RAPITSE MONTSHO

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s an emerging black farmer benefiting from the South African government's agricultural policies aimed at offering sustainable food security, I am often asked how, after growing up in urban areas with promises of greener pastures and a brighter tomorrow, I was attracted to the rural life of farming and what my experiences have been.

I have a simple answer. I am turning typically poor hillside plots into verdant paradise in which mealie fields and vegetables are a source of food for my family, clan and village local markets, and challenging the perception that farming and food production is for

LAND BRINGS ME JOY AND PEACE

khaki-clad bearded Afrikaners.

There is no doubt that demand for land reform has intensified as unemployment and poverty in South Africa have worsened.

However, thanks to the policy directives of the departments of agriculture and land affairs, and public works and infrastructure, the timely allocation of 700 000 hectares of land brings me joy and peace.

I have realised that one can accumulate wealth through land ownership and farming, thanks to government's old land redistribution for agricultural development programme.

Launched by the then department of agriculture and land affairs, the programme provided grants to previously disadvantaged individuals to use land for agriculture.

From this programme, I learnt a lot - from food production and distribution to soil types and appropriate cultivations. I also learnt how to work with people and how to overcome challenges.

PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY PANEL REPORT ON LAND REFORM

We should be grateful to the presidential advisory panel report on land reform, led by the late Dr Vuyo Mahlati, which recommended changing the Constitution to allow government to seize land without compensation, but only in certain circumstances.

I am glad that the report poured water on wholesale land seizures without payment, which was the fear of some farmers, investors and foreign governments.

It recommended that expropriation without compensation be applied under specific circumstances, including regarding abandoned land, land held purely for speculative purposes, land already occupied and used by labour tenants and former labour tenants, and inner city buildings with absentee landlords.

The report said land seizure without payment was one of several land acquisition strategies available to government.

It also recommended the Land Claims Court be reformed to become the main expropriation body, and be given additional powers to adjudicate on all landrelated matters, including the calculations of the value of land targeted for appropriation and what rights affected land owners were entitled to.

2020 EXPROPRIATION BILL

Thanks to the presidential panel report, the 2020 Expropriation Bill will allow land to be expropriated in the public interest and help boost government's ailing land redistribution programme.

The bill, which is being piloted by Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille and Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development Minister Thoko Didiza, will now be tabled in Parliament for processing.

The truth is, previous expropriation laws were restrictive and only allowed the state to expropriate land for "public purpose". This includes the building of roads, dams and other public infrastructure.

The 2020 Expropriation Bill will broaden the scope for expropriation in line with the Constitution, which provides that the state can expropriate "in the public interest", including paying no compensation. The proposed new law will harmonise more than 140 pieces of legislation empowering various organs of state to expropriate.

SUSTENANCE PRODUCTION AND FOOD SECURITY

Farming is the key to the food conundrum, and the green fields of food produce are at the crux of the agrarian revolution now under way, aimed at resolving this issue once and for all.

Black emerging farmers like myself are leading the way in the move from subsistence living to sustenance through partnerships with white farmers or on our own.

After all, sustenance production and food security are regarded as the starting point for the type of diverse agricultural economy that offers true incomeearning and life-changing possibilities.

BUILDING THE CAPABILITY TO EXCHANGE SKILLS

Here in Ventersdorp in North West, a town once associated with Eugène Terre'Blanche, the late leader of the right-wing Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, the farming model adopted by Johan Liebenberg and myself within the precincts of the same neighbourhoods and villages answers the question of

whose brother I am, and not who my brother is. We are building the capability to exchange skills and politics for the expedience of transforming the lives of the poor in Mogopa village near Ventersdorp.

For me and Liebenberg, the relationship between an emerging farmer and a commercial farmer is the key to successful farming and applying best practices, and that relationship must be based on a business partnership that would be beneficial to the nation.

For us, food security is a business that does not interest the children of white farmers, as was the tradition, but it is a business that must be pursued by farmers such as ourselves who are committed to food security.

LAND, MILITARY VETERANS AND RESERVES

As a member of the SA National Defence Force Reserves, I also believe that military veterans and reserves could add value in the emerging farming sector. They can forge links with experienced



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HARVESTING TIME Journalist-turned-farmer Rapitse Montsho turns typically poor hillside plots into verdant paradise in which mealie fields and vegetables are a source of food

commercial farmers in a model of smart partnerships.

Despite the fact that some people think that white farmers have the right skills and may have the wrong politics, while military veterans have the right politics and may have the wrong agricultural skills, it is essential for both partners to turn swords into ploughshares.

Military veterans and reserve force members have a critical role in the food security value chain in rural areas. Their participation in farming can achieve the blanket philosophy of ensuring that trained eyes and ears are on the ground. Such an immense contribution would demonstrate the patriotic commitment of military veterans.

RISING SCARCITY OF WATER

According to the Defence Review magazine, the propensity for conflicts arising from food security will most likely be heightened by the rising scarcity of water, and one can safely argue that the next world war will be over water.

The magazine argues that more than 75 million Africans will be affected by the climate crisis, especially small-scale and subsistence farmers. The compounding effects of how scarce resources are distributed has the ugly potential for intra-state conflict.

COOPERATIVE FARMING

Government should promote and support cooperative farming, which empowers farmers, particularly women, who do not have a steady source of income.

Women's engagement in cooperatives and farmer groups gives them a sense of independence and confidence. They are able to contribute to their family and household expenses, educate their children and run their households.

The security of having their own income has empowered many women who never dreamt that their daily chores would generate income.

AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IS AN **INCLUSIVE ECONOMY**

Land reform and agricultural issues affect the entire nation. Land reform programmes, including the Expropriation Bill, will definitely create opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups and make a contribution to the growth of the agricultural sector

on an inclusive economy. As former president Nelson Mandela once said: "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the action of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Let land reform produce emerging farmers across the country.

> Montsho is an emerging black farmer in Ventersdorp. He is a member of the SA National Defence Force Reserves