

Review

Public works programmes as a tool to address unemployment and skills shortages among the youth in South Africa

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There are over a billion young adults between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the world. It is estimated that 85% of these young working-age adults live in developing countries which offer few opportunities for productive work. One of the greatest challenges facing the world and South Africa is to enhance the skills level of young people in developing countries. Young people in South Africa account for approximately 60% of the working age population and also account for 70% of all unemployed persons in South Africa. In order to address both the problem of low skills level and the rising unemployment level, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) can be used as a starting point. History has shown that labour-intensive methods of production (labour-intensive traditional methods) have long been used in creating remarkable infrastructure projects. Investment in infrastructure has a huge potential to redress the high unemployment and poverty levels in South Africa and also to correct the skills deficits in disadvantaged communities. From a theoretical perspective, supported by experience elsewhere in Africa, there are reasons for considering that properly formulated labour-intensive public works programmes and projects could be established to construct and maintain the required physical infrastructure, thus creating employment, skills and institutional capacities. This paper will explore the past African experiences in implementing public works programmes and projects with regard to their successes and problems. The paper will then examine how initiatives such as skills development and the Expanded Public Works Programmes (EPWP) can be used to address the low skills level and the rising level of unemployment in South Africa. The paper closes with some recommendations for skills development in the future.

Key words: Labour-intensive, public works, poverty, unemployment, skills.

INTRODUCTION

The unemployment rate in South Africa is an extremely important indicator of economic and social health. Investment in infrastructure has a huge potential to redress the high levels of unemployment and poverty in South Africa, and also to correct the skills deficits in disadvantaged communities. Commitment to alleviation of poverty is very high on the government agenda and will remain one of the focal points of the government. This is motivated by the fact that currently, around 24% of the population lives on less than \$ 1 a day. This is below the poverty line as defined by the World Bank (World Bank, 1994). The levels of unemployment have been rising steadily over

the years. The level of unemployment was 7% in 1980; 18% in 1991 (McCutcheon, 1995); 15.7% in 1995 (Statistics South Africa, 2003); 30.2% in 2002; 27.4% in 2003; 25.6% in 2004; and 26.5% in 2005 (Statistics South Africa, 2005). In South Africa, the youth is defined as the segment of the population that falls within the 15 to 35 year age category. According to Borat (2004) South Africa has a working population of about 27 million people between the ages of 16 to 64 year.

The young working-age population (within the definition of 15 to 35 year) account for 60% of the total working-age population and they number 16.3 million individuals. The

youth form 70% of all unemployed persons in South African society. The unemployment rate rose rapidly during the 1990s, then fell in 2003 and 2004 and rose again in 2005. This paper will explore the past African experiences in implementing public works programmes and projects with regard to their successes and problems. The paper will then examine how initiatives such as skills development and the expanded public works programmes (EPWP) can be used to address the low skills level and the rising unemployment in South Africa. The paper closes with some recommendations for the future. The following section deals with the African experiences through the use of labour-intensive methods in public works programmes. Further discussion shows how various countries had benefited when applying labour-intensive methods in the implementation of public works programmes. The young working-age people benefit enormously as this group represents the largest percentage of all unemployed persons in most of the African countries.

AFRICAN EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE USE OF A LABOUR-INTENSIVE APPROACH IN PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMMES

Public works programmes have a long history in industrialised countries as an economic-policy tool. Such programmes have often served as a fiscal measure to expand or contract public spending in periods of unbalanced domestic demand as well as a short-term measure to alleviate unemployment. In order to alleviate poverty and generate employment during the construction and maintenance of infrastructure projects, attempts must be made to encourage the use of labour-intensive methods. Bentall et al. (1999) defined a 'labour-intensive approach' as an approach where labour is the dominant resource for carrying out works, and where the share of the total project cost spent on labour is high (typically 25 to 60%). The term 'labour-intensive approach' indicates that optimal use is made of labour as the predominant resource in infrastructure projects, while ensuring cost-effectiveness and safeguarding quality. This involves a judicious combination of labour and appropriate equipment, which is generally light equipment. It also means ensuring that labour-intensive projects do not degenerate into 'make-work' projects, in which cost and quality aspects are ignored. Labour-intensive construction results in the generation of a significant increase in employment opportunities per unit of expenditure in comparison with conventional capital-intensive methods.

The use of employment-intensive public works programmes is not new to Africa. In the 1960s, three countries in North Africa, namely Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, experimented with such programmes. Although started initially as emergency relief works programmes, especially

in rural areas, it gradually acquired a development orientation. The Moroccan experiment, known as National Promotion, was launched in June 1961. The importance of this programme was confirmed by its mention in the constitution of 7 December, 1972 and subsequently by the creation in 1975 of the High Council of National Promotion Plan. According to one estimate, the programme provided employment for 85 000 workers per month during the peak season (Jara, 1971).

Through employment-intensive infrastructural works, a few countries have tried to create relatively small 'functional economic areas' in the countryside. This has been done in an attempt to stem rural-urban migration and to retain more people on the land. An example is the Djoliba Pilot Project in Mali, the conversion of a swollen rural village into an agro-urban community, which called for several layers of investment in infrastructure. This project was to test the feasibility of establishing some 150 rural centres that would service Mali's more than 10 000 villages (Thwala, 2001). The Volta River Settlement Programme of Ghana, involving the creation of a network of rural towns and access roads, is another example of rural spatial planning. Three times as many workers were employed in these resettlement preparations than were involved in building the Volta Dam, showing the employment-generating potential of employment-intensive infrastructural investment. Several opportunities covering a range of skills were available to the young workers, ranging from site supervisor; bricklaying; site foremen; shuttering and formwork; plumbers; painters; carpenters; and tillers. Many of the youth who worked under the different programmes were self-employed on completion of the various programmes. Those who were not self-employed were able to find other job opportunities and employment in the construction sector. The public works programmes were significant in that they were able to expose the unemployed youth to various work opportunities and the skills required (Thwala, 2001).

In Kenya, more than 12 000 km of rural access roads have been constructed and more than 80 000 man-years of employment have been created (McCutcheon and Taylor-Parkins, 2003). The Kenyan Rural Access Roads Programme is the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Transport and Communications but operates within the National District Focus Policy which gives great autonomy to the local level. According to McCutcheon and Taylor-Parkins (2003), the methods have been considered so successful that they have been introduced in the secondary roads network (the minor roads programme). In Botswana a national programme of labour-intensive road construction units has been set up within district councils which are semi-autonomous bodies under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Local Governments and Lands. This programme has resulted in the creation of more than 3, 000 jobs (total employment within the public sector is only 20, 000) and the construction and upgrading of nearly 2,000 km of road

Table 1. Poverty indicators by province in South Africa.

Province	No. of poor persons (million)	Percentage of population in poverty	Poverty gap (R billion)	Share of poverty gap (%)
Eastern Cape	4.6	72	14.8	18.2
Free State	1.8	68	5.9	7.2
Gauteng	3.7	42	12.1	14.9
KwaZulu-Natal	5.7	61	18.3	22.5
Limpopo	4.1	77	11.5	14.1
Mpumalanga	1.8	57	7.1	8.7
North West	1.9	52	6.1	7.5
Northern Cape	0.5	61	1.5	1.8
Western Cape	1.4	32	4.1	5.0
South Africa	25.7	57	81.3	100.0

Source: Youth Development Journal (Ngoma, 2005).

networks (McCutcheon, 1995). Most of the working-age young people in developing countries have a low skills level and it is important to plan infrastructure programmes using labour-intensive methods in order to absorb the unemployed youth. Infrastructure programmes such as the public works programmes provide opportunities to unskilled and semi-skilled youth who cannot be absorbed by the other sectors which require specialised skills.

Thus, within various institutional and organisational frameworks, a wide range of techniques of labour-intensive road construction has been extensively tried and tested over the past 25 years. Despite their valuable contribution to employment-generation, many of these earlier experiments in employment-intensive public works in Africa suffered from one or more of the following shortcomings:

- i. The ad hoc nature of schemes, lacking spatial focus and often without any links to national rural development and infrastructural planning systems
- ii. Makeshift administrative arrangements and failure to inject sufficient managerial and engineering skills and technical competence into project selection and execution, as well as choice of technology, resulting in poor project planning, programming and manpower management
- iii. Lack of balance between centralisation and effective involvement of local administrations and popular bodies in crucial programme decisions, planning and implementation
- iv. Failure to adjust programme operation and intensity to seasonal labour demand for agricultural operations
- v. Lack of precision about target groups and programming on the basis of inadequate information about beneficiary groups; lack of adequate and sustained political commitment and allocation of public funds for the programmes
- vi. Inadequate post-project maintenance arrangements
- vii. Inadequate emphasis on, and arrangements for, reporting cost-benefit studies and general performance evaluation (Barker, 1986; Abedian and Standish, 1986;

Ligthelm and Van Niekerk, 1986; McCutcheon, 1994a; 2001; McCutcheon and Taylor-Parkins, 2003; Thwala, 2001).

POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The new estimates of poverty by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) shows that the proportion of people living in poverty in South Africa has not changed significantly between 1996 and 2001. The households living in poverty have sunk deeper into poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor has widened. Table 1 shows the poverty indicators by province.

KwaZulu-Natal Province has the biggest poverty gap (18.3 billion), followed by the Eastern Cape Province and Gauteng Province. Between 1996 and 2001, the Gauteng poverty gap grew faster than all other provinces. This is probably as a result of its population growth rapidly exceeding economic growth. The poverty gap has grown faster than the economy indicating that poor households have not shared in the benefits of economic growth. In 1996, the total poverty gap was equivalent to 6.7% of gross domestic product (GDP); and by 2001, it had risen to 8.3%.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The levels of youth unemployment have been rising steadily over the years since the 1980s. The unemployment rate is an extremely important indicator of economic and social health. Table 2 shows the employment status of the youth category of 18 to 35 years using data from the Statistics South Africa, 2005.

The provincial distribution of youth employment shows that the highest rate of employment was in Gauteng (29.2%), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (18.9%) and the Western Cape (17.0%). The Northern Cape has the lowest

Table 2. Employment status (official definition of employment).

Employment status	2001	2002	2003	2004	% change 01-04
Not economically active	5 301 206	5 419 493	5 734 023	6 338 939	19.6
Employed	5 370 419	5 121 588	5 103 594	5 259 895	-2.1
Unemployed	3 119 080	3 437 903	3 778 716	3 380 434	8.4
Total	13 790 706	13 978 984	14 616 333	14 979 268	8.6
Unemployment rate (%)	36.7	40.2	42.5	39.1	

Source: Youth Development Journal (Ngoma, 2005).

Table 3. Employment age cohort analysis for the age groups 18 to 25 years and 26 to 35 years.

Variable	2001 (%)	2002 (%)	2003 (%)	2004 (%)	% change 01-04
Age category (years)					
18-25 years	28.8	28.2	27.0	27.5	-6.5
26-35 years	71.2	71.8	73.0	72.5	-0.2
Total	100	100	100	100	
Gender					
Female	45.9	44.6	43.0	43.4	-7.4
Male	54.1	55.4	57.0	56.6	2.5
Total	100	100	100	100	-2.1

Source: Youth Development Journal (Ngoma, 2005).

employment rate (1.8%), followed by the Free State (6.0%) and Limpopo (5.9%). The highest rate of employment is amongst the 26-year-old to 35-year-old working-age cohorts.

Table 3 shows the employment age cohort data for the 18 to 25 year and 26 to 35 year age group. The statistics in Table 3 shows that employment rates have decreased among both age cohorts. Similarly, there has been a decrease in the employment rate of young women. In 2001, 45.9% of young women were employed compared to 54.1% of young men. A comparison between 2001 and 2004 shows that youth male employment increased by 2.5% and 7.4% and decreased among young women. In addition, the total decrease in total employment for all youth was -2.1%.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The low education and skill levels among the youth in South Africa had resulted in the rise in unemployment. The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) can be used as a tool to address the low skills levels and the rise in unemployment. In South Africa, there has been a marked increase in the employment opportunities in the occupation categories that require high-level specialist skills. There is a decrease in employment opportunities for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The labour market

is increasingly demanding highly skilled labour, while the demand for semi-skilled and unskilled labour is decreasing, due to the shift from labour-intensive to capital-intensive modes of production. Employment opportunities for semi-skilled and unskilled workers are therefore, decreasing. Attaining higher education levels among the youth is very low. Only 37, 113 young people have either a masters or doctors degree and only 61, 356 young people have an honours degree. As a percentage of the young adult population, attainment of tertiary education levels is below 0.3 percentile points for either qualification, and total tertiary achievement is well below 10% (Ngoma, 2005). In 2001 there were about 1, 158 031 young people with no schooling and 1 011 098 with Grade 8/Standard/6/Form1.

Historically, the construction industry has largely relied on a core of highly skilled staff (generally White and often expatriate) to supervise a largely semi-skilled and unskilled workforce. The decline in demand for construction products over the past decades, and associated uncertainty, has seen a reduction in skills training since the 1980s, and the closing down of industry training institutions in the 1990s. It has been reported that only about 70% of the available training capacity is currently being utilised (CIDB, 2004). Skills enhancement in the construction industry faces a very particular challenge since the construction sector employs the fourth highest number of persons having no formal education – after agriculture, households and mining. Industry has expressed

Table 4. Case study: Non-residential building sector.

Skills category	Additional skills requirement	Experience requirements (Years)
Contracts directors	60	10 - 20
Contracts managers	120	2 - 5
Site agents	230	2 - 5
Site engineers	700	2 - 5
Foremen	230	2 - 3
Junior foremen	350	2 - 3
Shutter hands	1 200	3 - 12 months
Rebar hands	1 200	3 - 12 months

Source: Construction industry development board (CIDB, 2007).

pressed a view that skills supplied to the market through the further education and training (FET) system were in many cases not appropriate to their needs, resulting in a skills gap. While industry-based training is seen as better aligned with company-specific requirements, South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) does not accredit some trainers, and some do not issue certificates for training and employment. This tendency limits mobility and career path prospects (CIDB, 2004). Table 4 shows the skills category, additional skills requirements and experience requirements for the non-residential building sector in South Africa.

Many experts in this field of skills development have expressed their views on the subject. One thing they all agree upon is that skills shortages affect the economic growth of the country. Many companies are finding it difficult to source suitable candidates to employ. The question the study needs to ask is: who must be blamed? The government, or the private sector? The answer is, both have a role to play in the training of South Africans. One of the critical points that must be made is that skills shortage is not only a South African problem, but a worldwide problem. Developed economies such as the United States, United Kingdom, for example, are facing a similar problem. The question is, why then? There are a variety of answers. One of the reasons is lack of interest in some types of skills. Some of the skills that are in demand both in developing countries and in developed countries are in the fields of nursing, medicine and teaching, etc. In the South African context one of the major reasons is that economic growth had outstripped the rate at which its manpower was being trained. Due to the reduction in skills training since the 1980s, and the closing down of industry training institutions in the 1990s, for reasons as stated above, the various training institutions had not increased the number of graduates at the rate at which the economy had been growing. Some in-house training centres which had been operated by different companies had to scale down or were closed down. Some colleges operated by government had to scale down or were closed down or merged with others.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is important to identify particular skills shortages in the various industries in South Africa and to recognise that work skills development in South Africa is critical for the growth of the national economy. The Skills Development Act (SDA) was promulgated to create the structures and framework for the national development strategy. In terms of the SDA, employers are obliged to provide formal structured education to their workers, hence it is incorporated in the problem statement. The act encourages partnership to this effect between government, employers, workers, education and training providers, and beneficiary communities. The trained people are the beneficiaries from the community. The needs of employers, the economy and the communities must dictate which skills should be developed; the problem statement addressing this aspect in the Act led one to the last objective stated, namely how to identify which skills are required by the various trades and in which provinces.

The SDA covers structured, targeted and generic training implying that all training interventions should be planned and managed as projects. This is the reason why one of major construction companies in South Africa, Group Five, has 'people at the gate' which is its Corporate Social Investment Project. In SDA, employers together with their workers formulate workplace skills plans (WSP) to enable them to realize their employment training targets. All designated employers pay a monthly skills development levy of 1% of their budgeted payrolls to the National Skills Fund (NSF), via South African Revenue Services (SARS). Of this amount, the employer can claim back 70% in the form of discretionary grant, provided that they submit WSPs and Implementation Reports (IRs) annually and conduct special training projects.

These levies finance the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS). The construction education and training authority (SETA), the construction CETA, receives 10% of the skills levies paid by construction employers for administration costs, NSF receives 20 and 70% is available to be claimed back by these

contributing employers. However, international trends shows that companies need to spend between 4 and 7% in order to be successful in addressing the current shortages and gaps (National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI), 2003). Furthermore, there appears to be over-reliance on the SETAs on a number of levels in the micro- and provincial economy, as being the responsible bodies for coordinating and identifying scarce skills in South Africa.

THE JOINT INITIATIVE ON PRIORITY SKILLS ACQUISITION

Human social and economic life depends on the construction industry in one way or another. Construction is one of the few industries that are of common importance in all countries including South Africa. Its role cuts across differences in resource endowments, social policies and existing levels of development. Its wide range of output provides the basis for social and economic development in many different sectors. It is generally recognised that the construction sector has a critical role to play in fostering economic growth and development in the informal and formal sectors of the South African economy. The sector is critical in providing the infrastructure that forms the basis for delivery in the South African economy. According to the South African Reserve Bank, the gross capital formation of the construction sector (civil engineering) was R 53.3 billion or 16.7% of total capital formation in 2006. This amount can be added a further R 35.8 billion for residential buildings and R 33.4 billion for non-residential buildings. The total value of the sector was R 122 345 billion or 38.2% of total gross capital formation in 2006 (SARB, 2006).

The Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) emphasises that a growth domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 6% will be required to meet key socio-economic targets. The target should create a sustainable annual growth rate of 6%.

The overarching objectives for AsgiSA are to: reduce the unemployment rate from 30 to 15% by 2014; reduce poverty from one-third to one-sixth of the population by 2014; and increase the annual GDP growth rate from the average of 3 to 4.5% per year for the period 2005 to 2009 and 6% for the period 2010 to 2014. The target should create a sustainable annual growth rate of 6%. The paper had examined the different initiatives that are currently in place to address the skills shortage in the South African Construction Industry. The paper then looked at the status of the construction industry and skills requirements in the non-residential building.

The Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition

The growth envisaged through AsgiSA depends in part,

on resolving the shortage of suitably skilled labour. South Africa lacks sufficiently skilled professionals, managers and artisans, and the challenge is amplified by the uneven quality of education and the impact of the apartheid legacy which located many people a great distance away from their workplaces, thus increasing the costs of commuting for the poor and the price of labour. The acquisition of priority skills was identified as one of the most significant challenges facing growth, because skills development is a long-term process.

AsgiSA identified a number of medium- and long-term interventions to address the skills shortage:

- i. Build a strong foundation in public schooling. This involves strengthening the capabilities of the poorest schools, encouraging knowledge acquisition in the Foundation phase, improving mathematics and science capabilities, providing career guidance, establishing a school feeding scheme and accelerating Adult Basic Education and Training Programmes.
- ii. Focus on areas of greater priority in tertiary education and training. The priorities include recapitalising the FET colleges to improve their capacity and expanding faculties that produce specialist skills such as engineering, among others. Throughput should be increased to one million learners, and the number of black graduates, in particular, should be increased.
- iii. Initiate and improve work-based training programmes and scarce skills initiatives. This includes developing an employment system to close the gap between potential employers and employees, providing support to Phase Two of the National skills development strategy and developing a database for short-term scarce skills needed to support AsgiSA interventions.
- iv. Establish a joint council in government to strengthen and co-ordinate the activities to address the skills shortage.

The urgent need for skills, which are a necessary input for AsgiSA programmes, led to the idea of creating a short- to medium-term troubleshooting approach towards skills challenges. This gave rise to (joint initiative on priority skills acquisition) JIPSA, an initiative that sets skills priorities in support of AsgiSA's economic growth objectives.

The Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) mandate

1. Lead the implementation of a joint initiative of government, business and organised labour to accelerate the provision of priority skills to meet AsgiSA's objectives
2. Give momentum and support to the implementation of AsgiSA
3. Prioritise key skills and develop appropriate human resource development (HRD) strategies to address these

in the short to medium term

4. Mobilise senior leadership in business, government, organised labour and institutions concerned with education and training and science and technology to address national priorities in a more co-ordinated and targeted way
5. Promote greater relevance and responsiveness in the education and training system and strengthen the employability of graduates
6. Lay the foundation for more co-ordinated and effective HRD strategies
7. Report to the AsgiSA Task Team and Cabinet on progress made towards agreed objectives
8. Identify blockages and obstacles within the system of education and training that stand in the way of the achievement of JIPSA's objectives
9. Lead an effective programme to communicate JIPSA's objectives and consult with stakeholders.

JIPSA advises on aligning the training and skills – development efforts of the public and private sectors with the objectives of AsgiSA, without undermining the development and implementation of longer-term HRD strategies. JIPSA provides an inclusive platform through which the social partners can demonstrate their commitment to human resources and skills development, deliver on both short- and medium-term skills targets, and strengthen the existing mechanisms for skills delivery.

JIPSA recognises the many initiatives in South Africa that strengthen education and skills development and works in support of these by identifying HRD priorities; seeking synergy across different initiatives; facilitating improved co-operation and co-ordination between stakeholders to solve specific HRD challenges; and providing information and analysis to empower the social partners to tackle the obstacles facing skills acquisition. While focusing on immediate skills priorities, JIPSA also takes a medium - to longer - term perspective on the wider policy and institutional environments as they relate to the HRD challenges facing South Africa. This enables it to provide insights into the operations of the current system and to identify aspects that require improvement.

THE NEED FOR PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Public works infrastructure programmes and projects are seen as a major development tool for transforming the lives of people throughout the developing world. The character of development, its direction and pace and the way in which people share in its benefits are largely determined by how a country manages its development projects and programmes. The chronic socio-political problems of South Africa, augmented by the continuing weak performance of the economy, have resulted in a

deteriorating labour-absorption capacity of the formal economy, an expanding informal economy and rapidly rising unemployment and poverty. The collapse of commodity prices and the prolonged droughts of the 1980s and 1990s compounded the already poor economic performance and have entrenched the poverty cycle experienced by the unemployed and underemployed. The severity of these problems as well as existing structural rigidities in the South African economy signifies the need for an active policy to redress past historical injustices and discrimination. In an effort to raise living standards, sustainable economic growth and structural reform are necessary to empower deprived communities and to bring them into the mainstream of the economic process. Unfortunately, there is no policy that can attain these goals overnight; the required solution is invariably multifaceted and must be directed at the very roots of poverty and unemployment - a mere treatment of the symptoms will not achieve sustainable results.

A major component of a policy aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty should be a large- scale, well co-ordinated public works programme. Implemented in conjunction with other supportive policies (in particular, fundamental restructuring of ownership within the economy), it has the ability to absorb large numbers of involuntarily unemployed persons and arrest the process of impoverishment. Not only does it act as a net to catch social tensions that culminate in crime and violence during the economic-political transition phase, but also facilitates the restructuring of ownership which in turn enhances the revival of economic growth and development.

WHAT IS THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME?

The expanded public works programme (EPWP) is a national programme that aims to draw a significant number of the unemployed into productive work. This programme involves creating temporary work opportunities for the unemployed, while ensuring that workers gain skills and training on the job, and so increase their capacity to earn an income in the future. The programme is one of an array of government's initiatives to try to bridge the gap between the growing economy and the large numbers of unskilled and unemployed people who have not yet enjoyed the benefits of economic development.

The fundamental strategies to increase employment opportunities in the economy are aimed at increasing economic growth so that the number of net new jobs being created starts to exceed the number of new entrants into the labour market. They are also focused on improving the education system and access to training in a way that better equips the workforce to take up the largely skilled work opportunities which economic growth

will generate. Therefore, in the meantime, there is a need to put in place short- to medium-term strategies that seek to reduce the vulnerability of the unskilled and marginalised. The EPWP is one of these government measures aimed at creating additional job opportunities through providing a combination of work opportunities and skills development and training for a minimum of one million people by the year 2009.

The emphasis of the EPWP is to expand the use of labour-intensive methods in government-funded service delivery projects to create more work opportunities and stimulate entrepreneurial activity. Many public-sector organisations in the country are already implementing the public works type of projects and programmes and one key objective of the EPWP is the expansion and replication of existing best-practice programmes, under the Code of Good Practice for Special Public Works Programmes (SPWP), or learnership employment conditions. EPWP projects and programmes are the built-in attempts by the public-sector body to define and facilitate exit strategies for workers when they leave the programme, as a way of helping to build bridges between the first and second economy.

How does the expanded public works programme (EPWP) work?

The programme has a target of providing employment opportunities and training for at least one million unemployed people in its first five years. It involves all spheres of government as well as State-owned enterprises (SOEs), establishing itself as a cross-cutting government programme that extends beyond the Department of Public Works. Projects and programmes are implemented that change the way in which prioritised services are delivered and expenditure occurs, but without creating any additional financial burden.

These projects were implemented under four sectors, namely environmental and cultural, social, infrastructure and economic sectors, in this way expanding the focus of the programme beyond the traditional infrastructure sector.

In the implementation of the projects and programme under the expanded public works programme (EPWP), the project managers and development practitioners must make sure that projects' objectives address the following to achieve a long-term impact. Projects should be:

- i. Specific instead of general
- ii. Not overly complex
- iii. Measurable, tangible and verifiable
- iv. Realistic and attainable
- v. Established within resource bounds
- vi. Consistent with available and anticipated resources
- vii. Consistent with organisational plan procedures and

policies

viii. Transparent

To augment the afore-mentioned list, project objectives have to be uniformly understood. In other words, project initiators should ensure that there is a common understanding of the objectives by all stakeholders and the route to be followed in achieving these objectives likewise should be clearly comprehended by all. Consistent with the organisational capacity to execute the projects, administrators should administer the projects and be in a position to manage the created assets.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to be more realistic in future, and to be in a position to clearly distinguish between what is achievable, and how to achieve it, and that which cannot be achieved. Employment opportunities envisaged in each project/ programme should be identified and quantified so as to enable monitoring and evaluation of the success upon completion. Two types of evaluation are meant to be carried out, that is internal and external (independent) evaluation. This aspect is crucial in getting the feedback in order to establish whether the particular projects/ programmes have achieved their intended objectives.

It must be noted that not all the work is suited for manual labour; areas best suited for labour -intensive construction should be identified and separated out. The labour-intensive opportunities in the construction industry should be appropriate, that is the job description and expected performance need to be designed and documented according to the strength and limitations of human labour. These projects must optimise the available resource, special considerations and adaptation of norms if necessary. Therefore, labour-intensive construction requires special guidelines in terms of quality aspects and project specifications need to be drawn up and adhered to.

Since the entire project in labour-intensive construction is approached with the capabilities of the human frame in mind, it is necessary to upgrade engineering education and other relevant disciplines to be able to respond to Third World societal dimensions. Third World projects require a much higher project management input, with many more factors to deal with, than similar First World projects in the Western world. In order to realise the set objective (and good intentions) of employing and training large numbers of workers in labour-intensive projects in developing areas, project managers must be competent and experienced enough to be in a position to respond to the unique circumstances in these areas.

Thus it is recommended that all project managers and development practitioners are trained in employment-intensive methods. Equally important is the concept of the feasibility study of the needs, expectations, availability of labour and the environmental composition peculiar to areas in question. All materials and human

resources necessary should be identified and mobilised upfront. The study should furthermore establish the availability and sustainability of the materials and also be able to take any remedial measures that may be necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The problems are informed by a long history of oppression and education denial. Millions of black people are unskilled, and the country needs these people to participate in growing the economy. The skills shortages require a home-grown solution. If Cuba could do it, South Africa can do it too. The following are the recommendations to address the skills shortages in South Africa through the utilisation of the expanded public works programme (EPWP):

1. The expanded public works programme (EPWP) must be used as a vehicle to provide employment opportunities to unemployed graduates. Thus the EPWP must be planned and designed to address the issue of unemployment in a holistic manner.
2. The EPWP must continue to facilitate the development of skills through the Construction CETAs mandatory grant system
3. Both public and private institutions must be involved to promote skills training in the EPWP in the nine provinces
4. Improve the quality and relevance of current training programmes
5. Improve the image of the construction industry and the EPWP projects
6. Involve local government in skills development in all EPWP projects
7. Import skilled workers to train and mentor South Africans
8. Long-term political support
9. Long-term financial support
10. Attract, train and stimulate the development of young professionals and skill the workforce
11. Good long-term co-ordination and objective external advice on skills development
12. Improve the salaries of artisans

The public works programme in South Africa should be adjusted as the policy environment changes, from relief, emergency and 'special' public works programme to a long-term structured employment-generation programme. The approach should link economic growth, employment and investment policies. The public works programme must aim to ensure that infrastructure is planned around local needs rather than vice versa. In the early phases the emphasis was on creating employment opportunities for unskilled labour. Over the past decade, it has become clear that in order to use labour productively it is necessary to train a skilled supervisor who is technically and

organisationally competent and thus able to direct and motivate the workers under his or her control. Equally, for a successful national programme it is necessary to educate engineers about employment creation and train them in the specific skills required in planning, control and evaluation of large labour-intensive programmes (to date the ratio is about one engineer per 300 labourers). In time, an experienced technician or technologist should be able to do this level of work releasing the engineer for engineering and planning. McCutcheon (1994) considers the following points as the main reasons for the success of the programmes in Kenya and Botswana to employ and train a large number of unskilled people: good preliminary analytical work and thorough attention to technical aspects throughout the work; pilot projects which test all aspects (technical, administrative, organisational, institutional, wage rates and conditions of employment, training, planning, socio-economic\ community) and act as the embryonic training programme for future work; strong institutions with good management systems: yet flexible; extensive training; long-term political support; and long-term financial support.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated past African experiences in implementing public works programmes and projects with regard to their successes and problems. The paper then explored how initiatives such as skills development and the Expanded Public Works Programmes (EPWP) could be used to address the low skills level and the rising unemployment levels in South Africa.

Education has been found to play a major role in the probability of finding a job. It appears that most of the youth (mostly Blacks) either suffers from deficiencies in education because these young people have made an early exit out of the schooling system, or they lack particular skills that are in high demand in the different employment sectors. According to Blanchflower (1999), youth unemployment has been shown to have detrimental effects for the individual, as unemployment early in someone's career, may permanently impair their future productive capacity. There is a link between youth joblessness and serious social problems such as drug abuse, vandalism and crime (Freeman, 1999). These problems also affect South Africa. Implementing policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment might thus have a significant impact on the society as a whole. The education system should be better aligned to the labour market so that qualifications held by young people are recognised and acknowledged by employers. This objective could be achieved through students being offered internships at government departments, private firms and consultants.

The Government needs to establish and deploy a long

term programme on employment-intensive construction. This cannot be established overnight, and will take some years to grow into a national programme. Public spending on infrastructure construction and maintenance can be a valuable policy tool to provide economic stimulus during recessions. Provided quality and cost-effectiveness are not compromised, labour-intensive approaches to infrastructure development can also be an important instrument for economic growth (World Bank, 1994); however, when public spending on infrastructure is not wisely deployed, it can crowd out more productive investment in other sectors.

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