International Labour Organization

Evaluation Office

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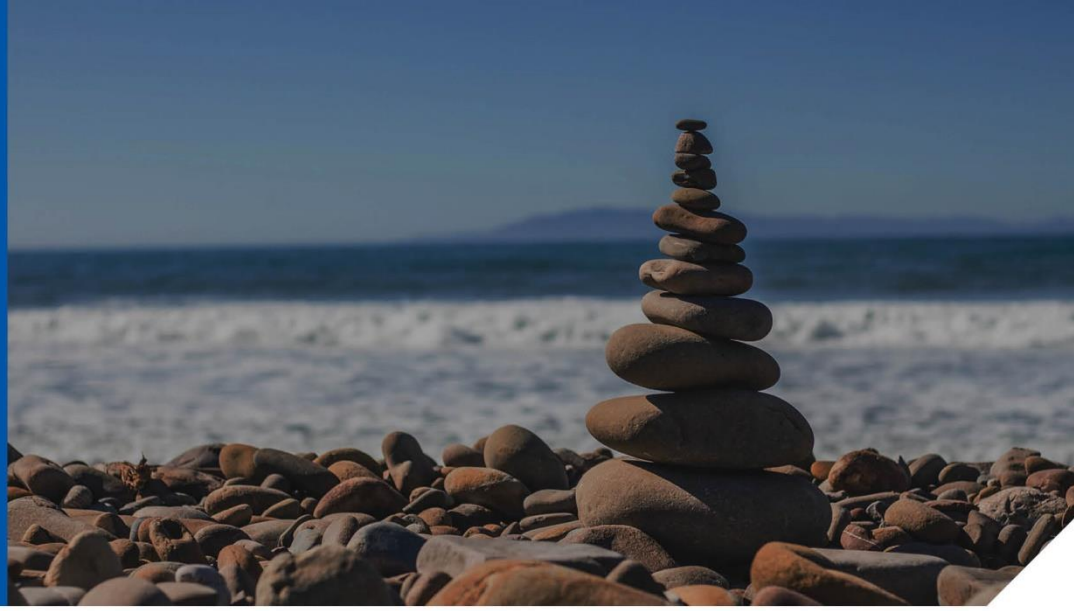

# COVID Recovery for returning Migrants and Host Communities in North West Cambodia

## QUICK FACTS

**Countries:** Cambodia

**Evaluation date:** 17 October 2024

**Evaluation type:** Project

**Evaluation timing:** Final

**Administrative Office:** Regional Office for Asian and the Pacific

**Technical Office:** Decent Work Technical Support Team-Bangkok

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**DC Symbol:** KHM/21/02/NZL

**Donor(s) & budget:** Government of New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, USD 4.35M

*Key Words:* ***Cambodia, COVID, Employment Creation, Marginalized Groups; Poverty Alleviation; Climate Adaptation Works, Crisis Response, Rural Road improvement and maintenance, Employment Intensive Approaches; external and internal returning migrants; local entrepreneurs; Vocational Technical Educational Training (TVET).***

| BACKGROUND & CONTEXT | |
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| **Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure** | Cambodia faced an unprecedented socio-economic crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic with an estimated 100,000 migrant workers returned from Thailand. A significant proportion of these returned to the provinces of Siem Reap and Battambang, along with returning internal migrants. Floods in the North-West have damaged roads and further induced labour and access to market challenges.<br><br>To address this, the government of Cambodia launched the project in partnership with ILO and supported by the New Zealand Government launched the project to provide decent work opportunities through two mechanisms. Firstly, through the application of Employment Intensive Investment Program (EIIP) or, 'labour intensive' approaches for constriction of infrastructure (rural roads) that has provided immediate income and at the same time repair and strengthen damaged commune roads which also constrained recovery from COVID-19. Secondly, to support the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system to move to distance and blended digital training systems, would increase workers and youth opportunities to obtain skills within the recovering construction and hospitality/tourism sectors.<br><br>These mechanisms were conducted from April 2021 to November 2024 in the Kaos Krab and Rukhah Kiri districts of Battambang province, and Puok and Anor Chum districts of Siem Reap province. |
| **Present situation of the project** | The project is now completed and closed operation in November 2024. |
| **Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation** | The purpose of the evaluation is both accountability and organizational learning. The clients for this are the implementing partners (Provincial governments of Siam Reap and Battambang and DGTVET), the donor (Government of New Zealand) and the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. |

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| **Methodology of evaluation** | (A short description of methodology of data collection and analysis, including rationale for choice of methodology, data sources used and major limitations encountered)<br><br>The Eval included three main steps (a) an Inception period including a zoom meeting with the ILO evaluation management team and study of relevant Project documents; (b) field visits for interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders, combined with direct observation of the activities completed; (c) validation workshop for feed-back and consultation with stakeholders.<br><br>During the field mission the Eval Team used a mixed methods approach; conducting FDGs with the direct beneficiaries; interviews with key informants including Provincial and District Governors, Commune chiefs, and administrators of TVET institutes at provincial and national levels. Specific key questions were developed to address engagement and benefits to both men and women and for persons with disability, with inclusion of these in the FGDs.<br><br>Field visits and inspection of works were made to all contract types in all districts for EIIP work. Data of beneficiary engagement was cross checked by examination of detailed record keeping (daily muster sheets for workers and Technical Progress Reports for students) and were then well triangulated by interviews with other stakeholders (contractors, commune chiefs etc.). Finally remote interviews were conducted with senior personnel of SR Provine, ILO and the NZL donor.<br><br>The Eval was conducted after field activities had been completed, so that students using the blended courses and now widely dispersed, were not interviewed. This made it difficult to assess the blended courses in terms of effective delivery and learning experience. |
| **MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS** | The application of EIIP approaches to road construction is an area that ILO has considerable experience with and developed effective tools and procedures. The project team responsible for this work included 2 engineers and assistants to support application of EIIP. |

As a result this component performed extremely well. The Project completed infrastructure works that included 92 culverts, community maintenance of 93 km of commune level roads, and 34 km of roads rehabilitated, thus matching the planned works possible from the funds available. In terms of generating decent work, the Project slightly exceeded its target, providing a total of 83,300 Work Days, (i.e. 100.6% of target), but fell short in terms of the number of House Holds (HHs) benefiting 2704 HHs (83%), a result that is still judged as highly satisfactory. A rough estimate is that 30-40% of those involved in the EIIP work have been able to obtain ongoing work in road construction as now experienced road construction workers.

It should be noted that a further set of social benefits were gained which are not typically achieved through machine-based construction: (a) high quality roads providing resilience to seasonal floods; (b) ownership and skills for effective road maintenance established within Communes; (c) substantial funds injected in commune with a multiplier effect (minimum factor of 1.5) enabling other economic activities in the communities; (d) stabilised the communities with migrate workers accessing work locally; and (e) roads and road-work better integrated into the community.

The project worked with 7 TVET institutions to develop and apply digitized course. This was successful in delivering 23 digitized course (3 above the target) which were then delivered to 3603 workers/students (90%) still highly satisfactory. The responsible TVET Institutions were successful in conducting On-the-Job Training (OJT) which exceeded its target (800 cf. 300-500) and building Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) which exceeded its target (2125 cf 120).

The NZL COVID-19 Recovery Project has in effect provided a pilot for the application of greening and digitization of the TVET system for the courses aimed at the construction and hospitality/tourism sectors. In the application of these, the Project has shown that the digitized course can provide access to courses for a greater range of workers/students, with reduced costs for delivery by the TVET

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| | institutes. The savings for both students and institutes, if widely applied, could have macro implications with reduction in fossil fuel used of several million lt./mth., and, delays in construction of additional classroom facilities and as such contribute the greening of the TVET system as a whole [1].<br><br>The pilot application of the digitized courses also indicates potential drawbacks for widespread application. Poorer learning experience for some types of students, and limited access for students that live under disadvantaged or challenging circumstances. For the TVET Institutes, there are unrecognised costs that could emerge once digitization is scaled-up; i.e. subscription fees for apps, cloud-storage and employment to additional IT staff. |

| **RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES** | |
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| **Main findings & Conclusions** | #1 The EIIP component was effective in generating decent work for returning migrant workers of 83,300 workdays, for 2704 HHs, and injecting $0,95M USD into the target communities<br><br>#2 The Project supported generation of 23 new blended courses and enabled these to be delivered to 3603 students and workers (90% of target). This in effect has provided a substantial pilot of digitized TVET courses and so contributes more generally to its further development in Cambodia.<br><br>#3 The TVET system itself is complex, and for project delivery does not have the depth of experience and protocols to guide implementation that EIIP has. Given the dynamic development of digitized ad blended systems, it was felt that this sector would be worthwhile both to the TVET system in Cambodia and to ILO. |

[1] Strategy 4.3.4 “Accelerate green transformation of TVET training institutions and adoption of sustainability practices across the whole TVET sector”. Green and Digital Technology TVET Policy Framework.

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| **Main lessons learned and good practices** | #1 Opportunities for Partners to Mainstream good practices:<br>Benefits of EIIP, demonstrated by the project, could be built upon towards mainstreaming these (for communal road rehabilitation), through design of a follow-up learning project in Siem Reap.<br>#2 Recognising the Need for Widespread Rehabilitation of Commune Roads.<br>The impact on improved commercial and social activity afforded by the Project indicates the benefit to be gained by wholesale rehabilitation of roads across a commune, rather than piecemeal and repairs that leave gaps in communication.<br>#3 Additional Social and Economic Benefits to be Gained by EIIP.<br>The EIIP delivers a range of benefits beyond the immediate income to workers. The funds that EIIP that delivers into community economies, along with multiplier effects, can have a profound impact on local commercial life. Further benefits include establishing a pool of workers within communities who can be effective and maintaining communal roads to ensure they are climate resilient, with these roads being better integrated into communal livelihoods than contractor managed works. |