



Evaluation Summaries



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation: Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Women (EOW) Viet Nam Chapter

Quick Facts

Country: Viet Nam

Final Evaluation: December 2006

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Technical Area: Employment Strategy

Evaluation Management: Asia

Evaluation Team: Nguyen Van Hung, Hoang Thuy Lan, Anne Richmond

Project Start: February 2002

Project End: August 2008 (project duration was extended as evaluation started)

Project Code: RAS/06/03/JPN

Donor: Japan (400,000 US\$)

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

Following the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the ILO has further strengthened its efforts to mainstream gender concerns at all levels within the work of the organization. Within this context, a number of gender-specific programmes and projects were launched including the ILO/Japan Asian Regional Programme on Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Women (EOW). This project was launched in Indonesia and Nepal in 1997, in Thailand in 2000 and it was expanded to Cambodia and Viet Nam in 2002. EOW Viet Nam has been officially operational since February 2002. The project aims to contribute to the national

efforts to alleviate poverty and promote opportunities and a conducive environment for quality employment for rural women, as well as to elevate the social and economic standing of women workers and their families in society. At the end of 2004, the project carried out a mid-term evaluation to assess the project's progress and achievements. The mid-term evaluation identified many positive impacts among poor women and officials of the Implementing Partners. In 2006, upon the request of various stakeholders, the project started to further extend successful strategies, for example it is now working with the national Viet Nam Women's Union to replicate EOW good practices in Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, and Lam Dong on a pilot basis.

The three project objectives were:

1. To empower poverty-stricken women in the rural area, economically and socially, through gender-oriented employment promotion and poverty reduction schemes at the community level;
2. To strengthen the institutional capacity of relevant national and local government and mass organizations in designing, coordinating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes in respect to women's employment promotion and empowerment; and
3. To identify policy concerns and formulate policy recommendations concerning women's employment promotion and empowerment based on the experience and good practices garnered from the EOW community-based employment promotion and poverty reduction

schemes for purpose of policy advocacy at the national level. Strategies to reach these objectives were:

1. Direct assistance to poor women and their families for demonstration purposes
2. Institutional strengthening and capacity building of partner organizations
3. Policy advocacy and development

Purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

Assess the project's progress towards achieving its objectives

Identify and document the project's good practices which brought positive impacts on the lives of women and other key stakeholders

Identify lessons learned and key strategies on women's economic and social empowerment for future use by the project's partner organizations and possible other actors.

Because the mid-term evaluation had looked in considerable detail at the action programmes and the status of implementation, this evaluation focused on the results achieved. This had four purposes: first, to establish the effectiveness of the project approach and implementation in terms of concrete impact to improve women's lives; secondly to explore the capacity of partner organizations and others to adopt, adapt and use the various tools and approaches piloted to better address women's needs in their ongoing programming; thirdly to establish a body of evidence to support advocacy for national policies and programmes; and finally to consider issues of sustainability and adoption in the Vietnamese national context.

The evaluators therefore established four areas within which they would seek evidence of results, oriented around the three objectives of the project and the sustainability issue:

1. Empowering women
2. Building capacity of national organizations
3. Policy and advocacy
4. Sustainability and replication

Methodology of evaluation

The main sources of data were secondary data (a review of the project documents and reports); interviews using an open-ended framework and questionnaire; and site visits (conducting discussions and observations at the EEOW project sites).

Key informants for the evaluation were: women beneficiaries who participate in the project activities; husbands of women beneficiaries; poor women who are not project beneficiaries; leaders of commune people's committees; leaders of women's union and mass organizations at village and commune level in project communes; implementing partners at the provincial level; partners at the provincial level; partners at the national level; ILO project staff and ILO staff of related projects in the Ha Noi office.

Information was obtained from three main sources: a desk review of project materials and documents; a participatory field study using focus group discussions, field observations and site visits to project villages and the offices of provincial and national governments and mass organizations concerned. Income sheets for quantitative estimation provided additional information on income generation activities.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The project has had significant and positive impacts in terms of the first two objectives. Income data collected in the evaluation shows that incomes have increased, and that the increase has been greater in areas where the project provided training. Reports from the action programmes indicate that households involved in the project have increased their incomes to the point that they no longer figure on the official list of poor households, thus helping to achieve commune and provincial goals for poverty reduction as well as the objectives of the project. Reports from beneficiaries, local leaders and implementing partners supports a conclusion that women have gained confidence and greater authority, and are taking more active roles in their families and communities due to their

increased knowledge and the experience they have gained in public participation. In terms of the second objective, improving the capacities of implementing partners, they report that they have built new skills and are using them successfully in their ongoing work as well as for activities related to the projects.

Efforts were made to advocate for acceptance and broader adoption of the project approach at the provincial and national levels. Impacts are difficult to assess at the national level, but changes in knowledge, behaviour and practice can be observed at the provincial and to some extent at ministerial levels. The project has documented its activities, has featured successes in a number of documentary films, and produced an important new resource in a revised Vietnamese manual (GET Ahead) for women's entrepreneurship which other development projects and the implementing partners have found useful and intend to continue to use.

The fact that the project got extended offers a good opportunity to further consolidate and analyze the lessons of the individual action programme, to identify the individuals and organizations that have the capacity to implement good models as part of their ongoing policies and programmes, and to advocate for broader adoption of the project's models.

Effective advocacy is grounded in understanding the needs and interests of key stakeholders, and the context within which messages may be received. While the project was not solely oriented towards improved incomes and better means of instruction, these were elements critical to achieving greater empowerment of women in the action programmes.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

A feature of the Action Programmes that could be helpful for national policy advocacy has been the experience that training women in improved agricultural techniques appears to lead to a higher rate of retention and dissemination than training for men only: in

the action programmes, women who are trained in new techniques overwhelmingly report that they immediately train their family members, friends and neighbours. This has implications for the selection of trainees in Agricultural Extension and other services already provided.

The project has tested in-depth, longer term, participatory training (rather than lecture style) – if the retention and subsequent application rates are significantly higher, this could lead to changes in the basis on which training funds are allocated (currently the target numbers of trainees and costs for provincial training budgets are calculated based on short, lecture style training).

Another policy lesson from the project is that training of local leaders, non-Women's Union mass organizations and local men in gender equality has impacts in terms of how planning and resource allocation is done, and in how family violence is understood and dealt with at the local level. These ideas have the potential to impact how government and other programmes are structured and financed, and are relevant to current Viet Nam policy concerns. This project should produce information that assists local authorities and national policies to be more effective in improving women's incomes and status. There is scope to further improve the connections between the project and these major national programmes.

This evaluation may also suggest a further lesson for the ILO's approach to technical cooperation in general. This project was universally described by partners and local leaders as small in size, and by working with a range of different partners in scattered locations it was inherently limited in its capacity to effectively scale-up and therefore have good information on the practicality of a larger scale version. While it has collected information on the project activities and results, there is little comparative information (such as the comparative cost and effectiveness of different training approaches – those normally used and the ones tested in the project).

A question for future ILO technical cooperation projects (with relatively small funds) intended to demonstrate more effective approaches is whether they might be structured as 'value added' elements to one or more existing initiatives. A project like EOW Viet Nam could for example be designed specifically to test whether certain approaches (training in gender equality, participatory training approaches, small business orientation, etc.) improved the effectiveness of existing poverty reduction strategies. Conceiving of a project in this way might more effectively ensure buy-in from the intended audience, and provide a broader reference framework for testing the marginal impacts of the new approaches. Such an approach would be highly consistent with the drive towards greater UN integration and with the principles of gender mainstreaming. It must however be acknowledged that the project in Viet Nam arose out of a specific history of discussion and partnership, and was designed to best fit the prevailing circumstances.

The present evaluation recommends a number of concrete steps to take to ensure that quality lessons can be drawn from the work that has taken place, and that they will find a hearing where they may have an influence. The larger question of how to structure relatively small projects, such as this one, to maximize their impact remains as a challenge to the ILO.