



Evaluation Summaries

Evaluation: *Expansion of Employment Services to Nine Provinces in Afghanistan*

Quick Facts

Countries: Afghanistan
Evaluation: September 2007
Mode of Evaluation: Independent
Technical Area: Employment Promotion
Evaluation Management: DRO Delhi
Evaluation Team: Michael Wheelahan
Project Start: 1 May 2004
Project End: 31 March 2007
Project Code: AFG/03/03M/FRG
AFG/06/01M/GTZ
Donor: Government of Germany (BMZ)
US\$3,455,686
Keywords: Employment Services

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS) initiated an intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 in support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to establish a pilot Employment Service Centre (ESC) in Kabul aimed at providing employment services to employers and Afghan job-seekers.

In 2004, a project entitled “Expansion of Employment Services Centres in Kabul and nine Provinces” was funded by the Government of Germany and was implemented by MoLSA with ILO as executing agency and Arbeitsgruppe Entwicklung und Fachkraefte (AGEF) as the

implementing partner. The project commenced in May 2004 running through until 28 February 2007.

The project aimed to provide capacity building within the MoLSA by providing training, equipment and resources to MoLSA staff in ESCs and direct assistance to a range of unemployed jobseekers.

Its immediate objectives were:

1. to establish ESCs in Kabul and nine provinces, and provide capacity building activities that would enable well-trained staff in these centres to provide specific advisory and labour market services to jobseekers;
2. to identify employment and training opportunities and refer jobseekers to suitable employment options, and
3. to provide advice and assistance on training and self-employment opportunities available in the local labour market to targeted groups of jobseekers.

Present situation of project

The Project has entered a Fourth Phase. This latest phase is, however, limited to the provision of a Chief Technical Adviser (CTA). Due to the new funding arrangements, with UNDP as the executing agency and the ILO as the implementing agency, the ESC project has become the Reintegration Support Project for Ex-combatants (RSPE).

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

This evaluation was undertaken to assess the impact and value of the project and to draw conclusions that may be useful for similar projects in the future or other related purposes. Its scope focused on the three components: provision of physical infrastructure, capacity building activities, and the quantity and quality of services delivered.

The principal clients were the project donor and the ILO Kabul, SRO Delhi, and ILO Head Quarters.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation included interviews, and visits with a wide range of external and internal stakeholders including representatives from MoLSA, project staff, employers, Employer and Union organisations, training providers, International agencies, jobseekers and representatives of other major projects being implemented in related fields. A desk review was carried out of available project documents, reports, implementation plans and training materials used on the project. The ESC database and other statistical reports were also reviewed.

Main Findings & Conclusions

1. The project has been successful in establishing a network of ESCs which are now fully operational. Very good collaboration exists with MoLSA and the ESC network has been formally incorporated into the Ministry's structure and appears on its organogram reporting to the Manpower Department. A total of 87 staff from the Ministry is now working in ESCs in various roles around the country.
2. The task of opening new ESCs and recruiting and training staff to work in these offices has been a major challenge for the project and dominated project activities during the first two phases of the project.
3. All staff has received initial induction training, on the job supervision and regular follow up training. An ESC

training manual is available and other training materials were prepared to support staff in their work activities

4. The project had to overcome a major cultural issue in having ESC services accepted. The heritage of patronage contradicts merit-based labour market services and the ESC network had to advocate the benefits of services when undertaking promotional work with employers. At the same time, many job seekers assumed that a recommendation to an employer by the ESC was a sufficient requirement to be selected for a post, just as it was in the traditional family based system.
5. No Steering Committee was formed to oversight project implementation and, as a result, the project did not benefit from potential inputs from external representatives or other stakeholders or from the guidance and management support that a Steering Committee may have provided.
6. The absence of 'backstopping' support missions and the inability to organise inputs by international experts on employment services placed a much greater onus on the CTA and project technical staff to implement the project's training and work strategies without access to other appropriate expertise envisaged for the project. This is seen as a major deficiency which impacted on the quality of the service being implemented.
7. The ESC has successfully introduced counselling and information services as well as referral to vocational training courses and this is meeting a need that was not being met previously.
8. In many respects, the ESC network in Afghanistan has developed along similar lines to a traditional labour exchange system seen in more advanced countries. However because of limited resources the

ESC has responded to the immediate vacancy demands coming from a particular sector and its coverage of other sectors remains low. On the jobseeker side rather than registering large numbers of jobseekers the ESC used a screening process and concentrated on registering jobseekers with certain levels of qualifications, skills or experience that it was most likely to be able to assist. The number of jobseekers from vulnerable groups registering with the ESC remains very low.

9. A major justification for this project on the demand side was the expectation that the reconstruction program in Afghanistan would require large numbers of workers particularly in the construction sector and that the ESC could play an important role in meeting the demands for labour from these projects. While the pace of reconstruction has not been as rapid as originally expected and many other factors have also intervened, scope exists for the ESC to selectively target this market more effectively and develop collaborative arrangements or partnerships with key clients to meet their recruitment and training requirements.

10. Outcomes achieved by the project included an average of 12,000 job seekers per year who went through a counselling, guidance or referral interview, around 1,500 job seekers per year who were successfully referred to training courses, and around 500 job seekers per year who were placed into jobs. In terms of job placements, ESC statistics show that over the life of the project only 10% of all jobseekers referred to positions were successful in obtaining the job and only 10% of all vacancies received by the ESC were filled by ESC action.

11. Although a wide range of activities were undertaken, many ESC activities focus more on the process rather than the outcomes. Jobseeker registration and data capture procedures are cumbersome and

the data base software although fully operational is not user-friendly. Individual databases are not linked making some tasks more time consuming and standard reports are not automatically generated and require considerable user intervention to prepare.

12. ESC has developed good relationships with vocational training providers and refers many jobseekers to courses that are available however it has not been so active in assisting graduates of training courses into employment. Now that the National Skills Development Program (NSDP) requires training providers to establish placement units to help its trainees to find work, there is an opportunity for the ESC to develop stronger collaboration with NSDP and individual training providers to offer placement assistance to course graduates.

13. The underlying assumption in the original project document that the ESC would become fully operational very quickly was overly optimistic. In fact the project has done remarkably well to achieve so much in the three years of its operation. The logistics and demands of opening a network of 10 offices and recruiting and training staff for each location should not be underestimated and in reality it was not until the third phase of the project that it could claim to be fully operational and in a position to embark on further development and improvements to its services.

14. There were many obstacles and constraints that the project faced along the way and key issues listed in various progress reports included:

- The security situation in Afghanistan has not been stable and has varied between provinces.
- The project experienced some initial difficulties in arranging with the Ministry for suitable staff to be

seconded to work in the ESCs and there was some turnover of staff.

- Staff working in the ESCs in such places as Kandahar and Jalalabad experienced greater restrictions in their activities, than do their colleagues in Kabul or other locations.
- The strength of local economies differed significantly.
- During the winter months, construction activities were often not possible.
- In summer the oppressive heat particularly in the southern regions resulted in fewer jobseekers attending the ESCs.
- Language was another challenge to achieving the objectives with the language of the project management unit being English, while that of the direct recipients was Dari.
- While interpretation and translation were routine components of the project, it cannot be claimed with complete certainty that the intended messages were the messages received. This had implications for the professional development of the ESC staff, as well as for relationships formed with cooperating ministries and agencies.
- Also impacting on this project were cultural traditions and beliefs, from notions about the role of women in society, to perceptions of persons with disabilities. In assisting these two groups, the ESCs had to address long-standing prejudices and biases and become advocates for change, if Afghan women and persons with disabilities were to avail themselves of the same opportunities as non-disabled male jobseekers.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

1. ESC should implement a 'key clients' strategy to target major employers, organisations and projects likely to have

major recruitment needs as part of the reconstruction effort and establish partnerships or collaboration arrangements with them.

2. A stronger 'service' culture should be developed with greater focus on achieving results.
3. ILO should consider developing 'best practice' guidelines for jobseeker reception, interview and data capture which could be used when future projects of this type are being implemented.
4. Steps should be taken in future projects to ensure that 'Backstopping' support missions and inputs by international experts are delivered when required.
5. Further enhancements to the database software would significantly improve the usefulness and efficiency of the database. The should give consideration to developing some generic database design guidelines or even a software package that could be customised and implemented in new situations without having to design the system from 'scratch'.
6. Now that the NSDP requires training providers to establish placement units to help its trainees to find work, the ESC should develop stronger collaboration and working arrangements with NSDP and individual training providers to offer placement assistance to course graduates.
7. The ESC should expand its information and counselling services to allow a wider range of jobseekers including those from vulnerable groups to gain access to these services.

Summary of lessons learned

- Short funding cycles can cause some uncertainty as well as lack of continuity and planning at certain points during a project particularly when further funding needs to be negotiated. Where new offices have to be set up and capacity building is also required there are usually significant lead times before the project becomes fully operational and assumptions should not be made that proposed strategies or

services can be implemented immediately at the outset of the project.

- Inability to organise inputs by international experts on employment services can diminish the intended impact of programs and services being implemented and reduce the effectiveness of staff training. Wherever possible, specialist inputs should be organised in advance and delivered when required at key points during project implementation.
- It is important to ensure that suitably qualified and experienced IT staff are used when system software is being developed and that the functions and system design requirements for any ESC database are specified in advance and that 'user testing' is carried out during the design stage to maximise usefulness and relevance of the application.
- Use of a Steering Committee with external representatives is an important way to ensure more inputs come from other stakeholders and better guidance and management support is provided to project implementation team. Efforts should always continue ensure that a Steering Committee is established when implementing projects of this nature.
- Without leverage, the ESC will always face difficulties in promoting the claims of vulnerable groups. This becomes even more difficult when the labour market itself is not growing rapidly and new job opportunities are not being generated. Projects should include a component providing financial or other incentives to employers who recruit workers from vulnerable groups.