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BUSINESS TRUST

Number 4

Learning Series

Plumbers, Magicians and Partners Private Support for Public Works

**A Case Study of the Expanded Public Works
Support Programme (EPWSP)**

The Business Trust Learning Series was established to enable the Business Trust to reflect on the lessons learnt from its work. While its primary purpose is to enlighten the Business Trust, it is hoped that the lessons captured in the series will be useful to others.

The case studies, which are written by Business Trust management and others close to the Business Trust, do not replace the formal external evaluations conducted as part of the Business Trust's extensive evaluation programme.

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Plumbers, Magicians and Partners

Private Support for Public Works

A Case Study of the Expanded Public Works
Support Programme (EPWSP)

Acronyms

CBPWP	-	Community Based Public Works Programme
CIDP	-	Construction Industry Development Programme
DPLG	-	Department of Provincial and Local Government
DPW	-	Department of Public Works
EPWP	-	Expanded Public Works Programme
EPWSP	-	Expanded Public Works Support Programme
GDS	-	Growth and Development Summit
MIG	-	Municipal Infrastructure Grant
MIS	-	Management Information System
NPWP	-	National Public Works Programme
PIG	-	Provincial Infrastructure Grant

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Prologue

Thaba¹ is sitting in his office in West Rand District Municipality in Gauteng. He is a worried man. As a manager with twelve years' experience, primarily in water and sanitation, he has been given responsibility for enabling the implementation of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in a district municipality. The municipality is functioning well, but the challenges are vast. There are high levels of poverty and unemployment in the area, which creates real challenges for the staff in the municipality.

Some weeks before, Thaba was deployed into the EPWP Unit, which is a new entity set up to implement the EPWP in his district municipality. He is pleased with the deployment, because it acknowledges his contribution over the years and presents a career challenge that will do him good. In any case, he feels strongly about job creation. He worries about the fact that so many people in his community are struggling to find jobs. Many can't afford to pay for basic services. Even though there are job opportunities opening up with the roll-out of infrastructure to support improved service delivery, many people in this community lack the skills required by these work opportunities.

But Thaba's biggest worry is this: how will the unit go about identifying labour-intensive work opportunities? And how is he going to introduce new processes into the municipality? How will he persuade municipal managers responsible for the implementation of infrastructure and service delivery programmes that they can implement these in accordance with EPWP Guidelines? After all, local government officials are already under so much pressure ...

Thaba decides to talk to Zolile, a colleague working in the municipality's water and sanitation services section (the department from which Thaba has

¹ This prologue is based on interviews with a range of municipalities. Thaba is a fictitious character and the points raised about the municipality are generalisations based on the views that were expressed by a number of municipal officials in interviews that have taken place as part of the Singizi Evaluation of the Expanded Public Works Support Programme.

been drawn). Zolile has been with the municipality for the last five years and they often share ideas on how to deal with the challenges of getting the services delivered more smoothly.

“This EPWP initiative is a great idea,” says Thaba, “but I don’t even know where to start. You know, we don’t have a budget for this. We have to use the existing budget to increase the number of jobs. And besides, if we are to start introducing labour-intensive methods, that means changing the project designs and contracting process. How does one do this? And how am I going to get the different departments to buy into this new approach?”

“It is tricky, you know,” says Zolile. “We have to deliver on our priorities and that’s what we are measured against. So I agree it is important to create jobs, but we can’t do it if it is going to delay the roll-out of our plans! I mean, what would this mean for my performance assessment? The EPWP is not even one of my key performance indicators!”

“Wait a minute, there is another side to this,” says Thaba thoughtfully. “The EPWP says that we should provide training to people on the project so that they can then access other work once the programme is finished. Don’t you think that this will help you speed up your roll-out plans if there are more trained people available?”

“Well the thing is ...” Zolile pauses. “Most of our projects really only require a limited number of people with skills. For these jobs we need people who already have the skills. The rest of the work requires very limited skill. There was one time that we tried providing training to people working in our project, but eish ... we really struggled to access money for the training. And then we weren’t sure how the workers would use their skills once they completed the programme. So it’s not that simple!”

The two men go back to their offices. Zolile had given Thaba a lot to think about. He makes a list of the projects that are being implemented in the municipality and tries to imagine how an increased number of work opportunities could be created. How would he access a budget for this work? He realises he would need to find out a lot more before he could really support the municipality to implement the EPWP.

Introduction

It was March 2005. Just a year before, in February 2004, then President Thabo Mbeki had announced the launch of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) that would create one million short- to medium-term work opportunities over a five-year period (2004 to 2009).

That responsibility fell to the Department of Public Works, but Cabinet had decided that the EPWP would be implemented across all government departments, across all sectors, and using existing budgets. How could this be achieved?

The proposal to provide support to the Department of Public Works began as an idea, with the Business Trust playing midwife to its full conceptualisation. By March 2005 it had developed into an office, a few desks and three staff members. Since then it has grown into an Expanded Public Works Support Programme (the Support Programme) that has developed strategies, systems and tools, which are being applied in both direct and joint engagement processes with municipalities.

The proposal to provide support to the Department of Public Works began as an idea, with the Business Trust playing midwife to its full conceptualisation.

The Support Programme enabled the EPWP Unit to expand its capacity, both internally (e.g. through increasing the resources allocated to the EPWP branch of the Public Works Department) and externally. This was possible through the adoption of a range of approaches:

- **Learning by doing:** The Support Programme demonstrated how the deployment of support to municipalities could produce the conditions necessary to create job opportunities. In so doing it showed what could be achieved under a range of circumstances and learnt what worked best in different municipalities. The impact of this is perhaps best expressed by Bongani Gxilishe, Deputy Director-General responsible for the EPWP, who observed that:

One of the things which sometimes amazes people, even in Public Works, is how we have been able to do so much with so few people. If you have a few dedicated people with the right mindset and right approach you can do a lot – you don't necessarily have to have lots of

money to make a difference – you can continue to provide strategic leadership and approach.

- This engagement has stimulated a **performance-driven** approach to programme management and the management of field staff. It monitors support staff in terms of the municipalities they are supporting and the numbers of work opportunities being generated. Bongani Gxilishe comments that:

We have managed to refocus our programme management support to municipalities; it is largely attributed to the Support Programme. Even in improving our capacity in the Unit.

- Further, the **target-setting** approach generated the capacity to determine how many work opportunities could be created and, even more importantly, to ascertain whether levels of labour-intensive work could be increased in projects. Where this was found to be the case, the technical support staff could engage with the relevant municipality to enable them to increase the numbers of work opportunities created.
- Perhaps one of the Support Programme's most significant achievements is that the relevant government department was **fully involved** and started exploring ways in which the programme could be expanded.

The approach adopted facilitated its evolution – from direct support in which an external agency worked in consultation with a government department and provided direct support to municipalities, to joint engagement in which the government provided direct support to the municipalities and an external support agency provided the government department with additional capacity.

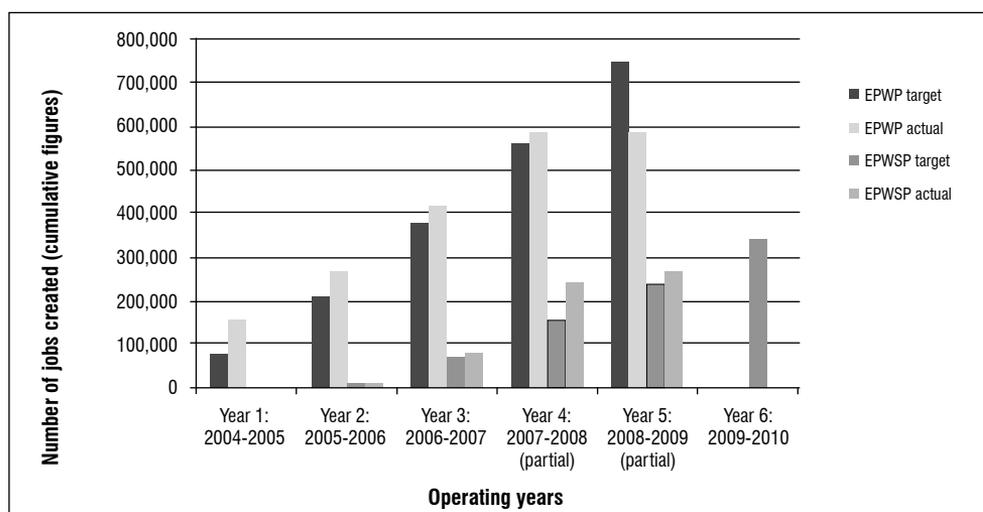
Now in the final stage of the five-year programme, the support model is evolving further and promises to enable government to assume full ownership of the support function and to sustain this in municipalities. Bongani Gxilishe believes that it has been possible to achieve coherence within the EPWP team and that the Support Programme has contributed to that. He argues that the model has real value and could be used in a number of contexts:

The model itself could be transferred into other departments in government. Even the location has not been hamstrung by bureaucracy

in the way other programmes in government have been. We have been able to bypass bureaucratic procedures in government.

What about the targets set for the creation of work opportunities by the Support Programme? The graph below shows that both the overall national programme and the Support Programme consistently met and exceeded their delivery targets.

GRAPH 1: Targets and actual work opportunities – EPWP and Support Programme (2004/05 to 2008/09)



Source: EPWP Quarterly Reports and Support Programme Quarterly Reports. Target for infrastructure sector provided by the EPWP Unit.

This case study tells the story of how the Support Programme worked with the Department of Public Works to create one million work opportunities in five years. It outlines how the Support Programme was established, the way in which it worked with the Unit in the implementation of a very ambitious Expanded Public Works Programme, and examines the critical lessons learnt about supporting the implementation of large-scale public programmes. In so doing, the case study reflects on the manner in which the Support Programme model was initially conceptualised and then explores the rationale for changes that were made to the way in which support was provided. These decisions provide an insight into the complexities that emerge in the context of an external agency providing support to a government department in the implementation of a national programme.

Background

In 1994, the year of South Africa's first democratic elections, the atmosphere was one of pride, expectation and confidence. Recognising the mood, the ANC clearly stated in its Election Manifesto² that,

The millions of people without jobs will be at the top of the ANC government's agenda. In establishing a dynamic and growing economy we will employ various means to create more jobs and opportunities ... An ANC Government will immediately start a national public works programme which will address community needs and create jobs. Through this programme alone we will aim to provide employment and training for about 2,5 million people over the next ten years, building roads and providing water, electricity, schools, clinics, housing and meeting other needs.

On this basis, the new government established the National Public Works Programme (NPWP) as a central component of the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The aim was to take concrete measures to provide rapid and visible relief for the poor, build the capacity of communities for development, and reorient mainstream public expenditure on infrastructure towards labour-intensive techniques³.

The aim was to take concrete measures to provide rapid and visible relief for the poor.

By 2002, however, the problem of unemployment had grown, rising from 20 to 28 per cent or from 31.5 to 42 per cent (depending on definitions of unemployment used). About 70 per cent of the unemployed had been out of work for a year or more or had never worked⁴. The ANC realised that the National Public Works Programme was not reaching the intended numbers. A review of the programme took place, and several proposals were developed.

² African National Congress (1994) *Election Manifesto of the African National Congress*.

³ It aimed to do this through the Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) and the Construction Industry Development Programme (CIDP).

⁴ Marifi (2002)

Finally, after much debate, it was decided to escalate the programme through the large-scale expansion of labour-intensive construction methods.

In June 2003 representatives from organised labour, business, government and communities met at the Growth and Development Summit (GDS) to consider the challenges facing South Africa. The GDS explored the theme of “More jobs, better jobs, decent work for all” and adopted the Expanded Public Works Programme as one of a number of interventions to reduce household poverty and vulnerability. The GDS agreement stated that by working with the relevant national, provincial and local government bodies:

... the EPWP can provide poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out socially useful activities. The EPWP will be designed to equip participants with a modicum of training and work experience, which should enhance their ability to earn a living in future ... it must be large enough to have a substantial impact on employment and social cohesion, especially for young people, women and the rural poor.

It was understood that the implementation of the EPWP could not solve the reality of unemployment in South Africa, but it could make a contribution to the alleviation of unemployment. This was a daunting challenge, and it was clear that the involvement of different partners would be crucial to the success of the programme. The GDS had therefore also agreed that business would play a role in support of the EPWP:

Business commits to mobilise and make available its skills and expertise, within a framework to be agreed after the GDS, with a view to enhancing the proper project design and management of these projects. Further, business will explore the potential synergies between corporate social investments and these initiatives, including support for skills transfer to local communities.⁵

⁵ GDS Agreement (2003)

The Business Trust, which had been established following the Job Summit in 1999, had built a reputation for helping business and government to work in partnership. So it was perhaps natural that in November 2003, during a meeting of the President's Big Business Working Group, then President Thabo Mbeki indicated that government would like to extend the life of the Business Trust as a partnership between business and government, and that the Business Trust should support the EPWP, among other activities⁶. According to Brian Whittaker, Chief Executive of the Business Trust, this was a challenge for the private sector:

The problem of unemployment had been on the Business Trust agenda since inception. But the private sector was skeptical about public works programmes. And it wasn't at all clear how a private sector perspective and partnership approach could be brought to expand public works.

Despite these private sector reservations, the Business Trust responded positively to the initiative, since job creation was so critical for the country.

In February 2004, with the social partners on board, the EPWP was officially announced in the President's State of the Nation Address.

In co-operation with the Department of Public Works, it established an Expanded Public Works Support Programme (the Support Programme) and allocated R100-million to it over a five-year period. In February 2004, with the social partners on board, the EPWP was officially announced in the President's State of the Nation Address, with the target set at the creation of one million short- to medium-term work opportunities over the initial five-year period (2004 to 2009).

⁶ Business Trust website, www.btrust.org.za

Starting out

The design of the Expanded Public Works Programme

The design, funding and implementation of the EPWP were shaped by three Cabinet decisions that sought to ensure that the programme would reach its target.

Firstly, Cabinet agreed that the Department of Public Works would drive the programme, but it would be implemented across all spheres of government (national, provincial and local) and through state-owned enterprises. Specific departments (sector lead departments)⁷ would take responsibility for implementing components of the programme.

Secondly, and this was a vital point, the public sector and the different public entities were to use their existing budgets and expenditure on goods and services to create additional work opportunities for the unemployed (usually unskilled people). For example, in the infrastructure sector R15-billion of the conditional infrastructure grants were earmarked for EPWP projects.

Thirdly, the EPWP would not be limited to the infrastructure sector only. Instead it was to be implemented in four sectors which had the

The flow of funds for the EPWP

Budget allocations are made from the national fiscus to provincial government departments via equitable shares which they apply in terms of their own discretion.

Municipalities generate their own revenue which they also apply at their own discretion. In addition, conditional grants are allocated for specific purposes. The Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) and the Provincial Infrastructure Grant (PIG) are conditional grants allocated by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) to support the delivery of infrastructure for improved services. The policy framework of these grants includes an emphasis on job creation. With the inception of the EPWP, additional requirements for labour-intensive approaches were included in the grant conditions. This ensured that the grant mechanisms supported the implementation of the EPWP.

⁷ The sector lead departments include the Department of Social Development in the social sector; the EPWP Unit and Department of Public Works in the infrastructure sector; the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in the environmental sector; and the Department of Trade and Industry in the economic sector.

Approach to labour-intensive public works strategies

Workers were to be employed on a temporary basis (either by government, by contractors, or by other non-governmental organisations), under employment conditions governed by the Code of Good Practice for Special Public Works Programmes, or by the Learnership Determination for Unemployed Learners. It was envisaged that the EPWP would provide a combination of work experience and training that would enable workers to access further income opportunities once they left the programme.

potential to create employment opportunities, in various forms. Thus:

- In the infrastructure sector the EPWP could create more work opportunities by increasing the labour intensity of construction and other projects. This would require substituting labour for machines in those components of the work where this is feasible. It was estimated that this would absorb approximately 15 per cent of provincial and municipal capital budgets.
- In the social sector it meant converting informal, voluntary services for people in need of care into more formal income-earning opportunities.
- In the economic sector this could be carried out by supporting enterprise development programmes that help entrepreneurs develop businesses for the provision of public services. This support was primarily to be offered through the New Venture Creation learnership which enables learners to acquire the skills and knowledge required to initiate and sustain a small business, while at the same time accessing work opportunities.

These decisions meant that the EPWP would cut across all three spheres of government (national, provincial and local), be implemented in four sectors, and be funded from existing budgets. Clearly the National Department of Public Works had its work cut out. It had been given the mandate to co-ordinate the EPWP and was expected to draw significant numbers of unemployed people into productive work in ways that would enable workers to gain skills and increase their capacity to earn an income after they had left the programme.

The National Department of Public Works created an EPWP Unit, initially staffed by two people, to manage and oversee the implementation of this mammoth task. The unit started its planning by seeking information from

provincial government departments, and calculated where jobs using labour-intensive methods could be created. Dr Sean Phillips, Head of the Unit at the time, describes the origins this way:

I worked in the Director General's office and we got as much information as we could. We formally wrote to the provinces on their projected spend on infrastructure and we divided it into types of infrastructure. We found out what the current jobs were and what would be the target if things were done more labour-intensively. We did estimates of the jobs that would result if there is no change and also an increase in labour-intensity. On the basis of the work undertaken, initial proposals for the development of the EPWP were formulated.

But how could the national department be sure that the required changes would be made at provincial and local government levels? Who would induct public officials in various departments into this new approach? After all, many municipal officials were in a similar position to Thaba in the West Rand District Municipality who wanted to make the programme work, but did not know where to start. Others felt that their current programmes were already very demanding and were reluctant to add another layer of complexity into the already difficult process of ensuring service delivery. And still others were concerned about what this new approach might mean for their career prospects in government.

Developing the Support Programme

Having taken the decision that the Business Trust was to provide support to the EPWP, the central issue was how to translate this commitment into concrete action. It soon transpired that developing the support model was no simple task. What form could it take? How could an external agency make a difference?

Building on the Business Trust's experience gained during its first five-year term, Chief Executive Brian Whittaker and Chief Operations Officer Saguna Gordhan realised that for the support to be effective, they needed

more clarity about the programme. It was therefore agreed that the first step would be to help the EPWP create a logical framework that set out the purpose, objectives and outputs of the government's Expanded Public Works Programme. Against this background, it would then be possible to establish what support could be offered and how it could be organised. Brian Whittaker comments that:

The setting up of this framework turned out to be a critical component in the success of the EPWP and in the Business Trust's ability to organise its support.

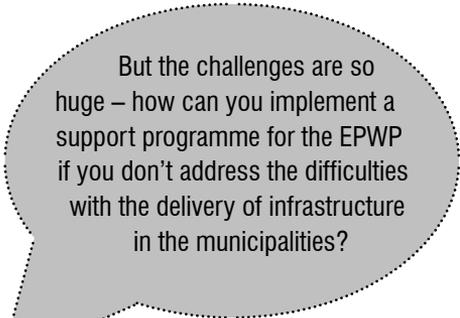
In collaboration with the Department of Public Works, the Business Trust scoped a call for proposals for the Support Programme. Sixty-five proposals were received, but none were suitable because they fell into two categories: either they were too ambitious and wanted to “fix everything in the system – you can't attach this to a broken system; we need to fix the whole system”; or they were focused on one aspect of implementing the EPWP, but did not really address the imperatives that were most pressing in its execution. Neither of these approaches were feasible.

A second call yielded one promising option that both the Business Trust and the Department of Public Works were excited about. Produced by Shisaka, a development management consultancy, the proposal took an approach which Matthew Nell, Team Leader of the Support Programme, describes as follows:

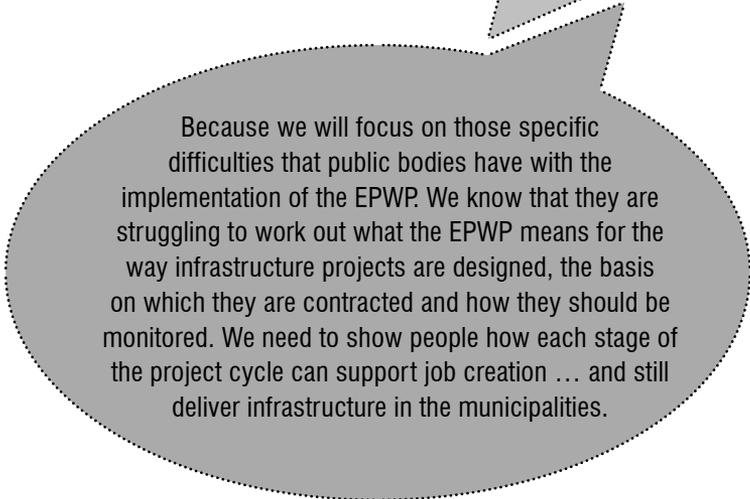
We are not getting sucked into the whole system – we are not offering to fix the whole system. What you are doing is like any of the companies in the construction industry who produce a new product. The EPWP is a new product that has to be sold to and be taken on by government agencies – and it is just like somebody producing a new PVC pipe: you train your staff on what the pipe can do and they sell it to the customers, [and] you train them and help them to use it.

In essence the approach articulated the need to “sell” the concept of the EPWP to municipalities, provincial government and other public entities.

In essence the approach articulated the need to “sell” the concept of the EPWP to municipalities, provincial government and other public entities. It would work with these institutions



But the challenges are so huge – how can you implement a support programme for the EPWP if you don't address the difficulties with the delivery of infrastructure in the municipalities?



Because we will focus on those specific difficulties that public bodies have with the implementation of the EPWP. We know that they are struggling to work out what the EPWP means for the way infrastructure projects are designed, the basis on which they are contracted and how they should be monitored. We need to show people how each stage of the project cycle can support job creation ... and still deliver infrastructure in the municipalities.

to identify specific obstacles to the implementation of the EPWP within the public sector and develop mechanisms to unblock these, so as to accelerate the implementation of the EPWP.

From the outset the Support Programme recognised that this approach would require significant time and person power, with limited resources. It thus decided that in order to assist public bodies in resolving specific obstacles, it had to limit the number of municipalities with which it worked⁸.

The Support Programme also recognised that working effectively with public bodies required that it synchronise its activities with those being undertaken

⁸ The Support Programme also identified provinces and public entities, but these do not form part of this case study.

by the EPWP Unit. No activities were undertaken by the Support Programme without the relevant officials within the EPWP Unit being briefed and having an input into how the work should be undertaken. Matthew Nell describes the relationship this way:

We really absorbed the idea of being a support programme – that is, across all of it: conceptual, emotional, and operational. We absorbed this issue. It is very important because unless you absorb this concept, all sorts of things (like ego, etc.) start to get in the way.

By early March 2005, the Business Trust Board had approved the business plan for a five-year period commencing on 1 March 2005 and ending on 31 March 2010, and work began in earnest. The Support Programme committed itself to facilitating the achievement of a percentage of the total EPWP target and set this target at 439,000 work opportunities as compared to the EPWP's target of one million (i.e. 44 per cent). In the infrastructure sector this translated into 342,500 work opportunities out of 750,000 (i.e. 46 per cent).

Although the Support Programme worked across all the EPWP sectors – environment, social, economic and infrastructure – this case study focuses on the infrastructure sector implemented at the municipal level⁹.

⁹ Details of other components of the EPWSP can be found on the Business Trust website at www.btrust.org.za.

Year one – a step at a time

With the fundamental tenets of the model in place, the Support Programme began its work with the Infrastructure Department within the EPWP Unit.

Selecting municipalities for engagement

As the Support Programme considered the municipal landscape, the key question was which criteria to use to select municipalities for engagement. There was considerable discussion: Should the Support Programme work with those municipalities that most required support? Or should it engage with municipalities in which the support would be most effective?

The Support Programme decided on the latter. It was felt that this approach would allow real needs to be addressed, learn and demonstrate ways in which support could most effectively be provided and, critically, would be able to create a large number of work opportunities. Based on these imperatives, the following criteria were used for the selection of the municipalities:

- The size of the municipal budget, based on analysis of the grant allocations and capital budgets of all the municipalities in South Africa. A short-list of twelve municipalities with the largest budgets was produced.
- The willingness of the municipalities to implement the EPWP and work with the Support Programme.

The selection **process** required extensive discussion with key decision-makers in the municipalities to secure their buy-in, not an easy process as municipalities were unsure about what commitments they were making.

EPWP Support Programme staffing

A **core team** was responsible for the overall programme management and included a Team Leader, Programme Manager and support staff.

Technical experts comprising a team of specialist consultants were called upon to undertake specific tasks.

Political facilitators were appointed on a contract basis to meet with key decision-makers and secure buy-in for the work to be undertaken.

A **field team** was employed to work with officials in the prioritised municipalities.

Administration was handled by specialist experts who provided services in respect of the Management Information Systems, accounting and general administration.

However, by the second quarter, after a great deal of ‘to-ing and fro-ing’, the Support Programme selected six municipalities: the City of Tshwane, the City of Johannesburg, the City of Cape Town, eThekweni, Amathole and OR Tambo. It was agreed to work with these six municipalities in the initial phase and then to extend the scope of the programme to 15 municipalities.

This approach was quite different from that adopted by the EPWP Unit whose focus was on ensuring that resources available for the EPWP would be equitably distributed and used across all the country’s municipalities. The difference in approach caused some tensions between the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit, which Ismail Akhalwaya, Chief Director and Senior Programme Manager: EPWP Unit, describes as follows:

The EPWP Programme Managers were very angry that the Support Programme was going where the EPWP was working already and shying away from the hard areas and leaving these to the Department. They felt that the Support Programme was ‘cherry picking’. In retrospect, though, they did what we could not and this meant that their resources could have maximum impact – they were sort of like the canary you send down a mine shaft to establish the environmental issues.

Brian Whittaker makes a similar point:

It was agreed that the Support Programme would do what the Department could not do. That is, choose those areas where at that time it was felt success would have to be achieved for the entire programme to succeed. While the government could not be seen to be prioritising in that way at that time, the Support Programme could.

Another member of the Support Programme commented on why this opportunity to select municipalities and directly engage was important:

This would allow the Support Programme the opportunity to learn how things worked at that level, to gain insight into how the municipalities were approaching their EPWP mandate.

Support Programme Team Leader, Matthew Nell, expands on this perspective:

We thought about how we could maximise the usage of the resources we had. We could cherry-pick in a way that government could not; we selected municipalities which would provide us with the best chance to learn and where we could create a large number of work opportunities. So we were driven by purpose. It was not an ideological decision; rather it was functional. We wanted to be able to identify and support cases in which EPWP would work – we wanted to be able to communicate how you could use the EPWP to accelerate delivery and create work opportunities.

Maikel Lieuw Kie Song, Chief Director: Labour Intensive Specialist at the EPWP Unit, provides a further nuance to this debate. He comments that while the Support Programme was ‘cherry picking’, the risk was that it may not have picked the cherries successfully:

I watched the process of selecting the initial municipalities and provinces. I foresaw the ‘cherry-picking’ approach, which was predominantly going for the big budgets, to be a problem. The Support Programme was very focused on this initially and I was skeptical, especially about the provinces and the cities they chose. And the cherries were not what they seemed to be – there were some sour cherries [picked] in the process.

These comments reflect the divergence of views about the approach taken in involving the municipalities in implementing the EPWP. Nevertheless the concept of the Support Programme engaging directly with the selected municipalities was supported by the EPWP Unit. The Unit felt that this approach would enhance and complement its own work. Perhaps the following description from Maikel Lieuw Kie Song best sums up the relationship between the EPWP Unit and the Support Programme at that point:

They do it their way and we will see how they do it. We saw it as a parallel process.

A direct relationship with municipalities

In essence, the model of entering into a direct relationship with municipalities was considered necessary for the following reasons:

- to enable the Support Programme to get those municipalities with high potential and high need to deliver results;
- to provide the Support Programme with the opportunity to learn how things worked at municipal level and to gain insight into how the municipalities were approaching their EPWP mandate;
- to enable the Support Programme to establish the nature of the blockages that each municipality was encountering in implementing the EPWP and, through this process, to identify the issues that would need to be addressed within municipalities in order for the programme to succeed;
- to demonstrate the value of the approach that the Support Programme was helping these municipalities to implement; and
- to build a relationship with the national EPWP Unit based on sharing the learning emanating from the programme's direct engagement with municipalities.

The Support Programme allocated fieldworkers to each of the six municipalities who worked closely with the municipal officials responsible

Together they focused on identifying EPWP projects, determining what was blocking their implementation, and then established what would be the most effective technical support to help municipalities create labour-intensive work opportunities.

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As time went on, it became clear that the concerns expressed by Maikel Lieuw Kie Song were prophetic: even the best of the 'cherries' found that implementing the EPWP was a complex process. Penny Foley, Infrastructure Sector Programme Manager: Support Programme, comments:

We got the facilitation officers and trained them and then put them into the municipalities and they encountered nobody actually implementing EPWP – there were EPWP units tasked with the responsibility of co-ordinating EPWP, but there were no project data available from line managers responsible for the implementation of infrastructure programmes. We then spent a few months understanding how you verify information. Never, never, never trust a project list, it does not matter who generates it. If you really want to understand what is happening you have got to look at the payment certificates and you need to go to site. ... The notion of what is an EPWP project was a huge challenge, as was trying to work out what was really happening and feeding it into a system so that everyone can see it. If it was not captured on site it was generally not reliable.

The extent of the challenge was sobering, and it was clear that further resources would be needed in the municipalities if the Support Programme was to succeed. Initial experience also provided an indication of the potential difficulties that may yet be encountered in other municipalities. Nevertheless, the facilitation officers were able to implement a number of interventions, as the following interaction between municipal officials and an EPWSP evaluator describes:

Complexities encountered by the Support Programme in identifying projects within municipalities that could be categorised as part of the EPWP

- Original files were not consistently kept in the municipality, but were sent through to the Department of Provincial and Local Government as part of the MIG registration process. This resulted in a loss of information at municipal level.
- Municipalities were not yet all using the MIG and there was uncertainty about where the business plans were filed.
- Even when business plans were filed, the pages of the forms relating to targeted person days of employment, training or budget allocations, were empty.
- Line departments were in some cases unwilling to share information about labour-intensive projects.
- In some departments there was no clear agreement on the status of projects.
- Information was unavailable because under-spending had required a review of project lists.

We were not yet sure what they (the Support Programme) could do, but we were interested to hear their ideas – they worked with us to identify the projects in our municipality that could be implemented as EPWP projects. They then loaded these projects onto the Management Information System and for the first time we could report to the EPWP about the number of jobs that we were creating!

(Municipal official)

Well, when they reviewed the infrastructure departments and assisted to identify the projects, they also provided us with advice about ways to deliver these projects using labour-intensive methods ... We were then able to set EPWP targets across the departments and this assisted us to work more proactively with these departments.

(Municipal official within an EPWP Unit)

But were they assisting you to create jobs or just to account for jobs more accurately?

... the Facilitation Officer gave us support for whatever information that we need. We have worked smoothly with him. I am telling you, he is exceptional.

(Municipal official)

I think it is a great system. Before the MIS we chopped and changed systems and in the process information got lost. Now we have a standardised reporting system.

Customising and sharpening support

Towards the end of the third quarter each municipality was invited to participate in a strategy session with the Support Programme staff to review the project data that had been collected, diagnose issues preventing delivery, and develop a focused technical intervention plan.

What emerged from these sessions was that:

- Each municipality is unique and that engagement with the municipalities must be done on a one-on-one basis. Based on these sessions, the Support Programme was able to develop specific interventions for each municipality and to refine the activities that were to be implemented across municipalities.
- Other interventions were considered necessary to deal with blockages. These included:
 - developing consultant and contractor capacity;
 - establishing systems to monitor and report on labour-intensive projects; and
 - developing a sustainable contracting model to expedite the delivery of infrastructure projects.
- It had become evident that the Support Programme required greater technical resources than initially anticipated. Technical capacity was required to identify new projects and to expedite the implementation of existing ones that would facilitate the creation of work opportunities. As one member of the Support Programme said:

We realised that the facilitation officers could not be ‘plumbers’ who come to unblock the blockages in a technical way. They are really only facilitators ... their role is to keep the fires warm and keep the relationship cozy¹⁰.

¹⁰ First Evaluation Report (Singizi, 2006)

- Another factor exacerbating these difficulties was that many municipal officials were reluctant to take on the EPWP as it was perceived as an additional responsibility¹¹. Other blockages that had to be addressed included:
 - the challenge experienced with co-ordination and compliance across line departments and difficulties with project implementation. These difficulties stemmed from the municipalities lacking a sufficient number of competent consultants and contractors to design projects, and poor monitoring of the work undertaken;
 - the lack of a municipal daily wage rate;
 - local councillors and communities not understanding the EPWP and being resistant to labour-intensive projects;
 - relevant officials not being able to identify, task and cost the labour-intensive components in projects adequately;
 - emerging and small contractors used by the municipality not being able to access the required EPWP contractor training or send employees for supervisor training; and
 - the lack of capacity to manage, monitor and report on projects.

While this list was daunting in its own right, Penny Foley comments that the challenges faced by the municipalities extended beyond project blockages to wider issues pertaining to the municipality more broadly:

In every municipality it was remarkable how consistently the blockage was institutional. People were confused about how the national supply chain management process worked and felt that the new supply chain management policy made it difficult to implement projects according to the EPWP Guidelines. And then there were a whole lot of other issues. In one municipality they were not spending because of internal conflict; in another municipality they did not have sufficient capacity; in one municipality the budgeting process made the planning process difficult; in another there was

¹¹ The EPWP could not legally compel municipalities to implement the programme, though there was political pressure on the municipalities to support the programme.

restructuring which meant they could not focus on EPWP; and in one municipality – the only one that did not have huge institutional issues – the key Departments were not talking to each other ... Across the municipalities, the institutional location of the EPWP portfolio versus the location of the people who had to do labour-intensive engineering was one of the biggest issues.

The perspective offered by Alan Campbell, Programme Manager of the Support Programme, resonated with this view:

The ideas at the outset were about unblocking blockages. But we came to understand that institutional support is also critical and that a key problem is lack of capacity to manage programmes.

Nevertheless, Support Programme Team Leader, Matthew Nell, argued that despite the emergence of these institutional challenges, the Support Programme had to maintain its focus:

I kept using the analogy that we were unblocking the sewer: we are plumbers – we are here to flush out the system – we are not designing the system to make it work. We were looking for blockages – we are the ‘rotor router’ – we flush out the pipes.

Thus in the fourth quarter the Support Programme allocated technical support people to work with the facilitation officers. Instead of having technical people that only came into the municipality at the request of the facilitation officer based on specific blockages that were identified, technical officers were deployed to play a dedicated role in each of the six municipalities. This provided the additional support required to understand the nature of the obstacles and to determine what could be done to address these.

Municipalities were very positive about the combined support received from the facilitation officers and the technical support team:

There have been sub-consultants appointed by the Support Programme to assist specifically on the infrastructure part of it and they have been helpful and that has been fruitful.

... the Support Programme has assisted us with practical proposals in terms of implementing jobs and projects and how to involve small emerging contractors in terms of our other programmes. It was really positive.

Despite this positive response, the Support Programme found that misunderstandings emerged about the role of the facilitation officers and technical experts. One technical expert described the problem this way¹²:

... there is this expectation that you have come here to do the work, and that is not our role; our role is a support role and not intervention. To some people it is clear and to others it is not and that can become problematic. Being support, you have to influence the actual people who do the work. You can't actually do the work yourself and it took me a month and a half to convene a meeting with Procurement. It was only when I went directly to the manager that it was set up. You don't have authority. The person that drives the programme cannot be outside.

But by the end of the first year it was clear that even with a determined focus on the 'plumbing' the effort required in this process was much more intense than originally anticipated. The Support Programme had to reflect on whether it was still feasible to work with the anticipated number of municipalities and, if not, what this would mean for the achievement of the targets agreed with the Business Trust.

Developments in the national EPWP Unit

While these developments were taking place at a municipal level, what was happening with the EPWP Unit?

Throughout the year in which the Support Programme engaged directly with the municipalities, it also worked closely with the EPWP Unit. This relationship was both formal – through the establishment of two key committees (see box on page 29) – as well as through the participation of Support Programme staff in EPWP sector and other EPWP co-ordination meetings.

¹² First Evaluation Report (Singizi, 2006)

Maikel Lieuw Kie Song cites the culture that developed around the Support Programme as being a critical factor in building the relationship between the two entities:

The culture that developed around the Support Programme – good co-operation and good brainstorming. One of the values is the Unit has a ‘thinking partner’ about how to do things – it is able to bounce things off people with different perspectives, which is very valuable. This is a relatively innovative way to get these perspectives; otherwise you are paying someone and you are not sure where their interests sit – or you don’t have a mechanism or you feel you are burdening people because you are asking them for advice. In the Support Programme you have an avenue where you don’t have to think about these things. This can’t be quantified, but has been quite important.

Thus, over the first year, the relationship between the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit grew stronger, based on increasing trust and respect between the individuals in the two entities. As indicated by Ismail Akhalwaya:

There is a joint understanding of a problem that exists between government and business and a joint commitment to put resources to address it ... the joint meetings and joint strategising in the sectors identified the common areas and common approach. It is not a case of these are our targets and these are yours.

These comments reflected the real convergence of ideas that was emerging and a shift towards an understanding of shared or common targets. Thus, while the contract between the Business Trust and Shisaka specified a set of targets for which Shisaka was to be held accountable, it was recognised that the success of the Support Programme would ultimately be measured by the success of the EPWP as a whole.

Co-ordination mechanisms between the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit

- A high-level **Partnership Committee**, consisting of representatives of business and government, provided oversight and direction to the Support Programme.
- An **Operations Committee** functioned as a management committee with representatives from the DPW, the Business Trust and the Support Programme to co-ordinate operational activities between the EPWP and the Support Programme.

The level of trust that had been established was further confirmed when, at the end of year one, the EPWP Unit asked the Support Programme to facilitate its annual strategic review session. This increased the alignment between the EPWP Unit and the Support Programme and was so successful that it has been repeated in every subsequent financial year.

By the end of year one ...

Important lessons were learnt by the end of the Support Programme's first year of operation.

The first was that prioritising a selected number of municipalities could yield important insights and knowledge, and demonstrated what could be achieved through focused interventions. This provided the Support Programme with the opportunity to develop and refine its methodology for engagement and further support.

However, as indicated, 'cherry picking', proved more difficult than anticipated. Before the end of the year support to the City of Cape Town had been terminated because of an inability to obtain consensus within the municipality on a number of fundamental issues. These included, amongst others, wage rates, accountability and reporting lines for the EPWP office, and the applicability of EPWP Guidelines to the City's capital budget.

Prioritising a selected number of municipalities yielded important insights and knowledge, and demonstrated what could be achieved through focused interventions.

While direct engagement continued between the Support Programme and the other five municipalities, the extent of the institutional challenges further demonstrated the complexity of selecting municipalities for support. This highlighted the need to refine the selection criteria and process for prioritising municipalities for engagement in the future.

The second was the significant learning about the nature of the support required: in order to accelerate the implementation of the EPWP, it would be necessary to address certain institutional issues as well as dealing with project blockages (such as those illustrated on page 26). It was also demonstrated that this process would require more resources than anticipated.

These insights forced the Support Programme to reflect on its practices and on its purpose. According to Matthew Nell:

... we did not try and force what we did into a pre-planned format, but took a very flexible approach where we organically responded to the realities of the programme [EPWP]. We took a 'learning by doing' approach.

The third lesson learnt was that the direct engagement approach had created opportunities for the partners to learn and the Support Programme's willingness to respond to these insights by adapting and changing its approach was critical to strengthening its co-operative relationship with the EPWP Unit. Maikel Lieuw Kie Song cites this as a positive factor:

The Unit and Support Programme grew side by side, they were both new – so one was not started before the other and they helped shape each other and their sizes have been comparable. One was never dominant over the other. We started with two very small teams, so the relationship grew – they were always part of the structure in many ways. Trust and co-operation developed over time.

By the end of the first year:

- the Support Programme had increased the resources it was putting into the municipalities;
- it had developed insights into the obstacles facing municipalities; and,
- by demonstrating the capacity for responsiveness, the Support Programme had built a productive working relationship with the EPWP Unit. This was of vital importance in that it enabled the partners to work together to increase the effectiveness of the Support Programme model going forward.

Despite the obstacles, and because of the 'learning by doing' approach, the Support Programme reached its targets for the municipal programme for the first year, which was to support the creation of 11,000 work opportunities.

Year two – sailing under one flag

The second year began on a high note: the targets of the previous year had been met and real trust was developing between the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit. Nevertheless, the Support Programme knew that a significant task still lay ahead: the targets for year two were six times higher than that for year one! How were they to reach these?

Given what it now knew about working with the municipalities, the Support Programme considered whether it could increase the number of municipalities with which it was working. How many more could realistically be reached?

The institutional challenges that the Support Programme had confronted in the municipalities in the first year meant that extending support to significantly larger numbers of municipalities would place a huge strain on the resources allocated to the Programme. Also, individuals in the Support Programme felt that working directly with more municipalities would not generate substantively new learning about the implementation of the EPWP.

In the interim, the EPWP Unit had been watching and engaging with developments in the Support Programme. While the ‘cherry picking’ approach had drawn mixed responses, the EPWP Unit acknowledged that prioritising a certain number of municipalities for more intensive support could yield a larger impact than working across all the municipalities at the same time. The EPWP Unit therefore determined, despite its initial reservations, that it would select a number of municipalities with which to engage. This was to be a larger pool than the six initially selected by the Support Programme, but used the same approach as that adopted by the Support Programme. The EPWP Unit therefore requested assistance from the Support Programme with the implementation of this initiative.

... there was a real need to step up the number of municipalities being supported.

At the same time the Support Programme acknowledged that the second year’s targets might not be met simply by working with a few more municipalities, and that there was a real need to step up the number of municipalities being supported.

It is at this point that the Support Programme reached a critical moment. At the strategic planning session between the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit in January 2006, a number of significant changes were made to the way in which support was to be provided to the EPWP Unit. In particular, it was agreed that the Support Programme would continue to engage directly with those municipalities in which it was already involved. But, it was the next set of decisions that really began to lay the basis for the evolution of the Support Model:

- It was agreed that the Support Programme would also assist the EPWP Unit itself to work directly with municipalities. This programme was termed the Joint Engagement Programme. The Joint Engagement Programme would use the tools and systems developed in direct engagement to widen the pool of municipalities that would receive support¹³.
- Further, the decision to introduce the Joint Engagement Programme meant that the role of the Support Programme changed substantively: in addition to providing support to municipalities through direct engagement with them, it would now also provide technical and strategic support to the EPWP Unit.

In addition to providing support to municipalities through direct engagement with them, the Joint Engagement Programme would now also provide technical and strategic support to the EPWP Unit.

Together with the EPWP Unit, the Support Programme also began to consider how the wider roll-out of the programme could take place. The possibility of using the systems that had already been developed and refined started gaining currency as one way of supporting all the municipalities.

Maikel Liew Kie Song suggests that this model of support represented a convergence of thinking among the partners:

Slowly we all realised that it was not useful to work separately. There were things the Support Programme was better at and others where we were, and it was better to focus on the strengths of each entity

¹³ These included monitoring, evaluation and adjustment methods, performance improvement tools, and templates to monitor the number of work opportunities on site, or to link EPWP workers with the training to which they were entitled.

and drive the same resource, rather than split it up and have a fence between the two. So that was quite a shift and it was based on certain things that made it possible. The good co-operation was important.

Support Programme staff explained that continuing with direct engagement would further develop the tools and instruments that had been introduced in the first year. Furthermore, the decision to continue with direct municipal engagement was a function of the Support Programme's uncertainty about whether the joint engagement approach would in fact achieve the targets. This concern was grounded in the experience gained in the previous year and, in particular, the length of time that it would take to set up relations with the municipalities, load projects and report on work opportunities. The Support Programme therefore understood that it needed to continue working directly with the municipalities to meet the targets that had been agreed with the Business Trust.

With considerable enthusiasm the Support Programme presented these revised ideas to the Business Trust, which, according to Brian Whittaker, was receptive to the new developments:

The Business Trust was receptive because it had to face the problem of securing wide-scale impact on the system as a whole. The hope that this can be done is seldom fulfilled. The change [towards both direct and joint engagement] provided an opportunity to address that problem explicitly.

Thus the model of support, which allowed for direct engagement, joint engagement, as well as wider roll-out, was formally adopted. It was this approach that was to be applied going forward.

Stepping up the pace

With the decision to continue with the process of direct engagement, the Support Programme did all that it could to increase the pace of identifying work opportunities significantly in the municipalities with which it was working directly.

The programme's facilitation and technical officers identified those projects that had budget allocations for the current financial year. They found that because the Support Programme had already been working with these municipalities for a year, it became easier for programme staff to capture the EPWP projects. Municipalities understood the systems better and were more equipped to ascertain which projects could actually be implemented and whether these could be considered EPWP projects.

The facilitation and technical officers also considered ways in which projects could increase the number of work opportunities by addressing blockages that had emerged in the previous year. In addition, they focused specifically on increasing EPWP compliance levels within these projects and introducing labour-intensive methodologies. The challenge experienced in introducing these is highlighted by the following exchange:

Well the one thing is to make sure that the engineers that you contract understand how to design projects using a labour-intensive approach - so basically you should create more jobs for the same budget.

(EPWSP technical team member)

But we are capturing the number of jobs in our EPWP projects and we are reporting these numbers nationally - what else is required?

(Municipal official)

But the contractors won't do it – they want to finish their projects as quickly as possible and that often means using machinery wherever possible.

(Municipal official)

The key thing is that the labour-intensive requirements are built into the contract – and the more people learn, the more they will realise that a well-run labour-intensive project need not run for longer; you only substitute where appropriate.

(EPWSP technical team member)

Examples of support provided to municipal EPWP projects

- In Amatole District Municipality the Support Programme technical team worked with the officials in the Supply Chain Management Department to finalise its EPWP policy and incorporate the requirements of the EPWP into their contracting documents.
- In the OR Tambo District Municipality the technical team worked with officials on 14 water and sanitation projects that had already been approved to ensure that they complied with the EPWP guidelines. In addition a number of road projects were identified as being compliant, but were not being recorded as EPWP projects. Accordingly a simple and compulsory method of recording these work opportunities was developed and applied.
- In the City of Johannesburg the technical team worked with the EPWP Manager and a number of infrastructure departments to review projects that could be delivered labour-intensively and set EPWP targets across the departments. In addition, work was undertaken separately with City Parks, Joburg Water and the Department of Development, Planning and Transport to identify EPWP-compliant projects and set targets.

Examples of the ways in which blockages were addressed are shown in the box alongside.

Engaging with wider municipal issues

In its continued direct engagements, the Support Programme addressed institutional issues to accelerate the objectives of the EPWP.

The interventions that were required varied across the municipalities. They included:

- supporting the development of municipal policies on EPWP;
- crafting key performance indicators (KPIs) for officials in relation to EPWP targets; and
- grappling with concerns about the requirement that training be a component of recognised work opportunities. Without a training component, projects could not record the number of work opportunities they were creating as EPWP-compliant. Over time, the EPWP requirement for training brought about increasing levels of resistance to the EPWP, while the difficulties experienced in accessing resources for nationally-recognised training became a municipal-wide concern.

For example, in eThekweni Municipality, they worked on the development of an EPWP policy that would guide the work of the different sections within the municipality and would focus their efforts with regard to the development of EPWP targets.

In the City of Johannesburg the focus was on enabling the city to integrate EPWP requirements into the KPIs of municipal officials. This became very significant in encouraging officials to see the EPWP as part of their work rather than something that they had to do in addition to their 'real jobs'.

The delicate balance between the Support Programme providing general assistance in municipalities and the continued need for it to remain focused on the EPWP emerged as an ongoing tension at the municipal sites. It appeared that there was a strong feeling amongst the municipal officials that the Support Programme staff based in the municipalities should be accountable to the EPWP Unit within the municipality and not the Support Programme. What many municipal officials hoped for was that the Support Programme technical team members could provide them with general capacity to undertake all EPWP-related work – from taking minutes in meetings, to representing the municipality in community forums.

Thus, while these expectations were positively framed, there was the risk that Support Programme staff could be overtaken by the myriad of issues that required increased capacity within a municipality. A related concern was that the more the support staff became immersed in municipal issues, the less they were viewed by municipal officials as external support. Although embedded support may appear to have an advantage over external support in that it signals that support staff are accepted within the municipality, it also meant that the traditional hierarchies in the municipalities would be applied. This meant that the support staff would be as confined by municipal protocol as any other official and would not be able to engage with individuals in the municipality as they needed to. This highlighted one of the real strengths of using an external agency.

Ultimately these ambiguities led the Support Programme to review the role of its facilitation and technical officers. Those facilitation officers that had been able to play their role effectively became responsible for more than one municipality and, in some cases, took on responsibility for the relevant province. Technical officers were drawn into far tighter management contracts and arrangements.

Joint engagement with municipalities

The decision to move towards a joint engagement approach forced the Support Programme to interrogate the learning that it had acquired through the process of direct engagement with municipalities. It had to reflect on what had worked and where challenges had emerged, so as to refine its approach into a model that could be more widely applied and shared.

A Joint Task Team on infrastructure was established, which included both the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit. This structure created space for the partners to debate the learning from the direct engagement experience. In the process they came to a shared understanding of a strategy for joint engagement with municipalities.

The partners agreed on the nature of the support that was to be provided and defined their respective contributions.

This was challenging as the activities and approaches had been developed within a private sector environment (the Shisaka consultancy) and these had to be translated into the public sector environment. The partners agreed on the nature of the support that was to be provided and defined their respective contributions. On this basis, the process of joint engagement between the Support Programme and the EPWP Unit began. It drew on the factors that had made it possible to provide effective support during the direct engagement phase, as well as the factors that hindered the provision of effective support.

Taking into account the experiences of direct engagement, a diagnostic tool, which was used in the selection of the municipalities for the Joint Engagement Programme, was produced. It assessed whether there is an EPWP champion in the municipality, the extent to which the municipal EPWP unit has access to resources and a budget, and whether or not an EPWP business plan has been developed.

The EPWP Unit appointed a consulting company to provide the necessary technical facilitation support (known as the National Technical Support Team). This gave the EPWP Unit sufficient capacity at a local level to provide the same level of technical support as had been provided in the direct engagement phase.

The EPWP Unit recognised the need to secure political buy-in and support prior to further engagement. This is reflected in the EPWP Unit's approach to striking agreements with the 45 municipalities to which it intended providing support. Firstly, the Minister of Public Works sent letters to the mayors of the targeted municipalities, requesting their co-operation. And secondly, these letters were followed up with visits from EPWP staff and individuals from the consulting team.

These steps proved to be very effective in securing participation from the municipalities. They opened doors for discussion about the EPWP and created the conditions whereby the municipality could use the support effectively.

The EPWP Unit recognised the need to secure political buy-in and support prior to further engagement.

The Joint Task Team on Infrastructure analysed the different types of engagement that had been used with municipalities:

- facilitate institutional processes required to approve EPWP projects;
- expedite the resolution of project blockages by providing technical support;
- convince decision-makers about the value of the EPWP initiative through the promotion of political support, getting buy-in from and providing the assistance that would translate these intentions into goals and plans; and
- educate municipal officials by providing basic information and making sure that there is a municipal-wide understanding of the EPWP, its significance and what is required.

The Management Information System developed during the direct engagement phase was adapted to enable the technical consulting team to load projects, record the jobs and training opportunities created, and identify the blockages in projects. In this way the EPWP Unit could easily determine the type of technical support required by each project/municipality.

The utilisation of these strategies, systems and tools involved an ongoing process of information-sharing between the EPWP Unit and the consulting team. In February 2007 an orientation workshop was held with the consulting

team, during which the different functions of the consulting team were explained. The workshop also highlighted the steps to be followed and the tools that were at the disposal of the consulting team. Critically, this workshop focused on how to engage with municipalities.

Officials from the EPWP Unit described the value of the process as follows:

The Support Programme is providing tools and learning. I am comfortable with the level of support. We have a good number of tools to assist, such as the municipal engagement process, and that is a good tool. We have achieved a lot in the joint engagement. There is a concise methodology that has been informed by direct engagement.

We have learnt a great deal from that process [direct engagement], because they've [the Support Programme] been placed at the coal-face of implementation. So indeed, they've continuously shared their lessons and experiences with us.

What was the impact of this learning? In theory it meant that the National Technical Support Team could enter the municipality and hit the ground running. In reality, individuals from the team commented that while they had found the orientation workshop very useful and had gained immeasurably from the strategic engagement with municipalities, they had not initially understood how to use the different systems and tools. Perhaps it was too much to absorb within one session, but in the process the Support Programme learnt that some things people would need to learn for themselves!

Taking this into account and, to facilitate ongoing learning, the Joint Task Team convened a monthly forum that created opportunities for the parties to engage around new experiences, consider ways to improve practice, and to share the expertise that it had acquired through implementing projects with municipalities.

Significantly, this demonstrated that in the course of year two, there was reciprocal learning between the parties. One of the areas in which the EPWP Unit was able to strengthen its capacity was in the management of its technical consultants, for which it took full responsibility. Since the facilitation

and technical roles were now all invested in one company, this meant that activities could be well-coordinated. The Management Information System, one of the key tools developed by the Support Programme, underpinned these management functions and served as one of the most significant legacies of the Support Programme's contribution.

By the end of year two ...

What had the Support Programme learnt and achieved during its second year? And how did this shape the support model?

The Support Programme had continued its focus on direct engagement with a small group of municipalities. In so doing, it began to make real headway in identifying and analysing blockages encountered in the process of implementing the EPWP. Support Programme staff were able to put in place mechanisms to resolve these blockages and succeeded in refining the systems and tools that had been developed in the first year. The tools and solutions were all shared across the processes of both direct and joint engagement.

Support Programme staff were able to put in place mechanisms to resolve these blockages and succeeded in refining the systems and tools that had been developed in the first year.

One indication that the EPWP was beginning to make headway in addressing blockages was the increased number of projects that changed their status from 'approved' to 'in progress' on the MIS¹⁴. In essence, this meant that projects anticipated as EPWP were finally beginning to generate the planned work opportunities. Further direct engagement generated 81,779 work opportunities, thereby exceeding the target of 41,000¹⁵.

The Support Programme was able to work with the EPWP Unit and, through an intense review of the successes and difficulties encountered in the direct engagement approach, was able to refine the support methodology for application in the joint engagement process. This acknowledged the contributions and strengths of the respective partners and contributed to building increased trust between them.

¹⁴ Third quarter report, Support Programme

¹⁵ Fourth quarter report, Support Programme

In the process of joint engagement the EPWP Unit was able to apply lessons learnt from the Support Programme's direct engagement experience, particularly with regard to the delicate balance that exists between providing external support in respect of the EPWP and gaining the trust of the municipal officials by meeting their wider institutional needs. The joint engagement process provided the opportunity for far tighter management of the support provision, and was accompanied by a greater sense of purpose. In this sense, in the words of one member of the Support Programme, "the process was not linear: sometimes joint engagement was ahead of direct [engagement]".

Interestingly, the ability of the Support Programme to learn as much from its mistakes as from its successes was considered one of the strengths of the programme, as is shown in the following comments from respondents involved in an evaluation of the EPWP¹⁶:

... we are involved in 'Joint' right now and a lot of the lessons that they [the Support Programme] learnt we are coming across and so it has been really helpful to know what mistakes they made and what to avoid and it has been useful.

We have learnt from their mistakes and the approach is more refined and that is why we are going to be more successful ... The strategy of joint engagement is very influenced by their (the Support Programme's) decisions and what has taken place in 'direct', and this is reflected in our decisions.

This highlights the real need for mutual respect and learning, both of which are essential foundations for partnership and are central to any support programme. The trust that developed between the parties was borne out of the Support Programme's willingness to play a strategic role and move ahead, and then to learn from this experience together with its principal.

Year two also illustrated the complexity of transferring learning for wider implementation. The Support Programme orientated the technical consulting

¹⁶ Singizi (May 2007)

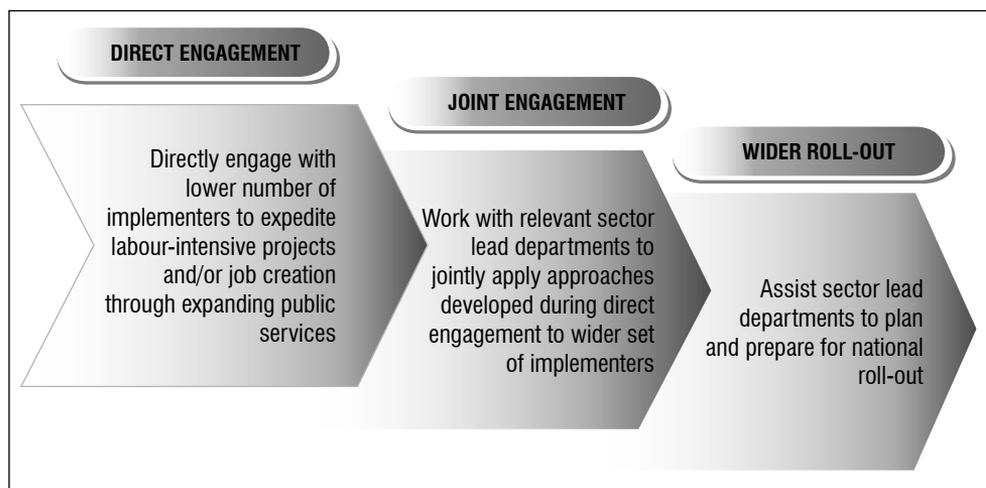
team through a formal training process, but time showed that the technical consultants needed to acquire sufficient experience in the field before they could confidently load projects on to the MIS and determine the number of work opportunities each project would yield. This was reflected in the results for the second year, which showed lags in the joint engagement process. The Support Programme had met its target for the year creating 70,000 work opportunities, although the majority had come from the direct engagement. These results validated the Support Programme's decision to retain direct engagement as a risk management strategy until the joint engagement process could generate sufficient work opportunities. Nevertheless, the results of the joint engagement process did not cause undue alarm since it was understood that this programme was still in an embryonic stage and that it would be fully operational by year three.

The Support Programme had met its target for the year creating 70,000 work opportunities ...

Finally, the scale of implementation through the joint engagement process began to place pressure on the MIS developed by the Support Programme and highlighted the imperative for the EPWP and the Support Programme to grapple with the implications of rolling out the EPWP more widely.

On the basis of this experience in year two, the support model was refined as is shown in the diagram below.

DIAGRAM 1: Structure of the EPWP support model by the end of year two



Year three – towards mainstreaming

In many ways year three became a critical turning point in the life of the Support Programme. The Direct Engagement Programme was yielding high numbers, but would joint engagement deliver similar results? Would the EPWP Unit be able to manage the support interventions successfully, and identify and resolve blockages? Could this be carried out in a manner that supported increased compliance with EPWP Guidelines? And would increased numbers of jobs be created, reported and validated?

The Minister of Public Works framed the challenge squarely at a Partnership Committee meeting held towards the end of year two when she asked: “What capacity are you leaving behind for me? How will the programme be mainstreamed?¹⁷”

The minister’s question led the Support Programme to interrogate the capacity that it was creating in the EPWP Unit. Would the EPWP Unit be able to sustain the interventions that had been started through the joint engagement process? Would these interventions be sufficient to facilitate the mainstreaming of the EPWP? Together, the partners considered the areas in which the EPWP Unit required additional capacity, taking into account the number of new staff that had been appointed in terms of its revised organisational structure and the challenges that were posed by the imperative to mainstream the Support Programme.

Consolidating the model

With the municipalities involved in direct engagement on track and developments within joint engagement looking promising, it was decided that it was time for the Support Programme to phase out of the municipalities with which it had been directly involved. These municipalities would then be integrated into the Joint Engagement Programme. This process took place gradually in the course of year three:

¹⁷ Expanded Public Works Support Programme, Business Plan for Year 3

- during the first quarter, the direct engagement programme was revised to focus on meeting contractual commitments with respect to targets and the value they added to the joint engagement strategy;
- by the second quarter the National Technical Support Team was the primary agent engaging with the municipalities, except for EThekweni and Johannesburg; and,
- by the fourth quarter the Direct Engagement Programme was concluded.

In making this decision, the Support Programme recognised that the Joint Engagement Programme had reached a stage that would ensure that it met the agreed targets. It was therefore felt that the Support Programme resources could be best utilised in the joint and mainstreaming processes. However, this shift did not occur without disturbance and some of the municipalities that had received direct engagement were concerned about the withdrawal of the Support Programme.

The Support Programme's work during this time focused on ensuring that it was able to make an effective contribution to the Joint Task Team on Infrastructure.

Having made this decision, and while continuing to manage relations with the municipalities with which they had previously had direct engagement, the Support Programme focused its energy on the joint engagement process that was developing rapidly. The prioritised municipalities had expanded from 45 to 57 and this placed increased pressure on Support Programme systems. Fortunately the individuals providing technical support in the field were now able to identify and load projects, establish and address blockages, and record jobs and training.

The Support Programme's work during this time focused on ensuring that it was able to make an effective contribution to the Joint Task Team on Infrastructure. It invested in finalising the tools and processes related to the implementation of EPWP Guidelines, supported the management of the MIS and the process of analysing blockages, and continued to manage progress.

During this time, the Support Programme also grappled with what mainstreaming meant. The experience of direct and joint engagement with municipalities had forced the programme to recognise that some level of capacity-building was required in the municipalities. It also prompted the Support Programme to consider ways of institutionalising the EPWP in municipalities. Interventions included:

- the provision of support to integrate EPWP objectives into the KPIs of municipal officials; and
- supporting the development of policies within the municipalities that facilitated decision-making that would result in the effective targeting and monitoring of job creation.

In developing a mainstreaming approach, the Support Programme focused on working with the EPWP Unit so that the Unit could take on the different support functions necessary to co-ordinate the EPWP across the sectors. This led to an organisational development process that assisted the Unit to identify the personnel it required and to revise its organogram accordingly.

Critically, the discussions around the mainstreaming process brought into focus the experience gained from the Joint Engagement Programme with regard to the management of field staff. This was developed further in a target-based management approach. It would enable the EPWP Unit to work with provinces and municipalities to determine (on the basis of their budgets) the number of work opportunities that they would be able to achieve, and to monitor these targets. It was recognised that this could have significant impact by removing the element of 'luck' and placing the EPWP in a stronger position to plan, address possible shortfalls and manage the performance of staff.

By the end of year three ...

By the end of year three the Joint Engagement Programme was effectively being implemented, and work opportunities were being recorded in all the participating municipalities. A total of 42,962 work opportunities had been created through joint engagement between the EPWP Unit and the municipalities with which they engaged. While this was still below the target set for joint engagement in year three, it did show rapid growth, which suggested that the programme was developing traction. This was further demonstrated

by the rapid growth in the number of work opportunities created through the direct engagement process: 111,856 work opportunities had been created by only five municipalities, compared to the target of 84,065. This highlighted the potential for growing the number of work opportunities once the programme developed some momentum. At the same time it continued to show that an intensive process of engagement was required before municipalities could produce results in respect of the targets set.

Further, with mainstreaming as a focus of attention, the building of capacity within the EPWP Unit became a programme in its own right, funded from the Support Programme budget. This was necessary on the basis of a growing understanding of what mainstreaming entailed. The EPWP Unit would have to support three institutional changes envisaged at municipal level:

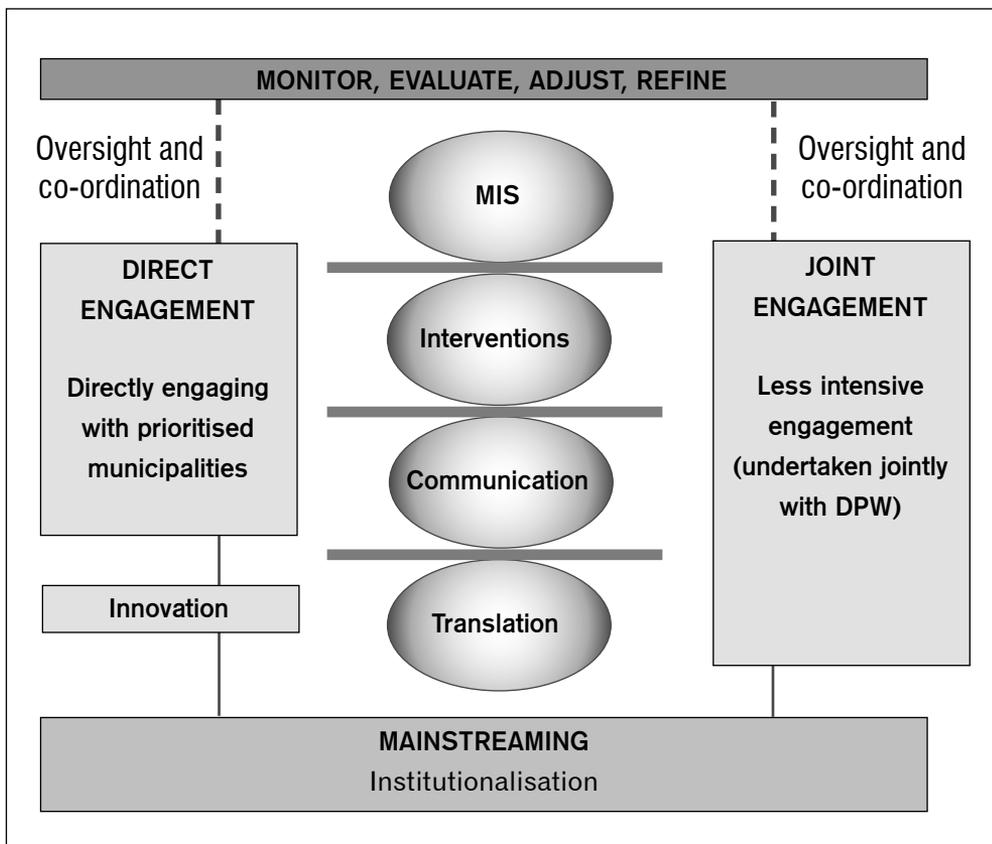
Further, with mainstreaming as a focus of attention, the building of capacity within the EPWP Unit became a programme in its own right.

- an agreed policy within the municipality that highlights its commitment to the EPWP and sets clear targets for the creation of work opportunities;
- a workable set of institutional arrangements, which give effect to the policies. Generally these included the establishment of a municipal EPWP Unit, but, most importantly, required that a co-ordinating mechanism be established with sufficient influence and resources to ensure that the policy is implemented across the municipality; and,
- the creation of incentives that embed the implementation of the EPWP within the job descriptions and performance agreements of the relevant managers.

Importantly, by the end of the third year, the EPWP Unit had taken full ownership of the provision of support to municipalities. The Unit managed the programme and all decisions related to infrastructure were taken in monthly Joint Task Team meetings chaired by the EPWP Unit. This meeting was attended by the Support Programme and the National Technical Support Team. The Support Programme appeared poised to enter the final stages of the process of providing support to the EPWP Unit. This triggered the final issue facing the Support Programme as year three drew to its close: How could the interventions that had been put in place be sustained going forward? It is this question that is the focus of years four and five.

These developments consolidated the support model further and helped to identify quite clearly the different elements required in an effective support programme. As a result, the model provides a framework for an external support agency to work directly with a large government programme in a way that ensures an acknowledgment of who the principals are and what role an external support agency can most effectively play. The model of support is captured in the diagram below:

DIAGRAM 2: Revised support model



Years four and five – managing the transition

In years four and five the Support Programme would focus on how the interventions developed in the previous three years could be sustained. In particular, it focused on how the EPWP Unit could sustain the support role that it introduced through the process of joint engagement with municipalities. The Support Programme agreed that the guiding principle in determining what and how to transfer functions would be determined on the basis of whether the “EPWP Unit loved it enough to do it themselves”. Three issues had to be considered.

The first issue was critical to the transfer of functions from the Support Programme to the EPWP Unit. Would the EPWP Unit take ownership of the Management Information System (MIS) and continue to update and use the data? How would this be managed? Alongside these decisions, the relationship between the MIS and other systems within the Department of Public Works would need to be considered more carefully. The Support Programme considered these issues and developed a plan that would ensure that by October 2008 the MIS would be handed over to the EPWP Unit with the Support Programme continuing in an advisory role until the end of its five-year contract.

The second issue had to do with the manner in which mainstreaming was to take place. Mainstreaming required the will to identify and implement mechanisms that would result in the EPWP becoming part of the normal business of relevant government officials. For example, the intention in the infrastructure sector was to make the EPWP a part of the supply chain management process and for it to be a requirement in the KPIs of senior management.

The third issue focused on supporting the EPWP to ensure that the Unit had in place the strategic capacity and organisational development processes required to manage and adapt the necessary tools and systems. This was

The Support Programme focused on how the EPWP Unit could sustain the support role that it introduced through the process of joint engagement with municipalities.

necessary to ensure that the Unit supported the evolution both of the infrastructure and the overall programme.

Cabinet had agreed that the EPWP should continue for a second five-year phase, but decided that the EPWP required a major step-up in the number of work opportunities it created ...

A further reality that had to be taken on board was that the first phase of the Expanded Public Works Programme (approved for a five-year period of 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2009) was coming to an end.

Cabinet had agreed that the EPWP should continue for a second five-year phase, but decided that the EPWP required a major step-up in the number of work opportunities it created – from one million work opportunities in five years to one million per annum over five years.

This second phase was termed EPWP2 and it was agreed that the Support Programme would work with the EPWP Unit to explore the nature of this second phase and develop proposals for its operationalisation. In years four and five, this formed an important component of the work of the Support Programme.

Through a range of discussions, a revised understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the different role players was developed. In the case of the implementation of the municipal infrastructure programme, the following three roles would apply to the EPWP Unit:

- The EPWP Unit of the Department of Public Works would be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the EPWP nationally. In this regard the EPWP Unit would focus on:
 - providing overall leadership for the programme (drive, co-ordination etc.);
 - facilitating to ensure that the EPWP is effectively implemented and meets its targets;
 - communicating around the EPWP;
 - monitoring, evaluation and reporting on EPWP progress and impact; and
 - facilitating to ensure that EPWP beneficiaries are trained.
- The EPWP Unit would also play a support role to those municipalities implementing the EPWP.

- Implementers undertaking the EPWP projects would have responsibility for the required budget. In the context of this programme the municipal units responsible for infrastructure development and service delivery would be the EPWP project implementers.

Within this context, the Support Programme committed itself to achieving the following over the final two years:

- ensure that lessons learnt are documented and shared with the EPWP Unit Infrastructure Chief Directorate;
- continue to work with the EPWP Infrastructure Chief Directorate to ensure that it is effectively able to use the guidelines that have been developed for the different infrastructure-related programmes;
- enable the Directorate to take full ownership of the management information systems and processes and ensure that there is sufficient capacity to apply these to EPWP projects and programmes in a manner that supports innovative methodologies for resolving any blockages that are identified; and
- work with the Directorate to support the implementation of the EPWP in terms of the development of approaches such as target setting and human resource management. This support would comprise both capacity building within the Directorate, as well as adapting the systems, processes and methodologies to public sector systems and for wider application.

Lessons learnt from the Support Programme

The case study has considered the way in which the Support Programme was implemented. But what does this tell us about how support can most effectively be provided to government by an external agency? What form should this take if it is to strengthen the implementation of a large-scale government programme across all three spheres of government (national, provincial and local)?

Sending down the canary

The support model adopted in year one enabled the Support Programme to hit the ground running. Once agreement had been reached with the EPWP

By learning first-hand about the challenges experienced by municipalities in the implementation of the EPWP, the Support Programme was able to develop strategies, systems and tools that could be tested and revised on the basis of experience.

Unit about how to approach and operationalise the programme, and the municipalities had been selected, the Support Programme was able to act immediately. By learning first-hand about the challenges experienced by municipalities in the implementation of the EPWP, the Support Programme was able to develop strategies, systems and tools that could be tested and revised on the basis of experience.

This was perceived to be vital in enabling the programme to engage with the EPWP Unit on the basis of actual experience that could meaningfully contribute to the implementation of the overall EPWP operations. And, was perhaps described most eloquently by a member of the EPWP Unit who likened the role that the Support Programme played within this context to a canary going down a mine shaft.

Coupled with the willingness of the Support Programme to try out an approach, really learn what the challenges were at a municipal level, and then engage with ways in which to address these, is the ability to learn from mistakes made and an openness to adapt and change the approach where the circumstances required this.

The Support Programme's real engagement with municipalities was appreciated by the EPWP Unit and a platform of trust developed between the partners as opportunities were created to share experience. This growing level of trust created a basis for the development of the joint engagement process as the methodology applied in the direct engagement phase had achieved sufficient credibility within the EPWP Unit to be considered for broader implementation.

Furthermore, the Support Programme was open to working with the EPWP Unit to find new ways that could escalate the implementation of the EPWP. This, too, paved the way for the further evolution of the support model.

Plumbers not magicians

The Support Programme recognised that it had to focus on specific problems that emerged in the context of the implementation of the EPWP rather than trying to transform the municipal system as a whole. The Programme had to work with the municipalities to establish the number of possible work opportunities based on the planned projects and then focus on what specific interventions would be required to ensure that the municipality could reach these targets.

Matthew Nell explains this as follows:

What is involved in the methodology is a rigorous process of linking the contractual outcomes we are committed to, to operational plans and performance contracts in the Support Programme ... The methodology applied is fundamentally a target- or goal-driven, data-based, performance-driven approach – which is in essence at the very core of the private sector. It focuses quite actively on trying to get to the core of what it is that is to be achieved. It does not fudge over the stuff, but tries to get to the essence of what we are trying to do. It asks hard questions about what the product/service is that we are trying to deliver and makes sense of it in terms of the demand and need in the environment. It is not market-driven, but opportunity-driven, and is performance-orientated i.e. find the opportunity, capitalise and

make it work. It is not about wallowing in the areas of irresolvable need, but making a difference where you can.

The case study highlights that the Support Programme achieved this through a process of direct engagement in which it prioritised municipalities to work with, and focused on specific blockages to be addressed. In implementing these activities, Support Programme staff came under considerable pressure to play different roles e.g. to fulfill EPWP-related functions within the municipalities as well as addressing institutional issues that were far broader than the EPWP.

By engaging with specific project issues directly, the Support Programme was able to have immediate impact and developed far greater insight into the nature of the challenges.

The Support Programme experience demonstrates that if it had tried to develop sufficient capacity to solve all the problems encountered, it would not have made any progress. By engaging with specific project issues directly, the Support Programme was able to have immediate impact and developed far greater insight into the nature of the challenges and the ways in which these could be addressed. This shaped a number of interventions, which have been integrated into the support model. They include:

- the combined roles of the facilitation and technical officers (through the adopted engagement model);
- the Management Information System; and
- specific tools, guidelines and policies.

However, the process illustrates that even the most focused of interventions needs to take the institutional context into account. This affects the manner in which a support programme enters the municipality, the nature of support offered, and institutional change processes such as the development of an EPWP policy at municipal level, target-based planning and performance management through KPIs.

Maintaining a focus on targets

From the outset, the Support Programme had agreed on a set of work-opportunity targets and that all activities were aimed at either expanding or accelerating the achievement of the national targets. The Support Programme

was managed rigorously by the Business Trust through quarterly reports and reviews of delivery against contractual targets. In addition an extensive evaluation process and programme was implemented to provide feedback.

At the end of each financial year, a considerable amount of time was spent on a strategic review process that resulted in the development of a business and operational plan for the following year. The targets were therefore carefully monitored and, where necessary, changes were made to ensure that these targets would be met.

Understanding support as an evolving construct

The evolution of the EPWP support model demonstrates that the provision of meaningful support depends on the government department itself being clear about its objectives and what it wishes to achieve.

This creates the space for the relevant department to define the role of other agencies and the manner in which these can most effectively assist it in achieving its programmatic objectives.

Further, a key learning from the Support Programme is that there must be a willingness to allow the support agency to test its methodologies and for these to evolve over time. Therefore while targets were maintained by the Support Programme, the Business Trust also supported its efforts to explore different approaches and to consider how impact could be maximised.

Equally important was the willingness of the government department – in this case the EPWP Unit in the Department of Public Works – to allow the support agency to test its ideas. It was the openness of the EPWP Unit to explore new approaches and its willingness to learn from experience that was so crucial to the evolution of an effective support model.

As indicated, the extent to which the Support Programme itself was open to learning and engaging was also vital. Had the Support Programme taken the viewpoint that it had all the answers, it would not have been able to build trust with its principal in government over time. Further, its willingness

A key learning from the Support Programme is that there must be a willingness to allow the support agency to test its methodologies and for these to evolve over time.

to evolve the model continually and respond in a focused way to changing requirements was also regarded as critical to its success. From the outset, the Support Programme's stance was that the government department is the principal and that, regardless of roles played, the Support Programme's role remained a supportive one.

The Programme's five-year lifespan enabled the partners to watch and learn from each other, and to play different roles at different times. Had the programme been confined to one year, the Support Programme would have implemented the direct engagement approach and would not have been able to refine it on the basis of the experience gained. Nor would there have been the opportunity for the EPWP Unit ultimately to take ownership of the support model.

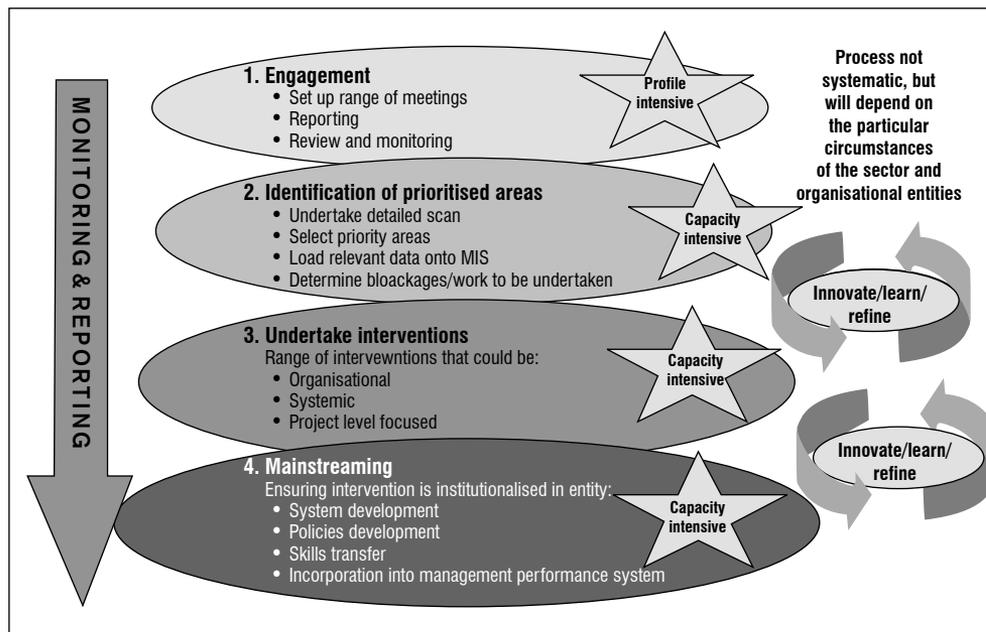
This story of an evolving model illustrates one other aspect of the Support Programme that is integral to the points mentioned above: it demonstrated that a high degree of flexibility is beneficial in being able to use different methods to achieve the targets. The Support Programme put in place regular monitoring and evaluation activities and instituted regular learning workshops. These enabled staff to reflect on the work that had been undertaken in the preceding six months. Through process such as these, Support Programme team members were exposed to the work undertaken by others in the team and were able to plan their work for the next six months with the benefit of the team's experience.

This flexibility facilitated the evolution of the model so that as the complexities of direct engagement with municipalities emerged, the model could be expanded to joint engagement, roll-out and ultimately mainstreaming, as illustrated below.

The concept of partnership

The support model developed in response to a need expressed by government and the proposed approach was worked through with the relevant government department. This influenced the way in which the programme has been run, with joint task teams making key decisions and determining the direction of the programme. The willingness of the partners to reflect on learning was

DIAGRAM 3: Support programme methodology



critical for building trust between the parties, while the acknowledgement of areas of strength and weakness was equally vital. This suggests that an effective partnership between an external agency and a government department requires the following elements:

- Partners that are willing and open to learn from each other and engage with each other.
- Respect for different types of expertise and recognition of the challenges associated with the varied institutional contexts. For example, while the public sector may not respond easily to the direct importation of an approach that was effective in a private sector context, certain approaches such as target-based management can be integrated effectively into the existing framework of government. In other cases the approaches require further adaptation or may in fact not be implementable in such different contexts.
- It is important to understand the different arrangements for institutional decision-making in the public and private sectors; this also needs to take into account the varied institutional practices in the different sectors.

Determining responsibilities within the partnership

A support programme can only assist in accelerating programme delivery if it is being undertaken in partnership with the government department that is actually responsible for the implementation of the programme. The government department must be motivated to deliver on its responsibilities and the officials who receive support should be under pressure to achieve results in the areas in which support is being offered.

This suggests that direct engagement can only be effective if the support is offered directly to the entity that has the mandate to deliver the specific service or product. In other words, for the Support Programme to have effect, it had to work directly with the municipalities that are responsible for the delivery of infrastructure and within the municipality they had to directly support those individuals with line responsibility for infrastructure delivery. By working with the municipality to establish the maximum number of work opportunities that could be achieved, ways to achieve this, and who is responsible or accountable for implementation, it becomes possible to support increased work opportunities.

The limitations of a support programme must be recognised:

- the finite resources that it has at its disposal;
- that it is in place for a limited duration of time; and
- that it stands outside the national department that is actually accountable for the programme – in this case the Department of Public Works and specifically the EPWP Unit.

Therefore, it is critical that the responsible department understands and agrees with the support measures being put in place. This is important in that it allows the Support Programme to enter the municipality with sufficient credibility to begin its engagement; it creates a platform for shared learning; and, critically, it lays the basis for the responsible department being willing to take responsibility for enabling other municipalities to benefit from the systems and tools developed.

Rolling out the support function suggests the need for an entity that has the capacity and the authority to provide this support more widely – that is, an entity that can take over the support functions from an independent service provider.

It is suggested that where a programme cuts across sectors and spheres of government, determining who is responsible for the implementation and how they can be supported is critical to ensure that the cross-cutting principles are maximised and recognised.

Conclusions

The support model significantly enhanced delivery of the EPWP through a methodology that focuses on strategising, selecting areas where success can be achieved, focusing on good systems and processes, and being flexible to the search for solutions to problems.

The support model significantly enhanced delivery of the EPWP through a methodology that focuses on strategising, selecting areas where success can be achieved, focusing on good systems and processes, and being flexible to the search for solutions to problems.

The EPWP support model is still evolving and its success cannot yet be fully determined. Nevertheless, this case study highlights those aspects of the model that are critical to ensuring that the support provided by external bodies is accepted in government, is perceived as being acceptable by its officials, and impacts on the objectives of the public service.

However, while the support model outlined here provides a set of universal lessons that can be generalised, the approach can only be used as a guide that must be adapted to the circumstances of the particular programme being implemented.

Epilogue

It is two years since Thaba and Xolile first had their conversation about how to create jobs within the EPWP. Thaba is thinking back on the work that has been carried out in his municipality through the EPWP Unit.

Thaba convinced the Water and Sanitation Department to use the Large Contractor Programme model and the response has been very positive. They have been able to appoint a single contractor that has since supported a number of small contractors and has provided them with mentorship and guidance. This has meant that the municipality has only had to deal with one contractor while the smaller contractors have benefited both from the work and from a level of support that they otherwise may not have received.

Further, the large contractor understood that a condition of the contract was to use a labour-intensive approach. The contract was designed accordingly by an engineer that had achieved a first-level qualification through training provided by an accredited service provider appointed by the municipality. This translated into work being parceled out to the small contractors and increased the number of people who could access employment.

Thaba has also had help from an engineer provided by the EPWP Support Programme who helped him capture his data so he could report on the work opportunities created within the EPWP. Not only that, but he has also been able to use the system to capture his future projects and to set a target for the number of work opportunities he will create across these projects over the coming year.

He thinks in particular of two women contractors – Surprise and Lufuno. Both are emerging contractors who participated in EPWP contractor training that assisted them with business planning, budgeting and, inter alia, administration.

Lufuno told Thaba that she had registered her company in 2003, but was not getting jobs. Still, she was confident that after the training she would get work: “I’ll be tendering with confidence after this process. In the training, one of the most important things we learn is about how to tender effectively.”

Currently, Surprise and Lufuno are working on an EPWP project that involves building gabions to prevent soil erosion at George Lea Park near Sandton. They supervise over 25 workers each and both women are excited to be given the opportunity to grow and develop in a male-dominated industry. Thaba remembers Surprise commenting that, “It is a nice industry, but it is a challenge. You have to prove that you can do the work and you have to prove a lot to yourself. You have to prove that as a woman, you can do this. You have to do more than men. You have to know yourself. I can think. I can do this. I can run a business. I can use my brain!”

Lufuno told him that she finds dealing with suppliers in the construction sector both frustrating and amusing, and told him about how people respond when she places orders: “I call to order a large shipment of concrete and the woman on the phone asks to speak to my boss. But like no! This is my company! I am the boss. When I had to order an excavator, it was like ‘why is this young girl ordering an excavator?’ You have to explain: I own the company. I am not working for anyone.”

Thaba is delighted that both women seem to be doing so well and that both are hopeful about their future in the construction sector. He feels good about having been able to play a role in presenting them with the opportunity to break through some of the barriers that had been holding them back in the past.

And then there is Stephen, also an emerging contractor who participated in EPWP emerging contractor training and who currently works on the George Lea Park gabion project. Stephen told Thaba that the training had helped him to understand the need to be professional when running one’s own business: “You have to know how to write real proper letters,” he said, “because you have to send letters for tenders and to the bank requesting finances. You have to make a good presentation. We learn this. I find it very interesting. If you don’t know the basics, you will always fall ... and in business, if you fall, you must be able to do a one-man get up. The classes make you motivated.” Stephen said that he likes working with emerging women contractors, who constantly challenge him and his ideas.

Thaba has also visited sites to ensure that the contractors are complying with the EPWP Guidelines. During these visits he sometimes talks to the workers. He remembers Michael and Lesedi who have both been working on an EPWP project at George Lea Park that involves building gabions to prevent erosion along a Sandton river embankment on William Nicol Drive. Much of the work involves building rock-filled wire boundaries and rocks are transported by hand and wheelbarrow as a means of supporting labour-intensive practices on the job.

Michael and Lesedi live in Alexandra and both were brought into the project through an Alexandra Community Liaison Officer. Thaba had explained to the owner of the company working on the gabion construction that the EPWP aims to create employment opportunities for local people. Since the George Lea Park project is located near Sandton, workers need to come from surrounding areas.

Both Michael and Lesedi had been struggling to find work for some time. Lesedi told Thaba that he is pleased to be working on the project: “It is a way for us to get work. It is helping us to get jobs.” Michael said that he is particularly happy to be working on this project, as he has safety clothes and boots for the first time on a job. In many of his other construction jobs, the equipment has been unsafe, and he has had no boots and clothing to promote better safety and reduce injuries.

Michael and Lesedi earn about R60 per day on the job. They would prefer it if they were earning a bit more, but are pleased to be earning some money to contribute to supporting their families.

This makes Thaba feel good. “The results of our work mean that I will earn a bonus! And, even more importantly, people in the community will receive an income – in many cases for the first time ever.”

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Interviews

All interviews were undertaken in January and February 2008.

- Sean Philips – Government (Previous Deputy Director-General of the EPWP Unit)
- Brian Whittaker – Business Trust (Chief Executive)
- Saguna Gordhan – Business Trust (Chief Operations Officer)
- Bongani Gxilishe – Government (Deputy Director-General: EPWP)
- Maikel Lieuw Kie Song – Government (Chief Director: Infrastructure Sector)
- Ismail Akhalwaya – Government (Chief Director: Senior Programme Manager)
- Alan Campbell – Programme Manager: Support Programme
- Matthew Nell – Team Leader: Support Programme
- Penny Foley – Manager: Infrastructure Sector Support Programme
- Jeniffer Ndindani – Careworker in Tzaneen, Limpopo Province
- Kadiaka Johnathon – Capricorn District Co-ordinator, Limpopo Province
- Kedibone Montshane – Careworker in Polokwane, Limpopo Province
- Stephen Makatile – Contractor
- Surprise Shoba – Ntshonondo Projects Manager, involved in Joburg City as an EPWP learner contractor
- Lufuno Mugwera – CEO: Mbonelaphanda Civils, involved in Joburg City as an EPWP learner contractor
- Michael Charhani and Lesedi Mahlwakwane – labourers involved in the George Lea Park infrastructure projects for the Joburg City EPWP.



The Business Trust Learning Series was established to enable the Business Trust to reflect on the lessons learnt from its work. While its primary purpose is to enlighten the Business Trust, it is hoped that the lessons captured in the series will be useful to others.

Plumbers, Magicians and Partners is the fourth case study in the series and focuses on the work of the Expanded Public Works Support Programme from February 2005 to June 2008.

In February 2004, the South African government announced the launch of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) that would create one million short- to medium-term work opportunities over a five-year period. That responsibility fell to the Department of Public Works, but the EPWP would be implemented across all government departments.

The proposal to provide support to the Department of Public Works began as an idea, with the Business Trust playing midwife to its full conceptualisation. With the help of the Expanded Public Works Support Programme, the EPWP created more than one million work opportunities in less than five years.

This case study describes how the Support Programme set about working with national government and municipalities, its areas of success and some of the challenges it faced in the process.