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Session 2: Eco-compensation and Poverty Reduction

Practical Experiences in Combining Poverty and Environment at the National Level: The Experience of South Africa

Job creation seen to be central to ecosystem restoration: The Environmental Programmes of the Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa

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Poverty in South Africa is seen as one of the major challenges facing the young democracy. This is compounded by the high unemployment figures that continue to rise, with the youth and women being the most exposed and on the receiving end. The population is then generally forced to over-utilize the natural resources leading to rather unwanted consequences of degraded natural resources and ecosystems. In trying to avoid further degradation of the natural resources as well as addressing the challenge of poverty as a result of unemployment, the Department of Environmental Affairs is participating in the nationwide Expanded Public Works Programme with a particular bias on job creation initiatives that address environmental challenges. This programme has its objectives as follows:

- Better environmental management practices
- Job creation
- Support for small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs)
- Skills development

Environmental programmes consist of a number of sub-programmes implemented nationally with the first of these sub-programmes (*Working for Water*) launched just after the first democratic government came into being in 1995. Fully funded by the National Treasury and managed by the department with an annual target for jobs and training opportunities prescribed upfront. Over the years, the programme has managed to create thousands of temporary jobs as well as training opportunities for the participants with thousands of hectares having been restored. The dual approach to the environmental and socioeconomic challenges is seen to be crucial for total ecosystem rehabilitation and sustainability.