

ADDRESS BY THE ACTING MEC FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT MR SEAPARO SEKOATI ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2017/2018 GALA DINNER AND RECOGNITION AWARDS CEREMONY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: BOLIVIA LODGE, POLOKWANE, CAPRICORN DISTRICT

13 March 2018

“Reducing Economic Vulnerabilities of Persons with Disabilities and Realising their Human Capital.”

Programme Director

Executive Mayor of Capricorn District, Cllr John Mpe

Executive Mayor of Polokwane, Cllr Thembi Nkadimeng

Head of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms. Jacqueline Maisela

Officials of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

The Event Sponsors, Old Mutual, Lawrence Gabela

The 2018 Awards Adjudication Team

Awards Recipients

Our Farmers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

Before going any further with my congratulations to our farmers, in particular those who received awards this evening, let us rise in memory of the founding chairperson of Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture and Rural Development, the late Mr Seun Mathale.

Thank You.

Mr Mathale passed away in November 2017 at his home village of Ga-Matsepe in the Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, Sekhukhune district. His death has left a void in the struggles of persons with disabilities in general, and those operating in agriculture and rural development in particular.

The seminar earlier in the day and this evening's glittering awards ceremony are a befitting tribute to the legacy Mathale has left us. We can best immortalise him by picking his fallen spear and continuing the struggle for the full realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is committed to the full realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

Consistent with the human rights culture we seek to entrench in society the Constitution says,

“Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.

“Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms.

“To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.”

To demonstrate the commitment of the democratic government to the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, Cabinet on 9 December 2015 adopted the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. With the adoption of the White Paper, government moved from theory to practice in the realisation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is intended to accelerate transformation and redress with regard to full inclusion, integration and equality for persons with disabilities. It enjoins government and society in general to take responsibility for ensuring that the policy directives of the White Paper are implemented.

The implementation of the policy prescripts of the White Paper will expedite the process of improving the quality of life of the persons with disabilities and their families.

We are enjoined by the law to contribute to the realisation of the rights of people with disabilities as envisaged in the Constitution and in the White Paper.

Realising the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an imperative, not a favour or an option.

As the Department it is a duty for us to open the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector to Persons with Disabilities. Opportunities in the sector manifest themselves in the form of quality and sustainable jobs. Most importantly Persons with Disabilities must get into the sectors as farmers and suppliers to the sector.

You must move to the very top of the sector, assume the role of serious players to guarantee the country and the continent food security. You must become serious players in the sector.

Earlier in the day you met in a summit to gain access and exposure to cutting edge knowledge and experience in the business of agriculture and rural development. An array of sector partners availed of their expertise and experience to capacitate you for new and bigger roles in farming.

Eskom was there to educate you in energy-saving measures to employ in the running of your enterprises. You've also been taken through the maze of Information and Communications Technologies and the registration of your cooperatives. The Department of Labour was there to educate you on the Basic Conditions of Employment on how best to manage your relationships with your employees.

What is even more important than the formal programme, is the opportunity to network and exchange notes with fellow farmers and service providers. Who knows, you may even strike a deal that can grow your enterprise beyond imagination.

The last leg of today's programme is this prestigious gala dinner to confer recognition awards to Persons with disabilities in Agriculture and Rural Development who have excelled in various categories in the sector. These annual awards are critical in the affirmation of Persons with Disabilities in farming and rural development.

With the recognition awards we encourage, motivate and affirm farmers who are growing vegetables in their backyards and those involved in livestock farming.

There is general ignorance and disregard of emerging farming enterprises, more especially those operated by persons with disabilities. According to conventional wisdom, People with Disabilities are disabled and can't enter the mainstream of the economy.

Through the Recognition Awards for Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture and Rural Development, we seek to dispel the myth that Persons with Disabilities are incapable of being big sector players.

Make no mistake, you can and you will be big sector players to whom the country and the world look up to for food security. As the Chinese say, the journey of a thousand kilometres starts with the first step. Our journey of a thousand kilometres, starts here today.

The best in every category, including the Overall Winner have been awarded with their trophies and other accolades. I congratulate you. We are proud of your achievements. You are game changers, you are changing the common narrative about people with Disabilities.

Conferment of the Winner's Medal doesn't mean the end of the struggle. The struggle has just begun. Now that you've risen to the pedestal to receive your honours, a lot is expected of you. Tomorrow we expect to see you on the national stage, on your way to national and international stages. This is how ambitious we must be.

Tonight's winners must go out there and share their experiences and knowledge with others. We must start the revolution to have persons with disabilities part of the mainstream agriculture and the economy in general. Show the way for the youth, that farming is their sector too.

The PDARD Recognition Awards are the first in the country. We lead and the country follows. This is how it should be, leading with excellence.

This year has been declared "**100 Years of Nelson Mandela: The Year of Renewal. Unity and Jobs.**"

Let us go out there and be part of the Thuma Mina Volunteer Movement to build a country of Madiba's dream of a better life for all.

It will be befitting to conclude by drawing from the wisdom of Madiba:

For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

I thank you.

