

Benefits of the Expanded Public Works Programme in South Africa: A Direct Stakeholder's Perception

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ABSTRACT

There are several socio-economic challenges ravaging the continent of Africa and other developing countries. Among these issues is unemployment, which is directly linked to the high crime rate, poverty, and other societal ills in South Africa. To develop sought-after skills and to facilitate gainful employment toward the goal of poverty alleviation in the country, several programmes are initiated by the South African government. One of the various interventions is the expanded public works programme (EPWP). This paper is aimed at identifying the beneficial factors of the EPWP in South Africa from the stakeholders' point of view. A quantitative research approach was employed in the study. Data collection was achieved through the duo of literature review and the use of a structured closed-ended questionnaire survey. The data from the returned survey was analyzed using descriptive and exploratory factor analysis. The findings showed that employment creation, strengthened community participation, infrastructure improvement, skills enhancement of participants, and provision of social security are the major benefits of the EPWP. Continuous revising and re-conceptualizing of the EPWP operations are recommended to maximize and sustain the benefits of the programme.

Keywords: Built environment, Poverty, Socioeconomic, South Africa, Sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION

The issue of unemployment is a global menace, especially among the teeming youth population of both developed and developing nations. As a country that is just recovering from the bitter experience of the apartheid era, South Africa and even other African countries are not exempted from the ripple effect of unemployment on the socio-economic status of the citizens. According to McCord (2002), the high unemployment rate is majorly caused by the prevalence of systemic inefficiencies in supply-side labour variables such

as skills shortages and inflexibility in the labour market. Also, the growing number of unskilled workers in this post-apartheid era has increased the unemployment statistics in South Africa owing to the constantly changing economic system of the country. The need for skilled workers is on the rise while the demand for their unskilled counterparts is declining (Rodrik, 2008). Therefore, South Africa is in a state of growth with a high demand for skilled labour (Mahadea and Simson, 2010), a situation that will not change anytime soon owing to the digitalization tsunami sweeping the globe.

As indicated by McCord (2005), the economic situation in South Africa is plagued by structural unemployment. Structural unemployment is described by Guichard and Rusticelli (2010) as an inflation-consistent rate of unemployment. With the significant rate of unemployed youths which is yearly on the increase, the situation is perceived as the most challenging socio-economic challenge in South Africa. This is because unemployment exacerbates inequality and poverty, results in a high crime rate, and moral decadence, and negatively impacts the socioeconomic development of a country. Hence, the need to proffer policies, programmes, initiatives, and drives decisively and collaboratively towards addressing the unemployment situation in the country. For such an effort to yield the expected result, there should be an all-encompassing programme that focuses on the youth, women, and persons with disability population of the country.

Globally, public works programmes (PWP) have been identified as one of the ways by which the government reduces the high rate of unemployment and improves the infrastructure of urban and rural areas. The PWP was initiated by the United States of America during the great depression period that began in 1929 (McCord, 2009). However, countries such as Argentina, India, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Senegal are a few of the adopters of the programme for addressing their socio-economic challenges. As indicated by Kingdon and Knight (2007), PWP are aimed at providing training and income to beneficiaries while enabling them to translate into other vocations via the provision of infrastructural services. The PWP utilizes more labour and light machinery to create and provide work opportunities around projects that in turn yield employment, and income to disadvantaged and needy households in rural areas (Braun et al., 1991). A renowned PWP initiated by the South African government is the expanded public works programme (EPWP). It is one of the many socio-economic interventions of the government aimed at addressing unemployment (Lal et al., 2010). As highlighted by Meth (2011), the EPWP is regarded as the largest active socio-economic intervention by the South African government. Hence, this study seeks to evaluate the benefits of the EPWP in South Africa by sampling the direct stakeholders of the programme.

BENEFICIAL INDICATORS OF THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

There are several benefits accrued to the effective implementation of the EPWP. These benefits revolve around the main objective of the programme which is to improve the socio-economic status of the people. Generating more

job opportunities for unemployed citizens has the potential to improve the potential and the capability of local communities which in turn grows the economy (McCutcheon, 2012). The effective roll-out of the EPWP enhances the preparedness and capacity of the beneficiaries to thrive in the labour market. As it is operational within the infrastructure, social, non-state, and environment and culture sectors in South Africa, the multi-faceted attribute of these sectors can accommodate the different classifications of the beneficiaries. Another benefit of the EPWP is improved infrastructure and service delivery access to poor communities.

Other benefits of adopting and implementing the public works programme are inequality and poverty reduction, jobs creation, crime reduction, enhancing national security and stability, improving public safety, reducing marginalization, enhancing social inclusion, promoting community development and empowerment, income generation for families and individuals, improving environmental sustainability, enhancing access to basic amenities and services, and improving public infrastructure such as roads. The implementation of public works programme also promotes economic development and growth, increases access to education and healthcare, improves living conditions and quality of life, stimulates local and regional economies, builds community cohesion and social capital, supports small business development and entrepreneurship, improves overall economic efficiency and productivity, encourages private sector investment, aids economic diversification, enhances access to energy and electricity, improves public health and reducing disease, and builds resilience to natural disasters and climate change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to gather information about the benefits of the expanded public works program in South Africa by surveying direct stakeholders. The study used a quantitative research method and collected data using a structured questionnaire distributed to professionals in the construction industry in the Gauteng province. These professionals include quantity surveyors, project managers, engineers, construction managers, and architects and were reached through a random sampling approach. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, one to gather demographic information and the other to measure the benefits. A total of 119 questionnaires were distributed and 104 were returned, resulting in an 87% response rate. The data were analyzed using various statistical methods such as Mean Item Score (MIS), Standard Deviation (SD) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The retrieved data was found to be reliable with a Cronbach coefficient of 0.90.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The background information of the respondents revealed that 32.7% have a Diploma degree, another 32.7% have Bachelor's degree, 17.3% have a Matric certificate, 8.7% have a Postgraduate diploma degree, and 3.8% with Master's degree. Also, 60.6% of the respondents are working in government

departments and municipality offices, 25% are working in contracting firms, and 14.4% works in consulting firms across Gauteng province. Furthermore, the respondents gave their opinion on the EPWP sectors they have been involved with in the past. 43.3% revealed that they have done it in the infrastructure sector, the non-state sector boasts of 28.8% of the respondents, 16.3% have done it in the social sector while 11.5% claimed they have been involved with EPWP in the environmental and culture sector. From the foregoing, it is deduced that the respondents have the prerequisite knowledge to provide answers in line with the objectives of the study.

Descriptive Analysis: Benefits of the Expanded Public Works Programme

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis result of the identified benefits of the Expanded Public Works Programme in South Africa according to the opinion of the respondents sampled for the study. The result revealed that Employment creation ranked first with a mean of 4.06 and std. dev. of 0.993, Strengthened community participation was ranked second with a mean of 3.95 and std. dev. of 1.083, Infrastructure improvement ranked third with a mean of 3.95 and std. dev. of 1.083, Skills enhancement of participants ranked fourth with 3.91 and std. dev. of 1.034, while the Provision of social security and Enhancement of self-esteem of vulnerable community members both ranked fifth with a mean of 3.88 but std. dev. of 1.046 and 1.068 respectively. At the bottom of the ranking are Reduction of discrimination

Table 1. Benefits of the expanded public works programme in South Africa.

Benefits	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranks
Employment creation	4.06	0.993	1
Strengthened community participation	3.95	1.083	2
Infrastructure improvement	3.95	1.083	2
Skills enhancement of participants	3.91	1.034	4
Provision of social security	3.88	1.046	5
Enhancement of self-esteem of vulnerable community members	3.88	1.068	5
Reduced number of disadvantaged people	3.85	1.156	7
Increased economic growth	3.83	1.144	8
Improved access to poor communities	3.82	1.189	9
Preservation of natural resources	3.77	1.108	10
Skills transfer for participants	3.71	1.196	11
Preservation of cultural heritage	3.65	1.104	12
Reduced crime rate	3.63	1.301	13
Reduction of inequality in communities	3.63	1.256	13
Protection of biodiversity	3.62	1.152	15
Reduction of discrimination in communities	3.55	1.269	16
Tourism preservation	3.51	1.239	17
Tourism promotion	3.48	1.238	18

in communities in the sixteenth rank with a mean of 3.55 and std. dev. of 1.269, seventeenth rank benefits was Tourism preservation with a mean of 3.51 and std. dev. of 1.239, while Tourism promotion was ranked eighteenth with a mean of 3.48 and std. dev. of 1.238.

According to the respondents, EPWP serves as a means of job creation for the community. The EPWP is a scheme aimed at reducing poverty and promoting economic growth by offering short-term employment to unemployed people (Mudau, 2021). It provides job opportunities in various fields such as construction, maintenance and community services, and pays a stipend to participants. In addition, it provides training and work experience that can boost the participants' future job prospects (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). By providing temporary work, the EPWP helps to create jobs and tackle poverty and inequality in communities (Mubangizi, 2013). Also, findings revealed that EPWP helps strengthen community participation in projects. The EPWP can enhance community involvement by including local communities in the planning, execution and administration of the program activities (Nyoka, 2016). By engaging the community, their abilities, knowledge, and resources are utilized, which boosts their sense of ownership and accountability for the program. This results in greater commitment from the community and improved results (Mudau, 2021). Additionally, according to Mashabela (2016), the programme offers opportunities for community members to participate in decision-making and express their opinions, which strengthens their sense of control. By actively engaging the community, the EPWP fosters trust and a shared sense of responsibility, leading to increased community involvement (Nyoka, 2016).

Furthermore, the respondents are of the opinion that EPWP will assist in infrastructure improvement within the community. According to EPWP helps to improve infrastructure by offering employment opportunities to unemployed individuals in South Africa on infrastructure projects (Musekene, 2015). The program aims to enhance the quality of life in communities by providing access to basic services, such as water, sanitation, and housing, as well as fixing and maintaining existing infrastructure (Mubangizi, 2013). The program creates short-term job opportunities that stimulate local economies and enable communities to have the ability to undertake future infrastructure projects. Consequently, the program offers training and work experience that enhances participants' chances of getting hired in the future (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). By focusing on infrastructure improvement, the EPWP promotes long-term sustainable development and reduces poverty and inequality in communities.

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Benefits of the Expanded Public Works Programme

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted on the data to ascertain its suitability for EFA. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.888. This is considered sufficient to conduct a factor analysis as any value above 0.6 is considered acceptable. Bartlett's test of sphericity returned a significant

value of 0.000. The p-value of Bartlett's test of sphericity (represented by "Sig"), indicates a measure of the multivariate normality of the set of distributions. The total variance of the benefits of the expanded public works programme in South Africa revealed three components which had Eigen values of above 1 namely (10.068, 1.342, and 1.085). The components Eigen value defined the 55.931%, 7.458%, and 6.029% respectively of the variance which indicates 69.418% of the total variance of the data set. This satisfies the cumulative proportion of variance criterion which states that the extracted components should together be 50% of the variation. Therefore, the three-factor groupings can be used to adequately represent the opinion of professionals in South Africa. The study adopted factor grouping based on PCA and direct oblimin rotation. Table 2 presents the pattern matrix which highlights how the factors have been clustered together. The table is followed by an analysis and description of the three (3) clusters that constitute the EFA of the identified benefits.

Based on the opinion of the respondents, the clusters are named thus.

Component 1: Community Empowerment and Inclusion. This component refers to the process of empowering and including marginalized communities,

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis pattern matrix for identified benefits of EPWP.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Enhancement of self-esteem of vulnerable community members	0.864		
Strengthened community participation	0.777		
Provision of social security	0.653		
Employment creation	0.561		
Reduction of discrimination in communities	0.524		
Improved access to poor communities	0.360		
Tourism preservation		-0.910	
Tourism promotion		-0.864	
Skills enhancement of participants		-0.675	
Increased economic growth		-0.562	
Skills transfer for participants		-0.527	
Infrastructure improvement		-0.483	
Protection of biodiversity			0.982
Preservation of cultural heritage			0.790
Reduced crime rate			0.777
Preservation of natural resources			0.625
Reduction of inequality in communities			0.477
Reduced number of disadvantaged people			0.360
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			0.888
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1540.545	
	df	153	
	Sig.	0.000	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

particularly vulnerable groups, in decision-making processes and providing them with equal opportunities (Mkhatshwa-Ngwenya, 2016). This approach aims to strengthen community participation, enhance self-esteem, provide social security, create employment, reduce discrimination, and improve access to essential services and resources. Community empowerment and inclusion are crucial for promoting social justice, reducing poverty, and ensuring sustainable development for all members of society (Hlatshwayo, 2017).

Component 2: Tourism Development and Skills Enhancement. This component focuses on the growth and sustainability of tourism while also providing opportunities for the local community to improve their skills and knowledge (Dladla and Mutambara, 2018). This approach aims to promote the destination, preserve its cultural heritage, and stimulate economic growth while also empowering local participants and improving their livelihoods. The combination of infrastructure improvement, skills transfer, and tourism promotion and preservation help create a mutually beneficial environment for both tourists and the local community (Mashabela, 2016).

Component 3: Sustainability and social equity indicators. This component looks at measures used to assess the overall health and well-being of communities, with a focus on both environmental sustainability and social justice (Nyoka, 2016). These indicators take into account factors such as the protection of biodiversity, preservation of cultural heritage, reduction of crime and inequality, and responsible use of natural resources. According to Mudau (2021), a holistic approach to these indicators helps to ensure that progress towards a more sustainable and equitable future is being made.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) serves as a crucial tool in addressing poverty and promoting economic growth in communities in South Africa. This study was aimed at assessing the benefits of EPWP to the South African communities. A quantitative research approach was employed with questionnaires distributed to professionals to determine their opinion on the identified benefits from existing literature. Findings showed that the programme provides job opportunities and training in various fields, which helps to create jobs, improve participants' future job prospects, and stimulate local economies. Moreover, the EPWP enhances community involvement by empowering local communities in the planning and execution of program activities, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and trust. The programme also focuses on infrastructure improvement, providing access to essential services and fixing and maintaining existing infrastructure. The respondents also emphasized the importance of three clusters in the EPWP, including Community Empowerment and Inclusion, Tourism Development and Skills Enhancement, and Sustainability and Social Equity Indicators. Community Empowerment and Inclusion focuses on empowering marginalized communities, promoting social justice, and reducing poverty. Tourism Development and Skills Enhancement aims to promote the destination, preserve cultural heritage, and improve local participants' skills and knowledge. Sustainability and Social Equity Indicators measure the overall health and well-being of communities,

focusing on environmental sustainability and social justice. It is recommended that the EPWP continues to prioritize these three clusters, as they are crucial in ensuring sustainable and equitable development in communities. Additionally, efforts should be made to increase the programme's reach and impact, making it accessible to more communities and individuals in need.

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