DELEGATES REFLECT ON SITE VISITS

Delegates at the 12th Regional Seminar on Labour Intensive Practices clearly appreciated the opportunity to comment and raise questions during a lively and interactive session that reflected on Wednesday’s project site visits.

It would seem that the indaba’s weather failed to dampen the enthusiasm of delegates who visited projects in areas south, north and the east of Durban. Of the three visits, the trip to Port Shepstone elicited the greatest enthusiasm among delegates who were moved to aplauses.

The Northern Route visit prompted most interest with all questions and comments reserved for the construction of the P240 Road, while the interest in the mushroom-growing project, coffee-making venture and the VDP toilets were more or less equally shared by delegates on the western excursion.

It was clear that the selection of emerging contractors, training and their skills levels were of great interest to delegates from other African countries. In this respect, the experience gained in the construction of the P240 Road near Munster and the P982 Road towards Highlands seemed of great relevance and the pioneering work through the Vukuzakhe programme clearly was admired.

Not that delegates held back on criticism; as did a road engineer who queried the alignment of the P240, prompting the response that the design flaw would be rectified. Other comments and queries were submitted in the same constructive criticism frame. These pertained to questions about the sustainability of projects, such as the mushroom-growing initiative and the coffee-making scheme.

The responses to these specific queries might have varied, but they were couched in a palatable sense of honesty. Delegates heard for instance that the mushroom project was very much a pilot and that there were teething problems and some seriously challenging concerns, not least finding a market for the produce.

The interaction also explored the “work for food” paradigm that, to a degree, can be regarded as a cornerstone of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

It emerged, for instance, that the high youth component (25%) of people employed in EPWP meant that money would not necessarily make its way to a household, and rather might be spent on consumption activities.

Similarly, the role of women featured prominently in the EPWP model with 60% of all workers of the female gender. The reason for this gender bias is charmingly simple and effective in that in a rural context, women tend to be the breadwinners.

Still on the topic of food security, delegates with experience in community gardens posed the question why not more was done in terms of composting as a natural fertilizer.

Sustainability as an economic imperative too was explored in depth. Praise, if not all projects, elicited a question about its long-term viability and the expected degree of self-sustainability.

Delegates heard that funding for the mushroom project was budgeted for seven years, and that the coffee-making enterprise was not motivated as a SMME venture, but as a means to reuse waste wood.

The recycling theme surprisingly was rather muted, but can reasonably be expected to assume greater importance as the EPWP minimizes entrenched among decision-makers.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A friendly reminder to all delegates who will need to effect payment for confirm
that arrangements in this regard with the Registration Desk.

All Seminar papers and presentations are to be posted on the website.
Copies of our daily newsletter, Siyasebenza can also be obtained from this website.

Ms Florence Muggendi, Kenyan Delegate

“I think the seminar was well-balanced and worthwhile. I was particularly impressed to see women involved in South Africa’s projects. However, my main concern is sanitisation on the sites.”

RETRACTION

As the Tuesday issue of Siyasebenza (15 October 2007), it was incorrectly reported that South Africa allocates at least 2% of its GDP to addressing unemployment and poverty. This should not have read 3.5%. Siyasebenza apologises for this gross error.

On speaking to Dr Santosh Mehta, one of the promoters of the Employment Guarantee Programme, he also pointed out that the extent of provision of the programme varied from countries of the magnitude of South Africa and India’s generally in the region of 0.5% of GDP allocated to labour-intensive programmes.”
Conference delegates welcomed panelists’ insights into many of the factors inhibiting beneficial social impacts in current public procurement approaches to large-scale employment.

Challenges relating to how best to incorporate social impact objectives into large projects are intensified by, for example, inflexible procurement strategies, time constraints, and the need for large-scale impacts. The study found that, in every case, there were no specific programmes associated with the project in question.

The study identified a range of challenges faced by procurement officers when trying to meet the social development objectives set by funding agencies and the clients of the projects they were managing. The challenges include:

1. **Limited Capacity**: Procurement officers often lack the knowledge and skills to incorporate social development objectives into procurement processes.
2. **Shortage of Resources**: There is often a lack of resources to support the implementation of social development activities.
3. **Lack oflas Capacity Building**: Procurement officers may lack the capacity to effectively engage with social development agencies.
4. **Lack of Communication**: There is often a lack of communication between procurement officers and social development stakeholders.
5. **Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation**: There is often a lack of monitoring and evaluation tools to track the progress of social development activities.

The study concluded that there is a need for procurement officers to be actively involved in the development of social development strategies and to be provided with the necessary training and support to effectively manage social development activities. It also recommended that procurement officers should be encouraged to work more closely with social development agencies to ensure that social development objectives are effectively integrated into procurement processes.
A dominant theme among presentations delivered and comments made during this week’s seminar was the issue of engaging communities and promoting social cohesion. It’s little wonder that when the panel discussion of the same topic was opened on Thursday, there was big audience present to listen and engage the participants.

Robert Guell posed the question of whether labour-intensive methods in construction could be used as a way to catalyse job creation in post-conflict societies. The question is relevant because the lack of meaningful employment is widely considered to be key causes of African conflict. “As a political scientist, I’m not here to say how this can be done, but rather why it must be,” he said.

Previously, Guell said, the stance had been that restoring infrastructure after war was impossible and unnecessary. “If you agree that infrastructure cannot stop conflict, you must admit that neither can the military, it’s the civil wars and development that can make the difference.” He explained that the main component of development work is DDR – disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating former fighters into civilian life. But, he said, it’s often difficult for these ex-fighters to get jobs as law-abiding citizens because all they know is fighting. They also find it hard to accept low-paying jobs and would rather resort to looting. “We have to help them get skills and provide an economic alternative to living off the gun so they can put food on the table.”

Another paradox he noted in post-conflict countries was that these regions have significant levels of infrastructure destruction and they are areas where violent conflict is more likely to re-emerge.

Guell said that most African countries, including South Africa, don’t have credible plans to back their commitment to rebuild or redevelop their economy. “We need to invest in our own technology to solve our own problems.”

Sizukudzo Simelane and Ziphele Madula presented a paper on the Mthomzi scheme, which is an initiative to create jobs through maintenance of community infrastructure in the Sisonke District Municipality (SDM), KwaZulu-Natal.

“Public works programmes introduced since (democracy began in South Africa) have provided hundreds of thousands of people with short periods of employment, but at the same time creating unprecedented rural infrastructure,” he said. SDM developed an initiative to create employment opportunities through revitalising and maintaining existing projects.

Known as Mthomzi (p.w.e.), the programme entails taking stock of the state of existing community water infrastructure, developing plans and mobilising resources communities to continuously monitor the well-being of these assets.

The project started last year offering its 19 participants who are called water monitors, two-year contracts. Now it employs 91 people and these contractors get a salary of R2,500. Participants are selected through a competitive process between traditional leaders and local councilors. ADO orphan and women-headed households are given preference in the selection process.

Alex Campbell of AnyWay Sold Environmental Solutions discussed the Rural Community Development Plan (RCDP) they developed which incorporates road building and low-cost housing construction projects. The project is based in Simume, which is southwest of Johannesburg.

In addition to offering employment, the RCDP is designed to teach marketable skills to those engaged in the process. While the science behind the products is complex, Campbell said, the technology transferred within the programme is readily learned by previously unskilled labourers. The programme trains teams of workers in three distinct disciplines, namely block making, roads construction and housing construction. This project shows how the private sector can promote rural development.

Nite Tansan, an independent consultant, delivered a study on Labour-Based Methods: A Key Area For Mainstreaming Gender In The Road Infrastructure Sector. The study was based on Kenya’s Road’s 2000 concept. This project is the government’s strategy for maintenance of rural roads. The strategy provides that all roads are to be maintained through labour-based methods.

Some of the themes explored included the potential for labour-based works in promoting gender equality, the gendered impacts of adopting labour-based methods and the challenges of promoting gender quality in labour-based approaches.

Tansan and her colleagues conducted their studies in Kenya and Uganda. They found that female contractors identified a number of constraints, namely training costs, access to credit and lack of knowledge of contracting systems also to be major challenges.

“They believe that without an affirmative action for women, especially in contracting, it would be difficult for them to get work,” she said.

Due to concerns that promoting women’s participation under contracting may be difficult because contractors are primarily interested in profit margins rather than equity, she suggested that motivating contractors to employ women through incentives could benefit the women.

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SMME CONTRACTOR DEVELOPMENT FOR JOB CREATION

Jubilees Zharane yesterday delivered a paper on a study commissioned by the EPWP Unit through the Business Trust Support Programme. The objective of the study was to review the Vukuphile Learning Programme, an emerging contractor learning programme established in 2004 under the EPWP, particularly with reference to the funding model of the learning programme. The study was undertaken in five provinces by sampling 320 of 1500 learners already on the programme.

The study findings concluded that the programme was reaching its intended targets, contributing immensely to the development of emerging contractors and that funds invested justified the success of the programme.

The discussion that followed mainly focused on the costs associated with the model, which resulted in an extensive debate on monitoring issues related to the selection and assessment process. It was agreed that the assessment of mentors is currently the greatest weakness of the programme.

Evil strategies were also raised and it was evident that planning for exit strategies should occur prior to the start of a particular programme, or whilst the programme is being implemented.

A paper delivered by Imvelo Tseputunu on SMME contractor development for job creation highlighted the difficulties experienced by small/medium contractors in circumventing the lack of preparatory factors. These include previous construction-related experience and other tertiary qualifications required by the industry. Research conducted confirmed a correlation between qualifications and success, as well as experience and success through considering the experience of 53 contractors.

Recommendations flowing from the research pertain to the development of an extensive training programme which covers the technical and business aspects of construction contracts.

However, the participants felt that more emphasis should be placed on on-site training. It was further recommended that the training requirements at the various CDBs grading levels should be assessed and that these should dictate the length of the training programme.

The Namibian model, according to Rodger Polzin (Roads Authority, Namibia) is based on the preparation of technical documents, which include the standardisation of specifications pertaining to on-site construction work, tender documents and schedule specifications. Specification of quantities are drawn up in different sections and the SME contractor only price those items which are not excessive. All paint items are therefore blocked out.

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cont. on page 4
The Search FOR SUCCESSFUL LABOUR

Expect the search for successful labour-based methodologies to gather pace as the agencies responsible for road construction in South Africa deepen their search for appropriate technologies.

This truism was one of the themes during the discussion on labour-friendly design and specification, one of the four parallel sessions after lunch.

The session focussed on three relatively challenging technical presentations. However, and in keeping with the nature of the discussion, the content of each of the three presentations by Messrs I. Cassen, J. Hastings and K. Mukura was made accessible to a diverse audience.

Arguably the most challenging aspect was the cost factor with specific reference to wages paid to labourers. It was felt that a straightforward comparison between the cost of labour and a machine was fallacious in that the discussion would necessarily include the concept of a labour-based philosophy — that of job creation and the need for socio-economic beneficial in a bid to mitigate the effects of the recession.

In the context, the construction of rural roads, as opposed to high-tech highways designed to carry high-volume traffic, represented the execution of appropriate technology.

Notwithstanding the synthesis of “man and machine” in the construction of rural roads, several interventionists had been developed to improve road-building and, in the process, empower the people entrusted with this function.

One such initiative is the CDB project that contains a wealth of information on the training of emerging contractors.

Informed by best practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, the project makes no-fuss claims as to its applicability. Essentially a simple “how to” manual in CD format, it states clearly that it does not meet the criteria for CETA or EPWP accreditation.

Similarly, it specifically excludes any application as far as bulk works, the development of borrow pits, and the processing of materials in borrow pits are concerned.

It is however, aimed at empowering local labour to become small contractors with skills and limited managerial capacity.

Its strongest element though is its philosophy of making work meaningful for labourers and, as such, imbues a high premium on skills development.

Its measure is that the quality of work by emerging contractors must be better or at least equal to what is being executed by machine.

The resource comprises five separate manuals each dealing with the characteristics of the unique elements of road building. It covers the fundamentals of road building, planning and contracting, gravel roads, bitumen roads and concrete roads.

Addressing the practical implementation of the philosophy of increased job creation, Johan Hastings pointed out that the single biggest challenge to the EPWP was the apparent absence of accountability.

In a typical scenario, a road-building team is made up of a workforce, SMME contractor, training provider, engineer, and a project manager that, in the greater scheme of things, collectively strives towards the EPWP goals of providing infrastructure, SMME empowerment and job creation.

These goals are pursued within the boundaries of budget, time and quality, a tough task at the best of times, but the problem is that there is simply not sufficient remedy for a client.

The only way to redress this vacuum is to introduce accountability through a so-called “learn balancing principles” paradigm.

Equally important is for labour-intensive projects not to be ring-fenced, to define optimum labour costs, introduce penalty and bonuses, to re-engineer processes, and to address delivery.

The challenges of road building in Africa are no better illustrated than by the fact that 80% of roads are unpaved, and that the continent is losing more roads than it builds.

Despite unfavourable views on labour-based methodologies, there are success stories in some countries.

At issue is quality assurance, a collective willingness to use appropriate construction materials, and the implementation of lifecycle costing principles with reference to future maintenance, budget, and project appraisal.

“It stands to reason that good quality materials will produce a better road that lasts longer and is more cost-effective,” said Kenneth Mukura.

Mr Kenneth Mukura

SMME Contractor Development – cont.

On the other hand, plant contractors price those items that are equipment-based and all labour items are blocked out. Ultimately SMME contractors and plant contractors submit a joint tender offer. As they are successful, they enter into a partnership contract, which defines their respective roles.

SME contractors secure management support and training during the execution of the contract and the costs of training, etc. are included in the contract price. The main contractor is the only contractor with this provision in South Africa.

SME contractors are currently undertaking work in the northern parts of Namibia, Poland said.

Training of SME contractors involves attendance at a one-week training course on SME contractor development. The course content includes training in the contract to establish training, tendering rates, etc. All persons wanting to participate in the programme should have completed the course and be in possession of a certificate. To date, 48 contractors have been trained.

Delegates showed immense interest in the revision of contract documents and were particularly eager to obtain further details regarding the mentor model applied in Namibia.
MADAGASCAR
TURNING THE TIDE ON POVERTY

With almost two-thirds of its population living in absolute poverty, the island country of Madagascar on Africa’s east coast is at pains to improve the quality of life of its citizens.

Plenty Razafimahery, Director of Total Planning in the Ministry of Economy, Finance and the Budget in Madagascar, painted the picture of his country’s socioeconomic landscape. Added to the extensive poverty in the country, he said, they also had to contend with the lack of employment opportunities.

Determined to win the battle against poverty and unemployment, national government has in place the Madagascar Action Plan for Employment and Growth (PAEG) to help to provide companies and the private sector with the conditions for growth in a sustainable way, he explained. The government has in use new approaches to prioritise employment in infrastructure investments through government programmes and the medium term expenditure framework (MTEF). It is also very important to note that Madagascar enjoys the support of a number of development partners and funders, he added. The Public Works that were the main drivers of labour-intensive approaches. Since 2000, other departments also got on board.

The labour-intensive approach, a strong relationship between state and the private sector in addressing economy growth and poverty reduction in Madagascar has proved to be very important. Through public investments, Razafimahery said, the state is able to show its solidarity with the poor. He added that government determines on an annual basis, through its budget process the rate of employment that must be met by public investment.

For him, the challenges they face in implementing labour-based methods must be met head-on, “In the minds of the public, labour-intensive construction is often associated with poor quality work that’s not sustainable. We therefore have to rethink the way we conduct business.”

In analysing the various techniques of executing labour-intensive employment opportunities, the Madagascar government bases its methods on information from projects which companies tender for as well as various other projects around the country. This approach assist in projecting labour costs and resources, it also helps to establish whether a product or service should be produced locally, or be imported.

He said that in 1995 they had to limit these projections to rehabilitation programmes, but programmes have now been expanded to include public buildings such as schools and hospitals as well as irrigation systems and the like.

“No matter what type of infrastructural project you have, the labour-based approach is better than the technological approach,” he said. Madagascar’s technique is to encourage all designers to include the farmer in their planning, “You can’t reach growth without creating jobs. From now on, as soon as the budget is voted, the government should impress on all concerned parties to include about-intensive approaches in their programmes. You have to insist on quantification, alignment and flexibility,” he added.

Razafimahery argued that government should always opt for the labour-based option, although this approach does not seem to bode well with all of those involved in these processes. Within Madagascar’s Public Works Department, he said, it does become a challenge to convince the engineers, who are more technologically-minded, to place more emphasis on labour-intensive approaches in their planning.

The Great Wall of China, he said, was built not just to block the enemy, but to create jobs for the Chinese people, “it’s this magnificent man-made structure that can be observed by the safeties - not highly advanced technological inventions” he concluded to much applause.

ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

The Employment and Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) information sharing session yesterday afternoon addressed issues of critical importance.

Mr. Jubilee Zharane from the EC Africa Organization stated that the objective of the programme was to create enterprises through contractor learning to do create additional work opportunities linked to training and to enhance the ability of workers to earn an income, either through labour-intensive or entrepreneurial activity.

She suggested that the recruitment and selection of participants played a particularly important role in achieving these objectives, “Training needs to be relevant and appropriate and mentors need to understand and deliver the type of services required to prepare learners for the industry,” she stressed.

Several challenges remain, including the provision of an effective service by mentors, i.e., to determine the optimal ratio in respect of the mentor/contractor relationship how to cover mentors’ unlisted costs, the monitoring of mentor firms to reduce incidences of fraud and ensure delivery and matching mentors’ relevant skills to projects.

Mr. Enokhe Gigaba, a PhD student (Wits University) elaborated on the importance of learnings and other opportunities provided by the V4PS programme (‘Get up and do it for yourself’ programme). He continued by stating that SMEs contribute immensely to the economy of many countries and despite the limited capital at their disposal, create more job opportunities than large companies.

South African banking giant, ABSA, also contributed to the project by investing an estimated R175 million in the project as part of its social responsibility programme. About 77% of the participants have already benefited from the project in terms of loans accessed from the bank.

According to a member of the panel, ineffective management and incompetence remain challenges. However, approximately 1 957 jobs have been created by this programme.

The need to provide relevant mentors in order for the programme to be effective and productive results has been identified as a major requirement by the South African EPWP.

Despite skepticism about the viability of the EPWP’s South Africa, measures are in place to successfully achieve the projected goal of creating 1 million job opportunities by 2009. Successful exit strategies form part of the aforementioned.

Mr. Roy Polin, a senior engineer from Nampula elaborated on the Namibian experience, noting that women indeed proved to be more focused than men in these programmes. Ms. Marietta Musa from Tanzania’s Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development said she appreciated the movement of entrepreneurs and developers in the planning and implementation phases, as they brought valuable insights to the upgrading of infrastructure, while simultaneously creating job opportunities and transfer of skills.

THE RIGHT TO A JOB

If there’s one thing macro-economist Rania Antonoopoulos believes in it is the “right to a job”.

She is not talking about herself of course, but about the growing phenomenon of jobless growth in the South African context, transfers to a booming economy against a backdrop of unprecedented high unemployment.

Antonoopoulos is a founder member of the Global Network of Economists, academics, policy advisors, practitioners, advocates and members of government, who are committed to the realisation of the right to a job.

“We believe that job creation is a strong and contributing factor to a just, equitable and human economic development path. We also believe that having access to decent work must become the highest economic and social priority and that the conservation of financial resources should not be an a priori justification for not fulfilling this responsibility,” she said.

She enumerated the historic reasons for unemployment, and rather a strong focus on the rights of the entire people and the recognition of the forced idleness and socialisation.

Controversially, certainly among some, she contended that Antonoopoulos and her network believes the primary responsibility for guaranteeing a job rests with the state.

To drive home her point, Antonoopoulos referred interested people to a website with a name that is a mouthful – www.economicforall.org.

“Award-winning forces with all who foster public dialogue and seek to promote employment guarantees programmes around the world. Together, we can provide coherent, viable policy alternatives that lead to inclusive and just outcomes for all,” she added.

To the end, the movement set out a number of key elements:

- The establishment of an international virtual community of people and organisations;
- To promote public dialogue for and build towards a worldwide campaign that places job creation and employment guarantees policies at the top of the policy agenda;
- Leverage and influence the policies and programmes of development agencies and financial institutions for improved employment outcomes, and;
- Build communities of learning and foster policy awareness on ongoing country level experiences, and
- Engage in teaching and policy oriented research that explores development, poverty and macro-economic issues linked to the design and implementation of the right to a job and full employment policies.

Speaking to the 5th Regional Seminar on Labour Intensive Projects, Antonoopoulos said the gathering helped to synthesise some of the principles and philosophies of the “right to work” into:

“The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is very much the manifestation of this philosophy and it was very good meeting with people who share the same concern,” she said.

Antonoopoulos was also highly complimentary of what she called the “shipping” around the issue in South Africa.

“There’s a long way to go, but I’m very impressed with the shipping around these issues,” she said.

Much as the issue is about the right to dignity, it equally release the power of economics, specifically the multiplier effect. The nature of such an exercise is directly proportional to the input, but I rely on my concerted effort to ensure that the ‘shipping’ around the South Africa economic will post additional growth of between 1.7% and 2.5%,” she said.
Mr Emeka Egbeonu, Doctoral Research Student at the University of Witwatersrand

“This is the first seminar that I have attended. What concerns me, is that we are still experiencing excruciating poverty, despite all the interventions in developing countries.”

Mr Tsutomu Arakawa, Ministry of Works and Transport in Uganda

“I think the visit to the projects was fabulous and informative. The projects are performed in a specialized fashion which is ideal for labour-intensive methods. I will definitely take some of the ideas back to Uganda.”

Mr Nhaupe Malbye, Deputy Director-General, Department of Public Works, South Africa

“The seminar has really contributed to increased awareness regarding skills development initiatives going forward.”

Special thanks to all the exhibitors who provided invaluable information to delegates throughout the week:

- South African Department of Public Works
- International Labour Organisation
- KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport
- Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works
- Mpumalanga Department of Roads and Transport
- Independent Development Trust
- Council for the Built Environment
- Agrement South Africa

Cocktail function

A farewell cocktail function was held at the ICC last night and judging by the smiles our photographer elicited, was thoroughly enjoyed by all.
THANK YOU and BON VOYAGE!

We would like to thank everybody for their contribution to the success of the 12th Regional Seminar on Labour Intensive Practices a success. For too many people played a role and made a contribution for us to name or feature them all, but we are deeply grateful for the support. We wish you a safe journey!