



President Jacob Zuma has called for training to be extended beyond farms to include all in the value chain

Pulling people from poverty

by Fidelis Zvomuya

President Jacob Zuma has called for education and training to be extended beyond agricultural farm life to non-farming income-generating agro-businesses, agro-processing, storage and processing.

Zuma said by educating farm workers, those along the value chain will see the country producing products that are on par with all basic international trade requirements.

“Education and training has to extend beyond farm life to incorporate non-farming rural income-generating activities and development of agro-businesses, which include agro-processing, storage and packaging,” the President said in his keynote address to the Farm Workers Summit held in Somerset West in July.

The poverty trap in most farms is compounded by limited access to high-school education, resulting in a community that is cut off from the rest of the country. Because of the dispersed spatial location of farms, as well as forestry and fishing businesses, workers live and work on privately owned property, isolated from one another.

In most cases, they are dependent on the farmers to provide their basic services, because most owners do not allow government officials to enter their premises.

Summit resolutions on education and training

On its final summit resolutions the delegates noted that the majority of vulnerable workers do not have access to basic education and training.

“The absence of science education that talks to the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors is a concern. Also, the lack of value addition opportunities and access to markets at local level and the lack of transformation in the sectors are challenges,” the communiqué from the department of agriculture and forestry states.

At the summit, it was agreed that access to education and training for workers would be facilitated and guaranteed by the education departments and that these departments are expected to take leading roles in the implementation of this commitment.

“Mentorship programmes to support the development of subsistence and small-holder producers will be established. Skills development programmes will be developed for each sector and an audit on the subsector skills will be undertaken.

“There must be promotion of science careers in rural areas, create incentive schemes to attract mathematics and science educators to work in rural areas and farms,” the communiqué states. In general, however, Zuma acknowledged that working conditions for many farm workers still remain far from ideal. “Long and unpaid working hours are

still a norm in some of the farms in the country. “Most of the workers do not have any kind of insurance, including Unemployment Insurance Fund, which means their future is not secure,” he said.

Weak bargaining power

Zuma said farm workers do not have the opportunity and means to organise themselves, which means they have very weak bargaining power.

“The status and conditions of women and children on the farms also need attention. Since this sector is often isolated, it takes long before practices such as child labour are uncovered, which calls for vigilance by government and non-governmental organisations.”

The summit was organised by the department of agriculture, forestry and fisheries and used by farm workers and those living on farms as a platform to influence future legislation governing their conditions at work and their security of tenure.

This national summit was a culmination of provincial summits that were held in the country’s nine provinces, consolidate the submissions collected and was handed over to the department of agriculture for use in formulating future legislation.

To provide evidence of the reality of working people within the sector, summit delegates representing the working life of farm workers, forestry and fishing workers gave personal testimonies of their life circumstances.

Zuma told delegates that everyone must commit themselves as government, labour, commercial and emerging agriculture and all sectors, that they will not rest, for as long as farm workers and farm dwellers do not receive respect and proper treatment from some of the farmers, lack proper housing with proper ablution facilities, have difficulty in accessing basic amenities and face long distances to access government basic services. **UM**



Farm workers work in a laboratory at a farm in Christiana



Farm workers packing fruit