

NORTH WEST PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE



OVERSIGHT REPORT- TAUNG

Portfolio Committee and the ACERD August 2009

8/28/2009

Hon. Dodo Baloyi (Chairperson)

Portfolio Committee on Agriculture

Oversight Report – Taung Skull, Nguni Cattles, Food Plots, Taung Agricultural College, Ponelo-pele Project and Taung Irrigation Scheme.

North West Provincial Legislature

Oversight Report of the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, Environment and Rural Development (ACERD)

1. Introduction

The Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, Environment and Rural Development held oversight meetings in Taung on the 28th August 2009. The purpose of the oversight was fact finding on problems raised by farmers, checking viable and non-viable projects, monitoring and evaluating overall performance of extension officers and assessing the implementation of MAFISA as well as CASP.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the oversight were to oversee all the projects operating in Taung as well as identifying any challenges they are encountering to intervene and refer them to the department of agriculture. The Portfolio Committee also wanted to check the functionality of the projects to interact with the municipalities as well as other stakeholders and to inspect the project facilities of the Taung Skull, to check and assess the modus operandi of projects funded by the department.

3. Taung Skull Project

The Portfolio Committee visited Taung Skull project to find the facts regarding any activities happening within the project. The management of the project (Taung Skull) was requested to brief the committee on the said project. The core issues were around the infrastructural budget of the project since its inception as well as trying to relocate the skull to Taung to attract tourists in order to benefit the local communities of Taung and neighboring cities. They were requested to brief the committee regarding the progress in terms of the investigation on alleged corruption activities and the implementation of the project (Taung Skull) as well as Vredefort dome heritage site.

They were also asked if they have a committee that is running daily within the site construction of the road.

In their briefing, the Taung Skull was working hand in hand with the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Environment and Rural Development (DACERD). It was reported that the MEC for agriculture is overseeing the project and also the appointment of the management team. It

was also highlighted that the budget for the project comes from Gauteng Province and that R1million was from the department of Sports, Arts and Culture which was meant for infrastructure but was later transferred to the municipalities due to the fact that the project did not have a permit. The project was listed but not yet declared to be the world heritage site by the South African Heritage Council as there were legal requirements. R3 million was for the administration and this forms part of the R7 million that is received annually.

4. Concerns raised by the Portfolio Committee (Taung Skull)

- Utilization of money that was transferred to the municipality in terms of accountability and efficient usage.
- Administration budget that is too huge compared to the capital project
- Investigation of the Taung Skull was not completed
- Total budget for the Palisades that is unclear in terms of outlining specifics.
- Vredefort dome that seems to be a threat for water pollution from Parys.
- The Portfolio Committee was concerned as to whether Wits University is making money out of the skull given the fact that it has been kept in Wits for almost 4-5 years.
- What measures have been made to come up with the Integrated Management Plan which includes all fragmented plans.

5. Responses (Taung Skull)

- The department is awaiting a report as the matter regarding the investigations of corruptions is being handled by the office of the Premier.
- The Skull is at Wits University for safe keeping as there is a museum under protection for 24 hours. However, Taung is ready to start construction of the museum and would start negotiations to return the skull.
- Budget transferred to the municipality as a result of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that was to be conducted hence it has taken too long to issue the permit. However, currently the permit is available and the process can start to unfold.

- Master plan has already been developed and will be made available to the Portfolio Committee.
- The management is not aware in terms of whether Wits is making money out of the skull that is currently in their possession.
- Service provider who was paid R2million was fired and sued for not delivering and the case is with the state law adviser of the department of agriculture.
- With regard to Vredeford dome, UNESCO was consulted to monitor but it is not known when they will start.
- Bapelaklip was doing the design guidelines and for Integrated Management Plan, tender was advertised and **Razor Millian Company** got the tender.

6. Challenges (Taung Skull)

- Service provider who was not delivering as expected.
- Capacity or competency challenges by the department to come up with a combined plan.
- The paving project was stopped due to lack of funds
- The sites do not have Integrated Management Plan (IMP).

7. Recommendations (Taung Skull)

- The memorandum of understating between Wits and Taung Skull to be sourced by the department on behalf of the Taung Skull and submitted to the Portfolio Committee.
- On completion of the infrastructure, Skull to be brought back to Taung after receiving security for the Heritage Site.
- The Portfolio Committee should negotiate with National Treasury through the department to fund the infrastructure.
- The two heritage sites must be seen operating as soon as possible
- Portfolio Committee on Agriculture should go to Johannesburg (Wits) with regard to the return of the skull.
- Outcome of the court case regarding the sued consultant to be made available and submitted to the Portfolio Committee.

- Organizational structure with clear roles and responsibilities must be issued to the Portfolio Committee to establish how many people and their duties as the budget seems to be too high.
- Budget breakdown for the two heritage sites must be disclosed so that the Portfolio Committee is privy to the development.
- There must be reports on R3million spent
- Conduct an oversight on Vredefort dome.
- The Portfolio Committee also requested the Business Plan, Master Plan as well as the executive summary of the project.
- The department must release 6million to finalize the Taung Skull project.
- During the development of the museum, all the departments should be consulted in order to determine what would be their contribution.
- The department of Sports, Arts and Culture to be approached to determine how far they are with regard to the proposed museum in Taung to accommodate the Skull.
- The management must focus on projects according to their phases i.e. phase 1 of the project until its completion given the fact that the project doesn't have adequate budget.
- The department should convene a meeting with the Portfolio Committee, Bapela, Management of the Skull as well as the Youth Commission to deliberate more on outstanding issues.

8. Nguni Cattles (Khudu-Tlou)

The farmers owning the cattles were visited in order to identify whether the project is viable and to establish the kind of challenges facing their project in order to find possible ways of addressing them. The aim was also to monitor and evaluate overall performance of the extension officers in terms of addressing the farmer's needs. The Portfolio Committee wanted to know the total number of cattles provided and the productivity. The Portfolio Committee was able to meet 6 members of the agricultural committee representing the community.

The farmers stated that they were provided with 24 cattles and currently have increased to 41. The cattles were initially allocated to one person. However, there is an

agricultural committee that works hand in hand with all the farmers around the area (volunteers). The project seems to be benefiting a farmer as he is able to sell to generate income and cater for other household needs. They emphasized their appreciation of government support establishing **Makgotla (committees)** for them and making their project known as well as visiting them to identify their challenges.

8.1. Challenges by the farmers

- Veterinary doctors to assist when the cattle are not well
- Stealing of the fence by the local communities who does.

8.2 Concerns by the Portfolio Committee

- The Portfolio Committee was concerned as to whether the contract signed has a clause indicating that the projects are not meant to benefit individuals.
- Volunteers that are not being compensated by either the department or the beneficiaries of the project.
- The committee was also concerned as to whether the farmer is aware that he must pay back the government within 5 years for the cattles provided.
- The department's intervention to address the issue of veterinary surgeons.

8.3 Responses by the Department

- There is SNT from the department to cater for the committee members for transport in cases where they are needed to monitor or address issues of various projects.
- There is an Extension Recovery Plan in place to address the uniformity of the extension officers throughout the Province.
- The Farmer green book has been developed to ensure that the extension officers attend to the projects and both a farmer and extension officer authenticate the presence by signing.

8.4 Responses by a farmer

- The farmer clarified that he has informed the authorities to come and select the calves that will be given back to the government for repayment.
- They normally inform the extension officer if they want to sell.
- With regard to the issue of extension officer's availability, the farmers indicated that they are always available as and when they are needed.

8.2 Recommendations (Nguni Cattles)

- The Portfolio Committee urged the department to come up with a strategy to compensate the volunteers in order to motivate them to enhance the sustainability of the projects.
- Issue of compensation for the volunteers must be debated by the Portfolio Committee.
- Policy document to be sourced in order for the Portfolio Committee to have inputs as it seems not proper for one farmer to be given 21 cattle.
- The department should address the issue of scarce skills (veterinary surgeons) for the fiscal year 2010.
- Local chiefs to find out if the projects within their communities are benefiting the people.
- Report on extension officer's performance per project as well as the status of those projects must be submitted to the Portfolio Committee.
- The Portfolio Committee recommended that a veterinary surgeon in Schweizer-reneke be consulted by the farmers where necessary.

9. Food Plots (Khudu-tlou)

The food plots where the farmers are producing fresh vegetables were also visited to monitor its viability and whether it is sustainable. The members on this project were initially 10; however other 7 members have pulled out due to the reasons best known to themselves as they did not communicate their withdrawal to the other members. However, the 3 remaining members anticipate that the withdrawal of other members might have been influenced by the fact that they have limited

resources to use the land efficiently. They indicated that they have been supplied with a small tractor by the department (DACERD) to till the land.

9.1 Challenges by the food plots farmers

- Limited resources to enable them to increase their production
- Unavailability of constant market as the production is very small to meet the demands.
- Municipalities do not have enough budgets to assist the farmers to increase production in order to be sustainable.

9.2 Responses by the Department

- The hub similar to the one in Zeerust has been identified and will be budgeted for 2010/11 financial year.
- The department is in the process of engaging the local chiefs and all stakeholders to encourage the communities to actively participate in producing.

9.3 Recommendations (Foot Plots)

- The municipalities in collaboration with the department must come up with a strategy to find markets for small scale farmers.
- A marketing plan must be in place by the department to encourage producers to increase their production. i.e. estimation of production and how is it going to be marketed.
- The department must create a hub for small scale farmers as well as Small, Medium and Micro Entrepreneurs (SMME's).
- The department and municipalities should prioritize the project and advertise them through various media e.g. local newspapers and radio stations.
- All the relevant stakeholders must assist SMME's to empower community rural development.

10. Taung Agricultural College

The Agricultural College was also visited to meet with the management to establish the state of readiness as well as the inspection of facilities for reopening of the college as per the Portfolio Committee's recommendations to the MEC of Agriculture

(DACERD). The committee requested the director to give a briefing regarding the college in order to have a way forward.

The director (Mr. Lipepeneng Serage) indicated that the institution lost its accreditation in 2002 hence they shifted to training of farmers, youth, correctional service offenders and farm workers. However, they have signed a deal with SETA and intending to start in 2010 to admit diploma students. It was highlighted that the department of public works has made a commitment to assist in renovating and currently in the process of finalizing the relevant documentations.

The director stated that all 12 agricultural colleges in the country are going through transformation to address issues of governance towards a better model in order to comply with high education.

10.1 Concerns by the Portfolio Committee

- Criteria used to dispose the equipment as well as livestock during the closure of the institution.
- Government land allocated to an individual who is a business man in the area.
- Capacity in terms of manpower to implement programmes for 2010.
- Criteria used to accommodate people within the college residence as there are people who are occupying the houses.
- Criteria for admitting new students and whether there will be bridging courses for those who are over-age and would like to pursue their studies.
- Assistance to the students who did not complete their courses during the closure
- Total Budget for reopening i.e. how much funds required for implementing the plan to reopen the institution.
- Preparations or Strategy to empower previously disadvantaged communities, SMME's or classes to address the farming problems.
- Integration of Potchefstroom and Taung College i.e. a plan to integrate the two as Taung was closed while Potchefstroom was still operational.

10.2. Responses by the department

- In response to the reason why the institution was closed, it was indicated that the programmes of accreditation was not issued hence the closure.
- The livestock disposal as well as the equipment was approved by the HOD in line with the Directorate Entrepreneurial Development (DED).
- Other equipment and livestock were intended to supplement certain programmes and such programmes were no longer available and therefore it was costly to maintain.
- Equipment and Livestock were sold to the emerging farmers through the extension officers with a market price.
- Awaiting DED report in order to come up with the disposal criteria.
- Transformation agenda- idea for the latter was to revitalize the colleges
- License that will be used for Taung to operate is the one in Potchefstroom as there is no new accreditation issued yet, however, the process is unfolding and non of the projects will be accredited until the process has been concluded.
- In terms of capacity, 13 personnel required for the institution to be operational.
- The houses are allocated to all the (any staff member)
- R1.5 million will be required to complete the 1st year programme for the 1st year students, advertising as well as the principal for Taung College as currently there is one principal for both Potchefstroom and Taung. Appointments will start in November in order to start in January 2010. However, additional of 2 million rand will be needed for basic facilities and 7million to fence the entire yard.
- In terms of preparations for reopening, the approval by the MEC for Agriculture (DACERD) has only been issued recently and the appointments will start and the brochures for the programmes are already at the printers and the timing is perfect to target matriculants.

10.3 Recommendations (Taung Agricultural College)

- The institution must create awareness programmes to sensitize the youth and community.
- The college should meet with youth commission and development agency so that there is synergy on youth programmes.
- All farmers must be given bridging courses to advance skills development.
- There must be a specific plan to interact with high schools and primary schools for issues of experimental exercise and research.
- Estimated projection plan for 2010/11 should be submitted to the Portfolio Committee.
- A detailed report with regard to the movable and non-movable assets (equipment and livestock) disposed should be provided to the Portfolio Committee.
- Agreement between the college and Agri-Seta should be provided to the Committee.
- 13 personnel posts to be appointed must be advertized in local newspapers and must take into consideration gender equality/, expertise and necessary qualifications.
- A college must update the Portfolio Committee on a monthly basis with regard to the progress made as far as the college is concerned.
- Partnership between Agric College and Taung Skull to synergize in order to promote heritage sites and address scarce skills in the province.
- Business plan must include mentorship plan
- The director must ensure that Mr. Gaoraelwe vacate the land of the college in seven working days.
- The College should embark on continuous training and workshops to emerging and established farmers.
- Pre-event to be arranged as part of celebrating the major development.

11. Ponelo-pele Co-operative

Ponelo-pele project is a cooperative that was registered on the 23rd January 2008 in an effort to alleviate poverty. However, during their visit to the MEC's offices to make their cooperative known, the MEC was unavailable. According to the

chairperson, this project is facing lot of challenges due to non-cooperation of the department of agriculture particularly the director (Angy Seeco) responsible for Taung region. They indicated that they were assisted by a private entity (Agrihire) to hire the equipment to implement their project.

11.2 Challenges by the Co-operative

- Non-cooperative of the department to assist farmers with both the equipments and technical support i.e. no Field Service Unit (FSU).
- Black farmers being sidelined in terms of acreage as opposed to the whites e.g. black farmers were allocated 200 hectares while white farmers were allocated 400 – 480 hectares.
- Limited implementing facilities to utilize allocated land hence only 170hectares were tilled and 30 remained.
- Decline in prices to discourage the black farmers.
- Theft of the pipes by the communities including the members of the cooperative
- Lack of monitoring of contractors by the government e.g. SABM.
- No responses to correspondence directed to the department to address issues pertaining to the cooperative.

11.3 Responses by the department

- SABM are funders and as such have their own conditions to grant funds
- The plan implemented by the department is that, cooperatives would be assisted individually to obtain necessary equipment in order to attain their goals.
- R1 million is not sufficient for 400 people, however the department has allocated funds for other projects e.g. water.
- SABM were granted rights to decide all matters of farming in Taung.

11.4 Recommendations

- The department should invite SABM to monitor its service level agreement level between the government and farmers.

- The department should be granted more funding as farming is more prominent in Dr. Ruth Mompati District.
- The department should be involved in all the cooperatives to encourage all farmers to participate and cooperate.
- Imbizo to be called by the department and co-operatives to be invited and negotiations to be held.
- Election of the interim committee must be monitored.
- The minutes of the meetings with the department, farmers, Portfolio Committee, interim committee, SABM and secretaries of the cooperatives must be recorded and distributed to all the parties concerned.

12 Taung Irrigation Scheme

Taung Irrigation Scheme was also visited by the Portfolio Committee in order to identify the challenges that they might be facing and to establish whether the project is progressing well since its establishment. However, the members of the scheme were of the view that the Portfolio Committee does not recognize them and that other co-operative is given high priority (Ponelo-pele). The chairperson of the Portfolio Committee clarified that the committee had received a letter from that particular co-operative to address issues that seemed to be of high importance. It was indicated to the scheme that all the co-operatives within the province are treated equally as they all contribute to the GDP of the province and ultimately of the country.

12.1 Challenges by the Irrigation Scheme

- The tractor that was supplied by the department without capital to ensure implementation of the project e.g. diesel
- Funding for fencing of the project to ensure safety and security of both production and the facilities.
- Extension officers who do not divulge or disseminate necessary information to all the farmers in proper channels as well as not taking their responsibility in terms of protecting state assets being stolen e.g. pipes
- Debt amounting to R9million which contributed to stoppage of the project as they are unable to irrigate the production.

- No feedback by the crisis committee with regard to the challenges that were to be discussed with the President.

12.2 Responses by the department

- The department provided funds in 2004 to resuscitate collapsed project.
- Interim Committee in the process of opening a trust account to channel all the funds from various funders such as MAFISA in order to pay debt.

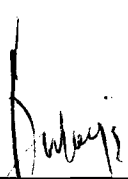
12.3 Recommendations (Taung Irrigation Scheme)

- A case number regarding the allegations of theft at the cooperatives should be submitted to the Portfolio Committee.
- R9million debt of the cooperative to be tabled by the Portfolio Committee to establish what contributed to the high costs.
- Line of communication should be established by the department and made known to all the projects to enable them to address their issues and avoid destruction by people who pretend to be part of the scheme.
- The department to take initiative to end the conflicts between the farmers and encourage them to work hand in hand for the betterment of the agricultural production to boost the economy within the province.
- A group market should be established and identify areas that can be funded and form a strong co-operative.

13. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Portfolio Committee urged the department to put extra effort to assist all the farmers within the province as farming is the economic hub of the country. The youth commission also appealed to the farmers to utilize the allocated land efficiently as failure to do that will contribute to the repossession of the land and handed to those who will utilize it to benefit the community. The Portfolio Committee has also made a commitment that the MEC for Agriculture would be invited to respond to all the matters raised.

Signed by:



Date:

28 August 2009

Hon. Dodo Baloyi
Chairperson, Agriculture, Conservation, Environment
and Rural Development