

Where are we at with the growth and development summit?



*Much fanfare was made when President Thabo Mbeki announced plans for a growth and development summit during his opening address to Parliament this year. Five months down the line, plans for the summit remain rather vague with indications of it being postponed until 2003. The **Labour Bulletin** looks at where the process is.*

As mentioned in *SALB 26 (2)*, the idea of a growth summit became a reality during the President's opening address in Parliament in February 2002. In his speech Thabo Mbeki linked such a summit to the idea of a social accord/compact.

Since that announcement preliminary discussions have taken place within Nedlac, various alliance structures and government. Some unease emerged as to whether the process should continue or whether it should die a slow death. This view was largely based on the concerns around what such a process would deliver in view of the experience of the Presidential Jobs Summit in 1998. It became clear during discussions that the summit should be postponed until next year. It was acknowledged that if it took place this year it would degenerate into yet another jobs summit experience as a number of major events would be dominating the scene.

In June 2002, Cabinet endorsed a document, which outlined a process to be followed in the build-up to the growth and development summit. The dti's head of external relations and policy coordination Wendy Dobson says government wants to ensure the process focuses on concrete issues rather than having an open-ended agenda. There has been some speculation that government wants to determine the agenda to ensure the summit process is not used as an opportunity to renegotiate government policy.

Dobson says government is looking to engage on a number of very targeted issues. The identification of these issues, which will form the subject of the agenda, will take place through a consultation process with senior representatives of the various

constituencies. It is envisaged that a minimum of three to five issues will be agreed on for an agenda for the summit process, Dobson says. Once these issues have been agreed to task teams will be established to deal with each of the issues identified. The success of the process will be dependent on senior level representation from all constituencies. Dobson pointed out that consultation might not be limited only to official business representation in Nedlac, but could extend to other sector specific business organisations.

In recent months there has been some concern expressed within government around the level of business input to broad policy debate and the disorganised state of business organisations. Such concerns were vocalised during the public hearings in Parliament on the dti's integrated manufacturing strategy. Business input and contributions could be given a boost with the recent decision by AngloGold chief executive officer Bobby Godsell to head up the business grouping in the MLC. Informally, government has welcomed this move. It is anticipated that the process will be held under the auspice of Nedlac. However, discussions in other structures such as the MLC could contribute to the success of the process.

The *Labour Bulletin 26 (2)* did a special focus on the growth and development summit which highlighted some issues, which could form the basis of an agenda. However, emerging discussions within the ANC in the build-up to the national policy conference in September reveals possible areas for discussion including the role of towns in economic development and the realisation of the need to the possible introduction of community-based public works programmes.