

SA, Namibia share notes on land reform

South Africa and neighbouring Namibia met on Monday, 22 October, to share notes, best practice and common interest in rural development and land reform.



Image source: www.pixabay.com

Led by rural development and land reform minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and Namibian minister of urban and rural development Peya Mushelenga, the talks, which have been labelled as a “learning session”, allowed the two sides to introspect on cooperatives policy formulation.

"We are very keen to learn. It is important to keep learning from each other, particularly as neighbours. We want to learn lessons and not repeat the mistakes they made because they were liberated first," said Nkoana-Mashabane at the end of the meeting, adding that there will be senior officials visiting each programme.

Among others, the two ministers also shared notes on Agriparks, sustainable farming, cooperatives and rural development centres.

The South African government is proposing a review of Section 25 of the Constitution, which will pave the way for the expropriation of land without compensation. Despite the country being 23 years into democracy, many South Africans remain dispossessed of land.

A land audit done by the government revealed that only 13% of the land is in the hands of government; about 87% of the land is in the private sector, while black South Africans still lag far behind and own only 4% of the land.

Government had a target that by at least 2014 it would have redistributed 30% of the land, but only managed to redistribute 13%.

This slow progress has been attributed to the high cost of restitution, in which government has spent over R40bn on just 8.4-million hectares of land.

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform has settled 80,664 claims benefiting 2.1-million beneficiaries at the cost of R40bn, inclusive of financial compensation to beneficiaries.

Namibia, on the other hand, wants to transfer 43%, or 15-million hectares of its arable agricultural land to previously disadvantaged blacks by 2020. According to the Namibia Agriculture Union, at the end of 2015, only 27% has been redistributed, while white Namibians own 70% of all agricultural land.

Willing-buyer willing-seller policy

The two ministers noted that rural development is about people and using the best resource - the land - to empower and skill them.

“Land is far more than farming. It’s about making sure that some of the procurement that government does involves communities... for example, in the cooperatives. We have also noted that the two countries shared a similar history and similar challenges of inequality, unemployment and poverty,” said Mushelenga.

Mushelenga said the challenge they face is resettling those who lost their land. He said there were willing buyers but not willing sellers, and an imbalanced economy.

“The land conference discussed issues pertaining to urban land and its ownership, and the recommendation made is that for industrial and business land, everyone is welcomed. But for the residential land, we should give priority to nationals because they are there to reside on it,” said Mushelenga.

At the start of October, Namibia held a national land conference that discussed policies that will accelerate land reform.

Mushelenga said like South Africa, their law allows for expropriation but the process the two countries have adopted is different. In South Africa, the process is led by Parliament for a constitutional review, while in Namibia, the process is led by government to deal with access to land.

Nkoana-Mashabane reiterated that land without compensation will ensure land is equitably distributed according to need, agricultural production and food security, while promoting economic transformation.