# Empowering South Africans with decent work

*While African economies have bounced back from the economic crisis, daunting challenges for the continent remain, including poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Faced with these and other major challenges, the Republic of South Africa is one of the 27 African ILO Member States that are implementing Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) aimed at promoting decent work as a key component of their national development. ILO Online reports from Johannesburg, South Africa.*

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JOHANNESBURG, Republic of South Africa (ILO Online) – “If you don’t address the issue of unemployment you’re sitting on a time bomb,” the then Labour Minister Membathisi Mdladlana told reporters at the launch of the DWCP in Johannesburg. Referring to the country’s efforts to tackle unemployment and poverty by creating jobs, the Minister warned of a “disillusioned and disgruntled” youth.

A member of the Group of Twenty (G20) States, South Africa is the largest economy on the African continent. However, the country faces major challenges such as high unemployment and HIV/AIDS. In October 2008, the South African economy sunk into its first official recession since the advent of democracy. That same year, the unemployment rate among youth reached an unprecedented 26 per cent.

What’s more, 8.7 per cent of the population is affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, according to the South African National HIV Survey.

“There is a clear link between unemployment and HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The pandemic depresses labour demand by declining the rate of overall economic growth. With the result that key sectors of the economy and employment shrink, particularly in the construction and equipment industries”, explains Vic van Vuuren, Director of the ILO office in Pretoria.

Last year, South Africa took the decisive step to promote decent work by signing an agreement with the ILO on the launch of a DWCP. The programme is aimed at strengthening fundamental principles and rights at work, promoting employment creation, strengthening and broadening social protection coverage and strengthening tripartism and social dialogue between government, employers and workers in the country.

The country is also actively being assisted by the ILO in implementing the ILO Global Jobs Pact through a national jobs pact, which aligns its policies with the main priorities of the DWCP. The Pact addresses the social and employment impact of the global financial and economic crisis and promotes a productive recovery centred on investments, employment and social protection.

The DWCP for South Africa will be carried out between 2010 and 2014 and has nine concrete outcomes. The programme makes sure that up-to-date international labour standards are ratified, complied with, reported on and enforced through labour administrations. The Programme promotes the creation of productive and decent jobs especially among women, youth and persons with disabilities by sustainable and competitive enterprises, including cooperatives.

The DWCP also encourages skills development, access to better managed and more gender equitable social security and health benefits as well as improved safety and health conditions at work. The programme aims to respond effectively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and also works to strengthen labour market institutions and increase the capacity of social partners to contribute to effective social dialogue and sound industrial relations.

“Social dialogue has guided South Africa’s efforts towards meaningful recovery through decent and productive jobs. At the onset of the global financial and economic crisis, the government and social partners, under the auspices of the National Economic Development and Labour Advisory Committee (NEDLAC), adopted the ‘Framework for South Africa’s response to the international financial crisis’ in February 2009. This national framework agreement has been the vehicle through which anti-crisis measures have been adopted and implemented”, Mr. van Vuuren said.

South Africa joined the ILO in 1919 but left the organization in 1966 because of the ILO position concerning the government’s apartheid policy. It wasn’t until the “New South Africa” emerged in 1994 that it resumed its membership. South Africa has since ratified 21 ILO Conventions and 18 of them are in force for the country, including the eight fundamental conventions regarding freedom of association and collective bargaining, forced and child labour and discrimination in the workplace.

*The 27 African ILO Member States are Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.*