation reflects that South Africa need to increase fish production by 50 million tonnes by 2030 in order to meet the global demand of fish products.

He added that South Africa had a potential to increase current production from 5000 tons to 20 000 tons which will increase the sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product from R0.5 billion to R3 billion, and this can lead to the creation of 15 000 job opportunities.

"This aspiration cannot be met if we continue with business usual, we need to change, we need business unusual and young people as the future of this country, can bring fresh and innovative ideas that will force us to get into the business unusual mode.

"We need young farmers and fishermen to take this space. This sector needs young people who will be committed and focus on livestock rearing, poultry production, and fisheries production (aquaculture and small scale commercial fisheries)" said Zokwana.

The minister added that for 2017, they were going to place about 180 young unemployed agriculture, forestry and fisheries graduates in farms for a period of two years across nine provinces.

His department, he said, would also recruit young agricultural unemployed graduates on a contract basis through National Agricultural Marketing Council "because we need a well young equipped cadres who will provide us with solutions to many opportunities and challenges facing the sector".

Meanwhile, Zimasa Mahlasela, from Eastern Cape, cited that she had learned more about fisheries from birth up until the marketing stage and what opportunities this sector can offer for them as the youth. She said the session was an eye opener for her.

"I did not have any information about aquaculture but now I have decided to follow this field because it is something new to us as young people. I would like to thank our government for creating platforms such as this one to ensure that we develop ourselves in order to contribute to the economy of our country,"

Siphiwe Majela from Kwa-Zulu Natal, on the other hand, said he was expecting many fish farmers to exhibit and showcase what they produce on their farms.

"Nonetheless, I got resources that will guide me in researching so that I can implement aquaculture in my province," explained Majela.

Ndobe Akela, who hails from Limpopo, added that the event served has exposed her in working with different kinds of fish.

"We really need to acknowledge government's efforts in ensuring that our lives are improved. What I've learned from this session is that the job creation target can be achieved as long as we play our part as the youth. People cannot survive without agriculture, so we really have to deviate from the old traditional ways of thinking and focus on agro-processing and aquaculture." Said Akela.

The Agricultural Demonstration Centre in the Xhariep District Municipality is a multi-purpose facility that strongly focuses on research, training and demonstration. It demonstrates aquaculture systems as well as hatchery for various freshwater fish species. It is one of the fourteen demonstration centres throughout Africa which emanates from the strong partnership South Africa have with the Chinese Government.