

# REFLECTIONS ON RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC: NEDLAC

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# ROLE OF NEDLAC

- The National Economic Development and Labour Council was set up by an act of parliament in 1995 and its role has been to facilitate engagement and negotiation between government, organised business, labour and communities on key socio-economic issues
- Very soon after the emergence of Covid in South Africa, a Special EXCO agreed to set up a Nedlac Rapid Response Task Team which seen this has worked actively and intensively to mitigate impact of Covid19 pandemic and lockdown and enabling the economy to open up safely.
- Social partners have lobbied, negotiated, provided feedback, implemented, partnered and exercised oversight with a high degree of consensus
- The focuses have shifted over the period but have included:
  - Health and safety at the workplace
  - Income replacement and relief for small businesses, unemployed, tourism sector etc
  - Feedback on the lockdown regulations and impact on the economy
  - Enabling and promoting vaccines

# SOCIAL PARTNERS APPROACH

- Principles agreed to by social partners to guide a response:
  - Certainty and predictability
  - Guided by data and science
  - Inclusivity
  - Consultative
  - Timeous and pro-active
  - Acknowledgement of the limited fiscal space to provide relief when economy closes down.
- They have consistently argued that most important measures to curb Covid19 are:
  - Ramping up **vaccinations** including through positive and negative incentives including vaccine mandates, **entry restrictions** and vaccine certificates
  - Promoting and enforcing **non-pharmaceutical interventions**
  - Reducing the size of **gatherings** and improving the management of large gatherings
  - Limiting restrictions that impact on the **economy** especially the tourism, hospitality, alcohol and leisure sectors
  - Continuing to provide **relief** where due to Covid19 restrictions, the sector is not able to operate

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIONS (1)

Area	What	Degree of success
Workplace health and safety	OHS Direction and amendments on opening up workplaces safely including NPIs, requirement for a plan, protection from doing dangerous work, reporting, sectoral guidelines etc	Green
	Surveillance and information management system	Red
	Training of employers, shop stewards on Covid19 compliance	Yellow
	Enforcement by OHS inspectors	Yellow
Vaccination campaign	Lobbying, support, resources, partnership, risk mitigation to get vaccination campaign moving	Green
	Partnership to implement vaccination programme including in respect of vaccine procurement and delivery, communication and building an all of society response	Green
	A robust system of issuing vaccination certificates is in place with little possibility of fraud and abuse	Green

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIONS (2)

Area	What	Degree of success
Tourism and hospitality	Liquor social compact, prevention of job losses and company closures	Yellow
	Dispensations for inter-provincial and national travel	Yellow
	Inputs into regulations for consistency and implementability	Yellow
Events and gathering	Proposing a dispensation that would see a safe return to spectators and audiences (vaccinated only)	Yellow
Relief	Lobbying and oversight for Covid social relief of distress grant	Green
	Shaping, oversight and operational support for Covid19 TERS	Green
	Lobbying for effective loan guarantee scheme	Red
	Do no harm provisions for informal traders	Yellow



## LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS

- The devastation of the Covid19 pandemic would have been even more severe if it had not been through the collective efforts of the social partners on issues of relief, vaccinations and collaborating on regulations to safely open up the economy
- However, there have been challenges which has limited the effectiveness of the Covid19 response:
  - A number of set backs to the delivery of vaccines in the first six months of 2021 limited the ability of vaccination to prevent a devastating third wave
  - The best information that data and science can offer has not always been used to mitigate the negative impact of restrictions such as in respect of the liquor and event sectors
  - Interventions have not been as timeous as they could have been
  - Our collective capacity to communicate to diverse South African communities has not been as effective compared to the HIV/Aids response.
- Responding to Covid involves a process of learning and unlearning as the Covid virus evolves and the our scientific understanding is enhanced.

# CURRENT APPROACH TO THE END OF THE STATE OF DISASTER

- The Nedlac social partners believe that there needs to be shift from:
  - Managing a pandemic to managing an endemic disease while being alert for a next wave and having regulatory measures that can be triggered if necessary
  - Enforcement through criminal sanctions to codes of good practice and guidelines
  - Preventing transmission of the virus to preventing severe disease and death, placing pressure on the health system and posing a serious public health risk
  - A covid19 focus to improved public health in general and learning lessons from covid e.g. mask wearing, hand washing
- The regulatory dispensation to replace the State of Disaster should include:
  - A bespoke Covid19 Department of Health regulation which:
    - Acknowledges the changing role of the virus
    - Includes preventative measures justified by science
    - Has a trigger mechanism to enable the Minister to bring into force more measures in the event of a resurgence
  - Workplaces including those open to the public to be regulated by OHS Act, Biological Hazardous Agents regs and the LRA Code of Good Practice on managing Covid in the workplace
  - Incorporating lessons from Covid in amending DoH regulations should be put on a longer term trajectory