

## A RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (CBEP)

**Overview:** This policy brief highlights the issues that constrain CBEP from maximizing its potential as a social protection scheme. The issues discussed in this brief were raised by CBEP focal persons themselves during an ILS-sponsored roundtable discussion. These include targeting leakages, limited institutional capacity of implementers, absence of community involvement, and lack of sustainability for poverty reduction. Correspondingly, this brief presents recommendations that will address the identified gaps. One of which is the conduct of a rigorous impact evaluation that will provide valuable insights not only in enhancing CBEP but also in framing future development programs.

### What is the issue?

As a social protection measure, the Community-Based Employment Program (CBEP) seeks to provide temporary employment to workers through the infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects undertaken by several government agencies. It also covers emergency employment projects designed to serve as safety nets during contingencies of disasters and economic shocks. Overall, it aims to contribute to inclusive growth through poverty alleviation. It is assumed that the temporary employment and income support extended to the beneficiaries would consequently uplift them from poverty.

However, while the government regularly monitors CBEP in terms of its job creation results, little is known about the problems encountered in designing and implementing the projects, as well as its actual impact on poverty reduction.

Employment programs, which are implemented at a national scale, require efficient institutions. On the other hand, CBEP entails heavier institutional

requirements because it involves various tiers of the government. At the national level, government agencies or government-owned and/or-controlled corporations coordinate with DOLE for the enrolment of their respective CBEP projects. These projects would then have to be cascaded to the regional and provincial offices for implementation.

However, not all regional and provincial offices have the technical capacity to efficiently implement the projects. This deficiency gives rise to divergent impacts at the local level. Moreover, DOLE's limited resources restrains the Department from delivering its responsibility, as the chairperson of the CBEP Inter-Agency (IAC) monitoring committee, to carefully check the veracity of the submitted reports and the accuracy of the accounted beneficiaries. At present, DOLE's responsibility is confined to the consolidation of reports submitted by the implementing agencies.

Another major challenge which needs to be dealt with is targeting leakages, which undermine the potential of CBEP as a social protection scheme. Currently, there is no standard criterion for the selection of beneficiaries since CBEP is comprised of existing programs implemented by different agencies which also do not set clear-cut guidelines on targeting. Further,

while pertinent laws require the implementers to coordinate with the Public Employment Service Offices (PESOs) the employment of workers for the projects, none of these laws explicitly identify the specific groups targeted for employment. The method by which PESOs draw their list of beneficiaries is also not well defined.

The absence of community involvement in most stages of the program cycle likewise diminishes the prospects of achieving more favorable results from CBEP. A participatory approach in designing the projects could be an avenue to facilitate the exchange of ideas between the implementers and the stakeholders. This process would ensure that government resources would be spent on projects that would actually match the needs of the community (Deveraux & Solomon, 2006).

Ultimately, CBEP lacks sustainability, as a program, for poverty reduction. As an active labor market program, it is not wholly linked with other social protection programs such as the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT). After several years of implementation, it has not been empirically proven that the beneficiaries were lifted out of poverty solely because of CBEP.

### **What are the facts and figures?**

For the period 2011-2012, CBEP created a total of 3,562,536 jobs. This accomplishment represented only 80% of the target set at 4,440,112 jobs (DOLE, 2013).

On the other hand, it has been observed that the country's employment situation has not significantly improved as illustrated in the results of the Labor Force Survey (LFS). While unemployment slightly eased from 7.4% in 2010 to 7.0% in 2012, the number of unemployed persons is nevertheless stuck at around 2.8 million (Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics, 2013).

However, it must be noted that the number of jobs created by CBEP and the LFS data on employment generation are not entirely comparable. The CBEP Monitoring System counts jobs, which refer to the activities done by a person for a living. In contrast, LFS captures employment. Consistent with the international standards, the National Statistics Office (NSO) defines employment as persons (or individuals) 15 years old and over who are reported either at work or with a job but no work. Since CBEP estimates activities (jobs), it is quite likely that its accomplishment (number of jobs created) would be greater than the number of employed persons. Given that there are no restrictions on the number of times that a person could become a CBEP beneficiary, any eligible worker could be employed in more than one CBEP project for the same year. This could result in discrepancy between the LFS statistics and CBEP data as the former only counts the beneficiary/person once regardless of the number of jobs he/she held while the latter counts the number of times a person was engaged in CBEP projects.

While CBEP is supposedly expected to contribute to poverty reduction, no empirical evidence has been established to conclude that CBEP has delivered on its promise. To date, there has been no comprehensive evaluation conducted to determine if the desired results have been met. The available reports are limited only to the actual accomplishments of CBEP in terms of job creation and budget utilization.

## Why is the issue important?

The role of CBEP as a social protection measure cannot be overemphasized especially in times of natural disasters and economic downturns. However, to further enhance CBEP's potential in addressing the country's unemployment and poverty situation, it is essential to revisit previous experiences. The lessons learned by the implementing agencies should be taken into consideration in case the government decides to restructure CBEP.

## What should be done?

The following recommendations may be considered by policy and decision-makers in the likely event of revising the current CBEP guidelines:

- First, it would be crucial to clearly outline the targeting system. The absence of specific targeting strategies reduces the effectiveness of any social protection program. Existing poverty-related data, including the results of the National Household Targeting System (NHTS), could be utilized to provide empirical basis in the selection process.
- Second, capacity-building interventions must be extended to the implementers to enable them to efficiently deliver their respective tasks. It is significant to note that not all government institutions involved in CBEP have the technical competence required in the implementation and monitoring of the projects. Specific technical support must be given to concerned entities. Cooperation between the different layers of government must also be strengthened to avoid overlapping mandates.

- Third, the intended beneficiaries must be engaged in the entire program cycle. They could provide practical inputs that could contribute to the improvement of CBEP.
- Fourth, CBEP must be linked to other social protection programs to boost its sustainability for poverty reduction. Additionally, harmonizing all development programs would not only prevent leakages but would also accelerate the attainment of poverty reduction and inclusive growth.
- Fifth, a rigorous impact evaluation of CBEP must be conducted. This will inform policymakers of the specific gaps to be addressed, including the need to amend pertinent laws to avoid conflicting provisions. The results of an impact evaluation could also provide valuable insights in framing an appropriate design for future development programs.

## References

- Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics. (2013). *Current labor force statistics*.
- Department of Labor and Employment. (2013). *Community-Based Employment Program online monitoring and reporting system reference manual*.
- Deveraux, S., & Solomon, C. (2006). *Employment creation programs: The international experience*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

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#### **About the Policy Brief**

This policy brief is an abridged version of the full working paper, under the same research title, written by Ms. Maria Isabel D. Artajo, Senior Labor and Employment Officer, Institute for Labor Studies. This publication is regularly released by the Institute in support of the DOLE's contributions to ongoing national policy discourses on key labor and employment policy issues of the day.

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