

## The Contribution of the Expanded Public Works Programme to Sustainable Livelihoods: Participants' Perspective

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### Background

Public Employment Programmes (PEPs), including the South African Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), are widely recognised as important social protection tools that address the challenges of persistent unemployment and dire poverty. PEPs offer a 'win-win' policy option by creating jobs while generating assets and delivering services.

### Research problem and rationale

- (i) In South Africa, the impact of PEPs has primarily been evaluated based on employment opportunities, thus creating a gap in the comprehensive assessment of their contribution to the broader livelihood of participants beyond job creation.
- (ii) This research sought to fill the gap by examining the programme's broader impact that extends beyond the narrow view of the programme assessment and evaluation, which solely focuses on number-counting, such as the number of jobs created, kilometres of roads constructed, or the number of bridges built.
- (iii) The study investigated the programme's impact on the Expanded Public Works Programme beneficiaries regarding their livelihoods.

### Study site and the population

Two key programmes from the EPWP Infrastructure Sector (Zimbabwe Road Maintenance Programme and Welisizwe Rural Bridges Programme) were selected due to their rural focus. The focus was on EPWP from the 2019/20 Financial Year until 2020/21 across three targeted provinces:

- (i) In KwaZulu-Natal, the following district municipalities were selected: Harry Gwala, Ugu, iLembe, and King Cetshwayo Municipalities (previously reported or referred to as uThungulu).
- (ii) The Electoral Commission selected the following districts: Amathole, OR Tambo, and Chris Hani District Municipalities. The selection also took into account where the bridges and infrastructure were built.
- (iii) The Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality in Free State was selected because this is where the Monatsa Project was implemented.

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## Key findings

- (i) The study indicates that EPWP has positively impacted the livelihoods of its participants.
- (ii) The study also uncovered challenges confronting the programme;
  - non-compliance with some of the programme's regulations,
  - including payment of participants below the minimum wage rate,
  - difficulties in achieving the youth target despite the soaring youth unemployment rates in South Africa.

## Key recommendations

- Establishing a comprehensive national policy for EPWP with accompanying enforcement mechanisms is imperative. This policy will address issues of non-compliance, and further enhance the program's effectiveness.
- To address the issue of high youth unemployment rates it is recommended to restructure existing programs within EPWP and introduce new initiatives specifically those designed to improve youth participation and create job opportunities for young individuals.
- The development of capacity for effective coordination and implementation of EPWP is crucial to ensure that the program can expand its job creation endeavours, especially during the period of high unemployment rates in the country.
- It is suggested that consideration be given to implementing a dedicated payment system for EPWP participants. This system would streamline internal reporting processes within departments, eliminating delays in disbursing beneficiary stipends and ensuring timely payment.
- By investing in infrastructure, services, and processes, governments can enhance the impact of these programs and create a conducive environment for beneficiaries to improve their livelihoods and escape poverty.
- Incorporate, within EPWPs, measures to mitigate the negative impacts of unexpected shocks on the livelihoods of individuals who depend on public works programs for employment and income support.

## Note

This policy brief is based on Dr L Dladla's PhD thesis titled: The Contribution of the Expanded Public Works Programme to Sustainable Livelihoods. This was completed under the supervision of Professor B.C. Mubangizi in 2023.

## Cite this policy brief

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