

# UMHLABA

EXTERNAL NEWSLETTER

PRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

April-May 2026 | ISSUE 06

**P3** RAMAPHOSA HANDS OVER LAND TO UMZIMKHULU COMMUNITIES IN MAJOR RESTITUTION MILESTONE

**P4** SEBILONG COMMUNITY RECLAIMS ANCESTRAL LAND IN HISTORIC LAND REFORM JOURNEY

**P5** MATHABATHA LAUNCHES RURAL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE TO TACKLE INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS



**A R10,3 BILLION BUDGET TO BOOST LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT P2**

## ARTICLE

6

MINISTER MEETS AMAMPONDO KING TO DISCUSS DEVELOPMENT IN LUSIKISIKI

## ARTICLE

7

MINISTER UNDERTAKES TO WORK WITH AFASA TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR FARMERS

## ARTICLE

8

"CROPS SPEAK" – AN ELEVATED LEGACY OF A LAND REFORM FARM IN FREE STATE



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land reform & rural development

Department:  
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## A R10,3 BILLION BUDGET TO BOOST LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

By JABULANI MALINGA



The minister responding to queries and questions from parliamentarians



Deputy minister presents the Rural Development budget

The Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLRRD) has received a budget allocation of R10,3 billion for the 2026/2027 financial year. This was revealed by Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso and Deputy Minister Chupu Mathabatha during the tabling of the department's budget vote and policy debate in Parliament on 20 May 2026

The department's budget allocation will be distributed to branches as follows: R630 million for Land Redistribution and Land Tenure Reform; R388 million for Land Development and Post-Settlement Support; and R3,839 billion for the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights to expedite the settlement of outstanding land claims.

Delivering his budget speech, Minister Nyhontso said the budget vote was focused on both the financial resource part of the department's work and on developing the necessary policy and legislative frameworks.

*"The work of the department remains directed towards advancing the constitutional and legislative mandates entrusted to it, on equitable access to land, restitution of land rights, ensuring tenure security, supporting sustainable rural livelihoods and promoting rural prosperity, modernising land administration systems, and improving spatial governance across all spheres of government. These responsibilities remain central to addressing the historical legacies of dispossession, poverty, inequality, exclusion, underdevelopment, and uneven spatial development,"* he said.

The minister's speech was followed by that of Deputy Minister Chupu Mathabatha, who presented on the Rural Development Programme's allocation. Rural Development received 8,3% of the total budget allocation, which will support rural infrastructure projects, rural youth skills development initiatives linked to work opportunities, rural technology research and development, and rural development coordination.

Mathabatha said the department continues to implement the Integrated Rural Development Sector Strategy. *"This strategy provides a comprehensive and multi-sectoral framework for transforming rural communities. It recognises that rural development cannot be achieved through isolated interventions. The strategy requires coordinated action across government, across sectors, and with communities themselves at the centre,"* said Mathabatha.

He further outlined the budget allocation, stating that the Rural Development Programme has been allocated R723,383 million for the 2026/2027 financial year. According to the deputy minister, this funding will be directed towards supporting rural infrastructure projects, youth skills development initiatives linked to employment opportunities, rural technology research and development, and the strengthening of rural development coordination efforts. Furthermore, with the Rural Infrastructure Development sub-programme receiving funding allocation of R378,179,00 in the 2026/2027 financial year, the department can continue uplifting rural communities.

Minister Nyhontso also reflected on the department's achievements during the 2025/2026 financial year, highlighting progress made in land acquisition and redistribution initiatives. Among others, he reported that the department acquired approximately 53,000 hectares of land during the period and allocated more than 35,000 of those hectares to qualifying individuals and communities, in line with the Cabinet-approved Beneficiary Selection and Land Allocation Policy.

Departmental data for the reporting period further indicated a strong focus on inclusive land distribution, with 20,000 hectares allocated to women beneficiaries and a further 13,000 hectares earmarked for youth recipients.



Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso shares a light moment with a member of parliament during the budget vote

## RAMAPHOSA HANDS OVER LAND TO UMZIMKHULU COMMUNITIES IN MAJOR RESTITUTION MILESTONE

By MPHABLELA M. RAMMUTLA



President Cyril Ramaphosa, accompanied by the minister of Land Reform and Rural Development, hands over title deeds to claimants in Umzimkhulu, in KZN.

President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered a powerful message to land claimants in UMzimkhulu as he handed over title deeds to their land—a moment he described as a restoration of dignity and belonging. “We are correcting historical land ownership injustice,” said Ramaphosa. The ceremony marked an important step in the land restitution programme as part of continued efforts to provide redress to individuals and communities who were dispossessed of their rights in land.

The handover, held at Esayidi TVET College, saw more than 17,000 hectares of land restored to the St Paul, Ngunjini, and Ndzimankulu/Vierkant communities, as well as the Lawrence family. More than 2,800 beneficiaries, including 571 female-headed households, stand to benefit from the land restoration.

Addressing the gathering, the president linked the restitution process to the legacy of the Natives Land Act, 1913 (Act No. 27 of 1913), which dispossessed Black South Africans of land and livelihoods, describing it as a central cause of generational inequality. “In his book *‘Native Life in South Africa’*, Sol Plaatje describes meeting victims of this unjust law,” Ramaphosa noted, quoting firsthand accounts of forced removals and exploitation.

He described land dispossession as “*the original sin*” that caused generational suffering. “*The systematic dispossession of people’s land, which began long before 1913, was the original sin that has caused suffering for generations. It stripped families of their livelihoods. They lost their livestock, their crops, and their homes. They were stripped of their dignity, rendered pariahs in the land of their birth.*”

The land that has been restituted had been under a long-term lease from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment to the Singisi Forestry Products for commercial forestry use.

The department, through the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, has validated the Lawrence family’s land claim, proving that they had historically occupied and utilised the land for residential settlement, agriculture, community activities, places of worship, and burial purposes prior to their dispossession in 1973. A total of 84,7 hectares is being restored to 27 households comprising 127 beneficiaries.

In another case, the department has continued to further advance the reversal of the legacy of the Natives Land Act of 1913 through the restoration of dignity to the victims of land dispossession. The Ndzimankulu-Vierkant community’s story bears testimony to this after regaining ownership of their 2,550-hectare portion of the land. This restitution, which benefits 124 households and 575 beneficiaries, is characterised by a high level of inclusivity: 173 women and a 5% representation of persons with disabilities.

The land will continue to be maintained and utilised for commercial forestry, but with the claimant communities as the new legal owners who will receive rental income from the use of their land. This income is key to improving their living conditions.

Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development Mzwanele Nyhontso said land reform remains key to economic inclusion and national development.

*“Land reform is a moral, social, and economic imperative. The economy cannot grow while the majority are excluded from land ownership,”* Nyhontso said.

KwaZulu-Natal Premier Thami Ntuli emphasised that land restitution restores both economic opportunity and identity. “*Dispossession reduced millions to second-class citizens. Today’s handover is about restoring dignity and enabling productive use of land,*” he said.

Chief Land Claims Commissioner Nomfundo Ntloko said government would continue supporting beneficiary communities to ensure the land contributes to economic development, particularly through forestry and commercial activities.

Community representative of Vierkant, Sifiso Madziba, welcomed the handover, saying it marked the end of a long struggle. “*It was not easy to reclaim this land. Now we want it to bring real benefits to our people,*” he said.

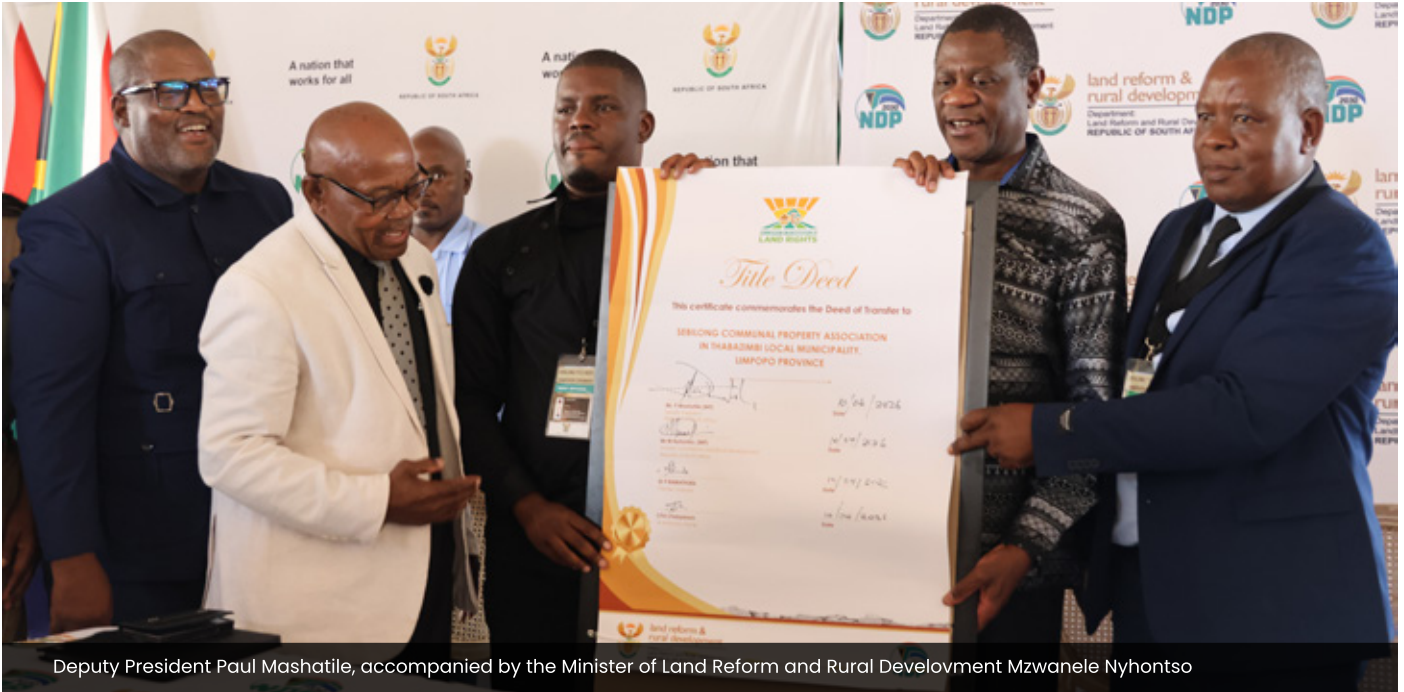
The event coincides with 30 years of South Africa’s Constitution, which guarantees restitution for those dispossessed under apartheid-era laws.



Successful land claimants in UMzimkhulu in KZN overjoyed to receive their title deeds to their land—a moment described as a restoration of dignity and belonging.

## SEBILONG COMMUNITY RECLAIMS ANCESTRAL LAND IN HISTORIC LAND REFORM JOURNEY

By OBED MAKGOALE AND MPHAPHELELA M RAMMUTLA



Deputy President Paul Mashatile, accompanied by the Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development Mzwanele Nkhosho

A wave of emotion and celebration marked a historic moment for the Sebilong community as they officially regained ownership of their ancestral land during a title deed handover ceremony held on 10 April 2026.

The ceremony, presided over by Deputy President Paul Mashatile, took place at Portion 27 of the Farm Swartkop 369 KQ in the Waterberg District. The event brought together national and provincial leaders, including the minister of Land Reform and Rural Development and local government representatives.

Delivering a heartfelt address, Sebilong Community Land Claim chairperson, Boitshoko Tisane, described the occasion as a long-awaited homecoming. *“Today is a historic moment for the people of Sebilong—re boetse gae! The land belongs to us,”* he declared to an applauding crowd.

For decades, the Sebilong community carried the painful memory of forced removals, holding onto stories passed down by their elders about the land they once called home. These included memories of fertile fields, grazing lands, and ancestral graves that remained behind even after their displacement.

*“This is not only about land,”* Tisane said, adding that *“it is about restoring justice, dignity, and a sense of belonging.”*

The land claim, originally lodged by the late Lazarus Nkale Tisane, has now been finalised in phases, benefiting 1,071 people from 89 households. The restored land, which comprises 15 portions of the Swartkop Farm, is expected to unlock both agricultural and mining opportunities.

In his keynote address, Deputy President Mashatile emphasised that the government’s role extends beyond returning the land. He committed to providing financial and developmental support to

ensure the community can productively utilise the land and implement sustainable business plans.

*“I want this community to prosper,”* he said, adding that post-settlement support would be key to long-term success. He further reiterated that the government would not simply return the land and walk away but would provide post-settlement support to enable the community to implement its business plans and productively utilise the land.

The Sebilong community has outlined an ambitious vision for the future, focusing on economic development, job creation, and youth empowerment. Plans include strengthening local enterprises, improving infrastructure, and collaborating with neighbouring communities to expand opportunities.

At the same time, the community has prioritised the protection of heritage sites, particularly ancestral graves, as part of preserving their identity and history. Tisane concluded by calling for unity and ethical leadership, urging community members to reject corruption and work collectively to combat poverty.

*“We will work together to achieve economic freedom in our lifetime,”* he said.

The handover marks not only a victory for the Sebilong community but also a significant step in South Africa’s ongoing land reform efforts, offering renewed hope that restitution can drive both justice and development.



Community of Sebilong waiting in anticipation

## MATHABATHA LAUNCHES RURAL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE TO TACKLE INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS

By MPHABLELA M RAMMUTLA



Deputy Minister Mathabatha addressing learners.

Deputy Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development Stanley Mathabatha recently launched the Improving Rural Learning Environments Initiative—an initiative aimed at addressing infrastructure and resource challenges in rural schools.

The initiative was unveiled at Ponti Secondary School in Limpopo, where Mathabatha praised the school's strong academic performance despite difficult conditions. The school achieved a 93,7% matric pass rate in 2025 and has maintained consistently high results over the past decade.

*"This is a declaration of what is possible when commitment meets discipline,"* Mathabatha said, commending learners, teachers, and the community for their resilience.

At the Maretele Secondary School, also in the Sekhukhune District, the deputy minister struck a different tone, where he highlighted serious challenges affecting learning conditions. *"We are not here to celebrate results; we are here to confront reality and change it,"* he said.



The Improving Rural Learning Environments Initiative is a targeted intervention led by the deputy minister's office to improve school infrastructure, access to resources, and overall learning conditions in rural areas. It will be implemented through the District Develop-

ment Model, which coordinates efforts across national, provincial, and local government.

Ponti Secondary School and Maretele Secondary School have been selected as pilot sites in the Sekhukhune District.

Despite its academic success, Ponti Secondary School faces overcrowding, deteriorating infrastructure, a lack of laboratories, and inadequate sanitation facilities. The school serves more than 800 learners with 27 educators.

Mathabatha announced that Ponti will also be included in a Technology, Research and Development programme, aimed at introducing digital tools and expanding access to learning resources.

Maretele Secondary School, which has 217 learners and only eight teachers, achieved a 69% pass rate but struggles with severe infrastructure challenges. These include cracked buildings, non-functional ablution facilities, lack of electricity in classrooms, and the absence of science and computer laboratories.

The initiative aims to provide coordinated and sustainable support, moving beyond once-off interventions. Planned improvements include replacing temporary structures with permanent buildings, upgrading facilities, and addressing safety concerns.

Mathabatha said the programme would serve as a platform to escalate school-level challenges and ensure that all spheres of government respond effectively.

The pilot project is expected to guide broader national efforts to improve learning conditions in rural communities.



Teachers and learners at Ponti Secondary School in Limpopo.



## MINISTER MEETS AMAMPONDO KING TO DISCUSS DEVELOPMENT IN LUSIKISIKI

By JABULANI MALINGA



Minister said the department will work together with AmaMpondo Kingdom in areas of development.

*"It is important that we bring development here because this area has more people than all other in the province, and it is also one of the poorest. This is why I brought officials from the national and provincial offices to come and identify issues that relate directly to our department in order to address them,"* said Minister Nyhontso.

The minister also touched on the fact that the department had already issued title deeds to 7,000 hectares of land to the AmaMpondo Kingdom and it is currently working on finalising the remaining 5,000 hectares.

As part of the engagements, the AmaMpondo Kingdom had prepared a presentation that was to serve as a guide on the areas that need urgent intervention by government. Mr Lwandile Gcume, a member of the AmaMpondo Interim Committee, took the meeting through the presentation,

He highlighted that under-development, which is characterised by, among others, poor road infrastructure, has an impact on agricultural activities in the area. He urged the government to prioritise this issue so that the community can start working the land, which will create jobs and lift community members from living below the poverty line and overly relying on social grants.

AmaMpondo King Daluxolo Sigcau has called for unity among his subjects. In his address to the members of the AmaMpondo community at the St Elizabeth Resource Centre, the king called on the community to be united if they wish to develop their land, build sustainable livelihoods, and improve local economic conditions.

The king had also invited the Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development Mzwanele Nyhontso to give the community an opportunity to engage him. The Deputy Minister of Agriculture Nokuzola Capa and Ingquza Hill Local Municipality Councillor, Prudence Pepping, were also part of the engagement.

*"We need to unite as the AmaMpondo nation and allow for development to happen in our land. We are one of the large royal families, however, we are behind on development,"* said King Sigcau.

Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso, who started the day with a visit to the homestead of the king for salutations (ukukhahlela), supported the king's call for unity, adding that unity will help the community get assistance more rapidly.

The minister told the gathering that the department was ready and willing to work with the king and the community to bring development in the area. He went on to say that the visit was not in isolation, but was part of an ongoing programme to address issues of land redistribution and rural development in that area.



Minister Nyhontso was supported by a delegation of national and provincial officials on his official visit to Kumkani Daluxolo Sigcau and the engagement session.



Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso and AmaMpondo King Daluxolo Sigcau during at the home of the king.

## MINISTER UNDERTAKES TO WORK WITH AFASA TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR FARMERS

By JABULANI MALINGA



Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso giving a keynote address.

**The Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development Mzwanele Nyhontso told delegates at the African Farmers Association of South Africa (AFASA) Land Summit, held on 6–7 May 2026 at the East London International Convention Centre (ICC), in Eastern Cape, that the department was exploring measures to fast-track the equitable distribution of land across the country. He said various categories of beneficiaries were targeted for land allocation, especially women, youth, and persons with disabilities, as provided for in the policies of the department.**

Held under the theme: *“Secure Tenure – Unlocking Potential and Moving from Access to Success,”* the two-day event brought together officials from the department led by the minister and Acting Director-General Clinton Heiman, AFASA representatives, experts in land matters, farmers, and politicians. The summit was aimed at addressing critical issues such as secure land tenure for farmers, their participation in the economy, and sustainable agricultural development.

Eastern Cape Premier Mr Oscar Mabuyane opened the summit with a keynote address in which he warned that the gathering must not be another talk shop, but it must ensure that it offers solutions to the challenges faced by farmers. *“This summit must ensure that our farmers don’t just have land but have the legal security and support they need to grow their businesses and feed our communities,”* said the premier.

The event also featured practical workshops and expert discussions on sustainable land management and community rights. Deliberations were held under four themes which included, strengthening Tenure Security Instruments to unlock Investment and Farmer Viability with focus on Tenure Security; land administration and bankability; and revitalising Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) and Communal Property Association (CPA) farms. The revitalisation of PLAS and CAPs will be a catalyst for sustainable production, women and youth participation and governance

with a focus on turnaround strategies, governance, and productivity. Furthermore, it will also assist in building effective systems and institutions to accelerate land reform delivery with a focus on institutional models, accountability, and a monitoring framework.

Addressing the gathering on its final day, the minister proposed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the department and AFASA be urgently drafted and adopted to address the issues that were raised by delegates at the summit.

Minister Nyhontso said that the summit was not merely symbolic, but it

represented a necessary recording of one of the most unresolved chapters of South Africa’s democratic journey.

*“Land, as we all know, is not simply an economic asset, but it is also identity and dignity. It is the foundation upon which people and communities prosper and build their future. But, three decades into our democracy, that foundation remains shaky for many African farmers. It is in this context that we commend AFASA for convening this platform,”* he said.



The issue of title deeds was high on the agenda.



There were robust engagements from delegated stakeholders.

## “CROPS SPEAK” – AN ELEVATED LEGACY OF A LAND REFORM FARM IN FREE STATE

By KEITUMETSE MOTICOE



Mr Kheswa with the Land Development Support Director, Ms Matshediso and Team

In the heart of the Moqhaka Local Municipality, Middenspruit Zuid Farm stands as a 907-hectare testament to the power of resilient farming and strategic government intervention. Kheswa Projects (Pty), is an agricultural enterprise managed by Mr Kampong Izak and Mrs Didi Ellen—the Kheswa power couple and their son, Mbangiso Robert Kheswa. The farm represents a family legacy that evolved into a thriving commercial enterprise. This transformation was fuelled by the synergy between Mr Kheswa’s lifelong passion and the Land Development Support (LDS) programme of the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLRRD) in Free State.

Following in the footsteps of his forefathers, Mr Kheswa Senior began his journey in 1991 on a small plot in Vereeniging. By 1993, his growing herd required a move to a farm in Heilbron, which he eventually purchased.

While his forefathers focused on livestock and subsistence planting, Mr Kheswa discovered a unique connection with crops.

*“Crops speak,”* he explains, describing an intuitive knowledge that allows him to read a plant’s health as a direct reflection of the soil’s condition.

This bond, combined with a 30-year lease agreement through the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) of the department, for which he now holds the title deed, fertilise the ground for a major agricultural breakthrough.

DLRRD identified Kheswa Projects (Pty) Ltd as a beneficiary of the economic stimulus package through the LDS programme. Ms Katlego Matshediso, Director for LDS in Free State, notes that this support was the key that unlocked the farm’s full potential.

The LDS intervention provided essential production inputs, such as seeds and fertilizer, along with mechanisation and infrastructure.

*“This support allowed Mr Kheswa to plant the entirety of his arable land of 530 ha. In the 2021 production cycle, the farm successfully yielded 123 ha of soya bean and 192 ha of sunflowers,”* said Matshediso. Notably, she said the soyabean production was the farmer’s own initiative, demonstrating a commitment to growth beyond the initial scope of the grant.

She also gives credit to the project officer, Mr Maele Moletsane, who worked hand in hand with the farmer to ensure that the farm reached its full potential through the support provided by the department.

She added that Mr Kheswa has managed to position himself as a service provider in the farming community. He assists farmers with transportation, cleaning of grains, harvesting, planting, and mentorship.

*“He is fully using the farm, and he has diversified as he is also a livestock farmer,”* she further added.

Middenspruit Zuid is a model of integrated farming. With 530 ha of arable land and 377 ha of grazing land, Mr Kheswa has balanced his passion for crops with a robust livestock operation. After the soya harvest, the project produced 220 bales of hay straw to serve as supplementary forage for his cattle during the winter months.

True sustainability, however, is seen in how the profits are *“ploughed back”*. Following the 2021/22 cycle, Kheswa Projects (Pty) Ltd undertook massive re-investments, which included the construction of an earth dam, the acquisition of harvesters, grass planters, and heavy-duty plough and tractor. .

Despite his success, Mr Kheswa is acutely aware of the challenges facing South African farmers, from seasonal floods to volatile markets. His primary goal now is value addition.

*“Dairy farmers don’t make as much, but those that value-add make a fortune,”* Kheswa observes.

He envisions a future where he no longer just sells raw produce but processes it on-site. He has already identified a structure for a sunflower processing plant and currently produces his own maize meal on a small scale for in-house use. His goal is simple but profound: to produce food for the nation while ensuring he captures a fair share of the value chain.



Director LDS in the Free State Ms Katlego Matshediso and Mrs Didi Ellen Kheswa

## STRENGTHENING COMPLIANCE AND CONSISTENCY: ADVANCING RULE 05 IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE COMMISSION

By NONTEMBISO KGATLE



Mr. Vhutshilo Ronald Ndiitwani, Acting Director: National Research Unit

The Commission on Restitution of Land Rights is currently undertaking a significant shift in its internal operations aimed at strengthening consistency, accountability, and compliance across its provincial offices. Central to this strategic transition is the alignment of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with the Restitution of Land Rights Act, particularly in relation to Rule 03 and Rule 05 investigation reports.

Through the standardisation of processes and the introduction of strengthened quality assurance measures, the commission seeks to enhance the integrity, credibility, and audit readiness of its work, while ensuring that the restitution mandate is implemented fairly, transparently, and accurately for all beneficiaries.

To unpack this important operational shift and its impact on the commission's work, we spoke to Vhutshilo Ronald Ndiitwani from the National Research Unit (NRU).

### **Q: What is the fundamental difference between Rule 03 and Rule 05 processes within the restitution programme?**

**A:** Rule 03 serves as a preliminary investigation research report intended to establish a prima facie case for a land claim's validity under section 2(1)(e) of the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act No. 22 of 1994).

In contrast, Rule 05 is a comprehensive investigation report that requires detailed documentation, including deeds information, archival records, maps, "inspection in loco" reports, and an analysis of the nature of rights lost and historical racial practices

### **Q: What led to the decision to standardise these processes across all provincial offices?**

**A:** Historically, there was a lack of consistency because Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were not fully aligned with leg-

islation.

This misalignment resulted in variations across provinces, prompting the commission to move toward standardised work practices to ensure all offices comply with the same SOPs.

### **Q: Why have verification and option workshops been moved to occur only after the approval of Rule 05?**

**A:** This strategic shift ensures that only legitimate, verified beneficiaries participate in taking resolutions regarding the settlement of land claims. By repositioning these workshops, the commission aims to improve the integrity and credibility of the process while avoiding potential audit queries that arise when unverified individuals are involved in decisions

### **Q: What practical tools have been introduced to support operations staff on the ground?**

**A:** The commission has introduced newly developed checklists for both Rule 03 and Rule 05. These checklists act as structured guides for project officers, helping them produce high-quality investigation reports and ensuring that the same standards are applied regardless of geographical location

### **Q: How will these changes impact the speed and quality of investigations?**

**A:** The revised approach is expected to fast-track investigations under Rule 05. By providing clear guidance through checklists and ensuring a correct sequence of processes, the commission can maintain high standards of accuracy while moving cases forward more efficiently

### **Q: Why is strict adherence to SOPs considered "non-negotiable" for the institution?**

**A:** Strict compliance is critical to avoiding audit queries and preventing the risk of a qualified audit outcome, which can damage the commission's reputation

Beyond financial oversight, following SOPs safeguards the operational integrity of the entire restitution process

### **Q: What is the message to staff regarding these implementation changes?**

**A:** The successful implementation of these changes depends on the full cooperation and commitment of all staff members across the commission. Compliance with the approved Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Rule 03 investigations, Rule 05 reports, and verification workshops is critical to ensuring consistency, accountability, quality assurance, and legislative compliance in the execution of the commission's mandate.

These measures are not merely administrative requirements, but form part of a broader institutional effort to strengthen governance, improve audit readiness, minimise errors and irregularities, and enhance public confidence in the work of the commission. Staff are therefore encouraged to familiarise themselves fully with the revised processes, apply them diligently, and work collaboratively to ensure uniform implementation across all provincial offices.

*Opinion***FARM WORKER EQUITY SCHEMES: PRO- OR ANTI-LAND REDISTRIBUTION**By **DR LUBABALO MBEKENI**

Farm Worker Equity Schemes (FWESs) were introduced in South Africa as an innovative land reform mechanism in 1992 at the Whitehall Fruit Farm in Western Cape. The model emerged when the farm owner proposed selling a portion of the enterprise to workers, leading to the establishment of a new farming company and a workers' trust. To finance their participation, the trust secured funding from development institutions and commercial banks. This prototype shaped many FWESs arrangements, characterised by owner-driven initiation, structured equity allocation, development finance, and collective ownership through trust mechanisms.

Following the democratic transition in 1994, South Africa anchored its land reform programme in section 25 of the Constitution, with an initial commitment to redistribute 30% of agricultural land to historically disadvantaged individuals. Land redistribution, one of the three pillars of land reform, was implemented through grant-based programmes such as the Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) and the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD). FWESs were incorporated into these frameworks as a strategy to promote worker participation in commercial agriculture.

At their core, FWESs aimed to enable farm workers to acquire equity in agricultural enterprises through a combination of state grants and individual contributions. Beneficiaries assumed dual roles as employees and shareholders, allowing them to earn wages while potentially benefiting from dividends and capital growth. The model was seen as a practical alternative to subdividing commercial farms, which was considered economically inefficient. By maintaining large-scale operations, FWESs sought to balance productivity with gradual ownership transformation.

However, when assessed through the lens of land redistribution, FWESs reveal fundamental limitations. The most critical weakness lies in the distinction between equity ownership and land ownership. In most cases, beneficiaries did not receive direct ownership of land but instead held shares in private companies or trusts that controlled farming enterprises. This arrangement deprived workers of secure tenure and independent rights to land. Consequent-

ly, FWESs functioned more as investment mechanisms than as instruments of redistribution, failing to achieve substantive land transfer.

The design of FWESs also entrenched existing power imbalances. Commercial farmers typically initiated and structured the schemes, selected beneficiaries, and retained majority shareholding. Farm workers were often excluded from meaningful participation in governance and decision-making processes. This limited agency undermined the transformative potential of the schemes as beneficiaries had little influence over financial decisions or strategic direction. As a result, the promise of empowerment through ownership remained largely unrealised.

Another major concern relates to the financial benefits accruing to participants. Although FWES theoretically offered dividends, many schemes lacked formal dividend policies and transparent financial systems. Beneficiaries frequently did not understand how dividends were calculated or when they would be paid. In some instances, dividends were irregular or non-existent, and payments were confused with discretionary bonuses. This uncertainty weakened the economic value of shareholding and diminished the intended benefits of participation.

The implementation of FWESs was further undermined by inadequate state oversight. While the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLRRD) provided substantial grant funding, it failed to establish effective systems for due diligence, monitoring, and post-settlement support. This resulted in irregularities such as inflated beneficiary numbers, weak governance structures, and unclear ownership arrangements. Once funds were disbursed, the state largely withdrew from active oversight, leaving governance to private actors and exposing beneficiaries to mismanagement.

From a land redistribution perspective, the scale of public investment in FWESs raises serious concerns about value for money. Significant resources were allocated to the programme, particularly in Western Cape, yet there is little evidence of a meaningful shift in land ownership patterns. Many beneficiaries remain landless and economically vulnerable, with some reportedly dying in poverty without realising tangible benefits. This outcome highlights a clear disconnect between policy intent and actual impact.

In contrast, alternative land reform approaches such as the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) provide a more direct pathway to land redistribution by enabling the state to acquire land and

*Continues...*

## FARM WORKER EQUITY SCHEMES: PRO OR ANTI LAND REDISTRIBUTION

By DR LUBABALO MBEKENI

allocate it to beneficiaries. Although PLAS has its own limitations, it centres on the transfer of land as a tangible asset rather than indirect financial participation. This distinction underscores the structural limitations of FWESs and highlights the importance of prioritising secure land rights. Notably, FWESs have contributed little, if anything, towards achieving the 30% land redistribution target set by the democratic government, further calling into question their effectiveness as land reform instruments.

The contrast between FWESs and PLAS is particularly evident in Western Cape. While the province led nationally in the implementation of FWESs, with over 54 projects, these initiatives did not translate into meaningful land redistribution. Conversely, under PLAS, Western Cape has performed relatively poorly compared to other provinces in terms of land acquisition. This disparity becomes even more pronounced at a district level. The Cape Wine-lands District, which served as the focal point of FWESs implementation, reflects the highest concentration of equity schemes. However, under PLAS, the same district has contributed the least in terms of land acquired, measured in hectares. This juxtaposition underscores the limited effectiveness of equity-based models in achieving substantive land redistribution outcomes.

Ultimately, FWESs demonstrate the risks of conflating financial participation with substantive ownership. Without direct access to land, secure tenure, and meaningful control over productive resources, equity participation alone is insufficient to achieve land reform goals. Effective redistribution requires the transfer of land rights in a manner that promotes both economic opportunity and social justice.

In conclusion, when assessed through the lens of land redistribution, FWESs cannot be regarded as a successful policy instrument and may, in effect, have operated contrary to the core objectives of land reform. While conceptually appealing, the model failed to deliver substantive land transfer, equitable participation, or sustainable livelihoods for beneficiaries. Instead, it often preserved existing ownership structures under the guise of reform. Future land reform efforts should therefore prioritise direct, secure, and enforceable access to land to give meaningful effect to the constitutional imperative of land redistribution.

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## DLRRD CELEBRATES THE LATE MR MUSO RIBA, AWARDED HIGHEST HONOUR—GLOBAL SURVEYOR OF THE YEAR 2026

Mr Riba was posthumously awarded the highest honour as the Global Surveyor of the Year 2026. This prestigious recognition is conferred upon individuals who have made an indelible contribution to advancing the geomatics profession within their respective countries.

As the first Black Chief Surveyor-General, the late Mr Riba carried a transformative mandate for the geomatics industry in South Africa. His leadership and tenacity led to meaningful change, including the significant increase of young Black land surveyors entering the profession. Notably, he was instrumental in initiating and championing the bursary system for geomaticians and planners, ensuring greater access and inclusion.

Furthermore, the promulgation of the Geomatics Profession Act was achieved under his leadership, marking a pivotal milestone for the profession.

