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THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS
IN THE LAND REFORM PROGRAMME

ADDRESS BY

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It is my pleasure to speak about the role of traditional leaders in the land reform programme. But, if I may, let me first give some background to my presentation.

When I was at school, there was a very unfortunate practice of giving children manual labour as penance for any wrong-doing. This created the impression among youngsters that having to work with one's hands is somehow a punishment, and that only those who do wrong end up having to work hard. This wrong principle influenced more than one generation, so that even today very few young South Africans consider it rewarding or admirable to choose farming as a career.

In truth, work is a blessing. It brings material provision, dignity, fulfilment and the opportunity to influence lives. That is the message traditional leaders must begin with.

I took up my hereditary position as traditional leader, or Inkosi, of the Buthelezi Clan in 1953. When I was installed, my mentor, Inkosi Albert Luthuli, wrote me a long letter, enjoining me to serve my people wholeheartedly. Some 17 years earlier, Inkosi Luthuli had given up a lucrative teaching position when he was elected traditional leader of the community at Groutville Mission Reserve. His example had already shown me how a traditional leader could uplift a community both spiritually and materially.

Over the course of six decades, I have sought to emulate that example, seeking development, improvement and growth for the benefit of all my people. Land is central to that goal. Land ownership and cultivation are foundational to any civilisation. When one looks at the history of the world, progress begins with working the land. That is, in fact, where our earliest forebears started; in the Garden of Eden.

In the 18 years that I was Chief Minister of KwaZulu, the policy of my administration was to promote subsistence farming and food production. Wherever I went, I would encourage people to plant vegetables, rather than

flower gardens. Although my wife, like every woman, loves receiving flowers, I said, "Plant cabbages, not flowers". People used to poke fun at me as the leader of Inkatha, suggesting that cabbages could not liberate us. But to me liberation meant more than political liberation. It also meant freedom from hunger, dependency and poverty. If only our struggle had focussed more attention on slaying these dragons.

Before 1994, if you travelled anywhere in rural KwaZulu or in what is now the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga, you would see verdant fields, cultivated and producing food. Families grew their own produce and there was always enough to eat. The provision of summer months lasted well into the winter months. Indeed, when I was growing up, I remember that people used to sell their mielies to the shops. Of course, the shop owners would then store them, and sell them back to the farmers!

But in the last twenty years, all of this has vanished. Now fields lie fallow and families go hungry. People are forced to buy non-perishable food in bulk from wholesalers, and their diets are not supplemented with fresh meats and vegetables. Entire families have become dependent, particularly on social grants, and knowledge of farming methods is being lost as parents no longer pass this down to their children, working alongside their children in the fields.

His Majesty King Zwelithini and I have appealed to our people to return to subsistence farming. We have tried to show, even by example, that people can still live off the land. The King has had opportunity to farm fairly extensively, and I ensure that I plough and sow one of my mother's maize fields every year. Of course, I find that before I have even reaped one ear of corn, people have gone into the field and helped themselves!

But traditional leaders must set the example, using land wisely. We need to impress upon our people that South Africa cannot be a nation entirely dependent on social grants. We need to decide, as a nation, whether we are a developmental state, as we claim to be, or a welfare state, as the statistics seem to indicate. When one considers that 15 million South Africans are dependent on social grants in a country where the land is fertile and the climate agreeable; clearly something is wrong.

A discussion like this must necessarily go back to the Natives Land Act of 1913, the first major piece of legislation in the drive to segregate South Africans. In terms of the Act, only 13% of our country's land could be owned by so-called "natives", meaning black land ownership was severely curbed. This year we commemorate 100 years since the passing of that Act; which has sparked much debate on whether we have come far enough in terms of restitution. The Act was in place until the 1990s. It was only then that we began to talk of restitution.

To my mind, what we have achieved in almost two decades of democracy in terms of land reform is deeply disappointing. Most of the land that has changed ownership as part of the land restoration programme is no longer used for

farming, and many farms have been ruined. By all accounts, the programme has failed.

Government-sponsored planting projects have been plagued by fraud and corruption. Government-sponsored machinery lies unused and is not serviced. Within the KwaZulu Natal Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Rural Development, there are management and planning deficiencies, particularly in financial planning, inadequate policies and Standard Operating Procedures, a lack of a proper procurement plan, an inefficient procurement process, an inaccurate asset register and non-compliance with policies and procedures. Scarce resources are ineffectively used and the work force lacks adequate skills. Fraud and corruption remain the greatest opponents.

This situation is untenable in a country in which the cost of living keeps rising. South Africa used to export food, but is now having to import food to feed our people. Surely this highlights the need for a renewed focus on rural development.

The Government in KwaZulu Natal, quite laudably, established a project called 'One Home, One Garden'. However this has largely been unsuccessful. Through experience in administering the erstwhile KwaZulu Government, the IFP knows that constant monitoring and evaluation are keys to the success of projects like this. Our self-help and self-reliance programme saw success because of close monitoring.

When we governed KwaZulu, we also had what we called Extension Officers, who were trained in our colleges of agriculture. They were then employed throughout rural areas to assist our people to obtain seed and fertilizer, and to train them in soil management and good farming methods. Now all that is gone. And even the cooperative structures that we started lie dormant. As far as the IFP is concerned, we need to return to these basics.

There is an idea in South Africa that everyone should become a businessman. Black Economic Empowerment has fostered the idea that the only money to be made is in industry and business. Yet, in our development, we cannot jump a flight stairs and become industrialists when we have not even mastered the first industry, which is farming. We need to know how to produce enough food for ourselves, and we need to produce it.

I am not speaking only of crop farming. Both His Majesty the King, and I, as the King's Traditional Prime Minister, are leading by example and farming with cattle. I do not have my own farms for this purpose, as the King does, but I have a Nguni producing project running on traditional land. Let us not forget that our people traditionally reared cattle and our Nguni breed is today registered and respected throughout the world. Breeding cattle should be encouraged.

When it comes to goats, which many of our people keep, we must explore the possibility of exchanging our indigenous goats for goats that can produce money. Most of our goats have not been properly reared and marketed to be able to

produce money for those who own them. But we must start from where we are, in order to get where we want to go. Many of our people also keep chickens. What we need is to ensure that we have chickens that can produce eggs for sale and for consumption. Indeed, even my wife began a chicken project and we spent money on building the necessary structures. Wherever possible, we must lead by example.

| have heard people using the excuse that there are no fences or camps, as there used to be, and thus there is no protection for fields or animals. The question should be raised over who is responsible for erecting fences. Is it the municipality or the provincial government? We need to attend to these basics as a starting point.

| know that there are many excuses, and many real obstacles. But the fact that we can't do much should never be used as a pretext for doing nothing. During Apartheid, farmers relied on government subsidies. Today there is need for Government to assist with loans from the Land Bank.

Our democratic Government faces a dilemma of how to reconcile the vast and competing needs of South Africa in a manner that is just, equitable and beneficial to our long-term future. And as with every problem, the solution is constricted by budget. Working within the allocated budget, the national Department of Rural Development and Land Reform must choose between purchasing more land for emerging black farmers, or purchasing less land in order to free up funding to support these farmers.

There is, of course, a danger in giving prime agricultural land to people who have no means or capital to make the land productive, or sustainably productive. But social justice demands that land reform be expedited. How do we find the balance? | believe that one of the overlooked tools to solving this problem is the contribution that traditional leaders can make within their communities.

Today many of our communities in KwaZulu Natal are able to embrace projects of sustainable development simply because of their background of self-help and self-reliance that has been championed by traditional leaders. Traditional leaders have also promoted traditional farming methods within our rural communities, which has great benefits.

There is a trend of throwing the baby out with the bath water when we try to modernise agricultural methods. We sometimes feel it is only progress if we replace labour intensive practices with machines. But machines are expensive and difficult to maintain. They require new skills training and decrease the number of jobs available. | am not saying mechanisation is bad. But | am saying that there is value in considering how we might return to old farming methods that require greater manpower.

There have been suggestions that, in every traditional area, traditional leaders should set aside land that can be cultivated on a cooperative basis. People can own a stretch of land in the area of a traditional leader which is farmed on behalf of the people there, in a system similar to shareholding. | am not unfair with the

idea to the extent that I can promote it. But this is one idea that is being proposed and it should be investigated.

Another idea was put forward by the MEC for Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Rural Development, to a meeting of traditional leaders attended by my Deputy. The MEC explained that he had liaised with the Chinese and that traditional leaders should make land available so that they could come and help. We need to be wary, however, of cultivating the mentality that the Chinese will do it for us. It is better to learn how to fish, than to be fed fish by someone else. We must avoid further dependency.

We must also consider the situation from all the different angles. For instance, here in KwaZulu Natal, many farms produce sugarcane and the sugarcane industry is even competing against plantations that sell to large paper manufacturers like Mondi. But I remember that when the IFP was in Government, investigations proved that where sugarcane is the cash crop, malnutrition is higher, because people neglect the need to produce fresh produce for their own consumption.

One cannot ignore the realities when looking at rural development. We know that billions of Rand has been set aside for infrastructure development. But I ask again; how many of our young people who have gone to high school and tertiary institutions would be keen to do farm-work, and would see it as a decent choice in life?

Let me speak briefly about the Communal Land Rights Act, or CLARA, as it is known. I find it amazing that nothing has been done to revive this legislation since it was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, not because of anything wrong on its merits, but on account of Parliament having adopted it in terms of the wrong procedure. One would have expected Parliament to reapprove it right away with the correct procedure. Yet, years later, Government has inexplicably not even tabled CLARA for re-enactment.

It just doesn't seem to be a priority for our Government, despite the dire situation of people squatting in cities, hoping to get jobs, because there is nothing for them in rural areas. The IFP criticized certain aspects of CLARA, because it sought to curtail the role and authority of traditional leaders. Yet we need to move forward, and if CLARA will take us forward then we must do everything we can to see it revived.

I am still gratified by the fact that the last piece of legislation enacted by the Government of KwaZulu, under my leadership, was the Ingonyama Trust Act. I was vilified in Parliament for having done this, and was even accused of colluding with former President FW de Klerk. But in truth, I prevented communally owned land from becoming state property.

In terms of the Interim Constitution, all communal land held by the erstwhile eighteen self-governing territories and the four erstwhile nominally independent TBVC states, was automatically transferred to the Government of South Africa.

In this process, what was communal land held in terms of indigenous and customary law became State land held in terms of the Land Administration Act. The Act made no reference whatsoever to indigenous and customary law, did not contemplate the power of Traditional Authorities to administer land and, more significantly, did not recognise the right of the members of each community to receive an assignment of sufficient land to be able to sustain their families.

That meant that the Interim Constitution would have made all black South Africans landless as far as legal entitlement was concerned. And that is exactly what happened in the rest of the country, except for the areas under the Ingonyama Trust. The Zulu nation is now the only ethnic group whose land is controlled by a Trust, headed by the King. Land held under this Trust is administered in terms of indigenous and customary law. By direction of our King, Traditional Councils and traditional leaders have been tasked with using this to the benefit of the people.

In closing, let me make my position clear on the issue of land restitution. While I believe that this is urgent and needs to be addressed, it would be very unwise to do it in a way that would cause productive farmers to leave South Africa, as happened in Zimbabwe. Already some of our farmers have left for Mozambique.

We have reason to be immensely proud of South African farmers. Our country relies on some 600 high quality, large farms to produce our food and export earnings. Our farmers are often highly skilled and internationally respected. These are role models, to whom we owe the very food on our tables.

The IFP has therefore called for a publically funded mentorship programme to see emerging farmers receive guidance from established farmers to increase agricultural production. When it comes to working the land, we need to build a good relationship between our people of different races to ensure that the efforts we put in to rural development can prosper and bear fruit.

I thank you.