International Labour Office

Towards the right to work

A GUIDEBOOK FOR DESIGNING INNOVATIVE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

EMPLOYMENT INTENSIVE INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Guidance note 7-1

PEPs and Labour-intensive infrastructure works

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PEPs and Labour-intensive infrastructure works

Objective

The objective of this note is to give policy-makers and practitioners an overview of the most common approaches and issues related to the implementation of public employment programme[1] (PEP) infrastructure and construction activities. The guidance note also provides some guidance on the selection of suitable projects.

Introduction

By far the most common activities undertaken by PEPs and employment guarantee schemes (EGSs) are related to infrastructure and construction. The term 'public works', which is also used to describe these programmes, also typically refers to infrastructure investments that a government undertakes on behalf of the public. There is vast global experience in implementing such activities, as well as extensive research and a wealth of literature. This note focuses on some key issues on what can be considered labour-intensive infrastructure projects and provides the basis for recommendations on project selection. Implicit in these discussions is the important trade-off between higher labour-intensive activities and higher quality infrastructure, with the intention of equipping participants to make informed choices regarding this difficult trade-off.

The durability of the assets created by PEPs or employment guarantee schemes depends, to a large extent, on the quality of the works as well as the operational and maintenance mechanisms put in place once the programmes end. Political commitment and continuous funding, either from governments and/or donors, the quality of the assets created and the cost-efficiency of the approaches, are all important elements to be considered.

[1] M. Lieuw-Kie-Song; K. Philip; M. Tsukamoto; M. Van Imschoot: *Towards the right to work: Innovations in public employment programmes (IPEP),* ILO Employment Working Paper No. 69 (Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2011).

Labour-intensive projects and approaches

Most PEPs emphasize the use of labour-intensive methods for the implementation of labour-intensive projects. The term labour-intensive is a relatively simple economic concept used to describe operations where proportionately more labour is used than other factors of production. However, the way it relates and is applied to infrastructure and construction projects in the context of PEPs needs some further discussion.

The first point to consider is that labour intensity is generally defined in terms of labour costs as a percentage of overall project costs. This means that the wage rate is an important factor in determining labour intensity. For example, bricklaying in the USA is much more labour intensive than bricklaying in Liberia because the wage rate is much higher in the USA. This is despite the fact that the hours of work required to complete the construction of a wall are similar. The comparison of labour intensities across countries, or even regions with varying wage rates is, therefore, difficult and it is important that this is recognized.

At the same time, however, regardless of the location and context, bricklaying is generally considered an *inherently* labour-intensive activity because there is no way of using equipment in the process.

The second point to consider is that, when projects involve activities that can either be done using labour or equipment, many more factors than wage rates drive different design and technology choices. Thus, a rural road in the USA would be maintained using a great deal of equipment, whilst the same work in Liberia would be done with very little equipment. In the end, however, the labour intensities may well be similar because of the high labour costs of the relatively few labourers in USA as compared to Liberia. Obviously, using the American approach in Liberia or vice versa would give very different results. This highlights that care should be taken not only when comparing labour intensities between regions but also when comparing what are seemingly similar projects or categories of projects. While these examples represent two extremes in terms of the differences in labour costs, similar distortions can occur even when comparing projects in the same country.

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Maximizing the labour intensity of a programme

Most PEPs aim to maximize the labour intensity of a programme as this will generally result in more employment being created and more income transferred per dollar invested. There are a few common strategies to maximizing labour intensity in these programmes. One is to choose projects or activities that are inherently labour intensive. In addition to the example of bricklaying, projects in the field of water and soil conservation (terracing, contour bonding, tree planting), waste collection and routine maintenance of roads are seen in many countries as inherently labour intensive and are included in such strategies, even though some provisions have to be made for the purchase of tree seedlings, the disposal of the waste collected, etc.

Another strategy is to choose projects with activities that, within the chosen region or area, would normally be implemented labour intensively. For example, in many areas, project activities involving small-scale irrigation, rural water supplies and the establishment of parks comprise activities such as trench digging and tree planting, which are normally carried out using labour. The use of equipment is only considered when large-scale activities are involved. If managers choose to include these activities as part of their programme, they may want to make sure that projects remain relatively small to ensure that the use of labour remains the preferred option. In general, however, besides picking the right projects, only limited provisions need to be made to guarantee that the activities are labour intensive.

Where only limited activities are labour intensive, or the programme has infrastructure delivery objectives that involve specific types of infrastructure that are not labour intensive, as is normally the case, a strategy to promote labour-intensive methods can be used. In these circumstances, the use of equipment for a *selected* number of activities may be prohibited. For example, the use of hauling and compaction equipment is essential for feeder road and dam construction, but other activities, such as excavation and spreading, can be done effectively using labour. The main criteria for selecting labour-intensive activities are generally that they can be carried out at comparable costs using labour without compromising the quality of work. In many ways, a strategy optimizing the use of labour offers the most potential as it can make a large part of planned infrastructure investments a component of a broader public employment strategy.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive and many programmes have used them successfully in combination to maximize both employment creation and the benefits to the community in terms of sustainable assets. However, they all have potential drawbacks. The table below provides an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these strategies

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of various strategies to maximize labour Intensity

Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
Select inherently labour-intensive projects	Easy to select and identify. Requires limited 'policing'. Labour content is 'automatically' maximized.	Many of these projects require some material inputs to be sustainable. Limits the choice of possible projects. May exclude projects that may be a priority for the community or that may have second-round benefits in terms of employment.
Select projects that contain labour-intensive activities based on the current norm	Easier to select and manage. Requires limited 'policing'.	Many of these projects still require considerable material inputs. Some projects that could employ many people may be excluded.[2] The current norm may not be the most suitable from a macroeconomic perspective.[3]
Promote the use of labour-intensive methods in selected project activities	Allows for a much larger degree of labour absorption. Allows for a wider selection of possible projects than if only the first two strategies were used.	May require active 'policing' or monitoring to prevent use of equipment. Selection of the wrong activities may result in higher costs or poor quality.[4]

[2] If the use of equipment for trench digging were seen as the norm to be maintained, such projects may be excluded as not being labour intensive enough even though the use of labour instead of equipment for this activity would yield a lot of additional employment.

[3] While the use of equipment may be common in some countries, equipment and fuel may have to be imported using scarce foreign currency. At the same time, they may have significant surplus labour and so, from an economic perspective, the norm of using equipment may not be optimal.

[4] If, for instance, compaction were selected as an activity to be done labour intensively, the required quality (densities) may not be achieved and the project's durability would be negatively affected.

Material and equipment inputs

A common tension in PEPs is to balance the need to maximize labour-intensive activities with the desire to have quality infrastructure. For certain types of infrastructure, the material and equipment inputs required may be substantial, thus, resulting in a lower labour intensity. There may, therefore, be pressure not to include these types of projects, especially when a programme's success is, to a large degree, measured in terms of the wages paid to the poor. A programme's focus on a limited set of highly labour-intensive activities may result in the exclusion of many of the projects that would provide benefits to the communities.

However, if PEPs are also seen as investment programmes, then the benefits of the infrastructure being created should be seen as an important output and the required material and equipment inputs should be seen as investments. While this is more difficult to measure technically, these benefits should not be ignored. A relatively high share of the costs should be considered for materials and equipment, especially when increased investment in materials and equipment would increase the durability and long-term benefits for the poor.

The compaction of earthworks, for instance, is an activity that has an enormous impact on the durability of any earth structure. A structure like a road or dam that is not properly compacted (which is much more difficult and sometimes impossible to do with labour only) will deteriorate much quicker and, generally, there is little sense in not using equipment for these activities, even if it leads to a reduction of the project's labour intensity. Similarly, there is little sense in economizing by using lower standard materials in order to meet a certain labour-intensity target. The quality of

assets is often found to be a weak point when PEPs are evaluated; so compromising on the quality in order to achieve a higher labour-intensity is generally a poor choice in the long run.

Technical and professional inputs

Another important element to consider in all infrastructure-related projects is that they require technical and professional inputs in the planning, design and implementation. The degree will vary considerably depending on the type of projects, but even seemingly simple projects will suffer if the works are not properly planned and designed.

The most important consideration is probably to be realistic about both the nature of the projects and labour intensity that can be achieved, and to make well-informed choices related to this particular trade-off. The next part of this guidance note gives an overview of the types of projects that can be carried out with typical labour intensity.

Project selection

In order to set criteria for project selection, a good understanding of the local construction industry and approaches is required as these greatly influence a project's final labour-intensity. The tables presented in Annex 1 give guidance on the range of labour- intensive activities that can be anticipated when selecting projects or setting criteria for the selection of projects.

For most PEPs, a Project Operation Manual is prepared that contains a list of projects (sometimes referred to as 'menus') that can be selected including general eligibility criteria. An example is given for the *Kazi Kwa Vijana* (Jobs for Youth) project in Kenya in Annex 2. This list will change from country to country depending primarily on the needs (infrastructure deficits), local priorities and approaches already used. In fact, projects are often identified at the local level (municipality, district, community) and selected from local development plans using general eligibility criteria.

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Annex 1. Types of infrastructure suitable for construction using labour-intensive methods and their labour intensity

Kenya[5]

Table 2. Average labour costs per day in Kenya, 2009

Types of labour	KSh[1]	US$
Unskilled labour	200–250	2.50–3.12
Skilled labour	300–500	3.75–6.25

[1] KSh: Kenyan Shillings.

Roads

Rural road construction

Rural roads are constructed by small contractors trained in labour-based methods of construction using appropriate equipment for hauling and compaction. The average labour content for spot improvement/rehabilitation is 30 per cent, for gravelling 15 per cent and for routine maintenance 40 per cent.

The average productivity for labour-based spot Improvement/rehabilitation is approximately 900-person days/kilometre, while for gravelling works (labour and equipment), the average productivity is approximately 450-person days/kilometre. The workers are paid on the basis of standardized task rates for the various road construction activities, such as excavation (3–4 m^3/person day), bush clearing (300–1000 m^2/person day), stripping and grubbing (200 m^2/person day) and culvert laying (18-person days/line), among others.

Off carriageway maintenance activities on urban and rural roads carried out under *Kazi Kwa Vijana* **(KKV) projects**

[5] Data are derived from an ILO study carried out in 2009. W.N. Omari: *Assessment of a sample of representative KKV projects* (Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2009), unpublished.

Off-carriageway maintenance activities include:

- cleaning of side drains
- cleaning of culverts
- removal of garbage
- clearing of bushes in the road reserves.

The labour intensity ranges between 73 and 83 per cent.

Water supply and sanitation

The cost of materials (pipes and fittings) forms the largest part of the costs on these projects. Labour is mainly used for:

- excavation of trenches
- laying and jointing water pipes
- backfilling of trenches
- connecting new pipelines to existing mains.

The labour intensity varies between 15 and 35 per cent, depending on the specific conditions encountered.

Soil and water conservation

These projects primarily entail the new construction or de-silting of existing water pans to store water for livestock in arid and semi-arid lands. Manual labour is used for the excavation and construction of small diversion structures, if needed.

The average labour intensity for these types of projects is approximately 70 per cent.

Irrigation

The rehabilitation of irrigation schemes lends itself to labour-intensive activities. The scope of work under canal rehabilitation may include the following activities:

- clearance of intake points
- de-siltation of existing irrigation canals
- weed clearance
- improvement of water diversion to rice fields
- rehabilitation of irrigation structures.

Such projects can attain a labour-intensity of up to 80 per cent.

Environmental protection

Tree-planting activities for the protection of catchment areas include:

- digging of holes
- planting of seedlings
- watering of seedlings
- nurturing/taking care of the seedlings until they are mature.

The labour content varies between 80 and 90 per cent.

Madagascar

Table 3. Average labour costs per day in Madagascar, 2005

Types of labour	MGA[1]	US$
Unskilled	2,000	1.04
Skilled	3,500	1.83
Gang leader	5,000	2.61
Site overseer (technician)	7,500	3.92

[1] MGA: Malagasy Ariary.

Roads

Labour-intensive methods are mainly used for the construction and rehabilitation of rural roads and, to a lesser degree, for the construction of provincial roads. Such road construction activities comprise preparatory works including:

- bush clearing and tree felling;
- all earthworks;
- quarry work;
- drainage structures;
- other structures of limited life-span.

In order to achieve the same quality roads as those constructed using equipment-intensive construction methods, appropriate equipment is used, for example, vibrating rollers (1.5–2 tons) and trucks (5–7 m^3) for transporting materials. Labour is mainly used for the routine maintenance of all roads.

The average labour content on new construction and rehabilitation ranges from 25 to 30 per cent for direct employment and up to 42.5 per cent if indirect employment is added (for example, locally fabricated materials and tools).

The labour content for routine maintenance activities is on average between 80 and 90 per cent.

The labour content on roads constructed using heavy earth-moving equipment is only 8 per cent.

Small-scale irrigation

The new construction or rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation schemes can be undertaken using a combination of labour-intensive methods and local materials (labour for earthworks, digging of foundations and local materials for structures, such as large crested weirs to divert the water and protection works using rip-rap or gabions).

The average labour content is between 25 and 30 per cent, double the amount needed when equipment is being used. This labour-intensity increases to 45 per cent if the indirect employment effect, mentioned above, is added.

Buildings

Local labour and materials are used for the construction of primary schools, health centres and local market places.

Schools are constructed using the maximum amount of local resources:

- stone masonry for foundations
- locally produced clay bricks or concrete blocks for walls, wood for roofing, doors and windows
- galvanized iron sheets with local material for roof isolation, etc.

The average labour content is around 12 per cent (direct employment on site) which increases to 35 per cent if the labour used in the production of the local materials and tools is added. This is almost three times the labour content (direct and indirect) as compared to the construction of prefabricated schools using imported materials.

Street paving

One of the most well known labour-intensive techniques is the stone pavement of streets in Antananarivo and in other provincial towns using granite cobblestones. The presence of granite quarries in many regions in Madagascar makes this technique technically feasible and less costly than other pavement techniques such as bitumen surfacing. In addition, the durability of stone pavement is superior to bitumen and the impact on employment is much more significant.

The average direct labour content is around 33 per cent (direct employment on site), which increases to 67 per cent if the labour used in the production of the local materials is added.

Erosion control

As Madagascar is subject to different types of erosion, local labour, materials and tools are often used in erosion control measures.

The labour content for these activities varies between 60 and 80 per cent, as in other countries.

South Africa

Table 4. Average labour costs per day in South Africa, 2007

Types of labour	ZAR[2]	US$
Unskilled	60–100	7.50–12.50
Skilled	100–200	12.50–25.00

[1] South African Rand.

Roads

On roads ranging from rural earth roads to low-volume paved roads, the following construction and rehabilitation operations may be carried out using labour-intensive methods:

- site clearance
- layer-work construction (loading, hauling and spreading material,[6] fencing, erection of road signs, roadside maintenance, rubble masonry bridges, culverts and retaining walls).

[6] All compaction should be done using conventional compaction equipment and, where necessary, the use of machinery may be employed to loosen material for excavation by hand.

On roads of a higher standard, the following construction operations may be carried out:

- macadam base course either dry, water bound or emulsion bound, foamed bitumen gravel, emulsion treated gravel, or slurry bound or composite macadam;
- application of bitumen bound surface treatment (cold), including spreading and dragging of chips;
- slurry treatments to existing or new road surfaces;
- in-situ concrete roads;
- concrete block paved roads;
- road markings.

The construction and rehabilitation of higher standard paved roads can achieve a maximum of up to 40 per cent labour intensity, whilst earth and gravel roads can achieve as much as 50–70 per cent.

Most routine maintenance and periodic maintenance of earth and gravel roads, such as reshaping, filling potholes, and repairing erosion damage on carriageways and drains, can be accomplished with labour-intensive activities. Similarly, most off-carriageway maintenance can be carried out using labour-intensive activities.

Routine maintenance can achieve labour intensity of 70–90 per cent.

Drainage and irrigation

Drainage and irrigation projects involve participation in:

small dams and dykes building;

- small irrigation canal digging and maintenance of small irrigation canals;
- drinking water supply works;
- village water projects (for example, sinking of wells, digging of small drainage and irrigation channels, preparation of watering places, upkeep of ponds, construction of cisterns and rainwater reservoirs, protection of springs).

Depending on the material inputs, such activities can achieve labour intensity of 40–80 per cent.

Land development

Land development projects typically involve the following activities:

- land reclamation
- land demarcation;
- undergrowth clearing
- stone clearing
- erosion prevention
- conservation and catchment protection (re-forestation, shrub planting, ground cover)
- terrace building.

These projects can achieve labour intensity of 35–50 per cent.

Sewage

Sewage projects comprise the construction of small sewer lines and sewer manholes, either in brickwork or using specially manufactured pre-cast manhole rings, and latrines.

These projects can achieve labour intensity of around 20 per cent.

Water supply

Water supply projects include the following activities:

- laying of water pipelines, fittings and house connections in all materials (including steel) where the weight of the individual pipes does not exceed 120 kilograms;
- construction of small reservoirs;

spring and well protection measures.

The labour intensity of these projects can be around 15–20 per cent as opposed to 5–10 per cent when equipment is used. Typically, the cost of the pipes is the largest financial input to these projects.

Electricity

Electricity project activities include:

- excavation of trenches for reticulation of all voltages
- excavation for and erection of poles for overhead lines.

Labour intensity of 12–17 per cent can be achieved, as compared to 5–15 per cent when using equipment. The material inputs are by far the biggest costs in these projects.

Houses, schools and clinics

Regional economic and social infrastructure projects involve:

- construction of marketplaces and trading centres, stores and silos;
- paving of village roads and other local road works;
- construction of buildings, such as houses, administrative centres, schools, dispensaries, public halls, sports grounds, rural services centres (banks, post offices, clinics, shops, small markets).

While building construction is generally already considered labour intensive, one or more of the following activities could enhance the number of local people employed:

- manufacture of masonry elements on site
- excavation of all foundation trenches by hand
- manufacture of roof trusses on site.

These projects can achieve labour intensity of up to 10 per cent, without taking the labour intensity of manufacturing of materials into account.

Annex 2. Example of project general eligibility and rejection criteria used in the *Kazi Kwa Vijana* project in Kenya

Acceptance criteria

The *Kazi Kwa Vijana* programme will fund small-scale works and social services that are either highly labour-intensive (labour content 70 per cent) or that have a substantial impact on permanent employment such as water-related projects.

The criteria that should apply to all projects approved by the KKV programme are listed below.

Infrastructure projects that can be realized using labour-based techniques and that maximize the use of local materials (minimum labour intensity required is 70 per cent), or works that create permanent employment (indicator: expected number of temporary and permanent jobs created or increase in income).

- The preparation of a project proposal is a MUST for each project to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Proposals must be technically feasible, financially viable and socially justified: social services must show clear social benefits that justify their investments, while productive projects, such as small-scale irrigation projects, must be financially and economically profitable (indicator: unit costs not exceeding a specific ceiling).
- For community projects, youth groups or community-based organizations (CBOs) must have made a clear commitment to operate and maintain the project's outputs after completion, where applicable. Such projects must include clear provisions for all components (financial and institutional) necessary to guarantee the future operation and maintenance of the works. Training to set up or reinforce users' associations should be provided whenever required (indicator: previous experience in maintaining self-help projects).
- Projects that benefit special needs groups, such as women in difficult circumstances (or at risk), and the socially marginalized.
- Projects that increase the technical and social capital of the beneficiaries (youth groups, CBOs or the community where the project is located) in relation to public works and/or social services.

Rejection criteria

Projects that are not sustainable or fall outside the mandate of KKV should be rejected. This includes projects that:

- contain complex, difficult to operate components (e.g. too sophisticated);
- have not resolved land tenure/resettlement problems;
- can only be executed using heavy or highly mechanized earthmoving equipment;
- cannot be maintained by the communities themselves or by the concerned technical departments of the line ministries (e.g. low sustainability);
- have been eliminated from public investment programmes for valid reasons or are inconsistent with national sector policies;
- create significant adverse environmental effects;
- require KKV funding of more than US$ 75,000.

Further reading

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Checklist

LABOUR –INTENSIVE INFRASTRUCTRE PROGRAMMES	
Respond to the following questions	☑
Do you have a menu of eligible projects?	
Do you establish targets in terms of job opportunities created a) per level of investment? b) per category of project?	
In order to create durable assets, have you allowed for other inputs in terms of materials and equipment?	
Have you foreseen sufficient supervision to: a) ensure that activities are being implemented using labour instead of machines; and b) guarantee quality?	
Will the PEP focus on public or private assets, or both? Consider the impact of all three.	
Useful work	
Work that contributes to the public good, community goods or social services	
Work that ensures freedom, equity, security and dignity	
Absorption capacity of the works	
Without sacrificing quality of works	
Using available capacity and technical expertise	
Is additional training required?	
Local resource-based approaches	
Community participation	
Resources, local material, technology and capacity available	
Geographical approaches (e.g. from a certain region, municipality, community, households)	
Demographical approaches (e.g. by age, gender)	
Level of poverty	
Time availability	
Work should not displace existing jobs	
Work should not include work undertaken by public sector employees	

Notes

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