

The MEC for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform
Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Executive Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality
Mayor of Matatiele Local Municipality
Members of the Traditional Leadership (Amakhosi)
Members of the Mayoral Committee;
Councillors
Chairperson of the Forest Sector Charter Council
Vice- Chairperson of the National Forests Advisory Council
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen;

South Africans have come a long way in celebrating the National Arbor Week which is one of the important campaigns in the agriculture and environmental calendars. Arbor Day was first celebrated in our country in 1983. This captured the imagination of people who recognised the need for raising awareness of the value of trees and forests in our society. As sources of primary societal needs such as building material, food, medicine, and simple scenic beauty, trees and forests play a vital role in the health and well-being of our communities. Collective enthusiasm for the importance of these issues in South Africa inspired the National Government to extend the celebration of Arbor Day to National Arbor Week in 1999. From 1 to 7 September every year, government institutions, schools, communities, businesses and organisations are reminded and encouraged to participate in community "greening" to improve the health and beauty of the local environment. In recent times, the scope of the Arbor Week campaign and the greening function has grown to include issues of global importance such as conservation of species biodiversity, food security and mitigation of green-house gases that lead to global climate change.

The year 2017 has been declared the year of Oliver Reginald Tambo. It is the year of unity in action by all South Africans as we move South Africa forward, together. We hope it will be the same in greening that we can get government, private sector, Community Based Organisations and Non-Government Organisations working together towards the greening of our country.

Programme Director, it is a fact that our country is still facing the challenge of drought. Though the situation has improved in other areas, sectors such as agriculture and forestry are still feeling the effects of drought on production and general issues related to climate. These prevailing drought conditions could be a sign that the effects of climate change which manifests itself as global warming are already starting to set in. This means climate change is now a reality. For this reason, the Department has decided to retain the theme "*Forests and Water*" so that as we promote tree planting to mitigate against climate change and to address household food security we are mindful of the fact that we should concentrate on indigenous species that helps to conserve water.

It is again for the same reason that the Department promotes the trees of the year. For this year the *Buffalo Thorn and Ebony Trees* have been selected as trees of the year. The trees of the year are selected from the species that are becoming extinct from our indigenous heritage. One species is common and the other is rare in terms of occurrence.

The Million Trees Programme is an innovative public greening initiative that was launched in 2017 with the main aim of contributing nationally towards the improvement of quality of life and contribute to the development of sustainable human settlements. The programme provides low-income communities with fruit trees to plant at their homes. It also targets schools, early learning centres, clinics and old age homes. The aim is to plant atleast a million trees across the country annually.

As part of the implementation of the greening programme it is estimated that about 3000 trees would have been planted by the end of the campaign throughout the area of Matatiele Local Municipality.

Ladies and gentlemen, my Department has developed a national greening strategy which aims to support Local government, Non Government Organisations, Community Based Organisations and other role players such as the corporate sector to initiate and implement greening interventions. The greening strategy's main focus is to assist Municipalities to develop greening plans at local level and to ensure that greening is included in the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). This initiative came as a result of addressing the way services were provided in the previous dispensation where more

affluent areas were provided for in terms of greening services, whereas the previously disadvantaged areas such as townships were not catered for. The main focus of the greening strategy is to uplift previously disadvantaged areas, while maintaining and protecting trees and other elements of greening in areas where they already exist.

Programme Director, according to the results of the 2015 revision the world population reached 7.3 billion as of mid-2015, implying that the World has added approximately one billion people in the last twelve years. According to this report, it is predicted that the World population will continue to grow and more than half of the global population growth between now and 2050 is expected to occur in Africa.

This has serious implications for food security. Traditional methods of food production and nutrition need to adapt to the changes and growing demands for food. This means that primary production of food is faced by a myriad of challenges amongst them competing natural resources for production, with land being the primary and critical one.

As food prices go high because of the global economic instability, many South Africans cannot afford to buy healthy food because the basic staples become scarce and expensive. Hence, the Department has joined the nation in embarking on greening the nation initiative. A healthy, diverse and productive environment treasured by the whole community. Through greening and Climate Smart Agriculture food insecure households will have access to environmentally-friendly agricultural technologies, resources and training, and capacity to reduce hunger.

Forestry through jobs in rural areas creates an environment where households derive an income to buy food and other items in the household. However, where small growers are involved, small plantations could be integrated with food gardens or cash crops to ensure household food security while awaiting the trees to grow. Such an Agroforestry system could be one of the key pillars for reducing hunger and poverty in both urban and rural areas. As a result the Department has finalized the development of the Agroforestry strategy and Implementation plan. The strategy will be piloted for implementation in phases in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Programme Director, trees do not only make a contribution to sustainable development through household food security alone. Trees and forests work as the world's carbon sinks and have a greater capacity to absorb Carbon emissions. On the other hand the destruction of the world's forests and other vegetation by humans actually reduces nature's carbon sinking capacity.

As they grow, trees and other green plants accumulate biomass. About 45% of the dry weight of plant biomass consists of Carbon, all of which comes from Carbon dioxide these plants have removed from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. Very hard and heavy wood contains lots of carbon. About 70% of the above-ground biomass of a forest is found in tree trunks. Wood is a very important storage of Carbon and it is the part of a tree most used for all kinds of purposes. Depending on how we use the wood, carbon may remain locked up for a very long time.

As we strive to contribute to food security it is important that measures are in place to protect the land and the food that we produce. Fire is one of the tools that we require for veld management and cooking by our communities but it can cause serious damage if not properly managed. In terms of integrated fire management, we are in a process of amending our legislation which will allow for participation of local communities in Fire Protection Associations. Through this process, the Department will provide capacity building for communities, Local and Traditional Authorities to increase awareness in fire management. I am aware that there is a community afforestation project in Mabenyeng that has planted 400 ha of Gum trees in the 1750 ha they have been allocated. The project has for years been affected by fires and as support, I am committing to providing some fire management equipment that will assist this community in firefighting.

Programme Director, in 2015, the Country hosted the 14th World Forestry Congress in Kwazulu-Natal, Durban. The World Forestry Congress was a convergence of scientists, policy-makers, government officials, technicians, civil society organizations and other role players to discuss and debate challenges, solutions and new innovations affecting the forestry sector globally. However during events of note such as the Congress it is beneficial when there is a legacy left behind, especially for local communities. The Department resolved to profile some of these projects during the annual Arbor Week celebrations. The projects for profiling this year include the following

- (a)** The Forest of Remembrance in KwaMakhutha, KwaZulu-Natal which was unveiled by the Minister to launch the 2015 Arbor Week Campaign and the World Forestry Congress. The initiative was a partnership between DAFF, eThekweni Municipality and a youth group called Future Leaders of Chance where 11 ha of an indigenous forest in the area was rehabilitated. To further support the Future Leaders of Chance, DAFF will provide material and financial support towards the establishment of a Community Based nursery to be operated by this youth group.
- (b)** The One tree-One child programme initiated by the OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. To ensure the growth and effectiveness of the project, the Department has engaged with the Municipality on the development of a greening plan for the King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality (Mthatha). The project will be supported with 600 trees.
- (c)** The furniture making projects supported by SAFCOL in Mpumalanga and Limpopo are recognized as making a contribution towards the creation of economic and employment opportunities, especially in the rural areas of the country.

Programme Director, as part of the Arbor Week campaign, we encourage Municipalities to be involved in greening initiatives and reward them through the Arbor City Award competition. This competition is a partnership between DAFF, Total South Africa and the Institute for Environment and Recreation Management, This year, a total of 46 entries were received and six were shortlisted based on criteria set out by the adjudication panel which comprised of DAFF, Total South Africa as the sponsor, South African National Biodiversity Institute and the IERM. The criteria focused on availability of greening policy/ strategy with budget; Maintenance and operational activities; extension of greening services to previously disadvantaged areas such as townships; and public participation in greening projects and stimulating Local Economic Development.

Today as we launch the Arbor Week Campaign, we will also be congratulating and awarding prizes to Municipalities who have done well in the competition. In addition to this, I want to encourage the Matatiele Municipality to be involved in greening and enter the competition. DAFF will after this event, engage with you to assist with the drafting of the Greening Plan.

The Arbor Week Campaign and the Arbor City Awards competition would not be a success without our partners and sponsors. TOTAL South Africa has been sponsoring the three programmes namely; Arbor Week, Million Trees Programme and the Arbor City Awards. Our appreciation goes out to them, without their support the impact of our greening programme would not have taken place in such a short period.

In addition to Total South Africa, the Department would like to thank other partners and role players who through their efforts we are able to make our country green and a better place for all people to live in. The general community and other sectors such as business and Non-Government Organisations are invited to join hands with government so that we can achieve our goal of greening the country. Government cannot do it alone and we need your support. Working together we can achieve greening of our country.

Thank You