



***Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment:  
differentiated pathways out of poverty –  
experiences from South Africa***

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## *Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty – experiences from South Africa*

### **Abstract**

This paper is based on insights from five case studies relating to household-based agriculture and transport infrastructure provision and maintenance projects in rural South Africa. The paper discusses experiences and impacts of agriculture and labour-based infrastructure provision and maintenance projects in relation to sustaining rural livelihoods for developing communities, particularly women. In the last ten years, South Africa has experienced relatively significant but ‘job-less’ economic growth, which has had the effect of substantially widening disparities in wealth between urban and rural areas and between men and women (Gini coefficient of 0.64 in 1995 compared to about 0.70 in 2000). Rural women in general and female-headed households in particular, are often located at the end of the poverty spectrum. Given that there is a preponderance of women in the demographic profiles of rural areas, it follows that abject poverty pervades in these communities. As a ‘developmental state’, spheres of the South African government have sought to normatively and creatively respond to this phenomenon through a raft of interventions two of which constitute the locus of this paper – building sustainable livelihoods by strengthening agriculture under-girded by rapid agrarian transformation as well as employing the transport sector not only to create and maintain community assets and bolster local economic circuits, but also to provide employment opportunities for those who are ill-suited to compete on the open market, most of whom are women.

In terms of gender inequalities, the differential impact and effect of rural employment on women, child-headed households and men are unpacked. The impacts and implications of agriculture and transport projects in terms of increasing women’s income, children’s education, mortality, health and nutritional status through to impacts on human capital development, productivity and local economic development are chronicled. Conclusions revolve around seeking to generate mechanisms to entrench and seamlessly scale-up such initiatives with a view to growing an employment-intensive economy and pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

**Key words:** Women, poverty, agriculture, impacts, community-based employment-intensive transport infrastructure construction & maintenance, sustainable rural livelihoods

## 1. Introduction

Persistent poverty, unemployment and underemployment remain major challenges facing developing countries (World Bank, 2002; Mashiri et al, 2008). In remote rural areas, where low levels of access to higher order rural service centres further inhibit both formal and informal employment opportunities, finding ways in which to address poverty and unemployment is all the more challenging (ILO, 1999; IFAD, 2001; Liversage & Carpano, 2002). At the same time, development projects to enhance the provision of basic services are being implemented in many rural communities, under conditions of limited financial resources, especially in areas where low population densities render investing in basic infrastructure necessarily costly.

Generating and extending beneficial and non-exploitative opportunities for employment is an enduring way to tackle poverty (FAO, 2004). Strategies that have been employed to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods for developing communities include among others, the following:

- Economic growth with expected trickle-down in the long-term
- Social safety net programmes that offer short-term relief but, while importantly, have only a limited impact in alleviating poverty in the long-term, and
- Linking employment programmes explicitly to economic growth, for example by introducing employment concerns into mainstream investment policy.

The emphasis has been on the first two approaches. However, the latter approach can, if implemented effectively, address both the short-term income-generation needs of poor communities and economic growth in the long-term. A typical example of this strategy is the adoption of community-based labour-intensive methods in basic infrastructure provision, such as in investment in access roads, irrigation works, community markets, low-income housing and schools (Riverson et al, 1991; ILO, 1999; World Bank, 2002, 2003; FAO, 2004).

Rural development is one of the key priority areas identified by the South African government (ANC, 1994; ANC, 2007). It encompasses three main thrusts, namely local economic development, human resources development and improved services delivery such as health, education and welfare. For most rural areas, infrastructure development tends to be the fulcrum that anchors sustainable development endeavours. The choice of the infrastructure sector as a catalyser for pro-poor growth is grounded on several factors. Infrastructure is crucial for investment and economic growth in other sectors and the relative weight of this sector in the overall economy is relatively high, especially in developing countries (Tajgman & Jan de Veen, 1998). Often, upwards of 70% of public investment is channelled into this sector (World Bank, 2002). In this context, local and international experience has lauded the potential of community-based public works programmes to simultaneously provide jobs, alleviate poverty, build local capacity, create community assets, reduce the cost of construction and maintenance and improve infrastructure (Department of Public Works, 1997; Mashiri et al, 2005).

The term ‘employment-intensive’ is used by the ILO to describe a competitive technology where optimal use is made of labour as the predominant resource in infrastructure projects, while ensuring cost-effectiveness and safeguarding quality (ILO, 1999). Given that a key resource among the poor is their own labour, employment-intensive initiatives offer a sure way in which government can directly contribute to addressing poverty.

Following from this understanding, in South Africa, the Mpumalanga Department of Roads and Transport (MDORT) conceptualised and implemented the Siyatentela community-based labour-intensive routine road maintenance programme. In KwaZulu-Natal Province conceived and implemented the Zibambele labour based construction and maintenance programme (DoT, 2005). In Limpopo Province, the Limpopo Department of Roads and Transport initiated the *Gundo Lashu* rural roads and infrastructure provision programme. In the Eastern Cape Province, the Department of Roads and Transport has conceptualised a programme called *Sakha Isizwe* community-based transportation programme which has components that include skills acquisition through empowerment of communities, poverty alleviation and emerging contractor development, among others. These programmes form part of a much broader initiative seeking to entrench government's extended public works programme by way of reaching out to and mainstreaming rural households into development activities.

The paper not only explores both the direct and indirect benefits, but it also addresses the extent to which community-based rural road maintenance and agriculture development projects can be used as a tool to empower women, the aged, children, youths, unemployed and the disadvantaged to work towards attaining sustainable rural livelihoods (Department of Public Works, 1997). In this regard, the need to integrate actions around gender inequality within the transport sector is an issue that is gaining greater recognition, both in South Africa and internationally (Buiten, 2007). While much more needs to be done to fully and effectively transform the transport sector in terms of gender, one area in which local policy and, increasingly, practice has begun to move in the right direction is to implement more gender transformed employment policies at the level of infrastructure provision (Turner & Spitzner, 2007). The *Siyatentela*, *Zibambele*, *Gundo Lashu*, *Sakha Sizwe* and *Siyazondla* projects are typical examples of this in the South African context, with the recruitment around employment-intensive rural household agriculture and road maintenance aiming to address gender inequalities and challenge conventional gendered recruitment patterns in the construction sector. Inevitably, some insights into the gender dimensions of the project are also explored in the paper.

## 1.1 Methodology

Based on an extensive desktop analysis of labour based rural household agriculture and road transport initiatives in South Africa and a recent impact study undertaken by CSIR Built Environment, this paper discusses the impacts and implications of the *Siyatentela*, *Gundo Lashu*, *Zibambele*, *Sakha Sizwe* labour-based routine road maintenance and *Siyazondla rural household agriculture programme* towards sustainable rural livelihoods in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces. While the Siyatentela program is extensively dealt with, the rapid appraisal of similar programmes in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape Province was conducted to improve the depth and representativeness of study findings and recommendations. The aim of this was to make references and comparison between the programmes in the different provinces for enhanced learning and understanding of the programmes' impacts and outcomes under different socio-economic and political contexts and conditions.

In terms of the main case study Siyatentela, a mixed method approach to the impact assessment, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods was employed. The approach was centred on a before and after cross-sectional survey of upwards of eight percent of Siyatentela participants to independently evaluate its impacts. Key informant interviews (with regional managers, road superintendents /supervisors and ward councillors), focus group discussions, physical observations, the assessment of project records, participatory road surveys with Siyatentela

road maintenance gangs and household interviews with targeted program beneficiaries were employed for this study. Life stories and testimonials (story telling technique) were also utilised in order to gain greater insight into the project impact. This mixed method approach enabled the triangulation of data. For example, information generated from physical observations was used to cross-check project records as well as information from key informant interviews. The empirical analysis of quantitative data for the study was based on descriptive statistics using Statistical Package for Social Scientists and Excel. Qualitative data elicited through life stories and testimonials was synthesised by way of a brainstorming exercise by the research team to inform and add to the quantitative interpretation of data findings.

This section has provided a broad brush perspective to the article. The research methodology employed has been briefly explained. The section that follows outlines the structure and organisation of the article.

## 1.2 Structure and organisation of the article

The article is organised into *seven sections*. *Section 1* has introduced the study background and discussed briefly the research methodology. *Section 2* presents a discussion of some benefits and motivations for employing an employment-intensive approach to routine road maintenance in rural areas. *Section 3* discusses some key issues revolving around the need to integrate gender transformation into household agriculture development and routine road maintenance programmes, and the rationale behind targeting rural women in indigent households. *Section 4* presents an analytical review of labour based routine maintenance programmes experiences from elsewhere in South Africa, namely Limpopo and Eastern Cape Province. *Section 5* on the other hand introduces the Siyatentela rural road maintenance programme case study and then proceeds to outline key aspects of the Siyatentela case study impact assessment methodology. *Section 6* presents some of the key findings from the Siyatentela case study. *Section 7* summarises the key conclusions and recommendations emanating from this article.

Having discussed the organisation and structure of the article, the next section discusses the benefits of employment intensive routine road maintenance.

## 2. Benefits of employment-intensive routine road maintenance approaches

As indicated above, the infrastructure and construction sector is a key strategic point of entry for pro-poor growth due to the significance of infrastructure within developing country economies. For example, infrastructure construction accounts for 3-8% of GDP, and the World Bank (2002) estimates that, every year, US\$200 billion is spent on new infrastructure in developing countries. This serves to confirm its billing as a sector brimming with opportunities to potentially address unemployment in the poorest communities.

Furthermore, the sector is quite amenable to creating employment, given that the range of technological options available for exploitation including labour-intensive means is relatively large. To illustrate this point, it is of interest to note for example, that the share of the cost of equipment in total costs of unpaved road construction could vary from 30% to 80%, while that of labour could range from 10% to 60% (Tajgman & Jan de Veen, 1998, World Bank, 2002). While the employment potential of infrastructure projects is vast, it is ironic that decision makers have not taken full advantage of this realisation. Many projects are still equipment-intensive, frequently

using foreign contractors (Tajgman & Jan de Veen, 1998). This means that money flows back outside the country and little use is made of readily available local workers and materials. While equipment-intensive technologies may be necessary for the construction and maintenance of certain types of infrastructure such as airports, motorways or heavy bridges, for more basic forms of infrastructure employment-intensive alternatives are available and offer significant advantages, especially in a developing country context (ILO, 1999). In this regard, while the intentions have indeed been noble, the application has been half-hearted and therefore the results have been relatively disappointing.

Comparative studies of employment-intensive versus equipment-intensive projects have shown that the following advantages are associated with the employment-intensive approach:

- Absorbs a higher percentage of semi-skilled and unskilled labour, with up to 60% of total project investment going into wages (ILO,1999)
- Contributes to improvement in income distribution, for example due to project wages being spent locally, and an additional one and a half to three times more employment being created in the area through the so-called multiplier effect (Keddeman, 1997; Mashiri et al, 2005)
- Contributes to an increase in household income and consumption, thereby strengthening local economic circuits (Mashiri et al, 2008)
- Saves foreign exchange by around 30% since money is being spent in the local currency rather than on foreign expertise, equipment, spare parts and fuel. A positive spin-off in this respect is a contribution to the improvement of the balance of payment and a reduction of debt (ILO,1999)
- Often based on demand from communities, and thus enhances democratic participation and a sense of responsibility for these ‘community assets’ (Mashiri et al, 2005)
- Up to 80% more cost-effective in low-wage labour surplus economies (World Bank, 2002)
- More environmentally friendly, as the use of heavy machinery can be avoided (Keddeman, 1997)
- Where implemented correctly, it can provide respectful and fair working conditions and basic labour standards, including equality of treatment, workers' participation and the prohibition of child labour and forced labour, and
- Promotes participation and empowerment of the poor by involving them in local level planning and introducing innovative methods of collective negotiation (Turner & Spitzner, 2007).

In these ways, appropriately implemented employment intensive approaches can offer socio-economic and growth benefits to poor communities while remaining feasible in terms of infrastructure development within the context of limited financial resources in developing countries (Mashiri et al, 2008). Indeed, ensuring that the employment of people in employment-intensive infrastructure programmes is framed by equitable and non-exploitative mechanisms is critical for these benefits to be enjoyed (ibid). This includes safe working conditions, secure and fairly remunerated work, adequate training and equal opportunities (Mahapa, 2003). One of the factors to consider in this respect is gender. In contexts often still largely characterised by gender inequality and gendered patterns of poverty, gender transformation within these programmes is key towards ensuring that the fuller benefits of income generation and distribution and poverty alleviation are achieved. This is discussed further in the next section.

### 3. Integrating gender transformation into employment-intensive projects and programs

Gender transformation involves more than the participation of women in paid employment (Buiten, 2007). It is constituted of a broad range of changes needed to transform the gender status quo, including changes in attitudes towards and perceptions of both men and women and their roles and statuses in society, in engendered relationships, power relations, institutions and approaches (ILO, 1992, ILO, 1996, World Bank, 2002). However, there are a number of reasons why women's access to non-exploitative paid employment is an important part of gender transformation, especially in the context of developing countries.

Many women in developing countries, including South Africa, experience the cumulative and interlinked burdens imposed by class, race and gender, making them particularly vulnerable to poverty. Kehler (2001) points out that 52% of South Africa's population is female, and 47% of these women live in rural areas. Unemployment among rural women in South Africa is at 53%, as compared to 37% among rural men (*ibid*). Statistics show that the majority of black South African women in rural areas live under extremely poor conditions, with the general barriers facing people in rural areas exacerbated by their limited access to education and skills training (*ibid*). Women in rural areas also experience the burden of both productive and reproductive labour, and their work in this regard is often unremunerated and under-valued (May, 2006). The absence of a significant number of men in rural areas of South Africa (for example, due to high rates of migration to urban centres) often implies that many women become *de facto* heads of households and 'breadwinners' for their families. In addition, due to the gendered social norms around care, women tend to be those who care for and support children and the elderly (Kehler, 2001; Mashiri et al, 2007). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 30% of rural households are headed by women, and are often the poorest (Shackleton & Mander, 2005).

Despite this, women are often still regarded as secondary income earners (Kehler, 2001). In households where men are present, women's access to and control over financial and other resources is often an issue due to gendered norms that shape ownership and control within the household (March et al, 1999; Venter & Mashiri, 2007). The importance of employing women to enable them to take charge of their finances cannot be over-emphasized. However, where this happens, men often either abdicate their financial responsibilities altogether or it becomes a cause for friction in the household). At a global level, too, there is a trend in paid employment confines poor women to more poorly paid impermanent jobs, increasing their vulnerability to factors such as retrenchment (Kehler, 2001). This trend is exacerbated by global patterns of cuts in social spending often associated with economic downturns and structural adjustment reforms, phenomena that tend to hit women hardest given their roles as caregivers (*ibid*).

This broad picture of rural women's location within local and global norms and patterns of poverty highlights the need to ensure that the employment benefits that can accrue from infrastructure investments do not perpetuate such patterns through the exclusion or exploitation of women. Given that women tend to be caregivers and care workers in their households and communities as Mashiri *et al* (2007) have observed, there is also a compelling argument that income generation for women, where they are able to control the use of such income, can be beneficial for entire households (including children and the elderly) and communities. Traditional perceptions that women are not 'appropriate' employees within labour-intensive and technical sectors also need to be proactively challenged. It is intriguing to observe that poor rural women in developing countries are almost always tasked with many labour-intensive forms of work on a daily

basis, such as the collection and transport of heavy loads of water and wood, as well as agricultural work. While it should be ensured that labour-based employment opportunities do not pose a risk to women's health, the perception that women can or should not be given employment in male-dominated labour-based and technical sectors such as construction needs to be continuously challenged and addressed. In this regard, the South African government has a deliberate policy that targets women on all 'extended public works projects (EPWP) projects.

The transport infrastructure investment sector, especially as it pertains to rural areas, is in fact one of the areas in which some of the greatest strides have been made to date in integrating gender issues into transport policy and practice (DoT, 2001, Mahapa, 2003, DoT, 2005). Turner and Spitzner (2007), in their examination of the effectiveness of gender inclusion into various transport and development initiatives of donor agencies and other sector entities, found that sector-wide engendered transport policy and practice was generally extremely limited. Rather, they observe that sub-sector efforts showed a greater integration of gender concerns, such as the rural road maintenance and construction sub-sector (*ibid*). They note that this specific sub-sector "is an area in which the choice of technology is seen as providing a space to promote the participation of, and benefits to, women" (Turner & Spitzner, 2007).

Turner and Spitzner (2007) also highlight South African government-based policy and practice, in particular, as a case study of the lead often taken by the rural road maintenance and construction sub-sector. Noting that South Africa, like many other countries, has generally not sufficiently incorporated gender issues into mainstream transport policy and practice, they point out that the policy statement of the subsidiary ministry for rural road maintenance, the Department of Public Works, acknowledges that a number of internal and external factors impact on women's lives, including the issue of equitable staffing at all levels of the transport sector (*ibid*). This policy statement also cites the promotion of labour-intensive construction methods that target the employment and training of women, and has in a number of cases actually translated this policy into practice through community-based public works programmes (Turner & Spitzner, 2007; Mashiri et al, 2008).

Turner and Spitzner (2007) therefore draw attention to the relative progress of gender equity made in this sub-sector, while noting that such efforts need to be extended to national policy levels. Their observations also underscore the need to further promote such initiatives towards firmly establishing their place within the transport sector. The benefits and outcomes of these interventions also need to be investigated and knowledge in this regard disseminated, as part of the process of refining and improving approaches to policy and action in this regard, as well as establishing an empirical knowledge base to support such initiatives. The impact assessment of the Siyatentela rural road maintenance program is one such effort in this direction.

This section has reviewed gender mainstreaming within the context of rural routine road maintenance. The next section presents a review of rural labour based routine road maintenance and household agriculture development programmes case study experiences from South Africa.

#### **4. Labour-based routine rural road maintenance and household agriculture development: experiences from South Africa**

This section presents labour-based routine rural road maintenance and household agriculture development experiences from South Africa. The justification for programme implementation was

the need to partner with communities in road construction and maintenance. Overall these programmes have significantly contributed to sustained poverty alleviation and provided people with the opportunity to create and sustain different and alternative pathways of social identity and integration.

In order to break poverty cycles in the medium to long-term, various provincial departments of roads and transport in South Africa have employed a mixed contract approach which ranges from an individual, household and contractor approach with the common aim being to push back the frontiers of poverty. The poorest of the poor are identified and selected by communities themselves. Women-headed households are targeted because they make up the majority of the poorest families

By 2007/08, 36 366 contracts had been awarded and a total of R672 million spent on Zibambele contractor salaries alone. One Senior Manager in the KwaZulu-Natal Transport Department summed the impact thus:

*“...Zibambele is an on-going and sustainable project. It is not only cost-effective but also cost-efficient. Included in its package are a skills development component as well as investment and wealth creation options through the formation of saving clubs and cooperatives. Mind you, the programme also has in-built exit strategies one of which is the savings clubs. For example, contractors have been organised into approximately 600 savings clubs. They have collectively saved over R2.8 million, most of which is used in investing in productive activities. An independent evaluation of the programme conducted in 2002 showed that 73 cents of every Rand spent within the programme accrued to Zibambele contractors and 95 percent of the R76 million was spent on wages. Indeed, money is circulated in the local economy...” (Extract of a telephone interview with a Senior Transport Official in the Department of Transport, KwaZulu-Natal, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2008).*

Generally community members from all programs depicted in Table 1 believe that the projects have opened up the areas for development and expanded the community’s horizon with regard not only to understanding developmental issues pertaining to their areas, but also with respect to perceiving and acting on economic opportunities. In this regard, a number of development related entities such as the *Amadiba* Poverty Relief Company (whose portfolio of projects running the gamut from tourism to agriculture epitomises the newly found optimism and hope for a better future) and *Xolobeni* Empowerment Trust have been set up to begin to marshal ideas and resources for local economic development. Also, community members working on the projects used their wages for building decent houses (some of them using skills gotten from the project], paying school fees for family members, buying agricultural inputs and livestock, as well as buying groceries. In addition, some enterprising community members [who were not necessarily direct beneficiaries] have increased their acreage for crop husbandry while others have acquired and improved household assets such as implements and houses). While on average, all projects share a common strength of creating alternative pathways out of poverty, they also share a weakness in that these alternative pathways out of poverty are not couched within the ambit of an overarching strategic framework. The programs do also share a weakness in terms of being externally generated (by either government or donor agencies) which may explain the limited levels of success associated with the projects. Table 1 provides a summary of the common and divergent project issues that relate to the major rural labour-based project experience in South Africa.



**Table 1: Experiences of Labour based routine road maintenance in South Africa**

PARAMETER	ZIBAMBELE	GUNDOLASHU	SAKHA ISIZWE	AMADIBA ROAD CONSTRUCTION (CASE STUDY)
<b>PROGRAM CHAMPIONS</b>	KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Department of Transport	Limpopo Provincial Government, Roads Agency Limpopo (RAL), ILO, DFID, Department of Labour	Eastern Cape Department of Roads & Transport	Mbizana Local Municipality, O R Tambo District, Eastern Cape Province Department of Roads & Transport, CSIR, South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL).
<b>PROGRAM THRUST</b>	Rural access labour intensive road maintenance, local job creation & poverty alleviation	Address backlog in rural road infrastructure and create jobs in order to improve rural livelihoods	Community based transportation program. Create new work and business opportunities for disadvantaged communities	Enhance accessibility to socio-economic opportunities for the upwards of 15000 people served by the road, including some 1,500 households located along the road.
<b>PROGRAM TARGETED BENEFICIARIES</b>	Unemployed in rural areas (youths, adults, women & aged)	Workers from communities located within 4 km of respective road corridors	Targets poorest of the poor (mainly women headed households)	Unemployed youths, women, aged in community
<b>CONTRACT DESCRIPTION</b>	Household based rather than individual focused	Traditional client-contractor-consultant relationship	Household based rather than individual focused	Individual temporary contracts (2 months cycle)
<b>WORKING CONDITIONS</b>	Flexible 60 hours of work per month	Normal industrial working conditions i.e. 8 am – 5 pm	Normal industrial working conditions i.e. 8 am – 5 pm	Normal industrial working conditions i.e. 8 am – 5 pm
<b>EQUIPMENT &amp; MATERIALS</b>	Wheelbarrows, pick, shovel, a machete, slasher, gloves, traffic cones, safety boots, vest reflectors,	Appropriate mix of labour based & high technology methods & equipment use	Appropriate mix of labour based & high technology methods & equipment use	Wheelbarrows, pick, shovel, a machete, slasher, gloves, traffic cones, safety boots, vest reflectors Appropriate mix of labour based & high technology methods & equipment use
<b>STIPEND &amp; / COMPENSATION</b>	R450 – R 1 200	Market wages & reward compensation for employees	Market wages & reward compensation for employees	Market wages & reward compensation for employees
<b>TYPE &amp; SCOPE OF WORK DONE</b>	<400 vehicles per day (road surface cleaning and verge maintenance covering areas between 500m – 800m road sections i.e. approximately 7 000m <sup>2</sup> ) <400 with more than 15% heavy vehicles (verge maintenance – grass cutting, weeding, drain cleaning & litter removal covering areas between 500m each side of the road i.e. approximately 7000m <sup>2</sup> ) +1000 vehicles per day (no Zibambele contractors used)	Road rehabilitation and maintenance of roads in all levels of classification	Use Kenyan Lengthmen model to allocate and measure labour inputs/outputs ratios	Use Kenyan Lengthmen model to allocate and measure labour inputs/outputs ratios

<b>TRAINING &amp; SKILLS TRANSFER</b>	Technical & maintenance skills Social skills	Life & basic entrepreneurial skills, landscaping/kerb laying, scaffolding, supervisory skills, farm business management, computer skills	Skills acquisition through empowerment of communities Road construction & maintenance skills & theory & experience	Technical & maintenance skills Social skills
<b>SUPPORT SERVICES</b>	Acquisition of identity documents, opening bank accounts, organising them into credit unions and savings clubs and investing savings into other productive activities	CIDB contractor profiling, registration and development.	Programme linked to the contractor grading system of the construction industry development board (CIDB) Support SMMEs Sakha Isizwe Learner ship Programme	Farm skill development, savings investment into housing/shelter improvement/development
<b>PROGRAM OUTCOMES</b>	95% of contracts awarded to women headed household	Each trained contractor has an average annual turnover of R5.0 million 267 km of roads rehabilitated & 142 km gravelled 24km sealed at a cost of R70.7 million. 24 contractors trained. 13 contractors are (54%) female, 70% of all trainees are youth. 8 Engineering consultants trained 10 RAL staff trained in LBM management. More than 59 272 training days provided so far. 895 627 worker days created in the and employment of 3 139 workers as follows: 1 697 workers (54.1%) female, 1 326 workers (42.2%) youth, 18 (1%) disabled.	1 995 households contracted (2006/07) Used in urban renewal (Motherwell & Ngangelizwe) Intergrated Sustainable Rural Development (Umzimkhulu) Learnership Programme has recruited 100% historically disadvantaged individuals, 100% youth and more than 60% female learner contractors. 220 temporary jobs have been created within this programme. This programme has created access to finance thus facilitating development for financial track-record for the learners through ABSA	Program employed 1700 villagers (albeit on a temporary basis – in fact, two months cycles to allow more community members to be involved) over a period of twenty months. Of those employed 1020 were women while 680 were men, reflecting a proportion of 60:40 as well as 20 percent youth (a stipulation of the Code of Good Practice for Special Public Works Programmes).  Women's incomes were largely employed to improve household welfare thereby reducing leakage of project funds out of the community. Community believes project opened up area for further development
<b>STRENGTH</b>	Skills transfer & training model Community employment & local economic development Integrated rural development approach Flexible working conditions and use of project equipment Targeting indigent poor especially female headed households	Comprehensive governance institutional strengthening model Small and medium enterprise contractor development programme Employ local communities within a 4 km road corridor radius	Capacity building and development Learner skills development Local transportation system improvement	Gender sensitive & opportunity development Local economic job creation Collaboration & partnership demonstration project
<b>WEAKNESS</b>	Top down driven initiative	Excludes members from beyond 4 km	Government driven (top	Government driven (top down)

	<p>Lack of a clear model for transfer and sustainability beyond government funding</p> <p>Lack of a clear &amp; limited strategy on exit options for pursuing alternative pathways out of poverty</p>	<p>road corridor radius</p> <p>Government Driven (top down)</p> <p>Lack of a clear &amp; limited strategy on exit options for pursuing alternative pathways out of poverty</p>	<p>down)</p> <p>Lack of a clear &amp; limited strategy on exit options for pursuing alternative pathways out of poverty</p>	<p>Lack of a clear &amp; limited strategy on exit options for pursuing alternative pathways out of poverty</p> <p>Project concept sustainability beyond project closure</p>
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Sources: DoT, 2001, 2005, Mashiri et al, 2005, 2007, 2008

#### 4.1 Siyazondla agriculture and food production: Province of the Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture (ECDoA) in collaboration with the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa: Eastern Cape (ASGISA-EC), and Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) have been engaged in a process of seeking to transform agriculture production systems, livelihood patterns and human development. This has also been made possible by support from various international donor organisations and support. The approach has sought to tackle poverty from an agriculture development, employment creation and empowerment perspective. The approaches are broadly referred to as Agrarian Transformation and Food Security pillars of the Provincial Growth and Development Plan (PGDP), which begot programs, such as Massive Food Production, *Siyazondla* Homestead Food Production, Comprehensive Nutrition Programme and Integrated Agricultural Infrastructure Programme. However, in the context of this paper the focus is on *Siyazondla* homestead food production.

The *Siyazondla* system of homestead production supports production of nutritional food within rural and urban homestead gardens, meeting immediate needs while strengthening household livelihoods and laying the foundation for livelihood diversification and enhanced economic exchange. The aim is not only to improve nutrition levels (particularly for people living with HIV/AIDS and/or TB) and strengthen household food supply, but also to support surplus production where possible and feasible. Such surplus production already occurs on many a farm and needs to be supported. The aim is not to turn every rural person in the former ‘Bantustans’ into a farmer. Rather, it is to address food vulnerability at the household level and support the diversification and strengthening of household livelihood strategies, while also supporting surplus crop production where appropriate (PGDP, 2004). The *Siyazondla* Programme assists with the establishment of food gardens at community level, at clinics and at schools. More than 10,000 vulnerable households benefit directly. Food security is further provided by means of the PGDP’s Comprehensive Nutrition Programme, which has several elements, one crucial leg of which is school nutrition. The Education Department provides meals to learners every day of the week, increased from three days a week in 2005. Schools are being encouraged to establish food gardens, and efforts are being made to organize local co-operatives to provide the school meals. As at 2006, the Education Department employed 5,800 meal servers. The programme has helped poor households to produce their own food. This has been possible through infrastructure, training, start-up inputs, and follow-up support programmes for backyard gardens that are upwards of 144 square metres in size. While the grant provides the most support in the first year, the magnitude of that supports tappers off in succeeding years. Grants are provided up to a maximum value of R2000 in the first year mainly for purposes of:

- Starter packs of farming tools like wheel barrows, forks, spades, rakes and watering cans.
- Production inputs like seeds, fertilizer, seedlings and insecticides.
- Irrigation pipes, garden fencing and water harvesting equipment.

One woman in the Eastern Cape had this testimony to make:

*“...Some of the women in my community including myself have started a vegetable farm with the help from the Siyazondla Homestead Food Production programme. Now we grow our own food and sell vegetables too. The income we derive from this supplements the household needs such as paying schools fees for children and buying their school uniforms. I do not want to think how difficult our lives could be without such programmes. It means families would have to traditionally dependent on absentee*

*husbands who have migrated elsewhere to look for employment. In fact we are learning a lot from the programme and from each other, since some of us have only been farmers all our lives...” (Extract of an interview with a female household headed parent, 22 September, 2008 in Tsolo, Eastern Cape).*

In addition, the programme is supported by the *Siyakhula* step-up commercial food production programme. This programme is aimed at farmers who want to farm commercially, i.e. produce for the market. The programme subsidises small-scale farms (farm size between 1 and 50 hectares) through a conditional grant scheme.

These programmes are linked to a food processing programme that provides for accessible local market for excess household garden production. At the same time a land care programme also exists. Under this programme grants are given to educate and build awareness so as to reverse land degradation. Since 2008, a ‘food-basket’ initiative has been started around Elundini Local Municipality, working with the municipality, community and farmer representatives. The Department of Agriculture has committed to increasing infrastructure investment, and to develop over 3 000 hectares linked to the Massive Food Production and *Siyazondla* Homestead Food Production Programmes (DoA, 2008).

*Siyazondla* has had a positive impact, since most of the people are happy as reported during the three *Siyazondla* preliminary assessment congresses that were arranged for socio-technical integration and capacity. This has served as a critical learning platform in terms of cooperation and organisation. Villages, communities, women and youth groups have successfully organised themselves into collective buying and marketing structures, which could be the cornerstone for agrarian transformation.

In addition, the *Siyazondla* programme has swelled the numbers of the employed most of whom had never had this experience. This programme is currently the highest contributor to local sources of income, while the others individually contribute less than a quarter of the total local income (DoA: Eastern Cape, 2008). Apart from participants being able to produce to satisfy home consumption, significant numbers are producing surplus for the market thereby improving their potential to generate income for other household needs.

Further project benefits like gaining knowledge in producing different crops and the resultant increased production leading to self sufficiency is another positive impact of the programme. In addition, being part of the project has helped farmers to come together as a unit not only for farming but to use their groups for advancing developmental needs of their respective communities and to learn from each other’s experiences. Incidences of diseases and pests have been observed to be lowering. Table 3 shows that a lot of community people are being offered alternative pathways to addressing poverty.

**Table 3:** Summary of *Siyazondla* Project Impact in the Eastern Cape Province

District	Projects (number)				No of households	Budget R	% spent
	Clinic Garden	Home Garden	School Garden	Community Garden			
Alfred Nzo	22	570	38	10	727	2.0 million	55
Chris Hani	11	500	15	7	830	3.0 million	35
O. R. Tambo	8	741	11	10	3460	4.0 million	61
Ukahlamba	1	757	3	2	764	2 million	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>6323</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>10266</b>	<b>11 million</b>	<b>57</b>

Source: Cabinet Lekgotla, 2007

Although no full scale impact assessment of the programme has been done, the preliminary assessment indicates positive benefits and impacts. The programme is one alternative way of South Africa is seeking to push back the frontiers of poverty. However, some commentators have labelled the massive food programme a ‘failure’. This is premised on the weak rural agro-logistics infrastructure support system, a lingering perception that beneficiaries appear to continue to associate development with receiving handouts from government, late ‘no till’ planting season owing to challenges of mobilizing inputs such as seed, fertiliser and equipment, the dysfunctional land care program as instanced by the continued visible soil erosion as well as poor access and information support systems in the rural areas. Nevertheless, what is clear is that it has begun to dawn on all stakeholders that the move towards sustainable agricultural transformation is a process and a learning curve. The program is thus being continuously improved.

Having, discussed the experiences from the different Provinces in South Africa, the following section introduces Siyatentela labour based road maintenance case study in Mpumalanga, South Africa.

## 5. Siyatentela rural road maintenance program

### 5.1 Siyatentela case study overview

The Mpumalanga Department of Roads and Transport (MDORT) implemented the Siyatentela employment-intensive routine rural road maintenance project with the purpose of not only cutting the cost of road maintenance and improving road conditions, but also as part of a much broader initiative that seeks to entrench government’s extended public works programme (Mashiri et al, 2008). The Siyatentela programme, which was modelled on the relatively well-known Zibambebe programme in KwaZulu-Natal, targets women in indigent households, especially female-headed families. These women are identified through a consultative and rigorous screening and verification process involving many stakeholders such as local political and traditional leadership, to ensure that the households most in need are included in the project. One woman per household is trained and employed to undertake routine road maintenance on a half kilometre stretch of road. However, these women often work in teams of ten to maintain a five kilometre stretch of rural road in close

proximity to their homesteads. The rest of the road is maintained by MDORT. The project's specific objectives relate to the following:

- Creating sustainable road infrastructure to facilitate easy movement of people and their goods
- Creating remunerative jobs to alleviate poverty in inherently poor communities
- Building and entrenching the local skills base; and
- Stimulating, growing and mainstreaming the local economy.

The programme commenced very modestly in the 2005/06 financial year in Ehlanzeni District Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province, with a budget of R300 000 and employing ten women. The programme has since expanded to all the three districts that constitute the province with a budget of R1.5 million towards the end of the 2005/06 financial year and employing fifty-five women. Siyatentela now employs 544 women maintaining 272km of rural roads in Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande and Nkangala districts. The women are contracted to work sixteen hours per week.

Largely because of its apparent success, the provincial government has sought to scale up this programme with a view to serving more poor households and, at the same time, service more community assets in the form of rural roads. In 2008, plans and projects to grow the program to a budget of R10 million per year were at an advanced stage. However, in order to upgrade this programme from R1.5m to R10m, there was a compelling need for MDORT to undertake an independent impact assessment of the Siyatentela programme. The outcome of the study has since constituted a firm basis for MDORT to take stock of what has transpired up until now, as well as provide it with adequate empirical evidence to arrive at an informed decision (the Department has since decided to scale-up the programme). The results of the study would also be employed as a baseline upon which subsequent evaluations would be undertaken.

The study focused on assessing progress towards achieving the intended objectives, as well as unpacking challenges faced by direct and indirect project beneficiaries. In addition, the study was undertaken in the context of the need to assess whether the original objectives were still relevant in advance of a provincial up-scale of the project, as well as to evaluate impacts towards fostering a culture of and framework for accountability and results-based disbursement of government funding. Ideally, the lessons could be disseminated to government, communities and the international community, particularly given the benefits and, by extension, the need to replicate such projects in South Africa and other African countries.

## **5.2 Siyatentela rural road maintenance program case study findings**

### ***5.2.1 Siyatentela contracts and employment frameworks***

Siyatentela awards renewable twelve month contracts. Although an individual signs the contract, in order to break the cycle of poverty in indigent households Siyatentela 'employs' the household rather than an individual, thus ensuring continuity should anything befall the original woman employed. Depending on skill and experience, participants earn weekly wages of between R600 and R1500. Siyatentela contracts women to maintain the drainage system and road signs, ensure good roadside visibility, maintain the road surface in good condition, and clear the road verges of litter and noxious weeds. While on paper each woman employed is allocated half a kilometre, the actual length depends on the nature of the terrain; the more difficult the terrain, the shorter the length of

road. Overall, the employed women work in groups of ten to maintain a 5km stretch of road close to their homes. Participants work two days per week with a maximum of 64 hours per month. Siyatentela encourages flexible working hours, thus allowing participants ample time to deploy their labour elsewhere.

*“...Since the women work only two days a week, we have been encouraging them to start small gardens at home. Some of them are now doing brisk business selling vegetables such as spinach to other programme beneficiaries and to the community at large...” (Project supervisor – February 2008)*

### 5.2.2 Training, knowledge and skills transfer

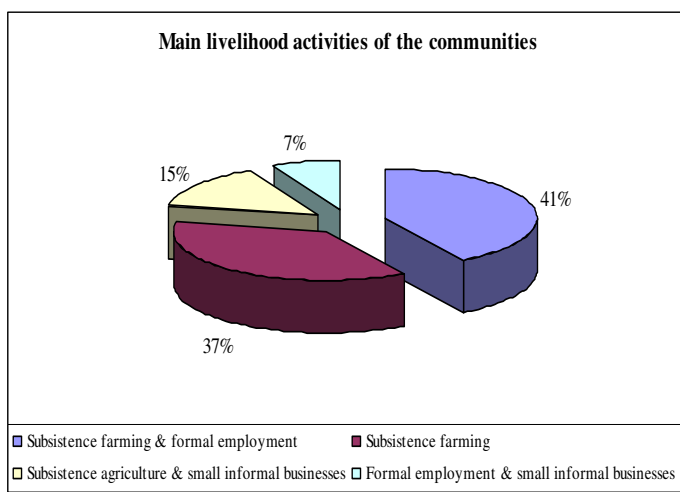
Participants were technically trained on road maintenance and life skills over the duration of their contract.

*“...Before the project, we did not know anything about drainage. Now we know what it means to have a good drainage system as well as how to maintain such drains. We are now in a position to undertake similar work when new opportunities arise, using skills we have acquired through Siyatentela...” (Project participant – February 2008)*

Siyatentela also assists in opening bank accounts, forming savings clubs, and investing some of their savings in other productive activities. Participants indicated that training improved their skills and capacity to confidently work on the project. They now employ maintenance skills learnt on the project, for example, in their homes and community.

### 5.2.3 Livelihoods and income use: Entrenching the rural private sector

The communities in which Siyatentela programme is operating are largely dependent on subsistence agriculture (and a little surplus for the market) based on small pieces of land or home gardens growing mostly maize and horticultural crops for their livelihoods. A small number of households rely on both formal and informal employment and mixed largely subsistence farming.



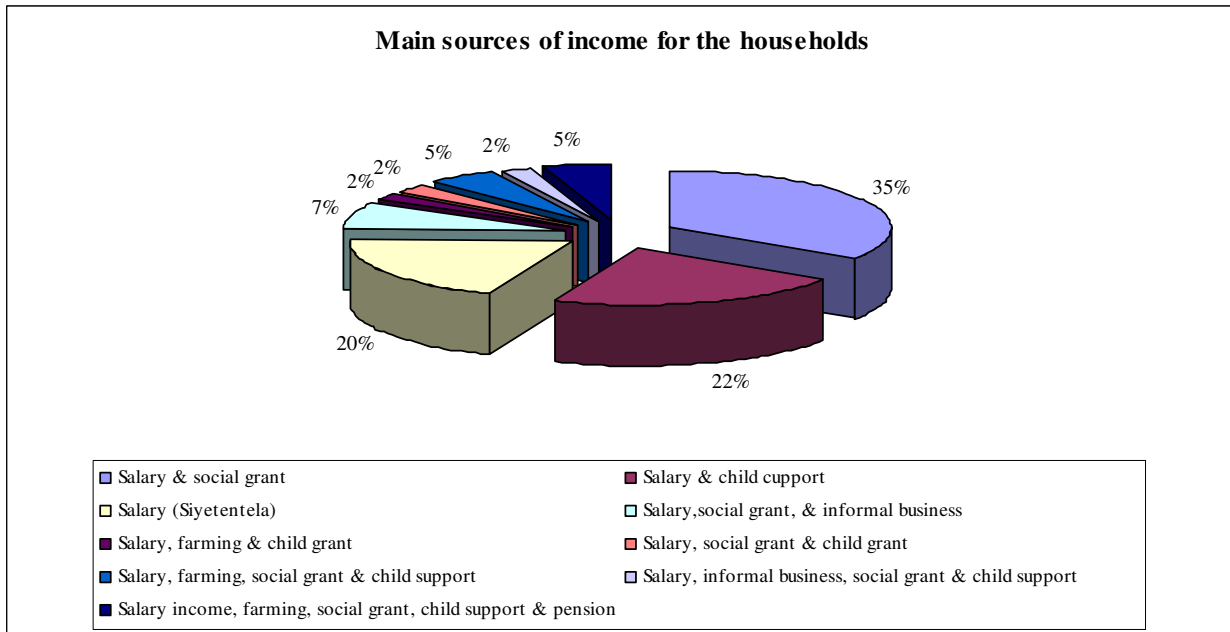
**Figure 1:** Main sources of community livelihoods

Income derived from formal employment such as grants (including child support) and pensions constituted the main sources of income for households in the Siyatentela road maintenance programme areas. Agricultural activities also form an important income stream for the households.

As presented in Figure 2, while 20% of households interviewed depend solely on income from the Siyatentela project, 80% had total monthly income of between R601 and R1500. In addition, all salary incomes reported by

respondent households derives from the Siyatentela project largely because these are the most indigent households. The programme is thus an important source of income markedly improving the financial situation of beneficiary indigent households, particularly those that have no other source of income.

**Figure 2: Main sources of household income**



The Siyatentela labour-intensive road maintenance programme has had a direct and immediate impact on livelihoods of the participating women and their households at two levels, firstly, through income derived and, secondly, through employment. In other words, indigent households now have access to a regular income source as well as the pride and a sense of being that comes from having a meaningful job that enables one to significantly contribute to both their households and the community at large. Indeed interviews from all project sites indicated programme beneficiaries were grateful and appreciative of this intervention.

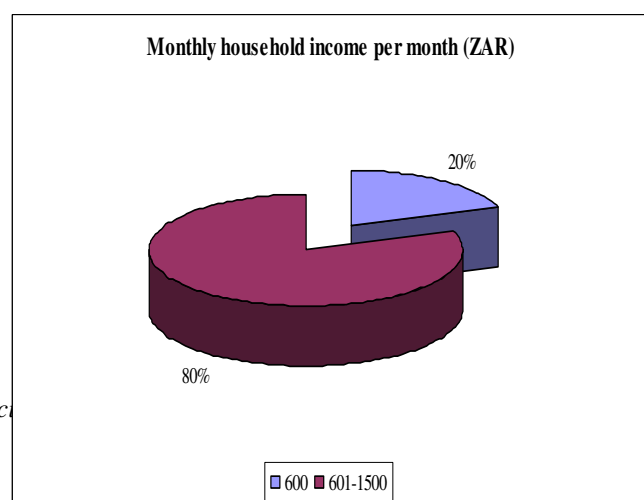
*“...This project has really helped us a lot and now we can earn our own money for use in the home. We certainly hope and would like the project to continue strongly into the future bringing more women like me into its fold...” (Extract of a testimony from one of the women involved in the Siyatentela programme – February 2008).*

**Figure 3: Monthly income for households participating in Siyatentela**

Table 4 presents how income earned from Siyatentela was employed by programme

*M. Mashiri, J. Chakwizira, C. Nhemachena*

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beneficiaries. The results support the hypothesis that the use of employment-intensive methods provides opportunities for participants to access and procure some of the most basic and yet critical needs within the household. The results also indicate that women spend the income from the project largely on basic household and family needs, especially the needs of children. At least 70% percent of the money earned from the project is used for food, clothing, school fees, agricultural inputs, medical fees and household assets. In this way, income earned on Siyatentela thus benefits the whole household. It is evident that the use of labour-intensive methods for road maintenance is having direct immediate impacts on livelihoods of the local participating women and the community at large through income and employment generation including skills developed from training and during road maintenance activities. In contrast, men often spend project wages on items and activities that have no bearing on household welfare, often in urban centres far from their settlements (Mashiri et al, 2005).

*“...When women get their wages they buy food and other needs for the family while men would most probably use the money to drink beer and play lotto...” (Key informant interviewee – Siyatentela foreman – February 2008)*

Just over 50% of the respondents also reported that they use the money for burial society contributions, a significant cost burden within many households and part of fostering a sense of dignity for households and communities, especially given the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has not exhibited any signs of relenting. This strengthens the view that such programmes enhance the social standing of the beneficiary women as they are enabled to meaningfully and visibly contribute to their communities.

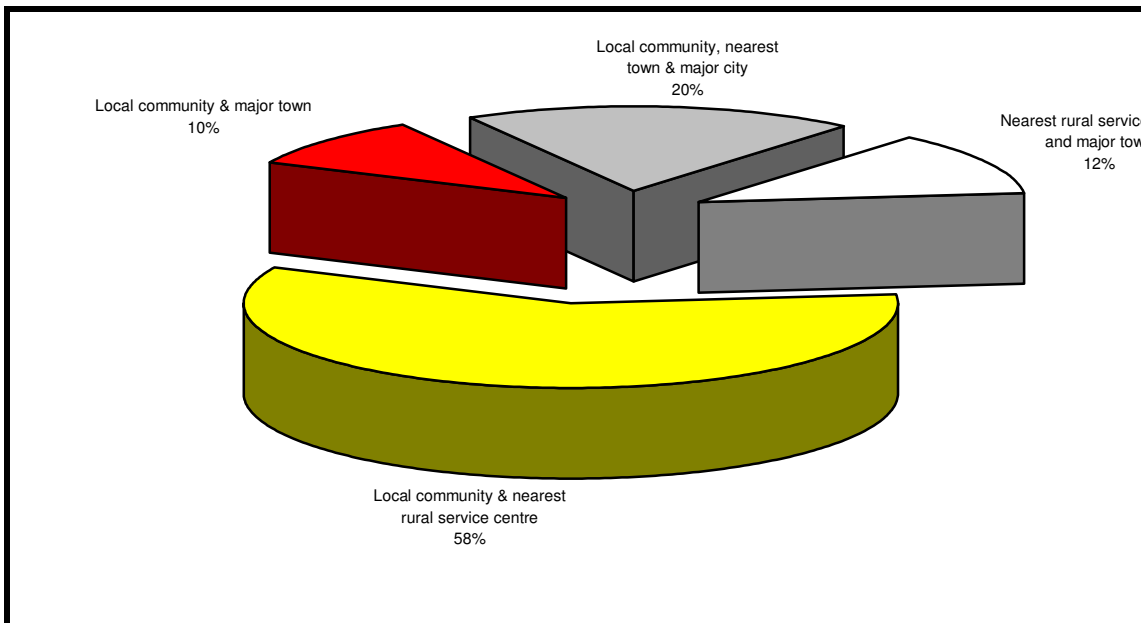
*“...The project has had a significant positive impact on the welfare of the women by providing them with opportunities to earn some money which is of great help to them in terms of caring for their families...” (Councillor from Swallow-nest)*

**Table 4:** Uses of the income earned on the project

Uses of income from the project	Percent
School fees	77.80
Food & clothing	94.40
Agricultural inputs	72.2
Medical fees	72.2
Household assets	77.8
Burial society contribution	55.6

Figure 4 presents how the income earned flows into different geographical economies, which has to some extent, an impact on local economic stimulation. 12% reported that all the income is used only within the local community, and the majority use their wages in both the local community and in other rural service centres and towns.

**Figure 4:** Where wages are employed



Purchasing local goods and services has the effect of stimulating local businesses by strengthening local economic circuits, thereby providing a basis for the creation of wealth (Mashiri et al, 2005). Employing local labour means that a significant portion of the investment assigned to road maintenance is retained within the local community which, in turn, is used to support local enterprises. Upwards of 60% of respondents use their wages to procure goods and services locally and in the nearest rural service centre as aptly described in a focus group discussion.

*“...We are making wise use of the wages we earn on the project. We have assisted each other in acquiring basic household goods that we did not possess prior to being employed on the project, including refrigerators, television sets, radios, electric stoves and other items of value. We have also used our wages to construct and improve our assets such as houses. This has certainly brought a sense of pride and achievement to our families and the community at large. These achievements are unlikely ever to have happened without the project...” (Focus group testimony, February 2008).*

Because participants often open bank accounts into which the government pays their wages, some of the women contractors spent their wages in distant rural service centres and towns with banking facilities. This represented some leakage of funds that could have been employed to stimulate small business in programme areas. A partial remedy could involve enabling the women to access their wages in their local areas, which could confine their purchases to bare essentials.

#### 5.2.4 Social capital

Project participants felt that the deliberate affirmation and involvement of women through the Siyatentela project is a positive development given that women often single-handedly fend for their families with meagre resources (Mashiri et al, 2008). Participants indicated that the project has elevated women participants’ social station, improved their self-esteem and ultimately raised their confidence, thus widening the window through which they view and respond to life’s opportunities and challenges. The ability to generate a steady and reliable income has also helped to facilitate

women’s entry into formal financial institutions and to improve their access to information and more developed urban centres. In addition, access to income and the formation of voluntary associations such as savings clubs has broadened participants’ social networks. This is aptly illustrated by one participant’s testimonial below.

*“...I used to live in a make-shift plastic shack. My family and I were used to going for days without a decent meal. We were surviving on our neighbours’ generosity. I had never had a brand new pair of shoes in my life, nor travelled beyond the village, let alone visiting a big city like Nelspruit. I had never had a bank account in my life. Thanks to Siyatentela, I now have a proper roof over my head, a bank account, go to town at least once every month, have all these many people and friends I can talk to...”*  
 (Extract of an interview with a project participant – February, 2008).

The setting up of investment clubs to facilitate the pooling of resources for procuring a variety of household assets is indeed a living example of community development in practice. Furthermore, these social capital gains contribute in some part to addressing strategic gender interests, challenging existing social formations that shape gender inequality (March et al, 1999). While income generation meets primarily practical gender interests, where well and thoughtfully implemented, employment for women can also contribute to challenging the more fundamental and underlying gender status quo, such as social perceptions of women, social power and power relations. Programmes such as Siyatentela should thus aim to maximise these kinds of returns if transformation is to bear fruit in the long-run.

Interviews with beneficiaries and key informants from all project sites revealed that the project impact was experienced at three societal levels, namely, individual, household and the community level as indicated in Table 5 below.

**Table 5:** Siyatentela programme impact

	Labour	Time	Resources	Culture
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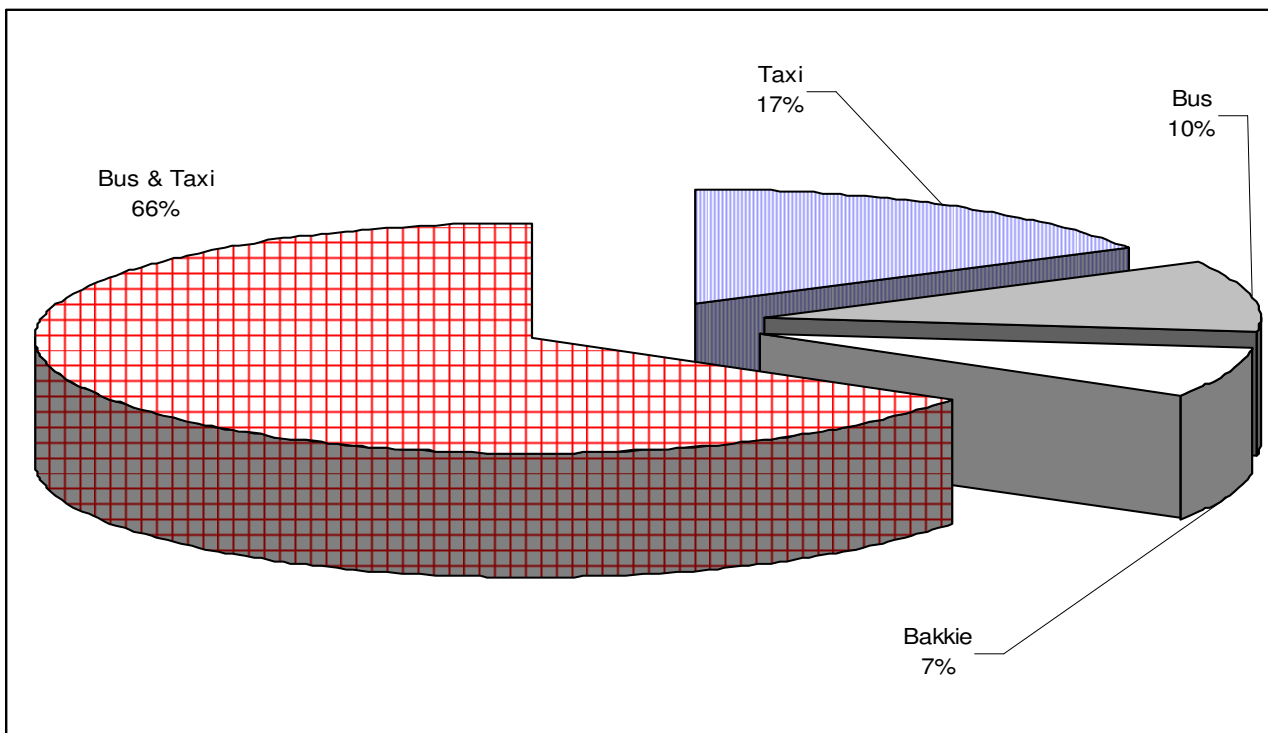
<b>Women</b>	Acquire skills in road works  Increased workload	2 days a week spent on the formal job  Less and fragmented time for household activities  Less time for leisure & rest	Access to & control of cash resources  Access to productive assets  Membership of savings club  Technical & life skills.	Exposed to more public life locally & in distant localities  Heightened self esteem & self-worth  Improved self- confidence – beginning to question some traditions & mores  Cash dependency
<b>Household</b>	Net increase in skilled labour – all women in same household are potentially employable on the programme	Less time for household chores  Structured 7 day week to utilise time more productively (farm, garden, work, community, etc.)	Improved household income  Improved food security & nutrition  School fees for children  Brick under zinc houses  Tangible household goods	Flexible working arrangement means women can balance work & home demands  Family & marriage stability/ instability – married women testified that the job was sometimes a cause for concern with husbands who still wanted to take control of resources generated from the job [see note below table]  Appreciative children
<b>Community</b>	Road maintenance & life skills transferred to community  Maintenance of community assets  Net increase in employment	Less time for community meetings & work  More time spent on developing & maintaining productive assets	Improved transport infrastructure  Better access to socio-economic services  Formation & strengthening of social networks.  Improved farm/garden produce & better prices for commodities since there was increased local supply of green produce and market forces prevailed in determining pricing (regular income influenced ability to purchase farm inputs)  Institution building & strengthening e.g. savings clubs.	Women participate more in community affairs including politics  More children attend school  Improved social cohesion (through voluntary associations such as the creation of savings clubs thus broadening social networks)

*Note: Depending on the household, access to regular income tended to be a double edged sword – it could either imply that the pressure was off for male household members to look for paid employment (in which case there was stability) or the pressure actually increased as they felt inadequate as household heads and therefore the tensions mounted leading to relative instability.*

### **5.2.5 Impacts of improved road maintenance**

The results of the survey indicated that the ownership and number of motorized and non-motorized vehicles increased after the road was upgraded and with routine road maintenance by the

Siyatentela project. In addition, public transport availability improved - especially buses and taxis. 37% of the interviewees were of the opinion that vehicles using the roads under the aegis of Siyatentela had certainly increased. In addition, a variety of public transport modes as indicated in Figure 5 were now available to ferry passengers to the main centres.



**Figure 5:** Availability of public transport

Perceptions of the impact of the road on agricultural, retail and construction activities indicate that Siyatentela has been beneficial to study communities. More than 70% of the respondents indicated that the impact of road upgrading and maintenance services has had medium to high impact on access to all the services indicated in Table 6 below. This is key to local economic development and improved economic activity. This importantly also includes benefits for construction activities.

**Table 6:** Impact on agricultural, retail and construction services

Economic activity	High	Medium	Low	No
<b>Agric services</b>				
Agric input supplies	17.10%	73.20%	7.3%	

Agric markets	26.80%	63.40%	4.9%	4.9%
Agric extension	14.60%	48.80%	19.50%	9.80%
Agric production	29.30%	39.00%	24.40%	7.3%
<b>Retail services</b>				
Retail input supplies	41.50%	31.7%	22.00%	4.9%
Retail markets	48.80%	26.80%	17.10%	7.3%
Level of retail/trade	36.60%	34.10%	19.50%	9.80%
<b>Construction activity</b>				
Level of building activity	51.20%	22.00%	19.50%	4.9%
Materials used	51.20%	22.00%	19.50%	4.9%

As indicated in Table 7 below, most of the local community members, especially the youth, can now more freely migrate in search of off-farm employment in distant towns and cities. About half reported that the roads are helping the community get access to potable water and 73% indicated that access to firewood has improved as a result of the road maintenance and upgrading. Those who reported that the road did not improve their access to firewood and potable water indicated that they do not use the main road to fetch firewood.

**Table 7:** Road improved access to off-farm employment, firewood and portable water

Variable	Percent
Off-farm employment	82.93
Firewood	73.17
Water (potable)	46.34

In terms of general social services, the results shown in Table 6 below indicates the perceptions of local women on the impact of the road upgrading and routine maintenance on access to services. It is evident from the results that the perceptions point to the high success of the road upgrading and maintenance programme in improving access to socio-economic services such as education, health, police and social networks. The results show that there is high positive impact of the road services on access to improved life indicators such as education, health and police services. The road services also improved access to emergency response vehicles (ambulance and police).

**Table 8:** Impact on access to services

Economic activity	Yes	No
<b>Education</b>		
Has access to schools been made possible	80.50%	19.5%
Road improved supply of school stationary	92.7%	7.30%
Road improved staff recruitment and retention	56.1%	43.19%
Road improved access for learners	90.20%	9.80%
<b>Health services</b>		
Has access to clinics been made possible	78.00%	22.00%
Road improved supply of medicines and equipment	78.00%	19.5%
Road improved staff recruitment and retention	41.50%	56.1%
Road improved access to clinic services	85.40%	12.20%
Road improved access to community health centres	85.40%	14.6%
Road improved access to ambulance services	87.80%	12.20%
<b>Police services</b>		

Road improved access to police services	90.20%	9.80%
Road improved response time for police call-out	65.90%	31.70%
<b>Networking</b> (Road facilitated:		
Broadening of membership of associations	82.90%	14.6%
Interaction between associations	85.40%	12.20%
Inter-school cultural & sports activities	80.50%	19.5%

### 5.2.6 Experiences of the project for the women employed

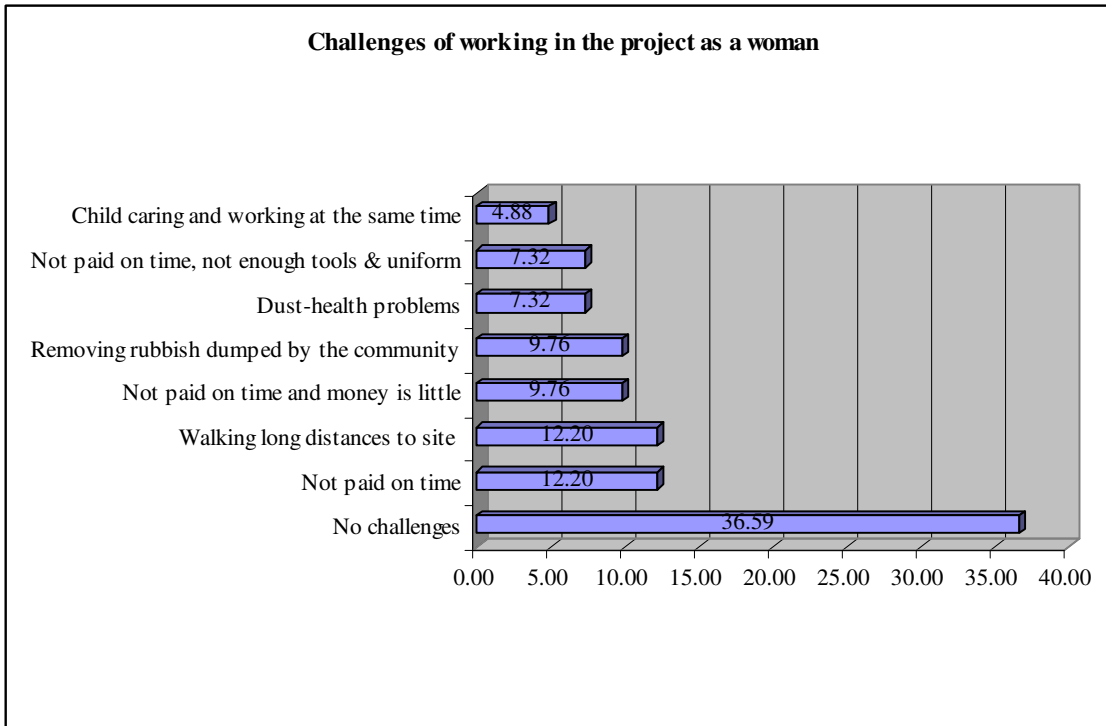
All the women employed on the program reported that they walk to work on the roads and that the average time it takes to get to work is 33 minutes, with a few walking for more than an hour. There are no leadership structures in the informal groups created for women working on stretches of road. The reason given by the women for deciding on a flat structure is that if they elect anyone of them to be a leader she would, begin to be bossy and creating divisions among them.

85% of the women received training on the project. This training is one day long and covers the work they need to do as well as some introduction to the rationale for road maintenance, for example, why side drains along the road have to be cleared. 93% of the women interviewed reported that training improved their skills and capacity to work on the project as well as in general, for example by using the new learnt skills in their homes through the creation of water drains, cleaning gutters, the removal of litter around their households and keeping the home neat and tidy.

Some of the challenges that women employed on the project face include the following (also refer to figure 7):

- Regular payment – some women had not been paid on time. This issue was discussed with the relevant authorities and ways in which to improve the situation identified. This is of critical importance given the significance of reliable, stable work and payment in enhancing women’s socio-economic position and reducing poverty.
- Distances women must walk to the roads were relatively long and cumbersome for some.
- Improved remuneration – some women felt they deserved to be paid more, between R1000 and 1500 per month.
- Working with inadequate tools and without complete uniforms was not only hazardous, but also encouraged inefficiency and circumvents the recognition that derives from donning a complete uniform
- Working in the heat of the daytime sun and with the dust from both the work and passing vehicles.
- Some women reported that work on the roads presented a challenge in terms of having to maintain their child caring activities at the same time. However, this is also mitigated to some extent by the flexible times that they work.
- Some women feared the threat of rapists and thugs when walking to and working on the roads.
- Burning unpleasant and at times explosive or dangerous material that might be dumped with the rubbish along the road was an issue for some women. The women indicated that they have not been given masks and eye glasses as protection against dust and other potentially dangerous materials.

**Figure 6:** Key project related challenges identified by women working on the project

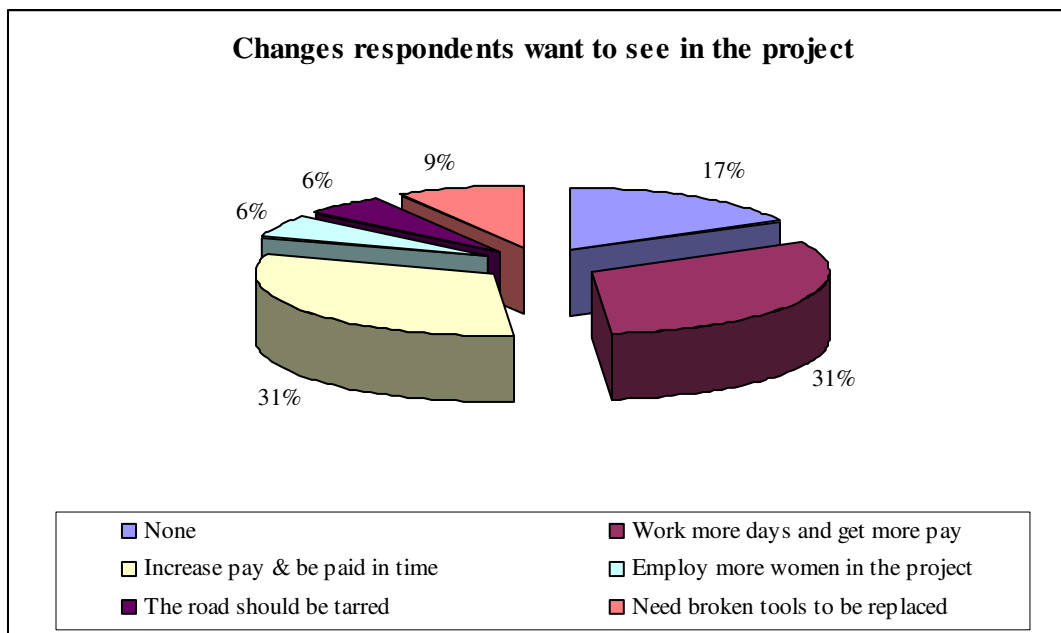


The question of occupational health, both in training and in the provision of adequate protective gear, clearly needs to be addressed. In terms of the problems associated with the threat of rape and assault, project supervisors resolved to group the women.

*“...The original arrangement was that each woman should work 500m length of the road and because of problems such as (rape, thieves, snakes, etc.) we decided that they should work as in groups. This will help them defend each other in case of any attack. However, this didn’t work well with some groups as some women complained that some of their colleague workmates were not working hard enough and we ended up asking them to group themselves and add 500m for each woman to the group as the length of the road they work on...” (Supervisor from Albert Luthuli Municipality).*

The women’s suggestions for improvement are enumerated in figure 7 below. The majority of women suggested improvements in pay, timely payment and the opportunity to increase work hours in order to earn more. The latter is a sensitive issue, given that there is tension between the need to spread the opportunity to widen the dragnet to earning numbers of households (therefore allotting few hours per household) and the need to improve the income of those already working on the project further.

**Figure 7:** Suggested changes to the project by respondents



### 5.2.7 Perceptions on the community labour-based project and women contractors

All the women reported that this project is suitable for women and felt that the project is fair in targeting women only. They argued that women are, overall, burdened the most with poverty, and that it is women who generally provide care for families. Some of the key informants interviewed, however, felt that there are also men and youths who are in need of such opportunities to earn an income, especially orphaned youths without adults to provide for them. If households do not include a woman, they are currently not considered for the project. Thus, while women may often be those with the greatest need, there is a need to reassess the selection criteria for the project to respond to other terms of poverty and vulnerability patterns in rural areas of South Africa, such as the impact of HIV/AIDS on youth and children.

Addressing gender transformation needs to include both a direct focus on women and an approach that sees gendered poverty in a more integrated way, looking at all within the community as interlinked and interrelated. For example, gender relations are implicated in the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, as well as in rural poverty. One of the outcomes of these is that families are dislocated and many children and youths left to fend for themselves. In this way, looking at gender in a project such as this need not only focus on women (although this is important too), but could also include a broader perspective on the interconnectedness of gender issues. This is something that could be further explored as the project is rolled out on a larger scale.

All the women expressed their desire to see the project expand to other regions of the country so that more disadvantaged women can benefit from this intervention. In this way, the project appears to be making an impact, as these women testified that the opportunity to earn money is one which was not generally open to them before the project.

*“...When women get the money they buy food and other needs for the household while men use the money to drink beer and play lotto and other gambling games...” (Councilor from Swallow-nest).*

“...Before the project, we did not know about drainage drains and their importance along the road. Now we know what it means to have a good drainage system as well as how to maintain such drains. When knew opportunities come in the area we are now able to use our skills gained from the Siyatentela project to do more work like working for the Mpumalanga Department of Road and Transport (MDORT) and working for construction companies...” (Woman involved in the project).

Following the research on the impact of the project on women, a set of gender practice guidelines were generated, as indicated in Table 9 below that could be used to inform future programs.

**Table 9:** Gender good practice guidelines

<b>Labour</b>	
✓	Plan tasks to accommodate women’s existing work/time burden
✓	Adopt task rates rather than daily rates
✓	Plan for flexibility in starting time
✓	Undertake most works during the off-peak agricultural season or only work 2/3 days a week, allowing time for other household chores
✓	Deviate from the traditional division of labour by allocating & trusting women with more technical tasks – underpinned by targeted capacity building
✓	Create awareness about the potential conflict of interests and identify coping strategies e.g. hiring labour for farm work
✓	Provide adequate remuneration and ensure timely payment for work done
✓	Provide sufficient tools and protective clothing
<b>Resources</b>	
✓	Link employment-intensive infrastructure provision and maintenance initiatives to mainstream investment policy
✓	Create awareness about the importance of women controlling household cash reserves, given that women’s income is likely to be spent on improving household welfare, payment of school fees and purchase of productive assets
<b>Culture</b>	
✓	Create awareness, targeting women, about the risks associated with exposure to public life.
✓	Create awareness, targeting men, about the importance of women participating in formal paid employment.
✓	Incorporate awareness-raising about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention in programmes.

Overall, this assessment indicates that Siyatentela has benefited the community and poor women by way of employment creation, skills and knowledge transfer, improved access to socio-economic opportunities through access to cash and better transportation, thus positively impacting community welfare and livelihoods. It also indicates some areas for improvement and the need for monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the benefits to women and communities are actualised.

Having discussed in detail the Siyatentela case study, the next section presents the major conclusions and recommendations of the article.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

### 7.1 Recommendations

A number of key recommendations emanate from this project. The thread that runs through the *Zibambele*, *Gundo Lashu*, *Siyazondla*, *Sakhi Sizwe* and *Siyatentela* projects is that all in their different but similar ways are having positive and significant impacts on livelihood improvement and sustenance in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo Province, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga provinces. The agriculture, transport and roads sectors provide a genuine opportunity to involve in productive work and building a bridge between the main stream economy. Not only do the programmes equip poor rural households with life skills, the programmes have a developmental approach and impact on the rural socio-economic landscape. Based on findings from the case study of *Siyatentela* conducted and references to case studies and rapid appraisal surveys conducted in the other project areas there exists a need to upgrade and upscale such projects through rolling them to similar areas in the province, country and southern Africa region as part of the MDG contribution by the Province and SADC member states towards halving of poverty by 2014 goal. Nevertheless challenges exist in terms of lack of adequate staff especially in the science and technology fields to assist with technology and skills transfer. This means women have only learnt rudimentary skills, which are difficult to market and so dependent on the existence of the project for future income. Funding constraints also limit the rate and pace of up scaling and replication that may be desired. At the same time the lack of standard datasets for evaluation make it sometimes difficult to engage in cross-programme direct comparisons.

In conclusion, it should be highlighted that routine maintenance of road infrastructure and poor household agriculture development and sustainability are strategic intervention levers that act as catalyser for pro-poor growth and development. This allows access to socio-economic services such as local economic investments, education, health and security among others. This study finding corroborates international findings that underline the important role that locally based development initiatives have in transforming peoples' lives. In conclusion, the views of a councillor from O.R. Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape perhaps provide a lasting evaluation of why differentiated pathways out of poverty should be supported by all stakeholders in encouraging rural development. The words in verbatim are quoted hereunder:

*"...The benefits of rural road improvements from Sakha Sizwe relate to improved access and use of health, education and gender as well as improved mobility due to increased public transport availability, better staffed clinics and increased availability of medicines stocks, significant increases in outpatient visits to health care facilities. Improvements in the health sector that can be traced down to Siyazondla programme include facilities improved diets as vegetables, fruit and protein from such crops as beans become more available and affordable to villagers. I have also heard reports that girls enrolment has risen while absenteeism by both teachers and learners has decreased significantly. Recently I was having a meeting with a women empowerment group in my constituency. They reported that access to livelihood opportunities by women is continuously being improved, which they greatly appreciated..." (Extract of an interview with an O.R. Tambo Councillor, 26 October 2008).*

### 7.2 Concluding remarks

In most communities in rural South Africa, there is a preponderance of women in their demographic makeup. While women, children and youths comprise a significant proportion of the indigent, crucially they can also be instrumental in breaking the poverty cycle. Empirical evidence from *Siyatentela* case study in particular and *Zibambele*, *Siyazondla*, *Gundolashu* and *Sakha Isizwe* and other similar projects suggests that, besides creating employment opportunities for those least able to compete on the job market, bolstering women's incomes, productivity and empowerment is pivotal in positively transforming the rural socio-economic landscape in favour of sustainable livelihoods.

Impacts can be gleaned on multiple dimensions of poverty, in ways that are not always evident from only increasing men's income – from children's education, health and nutrition status through to local human capital development, productivity and economic growth. Thus, investing in employment-creating initiatives that target and affirm women, youths and disadvantaged is not only important for poverty alleviation and social justice, but it also makes good economic sense. Clearly, the need to mainstream programmes with such a clear developmental agenda in policy initiatives and practice cannot be over-emphasized. However, there is scope to consider some refinements and improvements to the ways in which households are selected for inclusion in such programmes. This study affirms both the need and importance of focusing on women, aged and youths in communities as well as the need to consider other major socio-economic factors intersecting with gender, disability such as the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and the youth.

The assessment showed that significant benefits could flow from such projects if they are implemented carefully, thoughtfully and diligently. Some factors that could be addressed in the future include greater attention to occupational safety, and the question of whether to increase hours and remuneration for some or spread budgets out to provide employment opportunities for more people in poor communities. Furthermore, the study showed that there were both practical and some strategic gender interests met through the project, and consideration should be paid, in particular, to how the outcomes in terms of the latter can be further enhanced, as this is important towards truly transforming women's, youth's and other previously disadvantaged groups' position in society. This could include, for example, empowering programmes and educational initiatives alongside such employment projects and ensuring that the project is continually monitored in terms of its impact on social empowerment alongside economic empowerment. Finally, it is important that empirical data and careful reflection thereon be continually generated and disseminated towards entrenching gender transformation in development policy and practice.

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