

'I don't want to go back to the farm': A case study of Working for Water beneficiaries

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In addition to clearing invasive alien plants, the Working for Water (WfW) Programme, as a South African government public works programme, provides short-term employment and training to empower the poor in finding alternative employment within the labour market. Several studies indicate that its beneficiaries become financially dependent on WfW projects and tend to be reluctant to leave the programme. The sociological reasons for this reluctance, however, remain largely unstudied. We therefore address this gap by reporting on a case study of four WfW projects in the Western Cape Province. Face-to-face interviews with beneficiaries suggest that a number of push and pull factors contribute to their dependency on WfW. Chief among these factors is a fear among previous farmworkers of returning to farm work. It was found that the latter can be linked to a historical power-relations legacy between landowners and farmworkers, mainly created by institutional racism still prevailing on many Western Cape farms. These findings bear important implications for the implementation of a new draft WfW policy aimed at encouraging private landowners to employ WfW beneficiaries on their land as clearers of invasive alien plants.

Introduction

Initiated in the mid-1990s by the then Minister of Water Affairs, Professor Kadar Asmal,¹ the Working for Water (WfW) Programme is aimed at eradicating invasive alien plants (IAPs) while providing much needed employment in South Africa.² It is a short-term government public works programme (PWP), largely aimed at creating temporary work opportunities for the unemployed. Through skills training, the WfW Programme also aims to enhance the ability of people to earn an income after they have left the programme.³ However, research shows that beneficiaries have become 'reluctant to leave the security of the WfW Programme and find the prospects of seeking employment beyond the confines of the WfW Programme daunting'⁴. WfW beneficiaries' perceptions of WfW as a source of financial security, and their preferences for its teamwork approach, have also been noted.⁵⁻⁷

One aim of PWPs globally is to enable the poor to form and utilise beneficial social networks in their working environment.⁸ This function of PWPs partly originates from the late 1900s, when these workfare programmes were conceived as safety nets for the poor within an increasing liberalised market economy.⁹ Such programmes are still aimed at supporting the poor through the provision of employment and training, rather than by merely providing government welfare grants, in order to encourage their independence from the state.¹⁰⁻¹³ International examples of such PWPs include the Trabajar Programme in Argentina¹⁴, the Employment Guarantee Scheme in India¹⁵, and the Slovenian PWP¹⁶. In terms of alleviating poverty, the effectiveness of such programmes has been documented elsewhere.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ In general, as Devereux²⁰ states, such social safety nets are often regarded by neo-liberal critics as '[...] fiscally unaffordable compensatory mechanisms that make no effective contribution to sustained poverty reduction'.

Although such critique may also have relevance for WfW, no in-depth, sociological analysis has yet been conducted of the reasons underlying WfW beneficiaries' reluctance to leave WfW projects. Because WfW currently endeavours to provide employment of only a temporary nature, understanding such reluctance is crucial. This article contributes to such understanding, and thereby also provides a social perspective on the issue of IAPs, which very few studies in South Africa have as yet attempted. For example, none of the 13 articles on IAP eradication published since 1997 in the *South African Journal of Science* consider the perspectives of the workers who eradicate these plants. The article also provides much needed insight into the way in which those who make use of the work opportunities offered by PWPs in South Africa view their work and make employment-related choices.

The research reported in this article was aimed at exploring beneficiaries' reluctance to leave WfW, by examining particular WfW projects that absorb workers who used to work on horticultural farms. Historically, relationships among landowners and their workers in these regions have tended to be paternalistic and exploitative.^{21,22} Against this background, we explore the reasons why most beneficiaries seem to be reluctant to leave these projects, as well as their voluntary substitution of farm work for WfW employment.

The relevance of the research reported here is also linked to the fact that WfW is currently drafting a policy aimed at broadening its ambit to include IAP-clearing operations on private land.²³ Consequently, those beneficiaries, many of whom have previously worked on farms, who become independent contractors after their term at WfW ends, may have to approach landowners for IAP-clearing contracts. Recognition of and sensitivity to the history of paternalistic and often exploitative relationships between landowners and farmworkers is, however, absent from the draft policy. The findings reported here therefore have broader policy relevance and implications, by identifying potential problems that may be experienced in the implementation of this policy, as well as by making recommendations for implementing IAP-eradication projects on private land, which would consider the historical relationship between landowners as employers and the workers they employ.

The WfW Programme in South Africa

Working for Water is a multi-departmental initiative, administered by the Department of Water Affairs and, as a South African PWP, supported by the Department of Public Works.²⁴ Considering the alarming increase across

South Africa in IAPs (i.e. species introduced mostly by global travel^{25,26} that therefore occur outside their natural distribution range and which outcompete indigenous species²⁷), WfW's clearing of these species is considered imperative. It is estimated that IAPs currently infest 20 million hectares of South African land.²⁸ Among the many risks they pose, IAPs are also a serious threat to South Africa's fresh water, as these plants consume more water than indigenous vegetation.²⁹⁻³¹ In addition, the need to remove IAPs provides an opportunity to alleviate poverty and provide skills training to the poor.

Generally, PWPs were first established in South Africa during the 1990s to provide financial relief to the poor, while building their capacity and those of their communities, in order to stimulate economic development.³² Today, these programmes, as administered by the Department of Public Works, are aimed at, '[...] providing poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out socially useful activities'³³. PWPs are also a means of providing income protection to beneficiaries and their households,³⁴ thereby assisting the poor in accessing basic services, or alleviating the impact of financial shocks. In 2004, the scope of PWPs in South Africa was broadened by the launching of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP),³⁵ which formed part of the government's response to rising levels of unemployment.³⁶ In 2002, a Code of Good Practice for EPWP employment was originally published as a Government Notice under the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997* (this was amended in 2011).³⁷ According to this code, PWPs, such as WfW, must discharge (or, as it is referred to in policy, 'exit') those beneficiaries who have participated in projects for more than 2 years in a project cycle of 5 years. Although WfW currently endeavours to 'exit' its beneficiaries accordingly, this approach is in the process of being amended to provide longer-term employment to beneficiaries.³⁸

One way in which WfW strives to exit beneficiaries is through its Contractor Development Approach (CDA).³⁹ Under this task-based system, IAP-clearing operations are performed by contractor teams. Such teams consist of 11 workers and a contractor, with workers being compensated by the contractor on the completion of a contract. A team may consist only of general clearers, or of employees who fulfil more specialised roles, such as chainsaw operators, brush-cutters, herbicide applicators or health and safety officers.³⁹ A project manager is allocated to each WfW project. Once a contractor team has been assembled, project managers often support contractors in tendering, on a quotation basis, for contracts to the maximum of R30 000. As contracts are not always available, project managers and some contractors encourage their workers to seek other employment in-between contracts. The CDA also assumes that general workers will progress, through training and support offered by WfW, to become contractors themselves. In this way, according to a former WfW senior manager, the CDA aims to empower beneficiaries to establish 'micro-enterprises'. One goal of the CDA is then to create contractor teams, managed by independent contractors who should, ideally, have the capacity to undertake IAP-clearance work on a contractual basis, but independently from WfW.⁵

In response to recent legislation requiring landowners to 'prepare a plan for the monitoring, control and eradication of invasive species occurring on their land'⁴⁰, WfW is currently drafting a policy to provide incentives for private landowners to use WfW contractor teams to clear IAPs on their land.²³ In April 2009, a workshop was held in Cape Town to discuss this policy on the clearing of IAPs outside the borders of protected areas.^{41,42} During this workshop, some attention was devoted to creating opportunities for contractors and their teams to enter the labour market by tendering for contracts on private land, i.e. for projects beyond those provided by WfW. This draft policy is ultimately envisioned to create an enabling environment for beneficiaries to exit in accordance to WfW's exit strategy. Another objective of this policy is to '[...] build relationships between landowners and the contract clearing teams [of WfW]'²³. However, as the findings we report here show, highly unequal power relationships between landowners and farmworkers, and racism still persist in the Western Cape and may render this relationship-building objective highly challenging. Fulfilling this objective requires a critical assessment, not only of the likelihood of landowners employing WfW

contractors on their land, but also of the latter's willingness and capacity to engage in such a labour market, independently from WfW.

Potential benefits associated with being a WfW beneficiary

In a previous study on WfW beneficiaries,⁴ most of the respondents indicated a preference for remaining in WfW, with more than half affirming that they would never choose to leave. This finding prompted the question: If WfW endeavours to only serve as a 'bridge' into more sustained, independent employment, why do its beneficiaries feel reluctant to leave the programme? Previous research on PWPs in general, and WfW in particular, provides an indication that WfW beneficiaries associate a number of benefits with WfW employment, which may contribute to this reluctance.

Financial stabilisation

Considering the increasingly insecure nature of farm employment, it is not surprising that WfW projects engender perceptions of employment security. In one WfW study,⁴ some beneficiaries reported feeling so secure within WfW that they would recommend such work to friends, whereas having to search for alternative employment provoked strong feelings of insecurity. Such findings are also echoed by the results of research on other PWPs, which shows that many PWP beneficiaries in South Africa prefer remaining within such programmes, which they view as providing them with financial stability and security.³⁶ Illustrating this, a study conducted by McCord of the Zimbabwe PWP found that its beneficiaries explicitly valued the predictability of regular wages and employment offered by this programme.³⁶ Therefore, McCord argues that it is this stabilisation effect that transfers long-term benefits to the beneficiaries of such programmes, and which contributes to sustained poverty reduction.

Sense of connection and belonging to teams

A different form of security that relates to conditions of employment derives from the experience of team membership. It is often argued that traditional welfare grants tend to socially isolate recipients of such grants to a greater extent than PWPs do, as the latter enables beneficiaries to socially interact and build networks in a working environment.⁸ Kim and Zurlo⁴³ also mention that PWPs are advocated on the grounds that they prevent the poor from becoming socially excluded.

Although farm work in many cases also involves teamwork tasks, it appears that WfW's strong emphasis on teamwork, which implies that beneficiaries rarely, if ever, work alone, leads to perceptions of such work as 'safe' in a social sense,⁴ and engenders feelings of belonging. Previous research has indicated that some WfW beneficiaries are incapable of operating independently and that they need the support provided by WfW's teams.⁶

In summary, previous research shows that PWP employment, such as that offered by WfW, tends to provide benefits associated with income stabilisation and social interaction. This finding may in part explain why many beneficiaries seem to be reluctant to leave WfW. However, the broader social context in which particular projects are embedded needs to be taken into account as well.

The labour-relations context in the Western Cape

In this section, the context of the paper will be developed through a consideration of the history of paternalistic labour relations, as well as prevailing labour relations and the increasing casualisation of labour on farms in the Western Cape region.

South Africa is characterised by chronic poverty.⁴⁴ In the past, in many rural areas, racism and exploitative relationships between landowners and farmworkers intensified cycles of poverty, and contributed to the marginalisation of farmworkers. Within the horticultural industry of the Winelands and Overberg Districts, such relationships have been described as paternalistic, as they have involved the exploitation of

workers by some farmers (or landowners) within a culture of servitude, obedience and enduring racism,^{21,45} and have often entailed mutual obligations and rights between farmworkers and landowners akin to the relationship between a father and his children.²¹ Such paternalistic relationships also involve workers' 'loyalty' or submission to farmers' authority, in exchange for the farmers' protection of workers' well-being, often in the form of provision of housing to on-farm permanent workers.⁴⁶ Paternalism is usually accompanied by a highly racialised relationship between White, superior 'masters' and Black, subordinate workers.^{21,46} Racism thus often involves the degrading of farmworkers, thereby increasing the control that the White farm owner or manager has over his workers.

Although it is argued that such relationships on farms in the Winelands and Overberg Districts have changed, many scholars maintain that paternalism and racism persist,^{21,45,47} although modified by changes in labour relations.²¹ For example, the deciduous fruit export sector of the Western Cape underwent major policy changes in the 1990s, partly in response to farmers attempting to save labour costs by downsizing their permanent workforce,⁴⁷ and utilising the services of contractors to supply them with workers on a casual and temporary basis. Although landowners do continue to employ on-farm permanent workers, the growing importance of temporary, off-farm workers in performing many core farm tasks is supported by the literature.²¹

According to Du Toit and Ewert²¹, this casualisation trend towards sourcing off-farm contract workers on a casual, seasonal basis has rendered farm work increasingly uncertain and insecure and farmworkers highly vulnerable,⁴⁷ not least because many of them have been evicted from farms. Many of these evicted workers return to farms for contract employment during harvest seasons,⁴⁵ as this work, insecure as it might be, is often the only employment available. It is within this context, as this article will show, that the WfW Programme is fulfilling an important role.

Study methodology

We report on a case study of beneficiaries' dependence on four WfW projects, each situated in a CapeNature reserve and catchment area in the Western Cape Province. CapeNature is a public institution responsible for the conservation of biodiversity in this province.⁴⁸ One of the institution's mandates includes alien vegetation management to combat the spread of IAPs by means of labour-intensive methods that create employment opportunities. In order to fulfil this mandate, CapeNature has, for a number of years, selected specific WfW projects within CapeNature reserves and catchment areas for the implementation of IAP-clearing programmes.⁴⁸

In preparation for data collection, one of us (JAH) attended a meeting of CapeNature's WfW project managers, during which the research objectives were explained. Managers proposed a survey method for data collection (face-to-face interviews as opposed to focus groups) that would, in their opinion, best establish rapport with respondents. In addition, CapeNature and WfW senior management provided assistance in crafting the interview schedule for the survey, and suggested preferred fieldwork arrangements and interview procedures (for example, not interfering with respondents' work, nor providing incentives for their participation). Important internal WfW research reports were also obtained from management, and were used as guidelines in the development of the interview schedule.

The study required two stages of sampling. All procedures were conducted in compliance with ethical guidelines for Humanities research (Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities), Stellenbosch University). First, four WfW projects were purposively sampled from a data sheet provided by CapeNature senior management, which listed all CapeNature nature reserves and catchment areas in the Western Cape. The selection was made in collaboration with WfW and CapeNature management, and was primarily informed by a need to represent different conservation areas in the Overberg District. The

selection was also based upon the degree of collaboration which could be expected from the WfW project manager of the particular nature reserve. For example, CapeNature management pointed out that some project managers would be either absent at the time of the study, or too preoccupied to provide the necessary support. The following projects were selected: Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve WfW Project, Rivieronderend Mountain Catchment Area WfW Project, Marloth Nature Reserve WfW Project and De Hoop Nature Reserve WfW Project (Figure 1).

In the second sampling phase, stratified systematic sampling was employed in the survey to select a random sample of beneficiaries, defined as the contractor team employees (therefore excluding contractors). From April to June 2009, a list of beneficiaries was obtained from each WfW project manager. The lists were combined into a single sampling frame, which was then organised into homogeneous stratified subsets according to the variables age, gender and home language. Stratification ensured a greater degree of representativeness, by reducing the sampling error on these variables to zero, and by reducing the sampling error on related variables.

The choice of stratification variables depended on the data that were available on the list of beneficiaries. In addition, gender is a particularly important variable in the context of the WfW Programme, as a condition under the newly amended (2011) *Code of Good Practice for Expanded Public Works Programmes* is to attain the target of a 55% representation of women.⁴⁹ However, as the purpose of this study was to undertake a descriptive rather than an explanatory survey, these variables were not considered as independent variables in the analysis. The sampling frame contained 214 sampling elements (beneficiaries) in total, and, as data collection from a sample size of approximately 100 to 150 respondents was considered feasible, a sampling interval of two was decided upon. Following a random start, 120 potential respondents were sampled.

From August to October 2009, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the sampled beneficiaries. As nine respondents refused to participate in the interviews, the realised sample consisted of 111 respondents. Interviews were conducted in informal settlements near the locations of the projects, including informal settlements as part of Villiersdorp, Bredasdorp and Genadendal. The assistance of the contractors was enlisted in locating beneficiaries within their communities.

The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview schedule, with open-ended and closed-ended questions, originally constructed in English and translated into Afrikaans. Thus both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Questions asked related to socio-economic profiles (income and expenditures, household livelihoods and members' occupations etc.). Fundamental qualitative questions related to why respondents joined WfW, their engagement in alternative employment activities in between contracts and their aspirations with regard to long-term WfW employment. More than half (56%) of the interviews were conducted in the respondents' home language (Afrikaans). The remainder of the respondents, who were isiXhosa-speaking, were interviewed in isiXhosa by an isiXhosa-speaking fieldworker who recorded their responses in English. After completion of the interviews, three of the project managers and one Community Conservation Officer, speaking on behalf of the fourth project manager, were interviewed to provide background information on each project.

The quantitative data was statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 18.0), using predominantly frequency tables and variable analysis. In this process, tables of socio-economic baseline indicators and charts were created across a range of standard socio-economic dimensions (for example incomes and expenditures), which were used to make descriptive inferences. The qualitative analysis, alternatively, complemented the statistical analysis in that responses were categorised into themes to detect social trends. These themes were used to structure the presentation of the research findings.

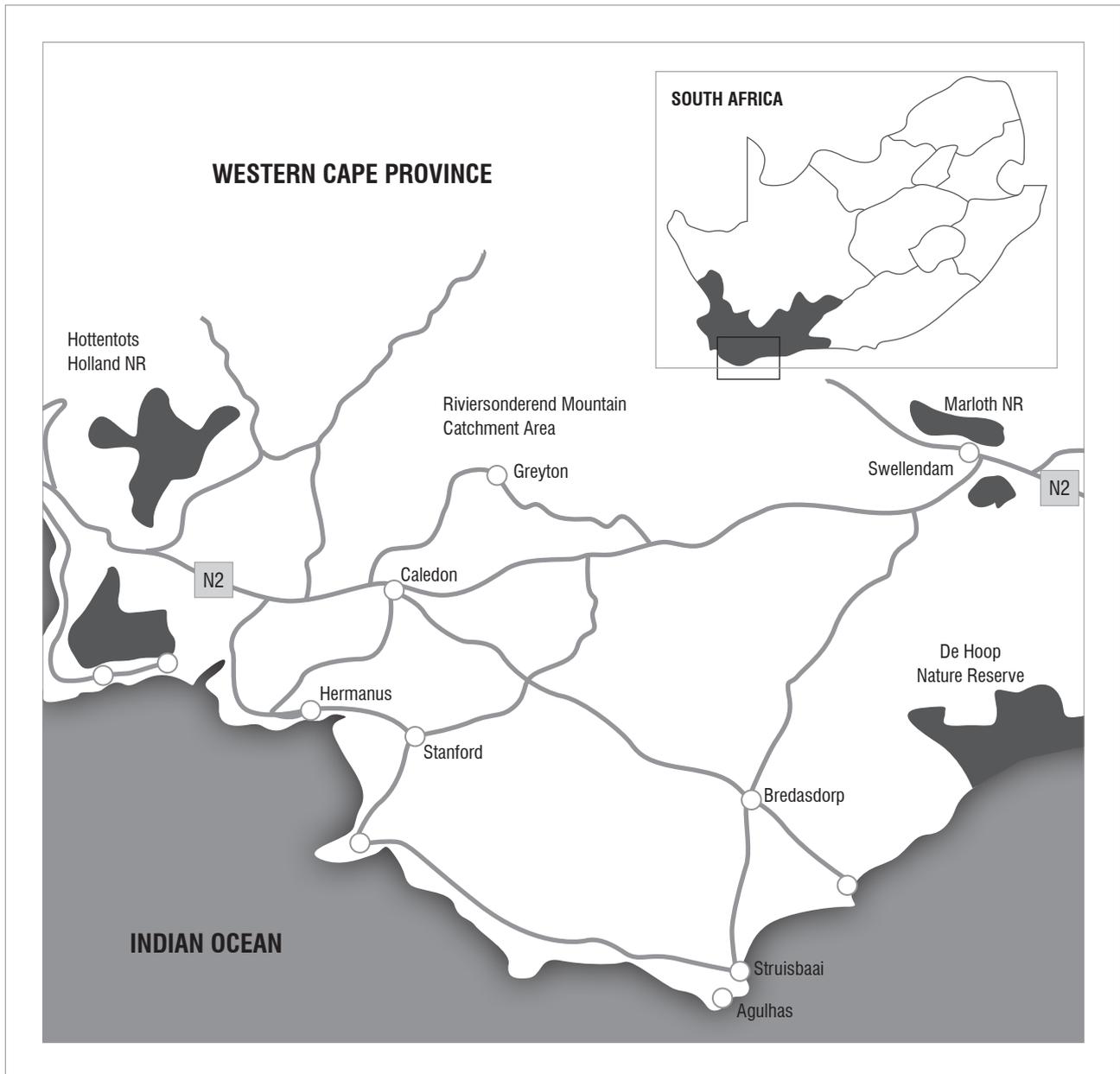


Figure 1: A map showing the study area.

Research findings

Socio-demographic profile

More than half (55%) of the respondents were men. Such an over-representation of men is surprising, considering the target of a 55% representation of women set for Special Public Works Programmes.

In terms of age, 5% of respondents were younger than 20, 47% were in their twenties, 25% were in their thirties and 23% were between 40 and 60 years of age. Almost three-quarters (73%) of the respondents identified themselves as single. In terms of level of education, the majority (60%) had completed some secondary education (Grades 8 to 11), 21% had completed some primary education (Grades 4 to 7), only 10% had completed Grade 12, and only 8% had no formal education. No respondent reported any form of tertiary training.

The projects included here tended to draw beneficiaries primarily from informal settlements near the locations of the projects, as indicated by the relatively large percentage (37%) of the beneficiaries who reported living in informal shacks on their own stands. About one-third of the

respondents (30%) used to live in other areas; one-third of these (11 respondents) used to live on, primarily, fruit farms in the Overberg and Winelands Districts. Seven of these respondents relocated to their current residency after 2000.

Employment history

Most respondents (80%) entered WfW after they had heard about the programme from friends or other people who had already participated in WfW projects. Approximately one-quarter (28) of the respondents were informed about WfW by contractors, of whom many were close friends or family members. As one respondent in the survey mentioned: 'My aunt [the contractor] was in need of workers, so I joined'. Evidence shows that WfW contractors also approach potential beneficiaries in their areas. For example, one respondent explained that a WfW contractor in her area saw that he had no work, and asked him to join her team.

At the time of data collection, 59% of the respondents had been continuously employed on these projects for less than 2 years. The

remaining 41% had been employed continuously for more than 2 years, with one respondent reporting participation for 9 years.

Previous employment

Of all the respondents, 83% (92) were employed before joining WfW. Of these 92 respondents, more than half (49) had been farmworkers within the Western Cape, working primarily on deciduous fruit farms, while the remaining 43 had been gardeners, cashiers, domestic or construction workers. Of the 49 respondents with a background in farm employment, the majority (30) reported earning a pre-WfW income ranging from R70 to R350 per week. Previous research on farmworkers within the horticulture industry in the Western Cape found a similar income range, namely R112–R320 per week.⁴³

Of particular relevance here is the finding that more than half (51) of the 92 respondents who earned an income before WfW, had voluntarily substituted this employment for WfW. Even more noteworthy is the fact that, of those 51, the majority (31) used to be farmworkers.

Interim employment

Three-quarters (75%) of all the respondents (although still part of the WfW team) were not working on a contract at the time of data collection. Evidence shows that almost all (96%) respondents had experienced similar 'interim' periods on WfW, during which more than half (57) of them did not earn an alternative income. 'I just wait for WfW work', one respondent declared. A possible explanation for this is provided by another respondent who asked, rhetorically, 'Why go look for work if you have work already?' For the remaining 49 respondents who earned an alternative income between contracts, the type of employment most frequently reported was seasonal farm work. For this and other types of alternative employment, most (40) of the 49 respondents reported earnings in excess of R1500 per month. This amount is very similar to what beneficiaries earn on WfW contracts, which is estimated at R1000–R2000 per month.

Push and pull factors

Comparing WfW to farm work

When requested to compare their previous work to working for WfW, most (85%) of the previously employed respondents (more than half of whom had been farmworkers) viewed WfW in a more favourable light. This result is not unexpected given that the respondents were workers who had not yet left WfW, and were therefore most likely satisfied with the programme. Indeed, a high proportion of respondents (71%) expressed reluctance to leave WfW (Table 1).

In addition, when respondents were solicited to elaborate upon the extent of their experience of WfW employment, one-tenth compared WfW work specifically with farm work, and portrayed the latter in a negative light.

Interpretation of the qualitative data revealed a number of themes, discussed below, which provide insight into the factors that 'pushed' respondents away from previous or alternative employment, in particular farm work, and/or 'pulled' them towards WfW work.

'The money you earn is a little bit more'

When respondents were asked their reasons for working for WfW, increased or more secure remuneration constituted the most common response: 'Your [WfW] work is fairly hard', said one respondent, 'but the money you earn is a little bit more'. This finding is supported by responses to another question posed to respondents who had previously been farmworkers – when asked to elaborate on why they left farm work voluntarily for WfW, the most common reason (provided by 11 of the 31 respondents) was that WfW remuneration exceeded farm work wages. Also, of the 49 respondents surveyed who earned an alternative income between contracts (but returned to WfW when another contract became available), 14 mentioned that they did so because they perceived WfW's remuneration as satisfactory.

'Sometimes we would work at the farm and not get paid'

The qualitative data show that the respondents perceived WfW income to be more guaranteed and regular (at least when contracts are available) than that of other work. 'For me, money comes quicker here at WfW', explained one respondent, while another explicitly referred to the fact that, '[s]ometimes we would work at the farm and not get paid'.

The importance of this pull factor is further supported by the fact that 10 of the 49 respondents who earned an alternative income between contracts, but returned to WfW when another contract became available, explained their decision with reference to WfW employment's being 'stable' or even 'permanent' in nature, particularly if compared to other types of employment. One respondent explicitly mentioned that 'WfW is permanent work', while another explained that, in comparison to WfW work, farm work does not offer the same level of security: 'You're never guaranteed that you will have work', he said. This is a counter-intuitive finding, considering the fact that WfW is not intended to provide permanent work.

Another pull factor related to income that emerged from an analysis of the qualitative data, is the belief that one 'scores' with WfW work, as a full contract's income is paid, even if the task is completed within a shorter period of time than originally contracted for.

'It's pleasant in the mountain'

The second most common set of responses identified working in the natural environment as an important reason why respondents enjoy and prefer WfW work. Although it can be argued that farm work, with which a large proportion of respondents have had experience, also often takes place in a rural and therefore 'natural' environment, respondents perceive the environment in which they conduct their WfW work as more 'natural' than the predominantly agricultural environment of a farm.

'We are more free'

Other relatively common sets of responses (with 8 respondents each) highlighted the perception that WfW work is less demanding and that working hours are more favourable than in the case of their previous employment, particularly farm work. To this point, one woman respondent explained: 'We are more free. Now if we finish a task, then we can be at home to look after the children.' Although this study did

Table 1: Respondents' feelings toward leaving the Working for Water Programme

Response on wanting to leave	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Cumulative percentage of respondents
Yes, definitely	8	7.2	7.2
Yes, possibly	17	15.3	22.5
Neutral	7	6.3	28.8
No, not really	27	24.3	53.2
No, definitely not	52	46.8	100
Total	111	100	

not disaggregate data by gender, this response points towards the fact that women and men most probably have had different experiences on farms, and, as indicated by previous research,⁵⁰ experience the WfW Programme differently, based upon their gender identities.

The importance of working conditions on farms as push factors was further highlighted by 12 respondents who specifically compared farm work unfavourably to WfW work. 'Farm work makes you sick', explained one respondent, while another described farm owners as '[...] very pushy in terms of they wanted the work done fast. WfW conditions are much better'. Another respondent also spoke about how workers were pressured by landowners to work harder; '(f)armers are constantly on our cases', and of the more demanding nature of the farm work, when compared with WfW work. Such respondents portrayed farming conditions as unpleasant, often because landowners or farm managers treated labour poorly: 'like a pig', as described by one respondent.

Further to this point, a respondent highlighted the absence at WfW of a 'baas' figure, there is 'no boss shouting at you'. On farms, these 'bosses' monitor, instruct and pressurise workers, as articulated by another respondent: 'At WfW there's no one telling you what to do. On the farms, there was always someone telling me what to do. At WfW you work for yourself'. The racial connotations implied by these responses were expressed more explicitly by other respondents. For example, one of these respondents said that he welcomed Black or Coloured project managers as opposed to working for a White landowner: 'I like the fact that we are managed by Black people, who understand us'.

It is not surprising, then, that a number of respondents expressed anxiety about returning to farm work, highlighting its temporality and/or seasonality, extended working hours, and the feeling that landowners exploited them. Some explained, for example: 'I don't feel like other work anymore', and 'WfW is at least a long-term work'. One respondent clarified: 'If I leave, I have nowhere to go to. I don't want to go back to the farm'.

'We are all together, like a big family'

Another relatively frequent (voiced by seven respondents) set of reasons for comparing WfW favourably to previous employment related to WfW's teamwork environment. The importance of this pull factor is further indicated by the fact that enjoyment of WfW work (which 95 of the respondents reported) was ascribed by 19 of them to WfW's teamwork approach and by the fact that 4 respondents mentioned the benefits of teamwork as a reason for their reluctance to leave WfW.

Although farm work on Western Cape wine and fruit farms is also mostly conducted in teams and workers rarely work alone, WfW beneficiaries perceive teamwork on farms as more isolating or 'lonely'. This perception could be related to the ways in which teams are organised or managed. In contrast to contractors who are responsible for remunerating the employees who form part of their team, teamwork on farms is often still linked to 'piece' rates, which means each of the workers is essentially self-reliant and paid according to the amount of work they do.

Although further research is necessary to establish whether this hypothesis is indeed valid, the difference between WfW and farm work in terms of the style of teamwork was borne out by the qualitative data collected in this study: 'Everyone works together', 'Our whole team stands together', and it is better working '[...] with your people' were some of the responses provided. Two respondents referred specifically to a non-discriminatory teamwork environment as the reason for viewing WfW more favourably than farm work. The contractors may play an important role in this regard, as one respondent reported that he could always ask his contractor for financial assistance. Indeed, when respondents were asked to whom they would turn to if they ever experienced emotional issues, 17% mentioned their contractors – the second most common response after turning to parents for help (38%).

'I don't want to start a new work in case we get a new contract'

A few (4) of the 57 respondents who had experienced periods on WfW during which there were no contracts, but did not earn an alternative

income, mentioned that they did not want to seek alternative employment for fear of 'missing' a WfW contract: 'I don't want to start a new work in case we get a new contract and I'm not available', explained a respondent. The relevance of sentiments such as this one is supported by another finding – the majority of respondents (62%) believed that their contractors did not want them to find other work in-between contracts.

Discussion

An interpretation of the descriptive data generated by this research conducted among beneficiaries of four WfW projects in the Western Cape, leads one to conclude that WfW beneficiaries are relatively young and uneducated, having mostly completed only some form of secondary education. Against the backdrop of increasing casualisation of workers on farms in the Western Cape,²¹ the need for stable and regular employment opportunities, which would transfer skills to this working population, is clear, and explains why the WfW Programme is often welcomed as an alternative employment opportunity by residents in this region.

However, the study raises concerns with regard to the extent to which the regulations of EPWPs are conscientiously implemented by the projects concerned. Firstly, the gender representation target of 55% women was clearly not attained in the cases studied here. Reasons for this are unclear, and need to be researched more extensively. Secondly, by the time of the study, a relatively large proportion of beneficiaries had already exceeded the allocated participation length for EPWPs. These regulations were introduced to prevent the type of dependency to which this study suggests certain beneficiaries are prone. It is important to note that we focused only on those beneficiaries who are currently participating in the programme. Therefore, we did not take into account beneficiaries who have succeeded in 'exiting' WfW. Nevertheless, these more 'dependent' beneficiaries' reluctance to leave the programme contradicts the purpose of WfW – which is to stimulate a sense of independence among and empower especially the youth to find alternative employment. Were the regulations to be applied more strictly, the WfW Programme may arguably become less popular.

Currently the beneficiaries choose WfW work above their previous work, which often constituted farm work. We further found that WfW beneficiaries continue to have ties to either farm owners (or family members still living on farms), or farm contractors who notify them when seasonal, casual work becomes available. However, employment offered by WfW projects is preferred even to seasonal farm work. An analysis of qualitative data revealed the most important push and pull factors that underlie this preference. An interpretation of these data leads one to conclude that WfW does not only function as a temporary safety net for these beneficiaries, but, rather counter-intuitively considering the irregular nature of WfW contracts, is also associated in their minds with permanence, stability and security. This finding may be understood as a function of the comparative perspective many beneficiaries maintained: other work is viewed as 'less' permanent and insecure compared with WfW contracts, which seem to always become available, eventually. Against the background of increasing casualisation of labour on farms, this perception makes sense. With regard to security, a distinction can be drawn between emotional security (which will be discussed in more detail below) and financial security. We suggest that the latter does not merely concern the amount of money earned, but the regularity of payment as well.

A further pull factor is the perception that WfW work is less demanding and that working hours are more favourable than those in other forms of employment, reasons for which are unclear. Possibly, productivity pressures are different from those experienced in other employment, and/or power relations between workers and contractors differ from those experienced in teamwork on farms. Indeed, the qualitative data reveal a preference among beneficiaries for being managed by Black project managers and contractors rather than by White landowners in what is perceived as a hierarchical relationship.

A related finding concurs with previous research that indicates a reluctance among WfW beneficiaries to exit contractor teams because

of the emotional security they associate with such teams.⁴⁻⁶ Teamwork itself is therefore not the pull factor; but the collaborative, non-hierarchical style of WfW teamwork, in comparison to teamwork on farms, emerged as an important consideration for beneficiaries.

However, there is evidence that WfW beneficiaries have in a small way constructed a paternalistic relationship with contractors, very much in the same way White farm owners and managers are also constructed as 'protectors' in the paternalist discourse on farms in the Western Cape. But, in the paternalistic relationship with contractors, the latter are still considered a better 'patron'. These findings need to be interpreted within the context of a long history of racialised power relations that have shaped, and still shape, social relations of workers within the Western Cape. Consequently, race, and indeed racism, is still a central aspect of the everyday social experience of workers. Our findings indeed indicate that racism and racial antagonism still persist in rural areas of the Western Cape. In particular, the pull factor of 'security' experienced within WfW teams, as opposed to the 'isolation' on farms, is shaped by the difference between unequal power relations and antagonisms existing between Black workers and White landowners or farm managers, as opposed to the less hierarchical nature of employment relations with, primarily, Black WfW contractors.

WfW therefore functions as a form of 'social protection' for beneficiaries who tend to become dependent on its projects, because they prefer the less hierarchical relation with, and racial profile of, management. Considering the history of paternalistic relationships and unequal power relations among landowners and their workers within the Western Cape, it makes sense that most beneficiaries are afraid to consider a future in which they have no other choice but to return to work as young, relatively uneducated farmworkers managed by mostly White, often exploitative, landowners.

These findings raise important questions about WfW's draft policy for IAP clearing on private land. They also raise questions as to the feasibility of creating a competitive market for the clearance of IAPs, which could provide work for exiting beneficiaries. Creating such a market would mean that landowners contract teams to work on their land, which would mean that beneficiaries might again be working on farms, albeit as clearers of IAPs, and therefore assumes the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between landowners and WfW beneficiaries. As the legacy of a long history of farm paternalism and exploitation still prevails in some areas of the Western Cape, and many of these WfW beneficiaries have worked on these farms, this assumption is unrealistic. If WfW currently provides an escape from farm work, and a preferred working environment, it is difficult to understand how beneficiaries would want to, or be able to, return to work on certain farms where they have very little bargaining power. This issue needs to be considered more fully in policy development, and requires an analysis of why the deeply entrenched historical power relations, created by institutional racism, still exist on Western Cape farms.

Conclusion

We explored why beneficiaries of WfW projects within the Winelands and Overberg Districts of the Western Cape are reluctant to leave these projects for alternative employment.

One of the most important findings that emerged was that beneficiaries voluntarily substitute farm work for WfW employment, primarily because an exploitative working environment is still perceived to exist on farms. Thus, such WfW projects function as a safety net for beneficiaries who are, simply, reluctant to consider a future of working on farms. WfW's CDA also reinforces a sense of emotional security, as many beneficiaries desire to work within the team environment that characterises WfW. The obstacles this poses for the creation of an alternative market for the clearance of IAPs will not be easily overcome without an analysis of how the racial legacy on Western Cape farms still operates, and why it persists.

We identified a number of important issues that should be considered in future research. Such issues relate primarily to the ability of WfW beneficiaries to 'exit' the programme comfortably and hence to become

independent of the programme. Firstly, gender identity needs to be taken into account in more detail, as women and men would have had different experiences on the farms, and would also experience the WfW Programme differently. Secondly, the question of why workers who have left WfW, have done so, also needs empirical attention. This determination would provide a deeper understanding of the choices available to WfW beneficiaries and their different rationales for not only remaining in the programme, but also for leaving it. Finally, we have highlighted the importance of race, and therefore recommend that future research differentiates between the experiences of Black and Coloured workers, who are presumably positioned in very different ways in local labour markets, which shapes their experience of WfW and their position as prospective providers of services to White landowners.

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Authors' contributions

The data were gathered and analysed by J.A.H. as part of his MA (Sociology) thesis, under the guidance of H.E.P. as his supervisor. Both authors contributed to the paper.

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