

## Enhancing the Expanded Public Works Programme's (EPWP) Role in Sustainable Livelihoods in South Africa

### Executive Summary

The EPWP is a government effort to reduce poverty and unemployment through service delivery and job creation. This brief, based on research in the Free State, Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal, examines impacts beyond employment indicators. While the EPWP offers essential services and promotes livelihoods, systemic issues, such as limited youth involvement, low pay, unsafe conditions, lack of pathways to permanent jobs, and weak institutional support, limit its effectiveness. Recommendations include establishing a national policy with enforcement, payment reforms, integrated service delivery, and targeted support for youth and vulnerable groups to enhance their long-term development.

### What is the issue?

South Africa struggles with high poverty and youth unemployment, particularly in informal communities. Since 2003, the EPWP has aimed to provide income and create community jobs across sectors such as social, environmental, cultural, and infrastructure. Past evaluations have focused on outputs such as jobs and assets, neglecting broader impacts on livelihoods. Challenges include the absence of a guiding

national policy, wage regulation breaches, and low youth engagement (44% of youths, despite over 63% unemployment). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted its vulnerabilities, emphasising the need for resilient policies. This study explores beneficiaries' experiences to understand how the EPWP affects their social, financial, and human capital, informing strategies for sustainable poverty alleviation, especially in rural areas.

### Key Lessons

The EPWP can improve their livelihoods beyond temporary work. Participants reported increased household income, enabling basic needs and future planning. However, 80% earned below the minimum wage with payment delays of to 3-6 weeks, undermining poverty reduction goals.

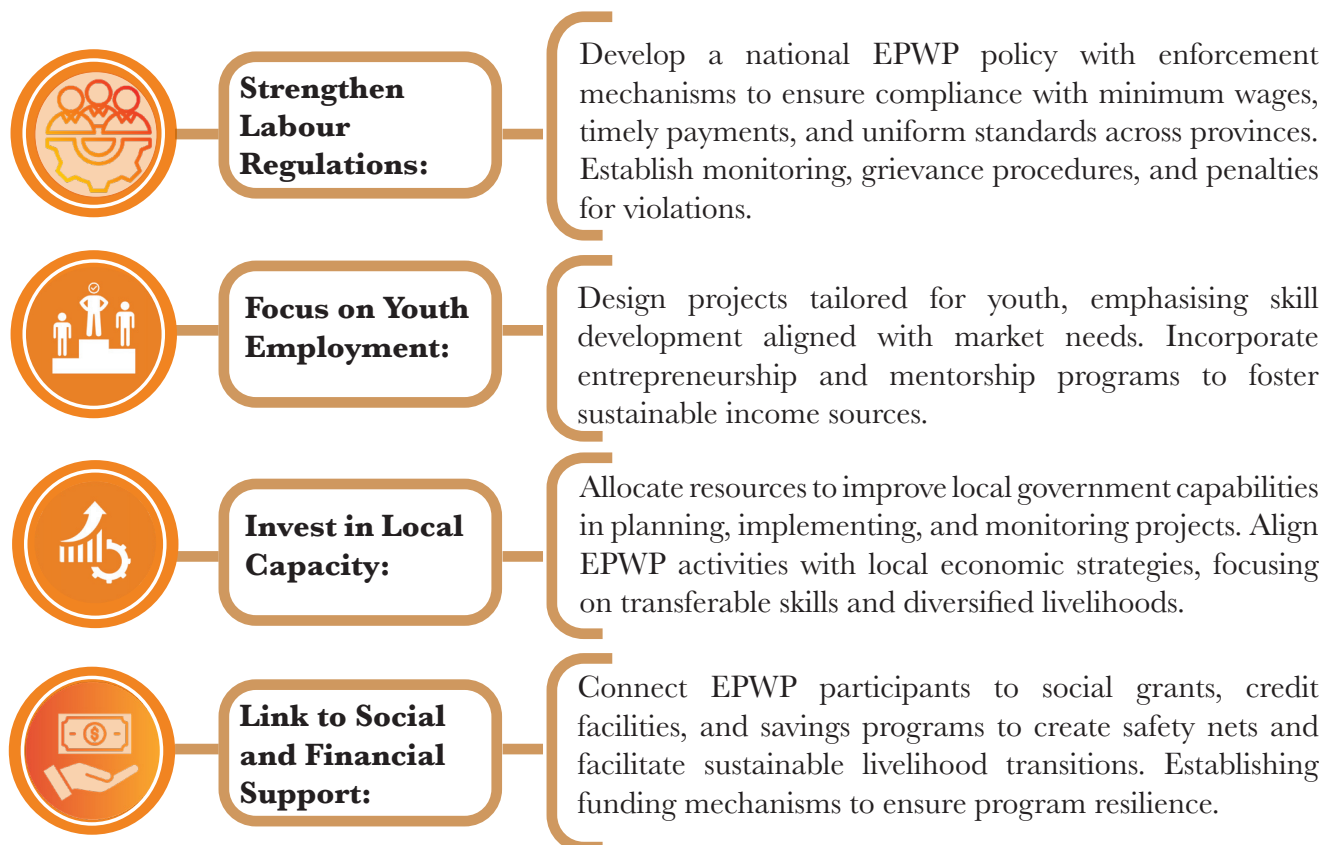
The programme facilitated skill development and access to training, with some using stipends to educate their children.

Asset acquisition was limited because of income and land tenure issues, but some invested in livestock and household repairs, improving natural and physical capital. Many used earnings for home improvements and bought household appliances, thus enhancing social networks and support through social clubs. Strengthening local governments' capacity to provide services and infrastructure could amplify these positive effects.

## Policy Recommendations

### To improve the impact of the EPWP, the following reforms were proposed:

While the EPWP provides valuable short-term relief, maximising its contribution to long-term livelihoods requires targeted youth engagement, strengthened institutions, and comprehensive national policy. Achieving these goals depends on political commitment, coordination, and adequate funding, ultimately supporting South Africa's developmental objectives.



### Cite this Policy Brief

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