

Statement delivered by
Her Excellency Angela Thokozile Didiza
Minister for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development of the Republic of South Africa
on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)

3 July

Your Excellency, FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu, our Chairperson, or Honorable ministers, distinguished guests, representatives from the civil society and private sector, Excellences, ladies, and gentlemen, it is indeed an honour and privilege to address you at this 43rd Session of the FAO Conference. Let me once again recommit South Africa and its people to support the fresh mandate given to Director-General, Dr QU Dongyu to lead the FAO.

Chairperson, the theme of this year's Conference is Water Resources Management for the *four betters*, Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment, and Better Life. It is more than relevant in the face of the crisis that affected negatively on the Agrifood systems and very chains.

The triple-seen challenges of COVID-19 conflict and climate change have all exposed the fault lines in our food systems. These challenges have also galvanized us to refocus on shifting the world into a sustainable and resilient path inquest to fast-track the achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in our case in Africa, the goals of Agenda 2063. These include addressing the water, energy, climate and food environment nexus.

Water resources management is important for South Africa, as we are a water-scarce country and the third-year driest country in the world. South Africa has approximately 14 million hectares under cultivation. It has generally low rainfall and limited underground aquifers. South Africa also depends on water transfers from our neighbouring nations to supplement our needs and that we appreciate.

This has both economic and social impacts where choices are to be made between the demands of agriculture, key industrial activities such as mining and power generation, and large and growing urban centres. The scarcity of water compels us to explore water use efficiency strategies as we work towards building a resilient food sector affected by the effects of climate change. To this effect, we have embarked on many initiatives to address this issue, including but not limited to the use of rainwater harvesting, and grey water reuse techniques in various communities.

We have also invested in the development of a software-based decision support system to provide both generic and site-specific risk-based delegation water quality guidelines for South Africa. A discussion on water resource management would not be complete without reference to flood risk management. Floods have proven to be a formidable challenge for Agrifood systems through disruption of production and destruction of infrastructure and threat to lives and livelihoods.

South Africa has witnessed the destructive power of floods in recent years with severe flooding in provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo causing immense devastation. We have recognized the importance of integrated flood risk management and have taken a significant step towards its implementation. One of our key initiatives is the establishment of early warning systems that alert farmers and communities about impending floods.

We largely rely on South Africa weather services, weather forecasting technology. It is our desire to employ modern technologies such as remote sensing, to provide timely information, enabling farmers to take proactive measures to protect their crops and livestock. Furthermore, we also need to invest in the development of resilient infrastructure and agricultural practices that can withstand flood events.

This include the construction of flood resistant storage facilities, the promotion of climate smart farming techniques, and the adoption of sustainable water management practices, notwithstanding these challenges. It is our assessment that by incorporating flood-risk management into our agricultural policies and programmes, we can be better prepared.

Addressing the impact of floods on agrifood systems requires a collaborative effort at both national and international levels. We must share our perspectives, strategies, and solutions to enhance our collective knowledge and learn from each other's experiences. We must ensure that we have a sound global water management governance framework supported by robust national policies.

South Africa stands ready to collaborate with other nations and international organizations to foster knowledge, exchange capacity building, and technical assistance in the field of flood risk management. Moreover, we must prioritize the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as small-scale farmers and rural communities, especially women in our flood risk management strategies. We also have to de-risk the public pest by ensuring that we optimize public-private partnerships in flood risk management.

In conclusion, Madame Chair and honourable Members let us seize this opportunity to recommit ourselves to integrated water resource management in the agrifood sector by raising awareness, sharing perspectives, and building consensus. Together we can develop and implement robust strategies and solutions that protect our farmers, secure our food supplies, and build resilient agrifood systems that can withstand the challenges of the future. I thank you.