

Make the circle bigger - Mashatile

By: Khulekani Magubane – Sunday Times

September 11, 2023

Make the circle bigger - Mashatile The deadline to establish a social compact has passed, but the recent pledge by CEOs to assist the government with logistical challenges, critical infrastructure interventions and the fight against crime and corruption is encouraging, says Deputy President Paul Mashatile.

Since assuming the position of deputy president, I have witnessed encouraging moves towards social compacting, such as the recent commitment of CEOs to work with the government to reconstruct the economy,' he said. In July, CEOs representing 115 companies committed to assist the government.

The social compact was conceptualised to foster commitment by the government, business, labour and civil society to build a growing, inclusive economy and developmental state. However, achieving it has proved elusive. During last year's state of the nation address, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced an intention to establish the social compact, but acknowledged during this year's address that role players were struggling to get it off the ground. Addressing the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) summit on Friday, Mashatile said he did not believe there should be a finite list of stakeholders or that all social compacts must be tripartite or tripartite plus one. 'The sector master plans on sugar, agriculture, clothing, retail and more recently the renewable energy sector often have many signatories, including partners that are not national or not in Nedlac, but can bring something or gain something from committing to a common plan,' he said.

Also at Friday's summit was minister of employment -and- labour Thulas Nxesi, who urged delegates to see beyond their narrow interests when working on the social compact and seek solutions to benefit all stakeholders. 'Whether we want to accept it or not, social compacting, which we have not achieved, is accomplished through compromise.

We have to learn to compromise to achieve this. We can't sit in our corners and be fundamentalists,' he said. Events including erratic weather, the Covid-19 pandemic and last month's fire in Marshalltown, Johannesburg, in which 77 people died, show that South Africa needed to build resilience against crises which have become 'the new normal', Nxesi added.

Whether we call what we do social Whether we accept it or not, social compacting is accomplished by compromise. We can't sit in our corners and be fundamentalists Thulas Nxesi minister of employment -and- labour compacting, partnering or collaborating, I continue to believe that Nedlac shines a beacon of light and brings a message of hope in these times, which can often be seen as dark and unpredictable.

B4SA executive director Martin Kingston said the collaboration of social partners was key to responding to challenges such as the July 2021 unrest, natural disasters and the pandemic, which threatened to undermine efforts to deal with growing and unacceptable levels of poverty.

Failure to address these issues will fundamentally erode the progress we have made since 1994 ... to ensure we can deliver on the explicit aims of our constitution to deliver a better life for all South Africans,' he said. Interrogating how South Africa navigated the pandemic and harnessing the skills and knowledge of social partners could provide essential inputs to adequately respond to similar challenges in the future, Kingston added.

Busa CEO Cas Coovadia said that in geopolitical engagements South Africa must consider what is good for the country and respond accordingly. He bemoaned longstanding challenges such as infrastructure failure, corruption, crime and the state's inability to deal with the hijacking of buildings. 'Follow the money, see who is getting the money for these hijacked buildings and deal with them.

For lack of a better term, it is as simple as that. Just deal with it. We need to respond as social partners to address the current context and the current crises. 'We have reached a stage in our society when we say 50 deaths this week, 72 deaths last week and we shrug our shoulders and just carry on. That does not happen in a normal society and it should not happen in a normal society,' Coovadia said.

Nedlac executive director Lisa Seftel said the council needs to embrace and pursue new forms of social compacting, including diverse social partners who should share information and experiences to ensure better decision-making. Cosatu deputy general secretary Gerald Twala said a good example of cooperation that must be replicated in the social compact is the agreement between government, business and labour to get more than five- million South African workers and their families vaccinated against Covid-19 at the onset of the pandemic.

Organised labour is proud of the relentless efforts and synergy of minds we showed as the Nedlac community during the pandemic to ensure we released more than R64bn from the Unemployment Insurance Fund to help 5.7-million workers care for their

families and the mass rollout of the vaccination campaign that reached over 60% of society, in particular, the most vulnerable,' Twala said. Events including erratic weather, the Covid-19 pandemic and last month's fire in Marshalltown, Johannesburg, in which 77 people died, show that South Africa needs to build resilience against crises which have become 'the new normal', according to employment and labour minister Thulas Nxesi.