

COMMUNITY CONSTITUENCY ADDRESS TO THE 15TH ANNUAL NEDLAC SUMMIT
By Andrew Madella (Disabled People South Africa – Secretary General)
Birchwood Conference Centre, BOKSBURG,
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Building a Partnership Anchored On Shared Growth Strategy

Programme Director;
Honourable Deputy President of the Republic, Kgalema Motlanthe;
Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers present at this 15th NEDLAC Summit;
Members of provinces' Executive Councils;
Government Officials;
NEDLAC Executive Director, Dr. Herbert Mkhize;
Leaders from all the NEDLAC constituencies,
Distinguished guests; and
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As NEDLAC's Community Constituency we sincerely welcome another opportunity to address you all.

Our sincerity in this respect flows from the fact that the Summit grants us the opportunity to critically and constructively reflect on our achievements for the past year, as much as it presents us with opportunities to define new, and redefine ongoing, policy objectives and strategies for the period ahead.

Programme Director,

Allow us to hasten into extracting a paragraph out of our Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana's address when, in March 2009, he said the following:

A globalised economy that does not deliver decent work to all will fail. People in the streets of our country want "work". Work to meet the needs of their families in safety and health, educate their children, offer them income security after retirement, they want work in which they are treated decently and their basic rights are respected.

South Africa is undergoing a journey out of the global economic crisis that we were not immune to. We are all certain of at least one thing that the end of this journey would remind us of: That there are no battles without casualties. Among these we count: decreased chances of employability among the unemployed; job losses among those who previously had jobs; families being forced into distress; as a result, an increase in social ills; workers' unyielding demands for higher wages; and to reopen the cycle again, hyperinflation.

Among other reasons, it is due to the hard squeeze that our socio-economic reality has felt that the necessity for the development of a shared growth strategy came about.

Unfortunately, growth is not a linear, straight line on a text book page. It is an amorphous phenomenon whose achievement, if we are lucky, may only be realised through consistency by generations after us. However, this shared growth needs to bear certain qualities and its manifestation will start through 'social dialoguing'.

Programme Director,

NEDLAC should pride itself as one of the few dialogue-enabling structures and processes through which Organised Business; Organised Community, Organised Labour and Government constituencies may frankly and significantly hammer out our collective aspirations into desirable policy and programmes' outcomes.

The first of the qualities that a shared growth strategy must have is that it must be crafted and reviewed and agreed upon through NEDLAC's processes. In NEDLAC, our consistent interchanges are the beginning of consolidating a deeper sense of understanding one another as a country, and thereby ensuring the paving of that path where we wish this country's future generations to broaden our strengths.

Therefore, we should be jealous of NEDLAC's accomplishments to date, as much as we should continue to strive for the strengthening of this institution's internal mechanisms for it is through these that we would anchor NEDLAC's role in our country's growth itinerary.

Secondly, both vertical and horizontal institutional integration between NEDLAC and other institutions need to be injected with life. In strengthening NEDLAC's institutional mechanisms, it would be unwise not to acknowledge that this institution is only one of the multiplicities of similar institutions both below and above it.

However, by and large, these remain disconnected in their work.

Therefore, it is our deep-rooted desire and belief that the work of all 'social dialogue'-seeking, consultative, and governance structures should assume an impact-bearing and effective integrated approach towards their respective work, and thereby achieving greater relevance in communities' day-to-day experiences throughout our country.

In this respect, in order to lay emphasis on institutional integration and the conditions allowing for it, we are hereby asking to be granted the liberty to paraphrase the Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe's speech of 04 August 2010 when he was addressing the Regenesys graduation ceremony.

The Deputy President was discussing the need for organisations to have codes of ethics that are enforceable through mechanisms in order for these to be meaningful.

Similarly, we see it befitting to say: If legislations and policies aimed at achieving operational institutional integration are to have real meaning to NEDLAC's intended objectives, these legislations and policies need to be enforceable.

If there are no mechanisms to enforce institutional and administration-to-administration integration, this leaves room for democracy to be manipulated with socio-political distancing resulting at communities' level.

As examples, we believe that important integration avenues like the Intergovernmental Relations Framework (IGRF) and local government Integrated Development Planning (IDP) processes need to contain weighty community emphasis in order for them to have the desired and effective contributions towards anchoring NEDLAC's continuous deliberations on our collective efforts of constructing a shared growth strategy.

Programme Director.

Therefore, as South Africans, when we fashion out a future growth strategy, this strategy should neither be pigeonholed into a category “economic” nor should it remain in the exclusive purview of some experts at the communities’ expense, lest we forget: The economic is the political, and the political is the personal.

The growth strategy we envisage is a comprehensive one that will ensure that as the country’s economy is grown, that this growth’s proceeds are democratically accounted for.

The masses of our communities need to know, and consent to, the direction that their country is heading towards. Not only towards the end of a political term in office, but through the integrated potential that needs to be realised in the processes and structures we already referred to earlier. The development of a growth strategy should equally include the deepening of socio-political accountability mechanisms.

Programme Director,

Let us reiterate to all those present in this Summit today that in order to lead in developing a sustainable and strong growth, South Africa needs to meaningfully and structurally link all its institutions of ‘social dialogue’, consultative, and Constitutional governance so as to enhance measures through which communities’ aspirations – that collective unit that we all come from – are unquestionably visible in the eyes of the services’ intended and rightful recipients.

Moreover, henceforth ours is to collectively move beyond formalised democratic institutions towards the realisation of a “partnership anchored on shared growth” that takes into account the need for operating within structured relationships that are emphatic of the organic nature of that growth.

Thus far our institutions have given greater prominence to: the bureaucratisation of our communities’ aspiration; and the exploitation of poor people’s adversity for political ends and using them as what has come to be known as “voting cattle”.

This is at the backdrop of rising disenchantment, and undesirable destructive communities-based protests that are mimicking the political opportunism that has embedded itself in the echelons of power.

Programme Director,

Let us remind our reputable leaders and attentive fellow country people under this roof today of the words of one of the late Zimbabwean literary protégés, Dambudzo Marechera, who wrote the following in 1978:

I didn’t feel bitter. I was glad that things happened the way they had; I couldn’t have stayed on in that House of Hunger where every morsel of sanity was snatched from you the way some kind of bird snatch food from the very mouths of babes. And the eyes of the House of Hunger lingered upon you as though some indefinable beast was about to pounce on you.

This extract’s eloquence becomes relevant in an environment where our current institutional framework increasingly results in the bureaucratisation of communities’ daily necessities like lack of food, and thereby resulting in civil detachment and political alienation.

This leads us to the **third** quality that the shared growth strategy that should be devised by NEDLAC should embrace.

In doing so, the Community Constituency is reiterating its awareness and appreciation of the President of the Republic, Jacob Zuma, in launching the long-awaited government's Comprehensive Rural Development Programme's (CRDP) pilot site in Muyexe (Limpopo Province), and the subsequent unveiling of similar sites in Riemvasmaak (Northern Cape Province); Mkhondo/Donkerhoek (Mpumalanga Province); Mokgalwaneng, Disake and Matlametlong (North West Province); Diyatalawa, Mokgolokoeng and Tshiame (Free State Province); Msinga and Vryheid (KwaZulu-Natal); Dysseisdorp (Western Cape Province); and Mhlontlo (Eastern Cape Province).

Programme Director,

We further emphasise, and thereby contextualising, the central role of rural development in community members' lived experiences of food shortage crisscrossed by numerous other real phenomena. This emphasis is best brought to the forefront by Lennard J. Davies' words when he says:

For centuries, people with disabilities have been... isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalised and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group.

The reality reflected in Davies above could, to a large degree, be said about our country's youth economic misempowerment as well as our mothers', sisters', and daughters' persistent abuse. It is for this reason that we welcome the CRDP as one of government's significant instruments in addressing the multiple and systemic challenges facing disabled people, women, youth and children.

The CRDP should be viewed more as a long-term impact food security initiative whose success will depend on our unrelenting vigour not to allow our people to be hungry because of lack of food. As a country, we should extend CRDP's efforts to individual households through ensuring that:

- Municipal councillors and their administrations initiate households' vegetables' gardens through providing every household throughout our country – in traditionally-owned, rural, peri-urban, and urban land alike – with vegetables' seeds. If health, water and electricity are regarded by our government as free basic services, how can vegetable seeds and fertilisers not be? Household vegetables' gardens are an essential for every household, indigent or not, and they are a conscious way of starting a farming culture among black communities who, according to research, have been showing a diminishing interest in studying agricultural studies when entering higher and further educational institutions.
- Communities' social development officials and community development workers (CDWs) are an inherent part of coordinating the resourcing of households' vegetables' gardens. Along with local government councils, the Ministry of Rural Development and Land Affairs should pursue the urgent need for each household to have its own vegetables' garden.
- All municipalities should identify land within each community that could be used for social co-operative farming projects. This is a way of establishing and consolidating a community-level farming culture and self-sustenance. It is also a practical, organic and day-to-day way of

keeping hunger at bay while working towards consolidating cash-dependent ways of securing food for our communities.

- Community-based food security initiatives should start to be given increasing budgetary attention through local government's integrated development plans (IDPs) than monetary-reliant food security initiatives.
- The ministries of Rural Development and Land Affairs and Higher Education and Training should work beyond the exclusive strengthening of agricultural offerings in agricultural colleges. The same should be engrained throughout all further education and training institutions.

We refer you back to NEDLAC's 14th Annual Summit when President Zuma cautioned:

We need to see the future as if we are not walking in the dark.

The **fourth** quality of a shared growth strategy is its ability to realise that it will need to reverse the quadruple oppressions that have characterised our landscape for much too long now while the rest of society has been looking the other way.

The continuity of these humiliation-inviting and burdensome attributes is evident in one disabled young girl whom I know of and whose family lives in the rural North West province. This young girl's parents cannot even afford to dream of getting her the wheelchair that she desperately needs because of the cyclical poverty-income that the family has been subsisting on from one generation to the next.

My challenge to you is: will the growth strategy that will be crafted by this house take away the pains of hunger and the despondency that she has been living in since infancy?

Programme Director,

In an age where globalisation orders the nature of all of our relationships, the Community Constituency unflinchingly supports this house's call for growth.

Same as the developed world economies have come to realise that the successful and credible resuscitation of the global economy will be effected through and by developing economies, we similarly urge this gathering – specifically the audience of the Deputy President – to be mindful of our future reality that: South Africa will achieve a strong, sustainable and balanced growth only through community-based co-operatives.

The Community Constituency represents a growing critical mass of sectors that are increasingly establishing co-operatives where their members live.

The challenge that these co-operatives are faced with are multiple, main among these being:

- Despite the fact that eighty percent (80%) of government departments at all tiers are resourced with financing mechanisms that could be utilised by these co-operatives, in effect as well as in practice co-operatives continue to be disregarded and thereby struggling for their survival. This is at the backdrop that globally the co-operative sector was the least affected economic sector by the now-leaving global economic crisis. We call on all partners to make community co-operatives work in all industries so as to obviate the possibility to a double dip.

- Our community co-operatives find the application of preferable procurement, with respect to selling their produce and services both in the public and private sectors, to be absent.

Despite contrary evidence sourced internationally, in South Africa community co-operatives remain an insufficiently explored source of organic social stability in their role of assisting government to deliver core services within communities, and thereby minimising service delivery-related protests.

Programme Director,

We are simply reminding this esteemed gathering that: disability, gender, geographic location and race will not be allowed as motives to pursue the injustices of the past and self-enrichment at the expense of the millions of South Africans.

The people cannot stomach this pain any further. Deprivation, destitution and a life of indigence should end the day we table the final version of that strategy.

Programme Director,

Fifthly, in order for South Africa to define and implement a successful growth strategy, that strategy would need to be closely monitored and every aspect of it operationalised over the next fifty years.

This means that in order for the country to grow its economic base, we consciously need to promote locally-relevant and locally-owned industries that add value to our current productive resources' base. Therefore, this aspect of our growth strategy will need to be emphasised through our industrial strategy's approach.

In so doing, we should further strengthen a skilling economy through which our farms can feed our growing population, while ensuring that our universities start putting real emphasis on the generation of research-based postgraduate degrees that will address the needs of our growth strategy.

Henceforth, we should not sit on as audiences and watch different workers – by virtue of race, disability, or gender – being differently remunerated for the same value of work.

Programme Director,

In conclusion, when delivering his Nobel Prize lecture for being the recipient of the same award in economics, Stephen Stieglitz might have been reminding us that in pursuit of growth we also need to alter our institutions and their outcomes accordingly. He specifically stated that:

One cannot ignore the possibility that the survival of the [past] paradigm was partly because the belief in that paradigm, and [its] policy prescriptions, has served certain interests.

Now, the Community Constituency reasserts that NEDLAC needs to reformulate these same institutions and their culture of exclusivity with the view of bringing forth a strong, sustainable and balanced South African growth that will lead to fifty years of development.

These are the possibilities within our horizon.

I thank you.

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