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AN OVERVIEW AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES IN
DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

by

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An Overview and Comparative Analysis of Special Employment Programmes in Developed and Developing Countries*

Over the years, special employment programmes (SEPs) have assumed an important role in developed and developing countries alike. Even in the years immediately prior to the first oil price shock of 1973-74, when a number of industrialised market economy countries had achieved nearly full employment, certain disadvantaged groups proved hard to reach through expansionary macro-economic policy. Special job creation and training efforts and targeted incentive measures were viewed as a means of distributing employment opportunities and providing necessary skills in response to existing or changing requirements of the labour market.

In low income countries characterised by marked rural-urban disparities, limited skill formation, a weak infrastructure base and grossly inadequate levels of basic needs satisfaction among the masses of the population, the arduous tasks of poverty relief and employment creation have provided a powerful argument on behalf of adroitly utilising and combining the widest range of policy instruments available. Moreover, interventions on behalf of special groups, such as those aimed at strengthening the organisational base of women and giving them greater access to resources have, in addition to their effect on productive capacity, often succeeded in raising awareness and status and in stimulating the subsequent release of further creative potential of the target population.

What has changed in the 1980s is that the economic crisis and eventual efforts to spur a recovery have placed in sharper relief the role of special employment programmes and related measures. The times have heightened expectations as to what these might accomplish but also gradually have led to a growing understanding of what they might realistically be expected to achieve. The greatest change, of course, has been in the increasing numbers that such programmes and measures are being called upon to reach. Often this has involved extending such interventions to segments of the labour force that were previously able to look after their own economic needs, or broadening their coverage of individuals and households thrust into poverty.

* This is a slightly revised version of a paper that was presented at the PREALC/Turin Centre Seminar on "Examen Comparativo de Programas Especiales de Creacion de Empleo", Turin, 6-29 March 1989.
The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of special employment programmes over time and across regions. An examination over time is useful for drawing attention to changes in the economic conditions and policy environment under which SEPs are being operated and how this, in turn, influences their role. An examination across countries serves to illustrate how different levels of development and sets of economic conditions influence the choice of SEP instruments as well as much of their programme content. But it also serves, perhaps even more importantly, to demonstrate the extent to which most if not all countries employing SEPs must confront similar policy choices and dilemmas as well as problems of programme design and implementation. Within this framework, developed and developing countries seemingly should have valuable lessons to share and considerable scope to learn from one another.

**Conditions which create a demand for special employment programmes**

In examining special employment programmes across regions and over time, it will be helpful to look first at the conditions which bring them about and the circumstances to which they are intended to respond. Such an overview not only enables the highlighting of similarities and differences in various SEP approaches but begins to point to some of their limitations.

It is appropriate to begin with public works programmes which have a long tradition as a counter-cyclic component of government policy. The most frequently cited historical example is the various public investment programmes devised to create work for people during the years of the Great Depression. In the United States, a massive infusion of government funds on a global scale was aimed at aiding recovery by using unutilised human resources to stimulate demand. The main concern of this Keynesian approach was to step up the level of public investment expenditure with a view to renewing economic growth and in the process putting people back to work. Unlike most present-day SEPs, which can best be categorised as micro-level interventions, often aimed at correcting for supply-side deficiencies, such public works programmes represented the use of a fiscal instrument and therefore constituted macro-economic policy.

Although operating on a much more limited scale, one of the special employment programmes which still exists today in Sweden is a programme of public works projects dating back to the 1930s that includes among the uses to which it can be put, the counteracting of cyclical unemployment. Since Sweden's public relief work projects are often organised to counteract unemployment resulting from seasonal as well as cyclic downturns in employment, four to five times more people are employed on these projects in winter than in summer.

When public works programmes are conceived as a counter-cyclic policy instrument, a prominent feature becomes their intended short-term character. Once the private sector begins to respond to the demand stimulus and the slack in the labour market is substantially reduced, such counter cyclic job creation efforts are to be scaled back. Plans for new public works projects such as the construction of roads and dams remain on the drawing board.
Macro-economic policy is thus seen to have achieved one of its historical roles of reducing unemployment. Further demand stimulation risks overshooting the mark, thereby introducing the risk of inflation. The timing of these more traditional public works programmes thus becomes of paramount importance. This not only involves ensuring that programmes do not continue beyond the phase of the business cycle where a stimulus is required, but ensuring at the outset that programmes can begin rapidly before a recession deepens. But without the institutional machinery and a stock of already designed public works projects in place, this can prove difficult.

In recent years, and certainly since the beginning of the 1980s, governments generally have been reluctant to use more traditional fiscal measures to stimulate the level of economic activity with a view to reducing high levels of unemployment. The fear on the part of most policymakers of rekindling inflation has been too great. Fiscal as well as monetary policy, to the extent that they have been used, have aimed to keep the rate of general price inflation as low as possible. Policy makers, when addressing their employment problems, have increasingly turned to a broad range of micro-interventions.

This is not to suggest, however, that public works activity has ceased. Quite the contrary is true. Rather, it is the form that this intervention takes which has changed. No longer global in nature, public works programmes most frequently are targeted on particular segments of the population. The lines of selection may be narrowly or more widely drawn up but generally bear some relationship to the employment or income status of the individual or household. Public works programmes also can be used to tackle high regional concentrations of unemployment within countries.

There are also today in several other Western European countries special employment programmes targeted on the long-term unemployed which include a certain amount of public work activity. Among these are the ABM (Arbeitsbeschaffungsmassnahmen) in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Job Offer Act in Denmark and the Community Programme in the United Kingdom. But while they often incorporate more traditional infrastructure construction, typically such programmes cover a range of activities defined as being of benefit to the community, including many which create social infrastructure or provide social services at a municipal or local community level.

Quite apart from the nature of the work activity, it is interesting to observe that all three of the aforementioned programmes have achieved a quasi permanence. The ABM traces its roots back to the West German Employment Promotion Act of 1969. The Danish Job Offer Act came into force in 1978, while the British Community Programme was the most recently launched in 1982. This seeming permanence of many special employment programmes in developed and developing countries alike is an issue the paper will address more fully in the final section.

Returning, however, to the nature and role of present-day public works programmes, far more common are those found in developing countries. Of particular note is a category of programmes comprising small-scale, labour-intensive public works projects called special public works programmes (SPWPs). Their special character derives from the fact that they are intended to supplement regular employment policy measures by assisting...
governments in the urgent provision of employment for particular segments of the population through the construction and use of durable assets not initially foreseen in the development plan. Generally speaking, SPWPs fall into four broad categories: (1) roads (construction, repair and maintenance of village access and feeder roads, bridges and similar structures); (2) soil conservation (including reforestation and other forest protection works); (3) irrigation and water supply (small irrigation canals, small hillside dams, flood control, etc.); and (4) social and economic village facilities (e.g. low-cost housing, dispensaries, schools and storage facilities).

At the outset, it was the direct short-term employment creation potential of SPWPs that stood out as perhaps the most powerful argument in their favour. In view of the seasonality of agriculture and large underutilised labour force characteristic of rural areas in most developing countries, labour-intensive infrastructure projects aimed at offering short-term income opportunities appeared especially attractive. When the construction phase of a project could be linked to the crop cycle, SPWPs offered workers a source of economic activity timed to provide incomes during the slack seasons of agriculture production.

It was also intended that SPWPs should create productive assets that offered long-term benefits to a wider population. Irrigation works could increase crop yields and feeder roads improve access to more distant markets. In practice, however, there was often a significant trade-off between rapidly relieving unemployment and underemployment in a project area and designing technically efficient and cost effective projects capable of achieving and sustaining longer term economic and employment gains.

As long as capital was readily available, there also was a tendency to place considerable reliance on equipment-intensive construction techniques whose maintenance required further infusions of fresh capital. The debt crisis of the 1980s suddenly made it extremely difficult to repair or replace the heavy equipment acquired in past years for the construction and maintenance of infrastructure works. As outside funds became increasingly scarce and completed infrastructure fell into disrepair, countries became more receptive to the use of labour-intensive, locally-resource-based construction and maintenance techniques. At the same time the emphasis placed on the generation of short-term direct employment gave way to increasing attention to SPWPs' potential to create indirect and long-term employment. Considerations of economic viability gained at the expense of earlier considerations of social equity.

The change of focus from the short-term goal of immediate employment creation to long-term objectives of indirect income generation, sustainability and local capacity for management and maintenance of the constructed infrastructure can yield significant employment creation results over the life of the project. A few illustrations serve to point out the possible employment effects associated with SPWPs. The implementation with ILO technical support of an irrigation project in Nepal resulted in the creation of 257,000 work days in the construction phase between 1980 and 1983, and the generation of 22,000 work-days per year for its operation, to which can be added 900 more work days per year, on average, for maintenance purposes. Moreover, it is estimated that the project should eventually help to provide an additional 260,000 work days annually through local and macro-economic multiplier effects. An ILO-supported afforestation project in Rwanda created
552,000 work days in direct employment during the construction phase from 1980 to 1983 and offers prospects for 14,200 work-days per year during the operational phase (the logging itself), and an additional 28,000 work-days annually for maintenance, over a 40 year period.  

From these illustrations it immediately becomes apparent that the long-term employment creation effects of well organised and properly phased SPWPs can be equally if not more important than the short-term direct employment that they generate. Furthermore, the technical requirements of most such projects make it difficult to launch them both quickly and successfully. Thus, although SPWPs may still be regarded as possessing an emergency character, as a policy instrument they may in general, be more appropriate for dealing with deeply entrenched conditions of unemployment and poverty or with economic crises whose effects continue over a long time period rather than with recessionary conditions of a shorter-term character. In fact, the former more closely depicts the situation which exists today and further underlines the important role that SPWPs can play as part of the recovery process. In this context it is also important to mention that although often regarded as a supplementary source of slack season income, where recession and structural adjustment measures have imperiled other sources of income, sustained SPWP activity becomes all the more critical. At the same time, the severe recession that rocked the world economy in the early 1980s and the ensuing efforts to adjust to external imbalances have been at an enormous social cost, thereby increasing the demand for special employment programmes which retain or possess an emergency character.

The social costs have not been uniformly experienced across regions. Among developing countries, Africa and Latin America have been more adversely affected than most of Asia. In the industrialised regions, the social costs have been more prolonged throughout most of Western Europe than in North America. Yet to the extent that generalisations can be permitted, it can be observed that in both developed and developing countries, there have been marked changes in not only the size but in the composition of those calling for SEP assistance.

In developing countries, rapid increases in labour force compounded by a slowdown in economic growth have resulted in a substantial increase in open unemployment. This has been most pronounced in urban areas, an important factor when the largely rural character of SPWPs is recalled. The unemployed comprise, particularly in Latin America, as PREALC has pointed out, a large proportion of heads of households and persons in the most active age group of 24 to 44 years. Here it may be observed that the cost of adjustment has been borne largely by those whose income originated from the labour market, with workers' income reduced by 4.8 per cent of GDP. Large numbers of traditional wage earners have been displaced from jobs in the modern sector. In Latin America there has been a sizeable decrease in employment creation in large private sector firms, while in Africa, public sector retrenchments have scaled back what has long been a major source of modern sector job opportunities. Some who lose modern sector jobs seek some form of assistance or support. Yet many others from this group have joined other new entrants to the urban informal sector, placing still greater pressure on declining productivity and incomes in that sector and increasing its requirements for further policy interventions. In addition, as a result of the totality of higher open unemployment, drop in real wages and reduced working hours, a larger number of households have been pushed below the poverty line. This
has had implications for programmes that look beyond the head of household in seeking to provide a measure of poverty relief or to channel assistance to others in the household, particularly to female spouses and other female members. The poverty-reducing side of SEPs takes on added significance in view of cutbacks in government expenditure on the social sectors and the absence of a safety net for most workers.

In industrialised market economy countries, where unemployment had stood above 30 million since the early 1980s, it finally fell back just below this figure in 1987. Although unemployment dropped below 5.5 per cent in the United States in 1988 and stands at under 2 per cent in Sweden and under one per cent in Switzerland, for Western Europe as a whole, unemployment has remained more or less steady around 11 per cent since 1984. Moreover, for many industrialised countries, high levels of youth unemployment persist and long-term unemployment has become an even more serious labour market problem.

What often has given cause for particular concern in Western Europe throughout most of the 1980s is that even when countries have achieved moderate rates of economic growth, sufficient new jobs have not been created. Sometimes what is observed is the phenomenon of "jobless growth", i.e. growth that is not generating additional employment.

A major part of the problem in Western Europe has been that the scars left by inflation have made most governments reluctant to return to more stimulative demand management policies. Instead the emphasis, throughout the present decade has been much more on micro-interventions and the supply side. Policy makers have focussed on price distortions, restrictions on competition, labour market rigidities and institutional barriers, all of which are cited as factors holding back entrepreneurship, growth and renewed job creation. Deregulation and attempts to achieve greater labour market flexibility have become the centrepiece of this new orthodoxy. Employment creation, to the extent that it remains a major policy goal, is to be achieved more as the result of indirect or longer-term processes.

Yet the weight attached to efficiency criteria frequently at the expense of equity considerations has resulted in substantial job loss and labour displacement along with a significant rise in precarious forms of employment and fewer full-time entry level positions. As a result, the 1980s have witnessed an increasing reliance on a growing number of temporary employment and mixed work and training programmes. In the United Kingdom alone, upwards of 1.7 million participants are enrolled in various special employment programmes. Throughout Western Europe many of these programmes are targeted specifically on young people. Two of the best known are the TUC (travaux d'utilité collective) in France and the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in the United Kingdom. The TUC is a community work programme that provides unemployed young people aged 16-21 who are not in school with 20 hours of work a week. Jobs in socially useful activities such as assistance to the elderly, conservation work and pre-school services, last from three months to one year. The YTS began as a one-year programme aimed at combining training and planned work experience in providing young people with a bridge between school and work. In 1986 the YTS was converted into a two-year programme open to all employed and unemployed school leavers. Seventeen-year old school-leavers remained eligible for one year. A considerable number of the 15 to 24-year-olds involved in the SEPs found across Western Europe are school dropouts in need of remedial assistance. Nevertheless, certain major
programmes have tended to cater more to young people with educational qualifications which, prior to the pronounced economic downturn of the 1980s, were normally sufficient to ensure them direct access to jobs offering full time wage employment.

Current forms of SEP

As already illustrated, not all public works programmes or, more generally speaking, special employment programmes are centred solely on the construction of physical and social infrastructure. In addition to SPWPs, which have already been discussed, four additional broad categories merit some consideration: first, those government funded programmes which provide direct opportunities, other than through rural works, to engage in infrastructure construction and repair, artisan activity, community service, etc.; second, those programmes which give subsidies to private sector employers to offer temporary jobs, often to a particular target group; third, those programmes aimed at enterprise creation or the generation of self-employment; and fourth, those programmes which are largely welfare-oriented in nature or of a clearly mixed character.

Direct government job creation efforts

Special employment programmes may be operated by the government alone or, as is frequently the case, the responsibility may be shared with non-governmental organisations. The latter may be non-profit making but here too there is no hard rule. The distinguishing feature of direct government job creation efforts is that the government itself is highly involved in the organisation of work, selection of participants and direction and control of overall activity.

For instance, under Sweden's public relief work projects most activity is originated by municipal authorities, although national authorities and even private employers also can launch projects. Most projects are concerned with care of children and the elderly, medical care, municipal services and administration.

In the case of the United Kingdom's Community Programme, projects of benefit to the community are operated by local communities and non-profit making organisations with guidance from the Manpower Services Commission.

Somewhat similar programmes have figured prominently in the Latin American response to the economic crisis. In Chile, for instance, there exists the Minimum Employment Plan (PEM) and the Employment Programme for Heads of Families (POJH), while in Peru can be found "El Programa de Apoyo al Ingreso Temporal" (PAIT). Unlike largely rural-based SPWPs, much of the activity of such programmes is targeted on individuals and households located in large urban areas including the capitals. Moreover, while major infrastructure projects form part of many such programmes, they also tend to feature a variety of somewhat simpler activities which sometimes may offer the advantage of being easier to start up in response to emergency conditions. For example, the POJH includes among a list of typical projects the construction of
pavements, the cleaning of drains, the equipping of picnic areas and the repair and painting of schools and hospitals. The PEM, in which 75 per cent of the participants are women, features such activities as vegetable gardening, the production of toys and garments and the operation of day care centres. The numbers inscribed in these two programmes are not insignificant. In 1983, the year in which their coverage was greatest, they counted over one-half million participants between them. By 1986 this number had fallen back to just over 200,000. In Peru, the PAIT, between October, 1985 and July 1987, mobilised around 375,000 temporary workers for its various projects.

The participants in such programmes generally are paid a sub-minimum wage or subsidy. In view of the low incomes received, critics sometimes argue that this type of intervention has the effect of removing participants from the unemployment rolls, while converting them to underemployed and sometimes exploited workers. Proponents respond that in the current economic circumstances, special programmes of this character are one of the few available means to generate short-term jobs in large numbers as well as incomes that are vital for the survival of the poorest segments of the population.

Perhaps then the main issue that this type of SEP raises is the following: once regarded as transitory, they have acquired what appears to be a more permanent character and represent the only source of income for very large numbers of individuals. This brings into question whether such schemes should be viewed as a temporary bridge to more stable, better paying employment or must now more properly be regarded as the source of a permanent minimum income for a more recent category of working poor.

Subsidised temporary employment, training and work experience schemes

A condition usually established for public sector job creation programmes is that they should not compete with or substitute for existing jobs in the private or public sectors. The problem here, however, is that if the work performed is not occurring elsewhere, the possibilities of transferring the skills or experience acquired to longer-term employment opportunities is reduced. But the fact that the government chooses to add to its own employment responsibility often reflects the unwillingness or inability of private sector employers to create additional jobs. Thus it is not uncommon for governments to try, through the use of subsidies, to encourage private employers to hire additional labour. This is especially true during times of recession or slack labour demand. While the response in terms of labour recruitment tends to be slower than through direct government hiring, there may be greater opportunity for subsequent or continuing employment, sometimes with the same employer.

Subsidised labour recruitment schemes have been quite in evidence in industrialised market economy countries throughout the 1980s. This approach has been used in particular to induce employers to take on young people, especially those who are relatively unskilled and considered uneconomical to hire. For instance, employers participating in the United Kingdom's Youth Training Scheme receive an annual grant for each youth trainee, intended to cover in large part the training provided.
Two of the longest running youth programmes in Western Europe were the Work Experience Programme (WEP) in Ireland and the "Contrat Emploi-Formation" in France, each of which began in the second half of the 1970s and operated to the mid-1980s, before being replaced by other programmes. Under the WEP, employers paid the youth participants a small allowance which was then reimbursed by the National Manpower Service, while under the French youth scheme, employers were paid a flat-rate sum by the State for each hour of training provided. Under several other subsidy programmes, such as one introduced in Spain in 1985, employers who hire or train youth are entitled to pay a reduced social security contribution.

Subsidy programmes of this nature often give rise to criticism on various grounds. There is almost always a certain risk of a substitution effect whereby the subsidised worker is hired or trained at the expense of someone else. There is also a frequent complaint that subsidies support activities which the employer would have carried out anyway. An additional concern is that employers may release workers after the period of entitlement has ended, perhaps hiring new individuals with similar eligibility. Employers argue, however, that they are being asked to take on people with very few qualifications and that the subsidy seldom covers the full cost of training. What may be concluded then is that while subsidies can give rise to abuses, under conditions of sluggish economic growth and lower revenues and profits, they provide a stimulus to many employers to hire and provide some training to young people and other target groups.

Self-employment and small enterprise creation

It is not surprising, in view of current limits on the opportunities to create additional wage employment in the modern sector, even low wage employment, that increased attention has been focussed on programmes and measures aimed at stimulating further self-employment. In developing countries, where self-employment has always represented the principal form of employment, during the current period of recession and recovery the promotion of self-employment in rural and urban sectors alike has assumed ever greater importance. The provision of business start-up advice, credit, training, marketing information and sometimes even tools, equipment and other productive assets is seen as a way of promoting an alternative form of employment and, in the process, encouraging entrepreneurship and greater self-reliance.

In speaking about self-employment there can easily be a problem of terminology, since the categories of self-employment may run the gamut from modern enterprises to household units comprising unpaid family workers, not to mention professional own-account workers such as doctors, lawyers and other professionals. Yet most initiatives aimed at fostering self-employment are working to create or enhance the productivity of rather small units, be they urban-based micro-enterprises, rural industries, or a broad range of informal sector undertakings. While some grow and go on to prosper and create additional jobs for the community, many more remain one or two person operations which yield meagre incomes and operate with a high risk of failure.

A variety of schemes and internationally funded projects aim to aid the promotion of self-employment in developing countries. In view of the limitations to further growth of wage employment opportunities, including in the public sector, such activity has come in for increasing attention in
Africa. One lesson of some recent experience is that all the various forms of support required by new business undertakings must constitute a comprehensive package of readily available inputs. There is little point in identifying individuals with sound business ideas and helping them to prepare loan applications if sources of credit for small undertakings do not exist. Similarly, it is of dubious value to obtain credit for a fledgling entrepreneur in the absence of a feasibility study which might discover an already over-saturated market for the product or service being proposed. The constraints on obtaining credit for small undertakings are legendary and must be tackled as part of any self-employment promotion effort. But once adequate funds, including working capital, have been obtained, business survival will be conditioned in large part by access to information, management and marketing assistance and often a reasonable degree of organisation among groups of the self-employed themselves.

Small undertakings and business start-ups are often unnecessarily penalised by excessive regulations. These may take the form of extremely inhibiting zoning laws and construction requirements, complicated administrative requirements for registering an enterprise, overly stringent quality control standards and disproportionately severe taxes and other fiscal burdens placed on small production units. The problem of undue regulation also needs to be tackled as part of any overall promotional effort.

While the preceding discussion applies with equal vigour to the urban informal sector, the very size of this sector and the role that it is compelled to play in the prevailing economic circumstances warrant some additional discussion. With a deepening of the economic crisis throughout most of the developing world, the informal sector was forced to go further in performing one of its traditional roles of absorbing unemployed or otherwise underutilised labour. An exceedingly high number of the self-employment undertakings that comprise the urban informal sector are barely viable. Yet there is an important nucleus of informal sector activity that with productive backing can expand, produce far from negligible incomes, contribute goods and services needed by local communities and sometimes generate additional wage employment. A rise in the incomes of informal sector entrepreneurs can provide a stimulus to additional demand. When successful endeavours also contribute wage employment, the multiplier effects become all the more significant.

All the inputs mentioned earlier need to form part of policy packages targeted on the informal sector. But one can also add here the importance of forging and strengthening links with other sectors of the economy. A lack of information and often outright restrictions prevent informal sector operators from competing for contracts with the government. Experience has shown that sufficient numbers of informal sector enterprises already are well equipped to act as suppliers to the government as well as to business establishments in the modern sector.

ILO projects in support of the informal sector in Mali, Togo and Rwanda are instructive as to how with proper assistance, enterprises in the sector can realise much more fully potential. By establishing "ateliers d'appui", groups of artisans gained access to infrastructure, equipment, technical information, exposition facilities as well as a common source of savings and credit. Among the groups assisted in Kigali (Rwanda), a sample survey of 21 such groups showed that 18 of them saw their revenues increase, with a net
gain of 46 per cent. Twenty-two unemployed artisans were hired and 64 apprentices were added. In view of the massive nature of the employment problem faced by Africa, such improvements may be regarded as modest, but as a contribution to greater employment, incomes and equity such results should still be regarded favourably.

In the industrialised market economy countries, where much of the United States' success in generating new jobs has been attributed to small enterprise creation, increased attention is being directed at the conditions required to spur business development. In several countries of Western Europe, measures aimed at helping the unemployed to go into business for themselves form part of the overall arsenal of policy instruments. For instance, under the Enterprise Allowance Scheme in the United Kingdom and a similar scheme called by the same name in Ireland, an individual's unemployment benefits are converted to a weekly allowance to be used to help in starting up a business. To qualify for this programme in the United Kingdom, it is necessary to have at least 1,000 available in personal funds.

In the industrialised centrally planned economy countries as well, self-employment has assumed growing importance in the economic reform efforts aimed at adjusting existing production, employment and incentive structures.

Clearly then the promotion of self-employment has a vital role to play in overall employment policy in developed and developing countries alike. Yet it also has to be recognised that this form of employment creation is not without its risks. Small undertakings frequently are undercapitalised in relation to their actual financial requirements. Even when well qualified persons go into business for themselves, the possibility of failure can never be totally excluded. But still when successful, many business start-ups remain one-person or family-run operations. Very little additional employment is generated. Consequently, self-employment promotion should not be viewed as a substitute for sound policy aimed at adding to the stock of wage employment. In fact, at times it would be useful to examine whether for a similar investment in time and money, more new jobs could be created by channeling funds and assistance into improving the capacity of established firms to generate additional wage employment.

Welfare and mixed interventions

The foregoing categories of special employment programmes share in common that they aim, through a variety of directly productive interventions, to help restore or partially compensate for the absence of employment-generating growth.

The overriding advantage of productive interventions is that by putting people to work, especially where the initiatives represent continuing jobs or are likely to lead subsequently to more long-lasting employment opportunities, they provide a more enduring solution to the crisis and lay a more stable foundation on which to build recovery. Moreover, by linking the receipt of incomes to some form of economic activity - although much of the work involved is recognisably menial - they can engender a sense of participation in the economic process and sometimes raise self-esteem.
The problem, of course, is that even with all the special programmes and supporting measures discussed above, it will be impossible, certainly for some time to come, to meet through productive interventions the minimum income requirements of all those presently mired in unemployment and poverty. In addition, it has to be recognised that in view of the extremely low incomes provided by some productive interventions, having a job is not synonymous with escaping from poverty. Very large numbers of the working poor still will not achieve minimum living standards.

It is only then by increasing and better targeting social spending that governments can ensure a minimum living standard for all of their citizens. A number of industrialised countries have constructed elaborate welfare systems intended to protect the unemployed or those who, for various reasons, are unable to work. Yet as a result of the severe economic downturn of the 1980s and the strain placed on public treasuries, some of these same countries have reduced social benefits or tightened eligibility requirements. Nevertheless, unemployment benefits and various social security payments constitute a safety net which provides an income often over a relatively long period. Yet with a growing number of homeless or derelict individuals found in some industrial societies, it is evident that the safety net is not without holes.

In the developing countries, the picture is very different. Social protection and benefits systems, to the extent that they exist at all, generally cover only a minority of workers, normally those found in the modern sector. Even there, part-time workers might not be included. Unemployment benefits are much lower than in developed countries and often of limited duration. They might consist of only a one-time payment. Thus for the vast majority of workers and their dependents together with those outside the labour market, there does not exist a safety net as such.

What is clear then is that only by increasing social spending can governments ensure the entire population an income sufficient to satisfy their basic needs. Such an increase in social expenditure should tend towards universal access to the provisions that allow for the achievement of a minimum living standard, such as health care, education, housing and social security.\textsuperscript{12}

At a time when many governments are trying to bring their budgets under even greater control, this suggestion may appear to fly in the face of conventional wisdom. In this regard, three observations are in order. First, the years of recession and structural adjustment have taken a terrible toll on social spending. World Bank figures on central government expenditure show that for lower middle-income countries, between 1972 and 1986 expenditure on health as a proportion of the total fell from 6.6 to 4.0 per cent, education from 22.1 to 14.5 per cent and housing, amenities, social security and welfare from 15.9 to 9.1 per cent.\textsuperscript{13} Only a major infusion of government expenditure could hope to restore standards in these various areas even to their pre-recession levels.

Secondly, the aim should not so much be to increase overall government expenditure as to make fiscal interventions more progressive. In other words, what is called for is a restructuring of public spending in favour of the poor, by (1) increasing social spending financed by reductions in other
areas of expenditure such as defense or outlays that disproportionately favour upper income groups and (2) a more discriminate targeting of social spending on groups in the population that are the least well off.¹⁴

Thirdly, a redistribution of income and services in favour of the poor will, in two broad respects, contribute to a more equitable and therefore probably more sustainable recovery. The poor will receive incomes to spend on basic goods and services. Since their expenditure patterns tend much more towards labour-intensive and locally produced goods, the resulting change in demand structure will favour domestic over foreign production and conserve on scarce foreign exchange. In addition, efforts aimed at improving nutrition, health and education have a clear link to increasing the affected groups' capacity for work and raising their productivity. An especially strong case can be made for improving the educational, health and nutritional levels of rural women, a group that is generally compelled to work long hours performing multiple tasks.

With a view to providing for social consumption and social services to poverty groups, India has established the Minimum Needs Programme. It covers elementary education, nutrition, rural health and water supply, rural roads and electrification, housing assistance to rural landless labourers and environmental improvement of urban slums.¹⁵

It is, of course, difficult and not really necessary to draw a clear dividing line between production-oriented and welfare-oriented interventions. Special programmes which offer a sub-minimum wage or related form of income support for the performance of relatively menial tasks, such as some of the programmes to which reference already has been made in Latin America and Western Europe, probably contribute more to poverty relief than to production. Nevertheless, it is sometimes argued that it is better to pay an individual for doing something rather than for remaining idle. In several industrialised countries this has led to the notion of "workfare" whereby the unemployed are obliged or strongly encouraged to take specified jobs or enrol in particular training courses as a condition for receiving their social benefits. While on the surface, this approach would appear to have certain attractive features for those who are fully able to work, it is necessary to guard against the imposition of hard and fast rules on the conditionality of benefit receipt which could discriminate against those for whom wage activity does not represent a viable option.

One very specific type of intervention of a mixed character in low income countries is food-for-work programmes. In view of both overall and seasonal shortages of certain food crops that form part of a subsistence diet in many developing countries, particularly in the rural areas, there is a role to be played by programmes that link food aid to the performance of certain work activity, frequently the construction of infrastructure. Certainly food shortages have been exacerbated by the economic crisis. The Food-for-Work Programme in Bangladesh is credited with having created nearly 600 million man days of employment between 1974 and 1983.¹⁶ Nevertheless, experience has shown that unless food-for-work programmes are well designed and co-ordinated, they can give rise to an uneven distribution of benefits, breed dependency and represent a step away from achieving food self-sufficiency.
Outstanding issues

The foregoing discussion suggests that the design and operation of SEPs raise many questions, often of a practical nature, that are or at least should be, of concern to those responsible for the development and administration of such programmes in developed and developing countries alike. The following are among the areas that have been examined before but still merit further consideration based on cross-country experience: (1) the proper degree of centralisation or decentralisation with respect to the planning and implementation of particular types of SEP activity; (2) arguments for and against alternative forms of programme financing; (3) criteria that influence or should govern project selection; (4) optimal duration of the individual's participation in particular programmes and provision for subsequent follow-up activity; (5) forms and levels of remuneration and non-pecuniary benefits and the considerations which help determine them; and (6) the importance of programme evaluation, the generally missing ingredient. There are, however, two further areas that raise issues and pose questions which go to the very essence of SEPs, i.e. their purpose and what they are intended to accomplish. The paper, therefore, concludes by examining the issue of participant selection and reaching intended beneficiaries; and the question of whether contemporary SEPs should be regarded as transitory or permanent and what this might imply in broader policy terms.

Participant selection and reaching intended beneficiaries

If a major goal of special employment programmes is to aid recovery by reaching target groups who are not readily touched by other policy measures, then such interventions must be judged in large part by how well they reach their intended beneficiaries. In this regard, based on evidence from developed and developing countries alike, the record has not always been reassuring.

For example, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is currently the major federally funded training and employment programme for economically disadvantaged persons in the United States. The JTPA spells out rather detailed criteria for its major programmes, among which are stipulations that 90 per cent of the participants must have family incomes no higher than the official poverty line and that at least 40 per cent of the available funds must be spent on programmes for youth aged 16 to 21. But in a sample survey conducted after the JTPA had been in operation for nine months, officials at 80 per cent of the JTPA's "service delivery areas" stated that they had made no concerted effort to define or serve those "most in need" and "able to benefit" in accordance with the Act's targeting requirements.

Another example is provided by the earlier mentioned Work Experience Programme (WEP) in Ireland. It was intended that this programme should give priority to young people under 25 years of age who had left full-time education and then had gone for at least six months without finding a job. In this way the WEP could serve young people who were experiencing prolonged difficulty in making the transition from school to work. In fact, it turned out that a high percentage of WEP participants had entered the programme within three months of leaving school, and in some cases almost immediately. Moreover, a 1984 survey of the educational qualifications of WEP participants
indicated that only 33 per cent had left school at an early stage as against 61 per cent who possessed a school-leaving certificate. A similar pattern was observed for France's "contrat emploi-formation." 19

The fact that such programmes often appear to attract or even cater to a significant number of participants who do not meet all eligibility requirements or who are located at the upper rung of the target group can be explained by a number of factors. First, those among the designated target group who suffer the most serious economic and educational disadvantages may be the most difficult to reach for reasons of access to information about and personal attitudes towards the programmes. Secondly, programme and project organisers, who often are concerned with producing results that look good on paper, especially high placement ratios, may tend to favour participants who give an indication that they are likely to fare well in the programme. Thirdly, for programmes that offer employers a subsidy to hire members of the target group, there is a considerable likelihood that creaming will occur, i.e. employers will seek to minimise their own risk by selecting the participants who appear better qualified. While there will always be some difficulties in maintaining full compliance with established targets and eligibility requirements, where the failure to reach intended beneficiaries becomes excessive, the use of public funds for such purposes is brought into question.

Numerous assessments of programmes intended to reach the poor in developing countries turn up evidence that among the target population the poorest of the poor receive a disproportionately low level of benefits. According to a study of special employment creation programmes in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the eligibility criteria were nearly always violated. Up to one-third of the beneficiaries appeared qualified but did not, in fact, meet the established criteria. 20

But even where the vast majority of beneficiaries fall within the stated eligibility requirements, the available evidence indicates that the better-off members of the target group are disproportionately favoured. Some of the more interesting illustrations of this phenomenon occur with respect to land ownership. For instance, in the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme in India, the farmers who owned over 25 acres comprised 14 per cent of the landowners in the state, whereas those owning less than 5 acres accounted for 35 per cent of landowners. While the former held a 32 per cent share of the area benefitting from the scheme, the latter held only 9 per cent. The Comilla project in Bangladesh provided a series of inputs to small farmers and achieved large increases in production, but hardly any of the participants held less than one acre of land. 21

In addition to rural-based projects which exclude the landless or tend to confer benefits proportionate to farm size, the poorest segments may lose out in still other ways. For instance, it is generally farmers who are relatively better off who stand to gain the most from rural road construction that opens up access to new markets. At the same time, such construction may raise land prices and lead to greater land inequality, especially when the higher prices encourage the consolidation of land into larger holdings, sometimes forcing out poorer farmers. 22
The foregoing analysis is not meant to suggest that special employment and poverty relief programmes do not help the poor but merely raises a question of whether, notwithstanding economic and often political obstacles to be overcome, more of the resources and effort might not be directed at trying to bring greater benefit to the poorest of the poor. It is, of course, recognised that just as in developed countries, the agencies responsible for projects in developing countries wish to appear "successful" and this may seem to imply reducing elements of risk. For instance, in the case of projects financed through loans, there may be considerable hesitation to provide funds to very poor farmers or to other individuals who are seen as representing very poor credit risks. The tendency then is to favour those members of the target group who are viewed as more creditworthy and likely to achieve adequate rates of return on loans that are disbursed.

At the same time it also has to be recognised that the requirements for bringing the lowest decile up to the poverty line are greater than what is implied to close the poverty gap for those at the next higher income levels. At the same time, even if marginal improvements in the incomes of the lowest segment are insufficient to reach the poverty line and relatively less than for other income groups, they still can make some difference. In this regard, India's Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is illustrative.

According to one study cited, that addressed the question of crossing the poverty line, among those IRDP beneficiaries who belonged to the very poorest category, 41 per cent moved up to the second income group and 15 per cent to the third group, while only 5 per cent were able to advance to the next income category, allowing them to cross the poverty line. Among those who started in the second income group, 42 per cent moved up to the third group and 16 per cent crossed the poverty line, while in the third income group, 30 per cent moved above the poverty line. Thus while the poorest income group manifested very limited results in crossing the poverty line, the income effects were more respectable in regard to showing at least some upward mobility.

Moreover, the differential impact on income aside, the fact that there has been some improvement in their living conditions appears to have a favourable effect on participants. Another report found that nearly 90 per cent of a sample of beneficiaries felt that they had benefitted from the IRDP: 91 per cent perceived a better employment situation; 88 per cent experienced higher incomes; 77 per cent believed that their consumption had increased; 37 per cent had augmented their assets; and 64 per cent felt that their overall status in village society had improved.

While the problem illuminated in this section does not lend itself to easy solutions, there are measures to be taken which may offer some improvement when conditions permit. First, in establishing at the design stage who is eligible for a particular programme, it may often be desirable to define the target group more narrowly. Secondly, where programmes are underway and it is considered undesirable or unfeasible to change the eligibility requirements, then the enforcement of the existing qualifying conditions might be strengthened. Thirdly, where the size of the target group is potentially very large, a differentiated programme response may be warranted. In other words, a set of more selective interventions could be introduced to better reflect significant differences in economic circumstances or other qualifying characteristic or condition. Finally, when reaching out, through special projects, to the poorest or most seriously disadvantaged members of an either differentiated or undifferentiated target population, achievement indicators or measures of success should be adjusted to more fairly represent the circumstances to be overcome.
Duration of SEPs and associated policy considerations

As long as SEPs were regarded principally, or at least to a large extent, as an instrument of macro-economic policy, the question of their duration was of limited importance. Once they had performed their counter-cyclic function, such macro-interventions could come to an end. Similarly, at a micro-level, SEPs organised to respond to the economic and social misfortune stemming from natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes, generally are phased out after the reconstruction has been completed.

Even in earlier times, SEPs were assigned such tasks as dealing with high regional concentrations of unemployment or the persistent unemployment and poverty of particularly disadvantaged groups in the population. SEPs designed to deal with problems of a largely structural character generally could be expected to remain in place for periods of longer duration. But the limited numbers and size and scope of most such programmes did not suggest a need to make a policy issue out of their duration.

This began to change in the mid-1970s. Western Europe experienced an initial upsurge in unemployment. At the same time, notwithstanding a massive recycling of oil revenues, not all developing countries were able to withstand the external shocks of this period. The subsequent external shocks of the early 1980s affected almost all countries to a lesser or greater degree and a mushrooming of SEPs formed a major part of the policy response.

Most such SEPs, particularly when established at the onset of an economic crisis were put into place hastily with little thought to their possible duration. There was generally the hope that the situation of high unemployment, low incomes or other social problem being addressed could be rectified quickly and the programme terminated or scaled back. This was the case with the PEM in Chile and certainly was true as the massive build-up in SEPs began in Western Europe. Back then, it was unimaginable that many programmes would be in place five to ten years, and sometimes even longer, or that in a country such as France it would be possible to count by the mid-1980s some 15 to 20 different special programmes.

There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong about establishing SEPs that are of long duration or even permanent as long as a consistent set of decisions are then taken with respect to goals, institutions and participants. For instance, an earlier section, in discussing the ILO's special public works programmes, pointed to the gradual change of focus from the short-term goal of immediate employment creation to longer-term objectives of indirect income generation, sustainability and local capacity for management and maintenance of created assets. As a result, when compared to earlier SPWP activity, much greater emphasis is now being placed on project planning and design. The design phase can lead to an initial project phase, with a relatively high level of technical assistance inputs but limited direct construction activities, enabling further surveys, consultation with target groups and local authorities, the setting up of support systems and training of staff. Only after these phases have been successfully completed does a third phase with a larger volume of construction work begin.24

Too many SEPs, however, which seemingly started out as transitory in nature have now acquired a quasi-permanent character. Yet to the extent that this represents a change in thinking about the nature of the problem, it is
seldom made explicit. More importantly, there is not sufficient evidence that goals and instruments or ends and means have been suitably adapted or reconciled in a consistent manner. This can have consequences and raises issues which merit more attention in present-day discussions of SEPs.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between the duration of a programme and the duration of involvement of individual participants. In the case of emergency schemes or other programmes of short duration, this problem is minimal. It is understood that the scheme in question will assist the individual only until the specific emergency or other form of crisis situation is over. This determination is much less clear-cut with respect to programmes of longer duration. A programme over time may assume a certain permanence, but almost all SEPs set a maximum period of participation for individuals. Nevertheless, it is not unusual for programmes to stipulate that in special circumstances the maximum period can be waived or at least extended. For low income individuals for whom no other source of employment appears, the permanence of a programme or set of similar programmes makes it easier to transform what may have started or at least been intended as emergency assistance into a continuing sub-optimal response to the individual's longer-term requirements.

Secondly, the institutional structure, called for by emergency schemes on the one hand, and longer-term programmes on the other, can be very different. Emergency programmes, due to their very nature, have to depend on existing institutional entities, and even counter-cyclic programmes, which generally have more lead time, may not require a complex institutional structure. However, it is likely that programmes which are intended to deal with protracted unemployment situations will have to organise a co-ordinated institutional effort that combines temporary employment, training and placement or other follow-up services. When programmes that begin as short-term initiatives gradually become long-term undertakings, it is necessary to ensure that institutional structures are either adapted or developed to carry out multiple, inter-related tasks. In this regard, a PREALC study observed that analysis of experience has shown it to be very difficult to improvise efficient projects, put the programmes within reach of the target groups most in need, and construct works that will have a lasting effect, without a process of institutional planning and organisation. It is maintained that the greater the coherence between the projects and overall planning, the better the results obtained in terms of productivity and permanence.25

Thirdly, SEPs, depending on their design and content can yield different short-term vs long-term effects, transitional vs permanent effects and direct vs indirect effects. If an SEP is confronting a conjunctural or emergency situation, then there is a strong argument for choosing projects that are intensive in employment that is direct, short-term and transitional in nature.26 Programmes dealing with more deeply embedded structural problems or prolonged forms of unemployment should be searching for solutions which are more long-term in nature and offering greater indirect and more enduring employment effects.

These differential effects are illustrated by the aforementioned PREALC study. It showed that housing projects were those that created the most transitional employment but resulted in the least permanent employment. Roads and irrigation projects, however, led to a moderate amount of
transitional employment, but scored highest on permanent employment creation mainly because of their indirect employment effects. Education projects did well in creating both transitional and direct permanent employment. Overall, projects in the social sector, e.g. housing, education and health were shown to have more immediate employment effects, whereas for physical infrastructure projects, the most important effects were seen to take the form of permanent indirect employment through their linkages to other productive sectors. The problem is that it cannot be readily expected that SEPs whose initial aims are short-term and transitional will adjust their calculations and content as they drift into a longer-term existence.

Fourthly, the discussion of short-term vs long-term effects places in sharp relief the possible conflict between wishing to respond quickly to a sudden and massive upsurge of unemployment and poverty, and designing programmes and projects that are cost-effective, sustainable and capable of considerable indirect employment and income generation. Experience in developed as well as developing countries has proven that ad hoc responses to immediate demands, without sufficient concern for technical efficiency, sustainability and long-term effects on the situation of both participants and others who may be affected either positively or negatively, too often prove shortsighted and limited as means of tackling a massive and enduring socio-economic problem.

This brings us to the final set of observations that pertain to the question of programme duration. SEPs established to deal with high unemployment often reflect an awareness of the limitations of other policy instruments, particularly of macro-economic policy or, as already mentioned, a concern that such macro-interventions will conflict with other policy goals, especially the control of inflation. But there also is a risk that when SEPs are not designed as part of an overall policy package and left in place too long, they eventually become a substitute for taking action on other fronts.

Yet SEPs are not without costs and, in fact, when funded by government itself can represent a considerable drain on the public budget. This suggests that the potential impact of such expenditures needs to be weighed against the cost effectiveness of other measures that might contribute to achieving the same objectives. In addition, the complementarity as well as the substitutability of different policy instruments needs to be examined carefully.

This paper has tried to demonstrate that SEPs have a major role to play in the fight against unemployment. When well conceived, they should add to the stock of employment and the flow of incomes rather than substitute for jobs with a high likelihood of being created through the normal growth process. SEPs should be targetted and carried out in such a way that they reach their intended beneficiaries and, to the extent possible, utilise and further develop the capacities of the participants, laying a foundation for a continuing stream of incomes. They should conserve on scarce resources and, in particular, on generally tight foreign exchange. Finally, the value of such programmes and projects is enhanced when they produce consumer goods, offer services and provide infrastructure facilities that benefit the poorest members of the community or target group. This may appear to constitute a tall order, but the growing resort to special employment programmes of long duration should require that they meet high standards in their design and operation.
References


4 ILO/PREALC: Meeting the social debt (Santiago, 1988), pp. 7 and 22.


6 It would be possible to add here additional categories which more fully capture the training components which sometimes form a major part of SEP activity. For instance, in those special programmes where training is assigned an important role to play, a distinction can be drawn between programmes which combine on-the-job training offered by the enterprise with institutional, often more theoretical, training given outside the normal workplace, and those programmes which combine vocational training and practical work experience.


12 ILO/PREALC: Meeting the social debt, p.78.


14 ILO/PREALC: Meeting the social debt, p.93.

15 D. Bandyopadhyay: A study on poverty alleviation in rural India through special employment creation programmes (New Delhi, ILO/ARTEP, 1986), pp.9-10.


17 Evaluation is discussed in some detail and the other areas at varying length in Freedman, op.cit.; Hollister, op.cit.; and Hollister and Freedman, op.cit.


20 Muqtada, op.cit., p.35.


22 Ibid., p.83.

23 Bandyopadhyay, op.cit., pp.58 and 62.

24 Watzlawick: op.cit., pp. 3 and 15.


27 ILO/PREALC: Employment creation in times of crisis, pp.32-34.
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