

Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit



Recognising Heterogeneity: A Proposed Typology for Public Works Programmes

by
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Recognising Heterogeneity: A Proposed Typology for Public Works Programmes

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Abstract

This paper highlights the diversity of the Public Works concept and the implications of this diversity for effective social protection programming. The paper outlines the heterogeneity of programmes currently implemented under the broad terminology of ‘Public Works’ and the conceptual confusion that arises as a result of the use of the generic term Public Works Programme (PWP) to describe a range of highly diverse programmes without making adequate distinction between the different forms, together with the programming errors which ensue from this conceptual confusion. One particularly egregious result of this lack of clarity is the repeated implementation of PWPs offering only a single short term episode of employment in low and middle income countries where unemployment is principally structural, an intervention which is unlikely to offer significant or sustained social protection benefits for participants. In an attempt to address to this problem, a typology of PWPs is presented to provide a framework for a more systematic and insightful engagement with PWPs, which links PWP form to likely social protection outcomes in differing labour market contexts.

Recognising Heterogeneity: A Proposed Typology for Public Works Programmes

This paper highlights the diversity of the Public Works concept and the implications of this diversity for effective social protection programming. First working definitions of the terms public works and social protection are offered, and then the paper offers a brief history of PWP programming and outlines the heterogeneity of programmes currently implemented under the broad terminology of 'Public Works'. Next the paper sets out the conceptual confusion that arises as a result of the use of the generic term Public Works Programme (PWP) to describe a range of highly diverse programmes without making adequate distinction between the different forms, together with the programming errors which ensue from this conceptual confusion. One particularly egregious result of this lack of clarity is the repeated implementation of PWPs offering only a single short term episode of employment in low and middle income countries where unemployment is principally structural, an intervention which is unlikely to offer significant or sustained social protection benefits for participants. In an attempt to address to this problem, a typology of PWPs is presented to provide a framework for a more systematic and insightful engagement with PWPs, and a schema of programme objectives put forward, highlighting the diversity of objectives associated with PWP programming. Finally the relationships between PWP type, objectives and the labour market context are discussed, and implications drawn in terms of the likely social protection outcomes.

PWP Definitions

There are numerous kinds of public works programmes, but the key components are the provision of employment for the creation of public assets at a prescribed wage for those unable to find alternative employment, in order to provide some form of social safety net. For the purpose of this paper, PWP are defined as all activities which entail the payment of a wage (in cash or in kind) by the state, or by an agent acting on behalf of the state, in return for the provision of labour, in order to i) enhance employment and ii) produce an asset (either physical or social), with the overall objective of promoting social protection for participants. The concept is defined more loosely in much of the literature linked to the World Bank, as set out by Subbarao, who defines public works programmes as:

‘... programmes in which participants must work to obtain benefits. These programmes offer temporary employment at a low wage rate, and have been widely used for fighting poverty.’
(2001:2)

It is interesting to note, according to this definition, that PWP are inherently temporary, an issue which will be discussed in detail below.

Social protection, the outcome against which PWP are considered in this paper, is a contested term, however, for the purposes of this paper, it may usefully be defined as:

‘public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk, and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society’ (Conway, de Haan and Norton, 2000:5).

There are a number of variant forms of PWP. The majority offer either food or cash in return for physical labour, known as food-for-work (FFW) or cash-for-work (CFW) programmes, respectively. Whether cash, food or other inputs are the most appropriate mode of payment varies according to the nature of the labour market deficiency which has created the need for the intervention. In situations where security is poor, food is not readily available, or food cost inflation is high, food often remains the optimal form of payment (Basu, 1996)¹. In some programmes, the wage in the form of food is used as an incentive for communities to construct assets (food-for-assets or FFA), or to participate in training programmes, (food-for-training or FFT), which expands the concept of PWP still further. Recently, the World Food Programme has adopted the terms *Food for Assets (FFA)*, and *Targeted Food Distribution for Assets (TFDA)* to describe their PWPs. This indicates that food is being given to assist communities in producing assets of economic value to them in an attempt to alter the beneficiary perception that the work requirement represents a form of conditionality which must be fulfilled in order to access food, irrespective of the quality or value of the asset created² (McCord 2005a). Programmes using a food rather than cash wage benefit tend to be implemented or supported by agencies such as WFP or USAID, which have historically had surplus food stocks at their disposal but limited access to capital to fund conventional CFW initiatives (*ibid*).³ Other PWPs offer alternative forms of payment, such as inputs-for-work (IFW) where the wage is paid in the form of agricultural inputs (fertilizers and seeds) as in the Malawian Government’s Inputs for Assets (IFA) programme (UK DFID 2004).

The PWP concept is further complicated by the fact that the term ‘workfare programme’ is used synonymously with ‘public works programme’ in much World Bank literature (Subbarao 2001: 2; Vodopivec 2004). This loose use of terminology is problematic given the specific labour market

¹ NGOs in Ethiopia are conducting pilot programmes to test the relative performance of different forms of PWP remuneration and beneficiary preferences. (Devereux et al. 2005)

² The WFP presents this approach as a ‘soft’ PWP, an intermediary step between the free (unconditional) food distributions provided by WFP in emergency contexts, and the cessation of food distributions once the crisis has abated. Thus it attempts to introduce a market dimension into the relationship between the beneficiary and the aid agency in terms of the reciprocity of food receipt in return for work.

³ The 40% global grain price rise in 2007/8 severely reduced the operating grain surplus of both USAID and WFP, and so the incidence of such programmes in the future is likely to be limited.

origins and policy objectives associated with the ‘workfare’ concept, along with the fact that this represents only one possible component of the broader and pluralistic public works concept⁴. The range of variant PWP forms and nomenclature inconsistencies identified so far contributes to the poorly conceptualised usage of the term PWP in both the literature and policy discourses. Thus the generic term ‘public works’ tends to be used for a multitude of divergent programmes, diverse in both design and objectives. This conceptual melee is acknowledged by Subbarao, who states that:

There is much confusion about the meaning and scope of public works programs (also known as workfare programs) across countries. (2001: 2)

Viewed in terms of their position in the social protection lexicon, PWPs are sometimes considered a particular form of conditional transfer (see Samson, van Niekerk and Mac Quene 2006: 8), with the transfer benefit being given in return for the fulfilment of the work requirement. But this categorisation is not unproblematic, and it is argued in this paper that there are critical differences between PWP and cash transfers which have a significant impact on their respective social protection functions.

Notwithstanding these definitional problems, the core PWP concept implies a labour-oriented form of social protection instrument in which a wage is provided in return for labour, with the objective of providing a safety net at a time when regular wage employment or participation in normal livelihoods activities is disrupted. This can be due to an economic, political or environmental shock, a structural shift in the economy caused by adverse global trading conditions, or classical unemployment due to chronically low rates of capital accumulation. They are intended to provide a basic income and prevent the distressed selling of assets in order to meet subsistence needs. Frequently they involve the creation or maintenance of potentially productive infrastructure, such as roads or irrigation systems which are also intended to contribute directly to the livelihoods of participants. Depending on the nature of the causes driving the implementation of a particular PWP, other objectives of greater or lesser importance may include skills development through work experience and on-the-job training, the stimulation of economic growth through the promotion of demand among PWP beneficiaries, and the maintenance of social and political order in the context of unacceptably high levels of unemployment and poverty. This range of objectives is explored in more detail below.

⁴ Workfare is associated with the US active labour market policies initiated in the 1980s, and with similar UK policies known as ‘welfare to work’. These attempted to make unemployment benefit conditional on taking up work opportunities offered to the unemployed, thereby aiming to reduce frictional unemployment and in this way bring down unemployment and demand for social welfare support (McCord 2007b).

Programmes are usually self-targeted on the basis of the principle of ‘less eligibility’. This concept implies that ‘relief [social assistance] should be limited to an amount and administered in a manner which leaves the recipient worse off than the employed’ (Barr, 1998:17). On this basis the value of the wage in a PWP is typically kept low in order to ensure that programme participation is an attractive option only for the poor unemployed, and will not result in labour market distortion where workers are drawn out of other forms of low income employment. This is often achieved by setting the wage at or below the market wage, on the assumption that only the target poor will self-select for PWP employment at this wage. When such employment is offered to all those seeking work, or at least one member of all work-seeking households, the programme is known as ‘universal’. However, where the number of those seeking PWP employment exceeds the number of jobs available, access is rationed using a variety of mechanisms. These include targeting on the basis of demographic or geographical characteristics, allocating employment through lottery systems, as well as community-targeting where the available employment is allocated by communities among themselves⁵.

The PWP wage (in cash or in kind) is usually given in return for a set amount of work. This is often stipulated in terms of the completion of a particular task (task-based employment) in order to avoid perverse incentives for workers to extend the time taken to complete a given task, thereby avoiding the potential efficiency trade-offs which could result from the adoption of a PWP mode of asset production.

History

PWPs have been implemented throughout the world for several centuries. Major programmes were conducted in Britain and Prussia during periods of labour market disruption and heightened unemployment resulting from industrialisation and conflict in the nineteenth century; in the United States of America during the Great Depression in the 1930s; and in Africa, Latin America and Asia during the second half of the twentieth century (Subbarao *et al.* 1997). In developing countries, PWPs have been used in response to both developmental and emergency crises, while in recent decades they have frequently formed a component of World Bank-supported Social Funds, often with developmental objectives relating to livelihoods and poverty reduction. Examples are MASAF in Malawi and TASAF in Tanzania.

In Africa programmes have tended to be short term and contingent on donor funding, while in Asia multilateral food-aid initiatives supported large-scale food-for-work programmes during the post-

⁵ A range of potential targeting measures is discussed in detail in Coady *et al.* (2002). This issue is not explored further here for lack of space.

WWII decades. More recently, many Asian programmes have shifted to cash-for-work and been implemented for prolonged periods with primarily domestic funding, for instance in Korea and India (Subbarao *ibid*). While PWPs are generally not used as long term instruments to address poverty, there are cases in Asia where they perform this function, most notably the Indian MEGS, initiated during the 1960s and still in operation, and the recently introduced National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) also in India. These programmes address poverty by attempting to ensure sustained access to employment by the poor, thereby in effect guaranteeing a minimum regular income and in this way promoting income insecurity and reducing vulnerability.

Food-for-work (FFW) was particularly popular in the post-war period largely due to the major grain surpluses produced by the US which, under Public Law 480 (PL480), were used to support FFW programmes around the world. PL480, also known as the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 or Food for Peace (FFP), is the US policy of using surplus agricultural production to supply the world's largest global food-aid programme, which in 2003 had a total value of US\$2 billion. However, in recent decades CFW has become increasingly popular, offering a more responsive and flexible option for beneficiaries, as cash can be used to meet a range of household needs directly, rather than requiring a process of household level monetisation which often entails losses in the net transfer value of the commodities provided as in-kind PWP payment. Yet it is often donor institutional priorities rather than beneficiary preferences which dictate PWP payment modalities. Thus agencies for whom food stocks comprise a large component of their operating budget still tend to promote in-kind payment. The World Food Programme and USAID still primarily support FFW based PWPs, with USAID utilising food drawn from the Food for Peace (FFP) allocation out of US surplus agricultural production.

PWP Heterogeneity

As illustrated above, while PWPs share the core characteristics of employing labour for the creation of goods,⁶ both physical and social in kind and in disproportionately high demand by the poor, at a

⁶ There are a small number of PWPs that provide private rather than public assets. Examples of these would be small-scale localised PWPs designed to assist HIV-affected community members through the creation of household level vegetable gardens in Zimbabwe (see McCord (2005)), or components of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS). At times during its 40-year history the latter has created private assets when it has not been possible to identify sufficiently labour-absorbing public assets for construction in a particular area. The recently introduced NREGP in India has explicitly extended its mandate to include the creation of private assets, as outlined by the Indian Centre for Science and Environment: 'It is argued that though creating private assets goes against the objective of a public works programme, the poor quality of public assets, absence of community benefits, and lack of maintenance funds is bringing about a change in the profile and ownership of these assets. While it may prove (sic) the durability and benefits of assets created under the EGS, it has also raised concerns about the equitable distribution of EGS benefits. For instance, farm ponds are in great demand under EGS (sic) in Maharashtra, but these are privately owned assets and cost Rs 40,000, require (sic) more than one acre of land and hence benefit only the

prescribed wage for those unable to find alternative employment. The primary objective is to provide a measure of social protection, and many different kinds of PWP interventions satisfy this criterion. PWP's are not monolithic entities, but rather a conceptually varied form of policy instrument which can differ in terms of duration, relationship to the labour market, scale, targeting and implementation modalities. This diversity is not sufficiently recognised in the literature, and its implications are not adequately considered.

Two critical problems are linked to the failure to recognise the heterogeneity of PWP's and the resultant loose terminology and conceptual confusion. The first is the discussion in the literature and at policy level of PWP as though it was a unitary concept, resulting in the mistaken attribution of the benefits arising from one form of PWP to other types of programme within the genre that are different.⁷ The second problem, a direct consequence of the first, is the widespread adoption of a particular form of PWP shown to be inappropriate which has become the archetype policy in much of Sub-Saharan Africa. The issues entailed are explored below.

The World Bank characterises the PWP as a short-term instrument for responding to acute or transient shocks⁸. This form of PWP has become common in the programme discourse. By design it provides a short-term episode of employment which reduces distress selling of assets, promotes consumption smooths income flows on a temporary basis during periods of disrupted access to income sources, particularly where the problem is covariate. In the context of a labour market crisis designated as acute, the World Bank argues that the use of a PWP instrument offering temporary employment may be appropriate in terms of cost and impact, particularly where the output of the programme is an asset which will directly reduce the vulnerability of the community to future shocks. See Subbarao *et al.* (1997) for a full discussion.

The kind of short-term PWP outlined above has, however, become synonymous with the term *PWP* in much of the current discourse. This is so because it is widely implemented in a range of contexts outside the specific 'acute shock' scenario where its efficacy has been identified by the World Bank and is consistent with conventional microeconomic theory, pertaining to consumption smoothing and asset protection. Normally it is selected in response to a range of labour market deficiencies and social protection challenges, without recognition of the fact that this represents only one particular

large farmers' (Centre for Science and Environment, n.d.:9).

⁷ For example, President Mbeki of South Africa mistakenly attributed the benefits of an EGS-style long-term PWP (Zimbabwe) to the National Public Works Programme (EPWP), which offers only a single episode of short-term employment, in his address to the National Council of Provinces in 2003.

⁸ See, for example, the 2001 World Development Report (World Bank, 2001) and the World Bank Poverty Nets website (World Bank, 2004).

PWP variant, appropriate in a limited set of circumstances rather than being universally effective. If examined in the light of limited empirical evidence, it is clear that this form of short-term PWP response is not appropriate in many of the contexts in which it is currently adopted.

In the literature it is argued that this archetypal form of PWP providing short-term employment functions as a response to acute or transient labour market disruption and this in itself is not problematic. What needs to be questioned is the identification of such PWPs as appropriate instruments in contexts not characterised by transient labour market disruption but on the assumption that a short-term PWP intervention can effectively address poverty irrespective of the nature or cause of the labour market's malfunctioning.. In the context of chronic poverty and labour market failure it is not evident that a short-term PWP intervention will have a significant or sustained impact (see McCord 2004 with reference to South Africa). Subbarao *et al.* reflect this presumption, arguing on the basis of cross country experience that:

‘... public works are essentially a temporary safety net and should never be used as a permanent escape route from poverty.’ (1997: 168)

Subbarao *et al.*'s use of the generic term ‘public works’ to describe a specific form or subset of short-term PWPs illustrates the problem in the discourse, which identifies short-term PWPs with the whole genre of PWPs. It can be argued that whether a PWP offers a temporary or permanent route out of poverty depends on the *kind* of PWP being implemented, and it is necessary to deconstruct the concept and clarify the characteristics of the PWP under discussion to promote an informed and useful debate. This challenges Subbarao *et al.*'s identification of all public works with *short-term* public works, and their supporting argument that public works generically should not, *de facto*, be used to address chronic poverty.

Interestingly, while the archetypal short-term PWP is not appropriate as a permanent escape route as Subbarao *et al.* assert, this type of PWP is often mistakenly adopted, even ironically with World Bank support, as in the case of the MASAF programme in Malawi. Other forms of PWP which offer prolonged or repeated access to PWP employment have been used successfully to provide ongoing poverty reduction, such as the MEGS in India.

The confusion of one archetype for the range of PWP types raises problems for the social protection function, as PWPs offering a single short episode of employment are repeatedly prescribed by donors and governments in situations of chronic poverty, in the hope that they will provide the ‘permanent escape route’ that Subbarao himself argues is not an option. The policy documentation in support of such programmes repeatedly indicates that governments and donors implementing

these programmes anticipate that these policy actions will have a significant social protection function that results in sustained improvements in livelihoods and poverty reduction⁹.

The PWP Problem

The key issue illustrated in the foregoing discussion is that conceptual confusion is leading to inappropriate policy choice, programme design errors, and unrealistic expectations on the part of implementers. Neither economic theory nor the limited evidence base support the adoption of short-term PWPs in many contexts in which they are currently implemented. This is probably due in part to ideological factors which underlie donor and government preferences for market-based development solutions achievable by the ‘treatment’ of the target group (Surender 2007) and which render the archetypal PWP form extremely popular (McCord 2008).¹⁰

Despite the dominance of the PWP archetype in practice, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, along with Subbarao’s identification of this type with the whole genre, many widely differing programmes share the generic PWP nomenclature while providing only a small area of shared identity relating to social protection and employment. But at the same time, the term *PWP* is frequently adopted and used either generically or without adequate discrimination to ensure a common understanding of the particular form of PWP under discussion. The core problem is the lack of a clear conceptual framework backing a term which is highly heterogeneous in its manifestations. Definitions which might assist in the clarification of the use of PWP terminology are absent in the current debate, which instead uses the term PWP as though it were homogenous, and the literature offers no typology of the different types of PWP. The purpose of this working paper is to define a typology of PWPs while developing a schema of PWP objectives to which it is applicable and on which it rests, as even within a single form of PWP there can be a range of different objectives and relative priorities.

A PWP Typology

The variety of interventions falling under the broad heading of *PWP* range from large-scale national government employment schemes (GES) to more limited project-based or spatially limited interventions responding to transient labour market problems. However, in current policy discussions there has been no attempt to establish any form of codification of this diversity, and there is no typology to facilitate more meaningful analysis or disaggregation of the generic term

⁹ An example is the DFID-supported PWP in Malawi which has as its goal ‘enhanced livelihoods for poor people in Malawi’ (DFID UK, 2004).

¹⁰ The ideological dimensions of PWP selection are not explored further in this paper, but the issue is explored in detail in McCord (2008).

PWP. A review of the international literature and over 200 separate programmes was carried out by the present researcher to identify discrete forms of PWP on the basis of core features relating to design and primary objectives.

The result is a typology of PWPs which groups programmes into four broad types. These types share a common PWP identity in the provision of employment with some form of social protection objective. But within this common framework there is scope to adopt different realisations of the basic public works concept. The two dominant types of PWP are those offering (i) short-term employment, and (ii) large-scale government employment programmes including some form of employment guarantee. The two less frequent but still identifiable types are (iii) those promoting labour intensification of government infrastructure spending, and (iv) programmes which enhance supply-side characteristics that promote ‘employability’.

It is important to note that while some programmes may include aspects drawn from more than one of these types, all PWPs tend to share a primary identity which enables them to be located in one of the four categories. This typology is applied within this paper in order to illuminate and to clarify the current conceptual confusion. For the sake of brevity the four kinds of programme identified above have been called types A, B, C and D as summarised in box 1 below.

Box 1: PWP Typology

Type A

PWPs offering a single short-term episode of employment

Type B

Large-scale government employment programmes which may offer some form of employment guarantee

Type C

Programmes promoting the labour intensification of government infrastructure spending

Type D

Programmes which enhance employability

Brief descriptions of each type together with examples are set out below.

Type A: Short-term Employment

PWPs offering short-term employment are typically implemented as a response to some form of temporary labour market or livelihoods disruption, which may result from environmental (e.g. drought, flood or hurricane damage) or economic shocks, such as the East Asian financial crisis.

They are mostly, although not exclusively, implemented in the infrastructure sector, and the underlying intention is to temporarily increase aggregate employment while providing a basic income for consumption smoothing during a limited period of elevated unemployment or livelihoods disturbance. These programmes offer basic ‘risk coping’ or ‘protective’ forms of social protection. In these programmes, the social protection transfer dominates objectives relating to the provision of assets, which may in many instances be essentially a ‘make-work’ activity, selected in order to satisfy the work conditionality.

Such programmes have been frequently implemented in Bangladesh and other Southern Asian states in response to climatic shocks. Indonesia’s Padat Karya (PK) programme is an example of such a programme developed in response to an economic shock (Vaidya & Abedin 2007). These programmes have come to be seen as archetypal PWP and therefore synonymous with the generic term PWP. They are typical of PWPs currently implemented in many sub-Saharan African countries (such as South Africa, Malawi, and Tanzania) where their labour market function is less clear, as the challenge is not one of temporary disruption but rather of structural and therefore chronically low labour demand.

Type B: Government Employment Schemes/Employment Guarantee Programmes

Large-scale government employment programmes (GEPs) are a response to chronic or sustained levels of elevated unemployment. Their implementation entails significant government expenditure on directly employing those who would otherwise be unemployed; that is, the state acts as an ‘employer of last resort’ (ELR) aiming to raise aggregate employment on a sustained basis. Employment may be created in any sector, and may be provided either directly by government or indirectly through private sector employers or civil society organisations under contract. The US New Deal programmes of the 1930s typify this approach. The objective of these programmes was the creation of productive employment opportunities to promote both macroeconomic development (increasing aggregate employment and stimulating the economy) and social protection outcomes. A subset of GEPs, in which the state guarantees ongoing or repeated episodes of employment on demand to those who are eligible, are known as Employment Guarantee Schemes (EGSs). An example is the NREGP in India. These programmes provide non-contributory income insurance through guaranteed employment for all who seek it.

The US response to the Great Depression in the 1930s exemplifies a classic public sector employment programme. Under the programme massive state expenditure on PWP was initiated, at their height absorbing up to 50% of the unemployed in an attempt to stimulate consumer demand and prevent the deepening of the economic recession (Harvey 2007a). These programmes take the

form of EGSs in some countries, wherein employment is guaranteed to all members of eligible groups on demand. Such programmes are currently operational in several states in India, for example, the MEGS (see Dev 1995), as well as on the national scale under the recently launched NREGP (India: Department of Rural Development 2007). In the Indian context, employment is defined as a constitutional right so that the state offers a guaranteed number of days of employment each year to one unemployed work seeker from any rural household seeking employment. The worker is employed for a maximum of 100 days each year on the creation of community assets and is paid the minimum wage. A similar large-scale programme initiated in 2006 is being implemented also in Ethiopia in response to the disruption of livelihoods which occurs periodically as the result of persistent drought (the Productive Safety Nets Programme or PSNP). Yet the extent to which employment can be offered to all seeking it in this case is constrained in practice, particularly in years of serious drought, as a cap on total employment creation has been set as part of the project design.¹¹

The definition of ‘universal’ is variously interpreted both in PWP design and in the literature. Hence access may be rationed even within nominally ‘universal’ programme, or Employment Guarantee Schemes (EGSs). Examples of large-scale programmes which attempted to provide some form of universal coverage in order to meet explicit social protection objectives are the US New Deal, the Jefes programme in Argentina, the Ethiopian PSNP, and the Indian NREGP¹². Logically the most generous definition of universal access would demand the provision of employment for all unemployed workers, but this is typically mediated by the adoption of criteria limiting eligibility based on considerations such as poverty level (as in the New Deal), spatial location of workers (as in NREGA open only to the rural unemployed), or some form of household rationing such as offers of one job per household (NREGP and Jefes)¹³.

The Jefes programme had two additional criteria: a demographic condition limiting participation to heads of households with children or disabled or pregnant spouses, and an exclusion provision applicable to those receiving unemployment insurance or transfer benefits from the government¹⁴. In many EGSs attempts have been made to limit ‘demand’ for PWP employment in this way by

¹¹ As an illustration of the scale of demand for PWP employment in Ethiopia, the precursor to the PSNP offered temporary work to up to 1.4 million people in drought-affected communities each year between 1999 and 2003 (see Subbarao and Smith 2003).

¹² The extent to which such programmes succeed in realising their ‘universal’ aspirations, however defined, varies considerably for many reasons including constrained budgets, institutional weaknesses, capacity constraints and corruption.

¹³ In the PSNP more than one household member can work, but collectively, household members are permitted to work only a total of 22 days, thereby earning one month’s wage per household.

¹⁴ Interestingly a companion programme, the Programma de Emergencie Laboral (PEL), offering similar benefits, was implemented for unemployed adults who did not meet the demographic criterion for Jefes participation.

adopting criteria that limit eligibility. Interestingly, among the EGSs discussed above, only the Jefes programme purposely adopted a low wage to promote self-targeting by the poorest (the dominant form of rationing access to PWP generally), while in the other programmes in this category the work requirement alone was the primary targeting mechanism (McCord 2007b). Wages were deliberately set at the minimum wage, reflecting an explicit concern among programme designers that the value of the labour of PWP participants should not be reduced relative to other labour market participants (Harvey 2007a). This ethical concern is not evident in the discussion of other types of PWP, where discounting the value of labour of PWP participants relative to others is central to programme design and is not identified in the literature as problematic.

The complication of rationed access even under ‘universal’ EGSs is exacerbated by the frequent inability of the state to provide sufficient PWP work for all those eligible. This is due to the limitations of state administrative capacity (programme design, technical supervision, execution, etc.), thereby further worsening the rationing problem even among those who are eligible. Interestingly, this difficulty is accommodated in a number of programmes which offer a commitment to the provision of a universal minimum income transfer for the poor as a backup should the state not be able to provide adequate employment for all the eligible work-seekers within the programme. Recognising that state failure to provide adequate employment runs the risk of undermining PWP’s mass employment and thereby also social protection objectives, the PWPs facing these constraints (such as the NREGP, PSNP) have been designed and implemented in such a way that, irrespective of whether it is possible to supply adequate PWP employment or not, the programme default is the provision of an ongoing (or repeated) cash transfer to those eligible.¹⁵

In the case of the New Deal’s employment programmes, those who could not be accommodated in PWPs, or whose earnings in public or private employment were insufficient to meet their basic needs, could apply to local relief agencies for public assistance. In this way the need for an income guarantee to back up the government’s job creation efforts was recognised.¹⁶ Hence, in such cases, provision of an ongoing transfer is not dependent on the capacity of the state to deliver employment; a fundamental difference from programmes where state capacity to deliver is the binding constraint on PWP scale, as in the case of the South African EPWP. The centrality of

¹⁵ In the case of NREGP, the primary function of the ‘back-up’ unemployment insurance guarantee is to provide an incentive for local government to offer sufficient employment since they are obliged to pay the unemployment insurance from their own resources, while PWP wages are funded by central government. However, this approach also has the implicit function of protecting workers from the inability of local government to provide adequate employment.

¹⁶ Harvey 2007, pers. comm.

capacity constraints in determining the successful performance of PWP has also been identified by Subbarao, who conceded that:

‘The main constraint in implementing public works programs in much of Africa is the lack of capacity.’ (2001: viii)

Type C: Labour Intensification

The primary objective of this type of PWP is the construction of assets while increasing aggregate labour usage. These programmes are initiated almost exclusively in the infrastructure sector, and labour-based techniques are specified in order to promote the absorption of increased amounts of labour for each unit of asset constructed. The work of the Ethiopian Rural Roads Authority (ERRA), the AGETIP (Agence d’Exécution des Travaux d’Intérêt Public contre le sous-emploi) in Senegal, related AFRICATIP-supported programmes in Western Africa, and the ILO’s Employment-Intensive Investment Programmes (EIIPs) all promote the use of labour-based techniques in the infrastructure sector and are typical of this type of intervention.¹⁷ In such programmes the social protection benefits are assumed to result from the increase in aggregate levels of employment generated during the creation of assets. What accrues to workers as a direct outcome of employment provided is the wage paid and possibly also productive use of the assets created, although recent work carried out by the ILO in Ethiopia using the newly developed Rapid Assessment of Poverty Impacts (RAPI) methodology indicates that it may not be possible to identify sustained benefits resulting from access to the new assets created (Mengesha & Osei-Bonsu 2007).

While these programmes are primarily aimed at infrastructure provision, they also confer basic short-term ‘risk coping’ or ‘protective’ social protection benefits, through the wage stream which terminates at the point of programme completion. Such programmes also frequently entail the promotion of small contractor development, in order to establish a cadre of entrepreneurs able to manage ongoing infrastructure provision contracts in a labour-intensive way.

Type D: The Promotion of Employability

Finally there is a PWP approach which addresses supply-side constraints to employment, and fosters the ‘employability’ of workers by promoting workplace experience and skills formation among the unemployed. Such programmes are implemented when the key constraint to employment is

¹⁷ The Chinese Yigong-daizhen programme is similarly constituted (see Devereux & Solomon 2006: 23), although in this case the objective of simultaneously providing infrastructure and employment coexists with a major forced labour component. This is in tension with the definition of PWPs adopted above, that is, the provision of remunerated PWP employment to promote social protection outcomes. Therefore such a programme may fall into a separate category of interventions, along with forced labour programmes in Burma, and so is not included in this typology.

identified to be lack of skills rather than lack of employment opportunities *per se*. These programmes have been adopted principally in Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries at times of high frictional unemployment, i.e. when the fundamental problem has been skills shortages in the labour pool. This type of programme assumes that sufficient numbers of jobs are available for the unemployed if they are adequately retrained and supported. It is associated with a political concern to encourage the unemployed to take up available work opportunities rather than to provide them with unemployment benefits. Typified by the US set of ‘workfare’ programmes and the UK ‘Welfare to Work’ initiative of the 1990s, this approach makes the provision of social protection benefits for the working-age unemployed conditional on participants taking up low-paid work or participating in work experience or training programmes. This approach will confer social protection benefits and promote aggregate employment only if the underlying assumption – that sufficient employment is available to absorb a significant number of the unemployed if they acquire additional skills and experience – holds true. Otherwise, such initiatives are likely to result in worker substitution within the existing labour force rather than in significant increases in aggregate employment.

Programmes to enhance employability by addressing supply-side problems are constituents of broader Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP), see Martin & Grubb (2001), designed to enhance skills and offer incentives for re-entry into employment. The success of such programmes is contingent on their ability (a) to successfully transfer skills to participants, and (b) to identify skills on the supply side which match skills in demand in the economy. This approach also depends on the labour market context being characterised by frictional rather than structural unemployment, and therefore the existence of significant numbers of appropriate but unfilled job opportunities. The feasibility of such approaches has been questioned generally in the literature (*ibid*), as also its doubtful appropriateness in developing countries that face structural rather than frictional unemployment (Karuri *et al.* 2007).

A Schema of PWP Objectives

Establishing a PWP typology brings conceptual clarification to the PWP discussion arena. Yet there is a need to go beyond the PWP form to look at programme objectives in more detail, a subject which also is neglected in the literature and a source of conceptual confusion. A review of international evidence suggests that a wide range of objectives is associated with PWPs, so that a single programme may include a diversity of objectives. While particular goals are associated with certain forms of PWP - for example, type D PWPs have skills development as a key objective -

different PWP types are not necessarily or exclusively linked with particular objectives, resulting in most programmes having a range of objectives open to being prioritised in more than one way.

The ranking of objectives in PWPs can result in significant differences in programme design and social protection outcomes. Lack of clarity on the relative importance of objectives within a PWP with multiple, potentially competing or contradictory objectives has been identified as the cause of PWP failure in a number of cases (Adato *et al.* (1999) with reference to the South African CBPWP, McCord (2007b) regarding the South African EPWP; and Curtain (1999) concerning the PK in Indonesia).

Drawing on the international reviews of PWP objectives set out in McCord (2005a, 2007), it is proposed that the objectives typically found in PWPs can be grouped into six broad categories to provide a conceptual schema for future PWP analysis. These categories determined by goals and representing sets of inter-related sub-objectives (referred to in the following text as ‘objective sets’), reflect PWP objectives as set out in programme documentation. As such they represent the range of different aspirations and intentions associated with PWP implementation, and also illustrate the confusion between ultimate and instrumental objectives that can reign in the current discourse. As a result the objective sets are not wholly discrete, with some being instrumental or proximate objectives necessary to achieving other ultimate objectives. For example, skills development is identified as an instrument to reduce frictional unemployment. In addition, certain objectives focus on micro level impacts while others concern the aggregate or macro-economic consequences.

Notwithstanding the issue of inter-relatedness, explicit identification of the range of PWP objectives is useful both in attempting to disaggregate the PWP concept and in providing a basis on which to assess PWP performance. The six objective sets are: (i) social protection, most frequently articulated as ‘poverty alleviation’, (ii) employment creation, (iii) skills development, (iv) asset or service provision, (v) macroeconomic stimulation, and (vi) political stabilisation. Within each of these objective sets, target outcomes are identified in greater detail. The most commonly articulated PWP objective is poverty alleviation. The remaining five sets are instrumental in their linkage to social protection outcomes, by contributing indirectly to this objective either intentionally or through the positive externalities anticipated from the programme. A range of other policy concerns are addressed directly in PWPs, being enhanced labour demand, supply-side improvements through skills development, gained efficiency in service provision, macroeconomic stimulation, and political stabilisation. This analysis clarifies the fact that PWPs can have both direct and indirect social protection objectives simultaneously, unlike other social protection instruments such as cash grants

which focus exclusively on achieving direct social protection benefits through a cash transfer. The six broad categories of objectives are summarised in Table 2.1 and each is assessed critically below.

The Social Protection Objective

The objective of social protection, often expressed as poverty alleviation, is explicitly articulated in most PWP. Typically, social protection is the primary objective of a programme, reflecting its core rationale, as in the case of type A and B programmes. However, not all programmes explicitly include social protection as an objective, and for some the stated goals are intermediate or proximate in nature such as ‘job creation’, with the ultimate social protection outcome of higher employment remaining implicit. In other cases PWP are primarily oriented towards service provision, and in these the social protection objective is subordinated to asset construction or service delivery. So protection is perceived as a secondary benefit resulting from a core service delivery function, as in type C programmes.

Table 2.1: International Overview of PWP Objectives

PWP Objective	Detail/Sub-Objectives
Social Protection	Income relief through temporary employment
	Income relief through ongoing/repeated employment
	Improved livelihoods after exiting PWP employment
Employment	Alleviate unemployment by creating short-term work opportunities
	Reduce frictional unemployment by increasing the capacity of those exiting PWP to take up existing unfilled work opportunities
	Increase aggregate demand for labour through labour intensification
	SMME development in the construction sector (change structure of demand for labour in the construction sector in order to facilitate greater labour intensification) (instrumental)
	Increased government expenditure – Government Employment Schemes (GES)
Skills Development	Skills training and work experience increase capacity of participants to earn an income after exiting (instrumental, directly contributes to 1.3 above)
Physical and Social Infrastructure Provision	Improve provision of basic physical infrastructure and physical services (road construction and maintenance, school construction, dam creation, irrigation, etc.)
	Improve social infrastructure through service delivery (e.g. Home Based Care (HBC), pre-school facilities)
Macroeconomic Stimulation	Introduce sufficient capital into economy to have stimulate demand on a regional or national level
Political Stabilisation	Provision of visible government response to unemployment or poverty crisis.

The relationship between the various objective sets and social protection is often not well articulated in the policy literature or in programme design, with causal linkages between achievement of the proximate objectives and some measure of social protection often assumed to be axiomatic rather than demonstrated by empirical evidence. Also, the frequently observed mismatch between programme type and programme objectives (see for example McCord 2007 with reference to South Africa and Malawi) implies an assumption that *all* four types of PWP identified can successfully deliver on *any* of the objective sets, irrespective of the design features that limit the potential of each type of PWP intervention. For example, as remarked above, it is frequently assumed that type A (short-term) programmes can be successfully linked to the realisation of social protection objective sets in situations of chronic poverty. This is so despite the design of such a programme being inherently inappropriate for delivering sustained social protection outcomes in any context other than short-term labour market disruption.

This linkage between programme type and stated objective is particularly problematic in relation to social protection, where the assumption is that any form of employment provision will lead to meaningful, in contrast to extremely transient, social protection gains. Such presumptions tend to dominate policy discussion where supporting theoretical and empirical analysis is particularly scarce. The work of Ravallion, Datt and Subbarao approaches this question, but they focus almost exclusively on long-term type B programmes or type A programmes in emergency situations, rather than address the problem of social protection impacts of type A programmes in contexts of chronic poverty. Recent work drawing on material from Bangladesh, Malawi, South Africa and Ethiopia (Helen Keller International 2007; McCord 2003; Chirwa *et al.* 2004, and Mengesha & Osei-Bonsu 2007) shows cause for concern because of the inappropriate social protection objectives ascribed to type A and type C PWPs in particular. The key problem here is the association of particular social protection objectives with the incorrect type of PWP, resulting in a poor fit between PWP form and function.

When PWP objectives include some form of sustained social protection, then adequate wage rates and/or a prolonged duration of new employment are required to promote accumulation. This is so since the poor use income to satisfy basic consumption needs first, then invest in human capital (education and health) as well as social capital, and invest in

activities to promote livelihoods only thereafter. Hence, a PWP is likely to impact on productive investment and an improvement in livelihoods which will be sustained after the period of programme implementation if it provides more than the income required to ensure that basic consumption needs are satisfied (Devereux, 2000). Even when wage income is markedly limited relative to household needs however, PWPs can still have a significant impact by providing a form of income insurance, although a programme can serve this function only if the public works employment is available on a sustained basis, thereby ensuring ongoing income flows through employment as required. Evidence from India indicates that this insurance function may be of greater significance than the value of the transfer in terms of sustained poverty reduction, since it reduces income fluctuation and thereby prevents acute distress to the poor (Dev 1995).

Three different sub-objectives relating to social protection provision can be identified in the literature and are set out below.

(i) Income relief through temporary employment

From a theoretical perspective, income relief through temporary employment is appropriate where the problem of poverty and/or unemployment is determined by some external shock, such as civil conflict, drought, floods, economic crisis or recession. It is essentially a short-term disruption to the labour market, countered as in the Indonesian PK programme for instance, which was deliberately implemented in response to the 1997/8 Asian financial crisis. Similar circumstances motivate many PWPs in other countries where an explicit poverty alleviation goal is linked to a short-term episode of employment provided in response to a temporary labour market crisis.

Provision of a single episode of short-term employment in the context of structural unemployment, when the labour market itself is not expected to provide additional large-scale employment in the short to medium term, is problematic but does occur frequently. Examples are found in South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania (see discussion in McCord (2007b) and PWPs launched in these circumstances are scarcely questioned in the international literature. A notable exception is Devereux & Solomon (2006) who mention this issue arising out of evidence from Zambia of the limited impact of short-term PWP employment on poverty alleviation. The lack of discussion of the limitations of such

programmes in these contexts is noteworthy, as also is the fact that implementation of such programmes occurs relatively frequently in low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa despite being an inappropriate instrument to counter structural unemployment when the need is for interventions that offer sustained benefits.

(ii) Income relief through ongoing or repeated employment

If a PWP approach to social protection is selected to counter structural or chronic unemployment, or is mounted in regularly repeated episodes of unemployment or labour market disruption of such a kind as experienced in many developing countries, then the appropriate form of intervention is the provision of some form of long-term employment through government employment programmes (GEPs) or EGSs, rather than the brief duration employment provided under PWPs. The inappropriateness of once-off short-term episodes of employment in this context is widely recognised in the literature. See for example, the World Bank's 2001 World Development Report (World Bank 2001), where it is explicitly argued that offering short-term PWP employment in the context of chronic unemployment is not likely to provide a sustained reduction in poverty. Rather than proposing some form of sustained PWP, such as GEP or EGS, the Bank argues that alternative forms of intervention offering long-term assistance, such as cash grants, may be more appropriate.

(iii) Improved livelihood as a result of accumulation during PWP participation

Many PWPs are premised on producing a sustained reduction of poverty by increasing the capacity of participants to earn an income after exiting the programme. This could be achieved by promoting (a) financial accumulation through wage payments; or (b) the accumulation of productive assets through savings or acquired access (this could be through the provision of productive assets as an output of the PWP itself); and (c) from the accumulation of human capital (via skills development and experience) during programme participation. If these forms of accumulation prove adequate to improve livelihoods, then these sub-objectives would be met.

While financial and physical asset accumulations are not conceptually problematic, the positive livelihoods value of improvements assumed for supply-side characteristics is not conceptually robust in all labour market contexts. This is so given that any intervention to

increase the ‘employability’ of participants is conditional on the availability of sufficient jobs (see for example Meth (2008)). This limitation is discussed below in relation to the skills development objective.

The Employment Objective

PWPs seek to address employment in four ways, three directly and one indirectly. These are (i) the provision of temporary jobs, (ii) reducing frictional unemployment through improving the quality of labour supply, in terms of higher levels of human capital, (iii) increasing aggregate demand by shifting the relative factor intensity of infrastructure provision towards labour intensification and the promotion of SMMEs, and (iv) increasing public sector employment. Each is briefly examined below.

(i) Provision of Temporary Jobs

As discussed above, the provision of temporary employment tends to characterise PWPs implemented during a period of temporary labour market disruption expected to normalise in the short to medium term. An example is the provision of a short episode of employment through the Indonesian PK programme which was a response to a particular and acute (short-term) labour market shock which created a short-term spike in unemployment (Vaidya & Abedin 2007).

(ii) Reducing Frictional Unemployment through Labour Supply Improvements

The temporary nature of the employment offered under many type A, C and D PWPs in situations of chronic rather than acute rises in unemployment may be justified in terms of the programme objectives of providing ‘spill-over benefits’ (work experience and training), rather than aiming to make a significant contribution to aggregate employment or poverty relief *per se*.¹⁸ Viewed in this way, in addition to the temporary cash wage which provides immediate assistance to participants, another purpose of the temporary jobs is explicitly to offer training and work experience to the unemployed in order to improve their labour market performance once they have exited the programme. This links to the skills development objective outlined below.

¹⁸ An example of a programme with such a stated objective is the South African EPWP.

In programmes intended to reduce frictional unemployment the objective is to improve the quality of labour supply, so that workers will be able to take up *unfilled jobs already existing in the economy*. This aim characterises PWP interventions which form one component of active labour market policies in OECD countries. Overall the objective of such policies is the reduction of unemployment which is primarily ‘frictional’ in kind, i.e. unemployment that results from a mismatch between the skills available in the labour force and those required by the economy, which in principle can be addressed by the provision of relevant skills and experience to improve the quality of labour supply (Martin & Grubb 2001).

However, this approach is based on the premise that there are sufficient existing work opportunities to absorb the unemployed if they are given training and work experience through PWP employment, or other forms of appropriate labour market assistance like remedial education. But this is not the case in many sub-Saharan African countries, where the number of unfilled job vacancies existing in the economy resulting from skills shortages is often marginal in relation to the scale of unemployment (see for example Kraak (2003)). The positive potential of a supply-side improvement intervention in PWPs offering short term employment is further constrained by the necessarily short duration of training, which limits adequate levels of skills transfers as does the sometimes poor quality of training provided (see Karuri *et al.* (2007)). Where workers do subsequently achieve employment as a result of the limited training received, this can result in the displacement of other low-skilled workers rather than leading to net increases in aggregate employment.

The effectiveness of this PWP approach even within OECD countries has been seriously challenged in recent years, so that its appropriateness outside the OECD in contexts where a great deal of unemployment is not frictional but structural is certainly questionable.

(iii) Increasing Aggregate Demand through Labour Intensification

Increasing aggregate demand for labour through labour intensification – raising labour input per unit of output - and therefore higher aggregate consumption or through increased government expenditure is a central presumption of many PWPs. These are founded on attempts to close an economy’s job gap through direct state intervention when market-based employment demand is inadequate, in all cases by providing more adequate livelihoods for a large segment of the population.

Attempts to increase labour demand through the labour intensification (LI) of production are widespread in practice. They are conducted primarily via the provision of physical infrastructure, as exemplified by the ILO Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) model and AGETIP in Senegal. Such programmes do not necessarily require additional budgetary allocations, since they entail only a shift in the factor intensity of existing expenditure to increase employment.

Despite the implementation of labour intensification programmes internationally, these have not yet become mainstream policies internationally, and they remain marginal components of infrastructure provision. In South Africa for example, although LI forms a major rhetorical component of the state's strategy to 'accelerate and share' growth (South Africa, The Presidency 2006), only a limited proportion of infrastructure projects suitable for labour intensification adopt LI approaches, and this is explicitly recognised as an area where the national PWP has failed to meet its objectives (South Africa, DoPW 2007). In South Africa, as elsewhere, this is largely due to lack of buy-in to LI approaches within the mainstream construction industry (Mabilo 2003; McDermott 2006). In general, the potential for expansion of aggregate employment in construction remains largely unrealised internationally.

In PWPs with this objective, the focus is on the macroeconomic impact, in terms of an aggregate expansion of the labour market, rather than the social protection impact on individuals. The latter outcome of such interventions is highly contingent on programme design features which determine the nature of the work provided (duration, wage level, etc.), and also on the socio-economic characteristics of those able to access the additional employment generated.

(iv) SMME Development in the Construction Sector

The objective of labour intensification is often associated with a broader attempt to change the structure of demand for labour in the construction sector, as in the case of the Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) in South Africa and the AGETIP in Senegal (Wade 2004). However, in order for such a transformation to be achieved, the development of a cadre of contractors familiar with LI approaches is required, along with the development of SMMEs with the capacity to implement a Labour-Based Infrastructure

Programme (LBIP) in the construction sector. Sometimes this features as an instrumental objective within PWPs.

What is entailed is investment in the promotion of construction and maintenance-oriented SMMEs expected to utilise more labour-intensive techniques of production than larger enterprises (CIDB 2008). SMME creation was a major component of the AGETIP programme in Senegal, which recognised that the creation of a cadre of SMMEs was both an end in itself as well as a necessary prerequisite if a large-scale shift to LI was to take place (McCord 2007b). Interestingly however, there is no evidence for the robustness of this assumption, and the impact of promoting SMME engagement in PWP may be one of worker substitution within the labour force (which may or may not itself be a deliberate policy objective) rather than the creation of new jobs. This is so particularly in situations where labour intensity is already high and existing personnel are made redundant in favour of PWP workers employed by SMMEs (McCord 2004, 2006 show this in the Gundo Lashu Programme in Limpopo Province and the Western Cape EPWP).

(v) Government Employment Programmes

Increasing aggregate employment through increased government expenditure is one of the most conventional forms of employment creation. It has been adopted in a wide range of contexts, the most well known historical example being the New Deal programmes in the USA in the 1930s.. These were mirrored by the employment programmes for ‘poor whites’ in South Africa during the same period (Abedian & Standish 1986). More recent examples include the massive MEGS and NREGP in India, and the Argentinian Jefes programme (Harvey 2007b). In these initiatives, employment may be directly provided by the government or through the private or NGO sectors based on an expansion of government funding to increase employment in labour-intensive activities.

PWPs with this objective are dependent on significant additional public expenditure, which may be funded either through deficit funding, as in the New Deal, or additional off-budget donor funds to pay for the creation of additional jobs, as in the case of the PSNP. Without a significant fiscal allocation, the aggregate increase in employment from a GEP is likely to be marginal, as illustrated by the EPWP in South Africa implemented without an additional budgetary allocations. Its impact on aggregate employment is extremely limited, providing

only 80,000 person years of work per annum (South Africa Department of Public Works 2007) when unemployment levels are four to eight million.

The adoption of a government employment programme (GEP) to meet the objective of increasing aggregate employment is ideologically in tension with the public sector restructuring and downsizing carried out by many MIC and LIC in recent decades. This renders the implementation of such an approach problematic in many contexts, particularly where governments are concerned to avoid being identified as populist in their policy stances.

Skills Development Objective

The objective of providing skills training and additional work experience to increase the capacity of participants to earn an income after exiting from a PWP is instrumental in terms of the reduction of frictional unemployment. This policy seeks to provide skills training and work experience through PWP employment, in order to increase the capacity of the unemployed to earn an income after participating in the programme. This human capital approach is central to many OECD PWP, and has been highly influential not only in the active labour market policy discussions in recent decades in developed countries, but also to a lesser degree in middle and low income countries. This strategy has been found to have only a limited impact, and to improve the subsequent labour market performance of participants only if the training provided is closely aligned to the specific skills gaps if identified accurately in the wider economy (Martin & Grubb 2001). Based on their review of international experience, Martin and Grubb argue that where training is included in programmes it should be kept small in scale, and ‘well targeted to the specific needs of both job seekers and local employers’ (*ibid*:33). The South African EPWP is one instance of a programme which does not conform with these guidelines, because the training offered is not closely aligned with the skills shortages identified in South Africa which are primarily for semi-skilled, artisanal and skilled workers. This shortcoming is a consequence of the limited training contact time possible during the brief period of EPWP employment.¹⁹ This

¹⁹ This is explicitly acknowledged in the Infrastructure Sector Plan for the EPWP, 2005, which states ‘the nature of the labour-intensive construction industry is such that [...] employment opportunities for labourers typically last only four to six months. [...], this entitles labourers to only eight to 12 days of paid training. This is not sufficient for training unskilled labourers to become artisans’ (EPWP, 2005).

limitation remains significant since it has been recognised officially in the South African policy arena that PWP employment without skills development will not have a sustained beneficial impact. One example is the EPWP documentation citing the proceedings of the 2004 Growth and Development Summit:

‘...job creation without skills development, upgrading and training, does not lend itself to sustainable employment and will have no long-term economic impact on the lives of the unemployed...’ (EPWP 2004)

This insight from the EPWP provides a general critique of the limited potential for training offered by short term PWPs. By contrast, within the Ethiopian PSNP and the MASAF Improving Livelihoods through Public Works (ILTPWP) programmes, this problem is addressed through putting in place complementary training programmes such as agricultural livelihood-promotion activities and small business training. These are external to the PWP itself and so are not constrained by the operational rigidities of the PWP in its duration, management, or content (McCord 2007).

These programmes aim to promote livelihoods through self-employment, although often at a survivalist level, rather than formal employment in order to facilitate ‘graduation’ from PWP dependence after a limited period of PWP support. The idea of ‘graduation’ upon exit from type A PWPs is prevalent in the programme design documentation, and is central to the conceptualisation of the EPWP in South Africa, the Malawi MASAF PWPs, and the Ethiopian PSNP. However, there is no empirical evidence of success in the literature to support this aspiration, and the limited evidence available suggests that most PWP participants return to the employment and poverty *status quo ante* once they exit PWP employment (Sultan & Slater 2005; Ndoto & Macun 2005).

It is interesting to note from the international literature that skills development is not typically a component of the programmes offering employment guarantees in the context of chronic unemployment. The NREGP does not include a skills development component but focuses on the ongoing provision of PWP employment in order to guarantee an income. Community development, skills training and livelihood-related interventions are carried out in association with the PWP, in the form of parallel programmes instituted at the same time, but not in the expectation that participation in these activities will reduce future vulnerability to the extent that the need for ongoing PWP support will be obviated.

In contrast, the Jefes and New Deal programmes both contain training and retraining components, but there were critical implementation differences. For instance, contact time with participants was not limited to an average of four to six months (entailing a total of eight to 12 days' training contact time under the EPWP). Further, training was linked to skills demanded in the wide range of different jobs included within the PWP programmes, which were far more diverse in kind than in the EPWP-based employment. The capacity of both Jefes and New Deal to train and absorb reskilled workers was significantly higher than is the case within the EPWP, given the significant capacity constraints facing EPWP programme designers and managers, which inhibit the potential for the EPWP to employ a wider range of EPWP-trained workers. Also, it is interesting to note that the training within Jefes was intended to promote the ability of participants to engage in the open labour market once the economic recession lifted (Harvey 2007b). This prospect of imminent economic recovery from recession is not relevant in many contexts where the labour market problem is structural rather than cyclical, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Physical and Social Infrastructure Provision Objective

There are two main forms of infrastructure which may be provided through PWP: physical infrastructure, the conventional approach, and social infrastructure. Each is discussed in turn below.

(i) Improved Provision of Basic Physical Infrastructure

In much of the literature the service provision function of PWPs is their unique selling point, rendering them preferable to alternative forms of social protection. This is clearly articulated in relation to physical asset provision by the ILO:

Employment-intensive investment approaches present an opportunity through which the two challenges [employment and infrastructure] can be addressed simultaneously (Amri-Makhetha 2007).

In accordance with this vision, infrastructure provision (primarily road construction) is the primary objective in PWPs supported by the ILO's Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) (ILO 2004), and pursuing their stated objectives in labour-intensive ways is recommended in order to increase aggregate employment. Similarly, in Rwanda PWPs have been identified as means to promote the provision of productive assets (Mellor 2003), a

policy orientation present also in countries recovering from conflict and requiring infrastructure reconstruction, such as Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan (see, for example, Bonin & Rinne (2006)).

However, on the spectrum of national examples PWP's differ significantly in the relative emphasis given to the objective of infrastructure provision, even in instances when asset creation is nominally a key objective. In such programmes the construction of physical assets is merely a way to satisfy the 'work' conditionality required for receipt of a transfer rather than the core rationale for the programme, against which it is evaluated. In some cases, such as the PSNP in Ethiopia, the PK in Indonesia, and the Jefes programme in Argentina, the primary motivation for the PWP is the delivery of the wage to participants in order to alleviate poverty. Asset construction activity exists primarily to satisfy the work requirement which is essentially a targeting mechanism, on the basis of the principle of less eligibility (as discussed above).

In the Indian, Ethiopian and Argentinian programmes, when it has not been possible to provide sufficient work projects to absorb all those seeking work within an accepted time, the work condition has been waived, and the cash transfer provided without any work being performed²⁰. In these cases it is evident that the asset creation objective is wholly subsidiary to the social protection imperative. Thus it is not a requisite component of the programme, with the result that it can be dropped if necessary for the successful pursuit of the primary social protection objective. This situation differs significantly from that which would obtain in a type D programme, where asset creation is the primary purpose of PWP implementation.

(ii) Improve Social Infrastructure through Service Delivery

While the dominant form of employment in PWP's is the construction of physical infrastructure like roads and dams, historically a wide range of activities have been included under the PWP banner, including social service provision. In the New Deal programmes, PWP employment extended to teaching, adult literacy, nursery care, social care, the implementation of national statistical surveys and culture and performance art, as well as the

²⁰ In such instances where the programme is delinked from service delivery, the programme becomes difficult to distinguish in conception and practice from a cash transfer programme.

production of consumer goods for direct distribution to recipients of public assistance (Harvey, 2007). In Ireland, the Community Employment Programme (CEP) provided complementary social services, while the Jefes programme included funding for microeconomic activities in agriculture and home production, as well as social care for children and the elderly. The lower material input cost of social rather than physical service delivery has the potential to significantly reduce PWP implementation costs, and also increase the range of activities absorbing labour to enable an expansion of the scale of potential programme employment. In recent years programmes have been developed in sub-Saharan Africa which simultaneously provide employment for the poor, while also expanding social service provision in addressing the burden of unpaid care which falls largely on women and is increasing due to the impacts of HIV/AIDS. The key challenges relating particularly to the social service delivery component of PWPs are: (i) the issue of quality control, (ii) the sustainability of service provision offered through non-permanent programmes, and (iii) confusion regarding statutory responsibility for service delivery by different branches of government.

The use of PWPs to create social as well as physical assets is one of the most innovative aspects of PWP programming to have developed in recent years. This policy emphasis has developed largely in response to the needs of households affected by HIV/AIDS. It emerged spontaneously in southern Africa in recognition of the need to support social infrastructure in the context of high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates and the growing pressure placed on households and existing service providers. PWP provision of social services is concentrated on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Home Based Care (HBC), also called Home Community Based Care (HCBC) in South Africa.

Within the region it is primarily Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and national branches of the Red Cross that have developed social service-based employment programmes. As said already, this was a response to the growth of the HIV pandemic starting from the objective of increased service provision rather than employment creation (McCord 2005a). In South Africa, this innovation has been incorporated into the EPWP with the dual objective of offering employment while also improving service delivery. It is particularly attractive as a PWP employment option, since it

offers an opportunity to provide sustained part-time employment while meeting a recognised social need. Further, such programmes have the potential to absorb large numbers of workers through increased funding to the NGO or CBO sectors, and with the likely roll-out of VCT and ARVs throughout the region the respective needs for para-medical and social support are likely to increase further.

The Zimbabwe Red Cross Home Based Care (HBC) programme, operational since 1992, illustrates the potential for the objectives of PWP employment and service provision to be addressed jointly. The HBC programme is one component of an integrated range of initiatives offered by the Red Cross for those affected by HIV/AIDS. It includes food distribution and agricultural development, employs over 2000 HBC facilitators, and supports an estimated 40,000 people directly and indirectly (*ibid.*). In South Africa, when the need for an extension of social service provision is recognised it has led to the inclusion of social service provision in the national Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), with the stated objective of extending the outreach of social service provision. Social sector employment in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Home Community Based Care (HCBC) comprises 13% of total planned PWP employment (McCord 2005b), and the subsequent employment of EPWP 'graduates' of HCBC and ECCD is contingent on ongoing and expanding state funding of NGO activity in the social sector.

While social service provision through PWP has focused on HBC and ECD, opportunities have been identified to expand PWP employment into a wide range of social sector interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently unmet demand for services is inhibiting access to services such as support of ARV roll-out, Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) service provision, tuberculosis (TB) sputum sample collection²¹ and delivery, birth registration, and a range of social grant registration and application services. This shift into social rather than physical infrastructure represents a significant opportunity for the expansion of socially constructive employment in PWP programmes in countries where service provision for the poor is otherwise constrained. This is particularly so at a time when demand for services is increasing as a consequence of rising HIV/AIDS infections. If

²¹ Ginsburg, adviser to the KwaZulu Natal Department of Transport and Public Works, provided information on implementing the Zibambele PWP, 2005, pers. comm.

adequately funded, PWP employment in this sector also has the potential to offer the extended periods of employment required in a GEP or EGS, in contrast to the short-term nature of employment inherent in physical infrastructure provision.

Macroeconomic Stimulation Objective

Historically, PWPs have sometimes been adopted in pursuit of macroeconomic objectives, predicated on the injection of sufficient additional expenditure into the economy through payment of the PWP wage to stimulate demand on a regional or national level. Thereby it stimulates secondary employment effects and raises economic growth. To achieve this, the scale of the employment created must be large and the resulting infrastructure economically productive.

This objective, with its Keynesian undertones, is rarely stated explicitly in current PWP discussion, although it has been a major factor behind the adoption of PWP in the past, and has very recently returned to prominence as a response to the mass rise in US unemployment resulting from the 2008 economic crisis²². As mentioned earlier, the most notable examples were the New Deal programmes implemented in the USA during the depression of the 1930s. At that time such policies entailed massive budgetary expenditure on direct government employment, and the decision to adopt such a massive and fiscally risky programme was contentious even at that time (Harvey 2007a). PWPs implemented under the US New Deal programme entailed a massive expansion of state expenditure by the federal government, consuming an average 4% of GDP annually in an attempt to stimulate the macro-economy while also providing sufficient employment to absorb a significant proportion of the unemployed and ensure that the basic needs of their families were met. Such employment was provided in special programmes operated both directly by the government and also through private contractors, together funded by massive expansion in infrastructure expenditure. At their height these programmes absorbed over 50% of the unemployed, made a significant impact by promoting counter-cyclical expenditure and therefore aggregate demand. Economic growth was stimulated directly while the deficit spending also created assets which themselves performed the function of enabling higher growth during the period of ongoing recession (*ibid*).

²² The US President elect has been reported as stating that ‘we will create millions of jobs by making the single largest new investment in our national infrastructure since the creation of the federal highway system in the 1950s’, *Obama Pledges Public Works on a Vast Scale*. New York Times, 6 December 2008.

The New Deal programmes illustrate that attempting to achieve macroeconomic stimulation through large-scale government employment creation is contingent on massive state resource allocations over time, as well as on the availability of human capital (administrative, managerial and technical) to manage implementation (*ibid*). It is relevant to note that the capacity to manage such a massive and complex programme effectively was in part due to the nature of the economic crisis resulting in unemployment across the skills spectrum. This rendered managerial, technical and administrative capacity readily available for deployment within the programme. Such a situation is rare in contemporary settings, especially in developing countries including South Africa, where a shortage of the skills required for effective programme implementation represents a major constraint to effective programme execution.

Political Stabilisation Objective

A review of the implementation timeframes of PWP launched in different countries in recent decades suggests that the final PWP objective may be an essentially political one; that is, a visible government response to an unemployment or poverty crisis with the aim of promoting political stabilisation and electoral support. Political change or instability is a common contextual feature at the initiation of many PWPs. During such unstable periods it is politically important for the state to be seen to be addressing unemployment in order to secure electoral support, and PWPs offer the potential for high visibility intervention. The AGETIP, NREGP, EPWP and PK all fall into this category, being implemented immediately prior to key political moments such as elections or periods of threat to the existing regime (McCord 2007). Although PWPs may be implemented to promote political stabilisation, this objective is more frequently implicit than explicit. Somewhat unusually though, this consideration was mentioned explicitly in a review of the AGETIP by its designer, who candidly stated that one of the success indicators applicable to the programme was its high 'cost/visibility ratio' (Wade 2004). Similarly, one particularly high-profile PWP in South Africa offering the best penetration into the rural poor, the largest scale of operation and the greatest impact was implemented in one of only two provinces where the ruling

party did not have a secure electoral majority²³. In such contexts PWP visibility may be more important than the actual content or coverage of the programme. This is true for AGETIP which attained only minimal coverage (less than 0.5% of the labour force), and yet is widely considered to be a PWP success story emulated throughout the West Africa region (McCord,2007b). This may also be true of the national EPWP in South Africa, which is presented in the popular discourse as a significant intervention to address the problem of the working age poor, despite its extremely limited coverage and impact; the presentation of a programme as credible and successful may be of greater political importance than its actual performance, at least in the short term.

Discussion of Objectives

As illustrated above, the PWP concept incorporates a range of potential objectives. These may be implicit or explicit and vary in their priority ranking. Programmes sometimes adopt a multiplicity of objectives. Such diversity may not necessarily be consistent with the type of PWP selected and may even be mutually contradictory in the programme design requirements. An example is the tension between the provision of quality assets and the urgency of providing immediate wage transfers, as in the PSNP, and thereby create trade-offs or conflicts within a programme.

It is suggested in the literature that the existence of multiple objectives in any programme reduces the likelihood of programme success. In part this is due to the increased managerial, administrative and coordination burden these objectives imply and in part due to the potentially conflicting priorities implied by diverse objectives (Curtain 1999). A similar problem was identified in the case of the South African EPWP, where it was argued that the coexistence of multiple objectives resulted in confusion reigning among implementers and beneficiaries regarding the nature of the programme, with negative consequences for both performance and accountability (Karuri *et al.* 2007).

The New Deal programmes were able to accommodate a diversity of mandates due to the adoption of a flexible institutional structure in which individual programmes were

²³ The Zimbabwe programme, uniquely successful among PWPs in South Africa, is examined in detail in chapters eight to ten of McCord (2008). It was implemented by the ruling ANC (African National Congress) in KwaZulu-Natal province, one of only two provinces where the ANC had a real political competitor in the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party) and where the provincial elections are highly contested.

implemented by different agencies with clear and discrete mandates and having the authority to elicit cooperation from a variety of other government agencies (Harvey 2007a). Such management flexibility is rare in current PWP. Where there is an attempt to address multiple objectives within one programme, as in the case of the South African EPWP²⁴, there is a risk that the state department leading the programme may lack the authority and the skills to coordinate across diverse ministries. This issue is particularly problematic if the lead department is one primarily charged with physical infrastructure provision, or is an external body, such as a Project Management Unit (PMU), with limited links to local or national government departments.

Conclusion

A critical weakness in the social protection policy discourse at the present time is the failure to recognise that PWPs are a highly heterogeneous form of intervention. In the absence of an analytical framework providing a PWP typology or schema of programme objectives openly recognising their heterogeneity, PWPs are poorly conceptualised. The presumption that a single type of PWP (the PWP ‘archetype’ offering short term PWP employment) can be implemented effectively in a variety of settings without recognising that a particular type of PWP can achieve only a limited set of objectives and can function effectively only in a particular labour market context, is pervasive in the literature as well as in programme design. This problem is one consequence of the conceptualisation of a PWP as a monolithic rather than highly differentiated set of linked but functionally discrete interventions. What results is the tendency to adopt the generic term PWP without further definition or discussion, and to assume that whatever form of PWP is selected a range of policy problems can be addressed, irrespective of the type of programme in question or the nature of the underlying labour market problem. In this way, the relationship between PWP form and function remains fuzzy in both academic and political discussion.

This conceptual weakness has additional programme design and analytical consequences. Failure to set programme objectives with adequate rigour can lead to tensions and contradictions between objectives and negatively effect programme outcome (Curtain 1999),

²⁴ With reference to the objectives of the South African CBPWP, the predecessor of the EPWP, it was stated that ‘Relief and development, income generation and empowerment, jobs today and training for future jobs ... is... without a precedent elsewhere in the world.’ (Adato et al, 1999: xiii).

while any assessment of programme performance is fundamentally influenced by the objectives against which a programme is evaluated. Neither the lack of analytical rigour in specifying PWP form and objectives, nor the programme design and its wider analytical consequences are recognised in the existing literature.

This Working Paper has addressed this critical weakness by providing a PWP typology and a schema of objectives in order to provide a framework for discussion. This will enable more rigorous use of the term PWP in policy analysis, as well as more explicit statements on PWP objectives with the aim of stimulating critical thinking on the concept of PWPs *per se*.

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The Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit

The Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) conducts research directed at improving the well-being of South Africa's poor. It was established in 1975. Over the next two decades the unit's research played a central role in documenting the human costs of apartheid. Key projects from this period included the Farm Labour Conference (1976), the Economics of Health Care Conference (1978), and the Second Carnegie Enquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa (1983-86). At the urging of the African National Congress, from 1992-1994 SALDRU and the World Bank coordinated the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD). This project provide baseline data for the implementation of post-apartheid socio-economic policies through South Africa's first non-racial national sample survey.

In the post-apartheid period, SALDRU has continued to gather data and conduct research directed at informing and assessing anti-poverty policy. In line with its historical contribution, SALDRU's researchers continue to conduct research detailing changing patterns of well-being in South Africa and assessing the impact of government policy on the poor. Current research work falls into the following research themes: post-apartheid poverty; employment and migration dynamics; family support structures in an era of rapid social change; public works and public infrastructure programmes, financial strategies of the poor; common property resources and the poor. Key survey projects include the Langeberg Integrated Family Survey (1999), the Khayelitsha/Mitchell's Plain Survey (2000), the ongoing Cape Area Panel Study (2001-) and the Financial Diaries Project.

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