

20 May 2024

Ten areas that require the attention of the SA agricultural leadership post-elections

- With just over a week left before South African heads into the 2024 general elections, discussions in various agricultural gatherings are understandably centered on the theme of elections and possible outcomes. However, the policy direction and commitment to implementation will be far more critical for agriculture. A rough scan of various political parties' manifestos shows that agricultural matters are well-featured, with varying views on land reform. Also evident this time is an appreciation of what the sector could continue to contribute to the rural economy, job creation and the national food security.
- Next month, when the new administration comes into office, we remain convinced that new policies should not be introduced. The focus should be on implementing and updating the existing programmes where necessary. As we argued recently, the starting point should be the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP), as it has the buy-in of most agricultural stakeholders and strives to grow a competitive and inclusive sector. The AAMP's growth narrative is through focused value chain deep dives and commodity corridors. The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) should, in the new administration, reignite the AAMP through clear communication of the expectations to the various provincial departments and local offices that private sector stakeholders will essentially work within the implementation of the plan.
- Moreover, the implementation of the AAMP has so far been slow because of various factors that have taken the government and stakeholders' attention away from the primary focus these past two years, such as load-shedding, port issues, and animal diseases. Organizations may have started some projects on their own during this time. Thus, there is a need for a formulation of a team that can take stock of the objectives of the AAMP and what work or projects various stakeholders have done that could be accounted as part of the AAMP or aligned with its goals. This would be important for reigniting the energy and focus of the social partners.
- Beyond that exercise, we believe there are ten key areas the new administration should drive in addition to the AAMP aspects. Admittedly, there is already work underway in some of these areas, and what will be essential is the continuous push for results. Some aspects of the DALRRD already have work underway that should continue after the election. These include:
 1. **Land reform:** The DALRRD should continue finalizing the Land Reform and Agricultural Development Agency. This Agency will help release the roughly 2,5 million hectares of land within the State Land Holding Account to beneficiaries, amongst other tasks. The Agency will also implement the beneficial selection criteria for such land. This land can potentially improve the inclusiveness and growth of the agricultural sector and employment possibilities. There may be a need for collaboration with various implementing agencies at different stages of the land release

process. The DALRRD has championed this work and should be see it to completion in the next administration. Blended Finance could also be aligned with this work.

2. **Animal health:** Minister Thoko Didiza appointed the Ministerial Special Task Team to provide insight on ways of improving animal health in South Africa. The report provides clear policy guidelines, which should be implemented in the new administration. The livestock and poultry subsector forms nearly half of the South African agricultural economy, which makes this task vital, especially for the export drive that is a focus in the sector.
3. **Agricultural product standards:** There have been various complaints in the industry about the practice of appointing assignees and their associated exorbitant costs. This aspect should be addressed in the next administration as such costs burden producers and consumers. Importantly, in some cases, the value addition of some of the assignees is not straightforward, and if anything, they add ambiguity and costs to the food system of South Africa.
4. **Registrar for Act 36:** The DALRRD, academia and organized agriculture have collaborative work underway to improve the capacity and effectiveness of this crucial office that registers all new agrochemicals, seeds and other agricultural products. The initiatives underway must continue under the new administration. The delays and backlogs in the Registrar's office may slow SA's agricultural productivity; thus, it is vital that DALRRD collaboratively with the private sector work to address the inefficiencies and continue with interventions underway.
5. **Agricultural exports:** The South African government has done admirable work opening various export markets over the years. These efforts should continue to focus on India, China, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, amongst others. Continuous efforts should also be made to nurture the existing markets in Africa, the EU, the Americas, parts of Asia and the Middle East. The rising geopolitical tensions in the world remain a concern, and South Africa should work to open as many export markets as possible to improve diversification.
6. **Ports and rail:** Transnet's new management continues to collaborate. Adequate ports and rail are critical to agricultural exports and domestic product distribution.
7. **Roads and municipalities:** While this work is not necessarily under the DALRRD, it remains vital for the success of agriculture and agribusinesses. Improving roads and the effectiveness of municipalities should remain high on the agenda post-election.
8. **Rural crime:** Stock theft and other forms of crime undermine investment in agriculture and the growth of small towns. This is, again, an area outside the DALRRD, but the department's leadership should raise it in various forums and ensure that improvements are made.
9. **Water:** Post-elections, there is a sensible collaboration with the Department of Water Affairs and various stakeholders to improve the policy dispensation on irrigation water.
10. **Statistics:** The DALRRD should work to improve the statistics on agriculture across all subsectors. These are critical for monitoring, evaluation and policy formulation. There remain some gaps in our

understanding of certain aspects of South Africa's agricultural economy, particularly the smallholder and informal value chains, partly because of inadequate statistics.

- South Africa's agriculture has the potential for inclusive growth and job creation. However, this cannot materialize if there is a continuous introduction of new plans without properly implementing the existing ones and addressing the fundamental issues that constrain the sector, which we highlight in these ten points. Admittedly, not all these issues fall under the DALRRD, but the department should use its leadership position in the next administration to push for proper improvement in these areas.