

# Public Employment: New Opportunities for Socially Useful Work



# Innovation in public employment



- Historically, ‘public works’ a short-term, crisis response.
- But markets don’t only fail to create employment for those who need it in times of crisis.
- Unemployment often a structural feature
  - Certainly the case in South Africa.
- In response: innovation in the design of public employment programmes



# Innovation in Public Employment



- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA)
  - A right to work, per household in rural areas
  - 100 days per annum
  - Mainly environmental and/or agricultural infrastructure
  - 55 million households
  - Social audit, transparency: [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in)
  - Impacts on poverty
- Ethiopia: Productive Safety Net Programme
  - Alternative to food aid: by traditional donors
  - Combines public employment in the dry season with a cash transfer for households who can't work:
    - Linking public employment and social protection.
  - 8 million households.
  - Mainly environmental and/or agricultural infrastructure.

# In South Africa...

- A track record of environmental public employment
- Working for Water, Working for Wetlands, LandCare, Firewise etc
- Based on a recognition of the public good role of the environment in sustaining life – and in the economy.
- A rationale for a public employment focus.



# Community Work Programme: the new kid on the block

- Designed to take public employment to new scale.
- CWP offers regular part-time work - on an ongoing basis  
2 days a week = 100 days a year
- It is an area-based programme, with a minimum target of 1,000 people per 'site' (covering about ¼ of a municipality).
- The CWP uses community participation to identify 'useful work;'
- Conditions of work are covered by the Ministerial Determination of Working Conditions in EPWP;
- CWP is implemented by non-profit Implementing Agencies
- Each site establishes an advisory Reference Group  
Including ward councilors, local government, and civil society organisations and key community actors (clinic sisters, school principals).
- A mandate of the Department of Co-operative Governance since the end of its pilot phase, from April 2010.

# Why Part-Time Work?

- A response to the structural nature of unemployment: to provide an ongoing employment 'safety net' avoid participants 'exiting back into poverty'.
- Regular part-time work – and hence income - provides an earnings 'floor';
  - A small but sustained increase in incomes is more likely to contribute to a sustainable improvement in nutrition, health – lessons from cash transfers.
- Enables financial planning, mitigating risks of enterprise activity;
- Regular participation in work provides structure, social inclusion
- Part-time work enables the economic participation of women.
- Income from CWP supplements rather than displacing other livelihood activity
- Regular income to participants creates a sustained rise in consumption spending – a more sustainable input into the local economy.
- Part-time work is unlikely to displace full-time work, regardless of the wage rate, reducing concerns about labour market displacement

# The concept of 'Useful Work'

- In the CWP, the work is not predefined.
- Instead, participatory community processes are used to identify 'useful work' – defined in CWP as follows:
  - It must have a 65% labour intensity at site level
  - It must serve the public good, improving quality of life for communities
  - It must use the labour of a minimum target of 1,000 people a week per site.
- The pragmatic assumption is that there is plenty of work to be done in poor communities: but where to begin?
- The need to answer this question requires participatory approaches: an area of innovation.
  - At the start of a site: a process of community mapping: to find out what the needs are.
  - The Organisation Workshop – Seriti Institute
  - From community mapping to visual mapping: as part of M+E



# The Organisation Workshop

- Developed in Brazil in the 1960's; adapted by Seriti Institute
- An action learning method that involves large numbers of people in a month-long exercise;
- Tackles local problems that can't be solved by an individual or small group
- Focus on self-organisation and task management skills required to run a collective enterprise
- Adapted as the inception phase of a CWP site.
- Two hours of daily lectures 'Theory of Organisation' – and many social issues.
- Innovation in community development, to strengthen community capacity.
- Powerful outcomes. (see Langa and Von Holdt).



# From community mapping to visual mapping

- TIPS piloting a GIS mapping technique to plot outcomes of community mapping processes on visual maps
- Training CWP participants – young matriculants.
- Provides a baseline
- A tool for community engagement
- A tool for participatory M+E
- Available to all on the web – transparency.
- A tool for a South African version of MGNREGA's 'social audit'.
- Building community ownership of outcomes.
- Part of institutionalising community-driven approaches

*‘The community work model’s importance lies not only in its scalability, but also in the way social mobilization is made integral to the rollout process, using non-profit agencies to implement the programme and creating new forms of partnership between government, civil society and communities.*

*‘The type of public employment that the commission advocates is not just income transfer in disguise. It is about inculcating a new mindset that empowers people to contribute to their communities.’*

**National Planning Commission  
Draft National Plan, November 2011**

# So, what work is done?

A set of anchor programmes are common at most sites:

- Care of many kinds
  - Food security:
  - Youth recreation
  - Support to schools
  - Community safety
- Minor infrastructure works
- Maintenance and clean-up activities
- Environmental rehabilitation – river cleaning

Strong scope for synergy with environmental/water related programmes

# Food security

- In SA, subsistence and smallholder agriculture very limited;
- CWP: a new impetus to food production: for vulnerable groupings unable to purchase or grow sufficient food.
- Over 45,000 food gardens at schools, clinics, creches, and for vulnerable households, linked to home-based care.
  - Linked emphasis on nutrition
- Reintroduction of agricultural skills: as part of 'work'.
- Spillover to households: food production by participants
- Impacts on child welfare, school outcomes and health outcomes.





# Restoring Dignity through Care

- Home based care: sick, elderly, child-headed households:
  - Washing, cleaning, food production and preparation, basic healthcare, link to health services
- For child-headed households: assistance with chores, homework, care of younger siblings
- Interface with health work: requires training, oversight, link to clinics.
  - Botshabelo: decline in Multi-Drug Resistant TB attributed to CWP
- The human element: requires continuity of care
  - And care for the caregivers



# Schools Support

- Scholar patrols
- Repair of fences
- Vegetable gardens for school feeding
- Security patrols at break to make schools safer places
- Cleaning the grounds
- Overseeing homework classes after school
- Organising sports activity
- Teachers aides
- Cleaning the toilets daily
- Planting trees, landscaping
- Building play equipment, jungle gyms
- Creating, maintaining sports facilities
- Maintenance and repair of buildings



# The transformative potential of 'useful work'

CWP unlocks what has been a 'dead asset' in poor communities:

The power of labour.

The necessary ingredients for this include the following:

1. Labour itself: unlocked by giving it a value
    - Through the wages paid
    - But also: a social value from the nature of 'useful work'
    - 'Decommodification of labour' in CWP (Von Holdt and Langa) enhances the meaning of work for participants
    - Unemployed = sense of being useless to society:
    - In CWP, the work performed is socially useful = participants are validated and recognised in their communities.
  2. Access to 'capital' – a form of 'public' capital, in terms of the tools and materials required to create social value;
  3. An enabling framework for action: a mandate to act from both government and the local community: the social sanction to take initiative to solve common problems.
- Unlocking new forms of agency and capability – at the level of communities as well as amongst participants: the antithesis of 'dependency'.
  - And providing a new development instrument for government.

# Working to end poverty

- In the hands of communities, labour is a powerful instrument in the fight against poverty.
- Already, the role of water/the need for water/the lack of access to water - is a recurrent issue within existing areas of work:
  - Sometime direct, sometimes indirect.
- The challenge: using public employment to respond to water-related challenges at community level;
- Raising awareness of the scope and opportunity to do so
- Doing so in community driven ways.
- Building partnerships to do so.