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**CLOSING ADDRESS TO THE EIGHT BIENNIAL NATIONAL LANDCARE CONFERENCE**

**BY**

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**BLOEMFONTIEN, FREE STATE**

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Executive Mayor of Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Cllr; Ms Olly Mlamleli

Directors –General present here;

Provincial Heads of Department present here;

LandCare International delegates

Members of the African LandCare Network;

LandCare Partners and governmental agencies;

LandCare project beneficiaries

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen

For the past two and half days, we have deliberated actively on many different aspects on how to improve the management of our land resources. This eighth Biennial National LandCare conference whose theme has been, **’LandCare partnerships and technology pathways enabling all communities to restore agricultural and environmental health for lasting food security**-----has indeed once more provided all of us with an opportunity to further reflect, introspect and learn.

As a country, and as a Department, we are proud that we have managed to host this prestigious event now and over the years, reinforcing our commitment to the sustainable management of our natural resources, as the cornerstone of agriculture and human survival.

Ladies and Gentleman, before I move into summarising the key policy issues and resolutions emerging from the various panel discussions and commission deliberations, I would want to echo the words of the Honourable Minister Zokwana in his key note opening address where he highlighted a number of imperatives that we should all take cognisance of.

Firstly, the restoration of partnerships across political, organisational and all boundaries that was highlighted as a major determinant of the eventual success of agrarian reform, job creation and the LandCare programme.

Secondly, the role of partnerships in enabling the LandCare programme to secure desperately needed financial resources and technical support from a wide range and variety of partners. He highlighted that the decline in funding for LandCare must be stopped.

Thirdly, the Minister underscored the importance of the commitment by senior leadership in directing administering, implementation and allocating resources for LandCare programmes.

Lastly and most importantly, the Minister encouraged all of us to reflect deeply and develop resolutions that will address the dire status of our farming land, effects of the recent drought, unsustainable farming practices, the involvement of youth, women and communities to restore and regenerate the agricultural system. For that matter, we are servants of the farmers, from whom we derive our mandate.

I have no doubt that we have managed to do this over the last two and half days. On the first day of the conference, a lot was heard from a number of local and international experts, all of them sharing critical aspects and dimensions of how we can take the implementation of LandCare forward. This continued on the second day until we moved into four different commissions where vibrant discussions on over 45 technical presentations were heard in all the commissions until this morning. Let me congratulate all of you for being able to do this much over this short space of time.

The deliberations enabled us to deepen our understanding of the nature of the challenge we are facing. The key challenges that stood out as impeding successful implementation of land care programmes include:

1. Natural resources degradation is accelerating and being multiplied by climate change - Poor soil health is a fundamental root cause of food insecurity
2. There is declining funding for Natural Resource management in South Africa
3. In some cases, there is lack of leadership and commitment at various levels of Government with non-participation of key managers in key events such as this conference leading to non-commitment and failure to translate resolutions into implementation
4. There is weak multi-sectoral collaboration especially among Government departments that have roles in Land care.
5. Awareness on the importance of land care remains an issue. This lack of awareness is not just at farm level but transcends through key actors such as policy makers and Government departments who unfortunately are supposed to play critical roles in implementation of LandCare programs
6. Lack of technical capacity to facilitate and roll out implementation of land care programmes remains an issue. The presentations illustrated shortages of critical staff and expertise for driving land care and concomitant equitable share funding to support concurrent function.

We have also managed to define some policy areas that need attention. The 5 key policy action areas that have emerged include the following:

1. **The decrease in funding for Land Care needs to be stopped and more resources need to be mobilized from various sources.** The Department will have to consider increasing the allocation for the land care programme from national fiscus. In addition, additional resources for land care will be mobilized through innovative business models through Public private partnerships (PPPs) to access funds such as Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation fund and other development partner funds available for natural resources management.
2. **Deliberations have shown that structured partnerships are an important driver for success of Land Care programmes.** In addition to strengthening intergovernmental and multisectoral collaboration on land care, structured land Care partnerships important in addressing NRM degradation. Farmer driven and community based land care projects, partnerships and processes have greatest potential. In addition, Land Care need to be sufficiently linked to viable business and value chains and therefore partnerships involving all VC actors and their business relationships should be rallied around SLM.
3. **In the discussions by farmers, it was clear that supporting and leveraging high potential, marketable smallholder value chain commodities is strategic.** The long term and most sustainable solution to food insecurity broad based inclusive economic development. For a lasting solution to food insecurity, natural resources management actions should be embedded in business driven value chains. Value chain development naturally carries the greatest potential to lift large numbers from poverty, create real employment and reduce the inequality gap. Focus should therefore be also on these commodities that are marketable, labour intensive and grown through organic farming which entrenches land care.
4. **Government will also need to consider structured incentives for land care.** It is critical for Government to effectively incentivise and catalyse investment by other value chain actors/business to adopt SLM technologies and practices. A promising avenue is Blended Finance models where Government resources are used only to incentivise investment by private sector (financial sector, insurance, markets) and farmers. Farm plan as espoused by Conservation Agricultural Act, 43 of 1983 must be used as approval criteria for all CASP and developmental programmes.
5. **Structured Capacity development, equitable funding to complement DORA funds, staffing of programme 2 with soil scientist, rangelands scientist, LandCare facilitators and soil conservation technicians and awareness programmes are needed.** The lack of technical capacities and knowhow is not only common for smallholder farmers, but also among land care implementing officers. Further, it will be a priority for Government to implement awareness programmes to reach not just smallholder farmers but also key decision makers in Government Departments
6. **The deliberations also revealed the importance of research and application of cutting edge technology in addressing Land care**. Deep structured research into cutting edge technologies for especially for smallholder farmers and the common property land resources is needed. Government will also need to continue supporting knowledge co-creation programmes and innovation at farm level. The discussions indicated that there are so many Land care technologies and innovations that need to be shared and applied at a wider scale.

**In conclusion**

In conclusion, Government is committed to further supporting the implementation of the Land Care through fully supporting and adopting the resolutions agreed during this conference. Through viable business driven partnerships, our famers and partners will be in a position to utilize the available agricultural land while ensuring that the resources are capable to produce economically under specific uses (crop/livestock) over an extended period of time without degradation to the natural resources. These resources will be available for future generations.

I want to emphasise that in 2020 when we meet in the Eastern Cape, we will be expecting each Province to provide feedback on the implementation of the resolutions of this conference

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your vibrant contributions and look forward to meeting you again in the 9th Biennial Conference on Land Care. For those traveling, safe journey back to your stations.