

EXTENSION SERVICES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Minister Gerrit van Rensburg

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this extremely topical and very important conference. Welcome in the Western Cape. I hope that you will enjoy your stay, and that you will return home with good memories.

Colleagues, let me begin by saying this: Extension services are at the coal face of agriculture in South Africa today. The technical advice that you are giving to a client today has far reaching impacts, some of which we will only be faced with in the future.

This conference is focussing on your work, given the fact of climate change. I want to tell you that there are two types of climates at stake here: The environmental climate, but also a social climate.

Let me share a few of thoughts with you regarding this social climate change I am referring to.

Land reform in South Africa must be successful. But what is successful land reform? I believe that it is successful when the beneficiary can use the land to improve his life. Simply put: He must be able to use the land to pay for his children's' education. He must be able to improve his financial position. The land must provide for him, so that government can assist others in need.

Unsuccessful land reform is where people receive land, but they also become poorer in the process. According to recent statistics, 90% of land reform in South Africa belongs in this category. Unsuccessful land reform leads to social instability and tension. This is the current social climate in South Africa. We cannot afford this in our new democracy. We need a climate change here.

The Western Cape Government wants to play its rightful role in South Africa, and we belief that what is good for our province is also good for the rest of our country. I have therefore committed my department to a 60% land reform success rate within the next five years. I am extending a challenge to other provinces to improve on our ambitious target. Let us compete on issues such as this one, where the end result is to everyone's benefit.

You, as extension officers, are probably the most important people in this effort for social climate change, as you have the key to help unlock the potential that land can offer to our people. Please bear this responsibility in mind when you advice your clients.

But there is also the environmental climate to consider. You will be addressed on this matter by a variety of esteemed experts during this congress. Climate change is predicted to have profound consequences for South African agriculture, so the time for debating if it really exist has long past, and we need to face up to it. Climate change is already influencing the advice you are giving to your clients. As an extension officer you have to be well informed with up to date knowledge in this regard.

I want to use an example to demonstrate to you the possible effects that extension service, together with climate change, can have on an ecological system, but also the social ramifications that it might hold.

Chad is a land locked Northern African country. It is predominantly a dry country. Its northern territories are in the Sahara desert. But Chad has one of the largest fresh water lakes in the world. Or that was the case in 1963, because Lake Chad has shrunk by 90% since then, and many experts believe it might disappear in the future. How is this possible?

A commission of the United Nations found that 50% of the water loss can be ascribed to climate change. But it also found that the other 50% of lost water can be blamed on inappropriate agricultural practices and inefficient irrigation techniques. Scientists' belief that overgrazing on

the lake's shore has contributed to the climate change affecting the area. Degradation of the natural grazing puts more pressure on irrigation, which accelerates the lake's depletion and so a negative cycle starts to spiral out of control.

Violent confrontation between local fishermen, farmers and herders are becoming frequent. Fishermen want the water in the lake to be able to fish. Farmers and herders want to divert the water in order to irrigate pastures and grow crops. Tension is also increasing between countries that share the lake's border as the water disappears.

But let us return to South Africa. Colleagues: Your advice and recommendations can make a huge difference in our country. Good advice will help to create the peaceful and content social climate we all wish for in our country.

But good advice will also help us in mitigating climate change so that we do not end up in a Lake Chad situation where our natural resources evaporate into thin air. We must not allow our dreams for South Africa to go up in smoke.