

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
BUDGET VOTE DEBATE – 6 May 2015**

Deputy Minister Jeremy Cronin

The Department of Public Works plays a critical lead role in one of government's flag-ship programmes – the Expanded Public Works Programme. Now in its third, five-year phase, this is a globally innovative programme that is multi-sectoral and in which all spheres of government are actively participating.

There are four national lead departments - DPW (for the infrastructure sector), the Department of Environmental Affairs (for the environmental and cultural sectors), the Department of Social Development (for the social sector), and the Department of Cooperative Governance (which takes the lead role for the Community Work Programme). However, it is the Department of Public Works that, over the past 11 years, has had the overall responsibility for monitoring the performance of this wide array of public employment programmes. The DPW has also convened annual EPWP Summits drawing together thousands of EPWP practitioners from different sectors and from all spheres of government to share experiences, to learn lessons and to facilitate and encourage an integrated approach.

We work closely with local NGOs. We also work collaboratively with the International Labour Organisation in order to share experiences of government-led Public Employment Programmes across countries and continents. There is considerable international interest in South Africa's EPW programme and we regularly host international delegations.

Last year, cabinet affirmed DPW's central coordinating role when it established a Public Employment Inter-Ministerial Committee, chaired by the Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, and with DPW coordinating the technical secretariat for this IMC.

The current administration has committed to ensuring 6 million public employment work opportunities by 2019. This target is in line with that set in the National Development Plan.

So where are we now after the completion of Year One of Phase 3?

By the end of March **1,24 million** work opportunities had been created – against a target of **1,04 million**, in other words, a **119%** achievement. In short, we are well on track to meeting the 6 million work opportunity target by 2019.

We are, however, doing less well when it comes to Full-Time Equivalents, calculated as 230 days of work, per person, per year. By the end of December we were only at 79% of the third quarter target.

There is still the illusion in some quarters that EPWP jobs are necessarily short-term and temporary. There are no regulatory time-limits set on participation. In the infrastructure sector there are obviously often CONSTRUCTION project-related limits to work opportunities. But with infrastructure MAINTENANCE, with work in the social sector and in the CWP these inherent limits do not apply.

The challenge of full-time equivalents – getting the balance right

I am stressing the challenge of full time equivalents because a problem has arisen here in the City of Cape Town. Yesterday the Corporate Services branch of the City issued a statement saying: "The DA run Cape Town's implementation of the National Expanded Public Work Programme..."

Let's hit the pause-button right there. Bear in mind that this is a statement issued under the letter-head of the City's administration, its Corporate Services division. It's nominally not a statement by a politician or a political party. A senior official in DPW issuing a statement referring to "The ANC-led government..." would be admonished by the Minister and myself. It seems standards are different in the DA-run City of Cape Town.

Anyway...back to the statement. It tells us: "The DA run Cape Town's implementation of the National Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is the most successful in the country..."

I don't know on what grounds the City of Cape Town makes this claim. I do know that of the four major metros in SA, Cape Town has often been one of the best performers in terms of work opportunity numbers, and consistently and increasingly among the worst performers when it comes to full-time equivalents.

In the three quarters to end December the City of CT was way ahead of its work opportunity target (172%). But, among the 4 major metros, it was joint worst performer (at 79%) of its FTE target. (This compares, for instance, with CoJ at 105% for work opportunities and at 108% for FTEs).

This suggests that the City of Cape Town is chasing work opportunity headcounts at the expense of work duration – which then has many implications for training, acquiring work experience, and also for the quality of the work performed.

This is certainly a long-standing allegation made by the Social Justice Coalition against the city and specifically in regard to its EPWP janitors at communal toilets in townships.

Now another problem has emerged in Cape Town, and I assume this is what led the administration to issue its statement this week. SAMWU is on a legal strike in the City and one of their issues is the allegation that the City has not been filling vacant posts and instead it has been employing EPWP participants on short-term stints.

I am not suggesting that the City of Cape Town is the only place in which there are dangers of pushing work opportunity numbers to the detriment of everything else. I am certainly not wanting to score cheap points against Cape Town – in DPW we want ALL EPWP programmes to succeed. Let's make public employment programmes something that unites us. However, taking short-cuts is liable to discredit the major achievements and great potential of South Africa's public employment programmes.

While the DPW will continue to measure and take seriously work opportunity targets, we are also increasingly placing emphasis on monitoring and evaluating other qualitative and developmental impacts. For instance...

What happens to participants in these programmes?

Last month StatsSA released data from its 2014 Labour Market Dynamics survey. It found that:

“In 2014, **seven out of ten** of those who participated in the EPWP and other government job creation programmes were employed.” This was up from 56,9% in 2011. The survey also found that 4 out of every 5 participants who were employed had a formal sector job.

These are statistics independent of our own DPW monitoring and evaluation. To be quite honest, I find them surprising on the up-side.

We will be engaging with StatsSA next week to get a better understanding of these very encouraging indicators at a time when pathways into formal employment are exceedingly difficult.

Measuring the outputs of our PEPs

As DPW we are also committed to monitoring and evaluating what the work in these programmes actually **produces**. Are participants just digging holes and filling them again? DPW has now started to record outputs more systematically, and for the first three quarters of the past financial year we have seen some interesting output indicators:

- By the end of December in the **Infrastructure** sector – 33 070 km fencing had been erected; 109 923 km pipelines laid down; 450 km storm water drains constructed; 64 632 kms, roads maintained
- In the **Environment and culture** sector 1 366 ha had been treated for invasive alien vegetation; 92 677 households had been serviced through waste collection; 20 045 trees planted; nearly 4000 square metres of dumping sites cleaned; and 6860 cemeteries cleaned.
- In the **Social sector** – nearly 20,000 Home Based Care practitioners were deployed and trained; 1 542 830 learners were benefiting from the National School Nutrition Programme which employed significant numbers of EPWP participants; and 184 321 learners were supported through the Teacher Assistant EPWP Programme.

Building community cohesion

But what is the developmental impact of these programmes on poor communities?

Do they result in greater stability and social cohesion in communities ravaged by unemployment and poverty? This is a critical question to ask and yet it's not easy to answer. What we do know is that there are some inspiring examples.

In the aftermath of the previous surge of xenophobic violence in 2008, SWOP institute at Wits University and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation brought out an important publication, "The smoke that calls". Based on field-work in seven communities, it remains extremely relevant as we seek collectively to come to grips with the underlying factors behind the recent resurgence of xenophobic violence.

The case-studies expose many common patterns in outbreaks of township violence, finding, for instance, that community protests and xenophobic attacks often overlap. Frustration with a lack of services and with local authorities often morphs into violence directed against foreign nationals.

However, one case-study was an exception. At the height of 2008 xenophobic violence, Bokfontein, a marginalised informal settlement near Brits, became an island of stability, and a refuge for fleeing foreign nationals. Why?

The origins of Bokfontein would have suggested very different outcomes. It had been plagued by chronic violence itself. The first arrivals in Bokfontein were families evicted in 2005 from farms in the Hartebeespoort Dam area. In 2006 a second traumatised group from Melodi was forcefully removed to Bokfontein by the municipality.

They were compelled to live together on a limited piece of land. The only water available was trucked in unreliably by the municipality.

The 2005 evictees understandably saw the 2006 arrivals as outsiders competing for pathetically scarce resources. Tensions escalated, and there was soon chronic violence.

According to community members the turning point came when Bokfontein was selected as a pilot site for the Community Work Programme (CWP) in 2008. Seriti, a non-profit organisation, was appointed by government as the facilitating agency. It's an NGO inspired by the work of the Brazilian activist and popular educator, Paulo Freire who called for "a pedagogy of the oppressed", a collective, participatory process in which the learners are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but co-creators of knowledge. And this is exactly what Seriti set out to do in Bokfontein.

It began as a series of workshops, with community members sharing reflections on their individual traumas. This helped deal with anger and a sense of disempowerment. As the workshops progressed topics included delving into different ethnic identities, and learning to sing each other's songs - some of the community members, for instance, were Shona-speakers from Zimbabwe. Practical skills were also introduced, from community mapping to dealing with crime, alcoholism and domestic violence. Participants collaborated in envisioning a different and shared future for their community, which included renaming Bokfontein – Tshaba-di-Maketse (literally, The Nations are Amazed).

These workshops then laid the basis for the launch of the Bokfontein CWP site, as part of the wider Expanded Public Works Programme.

In 2010 when the SWOP/CSVR study was conducted some 800 community members were participating in the Bokfontein CWP. They worked from 8am to 3pm twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

This left other days to do other things, including looking for formal work outside of Bokfontein. The community itself decided which public work to undertake and different teams worked on road maintenance, communal gardening, home-based care, and after-school care. With government funding but without waiting for government delivery, the community dug its own bore-hole and installed water-pipes to homes. They also surfaced the three kilometre access road to the settlement with a donation of gravel from the tailings of a local mine. At the time participants were paid R50 a day, a small but regular and welcome contribution to household incomes. Useful resources and services were collectively provided, community cohesion and self-esteem was built. Leadership qualities also emerged.

However, we all know how exemplary pilot projects often fail to sustain themselves. A facilitating NGO moves on. Local leaders quarrel. Early promises lose momentum. So it was with a degree of trepidation that I spoke this week with some of those involved back in 2008 and 2010.

King-George Mohlala was one of the community leaders who emerged out of the Seriti-led Bokfontein programme. He is still there. “For me CWP was life-changing.” “Did the recent xenophobic violence cause any ripples in Bokfontein?” I wonder. “No we just heard about it on TV.” “Is the CWP still functioning?” “Oh yes”, King-George tells me, “but now we’ve become even more self-sufficient - our own Bokfontein Development Forum is the implementing agency.” In fact, the Bokfontein project, has now inspired neighbouring communities in Madibeng Municipality and further afield. Back in 2010 relations with the municipality were strained, that too has changed.

“With our own hands we’ve provided government with a lesson in development”, another informant told me.

Of course, in real life not everything works out smoothly. There will be challenges, lessons to be learnt, and mistakes corrected as we continue to scale up our public employment programmes. There is one thing, however, of which we in DPW are convinced – over 11 years of EPW programmes, as South Africans we have shown there are grounds to believe, without undue modesty or arrogance, that Tshaba-di-Maketse (The Nations have reason to be Amazed).