



**national planning
commission**

Department:
The Presidency
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

PROFESSOR TINYIKO MALULEKE - DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON: NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Programme Director, Commissioner Tanya Cohen,

Commissioners of the National Planning Commission,

Dr Simphiwe Ngqangweni, Chief Executive Officer of the National Agricultural Marketing Council,

Distinguished Panellists,

Agricultural Sector Representatives,

Senior Officials from the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development and its Entities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of the National Planning Commission – an independent advisory body comprising experts and thought-leaders in various fields and tasked with the custodianship of the National Development Plan, it is my greatest honour to say a few words at the beginning of this roundtable. The roundtable theme is: 'Accelerating the Implementation of the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan.'



Vision 2030: Our Future, Make it Work

You may have heard this story told roughly twenty years ago by American author and English professor, David Foster Wallace:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the hell is water?”

Well, it is possible that fish do not realise that they live in and through water. Talk about taking things completely for granted! In our world today, food production, agriculture, and agro-processing constitute an ecosystem that is as liable to being taken for granted by human beings as water is by fish. I guess if one interrupted a bunch of teenage MacDonalds diners, in the midst of a meal, to ask about their take on agriculture and agro processing, they might respond by asking: “What the hell is that?”

The link between agriculture and food production is not always obvious to the average urbanite. Not until there is a calamity that disrupts the value chain. Maybe it was this reality that prompted the mercurial Robert Mugabe once to allegedly express the fear that there was emerging during our times, a generation of Africans who can speak excellent English on empty stomachs.

Indeed, not so long ago, in 2016 when our democracy was 22 years old, South African agricultural economist, Tracey Ledger, published a haunting book whose title consisted of three words: *An Empty Plate*. It did not make things any easier that on the book cover there was a picture of an empty old-style steel plate with a rusted spoon in it. It is eerie how the book’s prologue begins with a dystopian vision of South Africa as a country without clean water and without food. There are many signs that seem to point to the reality that we, as a country, may be on the brink of a profound water quality crisis, if we are not there already. This, amidst rising levels of poverty, not poverty as merely as lack of monetary income, but poverty as in being confronted by Tracey Ledger’s empty plate, morning, noon, and evening.

For the NPC, this gathering is necessitated and underwritten by the contents of the 6th chapter of the NDP. That chapter is unequivocal about the crucial role of agriculture in national food security, economic growth, inclusive development, and job creation.

The NDP has inspired and led to several of the country’s Master Plans designed to bring all stakeholders together in pursuit of key national development goals as they

pertain to various sectors of the economy. We have therefore carefully and deliberately chosen our theme for this roundtable: **‘Acceleration of the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan.’** All the operational and other challenges that pertain to the rolling out of the **Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan notwithstanding**, we will try, at this roundtable, to keep the big picture in view. The AAMP must be hammered into a spacecraft that will take South Africa to a transformed agricultural and agro-processing sector. That vehicle will take us to a land that is as food secure as it is resilient to climate change. That is the destination.

Above all, our robust discussion must be undergirded by a sense of hope and determination to overcome all obstacles so that we succeed in building a resilient agricultural sector, ready to play its part in climate action.

Today’s engagement comes at an opportune time as food and nutrition security takes centre stage on several international platforms, the most recent being the recent World Food Day on 16 October 2024. In South Africa we commemorated this day in the Northern Cape. It is important to remember that food insecurity is not just about lack of access to food, it is about access to nutritious food. World Food Day highlights the plight of some one billion undernourished people in the world, found mainly in rural areas where their main source of income is agriculture. The signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property was a particularly notable moment of the 2024 World Food Day.¹

Today, we have a further opportunity to explore how the AAMP, which is rooted in the NDP, may be further aligned both AU Agenda 2063 and the UN SDGs – especially SDG 1: No Poverty – end poverty in all its forms everywhere, and SDG 2: Zero Hunger – end hunger, achieve food and nutrition security and improved nutrition and the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

Above all, I urge the participants in this roundtable and all the stakeholders in the agricultural and agro-processing sectors, not to squander the opportunity that is

¹ <https://www.iccrom.org/news/iccrom-and-fao-sign-memorandum-understanding-establishment-global-food-and-agriculture-museum>

the **Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan**. I urge you to be as bold in the identification of hurdles in implementing the Master Plan, as you will be innovative in finding ways to align the efforts of all role players and policies. Essentially, this roundtable provides us with an opportunity to be catalysts who will facilitate the changes needed in the construction of a resilient, transformed, productive and green agricultural sector.

It may be worth taking a cursory look at what we have achieved since May 2022 when the AAMP was signed: South Africa has recently secured an export protocol for avocado shipments to China, while there is satisfactory progress in market access negotiations with India. Furthermore, export markets for horticultural products in the UK and Europe have been sustained, although phytosanitary and sanitary issues on citrus remain a challenge in the EU market. South Africa has further diversified its red meat export market towards the Middle Eastern nations of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iran, and Kuwait. Moreover, China was persuaded to reopen its borders for the importation of South Africa's wool and beef following the success in containing the spread of foot-and-mouth disease in the country in 2022.

The two-year mark of the AAMP also signals the period when South Africa started trading under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which is expected to lead to diversification of exports, acceleration of growth and an increase in investment as well as employment opportunities for South Africans and the rest of the continent.

While acknowledging this progress, there is more work to be done in order to fortify partnerships and collaborative work realise our objectives. It is important that we remember that this is our plan and as such, it will only succeed if we all join hands, pool our collective resources, and re-dedicate ourselves to this priority task.

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to our guests and panellists for making time to be with us and to share their views and knowledge on this important topic. Allow me to also extend my sincere appreciation to the National Planning Commission, in partnership with the National Agricultural Marketing Council for the arrangements to enable this roundtable to take place. Last but not least, I would also like to thank the

Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development for all their support. I believe that this valuable collaboration will facilitate the exchange of ideas and thoughts towards an impactful AAMP.

With these few remarks, I wish you success during your deliberations and look forward to robust engagements. I want to urge you all to do everything in your power to ensure that fewer and fewer South Africans are confronted with Tracy Ledger's empty plate. Not to speak of the increasing ravages of climate change.

I thank you.

