

**POLICIES, PARTNERSHIPS, LEARNING &
LOCAL EMPOWERMENT (PPLL) PROJECT**

RAS/25/01/JPN

**Midterm Self-Evaluation
Report**

September 2025

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Project is in its 17th month of operations as of the writing of this report in September 2025. With 13 months to go, it has accomplished a lot and is on the right path in terms of strategies and existing partnerships towards achieving its targets by project-end. Still a lot of work have to be done though, and the remaining months will not be easy ones considering the following:

- the current political crisis in Nepal;
- the shift in the governance and management of the mica mineral in India from the state to the national level; and
- the Project's current financial position.

With regards its component on research and learning, the Project has initiated a lot of important studies in both countries. In India these are related to its work in building capacities and designing interventions among stakeholders in Jharkhand and Rajasthan, where mica and sandstone mining communities can be found, respectively. In Nepal the major effort under this outcome is the integration of a child labour module in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and ensuring that the actual process commences. Overall, what is need for the succeeding months though is to ensure that these studies are completed and they be used for knowledge-sharing activities designed to develop interventions and innovative solutions. The publication of this research once done should also be taken as priority.

Under the second component on enhancing laws and their enforcement, the Project has gone a long way in Nepal through its support for the strengthening of the child labour act, having a hazardous work for children list adopted, reviewing the Child Labour Free Zones (CLFZs) programme and assessing the implementation of National Master Plan (NMP-II) on child labour. In India, the Project has hit a hurdle when the central government took governance over the mica mineral away from states and handed it to itself by reclassifying it from a minor to a major mineral. With almost all targets of the Project in this component in India related to its work at the state level and no clear guidance issued yet on how this transition will happen, the Project has had to pivot and pursue other similar interventions such as the development and eventual adoption of a state action plan on child labour in Jharkhand. Its work on improving enforcement of child labour laws and implementation of social programmes among sandstone mining communities in Rajasthan are also accomplishments here. What is needed under this outcome in the remaining months though is more of this focus on enforcement and implementation as the next step after all the policy-level interventions.

As for the third component on strengthening inter-agency coordination, the Project completed a major analysis of bodies doing such convergence in India which will be used as basis for the development capacity-building interventions. Work at the ground level in Rajasthan among sandstone mining communities has targeted

district-level coordination bodies and made them more effective in fulfilling their mandates when it comes to child labour elimination. In Nepal, the work here revolves around the partnership with the National Child Rights Council (NCRC) and its setting up of a referral mechanism on child labour tied with the existing child protection mechanism. A major feature of its approach is the bringing together of different stakeholders who will perform roles under the enhanced system. The next step for the succeeding months though will have to translate these different interventions into actual well-functioning coordination bodies.

The Project overall has done good work under the fourth component on empowering local communities. In Nepal, this is very clear in its work in enhancing the CLFZ programme and actually supporting municipalities using the approach. With the partnership with the NCRC it is expected that local capacities related to detecting and addressing child labour will be enhanced. In India, as previously mentioned, most of the work here is in the sandstone space in Rajasthan where communities have been organized into different associations so that they can address child labour at their level and access key government programmes and schemes to address root causes. What is needed as a next step here is to document these interventions and package them as models to be presented to governments for replication and adoption as prescribed solutions.

Despite the different challenges the Project is facing, which is an echo of what the ILO itself and the rest of the UN are facing, the fact remains is that the external environment and the actual feedback of external stakeholders are pointing to the fact that the work on child labour elimination remains relevant. The specific approach of the Project of integrating sectoral and area-based approaches, and of integrating different Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW), of addressing short-term root causes-related needs while building capacities which have longer term impact are also seen as valid and very much need as well given the current social climate.

To continue to respond to the needs of the current situation related to child labour and the explicit requests of child labour the Project needs more time and resources to build upon its gains thus far and current momentum.

B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Policies, Partnerships, Learning and Local Empowerment (PPLL) Project is a regional undertaking funded by the Government of Japan (GoJ) on the elimination of child labour. Its overall objective is to contribute to accelerating actions against child labour in South Asia, particularly in India and Nepal, while also undertaking interventions at the regional and sub-regional levels. ILO builds upon its long history of combatting child labour in South Asia by mainstreaming this agenda into broader

socio-economic policies and involving tripartite constituents at the national, provincial, and local levels. It supports the acceleration of efforts against child labour by building upon the gains made by and lessons generated from UK-funded Asia Regional Child (ARC) labour Project which started in 2019 and ended in March 2024.

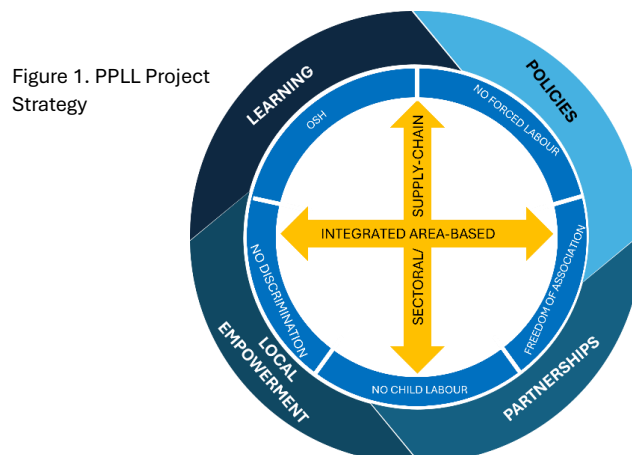
While using the elimination of child labour as the primary focus and entry point, the Project takes an approach integrating the other FPRWs of ILO, namely: abolition of forced labour; promotion of freedom of association; non-discrimination; and occupational safety and health.

The Project works with ILO's constituents and other stakeholders in the two countries (Nepal and India) and at the regional level towards the following objectives:

- 1. Innovative solutions generated and tested from learning;**
- 2. Enforcement of policies and implementation of plans on child labour are more effective;**
- 3. Inter-agency collaboration mechanisms on child labour are functional and active; and**
- 4. Communities and local stakeholders are empowered to address child labour.**

The Project pursues interventions using a combination of integrated area-based and sector-based approaches towards creating CLFZs and child labour-free supply chains, including contributing to strengthening law enforcement and enhancing public awareness. It works with governments to ensure that policies on child labour are aligned with relevant ILO conventions, in particular, the C182 on worst forms of child labour and the C138 on the minimum age for employment and build their capacities to strengthen the implementation of national and local plans of action for prevention and elimination of child labour.

Figure 1 below captures this above-described approach.



C. PURPOSE, SCOPE & CLIENTS OF EVALUATION

With a total budget of USD 1.8 M and a timeline of 30 months starting April 2024, the Project is due to finish by September 2026. It is thus due for a midterm evaluation. In lieu of an independent external evaluation, the Project has been approved to undertake a self-evaluation as its midterm review on the following grounds:

- the Project has a strong M&E system in place developed by an embedded M&E officer who stayed until July 2025;
- the Project tracks its progress against the indicators set in the results framework;
- the Project conducts semestral review meetings and monthly monitoring meetings; and
- the evaluation budget of this Project is small at USD 26,760 which is only sufficient for funding the final independent evaluation.

The objectives and evaluation criteria of the self-evaluation are the following:

1. To determine project progress versus targets, identify factors for variance and lessons learned.
2. To determine efficiency in utilization of resources.
3. To check on project relevance and design validity.
4. To determine current state of sustainability efforts.
5. To identify and prioritize action items and course correction measures to help improve implementation in second half.

The intended clients of this evaluation are the following:

1. Project team members to use as basis for making necessary adjustments during the remaining period of the Project;
2. the India and Nepal Country Offices so they can check Project contributions to programming targets and effectively provide technical support in the succeeding months;
3. the FPRW Branch, especially specialists looking after Asia and the Pacific, as basis for their continued technical guidance;
4. EVAL colleagues as an input into their knowledge base on evaluations across different ILO projects and as an example of doing Self-Evaluations; and
5. Project implementing partners and stakeholders, so they are aware of the Project's status and what are emerging areas for collaboration moving forward.

D. METHODOLOGY

The Project utilized a couple of methodologies in doing the Self-Evaluation. Documents analysis involving implementation reports, Technical Progress Reports (TPRs) and minutes of team meetings were done in the early stages as bases for succeeding steps. Then, a key informant's email survey was conducted among selected stakeholders to get in-depth feedback on the different criteria. A total of 17 (6 in India and 11 in Nepal) were reached through this. The survey tool is attached as Annex 1 and the list of respondents as Annex 2.

After all the data were gathered, these were all synthesized and collated in matrices (Annex 3). The matrices were then used as bases for in-depth discussions done by the Project team during an online Midterm Internal Review and Planning Meeting held for 2 days on 22 and 24 July 2025. The design of this review meeting is attached as Annex 4.

As can be seen in the review meeting agenda, the Project team intensively discussed each component and criteria based on the survey results as well as the project updates from each country. After the discussions in each component, the team agreed on the findings, factors and recommendations which are the ones that are contained in this report.

E. FINDINGS FOR EACH CRITERION

In this section, the different findings will be presented per criteria. In the case of Criteria 1, the presentation is sub-divided into outcomes or components.

I. **Criteria 1: *Project progress versus targets, identify factors for variance and lessons learned.***

Outcome 1: Innovative solutions generated and tested from learning.

1. 2 of the 4 targeted studies in India, the one on child labour in sandstone mining, was completed. This was tied to the development of a toolkit on child labour for the sandstone sector in Rajasthan which was preceded by an in-depth study. The study on migration flows in the brick kilns sector was dropped because of the challenge of conducting cross-border studies. The third one, on child labour and FPRW in critical mineral supply chains, is going to start very soon. This will become an important basis for the design of ILO interventions in the space. An important piece on gap analysis of inter-agency coordination has been completed already and, as with the others earlier mentioned, will make for good inputs into the design of interventions, especially those related to capacity-building.

2. Knowledge sharing activities were pursued in India as part of events conducted such as the launches of the Mica Development Masterplan and the State Action Plan on Child Labour in Jharkhand. In Rajasthan, different sessions were done to share knowledge at the state and district levels. The envisioned work with a knowledge sharing platform is still to be done as part of activities to advocate for more awareness and involvement about FPRW in the critical minerals supply chain.
3. In Nepal, the Project was instrumental in having a child labour module integrated in the ongoing process of preparing for the country's LFS. The Project also provided technical support and guidance to the overall LFS process. Studies on child labour in both the carpet and bricks supply chains are ongoing and will be launched soon to serve as bases for the development of interventions in the concerned sectors.
4. The work on the LFS in Nepal was stalled because of the lack of funding. The Project was instrumental in acquiring funding from (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the UK Government for this but bureaucratic delays on the part of government led to the non-release of the funds.
5. The Project was able to develop an innovation strategy to serve as guide for the conduct of innovative and agile demonstration interventions on the ground. The country teams are still waiting for the completion of key research before it can reach this stage. Along with this, will be the targeting of knowledge sharing platforms that will work with the Project on these innovative solutions.

Outcome 2: Enforcement of policies and implementation of plans on child labour are more effective.

6. The policy level work of the Project in India, was tied to the development and formalization of the mica sector in Jharkhand. However, the whole sector was recently disrupted when the central government of India re-categorized mica from a minor mineral to be governed at the state level to a major mineral to be handled by them. All stakeholders are still awaiting guidance from both levels of government on the way forward. This has led to a pause and consequent delay of Project activities in this space.
7. To make up for this, the Project has shifted to working with the state government of Jharkhand in the development of state action plan on child labour to update the 2013 version. A draft that was launched this year has already undergone many rounds of consultation at the district level and will enter the stages of finalization and adoption soon. The Project has also started talks with key stakeholders in Rajasthan to replicate in the sandstone its formalization and development efforts that were started in the mica space in Jharkhand. A scanning study will be started soon to launch the work in the sector.

8. In terms of building enforcement capacity, the Project in India has focused on the sandstone space in Rajasthan, especially at the local level. Various interventions designed to enhance government action against child labour on the ground has been done through the conduct of different capacity building interventions, such as district-level dialogues on child labour laws and enhancement of local level child protection mechanisms.
9. In Nepal, the Project was instrumental in having the new hazardous work list for children processed and approved by government. The Project through its work with the NCRC in mapping light work done by children in the country as a step towards the creation of a light work provision in the child labour act. This also supports the ongoing effort of government to review the child labour act, which the Project is providing technical advice to. The Project is also working with and providing technical guidance to the Alliance 8.7 Secretariat together with FAO and UNICEF.
10. As Nepal is in the middle of preparing government reports to ILO with regards its application of Conventions 138, 182 and 29, the Project has initiated a study to look at the country's efforts related to these along with a review of the implementation of the national plan of action on child labour and the CLFZ program. The findings will not only be used for the report to ILO but as basis for the development and enhancement of policies and interventions.
11. The Project has conducted a lot of activities focusing on the regional level as well as working with regional formations to strengthen country-level interventions. This was done through the Project's position as Chair of the Child Labour Technical Working Group (TWG) of the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG) and ILO's MOU with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC). Under these partnerships a South Asia-wide face-to-face regional meeting on children in emergencies, with a focus on Rohingya children, was carried out in Nepal. Leading to this, a national children's consultation was done in Nepal to gather feedback from the children and relevant CSOs in the country about the issue. A virtual regional consultation for CSOs and children was also conducted as part of the preparations for the ILO-organized 6th Global Conference on Child Labour in 2026. These partnerships were also instrumental in having a national children's consultation in India involving child representatives from 18 states.

Component 3: Inter-agency collaboration mechanisms on child labour are functional and active.

12. In India, a gap analysis of the performance of inter-agency structures on child labour enforcement in Jharkhand and Rajasthan was done. The

study also served as a scanning exercise on capacities of agencies mandated to address child labour. The Project is currently developing interventions from these findings of this gap analysis to carry out activities to improve inter-agency coordination and build overall enforcement capacity during its last year of implementation.

13. As it enters the critical minerals space in Rajasthan, the Project has initiated discussions with key players in the state to create an inter-agency coordination group to investigate FPRW-related issues in the sector. Upcoming activities will include conducting a rapid appraisal, convening of a working group, organizing policy discussions and technical forums on the issue. The vision is that these will lead to the incorporation of an FPRW agenda into the plans that government and stakeholders to develop the sector.
14. In Rajasthan, interagency coordination at the local level was strengthened as part of interventions designed to improve performance of duty-bearers. The conduct of district interface meetings bringing together different enforcement and service-delivery agencies to ensure alignment in the performance of their roles is an example of this. State-wide meetings to discuss how to improve coordination across district mechanism and actors along with the strengthening of inter-agency child protection committees in nature were also done.
15. In Jharkhand, as part of the process of developing a state action plan on child labour, various consultations which were participated in by different agencies and groups. These are expected to be instrumental moving forward to the implementation of the action plan as its various activities and interventions are designed around inter-agency convergence.
16. In Nepal, the work with the NCRC involves fostering inter-agency collaboration in addressing child labour issues at the level of the child labour-free municipality. Aside from this, it is also geared at strengthening coordination among the NCRC which is a national body, provincial-level agencies and the municipalities themselves.
17. The Project's work through Nepal's Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) program promotes inter-agency collaboration as this serves as a platform for convergence of different government agencies and other in resolving child labour and child protection issues at large in the municipality.
18. The Project also convened workers' and employers' groups in the bricks and carpet sectors in Nepal to enable them to design interventions involving their collaboration in addressing FPRW issues in the two sectors. They have already developed the projects they intend to pursue which will be carried out during the Project's second half.
19. Nepal's Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG), composed of different international organizations and UN agencies, is being continually assisted by the Project through the provision of technical guidance and support.

20. The Project's work at the regional level has promoted inter-agency coordination among international organizations and UN agencies on the issue of child labour. This has cascaded to the country level as activities organized involve National Action & Coordination Group for Ending Violence Against Children (NACGs) which are networks involving local CSOs.

Component 4: Communities and local stakeholders are empowered in addressing child labour.

21. The Project's work in the sandstone space in Rajasthan has empowered target communities to fight child labour by organizing and tapping different associations such as children's clubs and workers' collectives. Capacity building in the areas of leadership, accessing social protection schemes and legal rights have provided communities with essential tools to address the issue.
22. The Project is working with AITUC (All India Trade Union Confederation) to organize workers and informal groups in the mica belt into unions. This will not only enhance the workers' capacities but also strengthen their claims-making efforts by connecting with a wider trade union.
23. As mentioned under Component 2, the re-categorization of mica from a minor mineral to a major mineral has impacted the work of the Project in the space. Banking on Jharkhand's Dibra Policy which called on the use of the cooperative model as the way to formalize workers and activities, the Project targeted the organizing and strengthening of mica workers' cooperatives in the space. With the shift though, this policy's implementation has been paused and consequently affected the Project's ability to design and pursue interventions related to cooperatives. It is exploring if the work with unions can be expanded to include the organizing of cooperatives, but this approach is still being discussed internally.
24. In Nepal, the main strategy to promote empowerment at the local level has been the work with CLFZs. The Project has supported 2 more municipalities to declare themselves as child labour-free. At the same time, it has also continued to provide technical support to other municipalities it has previously supported. By engaging national processes, especially the ongoing review of nationwide efforts against child labour including the CLFZ programme, the Project is also ensuring that the work across all the other municipalities striving for CLFZ status is also enhanced.
25. The Project's involvement with the field offices of NSO to build their capacities especially in the measurement of child labour will lead to the enhancement of their work with CLFZs in doing their baseline studies.

26. The work with NCRC is also designed to improve the capacities of CLFZ municipalities so that their work on child labour is consolidated and is streamlined into the overall community-level child protection system. More importantly though, NCRC will also undertake interventions related to strengthening mechanisms to rescue and rehabilitate child labourers at the local level.

II. Criteria 2: Efficiency in utilization of resources

27. The Project has been hampered because lack of financial resources to pursue activities. It is still not yet sure at this stage if funding intended for 2026 will be released and is operating as if whatever funds are in the system currently will have to last until Project-end. With this and still a lot of deliverables to pursue, the Project's ability to achieve all targets is being threatened.

28. Of the Project's total budget of USD 1.8 million, around USD 1,721,389 or 95% have been received already. However, a greater amount has gone into operations and salaries due to unforeseen expenses like additional operational costs, country-level salary increases and step increments of staff. The Project has also secured staff salaries until target end-date of September 2026. The Project needs additional funds for 2026 thus to pursue remaining activities.

29. One of the reasons for the Project's financial situation is the lack of clarity on the schedule and amount of releases. The Project had an overall workplan as part of its submissions when submitting the Project Document. And this workplan indicated how much was needed on a yearly basis so that all planned activities could be forward. However, in practice this schedule was not followed, and releases instead were dependent on factors such as:

- sources of funds on the donor's side (whether supplementary or regular);
- the cycles of these different sources;
- availability of extra funds from other projects; and
- approval from the donor's government on a yearly basis.

30. What made this more challenging was that there was a lack of communication to the Project about the timelines associated behind these different factors. As a result, project management became challenging as the Project could not see and plan for a longer period than what the funds available in the system could support. Programming activities sequentially so they hit end-of-project targets became difficult.

Given that the Project still does not know whether 2026 funds are arriving or not, the overall financial picture is all the more challenging.

31. Another impact of this irregular and ad hoc releases was it made financial management confusing. In order to avoid the cutting of staff contracts (which almost happened twice in the life of the Project because of delays in releases), the priority of the Project was to extend staff contracts upon release of payments to a point where the next tranche was most likely to arrive. Then, the Project would use what was left for activities. With the Project now having secured staff costs until September 2026 which is important given the budget crunch being experienced in ILO and across the UN, it is in need of additional funds to pursue other activities.
32. Despite these challenge, the Project's strategy of fostering collaborative work among stakeholders, tapping existing mechanism and schemes and building capacities of key stakeholders made its pursuit of some activities efficient in terms of fund utilization. The investments it has made in these areas and the building of trust with stakeholders has enabled the Project to take a technical leadership role even without spending a lot of resources.

III. Criteria 3: Relevance and Validity

33. All evidence and feedback point to the conclusion that the Project remains relevant given the present context. Overall, the message is there is still a need for interventions against child labour given challenges on both the sides of duty-bearers and rights-holders. These are some of the major ones:
 - Child labour remains a problem especially in agriculture and the informal economy despite the global decline. Increase in incidences of conflicts and emergencies which lead to child labour.
 - Still a lot of gaps on the enforcement side, e.g., implementation of laws, capacities of duty bearers, poor functionality of government structures and mechanisms.
 - Clear government demand for additional and expanded support from stakeholders such as from the government of Nepal in the areas of research, CLFZs, updating of laws and plans and revision of national laws and plans. Or from stakeholders in the small-scale mining sector in India asking for more ILO technical assistance in formalizing enterprises and workers in the space.
 - Recommendations of ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) related to child labour Conventions in both countries and beyond

require the strategy and interventions that the Project is pursuing for them to be acted on.

- There is a lot of good work and good practices among stakeholders which are asking for a platform for knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

34. In terms of the Project's strategy and approach, the consensus is that these are still valid. The following are the explanations for this:

- The mix of sector-based and integrated-area based approaches casts a wider and holistic net so that all forms of child labour and their root cause are effectively addressed. This is way better than strategies that just utilize either of the two.
- Using an integrated FPRW approach anchored on ultimately addressing the broader problem of lack of decent work in a specific sector or community makes integrations more relevant and their results longer lasting.
- Building capacities of key sectors like government, employers and workers in fighting child labour pays off better in the long run as it provides them with the means to continue their leadership roles in the space even when this Project or other similar initiatives are finished.
- Leveraging and maximizing existing government programmes, especially social protection schemes, puts the Project in a position to have more outreach and use its resources more efficiently and strategically.
- Working on root causes and immediate problems at the community-level while also building capacities of duty-bearers at the same time enables the Project to tackle both short term and long-term needs in parallel during the Project.
- The promotion of inter-agency collaboration and convergence through the Project's leveraging of ILO's social dialogue principle and expertise is building a greater cooperation and coordination among stakeholders and is still very much needed moving forward.

35. These points are really saying that the Project's strategy as captured in its 4 outcomes of; research and learning; policy enhancement and implementation; inter-agency collaboration; and empowerment of local communities and how they are integrated along with the addressing of FPRW and decent work issues remains a very valid approach.

36. The Project, however, needs to reflect on its strategy in the face of shrinking budgets in the whole international development space, ILO's own internal review process and how ILO's FPRW Strategy has shifted to emphasize work at the policy level more. One clear shift is to look at work at the community level as the building of models and the testing of

innovative solutions which will then be used as bases for policy and programme recommendations to stakeholders, especially governments. These will then lead to them being potentially incorporated into official policies, strategies, plans and programmes through advocacy measures.

IV. Criteria 4: Sustainability

37. As already discussed above, sustainability is already built into the work of the Project because of its strategy of fostering collaborative work among stakeholders, tapping existing mechanism and schemes and building capacities of key stakeholders. The work with the NCRC in Nepal, for example, in installing a child labour lens into their child protection system will continue as an institutionalized mechanism after the Project.
38. The Project utilizes a phase-over approach where its approaches and interventions are transferred to key stakeholders identified as potentially instrumental in sustaining them beyond the life of the Project. Efforts toward this will intensify during the Project's final year.
39. Working with communities, not in terms of service-delivery but in terms of building their capacities to make claims according to their rights, also ensures sustainability. The Project has organized associations among women, children and broader communities among small scale mining villages in Rajasthan and Jharkhand. These have allowed them to become effective frontliners against child labour and be effective in addressing root causes of this at their level, especially in lobbying for more services and greater access to social protection schemes. Working with local level officials and strengthening their capacities and ensuring improved coordination in handling child labour cases and child protection issues in general will also go a long way in sustaining the work of the Project.

V. Criteria 5: Course Correction Measures *(see section on Recommendations)*

VI. On Inclusion

40. Because the Project is using an integrated FPRW approach which includes non-discrimination, addressing gender, disability and issues of minorities, promoting rights to inclusion is incorporated in its work. For example, in Jharkhand, the communities working in the informal mica space are mostly indigenous peoples and by helping them the Project is also contributing to addressing their marginalization and non-inclusion and promoting their rights and development.
41. The Project is also working with *dalits* or untouchables in Nepal, particularly on the issue of forced labour. It is also working with children

with disabilities as part of its overall approach in helping communities in the sandstone sector of Rajasthan.

42. The Project has developed a gender strategy and has ensured that this is part of the development of interventions and in generating reports. In terms of strategy, this is reflected in the Project's work with women's groups and women-led savings clubs in the artisanal mining communities in mica and sandstone areas. Given that child labour in small scale mining is associated with child rearing activities of women, these interventions are important strategies against child labour.

F. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

The approach in Nepal is to support the whole government across different departments and levels of governance in working for the elimination of child labour. This entails working with the Ministry Of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MOLESS), the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the National Child Rights Council (NCRC) and inter-agency structures at the national level while also working with provincial-level and state-level offices in the implementation of the CLFZ programme. However, recent developments in the country which culminated in the collapse of the previous government and the transition to a temporary one has led to uncertainty about how to move forward. This is true not only for the Project but for everyone else doing activities in the country. This has not stopped the Project from continuing to engage stakeholders and along with them strategize what interventions can feasibly be pursued under the circumstances.

In India, as previously discussed, a lot of Project interventions across its 4 components in relation to mica mining were linked to the positive developments happening Jharkhand state where government was paving the way for the formalization of informal mining. During that time, mica was a minor mineral which meant it was being governed at the level of the state. No one expected this to change until the central government suddenly declared it as a major mineral effectively moving mica-related activities under its jurisdiction. This disrupted the work, approaches and projects that were being conducted in the space within Jharkhand. And along with them, also the operations of the Project. No clear guidelines moving forward have been issued yet and all stakeholders have mostly paused their activities. This has led the Project to shift to other similar activities in the state as reported in previous sections.

This trend where governments, especially in South Asia, are trying to minimize official numbers of child labourers is causing confusion among stakeholders and affecting actual work on the ground. In India this is seen in the government's lack of interest in doing studies that have to do with determining incidence of child labour or any those that mark a specific sector or territory as having forced labour. In Nepal

this is reflected in government's active and strong push to exclude family-based work in agriculture from the determination of child labour even though there is already a clear ICLS guidance on the matter.

Another issue that arises when dealing with government offices is the frequent turn-over of officials. In Nepal this has become a regular occurrence and the Project, along with other stakeholders, have had to adjust to different priorities of incoming officials compared to their predecessors. The same thing is happening in India, albeit not as frequent.

The Project's financial situation which has led to its difficulty in pursuing targeted activities is also a major current challenge as already discussed. On top of this, however, the process itself that led to this, i.e., the lack of clear information about when financial releases from the donor would come and for how much took away the Project's ability to programme activities in a sequential manner towards attaining end-results. Planning became reduced to what could be done in the short term done with available funds in the system without any assurance when the next tranche would come, if at all. This made financial management and overall project management extra challenging.

G. LESSONS LEARNED & GOOD PRACTICES

The following are what stakeholders, and the Project team consider to be good practices worthy of being disseminated as models. A sub-section of lessons learned follows where key insights from the challenges that Project faced in the course of implementation are identified and described.

Good Practices

As discussed in the section on relevance and validity, the Project's approaches have proven to be valid as their efficacy has been validated by feedback from stakeholders as well as actual demand for expanded work.

One clear good practice is how the Project takes an integrated approach in tackling child labour and addresses it as part of a broader strategy on the promotion of decent work, starting with the FPRWs. In the mica belt of Jharkhand, for example, project interventions address issues on child labour, forced labour, non-discrimination, freedom of association, occupational safety and health, and social protection. This approach, as captured in the feedback from partners, casts a wider net on the problem and tackles root causes. It also allows the Project to tackle immediate issues on the ground while also addressing long-term needs and sustainability by building capacities of duty-bearers in these various technical areas.

Providing a platform for collaboration is also a good practice of the Project and seen in its work in Nepal as it tries to bring different actors together in having municipalities achieve the status of being child labour-free. This collaboration is both horizontal, across different themes and departments, and vertical, across different levels of governance. When before, for example, MOLESS was handling child labour issues separately from how Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MOWSCS) was handling child protection issues at large, through the Project there is greater collaboration because of the development of a referral mechanism on child labour attached to the existing child protection system.

The CLFZ approach in itself is also a good practice as executed by the Nepali government. Though this strategy can also be found in other countries, the commitment in Nepal is very evident because actual financial investments are made by the national government to support efforts of local government units to clear their territories of child labour. Though the process towards being declared as child labour-free is still quite slow and complicated and the overall approach still needs some tweaking, it is a programme that has shown that success on the ground can be achieved if commitments are translated into actions and budget allocations.

Another important good practice of the Project, as seen in its work in the small-scale minerals supply chains of India, is the linking of work on the ground in addressing poverty- and labour- related issues to broader efforts towards formalizing whole sectors. This is clearly seen in the work in Jharkhand as the Project worked with different stakeholders in asking government to take steps to formalize mica picking. The Project built on this by proposing and launching a master plan for the development of the mica sector according to the pillars of FPRW. Though work in this area is still on pause as discussed above, the gains thus far are something that can still be considered a model in working with different states and even different sectors.

Through its efforts at the regional and sub-regional level, the Project has been able to show the benefits of collaboration in building a greater movement at these levels towards addressing child labour. These eventually will cascade to the countries and support the work of the Project and other stakeholders at that level. The Project has been instrumental, as reported in previous sections of this report, in bringing together different UN and international organizations at the sub-regional level through its chairmanship of the TWG on Child Labour of the SACG and its MOU with SAIEVAC. These have been translated into important sub-regional and regional meetings and consultations that have strengthened the advocacy against child labour across the South Asia sub-region and beyond.

Lessons Learned

The current slowdown in Nepal brought about by the political transition in the country and the still unstable situation and the pause of the work in the mica space in Jharkhand have taught the Project to do a much deeper risk analysis at the onset. These 2 incidents would never have been imagined possible at the beginning of the Project and the risk analysis done at that stage never captured them. Given how complicated and quickly shifting the world is right now though, a much thorough risk analyses and their monitoring and early mitigation are very important.

A lesson learned related to the donor's system is for its implementing partners to be properly informed about financial releases and as much as possible make this part of a regular cycle. This will greatly enhance project management in a project as it will allow for proper planning and budget allocation and spending. The connection between the workplan and budget plan designed at the onset of the Project and the release schedule and cycle should be established.

The Project did not budget for communications and advocacy work and is realizing now that this would have softened the ground for its work in the 4 components. In Nepal, for example, where this is still a confusion about child labour definitions and the government itself is actively trying to change the interpretation of the definitions, having a communications and advocacy campaign would have been very helpful to clarify the matter to a certain extent.

The previous work of the ARC Project in doing village development plans with a child labour component in India is a good example of how work at the local level can be in fact part of the mainstream government system which allows for policy influencing at the end of the process. The CLFZ programme in Nepal is another example of this work with institutionalized systems at the local level. These interventions will bridge the gap between community work and policy advocacy and should be factored into future project design.

Given the high standards of ILO when it comes to technical and financial reporting by vis-à-vis contracts by partners, selecting an individual or firm that has the required capacity is always a problem. Which is why doing sufficient due diligence in the procurement process is a key approach. However, this is not an assurance that the selected contractor will be at par with the standard required still. A lesson here is to have a standard orientation and capacity-building session among implementing partners and contractors at the start of their contracts where skills on ILO procedures, financial management and project management are enhanced.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS & COURSE CORRECTION MEASURES

Based on the discussions in the preceding sections, the following are key recommendations on how the Project can adjust its course to be able to achieve its targets or at least increase the chances to achieve them.

Component 1

1. Complete ongoing studies as soon as possible and ensure that these are well-disseminated through publications and the conduct of validation or knowledge-sharing workshops. Concrete recommendations and solutions should be generated from these discussions.
2. Identify knowledge-sharing platforms that will host the discussion of these studies by the Project and other stakeholders and translate them into actionable items or, better yet, innovative solutions that can be piloted in some areas.
3. Extra effort should be exerted to seek additional funding for the conduct of the LFS in Nepal which is delaying the start of data-collection activities. This is crucial especially that a child labour module has already been integrated into the questionnaire.

Components 2 & 3

4. The Project in Nepal should continue to take the lead in ensuring that stakeholders, especially government bodies and officials, are clear on the international conventions on child labour and what are the allowable parameters for this to be adjusted at the country level.
5. In the remaining time left, both countries should double the effort to have the different capacity-building activities translated into actual improvements in enforcement operations of relevant stakeholders. More activities targeting enforcement actors is needed for this.
6. Similar to the recommendation on enforcement, the Project should be more purposive in the second half to actually work on the improved functioning of inter-agency bodies as a follow-up to studies on analyzing coordination gaps and reviewing of mechanisms.
7. The Project needs to work more with employers and trade unions especially in pursuit of Component 3 and Component 4 activities. As designed, the employers can help in the promotion of social dialogue and the workers in promoting freedom of association at the local level. The existing opportunities in Jharkhand and Rajasthan in India to develop partnerships with employers' groups in line with the Project's work can be explored.

Component 4

8. The Project needs to document its substantive local-level work and package these as models that government can learn and design interventions from. At this stage, advocacy with government will be the key but this is not something the Project is equipped for. The documentation, packaging and submission should be sufficient given the limited time and resources left.
9. In Nepal, it is very important for the Project to convene sessions to discuss and resolve the confusion around the overlap between the CLFZ programme and Child Friendly Local Governance system.
10. The current review of the CLFZ programme in Nepal should lead the Project to organize sessions on how to further enhance the system in the interest of streamlining the process and ensuring that indeed CLFZs are able to handle newly emerged child labour cases effectively.
11. The Project should immediately seek clarity from relevant authorities on how to break the current impasse in the mica mining space in India and what is the guidance in terms of shifting interventions from the state level to the centre.

Across All Components

12. As already discussed in the section on sustainability, though the overall approach already allows for this, the current stage of the Project is the right time to proactively pursue its phase-over strategy.
13. Given the interrelatedness of its 4 components, the Project should try to connect the different interventions together in a broader approach as they can reinforce each other. The research work in component 1, for example, can feed into efforts related to capacity-building and coordination strengthening in components 3 and 4, respectively. All these can also find their way at the community level and enhance the work of the Project there.

Project Management

14. Amend the logical framework in light of adjustments that have been made, e.g., the dropping of the study on migration across India and Nepal tied to employment in brick kilns. Given the external shifts in Nepal and in the mica space in India, some additional adjustments may also need to be made.
15. For the donor, and as already discussed in previous sections, it is important to have a more straightforward and regular system for fund releases so that the Project is able to plan and implement better.
16. Project team members should continue the current pace of doing procurement where enough time and planning is allocated for preparations so that Country Office deadlines are sufficiently met.

17. The Project needs to settle the question of whether or not it is still pursuing the work on cooperatives in the mica space given the current impasse in the sector. If not anymore, an alternative approach towards local empowerment has to be pursued especially that different pieces on cooperatives are in the results framework.

Post-Project Prospects

18. The Project needs to receive additional funds in 2026 to pursue the rest of its activities. Additionally, a cost-extension beyond its end-date of 30 September 2026 would greatly benefit the clients of the Project given the great demand for the Project's strategy and leadership.
19. For future projects or in case of an extension, maximizing already completed research or just doing a synthesis of them as basis for the designing of innovative solutions would be more cost-efficient way of doing things.
20. For future projects or in case of an extension, a budget for capacity-building of implementing partners as well as that for communications and advocacy should be included.
21. For future projects or in case of an extension, the new FPRW strategy will have to be heavily considered, and community level work has to be oriented towards supporting policy advocacy work. As earlier discussed, the development of village development plans with a child labour element in India and the whole CLFZ programme in Nepal are good examples of how local level work can automatically be part of mainstreaming efforts.
22. Explore a follow-up project that is focused on the small-scale minerals space given the current global interest in critical minerals and the trade-related issues surrounding it. This project could build upon the current work in mica and sandstone and leverage the expertise developed in working towards greater respect for FPRW in the mining of critical minerals. This could be a regional project that covers India and Nepal and potentially include Sri Lanka as well.

I. ANNEXES

Annex A: Survey Tool

Annex B: List of Survey Respondents

Annex C: Data Matrices

Annex D: Review Meeting Design