

**An evaluation of the theory behind the South African Expanded Public Works  
Programme**

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## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis evalueer die teorie agter die Suid-Afrikaanse Uitgebreide Openbare Werke Program (UPWP) tydens die eerste fase van 2004-2009. Die navorsing ondersoek hoe grondig die teorie die logika tussen program doelwitte en program-aktiwiteite en hulpbronne verduidelik. Die data vir hierdie studie bestaan uit departementele dokumente oor die konteks van die UPWP en die beleid wat die program ingelig het.

Evaluering van die UPWP-teorie het aan die lig gebring dat die program gebaseer is op 'n grondige teorie, met die fokus uitsluitlik op geprojekteerde doelwitte, aktiwiteite en hulpbronne. Die evaluering van die UPWP-teorie het ook die gebrek met betrekking tot die bereik van groter beleidsdoelwitte aan die lig gebring. Die teorie konstruksie-en evalueringsraamwerk deur Rossi, Freeman en Lipsey (2004) is 'n evaluering instrument wat gebruik was om die UPWP te evalueer. Meer teoreties-gebaseerde evaluering sal waarde toevoeg tot die gebrek van teorie-gebaseerde program evaluering in Suid Afrika.

Ter opsomming, werkloosheid is n strukturele probleem in Suid Afrika en vereis langtermyn oplossings. Die beleide en die beleid programme moet dus ontwerp word met permanente indiensneming geleenthede in gedagte. Indiensneming deur een van die grootste programme in Suid-Afrika, die UPWP bied egter kort termyn indiensneming. Dit word dus aanbeveel dat die teorie-gebaseerde benadering van progamevaluering in meer studies gebruik word voor die implementering van 'n program, want as die logika agter 'n program grondig is, is die kanse van sukses verhoog.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

South Africa is a middle income country with a labour market characterised by high unemployment and few job opportunities. In 1999, unemployment and poverty was listed as the most threatening aspects to South Africa's five year democracy as 40% of the working age population were unemployed (Woolard and Woolard, 2006:1). In 2001, unemployment varied from 0, for skilled workers, and up to 50% for unskilled or low skilled workers (Woolard and Woolard, 2006:1). In terms of the strict definition of unemployment<sup>1</sup>, 4.6 million people were unemployed and 8.3 million in terms of the broad definition (Phillips, 2004).

These problems of poverty and unemployment experienced by the majority of the population are commonly attributed to the legacy of apartheid (Deegan, 2001: 115; ANC, 1994: 2). The fifty years of economic policy favouring a white minority had a part to play in the conditions South Africans endured after democratisation. When looking at the education system, the disadvantage is still located within former African schools and white workers are generally much more educated (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2004: 17). However, after more than a decade of democratic rule, the official unemployment rate was at 26%, which was more or less the same as in 1994 (Arora & Ricci, 2005).

Different policies and programmes have been developed to address the problems of poverty and unemployment in South Africa. These policies and programmes are reflective of the needs the country reflected at that time. For instance, the development of the Reconstruction and Development programme (RDP) in 1994 was focussed on eradicating the last remnants of apartheid and building a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society (ANC, 1994: 1). The RDP was short lived and in 1996 the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy was introduced (Deegan, 2001: 119). With GEAR the focus was economic growth and

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<sup>1</sup> "The requirement of a strict definition is that an individual must have taken steps to find employment for four weeks prior to a given point." (du Toit, 2003: 6)





young in South Africa and there is a lack of theory based programme evaluations. This section will be followed by the purpose of this study which is to apply a theory based approach to evaluate the EPWP. A chapter outline will then be given from chapters' two to six in order to provide an outline of the rest of the thesis. Finally, this introductory chapter will be concluded with a summary of the chapter.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The field of programme evaluations is still fairly young in South Africa (Louw, 1998, Potter, 1999, Potter and Kruger, 2001 *in* Abrahams, 2004: 2). The development of programme evaluation followed a different course from that in the USA and the UK (Mouton, 2010: 181). Programme evaluation in these first world countries originated within government and formed a top down approach. Programme evaluation in South Africa grew as a result of donor funding and came from the bottom up (Mouton, 2010: 181).

Prior to 1994 donor funding came with few if any strings attached. The only conditions were a report or financial audit occasionally (Mbuli, 2008: 143). However, post-1994, donors in support of the new democratic government increased and funds were now channelled through government. The increase in donor support was accompanied by stricter regulations for accountability mechanisms which included monitoring and evaluation (Mbuli, 2008: 143). Programme evaluation was only institutionalised when the public sector adopted it ten years later in 2004.

Programme evaluation has become a professionalised field in South Africa. However, the application of programme theory evaluation is still neglected (Louw, 1998: 264; Mouton, 2010: 125). The programme evaluations commonly conducted in South Africa focus on the summative purpose of evaluation. Programme evaluations are thus conducted to assess how good the programme was after it has been implemented and if it can be improved. The theory based approach studies the assumptions that informed the programme and evaluates these in the context of the environment, conditions and target group it will be directed at.



The EPWP mentioned in the introduction of this chapter is the case study to be used in this research. Following the trend of programme evaluation research in South Africa, this programme has only been evaluated by looking at summative value and the interest of the stakeholders or clients. A theory based approach has not been applied to evaluate the EPWP. The research will therefore address the following question: *How sound was the theory behind the South African Expanded Public Works Programme?*

The thesis aimed to do a theory based evaluation of the EPWP evaluations are normally conducted at the end of the life of the programme by weighing up the results against the objectives set initially. This type of evaluation is therefore focussed on the outcome of the programme, but in this study the thought process behind the mechanisms of how the programme will work will be evaluated. Louw (1998: 264) states that it is important to study ‘why a programme should work and the causal process which mediates the relationship between input and output’.

This thesis reiterates the notion by Pawson (2003: 471) that social programmes are underlined by theories. I use this as the basis to apply an alternative approach of evaluating the EPWP. This approach proposed to study the assumptions behind the decision making of programme inputs, activities, target group and other factors. The evaluation of the programme will thus be focussed on how sound the thinking behind the construction of the programme was. In order to review the different views that formed the theory, one needs to focus on the problem that the theory addresses.

This is an interpretive study, because it looks at the theory underlying the programme in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. The approach of evaluation will therefore be done by using an approach from Rossi *et. al.* (2004). The EPWP theory will be evaluated by the application of Rossi’s evaluation questions. This framework forms an integral part of the thesis, because it is the tool that was used to evaluate the theory underlying the EPWP.

The reasoning behind the choice of this approach is the fact that construction of the theory underlying the programme reveals expectations and perceptions regarding the programme that mainstream evaluations might not. For example, mainstream evaluations would not pay attention to the notion that the programme was expected to address gender inequality in the work place by making women part of the main target population. For mainstream evaluation the focus would be on the results the programme has delivered in terms of the amount of persons employed. Applying a theory based approach to evaluation facilitates learning prior to a programme being set in motion. In addition, the study could add value to the gap of theory based evaluation in South Africa.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

In the aim of conducting a successful theory based evaluation of the EWP, there are certain research objectives that need to be reached. These objectives will address the problem statement discussed above and address the research question accordingly.

The first objective of the study was to construct the EPWP theory. This is the foundation on which the evaluation was based. The construction of the theory needed to be a rich source of information that the evaluation questions can be answered with. Constructing the theory required detailed description of the intended programme in order to identify the thoughts and plans on how the programme would reach its goals. All these details had to be compiled into a diagrammatical format to illustrate the theory from first interaction to intended outcome.

The second objective was to evaluate the EPWP theory through evaluation questions specifically formulated to evaluate programme theory. The evaluation of the theory aimed to establish how sound the EPWP was in theory to address unemployment in South Africa.

The third and final objective of the study was to draw certain findings from the evaluation of the theory and in doing so answering the research question. This objective was only attainable if the findings drawn from the evaluation questions were supported by enough information from the theory constructed in chapter four.

#### **1.4 Limitations and delimitations of the study**

The EPWP was launched in 2004 and the evaluation study was conducted in 2011. Abrahams (2003: 14) states that in programme evaluation there is always a concern with how evaluable the programme is. This is merely a concern if the programme has not been around long enough for it to achieve its set objectives. Fortunately with the theory based approach the study is focused on the pre-implementation phase. The focus of the study is on the thinking and planning that was invested into the formation of the EPWP. The time frame therefore does not play such an important role as it would in main stream programme evaluation focused on the achievement goals in relation to objectives of a programme.

Another limitation the study has incurred came about with the size of the programme. The EPW is a very extensive programme stretching over various sectors and implementation varies from municipality as well as which sector of the programme each project forms part of. The study was thus limited in the sense that the focus was too broad. If one particular leg of the programme to be implemented in a specific area was focused on, it could have made the study more detailed and the theory evaluation more focused.

#### **1.5 Research design and methodology**

A qualitative approach was used in this study as the focus was placed on the ideas and thoughts by various role players to construct the theory of the EPWP. The qualitative approach was more suitable to interpret these socially defined ideas and opinions (Firestone, 1987: 16).

The EPWP was evaluated as a single programme during a particular time frame using a specific source of data. A case study research design was therefore applied to best incorporate all these factors. The time frame focused on was the first phase of the programme from 2004 till 2009. The data collected was primarily programme and policy documents focused on the aspects of the

programme pre-implementation. It was found that studying programme documents and the policies that informed them was the best source of insight into the EPWP theory. It led to a broader understanding of the decisions made with regard to the focus of the EPWP on the infrastructure sector as well as the inclusion of all the other sectors of the EPWP.

The data collected for this study was analysed through thematic analysis. A six step thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied in order to extract the themes which were vital in constructing and evaluating the EPWP theory. Thematic analysis also assisted in answering the evaluation questions more accurately and extensively.

## **1.6 Chapter outline**

This thesis has six chapters. This introduction created the context in which the study is conducted by providing some facts on the South African employment market. In addition, it described the problem of the lack in theory based evaluation research of programmes addressing South Africa's chronic unemployment. This led into a short discussion of the purpose of the study which is to conduct a theory based evaluation of one of the largest employment programmes in South Africa, the EPWP. The last section of this introductory chapter provides an outline of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter two comprises a review of the literature on previous evaluation studies of the EPWP. The discussions in this chapter include the approaches taken to evaluate the EPWP debates in the subfield of programme evaluation and the alternative method of evaluation applied in this study. The literature on the EPWP is grouped by similar findings. The approaches to evaluation research include the main debates in the field between those in support of quantitative and qualitative methods respectively, empowerment and utilization focussed evaluation and experimental and theory driven evaluations respectively. The alternative approach to construct and evaluate the programme theory applied an approach by Rossi, Freeman and Lipsey (2004).

Chapter three describes the research methods applied in this study. It states that the study applied a qualitative approach. A case study research design was applied and data collection was done through a literature study of programme, policy and government documents. The data analysis is then discussed which was conducted by use of thematic techniques. The advantages and limitations of the document review and thematic analysis is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter four dealt with constructing the theory of the EPWP. This was done by applying a framework adapted from Rossi *et. al.* (2004). The components in the framework are useful to extract the theory and forms the platform for the next chapter in which the theory will be evaluated. The framework required the discussion of programme objectives, activities and how these two logically link to produce the desired outcome of the programme.

Chapter five presented the evaluation of the theory by applying the principles derived from the framework by Rossi *et. al.* (2004). The principles were presented as questions and will form the themes of this chapter (Rossi *et. al.*, 2004). This evaluation concluded in providing certain findings regarding the logic that lies behind the construction, initiation and implementation of the programme to address unemployment, service delivery and sustainable development in South Africa.

The final chapter provides a summary of the problem that the research aimed to address, the research question that informed the study and the major findings the study has produced. The final section of the conclusion offers some recommendations for further study.

## **Chapter 2: Theory based programme evaluation as an alternative approach to evaluating the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)**

### **2.1 Introduction**

“Programme Theory Evaluation (PTE) consists of an explicit theory or model of how the program causes the intended or observed outcomes and an evaluation that is at least partly guided by this model” (Rodgers, 1983: 5). The focus is thus on the ideas regarding programme process that should lead to a desired outcome. The central aim of this chapter is to make the case for applying the theory based approach to evaluate the EPWP. This is done by discussing previous literature of evaluations of the EPWP, debates within the broader field of programme evaluation and the theory based approach applied to evaluate the EPWP.

Research on the evaluation of the EPWP is reviewed through the course of this chapter. The approaches to evaluation predominantly adhere to principles of mainstream approaches such as outcome and impact evaluations. They have followed the common approach to evaluation which is to make conclusions based on comparing outcomes to inputs.

The approach applied in this study will then be presented as an alternative method of evaluating the EPWP. The approach entailed constructing the theory underlying the programme and evaluating the theory. Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (2004) identified programme theory based evaluation as one of the twelve emerging trends that will have the biggest influence in shaping the future of evaluation research. It has been viewed as a compass for decision making with regard to programme function, objectives and impact (Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick, 2004).

The first discussion in this chapter covers previous evaluation studies of the EPWP. This discussion was categorized according to similarities of the findings these studies produced. These findings included the insignificant impact the EPWP made on unemployment and poverty. Other studies found that improvement was made in some cases of the EPWP. There were also studies based upon the perception of the EPWP. The last category in this section discussed the disconnect that was found between the design and implementation of the EPWP.

The next section in this chapter brings the discussion closer to programme theory based evaluation by discussing the debates in the field of programme evaluation. These debates include the quantitative versus qualitative debate, the utilization versus empowerment focused debate and finally the experimental versus theory based programme evaluation debate. The last debate introduces the final section of this chapter which focused on the theory based approach to evaluating the EPWP in this study. The framework from Rossi, Freeman and Lipsey (2004) was applied to construct and evaluate the theory behind the EPWP. The components for the construction are discussed as well as the evaluation principles to evaluate the logic underlying the theory.

## **2.2 Evaluation research on the South African EPWP**

Most of the EPWP evaluation studies used a qualitative approach (Altman *et. al.*, 2009; September, 2007; Kobokane, 2007; Phillips, 2004; McCord, 2005; McCord, 2007; HSRC, 2007). One quantitative study was reviewed, but this study also adhered to the elements of a mainstream approach when evaluating the impact that the EPWP had on job creation in the Zululand district (Khanyile, 2008).

These studies been grouped according to the similarity of findings. In the first category, the studies revealed that the EPWP has not had a significant impact on poverty and unemployment. However, a second set of findings showed that noticeable improvements have been made in certain areas of the programme in specific case studies.

There were also studies based on the perceptions of the EPWP. These studies projected that perceptions are not consistent (September, 2007; Kobokane, 2007; Social Surveys Africa, 2007). The last group of studies revealed a disconnect between the design and implementation of the EPWP.

### **2.2.1 The EPWP had an insignificant impact on unemployment**

As with poverty, unemployment is believed to be one of the greatest needs to be addressed in post-apartheid South Africa (Human Science Research Council, 2007). Researchers disagree with regard to the goals surrounding unemployment solutions and the EPWP. Some studies indicated that the EPWP is not the solution to the unemployment problem in South Africa (Phillips, 2004). Other documents express the notion that the EPWP is large enough to have a sustainable impact on unemployment (HSRC, 2007). These authors believed that the EPWP could potentially make a contribution to the employment market, but the amount of employment created is small in comparison to the scale of unemployment in the country (Phillips, 2004; McCord, 2004).

In relation to the problem of unemployment, McCord (2005: 580) found that many of the participants of the programme return to the unemployment pool after exiting. The proposed long term goal of sustainability of the programme is thus brought into question, because the provision of a temporary monetary wage only provides immediate relief to the dire circumstances of participants. The length of the training is approximately six months and this does not suffice as sustainable job creation, because the labour market is not expected to provide such large scale employment (McCord, 2007: 9).

The short term nature of the EPWP and other programmes like it is attributed to a society facing social and political crisis, because it provides temporary relief to the marginalised (Altman, 2004: 7). This could be problematic as it addresses unemployment and poverty which are structural problems, with short term programmes when long term solutions are required. The



Human Sciences Research Council (2007) thus pointed out the inadequate focus on the exit strategy of the programme. McCord (2007) confirms this notion and states that the exit strategy needs to be thought through with the capacity of the labour market in mind when constructing programme objectives.

### **2.2.2 Improvement in some sectors of the EPWP in certain areas**

Studies were conducted by focus on a particular sector within the EPWP. This selection of a certain element of a programme has been termed as interactive evaluation (Owen, 1999) and is normally directed at a specific social ill. The Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) conducted a study on the environmental and infrastructure sectors and found that in the case studies conducted in various areas, visible improvement was observed in both these sectors (CPSI, 2004). Roads were improved which meant access for emergency vehicles to rural areas. In addition an increase in job creation and overall living conditions were observed (CPSI, 2004).

Another study presented the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector as a vehicle to address poverty (September, 2007). The study found that the ECD sector plays a crucial role in poverty reduction and therefore needs a better coordinate systematic and organized place in the EPWP (September, 2007: 23). The study done by Kobokane (2007) was also focused on poverty reduction through the environmental sector of the EPWP. This study found that the EPWP was effective in involving the public in conservation while aiding them in meeting their basic needs. It was also found that the EPWP projects need to be more strategically planned. A problem addressed by the EPWP that is not always mentioned in studies is that of service delivery. A study conducted by the CPSI (2004) depicts the infrastructure and environmental sectors of the EPWP attending to this issue nationally. The study found that a higher standard in infrastructure and service delivery can be maintained through labour intensive practices as applied by the EPWP (CPSI, 2004).

### **2.2.3 Perceptions were different pre and post implementation of the EPWP**





















































































































































































