

# Celebrating 10 years of changing lives for the better



In March 2014, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) marked 10 years of existence. This programme has its origins in the Growth and Development Summit (GDS) of 2003. The Summit agreed then, that Public Works Programmes are able to provide poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out social useful activities.

This programme is a key Government initiative that contributes to Government's priorities and it directly contributes to outcome 4, which speaks to decent employment through inclusive economic growth.

When the programme was introduced in 2004, Government wanted to address the high level of unemployment in the context of an economy with jobless growth. The EPWP's aim was to ensure that a significant number of the unemployed is drawn into productive work - and, more importantly, that these workers should gain skills while they work.

In the first phase of the EPWP, from 2004 to 2009, the target of one million work opportunities was achieved a year in advance. The EPWP consisted of 4 sectors, namely the infrastructure; social; environment and culture; and economic sectors.

In the second phase, from 2009 to 2014, a target to create 4.5 million work opportunities had been set and more than 90% was achieved. There were 2 major innovations in this phase. The first was the introduction of the Non-State Sector that involved a partnership with civil society by working closely with Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), as well as the Community Work Programme (CWP). The second innovation was the inclusion of a fiscal incentive to reward the creation of more and longer term, more stable employment in Provinces and Municipalities. All spheres of government were encouraged to create more work opportunities through labour-intensive programmes.

There is no doubt that Public Employment Programmes contribute enormously to the economy and the people of our country. Except for the work opportunities created, the EPWP contributed much more in terms of assets and services to poor communities.

The following are a few examples across the different sectors of the EPWP:

- The fires extinguished by the fire fighters in the Working on Fire Programme saved the Forestry industry millions of rands over time
- Through the removal of invasive alien plants in the Working for Water Programme, rivers have started to flow again and wetlands have been restored through the Working for Wetlands Programme
- The maintenance of rural roads by mainly female-headed households in the Zibambele Programme led not only to income transfers into these households, but also to women starting savings clubs and forming co-operatives
- Thousands of children got exposure to early education while their parents are at work through Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres
- Thousands of the infirm and Aids sufferers are taken care of through the home-community-based programme (HCBC).

Phase 3 of the programme, which was launched on 3 October 2014 in Keiskammahoek in Eastern Cape, will create 6 million work opportunities over the next 5 years (that is, for the period 2014 to 2019).

Public Employment Programmes are an important part of our programmatic approach to addressing the interlinked challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality. Important lessons have been learnt from the 1st and 2nd Phase of the programme. There are elements of the previous Phases that are being transferred to Phase 3, as they are. There are also elements from the previous Phases that had been improved upon.

In Phase 3, there has been a paradigm shift and the emphasis is on community participation and ownership, as well as the broader development outcomes of the programme. The impact of assets created and services delivered on communities will be measured. Furthermore, Government wants to see improved co-ordination and far better integration between Public Employment Programmes within and across different sectors. That is the reason why the Presidential Public Employment Inter-Ministerial Committee (PPE-IMC) was approved by Cabinet in 2013. The PPE-IMC is solidifying high-level governance arrangements to ensure accountability at the highest political level across all three spheres of Government.

In designing, planning and implementing Public Employment Programmes, there must be co-ordination, integration, synergy, co-operation and coherence between all spheres of Government; departments; public bodies; programmes as well as within them; and projects as well as within them.

South Africa prides itself the uniqueness of its Public Employment Programmes. The EPWP focuses on both rural and urban areas. Public Employment Programmes cut across several sectors. Traditionally, Public Employment Programmes focused on short-term infrastructure programmes only on agriculture types of interventions during times of poor economic growth or hazards, such as droughts or floods. The EPWP has moved beyond these programmes.

South Africa remains the only country in the world with a range of Public Employment Programmes in the Social sector, including, but not limited to, ECD, home-based care programmes, school feeding schemes, school safety, adult education and homework supervision programmes. It is championed across all spheres of Government, national, provincial and local, through different line departments and different implementing public bodies.

Through the EPWP Non-State Sector Programmes, namely, the Community Work Programme (CWP) and Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), Government is working closely with NGOs, faith based organisations and community based organisations, on an important counter-weight to the dangers of excessive bureaucratisation of Public Employment Programmes.