

# Article

## The Community Work Programme: potentials and problems

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### Abstract

This article provides a detailed and critically reflective ‘insider’ account of the origins and development of a Community Work Programme as a public employment programme intervention. The article explores the significant potential of such a Community Work Programme to reduce unemployment and improve socio-economic livelihoods for programme participants, and its potential to model public/private alignment across sectors that complements what can be accomplished within the budgetary constraints of the central government alone. It also describes the challenges of programme implementation as a social policy intervention, arising in part from the difficulties of scaling up successful pilots to create a nationwide programme. The article demonstrates real achievements but also the difficulties of engagement with the state by non-profit organisations, and the difficulties of forging sustainable partnerships between communities and government around shared goals.

### Introduction

The Community Work Programme (CWP) has had five distinct features which together differentiate it from other Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) around the world. First, it offers two days of work every week indefinitely to large numbers of people (usually a minimum of 1,000 at a site), and thus provides *predictable and regular work* to those who are unemployed or under-employed. Second, the CWP has a mandate to use public employment as a catalyst for community development. Third, the work done is whatever the local community decides is ‘useful work’ – work that contributes to a popularly-defined public good. Fourth, labour intensity (ratio of wages to all other costs) is set at a minimum of 65 per cent, so it is a pretty efficient way of getting resources to those intended as beneficiaries.

Finally, although it is funded and administered by government, the CWP is implemented by not-for-profit organisations (NPOs).

By the end of 2013 the CWP employed some 195,000 people in 148 sites across South Africa. In his 2014 State of the Nation Address, president Zuma repeated previous government statements that it would be scaled up to include a million participants in the near future. We argue that the CWP has demonstrated the capacity to improve socio-economic development in poorer communities. It offers an approach and lessons that should be considered in other countries. Unfortunately, a number of growing pains suffered during the scaling up process have reduced its impact. Overcoming the obstacles encountered and realising the full potential of its innovative approach requires political will and decisive action. Our account also highlights the role that individuals can sometimes play in shaping government policy, the potential that poor people have to collectively improve their lives, and the value of using non-governmental organisations to mediate the relationship between government and people.

Reflecting its social and political importance, there is a growing body of literature around the CWP (see for example Langa and von Holdt 2011, Webster 2011, Philip 2013a and 2013b, Shumba 2014, Langa 2014, Stanwix and van der Westhuizen 2012). This article makes a distinctive contribution by providing an overview of the CWP's history. One of its authors was intimately involved with the programme's conception and development, and we like to think that it offers some of the benefits of an insider's perspective, including knowledge of detail. We hope the article will attract the kind of critical response the CWP deserves. Our main contention is that while the programme shows much promise as a radical rejoinder to South Africa's massively high unemployment and to the social disintegration associated with unemployment, its full potential is yet to be realised.

## **Second Economy Strategy Project and the origins of the CWP**

Perhaps the most persistent legacy of apartheid is structurally entrenched inequality, which has strong racial and spatial dimensions. In 1998 then deputy president Thabo Mbeki captured the dramatic differences that constitute everyday reality in South Africa in an address to parliament about the 'Two Nations': one largely white, urban and with high standards of living, well-linked to the international economy and enjoying all the cultural and social amenities associated with the global North, and the other almost exclusively black, living in high-density peri-urban townships, informal

settlements and rural areas with high levels of crime, unemployment, HIV infections and other illnesses as well as malnutrition, and eking out a frugal and sometimes squalid existence from wage remittances or grants.

Mbeki was elected president in 1999, and returned to this theme in an address to the National Council of Provinces (parliament's second chamber) in 2003.

Scholars have argued that it is misleading to take literally the idea of two disconnected 'parallel' economies. Indeed, it was pointed out that the so-called 'second economy' is a consequence of forms of accumulation in the first, and that the 'first' depends on the continued existence of the second. Further, both ends of the spectrum are unsustainable, and addressing poverty means effecting change in patterns of distribution (see Bond 2007, du Toit and Neves 2007, Philip 2010a). Nevertheless, the focus on the 'second economy' did have the potential to bring analytical and policy focus on the determinants of inequality and poverty.

In 2007, the Presidency established the Second Economy Strategy Project (SESP) to review performance of existing programmes targeting the so-called 'second economy' and to provide strategy recommendations for improving outcomes. Some 16 initiatives were examined. One realisation was that although the expansion of social welfare had played a significant role in reducing poverty, there was a huge social protection 'gap'. Old age pensions and disability payments had been increased very substantially, and child support had been introduced, but there was no form of social protection for the unemployed, apart from those who had worked before and thus earned benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (and even then there were restrictions on access). This was especially disturbing in a country where only 35.5 per cent of 15-34 year olds were employed (Statistics SA 2008: quarter 1) and where more than half of all unemployed people between 18 and 35 had never had a job (Philip 2010b: 5).

### **The germ of an idea**

In July 2007 Kate Philip, the coordinator of the SESP, made a presentation at a seminar convened by the Department of Social Development (DSD) and then stayed to listen to the next presentation, by Gavin Andersson, one of the founders of Seriti Institute, an NPO, about an Organisation Workshop (OW) that had been run in Munsieville on the West Rand earlier in the year.<sup>2</sup> This OW had involved 200 participants working together as an enterprise for a period of one month, performing jobs that improved their township (tree

planting, creation of a youth centre, restoration of an abandoned schoolhouse to form a new community centre, action in support of vulnerable children, planting of gardens at schools and clinics, and reclamation of a farm adjacent to the township). Time and skills possessed by community members largely excluded from the market economy were put to work to meet community-identified community needs. Crucially, participants in the OW had gained a high level of proficiency in *organisation*; they were able to manage a complex enterprise, discuss potential activities with community members and mobilise resources to do the work. Nevertheless, given the chronic insufficiency of effective market demand for labour, the majority of the participants, though alive to their ability to work and create value, were likely to go back into full-time unemployment.

Philip had been wrestling with an idea about creating a Public Employment Programme (PEP) similar to India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), where there was regular and predictable work opportunity for large numbers of people (see Philip 2010b).<sup>3</sup> There were several crippling constraints which made a South African version of this scheme seem impossible. What was the way to mobilise community support in every place? Who would identify tasks or work opportunities on the scale required? How was it possible to develop skills and capacities to allocate work at local level? Crucially, how could all this be done without further burdening local government (which was in disarray in many municipalities)?<sup>4</sup>

As Philip listened to the OW presentation 'There was a light-bulb moment!' (Philip, quoted in Shumba 2014). The community members who had been through the OW were able to perform all these tasks; if community development methodologies like this were used, a PEP could come into being *that drew on the agency, resources, and creativity of local residents themselves*. Moreover, there was a significant common purpose with Seriti Institute which had run the OW. She listened as the presenter outlined the immediate 'problems of success' brought by the methodology: how to sustain the momentum of the intensive one-month process? How to create opportunities to apply the work-organisation skills learned? How to safeguard the follow-up, for example, for gardens (which need water), for support to orphans that had started during the OW, for the anti-violence initiatives and so on?

Over the next weeks Philip explored the viability of a work scheme rooted in communities and catalysed by NPOs steeped in community development methods, in discussions with Andersson and David Cooper, MD of Teba

Development (TD).<sup>5</sup> She took the ideas forward within the SESP, setting up a steering committee for the scheme that included the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies organisation (TIPS), which hosted the SESP. TIPS took responsibility for raising seed-funding for pilots of the work scheme. By the end of 2007 Seriti and TD had initiated discussions with local actors and were poised to launch the pilots.

### **2008: initial pilots**

On Saturday January 26, 2008 the first work day of a ‘Right to Work’ (RtW) scheme was held in Munsieville, drawing on participants from the OW of the previous year. Some of these people took up the roles of coordinators of work teams, data capturers and storekeepers. Others led work efforts in agriculture or building, early childhood development and home-based care of elderly and ill people. The coordinators and site manager canvassed local church leaders, school principals, councilors, youth leaders, women’s groups and choirs about the work they would like to see done by the RtW. In Alfred Nzo municipality, Eastern Cape, TD started the RtW a few weeks later. This followed participatory rural appraisal exercises involving residents of several villages as well as councilors and local government officials.

In the first months Seriti and TD focused on the meticulous tasks of setting out the work procedures for the scheme as well as job descriptions for all personnel. As work got underway, registers were designed, inventory controls were established, bank accounts were opened with local banks, and induction training for coordinators was initiated. Coordinator and data clerk wage levels were established in consultation with the Steering Committee. New participants were recruited every week. In Munsieville, for example, figures rose from 150 in January, to 550 in March, and 1,000 by September.

After a few months the Presidency suggested that ‘Right to Work’ was not an appropriate name, and the programme adopted the term used by participants – the Saturday Work Scheme – reflecting the fact that all work was done on a Saturday.

As it turned out this new title was used for only a few weeks, because at a meeting of the Steering Committee in May 2008, reports from both Munsieville and Alfred Nzo indicated that the vast majority of participants wanted the programme to take place during the week. Saturday was the time for washing clothes, for funerals and for family gatherings, and not suitable at all for community work, whereas unemployed people were available on any

other day of the week. The Steering Committee agreed that it was entirely acceptable to have the work day during the week. It renamed the scheme, dubbing it the Community Work Programme.

In May 2008 a third pilot site started at Bokfontein, following an OW run by Seriti. By the time of a workshop convened by the SESP in September, TD and Seriti had learned valuable lessons, including the need for slight variations in procedure for rural, urban and peri-urban areas. A key constraint at this point was the size of the budget available for non-wage costs (tools and materials, but also for those personnel in the two organisations whose days were taken up with implementing the programme). Seriti and TD drew on other budgets or borrowed money to cover their costs of involvement in the pilots. Meanwhile, TIPS started the work that would eventually lead to agreed financial ratios for expenditure in a public employment programme that catalysed community development. The labour ratio (the proportion of expenditure going to participants' pay) was set at 65 per cent, and provision was made for bank charges, protective gear, tools and materials (or trees and seedlings), training, technical support, and project management.

### **2009: official pilot**

By August 2008 the CWP Steering Committee was able to argue that the programme was effective in reducing poverty and building social cohesion, and should become part of the country's portfolio of anti-poverty initiatives as part of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). However, this was an unusual time for new policy initiatives. Following the ANC's December 2007 Polokwane conference, president Thabo Mbeki had become a 'lame duck' after his removal as the party's president, and indeed resigned as president of the country in September 2008. He was replaced initially by Kgalema Motlanthe, selected as a 'caretaker', and then, after the May 2009 general election, by Jacob Zuma (Mbeki's successor as ANC president). In the meantime, with support from the Presidency and DSD, and backed by funds raised by TIPS, the CWP was extended to 100 workdays a year at the three pilot sites. This usually meant two workdays a week although in some rural areas participants preferred to concentrate their days into two weeks every month.

Just after the election, a few minutes into his State of the Nation speech, president Zuma announced that the new administration would make the CWP a flagship programme, and that it would be scaled-up immediately. Zuma was seen by several social commentators as a 'pro-poor person' (see

Shumba 2014: 96). He had been elected on a wave of popular support from trade unions and poorer members of the ANC, and this was possibly a factor in the support given to the CWP. Urgency was underscored by evidence of rapidly increasing unemployment linked to the global economic crash. In the 15 months between the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2008 and the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2010, the number of people employed slumped from 14.8 million to 13.8 million (Stats SA 2014: 5). This was followed, in the second half of 2009 and into 2010, by a rapid increase in community protests, which led commentators to conclude that a ‘rebellion of the poor’ was underway (Alexander 2010).

The Cabinet’s Strategic Framework for 2009 outlined the proposal that ‘the concept of a minimum employment guarantee be adapted to South Africa, to target the most marginalized....[so that] those least able to find other forms of employment have access to a minimum level of regular work, building on the approach demonstrated in the Community Work Programme’. While the CWP was linked to the EPWP and accepted the daily rates of pay and conditions of employment that it had established for beneficiaries (later termed ‘participants’ in the CWP), it was also different in key aspects, including the possibility of ongoing access to work (rather than projects lasting a few months), the mobilising of partnerships and community resources complementary to government resources, and augmenting the social capital of poor communities. It was thus seen as a potentially more effective safety net. The government had committed itself to something novel. The CWP was a PEP driven to a large degree from below, by communities that, at least in principle, could largely determine what projects should be undertaken and which individuals should be employed. It was also a programme that would be implemented by NPOs experienced in people-centred and participatory methodologies and with knowledge of the communities they served, in cooperation with local government. It was recognised that partnership between government and actors in the civil domain was essential if communities were to be enabled to organise on their own behalf.

Immediately after the president’s announcement, TIPS and the CWP Steering Committee met with Seriti and TD to discuss ways of expanding the number of sites. By August 2009 these two NPOs had expanded their reach and were implementing the CWP at a total of 21 sites. In December they each took on a further eight sites, and in January 2010 yet another 12 sites were added, so that by March 2010 the CWP was operational in 49 sites (for list see Philip 2010: 14-16). In all except the last 12 sites (started in January 2010),

a minimum target for participant numbers was 1,000, and in some cases more than that; the biggest site in the country was Welkom with a target of 3,000 participants. The target for participants employed in the CWP by the end of March 2010 was 53,720 with a total wage spend during the year amounting to R91m. This was a far cry from 3,000 participants in three sites just one year before. It was 'still only an ant compared to India's [NREGA] elephant', to quote Philip (2010b: 8), but it was a significant step in the right direction.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, this increase was accomplished with only a minimal reduction in community development methods. TD continued to draw on the participatory approaches that had characterised its initial work in Alfred Nzo. Almost half of Seriti sites had benefitted from the OW, and in others a community mapping process was put in place that helped participants recognise the strengths, assets and potentials of their community. In March 2010 Seriti launched another OW in Diepsloot, outside Johannesburg, both to initiate the CWP there and to prepare participants from five more sites to start the CWP back in their home areas. This OW proved to be singularly successful, attracting attention of the media and social commentators alike.<sup>7</sup> But it turned out to be the last occasion on which the OW methodology was approved for use in the CWP.

With the scale-up of the pilots and the first tranches of government money arriving (through the EPWP Phase 2 budget), responsibility for contracting the implementing agents and disbursing funds moved away from TIPS to the Independent Development Trust (IDT).<sup>8</sup> TIPS retained its role in providing technical support to the programme and by December 2009 had refined the budget model (so that for the first time the implementing agents were able to access the full budgets for non-wage costs). Then, in the first months of 2010, government moved the CWP from the IDT to the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG), the department that has responsibility for local government and thus, it was argued, best placed to foster an enabling environment for the programme within local authorities.

Seriti and TD were able to meet all targets for the financial year ending March 31, 2010. The annual CWP report, compiled by TIPS and published by DCoG, with the logos of Seriti and TD on the back cover, show that performance against target for *Participation Rates* (ie the number of people working in the CWP) was 103 per cent, for *Person Days worked* (ie the total number of days worked in the year by the participants) 96 per cent, and for *Labour Intensity* (ie the amount spent on participants' wages as a proportion of total expenditure) 99 per cent.

## **April 2010 to March 2012: DCoG's first phase**

DCoG appointed a small secretariat of five people, led by Reckson Luvhengo, to administer the CWP. This reported to a management committee chaired by a deputy director general that included representation from TIPS and from the two implementing agents (TD and Seriti). A senior official in the department's finance team was given responsibility for CWP financial management. TIPS was contracted to support the small secretariat which adhered firmly to the patterns, rhythms and practices that had been established during the pilot phase of the CWP.

A sense of consolidation extended to entrenching a set of nationwide Norms and Standards for the CWP, which drew strongly from the insights of the pilot phase. They included a financial model for the programme which set out the proportion of budget to be allocated for each item that was necessary for its success: participants' remuneration 65 per cent; project management 9 per cent; bank charges and statutory obligations (such as workmen's compensation and unemployment insurance) 5 per cent; tools and materials 13 per cent; and training and technical support 8 per cent. A manual was produced that set out all procedures for site establishment and management, work planning, work team organisation, training and technical support, procurement, reference committees composed of local notables who were to assist in identifying 'useful work', relationships with government departments, and all the other intricacies of effective implementation. In some sites Seriti and TD were mentoring local organisations to become local implementing agents. These organisations worked with the Norms and Standards. Agreements were reached for sharing of the project management fee according to their level of involvement.

A change in procedure during this phase of DCoG administration was that the CWP Steering Committee was upgraded to an inter-ministerial committee, bringing in representatives from DSD, the Treasury, the Presidency, DCoG and the Department of Public Works. As it turned out DCoG was given the role of convenor, and the committee rarely met. The department effectively took over all strategic and tactical decision-making for the programme.

But what did the CWP amount to on the ground? Researchers who studied sites in Keiskammahoek (Eastern Cape) and Westonaria (Gauteng) at the end of 2010 were impressed. They concluded that 'the programme was making a significant socio-economic impact on the lives of participants' (Webster 2011: 171). They also noted a range of 'social multipliers', including 'making friends', the development of an ethic of care and support for the vulnerable,

and improvement of the environment through clean-up campaigns, tree-planting, dam repair and water harvesting (Webster 2011: 170-1). Other researchers (Langa and von Holdt 2011) studied Bokfontein, an ethnically mixed community, at about the same time. They show how the OW and CWP united a sharply divided population, and how community cohesion helped block the wave of xenophobic violence that swept through South Africa in 2008 (leading to about 80 deaths). They also note that the CWP contributed to the development of the Bokfontein Development Forum, which, reconstituted as an NGO, was able to take over the running of the local site from Seriti. They provide the following quote from a participant: 'Even though the money is not good, but you feel good that you are doing something good for your community' (Langa and von Holdt 2011: 262-5). For her doctoral dissertation, Rejoice Shumba (2014) undertook case studies in Bokfontein and Welkom. Her fieldwork, undertaken in 2011, left a similarly positive impression. In Welkom, TD worked through an existing NGO and ran a wide range of projects that included home and community gardens, an orchard, home-based care, an old people's home, plumbing, street paving, and, finally, the making of metal palisade fences, an activity that included skilled work. Shumba questioned the extent of community participation, but noted that local management was dynamic and innovative.

In 2011 TIPS together with the ILO's International Training Centre ran a leadership course on PEPs, which brought all government and non-profit actors together for a week. Apart from significantly improving the level of understanding of the CWP amongst participants this brought an appreciation of the unique character of the CWP as a *partnership programme* involving both government and NPOs and the consequent adjustments to work culture required on each side.

By the end of March 2012, the CWP had expanded to 79 sites commissioned by DCoG, with another six sites commissioned by the Gauteng Department of Economic Affairs in different parts of Gauteng. On top of this an innovative 'Rivers Project' was initiated which saw community management of the Apies River watershed supplying the Hartbeespoort Dam using CWP labour. Altogether around 95,000 people were working for two days a week. Once again the programme performed at impressive levels, achieving more than 99 per cent against targets for Labour Intensity, Participation Rates, and Person Days worked.

The last months of the financial year ending March 31, 2012 included preparations within DCoG for the new phase of the CWP, the 'scaling up'

of the programme so that there would eventually be a site in each of the country's 226 local municipalities, with around one million participants enjoying regular work, all in pursuance of a Cabinet resolution of July 2011. This scale of programming, it was felt by DCoG, needed different arrangements. The idea was to award contracts to three Lead Agents (LAs), each responsible for a cluster of three provinces, who would appoint several Provincial Implementing Agents (PIAs) in each province. PIAs would not pay participants; this function would fall to the LAs. The PIAs in turn would appoint Local Implementing Agents (LIAs) at each site and mentor them so that they performed well. Procurement would be the responsibility of PIAs, following procedures laid down by DCoG and supervised by the LAs.

### **April 2012 to March 2014: the birth pains of 'scale-up'**

The three LAs appointed were TD, Lima Rural Development Foundation, and Mvula Trust. Although Lima had vast experience and had worked for the CWP as a local implementing agent, Mvula had never been involved in the CWP before this time. Seriti was left out as an LA, but was appointed as a PIA in six provinces.<sup>9</sup>

The first months of the new arrangements were confusing to all concerned. DCoG replaced the small secretariat who had run the CWP with a large team of some 40 officers, none of whom had been involved in the CWP before (Shumba 2014: 40). Luvhengo, who had been an effective head of the CWP despite limited staff, was moved from the CWP and resigned to take up a position in TD. TIPS' advisory and support contract was ended. There was thus *no institutional memory of the programme* among the large and unwieldy grouping of government officers tasked with management of an expanded CWP. There was no induction programme for new PIAs or LIAs. They had to do the work as best they could, by referring to the manual or guided by the two LAs with a history in the programme. Mvula Trust became the subject of perennial scandal, as it became apparent that its participation in the CWP was actually sub-contracted to a private company. It took DCoG more than a year to address this issue by which time there were significant problems facing the cluster of provinces for which Mvula was responsible.

At the site level there was similar confusion. Most sites in which Seriti and TD had been working prior to April 2012 were given to new PIAs. The task of starting new sites moreover became significantly more difficult than had been the case in previous years. The initiation phase demands intense work by implementing agents since this is the time to involve local stakeholders,

recruit participants, select and induct site management, and plan and launch work. There are high costs involved in getting secure storage space and buying tools and safety gear for participants who will join the programme. Prior to April 2012 a budget was made available for project management, as well as for the purchase of tools and safety gear in the first months of a new site. It was calculated as a pro-rata percentage of the projected budget for the year. In a departure from this practice the new financial manager in DCoG maintained that funds for tools, protective gear and project management could only be calculated as a percentage of participants' wages in that very month. In other words, budgets for tools and protective gear could only be drawn down once participants and site management had been recruited, inducted and were working (with no tools!). This became a kind of Catch 22, and was solved, in most cases, by Provincial Implementing Agents borrowing money to initiate work (on occasion suffering financial loss).

Worse was to come. The new financial manager drew up 'Directives' which changed the Norms and Standards of the CWP as they applied to the financial ratios. The Project Management Fee was cut to 8 per cent, and PIAs were told to pay 60 per cent of this amount to emerging LIAs. PIAs were forbidden to use any part of the Training and Technical Support budget. Costs of procurement and transporting tools to sites were now ascribed to project management rather than being a legitimate expense under the category of tools. Taken together this all meant that PIAs were able to earn around 25 per cent of what Implementing Agents had previously earned, and in this circumstance were able to pay only the most rudimentary attention to the quality of work at sites, and to site management development. In KwaZulu Natal, two of the six organisations initially appointed as PIAs threw in the towel, finding it impossible to survive.<sup>10</sup> The most telling impact of the changes was that community development tended to be completely ignored. CWP performance became increasingly measured by numbers of participants rather than the outputs and quality of work.

The management chain of DCoG, LAs, PIAs and LIAs proved to be hopelessly opaque. When participants were not paid or terms of contract for procurement were not met, it was difficult to know where the problem lay. Had DCoG paid the LAs? Had the LAs indeed approved and passed on invoices from the PIAs to DCoG, and if so had this been approved within DCoG? Had the PIAs provided all relevant source documents and invoices to the LAs? It took months before some of these problems of opacity found resolution; and this happened not because of the streamlining of process, or the

establishment of procedures for accountability, but because decent people at all levels of this complicated ‘delivery chain’ took it upon themselves to try and make things work despite the poor system. The practicalities of implementation in the three-tier structure had not been carefully considered, while increasing bureaucratisation accompanying the scale-up made it impossible to adjust the structures and procedures on the basis of knowledge gained from experience.

### **Reviewing institutional arrangements**

In the second half of 2012 the National Treasury sent a small team from its technical advice unit to conduct an institutional review of the CWP. This investigated the impact of DCoG’s new arrangements and made proposals aimed at improving performance. Disappointingly, the team’s report was blocked by minister Richard Baloyi, who was responsible for political leadership of DCoG. He announced that he had commissioned his own review, and the Treasury’s report was never released.

By the end of March 2013 and the first full year of the ‘scaling up’ arrangements, there was only mediocre performance to report. Despite an exponential increase in management costs (mainly for the large contingent of government officers, but also the LAs monthly fees, and PIA and LIA project management fees), there was a relatively modest increase in the number of participants. More problematically the many cuts in non-wage costs had the combined effect of strangling the negotiation of partnerships for development and the mobilisation of community resources, including the volunteer time of the participants themselves beyond the days for which they were paid. Having returned to Bokfontein and Welkom in 2012 and 2013, Shumba revised her earlier accounts of the stimulation of community agency. She concludes: ‘Spaces for participation in the development of ideas have not been developed ... [for participants] what is important is reporting for work on time and receiving their remuneration’.

Clearly, the appointment of NPOs as implementers is not, on its own, sufficient to ensure success of the CWP. Community initiative needs to be complemented by budgets for tools, training and materials, while many of the new NPOs appointed as implementing agents had little affinity or respect for community development process. Departmental policy did not help. In Bokfontein and in Welkom there were complaints that a DCoG directive had removed the lowest level of supervision – semi-skilled participants in Bokfontein, group leaders in Welkom – leading to a loss of on-the-ground

leadership and reduced work discipline (Shumba 2014: 219).

It was announced in January 2014 that as from the start of the new project cycle in April, the ‘three tier’ system would be scrapped. There would be a return to a single tier of implementing agents, who would once again be directly contracted by government. This announcement brought a cautious optimism to some of the non-profit actors that the CWP could be restored to health, after the deformities in the original design during the ‘scaling-up’ period. Optimism increased when it was learnt that the financial manager whose cuts had sidelined the community development character of the CWP would not be continuing in position. NPOs completed the tender documents for new positions of IAs with hope that there would be a return to the halcyon days of the CWP.

### **The third DCOG phase: April 2014 to present**

With the awarding of contracts for the next three-year phase, several NPOs started to feel that their hopes were misplaced. It turned out that previous performance had not been taken into account at all by the tender committee. Instead, the core criterion was the cost quoted for management of each site – but of course these lower fees also meant less resources for participatory development and effective management.

Dhladhla Foundation, which had managed only seven sites in just one province in the previous two years, now made a quantum leap: it was given 66 sites across all nine provinces. Lima, which had been an implementing agent in three provinces at the very early stages of the CWP, and later a Lead Agent in three provinces, was awarded only three sites – in just one province. TD which had been one of the agencies pioneering the CWP, an implementing agent in over 30 sites in the period from 2010 to 2012, and the Lead Agent for three provinces, secured only 17 sites spread across three provinces. Seriti Institute, the other pioneer of the CWP, saw its number of sites reduced from 44 sites to 32. New Implementing Agents with no CWP experience at all were appointed in several provinces.

In the first months of the new financial year, which started on April 1, 2014, it became clear that although DCoG was seeking to reverse past harmful financial practices, the effects were uneven and sometimes counterproductive. A decision to suspend procurement of tools, training, materials and protective gear for five months, until DCoG determined the best possible procedures, made it difficult for sites to implement their plans. A decision that government would pay participants directly led to hiccups in payments, and even late

payments, for the first few months. A meeting between staff members of two of the IAs concluded there was now a cadre of people within DCoG that was genuinely sympathetic to the ideas of the CWP, including a spirit of partnership with the NPOs, but it also noted the consequences of indecision and mistaken concepts of efficiency.

This is not to imply that it was government alone that was responsible for a weakening in the quality of CWP implementation. The practice of the NPOs was extremely variable. Some showed that they possessed all the resources for genuinely participatory approaches, and a commitment to enabling this in every site they worked. However, it was also apparent that not all NPOs are able to play this role successfully. Some lacked any interest in doing so, but even if interest is present there can be a shortage of skills and/or imagination. Moreover, there have been material constraints. As one IA ruefully reflected in its quarterly meeting, changes in project management fees over the years, as well as unreliability of procurement budgets, have led to a general slipping of standards, with consequent chilling effects on stimulating local development processes and active citizenship.

### **Politics in command?**

By the middle of 2015 it had become apparent that both the political and administrative arms of government were determined to see a reinvigoration of the CWP. The deputy minister responsible for DCoG, Andries Nel, led meaningful consultations with Implementing Agents and gave leadership to an organisational development process within DCoG that breathed new life into the programme. Implementing Agents immediately felt the effects of this intervention, which also led to a change of personnel in leading positions within DCoG. This new CWP management team steadily improved monitoring of site implementation, and at the beginning of the 2016/17 financial year implemented a rigorous assessment of IA performance, having provided clarity about the various Portfolios of Evidence that would be assessed, covering all aspects of programme implementation. Supported by the Auditor General's office it also launched a meticulous audit of assets management by IAs.

However, it is no easy feat to solve the myriad problems encountered in moving from pilots to scale and it takes time to reverse the effects of mistakes made over a period of several years. At the time of writing only a little had been done to counter the reduced autonomy of NPOs and the reduction in the ethos of bottom-up development. It is these factors that have led at many

sites to a decline in community participation. This is ironic, because one clear justification for spending public funds on the CWP is that the community development process produces results that are much greater than could be attained through government alone. The pace of renewal was moreover constrained by inadequate budgets for tools, materials and training as a result of unusual procedures adopted for procurement in the 2014/15 financial year, which caused a halving of budgets available in 2015/16.

The change process within the CWP over a period of five years brings clear lessons. At the outset of the CWP scrupulous attention was paid to the implementation of the programme at community level. However, it is clear in retrospect that *too little attention* was paid to creating the conditions within government that would ensure that the CWP continued to flourish. The *absence of careful institutional design* prevented the new staff team from benefitting from the institutional memory and the experience accumulated in the early days when CWP was in its pilot and first scale-up phases. The unintended consequence has been a gradual denaturing of the programme year after year. It may be a long and tedious process for even the most astute and energetic political leadership to restore all key features.

IAs interviewed at the time of writing were extremely optimistic about what they perceive to be moves to restore the CWP's original design, and to scale it up significantly. Even if this takes time there may still be notable achievements at the local level. An IA may innovate new CWP anchor activities which, replicated at all sites, can shift community dynamics for the better across the country. In some areas CWP site management might, as in Orange Farm, forge intersectoral partnerships and exploit other opportunities that assist active communities to use the programme's limited resources to local advantage. To the degree to which there can be learning from experiences at different sites then, there is a chance of a steadily strengthening programme.

Despite variation across the programme deriving from inappropriate institutional arrangements and weak capability in Implementing Agents, there is still solid evidence of the CWP's potential, as it has been realised in well-managed sites. In one of several notable cases reported by Malose Langa (2014), local coordinators have facilitated vigorous community engagement in the work of their CWP site, ensuring that its resources are put to good use. He describes the growth of community spirit in Orange Farm, south of Johannesburg, where leading CWP coordinators have shown entrepreneurial energy by forging partnerships with the City of Johannesburg and different NPOs to launch a wide range of initiatives, including enterprise

development, home based care, and violence prevention. They have also fostered peer support by strengthening *stokvels* and other organic mechanisms for mutual assistance. Langa (2014: 73) concludes that the CWP is nurturing non-violence among community members and ‘seems to be facilitating conditions of humanity, solidarity, care, love, nurturance, unity, oneness and togetherness’. He quotes one participant as saying: ‘The CWP has taught me to share with other people ... It is not just all about money, [but] it is about looking after your community and make sure your neighbour is well’.

### **Reflections: progress and prospects**

Notwithstanding all weaknesses noted above the CWP displays very positive features. As a Public Employment Programme it is extraordinarily efficient and an effective means of providing resources to poorer communities; a labour intensity rate of 65 per cent makes it one of the most efficient of PEPs internationally. Moreover, it does this by means of predictable and regular work. Benefits are not only material, quantifiable and short-term, they can also be social, qualitative and lasting.

The CWP has been important for the potential it has demonstrated to foster bottom-up development. Community representatives have participated actively in management, and in the best cases chose projects geared to neighbourhood priorities. Popular participation improved organisational and leadership skills, and boosted morale and community cohesion, creating new friendships and solidarities along the way (as is demonstrated by many quotes from participants, including the one drawn from Langa’s account of Orange Farm that is replicated above).

The CWP has also shown the potential for government to work with NPOs in ways that play to the strength of each partner. At best, government can mobilise substantial resources and deploy the efforts of several departments in an impartial manner towards an integrated local development process. At best, NPOs facilitate popular participation in the use of these resources, so that there is exponential benefit accruing from them. NPO expertise varies, but the best have considerable experience of participatory development and have staff with a range of valuable skills. In general, they can deliver inputs at lower cost and with greater flexibility than civil servants. Finally, the CWP has also shown the potential for individuals with good ideas to influence government policy, NPO practice and local development.

The combination of an ineffectual scaling strategy and bureaucratic difficulties has contributed to a significant disappointment, the failure to expand the CWP to the one million participants first announced as a target in July 2011, and repeated on many occasions since then. In the ninth year of the CWP total participation hovers at *less than a quarter of this target*. As a matter of fact there appears to be a lapse of concentration on this matter: in his February 2015 State of the Nation Address to parliament, president Zuma did not acknowledge that the unemployment rate had increased over the past year, and there was no mention of the CWP. There is a danger that an opportunity to reduce joblessness and tackle poverty and associated pathologies is being missed.

In the past, the African National Congress has strongly supported public participation for socio-economic development. The *Reconstruction and Development Programme*, its manifesto for the first democratic election, stated: 'Development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about the active involvement and growing empowerment of people.' (ANC 1994: 5). In 2009, the global financial crash and a rapid rise in unemployment provided the context for the Cabinet's backing of a programme that endorsed the philosophy of 'active involvement'. A core tenet of the National Development Plan is the concept of active citizenship.

So why was the decline of the CWP tolerated for so long? Why were reforms allowed that lessened the capacity of CWP to draw on active citizenry by the poor themselves? Part of the reason is certainly conceptual. The old idea that the civil service 'delivers' programmes to citizens only slowly makes way for the 'new' (but really ancient) idea of alignment across sectors for the common good. The old Weberian idea still informs the ways civil servants routinely do their work. There is little appreciation of the power and vitality of vibrant community development processes. The focus turns to the number of participants and the slow growth of site numbers, the routines of meeting after meeting, and the steady churn of reports from one level to another.

How likely is it that the government will substantially expand the CWP to approach the 1-million target announced more than six years back? This possibility should certainly not be ruled out, and in fact there is every reason to maintain this target, and maintain a strong community development focus. The government is under considerable pressure from increased levels of poverty and protest. South Africa's widening societal gulf was highlighted by the Marikana massacre in 2012, which triggered the creation of two new

political formations opposed to the ANC: the Economic Freedom Fighters and the United Front. Moreover, the country probably has more protests per capita than any other in the world, and the trend is upwards and towards greater violence (Alexander et al 2014). These protests are underpinned by high unemployment, and they raise demands about housing and service delivery. They also reveal popular dissatisfaction with top-down decision making and inconsistent and arrogant politicians, especially local councilors. All of this argues in favour of a PEP that engages communities in useful work to improve their quality of life and stimulate the local economy. It is the multiplier effect of citizen action that could persuade the minister of Finance to give priority to CWP, since its capacities to mobilise community resources and to forge partnerships make it an efficient way to spend public money at a time of increasing fiscal constraints.

Taken overall, the CWP has demonstrated its potential to reduce unemployment and improve socio-economic livelihoods for programme participants while unleashing energy for community development.

## Notes

1. The authors are grateful for critical comments received at a seminar held at the university in 2014, especially those of the discussant, Dr Kate Philip. They also acknowledge insights gained in the course of supervising doctoral research by Dr Rejoice Shumba.
2. Philip took on this post after, amongst other things, some 20 years of practical work addressing poverty, notably as head of the Mineworkers Development Agency. Seriti Institute describes itself as using large-scale community organisation methods to create socially healthy and economically vibrant communities, thereby promoting sustainable livelihoods and prosperity (Seriti Institute 2014). The OW fosters organisational literacy while creating production infrastructure and providing vocational training (see Langa and von Holdt 2011: 260-1).
3. For NREGA see Lieuw-Kie-Song and Philip 2010, and Novotný et al 2013.
4. One indicator of the continuing malaise in municipal management comes in the annual reports of the Auditor General. In the 2010/2011 Report the Auditor General noted that only 5 per cent of municipalities had received a clean audit, while unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure had increased from R6bn in 2009/10 to R10bn in 2010/11.
5. Teba Development was formed in 2002 by Teba, the mine recruiting agency then owned by the Chamber of Mines. It was particularly strong in the mine-sending areas, notably the Eastern Cape, and in some communities neighboring mines.

- Always a not-for-profit organisation, it was initially semi-autonomous of Teba but was re-launched in 2012 as the fully autonomous Thembaletu Development.
6. Philip (2010: 8) says the CWP expanded from 1,500 participants in April 2009 to 70,469 by August 2010.
  7. See for example Anton Harber (2011: 205-8).
  8. The IDT was established through an apartheid government endowment in 1990, and in 1999 was enabled to act as a public entity supporting government's efforts to eradicate poverty (in the course of the tabling of the Public Finance Management Act).
  9. In total there were 22 PIAs. No other PIA was appointed in more than one province.
  10. The Seriti Institute Annual Report for 2012/13. reveals that in order to 'stay in the game', the Institute had used up its entire Reserve Fund, amounting to a loss of R2.2m in the first year of the new arrangements. Available at: [www.seriti.org.za](http://www.seriti.org.za)

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