The Community Work Programme

The Community Work Programme (CWP) is a public employment programme that provides two days of work per week to unemployed and underemployed people in economically marginalised areas. The CWP aims to be an employment safety net, ensuring a basic stable income for residents of CWP sites.

CWP participants are intended to do ‘useful work’, defined as work that ‘contributes to the public good, community goods or social services’ and assists with community development. This includes home-based care, early childhood development, support work at schools, community safety, and looking after the local environment by cleaning, building community gardens and planting trees.

In April 2014–March 2015 there were 202 599 participants at 186 CWP sites across South Africa. Of this total, 75% were women, and 42% were women above 35 years of age. In light of these figures, this policy brief looks at the prominent role (older) women play in the CWP, given their predominance in the programme. It discusses women participants’ effect on social cohesion and violence prevention in CWP sites.

CSVR’s study on the Community Work Programme

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) has been involved in research on the CWP and its impact on violence and crime prevention since 2013.

In light of these figures, this policy brief looks at the prominent role (older) women play in the CWP, given their predominance in the programme. It discusses women participants’ effect on social cohesion and violence prevention in CWP sites.

Policy brief 1 outlines the purpose of the CWP and how it can be a vehicle for community development and contribute to economic and social inclusion.

Policy brief 2 looks at the CWP’s overall impact on crime and violence.

For more CSVR research on the CWP, including site-specific reports, see www.csvr.org.za.
WHY WOMEN ARE PREDOMINANT IN THE CWP

While the national unemployment rate is higher for women than for men, far more women participate in the CWP than can be explained by unemployment figures.

Women make up more than 80% of participants in some sites, such as Ivory Park in Gauteng. In addition, women represent the majority of coordinators, office staff and in some cases management at CWP sites.

Before discussing violence prevention, this brief outlines what participants generally view as the benefits of working in the CWP. It describes how participation in the CWP is compatible with older and younger women’s priorities in terms of their personal, familial and community responsibilities. It also provides some insights on why this draws more women than men to the programme.

What participants see as the benefits of working in the CWP

CSVR’s research shows that participants overall are positive about the CWP. While all participants who were interviewed state that the CWP wage is too low – an average of R608 a month – they note that the programme allows them to earn a stable monthly wage while meeting their responsibilities.

The regular income increases the financial independence of unemployed and underemployed participants, enabling them to contribute to the overall income of their households, have more control over how household income is spent and participate in community activities that involve a financial contribution.

Another benefit is that most CWP work is not physically demanding. Many CWP sectors do not entail physically demanding work, such as manual labour, long periods of standing or walking, or exposure to task-related hazardous conditions. Some participants are also able to split the two days of work across the week. For example, participants may work four hours a day, four days a week.

The main benefit identified by participants is that the CWP enables them to work close to home. This cuts the costs and safety risks of transport to work, which would otherwise usually be located outside their communities. It also allows participants to keep an eye on their households and respond to the needs of family members at home on short notice.

The CWP offers empowerment and mutual support. It provides participants with work experience and basic training, and exposes them to a broader range of people in their community, along with government and civil society stakeholders. Many report an increased sense of dignity, new leadership skills, a greater understanding of community dynamics and more access to information and resources. Participants also say that working with the CWP provides relief from stresses at home, along with the emotional and material support of other participants.

BENEFITS

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WHY WOMEN ARE DRAWN TO THE CWP

The nature and structure of CWP work, which participants describe as benefits of the programme, are a significant draw for women residents of CWP sites.

Women participants focus on working close to home as the main benefit of the programme. They say it enables them to meet their obligations as caregivers, ensuring that their dependents are fed each day. As is the case globally, women in South Africa tend to be the primary caregivers in their households, with men playing a far smaller role in this regard.ii Women CWP participants are caregivers mainly to children, but also to family members of various ages who are managing an illness or disability. Working within CWP sites allows women participants to respond quickly to emergencies at home. Many work in the CWP in the morning, which allows them to care for young children after crèche or school.

This is especially relevant as most women participants interviewed report that they experienced long-term unemployment (more than a year without work) before joining the CWP. Many had to leave their previous employment as a result of falling pregnant or needing to care for small children or for ill or disabled family members. Often related to these factors, some had never been employed before.

Women participants also note that the stable income, although small, enables them to plan for the month and ensure some food security for their household. The CWP wage lends women participants a degree of financial independence, which they value as it gives them greater control over how the household income is used and allows them to meet their responsibilities as caregivers more effectively. Many women participants use the CWP wage in combination with child support grants from the state, another small but stable source of income at R320 per child per month. Some combine it with a care dependency grant for disabled children of R1 420 a month.

A number of women participants state that increased financial independence has created tension in their household, because of their greater control over finances and their sense of personal empowerment. Several report an increase in domestic violence from their male partners or family members, including grown children. Most participants, however, emphasise the benefits to their dependents and themselves of earning a stable wage, downplaying any risks that joining the CWP may entail.

Women participants especially value the empowerment and support they receive through the CWP. Along with new skills, they highlight their pride in being able to better contribute not only to their household but also to their community. Many women participants and coordinators note that they did community work on a volunteer basis before joining the CWP. As will be discussed in detail below, this suggests that women are also drawn to the CWP because it builds on social networks in their community, and enables them both to earn a small wage for doing community work and to have an impact on a larger number of community members.
WHY THERE ARE MORE OLDER THAN YOUNGER WOMEN IN THE CWP

As noted, women made up 75% of CWP participants in April 2014–March 2015. Women under age 35 made up 33% of participants, 64% of whom remained in the programme for more than a year. Women above age 35 made up 42%, with 76% remaining in the CWP for more than a year. This shows that the CWP attracts and retains older women in greater numbers than young women.

Yet, the 2015 national unemployment rate for women aged 15–34 was 40.7%, compared to 18.4% for women aged 35–64, which implies that the CWP would attract younger women participants more than older ones.

While they express similar reasons for being drawn to the CWP, young women participants more often report an intention to exit the CWP for other work, whether full-time or part-time, formal or informal. CSVR’s research suggests that young women participants, who often do not have matric or previous work experience, see the CWP as an opportunity to receive basic skills training and become more work-ready. Some view the CWP as an opportunity to study part-time towards a matric or, in a few cases, additional qualifications. Others view the CWP as interim employment, having completed a short-term contract and applied for other jobs. A number have left and then returned to the CWP. Older women participants and coordinators often prioritise trainings for young women participants so they can permanently exit the CWP.

Ultimately, however, young women report that they see the CWP as a programme for older people who do not have other options and likely will remain in the CWP in the long term. This perception accounts for much of the difference in participation rates among younger and older women, but it is important to note that young women’s participation in the CWP is still substantial at 33%.

A significant number of participants in the CWP are over 45, with many around 60. Participants say that women participants in this cohort have largely given up looking for other work, arguing that this is because employers do not hire older women, especially those without matric and other qualifications.

CSVR research suggests an additional reason for the large number of older women in the programme. Many participants in this cohort either receive a disability grant or have access, in the present or within a few years, to an older person’s grant. Each of these grants provides up to R1 420 a month. In addition, the CWP does not have limits on the maximum age of participants or on the length of time participants can work in the programme. While a number of younger women participants live with chronic illnesses that have made other employment difficult to access, with some medically boarded from work, it is mainly older women participants struggling with medical problems linked to growing older who see the CWP as a viable employment option.

Older women participants value the CWP because they can have a stable income from the combination of wages and state grants, and do work that is less demanding in terms of physical exertion, hours and exposure to safety risks, while meeting their caregiving obligations in the household and expanding on their community involvement.
WHY MEN PARTICIPATE LESS IN THE CWP

Men represented 25% of CWP participants in April 2014–March 2015. Men under age 35 made up nearly 12% of participants, with 55% staying in the programme for longer than a year. Men over age 35 made up 13% of participants, with 71% staying for longer than a year. This means that older men are more drawn to the CWP than younger men. They stay longer, and many have no plans to exit the programme. CSVR’s research suggests that some of the benefits older women participants see in the CWP also apply to older men, specifically being able to continue working but in a job that is not physically demanding, and combining the CWP wage with a disability or older person’s grant.

Nonetheless, men are a minority among participants and coordinators in the CWP. Women participants complain that men are ‘too lazy’ to join the programme, but CSVR’s research suggests other explanations. One is that men, especially young men, are not as concerned with receiving a stable income, and rely instead on casual or piecemeal work through which they can earn as much or more than CWP participants do in a month. While women report depending on a stable income in their role as caregivers, men have more flexibility in how they contribute to the household income, which allows them to wait for better-paying work.

Another major reason for men’s lower participation appears to be inaccurate perceptions about the programme. CSVR’s research shows that many men perceive the CWP to be a programme for the elderly, specifically for elderly women. Some see the work, such as cleaning and caring, as ‘women’s work’ not suitable for men but also designed by government to be done by women. Many view it as a dead end, offering no exit opportunities for participants. For these reasons and because CWP activities are done locally, men often believe that working in the CWP would negatively affect their social standing in the community.

However, these associations come primarily from a lack of awareness of what the CWP is and what it does, with many men believing it to be just older women doing street cleaning. Not many report having received any specific information on the CWP or having a clear idea of the location of the local CWP office. Women more often report being aware of the CWP and its various sectors. This suggests that, in addition to the CWP more directly meeting the personal and familial needs of women, knowledge about the CWP is shared through women’s social networks within communities.
As noted above, a number of women participants and coordinators did community work before joining the CWP. While some of the community work was through government or civil society structures, much of it was done informally and on a volunteer basis. Some women participants see the CWP as a continuation of what they always did in the community. Others see the CWP as actively bringing people together and boosting their ability to improve the community. In either case the CWP mirrors social networks in the sites, and CSVR’s research suggests that these community networks are primarily among women.

Reflecting trends across South Africa and elsewhere, women participants note that women are generally more involved in community affairs than men. They say that it is mostly women who attend faith-based and cultural events, school events, localised development initiatives and other community-based meetings. They participate in stokvels, burial societies and other mutual support schemes. Through such activities, women share information about community-based initiatives, including the CWP. In fact, participants report that they learned about the CWP by word of mouth, rather than from advertisements.

This suggests that women’s predominance in the CWP is an extension of their participation in community life. Through this participation women find out about what the CWP does and how to apply to the programme. Because participants are mainly women, women also have a better chance of learning about and applying for senior positions when they become available, which contributes to their predominance among coordinators and office staff. In this sense, the CWP draws on and benefits from social cohesion among women within sites.

The CWP also builds this social cohesion. Women participants pride themselves on working for their community. They say residents approach them with problems because of their access to information and resources and links to other community structures. Many note that working with the CWP increases their understanding of their community and compassion towards different types of people. The work allows them to transfer their skills to others, especially to younger participants.

Within the CWP itself, most participants and coordinators report a collegial feeling, noting that they resolve problems internally. They report no significant tension between women and men in the CWP, including in cases where men participants work under women coordinators. Long-time participants who have built relationships in their team especially tend to talk about the mutual respect in the CWP.

The CWP can have a negative effect on social cohesion, for example where participants are allocated positions based on political affiliation or racial identity, or where CWP activities are not guided by community priorities. But CSVR’s research shows that the CWP supports existing relationships and helps form new relationships. It can also increase links between and understanding among participants and community members, helping participants do their community work more effectively.

One area in which this social cohesion comes through is CWP activities on crime and violence prevention, which have largely been driven by women participants.

### How the CWP supports social cohesion

- Promoting social and economic inclusion.
- Increasing social links among participants and other community members.
- Providing a foundation for relationships of mutual support, solidarity and greater care within communities.
- Supporting the willingness and ‘collective efficacy’ of community members to take action to advance community interests.
- Selecting activities that build social cohesion:
  - Targeting marginalised groups (e.g., ex-offenders, domestic violence victims, indigent households).
  - Promoting common activities among disparate sections of the community (e.g., across gang boundaries).
  - Mobilising the community for a common cause (e.g., anti-crime marches).

For more see policy briefs 1 and 2.

### How the CWP draws on and builds social cohesion

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HOW WOMEN CONTRIBUTE TO CRIME AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION THROUGH THE CWP

The CWP does not have an explicit crime and violence prevention agenda. In some sites participants say that the CWP should not do safety work, as it may place participants in danger and should be the responsibility of police. Yet CWP sites are marginalised communities with generally high rates of crime and violence. Participants note that children in their communities from early on are exposed to incidents of violence, along with substance abuse, both on area streets and in their households. They say that it is hard for children and young people not to be pulled into violence. In these environments CWP participants end up engaging in activities that indirectly and at times directly address violence. As elaborated in the discussion of Manenberg below, social cohesion among women participants enables them to drive these initiatives.

In terms of indirect violence prevention, much CWP work can be seen as primary prevention, which addresses ‘risk factors’ that may lead children and youth into crime and violence. Examples of CWP participants’ primary prevention efforts are early childhood development, care work in child-headed households and support work at schools. Recreational activities and mentoring with children and youth can have a similar effect.

Primary prevention extends into participants’ own households, as participants note that earning a wage through the CWP allows them to provide a more stable home for children and youth, working close to home helps them monitor children’s activities and working with the CWP provides them with new skills for addressing ‘risk factors’ in their families.

In some sites the CWP does direct violence prevention. One approach is providing advice and information at local police stations. Participants support victims and other community members to access resources for coping with domestic violence, violence against women, child abuse and gang-related youth violence. Another approach is organising marches, rallies and public education events to raise awareness about different forms of violence, how they affect the community and how they can be addressed.

Participants also patrol CWP sites, including late at night and in the early morning when residents are heading to work, seeking to prevent crime, violence and behaviour associated with ‘risk factors’. In addition, they patrol schools to prevent violence between learners and address ‘risky’ behaviour such as substance abuse and selling drugs or cigarettes. Even something as simple as cutting tall grass at ‘crime hotspots’ can reduce opportunities for criminals to conceal themselves and lower the likelihood of attacks. (For more detailed information on CWP and violence prevention see policy brief 2.)

Women participants are the main contributors to both indirect and direct violence prevention through the CWP. Women participants undertake most of the primary violence prevention, as it involves care work and work with children and youth in homes and schools that is commonly performed by women. Because these activities may be seen as ‘women’s work’, women participants’ contribution to violence prevention is often not adequately recognised.

Women also perform much of the direct violence prevention. Because such activities are not part of CWP’s formal agenda, women participants and coordinators initiate the programme’s involvement in violence prevention at the sites, identifying priorities through their community-based social networks and integrating community work they performed before into CWP’s activities. In some sites decisions regarding such activities are taken through formal structures, such as a community-based local reference committee, but in many they are taken independently by those who implement them (and often in the absence of such structures). Men participants certainly contribute to violence prevention, but the predominance of women in various positions at site level means that they are usually the drivers of this work.

Research at the Manenberg CWP site provides insight into how women participants’ gender roles and the social cohesion within their community-based social networks shapes their direct violence prevention efforts.

EXAMPLES OF CWP MOBILISATION AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In Alexandra the CWP started a campaign, ‘Today He Gave Her Flowers’, to raise awareness about domestic violence and violence against women using marches and protests.

In Orange Farm the CWP together with the Community Police Forum implemented domestic violence awareness campaigns.

In Orange Farm and Manenberg participants working in the advice office at the local police station provide support and advice to domestic violence victims, assisting them to file protection orders and access services.

In Manenberg participants in the safety sector are called by residents to intervene in domestic violence incidents, defusing the situation and advising the victims of their rights when possible or contacting the police after assessing the situation.

For more examples of CWP violence prevention initiatives see policy brief 2.
The Manenberg CWP site, which is based in the ‘Cape Flats’ area of Cape Town, faces high rates of crime and violence stemming from gangsterism. This site has been especially active in direct and indirect violence prevention.

The coordinators and office staff at the site, the majority of whom are older women, were involved in formal and informal community work before the CWP and have integrated much of this experience into CWP activities. Women participants, many of whom also engaged in community work before hearing about the CWP through friends and neighbours, are the main implementers of direct violence prevention initiatives in Manenberg.

As the examples below show, these participants’ role as ‘mothers of the community’ – as maternal figures who have strong social networks in their community – helps them in their crime and violence prevention work. While older women own this role to a greater extent, younger women also participate in and acquire skills from the activities.

Manenberg participants, both women and men, note that young men, who are the main participants in crime, violence and ‘risky’ behaviour, are less likely to be verbally and physically aggressive with older women participants on patrol or in schools than with men participants. They suggest that, in addition to often knowing women participants from the neighbourhood, young men see them as maternal figures. Whether this means that the women command respect or project weakness in their eyes, young men risk losing face in front of their peers if they respond to interventions by female participants with aggression.

Women participants also say they have developed a gentler approach than men usually adopt in interacting with young men at risk, using a respectful, ‘motherly’ tone and putting dialogue before discipline. They note that young women involved in ‘risky’ behaviour also respond positively to this approach.

In one case, a long-time neighbourhood watch group has become a CWP team. Manned by women participants and a coordinator, the team patrols the streets of one area of Manenberg, keeping an eye on ‘crime
hotspots’ such as drug houses. Because they have worked in the area for many years, residents trust the participants and often contact them before they do the police if there is a disturbance in the area or they believe a local youth is engaging in ‘risky’ behaviour. In addition to preventing crimes such as robbery, house breaking and drug dealing through visible patrolling, the participants are called to intervene in instances of domestic abuse. They report using a similarly gentle, conversational approach in these cases. If the participants feel they cannot handle a situation, they contact the police, with whom they have built a relationship.

In another case, CWP participants and coordinators motivated for the site to organise weekly marches against gang-related violence in Manenberg. Dubbed ‘Take Back Our Streets’, the 2014 marches responded to an intensification in gang violence and aimed to unite the community against gang violence as well as show children and youth an alternative to gangsterism. In addition to women participants driving the marches, the majority of community members in attendance were women. While this is partly due to the risk of violence that attending such a march poses for men in Manenberg, whether they are in a gang or not, women participants say that it is also due to women’s greater investment in community affairs and to women participants mobilising their social networks.

It is also worth noting that the Manenberg CWP has a long-running ex-offender programme, providing training and an income to parolees, mostly men, who often cannot find other employment after prison. The aim is to keep ex-offenders from returning to crime while assisting them to reintegrate into the community. This programme is run by a woman coordinator.

These examples demonstrate that social cohesion among women in Manenberg, which is formalised and built on by the CWP, has contributed to crime and violence prevention in the site. They show that, in the absence of a mandate from government or the implementing agent, participants have initiated direct violence prevention activities themselves. In addition, as Manenberg has not had the guidance of a local reference committee or other formal entity, the participants’ violence prevention activities and approaches have emerged from years of informal community engagement and feedback from social networks. Participants and coordinators in the Manenberg safety sector have attended two or three training sessions on community safety organised by police and by municipal or provincial government. Otherwise, they have managed to implement their violence prevention activities with little institutional support. Participants report that the limited engagement of the implementing agent and of government stakeholders in the site, combined with a decreasing budget for CWP, is inhibiting their ability to implement their initiatives.

Manenberg participants seek additional, more specialised training and better equipment. They also suggest that better communication and more active engagement from the implementing agent, along with partnerships with government departments, such as the Departments of Correctional Services, Community Safety and Education, would assist them in improving their crime and violence prevention initiatives and introducing new ones.
How to Bolster Women Participants’ Contributions Through the CWP

The example of the Manenberg CWP site demonstrates how much members of marginalised communities can do with limited resources. Despite receiving little official support to date, and despite working for a small wage that comes with no job security or benefits, women participants continue to invest much time and effort in CWP and to contribute to the programme’s successes.

Since CWP is designed primarily an employment safety net, it faces a number of financial and operational constraints. Based on CSVR research and participant input, the following recommendations outline ways in which government, implementing agents and other stakeholders can work within these constraints to support women participants’ initiatives in the CWP.

1. Acknowledge and build public awareness of the contribution of women participants and coordinators in the CWP and their communities. This includes recognising that women participants’ work indirectly contributes to violence prevention, and supporting approaches to direct violence prevention developed by women participants.

2. Provide monetary, technical and programmatic assistance to participants in developing and maintaining their initiatives in each site. Effective site management and responsive implementing agents can help build on women’s knowledge and work in the community, strengthening social cohesion and contributing to violence prevention efforts.

3. In line with the second recommendation, and after consultation with sites, ensure that participants receive more specialised and targeted training within the CWP and in partnership with local government departments and civil society stakeholders. Tailored trainings are more context-responsive and cost-effective than general trainings.

4. Set up systems for participants to communicate their issues and ideas with site management, implementing agents and government, in order to harness their knowledge and initiatives. A learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation system with feedback loops among these stakeholders is a useful tool in this regard.
In addition to supporting current CWP participants, these recommendations apply to encouraging a broader range of unemployed and underemployed residents of CWP sites to join the programme, specifically young men and young women. Informational campaigns would show the variety of CWP activities and clarify how recruitment works. Better community consultation would not only spread information about the CWP but also assist sites in identifying CWP activities that attract young men and women. Tailored trainings may draw younger participants to the CWP, with the idea that new skills and work experience would increase their employability and likelihood of exiting the programme. Better communication among stakeholders and effective site management would improve the CWP’s image in communities and counter concerns about social standing.

However, this policy brief demonstrates the ways in which the CWP works for women and women work for the CWP. The contribution of women, especially older women, to innovation and effectiveness within the CWP needs to be fostered. While the CWP works to spread its safety net beyond current participants, it should not neglect participants who face a variety of obstacles in the current employment context – old age, physical constraints and household responsibilities, in addition to limited education, skills and work experience. This brief shows the extent to which these participants are the ones who make the CWP a community-based programme.

5. In line with CWP guidelines, ensure that sites have effective local reference committees that include CWP participants and staff, community leaders, representatives of local government stakeholders and civil society. This will again harness the knowledge of participants’ social networks and formalise community consultation in determining CWP priorities in each site.

6. In light of participants’ indirect and direct violence prevention efforts, ensure that participants have access to psychosocial counselling and basic training on working with children and adults who have experienced crime and violence. This also helps mitigate the effects of violence women participants may face at home, especially in cases where the income and empowerment that comes from working with the CWP creates tension in households.

7. Launch national and site-specific information campaigns to raise awareness about the CWP mandate, operations and benefits.


This policy brief is based on a review of the case studies of the CWP in Orange Farm, Ivory Park, Kagiso, Grabouw and Manenberg, and on primary research at the Manenberg CWP site. See also, Fairuz Mullagee with David Bruce, Building a Good Nation in Manenberg: A Case Study of the Manenberg Community Work Programme (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2015).

Bruce, “Preventing Crime and Violence”.


Bruce, “Preventing Crime and Violence”.

Statistics South Africa, National and Provincial Labour Market: Youth (June 2014).

Overcoming the Legacy of Discrimination in South Africa: Final Report (2005). Men tend to be more involved in work-related social networks and in community-based activities that are related to local politics or to employment opportunities.

Social cohesion in this research was understood as cooperation, inclusive relationships and consensus-based conflict resolution.
