

**Public Works as A Safety Net:
Evidence and implementation in South African municipalities**
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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Submission: Feb 11, 2022</p> <p>Revisions: Jul 06, 2022</p> <p>Acceptance: Sep 01, 2022</p> <p>Published online: December 03, 2022</p>	<p>This article analyses the coordination processes, challenges, and outcomes of the South African Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) as the social safety net related to poverty and unemployment, drawing on the Cape Town and Mangaung Metropolitan Municipalities case studies. The article draws from a qualitative desktop approach based on an extensive literature review. The study findings reveal similar institutional challenges as a deterrent to the effectiveness of the EPWP in addressing poverty and unemployment. These include political interference, lack of reporting, human resources training, administrative capacity, adequate funding, and the absence of an EPWP structure. To remedy these challenges, South African municipalities should improve monitoring, evaluation, talent management, and foster public-private partnership synergies.</p>

Keywords: Expanded Public Works Programme, Implementation, Safety net, South African municipalities.

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Introduction

Since the end of apartheid, the South African government has undertaken various economic programs on equal income distribution and poverty alleviation – notably, the Reconstruction and Development Programme adopted in 1994 to achieve equality in society and, consequently, economic growth (Maphunye, 2011:616; South African History Online [SAHO], 2019). Similarly, in 2004, the government employed the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), dispersed in all nine South African provinces, to solve social challenges including unemployment, poverty, and inequality. The program's outcomes include short-term income and skills development acting as a social safety net (Department of Public Works 2017a; Hochfled, 2017; Maphanga & Mazenda, 2019; Musekene & Du Plessis, 2016:35). The 2003 Growth and Development Summit (GDS) concluded that public works projects provide poverty and income support for the unemployed through temporary work such as performing socially acceptable tasks. The programmes support government strategy on decent work and livelihoods, education, health, rural development, food security and land reform, and crime and corruption prevention (Department of Public Works, 2017a). The proceeds from the EPWP go to various income and skills generation projects. The grants enhance the potential of small municipalities to participate in the program, and the provision of these grants enables lower-capacity municipalities to perform better. Additionally, the provision of financial rewards motivates provinces and municipalities to create more labour-intensive jobs (Department of Public Works, 2017a).

However, despite all the above, data extracted from the South African Cities Network (SACN) (2018) indicates that of the 1,303 projects implemented in nine South African Metropolitan Municipalities (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, City of Cape Town, City of Ekurhuleni, City of Johannesburg, Mangaung Municipality, Musunduzu Municipality, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and City of Tshwane), the City of Cape Town (CoC) implemented 547 projects (around 41 percent of the total number of projects implemented by all the South African Metropolitan Municipalities). From these projects, 25,389 work opportunities were created between three sectors: 5,078 in the infrastructure sector, 10,935 in the environment and culture sector, and 9,376 in the social sector (SACN, 2018:35) with a budget allocation of R5,025,361,015 (US\$330,042,752.25). Contrary to the success of the CoC is the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MM), which has experienced several challenges, such as political interference, lack of reporting, lack of training, and the absence of an EPWP.

This leding to the metro implementing only six projects (0.466 percent of the total number of projects implemented) and creating only 627 work opportunities (41 in the infrastructure sector, 586 in the environment and culture sector, and none in the social sector) (SACN, 2018:35) with a total budget allocation of R1,522,142,040 (US\$917,892,48.92) (SACN, 2018:26). Similar patterns were experienced in 2018/2019: The CoC implemented the most projects (a total of about 700 projects), and Mangaung MM, despite the increase of projects implemented, was one of the least performing cities with 16 projects implemented (SACN, 2019:86). Consequently, the challenges in project implementation translated into unemployment. In 2019, Statistics South Africa (2019) reported the Mangaung MM unemployment rate at 30.3 percent, compared to 22.6 percent in the CoC, following a similar pattern to previous years.

Thus, based on the above, this article seeks to draw on the following objectives:

- Examine the coordination processes and outcomes of the EPWP in the CoC and Mangaung MMs;
- Identify the challenges affecting the implementation of the EPWP as a safety net in the CoC and Mangaung MMs; and
- Provide recommendations on how the government can improve the administration and coordination of the EPWP.

To address the above questions, the article relied on the theory of change that explains how an intervention (or series of interventions) will lead to a specific development change (United Nations Development Group [UNDG], 2017:4). The theory identifies problem causes and effective solutions (UNDG, 2017:4). Applying the theory to societal challenges is necessary for building sound policy reforms. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers collected data using unobtrusive research techniques, including documentary analysis and analysis of authoritative sources related to the EPWP in South Africa and the Mangaung and CoC MMs.

The article is organised as follows. Following the methodology, the article provides an overview of the EPWP's structure and organisation. Then, the proposition of the theory of change concerning the EPWP is examined. The third part presents the challenges hindering the program's execution in South Africa. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations are presented.

The study makes two significant contributions. The first is toward poverty eradication and unemployment in rural and urban municipalities by highlighting challenges deterring the proper implementation of national public works programs. The second is by advising planning consultants and policymakers on how to foster sustainable outcomes from participation in government-sponsored short-term empowerment programs.

Methodology

This article employs a qualitative approach, which follows a case study design and is based on a literature review of documents related to the EPWP in South Africa and the Mangaung and CoC MMs. This method was chosen as it allows the understanding and exploration of complex issues and social realities (McLeod, 2019), while document analysis enables researchers to understand the aspects of social life and generate possible themes for analysis (Bowen, 2009:27). The main documents reviewed include the state of EPWP in South African cities (SACN 2017; 2018; 2019), 2019 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, linking population dynamics to municipal revenue allocation in the CoC and the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, and Programme Integrated Grant Manual. The documents were selected based on their relevance to eradicating poverty and unemployment in local municipalities. A thematic analysis emphasises identifying, examining, and recording data patterns important in responding to the research questions (Patton & Cochran, 2002) and was used to draw meaning from the documents.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of change explains how an intervention (or series of interventions) will lead to a specific development change (UNDG, 2017:4). The theory identifies problem causes and effective solutions (UNDG, 2017:4), and applying it to societal challenges is necessary for building sound policy reforms. To be effective, the theory should be grounded in or informed by prior research evidence and knowledge of the challenges to be addressed (Cloete & De Coning, 2018:62).

The theory is underpinned by seven components (stages) used in the event of an intervention. The first component involves the activities and the actions taken by the parties involved in the intervention (Mayne, 2015:122). The second component concerns goods and services, which are the direct outputs of the activities and/or actions taken in the first stage (Mayne, 2015:122). The third stage is reach and reaction, targeted at the beneficiaries of the intervention and their initial reaction to the intervention (Mayne, 2015:122). The fourth stage identifies the changes potentially noticed by those who use the goods and services affected by the intervention. Such changes may be in the form of knowledge, skills, or opportunities (Mayne, 2015:123). Behavioral changes fall under the fifth stage; as a result of the intervention, the target group/beneficiaries would start to do things differently (Mayne, 2015:123). The sixth stage relates to direct benefits – that is, direct benefits to the beneficiaries (Mayne, 2015:123). Finally, the seventh stage encompasses the well-being changes that arise as an extension of the direct benefits.

The researchers used this theory to inform the significance of government intervention through EPWPs, which can lead to short and long-term improvements in many citizens' lives. Applying the theory of change in the CoC and Mangaung municipalities would entail realising EPWP outcomes of the social safety net based on the number of projects implemented. These outcomes relate to both municipalities' coordination processes and management of paid out resources.

Poverty levels and unemployment form part of the societal problems that need intervention through the EPWP, with various accruing benefits to citizens, including income, short-term employment, and multiple employment initiatives, all with a mandate of reducing poverty and promoting a healthy lifestyle and citizen well-being.

When there are covariate shocks, like natural disasters or micro crises, or when there are shortfalls in seasonal labor demand, public works programs can help protect families from job losses and lift people out of poverty by providing part-time jobs (Subbarao et al., 2013:29). Public works programmes are a means to human emancipation in many developing countries. The programs have been more successful in India and Bangladesh. Del Nino et al. (2009) argue that public works programs in these two countries have made a significant difference regarding poverty and unemployment. Public works programs have also been used in middle and low-income countries at various times (Del Nino et al., 2009). In Sri Lanka, the public works program was implemented to rebuild the country from a long civil war. (Subbarao et al., 2013:30).

In Argentina public works programs such as the “Jefes de Hogar” was made to cushion against the aftermath of the 2002 financial crisis. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program cushioned households against food security shocks.

The EPWP Policy Context

The EPWP in South Africa was established under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996), Section 27 (the Bill of Rights), which provides the right to adequate food and water to all citizens. Section 152 (1) and (2) of the Constitution further dictates the functions of local government, which include:

- Providing a democratic and accountable government for the local community;
- Ensuring that services are provided sustainably to benefit the present and future generations;
- Encouraging social and economic development;
- Striving for a safe and healthy environment; and
- Encouraging communities to be involved in local government affairs (Del Nino et al., 2009; Zimmerman, 2014).

As a constitutional democracy, South Africa aims to empower local people through EPWPs to generate household income on a short-term basis and through the "multiplier effect" of skills development. Additionally, the EPWP objectives draw on the National Development Plan (NDP) 2012–2030 agenda, where the government ensures equal access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, water, and health care National Development Plan (Republic of South Africa, 2012:360). While the plan's success is centered around several objectives, three stand out. These include increasing employment through economic growth; striving for improved education, skills development, and innovation; and the national development transformation agenda. However, municipalities failed to achieve the NDP mandate due to numerous challenges, such as poor coordination and planning, a lack of monitoring and evaluation capabilities, and poor institutional mechanisms. The EPWP, therefore, exists to alleviate poverty and create employment targeting the vulnerable, mostly women and youth (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018:1).

To enhance the implementation of EPWPs in South African municipalities and promote skills development, the Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998) was enacted. Since many people working in the EPWP have no skills, this policy presents an opportunity to obtain basic technical skills that enable citizens to generate either their own employment or become employed within the labor market. Caution should be exercised since skills development depends on the capacity of local municipalities to implement such initiatives requiring extensive funding. Nonetheless, the Skills Development Act provides an institutional framework that can be used to develop and improve the skills of South African workers. It also merges the National Qualifications Framework strategies stipulated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995. In addition, the South African Qualifications Authority Act provides learnerships that lead to recognised qualifications. The Department of Public Works (2018) notes that skills development in South Africa consists of three pieces of legislation, namely the Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998), the South African Qualification Authority, and the Skills Development Levies Act (Act No. 9 of 1999). These Acts can be used as guidelines for local municipalities if they embark on skills training for EPWP workers or their municipal employees. Notably, learnerships help young graduates obtain industry experience, making them more marketable and providing entrepreneurial knowledge to start

their businesses. EPWPs function well when people are skilled and can obtain further employment after the termination of the EPWP projects.

Lastly, as a strategy for creating employment and complementing EPWPs, the New Growth Path (NGP) was proposed by the South African government in 2010. The strategy aims to create jobs and reduce the country's unemployment rate by 10 percent in 2020 (ILO, 2011). The strategy targets employment creation harbors or areas, which are termed job drivers. The NGP focuses on five job drivers: "infrastructure, main economic sectors, seizing the potential of new economies, investing in social capital and public service, as well as spatial development"(Department of Economic Development NGP, 2010:33). The first, third, and fourth drivers recognise the importance of a public works program such as the EPWP to create employment in society (Department of Economic Development NGP, 2010:33).

The EPWP in the Mangaung MM

The Mangaung MM identified high levels of poverty and unemployment as challenges in its Integrated Development Plan (Mangaung MM, 2018b). One of the municipality's objectives was to mainstream poverty reduction by facilitating intervention programs in partnership with various stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations (MM, 2018/19:70). From 2018 to 2019, the municipality saw an increase in unemployment from 29.7 percent to 30.3 percent, and a decline in the poverty line from 32.3 percent to 22 percent (Mangaung MM, 2018:19; Statistics South Africa, 2019). However, prospects for improving this are low, with the municipality being among the lowest-performing metropolitan municipalities. The SACN reports for 2017/18 show that the Mangaung MM could only implement six of the overall 1,303 projects, making it the municipality with the lowest number of implemented projects in South Africa. In addition, for the 2018 financial year, the municipality created 627 work opportunities in the city, with only 121 being full-time (SACN, 2018:78). This indicates that the municipality is struggling to implement its projects.

Institutional arrangements

The city's executive mayor acts as the program's champion and is responsible for providing leadership and direction for implementing the EPWP. Heading the administrative role is the city manager. The city manager is tasked with ensuring that heads of departments have included the EPWP as an item on their performance agreements, realising the program in the city's development plan, and monitoring its implementation (SACN, 2018:77).

Allocation of funds

Mangaung MM has several funding sources, ranging from the Urban Settlement and Development Fund to the EPWP incentive grant, municipality budget, and national and provincial government department funds (Mangaung MM, 2018:22). These funds contribute to the management of the municipality's EPWP projects. For the 2018/19 financial year, the Mangaung MM was allocated a project budget of R17,694,000 (US\$10 669 95,675) (SACN, 2018/19:30). However, the metro could only spend R5,638,228 (US\$34 000 00, 28), which is considerably less than the projected budget. This has negative consequences for access to the grant accrual in the preceding financial year.

According to the guidelines in the Integrated Grant Manual (Department of Public Works, 2019:14-15), public bodies are eligible for the incentive grant because they meet the reporting and performance criteria. The potential grant allocation is calculated by multiplying the average number of full-time equivalents created over 18 months by the minimum programmed wage rate. Mangaung MM's relatively low incentive grant allocation of Rands2,420,000 reflects the municipality's challenges in creating more long-term projects. The longer a public body's projects are, the higher its chances of receiving a high grant allocation (Department of Public Works, 2019:14-15).

Eligibility and selection

The Mangaung MM EPWP policy emphasises beneficiary selection based on the following criteria:

- Proof of citizenship in the Republic of South Africa;
- Proof of residence within the area in which the project(s) is implemented;
- Origin from impoverished households, where only one person from such a household is given the opportunity (poverty-stricken households are profiled through the Department of Social Development); and
- Membership of any disadvantaged group in society (women, youth, and people living with disabilities) (Mangaung MM, 2018:19).

The role of selecting participants is given to the community liaison officer, who is nominated by contractors and stakeholders to select eligible participants within the municipality (Mangaung MM, 2018:19).

Sector analysis

The EPWP is implemented across four sectors of the economy: infrastructure, social, environment and culture, and non-profit. The Mangaung MM is underpinned by strong performance in the environment and culture, and infrastructure sectors SACN, 2018).

- i. Environment and cultural sector The Mangaung MM has identified five strategic development areas, with Spatial and Economic Legacy Transformation aligning with the EPWP. These including greening Mangaung, working for water, working on waste, cemetery maintenance, and food for waste. The Greening of Mangaung Project was the only project used and was implemented in the 2017/18 financial year. The project falls under the parks and beautification program, which is responsible for developing and maintaining parks, sports fields, city gardens, and street trees. Data extracted from the Department of Public Works EPWP (2017/18:360) reveals that for this financial year, the MM implemented only one project through its environment and culture sector. The single project produced 522 work opportunities from a budget allocation of R2,000,000 (US\$118,621).

- ii. Infrastructure sector
- The municipality identified service delivery as one of its developmental priorities within the infrastructure sector. The main focus is the refurbishing and maintenance of infrastructure, assets, and facilities to achieve economic growth (Mangaung 2020:98). The labor-intensive nature of these services aligns with the EPWP infrastructure sector, centered on the construction and maintenance of roads, buildings, dams and reservoirs, and water and sanitation, as well as Vuk'uphile (learnership contractor development program) and the Youth Entrepreneurship Development Programs (YEDP). However, reports by the Department of Public Works (2017/18) did not show specific information on the Mangaung MM programs' infrastructure sector (the number of projects implemented, the budget and expenditure, and the work opportunities provided by the sector). This highlights the municipality's challenge in reporting. This was attested by the SACN (2018:35) report on work opportunities created by the MM for the 2017/2018 financial year. The report states that for the 2017/18 financial year, the municipality created only 41 work opportunities out of the projected 821 opportunities.

Key among the infrastructure sector programs is the YEDP, aimed at training and upskilling youths in their areas of interest. In 2017/2018, the program drew 595 participants, distributed among three projects: digital migration, human settlements, and trolley refurbishing. In support, the Allied Banking Group of Southern Africa (ABSA) implemented a business start-up after-care funding strategy for successful certified participants. However, as Swanepoel (2017) reports, despite this initiative, youth still failed to create sustainable businesses, potentially due to their choice of skill training courses and a lack of experience. Therefore, the YEDP must specify critical employable training skills for youth enrollment as a sustainable employment strategy.

The EPWP in the CoC

The CoC has highlighted, through its 2017 Integrated Development Plan (IDP), the need to foster economic growth, create employment opportunities, and assist the most vulnerable (CoC, 2017/22:4). Thus, the EPWP is a necessary strategy to improve residents' quality of life (CoC, 2017/22:75). The State of Cities Report reveals that between 2001 and 2011, the CoC's quality of life improved with evidence of the poverty level declined from 28 percent to 19 percent. However, the unemployment rate rose from 21.2 percent to 22.6 percent (SACN, 2016:320; Statistics South Africa, 2019).

According to Melody and Zonyana (2015:26–27), the EPWP is vital in achieving the city's Economic Growth Strategy, which aims to grow the economy and create employment opportunities. However, despite the formal market receiving an influx of entrants, it has been unable to absorb them (Melody and Zonyana, 2015: 26–27). The program's role and importance are drawn from the fact that it can employ, upskill, and provide income transfers to residents even when they are shut out of the formal job market.

For the 2017/18 financial year, 25,389 work opportunities were created in the CoC; of those, 3,871 were full-time. The CoC is the champion of the EPWP, as it contributed 41 percent of the projects executed by all South African cities (SACN, 2017/18).

Institutional arrangements

The SACN (2009/12:51) report affirms that "the signing of the implementation protocol agreement between the city and the Department of Public Works in the year 2010 led to the city's executive mayor carrying the responsibility as the EPWP chairperson." The CoC EPWP office is run from the deputy city manager's EPWP Unit. The Unit is responsible for developing and implementing the EPWP policy, monitoring and evaluating it, supporting line departments during the program, and cooperating with all spheres of government.

Allocation of funds

The CoC's EPWP projects are funded by various sources, including line departments, the municipality's own budget, the Urban Settlements and Development Grant, and the incentive grant (Department of Public Works, 2017:13). For the 2018/19 financial year, the city had a total budget allocation of just over R8,161,618,717 (US\$492,167,506.26), of which more than R2,000,000 was from the incentive grant. The project budget allocation was based on the city's previous performance in terms of the work opportunities created and projects implemented. Therefore, the city had to spend a lot of money because it created the most jobs and worked on the most projects (SACN, 2017:28).

Eligibility and selection

To monitor the selection of the EPWP beneficiaries, the revised Jobseekers Database Policy sets out the principles to be followed during the registration, recruitment, and selection stages of the city's EPWP. The jobseeker database not only incorporates the traditional guidelines of the program's selection and recruitment process but also aims to ensure that individuals get fair access to community-based work. Neither nepotism nor any form of favouritism is encouraged (CoC, 2017b:85-188). This is done by randomly selecting candidates from the database and removing them from the list of people who can be hired for 30 days, no matter what happens in the process (COC, 2017b:191).

Sector analysis

The CoC sectoral analysis identifies three key sectors in which resources were disbursed; Environment and culture, infrastructure, and social (CoC, 2017:76-79).

i. Environment and cultural sector,

The CoC Strategic Focus Area 1.4 on Resource Efficiency and Security emphasises the need for the city to find a balance between developing its economy and preserving the environment. To achieve this, the city's EPWP environment and culture sectors have been active in the following projects: biodiversity management, green infrastructure, and waste minimisation and recycling (CoC, 2017, 76-79). Data extracted from the SACN (2017/18:39) report reveals that for the 2017/18 financial year, the CoC created 10,935 work opportunities in this sector, falling short of its target of 16,871. With a recorded budget allocation of R121,398,205, only R18,341,103 was used to implement 122 projects between the first and third quarter of the year (Department of Public Works, 2017/18:283). Consequently, in the 2018/2019 financial year, the city created 12,345 work opportunities from 247 projects between the first and third quarter of the year (Department of Public Works, 2019:302). The main project implemented in this sector was the

Biodiversity Management Skills Development Project. The project aims to draw individuals from low-income communities and up-skilling and provide them with work experience. This program, in particular, had a significant impact as it absorbed 40 percent of participants who had completed one of eight biodiversity programs, while eight of the 12 vacant positions were filled by individuals who had participated in the EPWP or skills development programs (CoC, 2018:64-65).

ii. Infrastructure sector

The city's Economic Growth Strategy has identified infrastructure construction and maintenance as a key contributors to economic growth. The infrastructure sector, underpinned by three sub-sectors – basic infrastructure, transport infrastructure, and ICT Infrastructure – is key to this objective. Outstanding is basic infrastructure, which centres on constructing and maintaining the city's roads, water, and sanitation services. In addition, the infrastructure sector aligns with the city's Strategic Focus Areas 1 (Opportunity City) and 3 (Caring City).

Drawing from the SACN (2019) report, for the 2017/18 financial year, the city's infrastructure sector created a total of 5,078 work opportunities, falling 11,035 short of its target. These opportunities came from 61 projects over a budget of R1,619,917,108 and at the cost of R15,643,411 (CoC, 2013:10).

Based on previous employment inequalities – in which 53 percent of women were unemployed (CoC, 2013:10) – through the EPWP in the infrastructure sector, the city has established the Women at Work program to prioritise women's employment in male-dominated sectors, such as the transportation sub-sector. The program offers 10-month temporary employment in which participants acquire skills that would make them attractive to the job market (Transform, 2016).

iii. Social sector

The CoC Social Development Strategy considers factors that can cause hindrances to an individual's way of living. When the strategy was created, its main goal was to use the EPWP to help people in the social sector improve their skills so that the city could provide a better life for its citizens (SDS, 2013:5-9). Among these programs are early childhood development, home and community-based care for children, crime prevention, and drug abuse and addiction elimination. Through Strategic Focus Area 2 (Safe City) and 4 (Inclusive City), the city's IDP refers to the programs being done.

Using data from the SACN 2017/18 report, in the 2017/18 financial year, the CoC created 9,376 work opportunities – 8,054 more than what the city had targeted. A project budget of R101,363,341 was used to fund these opportunities, but only R9,165,842 was spent and split evenly between 112 projects. Concurrently, the Women for Change program was implemented, which aimed to alleviate poverty while addressing the city's social ills. Over R28,000,000 was set aside in the budget, which meant that for six months, more than 1,500 women could receive training and learn how to make money (CoC, 2018).

Results and Analysis

This section presents the challenges affecting the implementation of the EPWP in the Mangaung and CoC MMs. The study findings were obtained through analysing the SACN 20/17, 2018, and 2019, the 2019 Quarterly Labour Force Survey, and the CoC and Mangaung MM EPWP manuals and reports. The themes were derived to address study research questions.

Mangaung MM

Political interference

Mangaung MM experienced many challenges in the allocation and implementation of EPWPs. The SACN (2009/12:69) report findings show that the municipality had a lot of political interference that made it hard to complete its EPWP. This finding corroborates the study of Kleynhans (2018:4), which affirms a strong sense of political interference, especially with the allocation of EPWP job opportunities. In addition, poor coordination and collaboration were noted in the municipality as the inter-governmental relations were not properly coordinated when implementing EPWPs. Kleynhans (2018) confirms that the allocation of job opportunities occurred at the local level and that preference was given to loyal members of the African National Congress. As a result, many people in the community who did not belong to the ruling party could not get jobs at the EPWPs, making it hard for them to escape poverty (Kleynhans, 2018).

Reporting

The document analysis further reveals that Mangaung municipality has been struggling regarding its reporting. The EPWP project managers could not provide detailed and concise reports on time, making critics suspect fraud and corruption cases (Mangaung MM, 2018:8).

The absence of an EPWP structure

Each department participating in the EPWP is in charge of planning and implementing strategies to help the EPWP projects succeed. This ensures that the EPWP projects meet job creation goals, assess their impact, advise and report to executive authorities, and report to the Department of Public Works on the progress made (SACN, 2017/18:79). Unfortunately, this was absent in the Mangaung MM due to the 2016 local government elections, which dissolved the existing EPWP structure. As a result, the municipality's EPWP unit was left without many essential people after the structure fell apart. To a large extent, this issue was the underlying cause of the various challenges the MM faced, such as being unable to implement targeted projects, meet work opportunity targets, and use the municipality's budget allocation (SACN, 2017/18:15).

Lack of training

Although training is no longer a compulsory element in the program, its contribution to the program remains crucial. The need to develop participants' skills aligns with the program's exit strategy to ensure that the work experience acquired from temporary employment carries some value with it. This value is realised when employees exit the program with sufficient skills, enabling them to acquire sustainable livelihoods by either joining formal job markets or being entrepreneurs. However, the SACN (2018:26) records show that the Mangaung MM did not report any training days for the 2018/19 financial year.

Small Micro and Medium-sized Entities (SMMEs) are the best way to address the country's structural unemployment. Research shows that they account for 28 percent of employment (though they are still far from meeting the NDP's goal of a 90 percent contribution to job creation) (Vuba, 2019). One of the main reasons for this slow growth is a lack of skills development due to a lack of funding. Swanepoel (2017) suggests otherwise: One of the leading causes of the non-success of the municipality was poor program management, especially in the YEDP in the infrastructure sector.

Swanepoel (2017:34) reiterates that governance issues such as unemployment cannot be ended by one sector; instead, a network must be established to deal effectively with them. Network governance advocates for the exchange of resources between the private and public sectors to enable the two to deal with governance issues effectively. For example, the Mangaung MM established the YEDP as a strategy to deal with its unemployment issues. The program was a partnership between the municipality, ABSA, Central University of Technology, and Skills Education Training Authority (SETA). The program promised a positive long-term impact with funding, skills, and know-how tabled by the different parties. However, despite SETA being involved, most courses were not accredited, which restricted bankrolling of finances (loans) from ABSA, as accreditation was a prerequisite for financing.

The CoC MM

Inadequate administrative capacity

The SACN (2018) report indicates that Cape Town MM has championed its way in the EPWPs. Nevertheless, the SACN (2009/12) report illustrates that, in its infancy, the municipality struggled to implement the EPWP as poverty-alleviation and employment-generation tools properly. However, as more experience and insight were gained, the CoC witnessed a transformed system capable of executing the EPWPs' aims and objectives. The program's second phase led to increased job creation targets and administrative compliance. However, this led to a lack of organisational capacity in departments to handle the workload, corrected through institutional and structural change strategies. Key to this is the inclusion of the EPWP in the city's IDP and the creation of an EPWP management office (Melody & Zonyana, 2017:10).

Low quality of employment

Among the nation's key priority issues is job creation. This is reflected in the GDS's first theme of "creating more jobs, better jobs, and decent jobs for all". The ILO defines decent work as work in which workers' rights are protected, with fair income distribution and adequate social protection (ILO, 2007). The EPWP is listed as one of the programs to assist in achieving decent work. Therefore, its outcomes must align with the definition of decent work. However, this seems not to be the case in the COC.

The city of Cape Town has been able to create 25,389 jobs. However, the municipality has not been able to create long-term jobs, with only 3,871 full-time equivalents, far less than its goal for the fiscal year. This raises the question of when it comes to social protection, "decent work" only refers to the creation of jobs, even if they are not full-time. Every social assistance program has three main functions: helping the poor (or on the verge of poverty) meet their basic needs, assisting the pro-poor growth, and giving them more power to move out of poverty (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2007). The argument posed by Mpahlele in Sibeme (2019)

is consistent with the fundamentals of social protection. Mpahlele states that the short-term nature of the city's projects does not allow people to build assets like income and skills to help them get a job and move out of poverty into a more stable state. Even though the city has many projects and jobs, people are unsure how long the projects will last or how big an impact they will have. Although it is not the program's mandate to provide permanent employment, it is mandated to create longer-duration employment opportunities (SACN, 2018:21).

Conclusion

Public works programs are a common form of government intervention in developing countries. Public works programs also tend to suffer from implementation problems such as rationing, corruption, and mismanagement. However, overall, targeting programs for the poor seems to work fairly well. The safety net function of these programs is usually important and can generate welfare gains even when the program functions imperfectly. Governments must be clear about their goals when planning and running public works programs as part of a poverty-reduction strategy. Identifying and reaching the right group of workers, setting the correct wage, and setting up government institutions that make public works projects efficient and transparent are essential. The central basis of this research was to analyse the EPWP in the CoC and Mangaung MMs. Through the theory of change, the EPWP enhance asset building in communities by allowing unskilled and unemployed individuals to gain work experience while receiving income transfers for the program tasks they performed, thereby drawing them closer to sustainable livelihoods. This goal, however, was met with challenges. Prominent in the Mangaung MM were institutional and long-standing challenges, including political interference, lack of reporting, lack of training, and the absence of an EPWP structure. Additionally, although numerous recommendations were provided, drawing from the program's success, the CoC struggled to properly implement the EPWP as a social safety net for poverty and unemployment reduction.

Drawing back to the theory of change (ToC) that explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, program, or policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts. Looking at the EPWP results from both municipalities, one can assert that the CoC and Mangaung MMs have, to an extent, not fully employed the theory of change (ToC). Nevertheless, the ToC is relevant in guiding the CoC and Mangaung MMs to implement the EPWP as a social safety net. To aid the success of the EPWP as a social safety net, we propose the following recommendations.

Building human capital

Building human capital through training is crucial in the implementation of EPWP projects. This is because some projects last only a short period. So, people working in the EPWP must learn new skills to create their own jobs or find work in the labor market. This can be achieved through vocational education offered by local municipalities, although stakeholder intervention is key to ensuring its success.

Shift toward sustainable/permanent employment

A shift toward permanent employment is necessary to alleviate poverty. The EPWP provides temporary employment to the unemployed. However, the government must implement poverty

alleviation programs that enable unemployed people to gain long-term employment, which is crucial for increasing household income in the Mangaung and CoC MMs.

Talent management

Talent management should be appropriately practiced in both municipalities, as evidence indicates that EPWPs attract unskilled employees who later face employment challenges at the end of their contracts. Therefore, the human resource departments of both municipalities should help identify talent and build the capacity of economically active groups. This is crucial for future employability capacity, local communities' development, and household income generation at large.

The human resource departments of the two MMs should also focus on existing talent. This entails continually developing the skills of departmental officials to ensure that they are better equipped to deal with the changing nature of the program.

Mangaung jobseeker's database

The Mangaung MM should also consider implementing a jobseeker's database policy similar to the one used by the CoC. This is important for preventing corruption and giving every citizen a chance to work in the EPWP and other local economic development programs once they are hired.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating continue to be critical for the successful implementation of the IDP. The literature analysis and study findings revealed that poor monitoring and evaluation were experienced in the EPWP in Mangaung MM. The absence of the monitoring and evaluation control mechanism keeps the municipality from obtaining a government grant, adversely affecting community service delivery. Robust monitoring and evaluation techniques are key to project implementation and the success of development projects.

Public-private partnerships

Over the past few years, the private sector has made immense contributions to the program, mainly through its sub-programs. However, to meet the NDP goal of a 90 percent SMME contribution to employment, the public and private sectors must work together to ensure adequate resources are allocated to training and skill development while broadening the program's reach and scope.

This is evidenced in the Mangaung MM, as the municipality implemented only a few projects due to a lack of private partners coupled with management challenges. Consequently, unused finances should be bankrolled for the next financial year, avoiding the temptation of wasteful expenditure. Currently, the EPWP releases finances based on the previous year's success of the program. This hampers the implementation of projects in the succeeding years and presents a challenge to the programs' employment and poverty alleviation objectives.

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