

Youth outreach event at Gariep Dam



MEC Oupa Khoabane and Minister Senzeni Zokwana during the Youth Outreach event.

On Tuesday both MEC Khoabane together with the national minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mr Senzeni Zokwana embarked on youth outreach programme to address the young people who gathered under one roof from all the corners of South Africa at Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre in Gariep Dam; to outline the opportunities which Agriculture have for young people as well as enhancing career opportunities and accessibility to various entrepreneurial interventions targeting youth.

The executive mayor of Xhariep, Mr Mntwanambi, welcomed the delegation as well as the youth who were to be at the centre for three conservative days to acquire skills, training and get introduction to Aquaculture. In his opening remarks, he requested the youth to focus and realize that they are the future of South Africa hence government of the day is working tirelessly in ensuring that all available opportunities to capacitate the youth are effectively communicated.

He added by acknowledging that it is a high time for young people not to bank too much on traditional careers or being employed by other people instead rather dwell more on focusing and participating on government opportunities aimed at enhancing the economy of the country; and that they must also be willing to learn to engage critical issues to enhance their knowledge.

"Today's initiative emanates from the African Youth Charter which defines empowerment as building of knowledge and education through raising awareness campaigns, capacity and skills building sessions. This is a platform we create for our young people to access the quality education and capacitate themselves to move our country forward through specialization and entrepreneurship in areas of aquaculture and agro processing," MEC Khoabane said.

The centre in Xhariep district municipality is a multipurpose 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 has with the Chinese Government.

Khoabane explained that the centre focuses 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," the MEC added.

The department is responding to the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 which

clearly highlights the role youth can play in the country's advancement. Furthermore, the MEC indicated that Aquaculture is 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.

He continued: "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. It is up to the youth of today to focus on real/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. Statistics shows that South Africa lacks 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."

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, previously women were 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 continued that Free State government is assisting a number of young people to pursue their studies across the world in countries such as Belarus, China, Russia and many more and most of them are going to study Agriculture as well as Aquaculture, Vet services and so on.

"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 these 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 Organization reflects that South Africa needs to increase fish production by 50 million tonnes by 2030 to meet the global demand of fish products. He added that South Africa has 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)," the minister said.

He added that for 2017, they are going to place about 180 young unemployed agriculture, forestry and fisheries graduates in farms for a period of two years across nine provinces; and his department will also recruit young agricultural unemployed graduates on a contract basis through National Agricultural Marketing Council because they need a well young equipped cadres who will provide them with solutions to many opportunities and challenges facing the sector.

Zimasa Mahlasela from Eastern Cape indicated that she have learnt 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 three day event 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 to create platforms such as this one to ensure that we develop ourselves in order to contribute to the economy of our country," said Ntsokolo Skwenya from Potchefstroom in North West.

Siphiwe Majela from Kwazulu Natal

explained that he was expecting many fish farmers to exhibit and showcase what they produce in their farms but nevertheless he got resources that will guide him in researching so that he can implement Aquaculture in his province.

Ndobe Akela from Limpopo added that the event has exposed her to working with different kinds of fish. "We really need to acknowledge government's efforts of ensuring that our lives are improved because according to what I have learnt 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 deviate from the old/traditional ways of thinking and focus on Agro processing and Aquaculture," she said.



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