

The sustainability of employment-intensive (EI) approaches – a key to improving the livelihood of the poor

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Introduction

History has shown that labour-based methods of work have long been used in creating remarkable infrastructure works. The Great Pyramids of Egypt, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia, and the Great Wall of China are but some of the unique works around the globe that have been built by hand. Their quality speaks for itself – these structures are still in remarkable condition and attract huge interest from professionals the world over.

Recent years have seen an increasing use of employment-intensive approaches in the construction and maintenance of infrastructure assets. The approach has been recognised as a viable means for creating sustainable infrastructure assets and, at the same time, creating jobs and in so doing impacting on poverty reduction. For many governments in developing countries that face constrained resources and growing demands for infrastructure, services, and employment, this approach is a viable alternative to equipment-based infrastructure provision. Particularly as they now see employment creation as a fundamental element in their poverty reduction strategies.

Governments and beneficiary communities alike talk highly of the employment-intensive approach and the benefits accruing from its application, while researchers and other professionals have documented its successful application and positive impact on the livelihoods of the poor. This then begs the questions; if this approach results in such positive results, why have most developing countries failed to sustain its use? Why are employment-intensive approaches still not considered as ‘the’ primary means of delivering infrastructure assets and services?

Past experience indicates that insufficient attention has been paid to issues of institutionalisation and the monitoring of the approach. As a result the use of the approach and its impact have not been sustained. We do not claim to know the all answers and more work on the barriers to sustained use and impact of employment-intensive approaches still needs to be done. However, we have learned that the commitment, support, and participation of all stakeholders including government, beneficiary communities, practitioners, the private sector, and learning institutions as well as workers is essential.

In this centre-fold we have sought to list what we feel are the essential ingredients for establishing and sustaining the application and impact of employment-intensive approaches.



Source: ASIST – Africa

Labour-based road works in Polokwane, South Africa

Further reading

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1. Supportive Policy and Legislative Environment

- Develop home-grown policies through consultation of all stakeholders. Policy development must be driven by the countries themselves and not be imposed by donor considerations. Such policies should:
 - Be responsive to grass root priorities and balance national and regional needs, in terms of growth, economic and social objectives
 - Promote local resource utilisation
- Establish sustainable mechanisms for resource allocation to achieve policy objectives;
- Create an enabling legislative environment to support the implementation of the policies;
- Develop tools to support the implementation of the policy, for example procurement that favours the involvement of local small contractors, and the achievement of social objectives such as employment creation, etc.;
- Develop tools, indicators, and mechanisms that monitor and inform implementation and further policy development;

EXAMPLES OF AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

In the early to mid-70s, Kenya, Lesotho, and Malawi, with the assistance of various development and international financial institutions, started using employment-intensive approaches in the maintenance and improvement of infrastructure. Until the early nineties good progress was achieved in developing working methodologies, standards of work, reporting and monitoring tools, capacity-building, and, to some extent, institutional setup. Among the nationwide programmes implemented in these countries were the Rural Access Roads Programme (RARP) (Kenya) and Minor Roads Programme (MRP) (Kenya), the Labour Construction Unit (LCU) (Lesotho), and the District Roads Improvement Unit (DRIMP). The question is: After over thirty years of experience, how far have these countries developed employment-intensive approaches?

With the withdrawal of donor assistance and their changing political environments, little progress has been achieved in Kenya and Malawi since the early to mid-90s. The knowledge base for EI approaches is currently very thin in Kenya and Malawi and capacity-building and institutional development will have to be restarted before any nationwide programmes can be developed. The previous programmes did not take the institutional setup or capacity seriously nor did they have the necessary government commitment to make the EI approach home-grown.

In Lesotho, however, the programme is undergoing continuous transformation in order to address the issues at hand. In late 80s, the Government adopted a policy that promoted the extensive use of local resources in all sectors and gave its commitment by both establishing a new institution that promotes the application of EI approaches and allocating resources on an increasing scale (both recurrent and capital). Planning and prioritisation tools for rural roads have been refined to include social issues, local needs, and a long-term government development plan. Since the early 90s the Government's contribution (in a form of recurrent and capital budget) has increased more than ten-fold.

Further reading

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Taylor, G. and M. Bekabye. 1999. *An opportunity for employment creation, labour-based technology in roadworks – The macro economic dimension*. Socio-economic Technical Paper (SETP) No. 5, ILO, DANIDA, Geneva.

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2. Adequate Technical Knowledge and Skills

- Assess, identify, and address capacity constraints at all levels and for all stakeholders, including managers and engineers of works, supervisors, contractors, and workers;
- Establish capacity-building capability to ensure continued development of required capacity;
- Ensure that knowledge and experience are captured through regular monitoring and impact assessment, and documentation, to inform policy and planning, and improve implementation from lessons learnt;
- Institutionalise and disseminate lessons learnt and best practices;
- Carry out advocacy and promotion using the media and influential stakeholders at all levels;
- Involve existing networks and institutions that are focused on knowledge-sharing in dissemination;
- Carry out research and development and/or partner with private sector and institutions of higher learning to advance knowledge and practice.

Further reading

Edmonds, G and B. Johannessen. 2003. *Building local government capacity for rural infrastructure works*, ILO, Bangkok.

Bental, P, Beusch, A and J. de Veen. 1999. *Employment-intensive infrastructure programmes – Capacity-building for contracting in the construction sector*, ILO, Geneva.



Training and capacity building are essential. A recent workshop to identify training needs of stakeholders in urban slum upgrading in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2003

3. Appropriate Planning Systems in Place

- Effective and sustainable development must be owned and driven by the needs and objectives of the beneficiaries;
- Develop and adopt participatory local-level investment planning approaches and build the relevant capacity at all levels to support these systems;
- Planning strategies should be cognisant of cross-sectoral needs and establish the appropriate cross linkages.

IRAP – A LOCAL-LEVEL PLANNING TOOL

Local-level investment planning is an important undertaking in ensuring that investment decisions are made by target beneficiaries at local level and that resources are allocated efficiently.

The Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) tool was designed for this very purpose, and uses a 'bottom-up' participatory approach that involves communities at the different stages of the planning process. IRAP offers a multi-sectoral and integrated planning approach that addresses interventions that enhance rural people's access to social and economic needs, in line with the context of integrated rural development. Integration is across both sectors and within the local-level planning system within the districts. The tool fits well within a decentralised environment as it enhances the process through capacity and skills development at a local level.

The pace of adoption of the IRAP approach in African countries has been slow. This is partly due to the unfavourable institutional environment at local level prior to the start of decentralisation reforms in late 90s, when capacities for planning and implementation were minimal. On the other hand, the lack of interest and understanding of the essence of consistent planning at local level has hindered adoption, as the process is seen as time-consuming and thus not politically attractive. This constraint can only be addressed through awareness creation, while at the same time exploring flexibility on the use of the tool, taking into account specific local contexts. Further work is required to strengthen the link between IRAP and local economic development approaches. This will facilitate the closer alignment of local level planning with the real needs of the poor, and thereby have a greater impact on poverty alleviation at grassroots level.

Further reading

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4. Appropriate Technical Standards and Procedures

- Maximise the use of techniques that optimise the use of locally available and economically beneficial resources;
- Develop and apply standards of design and construction tailored to actual needs;
- Institute environmental protection measures;
- Establish operation and maintenance systems and develop the relevant capacity at all levels.

APPROPRIATE ENGINEERING STANDARDS

A study into appropriate engineering standards for low volume roads constructed using labour-based methods is currently underway. This will result in a set of guidelines and enable life cycle costing using appropriate empirical deterioration relationships. The study is to be carried out in six countries with different climatic, geological, topographic properties, etc.



Source: ASIST Africa

Research: Labour-based surfacing trials in Mozambique, 2002

5. Partnerships for Implementation

- Explore innovative ways to address implementation constraints by using, for example, private sector initiatives and public private partnerships and cooperative structures.

CITIES PARTNER WITH COMMUNITIES

Cities and their authorities are facing tremendous problems in providing a decent living and working environment due to financial weakness and their lack of capacity for appropriate policy formulation and implementation. However, the combination of labour-based methods and community participation can help improve service delivery. At the same time it presents many advantages in terms of community empowerment, job creation, and income generation, as well as capacity-building and partnership development.

For example, Maseru City Council, Lesotho has been unable to meet its responsibilities and properly address the expanding and grave challenge of urban unemployment in the city. The City has therefore embarked on an approach allowing for community involvement right from the beginning. Projects are formulated around prioritised needs, focusing on the use of labour-based approaches and the involvement of the communities. This has helped the City to better respond to actual needs while at the same time creating employment opportunities for the most needy. It also engenders community empowerment and ownership. With this new sense of belonging to the city, the approach is likely to have a positive impact on sustainability of community infrastructure and services.

- Define roles and responsibilities of partners clearly and ensure partners have the requisite capacity to play their respective role.

COMMUNITY CONTRACTS

Roles and responsibilities can be established through a community contract. This contract approach is based on partnership relationships and is achieved through a process of negotiations that arrive at a contract that is satisfactory and feasible for all parties. The negotiations between public administration and community groups strengthens the social position of the target groups in the informal sector and is also likely to strengthen the collective capacities of the poor to act as partners in development. The negotiations address and build on the issue of cost-sharing, which includes the labour inputs of the project.

Further reading

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- Tournee, Jane and Wilma van Esch. 2001. *Community contracts in urban infrastructure works, practical lessons from experience*, ILO/ASIST, Harare.
- Cotton, AP, Sohail, M. and WK Tayler. 1998. *Community initiatives in urban infrastructure*, WEDC, Loughborough.

6. Decent Work

- Create awareness of decent working conditions and standards for all stakeholders, from policy-makers and planners to implementers, contractors, and workers;
- Incorporate into procurement procedures social clauses that ensure decent working conditions and standards;
- Develop and establish systems to monitor and ensure good working conditions and standards;
- Work and strengthen tripartite structures to enable dialogue and articulation of obligations and rights.

CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Government of South Africa has recently adopted a Code of Good Practice that applies to special public works projects targeted at poverty alleviation and the reduction of unemployment. The Code aims at regulating and standardising the conditions of work and the remuneration of workers. With the view of having the support of all role players, the Code was extensively consulted and discussed among the tripartite partners before it was gazetted.

Basic conditions of employment act, 1997 – Code of good practice for employment and conditions of work for Special Public Works Programmes. Government Gazette South Africa

Further reading

- Jennings, M., Ladbury, S. and A. Cotton. 2003. *Implementing labour standards in construction – A sourcebook*, WEDC, Loughborough.
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