

# Will social dialogue deliver on the people's contract?

*The first anniversary of the Growth and Development Summit (GDS) has come and gone. Are the social partners delivering on their commitments? The **Labour Bulletin** talks to **Joel Netshitenzhe** about the concept of the people's contract.*

**Labour Bulletin:** A central element of the ANC's election manifesto is the idea that delivery will occur through a 'people's contract'. What does this mean in practical terms?

**Joel Netshitenzhe:** The overall objective is to ensure that in all areas of endeavour in society we have an approach and spirit of partnership which guides implementation whether it is in the area of crime or HIV/AIDS. We should be guided by the principle that people are their own liberators. Therefore, we need to mobilise them in their own communities and organisations to ensure implementation.

In practical terms this approach is expressed in various ways. There are elements of partnerships and people's contracts which have been evolving over the years. For example, the start of the major campaign around HIV/AIDS saw the setting up of the AIDS council in 1998. There are other similar examples as reflected in the community policing forums; the campaign around volunteerism or the

anti-corruption initiatives; the moral regeneration summit and in the area of the economy – first the 1998 presidential jobs summit and then the GDS last year.

The key challenge is how we consolidate the manifestation of these partnerships across the various sectors/areas which over time could emerge as a fully fledged people's contract. The manifestation of these 'peoples' contracts' is that it is not intended to be a top down process but rather initiatives which are built from the ground upwards. President Thabo Mbeki's state of the nation address (during the opening of parliament after the elections) reveals the progress achieved on the things government committed itself to during the GDS. The president was clear that as a partner in this process we will be meeting our own commitments. He was signalling to other social partners to deal with their commitments and ensure implementation of GDS agreements.

The basis of achieving a peoples'

contract in the economy requires that all key stakeholders accept the overall framework and programme of the main actor – government.

**Labour Bulletin:** What are the elements necessary for a partnership?

**Joel Netshitenzhe:** An important element is to ensure that a common vision exists to which people pay allegiance within organised formations (such as the union movement). In addition there are other challenges. For a partnership to work organisations such as unions need to ensure the leadership interact with membership to ensure and create awareness around the elements of a partnership. Secondly, some discussion needs to take place on what type of information an ordinary member of a trade union should have to appreciate the partnership. What is it that people need to know and understand for the partnership to work?

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*Netshitenzhe is head of GCIS.*