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SOUTH AFRICA'S STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AND YOUTH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME MODEL

Nomazulu Sibanda*, ORCID: 0000-0002-1824-632X,
Vusilizwe Thebe, ORCID: 0000-0003-1220-7458

University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20, Pretoria, 0028, South Africa

*Corresponding author: Nomazulu Sibanda, nomazulusibanda07@gmail.com

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Abstract. This paper presents an analysis of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), one of the key South African government policy initiatives that are meant to ease the burden of poverty or unemployment on the poor and unskilled. Historically, such programmes have been used as a relief during short-term crises. Of late, countries have adopted them for long-term structural challenges. In South Africa the programme is meant to protect women and youth. This paper uses a mixed methodology approach to determine the active participation of women and youth in the EPWP and their chances of transitioning into the labour market. The study also solicited the views of the EPWP participants (active and former) and officials to get information which is not captured in the programme's official reports. The analytical procedure involved document analysis, focusing on EPWP reports from phases One (1) to Three (3) of the programme. The study makes two propositions: the need for public private partnerships to solve the country's unemployment challenge because independent policies for government or markets are inadequate; a new programme design which separates job seekers from social protection beneficiaries. In its current form, the EPWP is designed as a lower tier poverty trap.

Keywords: *Expanded Public Works Programme, Public Employment Programmes, Public Works Programmes, Unemployment, Women, Youth.*

Rezumat. Această lucrare prezintă o analiză a Programului extins de lucrări publice (EPWP), una dintre inițiativele cheie ale politicii guvernamentale din Africa de Sud, care sunt menite să ușureze povara sărăciei și șomajului asupra celor săraci și necalificați. Din punct de vedere istoric, astfel de programe au fost folosite ca ajutor în timpul crizelor de scurtă durată. În ultimul timp, țările le-au adoptat pentru provocări structurale pe termen lung. În Africa de Sud, programul este menit să protejeze femeile și tinerii. Această lucrare folosește o abordare metodologică mixtă pentru a determina participarea activă a femeilor și tinerilor la EPWP și șansele acestora de a trece pe piața muncii. Studiul a solicitat, de asemenea, opiniile participanților EPWP (activi și foști) și ale oficialilor pentru a obține informații care nu sunt surprinse în rapoartele oficiale ale programului. Procedura analitică a implicat analiza documentelor, concentrându-se pe rapoartele EPWP din fazele Unu (1) până la Trei (3) ale

programului. Studiul face două propuneri: necesitatea parteneriatelor public-privat pentru a rezolva problema șomajului din țară, deoarece politicile independente pentru guvern sau piețe sunt inadecvate; o nouă concepție a programului, care separă solicitanții de locuri de muncă de beneficiarii de protecție socială. În forma sa actuală, EPWP este conceput ca o capcană a sărăciei de nivel inferior.

Cuvinte cheie: *Program extins de lucrări publice, Programe de ocupare a forței de muncă publice, Programe de lucrări publice, șomaj, femei, tineri.*

1. Introduction

South Africa's unemployment challenge has a long pedigree, dating back to the apartheid era; it was first classified along racial lines, with previously disadvantaged races bearing the brunt, and of late women and youth feel its impacts even more. Like other African countries, the country struggles with unemployment rates that are high among the youth and other vulnerable groups [1-3]. Generally, the country has consistently recorded a growing unemployment trend. In the fourth quarter of 2021, the country recorded 35.3 % unemployment, translating to 7.9 million people, albeit based on a narrow definition of unemployment [4]. Women and youth unemployment was the worst, with 37.3% of women compared to 32.9 % of men, while youth unemployment (for 15-24 years and 25-34 years age groups respectively) reached 66.5 % and 43.8 % in quarter three (3) of 2021 [5]. The country's unemployment levels are also dominating among the South African Customs Union (SACU) member states. In 2019, women unemployment in South Africa was highest at 30.5 %, with Lesotho ranking second highest at 28.13 %, the Kingdom of Eswatini coming third at 23.9 %, Botswana fourth at 20.51 % and Namibia ranked fifth at 18.53 % [6]. While youth unemployment is also said to be the highest among the SACU member states at 57.5 %, followed by the Kingdom of Eswatini at 46 %, Namibia at 37.8 %, Botswana 35.6 % and Lesotho coming in last at 34.4 % [7].

Many reasons account for this challenge, such as population growth, poor economic growth and the economic restructuring which has led to a rapid shift towards highly skilled labour, leaving many unskilled people out of the labour market [8-9]. The agriculture and mining sectors, which are the main absorbers of unskilled labour have experienced severe decline while in contrast the sectors that include services, finance, business, wholesale and retail, which require specific skills, have grown significantly [10-11]. The challenge of structural unemployment and skills shortage in South Africa is amplified by skill requirements of the recent Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR, has significantly altered the way which people live and work, thereby thrusting the young people to the forefront of development [12] but there has been a shift too in skills required. Anxious to create an all-inclusive South Africa, the government initiated several policy interventions dating back to the end of apartheid era, all of which had specific targets for solving the country's unemployment challenge. In their diverse versions, these interventions privilege the need for education and training and labour absorbing growth [13-14].

It was in this context that the government introduced a Public Employment Programme (PEP) known as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in 2004 as a short to medium-term relief strategy to address the country's unemployment challenge [15-17]. The genesis of this programme was in the mid-1990s when it was first implemented as the Community-Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) which utilised labour-intensive approaches to build community assets and local capacity, thereby creating short-term

employment to cushion the poor and unemployed [18-20]. The EPWP is a five (5) yearly phased programme aligned to the broader government policy initially linked to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 and currently to the current government development blueprint, the National Development Plan (NDP) adopted in 2012 [18, 20]. The programme's aims are now focused on social protection, creation of assets and employment opportunities for poor and unskilled [21] with more emphasis being placed on employment of vulnerable groups. The country's unemployment especially for women and youth is worrying to government, civil society, communities and other stakeholders. This is despite government efforts to curb it. This article aims to analyse how the EPWP is responding to this challenge. In pursuing this, the paper aims to seek answers to the question on how the programme addresses the country's structural unemployment problem among the women and youth population categories in post-apartheid South Africa.

Grounded on the Keynesian model, PEPs or Public Works Programmes (PWP) have a long pedigree as a short-term crisis-employment policies. They have been employed by both developed and developing countries in response to a number of crises. Dating back to the 19th century, when India (known then as British India) responded to successive droughts in the 1830s, 1870s and 1890s where through labour-intensive methods, a PWP was used to protect victims of famine [22-23]. Later on, countries like the United States of America (USA) during the Great Depression in 1934, East Germany during an economic crisis after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Argentina during the 1998 to 2002 economic crisis and Ethiopia have also used these programmes [22-27]. It is in the same vein that South Africa also introduced the EPWP in 2004, targeting the poor and unskilled to provide temporary employment relief to the unemployed while reskilling the unskilled or semi-skilled [15-16, 27]. However, globally such programmes are not recognised as active labour market policies because, in their nature, they are designed to provide temporary employment relief. Of late, some countries have innovatively used these programmes to address long-term challenges thus, changing the underlying philosophy of short-term crisis relief, bringing a new dynamic to the labour market arena [25, 27]. This has been the case with the EPWP which has become the next best alternative for the unemployed in South Africa [28-29]. This places a significant responsibility on the programme as opposed to it being a complementary employment programme.

This article, employed a mixed methodology with primary data collected through structured and semi-structured interviews, supplemented with secondary data on EPWP and general labour market reports. Through analysis of lived experiences of active and former EPWP participants, this article aims to contribute literature on how PEPs or PWP can effectively be used by countries to solve long-term challenges. Specifically, in the developing world where challenges are not short-term crisis oriented but have become a part of the daily lives of many ordinary citizens with significant bias towards vulnerable groupings such as women and youth. This article is divided into five (5) sections. The first section includes the background of the study and the research questions. The second section discusses the materials and methods used in the collection of data. The third sections discusses results. Discussions follow in the fourth section and then section five (5) concludes the study.

2. Materials and Methods

Social issues are complex, so is the unemployment challenge in South Africa. Whereas some sources argue that women and youth have taken centre stage in leadership, the economy and on the labour market [30-31], there is hard evidence to the contrary. This article

adopted a robust approach for a complete understanding of the EPWP and how it relates to the protection of the vulnerable in the country. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods which consisted of primary as well as secondary data. The two approaches complement one another in how data is generated and analysed. The former which consisted of structured and semi-structured interviews was collected from 224 (active and former EPWP participants) in Kimberley and Kuruman in the Northern Cape as well as 30 EPWP officials in Kuruman, Kimberley and Pretoria (EPWP Head Office). The latter consisted of document analysis and quantitative data in the form of documented statistics. The data was analysed using graphs and tables as well as thematic presentations. Quantitative data was first collected from the field through surveys using structured questionnaires. Some qualitative data was collected from secondary sources such as EPWP, labour market and media reports. From this data, key issues were identified. Semi-structured interviews were held with a small sample of participants or former participants and EPWP officials to clarify issues identified as requiring follow up. In order to elicit sufficient understanding on how EPWP has responded to these challenges, this article strove to deploy these investigative constructs in the field [17, 32-34]. A single method does not allow for sufficient investigative depth and breadth on the critical drivers of unemployment among women and youth in South Africa.

3. Results

South Africa suffers from structural unemployment, which means those without skills need employment alternatives. Government continues to emphasise creation of EPWP employment as a complement to efforts by labour absorption institutions and job creation by the private sector [35]. The programme is perceived and understood as a temporary relief to the unemployment challenge. Questions abound on the extent to which the programme has managed to provide this relief especially to women and youth.

3.1 EPWP employment is too small to provide the country's much needed relief

EPWP employment opportunities are very low compared to employment required by the unemployed in the country. Figure 1 shows that in 2008, the country had over 4 million unemployed people, and in just over 10 years, unemployment shot up by 50% to 6.1 million people in 2018.

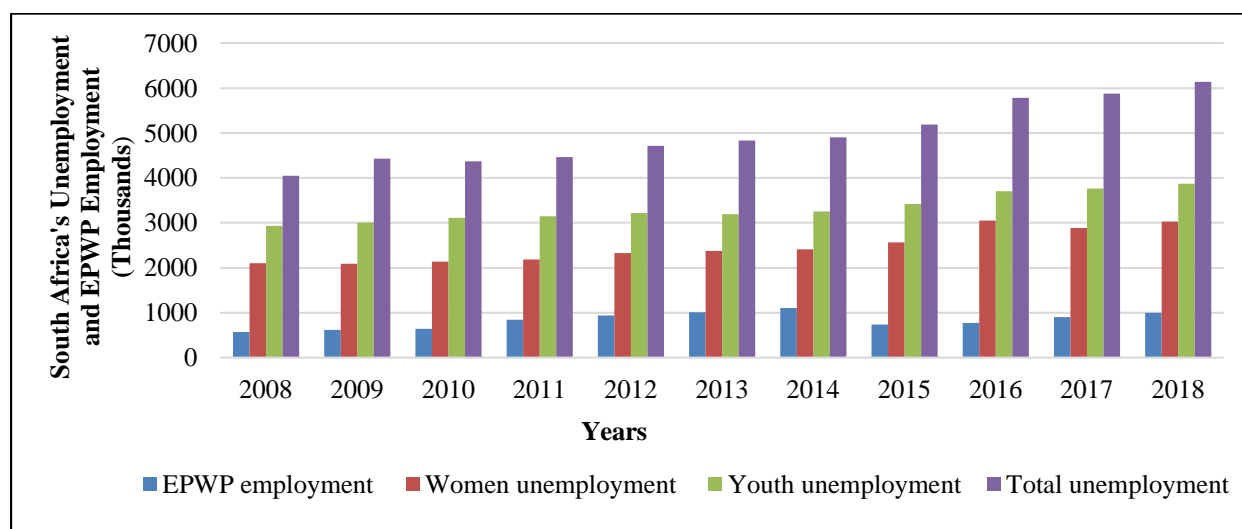


Figure 1. South Africa's unemployment and EPWP employment [36-37].

These numbers reflect the official definition of unemployment, meaning that in the broad definition, the number of unemployed people is substantially much more than what is reflected.

As shown above, the EPWP created 570,019 jobs in 2008 compared to over 4 million people who required employment in the same year. The EPWP employment levels have ranged between 14% and 22% of the unemployed throughout the three (3) phases of its implementation. The 4.5 million jobs target for Phase Two (2) or 6 million jobs target for Phase Three (3), which were for the full five-year period of each phase (Department of Public Works, 2019) are equivalent to all the jobs required in the country annually. Poor project administration was identified as a challenge leading to poor creation of employment opportunities on the programme. Of the EPWP officials who took part in the survey, 41% said that jobs are created but are not reported due to poor administration. Employment created is reported on the EPWP reporting system. A report on EPWP by the South African Cities Network stated that, "...changes to the reporting system requirements made in 2015/16 led to data relating to projects being non-compliant and so projects and work opportunities created could not be reported" [38, pp.43]. As a result, some data was discarded because it is unreliable thus losing track of work opportunities created. The other reason given for this is the lack of capacity in government. This was a view by one EPWP official who said:

Government does not have capacity to implement infrastructure projects, some unit heads are former educators who have no knowledge of the construction sector, so some projects cannot be implemented [39].

The gap between the number of jobs created by the EPWP and the levels of unemployment is too wide; hence, there have been calls to expand the programme in order to absorb more jobless people [15, 28]. The need to expand the programme was also echoed from within the programme with one EPWP official emphasising it saying:

There was a need to table a policy framework in parliament that makes it compulsory for public sector projects to have EPWP component [40].

It was suggested in the parliamentary debates on 14 February 2019 that the programme should roll out large infrastructure projects that could then absorb the unemployed [35]. This comes as no surprise as the unemployment question has become a major policy issue, and the government is hard pressed to create more jobs. However, there are several austerity measures designed to reduce state the fiscal burden introduced from 2014/15 financial year with one of the consequences being a reduction on social spending and cuts on infrastructure grant allocations [20]. The infrastructure grants are the funds that public bodies use to create EPWP employment. Reduction of these grants cripples the programme's expansion potential. If the programme is to expand, it has to do so within the government's constrained fiscal purse. This was supported by one EPWP official who said:

Our budgets are cut and EPWP work opportunities are not revised according to budget cuts. We end up reprioritising projects and in the end people we are supposed to employ end up not getting the opportunity [41].

This was supported by 17.6 % of the EPWP officials who took part in the survey who said budget cuts are a major impediment to growth in creation of employment opportunities by public bodies.

One the other hand, the unemployed felt the pressure to remain working on the programme because it is difficult to get work elsewhere. For example one EPWP participant, Nolwazi, a 31-year-old woman from Gamothibi village, who has never had a permanent job in her life and is currently working in a community garden with eight other people from her village sees the EPWP as a welcome relief from her unemployment plight. She said that she has an incomplete matric certificate and the EPWP is the only employer in her village. She, however, complains that EPWP opportunities are limited as only a few people can work on the programme at each specific time. When other people apply through the Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) office that is responsible for implementing the programme in her village in Kuruman, they are usually told that there is not enough budget to take on new participants. They are advised to wait for the following year as the budget is likely to be increased. She said there are two women who joined her group in 2018 after waiting for three years to be included among EPWP participants. While they were waiting for the purported budget increase, they had no work to do since there are no 'skrops' (part time jobs) in the village. She found this situation very frustrating. This view was shared by an EPWP official who said:

Programmes like the EPWP are key to fulfilling the government's promise to create employment, and this can be done through increased budgetary support to the programme to facilitate expansion [39].

These job opportunities are needed by the communities but budgetary constraints are frustrating the intended programme outcomes of protecting the poor and unemployed.

3.2 The EPWP projects offer limited employment options

There are not many employment opportunities so the EPWP has become what [28] termed 'an employer of last resort'. The unskilled or semi-skilled have to look for an EPWP opportunity. Women appreciate EPWP work due to limited options. For example, Keneilwe, a 38-year-old woman from Greenpoint Township in Kimberley who currently lives in an RDP house with her three children, parents and four siblings feels the impact of high unemployment levels in the country. She appreciated working for the programme because there is no other option for her. She said:

it is difficult to find work especially here in Kimberley...when they built the Diamond Pavilion Mall we were hoping we are going to get work there as shop assistants but some of us failed. Most girls in my area who dropped out of school have two or more children and end up doing this 'vat en sit' thing (meaning unmarried couples living together). Life is not normal here. We really need work [42].

Keneilwe does not have any formal skill and the only work experience she had was working as a housekeeper at a hotel in Kimberley on a short-term contract. She had never had a permanent job in her life and was in need of permanent work. She had joined the EPWP about five years prior and worked on a street paving project in Greenpoint Township. She said:

I was happy when the Deputy President (meaning Mr. Ramaphosa who is now President of the country) visited our project in 2015, I thought we were going to get permanent jobs after seeing the good work we had done. That did not happen because we are still relying on EPWP for work [42].

At the time of the interview, Keneilwe was now working on a street cleaning project in Kimberley. Similar to Keinelwe's situation, young people who have failed to make it in the labour market resort to the programme for employment. For example, Kealagile, a 31-year-old male from Glenred Village who matriculated in 2008 but failed to get the required subjects to proceed to tertiary education and then went to the farms in the Western Cape

Province to find work, is grateful for working on the programme. Since remuneration is very low on the farms and the work is seasonal, he reports that he found life unbearable and therefore decided to go back home. Unfortunately, in his village there is no employment opportunities save for the EPWP projects. He said:

in 2012 I decided to go back home and I was employed as a supervisor on an EPWP project where I earn R2,500 per month [43].

According to Kealagile, unemployment is a challenge in his village and the unskilled rely on EPWP work. The only job opportunities in his village are government jobs in teaching, agricultural extension services, nursing or within the police force in Bothitong Village which is about 15 km away. The fortunate ones get work in Kuruman, about 70km from his home. The EPWP employment is necessary in these areas to cushion the poor and unemployed from the adversity of joblessness.

3.3 Some the EPWP sub-programmes employ youth better than others

The programme has managed to create sub-programmes that are able to absorb women, with the Social sector employing women at 82%, the Non-state sector employing 78% women within the CWP, and NPO employing 74% women as shown in Figure 2. One EPWP who praised the programme for providing work opportunities for women said:

the introduction of the non-state sector in 2009 saw a rise in the employment of women on the programme. The general rise in the sub-programmes favouring women such as school nutrition, home based care and some sub-programmes from the NPO and CWP have promoted this growth [44].

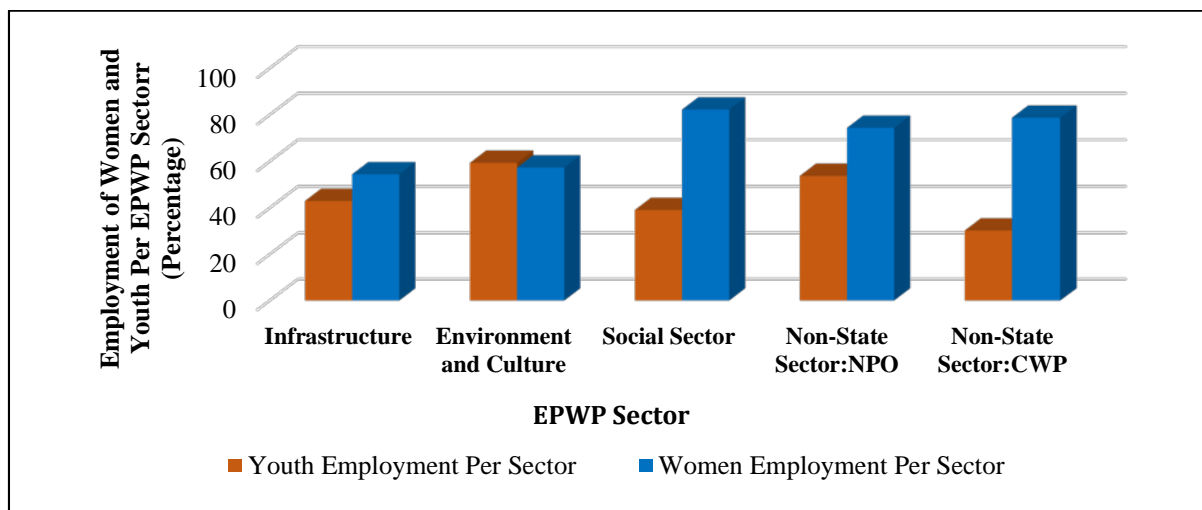


Figure 2. EPWP employment of Women and Youth per Sector in 2019 [36].

On other hand, the programme has been struggling to draw the attention of youth to its programmes. This is evidenced by low participation of young people despite their high levels of unemployment. As shown in Figure 3 youth absorption ranged from 30% to 59% in 2019. Young people view EPWP work as degrading according to Mercy’s observation. Mercy is a 34-year-old woman who is a supervisor on an EPWP project in Veregenoerg Township. Mercy said:

they (referring to youth) take it as old people’s job...the ones we started with resigned and looked for other jobs [45].

The EPWP provides employment but some young people feel that the work done on the programme is not decent enough for them. However, one of the reasons given by EPWP officials who took part in the interviews is that in some cases, young people do not meet the minimum requirements for certain sub-programmes. The EPWP officials said: “*it’s not easy to get learners with Maths and Science*” [46]. This is one of the minimum requirements for participating in the NYS sub-programme, and without such credentials, then the National Youth Service (NYS) sub-programme cannot assist.

3.4 EPWP produces poor quality of labour

People employed on EPWP projects are expected to find their way into the formal labour market. A distinguishing factor of EPWP employment is that it is project-based and most projects are of short-term duration. In addition, the level of effort required across different projects varies, with some people having much heavier workloads compared to others [28]. The quality of labour is determined by time spent at work, work experience gained from projects, EPWP activities and mobility within projects. Quality of labour takes into consideration the type of work experience that EPWP participants gain from the programme, which is also critical if they are to be gainfully employed. The EPWP participants are trained as general labour across all trades. One EPWP official said:

our EPWP participants do everything. We give them any task that is available, all they want is to get a stipend [39].

Data from the EPWP participants indicate a certain trend in the work experience of EPWP workers as shown in Figure 3. They tend to have work experience that is so diverse that there is no discernible growth in the skills each of the components contribute to the participant.

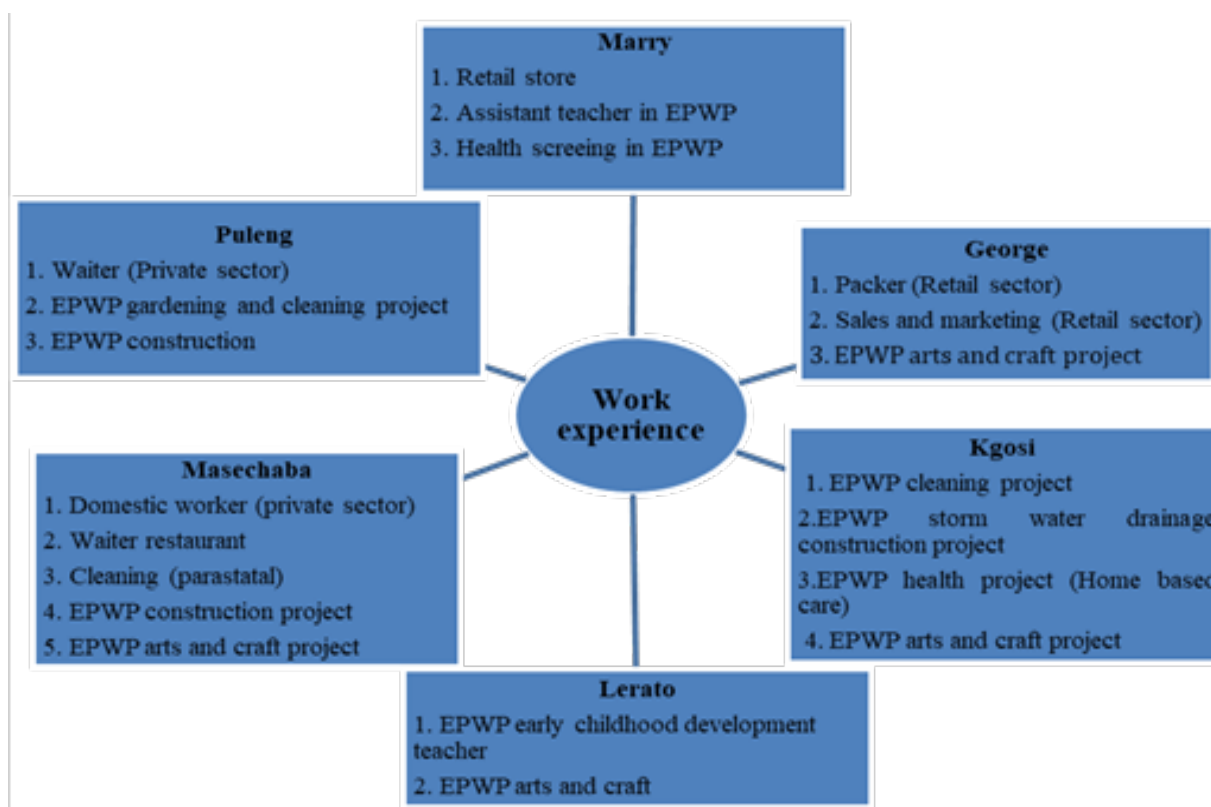


Figure 3. EPWP participants work experience.

The respondents cited in Figure 3 have work experience from either the EPWP and private sector or the EPWP only. Most EPWP participants have work experience from more than one sector of the EPWP. It is difficult to draw a career path, for example, for Kgosi from Greenpoint Township, who has more than three years' work experience from the EPWP only. In the three years that Kgosi has spent on the EPWP, he has worked in all four sectors of the programme. When he started working on the programme he was in an Environment and Culture Sector project responsible for street cleaning. In the same year, he dropped out of the cleaning project to join the Infrastructure sector, where he was involved in the construction of storm water drainages as a general labourer. This was a short-term, 6-month contract. When this contract ended, he joined the home-based care project in the Social sector where he worked for a year. He again dropped out to join an arts and craft project in the Non-State sector. Kgosi, therefore, has had short stints of work experience in unrelated activities. Kgosi's work history seriously impairs his chances of convincing a potential employer who is looking at his profile that he can do a particular job as he has not had extended experience in any particular sector or industry.

Another similar case is that of Masechaba from Roodepan Township who has more than five (5) years of work experience having worked in the private sector and on EPWP projects. She has worked as a domestic worker in the private sector, cleaner in a parastatal, waiter in a restaurant, involved in construction in the EPWP, and was now working for an arts and craft project in the EPWP. The first three (3) jobs are related, but she found herself in a construction project as well as an arts and craft project when she joined the programme, taking a totally different career direction altogether. This puts Masechaba in the same dilemma as Kgosi. These are typical cases of most EPWP participants, with some having worked in almost all sectors of the programme and therefore making it difficult to place them in any one sector of the economy.

3.5 EPWP causes displacement or substitution of full time workers

The EPWP workers have become low cost workers in some government institutions, in the process displacing or substituting full-time workers. For example, Annelia, a 33-year-old female from Glenred Village, who works on an EPWP project assisting at a local school as a receptionist and is also responsible for cleaning of staff rooms as well as the principal's office, expressed concern about this. She said she had been doing work that was supposed to be done by full-time staff for about two years. She works with three other people, two women and one male, who are all youth. Annelia earns R780 per month working two days a week. Some EPWP participants in other parts of the country have turned to industrial action demanding that they be employed permanently in such positions. About 62 % of EPWP participants from the field data indicated that they were working on a short-term project while 38 % indicated that they were doing work that is supposed to be done by permanent staff. Some labour representatives have called for a stop in this exploitative practice of using EPWP participants in key service delivery government functions [47-48]. The political leadership has also called for an end to this practice by government institutions, with the National Assembly having reiterated this towards the end of Phase Three (3) during a parliamentary debate on the EPWP [35].

3.6 The EPWP programme support structure is weak

The EPWP's support structure is fragile because it mainly depends on the government sector, which in many cases has its own pre-existing performance challenges as identified by

the Auditor General South Africa [49]. Government is highly criticised for failing to provide the necessary public goods and services to the communities which has seen a rise in service delivery issues over the years. Since EPWP is delivered through this model, it is also caught in this trap of long standing issues which government has not been able to resolve over the years. This has been a norm in government where local government is the worst spender among public bodies implementing the EPWP, with the 2018/19 financial reports showing underspending of 13% on municipal budgets and conditional grants [50]. This is supported by EPWP data on expenditure from 2008 to 2019 in Figure 4.

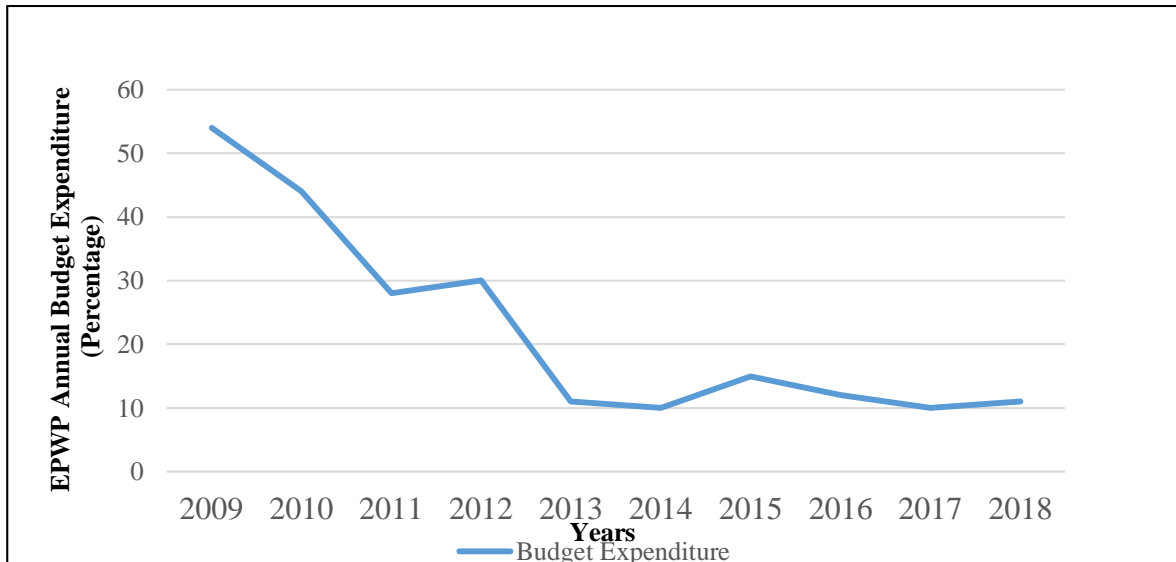


Figure 4. Reported EPWP Annual Budget Expenditure [36].

Figure 4 illustrates expenditure on projects as reported on the EPWP reporting system from Phase Two (2) to Phase Three (3). As illustrated above, the programme was only able to spend over 50% of the allocated resources only once in the 10 years of implementation. In 2009, when the Non-State Sector was introduced, the programme managed to spend 54% of the allocated resources. From 2013, the programme has consistently spent less than 20% of the allocated resources. This emphasises the point that as much as the Keynes approach to government intervention is necessary, government alone is not able to effectively provide the much-needed relief to the economy hence the need to involve the private sector. There has been suggestions of inclusion of private sector as proposed in the programme's initial framework of 1992 which have not materialised [38]. Unfortunately, the programme has been entangled in this government web of poor performance which has been normalised within government structures.

4. Discussion

This article focuses on the alleviation of long-term challenges through implementation of EPWP in South Africa with specific focus on its ability to cushion the vulnerable (women and youth). It remains critical to ask whether the desired outcomes of EPWP were incorporated in its design. Due to the complexity of the programme and the challenge at hand, understanding the underlying assumptions is crucial to explaining these programmes [32,51]. This also enables one to be able to draw linkages within the ecosystem.

Figure 5 illustrates PEPs or PWP assumptions. Its ecosystem consists of stakeholders (who provide projects and policy guidance) and the participants (poor and unskilled looking for employment opportunities).

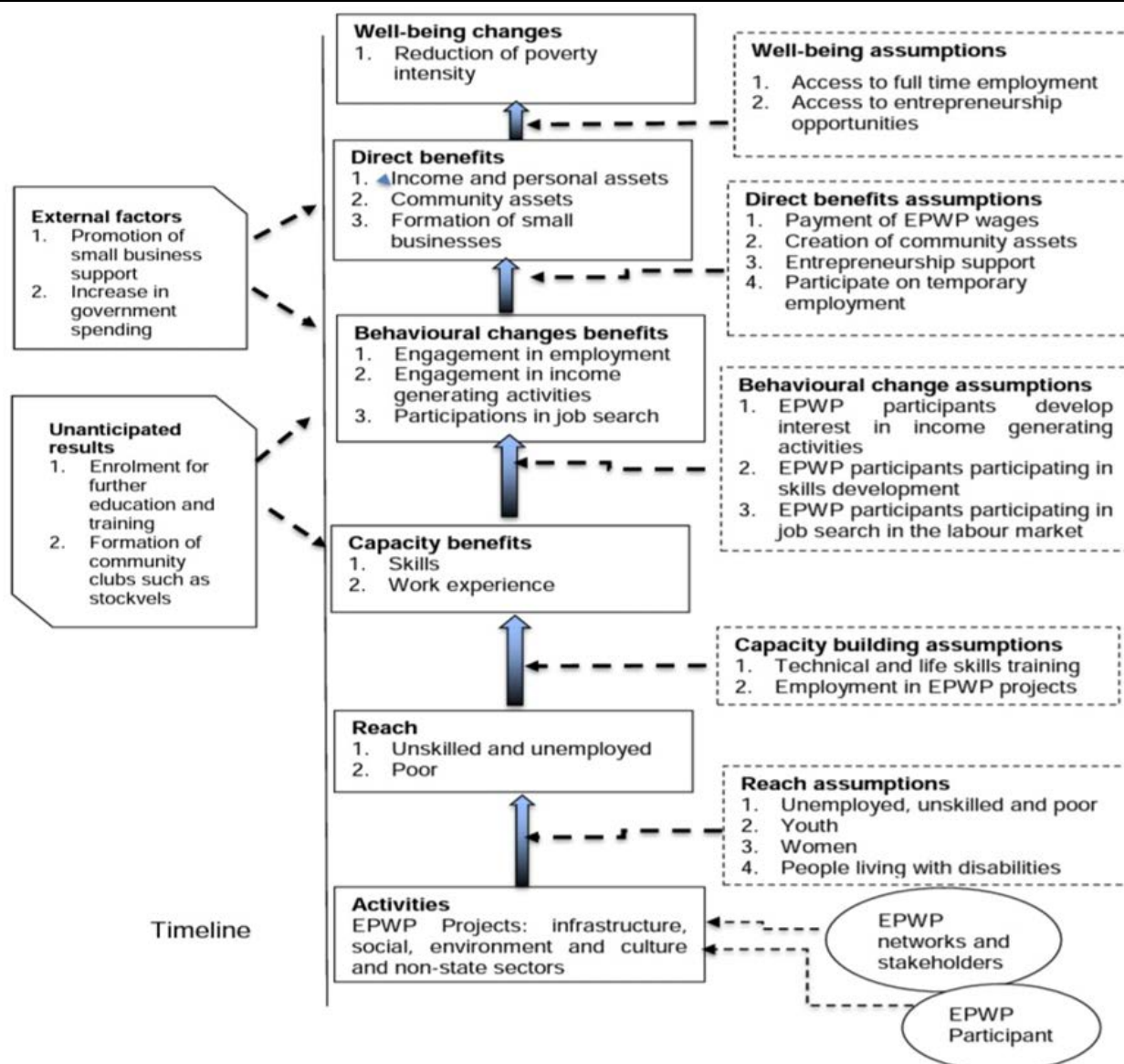


Figure 5. Programme model [32, 51].

This model makes assumptions that the programme reaches the targeted beneficiaries, while on the programme participants receive capacity building, it also assumes that participants behavioural changes (job search, entrepreneurship participation and skills development).

By participation on the programme participants are said to receive direct benefits such as temporary employment, wages, community assets and entrepreneurship support. In the end there is well-being changes in the form of reduction of poverty intensity. There are some unanticipated outcomes such as enrolment into further education or training and participation in savings clubs. These assumptions shape the model of the programme. South Africa has deeply rooted structural unemployment, which, by its nature, falls outside the scope of a short-term policy or programme response. This necessitates bringing together of approaches as informed by both the Keynesian theory (which favours government intervention) and the Neoliberalism (which is in support of free markets). If only the Keynesian approach is adopted, the typical short-term EPWP approach would fall short of effectively addressing the structural unemployment problem.

This paper rejects the notion that the EPWP should utilise its short-term capabilities drawn from standard PEP or PWP approaches to tackle a long-term challenge. This argument is in line with findings by [15, 28-29] who argued that policy must be designed to address the long-term nature of the challenges. Two key issues make the South African case unique; firstly, unemployment in the country is structural, making the challenge intractable from neoliberal approaches such as boosting the economy alone and expecting the markets to absorb the unemployed. Secondly, unemployment in South Africa affects women and youth more than it does men, essentially meaning that the approach needs to be unique and oriented towards addressing these two critical aspects. The challenges in the developed and developing world have laid bare the weaknesses of these programmes which this paper recommends a more practical approach to solving long-term challenges which deviate from the usual norm of short-term government intervention alone.

5. Conclusions

Discussions in the findings above highlighted that the EPWP is too broad and as a result its impact especially on unemployment of women and youth is insignificant. The issues raised in data collection necessitate the need for the programme to be redesigned. In its current form its contribution is minimal. Key questions to be addressed in this regard include whether the programme should shift its focus from short-term crisis relief to provision of longer term opportunities in recognition of the structural and long-term characteristics of unemployment. The second option will be to design itself as an employer of last resort. In the first instance the programme will be focusing on the quality of jobs which means skills development and work experience will be key in the programme design. In the second instance the programme will be providing employment to the poor and unskilled who cannot be absorbed by the labour thus, focusing on the quantity of jobs. The EPWP is a twin programme which provides social protection and employment opportunities. Trying to pursue both is overwhelming to the programme thus, leading it to only scratch on the surface with nothing much to show. However, the country's poverty and unemployment challenges are urgent. This means if the twin programme is to be successful there is a need for it to be redesigned. Redesigning, therefore, means the programme should separate its social protection imperatives from the creation of employment opportunities. Mixing the two groups deprives new labour market entrants or youth from getting full-time employment in the future.

This therefore leads to a discussion on what the programme can do differently in order to be able to (1) provide a cushion to the poor and (2) facilitate transition of women and youth to full-time employment. In designing the programme it is important to consider that the country is sitting on a *'ticking time bomb'* due to the unemployment of women and youth which makes every effort towards addressing it urgent. People targeted by the programme have different needs. Youth and economically active people need skills or work experience to re-join the labour market. There is another group that needs to be cushioned from poverty. These different needs are to be taken into consideration in the design of the programme.

In redesigning the programme the process should address three (3) questions as follows:

- i. *Who* – the programme should separate EPWP participants according to their needs (those who need cushion from poverty or unskilled who are economically active).

- ii. *What* – social protection or creation of employment opportunities. In this case, EPWP participants should be classified according to needs to either under social protection or creation of employment opportunities.
- iii. *How* – this is the implementation part of the programme, which will be guided by the classification of the EPWP participants. The stakeholder mix and programme offer to be in such a way that it supports transition to employment or social protection.

This means the package for employment seekers needs to be different from that of social protection beneficiaries. In relation to the former this paper proposes that unskilled or semi-skilled economically active women and youth are targeted by the programme. In the case of the later the aim is to provide a cushion to the poor. Public private partnerships, skills development, type of activities is necessary to facilitate transition to full time employment so that the economically are not trapped on the programme with no way out. The programme will need to expand on the quantity of job opportunities to cater for the large numbers that need social protection. While working on the programme participants need to be taught life skills or be linked with entities that support such initiatives. Policy needs to take into consideration the uniqueness of the challenge. Government efforts are to be directed towards a more sustainable approach which future studies need to look into more innovative ways to be used in solving these challenges.

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