



The Contributions of Expanded Public Works Programme Towards Income Security of
Female-Headed Households in Kabokweni, Mbombela Local Municipality, Mpumalanga
Province

Research dissertation

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in the School of Development Studies, at the University of Mpumalanga.

By

Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole

201839393

Name of Supervisor: Professor Thandeka P. Sabela

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DECLARATION

I, Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole, hereby declare that this Research dissertation, entitled “The Contributions of Expanded Public Works Programme Towards Income Security of Female-Headed Households in Kabokweni, Mbombela Local Municipality, Mpumalanga Province” and submitted to the University of Mpumalanga for the Development Studies Masters has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university. This dissertation is my own work in design and execution, and the materials contained therein have been duly acknowledged.



Student signature

PT Sabela

Supervisor signature

21 April 2026

Date

21 April 2026

Date

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my guardian angels, Lydia Mmakwena Tsheole, Abram Kabelo Tsheole, Noko Ednah Mashilo, and Lucas Maphuthadicha Molekoa.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the contribution of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) towards improving the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni, Mpumalanga, South Africa. Women constitute a significant proportion of EPWP participants, but the extent to which EPWP contributes towards female-headed household income security and the lived experiences of the participants remains understudied. Empirical clarity on how and to what extent the EPWP programme contributes to income security, especially in rural settings, remains limited.

A qualitative research approach was adopted to obtain in-depth, personal information from the participants. Data were collected through focus group discussions with 15 women, who head households and who are beneficiaries of the EPWP. The participants were purposively selected to ensure the collection of relevant data related to the EPWP and income security. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five key informants involved in the implementation of the EPWP. The findings of the study revealed that the EPWP plays a significant role in providing short-term income relief, enabling female-headed households to meet basic needs of food, household expenses, and children's education. However, the study also found that the EPWP has limited impact on long-term income security, due to the temporary nature of employment and inadequate skills development and training opportunities. As a result, many female participants remain vulnerable to income insecurity once they exit the EPWP.

The study concludes that while the EPWP contributes positively to immediate income support for female-headed households, it fails to promote sustainable livelihoods. The study recommends the strengthening of skills development, training, and exit strategies within the EPWP to enhance long-term income security and economic self-reliance among female-headed households.

Keywords: EPWP, income security, female-headed households, empowerment, and job creation

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This study aimed to explore the contributions of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) towards the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni. The EPWP was established in 2003, because of the government's commitment to employment creation. In its nature, the EPWP aimed to create 450,000 new jobs per year and provide skills development opportunities for the most vulnerable population (Philips, 2003; World Bank, 2003; Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). Based on the aims of the EPWP, the study's theoretical expectation is that, as a social protection mechanism, public works programmes (PWP) have a critical role to play regarding equal provision of adequate support to targeted beneficiaries irrespective of gender, race, age and other attributes, thereby mitigating their vulnerability to economic adversity and fostering economic resilience.

Sibanda and Thebe (2022) confirmed that unemployment in South Africa has continued to be a pressing issue, with a higher incidence among vulnerable groups, such as the youth and women. The magnitude of South Africa's social crisis, and the inability of previous social protection programmes in addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequalities, have led to vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, remaining vulnerable to income insecurity (Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017). Additionally, Sibanda and Thebe (2022) maintained that structural unemployment and skills shortages remain and have prompted the government to introduce various programmes, including the EPWP, as a short to medium-term relief measure to address the country's unemployment challenge.

The EPWP represents an important alternative labour management pathway for countering triple developmental challenges, by acting as a social safeguard and offering a temporary financial cushion to needy individuals and households (Chakwizira, 2010). As such, the EPWP shows potential to enhance the income security of female-headed households, with the added advantage of stimulating local economies. The latter stems from the notion that, by addressing poverty and unemployment, the EPWP contributes to income security for participants, their families, and the larger community. This, in turn, helps to maintain social stability, promote economic progress, and advance human development (Chen, 2024).

Extensive research exists on EPWP (Wittenberg et al., 2013; Maharaj, 2014; Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017; Hlatshwayo, 2017; Oguntona et al., 2023). These studies focus on EPWP as strategies to alleviate poverty, create job opportunities, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and the effectiveness of the EPWP towards food security and unemployment. There seems to be minimal research engagement on the extent to which EPWP contributes towards income security of female-headed households. Sibanda and Thebe (2022) argued, however, that when EPWP has become the best alternative for the unemployed, the challenge becomes a part of the daily lives of many ordinary citizens with significant bias towards vulnerable groups, such as women and youth. Understanding their lived experiences as participants in EPWP and how it contributes towards income security is essential.

A report by Maphanga and Mazenda (2018) on the effectiveness of the EPWP, indicated that 69% of the participants within the programme are women, a population that is more prone to economic instability. Furthermore, South Africa is widely regarded as among the world's most unequal nations, with a Gini coefficient recorded at 63 in 2014/15 (World Bank, 2020). In 2014, approximately 30.3 million South Africans were recorded to be living in poverty, and the highest proportion of those living below the upper-bound poverty line were female-headed households (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, Milazzo and van de Walle (2017) confirmed that female-headed households are more income insecure than their counterparts, making them the poorest of the poor. Nwosu and Ndinda (2018) argued that the income generation is not only greater among low-income groups, but female headship itself is deemed to increase poverty. This is because women are likely to be the main earners in female-headed households compared to male-headed households, while women, generally, earn significantly less and have less access to economic opportunities than men. This provided the basis for this qualitative study on the contribution of EPWP towards the income security of the female-headed household participants in the programme.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Petrov and Romaguera-de-la-Cruz (2025), income insecurity remains a persistent socio-economic problem globally and is characterised by an increase in unemployment and a rise in household debts. Furthermore, the widening disparities between the rich and the poor, along with an increasing number of people working in informal or precarious employment, contribute to heightened economic vulnerability. Within the South African context, unemployment and income insecurity remain deeply entrenched in rural households and

disproportionately affect female-headed households. Studies show that female-headed households are more likely to experience income insecurity, higher poverty incidences and high unemployment rates (Milazzo and van de Walle, 2017; Nwosu and Ndinda, 2018).

In response to these socio-economic challenges, governments in developing countries, including South Africa, introduced PWPs, which include the EPWP. The initiative was aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty through job creation (Oguntona et al., 2023). The EPWP was intended to function as a social protection mechanism with added activities, such as infrastructure development, environmental management and provision of basic services. Addressing socio-economic issues is crucial because these challenges create a series of other problems, including poverty and inequalities in the country. However, many households continue to struggle to secure stable and adequate income to meet their basic needs and sustain their livelihoods (Mohapi, 2016).

According to Mohapi (2016), Hlatshwayo (2017) and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (2021), women constitute a significant proportion of EPWP participants. The extent to which EPWP, however, contributes towards female-headed household income security, and participants' lived experiences, remains understudied. Empirical clarity on how, and to what extent, the EPWP contributes to income security, particularly in rural settings, remains limited. Much of the existing literature has focused on employment creation, and poverty alleviation, rather than examining the income security outcomes of female-headed households. There is insufficient understanding of whether the EPWP meaningfully enhances income security and livelihood sustainability for female-headed households.

This knowledge gap directly informs the central question of this study, which aimed to establish how the EPWP contributes to the income security of female-headed households in the study area. The focus was on exploring how the programme benefits women or ensures that female-headed households are income secure. As a social safety net, the EPWP is supposed to serve a critical role in providing adequate support to targeted beneficiaries, thereby mitigating their vulnerability to economic insecurity and fostering economic resilience. However, regardless of the objectives of the EPWP, female-headed households in rural South Africa remain prone to extreme levels of income insecurity (Lehohla, 2016; Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017). Recent research highlights the shortcomings of the EPWP in addressing the needs of female-headed households. As such, issues like insufficient training and skills development provided to female participants as a tool for empowerment, and limited access to long-term work possibilities, make it difficult for income security to be addressed (Samson, 2018).

It is imperative to note that the EPWP was established to address the country's triple challenges of unemployment, inequality and poverty, thus resulting in a more equitable and sustainable South Africa (Mathuloe, 2023). The EPWP addresses these challenges by providing poor households with an important avenue for labour absorption and income on a short to medium-term basis. The decision to employ on a short-term basis is argued intensively, because chronic poverty, structural unemployment, and severe levels of income insecurity cannot be eradicated permanently by short-term unguaranteed work opportunities, which provide a wage transfer that is below the labour market minimum wage. Additionally, in terms of sustainability, skills received by participants have been criticised as less competitive within the labour market, and not assets created from the EPWP have a direct income security benefit to participants.

This study does not seek to undermine the importance of the EPWP in providing temporary employment and income to vulnerable groups. It recognises the limitations of the programme in ensuring sustainable income for female-headed households, and that this necessitates further scholarly investigation. Therefore, the study aims to critically examine how the EPWP contributes towards the income security of female-headed households, with a particular focus on lived experiences, perceived benefits and economic outcomes.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The general research question of this study asked: How does the EPWP contribute towards the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni?

This study addressed the following sub-questions:

- What is the nature of EPWP in Kabokweni with reference to the participation of women in EPWP?
- What are the perceptions of female heads households regarding the adequacy of income received in the EPWP in the study area?
- How do female heads of households' experience participation in the EPWP in Kabokweni?

1.4. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to explore the contributions of the EPWP towards the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni, City of Mbombela local municipality.

In research, objectives should specify outcomes that contribute to and are necessary for the attainment of the aim. These objectives will assist to frame what can and cannot be tackled in the time frame allowed and the resources available (Denicolo and Becker, 2012).

From the aim, several objectives were drawn:

- To describe the nature of EPWP in Kabokweni with reference to the participation of women in EPWP.
- To establish the perceptions of female heads of households regarding the adequacy of income received from EPWP in the study area.
- To examine the experiences of female heads participating in the EPWP in the study area.

1.5. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Expanded Public Works Programme: Phillips (2004) defined EPWP as “a nation-wide programme which is meant to draw significant numbers of the unemployed into productive work, so that workers gain skills while they work, and increase their capacity to earn an income”. This study adopts the definition as it entails some important elements required for the success of the study.

Female-headed households: In the 21st century, defining female-headed households for research interests may be based on the household demographic composition, which considers whether the female head is married, and there is the presence of a spouse, other adults and children in the household. According to Murray and Newby (2012), female-headed households are defined as households where no men are present. However, other scholars define female-headed households based on the economic contributions of individual household members. In this context, households are said to be female-headed where the woman is the sole or main income earner (Milazo and Walle, 2017). This study adopted the latter definition because it targets female participants who are the sole or main income earners in their households.

Income security: Income insecurity refers to the uncertain ability of individuals or households to maintain a stable and adequate income, to meet their basic needs and sustain their standard of living. It is often associated with a lack of financial resilience and can lead to poverty, food insecurity, and other socio-economic challenges

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The EPWP was introduced in South Africa over two decades ago. This programme was adopted to address the challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment facing the country. Specifically, the EPWP aims to provide a social safety and play a critical role in providing adequate support to targeted beneficiaries, thereby mitigating their vulnerability to economic insecurity and fostering economic resilience. This study establishes a link between the EPWP and the income security of female-headed households, to understand whether the programme is beneficial, or if it makes female-headed households to become income secure. The findings and recommendations, if adopted, will inform policy decisions and interventions that target this marginalised group. The study will add to existing literature, debates and conversations about the value of the EPWP in terms of income security. The results will enhance our understanding of the programme's effectiveness in reducing poverty and promoting economic empowerment among female-headed households. Ultimately, the findings of this study will provide policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders with valuable insights for enhancing social protection mechanisms and promoting inclusive economic development.

1.7. BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed an exploratory research design to gain insight into the contribution of the EPWP towards the income security of female-headed households. The participants were purposively selected, based on their participation in EPWP as female household heads. The study targeted only female heads of households working in EPWP. Additionally, these participants were selected because they possess the necessary knowledge and experience regarding their income security, and their participation in the EPWP. To obtain in-depth knowledge, face-to-face interviews were conducted using the interview guide to facilitate the discussion. This data collection method allowed the researcher to probe for more explanations during the discussions. The management of the EPWP also formed part of the key informants, mainly to gain understanding from a municipal management perspective. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with the participants to allow a breadth of points of view to emerge, and for the groups to respond to the views expressed. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, and NVivo software was used as a tool in the analysis. The study adhered to correct ethical procedures to obtain data from participants, which included considering the privacy and respect of participants, anonymity, confidentiality and integrity in the analysis and interpretation of the data. These procedures were adopted to avoid physical

and emotional harm to the participants. Firstly, the researcher acquired ethical clearance from the University of Mpumalanga and permission to conduct the study in and around Kabokweni, in the Mbombela Local Municipality. The safety of participants was a priority throughout the study, and therefore, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Additionally, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their consent was obtained upon signing the consent forms.

Lastly, to ensure the quality of the study, the researcher used language that was easily understood by the participants, which allowed them to provide accurate and confident answers. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that all questions were asked of all participants, not just selected ones, which assisted in ensuring proper data collection. As a result, the data control measures of trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability were ensured.

1.8. CHAPTER SEQUENCE

This section outlines the structure of the proposed dissertation, which consists of five chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

This chapter serves as the introductory chapter in the dissertation. It provides an introduction and background of the researched problem, a description of the research purpose and questions, a statement of the research problem, and a summary of procedures to be followed in obtaining the required data for the research study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter consists of the theoretical framework and literature review. It provides a detailed explanation of the theoretical framework on which the study is based, and the literature associated with the study to understand the main arguments of the researched phenomenon.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter consists of the research design and methodology adopted in the study. The chapter discusses the research design and research approach in the study. Furthermore, with the study being purely qualitative, an explorative research design was implemented. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and later analysed through NVivo software.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Presentation

This chapter includes data analyses and presentations of findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter serves as the last chapter in the dissertation. It includes the conclusion and recommendations of the study. The main agenda of this study is that, while the EPWP contributes positively to immediate income support for female-headed households, it fails to promote sustainable livelihoods. It is important that the government strengthens skills development, training, and exit strategies within the EPWP to enhance long-term income security and economic self-reliance among female-headed households.

The following chapter examines the literature review, conceptual, and theoretical framework. It further discusses the matter of importance in detail.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review synthesises and critically reviews the previous work published on the value of PWPs, specifically assessing how the EPWP influences economic stability, social integration, and empowerment. This chapter begins by providing an overview of the EPWP at both international and national levels. It then examines the nature and key characteristics of the EPWP in South Africa, highlighting its role within local communities. The chapter further discusses the challenges encountered during programme implementation and explores potential strategies for improving the overall effectiveness of the EPWP. The income status and the causes of inequalities among rural households are further discussed in this chapter. Most importantly, an outline of key policies intended to address the inequalities in status income in South Africa is covered in this chapter.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF EPWP WITHIN INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL, AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Globally, PWPs have been identified as a key strategy used by governments to alleviate high levels of unemployment while simultaneously improving infrastructure in rural and urban areas. Originally, PWPs emerged in the United States of America during the Great Depression, which began in 1929 (McCord, 2009). These programmes aimed to provide beneficiaries with temporary employment, skills development, and income, while facilitating their transition into other forms of work through participation in infrastructure-related projects. Upon inception, PWPs were widely commended for their capacity to create employment opportunities using labour-intensive methods, thereby generating income for poor and vulnerable households, particularly in rural areas (Moto et al., 2025).

Currently, PWPs are active in the first world and developing nations. India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Ghana are examples of nations that have implemented the PWPs (Larsson and Nybom, 2006). Programmes are executed in countries with the same mission of developing infrastructure, increasing the income levels of the poor and unemployed, and lowering poverty. The magnitude and scope of the PWPs vary from nation to nation. This is because certain PWPs arise in response to covariate shocks, including natural disasters, global crises, or seasonal shortages in labour demand, with the aim of protecting households from

temporary employment losses (Bokolo, 2013). Additionally, they tend to differ in terms of time; some programmes have medium to long-term lifespans, while others have shorter lifespans. Most long-term programmes are anti-poverty initiatives that seek to lessen the effects of poverty by providing the disadvantaged with a wage income over time. In most situations, these programmes would run for at least 12 months (Bokolo, 2013). However, short-term programmes have been launched in nations like India, with some barely lasting 15 to 30 days (Bokolo, 2013; Satumba, 2016).

This section of the chapter presents a comparative study of the case of EPWP within international, national, and local frameworks. This chapter applies a comparative qualitative approach. A comparative study refers to the analysis of two or more case studies to find out and provide a description of similarities and differences between the cases under study. When doing this type of study, a researcher looks for causal relationships and explanations for their recurrence (Rihoux, 2006).

2.2.1 International Perspective

Within the context of European policy, Public Employment Services are permitted to play a significant coordinating role, to ensure that the public is adequately supported, thereby enabling people to make transitions within the labour market (Sultana and Watts, 2006). Governments on the European continent have been using the PWPs to deal with the issue of unemployment for a long time. These programmes were used to give significant social assistance to those affected, simultaneously providing a boost to community infrastructure and services (Desiere et al., 2019). Notably, although many Public Works Programmes (PWPs) have been in existence for an extended period, they have generally undergone significant changes since their inception (Sultana and Watts, 2006). This is because the government faced different challenges; as such, the way they adapt PWP to meet the existing conditions to face various challenges and needs is not the same.

Desiere et al. (2019) conducted a study which revealed that Hungary stands out when it comes to the Public Employment Services, while in Ireland and Lithuania, the PWPs play an important role in the active labour market. The schemes of the PWP tend to be relatively more important in Eastern and central European countries, and even in France and Ireland, they are deemed crucial. Desiere et al. (2019) further note that the community service jobs scheme is very important in Germany. The latter is in line with findings of a study by Sultana and Watts (2006),

which indicates that about 15,6% of the participants argued that the country greatly benefits from these community service jobs.

The role of PWP also becomes apparent and significant in some of these countries during a crisis period. The PWP was introduced in Latvia, specifically as a crisis response strategy. Latvia was first hit by a crisis in 2008, when the existing paid temporary PWP was already facing significantly increased demand as compared to past years. During 2009, the government introduced a temporary relief measure aimed at registered unemployed individuals who were not receiving any benefits, to reduce the impact of the crisis on households confronted by financial hardships.

In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is regarded as a key policy mechanism for mitigating rural poverty and unemployment by stimulating demand for labour within village economies. Since India's independence, there has been an unprecedented increase in rural poverty and unemployment. This has resulted in rising rates of illiteracy, hunger, child malnutrition, farmer suicides, and starvation deaths, due to insufficient employment opportunities and inadequate responses during droughts (Datta and Singh, 2012). In response to these challenges, the Government of India introduced the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2005.

The world's largest poverty reduction programme was launched with an initial budget allocation of ₹11,300 during the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Now known as the MGNREGA, the Act guarantees up to 100 days of wage employment per year, to adult members of rural households who are willing to undertake unskilled manual work on public projects, at a wage no lower than the legally prescribed minimum. When the Act came into effect on 2 February 2006, it covered 200 districts. It was subsequently extended in 2007–2008 to include an additional 130 districts (Roy and Samanta, 2010).

In the study titled 'Impact of NREGA on Empowerment of the Beneficiaries in West Bengal,' conducted by Roy and Singh (2010), it was found that the EPWP had a positive effect on empowering individuals within West Bengal. Research undertaken by Tiwari and Upadhyay (2012) identified several challenges faced by female beneficiaries under the MGNREGA, highlighting personal and familial issues as predominant constraints. Das (2012) explored the influence of the MGNREGA on women beneficiaries through variables such as income levels, consumption patterns, inter-household dynamics, and broader community-level effects. His

analysis concluded that the MGNREGA contributes positively to enhancing women's employment status.

Pankaj and Tankha (2010) observed that female workers experienced increased empowerment after participating in the MGNREGA across the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh. Similarly, in their study titled *"Participation of Women in MGNREGA: An Assessment of Its Successfulness in Morigaon, Assam,"* Kumar and Bhattacharya (2013) investigated women's participation levels relative to men within MGNREGA initiatives. Using primary data collected through a district-wide survey in Morigaon (Assam), and applying a probit regression model, the researchers concluded that women's participation in terms of physical involvement and decision-making remained inadequate. They therefore recommended the implementation of appropriate measures to improve women's engagement in the EPWP.

In the study titled *"Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme: A Unique Scheme for Indian Rural Women,"* Arora et al. (2013) underscored the significance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in empowering women in Rohtak district, Haryana.

This research involved a field survey with a sample size of 250 participants. Findings discovered that 95% of beneficiaries believed participation in the programme improved their creditworthiness, thus enabling them to start saving money. Farooqi and Saleem's subsequent work, published in 2015, entitled *"Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Empowerment of Women from BPL Families in rural areas: A Case Study of District Aligarh (India),"* suggested policy modifications aimed at reducing women's involvement in arduous manual labour, by incorporating provisions for skilled or semi-skilled employment under MGNREGA. This adjustment would facilitate professional skills development among participating women. Furthermore, they advocated for governmental action to ensure that rural women benefit from MGNREGA's mandate, reserving one-third representation for female workers within this initiative.

Argentina is widely acknowledged as a forerunner in Latin America in the formulation of social policies with far-reaching and inclusive impacts. The state initially intervened in the education sector during the late nineteenth century by establishing an extensive network of public schools across the country. By the mid-twentieth century, governmental involvement expanded to the health sector with the creation of the Ministry of Health, which assumed a central role in both service provision and regulatory oversight. Between 1940 and 1950, Argentina achieved

notable advancements in social protection, particularly through the establishment of a pay-as-you-go pension system founded on principles of intergenerational solidarity. Within these frameworks lies recognition for exemplifying successful expansion, regarding essential aspects relating primarily towards institutionalised forms aiding socially protective measures, across varying sectors throughout considerable durations. Such notable accomplishments remained especially noteworthy until economic reforms, enacted sometime amid the early 1990s, shifted existing paradigms closer to neoliberal ideations governing thereafter operational tendencies (Faur, 2008).

In 2002, Argentina introduced the Public Programme for Unemployed Heads of Households, commonly known as Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados (hereafter Jefes y Jefas), as an emergency income support initiative in response to the country's financial crisis. The programme's main objective was to provide basic employment opportunities and offer direct financial assistance to households with dependents who had lost their primary sources of income due to the crisis. This programme was aimed at ensuring social inclusion rights for these households, thereby requiring beneficiaries to demonstrate regular school attendance by their children and undergo periodic health assessments.

Moreover, Galasso and Ravallion (2004) noted that beneficiaries were incorporated into a range of community-based initiatives, as well as vocational or educational training programmes, and in some cases, transitioned into private sector employment. The Argentine government developed the programme with assistance from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and secured funding through a World Bank loan. As observed by the ILO, this experience highlighted the critical need to establish appropriate exit strategies for emergency cash transfer and employment programmes in Global South countries (Maletta, 2009). However, it remains ambiguous whether this initiative was primarily an income transfer scheme or an employment programme as per Decree 312/02.

A significant number of middle-aged Argentinians, and individuals with previous experience in formal employment, viewed the projects offered by the programme primarily as a temporary solution. They expressed concerns that extended participation would hinder their ability to re-enter positions comparable to those they had previously held (Chakrabarti, 2012). The programme lacked initiatives aimed at facilitating participants' transition out of it; specifically, it did not provide education or training opportunities, nor create new job prospects such as vocational programmes or workplaces.

The effectiveness of the programme was further weakened by its gradual withdrawal, which caused many participants to return to their initial circumstances (Golbert, 2004). For enhanced effectiveness, it would have been advantageous for the programme to incorporate stronger public sector involvement and provide incentives for employers to recruit beneficiaries. This approach could have effectively extended benefits as a temporary wage subsidy. However, during its initiation period, conditions within the private sector were unfavourable due to workforce reductions that prevented companies from employing additional personnel; whereby only 30% of beneficiaries secured employment through this initiative (Maletta, 2009).

Numerous beneficiaries exhibited hesitancy in exiting the programme to participate in activities such as seasonal employment, particularly within the agricultural sector. Kostzer (2008) surmised that this reluctance stemmed from the typically short duration of such work, which generally extended for only a few weeks or months. Furthermore, seasonal employment is often criticised for its insufficient protection of workers' rights. Additionally, challenges were noted regarding accurately identifying target participants; it appeared that many individuals classified as participants were not, in fact, heads of households.

In nations characterised by a substantial informal sector, it is imperative to utilise verification methods beyond mere affidavits for confirming unemployment status. Men are predominantly engaged in the informal economy, which accounts for their spouses enrolling in and appearing eligible for support programmes (Galasso and Ravallion, 2004). Some researchers contend that factors such as the ages of beneficiaries and the number of their dependents were inadequately assessed. As stated by Neffa (2009), and Mirza et al., (2010), families with larger numbers of children should receive greater financial assistance, and elderly individuals lacking access to public aid should be incorporated into the target *Jefes y Jefas* framework.

2.2.2 National Perspective: South Africa's EPWP

After PWPs were successfully initiated in the United States of America during the great depression, the programme was introduced and implemented in Africa and other countries across the world. Many developing countries have been using approaches such as cash for food or food for work to pay their employees during these programmes (McCord, 2005). The public work programme is an initiative that has been employed by several countries, such as Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, and India, to reduce the high unemployment rate, while simultaneously enhancing rural and urban areas. According to von Braun et al. (1991), PWPs deliver infrastructure by adopting labour-intensive approaches that rely more on human labour

than on machinery, thereby creating employment opportunities for citizens. Beyond job creation, these programmes aim to provide meaningful work experience for disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, offer temporary income support, enhance skills development, and reduce social exclusion.

In South Africa, PWP was introduced in 2004 as part of the government's broader strategy to reduce poverty and unemployment. Implemented as the EPWP, the programme was designed to generate short-term employment opportunities across various sectors, including infrastructure development, environmental management, and social services (Maphanga, 2019). The EPWP was rolled out in phases, with notable achievements recorded over time. During Phase 1(2004–2009), the programme met its target of creating employment opportunities for one million people. In Phase 2, approximately 80% of the target to generate 4.5 million work opportunities was achieved by 2014 (ILO, 2018). Phase 3, spanning from 2014 to 2019, aimed to create six million work opportunities, supported by a government funding commitment of R150 billion over five years (ILO, 2018).

The EPWP primarily targets vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities (Moeti, 2014). It has also been identified within the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as a critical mechanism through which employment creation can be linked to economic development, addressing basic needs and redressing infrastructure inequalities inherited from the apartheid era (Altman and Hemson, 2007). This resulted in the EPWP coming up with three main roles, namely, the provision of basic services, employment creation and developing local infrastructure.

Altman and Hemson (2007), Mkhathshwa-Ngwenya (2016), and Moeti (2014) argued that the EPWP serves a dual purpose: generating short-term employment and alleviating poverty, particularly among disadvantaged and marginalised populations facing widespread unemployment. As noted by Altman and Hemson (2007), the programme's primary aim is to provide job opportunities, offer training, and support participants in transitioning into the broader labour market.

During the announcement of the EPWP, then-President Thabo Mbeki stated that the purpose of creating this programme was to utilise public budgets to provide the unemployed with temporary jobs in the productive sectors. The leader of the country at that time believed that this would allow ease facilitation of people's absorption into the job market through the provision of income alongside skills development. Most importantly, the primary purpose of

the EPWP is to provide employment opportunities to the majority. This programme aimed to create approximately 1 million jobs in Phase 1, which spanned from 2009 to 2014. The EPWP in Phase 3 intended to generate about 6 million jobs between the 2014/15 and 2018/19 financial years. Altman and Hemson (2007) indicated that the programme focuses on expanding labour-intensive construction methods and production through government-funded projects, aiming to create more job opportunities. This is achieved by limiting the use of machines and employing people to do the work. This clearly demonstrates that the government at that time was more concerned with encouraging local residents to play a role in the well-being of their communities, while simultaneously employing them to meet their personal and household needs. This initiative also aimed to reduce the high levels of poverty within local communities, enabling many people, especially women, to take control of their own lives. Through this programme, the income security of the majority could be ensured, even though it may not be enough to meet their needs.

Under the EPWP framework, several policy tools have been established to guide and strengthen its implementation (DPME, 2019). One of the key frameworks is the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP aims to enhance the quality of life of South Africans and promote a more inclusive and equitable society by 2030 (DPME, 2019). The plan highlights key statistics related to the EPWP and, among its various recommendations, calls on the government to expand the programme to generate up to two million full-time equivalent employment opportunities by 2020 (National Planning Commission, 2012). In addition, the EPWP has its roots in the RDP carried out by the country's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). The EPWP, according to the RDP, is the major area where special measures to create jobs can link to expanding the economy and providing necessities in redressing infrastructural inequities created by apartheid (Hlatshwayo, 2017).

The skills development and creation of jobs, as outlined in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), continue to be key priorities for rural communities (Mkhatshwa-Ngwenya, 2016). The EPWP has become a primary vehicle for the government to create job opportunities, and it has recognised a conceptual framework that assigns a particular role to every municipality regarding this programme (National Planning Commission, 2012). In the quest for continuous search for solutions, several initiatives have been implemented by the government to eradicate poverty, unemployment, and inequalities. Although some of these initiatives are a result of the poor performance of the others, some arise in solidarity with international causes. However, due to its classification as an “*emergency*” intervention, the *Jefes y Jefas* programme faced

several limitations. Its impact on income poverty reduction was limited, and the impact it has on addressing structural unemployment remains unclear, as it is uncertain whether the programme resulted in sustained job creation (Pi Alperin, 2007). It appears that the programme did not effectively address the fundamental causes of unemployment, as it failed to significantly assist beneficiaries in securing employment in the private or public sectors.

2.2.3 Provincial Perspective (Mpumalanga)

In 2023, a keynote speech was delivered by the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, at the EPWP Mpumalanga Summit (Swarts, 2023). This address focused on the achievements of the Mpumalanga Provincial government since the start of the EPWP Phase 4 in 2019, as well as the plan for Phase 5 of the programme (Mathuloe, 2023). According to the minister, the EPWP has created 610,882 work opportunities in the current financial year, 2023/2024, and has accurately generated over 4.5 million job opportunities since the start of Phase IV in the 2019/2020 financial year. Additionally, the minister highlighted the role of EPWP in the socio-economic upliftment of communities. As the EPWP engages participants in productive activities within their own communities, studies indicate that beneficiaries spend a significant portion of their earnings locally, thereby stimulating economic activity and Supporting the socio-economic advancement of these communities. Furthermore, the Deputy Minister highlighted that EPWP participants play an important role in delivering essential community services, including providing care for the sick and elderly, supporting early childhood development centres, and assisting in the provision of nutritious meals to learners through the government's school nutrition programme (Mathuloe, 2023).

2.2.4 Comparative Analysis: Convergences and Divergences

PWPs have become a strategic intervention in response to unemployment, poverty and infrastructural deficits across countries of the world. Although they differ in their implementation in different countries, various convergences can be seen in their objectives, target populations, mechanisms of the operations, as well as their social and economic effects. These common features point to the universal utility of PWPs as an instrument for solving pressing socio-economic problems and promoting long-term development. Alternatively, although PWPs have several similarities in terms of objectives and the type of approaches they utilise, there are differences in terms of design, implementation, scope and results of PWPs by various countries. The nature of these differences is conditioned by the socio-economic, political and institutional contexts within which the programmes are functioning. A more in-

depth look at these differences will showcase the special setbacks and advantages of PWPs across different contexts.

The considerable difference between PWPs, is probably their scope and duration. In India, MGNREGA guarantees, through laws, up to 100 days of employment per year to rural households (Datta and Singh, 2012). Such a rights-based approach over the long-term ensures that the programme is institutionalised and delivers stability to the beneficiaries. In contrast, the EPWP (EPWP) in South Africa is more project-connected, with government efforts to cut short-term employment in areas like infrastructure, the climate and social services (Maphanga, 2019).

Whereas MGNREGA is positioned as the permanent anti-poverty scheme, the EPWP exists on a phased basis with certain definite directives per phase. Such a difference in duration is indicative of the various policy priorities and resource limitations of the two countries. Likewise, Argentina established the Jefes y Jefas programme in 2002 as an emergency income transfer measure after the country's financial collapse (Galasso and Ravallion, 2004). In contrast to MGNREGA or EPWP, the programme in Argentina was specifically short-term, i.e., aimed at covering a short period of crisis. Such a deviation in span emphasises the different functions of the PWPs, as some of them are long-term processes of development and others are immediate crisis resolutions.

One of the critical areas of convergence on PWPs is that they all favour labour-intensive modes that create as many job opportunities as possible. South Africa's EPWP restricts the use of machines and engages the local labour force to contribute to communal advancement and create employment (Altman and Hemson, 2007). The rationale of this methodology is based on the necessity to make government-funded projects focus more on human labour than on automation, thus providing more people in a community with job opportunities. Likewise, the MGNREGA in India utilises unskilled manual labour carried out on government projects, especially infrastructure developments in rural India such as roads, irrigation canals, and other works (Roy and Samanta, 2010). Labour-intensive approaches not only generate jobs but also involve the community in ownership and participation of development projects. These types of programmes help empower individuals and bring about communal growth because the local populations are occupied in work that matters.

PWPs have also been adopted as viable crisis response measures that can offer temporary aid to households in case of a crisis due to an economic or environmental shock. For example,

Latvia used temporary PWPs to help overcome financial troubles in households during the 2008 financial crisis (Desiere et al., 2019). These schemes were uniquely made in response to the higher employment conditions and incomes in the era of crisis. In parallel, EPWP in South Africa has been modified to cover socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty that were enhanced by inequalities in South Africa (Altman and Hemson, 2007). This convergence highlights the versatility of PWPs in reacting to structural and covariate shocks by showing how the programme would furnish instantaneous relief and lay the basis of long-range repair.

The areas of institutional and policy frameworks affecting PWPs are also wide-ranging as they are varied across the countries. In India, MGNREGA is listed in the law and has become a pillar of the governmental approach to rural development, guaranteeing work for its citizens (Datta and Singh, 2012). This law structure makes it to be accountable and makes it to be committed in the long term to the program. In contrast, the National Development Plan (NDP) and the RDP serve as the foundation for EPWP, which is implemented within the framework of South Africa's socioeconomic development agenda. (National Planning Commission, 2012). Despite having strong policy support, the EPWP lacks the same legal protection as MGNREGA.

In Argentina, the Jefes y Jefas programme was implemented with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and funded through a World Bank loan (Maletta, 2009). The use of outside resources and knowledge highlights the emergency nature of the programme and its external reliance on foreign assistance. Such variations in institutional arrangements are indicative of the degree of domestic capacity and global involvement during both design and implementation phases for PWPs.

The effects of PWPs and their sustainability are also different across countries. In India, MGNREGA has been both lauded and criticised variously of its effectiveness in alleviating poverty in rural India, on women empowerment and on corruption (delays in release of wages of workers, and poor monitoring) (Tiwari and Upadhyay, 2012). In South Africa, the EPWP has seen millions of work opportunities created, but this has been short-lived due to its lack of focus on skills building and thus its ultimate low effects in alleviating the poverty and unemployment rates (Altman and Hemson, 2007).

Table 2.1: Comparative Analysis

	MGNREGA (India)	Jefes y Jefas (Argentina)	EPWP (South Africa)
Duration	100 days/year, continuous	Temporary (4–5 years)	Short-term, project-based (12 months)
Legal Status	Legal right to work	Emergency decree	Policy programme
Wages	Near minimum wage	Below poverty line	Low stipend (often below/at minimum)
Gender Quotas	≥33% women (formal)	No quota, majority women	Strong female participation, but everyone can participate.
Exit Strategy	None (ongoing safety net)	Weak initially, later added	Intended but largely ineffective

2.2.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

Globally, PWPs provide useful lessons that countries like South Africa can learn. They can learn about the achievements and difficulties of other countries. One of the lessons is that legal entrenchment is essential in the sustainability and functionality of PWPs. The MGNREGA of India demonstrates how legally binding contract terms can give PWPs long-term sustainability and a regular income. The programme ensures employment and provides stability and predictability to the beneficiaries by integrating the law. South Africa has the EPWP, which would benefit from having a similar legal framework to boost its capacity to provide steady assistance to its beneficiaries (Datta and Singh, 2012).

Other countries have sustainable funding strategies, which can be learnt by the EPWP. The *Jefes y Jefas* programme of Argentina illustrates that a variety of financing sources is essential, which includes the International Labour Organization and the World Bank. The partnerships provide funding stability and provide international experience and best practices that enhance

the design and execution of programmes. The EPWP would stand a better prospect of seeking international collaborations to enhance financial stability, as well as increasing its educational and vocational training programmes (Maletta, 2009).

The use of monitoring and evaluation plays an important role in enhancing the implementation of the EPWP at a local level. The MGNREGA experience in India highlights the need for a comprehensive monitoring system to address issues such as wage delays and corruption, ensuring that all resources are utilised to achieve the desired objectives (Tiwari and Upadhyay, 2012). The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms may be vital in South Africa, where the identification of the challenges at the earliest stage, and the introduction of corrective steps should take place on a timely basis. This would not only maximise the utilisation of the resources, but it would also enhance transparency and accountability, which would result in broader public confidence in the programmes. It is also critical that the goals and activities of PWP are synchronised at national, provincial, and local levels to achieve unified developmental results. Although other models, such as MGNREGA, could be used in other countries to show that a coherent legal framework is useful, they also point out the necessity of local adaptation to context-related problems (Roy and Samanta, 2010). South Africa may consider a multi-tiered strategy in which national goals of EPWP can be effectively transformed into local initiatives, taking into consideration regional requirements and demands. This approach would promote a more equitable distribution of the initiative's benefits among communities, enhancing social equality.

The EPWP might consider implementing community buy-in and integrating strong public sector participation into the company's operations to increase its socio-economic impact and make the enterprise's functioning more sustainable. As evidenced by experiences in Argentina, community participation in project design and implementation can help in resolving the long-term employment problems by bridging the gap between temporary job creation, skills development, and vocational training, which can result in permanent employment opportunities (Galasso, 2004). The private and governmental collaborations may provide options through which EPWP recipients can be absorbed into semi-skilled and skilled employment, so that the programme does not just produce short-term employment opportunities but also career prospects.

When undertaking strategic recommendations, one major requirement is that policymakers incorporate a strategy to exit the workforce into EPWP in a manner that responds to the changing economic environment and labour market needs. As observed in Latvia's response

during the crisis, an adaptive programme that can adjust according to changing socio-economic needs is what guarantees continuity in addressing unemployment and poverty problems, even as initial conditions evolve (Desiere et al., 2019). Elastic structure of South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme to strategically phase the beneficiaries into employment will not only guarantee the programme to meet the short-term requirements, but also stimulate the economy over time.

The introduction of vocational training as part of the EPWP may enhance its performance. In contrast to the present model, which primarily targets short-term employment by intensifying its activity in the form of labour-intensive employment, structured skills development would help provide skills to people who then become long-term employable. Industrial training provisions with Industry consultation would ensure that the labour force is trained to operate in sectors with high growth potential, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the EPWP in reducing unemployment and promoting economic growth (Altman and Hemson, 2007). To streamline the EPWP, one must inject strategic, necessary international best practices, which have been localised to suit the South African context, to achieve its developmental objectives.

2.2.6 Brief Summary

Essentially, PWPs are an important policy instrument to deal with socio-economic issues such as unemployment, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure in different countries. The case studies of EPWP in South Africa, MGNREGA in India, and *Jefes y Jefas* in Argentina demonstrate that the goal will have a very close overlap, where the aim is to provide jobs, boost infrastructure, and reduce poverty with labour-intensive approaches. Programs that have been emphasised by these initiatives not only highlight the global importance of PWPs as effective short- and long-term socioeconomic programmes but also encourage community involvement and participation in national programmes. Nevertheless, despite these common objectives of the PWPs, differences arise in how they are designed, implemented and sustained, based on unique socio-economic, political and institutional conditions of countries. As an example, MGNREGA has the advantage of an established legal framework that guarantees sustained benefits, but EPWP and *Jefes y Jefas* are implemented as one-off programmes and may not have the strength of a long-term intervention. The differences also emphasise the need to customise PWP models to national situations so that they can have maximum effectiveness. In the case of EPWP in South Africa, coordination of its goals with the holistic legal and policy frameworks, as evident in the case of India, can greatly improve its ability to deliver enduring advantages. Moreover, the incorporation of long-term plans, i.e. skills development and

strategic exits into the workforce, can make the EPWP more of a catalyst in the efficient economic growth that it would be, instead of a temporary relief programme. Through international consideration of best practices and a local adaptability in taking up locally relevant solutions, PWPs can better cope with acute socio-economic issues in a wide variety of settings.

2.3 THE ROLE OF EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There are many benefits of the EPWP that were and are still enjoyed by most local communities in South Africa. McCutcheon (2012) stated that these benefits emanate from the key objective of the programme, which is about improving people's socio-economic status. The potential and capability of local communities to grow the economy can be enhanced by generating more employment opportunities for unemployed citizens. The success of the EPWP roll-out enhances the recipients' preparedness and capacity to succeed in the labour market. McCutcheon (2012: 47) argued that "as it is operational within the infrastructure, social, non-state, and environment and culture sectors in South Africa, the multi-faceted attribute of these sectors can accommodate the different classifications of the beneficiaries". This simply suggests that regardless of gender or age, the programme was designed in a way that everyone will be accommodated irrespective of the aforementioned factors and present them with the same or equal opportunities. Also, every sector of the economy will be able to absorb everyone, whether skilled or not. Another positive outcome of the EPWP is the improved infrastructure and service delivery access to poor communities.

Despite South Africa's current economic progress, significant work remains to be done in reducing substantive and substantial inequities among its people. While a growing minority benefits from economic progress, the bulk of South Africans remain severely stuck in the second economy (Milazzo and van de Walle, 2017). In post-apartheid South Africa, female-headed households face severe challenges that make them more vulnerable to poverty (Satumba, 2016). Income security for female-headed households is crucial due to the high levels of poverty and economic vulnerability they face. Research indicates that female-headed households are disproportionately affected by economic instability due to factors such as lower employment rates, wage disparities, and fewer assets (Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017).

The EPWP is regarded as the primary engine of job creation. Scholars first questioned the programme's ability to provide jobless solutions. Some research found that the EPWP is not a

solution to South Africa's unemployment problem (Phillips, 2004; McCord, 2004). This is because many programme participants return to the unemployment pool after leaving the EPWP (McCord, 2004). The suggested long-term goal of programme sustainability is called into doubt, as the supply of short-term monetary pay only gives quick respite to members' severe and difficult situations.

The EPWP is commonly known for the continuous generation of jobs to the unemployed population. According to the World Bank (2011), the EPWP's limited number of employment opportunities and the short-term duration of employment, for each worker, make it unlikely to have a substantial impact on employment and poverty. Furthermore, with the EPWP as a temporary employer, the unemployment rate in municipalities such as the city of Tshwane worsened from 14.7% in 2011 to 22.3% in 2015. This represents an increase of about 337,600 from at least 313,700 unemployed in 2011 (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). This is because the EPWP offers temporary employment, with no guarantee of future employment opportunities (SACN 2017). Notwithstanding the short-term constraints associated with the programme, EPWP initiatives have made notable progress in delivering the employment opportunities initially envisaged. Theron (2014) indicates that from 1 April to 30 September 2012, the EPWP recorded 577,575 work opportunities, most of which involved temporary employment periods of roughly four to six months.

According to the SACN (2017), unemployment is the leading cause of income insecurity in South Africa. Globalisation, a lack of skills, inadequate research and development, and foreign direct investment in the country's economic sector are contributing factors to the increased unemployment rates. Furthermore, graduates and economically active individuals lack work experience (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). As a result, households' failure to overcome poverty may stem from a lack of income and purchasing power. Generally, poverty is defined as an economic state in which an individual lacks income and the fundamental requirements of living. Food, water, education, and shelter are among the fundamental essentials (Leibbrandt et al., 2010). However, the most difficult aspect of obtaining these essentials is that they come at a cost, which usually prevents those without money from attaining them. In other words, unemployment is one of the most significant factors contributing to poverty. In addition, high unemployment levels place female-headed households-especially those headed by Black women-at greater risk of experiencing both food insecurity and poverty (Saad et al., 2022). The Department of Agriculture (2015) defines food insecurity as the lack of consistent and dependable access to the foods required for optimal health.

2.4 THE IMPACTS OF EPWP ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The concept of women's empowerment has gained popularity within the development discourse (Parpart et al., 2002). Numerous organisations, including the UN and the World Bank, as well as smaller grassroots groups, refer to it (Mosedale, 2005). However, although there is no precise meaning for the term, women's empowerment might be defined differently by different people (Mosedale, 2005). As a result, there are numerous approaches to achieving empowerment. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stipulate that, in addition to being a fundamental human right, eradicating all forms of discrimination against women is essential for a sustainable future (UNDP, 2015). Additionally, it has been proven that empowering women contributes to economic growth and development. The EPWP actively promotes women's empowerment through various initiatives. It focuses on providing work opportunities, skills development, and economic empowerment to women, especially those from vulnerable groups (Mohapi, 2013). The EPWP's success is evident in the high percentage of women participating in EPWP projects and the positive impact on their livelihoods and economic independence. This segment of the literature review explores the influence of EPWP on women's empowerment, focusing on the creation of work opportunities, skills development, and economic empowerment for women, with a particular emphasis on the South African context.

2.4.1 Women's Empowerment Through Creating Work Opportunities

The EPWP has emerged as a vital initiative in South Africa, providing work opportunities to millions of people, with a significant focus on women. By creating jobs in various sectors, including infrastructure, environment, and social services, EPWP has played a crucial role in empowering women, particularly in rural and marginalised communities (Philips, 2003; World Bank, 2003; Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). Through EPWP, women have gained access to income-generating opportunities, skills development, and social support, enabling them to improve their economic independence, social status, and overall well-being. In its selection, the EPWP prioritises women over men, with the selection process accommodating about 55% of women and 40% of men. In the 2021/22 financial year, 73% of the work opportunities created were for women, according to the South African government. These employment opportunities were created through EPWP, which represents a remarkable milestone in South Africa, as women are more likely to experience unemployment.

According to McCord (2012), the main objective of public work programmes around the world is to provide beneficiaries with work experiences which would support them in securing employment after leaving the programme. The latter is demonstrated by the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme in Rwanda, the MGNREGA in India, the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia, and the EPWP in South Africa (Amoah et al., 2023). Furthermore, Holmes and Jones (2013) argued that public work programmes must contend with a variety of intersecting gendered labour-market inequalities for them to improve women's agency. Women often have fewer formal sector employment options due to different discriminatory norms and practices, and are typically disproportionately represented in the informal sector, where social security benefits are rare.

The empowerment of women through the EPWP goes beyond the provision of employment. It includes primarily the involvement of women in decision-making on issues that concern them, in the family or in society (Mosedale 2005). This may include decision-making responsibilities such as choices regarding children's education or the allocation of household financial resources. Empowerment is generally understood as an ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome, meaning it is context-dependent and varies across time and circumstances (Mosedale, 2005). The concept of women's empowerment has been closely linked to both the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches, with its initial objective centred on transforming existing power relations (Visvanathan et al., 1997). In this context, altering power relations involves reshaping gender roles, which are widely regarded as socially constructed rather than biologically determined (Moser, 1993).

Although employment through the EPWP is changing people's lives, the provision of jobs to the people has its critics. Scholars such as Hunt and Summan (2016) argued that EPWP employment is not decent. Decent labour is crucial to economic empowerment due to its inherent importance to women's well-being and growth in areas such as earning a living and acquiring assets. The likelihood of "decent" work is higher in the formal sector. According to data from the Gallup World Poll (2025), men and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds and ages value quality employment, regardless of whether they are currently employed. Additionally, in 2009, about 90% of men and women in 17 Middle East and North African and Sub-Saharan African countries, the areas of the world with the worst levels of gender inequality, reported that having decent employment is either "vital" or "very essential" to them (Stotsky et al., 2016).

2.4.2 Women's Empowerment Through Skills Provision

Training and education are important at every stage of life. Having access to high-quality education as a child is crucial in and of itself, and it also has significant knock-on effects that help end intergenerational cycles of poverty, postpone marriage and childbearing, and enhance later labour market results (Hunt and Summan, 2016). The EPWP has a mandate to ensure that its beneficiaries are empowered with the skills to better their lives and ensure future sustainability. The process of skills development and training is believed to be beneficial to beneficiaries, as it enables them to secure long-term employment after participating in the EPWP (McCord, 2005). Since the introduction of the EPWP, most communities, particularly those in rural outskirts, are dependent on projects provided by the EPWP (Manjoro, 2013). In its nature, through short-term employment opportunities, the EPWP facilitates both income generation and skills development among unemployed individuals engaged in productive community activities. The programme intentionally integrates elements of training and work experience to enhance participants' long-term employability and income-earning potential (GDS Agreement, 2003).

The provision of training and skills development by the EPWP is important as it increases women's knowledge, which can support them in securing employment and improving savings (Holmes and Jones, 2013; Amoah et al., 2023). However, training and skills development are more likely to improve women's employment prospects if the training is relevant to the labour market's needs (Pandit, 2025). In South Africa, the EPWP was designed to include a training and skills development component into self or formal employment; however, an evaluation of the programme highlighted that although some participants have found formal or self-employment after programme completion, many have returned to unemployment, revealing the challenges of long-term poverty alleviation (ILO 2018). According to Antonopoulos (2007), providing women with access to senior roles as supervisors and semi-skilled EPWP categories can help develop their on-the-job skills, while also boosting their confidence, leadership potential, and social skills. According to our neighbours, Sri Lanka's NHDA and Botswana's LIPWP both provided women with training and managerial positions within the programme, thereby improving their representation and ability to make decisions (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

2.4.3. Women's Economic Empowerment Through the EPWP

In post-apartheid South Africa, economic empowerment is one of the main goals our country strives to achieve. Women's economic empowerment has been a buzzword among scholars

and policymakers worldwide. Women's economic empowerment is acknowledged as a global policy priority due to its potential contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Taylor and Perezniето (2014), women's economic empowerment is commonly described as the process by which women secure equitable access to and control of economic resources, thereby enhancing their ability to exert control in other areas of life. The latter is a result of its achievements throughout the years. According to O'Neil, Domingo, and Valters (2014), women's empowerment is not a singular or isolated event, but a process of personal and social transformation that occurs over interlinked and mutually reinforcing psychological, political, social, and economic domains. Through this, women individually and collectively gain power, meaningful choices, and control over their lives. Additionally, the process of women's economic empowerment is a path marked by compromise and negotiation, with unpredictable results, rather than a straight-line, uncontested procedure (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014).

The EPWP serves as a form of intervention mechanism, targeting women primarily due to their history of marginalisation and underemployment (Hunt and Samman, 2016). Introduced by the South African Government in 2004, the main objective of the EPWP is to offer basic services and infrastructure to underserved communities, improve skills for unemployed individuals, and provide employment opportunities using appropriate technology. During the first five years of the EPWP, the government created jobs for almost one million individuals. The programme aimed to generate possibilities for jobless and marginalised populations across four sectors: infrastructure, ecological, economic, and social. EPWP targets unemployed, unskilled individuals, those who are not recipients of social grants, the poor, women, and those with disabilities (International Labour Organisation, 2010).

Since its inception, the EPWP has been active in communities and families, enhancing their standard of living and contributing to women's economic empowerment. Golla et al. (2011) argue that economic empowerment has significant ramifications for women's lives, making it a challenging issue to address. Individuals, communities, institutions, markets, and the political and legal environment all need to change. Several key aspects that directly impact women's individual and collective lived experiences either facilitate or hinder the process of improving women's economic empowerment. Education, training and skill development, unpaid care and job obligations, access to property, assets, and financial services, collective action and leadership, and social protection are some of these elements.

2.5 THE CHALLENGES OF EPWP

Despite the success of the EPWP in South Africa, the programme does not go without challenges, which makes it hard for the programme to intensively fight the triple challenges and offer a proper standard of living to its beneficiaries, particularly women. The difficulties experienced by female-headed households in the context of EPWP have been repeatedly underlined by research. Research has indicated that women in the extended poverty population encounter notable obstacles, such as restricted access to education and employment prospects, caregiving obligations and gender norms expectations, and being subjected to discrimination and violence based on gender (Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017; Lehohla, 2016; Makino, 2015).

Furthermore, EPWP has come under criticism for its meagre benefits, poor pay, and unstable employment, all of which disproportionately impact households headed by women (Samson, 2018). Additionally, research indicates that women in the EPWP have trouble getting credit, resources, and social support (Molyneux, 2006), which makes it more difficult for them to escape poverty and raise their socioeconomic standing. Overall, the literature emphasises the need for a more complex understanding of the intersections between gender, poverty, and EPWP to develop effective strategies for addressing the challenges faced by female-headed households.

According to Van der Walt, Swart, and De Beer (2014), one of the biggest obstacles to the EPWP's implementation and oversight is limited communication. Participants' lack of coordination and collaboration is evident because the programme deals with the provision of public infrastructure. According to Hlatshwayo (2017), inconsistent monitoring and a lack of reporting are caused by a lack of expertise in project monitoring, coordination, and evaluation. Additionally, in certain local communities, EPWP accountability—which is achieved through accurate reporting of the programme's progress—is not implemented. Both the programme's success and its stakeholders are negatively impacted by this. Accountability is paramount towards the success of any project or programme. Van der Walt et al. (2014) further noted issues surrounding proper accountability of funds. The transfer of funds from one financial year to another is not remarkable as it tends to make auditing and the practice of accounting difficult.

The majority of South Africa's disabled population is underprivileged and lacks employment possibilities due to their exclusion from the workforce. Therefore, limiting their involvement in training programmes is a discouraging problem since it keeps people in poverty. According

to Dube (2013), disabled persons are excluded from EPWP because they lack the necessary abilities and are unable to do certain duties. The programme's goal of reducing poverty in beneficiary communities will be greatly aided by offering ways to accommodate these individuals rather than imposing limitations (Dube, 2013).

Poverty rate falls under the umbrella of the most critical challenges of the EPWP in the country, regardless of how or to what extent it has decreased when compared to the rate during the apartheid epoch. September (2007) found that the of people in South Africa are found to be living in poverty, and it is not easy for them to achieve their basic needs. Significantly, the high unemployment rate and increasing population growth are regarded as the two most crucial contributing factors toward poverty. The development of this country is affected by the high level of population growth, which results in sky rocketing rate of unemployment, which in turn, perpetuates the rate of poverty. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) reports that 51.8 million people live in poverty. September (2007) asserted that unemployment is the cause of poverty and that deep poverty at the household level is directly related to unemployment, which is likely to have a major effect on children. This is the case since children rely heavily on their parents to support them and run the family.

The consequent lack of access to goods, isolation towards the resources, inadequate infrastructure and service delivery are the great contributors to poverty, Manjoro (2013). The Southern African Development Community (SADC, 2008) explained that an "effective strategy for poverty reduction must therefore help to achieve pro-poor and sustainable economic growth, pro-poor governance, and inclusive social development". Additionally, eradication of poverty is seen as one of the priority interventions under the cross-cutting category. Undoubtedly, countries across the continent and the globe continue to be affected by poverty, which appears to be rising daily. Manjoro (2013) suggests that the government in the country must ensure there are sufficient programmes to alleviate poverty. This complements the claim by Petersen (2014), who elaborated that EPWP should aim to reduce poverty and income relief through temporary work, particularly for those who are not employed.

Financial power and resources are critical factors in determining whether initiatives can be implemented or sustained in any institution or programme, especially in the modern era. The National Department of Public Works, as the coordinator, is responsible for ensuring that funds are allocated annually for the implementation of the EPWP. One of the objectives of the EPWP is to utilise public sector budgets to reduce unemployment by creating productive employment opportunities (Nzimakwe, 2008). The author believes that the inclusion of a reward system in

the Wage Act for EPWP workers, as a way of encouraging them ensuring they continue to contribute greatly and provide better service to the communities, is an initiative that could be fruitful. The National Department of Public Works, provinces, and municipalities are allocated funds through the normal budgeting process for the implementation of EPWP. This allocation is divided among the provincial departments. A study conducted by Nxesi (2013) revealed that the departmental budget allocation was reduced by nearly 20% during the financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14. Reducing funds for the project is a serious challenge that affects the entire implementation process and the intended goals. Nxesi (2013) asserted that funding for EPWP should be increased annually to cover the stipulated costs of projects and sustain the current running projects. Therefore, reducing funds is not ideal or advisable, as it will pose critical issues for EPWP. For example, in the province of Northwest, poor performance was experienced during the first phase, subsequently affecting its allocation for 2009/10, so that the incentive grant was less than 5%. The fewer budgets led to a drastic impact on the implementation plan, making it difficult to achieve the intended objective (Nxesi, 2013).

2.6 HOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN IMPROVE THE EPWP?

According to the Minister of Public Works, the EPWP should be restructured to create employment opportunities that incorporate skills development, leading to sustainable livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and improved service delivery. Hlatshwayo (2017) further contends that achieving coherence among different spheres of government requires effective coordination and integration to ensure collective ownership of public policy. The state's capacity to implement policy is often constrained by the absence of supportive policy frameworks and by the tendency of government institutions to operate in isolation (Hlatshwayo, 2017). Similar challenges are evident at the international level, where greater inter-institutional collaboration is increasingly emphasised. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2017) argued that traditional development approaches adopted by many countries have often been counterproductive, undermining the integrated planning required to achieve sustainable development. This highlights the need for countries to adopt more innovative and coordinated approaches to development. In the South African context, effective alignment and cooperation among government institutions are therefore essential for achieving policy effectiveness and sustainable development outcomes.

A study conducted by Pindus et al. (2020) emphasised that *“characterised by features such as common intake and seamless service delivery where the client may receive a range of services*

from different programmes without repeated registration procedures, waiting for other administrative barriers". Clearly, the institutions of the government need to ensure that there is a correspondence between policies or programmes of the government and services offered to local communities. The authors state that policies which are effective end up being suppressed by a lack of necessary support bodies in the government. The author further argued that the government always reserves a space for cross-fertilisation across all spheres, and this will enhance its effectiveness and efficiency. They further argue that the existing institutional arrangements and reporting structures within the country can be leveraged to support an integrated approach to implementation. Programmes, such as the EPWP, present opportunities to ensure that responsibility for implementation is not confined to the coordinating department alone, but is instead shared across all implementing government institutions, which should collectively regard the programme as their responsibility.

Melody and Zonyana (2017) conducted a study where they argued that *"the challenge of proper alignment and exploitation of EPWP with strategic policies and frameworks is not just a local government challenge but a national challenge that requires urgent and continuous intervention"*. Undoubtedly, the challenges faced by local communities frequently attract the attention of the national government. In contrast, it would be ideal or advisable to start by addressing such issues at the upper sphere of the government, in that order. Melody and Zonyana (2017) maintain that allowing the stakeholder integration to play its role would be crucial for the programme, as the resources can be put to good use and targets of government policy can be attained if all pull in the same direction. The government institutions can benefit greatly from collaborations since they are not in competition, unlike the private sector.

It is ideal for the government to strengthen its human resource base so that its operations are not reliant on advisors who are likely to raise the cost of government goods and services while jeopardising some government policy initiatives (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996). According to the author, South Africa's public service must be changed to accord with Chapter 10 of the Constitution.

This chapter focuses on the fundamental values and concepts that regulate public administration, the Public Service Commission, and public service. The state workers lack skills, transparency, ethics, accountability, development orientation, efficiency, and effectiveness (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996). The efforts of the government need to be directed towards building its capacity to deliver on public goods and services as mandated by the Constitution. The government must also build a capable state, as

suggested in the National Development Plan; this occurrence will ensure that government initiatives such as EPWP benefit from the improvement in the quality of state capacity. The National Planning Commission (2012) stated that this programme is hindered by long-standing government problems which have delayed maximum performance. Therefore, it is essential the government change the way in which it conducts its business. The National Planning Commission (2012) pointed out that “for a very long period of time the government has been complaining about the conduct of its workforce, but very little effort is going towards correcting the existing state of affairs because the situation has not changed”. This implies that the government has the capacity to address the misconduct of its workers, but so far, not much has been done and taken seriously, as witnessed by unchanged behaviour.

Another strategy through which the government could strengthen the EPWP is by aligning national skills development initiatives with labour market demands. South Africa’s persistent structural unemployment can only be effectively addressed through an education system that is responsive to labour market needs. The International Labour Organization (2019) reported that skills shortages forced 53% of the 2018 workforce to occupy positions for which they were not adequately qualified. This underscores the urgent need to prioritise skills development within the country.

Unequal access to post-secondary education remains a significant challenge and is widely regarded as a root cause of skills mismatches. Estimates from 2016 indicate that access to tertiary education was 13.4% in urban areas, compared to 8.6% on farms and 7.1% in rural areas. In addition, limited access to quality and equitable basic education further disadvantages many individuals from progressing into higher-skilled segments of the labour market. These inequalities perpetuate uneven access to employment opportunities, with rural and farm-based populations facing significantly greater barriers than their urban counterparts. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure greater consistency in educational outcomes nationwide. Altman and Hemson (2007) found that some unemployed individuals are excluded from EPWP employment opportunities because they do not meet the minimum entry requirements of certain sub-programmes. This highlights the need for closer alignment between education and employment criteria, ensuring that individuals exiting the schooling system possess skills that correspond with labour market requirements.

2.7 THE STATUS OF INCOME IN FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

A significant proportion of female-headed households in South Africa continue to experience poverty and high levels of income insecurity. Statistics South Africa (2022) reported that over 44.4% of households headed by women are classified as living below the poverty line, whereas the corresponding figure for households headed by men is 24.7%. In addition, households headed by women have a lower mean monthly income of R13 400, in contrast to households headed by men, which have a mean monthly income of R23 300. Income insecurity for female-headed households is worsened by the gender wage gap, restricted access to education and work prospects, and the added responsibility of caregiving (Moyo, 2022). Consequently, numerous households led by women depend on social support grants, to supplement their income. This underscores the necessity for targeted interventions to address the structural barriers that hinder economic empowerment and income security for these households.

The South African government classifies households into three main income groups: low-income, middle-income, and high-income households (Tshuma and Jari, 2013). Households in the low-income category earn between R1 and R19 000 monthly. Households with yearly household earnings ranging from R19 201 to R307 200 fall into the middle-income category (Tshuma and Jari, 2013). Alternatively, upper-income individuals have a reported household income of R307 201 or more (Tshuma and Jari, 2013). According to the Stats SA Income and Expenditure Survey (2010/2011), 48.3% of South African families reported falling in the middle-income bracket in 2011. This is a considerable increase over the previous year's figure of 32.3%.

According to Lombard (2013), an increase in household income signifies an improvement in the quality of life of South African households, and is considered a potential growth of a stronger middle class. The Income and Expenditure Survey (2010/2011) indicated that the average annual income of poor households amounted to R25 348, exceeding the upper income threshold of the low-income category, which is set at R19 200. As a result, classifying households in this income group as impoverished would be problematic (Census, 2011). While a lack of income is common in most townships and rural areas due to a lack of jobs. Luebker (2008) suggested that poor households have a variety of income sources that allow them to escape the poverty trap. According to Tshuma and Jari (2013), having multiple sources of income is beneficial, as it enables households to meet most of their basic needs.

2.8 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DIFFERENCES IN THE STATUS OF INCOME AMONG RURAL HOUSEHOLDS

It is imperative to acknowledge that inequality has always been the word of the day since almost the beginning of time; it is not a contemporary topic. The existing distribution of income and wealth is associated with historical routes which relate to or go back to several centuries. Hundenborn et al (2016) conducted a study which found that based on the Gini coefficient of income, it dropped slightly during 1993 and 2014, from 0.681 to 0.655, despite a temporary increase accompanying the global financial crisis, when inequality went up to 0.96 during 2008. This was an overall inequality in South Africa. According to Finn (2015), the Gini coefficient of income in 2015 was 0.66. This finding implies that there has been no significant progress towards reducing the overall inequality after apartheid in the country. A study by Wilson and Ramphela (1994) revealed the Gini coefficient of income of South Africa compared to that of the other 57 countries for which there were data during that period, at 0.66.

Wilson and Ramphela (1994) argued that South Africa's inequality is shaped by structural factors originating from apartheid-era social and economic power relations, many of which remain influential. In testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997, Wilson and Ramphela (1994) emphasised that apartheid and the capitalist system were mutually reinforcing rather than opposing forces. Contrary to popular belief, apartheid governance and capitalism were not contradictory but instead operated in ways that sustained one another. In contemporary South Africa, although apartheid has formally ended, the capitalist system continues to reproduce inequality across social and economic spheres. Income inequality remains severe and is largely driven by disparities in wages. Finn (2015) showed that wage inequality accounts for approximately 91% of total income inequality in the country.

One of the central drivers of South Africa's socio-economic difficulties lies within the labour market. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017), the narrow unemployment rate stood at 20% in 1994, rose to 26.7% by 2000, and subsequently declined to 22.5%. However, by 2017, unemployment had increased again to 27.7%, representing the highest level recorded during that decade (StatsSA, 2017). Projections suggest that the narrow unemployment rate may approach 30% in the future, driven by weak economic growth and ongoing political uncertainty. The ILO (2017) characterised South Africa's labour market as highly segmented, with excess demand for high-skilled labour alongside an oversupply of low-skilled workers. In rural South Africa, particularly within former apartheid homelands, limited economic opportunities continue to contribute to persistently high unemployment levels

(Bhorat et al., 2016). The assertions suggest that wage income is the primary driver of income inequality in South Africa, while also a significant determinant of household poverty.

A study conducted by Finn (2015) found that almost 83% of households without any member employed fall under a poverty line of R1,319, in comparison to 50% of households with at least one earner. As such, access to employment becomes a real challenge in addressing poverty and inequality. South Africa is one of the developing countries which witnessed a sustained decline in its primary sector, largely platinum, coal and gold mining and a related decrease in employment. But South Africa, in comparison to most of the developing countries, has failed to grow its industrial base and faced a drop in manufacturing employment, together with its shrinking primary sector. Given the fact that the fourth industrial revolution is taking over, it becomes unclear as to how the long-term trend of increasing unemployment can be reversed.

2.9 SUSTAINABILITY AND EPWP

Patel (2005a) identifies several key features of sustainably implemented projects and programmes, including efficient administration, contributions to increased household income, operation within a supportive community context, the production of measurable outcomes, and the incorporation of community knowledge into decision-making processes. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1995:1205) defines sustainability as the ability of an initiative to be maintained or continued over time. Within the context of this chapter, the sustainability of the social sector of the EPWP is assessed using criteria such as participants' income levels, skills and capacities developed, effective management practices, and the meaningful participation of targeted beneficiaries.

The sustainability of programmes aimed at supporting vulnerable populations is of critical importance. The White Paper for Social Welfare, issued by South Africa's Ministry for Welfare and Population Development in 1997, describes sustainability in terms of affordability, financial viability, efficiency, and effectiveness. It is therefore essential that the EPWP aligns with these sustainability principles by addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups, while ensuring that the programme's benefits are sustained beyond direct government involvement.

Additionally, it should promote institutional development, which involves "*creating or strengthening the existing organisations of civil society,*" as stated in The White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). This indicates that ensuring the sustainability of the EPWP necessitates addressing the needs of targeted communities. To achieve this goal effectively, capacity building must support vulnerable

groups so that benefits persist beyond the programme's conclusion. Within this study's context, attention will be centred on women, youth and persons with disabilities who are categorised as vulnerable populations within EPWP's social sector.

Numerous anti-poverty initiatives have encountered challenges in reconciling the objectives of achieving immediate, tangible change, such as infrastructure development projects like road construction and water tank installation, with fostering sustainability through capacity building and leadership enhancement. This approach aims to empower these vulnerable communities to address their long-term challenges independently (Hannah, 2006). The EPWP aims to develop sustainable communities by enhancing community asset value, thereby improving economic conditions. A critical aspect of this goal involves strengthening community capacities to effectively manage future developmental endeavours (Zegeye and Maxted, 2002). An evaluation must be conducted on the social sector component of the EPWP, with a focus on ensuring its sustainability; such efforts should specifically aim at empowering women, children, and persons with disabilities, so they are well-positioned in advancing their developmental projects autonomously for lasting impact.

The sustainability of the social sector of the EPWP in South Africa proves to be a complex problem that must be assessed from multiple perspectives, including participant income, capacity building, management effectiveness, and beneficiary involvement. The EPWP aimed to alleviate unemployment and promote socio-economic growth by offering temporary jobs. Bennett and Fieuw (2018) stated that the socio-economic implications of the EPWP in areas such as KwaZulu-Natal emphasises the opportunities and challenges that contribute to its sustainability. In evaluating the programme's capacity to make a sustainable, positive contribution to the community, it is crucial to examine how the programme can convert the short-term nature of participants' employment into longer-term economic benefits and social transformation.

Financially, the impact of the EPWP must be measured in terms of its ability to raise household income sustainably. The target of the programme is not only to create employment but also to make sure that the participants acquire skills and knowledge that can culminate in permanent employment or entrepreneurship. According to the Department of Public Works (2004), skill development initiatives are essential in the EPWP framework, which is meant to empower beneficiaries to make more meaningful contributions in the economy. This is important to sustainability because the participants cannot go back to their initial economic status, as the

temporary employment terminates, and they might not have a continuous income generation, post-programme.

The other important pillar of assessing sustainability is capacity development in the context of EPWP. The decision to transfer new skills and knowledge is critical, as per the Patel framework of sustainable project implementation (Patel, 2005b). This aligns with the overall goals of the EPWP, as outlined by the Department of Social Development (2004), which demonstrates the social sector's plans to build capacity through specific training programmes. Key to the sustainability of these initiatives is the likelihood that the developed capacities will be put to good use, bringing long-term community and economic outcomes. This implies that there must be a match between the skills of the participants and the market demand, thereby transitioning from temporary employment to a long-term career.

Effective management practices, which ensure that resources are optimised and maximise programme outcomes, are another factor explaining the success of the EPWP. Effective administration, as noted by Patel (2005a), ensures that the EPWP can maintain its goals over time. Project management is effective through strategic planning, resource allocation, monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms. The long-term viability of the programme can be evaluated by its ability to respond to the dynamics of the socio-economic environment and the needs of the participants. A comprehensive programme overview, as stated by the Department of Public Works (2005), supports the fact that strong administrative structures are indeed necessary, thereby establishing a conducive environment for the overall success of the programme.

The presence of a conducive community atmosphere is very relevant to the sustainability of the social sector of the EPWP. The interaction among community stakeholders, the local government, and the programme itself is necessary to create a conducive setting that promotes the programme's objectives. The White Paper on Social Welfare (1997) focuses on the relevance of community inclusion in the development of social development programmes that capture communal needs and aspirations. Involving beneficiaries in decision-making will also ensure that they are heard, making the programme more relevant to them and fostering a sense of ownership and enthusiasm.

Additionally, the EPWP must demonstrate concrete results that contribute to sustainability. This will entail evaluating the effects of the programme in achieving poverty reduction, social cohesion, and economic development in the targeted areas. Since Aydin et al. (2025)

emphasised the implications of sustainability efforts elsewhere, the EPWP would gain advantages by engaging in comparable models that emphasise the idea of inclusive growth and environmental concerns. The programme should ensure that it produces not only short-term but long-term positive impacts in the communities it works in.

Fundamentally, the inclusion of community-based knowledge in the decision-making processes of the EPWP emphasises the necessity of developing specific strategies that capture the unique situations and problems of various areas. Through its local approach, the programme will be able to make interventions relevant, effective, and sustainable. Local wisdom and cultural perspectives enhance the relevance of the programme, making it more responsive to local needs and dynamics, as well as the specific needs of these communities. Through this form of strategic integration, the social sector of the EPWP will be empowered to become more sustainable, resulting in resilient communities that will continue to prosper long after the programme concludes.

2.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To provide structure and a systematic lens for this research study, the theoretical framework guides the formulation of questions, data collection, and analysis. This study adopted two theoretical frameworks, namely the feminist theory and the social development approach. Each approach/theory was adopted to assist in understanding different aspects of the study. Feminist theory focuses on understanding gender dynamics, the role of women in society, stereotypes, and economic inequality. Whereas the social development approach promotes the welfare and well-being of everyone, including economic development. The social development approach uses income support as a tool to address poverty.

2.10.1 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory provides a critical viewpoint on women's social, economic, and political experiences. This theoretical framework is founded on the notion that gender is a social construct that influences individual experiences, opportunities, and outcomes (Ferguson, 2017). Its main advantage is investigating how gender-based power dynamics interact with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality, to create and sustain social inequities. This paradigm provides a lens through which to examine how societal structures and institutions perpetuate gender disparities, as well as how these inequities impact the lives of women. As a result, this study adopted a paradigm to facilitate a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between gender, power, and inequality, enabling the researcher to

analyse the factors that shape and influence the lives of female-headed households and their participation in income-generating activities, thereby exploring the factors surrounding income security.

Feminist theory is applicable to this study because it exposes and challenges inequalities across diverse groups, independent of age or gender. Since this study focuses primarily on female-headed households, which implies that the main target group is women, the employed theory seeks to ensure that no injustice or unfairness is done to women. However, this does not imply that women should be superior to men; rather, it advocates for equality between genders. The study also employed this theory because it strives to establish how women identify within a specific society and how they would like to be treated. Feminist theory also assists in understanding the behaviour of women as a whole and what shapes and guides their minds when making decisions.

2.10.1.1 Significance of Feminist Theory

In its primary objective, feminist theory aims to analyse situations and occurrences that shape and influence the lives of women, and to explore cultural understandings of the role of women in various cultures (Jackson and Jones, 1998). Those who advocate for feminism believe that inequalities between men and women are human-made and inevitable, and that they ought to be questioned. Jackson and Jones (1998) suggest that feminist theory has been, and continues to be, concerned with understanding fundamental inequalities between men and women, particularly through analyses of male dominance and power relations over women. This study is underpinned by feminist theory and examines the contributions of the EPWP towards the income security of female-headed households, demonstrating how the EPWP can empower these households to take control of their economic lives.

2.10.1.2 Expanded Public Works Programme Links with Feminist Theory

The relationship between the EPWP and feminist theory lies with the idea that feminist theory strives to analyse situations or occurrences that shape and guide the lives of women and explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman. The EPWP puts women at the centre of development and provides them with income to better their lives, and improve their standard of living.

- Recognition of women's work

Feminist theory argues that women's care and community work (e.g., childcare, healthcare, cleaning) is often invisible and unpaid. The EPWP compensates women for this work through

programmes such as home-based care and early childhood development, recognising it as productive economic labour. This aligns with feminist efforts to value and legitimise women's traditional roles.

- Economic empowerment

Feminists advocate for economic independence as a foundation for gender equality. The EPWP provides income, skills training, and work experience to women, particularly from marginalised communities. This enhances women's economic agency and challenges gendered poverty.

- Challenging gender roles

To some extent, the EPWP challenges gender roles. While many women in the EPWP are in "care" roles, some also enter non-traditional fields, such as construction or environmental projects. This helps break stereotypes about "men's work" and "women's work."

2.10.1.3 Principles of Feminist Theory

The feminist theory is widely regarded as an interdisciplinary framework for addressing issues of equality and equity related to gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality, as understood and advanced through social theory and political activism (Lundén, 2006). The author posited that "historically, feminism has evolved from the critical examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality". The purpose of this theory is to interrogate inequalities and inequities, together with the intersectional lines of ability, gender, race, sex, class, and sexuality. The advocates of feminism seek to effect change in areas where these intersectionalities create unfairness (Ferguson, 2017). Most people perceive feminist theory incorrectly, in that it mainly focuses exclusively on women and girls, and it seeks to promote the superiority of women over men (Armstrong, 2020). However, that is not the case, because the theory is about promoting equality and eliminating inequality between women and men. Historically, women's perspectives and experiences were excluded from social science and social theory for many decades (May, 2015 and Armstrong, 2020). As a result, feminist theory placed more emphasis on women's lived experiences and social interactions. This approach highlights the importance of including women, who comprise half of the global population, in analyses of social relations and problems (May, 2015 and Ferguson, 2017).

People, regardless of gender, have been found working in the field of feminist theory today, even though most feminist theorists throughout history have been women (Visvanathan et al.,

1997; Mohanty, 2005). Feminist theorists have developed more inclusive and innovative social theories by challenging approaches that assume the social actor to be inherently male and by shifting analytical focus toward women's experiences and perspectives. Visvanathan et al. (1997) and Mohanty (2005) argued that the inclusivity and creativity of feminist theory originate from its emphasis on the intersection of multiple systems of power and oppression. As such, feminist theory extends beyond gender-based inequality to examine how gender intersects with structural racism, sexuality, nationality, class hierarchies, and disability. This perspective provides a holistic framework for examining individual and collective actions within the broader societal context, with particular focus on women and the challenges they encounter in modern society (Mohanty, 2005). Applying a feminist lens facilitates the analysis of individuals, families, groups, and institutions within their wider social, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural contexts, while simultaneously promoting and safeguarding women's rights.

According to Statistics South Africa (2025), rural households in South Africa are associated with high levels of inequalities between men and women. This situation is exacerbated by employment opportunities presented to men over women, and this, in most cases, is determined by the labour market in the country (Ferguson, 2017). Currently, more men are still employed in comparison to women, and this is because of apartheid (Armstrong, 2020). In essence, there is a major gap in unemployment between men and women, and this is the main driver or contributor to the existing levels of inequalities in the local communities. Considering these, the regime of the former president Thabo Mbeki introduced initiatives, such as the EPWP, to expose most people in the country to employment opportunities. Nyoka (2016) noted that the EPWP came as an attempt to empower the marginalised and address pressing issues, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequalities, which are major influences of income insecurity.

2.10.1.4 Equality, Ownership, and Empowerment

Different groups within communities are exposed to various levels of inequality. The epoch of segregation and discrimination in African countries, such as South Africa, caused and exacerbated issues of inequality (Masenya, 2023). It has been debated and proven that there is a huge gap in inequality between women and men, and this tends to hinder the progress of community projects (Ferguson, 2017). This is because men are often prioritised over women, which can limit progress toward realising or achieving a community's objectives, particularly given women's prevalence within the population. This suggests the need to balance the gender

representation, as both men and women can contribute equally to community development when they are equipped with comparable skills and opportunities (Masenya, 2023).

Feminist theory also indicates and emphasises that the role of women within community projects is significant and cannot be ignored (Mohajan, 2022). This does not suggest that men play a lesser role, but inequality as a legacy of apartheid must be addressed, because it would encourage the participation of women in community projects. The theory employed in this study asserts that women should be placed at the centre of all projects, as they have been disadvantaged in the past. Additionally, the objectives or goals of economic growth and development can be achieved by prioritising women, as they possess unique skills to benefit themselves, their families, and their communities.

2.10.1.5 Assumptions of Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is associated with several key assumptions. Masenya (2023) stated that women and men have different experiences, because their worlds differ. Some perceive the objective of this theory to be equality, which essentially means having similar opportunities and choices as men. Advocates of feminist theory aim to highlight the differences between men and women, emphasising the importance of gender in understanding human behaviour alongside political, social, historical, and cultural factors, and the forms of oppression rooted in gender (Flax, 1999; Roy, 2015; and Nyarko, 2022). Flax (1999) further asserted that women's oppression cannot be reduced merely to other social hierarchies, such as class structures. Rather, feminist theory recognises the oppression of women as a distinct set of social challenges that must be analysed and understood on its own terms (Nyarko, 2022).

Oppression is understood as an inherent feature of societal structures, not merely the result of individual prejudice or outdated traditions; it is embedded within the socio-economic and political organisation of society (Armstrong, 2020). The structure is that of patriarchy, which is considered to have deep roots in the culture. Moreover, Flax (1999) identified specific goals with this theory. An understanding of power differentials between women and men, as well as the role of power in relationships, is crucial for the evolution of awareness about oppression and the pursuit of social change to end it (Masenya, 2023). The primary purpose of the theory is a commitment to changing oppressive structures and connecting abstract ideas with real issues to drive political action. Oppression can be seen as the absence of choices (Hooks, 1984). In Western society, women are exposed to vast choices regarding everyday human experiences, which encompass the production of resources, reproduction, and the integration of the

biological and psychological (Armstrong, 2020). Finally, for this reason, some of the women do not name oppression as a concern or identify as feminists. Hooks (1984) argued that the lack of extreme restrictions pushes most women to ignore the areas in which they are exploited, which may result in them thinking that not even a single woman is oppressed.

2.10.2 Social Development Approach

The social development approach uses income support to address poverty, and it views economic growth and social welfare as mutually reinforcing (Patel and Midgley, 2023). By providing income support, such as social grants, governments aim to improve living standards, but they also recognise that true social development requires a broader approach that links economic growth to the redistribution of opportunities and social investments, in areas like education and services (Loewe, 2021). It is paramount to adapt the social development approach in this study because it emphasises the promotion of the welfare and well-being of people, which includes economic development. This is pertinent to the EPWP, as the programme similarly prioritises the creation of employment opportunities, the promotion of economic development, and the development of skills (Patel and Midgley, 2023).

2.10.2.1 Principles of Social Development

Social development spans multiple areas, including welfare services, health, education, and economic development. The social sector of the EPWP reinforces this cross-sectoral collaboration (Lombard, 2007). According to Mohapi (2016), the key principles of social development are outlined in the following section, highlighting the clear connection between these principles and the objectives of the EPWP.

2.10.2.1.1 Social Development Is Linked to Economic Development

Social development involves efforts to improve the well-being and quality of life for individuals and communities by promoting social justice, social cohesion, and the development of individuals' social skills (Loewe, 2021). At a community level, it involves creating policies and programmes that address issues like poverty, inequality, and unemployment, to ensure access to services and opportunities for everyone (Loewe, 2021). Consequently, social development approaches are intended to bring about positive changes in people's lives, reflected in improved living standards and enhanced economic conditions (Mohapi, 2016). Central to social development is the active involvement of people in identifying and addressing their needs. Without tangible economic benefits for the community, social development cannot be considered meaningful (Patel and Midgley, 2023). The EPWP similarly emphasises

economic development by creating employment opportunities for unemployed individuals, demonstrating a clear connection between social and economic development objectives.

2.10.2.1.2 Social Development Is Interdisciplinary

Social development, understood as fostering positive change, is inherently interdisciplinary, encompassing multiple social science disciplines, such as economics, politics, and social work (Mohapi, 2016). This interdisciplinary approach is reflected in the EPWP, which is executed through multiple government departments, including Social Development, Education, Health, Transport, and Public Works (Loewe, 2021). Similarly, the social sector of the EPWP-the focus of this study-adopts an interdisciplinary perspective by integrating initiatives related to social services, education, and health.

2.10.2.1.3. Social Development Involves a Process That Leads to Positive Change

In the implementation of social development initiatives, government departments and development practitioners consistently stress that the goal should be to bring about positive changes in the lives of beneficiaries and communities (Liesering, 2021). This principle is particularly relevant to the EPWP, which is designed to ensure that, upon completion, individuals and communities experience tangible improvements through skills development and access to employment opportunities, thereby enhancing their empowerment.

In theory and practice, social development focuses on addressing poverty and unemployment. Addressing the socio-economic challenges is crucial because they lead to inequalities (Mohapi, 2016). Social development, always to some extent, is associated with equality, an important principle (Shaw, 2008). Shaw (2008) stated that it is rooted in the emerging practice of working with and in communities to challenge unfairness and bring about social change. Most community members employed in community projects tend to place this commitment at the centre or heart of their work. The concept of social development is accepted as a process designed to create conditions for economic and social progress within the entire community, with active participation from all its members (Ife, 2013). In the past, it was renowned for its collaboration with relevant stakeholders and vulnerable communities to eradicate diseases, poverty, and underdevelopment (Armstrong, 2020). During this period (post-war decades), officers within the local authority were tasked with managing housing estates by housing organisations to foster community spirit and encourage tenant participation. This involved getting people to take part in local activities as a way of improving services and social infrastructure (Ife, 2013).

A radical model of community action, reflecting a growing awareness of inequalities, emerged during the 1970s. Shaw (2008) emphasised that the evolution of this model hinges on an explicit class analysis that links economic status with inequalities in education, health, and household income. The initiative behind this agenda was driven by male community workers. However, given the increasing number of women entering this field, attention began to shift towards securing or developing quality play and childcare facilities, and challenging traditional masculine ways of organising (Gilchrist and Taylor, 2016). At the same time, equal treatment and developing provisions for diverse cultures were demanded by Black communities. The social model of disability emphasises the importance of understanding and eradicating the barriers that prevent disabled individuals from exercising their rights as equal citizens in society (Gilchrist and Taylor, 2016). These authors suggest that several initiatives or campaigns that do not support ageism place more emphasis on biases that affect people at both ends of the spectrum, such as the empowerment of older people alongside women and children, as well as the views of youth. Studies conducted by several scholars have shown that sustainable development cannot exist without gender equality and the involvement of women or their empowerment. Gender equality is primarily understood as a human right concern, a necessity for, and an indicator of long-term development. Gender equality is crucial for creating an equitable and sustainable society, as well as for empowering women to support their communities and families (Inglehart et al., 2003). This approach is paramount for the study because any approach that places people at the centre helps empower women and achieve gender equality.

2.10.2.1.4. The Change Process in Social Development Is Progressive

By progressive development, it is believed that all human beings have the potential to improve. Thus, the changes brought about by social development approaches should always lead to improvements in people (Liesering, 2021). This is also the case with the EPWP, because it seeks to empower people by providing skills and creating job opportunities. Additionally, the concept of social development is understood as a process through which people can take responsibility for mobilising, distributing, and managing available resources sustainably and equitably to improve the quality of life (Esteva, 2010). The author emphasises that it is important for citizens to drive or control their development and be able to decide on the meaning of a better life for themselves. The author further argued that they should be provided the opportunity to actively develop themselves. According to Kinyata and Abiodun (2020), an approach that prioritises people aims to invite them to participate in their development and

become part of the processes that describe how individuals develop. This would enable people to access information required to improve the quality of their livelihoods. Shaw (2008) argued that it is also significant that communities are tasked with providing basic services and not relying solely on development to actively participate in the democratic mechanisms for development.

2.10.2.1.5. The Process of Social Development Is Interventionist

Social development is a process that occurs through intervention (Mohapi, 2016). As a result, people's welfare or living situations won't improve on their own or organically. Thus, intervention is constantly required to improve people's living circumstances. For this reason, it is crucial to make deliberate attempts to effect positive change. One of the deliberate and beneficial initiatives taken by the South African government to better the lives of its residents, particularly those who are marginalised and disadvantaged, is the EPWP (Maphanga, 2019). However, the EPWP is not the only intervention strategy to be adopted by the government. A clear example of intervention techniques in the country can be traced back to 1994, when South Africa's Apartheid ended. The new period of political freedom was seen as the foundation for economic growth and inclusion (Philip et al., 2014).

There are key policies that were designed specifically by South Africa's democratic government to deal with the disparities perpetuated by the apartheid government. These policies Education policies, Employment Equity Act, RDP, GEAR, and NDP (Maphanga, 2019). Beneath the acronyms are fundamental and unresolved disagreements about the best course of action for a country like South Africa, which has a robust natural resource base but deeply ingrained inherited disparities, particularly across racial lines. Philip et al (2014) claimed that "addressing the issue of growth by tackling poverty in the absence of policies to address inequality may not produce the desired results.

2.10.2.1.6. The Goals of Social Development Are Carried Out Through Various Strategies, Which Are Linked to Economic Development

It is generally understood that development is a process that spans various disciplines. Within the framework of social development, various approaches can be implemented at the individual, community, or governmental levels (Mohapi, 2016). At the individual level, social development can be achieved by enhancing people's social functioning, promoting entrepreneurship, or supporting small companies that generate income for the impoverished. Social workers can help in this situation by providing tailored treatments to reduce obstacles

that hinder people's ability to operate effectively (Midgley, 1995; and Liesering, 2021). At the local level, communities can improve their lives through community development programmes or by addressing specific issues, such as gender issues or women's development. This is consistent with the EPWP since it likewise targets communities or demographics as beneficiaries, including women, young people, and people with disabilities.

2.10.2.1.7. Social Development is Inclusive and Universalistic

All members of society are encompassed within the broad concept of social development. Although social development interventions primarily target the poor and disadvantaged, they also operate within a broader universalistic framework that advances the welfare of all individuals within a region, community, or society (Liesering, 2021). As a result, social development focuses on specific, broader, and universal geographical contexts, such as rural areas, particular regions, cities, or nations.

2.10.2.1.8. Social Development Promotes Social Welfare

By managing people's issues and generating opportunities, social development enhances the well-being of individuals and communities (Liesering, 2021). This implies that satisfying people's needs and assisting them in resolving their issues should be the goal of all interventions (Mohapi, 2016). By addressing people's needs through skill development and job creation, the EPWP also advances social welfare. Therefore, rather than taking a corrective strategy, the social development approach seeks solutions that empower individuals and communities (Twikirize et al., 2013).

2.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The literature reviewed demonstrates that the EPWP plays a significant role in the lives of disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalised people in rural communities. Although its impact is limited to a short-term period, its contribution is recognised. It further revealed that the EPWP is considered the only route, which is followed by the majority, particularly those who lack the necessary skills, knowledge, or experience that can make them competitive in the corporate world. Most scholars have noted that people can cope with issues of hunger for a certain time, which is often achieved through employment in the EPWP; however, they maintain that this is unfortunate because the EPWP offers employment basis. It would, therefore, be ideal for the EPWP to be restructured in a manner that creates permanent employment. Even the Minister of Public Works noted that the programme must be

restructured in a way that creates job opportunities involving skills development for sustainable jobs or entrepreneurial outcomes.

The chapter covered the following: an overview of the EPWP at both the international and national levels, the nature and characteristics of the EPWP in South Africa, and its role within local communities. This is followed by a discussion of the challenges encountered during the implementation of the EPWP and potential strategies for enhancing the programme as a whole. The chapter also covered income status and the causes of inequalities among rural households. Additionally, this chapter outlines key policies aimed at addressing the income status inequalities in South Africa. The final section of this chapter presents the theoretical framework that guided this study. The next chapter presents the methodology used to collect data.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a critical analysis and synthesis of previous scholarly work on EPWP, its contribution to poverty reduction, and addressing unemployment. This chapter outlines the research process undertaken to address and provide answers to the research problem, specifically regarding the contribution of the EPWP to the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni. It provides a systematic account of how the study was conceptualised, designed, and executed to generate credible and contextually grounded findings. The chapter begins with a detailed description of the study area, situating the research within its geographical, socio-economic, and demographic context. It then explains the research design, the methodological approach adopted, and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the inquiry.

Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on the qualitative approach employed, including the data collection and analysis methods used to explore participants' lived experiences and perspectives. Ethical considerations that guided the research process, as well as the strategies applied to ensure trustworthiness and data quality, are also outlined. Given the nature of the research questions, the study employed a purely qualitative approach, allowing for an in-depth and nuanced understanding of how the EPWP affects income security among female-headed households in Kabokweni.

This chapter describes the research process followed to provide answers to the research problem: the contributions of the EPWP towards income security for female-headed households in Kabokweni. The first part of this chapter provides a detailed description of the study area, an explanation of the research design, the approach adopted, and the philosophical framework guiding the study. This is followed by the methodology, ethical considerations, and data quality measures. This is a purely qualitative study that employed qualitative methods to collect and analyse data.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

This research study was carried out in Kabokweni, a peri-urban area, within the city of Mbombela in Mpumalanga province. The settlement was established in 1967 during the apartheid era, where people were forcibly moved from White River to Kabokweni, an area that was categorised as being under the KwaNgwane Bantustan (Agholor and Yusuf, 2024). Like

most disadvantaged communities, the area of Kabokweni faces significant unemployment due to limited formal job opportunities, and it is faced with significant service delivery challenges and poverty. Agholor and Yusuf (2024) recognised the interconnections between unemployment, poverty, food security, health and inequality. Many households in Kabokweni rely on inconsistent or informal income. Additionally, Kabokweni has infrastructure backlogs, as described in the Ehlanzeni District Municipality IDP (2024-2025), which have been identified as being in a state of deterioration and inadequate. Several basic services were identified as requiring renovations, including health facilities, the community hall, and others. The area has a limited economic base and, according to Mbombela's IDP Plan (2022-2027), it is one of the highest crime spots due to poor lighting, inadequate use of structures, and a lack of crime awareness.

The EPWP was implemented in various areas within Mbombela Local Municipality, including the study area of Kabokweni, to tackle several socio-economic issues, such as high unemployment and widespread poverty. The focus was on creating employment opportunities to enable residents, particularly youth and women, to gain access to income and work experience. The municipality experiences particularly high unemployment rates among persons with disabilities, youth, and women. To address the above challenges, the municipality has utilised the implementation of Local Economic Development (LED) programmes, the EPWP, and the Community Works Programme in its efforts to create job opportunities for various communities (Mbombela LED Strategy Review, 2015). The EPWP also aims to improve community infrastructure and public services through labour-intensive projects, while equipping participants with practical skills that can help them secure longer-term employment. Additionally, the programme supports the Mbombela Municipality's development priorities and contributes to reducing inequality in historically disadvantaged areas, such as Kabokweni.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design refers to a plan outlining how the researcher intends to conduct the study, with an emphasis on the final outcome (Babbie and Mouton, 2009; Mason, 2017). In addition, the selection of the research design is guided by the researchers' ontological and epistemological perspectives, which influence the way data is collected (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). This study employed an exploratory research design, which enabled the researcher to investigate the contribution of the EPWP to the income security of female-headed households. This was informed by the belief that the participants have their own perceptions and

experiences regarding the contribution of EPWP towards income security. Studies that the researcher had access to focused on the general effectiveness of the EPWP and how it contributes to household income security, with minimal studies conducted on gender distribution or household headship regarding participation, or benefits from the programme. The design enabled the researcher to explore whether women who head households benefit or gain adequate income from the programme. Generally, studies conducted (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019; Aanuoluwapo, Akinradewo et al., 2023) focused on the effectiveness concerning issues of food security and the contribution towards addressing unemployment without any attention given to vulnerable groups such as women and female-headed households.

The study sought to explore the benefits of the expanded public works programme through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, as tools to gather participants' perceptions and experiences of female-headed households on the EPWP towards income security. Hlatshwayo (2017) adopted the same design to evaluate and analyse the views and perspectives of workers employed in the EPWP, highlighting key issues related to the ways in which the Programme and other government projects address the social and economic challenges facing South Africa. However, the results provided a general overview without providing gender disaggregated views and experiences. Income security is not only concerned with having an adequate level of income but also relates to assurances and expectations about receiving an income now and in the future (Yusuf, 2024).

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study was purely qualitative and involved the collection and analysis of the opinions and experiences of female heads of households who are participants in the EPWP in Kabokweni, as well as municipal officials in Mbombela, who served as key informants. The focus of the study was placed on the role of EPWP towards addressing poverty and unemployment, to ensure the income security of female-headed households. Khawula (2019) adopted a similar approach in his study to explore the execution of the Expanded Public Works Programme in the eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal province.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Mason (2017) defined qualitative research as an activity that situates the observer within the world being studied. This approach follows an interpretive, naturalistic perspective by studying phenomena in their natural environments and interpreting them according to the meanings individuals attach to them. Schurink, and Fouché (2021)

maintained that qualitative research focuses on exploring, describing, and understanding realities from the inside out, driven by a need to find new ways of understanding in response to social changes. The approach was chosen because it involves critical scrutiny and produces explanations or arguments, rather than merely offering descriptions. The research process was carefully thought through, considering what was to be explained and the need for the research to produce explanations or arguments that are generalizable. However, the researcher in the same vein considered the challenges posed by generalising from qualitative data. The adoption of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to interact with individuals involved in the EPWP in Kabokweni, thereby discovering unexpected and unanticipated information that would not have been possible with other approaches, such as the quantitative research approach.

3.5 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The qualitative research is generally known to involve a systematic investigation of social phenomena within natural settings (Babbie and Mouton, 2009; Teherani et al., 2015). Such phenomena may include individuals' lived experiences, behavioural patterns of individuals and groups, and the ways in which social interactions influence relationships. Additionally, qualitative research begins from a fundamental set of beliefs, unlike its quantitative counterpart. Willy (2018) maintains that qualitative research draws inspiration from the interpretivist paradigm and believes that there is no single reality. Furthermore, reality is described as multiple, subjective, and socially constructed, and the researcher elicits the participants' opinions of reality during data collection (Lincoln et al., 2011; Willy, 2018).

The interpretivist paradigm was adopted in the study to help the researcher acknowledge and appreciate that multiple realities exist in the world, as perceived and expressed by different individuals within the research setting. The researcher aimed to understand the meanings participants attributed to the contribution of EPWP to the household income of female-headed households. The study required an understanding of the participants' reasoning processes and how they interpreted their engagement in EPWP, and the benefits thereof. The participants were viewed as primary data sources to gain a deeper understanding of their activities and ideas from the insiders' viewpoint. This type of research sought to understand the context in which people live and work, as well as how they construct subjective meanings from their experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed participants to respond to qualitative questions.

3.6 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Babbie and Mouton (2009) and Sefotho (2021), the research methodology encompasses the process, tools, and procedures employed in conducting a study, which are determined by the chosen research design. Sampling, data collection, and data analysis form part of the methodology and are determined and informed by the research approach, ontology and epistemology (Sefotho, 2021). The following section provides a detailed explanation of the target population selection, sampling methods and procedures, as well as the data collection and analysis methods and procedures.

3.6.1 Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of female heads of households who had participated in the EPWP for more than a year. The selected participants were heading households while working in the EPWP. The researcher ascertained that the selected participants could share their experiences regarding the adequacy of their income gained through participation in the EPWP. Additionally, the study targeted key informants, including municipal officials involved in the planning and implementation of the EPWP, supervisors, and ward councillors. These individuals were targeted because of their involvement in leadership and decision-making within the EPWP in Kabokweni. Table 3.1 provides the number of participants and the role played in the study.

Table 3.1: The target population and role played

Target population	Number of participants (N=20)	Role in the Study
Key informant 1 and 2 Municipal Officials	02	Key Informant: Provided approval for the researcher to conduct the study within the jurisdiction of Mbombela.
Key informant 3 Ward councillor	01	Key Informant: Supplied the researcher with further information pertaining to the area of Kabokweni, and the challenges residents are facing, particularly women.
Key informant 4 and 5 Supervisors in EPWP	02	Key Informant: Assisted the researcher in reaching sites where participants are placed and operated regularly. Provided information on recruitment, task allocation, and working conditions, training, and general information about gender dynamics and support given, challenges, and benefits.
Female household heads participating in EPWP	15	Participants: Provided the researcher with in-depth information on perceptions and experiences in EPWP and income security

3.6.2 Sampling Method and Procedure

The researcher employed non-probability sampling methods, specifically using the purposive sampling technique to select all participants. Precisely as the name suggests, members of a sample were chosen with the purpose of obtaining information about EPWP and engagement of women, and the benefits of their engagement. Roberts (1997), Lewis (2013), and Strydom (2022) argue that purposive sampling is commonly used to expand knowledge by intentionally selecting participants who are considered rich sources of relevant data. Purposive sampling is also referred to as judgmental because it involves the judgment of the individual researcher who decides to select cases that illustrate a feature or process of interest, or for justified reasons (Strydom, 2022).

In this study, the sample was selected based on gender, female-headed households, and participation in the EPWP. The procedure for selecting the sample involved the researcher reviewing a list of EPWP projects, which was obtained from the Mbombela Local Municipality. From the list, four projects were identified as being based in Kabokweni. A meeting was organised for the researcher by the municipal official, and it consisted of supervisors from the four EPWP projects of all three sectors. From the meeting, the researcher established that projects under infrastructure and environmental management had more female participants, aged between 30 and 60. Two projects from the two sectors were selected, and the field visits were done together with the supervisors. The field visits assisted the researcher in identifying household heads among a group of women, after which they were approached to form part of the sample. With the challenge of not reaching the desired sample, findings may not be transferable to EPWP participants in the social or non-state sectors, where work conditions and income may differ.

The study sample included 15 women participating in the EPWP who are head of their households. These women are paramount to the study, as they have been employed within the EPWP for over a year. The sample also consisted of five key informants. For this study, five informants were purposively selected, comprising two municipal officials overseeing the EPWP in the Mbombela Local Municipality, two sector supervisors, and a ward councillor. These key informants were purposefully selected by the researcher because they possess the most accurate information, and their contribution is pivotal to the study, as they are deployed

as leaders in the EPWP within Mbombela Local Municipality, thereby making them part of the planning and implementation phases.

3.6.3 Data Required

This study necessitated the use of both primary and secondary sources of information. The term “primary data” refers to the first-hand data gathered by the researcher themselves (Creswell et al., 2020). However, in the context of this study, primary data refers to the information gathered directly from female-headed households that are participants in the EPWP, as well as key informants who serve as leaders in the programme. Therefore, primary data for this study was obtained through focus group discussions with female participants who are household heads, and interviews with key informants.

A document analysis was conducted to gather secondary data for this study. This approach entails examining a variety of document kinds, such as books, newspaper articles, scholarly journal articles, and institutional reports. Patteson (2015) forwarded that any text-based document can serve as a source for qualitative analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) supported the notion that the term “*document*” can refer to a broad range of content, including visual sources such as images, videos, and films. This study reviewed municipal documents published on the EPWP in the city of Mbombela. Emphasis was placed on the following documents: EPWP recruitment guidelines, EPWP minimum wage, EPWP training, EPWP Five-Year Report, and the EPWP’s framework for monitoring and evaluation of the EPWP.

3.6.4 Data Collection Methods and Procedure

To gather the required data and meet the study’s goal, the researcher visited the Mbombela municipal offices to obtain approval to conduct the study and establish a relationship with officials involved in EPWP. This enabled the researcher to identify key informants who would participate in semi-structured interviews. The key informants introduced the researcher to EPWP supervisors, who served as key informants. The researcher then conducted field visits with supervisors. This assisted with the recruitment of participants for focus group discussions. During these field visits, the researcher engaged the beneficiaries and oriented them on the study, to build a rapport. It was important for the researcher to establish trust with the participants because, initially, the participants assumed that the researcher was employed by Mbombela EPWP. The researcher explained the purpose of the study in detail and provided evidence to show that the researcher is a student at the University of Mpumalanga, by showing his student card as a form of identification, along with the research approval letter. Upon

gathering the participants, the following methods were used to collect primary and secondary data required for the study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

An interview is a one-on-one interaction in which one participant assumes the role of interviewer, while the other serves as the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method of data collection (Creswell, 2014). This approach was selected because of its inherent flexibility, which allowed interviewees to elaborate on issues related to the research topic, while enabling the researcher to explore emerging insights in greater depth. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted exclusively with key informants. Appointments were scheduled with two municipal officials, two supervisors, and a ward councillor. The interviews took place in their respective offices. The key informants were purposefully selected due to their expert knowledge and direct involvement in implementing the EPWP within Mbombela Local Municipality, particularly in Kabokweni.

The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated the incorporation of open-ended questions, which enabled participants to introduce new ideas and perspectives during the discussions. Follow-up questions were posed to obtain clarity and explore emerging themes in greater depth (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are exploratory in nature, typically guided by an interview schedule that provides a general framework focused on the core research topic (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). In line with this, the researcher utilised an interview guide to structure the interview process (see Annexure C). Responses from key informants were initially recorded manually in a notebook and subsequently transferred to a computer for proper documentation. The conversations were recorded using a voice recorder after obtaining prior permission from the participants.

Focus Group Discussions

Considering that the population consists of a homogenous group, that is, female heads of households involved in EPWP, the researcher adopted focus-group discussions as a data collection method. Focus group discussions were selected on the premise that group interaction can enhance the breadth of responses, stimulate the recall of overlooked experiences, and reduce inhibitions that might otherwise prevent participants from sharing information (Moloantoa and Geyer, 2021). With the assistance of the supervisors, focus groups were formulated to identify participants. Participants were requested to sign the informed consent forms.

Focused group discussions were held by the researcher with the participants in their work setting. For better flexibility, two sessions were conducted, each lasting 60 minutes, with permission obtained from the supervisor. The maximum duration was 60 minutes, and the discussions took place during the workers' lunch hour at their respective sites. Given the discussion that took longer, permission was granted to slightly exceed the 60-minute limit. To divide the groups, the researcher worked on the shift schedule. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, only half of the workers were on duty. The researcher worked with a small group of selected workers who were on duty on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The researcher, being the moderator, directed a discussion among a group of selected female household heads with the purpose of collecting in-depth qualitative data about the experiences and perceptions of participants regarding the value of their participation in EPWP and whether it contributes to their income security. A total of 15 female household heads participated in the focus group discussions. The researcher divided the participants into two groups for easy coordination. The first group consisted of seven people, and the other one consisted of eight people. Although the number might appear small, the focus groups should neither be too small to allow the domination of one or two members over the others, nor too large to become unmanageable. The size of the group should not exclude members due to time constraints (Harvey-Jordan and Long, 2002). The discussions were conducted in English and Siswati to ensure that the participants understood the questions asked (see Annexure A and B). Additionally, their responses were recorded with the participants' agreement, and notes were drafted.

The researcher facilitated the discussion, highlighting the method's shortcomings. The complexity of organising focus groups was overcome through adequate planning, and the researcher ensured that the number of participants per group was controlled, staying between 8 and 10 members per group. Members were encouraged to participate, and the dominant members were kept in check. The participants used their language to interact with each other; hence, rich and diverse data were obtained. However, the disadvantages, such as transcription of focus group discussions, were found to be time-consuming. Time constraints were noted as another challenge that limited active engagement on some of the important issues.

3.6.5 Data Analysis Method and Procedure

Data collected through qualitative data collection tools was analysed using thematic analysis, which was executed using NVivo 12 software.

Thematic analysis was adopted due to its primary advantage as a qualitative technique that involves examining data collected to identify, analyse, and report recurring themes (Nowell et al., 2017). For a successful thematic analysis, the technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed.

The method of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), has become the most widely adopted approach in the qualitative literature (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The method of thematic analysis consists of six steps. However, it is important to note that this kind of thematic analysis is designed to be recursive, rather than linear. Thus, it is a process in which subsequent steps may prompt the researcher to revisit earlier steps considering new data or newly emerging themes that warrant further investigation. The following steps were taken when conducting thematic analysis.

Step 1: Familiarising yourself with the data

Interview transcripts were read and re-read by the researcher, noting down initial ideas. The interview transcripts were then imported into the data management software NVivo 12.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

After the researcher had familiarised himself with the collected data, initial codes were then generated. Descriptive coding involved deconstructing the data from its initial chronology.

Step 3: Searching for themes

This step involved reviewing the open coding, merging, renaming, distilling, and collapsing the initial codes into broader categories of codes. This process enabled the data to be constructed in a manner that fulfilled the research objectives.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

In this phase, the researcher conducted the process of ‘drilling down’, which involved re-coding the text using the initial codes, reorganising it into a coding framework, and breaking down the themes into sub-codes to better understand the meanings embedded therein.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

After reviewing themes, the process of defining and naming themes followed, which involved the abstraction of the data into a broader thematic framework.

Step 6: Producing the report/manuscript

The stage involved writing analytical memos to accurately summarise the content of each theme and propose empirical findings.

With data analysis being a complex process, NVivo reduces a significant number of manual tasks, affording the researcher more time to discover patterns, recognise themes, and draw conclusions. The raw data from field notes and transcribed voice recordings were imported into NVivo software for analysis. The data were coded and divided into themes and sub-themes to detect trends, patterns, and linkages. The researcher later presented the data in a clear and interpretable format, consistent with the research purpose.

3.7 DATA CONTROL MANAGEMENT

To ensure quality, the researcher used language that is easily understood by the participants, allowing them to provide accurate and confident answers. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that all questions were asked of participants, not just selected ones. Thus, this assisted in ensuring the proper collection of data. Additionally, for triangulation purposes, this study employed two data collection methods: focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The data obtained through the two data collection methods were reviewed and analysed to ensure trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

For trustworthiness to be determined in this study, a thorough assessment of data analysis, findings, and conclusion was undertaken. This credibility was achieved using a well-defined research procedure that corresponded to the research questions and theoretical views related to the research aims. To ensure transferability, this study's findings demonstrated that they can be implemented in different situations and are comprised of and dependent on the findings. Furthermore, the findings do not reflect the researcher's biases, motivations, or interests, but rather the opinions and experiences of agricultural cooperatives, extension agents, and municipal officials, ensuring confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility relates to the trustworthiness of the data and is established by determining whether the findings accurately represent events in the study setting and whether the researcher has properly captured the phenomenon under investigation (Pitney, 2004). To ensure the credibility of the findings, various strategies were employed, such as triangulation, member checks, and peer review. Triangulation can be attained using more

methods of collecting data, and for this study, it was achieved using in-depth interviews and observations.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to show that the data reflect the participants' responses rather than the researcher's personal biases or perspectives (Polit and Beck, 2012). In this study, confirmability was ensured by clearly describing how conclusions and interpretations were derived, and by demonstrating that the findings emerged directly from the data. To support this, all fieldwork findings were securely stored and documented, including audio recordings of the interviews.

Confirmability helps minimize the researcher's influence on data interpretation, thereby producing authentic, rich data unaffected by external factors. To further safeguard against participant responses being shaped by the researcher's expectations, participants were informed that all responses were valuable and that they should provide their own subjective interpretations rather than attempting to please the researcher. Additionally, participants' contributions were acknowledged and considered during the data analysis process.

Transferability

Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the research methods, study contexts, and settings, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Transferability, therefore, reflects the extent to which findings can be generalized or applied beyond the immediate study setting.

Ensuring transferability is considered a critical aspect of qualitative research, as it involves assessing whether findings are relevant to similar contexts. According to Pitney (2004), qualitative researchers typically provide in-depth information about the study context or participants so that readers can judge whether the results are applicable to their own situations or experiences. In this study, the researcher facilitated transferability by offering a clear representation of the primary research site, while providing only limited information about participants to maintain their confidentiality.

Dependability

Dependability is grounded in the idea that consistent results could be obtained if the same methods and participants were used in a similar study. According to Pitney (2004), dependability can be enhanced through the use of member checks, which involve participants

verifying the accuracy of the information collected. It also enables participants to clarify to the researcher that the researcher's descriptions and interpretations are accurate (Pitney, 2004). In the researcher's view, member checks can be facilitated by storing the data. Dependability in this study was ensured by securely storing the collected information, which allowed it to be subsequently presented to participants for verification.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Key ethical considerations in this study included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, promoting voluntary participation, showing respect to participants, and minimizing any potential risk or harm. This is consistent with recommendations made by Kothari (2013), who stated that informing potential participants is crucial. This study considered the necessity for participants to understand the hazards and methods used in the investigation. This was considered to help them decide whether to participate in the study. The following is an explanation of each ethical consideration premise. The University also provided an authorised ethical clearance letter, which is included in Annexure C.

Permission to Conduct the Study

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained ethical clearance to continue with the study from the University of Mpumalanga research committee and written permission from the Mbombela Local Municipality, allowing the researcher to continue with the study in the domains of the municipalities. Thus, the authenticity of the study was prioritised (see Annexure G and H).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

For this study, Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their identities. To maintain anonymity, the researcher used labels such as "Participant 1" and "Key informant 1" instead of recording their real names". This aspect encompasses the principle of trust, in which participants were assured that their trust would not be exploited for personal gain or benefit, nor would they be deceived or betrayed in the research process or its published outcomes (Lubbe, 2003). Furthermore, the participants were also informed that the information they provide will only be used for academic research purposes and not for the researcher's personal gain.

Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

Before engaging the participants, the researcher advised participants that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. Additionally, no one was forced or deceived to participate in the study. Informed consent forms were issued to the participants of this study (Refer to Annexure E and F).

Privacy

During data collection, the researcher made every effort to respect participants' personal boundaries, private spaces, and sensitive topics. As a result, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at times and places that were comfortable for the participants.

Respect

The researcher treated participants with dignity, respected their autonomy, and was mindful of cultural differences. Respecting the cultural norms, values, and language of participants is essential. This includes adapting methods to culturally appropriate practices and being aware of potential cultural misunderstandings. The researcher used SiSwati to ensure that the participants understood the questions asked and were comfortable in answering them.

Avoiding Harm

The researcher ensured that participation did not cause psychological, emotional, social, or physical harm. The participants' well-being was protected by scheduling interviews at convenient times and in an environment that was comfortable and appropriate during working hours. This includes avoiding questions and activities that may retraumatise or distress participants.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

The researcher maintained professional boundaries, avoided exploiting participants, and was mindful of power imbalances (e.g., between researcher and vulnerable groups). Trust was initially established with the participants through the researcher, who provided them with his University of Mpumalanga student card and an approval letter. Additionally, the use of SiSwati as a language of communication helped build a positive relationship.

Ethical Data Handling

Ethical Data Handling is paramount in every study. As a result, to ensure that this ethical consideration was followed, the data collected was stored, analysed, and reported responsibly.

This includes secure storage, limited access, and the proper destruction of data when it is no longer needed.

3.9 LIMITATIONS

Conducting social science research does not occur in a vacuum; several factors may hinder the study from achieving its purpose. Firstly, this study aimed to reach participants from all four sectors of the EPWP (social sector, infrastructure sector, environment and cultural sector, and non-state sector); however, only participants from two sectors (Infrastructure sector and Environment and Cultural sector) were reached. This is because projects in these two sectors are comprised of more women between the ages of 30 and 60. There was no response from the social sector and non-state sector. Thus, the results from this study may not be transferable to EPWP participants in the social or non-state sectors, where work conditions and income may differ.

Secondly, the time allocated for conducting focus group discussions and the environment in which the discussions were held posed a limitation to the study. The researcher could meet with the participants during their lunch hour, which was not enough time for the participants to provide sufficient information to the researcher, as they had to quickly finish so that the participants could go have their meal. Additionally, since the focus group discussions were conducted in the participants' workplace, some participants were hesitant to voice their opinions, fearing that their supervisors might be listening outside the room. Future studies are recommended to adopt the use of questionnaires in this instance. Thirdly, with the focus group discussions conducted in Siswati, it was challenging for the researcher to translate or record the responses in English without losing their value and meaning. Fourthly, Key informants reported different things to the researcher, making it difficult to establish consistency and accuracy. Lastly, it was difficult for the researcher to organise focus groups due to being an outsider. However, with the assistance of EPWP supervisors, the process was made easier.

3.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter on research methodology provided an overview of the qualitative approach used for data collection and analysis in this study. The chapter provided an overview of the research design, philosophy, strategy, target population, sampling method, and data collection instrument. The chapter covers interview administration, data analysis, and study validity/reliability. Additionally, the study's ethical considerations and methods for eliminating bias were discussed. Chapter Four presents the key research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research process followed to conduct the study, including data quality measures and ethical considerations. This chapter presents the data collected from the participants, interprets and analyses it, and provides a detailed discussion of the findings. The first part provides a summary of the themes that emerged from the data. This is followed by a presentation and analysis of the EPWP, which covered an understanding of the programme by the participants and key informants, recruitment of contractors and participants, and experiences of employment within the EPWP or other related projects.

The background of income security, which includes an understanding of income security, generation of income, and other sources of income, and education on measures to ensure financial sustainability. It also presents the nature of women's empowerment, which encompasses an understanding of women's empowerment, the skills acquired through participation in the programme, and the involvement or encouragement of women in the EPWP.

The chapter also presents the role of the EPWP, which encompasses employment creation and poverty eradication, women's self-reliance through skills acquired, and the progress made by the EPWP in alleviating income insecurity. The challenges faced within the EPWP, which encompass issues confronting the participants and challenges encountered during the implementation process, are addressed in this chapter. Finally, the perceptions about strategies that could be adopted or are already in place to enhance EPWP, and ensure that the participants are employed after the programme. Table 4.1 illustrates themes emerging from the study:

Table 4.1: Emerging themes from the study

Themes	Sub Themes
The nature of EPWP	• An understanding of EPWP • Recruitment of contractors and participants • Experiences associated with employment in the Expanded Public Works Programme or related initiatives
The nature of income security	• An understanding of income security • Generation of income and other sources of income • Education on measures to ensure money sustainability • Adequacy of income
The nature of women empowerment	• An understanding of women's empowerment • Skills acquired by participating in the EPWP • Involvement or encouragement of women in the EPWP
The role of EPWP	• Employment creation and poverty eradication • Progress made by EPWP regarding alleviation of income insecurity • Benefits of participation • Enhancement of living status
Challenges faced within the EPWP	• Challenges confronting the participants • Challenges experienced during the implementation process
Perceptions about strategies which could be adopted to enhance the EPWP and ensure employment of the participants after the project	• Skills development • Livelihood diversification

Source: Survey data

4.2 THE NATURE OF THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

The nature of women empowerment theme provides data on the types of projects, recruitment of participants in the programmes and experiences regarding employment in EPWP.

4.2.1 A Description of EPWP Projects in Kabokweni

Kabokweni has several active EPWP projects. This study, however, focused on two projects that had more female participants in the area. The researcher selected the roads and transport project responsible for the management of potholes, cleaning of road reserves, and cleaning of the stormwater drains. The second project was responsible for water and sanitation, with a

focus on maintenance of water and sewer plants. Participation in these projects includes both men and women, but participation is mostly dominated by women aged between 25 and 40 years old. These women are all from different backgrounds, but all share a common interest in gaining an income and fighting poverty in their households. From interactions with these women, it was discovered that they are confronted with various challenges, such as inequalities, discrimination, and low wages. The women indicated that they can meet essential household nutritional needs, as a result of the income earned through the EPWP.

4.2.2 Participant's Understanding of EPWP in Kabokweni

The question on understanding of EPWP was asked to determine whether the participants understand the EPWP to assess the accuracy of their perceptions. It helped to identify information gaps, misunderstandings, or barriers that could affect their participation in the programme. The information was essential in understanding the effectiveness of the programme and in recommending improvements to enhance programme participation and implementation.

Most participants demonstrated understanding of the programme and expressed that it aimed to empower them, and it is a programme for poor people who need employment. Participant 1, 2, and 3 from the first focus group further mentioned that through this programme, they were able to generate both household and personal income, regardless of how little it is. In support of this notion, all participants from the second focus group stated that *all of us can put bread on the table, although the money received is very little*. Research by Khawula (2019) concurred with the findings, noting that the EPWP provides a significant route for labour absorption and income transfers to disadvantaged households.

For better understanding, the key informants in this study were asked a similar question. Most of the key informants shared the same notion with the participants in that this programme was introduced with the intention of addressing or mitigating all these social ills faced in almost every local municipality. However, even though this may be deemed as a good initiative, key informant 4 and 5 maintained that *this programme will successfully address the challenges experienced only if it offers employment on a permanent basis*. In addition, key informant 3 alluded:

The unfortunate part about this programme is that it only provides or ensures employment for only 12 months, meaning that our people are only employed on a temporary basis.

Hlatshwayo (2017), in a study on the perspectives of direct beneficiaries of the EPWP, confirms that there are complaints about the temporary nature of employment, including low wages and poor work conditions. The challenges were also expressed in the study about the sustainability of the programme, suggesting the need to have this addressed, given that it adds value to the livelihoods of the participants.

4.2.3 Factors Contributing to the Participation of Women in EPWP

The researcher asked participants about the factors influencing their involvement in the EPWP. This question was crucial to assess the push factors and establish whether the EPWP is meeting its goals of promoting gender equity and reducing poverty and unemployment. As women, particularly female-headed households, often face higher unemployment and poverty rates, understanding their motivations and enabling factors helps determine if the programme is reaching its intended beneficiaries.

Most participants in group 1 highlighted that *we are driven by the need to survive or make a living*. The statement was supported by other participants in group 2. Poverty and unemployment were dominant amongst push factors that made women participate in the programme. The description of the study area in 3.2 indicated a lack of employment opportunities and that the community members are faced with significant service delivery challenges and poverty. Agholor and Yusuf (2024) confirmed the link between food insecurity, unemployment, inequality and poverty.

Furthermore, most African countries are confronted with serious challenges such as inequality, high levels of crime, unemployment, and poverty (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). These challenges could be addressed using short or medium-term strategies that have been implemented, such as the EPWP. The data indicate that the unemployed members in the study area participate in the expanded public works programme to fight unemployment and generate a living. This was also confirmed by key informant 1 and 2 when they stated that *most people involved in EPWP can generate a living*. The Department of Public Works (2017) reported that the PWP were introduced to address, in particular, unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

4.2.4 Recruitment of Participants and Duration of Employment Within the EPWP

The researcher inquired about the recruitment and employment duration of participants in the EPWP. This helped to assess whether opportunities within the EPWP are allocated fairly, transparently, and in line with the programme's objectives. It also shed light on the programme's effectiveness in providing meaningful income support.

It is widely acknowledged that the EPWP is designed to operate for a period of twelve months. However, findings showed that the majority of participants had remained in the EPWP for an extended duration. Most older participants from both focus groups alluded: *We have been employed or engaged in the EPWP for no less than five years, while others reported participating since the inception of the programme.* In contrast, a few participants stated that *they had only been involved for approximately three years or less.*

These responses suggest a lack of fairness and consistency in the participant selection process, as some individuals appear to be continually reabsorbed into the programme, limiting opportunities for new participants. At the same time, the prolonged involvement of participants implies that the programme contributes meaningfully to income generation and supports their sustained livelihoods. Notably, current policy guidelines on the implementation and duration of participation do not explicitly mention rotational access to ensure that all community members benefit from employment opportunities. Hlatshwayo (2017) stresses the need for municipalities to adopt the principle of integrity and remain fair in the selection process, while following the policy guidelines.

To understand the notion behind the reappointment of participants in the EPWP, the researcher asked the participants that stated to have been involved in the EPWP for over 12 months to share their reappointment journey. Some participants explained that upon the completion of a project cycle, they simply complete and submit a form, after which they receive notification confirming their employment for the following year. This suggests a lack of diligence on the part of the relevant departments, which appear to rely on the reappointment of previous participants rather than initiating a transparent and inclusive selection process. Additionally, some participants argued that certain individuals are directly rehired by their coordinators, supervisors, and ward councillor. Consequently, individuals who have never participated in the programme may be unfairly disadvantaged due to limited access or proximity to key decision-makers.

These responses are consistent with the account provided by key informant 1, who explained that the municipality is responsible for directly employing EPWP participants and that contractors are not involved. Key informant 2 added that the responsibility primarily lies with the unit responsible for hiring or recruitment.

The municipal officials further stated, that theirs is simply to run their departments. To support this, 1 key informant stated:

My job is to ensure I perform my duty accordingly, which is to run my unit in the same manner as other units are run by relevant individuals. What happens to the participants after the completion of the project is out of my control?

Key informant 2 added: *The ward councillors identify these people during implementation, and these participants must be unemployed, unskilled and from a poor family background.*

The perspectives shared by these key informants highlight the need to refine recruitment processes and procedures to ensure fairness and consistency. The policy framework should also provide clear guidance on the recruitment of programme participants to minimise ambiguities that could create opportunities for corruption or other forms of malpractice. Ensuring transparency and fairness in the recruitment process is essential, particularly given the high demand for employment within communities.

4.2.5 Experiences of Employment Within the EPWP

Learning about the experiences of employment within the EPWP was crucial to understand what shape the perceptions of these women. Most participants in this study indicated that their experience in the EPWP has remained the same since they got appointed. However, they mentioned that it is not as if they are associated with or tasked with heavy labour, which could endanger their lives. The changes desired are just minor, but that does not make them less important. The participants maintained that being in the same environment with the same people have socially contributed to their lives. Some of the participants mentioned that *they are now closer to those they work with to an extent that they share a lot of stuff*. However, economically, they emphasised that it has been a negative experience even up to today. Participant 6 from group 2 argued that *being involved in this programme feels less like a work environment because of how much they earn*. They further argued that sometimes one feels like not waking up and going to work, but because of children who must be fed, they are forced to get out of bed. Data collected from Kabokweni Local Municipality revealed that getting involved in the EPWP was the first exposure to the participants. This simply implies that these participants have never been under any related programmes of this nature. In support, key informant 2 argued:

It is highly recommended and well-articulated in the policies of the EPWP that we are strictly required to employ people who have never been in any programme; hence, we always tell people that they can only apply if they are unskilled and have never worked or been employed before.

The participants collectively felt that they were fortunate to be afforded the opportunity to participate in the programme, and participant 1 stated: *I consider myself lucky since this programme exposed me to skills that I never thought I would ever acquire in my life.*

The collective tone of the statement reflects a shared social experience among participants. However, it is worth noting that focus group settings often create pressure toward conformity, where individuals tend to align their responses with the perceived dominant view (Sefotho, 2021). Therefore, while the statement provides valuable insight into participants' appreciation for the programme, it may not adequately portray the diverse experiences of participants, including potential dissatisfaction, unmet expectations, or challenges encountered.

In this regard, although certain participants expressed their dissatisfaction about their participation in the EPWP. They somehow agreed with other participants who mentioned that they were happy with working for the programme. Conformity was addressed when participants expressed that "the experience in the EPWP has remained the same since they got appointed. However, they mentioned that it is not as if they are associated with or tasked with heavy labour, which could endanger their lives. The changes desired are just minor, but that does not make them less important"

An in-depth analysis of the statements indicates that participants acquired skills they 'never thought' they would gain, suggesting meaningful exposure and empowerment. However, the statement does not provide insight into the relevance, applicability, or sustainability of these skills beyond the programme. Without long-term employment pathways or continuous development opportunities, the skills acquired may have a limited impact on participants' broader livelihood security.

The positive sentiment could also mask the structural vulnerabilities that necessitate participation in EPWP in the first place. Many beneficiaries may experience socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, food insecurity, lack of income and other problems related to livelihood generation, which could lead them to perceive any form of opportunity as overwhelmingly positive. As such, expressions of gratitude may reflect a lack of alternative income-generating opportunities rather than a comprehensive endorsement of the programme's effectiveness.

4.3 THE NATURE OF INCOME SECURITY

The third theme covers the views of participants regarding income security, and the discussion includes adequacy of the income.

4.3.1 Views About Income Security

The participants were requested to identify the sources of income within the households and mostly expressed that they receive income from the programme and a social grant from the government. Some participants from group 1 revealed that the income received barely covers the month's expenses. Participant 3 and 4 emphasised that *they struggle almost daily to meet the necessities of their households, particularly those that require money*. They stressed that the dire situation they live under cannot be addressed by the meagre wages obtained from the programme, including income from a social grant received. However, they earn R600 per week, which is to R2 400 monthly, which classifies them as earning above the lower bound of the poverty line. The National Poverty Line in South Africa (2024) defined R1 109 per person per month as the lower bound poverty line, and the earnings received are well above the line. Tshuma (2013) pointed out that low-income households earn between R1 and R19 000 in South Africa. The findings of this study discovered that those who participate in the EPWP do not fall under the category of low-income households.

The majority of participants expressed that they felt hopeful that the Expanded Public Works Programme would improve their lives, but in some instances, it has made them worse. In contrast, the key informants, when asked to elaborate their views about income security, mentioned that being income secure simply implies that one is in a state which enables them to afford basic needs. They argued that this situation occurs when a household can carry throughout every month without going to sleep hungry. In support, key informant 3 stated:

I personally think that income security in general is experienced when every member of the household achieves their personal needs, but importantly, when they can put bread on the table.

On the contrary, the findings of this study suggest that most of the participants are struggling to make ends meet and barely make it throughout the month. The focus was on female heads of households as the target population, implying that it is challenging for them to meet the needs of every household member. What compounds the problem is the unexpected payments given to participants, which tend to exacerbate income insecurity. Participant 3 stated:

Our authorities or leaders sometimes act inconsiderately because they have this tendency of sending or paying us advances without our knowledge, and because we are ignorant and everyone loves/needs money, we don't even ask what the money is for. However, to our surprise, when we expect our wages on the month's end, they deduct a certain amount

of money and tell us that we were given advances. This makes our lives very difficult and makes it difficult to make it throughout the month.

This statement highlighted how inconsiderate the authorities are, as they sometimes issue wage advances without informing workers beforehand. This suggests that the participants are usually unaware of these advances and may not fully understand the implications, leading them to unknowingly accept the payments. At the end of the month, deductions are made from their wages to recover the advances, often without prior explanation. For female-headed households, who typically bear the sole responsibility for providing for their families, this practice directly undermines income stability and financial planning. Unexpected wage deductions disrupt the ability to budget effectively, meet essential household needs, and maintain financial security. The practice indicates a lack of transparency and communication, and this further exacerbates their vulnerability, as these households already operate under constrained financial conditions. Such practices contribute to financial strain, insecurity and heightened socio-economic stress for female household heads (Moloantoa and Geyer, 2021).

4.3.2 EPWP as a Source of Income to Female-Headed Households

It was necessary to examine the adequacy of income received by households working in the EPWP. The findings revealed that although the programme does provide participants with an income, this income is largely insufficient. Participants in both groups reported to be earning approximately R600.00 to R700 per week, totalling about R2 400.00 to R2 800.00 per month. The data obtained indicated that this amount is inadequate to meet the needs of an entire household (Tshuma, 2013). Although participants earn above the lower-bound poverty line, this does not necessarily imply economic security. When considered against the food poverty line and upper-bound poverty line, participants may still experience difficulty meeting basic nutritional and household needs. This suggests that while the EPWP provides short-term income relief, beneficiaries remain economically vulnerable.

Furthermore, the participants were also asked whether they had any additional sources of income aside from the EPWP. The results showed that, apart from their EPWP wages and social grants, they had no alternative or supplementary income streams. The study further found that the inadequacy of income is compounded by the fact that many participants serve as the sole heads or providers of their households. This places a substantial burden on them, as they are responsible for meeting multiple household needs, including ensuring that children are fed, clothed, and able to attend school. In support, participant 5 from group 1 said:

It does help, but it is very little. It cannot even cover half of the household's expenses, but it's better than nothing as children do not go to bed hungry.

Key informant 4 and 5 supported these views, noting that the salary paid to EPWP participants is insufficient, as it can scarcely sustain even the individual receiving it. Therefore, when this income is expected to support an entire household, which, in some of the most challenging circumstances, may comprise seven or more members, it becomes wholly inadequate.

However, several participants, particularly those who described themselves as new to the programme, argued that the income earned is still preferable to having no income at all. They explained that many community members who are unemployed or not part of the EPWP wish to be included, as any form of income, regardless of how small, is perceived as valuable. This highlights the extent of financial hardship within the community and the desperation for even minimal economic opportunities.

The findings further revealed that social grants are often the only additional source of income, yet many participants reported being told that they are ineligible for certain grants, specifically the Social Relief of Distress grant of R350. Although this amount is modest, participants expressed a strong desire to receive it, in addition to their EPWP earnings. This highlights the extent to which individuals in local communities must go to secure a livelihood.

4.3.3 Education on Measures to Ensure Money Sustainability

Regarding measures to ensure adequate and proper management of income and provision of basic financial literacy training for EPWP participants in the study area, all key informants confirmed that *relevant initiatives are outlined in municipal policy documents*. They emphasised that *the intended purpose of this training is to equip participants with essential financial management skills, including saving a portion of their wages and preparing personal monthly budgets*. Key informant 2 further expressed that such skills are crucial for enabling participants to manage their earnings more effectively.

Despite these documented intentions, all participants reported that *no financial literacy education or training is currently being implemented in practice*. This implementation gap may help explain why participants indicated that their income is insufficient and does not cover even half of their household expenses. Data gathered from participants also revealed the absence of municipal programmes or initiatives designed to assist workers in utilising their income more effectively.

Nevertheless, documented evidence exists regarding the provision of basic financial literacy training at the national level, as highlighted in the Department of Public Works report (2018). According to the report, efforts to deliver basic financial literacy training began in June 2018, with more than 3 500 participants trained during the 2018/2019 financial year. The initiative had commenced earlier, in 2016, and by that time had already reached approximately 12 500 participants nationwide. This indicates that financial literacy training has long been regarded as an integral component of the programme's support services, aimed at equipping participants with the knowledge required to make informed financial decisions.

Key informant 4 and 5 mentioned that, *although such an initiative is well-documented, there is no education or training in place to equip participants with the necessary skills*. Lack of training or education about basic financial literacy could be one of the reasons why the participants maintained that this income generated is very little and cannot even cover half of the household expenses. The data collected from the participants in this study also indicated that there are no programmes or initiatives to develop workers in using money wisely. Most of the participants and municipal officials argued that there is a need for improvement within the municipality, as the municipality is more likely to be left behind if such campaigns are properly coordinated and implemented.

4.3.4 Adequacy of Income

Tabbarah (2007) defined a household's adequacy of income as the ratio of its own income to the required level of income to achieve the conventional standard of living in the socio-economic group to which the household belongs. This refers to whether the amount of income received by a particular household is sufficient to meet its own needs and wants (Tabbarah, 2007). The data collected in this study suggests that the level of income earned by the beneficiaries is very low and fails to afford both personal and household needs. The participants consistently emphasised that they cannot do much with the money they earn from EPWP. This simply indicates that the income received is insufficient. Most participants mentioned that the role played by the EPWP in income generation often goes unnoticed; however, it would be ideal to increase income generation, as the current level fails to cover the expenses of the beneficiaries. To support this, participant 3 from group 2 alluded:

Even though the income we get is not that much, without this programme, most of us in the community would be hopeless, and others would start resorting to illegal activities. So, the EPWP prevents people from doing silly stuff regardless of the income earned.

Other participants added by indicated that *with the income earned, they can barely afford to take their children to school, but it is better than getting nothing*. The assertions confirm that, despite the EPWP's efforts to ensure access to job opportunities, the income earned still leaves the participants destitute. It fails to minimise income inequalities in rural communities, because the income earned is still insufficient to bridge or narrow the income gap. Participants in this study maintained that the issue of income adequacy cannot be achieved solely by participating in the EPWP. For them, having a side job, hustle, or opening a business could assist in terms of improving their situations, as they would not be relying solely on the income earned from the programme.

4.4 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

This theme examines the diverse perceptions of women's empowerment and its achievement in the EPWP, particularly in the study area.

4.4.1 An Understanding of Women's Empowerment

In simple terms, women's empowerment implies that women should be given the same opportunities and rights as men. It is a very simple concept, which denotes that women must be given equal positions as men, that laws and rights shall be fair for all, without sex bias, and that there is no difference between women and men (Satumba, 2016). In contrast, Statistics South Africa (2023) indicates that the most vulnerable people within the labour market are women. Unlike men, women face longer periods of unemployment, which ultimately impacts their future employment prospects. Key informant 1 and 2 stated that *women's empowerment is one of the key channels through which the high levels of unemployment confronting the country could have been minimised*.

In essence, better opportunities are realised in a society that characterises gender equality, which is what one of the municipal officials emphasised during the interviews. The key informants further argued that if some of the social ills are to be successfully addressed, women should be placed at the centre. This includes youth, regardless of gender, as they are considered the future of this country. Allowing them to drive the economy would be one of the steps towards achieving a community free of social ills. In contrast to what the key informants mentioned, the participants stated that women empowerment can easily be achieved if both men and women are given the same opportunities. Not that the other gender should be prioritised over the other, because empowerment is a vital factor that can affect the whole

community and the very same community that consists of both genders (Maphanga and Mazenda, 2019). In support, participant 4 from group 2 stated:

I believe for the sake of the future generations to come; it would be better to encourage empowerment from both sides regardless of how us women we were deprived off opportunities in the past.

In support, another participant from group 2 added:

The programme allowed us to get new skills, for example, we are able to use other equipment such as grass cutter. I also own my own which I use to make extra cash.

These assertions explain the significance of the programme and how the women, as part of the direct beneficiaries and who participate in this programme, are empowered. Hlatshwayo (2017) contends that excluding beneficiaries as a source of information and lived experience undermines the opportunity to gain meaningful insights into the relevance and significance of programmes implemented to support people at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, the findings of this research also revealed that women's empowerment in local communities is very undermined or not taken seriously. Hence, there tend to be high levels of unemployment amongst women regardless of age. This claim is supported by the findings of Statistics South Africa (2023), which indicated that young women, who fall under the 15-24 years' category, are prone to unemployment, with 48.1% of women compared to 40.5% of men comprising the unemployed youth rate in total.

4.4.2 Involvement or Encouragement of Women in the EPWP

Democratically, it is expected that every institution balances the gender within the work environment. Since this programme was introduced by the government, the researcher sought to find out how the gender issue is handled. The findings of this study suggest that there is a policy in place which outlines that, within the EPWP, women must be prioritised over men. One of the municipal officials mentioned that for the programme to start, at least 60% of women must be involved. They further indicated that the policy encourages that within EPWP, women must hold the highest proportion of employment. In addition, most of the participants in the EPWP emphasised that if there is one thing the municipality seems to be doing correctly is ensuring that more women than men are employed.

However, key informant 2 mentioned that:

In as much as there is a will to include more women than men, the reality is that even more men are needed because there is some equipment which we do not expect women to carry due to their weight.

This issue tends to slow down production. Key informants 3 mentioned that getting women to participate in the EPWP programme is not a difficult task to fulfil, as most of them are unemployed and have nothing to do. They further said:

it is unfortunate, because we always find a large number of them willing to join but because of space, it becomes impossible to absorb them.

4.4.3 Skills Acquired from Participation in the EPWP

Participation in community-based initiatives such as the EPWP is widely regarded as a pathway to acquiring new knowledge, experiences, and skills. Phillips (2004) defined EPWP as a nationwide programme aimed at skilling previously unemployed EPWP workers to increase their capacity to earn an income. Therefore, engagement in such programmes is especially valuable for individuals with limited employment opportunities, as it offers exposure to practical activities that may contribute to personal and economic development. Data collected in Kabokweni suggest that most EPWP participants believe they have gained skills they would not have accessed had they not joined the programme. The key informants confirmed this perception, emphasising that participants are fortunate to be part of the EPWP because it offers them skills that may enhance their livelihood prospects beyond the programme cycle. Participants reported gaining competencies such as operating machinery, including lawn cutters and grass trimmers. Participant 1 stated:

We do get serious skills through this programme. For example, we got exposed to using machines like the lawn cutter and grass cutter. This is a skill that I believe I can use even after the completion of the programme.

The statement was supported by all participants in both groups. While such skills may appear minor to individuals with stable employment or access to formal training, they hold significant value for those with limited prior work experience. For women and unemployed individuals, exposure to practical tools and work routines can serve as an important stepping stone toward future income-generating opportunities.

However, a critical analysis of the findings highlights a major limitation that participants do not receive formal recognition for the skills they acquire. Although many participants expressed confidence that these skills would remain with them for life and could even be

transferred to family members, the absence of certification substantially diminishes the potential impact of these skills on their employability. Key informant 5 noted that, despite participants' competencies, they

have nothing to show for it, meaning that they cannot provide proof of their skills when applying for jobs. This concern was echoed by key informant 5 who stated: *It is unfortunate that participants are unable to submit a required document when applying for employment. I believe this tends to disadvantage them when searching for employment.*

The lack of accredited skills development or formal recognition restricts participants' ability to leverage their experience for long-term employment. This undermines one of the intended objectives of the EPWP, enhancing employability and promoting income security. Furthermore, the programme's limited capacity to create clear exit pathways results in many participants returning to unemployment once the project cycle concludes. Key informant 1 explained that, *upon tracing former participants, some were found "sitting at home doing nothing," despite having gained useful skills.* This suggests that skills acquisition alone is insufficient without access to job opportunities or mechanisms that link participants to further employment. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal instances where participants have been re-engaged in other projects, often through informal recommendations. Key informant 4 stated:

I sometimes recommend that they bring back those I once worked with. I successfully managed to convince them, hence three of the participants are back, but others are not due to political reasons.

This highlights an additional challenge: re-employment and further opportunities within the EPWP may be influenced by subjective or political considerations rather than a systematic, merit-based process. Such dynamics limit the equity and sustainability of skills utilisation among participants.

Overall, while the EPWP provides valuable practical skills, the absence of formal accreditation, limited job placement pathways, and the influence of political dynamics significantly constrain the long-term benefits of participation. Strengthening skills recognition and establishing structured exit opportunities would be essential steps toward enhancing the programme's contribution to sustainable livelihoods (Leibbrandt et al., 2010). In addition, the type of skills provided should not only include skills related to performance but also skills that will enhance

the livelihoods generally, such as the basic financial skills that were mentioned as lacking in 4.3.3 (Education on measures to ensure money sustainability).

4.5 THE ROLE OF EPWP

This theme explains how EPWP contributes to employment creation, poverty reduction, income security and enhancement of the living standards.

4.5.1 Employment Creation and Poverty Eradication

South Africa may be experiencing economic growth, but significant progress is still needed to address extreme levels of inequality among its people (Milazzo and van de Walle, 2017). The authors argue that most of the population is deeply entrenched in the secondary economy, while a growing number of minorities are reaping the benefits of economic growth. Both poverty and unemployment are extreme challenges that need close attention if they are to be properly addressed in post-apartheid South Africa (Satumba, 2016).

The EPWP was implemented as an instrument or ladder that people can use to climb towards realising employment and eradicating poverty. Since its introduction, there have been numerous debates regarding whether this programme is the solution to the issues faced or not (Phillips, 2004; McCord, 2004). The findings of this research revealed that the EPWP has been a valuable tool for employment in the Kabokweni community for many people. It also transpired that most of the participants involved in the EPWP as workers lacked skills, which made it difficult for them to compete in the corporate world. The EPWP presents a significant source of employment and has played a crucial role in creating jobs for the vulnerable. The key informants from the local government confirmed that the EPWP has created job opportunities and enabled people to support their families, and they viewed, without hesitation, that the EPWP is a solution. However, they expressed that the programme will be considered as an absolute solution if it offers employment on a permanent basis.

The programme in the study area offered employment for only twelve months, which implies an availability of temporary opportunities. Even the study conducted by McCord (2005) revealed that most participants in the programme find themselves unemployed after completing the cycle. This finding complements the assertion made by the World Bank (2011) in that the limited scale of employment opportunities and the short-term duration of employment for each worker offered by the EPWP make it unlikely to have a significant impact on employment and poverty at all levels. In support, key informant 2 stated:

The nature of employment offered by EPWP, which is 1 year, makes it difficult for the participants to have stable employment, which will enable them to support their children and family members. Also, to sustain their personal needs and that of the whole household

Concerning poverty, Saad et al (2022) posit that there is no straightforward definition of the concept of poverty and further argue that if a person is considered poor in one country, it does not mean they may be poor in another country. However, the term poverty, to some extent, is accepted as a situation wherein a person lacks both income and the basic requirements of living. As stated by Leibbrandt et al. (2010) these basic requirements of living comprise education, food, water, and shelter. Accordingly, scholars such as Van de Merwe et al. (2017) argue that the EPWP's primary role is to assist with sustaining a way of life, and the imposition of the national minimum wage is a few examples of initiatives for reducing poverty.

This study found that some of the participants in the programme are poor, to an extent that even the income earned through the EPWP, together with social grants received, combined cannot afford the needs of entire households. These participants, when asked during the focus groups discussions, mentioned that *at times, they are forced to compromise the quality of essentials for the quantity so that at least everyone in the household could benefit*. This goes to show that most of the participants' households are not food secure. Saad et al. (2022) noted that most of the households that are female-headed are more likely to be food-insecure and live in poverty, which is primarily because of unemployment. Findings of this research exposed that indeed most of the households that are led by women in the study area experience food insecurity. The Department of Agriculture (DOA, 2015) described the state of being food insecure as one in which one does not have regular, reliable access to the foods needed for good health. Most of the key informants in this study complemented the assertion put forward by Saad et al. (2022) in that their realisation is that families which are headed by women are less likely to be food secure. The participants in this study mentioned that they are in the situation they are in because of the minimum wage they get. They further argued that in the current economic conditions confronting the country, it becomes difficult to afford and maintain a certain style of living. In support, key informant 2 said:

Regarding the existing episodes of economic fluctuations, it becomes even more harder for the participants to afford the standard of living with the wages they earn, even if it is combined with social grants, it is still little. The current economic situation in the country

affects everyone, even some occupying better positions within the programme cries about the same issues.

4.5.2 Progress Made by EPWP Regarding Alleviation of Income Insecurity

Income is one of the main factors shaping both poverty alleviation and food security (Tawodzera, 2016). Swarts (2023) stated that since the start of the EPWP phase IV, and the number of work opportunities reported, “the EPWP is currently on track to achieve its five-year target of the five million work opportunities. Over the past financial year, the EPWP contributed R12.924 billion in wages to poor households.”

This implies that the progress made by this department is gaining popularity and assisting in terms of mitigating the issue of income security in the country. Ndodo and Sekhampu (2013) believed that low-income households are susceptible to food insecurity as compared to their middle and higher-income counterparts. The ability to earn income means purchasing power for basics, including food and electricity and reduces occurrences of food insecurity in all four dimensions of availability, utilisation, access, and stability (Ndodo and Sekhampu, 2013).

Income is basically an instrument that affords one the power to purchase and ensures and enhances the livelihood of the participant in the short term, even in the long term, especially when skills acquired enable one to get employed within different sectors of the economy. Data collected from Kabokweni, Mbombela Local Municipality, suggest that most of the participants appreciated the opportunity of earning an income. Key informant 3 during the interviews mentioned that *employment opportunities created by the EPWP affords the Kabokweni community an opportunity to earn an income, which leads to better lives*. The statement was supported by some of the participants in group 1 as they mentioned that *there have been changes in their lives in terms of their economic situation since they got involved in the EPWP*. These participants indicated that their conditions changed in a positive manner as they were not earning anything before the EPWP. Key informant 1 during the interviews argued that there has been progress made by the programme; however, it is both positive and negative. In support, the key informant 2 mentioned:

The impact of the EPWP is positive but too little because the wages earned is very little for one to maintain the living standards, on the other hand, it is also negative in a sense that the participants happen to get dumped at the end of the project, and this compromises their income greatly.

This simply implies that the participants of the EPWP are only guaranteed income security on a temporary basis, which happens to be only twelve months. Key informant 5 complemented this by asserting that though the question is difficult for them to answer, the municipality employs people for only twelve months and generates income for only that period. They further indicated that the EPWP is a good programme, but it has many backlogs. Findings of this study also revealed that politics also have an influence to a certain extent within the programme. The key informant alluded that if the correct role players within the political sphere play their role accordingly, the nature of this programme should be changed, as this will help with improving the income insecurity of the participants.

4.5.3 Benefits of Participation

Members of rural communities, particularly women, always face challenges when it comes to adding value or contributing to the well-being of their communities unless projects are designed (Kinyata and Abiodun, 2020). Such projects should see them making a full contribution or receiving their full share of benefits. Kinyata and Abiodun (2020) stated that participation, regardless of gender, remains a vital factor when it comes to the development of the community. In this study, the researcher found that the participation of women in projects such as the EPWP plays a significant role. According to Olukotun (2017), participation of women in many communities results in an increase in project acceptability, project sustainability, more equitable distribution of benefits, local resource mobilisation and improvement in project design by using local knowledge. Participating in community projects not only provides valuable local insight but also instils a level of accountability (Olukotun, 2017). Also, through participation in the community, problems over equitable development by gender issues become clearly highlighted. This enables women to have a voice in decision-making processes with ease. Additionally, having women's engagement in such projects means that resources can be managed in a manner which create support for women and girls.

Data collected in this study revealed that there are positives or benefits of being part of the EPWP. The participants mentioned that participating in the EPWP bring sense of belonging and makes them feel important members of the community. It was found that most of the participants in the study area are left with certain skills after the end of the programme. Participants maintained that they can use skilled obtained to do other things, like cutting grass for people in the community, and they get compensated or paid for such service. They also said they can share such skills with their children and other members of their families. In support, this is what participant 2 had to say:

Some of us make use of the skills we got from the project to make a living because this project employs us on temporary basis. I would say this is one of the benefits of participating in the EPWP.

Most of the participants in this current research alluded that through this programme, they can be independent and self-reliant. They mentioned that they can do some of the things on their own without having to be helped by someone. Some of these participants said that they even use such attributes in their own homes. This signifies the contribution of EPWP to the community members. Another benefit of the programme, as mentioned by the participants, includes ownership. Some of the participants mentioned that by participating in the EPWP, they feel like they are the main drivers of their own development, and the project belongs to them. This is in line with what Olukotun (2017) said, that if people are allowed to determine their own development, they will gain a sense of belonging, feel important, and they will do anything in their power to protect such initiatives.

4.5.4 Enhancement of Living Status

The role played by the EPWP towards improving the living conditions of its beneficiaries is crucial, this is according to the participants. The researcher found that there has been an improvement in the living status of participants in the study area. Data collected revealed that those involved in the EPWP enjoyed some progress in their lives, even though it is not that much. Some participants argued that *even though we do not earn much, the programme has changed their lives to some extent*. They said their lives would not be the same, if the EPWP were not established. Most of these participants stressed that they are now able to afford some of the things which they could not afford before they were employed within this programme. This means that the EPWP possess the capacity to enhance the lives of many people living in rural communities, irrespective of income earned. All key informants agreed with this statement, putting forward the need for continuous enhancement.

4.6 CHALLENGES FACED WITHIN THE EPWP AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE PARTICIPANTS

Regardless of the praises given to the EPWP in the country, the programme is still characterised by several challenges. The findings of this research revealed that although the programme is beneficial to the local communities like Kabokweni, there are still vital issues which serious derailing the success of the local municipalities. During the focus groups, the participants collectively emphasised that the main challenge that they encounter almost every week is the

availability of transport. This issue tends to make them late at the workplace. Another problem raised by the participants was the issue of having one pair of uniforms, which they referred to as covers. Some complained that as they work from Monday to Friday, they hardly get time to wash their uniforms every day. Participant 1 felt strongly aggrieved and stated:

We suffer a lot in terms of transport. For example, the transport is only available when the driver comes to work, if he does not come to work, we are compromised. You can see even now it was raining and transport was not available, which forced us to go and hike in this rain. This also is putting our health at a risk.

This was confirmed by participant 5 who added:

The issue of one uniform is a problem. It would be better if we are given at least two pairs to change. We are forced to wear one uniform for the whole years, if you can look at some of us, we are wearing torn covers / uniform.

The participants also pointed out that there are also not told anything regarding their daily activities in time. They only get to know what they will be doing when they arrive at work. This implies that the state of communication is poor within the study area. According to Van der Walt et al. (2014), communication is among some of the most critical challenges which are experienced in local communities which are associated with programmes like the EPWP. It is very easy to notice factors such as cooperation and coordination among participants since such programmes deal with the provision of public infrastructures. Van der Walt et al. (2014) point out that this could be due to diverse political interests in public infrastructure projects. The Department of Public Works (2009) illustrated that an increase lack of reporting comes from insufficient knowledge to monitor, coordinate, and evaluate projects. An insufficient knowledge and commitment towards the establishment of EPWPs within some municipalities has become difficult (Kitchin, 2012).

A study conducted by Hemson (2007) also revealed that in some of the local communities, accountability of the EPWP, which is done through proper reporting of the programme, is not done at all. This is in line with what key informant 2 maintained when interviewed, that some of their colleagues fail to take responsibility for their own failures. The outcomes of this situation would be negative, especially on overall parties which are involved within the programme, including the success of the programme itself. Issues associated with proper accountability of fund was noted in a study conducted by Van de Walt et al. (2014), wherein it was observed that the transfer of funds from one financial year to the next is not outstanding,

as it tends to make auditing and the practice of accounting difficult. Inconsistent payments of wages have been paid to participants over the years during which the programme has existed (Kitchin, 2012). The author pointed out that participants stated that they did not receive their wages as agreed, participants would take about five months without getting their stipends, and this tends to demotivate them. It is believed that some end up leaving the programme due to this shortcoming.

According to the Department of Public Works (2009), enough budgets for training to start at the local government level were not available. The lack of funding was then considered the biggest challenge for not approving accredited training for the EPWP participants at the beginning of the projects. Such an occurrence might be associated with the delay and inconsistency in the wages of the beneficiaries of EPWP. The findings of this study also revealed that the participants have spent several months without receiving their stipends. It was also noted that the participants do not receive the intended training at all. There is also the problem of inadequacy in the training time offered to the participants (McCord, 2002). It is believed that training opportunities of two days for every twenty days worked are provided to most of the participants of the programme. Hence, it is regarded as inadequate to give participants training from unskilled to semi-skilled workers.

In South Africa, those who are physically challenged are mostly part of the people in need and lack work opportunities because they are rejected in the labour market (Dube, 2013). These individuals are more likely to be trapped in poverty as they are restricted from participating in training programmes. They are excluded from programmes such as EPWP as it is believed that they cannot carry out some of the required tasks and lack enough skills to communicate with them. It would have been better if there were means to accommodate them instead of placing restrictions; doing so would have promoted the intended effects of the programme on the eradication of poverty in their communities. The assertion by Dube (2013) was proved right by the findings of this study, in that no disabled person was found to be participating within the EPWP. Dube (2013) stated that another crucial challenge of public programmes is the lack of discipline among the participants, as well as late coming and disobedience. This point concurs with what one of the participants has said about the lack of reliable transport.

4.7 CHALLENGES CONFRONTED DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

There are serious challenges which are experienced by the government in terms of implementation and management of EPWP. Lack of proper implementation and management

of this programme has critical implications on smooth running of projects. This is complemented by the findings of the study, which revealed that the EPWP experiences many problems when it comes to the facilitation of this programme wholly. Even key informant 1 emphasised that *after a few years of implementation of the programme, the target of the EPWP was not fully realised*. According to Nzimakwe (2008), the process of implementing the programme should not only focus on reducing poverty temporarily but also should further aim to ensure sustainable creation of employment in the existing projects and ensure that monitoring and evaluation are conducted frequently. Hence, the key informant maintained that monitoring and evaluation need to be involved from the initial stage of the implementation until the project is handed over to the municipality. They further argued that the main cause of issues associated with poor implementation is a lack of coordination internally.

The implementation of projects that need to be won is associated with various challenges (Nzimakwe, 2008). The author elaborated on the key challenge for this programme to mobilise all three spheres of government, which include local, provincial, and national, toward implementing the EPWP. This could be the correct blueprint to address all implementation challenges. Regardless of the EPWP creating jobs, there is several issues that need to be addressed, and these include training, high rate of poverty, monetary and evaluation. According to the Department of Public Works (2009), there was a huge gap between policy and implementation and a lack of clarity concerning the primary objective of employment creation.

There was also a concern regarding insufficient commitment from the top management and a lack of capacity for the government and the service provider. To support this, key informant 2 during the interviews mentioned that *when the programme was introduced, it lacked legislative guidelines to cover the whole spectrum of the EPWP, and that it only focused on the labour part*. This implies that the EPWP as a field or department had one intention, which is employment creation, and ignored or did not consider other elements which went beyond and/or complement employment.

Ideally, leadership by top management should be shown by taking the lead in all departmental activities. The reports from the Auditor General (2012) indicated that coordination with the provinces is needed to monitor and guide the programme implementation and that there is instability of leadership that must be corrected to ensure smooth coordination. Auditor General (2013) raised a concern that the relevant unit failed to ensure that its action plan was fully implemented. Auditor General (2015) indicated that no policies are guiding the implementation of the programme. Based on this, there is no doubt that the EPWP faced challenges since the

implementation stage, and this should be given attention before they lead to serious challenges that will affect the overall implementation and process. The Department of Public Works and Roads in 2015 resorted to cutting the contracts of their participants. This was heavy to carry and greatly contributed negatively towards unemployment rate. Given this, the problem of the implementation of EPWP needs to be tackled.

4.8 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT STRATEGIES WHICH COULD BE ADOPTED TO ENHANCE EPWP

The data collected from Kabokweni, Mbombela Local Municipality, showed that the participants, together with the key informants, have different views on how the EPWP could be enhanced. People tend to hold particular beliefs about how challenges should be addressed, and these beliefs guide the ways in which they respond to specific issues. Such beliefs are often shaped by individuals' lived experiences of the problem or by the direct impact the issue has on their lives. It was necessary to find out their opinions as it is believed that this programme plays a significant role towards improving the living conditions and standards of people, in general, their lives, within most of the local communities.

Most of the key informants during the interviews said that it would be beneficial if the EPWP is restructured in a way that it will create work opportunities that involve skills development for sustainable jobs or entrepreneurial outcomes, as well as to boost service delivery. This finding addresses one of the major complaints of the participants, which was that if nothing is done, then the EPWP will continue not to be productive or a solution in their lives, as the programme only guarantees them employment for one year. This simply implies that even the participants themselves greatly believe that something must be done to ensure that they get employed for a long-term period instead of only twelve months. The key informants in this study argued that a proper way of ensuring sustainable or long-term employment is to educate these participants about entrepreneurial skills. In support, key informant 3, alluded:

During the course of the programme, the relevant department must ensure that the participants are equipped with necessary education which will enable them to start their own businesses at the end of the programme.

Key informant 5 added that:

the responsible unit must put them in their database and prepare them for entrepreneurship opportunities

However, since some of the participants indicated that they are not interested in becoming business owners, it becomes important and clear that the entrepreneurship route will not work out for everyone. As such, one of the key informants emphasised that it is key to create or design drives or campaigns where people will receive relevant skills and training, which will make them competitive in other sectors of the economy. The majority of the participants also believe that it is important that they are not provided with skills which are only relevant to the work they do in the programme, but also the related or broad skills which speak to infrastructure. This would enable them to apply and compete within the infrastructure wholly instead of only focusing on a single part of this field. This implies that the participants will not only be limited or subjected to dealing with the cleaning of roads because that would be the only knowledge they have, but they will also be able to work under construction and other related works. In support, key informant 3 noted:

Our people should be certificated on the entire field as this might make them attractive in the corporate world after the completion of the programme.

During the interviews, the researcher also sought to find out if there are any proposed strategies that are in place in the study area. Unfortunately for this municipality, it was found that there were no measures in place to improve the EPWP. However, key informant 2 mentioned that to increase and improve performance in the programme, some sort of incentives for better performance should be introduced within the municipality. The implication behind this is that people tend to change their attitudes or behaviour when such initiatives are put in place. Additionally, most of the participants in the EPWP believe that recognising them by giving them awards or referential letters after the programme would mean a lot to them and make them feel proud and appreciated. Furthermore, participant 5 believes that changing a stipend to a salary would change most of them in terms of how they view the programme and stop treating it like a hobby or daily activity, but a real thing, work. This denotes that an increase in income earned would change everything.

The findings of this research also indicate that there are no proper strategies in place to ensure the employment of EPWP participants after the completion of the programme. Key informants 4 and 5 noted that they do not even know what happens to the participants after the programme has ended. In contrast, key informant 2 mentioned that they try to trace the participants after they have left, but even if they find them, there is nothing they can do because their role is to run a certain department. They further indicated that it is not their responsibility to create

opportunities, but that does not mean that they cannot do so; the problem is that they are not given the platform to create opportunities. In support, this is what the key informant 1 said:

they do not have the power to control what happens afterwards, we can only be proud that the municipality nurtured these people to be what they are.

4.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter was to reveal the findings from the focus group and semi-structured interviews. The EPWP, as a short to medium-term strategy, aims to do away with high levels of unemployment and poverty eradication in local communities. However, this is happening for only one year. It was found that those who participated in the EPWP are found to be unemployed, and that there are no strategies put in place to ensure that they are employed after the programme. Firstly, this chapter presented the nature of the EPWP, which covered an understanding of the programme from the participants and key informants, recruitment of contractors and participants and experiences of employment within the EPWP or other related projects. Secondly, it presented the background of income security, which includes an understanding of income security, generation of income and other sources of income and education on measures to ensure money sustainability. Thirdly, this chapter presented the nature of women's empowerment, which covers an understanding of women's empowerment, skills acquired from participating in the programme and involvement or encouragement of women in the EPWP. Fourthly, it presented the role of the EPWP, which comprise of employment creation and poverty eradication, women's self-reliance through skills acquired, and progress made by the EPWP concerning alleviating income insecurity. This is followed by the challenges faced within the EPWP, which consisted of issues confronting the participants and challenges experienced during the implementation process. Finally, the chapter dealt with the perceptions about strategies which could be adopted or put in place to enhance EPWP and ensure that the participants are employed after the programme. The next chapter presents conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the contributions of the EPWP towards the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni, an area situated within the city of Mbombela, Mpumalanga. Drawing from the study's objectives, literature review, and theoretical framework, this chapter summarises the findings, presents the main conclusions, offers recommendations to tackle identified challenges, and identifies areas for further research.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study's findings are based on qualitative data collected during the research and interpreted through feminist theory, highlighting gender dynamics, women's roles, stereotypes, and economic inequality, together with the social development approach that supports social welfare and economic progress. Linked to this study, both theories put emphasis on stability, adequacy, and sustainability of income, as critical determinants of household well-being. The objectives of the study were to describe the nature of EPWP in Kabokweni to establish whether women do participate in the programme and the way they participate. The other objectives included examining the perceptions of female-headed households regarding the adequacy of income received from EPWP in the study area, and to gain insight into their experiences as participants in the EPWP. A sample of 20 participants was drawn, comprised of female-headed households participating in EPWP, and key informants made up of officials directly involved in EPWP and the local leadership, to understand the recruitment procedures and overall participation of women in EPWP. The study used face-to-face in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for data collection, followed by thematic analysis, and the summary of findings below is guided by the study objectives.

Objective one: Description of the nature of EPWP and participation of women, particularly, female heads of households.

The focus of the first objective was on the nature of the EPWP in Kabokweni and the participation of female-headed households, including the duration of participation in the programme and the remuneration. The findings revealed that the EPWP in Kabokweni operates across multiple sectors, notably social services, infrastructure and environmental management, which were the primary areas of engagement for the study participants. Female heads of households reported active involvement in these projects, indicating that the EPWP plays a

critical role in facilitating access to employment and income for economically marginalised women. From an income security perspective, this access to paid work represents an important short-term safety net that mitigates extreme income deprivation. However, the temporary nature of employment limits the programme's capacity to ensure long-term income stability.

Participation in the EPWP was found to be inclusive of men and women, though dominated by female participants. This trend aligns with EPWP recruitment policy guidelines that prioritise women's inclusion. Qualitative accounts highlighted that women's dominance in the programme enhanced their economic participation and reduced immediate household vulnerability. Income security theory suggests that targeted inclusion improves distributive equity and enhances women's control over financial resources, which is particularly significant for female-headed households that rely on a single income source. Although women's participation was substantial, the study revealed minimal involvement of persons with disabilities. Participants attributed this exclusion to the physically demanding nature of EPWP tasks and the limited dissemination of programme information to disabled communities. This finding highlights structural gaps in inclusive income security interventions, suggesting that while the EPWP advances gender inclusion, it falls short in addressing the diverse capabilities and needs of all vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, it was found that the EPWP in Kabokweni primarily offers employment for a period of up to 12 months, with occasional extensions. While this duration provides temporary income relief, the absence of clear exit strategies or post-programme employment pathways emerged as a significant concern. Upon programme completion, participants often return to unemployment, thereby undermining income continuity. According to income security theory, the lack of sustainability and predictability in earnings perpetuates chronic income insecurity among female-headed households.

Beyond individual income gains, the findings indicated that EPWP infrastructure projects improved access to social services and stimulated both informal and formal economic activity within the community. These indirect benefits contributed to local economic circulation and enhanced livelihood opportunities. From an income security theoretical standpoint, such multiplier effects are significant, as they support broader economic resilience and create an enabling environment for supplementary income generation.

Objective Two: Determining the perceptions of female heads of households regarding the adequacy of income received from EPWP in the study area.

This objective focused on perceptions concerning the adequacy of income received from EPWP, a government initiative aimed at creating jobs and stimulating local economies. The main idea was to establish whether the income received by women from the EPWP has the potential to improve the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni. Despite providing income access, the remuneration associated with EPWP participation of R13.97 per hour, amounting to approximately R2 600 per month, was widely perceived as insufficient to meet household needs. Participants' narratives reflected ongoing financial strain, underscoring the inadequacy dimension of income security. In response, women adopted various coping and adaptive strategies, including establishing small informal businesses, engaging in household food production through gardening, and participating in community-based savings schemes such as stokvels. These practices illustrate women's agency in extending and diversifying income streams, partially compensating for the programme's limited financial returns.

Nevertheless, the EPWP, through the income provided to beneficiaries, alleviates, to a certain extent, poverty and unemployment in the community while simultaneously promoting skills development. The latter stems from the notion that, by addressing poverty and unemployment, the EPWP contributes to income security for participants, their families, and the larger community. Most of the women perceived the income generated through the EPWP as very little, and not enough to cover the needs of the entire household. Most of the participants barely made it throughout the month. This implies that it is difficult for female heads to satisfy the needs of every member of the household. Most of the participants maintained that they struggle almost every day to achieve the goals or necessities of their households, especially the ones that require money. The submission made by the participants put forward that the reason why income generated through the EPWP is not enough is because the participants are the sole leaders or providers of their families. The adequacy of income from the EPWP is visible in the household when diversified with income from other sources, for example, social grants, remittances, and informal businesses.

Objective Three: Examining the experiences of female heads participating in the EPWP in the study area.

This objective sought to explore the lived experiences of female heads of households participating in the EPWP in Kabokweni, using a qualitative research approach. The findings revealed that participants generally expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the programme, primarily because it provided them with an opportunity to earn income and support their households. Employment under the EPWP was perceived as a critical source of livelihood

in the context of widespread unemployment and economic vulnerability. Despite this positive perception, participants expressed concern regarding the temporary nature of the employment. The limited duration of contracts was viewed as a major constraint, as it restricted participants' ability to plan and achieve longer-term financial stability. Many female heads indicated a preference for extended employment periods to enhance income continuity and household security.

The findings further revealed several operational and structural challenges affecting participants' experiences in the programme. Transport emerged as a significant daily challenge, with inadequate or unavailable transport contributing to lateness and increased stress among workers. In addition, participants reported being issued only one set of work uniforms, which was insufficient given the demands of daily work and the limited time for maintenance.

Poor communication between supervisors and participants was also identified as a key challenge. Participants indicated that they were often not informed in advance about daily tasks or work schedules, only receiving instructions upon arrival at the worksite. This lack of timely communication reflected the absence of a clear work breakdown structure and hindered effective coordination, and cooperation among workers. Such challenges negatively affected participants' work experience and efficiency, highlighting gaps in programme implementation at the local level.

In summary, while female heads of households valued the income and employment opportunities provided by the EPWP, their experiences were shaped by job insecurity and operational constraints that limited the programme's effectiveness in promoting sustainable livelihoods.

5.3 BRIEF SUMMARY

The findings addressing Objectives 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate that the study's aim and objectives were achieved, offering a comprehensive insight into participation, income adequacy, and the lived experiences of female-headed households engaged in the EPWP in Kabokweni. When examined together, the results reveal the strengths and limitations of the programme in addressing income insecurity among female-headed households. It is concluded that the EPWP in Kabokweni offers inclusive employment opportunities, with female heads of households constituting a significant proportion of participants. This participation enhances short-term income access, facilitates skills acquisition, and enables women to adopt adaptive strategies,

such as income diversification. These findings indicate that the programme has succeeded in reaching its intended beneficiaries and promotes immediate economic inclusion.

However, despite access to employment, the income generated through the EPWP is largely inadequate to ensure sustained income security for female-headed households. While the predictability of a fixed monthly income contributes to short-term financial stability, the low level of remuneration, coupled with the participants' sole responsibility for household provision, limits the capacity of the programme to meet household needs. As a result, EPWP income is most effective when supplemented by other income sources, such as social grants or informal economic activities.

The lived experiences captured provide critical insight into how the structural characteristics identified in Objectives 1 and 2 are experienced at the household and workplace levels. Although participants expressed appreciation for the employment and income opportunities provided by the EPWP, their satisfaction was tempered by the temporary nature of the work, which heightened uncertainty and constrained future planning. This employment insecurity reinforces the findings under Objective 2, where income stability was found to be short-term and insufficient for long-term household security.

Furthermore, the operational challenges reported, including inadequate transport arrangements, limited work gear, poor communication, and the absence of a clear work breakdown structure, further diminish the potential benefits of participation identified. These challenges not only affect work efficiency and morale, but also exacerbate income vulnerability by increasing daily stress and limiting productivity. Consequently, while participation creates opportunities for income access and skills development, implementation gaps undermine the programme's effectiveness.

In conclusion, the three objectives were achieved, demonstrating that the EPWP in Kabokweni functions primarily as a temporary livelihood support mechanism rather than a sustainable income security intervention. While the participation of women and agency are evident, the inadequacy of income, the temporary nature of employment, and operational inefficiencies constrain the programme's transformative potential. Highlighted in this study is the need for policy and programme adjustments that extend employment duration, improve income adequacy, enhance workplace management, and provide structured exit pathways to promote sustainable livelihood outcomes for female-headed households.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations have been made to ensure the effectiveness of EPWP in rural areas.

5.4.1 Strengthening of Exit Strategies

Although the creation of permanent employment opportunities remains a desirable goal, it may not be feasible within the financial and structural constraints of the EPWP. Instead, this study recommends strengthening exit strategies to facilitate participants' transition into sustainable employment. This could include establishing partnerships with local businesses and contractors to prioritise the recruitment of EPWP participants, as well as creating pathways into further training, entrepreneurship, or other livelihood opportunities. Additionally, the municipality could consider extending participation periods or offering repeat opportunities where possible to enhance income stability while maintaining the programme's temporary nature.

5.4.2 Provision of Skills Training and Vocational Training

Although the EPWP in the area has demonstrated its capacity to generate employment opportunities, it is recommended that stronger focus be placed on structured skills development and formal training within incentive grant projects. This approach would equip beneficiaries with recognised qualifications upon contract completion, facilitating their integration into relevant industries and enhancing prospects for sustained employment. Additionally, it may stimulate entrepreneurial development, contributing to long-term self-reliance and extending benefits beyond the lifespan of the projects. Additionally, an integrated vocational training programme as part of the EPWP could enable vocational training to equip beneficiaries with job-relevant skills, not only for immediate employment opportunities but also for long-term career development. The recommended training should be aligned with the standards of relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to ensure that participants receive formal certification and transferable skills.

5.4.3 Involvement of Community Leaders and Community-Based Organisations

Active involvement of community leaders and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) is recommended to strengthen sustainability and encourage meaningful community participation. By being informed of EPWP project selection criteria, community leaders can assist in identifying eligible beneficiaries. These leaders and CBOs may be recognised through coordination with local municipalities, ward councillors, social development agencies, and the

Department of Public Works, with nominations conducted at community stakeholder meetings. Formal agreements should be established to ensure honesty, accountability, and adherence to eligibility requirements when serving the community.

5.4.4 Implementation of Proper Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines

Monitoring and evaluation structures often struggle with non-reporting and under-reporting, limiting the accurate measurement of EPWP objectives. These challenges stem from weak accountability and inadequate reporting systems. This study recommends that the Department of Public Works at national, provincial, and local levels implement regular monthly and annual monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure adherence to programme guidelines. It is also suggested that EPWP projects be closely monitored to ensure delivery on promised outputs. The above can be done by adopting a technology-based reporting system could improve data accuracy and accountability. For example, mobile-based reporting applications could be used by supervisors to submit daily attendance and progress reports in real time, thereby reducing delays and non-reporting. Additionally, geotagged photographic evidence of completed work could be required to verify outputs and minimise the risk of inflated or false reporting. Such systems would enhance transparency, improve monitoring efficiency, and ensure more accurate measurement of EPWP outcomes.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study's findings revealed a lack of participation by people with disabilities in EPWP projects. Persons with disabilities in South Africa frequently experience limited access to employment opportunities due to labour market exclusion. This restriction is problematic, as it contributes to persistent poverty and socio-economic vulnerability. Future studies should investigate the causes of poor participation by people with disabilities in EPWP projects.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This study explored the contributions of the EPWP towards the income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni. In the context of South Africa's high unemployment rate, the EPWP serves an important role in fostering community development by offering temporary employment opportunities to the unemployed and providing participants with skill-building opportunities. The programme accommodates both skilled and unskilled individuals, enabling them to engage in productive activities. EPWP projects are instrumental in advancing community development and are recognised as a central tool in national development

initiatives. However, the programme continues to face challenges in its implementation. The research objectives and questions established in Chapter One were thoroughly addressed in Chapter Four, and this chapter presents the study's conclusions, recommendations, and directions for future research.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW GUIDE - FHHS



UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME TOWARDS INCOME SECURITY OF FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KABOKWENI, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

This data collection tool is intended to gather information regarding the contributions of Expanded Public Works Programme towards income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni, Mbombela Local Municipality. The research study is registered with the School of Development Studies at the University of Mpumalanga. The information obtained from this interview will be used for academic purposes and no information will be used against any participants or community at large. Your anonymity as a respondent is guaranteed, thus you do not need to mention your name or contact details. Participation in this study is strictly voluntarily, no one is forced to participate. Furthermore, participants who participate in this study are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time when they wish to do so.

If you agree to take part in this study, please write your initials and provide your signature below:

Initials: _____

Signature: _____

Thank you for your cooperation

This set of questions will be asked to selected participants during focus group interviews. The guide also allows the use of other questions that might come up from the answers received.

- What is your understanding of the Expanded Public Works Programme?
- How long have you been employed in the Expanded Public Works Programme?
- Have you been employed in the Expanded Public Works Programme previously, maybe in another project?
- How do you feel about your role and participation in the EPWP?
- What challenges do you face within the Expanded Public Works Programme?
- Based on your experiences in the Expanded Public Works Programme, would you recommend the programme to other female-headed households?
- In your opinion, what do you think can be done to enhance the effectiveness of the Expanded Public Works Programme?
- What is your understanding of income security?
- How much do you earn per month at your role in the Expanded Public Works Programme. Is the money you earn from the Expanded Public Works Programme enough to cover your basic needs?
- Apart from your stipend, do you have any other sources of income? If so, please elaborate.
- What is your understanding of women empowerment?
- Apart from the work you do on a daily basis, are you currently involved in any development programme through the EPWP?
- Apart from the skills you had before participating in the EPWP, what are other skills you have acquired through participating in the EPWP?
- Do you believe that your participation in the EPWP will open doors for you in future?
- What are your plans after leaving the EPWP?

ANNEXURE B: FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW GUIDE – TRANSLATED TO SISWATI



**UNIVERSITY OF
MPUMALANGA**

Iminikelo yeLuhlelo Lwemisebenti Yemphakatsi Lolubhekiswe ekuvikelekeni kwemali lengenako yemakhaya laphetfwe bomake Kabokweni, kuMasipala Wendzawo yaseMbombela, Esifundzeni saseMpumalanga

Lelithulusi lekugcogca umniningwano lihlose kuhlenganisa umniningwano macondzana neminikelo yeluhlelo lwemisebenti yemphakatsi loluvheke ekuvikelekeni kwemali lengenako yemakhaya laphetfwe ngulabasikati eKabokweni, kuMasipala waseMbombela. Lolucwaningo lubhaliswe eSikolweni seTifundvo teNtfutfuko eNyuvesi yaseMpumalanga. Lwati lolutfolakele kulengcoco lutawusetjentiswa ngetinjongo tekufundza futsi kute lwati lolutawusetjentiswa kubantfu labatsintsekako nobe emphakatsini wonkhana. Kungatiwa kwakho njengemphendvulo kucinisekisiwe, ngako-ke awudzingi kutsi usho ligama lakho nobe imininingwane yekutsintsana. Kubamba lichaza kulolucwaningo kutentakalela ngekutitsandzela, kute umuntfu lophocelwa kutsi abe yincenye yako. Ngetulu kwaloko, labaphendvulako labadlala indzima kulolucwaningo bavumelekile kutsi bakhululeke kulolucwaningo nobe nini nabafisa kwenta njalo.

Nangabe uyavuma kubamba lichaza kulolucwaningo, sicela ubhale emagama ekucala emagama akho bese uyasayina lapha ngentasi:

Ema-initials:

Kusayinwa: _____

Siyabonga ngekusebentisana kwenu

Loluhlelo lwemibuto lutawubutwa bantfu labakhetsiwe labatawucocisana nabo emacenjini ekucoca. Lencwajana iphindze ivumele kutsi kusetjentiswe leminyane imibuto lengavela emphendvulweni yemibuto.

- Uyini umcondvo wakho ngeLuhlelo Lwekwandzisa Imisebenti Yemphakatsi?
- Usebente sikhatsi lesingakanani ku-Expanded Public Works Programme?
- Uke wasebenta ngaphambilini ku-Expanded Public Works Programme, mhlawumbe kulenye iphrojekthi?
- Utiva njani ngendzima yakho kanye nekuhlanganyela kwakho kuLuhlelo Lwekwandzisa Imisebenti Yemphakatsi?
- Ngutiphi tinsayeya lobhekana nato kuLuhlelo Lwekwandzisa Imisebenti Yemphakatsi?
- Ngekuya ngekwati kwakho ngeLuhlelo Lwekwandzisa Imisebenti Yemphakatsi, ungaluncoma yini loluhlelo kulamanye emakhaya laphetfwe bomake?
- Ngekubona kwakho, yini longayenta kute utfutukise kusebenta kwe-Expanded Public Works Programme
- Wena ukucondza njani kuvikeleka kwemali loyitfolako?
- Uhola malini ngenyanga kulomsebenti wakho we-Expanded Public Works Programme. Imali loyitfolako ku-Expanded Public Works Programme yanele yini kutsi ukhona kuhlangabetana netidzingo takho letisisekelo?
- Ngaphandle kwemholo wakho, uneminye yini imitfombo yemali? Nangabe kunjalo, ngicela ucacise.
- Uyini umcondvo wakho mayelana nekuhlomisa labasikati?
- Ngaphandle kwalomsebenti lowentako onkhe malanga, ngabe ukhona yini kuhlanganyela kuloluhlelo lwekutfutukisa ngekusebentisa i-EPWP?
- Ngaphandle kwemakhono lobewanayo ngaphambi kwekuhlanganyela ku-EPWP, ngumaphi lamanye emakhono lowatfolile ngekuhlanganyela ku-EPWP?
- Uyakholelwa yini kutsi kuhlanganyela kwakho ku-EPWP kutakuvulela iminyango esikhatsini lesitako?
- Ngutiphi tindlelo takho ngemuva kwekushiya i-EPWP?

ANNEXURE C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

This set of questions will be asked to key informants during focus group interviews

- What is the nature of the Expanded Public Works Programme in the municipality?
 - How long do the projects in the Expanded Public Works Programme run?
 - How are contractors and participants recruited?
- What challenges do you come across in the implementation and management of Expanded Public Works Programme?
- What is the role of the Expanded Public Works Programme in creating jobs for female-headed households in Kabokweni?
- In your opinion, what is women empowerment?
- How is women empowerment encouraged in the Expanded Public Works Programme?
- What strategies are put in place to assist participants to get employment after leaving the programme?
- Do you believe that the salary received from the Expanded Public Works Programme is enough to cater for the needs of the people?
- Are the participants orientated about money management? Measures to make their money sustainable?
- Do you believe that the Expanded Public Works Programme is capable of countering unemployment and eradicating poverty in Kabokweni?
- What progress has been made by the Expanded Public Works Programme towards income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni.
- Do you believe that the skills obtained from form the programme will be effective in assisting beneficiaries to be self-reliant in future?
- Are beneficiaries involved in any development programme through the Expanded Public Works Programme?
- What more can you add regarding the Expanded Public Works Programme in Kabokweni?

ANNEXURE D: INFORMATION LEAFLET

INFORMATION LEAFLET

Researcher: Kamogelo, Tsheole (201839393)

Supervisor:

Name: Prof. T Sabela

Telephone: 0130020479

E-mail address: Thandeka.sabela@ump.ac.za

Dear Potential Research Participant,

I am, Kamogelo Tsheole, a Master of Development Studies student at the University of Mpumalanga, in the School of Development Studies, Faculty of Economics, Development, and Business Sciences. You are invited to participate in a research project titled “THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME TOWARDS INCOME SECURITY OF FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KABOKWENI, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE”.

The aim of this study is to explore the contributions of Expanded Public Works Programme towards income security of female-headed households in Kabokweni.

From the aim, several objectives are drawn as follows:

- To describe the nature of Expanded Public Works Programme in Kabokweni with reference to participation of women in EPWP.
- To establish the perceptions of female heads of households regarding the adequacy of income received from EPWP in the study area.
- To examine the experiences of female heads participating in the EPWP in the study area.

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

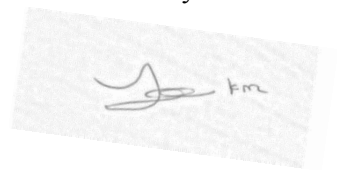
- Sign this informed consent form
- Participate in Focus group discussion and interviews

The questions are strictly for the purpose of this research study. Please note that your participation in answering this Focus group discussion and interviews questions is completely voluntary and you are allowed to withdraw any time should you wish to. Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way during data analysis and discussion of results in the research report. All responses will be summed together as a group with other respondents with no reference to individuals. This research is strictly for educational or academic purposes.

Your co-operation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Please sign the informed consent below if you agree to participate in the study.

Kindly, answer each question honestly and accurately as your participation in this process is essential to the success of this study.

Yours faithfully



Signature

Kamogelo Tsheole

ANNEXURE E: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

1. I _____ agree to and am voluntarily taking part in this research project.
2. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and may choose no longer to participate without having to explain myself.
3. I am aware that the information I provide on the questionnaire is for educational / academic purposes.
4. I understand that my name will not be recorded.
5. I have been provided with, have read, the information leaflet regarding this research study.
6. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
7. I agree to answer the questions to the best of my ability.
8. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering.
9. By signing this letter, I give free and informed consent to participate in this research study.

DATE

PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE

RESEARCHER NAME

RESEARCHER
SIGNATURE

This research is being conducted by Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole.

Telephone: 0739647262/0727696529

E-mail: 201839393@ump.ac.za

If there are any further questions about the research study or the questions itself, please contact the Supervisor (Prof.Sabela) at UMP. The Supervisor's contact details are as follows:

Supervisor

Tel: 0130020479

Email: Thandeka.sabela@ump.ac.za

**This research project has received ethical approval from the School Research Ethics Committee/
Faculty Research Ethics Committee/ UMP Research Ethics Committee for Human and Social
Sciences.**

ANNEXURE F: CONSENT FORM TRANSLATED TO ISISWATI

LIPHEPHA LEMININGWANE

Umcwani: Kamogelo Tsheole

Umcondzisi:

Libito: Prof. Sabela

Lucingo: 0130020479

I-imeyili: Thandeka.sabela@ump.ac.za

Lotfobekile,

Libito lami ngingu Kamogelo Tsheole, umfundzi weticu te-Masters kutifundvo teNtutfuko (Master of Development Studies) enyuvesi yaseMpumalanga, esikolweni lesiphatselene netifundvo teNtutfuko ngaphansi kweLuphiko/i-faculty Lweteminotfo, Kututfukiswa kanye neTesayensi yeBhizinisi. Uyamenywa kutsi ubambe lichaza kuphrojekthi yelucwaningo lenesihloko lesitsi “Kufaka sandla kweLuhlelo Lwemisebenti Lowandzile Ekututfukiseni Kuvikelwa Kwemiholo Wemakhaya Laphetfwe Bafati Kabokweni, kuMasipala Wendzawo yaseMbombela, Esifundzeni saseMpumalanga”.

Kusukela kulenhloso yalolucwaningo, kunetinjongo letimbalwa letilandzelwako:

1. Kuhlola ligalelo leLuhlelo Lwekwandzisa Imisebenti Yemphakatsi ekucinisekiseni imali lengenako yemakhaya laphetfwe ngulabasikati Kabokweni.
2. Kuhlola luhlobo lwe-EPWP Kabokweni.
3. Kuhlola kusebenta kweLuhlelo Lwemisebenti Yemphakatsi (EPWP) ekucinisekiseni imali lengenako yemakhaya laphetfwe ngulabasikati Kabokweni.
4. Kuhlola timphilo talabasikati lababaholi labadlala indzima ku-EPWP Kabokweni.

Nangabe ukhetsa kuhlanguyela kulolucwaningo, utawudzingeka wente loku lokulandzelako:

- Sayina lelifomu lemvumo lenelwati
- Hlanganyela ekucocisaneni kwemacambu ekuhlola kanye nasetingcocweni

Lemibuto ihloselwe kucondzisa lolucwaningo. Uyacelwa kutsi ucaphela kutsi kuhlanguyela kwakho ekuphendvuleni lemibuto yelicembu kanye netingcoco kufanele ukwente ngekutitsandzela futsi uvumelekile kutsi uhoce nobe kunini uma ngabe ufisa. Libito lakho ngeke libhalwe nobe kuphi futsi kute umuntfu lotawukhona kukuhlobanisa netimphendvulo lotawuniketa. Imphendvulo yakho itawuniketwa inombolo yekhodi nobe ligama lekungilo futsi utawubitwa ngaleyo ndlela ngesikhatsi kuhlatywa umningwane kanye nekukhulumisana ngemiphumela yalolucwaningo. Tonkhe timphendvulo titawuhlanganiswa ndzawonye njengelicembu nalabanye labaphendvulako ngaphandle kwekubhekisa kumuntfu ngamunye. Lolucwaningo lwentelwe kuphela kufundzisa nobe kufundza.

Kubambisana kwakho kanye nekuhlanguyela kwakho kulolucwaningo kutawubongwa kakhulu. Nangabe uyavuma kuhlanguyela kulolucwaningo, sicela usayine lelifomu lelingentasi.

Ngemusa, phendvula yonkhe imibuto ngekwetsembeka nangekucophelela njengobe kuhlanguyela kwakho kulenchubo kubalulekile kute sifundvo siphumelele.

Ngekwetsembeka,

Sayina

Kamogelo Tsheole

LIFOMU YEMVUMELELO

1. Mine _____ngiyavuma futsi ngenta ngekutitsandzela kulomsebenti wekucwaninga.
2. Ngiyavisisa kutsi nginelilungelo lekuhocisa kulolucwaningo nobe kunini, futsi ngingakhetsa kungasahlanganyeli kulo ngaphandle kwekutsi ngitichaze.
3. Ngiyavisisa kutsi umniningwane lengiwuniketa kuloluhlaka lwemphendvulo unetinjongo tekufundzisa.
4. Ngiyacondza kutsi libito lami ngeke libhalwe.
5. Nginikwe incwajana leneminingwane lemayelana nalolucwaningo futsi ngayifundza.
6. Ngitfole litfuba lekubuta imibuto lemayelana nalesifundvo, futsi ngatfole timphendvulo letenetsako kulemibuto yami, kanye naleminye imininingwane lebengifuna kuyitfole.
7. Ngiyavuma kuphendvula lemibuto ngalokusemandleni ami.
8. Ngiyavisisa kutsi ngingahle ngingafuni kuphendvula nobe nguyiphi imibuto lengingajabuli kuyiphendvula.
9. Ngekusayina lencwadzi, nginiketa imvumo yami ngekukhululeka nangelwati kutsi ngihlanganyele kulolucwaningo.

LUSUKU	
KUSAYINA KWALOTSATSA LICHAZA	
LIBITO LEMCWANINI	KUSAYINA UMCWANINGI

Lolucwaningo lwentiwa ngu Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole.

Lucingo: 0739647262/0727696529

i-imeyili: 201839393@ump.ac.za

Uma unemibuto leminye mayelana nelucwaningo nobe imibuto ngekwayo, sicela utsintsane neMcondzisi (Prof.Sabela) e-UMP. Imininingwane yekuchumana nemcondzisi ihlekleke ngalendlela:

Umcondzisi

Lucingo: 0130020479

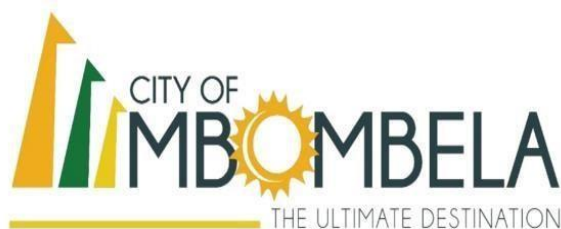
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i-imeyili:

Lomklamo welucwaningo utfole imvume yekwenta umsebenti kuLikomidi leliphatselene nekulandzelela indlela lekungiyi nakwentiwa lucwaningo ngaphansi kwesikolo se Sayensi yeBuntfu neTehlalo.

This research project has received ethical approval from the School Research Ethics Committee/ Faculty Research Ethics Committee/ UMP Research Ethics Committee for Human and Social Sciences

ANNEXURE G: CITY OF MBOMBELA APPROVAL LETTER



P O Box 45
Civic Centre
Mbombela 1200
1 Nel Street
Mbombela 1201
Republic of South Africa
Tel: +27 (0)13 759-9111 Republic of South Africa Fax:
+27 (0) 13 759-2070

CITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole, student no. 201839393

This letter is to certify that the above named is currently a student of the University of Mpumalanga undertaking a Masters Course – Master of Development Studies in the faculty of Economics, Development, and Business Sciences.

As part of his studies, he is required to undertake an information research project prior to completion of his Master's degree.

Any assistance given to him will be highly appreciated.

Note: before any Questionnaire/Interviews, the student must produce a letter from their university as this research is not conducted on behalf or in the interest of the City of Mbombela Local Municipality.

Please contact us in case of any further clarifications.

Yours faithfully,

Annah Chiloane

City Planning and Development

Manager: Policy, By-laws, and Research Division

Email: Anna.Chiloane@mbombela.gov.za

Tell: (013)759-2152



ANNEXURE H: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF
MPUMALANGA

Ref: UMP/Tsheole/6/2023

Date: 26 June 2023

Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole [201839393]

School of Development Studies

University of Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:

The Contributions of Expanded Public Works Programme towards Income Security of Female-Headed Households in Kabokweni, Mbombela Local Municipality, Mpumalanga Province

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Questionnaire/Interviews Schedule, Informed Consent form, Title of the project, Location of the study, Research Approach, and methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/ modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ogujiuba Kanayo'.

Prof. Ogujiuba Kanayo

Chairperson: FREC,

Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences

University of Mpumalanga

ANNEXURE I: PLAGIARISM REPORT

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ANNEXURE J: EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE



Helen Bond
IMPELA EDITING SERVICES
impelaediting@gmail.com
079 395 5873

01 February 2026

CERTIFICATE

Kamogelo Mathews Tsheole

Dear Kamogelo

Thank you for using Impela Editing Services to edit your Master's thesis entitled "*THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME TOWARDS INCOME SECURITY OF FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KABOKWENI, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE*".

I have proofread for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax and typing mistakes.
I have formatted your work and checked the references according to Harvard.

Please note that Impela Editing accepts no responsibility for work changed after issuing this certificate.

Kind regards



Helen Bond (Bachelor of Arts, HDE)