

REMUNERATION FOR COMMUNITY WORKS

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1. Background

1.1 The ILO helps developing countries to generate employment and to improve living conditions in rural areas through the creation and the subsequent use and maintenance of productive, economic or social infrastructure by means of Special Public Works Programmes (SPWPs). Ideally, these are multi-sectoral aggregations of labour-intensive, community-based projects and thus may encompass all types of rural works: feeder roads, village infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, self-help housing, small-scale irrigation, soil conservation, land reclamation and even afforestation. For the purposes of this note, the works done fall into three categories.

1.2 Public works are those in which the workers do not necessarily benefit from the assets created and are remunerated in full for their work, e.g. the construction of an irrigation scheme by labourers who will not have any irrigated land. In such cases, remuneration (which may be up to 50 per cent in kind) should at least be equal to the opportunity cost or the market price of labour, whichever is the higher. Thus, if a public works project fails to attract labour, it is almost certainly because the wages are too low.

1.2.1 Individual/Household works are those in which people work essentially for their own benefit, e.g. building themselves houses or pit latrines. In such cases, technical assistance is usually necessary and material assistance may be justified in some circumstances but there should be no remuneration, i.e. self-help labour.

1.2.2 Community works are those in which the workers are members of a community which will benefit directly from the creation of communal assets, e.g. villagers providing unskilled labour and locally available materials for the construction of village schools, clinics or water supply schemes. In such cases, both technical and material assistance are usually necessary but remuneration (which may be 100 per cent in kind) can range from zero to full remuneration. Failure to determine the appropriate level and form of remuneration is a common source of problems for community works projects.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this discussion note is to highlight some of the key factors affecting remuneration for community works and to illustrate specific aspects with a case study from Uganda.

3. Key factors affecting remuneration for community works

3.1 People are motivated to work on community development projects in several ways, notably by:

- their perception of the benefits accruing from the projects;
- social, religious or traditional obligations for mutual help;
- genuine community participation in the identification, planning and implementation of projects and in the use and maintenance of the assets created; and of course by
- remuneration, in cash or kind and, for many people, this may be the most important factor.

3.2 The main disincentives to working on community development projects are probably:

- the opportunity cost of the labour, especially for subsistence farmers who cannot afford to take unnecessary risks with their crops;
- an unfair distribution of work amongst members of the community;
- a highly individualistic, movement-oriented society; and
- the feeling that the government should provide the facilities and that community works are simply another way of exploiting the people.

3.3 From an essentially economic point of view, then, the perceived benefits (ideally the actual benefits) plus any remuneration should compensate participants for the opportunity cost of their labour and any risks they have taken with their livelihood. This proposition implies that:

- remuneration should vary from worker to worker (but this is unlikely to occur in practice); and that
- remuneration will probably be necessary whenever the perceived benefits are low and the opportunity cost of labour is high.

It also highlights the importance of:

- participants being fully informed of the actual benefits (and the contributions they will be required to make); and or
- programming community works to coincide with the agricultural slack season (when the opportunity cost of labour is low).

3.4 This proposition is modified, however, by socio-cultural factors which may encourage or discourage participation in community works. Social, religious and traditional obligations may foster community spirit and thus reduce the need for remuneration. It is even possible that a person who does not expect to benefit will participate in order to enhance his or her status in the community or simply to acquire merit. However, not all traditional mutual-help arrangements encourage the provision of free labour; many impose reciprocal obligations and serve to formalise the exchange of labour without money. In such cases, and those where community works are regarded as an unfair imposition, remuneration is likely to be required.

3.5 Thus, it is likely that community works will often involve some remuneration, the level of which should be determined from a socio-economic study of potential participants before work starts. This study should also determine the appropriate form of remuneration. Food for work is a common reward but it is not always the right answer:

- it can discourage agricultural production;
- it may fail to attract the desired workforce; and
- it may develop relief and social welfare features.

Cash or a combination of cash plus agricultural inputs and tools may be more appropriate. Community works should supplement agriculture not supplant it.

4. Case study for Uganda

4.1. Luwero District, some 60 Km north-west of Kampala, has been ravaged by successive waves of internal conflict. The infrastructure has been destroyed and the economy of this once productive and prosperous district has been crippled. In March 1986, the government invited the UNDP and the ILO to set up a SPWP to rehabilitate the infrastructure. initially in a pilot village, Kalege, and then throughout 63 hamlets of Semuto Sub-county. The pilot phase started in September 1986 and was completed at the end of February 1987. The expanded phase is now in progress.

4.2 The Village Resistance Committee (RCI) of Kalege was responsible for arranging labour for the community works. Workers were paid a wage higher than the government's minimum for four days/week but in return they were expected to contribute one day/week self-help labour, based on the traditional "burungi bwansi" system of mutual help.

4.3 In the initial phase of the pilot project the villagers, being mobilised by civil servants and cabinet ministers, were working once a week on a "burungi bwansi" basis (clearing feeder roads, digging murram and sand, planting trees along main road, etc.). However, in time the "burungi bwansi" activities collapsed and the direct interest of the villagers for the project decreased for a variety of reasons.

4.4 First, the villagers were probably not fully informed about the project's objectives. As a result, many people did not see themselves as beneficiaries and refused to work unless highly paid.

4.5 Secondly, there appeared to be a lack of mobilisers who, in close collaboration with the villagers, would clearly establish their priorities and motivate them for project activities such as road, school, cooperative store and other communal assets rehabilitation. In fact, only towards the end of the project's main activities the villagers have started working again on a self-help basis while technical and material inputs are provided by the project. These activities concern the rehabilitation of the school's pit latrine, headmaster's and teachers' houses as well as the catholic and protestant churches.

4.6 Thirdly, the village is situated in a very fertile area and agriculture has always played a predominant role in their economy. Thus, from the villagers' point of view, the short-term benefits of agricultural production by far seemed to outweigh the longer-term benefits of rehabilitating schools, clinics, etc.

4.7 In the case of Kalege, this was proved when, towards the end of the pilot phase, a tractor service assisting the peasants in opening up their fields was organised by the project. In return, peasants were willingly engaging themselves in project activities. This approach appeared to be very successful and is quite understandable from the fact that on the one hand the opportunity

cost of labour is high in this area and on the other hand working for project activities is not going to be at the expense of basic agricultural activities.

4.8 Finally, it may be that traditional socio-cultural factors play a very important role in the "burungi bwansi" system which had not been recognised in an earlier phase. For instance, the actual rehabilitation of a shallow well in Kalege was not initially supported by the villagers because they were of the opinion that clearing the well-site would drive off snakes and ghosts which could lead to the disappearance of the water in the well.

5. Issues for Discussion

5.1 Economic factors appeared to dominate the villagers' decisions but to what extent were these modified by socio-cultural factors?

5.2 What should the SPWP field staff and RCI members have done to encourage the villagers to participate voluntarily?

5.3 What level and form of remuneration would have been appropriate?

5.4 How should the SPWP staff approach the next phase of the project?

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