



MID TERM EVALUATION OF ILO'S SUSTAINING COMPETITIVE AND RESPONSIBLE ENTERPRISES (SCORE) PROJECT, PHASE IV (2022-2024)

QUICK FACTS

Countries: National and international Supply Chains and actions in Bolivia, Myanmar and Tunisia

Evaluation date: 17 October 2023

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO/EMP/SME unit

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Donor(s) & budget: SECO and NORAD: 6.3 M USD

Key Words: Small and Medium Enterprises, Supply Chains, Decent Work, Sustainable Enterprises, Responsible Business Behaviour

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) is one of the longest running projects in ILO's portfolio. It is a global project focusing on improving productivity and working conditions in SMEs, contributing to achieving ILO's strategic outcome 4: Sustainable enterprises as generators of employment and promoters of innovation and decent work under the ILO's Programme & Budget 2022-2023.

The SCORE project originally started operations in September 2009 and its fourth and final phase started in 2022 and is scheduled to end in December 2024. It has been historically funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The SCORE phase IV project is implemented in four countries: Bolivia in Latin America, Tunisia and Ethiopia in Africa and Myanmar in Asia.

In Phase IV, the SCORE project is focusing on integration of SCORE Training in the national economic development frameworks and inclusion of SMEs in national and global supply chains, except for Myanmar where SCORE project does not engage with the national government and only with private sector actors, since the military coup of 2021.

The project plan of SCORE project Phase IV specifies the following two outcomes:

- **Outcome 1.** SCORE training is fully sustainable at the national level, being adapted to specific needs of local SMEs and fully integrated in the national economic development framework, including public and private implementation partners;
- **Outcome 2.** Small and Medium Enterprises have developed their capacity to link to national and global supply chains, thanks to improved productivity and access to lead buyers.

Present situation of the project

Project activities are at different stages of implementation depending on their starting year of interventions during phase III. The different country projects are offering the SCORE training services in different economic sectors. Some sectors are shared between the countries, such as textile, and agri-food production. The Hospitality (tourism) sector is covered in Myanmar and in Bolivia there is a specific focus of SCORE training on micro-enterprises and informal economy in this country.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The objective of the evaluation is to:

- Independently assess the progress of SCORE project Phase IV against the logical framework;
- Inform the ILO on whether the current project strategy (including sustainability strategy at country level) is working, and provide recommendations on what could be changed to increase the likelihood that the project reaches its objectives;
- Identify good practices and lessons learned that would contribute to learning and knowledge development of the ILO and project stakeholders.

As the project is in its final stage and will not be continued, particular attention is requested to look at possibilities to feed in lessons learned from SCORE Programme in other projects in the area of productivity related ecosystems, which are also of interest to SECO and NORAD.



The evaluation considers SCORE project implementation under phase IV only, from January 2022 until July 2023, which was the period of data-collection and fieldwork of this evaluation. The evaluation includes the SCORE project components in Bolivia, Myanmar, Tunisia and global components. The SCORE implementation In Ethiopia is subject to another separate evaluation process.

This evaluation considers the following evaluation criteria:

1. Relevance, strategic fit and alignment of the intervention;
2. Coherence on the intervention logic;
3. Intervention progress and effectiveness;
4. Effectiveness of management arrangements;
5. Efficiency of resource usage;
6. Impact orientation and sustainability of the intervention.

The key users of this evaluation are:

- a) The donors SECO and NORAD;
- b) The SCORE project staff, ILO Country Offices and other field and Head Quarter (HQ) staff;
- c) Tripartite members of the global and national advisory committees, where applicable, and partner organisations in the evaluated countries.

Methodology of evaluation

This evaluation was based on a mixed approach to ensure that forward and backward perspectives in the analysis can be combined. Furthermore it has focused on utility of conclusions and recommendations for ILO and its donors SECO and NORAD. The evaluation also identifies best practices and lessons learned during the research phase of this evaluation. Participation of evaluation stakeholders was enabled at global and national level in the three countries subject to the evaluation to ensure that their views were properly taken into account.

In total 82 key informants were interviewed and an additional 9 stakeholders have provided inputs through a multi-lingual survey. In Bolivia and Tunisia field work was done by the international lead consultant to meet with internal and external stakeholders at the country and sector level, while in Myanmar face-to-face and on-line interviews were conducted by a national expert, complemented with on-line interviews by the international lead consultant. The evaluation process also included an extensive analysis of M&E data and reports provided by the SCORE project on-line evaluation data-base.

In Bolivia and Tunisia briefing and debriefing meetings were organised with the SCORE project officers and at international level ILO officers and SECO and NORAD representatives were involved in debriefing and validation meetings.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

On relevance, strategic fit and alignment



- The SCORE project of ILO in its 15 years of existence has gained considerable reputation as a relevant and effective support intervention to strengthen productivity and sustainability of SMEs in more than 30 different countries world-wide.
- SCORE training has been relevant to advance ILO's decent work priorities to enable employers'-workers' dialogue and cooperation, particularly at the company level.
- Strategic importance and alignment of SCORE services at the country and partner level, can be witnessed through continued commitment and ownership of SCORE service delivery by national governments and private partners.
- Relevance of SCORE project for SMEs in specific sectors is confirmed widely by SMEs and shown by considerable cost-recovery of the SCORE service provision at the enterprise level.
- SCORE experiences in Bolivia, Tunisia and Myanmar, show that SCORE service delivery is most relevant for those SMEs that already are formalised and are active in supply chains.

On coherence

- SCORE project's original ambition as expressed in its ToC of Phase III to achieve systems level changes in supply chains was not pursued in phase IV.
- ILO in Tunisia and Bolivia has found the national employers' associations, as national partners, willing to take over SCORE training, aligned with their own interests.
- SCORE implementation in Bolivia, Myanmar and Tunisia has been demand-oriented and characteristics of SCORE training were adapted to local contexts.
- SCORE training is well embedded in ILO approaches and linked with other projects and programmes of ILO and the national and regional decent work programmes of ILO.

On effectiveness of the intervention

- The most prominent results of SCORE at the SME-level are achievement of cost savings, increase in productivity, reduction of end-line defects, reduction of waste and reduced absenteeism. Reduction of workers' complaints in Bolivia and Tunisia, and reduction in materials-use and in waste in Tunisia and Myanmar were specific country-level results.
- On most of gender indicators positive changes are reported in terms of participation of women among the trainer population and in participation in training.
- SCORE training beneficiaries consistently highlight significant qualitative changes in their companies and confirm its training is unique in its hands-on and people-oriented approach.
- The SCORE project in phase IV has further developed and consolidated partnerships in Bolivia and Tunisia in ensuring a wide coverage of SCORE services to SMEs in different sectors and regions. This was not possible in the current context of Myanmar.
- In spite of strong ownership and commitment among government and private sector partners in Bolivia and Tunisia, handing over SCORE training to the national partners has not yet advanced much and no formal agreements are yet in place for the transfer of SCORE training and future coordination and governance and SCORE business planning.
- The pool of trainers and expert trainers for SCORE project in Bolivia and Tunisia need further strengthening and (re)certification of trainers in both countries is one the key activities that still requires significant effort.
- SCORE training at the country level is not yet sufficiently visible and is not strongly communicated and marketed in relevant private sector communities.

- The SCORE modules, since COVID-19 have undergone innovations and enrichment over time in both contents (e.g. climate change) and methodology (on-line and hybrid mixes of technical support) to ensure that SCORE service provision remains up to date and relevant.

On effectiveness of management arrangements:

- The SCORE project is managed and implemented by small national teams, in frequent and close interaction with SME and Enterprises staff at regional offices and at the central level.
- The M&E database of SCORE project is extensive and contains a wealth of data on SCORE activities in over 30 countries, though there are also weaknesses: data collection is based on voluntary efforts and on many indicators; collection is not consistent and possibly not always based on reliable sources.
- The SCORE M&E database is cost-effective for more extensive use and exchange of data, potentially also allowing for interesting comparative research across countries and regions.
- An important management arrangement for securing ownership of SCORE project implementation at country level is the Tripartite Advisory Committee. At central level, the TAC was replaced by regular planning and coordination meetings with the donors.

On Efficiency

- SCORE in phase IV has worked with a limited budget, particularly at the country level. The low country-specific budgets translate in relatively small SCORE teams, particularly in Tunisia and Myanmar. The small SCORE teams, as witnessed in Bolivia and Tunisia often deal with considerable organisational stress to achieve planned activities and results.
- The SCORE team in the SME unit at HQ level has the capacity to follow-up to SCORE developments and actions in a large number of countries and is able to make lessons available on SCORE training across countries, leading to international synergies and savings.
- The centralised M&E system is available for follow-up of SCORE actions in all SCORE countries, allowing for economies of scale and global exchange of lessons learned.
- A strong feature of the SCORE service delivery approach has been cost recovery of training provision at the enterprise level. This has allowed the project to achieve considerable reach in the SME community in the different countries with limited direct delivery costs.

On impact and Sustainability

- National employers' associations as national constituent tri-partite employers' partners of ILO, are a guarantee for continued relations beyond the duration of the current SCORE project. Such handover is not possible in Myanmar, due to the current political situation.
- While capacities of national partners interested in taking ownership of SCORE in Bolivia and Tunisia are well developed, not all steps are taken to realise an effective hand-over.
- The productivity ecosystem in Tunisia is well developed and functional for the SME sector. SCORE in Tunisia also successfully acquired contracts for cooperation with third parties.
- SCORE training effects generally are more strongly visible and more lasting in larger and more formalised enterprises that are already integrated in supply chains.
- At SME-level, SCORE training and particularly its in-company technical assistance has had significant and lasting effects. SMEs point to the establishment of the Enterprise Improvement Teams (EITs) as one of the key results of SCORE training approach.
- While SCORE training had an impact on management-workers dialogue and cooperation in SMEs, effects on strengthening formal workers' representation are not common.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main recommend- dations

1. SCORE team and the SME unit in the ILO ENTERPRISES are recommended to secure and strengthen the SCORE training focus on the small and medium enterprise sectors in countries with favourable productivity ecosystems environments and potential for stronger integration of SMEs in international and national supply chains;
2. SME unit at ILO Enterprises and SME support staff in regional offices SCORE training are recommended, after the end of the SCORE project to continue to engage and involve its tri-partite partners at national level in future coordination and follow-up of SCORE training delivery at national level;
3. SME unit at ILO Enterprises is recommended to explore if SCORE training and technical assistance can be more closely linked with existing (international and national and sector-specific) certification schemes active in specific sectors and supply chains;
4. SME unit and SME/SCORE officers at the national and regional level, are recommended to invest ample time and effort in developing business and marketing and sales plans with its national partners to ensure that SCORE services can continue to be provided, ensuring full cost-recovery (or third-party subsidies) for the national partners and profitability for the (expert) trainers involved;
5. Both in the remaining SCORE project implementation period and beyond, the ILO SME unit, national and regional ILO offices and SCORE partners and national level are recommended to strengthen communication and dissemination efforts around SCORE training to ensure visibility of SCORE training at the country and sector level. The ILO SME unit and SECO and NORAD are recommended to consider additional efforts to increase visibility of SCORE training in all previous and current SCORE countries;
6. SME unit in ILO is recommended to consider simplification of its M&E focusing on the key qualitative and quantitative aspects of SCORE training, beyond the current final phase of SCORE project. ILO should keep a light and easy to follow-up to data-entry and analysis of continued SCORE training delivery, beyond current project-duration.
7. SCORE-team in **Bolivia** is recommended to:
 - With support of the SME unit and the regional office in Peru, apply a strong focus in the remaining few months of SCORE implementation on preparing the transfer of SCORE training to the national partner CEPB;
 - Further strengthen and expand the existing group of trainers, and dedicate special attention to empower and equip trainers in the network to prepare them for the arrangements for continued SCORE training delivery under coordination of CEPB;
 - Consider continuing SCORE service delivery specific supply chains (coffee and Andean grains) where concrete sustainability perspectives exist.
8. SME unit in ILO and the ILO offices and staff dealing with SCORE project in **Myanmar** are recommended to maintain a minimum level of (moral) support to the trainers in the country and to remain in touch with them through a loose and informal network, even if they are not able to continue to be able to effectively market and sell their SCORE services on the short and medium term.

9. SCORE team in **Tunisia** is recommended to:
- With support from the SME unit at ILO HQ continue and speed up efforts in establishing and consolidating the institutional setup for continuation of SCORE services on the Tunisian market beyond the project duration;
 - With support from the SME unit at ILO HQ develop a policy to ensure that SCORE training and TA is offered in Tunisia against market prices and appropriate payment conditions and arrangements;
 - Feed and support further learning and innovation on specific SCORE services (e.g. in platform economy and financial services) in Tunisia relevant for other countries in international SCORE exchanges, including in other French speaking countries, where thus far, SCORE services are thinly spread.

Main lessons learned and good practices

Key good practices

- SCORE training and in-company technical assistance is unique in its participatory, hands-on and empowering approach, visualised by the enterprise improvement teams that usually remain in place also after SCORE trajectories;
- Smooth cooperation relations between SME staff at HQ , regional and country and project level have enabled exchange of experiences and knowledge, that allow different SCORE project countries to easily mine upon other experiences;
- SCORE training modules have been upgraded and adapted continuously to ensure that the SCORE service delivery remains relevant in changing contexts (such as COVID-19 and climate change);
- National partners have been empowered to implement the SCORE training delivery and to manage and coordinate the national trainer networks, providing good sustainability prospects;

Key lessons learned

- It is very important to start new SCORE project-phases with planning for exiting and sustainability and not leave actions directed at transfer and sustainability for the final phase of the project;
- ILO's communication and marketing around SCORE project has not been strong and too much confined to ILO's own networks and not in broader private sector networks;
- The SCORE training approach to build ownership of SMEs and strengthening sustainability of SCORE training requires consistency in asking for payment for SCORE services, while existing national Government subsidy arrangements may be used to facilitate access to SCORE services;
- A supply chain approach should focus less on lead buyers with principally financial support and sustainability in mind. A better approach is to focus on supply chain integration and governance and on due diligence requirements allowing a stronger buy-in of key actors in these supply chains;
- Quantitative KPIs to measure SCORE training induced changes at the specific SME-enterprise level are not always reliable and difficult to measure and some employment related indicators, may not be appropriate to measure SCORE training effects and impact.