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Increasing Access to Employment Opportunities for Vulnerable Urban Population in Basra City in Response to the COVID 19 Crisis

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Iraq

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

In 2022, the ILO and UN-Habitat signed a three-year cooperation development agreement titled *Increasing Access to Employment Opportunities for Vulnerable Urban Population in Basra City in Response to the COVID 19 Crisis*, funded by the EU in Iraq. The EU-funded project aimed to a) improve water, electricity, and waste management services and access in three underserved settlements in Basra (Al-Ahrar, Al-Kubiyah, and Jurf Al-Melah) led by the UN-Habitat and b) enhance job opportunities for unemployed young men and women, led by the ILO.

The cooperation agreement between the ILO and UN-Habitat officially started on 24 October 2022 and ended on 31 January 2025. The ILO-led objective was increasing access to employment opportunities for young men and women in Basra, focusing on three informal settlements (Al Kubyah, Al Ahrar, and Jurf Al Melah), where the unemployment rate is high, vulnerable people reside, and living conditions are poor.

In this project, the ILO's Theory of changes was: IF young men and women in three neighbourhoods of Basra City received series of skill development and Start and Improve Your Business trainings, and IF the employment services centre and digital employment platforms in the city are established and strengthened to provide the necessary services to unemployed vulnerable youth in the city, THEN those targeted young men and women will be equipped and empowered to secure better and more jobs in the private construction sectors and waste management businesses, BECAUSE: young men and women in Basra City are deprived of employment services and digital employment platforms; lack technical skills in the construction sectors; and they are desperate looking for jobs in the city.

Present situation of the project

ILO tailored its interventions to create jobs through three complementary dimensions: First, ILO developed labour standard conditions, contractual clauses and monitoring tools for the government and private stakeholders involved in the infrastructure sector in Basra to improve employment opportunities for young graduates and to enhance decent work principles. ILO followed the

	<p>development of those tools with a workshop for 27 stakeholders in Basra on Labour Standards and Local Resource Based technologies</p> <p>Second, to improve the employment and business skills of young, vulnerable women and men job seekers, ILO conducted 19 various vocational trainings for 456 (189 females and 267 males) and Start and Improve Your Business training for 252 potential entrepreneurs from three informal settlements of Al Kubyah, Al Ahrar and Jurf Al Melah. Additionally, ILO enhanced the skills and business endeavours of 51 (4 females and 47 males) informal waste collectors over 21 days of intensive and on-the-job training.</p> <p>Third, ILO built and equipped an employment service centre at the Basra General Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs premises to enhance access to employment services in Basra. To make the Employment Service Center functional and sustainable, ILO developed standard operational procedures, which motivated both the general directorate and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to create similar standards for other departments and units in Iraq. Furthermore, under this intervention dimension, ILO trained 27 general directorate staff members to perform career guidance and counselling for job seekers in Basra.</p>
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	<p>The evaluation of the ILO project sought to provide valuable insights into its intervention strategies and theory of change within the framework of the joint cooperation development project with UN-Habitat. Key objectives of this evaluation were assessing project outcomes, identifying and analysing challenges encountered during implementation, evaluating the potential impact of the interventions, distilling key lessons learned, and developing actionable recommendations for future program design and implementation.</p>
Methodology of evaluation	<p>This final internal evaluation process adopted OECD-DAC criteria to meet the overall purpose and the specific objectives in terms of (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability). During the evaluation process, those criteria were studied in light of specific questions grasped from the evaluation Terms of reference.</p>

A mixed methodology approach was utilized to assess the project achievements against the intended results. The approach constituted a secondary and primary research endeavour. The secondary research focused on reviewing the project documents, published reports and studies referenced in this report.

The primary data research consisted of a survey with young engineers and staff of the employment service centre, representing at least 57.1% of the beneficiaries reached through the training. Meanwhile, the qualitative research consists of interviewing 78 project stakeholders, including 66 participants of FGD and 12 KII interviews.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The main observation is the project had a great echo within Basra to the degree that people thought it was the ILOs alone. The evaluation process found that the ILO's project was highly relevant to the needs in Iraq and in Basra. All the project beneficiaries and stakeholders explained that ILO's project was directly meeting the priority needs in Iraq and, precisely, in Basra, which was due to the lack of job opportunities, mismatch between the skills and experiences of young graduates with needs of the market, lack of awareness among young people of the public platform (Mihan) for the job seeker, lack of employment service centre in Basra, lack of protection of informal workers and lack of developed waste management infrastructure in the country.

The ILO strategic intervention was a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach. ILO worked on job creation through training, developing the Standard Operational Procedures of the Employment Service Center, and training the staff on counselling and career guidance services. Meanwhile, the ILO project was coherent with the existing ILO programs in the country and with the UN-Habitat intervention, improving access to basic services in the same targeted areas.

Additionally, the evaluation process found that the project design and implementation modality were very efficient. The ILO wisely worked efficiently with the project's existing resources by involving multiple stakeholders in steering the project, including Civil society

Organization, the Contractor Union, local authorities, and the General Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs.

The evaluation process found that the ILO project was highly effective in creating jobs, equipping the project beneficiaries with the skills and knowledge necessary to find jobs and engage in the world of work. For example, capacitating the young engineers and the staff of the Employment service centre was very satisfactory, engaging and retentive. Participants of the Focus Group Discussions reported a high approval of the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme training, demonstrating their newly acquired practical and project management skills. Meanwhile, the employers endorsed the training and explained, “No one learns from theory, and everyone learns from practice and hence recommend the initiative to go to students at college, so they gain employment skills early”. The same findings apply to capacity-building activities of job seekers through Vocational Trainings, Start and Improve Your Business training, and waste management trainings, as the majority of the interviewees found the ILO initiative highly effective and very satisfactory. They clearly explained that they attained knowledge and technical experience, which grew from zero to confidence in applying for jobs or becoming self-employed. However, raising awareness of the contractor through a workshop on Labour Standards and Local Resource Based technologies was found to have limited impact, which needs a follow-up to practise that knowledge. Additionally, access to finance is still challenging for the project beneficiaries planning to start up their business.

The waste collectors are the most successful examples of the project's effectiveness. They benefited from enhancing their skills and capacities and remaining in active employment. For them, making a profit from waste while saving the environment and doing it through decent work was a win-win situation.

The project is highly likely to produce long-term effects on job creation and employment opportunities for the most vulnerable groups in the three selected neighbourhoods, focusing on young men and women. Youth gain new skills and knowledge through vocational training, business startups, and job searching, enabling them to hold the skills and experiences required in the job market. For example, 15

out of 19 surveyed engineers have jobs. Meanwhile, the evaluation found the project enhanced the waste collectors' performance and business endeavours through healthily performing their job, connecting the waste collectors to the recycling factory (SMEs). Additionally, the social impact of the project on all trainees was significant. They made new friends and connected via WhatsApp groups. They help each other by referring job vacancies to each other. Furthermore, one significant impact of the project was the establishment of a new Employment Services Center at the General Directorate premises, followed by training the staff on career guidance and counselling and development of the Standard Operational Procedures to sustain the operation.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

The project evaluation identified a set of lessons learned and good practises and developed a set of recommendations, which are summarized as follows:

Recommendations

1. Project stakeholders unanimously request that the project be taken to the next level or extended to reach more expansive areas and youth. Therefore, it is recommended that the ILO design similar interventions in Basra.
2. Facilitate access to finance for the Start and Improve Your Business graduates, enabling them to start their businesses. Therefore, it is recommended that the ILO collaborate with DOLSA and find ways to allow trainees to benefit from government loans.
3. Enhance collaboration between the Employment Service Center, Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs' and the Contractor Union for the basic infrastructure project to activate the Mihan platform for employers and job seekers. This is a recommendation to be considered by the ILO in designing new designed initiatives
4. Enhance the role of contractor unions by a) engaging them in project steering committees to assist in defining

	<p>skills required in the market, duration of the training, and delivering the theoretical and practical sessions of the training. B) building capacity of contractor unions on decent work principles, ways of approaching male and female job seekers and connection with the Employment Service Center.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. CSO's contribution was instrumental in community mobilization and coordination. Their expertise in designing new projects or enhancing existing ones would benefit future initiatives. 6. The evaluation process found that the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme was effective in creating jobs. Therefore, it's recommended that the program be replicated and that government organizations build their capacity on the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme . 7. It is recommended to maintain the interlinkage of the ILO program in the country as it will maximize the project results. Therefore, sharing the collaboration development proposal among the ILO teams in the country before sending it to donors is highly recommended. 8. Working with waste collectors enhanced the project's impact, which was evident during the evaluation. However, the evaluation recommends that the ILO create a vision and a strategy for its intervention before continuing in this sector, as the country does not have a systematic and functional recycling system.
<p>Main lessons learned and good practices</p>	<p>Lesson learned</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- In general, while UN-Habitat and ILO Delivered as One- a United Nation initiative as a reform agenda for efficient resources use, and a framework for a unified and coherent UN structure at the country level, the two

agencies were complementing each other in terms of areas of expertise. However, it could have been better for both agencies to have mitigated risk of staff turnover and what implication that has had on the payment, timeline...etc.

- 2- Contractor Union: it would have been better to capacitate and involve them in the project through the steering committee to activate their contribution and improve their collaboration with directorate of Labour and Social affairs as the Union had limited capacity and role in the project.
- 3- Synchronizing and interlinking the project with other ILO country programs contributed well to its achievement, as demonstrated by the development of the Employment Service center and the Standard Operational Procedure manual.
- 4- Involving a CSO in the community mobilization in the project intervention showed that it could overcome cultural constraints on women participation as they were vulnerable and hard to involve initially
- 5- Combining theoretical training with practical training and awarding certificates and tool kits to graduates were factors in boosting their confidence and contributing to kick-starting graduate employment. However, the tool kits were not enough because access to finance is still an essential factor in starting their businesses. Graduates who tried to apply for loans were marred by conditions that they could not meet

Good practices

- 1- The ILO linked the young engineers with the private sector, an ongoing construction project, enabling trained young engineers to gain practical experience. This was an ILO initiative which showed creativity.

- 2- Connecting the project beneficiaries with the other country's program projects to access finance enables them to maintain their economic activities and start up their business.
- 3- Mobilizing the vocational training graduates to serve in their community by rehabilitating the school was another good practice that benefited the community and the graduates as they practiced their new professions.
- 4- A steering committee was important to ensure coordination among project stakeholders. The Committee met regularly to keep each other informed and find solutions to issues during the project implementation.
- 5- Establishing temporary satellite employment centers within the community ensured that the project reached to most vulnerable people, including female and disabled people.
- 6- Investing in the employment service centre ensures that more youth will benefit from counselling, career guidance, and job seekers' links with employers. Referral of these beneficiaries to vocational trainings means that they will gain experience and potentially employment.