



EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE POLICIES

I. Introduction

The recent financial and economic crisis has called into question many of the beliefs about market economics that held sway for more than two decades, with a new consensus emerging that markets alone cannot deliver economic stability. Governments and their partners, including international financial institutions, are re-evaluating stabilization policies and financial sector deregulation.¹ The search for new ideas and more effective practices is also opening up space for considering how to reach key development objectives—including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).²

Mobilization of domestic resources and expansion of fiscal space³—alongside international development resources—has always been a high priority for developing nations. Labour is another key domestic resource that remains underutilized. Under-employed, unemployed, and often forced into inactivity, its contributions to human and economic development have yet to be realized. Public works and employment guarantee programmes present a significant opportunity to mobilize this underutilized resource. In doing so, these programmes can equitably and efficiently create jobs and income and can bridge development gaps.

In response to ballooning unemployment following the financial and economic crisis, some countries are already implementing such programmes. At the most basic level, these programmes are government-funded initiatives offering minimum-wage jobs to those who are ready and willing to work, but otherwise unable to secure employment in the private sector. In these instances, the state acts as ‘the employer of last resort’, providing the security of a work entitlement when all else fails. However, a shortage of paying work is a problem both during and after crisis; large segments of the world’s population, particularly women, were unable to find jobs even before the recent global economic upheaval.

This Policy Brief discusses the importance of addressing issues of gender equality and employment guarantee policies, targeting UNDP country offices and their national partners (e.g., national, regional and local governments and parliaments, academia, media, civil society and the private sector). It aims to stimulate and inform country-level discussions with a view towards developing locally-adapted gender-responsive job creation initiatives, and, as an advocacy tool with a view towards increasing awareness of how gender equality can be promoted within government employment initiatives from the local to international levels.

BOX 1: THE GLOBAL JOBS PACT

The Global Jobs Pact is the UN system's key response to the global financial and economic crisis. The Pact is designed to guide national and international policies aimed at stimulating economic recovery and providing social protection to working women, men and their families. By placing the goals of full and productive employment and decent work at the heart of crisis response, and by emphasizing support for job creation and transitioning people into work, the Pact bolsters governments' efforts to limit the risk of long-term unemployment, underemployment, or dependence on the informal labour market. The Pact supports responses that include public employment guarantee schemes, emergency public works programmes and other job creation schemes that are well targeted and include the informal economy. Stating that "the current crisis should be viewed as an opportunity to shape new gender equality policy responses," the Pact explicitly recognizes that recovery package design and implementation should give women and men equal voices, should account for how the crisis affects them, and should incorporate gender concerns into all measures. The 2010 UNDP Executive Board decision, 'UNDP response to the economic and financial crisis: promoting the Global Jobs Pact,' requested UNDP to integrate the Pact into its operational activities.

Source: Global Jobs Pact, available at: www.ilo.org/jobspact/lang--en/index.htm.

II. What is an employment guarantee or public works policy?⁴

The origin of government 'public works' programmes can be traced back centuries to state interventions to avert famine.⁵ Government-led relief programmes were implemented to provide the means of survival to those most affected by economic crises or natural disasters. The state identified useful projects—such as building canals and roads—and paid for public service jobs to build them.

Periodically throughout the last century, many countries adopted public service job creation policies that rendered the government effectively (yet in most cases only temporarily) the employer of last resort.⁶ To avoid displacing private sector employment and to prevent the more affluent from participating, the pay was usually set around the minimum wage rate.⁷ In some instances, most notably in India, the offered wage eventually led to an increase in unskilled rural labour's wages.⁸

There have been several approaches to job creation (see Table 1). Special attention should be given to the public works programme of India, which has two innovative components: work guaranteed by the Constitution; and a human rights based approach (see Box 2). For this reason, many examples in this brief are drawn from India. In Argentina, the *Jefes y Jefas de Hogar* was introduced

following the 2001 financial crisis. Part-time, year-round employment at slightly below the minimum wage was offered to any head of household with dependent children. The programme was gradually phased out as the crisis eased. The Republic of Korea implemented a similar programme in the wake of the 1997 Asian crisis. In Bangladesh and Ethiopia, public works initiatives have been used during years of severe drought to increase food security, and project selection has aimed at enhancing rural productivity. Many employee guarantee initiatives in Africa and Latin America were introduced to remediate for structural adjustment. However, the initiatives were short-lived and ineffective.

Though transitiveness is a common characteristic of these initiatives, this is not necessary; such programmes can be a useful and critical aspect of a country's economic policy toolkit.⁹ Hyman Minsky¹⁰ proposed a permanent employer of last resort policy that utilizes surplus labour to lead to a more inclusive path of development by focusing on socially needed tasks. Examples of assets created include new roads, maintenance of public infrastructure, rural land development, flood control works, reactivation of traditional water supply systems, reforestation, and environmental cleanup. Society receives many benefits, including increased

TABLE 1: EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNMENT JOB CREATION PROGRAMMES/PROJECTS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

Country	Year	Programme Description
Argentina	2002 onwards	Head of households plan (<i>Jefes de Hogar</i>) offers households with children under the age of 18 years old 20 hours of work per week.
Australia	1940–1970	<i>The Commonwealth Employment Service</i> kept unemployment at a low average of 2 percent; in contrast to unemployment hovering near 9 percent in the 1990s.
Bolivia	1986–1990	<i>The Emergency Social Fund</i> and subsequent stabilization programme was established to cushion the economic crisis' adverse effects on the poor by facilitating the transition through structural adjustment phases. Temporary employment in small-scale, labour-intensive projects increased the average worker's weekly earnings by 32 percent.
Botswana	1980s onwards	During drought years, the <i>Labour-Based Drought Relief Programme</i> and the <i>Labour-Intensive Rural Public Works Programme</i> provide short-term employment support for vulnerable population groups.
Chile	1975–1987	<i>Programa de Empleo Mínimo</i> was created to combat record high unemployment of 30 percent and managed to employ up to 13 percent of the workforce.
Ethiopia	Piloted in 2005	<i>The Productive Safety Net Programme</i> aims to provide households with enough income (cash/food) to meet their food gap and thereby protect their household assets from depletion, and aims to build community assets to contribute to addressing the root causes of food insecurity.
Ghana	1988 onwards	<i>The Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment</i> —part of the government's structural adjustment programme—has largely involved labour-intensive construction.
India	1972, 2005	<i>Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme</i> guarantees manual work to any applicant. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act offers 100 days of employment to rural households.
Indonesia	Relaunched in 1998	Responding to the Asian crisis, the <i>Padat Karya</i> programmes aim at rapidly disbursing income support to the most needy while maximizing the employment potential of the funds spent. The programmes include poverty alleviation and emergency job creation measures through small-scale infrastructure projects.
Korea	Initiated in 1997	<i>The Master Plan for Tackling Unemployment</i> involves emergency public works programmes for low-skill workers. The number of participants varied in each year. For example, in 1999, projects provided approximately 400,000 jobs, which reduced the unemployment rate by 2 percent.
Morocco	Since 1961	<i>The Promotion Nationale</i> is an autonomous public entity in charge of mobilizing an under- or unemployed workforce to implement labour-intensive projects. Focusing on rural communities in the Saharan and South Provinces, rural-to-urban migration is limited through the permanent improvement of local incomes and living conditions.
Nepal	Initiated in 1989	From 1992–1996, the <i>Dhaulagiri Irrigation Development Project</i> saw the formation of 66 Farmers Irrigation Associations, 43 Functional Literacy Groups and 90 Women's Savings Groups/Mother's Groups (under the heading of 'Irrigation Related Income Generation'). These groups received training on environmental awareness, vegetable nurseries, smokeless stove construction and financial management.
Peru	1991–1995	<i>Programa de Apoyo al Ingreso Temporal</i> , a public works programme focusing primarily on women. At one point in time it employed 500,000 workers.

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Country	Year	Programme Description
South Africa	2004 onwards	The <i>Expanded Public Works Programme</i> seeks to reorient existing departmental expenditure in ways that maximize jobs creation in the environmental, infrastructure and social sectors.
Sri Lanka	1985 onwards	<i>The National Housing Development Authority</i> engages urban communities in housing and infrastructure development.
Sweden	1938–1970	Programme offered an alternative to welfareism by emphasizing the right to work rather than the right to income. Unemployment rates remained below 3 percent until the late 1980s, when the programme was dismantled.
United States	1933–1936, 2009–2010	The <i>New Deal</i> public works programmes (e.g., Civil Works Administration, Public Works Administration, and the Works Projects Administration), were established as a response to the Great Depression. In 1935, the programmes started to directly engage women, mostly by involving them in arts programmes, school lunch programmes, and clothing and sewing project for charities and hospitals. The <i>American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009</i> aims to create new jobs and save existing ones; spur economic activity and invest in long-term growth; and foster unprecedented levels of accountability and transparency in government spending.
Zambia	1991 onwards	Micro-project unit targeted the poor and focused on the maintenance of existing infrastructure.

quality of life, enhanced productivity and livelihood options, development of small- and medium-size businesses, and crowding-in of private investment.

South Africa’s Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), is another example of a permanent labour market policy programme. Introduced in 2004 with a five-year target to create one million work opportunities, the programme is now in its second phase and aims to double its initial target. To alleviate problems stemming from chronic

unemployment (which has averaged between 25 and 30 percent in the post-apartheid era), EPWP utilizes public-sector budgets in order to provide short- to medium-term employment opportunities to unskilled, unemployed workers from poor households. EPWP is innovative in that it provides work opportunities not only in infrastructure, but also in the social sectors of the economy (e.g., early childhood development, home-based care and upgrading of other community services—of particular importance for gender equality and women’s empowerment).

BOX 2: INDIA’S NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT

India’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a permanent programme that creates public works. Introduced to generate employment for members of poor rural households during the agricultural off-season, the NREGA became part of India’s Constitution in 2005. Beyond being a public works programme, NREGA is an entitlement of a permanent employment insurance, guaranteed through an amendment of the Constitution. This made the state the guarantor of the right to work. The programme provides 100 days of work per year to households located in any of the poor rural districts throughout the country. There are ongoing discussions regarding expanding the programme so as to reach the poor in urban centres, and extending the number of available working days to 150 per year. So far, work projects have been selected with the explicit aim of improving rural infrastructure, increasing agricultural productivity, and enhancing livelihood options. The program is unique in many regards, including the simultaneous passage of the Right to Information Act, which enhances civil society’s oversight of transparency and accountability in monitoring of the programme. The cost of the programme, which reaches over 40 million households, is less than 1 percent of India’s gross domestic product.

III. Why a public works policy?

For some people, the global financial and economic crisis marks a setback from a path to prosperity, while for many others around the world it is accentuating poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. The crisis has led to significant reversals in development gains over the past two years. About 50 million more women and men joined the ranks of the unemployed and, combined with the fuel and food price spikes of 2008, over 150 million more women and men have been trapped in poverty than predicted prior to the crisis.¹¹

Evidence from previous financial crises shows that despite stabilization of gross domestic product growth, employment recovery in the aftermath of crises lags behind other economic indicators by as much as a decade, if they recover at all. For example, in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Philippines and Thailand took nearly a decade to decrease unemployment rates to their pre-crisis levels, while Indonesia never recovered to its pre-crisis levels.¹²

Sudden declines in aggregate demand have always negatively affected employment. Yet problems arising from scarce employment opportunities are not limited to times of crisis. For example, many who work in informal conditions suffer from chronic underemployment and unpredictable spells of unemployment. Most rural workers have access to agricultural work only seasonally and, despite distress migration, face perpetual employment uncertainty. Own-account workers also depend on unstable sources of income, as their earnings from sales are highly volatile. Structural unemployment also takes its toll: Despite many policies to accelerate economic growth, 25 percent of the population in South Africa has remained excluded from access to work opportunities for over fifteen years.¹³

The imperative for public job creation is gaining much attention at this juncture from governments and policy-advising bodies. In March 2010, UNDP Administrator Helen Clark met with Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, to discuss how UNDP could enhance its partnership with India to foster human development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (see Box 3).

BOX 3: UNDP ADMINISTRATOR ON NREGA

“UNDP’s partnership with India in the 21st century should also have a global dimension. India has many experiences to share and technologies available to assist other developing countries to meet their development challenges,” said Helen Clark speaking at a symposium on ‘Millennium Development Goals and Human Development in India; Achievement and Challenges.’ Clark added, “Building on these experiences, UNDP looks forward to taking its relationship with India to a new level of engagement in South-South cooperation.” [Among these experiences], the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme... is an example of the knowledge and experience that India could export to other developing countries for transformational change.”

During her visit to India, Union Minister for Rural Development C. P. Joshi accompanied Clark to the Bhilwara District in Rajasthan to see the implementation of a NREGS programme that fights poverty in India by providing employment for those who want it. In Bhilwara, Clark saw the innovations that UNDP is collaborating on with the Ministry of Rural Development under the NREGS. While there, she visited a water conservation work site and discussed new projects that allow workers to receive wages through fingerprint technology. A simple mobile-based SMS system also enables workers to access information just by sending a text message.

“There are very many exciting aspects to this scheme, but most exciting of course is the benefit it can bring to women, men, and families,” said Clark. “We hope by working 100 days per year, there will be more money for food for the family, more money for health care, and more money for people to be able to support themselves.” Afterwards, she discussed the programme with local women who had been elected representatives in the district.

Source: “UNDP Chief Helen Clark meets Indian Prime Minister: UNDP-India to explore ways to expand and deepen partnership in India and globally”. United Nations Newsroom, March 11, 2010. <http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2010/march/undp-chief-helen-clark-meets-indian-prime-minister.en>; March 12, 2010

IV. Gender equality, public works, employment guarantees and employer of last resort programmes

In creating job opportunities, public works and employment guarantee programmes deliver income protection for all participants, women and men alike. Thus, employment assurance policies represent a productive social safety net system creating assets and income opportunities, and yielding public and private benefits. These initiatives complement conditional cash transfer programmes by creating opportunities for participants to acquire or upgrade skills, thereby enhancing livelihood options and employability.

Initiatives to hire unskilled manual labour aim to promote social inclusion of marginalised groups and supplement the incomes of those in vulnerable employment. Women make up the majority of the world's 1.3 billion poor people, comprise larger numbers among those in vulnerable employment, have lower labour-market participation rates, and suffer higher rates of unemployment. It is therefore important to explore how public works and employment guarantee programmes can best serve women's interests. Insight can be gained by addressing two key issues: first, ensuring that women have access to employment guarantee programme jobs and, second, ensuring that programmes reduce women's unpaid work.

A. ENSURING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE PROGRAMME JOBS

Employment guarantee programmes should be aware of long-standing biases and inequality patterns in the division of labour between women and men. Entry barriers, job assignment segregation, and other asymmetries can be remediated at the design phase. From a policy perspective, four aspects deserve attention:

1. **Ensuring that women have equitable access to jobs by addressing gender-differentiated labour supply constraints.** Unlike men, much of women's time is devoted to unpaid care work. These tasks include household maintenance, sanitation, food preparation, and—particularly among poorer households—collection and transportation of free goods, fuel wood, and

water. Traditionally, women and girls have also been responsible for raising children, necessitating around-the-clock supervision. Hence, their time and space for participation in paid work is constrained.¹⁴ The potential contribution of employment guarantee programmes to reducing unpaid work is addressed in Section B.

Aware of women's choices between caring for family members and securing employment, India's NREGA mandates that worksites provide and maintain childcare, shade, and water for children; that lactating mothers have time off to feed infants; and that work projects are within five kilometres of participant's dwellings. Though Argentina's *Jefes y Jefas de Hogar* does not have any formal stipulations, women participants requested and organized on-site child-care facilities and established communal kitchens for meal preparation. In addition, a cost-saving aspect of the programme included some jobs that required only half-day, part-time commitments. When first made available to heads of households with children, the government expected around 300 to 400 thousand households to participate. However, 2 million people, most of whom were women, declared themselves heads of households and eager to participate. Allowing more time for domestic responsibilities, many women reported satisfaction with the twenty-hour per week work restriction, accounting for the very high levels of female participation (over 70 percent) in the programme.¹⁵

2. **Ensuring that women are not excluded from jobs that are traditionally considered men's work.** The gender nature of work assignments (i.e., the horizontal segregation of the labour market) may preclude most women from accessing some jobs. For example, men traditionally fill construction and infrastructure maintenance jobs (which comprise most opportunities created through employment guarantee programmes). Though physiological characteristics are responsible for some of this segregation, the proportion to the number

TABLE 2: EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE PROGRAMMES (EGP) AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

MDGs	Employment guarantee programme focus areas	Contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals
MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical and social infrastructure investments ▪ Agricultural land development, water harvesting and other environmentally sustainable interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased incomes to beneficiaries/workers ▪ Reduced unpaid care work for women and girls ▪ Enhanced food security and localized agricultural production
MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical and social infrastructure investments ▪ School construction/maintenance ▪ Training/education opportunities for adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced unpaid care work for girls ▪ Enhanced facilitation of increased school enrolment and attendance
MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical and social infrastructure investments, including durable housing and public-use ovens for meal preparation ▪ Water provisioning for and by beneficiaries ▪ Home-based care work incorporated into employment guarantee programmes ▪ Training opportunities for women workers ▪ Participation of female beneficiaries in project selection, design and implementation ▪ Early childhood development centres for young children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased incomes for women ▪ Reduced unpaid care work for women and girls ▪ Enhanced labour force participation of women ▪ Enhanced participation of women in decision-making
MDG 4: Reduce child mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early childhood development centres for young children ▪ Certified training in extension health services ▪ Infrastructure for clean water, latrines and crèche 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased income for extension workers and early childhood development community workers ▪ Enhanced health of children
MDG 5: Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education/training certification programmes ▪ Maternal health care education programmes ▪ Auxiliary community care activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased income for maternal health care education programme extension workers ▪ Enhanced engagement in auxiliary community care activities
MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education and training programme for home-based and community-based care workers ▪ Auxiliary community care services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accelerated access to prevention and treatment services within underserved communities
MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental remediation, reforestation, development of ponds, traditional irrigation systems, water projects and ecological latrines ▪ Management of wastelands and watersheds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation ▪ Enhanced adaptation to climate change
MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning from the international experiences of job creation programmes ▪ Coordination of UN agencies to finance job creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced South-South cooperation

of tasks that do not require strength does not support the overall amount of segregation. Responding to this challenge, some public works and employment guarantee programmes have included targets for women. For example, during the first phase of EPWP in South Africa, the overall annual participation target was for 55 percent of workers to be women¹⁶ and, in India, NREGA mandates a 33 percent participation rate for women. Though there is variation across programmes, women overwhelmingly want to seek jobs in infrastructural projects.¹⁷

3. **Ensuring women's access to semi-skilled categories of public works and increasing their participation rates as subcontractors and supervisors of projects.**

In some cases, gender disparities may be a reflection of entrenched and discriminatory labour practices that prevail in the rest of the economy. Proper skills assessment can go a long way, but when appropriate training is warranted it must be mainstreamed into public works initiatives; employment guarantee programmes can play a crucial role in this domain.

Improving skills can broaden livelihood opportunities beyond participating in less traditional occupations. Research in Argentina found that women beneficiaries who received training in carpentry later sought such work as independent contractors in their communities.¹⁸ In a rural area of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, a women's cooperative for mushroom production, formed within the Expanded Public Works Programme, became self-sustaining. In Limpopo, South Africa, agricultural extension services, combined with the Programme's social service sector (e.g., child care services), led to the development of vegetable gardens

programmes (e.g., the NREGA) have long experience in combining agricultural extension services and marketing training to cooperatives. In addition, South Africa introduced a skills-upgrading component in its initial programme design: the programme allocates one day per week for this purpose, ultimately resulting in participants receiving accreditation and certification from local authorities.

The Rural Roads Maintenance Programme in Peru (2003–2006) increased women's participation from 3.5 to 24 percent by setting a female participation quota of 10 percent in micro-enterprises, and by providing gender training programmes targeted at different actors and levels of the project. Women's improved participation in decision-making roles in 284 micro-enterprises was directly linked to the targeted training. Women also undertook all maintenance activities and performed better than men in many activities.¹⁹

4. **Ensuring equitable wages and equal pay for comparable work.** The need to address gender-based inequalities in wages stems from the concern that programmes do not mirror practices that are pervasive in the general economy. On a global scale, women's

BOX 4: WOMEN WORKERS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF NREGA IN INDIA

NREGA participants, women and men alike, belong to the most disadvantaged groups. Many female respondents said that NREGA work was the only paid work opportunity for them. The acceptability of NREGA work by society and women themselves

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