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Labour
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Asia Regional Child Labour Project – Independent Final Evaluation

QUICK FACTS

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Administrative Office: ILO - Delhi

Technical Office: FUNDAMENTALS

Evaluation manager: Sherelle Wilson

Evaluation consultant(s): Ruth Bowen, Faaiz Irfan (Cynosure International)

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The Asia Regional Child Labour (ARC) Project was implemented in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. It aimed to reduce vulnerability to child labour and enhance the protection of children from exploitation through interventions in three outcome areas – 1) **building a credible knowledge base** on the causes and drivers of child labour; 2) **aligning legislation and policies with international conventions on child labour and building enforcement capacity**; and 3) **applying a holistic approach to eradicating child labour, particularly its worst forms, in selected regions of each country**. The strategies included support to national child labour surveys and qualitative studies, supporting the tripartite constituents to improve legal and policy frameworks and enforcement capacity, and piloting integrated local intervention models to tackle child labour in partnership with local governments, social partners, and non-government organizations.

The project was the responsibility of the ILO New Delhi Country Office. Project teams were established in each country led by a Chief Technical Advisor based in New Delhi.

Present situation of the project

The project inception phase took place between May and December 2019 and implementation began in January 2020. The project faced significant challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and political upheavals in Myanmar and Afghanistan. Following the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the project refocused its approach in line with the UN guideline on non-engagement with the military regime, while operations in Afghanistan ceased following the donor policy after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. A midterm evaluation together with an evaluability assessment were completed in December 2022.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The evaluation aimed to assess the extent of achievement of the Project’s outcomes, and its relevance, coherence, efficiency, impact and sustainability prospects. It covered all six countries from the project start until the time of the evaluation. The clients of the evaluation are the ARC Project team, ILO Country Office and Decent Work Team Delhi, ILO FUNDAMENTALS, the donor and national and local partners and ILO constituents.



Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation used a mixed method, “theory-based” approach, which examined the results achieved through the lens of the planned project outcomes in each country, and the contributing factors. Data collection methods included: **document review** related to the project’s context, design, technical and financial progress, and key project products; **key informant interviews** (in-person and remote) with 124 project stakeholders (of whom 35% were women) including constituents, ARC project staff, partners, ILO country office and technical backstopping staff; **field visits** in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan including group interviews with beneficiaries, and an **online survey** of project training participants.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The ARC Project was **relevant** to address the child labour situation in the countries, and even more so in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and following the military coup in Myanmar with children’s heightened vulnerability to exploitation. Most of the ILO’s tripartite constituents found the project aligned with their priorities and interests; however, engagement of the national government in India was not highly evident and was not pursued in Myanmar following the coup.

The project was **coherent** with national constituents’ and other stakeholders’ efforts on eliminating child labour, exhibited through support to rolling-out national action plans on child labour in Bangladesh and Nepal in particular. The project successfully collaborated with UN agencies, especially UNICEF, in updating child labour statistics in Pakistan and in complementary interventions in the brick industry in Nepal. Within the ILO, the project aligned with the respective Decent Work Country Programmes, although it could have been more strategic at the local level according to senior ILO officials in Pakistan. Country offices and the project teams ensured good coherence among related projects, most notably in Myanmar where the ARC project, the Myanmar Programme Against Child Labour, and the ARISE project took a highly integrated approach, enabling efficiency, a unified stance, and scale.

Regarding **Effectiveness** and **Sustainability** – toward the **knowledge base** pillar, the project contributed to substantial knowledge on the



extent child labour in the six countries and the dynamics in key hazardous sectors; and as a sustainable result, built the capacity of government statistics officers in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal to collect child labour data in line with internationally agreed definitions. However, updating national child labour data was constrained in India which has not yet transitioned to a statistical child labour definition aligned with ILO guidelines.

Towards **strengthening laws and policies** on child labour, and national implementation capacity, key improvements were the updated hazardous work lists for children in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan (Punjab); Bangladesh's ratification of C138; new law prohibiting domestic work under 16 years in Pakistan's Islamabad Capital Territory; and in Nepal, the creation of a mechanism for coordination among multi-stakeholder members of the Alliance 8.7 toward the achievement of SDG Target 8.7 on elimination of child labour, human trafficking and forced labour. The project also lent support to elaborate national action plans on child labour and enhance child labour monitoring (CLM) and information systems, notably in Bangladesh and Nepal through improved CLM software.

The project's local intervention models to tackle child labour proved effective to varying degrees. They were generally aligned with ILO's area-based approach, aiming to reach all children engaged in child labour in a locality, apart from the child domestic work model in Pakistan. The holistic intervention applied in mica mining areas in Jharkhand and Bihar states in India highlighted the importance of empowering communities and children to report child labour, strengthening community resilience to address root causes, and improving OSH practices in informal mining, linked with policy development to protect informal mica mining workers. Nepal's Child Labour Free Zone model was expanded to more municipalities; while in Bangladesh the community-based child labour monitoring system, supporting children engaged in child labour and their families with education, livelihoods and social protection access resulted in a whole district declared free of child labour. In Pakistan, the trade union partners set up a promising community monitoring model to withdraw children from domestic work in Punjab. The **sustainability** of the models is clearest in Nepal

where government funds are provided to support municipalities declared child labour free. The evaluation found that ARC project management, coordination and resource use were **efficient**, demonstrating an agile approach in the face of significant external challenges, including the budget reductions made due to the donor’s financial constraints. The project team emphasized learning processes, ensuring documentation of project models for dissemination prior to the project closure.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main recommendations

General recommendations

1. Continue to implement child labour programmes in the sub-region towards SDG Target 8.7, ensuring that capacity building strategies apply ILO’s expertise on decent work and FPRW to the extent possible.
2. Strengthen the engagement of ILO’s social partners – trade unions and employers’ organizations - in advocacy and concrete actions for child labour elimination.
3. Continue to design national policy advocacy on child labour around the guidance of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.
4. Strengthen gender responsive strategies and focus on vulnerable groups in future child labour programming.
5. Promote convergence of enabling policy and service for child labour elimination at national and state levels.

Country recommendations

6. Seek funding to continue child labour programming in Afghanistan, prioritising the brick kiln, coal mining and agriculture sectors with high child labour prevalence.
7. Continue the programmatic response to support Bangladesh’s National Plan of Action on child labour (with specific priorities suggested).
8. Continue a programmatic response to address child labour in India, focusing on policy and enabling environment interventions and consolidating progress made in the mica mining sector.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Build on the contributions of the project in the ongoing child labour programmes in Myanmar, including a strategy to promote and market the child labour e-learning courses.10. Continue support to child labour programming in Nepal to expand the number of child labour free municipalities, prioritising high risk population groups and sectors and promoting ILO's decent work approach within the government's child labour free zone agenda.11. ILO Pakistan should consider the strategic priorities in continuing to address child labour, including further support to province action plans arising from the child labour surveys, advocacy for further legal amendment to align with the child labour conventions, and assessing the local models for child labour prevention to carry forward.
Main lessons learned and good practices	<p>Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project design needs to be realistic about the time needed for research results to contribute to policy change.• Responding to host government needs and interests facilitates impact.• Agile project management is critical, especially in times of crisis.• An integrated approach across related projects at country level enhances efficiency, impact, and scale.• Geographical scope needs to be balanced relative to time and budget resources. <p>Good Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrating community-level child labour interventions with mandated government institutions in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal.• Applying a holistic decent work approach to address child labour in the mica mining sector in India.• Empowering communities and children to end child labour in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan.• Creating a child labour e-learning programme in Myanmar.