

Executive Director introduction

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This Annual report covers the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004.

There remains a number of challenges for Nedlac going forward. Nedlac's value lies in its endeavour to enhance democratic participation by civil society in South Africa. In doing so, it must also confront its own strengths and shortcomings.

It is common cause that Nedlac bears a heavy burden in its endeavour to manage a varied set of interests and has had to adapt global experience in social dialogue to local circumstances. Yet in the making of South Africa's democratic dispensation, we did not choose the path of least resistance for that is always the path of least foresight. We had to do the right thing and that's always difficult. It is exactly for this reason that Nedlac has grown over the years as much as it has.

Before the institution of Nedlac, the social parties did not have a formal forum for dialogue. Even if nothing else was achieved, the building of bridges between the different parties will remain an eminent and unique accomplishment for the council. In spite of all the differences and tensions, the social partners have a much greater understanding and respect for each other than ever before.

This growing understanding among the social partners is the key to South Africa's founding principle – openness to talk and sharing ideas with each other, to work together in solving new and old problems. It is the key to the further involvement of the people in their governance. Therefore, Nedlac's mission could never be finished.

Nedlac had an extremely busy schedule during the period under review because the policy and economic issues to be confronted varied widely. The council had to start implementing the agreements that the social partners made at the Growth and Development Summit. The increased job losses in the textile sector resulted in numerous Section 77 notices and the volatility of the exchange rate threatened the employment levels in the mining sector. On the policy front, the curbs on the use of plastic bags in the retail industry came into effect and there was an increased emphasis on commuter safety in Metrorail. All of this was in addition to the routine work programme of the chambers.

Nedlac needs to maintain its position as the pre-eminent site of social dialogue in South Africa. To do so, we have to monitor the implementation of various policies that the social partners and the state have committed to. Importantly, therefore, we have to find innovative ways to attract and retain the skills that are critical for achieving our objectives. Our efforts to date have been undermined by the persistent staff turnover in the secretariat.





Key highlights

(I) GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT AGREEMENT (GDS)

The Growth and Development Summit Agreement signed by all the Nedlac constituencies on 7 June 2003 has been the most important achievement for Nedlac in the period under review. The GDS agreement contains commitments by all the constituencies on what they will contribute to addressing the growth and development challenges facing South Africa. NEDLAC's role during this period has been to ensure that the constituencies continue to engage on the issues agreed upon at the Summit. (Details on the implementation of the GDS Agreements are dealt with under the relevant section.)

(II) EMPLOYMENT EQUITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Nedlac constituencies embarked on a campaign to raise employment equity (EE) awareness and to encourage designated employers to submit EE reports. The road shows were well attended by all Nedlac constituencies. More road shows are planned for 2004/5.

(III) CANCUN TRADE TALKS

Once again, Government took a quadri-partite delegation to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, Mexico. The labour representatives were Tony Ehrenreich, Tanya van Meelis and Cunningham Ngcukana; the community representative was Sizwe Shezi, and the business representatives were Hans van der Merwe, Michael McDonald and Cleo Mtshali. The Nedlac Co-ordinator of the Trade and Industry Chamber, Joy Smith, was also part of the delegation to Mexico. South Africa played an important role in mobilising developing countries, especially within Africa, to strive for the incorporation of development issues in the trade negotiations.

Social Dialogue remains a key instrument of promoting broader participation in policy formulation in South Africa. Nedlac is a unique model for social dialogue that is unparalleled in the world. The report that follows reviews Nedlac activities during the period under review and highlights areas where we have made excellent progress and those where more work is needed. ■