



Contribution of the Expanded Public Works Programme in the South African Labour Market

Article by: Kgomoitso Zantsi

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) submits questions to the Labour Force Survey on the first quarter of each year to establish the following: awareness about the Programme, participation of South Africans in EPWP as well as characteristics of EPWP participants after exiting the programme.

The Labour Force Survey in South Africa is a report that is conducted quarterly by Statistics South Africa in order to collect data on labour market activity of individuals aged 15 years or older who live in South Africa. The sample is designed to be representative at provincial level. Data is collected through Computer-assisted Telephonic interviewing (CATI).

The analysis of the report provided information on labour market in 2021 based on the panel data from Quarter 1 Labour Force Survey (QLFS) of 2021.

EPWP awareness

During the survey, respondents were asked if they ever heard of the EPWP. The results of QLFS Q1 2021 indicates there has been an increase in the awareness, 76% have heard about the programme compared to 52% in 2015. This shows that awareness of EPWP in South Africa is increasing significantly over the years. The findings also indicated that the 76% of the respondents who are aware of the EPWP, (51%) are females while 49% were males. More youth (51%) heard about the EPWP compared to 49% of adults. Majority (56%) of those with below secondary education level have heard about the EPWP compared to those who completed secondary and tertiary qualifications. This shows that EPWP communication strategy is reaching more females, youth and the unskilled population. These are the main target audience of the Programme.

The figure results also indicated awareness of the EPWP by province. It shows that the highest percentage in terms of awareness was recorded in Gauteng province followed by the Kwa-Zulu Natal province over the years. While the least was recorded in Mpumalanga and Northern Cape provinces.

Current participation in the EPWP

About 60% of the EPWP participants who were participants of the programme in the past and are currently engaged in EPWP projects. This result proves that there is a high level of retention within the EPWP programmes and suggests there is a high level of dependency on EPWP by participants and that majority of participants continue to be part of the programme after 12 months of participation.

Those that reported that they were currently working for the

EPWP were asked what their main activity was before they started working in the EPWP. The majority of the respondents (76%) reported they were unemployed looking for work before they worked in the EPWP. A significant number of respondents (14%) reported that they were working elsewhere before they started working for the EPWP whilst 5% reported that they were at school before working in EPWP. The findings of the survey confirms that the EPWP is managing to reach the unemployed South Africans.

Employment status of the EPWP participants 12 months after participating in the programme

The EPWP aims to create work opportunities for the unskilled and unemployed by providing them with work experience which will assist them to get employment after they exit the programme. It is therefore important to determine the employment status of the EPWP participants 12 months after participating in the programme.

In 2021, 297 (36%) respondents out of 201 844 reported that they were unemployed and 22% (45 074) reported that they were employed. Twenty percent (20%) were discouraged job seekers and 21% were not economically active at the time.

The report shows that more individuals between 35 and 65 years have participated in the EPWP programme compared to the youth cohorts. This suggests that more should be done to create programmes that will attract youth participation in EPWP to ensure that the youth target is achieved. High youth unemployment continues to be a challenge in the country and despite the increase in work opportunities target over the years, the EPWP contributes only 1% to the labour market.

The EPWP aims to provide participants with work opportunities that will enhance their skills and future earning potential. The report shows that the EPWP has managed to exit 22% of the participants into employment. Of those 9% were own-account employees or employers. This also confirms the assumption underlying which suggests that participation in EPWP is a 'stepping stone' to employment in the open labour market (Department of Public Works, 2004).

The report also shows that the majority of the participants who were exposed to EPWP previously, go back to being unemployed, become discouraged or end up not being economically inactive.

Exiting NYS learners to be employed by an electro mechanic and civil contractor in Limpopo

By Michael Mokoena

Pictures by Victoria Mphahlele



A Limpopo based BMK Electronics private company has committed itself to employing some of the learners who were trained by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) under the National Youth Service (NYS) programme. The 16 learners were part of a DPWI and BMK Electronics project which was set up to maintain, service and repair some of the Groblersbridge Port of Entry buildings.

The learners were trained in the Building and Civil Construction (NQF Level 2) for a period of 9 months by the Sejamo Building, Civil Construction and Training. They were provided with construction skills such as plumbing, electrical work, bricklaying, painting and general building work.

Speaking at the graduation ceremony of these learners that was hosted recently by DPWI Limpopo Regional Office in Polokwane, the Director for BMK Electronics, Mr Bernard Malik, said they were interested in employing three of the learners.

"During their training, the learners were working with us and we saw how dedicated they were to the work that we were doing on site. As a result of their eagerness to learn and commitment to do the work, we were encouraged to look at appointing three of the learners into our team," Mr Malik explained.

He added that BMK Electronics – an electro mechanic and civil contractor located in Tzaneen – was committed to working with government to tackle youth unemployment in the province.

The Deputy Director for EPWP Enterprise Development in Limpopo, Ms Victoria Mphahlele commended BMK Electronics for its intention to employ some of the learners.

"As DPWI we wish to applaud BMK Electronics for a positive contribution they have made in the lives of some of these participants. We wish the participants who will be appointed the best for the future. We also call on other private sector organisations that we work with in the implementation of the EPWP to emulate the good example set by BMK Electronics... we wish to see more of our participants get work as they exit the Programme," Ms Mphahlele said.

At the time of publishing this article, the names of the three participants who stood a chance to be employed by the BMK Electronics were still to be decided.

Meanwhile, DPWI Limpopo Regional Office hosted another NYS Graduation Ceremony for the 25 learners who participated in the construction of Mokopane Home Affairs' new offices in Mogalakwena Local Municipality. The learners were all placed at the construction site for a period of 12 months and were trained in various trades such as plumbing, painting and general building work. During the ceremony, the learners were issued with certificates of completion.

The Deputy Director for EPWP Enterprise Development in Limpopo: Ms Victoria Mphahlele congratulated the learners for successfully completing the training. Ms Mphahlele said the learners acquired skills and knowledge at the construction site where they worked with a contractor by the name of Ro-Swika Projects and indicated that the training was delivered by Kamofatso Construction Academy.

This graduation ceremony was attended by one of the Ward Councillors from Mogalakwena Local Municipality and the Deputy Director responsible for NYS in DPWI head office, Ms Lungile Zulu, as well as officials representing the training provider and the project contractor.

Learners' Testimonials

Speaking on behalf of the learners, Mr Jacky Masenya thanked the government for giving them an opportunity to participate in the NYS programme.

"We have acquired various skills such as painting, plumbing, health and safety at work as well as using tools and machines on the construction site. I believe that the skills we have gained from this training will assist us to find work or even set up small businesses as we exit the Programme," Mr Masenya said.



The EPWP makes a positive impact on the life of a Gouda resident

By Hildegard Adonis (EPWP Participant) edited by Thozama Nzama
Picture by Hildegard Adonis



A former Expanded Public Works Programme participant says she always acknowledges the fact that the much needed skills she gained through the EPWP were a stepping stone to a permanent job that she has. Ms Hildegard Adonis from Gouda a village that is 37km south of Porterville in the Cape Winelands District Municipality in the Western Cape Province, says after completing Grade 12, she worked in factories and on farms.

Determined not to remain jobless after the liquidation of a steering wheel factory she worked for, Ms Adonis began selling second-hand clothes. However, she was soon without an income and ended up staying at her husband's home.

She says she, her husband and her son eventually moved into a rented home in Gouda and she relied on her husband's income. Here, she explains her journey:

"Unemployed and directionless, I went to the Gouda Library and asked for volunteer work; the staff did not hesitate and received me with open arms. Andrid Pieters and Camille Lewis trained me in the basics and Gouda Library became like a second home for me. After volunteering for a year, I was offered an EPWP contract by the Drakenstein Library Services - under the mentorship of the Wellington Library

They worked shifts, I could not say no because I knew my heart was in the right place and I had found my passion. At 4 o'clock in the morning I would stand up no matter the rain, darkness or wind to catch the 5:30 train, arriving at Wellington station at 6 o'clock and then the half hour walk to the library. When the shift is over I would walk to the train station and by the time I get there, the train would be gone, and for a week I hitchhiked back to my home. The latest I ever got home, was 22h00 and not once did I complain.

Through my determination and the hunger for my passion, I never gave up. After my mentorship, Library services offered me a job at Hermon Library. For 2 years, I was on an EPWP contract. My money was just for travelling expenses, not once did my husband say I must quit the job because he saw the passion in my eyes whenever I spoke about the community and the children. Every time a new post opened, I applied and got as far as two interviews but was unsuccessful both times.

Because of that, it drove me to do better at my job. I felt my job description was so unimaginative and I expanded my services to creative classes, training for the youth and everything I saw that the community might need.

I was willing to help with everything, and some would say; "I will never break my back for EPWP-money" and I would always say; "where there is a will, there is a way." I received a Certificate of Excellence and that was a great achievement for me, because someone saw the work I was doing for the community.

I received on the job training and in return used my skills to contribute towards the up-lifting of the community and to deliver excellent library services. The 9th of September 2017 will be memorable for me, because on that day I signed my permanent contract with Drakenstein Municipality. Being on EPWP gave me hope and my dream of getting a permanent job to provide for my family came true. Thanks to Mrs. Lorensia Thomas and Drakenstein Municipality who believed in me.

The EPWP programme is a meaningful contributor to current household incomes of unemployed people, and especially the youth, women and people with disabilities. My motto is "If you have a passion for your work, you never have to work a day in your life". When things are not going as you want, you just have to keep trying and trying. Never let obstacles ruin your goals, let them serve as a motivator to you until you reach your goal." Ms Adonis concluded.

Contractors at Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma Municipality gain knowledge in labour intensive construction

By Sduduzo Simelane

Pictures by Sduduzo Simelane



'It was a very good training programme from which we learned labour intensive construction methods. And I would like to say it in front of the Honourable Mayor that NDZ (Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma) Municipality does have contractors who know labour intensive construction. And our aim for participating in the programme was always to uplift ourselves and our families'. These were the words of Ms Thembisile Msomi speaking on behalf of contractors at the recent Expanded Public Works Programme event to hand-over the statement of results to the Vuk'uphile learner contractors. The event was hosted by the Mayor of Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma Local Municipality at Himeville Hall, near Underberg, on 10 August 2021.

It was in 2014 when the then KwaSani Local Municipality in the Harry Gwala District signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (NDPWI) to recruit and train five contracting businesses of two individuals each (one contractor and one site supervisor) under the auspices of the Vuk'uphile Learnership Programme (VLP).

In terms of this agreement, the municipality was to ensure that; (i) there was project budget to help avail three projects to each learner contractor over a period of about thirty months; (ii) it employed these learner contracting entities for the practical phase of training; (iii) it appointed an engineer to ensure compliance and (iv) co-funded the appointment of a mentor.

For its part the NDPWI (i) formulated programme guidelines; (ii) appointed trainers; (iii) co-funded the appointment of the mentor and (iv) assumed overall responsibility for quality assurance. The partnership between Kwasani Municipality and the DPWI was thus intended to develop these learner contractors into fully fledged contractors who would be able to execute labour-intensive projects having been armed with the necessary administrative, technical, contractual, managerial and entrepreneurial skills.

Unfortunately, KwaSani Municipality went into a merger with the then neighbouring Ingwe Municipality to form the new Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma Municipality ahead of the August 2016 Local Elections and the VLP initiative tailed off when the learner contractors had just managed to complete theoretical training (for which they were receiving the accredited statements of results) and only a single project each for practical training.

Mayor Patricia Mncwabe of the NDZ Municipality took time off to meet the erstwhile learner contractors and to give them framed original copies of their statement of results. The mayor acknowledged that the programme had not gone according to plan but also expressed pleasure in that the Programme had proved to be a catalyst for building relations between these contractors and the NDZ Municipality. Some of these contractors were now accessing work from the Municipality independently of the Vuk'uphile structure, the mayor said.

She then pledged that the Municipality would continue working with these contractors as they were 'uniquely equipped in terms of labour intensive methods'. She thanked them for the matured way they had conducted themselves in the face of the difficulties encountered during the programme. The Mayor also expressed delight in that three of the five contracting entities were owned by women.

Addressing the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure Mayor Mncwabe stated that, although the VLP initiative did not go through all the stages, it had provided useful future lessons for the Municipality. She indicated that the NDZ Municipality hoped to enter into another Vuk'uphile partnership with the Department in the near future.

Later, the NDZ Municipality Director for Infrastructure Services, Mr Zwelethu Dlamini, said he would soon be meeting his fellow directors with a view to planning for, as he put it, 'an NDZ Vuk'uphile'.



Eastern Cape hosts NYS graduation ceremonies in various parts of the province

By Michael Mokoena

Pictures by Nonhlanhla Ntuli-Mahlikihla



The Eastern Cape Regional Office of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) recently hosted graduation ceremonies for National Youth Service (NYS) programme learners in the province. The regional office held 3 graduation ceremonies between 17 and 19 August 2021 in Idutywa, Ntabankulu and Matatiele respectively.

The graduation ceremonies were officiated by the DPWI's Eastern Cape Programme Manager for Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Mr Mziwabantu Ntsele and some of the ceremonies were attended by local government leaders (Mayor of Mbadhe Local Municipality, Councillor Samkelo Janda). Mr Ntsele explained that the aim of the NYS training was to provide local youths with skills they can use to lift themselves out of poverty and joblessness.

The Manager responsible for NYS in the region, Ms Nonhlanhla Ntuli-Mahlikihla, explained that the regional office exited a total of 44 learners during the three graduation ceremonies.

"In Idutywa, 12 learners who participated in the refurbishment of the local police station graduated and exited the Programme. All these learners received a 1 year training in painting. The Matatiele graduation ceremony saw the exiting of 20 learners who took part in the refurbishment of their local police station (Avondale Police Station) and these learners received training in various construction trades such as painting, plumbing, carpentry and general building work"

"We also had a graduation ceremony in Ntabankulu where we exited 12 learners who also received training in painting, plumbing and general building work. These learners partook in the refurbishment of the local police station," Ms Ntuli-Mahlikihla added.

She commended the role played by various government organisations and independent training providers in ensuring that the NYS programme was successfully implemented in the province.

"DPWI partnered with a number of stakeholders such as Coega Development Cooperation, Botani Construction and many other organisations to ensure the successful training of the NYS learners that we have recently exited," she said.

Participants' Testimonials

Mr Sibusiso Dodi, who spoke on behalf of the learners who participated in the refurbishment of the Idutywa police station, stated that being part of the NYS has given them skills they can use to make a living for themselves post their participation in the Programme.

Ms Sinovuyo Goso – who represented the learners from Ntabankulu – the training was valuable because it gave them skills they never had before. "Since many of us were unemployed for a very long time, the NYS training has given us hope for a better future. Through this training we have acquired skills such as painting and tiling. As we exit the Programme, we are confident that we will get work in our communities and that our lives will change for better," she said.

Mr Motobatsi Nthunya – who spoke on behalf of the learners from Matatiele – commended the role played by the NYS in providing the youth with skills. "I wish to also encourage other young people in the NYS and those who are yet to participate in the Programme to learn as much as they can from the programmes. They must not focus much on the stipend but rather on the skills they will learn from the Programme."

Nelspruit Regional Office of DPWI provides EPWP participants with training in Construction Roadworks

By Michael Mokoena

Pictures by Michael Mokoena



The Nelspruit Regional Office of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) has partnered with two municipalities in the province to provide 67 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) participants with training on Construction Roadworks.

The NQF Level 2 training and is accredited by the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA).

The two municipalities that the DPWI Regional Office - through its EPWP Training Unit- is working with to implement this training project are the Emalahleni and Victor Khanye local municipalities and are both located within the Nkangala District.

Mr Lesley Nthangeni, the EPWP Training Coordinator in the province, said the training is aimed at providing participants with skills they can use to gain employment in the construction sector.

“Since the training is accredited, it will provide participants with skills they can use to find employment or even start their own road maintenance companies,” Mr Nthangeni explained.

He pointed out that the participants had already completed the theoretical aspect of the training and that they are currently undergoing practical training at various sites in their communities.

“The participants are currently performing practical work in various communities such as Kriel and KwaGuqa in Emalahleni Municipality and in various parts of Victor Khanye Municipality. Part of the actual work performed by the participants on site include doing road markings and fixing potholes on some of the public roads in their communities,” Mr Nthangeni said.

He further stated that the participants were being trained under the supervision of the Roadworks units of municipalities they were working for.

Mr Nthangeni also thanked both municipalities, the independent

training provider as well as the Department of Higher Education and Training (through its National Skills Fund) for ensuring that the project is implemented successfully.

The Director for Edu House South Africa (the training provider), Mr Abhakholwi Makungo detailed that the participants were exposed to both theoretical and practical aspects of training.

“The participants are now on site executing what they have learn in the classroom and we are pleased with the work that they are doing thus far,” Mr Makungo added.

Participants’ Testimonials

For Ms Mary Dengana, being part of this training has been an exciting experience.

“The training has taught me a lot regarding road maintenance work. I have learned about the machinery and the tools that are used on site and I am able to operate them,” she said.

Ms Dengana also believes that the training will leave her with skills she can use to make a living after exiting the EPWP.

Another participant, Ms Zanele Cossa, said the training has changed her life for the better.



FSCA Financial Literacy Training for EPWP Waste Collection Project at Thembisile Hani Municipality in Mpumalanga

By Michael Mokoena

Pictures by Michael Mokoena

The Nelspruit Regional Office of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) recently provided Financial Literacy training to 45 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) participants who are working in a Waste Collection project at the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality in Mpumalanga.

The training, was implemented in partnership with the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA) and facilitated by the EPWP Provincial Training Manager, Ms Fela Mashaba and Mr Lesley Nthangeni, the EPWP Provincial Training Coordinator.

According to Ms Mashaba, the training offered covered a range of topics such as:

- Managing money better,
- Budgeting: What is a Budget? Importance of budgeting, How to draw up a Budget,
- Saving: Definition of saving, why save? Different ways to save, Savings versus Investments,
- Distinguishing between Needs and Wants,
- Short term & long term insurance,
- Managing debt, and other important topics

“This training will assist participants to set up a plan to manage their finances better. In fact, participants were extremely happy that they could receive this training as they believe that it will change the way they manage their personal finances going forward. They believed that this is a lifetime knowledge that they would also be able to share with their families and community members,” Ms Mashaba said.

She added that the training was implemented under strict Covid-19 regulations.

About Thembisile Hani Waste Collection Project

Commenting on the Thembisile Hani Waste Collection project, Mr Nthangeni explained that it (project) was implemented by the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, under 32 Wards.

He said the project’s main activities are:

- Collection of refuse from households
- Cleaning and maintenance of parks
- Cleaning of Storm water drainages

“EPWP Recruitment Guidelines were followed when recruiting participants. Participants were recruited from the 32 Wards within the Local municipality. Single-parent households and women were given preference during the process.”

“The Community Development Steering Committee from within the Local municipality was given a task to identify unemployed people for employment in this project, and a total number of 48 participants were employed. Their daily wage ranged from R100 to R120,” Mr Nthangeni said.

Participants’ Testimonials

One of the participants, Ms Sandile Kabini, welcomed the training. She indicated that learning about debt management will assist her deal with her current debts.

Another participant, Mr Henry Petla, said the training had showed him better ways of saving money. “The training will assist me to budget better onwards.”

He pledged to share the information and knowledge received with those around him.

South Africa to send 100 firefighters to assist in firefighting efforts in Canada

By Working on Fire Communication Unit

Pictures by Working on Fire Communication Unit



The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment's Working on Fire programme recently deployed 109 firefighters and management to the province of Manitoba in Canada to assist with firefighting efforts in that country.

This is the fourth deployment of firefighters to Canada.

"I would like to extend my good wishes to the Working on Fire team as you embark on your fourth deployment to Canada to assist in bringing the fires currently raging across Manitoba under control. I trust that, as in the past, you will fly South Africa's flag high and that your camaraderie will stand you in good stead as you battle alongside colleagues from other Canadian provinces and cities to save lives and homes," said the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Ms. Barbara Creecy.

The Working on Fire programme is administered through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). It provides work opportunities, skills training and personal development to communities across the country. The focus is on young people and women, with around 85% of crews comprising young people and about 30% women.

The request for assistance came from the Canadian Inter-agency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) which has, in terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Canada and South Africa, asked for firefighting assistance from Working on Fire (WOF) to assist with their fire management in Canada. The MOU provides for the exchange of Wildland Fire Management Resources between these two countries.

A crew of 100 firefighters and a nine-person management team has been selected following a selection process which included criteria such as physical fitness, having a valid Yellow Card, more than three years actual firefighting experience, a valid South African passport, and additional criteria such as passing a drug test and having a clear criminal record. Out of the selected firefighters 30 are women and 35 have previous deployment experience to Canada and they will be deployed for a period of 34 days.