



MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**PROVINCIAL ANNUAL EXTENSION AND
ADVISORY SERVICES SUMMIT 2026**

*“Towards an Inclusive, Digital and Resilient Extension Paradigm for
Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Positioning Agricultural Extension as a
Driver of Innovation, Equity and Sustainability in Crops, Livestock,
Forestry, Game Farming, Environment and People”*

OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICES AND
ADMINISTRATION**

INKOSI MZAMO BUTHELEZI, MP

Venue: Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre (ICC),

Durban, KwaZulu-Natal

Date: 01-02 June 2026

Programme Director,

**MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development in KwaZulu-Natal,
the Honourable Mrs Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa,**

Heads of Department

The Executive Mayor of EtheKwini Metro, Cllr Cyril Xaba

Leaders of Organised Agriculture

Farmers and Agricultural Experts and Stakeholders,

Researchers and Practitioners,

**Our hardworking Extension Officers - the true backbone of this
work,**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sanibonani.

I am very honoured to be invited to this Provincial
Annual Extension and Advisory Service Summit for
the year 2026.

If one really looks around the world, we can see that
food systems are being tested by many disruptions -
meaning that this Summit is held at a very critical
moment in the history of agriculture.

There is also a proverb that says **the soil does not lie** - and that is very true. Indeed, we can manipulate markets, draft policies and commission reports. But when you put a seed in the ground, the earth will tell you nothing but the truth.

It will tell you whether the rainfall was enough, whether the nutrients were balanced and whether the farmer had the knowledge to prepare the soil correctly.

The land, ladies and gentlemen, does not bend to political speeches. It only responds to practice, and that is why we are here.

We are here because the Honourable MEC for this portfolio, MEC KaMadlopha-Mthethwa saw a need that the future of KZN's agricultural future is not going to be decided in boardrooms or in budget meetings, but it will be decided in the fields and farms of Umkhanyakude down to Ray Nkonyeni.

It will be decided the kraals of Zululand and everywhere in the plots where women of Umsinga wake before sunrise to tend crops that feed children and the community.

And the people who stand between knowledge and those farmers are people who also carry science into the soil. And that is you - our extension practitioners.

We are therefore gathered here to be honest about where we are, to be bold about where we need to go, and to be practical about how we will get there.

Programme Director, the theme of this Summit says, *“Towards an Inclusive, Digital and Resilient Extension Paradigm for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Positioning Agricultural Extension as a Driver of Innovation, Equity and Sustainability in Crops, Livestock, Forestry, Game Farming, Environment and People”*.

This theme calls us towards something that is very profound. It asks us to recognise that extension services can no longer operate as they did twenty or thirty years ago.

The modern extension practitioner must be more than a messenger of technical information but must be equipped to reimagine extension, and what it means to deliver agricultural knowledge in the 21st century.

I want to engage with this theme directly because it deserves more than just to mention it in passing.

When we speak of an inclusive extension paradigm, we are acknowledging a hard truth that for too long, agricultural extension in South Africa has not reached everyone equally.

The commercial farmer has had access to agronomists, to credit, to market networks even to credit and information.

The smallholder farmer on the other hand, particularly the woman farmer, the youth who chose to work the land and the communal farmer without any title deeds, has in many cases received the least support while facing the greatest challenges.

Inclusion therefore has never been a courtesy but a constitutional obligation and an economic necessity.

When we exclude productive people from the knowledge economy of agriculture, we risk impoverishing the entire agricultural sector.

Even when we speak of a digital extension paradigm, we are not suggesting that we hand every farmer a tablet and call it transformation.

We are saying that the tools of this era, which are mobile platforms, satellite imagery, early warning systems like access to weather forecast, systems that detect diseases must be harnessed deliberately ensuring that they even serve those with limited connectivity compared to cities.

It means we must build hybrid models. Models that are digital where it accelerates service delivery and that are human where it matters most.

And that does not mean that the extension officer is at risk of being replaced by technology. No! It simply means the extension officer becomes empowered by it.

And when we speak of resilience, we are naming what farmers already know in their bones that the weather our grandparents farmed by is not the weather we experience today.

Nowadays we see unpredictable rainfalls and floods, droughts, animal diseases and many other environmental shocks.

Climate change is stripping yield from farms right now, in this very province, in this country. A resilient extension paradigm means that farmers must be equipped not just to survive a bad season, but to build farming systems that are structurally prepared for any inconsistencies.

And when we tie all of this to sustainable rural livelihoods, we are saying that the measure of success is not a statistic on a government report. It is a family that eats.

A young person who sees a future in farming. A rural community that does not collapse because its people see no economic reason to stay.

Programme Director, none of what we are doing here exists in a policy vacuum. We are here standing on the shoulders of two of the most important development frameworks that guide our work as a government and as a continent.

And I want to speak to both directly, because they are not for decoration, but they are a living instruction.

The first is South Africa's National Development Plan Vision 2030, specifically Chapter 6, which speaks to the transformation of our rural economy.

Chapter 6 of the National Development Plan is explicit in its diagnosis. It tells us that the rural economy has been characterised by low agricultural output, poor infrastructure, weak market linkages, and inadequate support services.

It tells us that smallholder farming must be restored not as a social welfare programme, but as a genuine economic driver.

It also sets out a vision where one million new jobs are created in agriculture and agro-processing by 2030, where smallholder farmers are supported to produce for commercial markets, and where extension services are strengthened to deliver meaningful, evidence-based support.

The NDP Chapter 6 specifically identifies extension services as a critical lever. It calls for an increase in the number of extension officers, an improvement in the quality of their training, and a closer integration between extension work and research institutions.

It also envisions extension officers who are not generalists but specialists who understand the specific farming systems, soil types, and market contexts of their areas.

We are now only four years from 2030, and the implementation and revitalisation of rural economy is of urgency and this Summit as well as the Agricultural Blueprint we are to unveil, serves as a commitment to close that gap before Vision 2030 becomes a missed appointment.

The second framework is the African Union's Agenda 2063, which is *The Africa We Want*, which in its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan identifies agricultural transformation as central to Africa's structural economic change.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Agenda 2063 envisions an Africa where agriculture is the foundation of shared prosperity. It calls for a transition from subsistence farming to productive, climate-smart, market-oriented agriculture across the continent.

It speaks of an Africa where agricultural research is translated into practice at scale, where women and youth are not marginalised participants but engines of the agricultural economy, and where African nations feed themselves and each other rather than depending on food imports.

Even the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) - which sits under Agenda 2063, asks member states to allocate at least ten percent of national budgets to agriculture and to achieve six percent annual agricultural growth.

These are not just wishes and aspirations, but they are benchmarks against which we are being measured not as the Province of KwaZulu-Natal but as a country and as the entire continent.

So, this gathering today is serving and fulfilling what is demanded by Agenda 2063 - and that means that the extension system we build must not only serve our farmers today but must position South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal as a model for the continent.

It is not about a small-scale farmer, but it is more about farmers like Mr Nhlakanipho Nzama of Enkanyezini Livestock, Miss Mandisa Mbuyazi, a goat farmer and many others who are contributing to the architecture of African food sovereignty.

Programme Director and Honourable MEC KaMadlopha-Mthethwa, I am invited here in my capacity as the Minister of Public Service and Administration, and some may wonder what the public service has to do with agricultural extension.

The answer to that is everything because the extension officer is a public servant.

Therefore, the quality of service a farmer in Mtubatuba or Pongola receives from their local extension officer is a function of how that officer was trained, how they are resourced, how they are supervised, how they are motivated, and how they are held accountable.

Those are public administration questions because the NDP Chapter 6 vision cannot be realised through political will alone. It requires a capable, professional, and well-supported public service that delivers at an extra mile.

And this government has made a commitment through the Agricultural Blueprint that will be unveiled at this Summit that we will not accept a gap between the promise of extension services and their delivery on the ground.

And do not look at the Blueprint as a document. Look at it as more of a declaration of intent that **declares it sees you** as extension practitioner.

Look at it as a declaration that says, we know you have been working with insufficient tools, you have been stretched over impossible geographies and have been asked to do more with less.

The Agricultural Blueprint therefore commits to rebuild the system around you so that you can rebuild it around the farmer back at home.

Ladies and gentlemen, when I think about what this province is capable of, I am not cautious in my optimism – meaning that I am very aware of the challenges but choosing to move forward towards what is possible.

KwaZulu-Natal is one of South Africa's most agriculturally diverse provinces. From sugar cane along the coast, to maize in the midlands, to game farming in the north, to livestock in the mountain regions, our province holds extraordinary range of agricultural potential.

And it holds communities whose relationship with the land is not just economic but very ancestral. Our relationship with the land is more spiritual – it is our identity.

Therefore, this is not a blank canvas but a living heritage and the knowledge of generations of farmers who understood this soil before there were universities to study it.

So the most effective extension work will not speak at farmers but will speak with them, combining the best of scientific research with the wisdom that already exists in communities.

Here I am talking about knowledge that has been held in practice across generations. When we honour that knowledge, we do not slow down science, instead, we deepen it.

I want to also say something directly to our extension practitioners in this room. You are not bureaucrats and neither you are statistics on a staffing spreadsheet.

You are the most important link in the chain between agricultural science and food on a plate.

Every farm visit you conduct, every demonstration plot you manage and every small-scale farmer you uplift from survival to a surplus, that is nation-building and that is what the National Development Plan means when it speaks of a transformed rural

economy. You are all what rural development looks like.

And that is what Agenda 2063 also means when it speaks of *The Africa we want*. You are what those visions look like when they enter the field and the farms.

Before I conclude, it is my humbly plea that when you leave this Summit going back, you leave with practical tools and with networks that you did not have when you arrived here.

It is my wish that you leave here with the knowledge that the work you are doing, often in difficult conditions and without enough recognition, is seen, is valued, and is at the very centre of where this country and the entire continent need to go.

Honourable MEC, food insecurity is one of the defining challenges of our time. We cannot separate it from climate change. We cannot separate it from poverty, gender inequality, land access, or the urban-rural knowledge divide.

Regardless of all these challenges and more, the only thing we owe to do is to refuse to be paralysed by its complexity. As we have chosen today, we can still and always choose to act with a blueprint, with a strategy, with trained people and with the political will to see it through.

We can also choose with the accountability of two great frameworks, which are the NDP and Agenda 2063 as they continuously watch over our shoulders, reminding us that we made a promise to our citizens and to our continent.

Lastly, remember that the soil does not lie. And in the months and years ahead, the soil will tell us whether this Summit meant something.

The land will reveal if the commitments made here were carried into fields. It will tell us whether the farmers of KwaZulu-Natal were better equipped, better supported, and better connected than they were before this Summit.

Let us make sure that when the time for harvest comes - our answer is a confident YES!

I thank you.