



Evaluation Summaries

Promotion of decent work for youth in Sri Lanka

Quick Facts

Countries: Sri Lanka

Final Evaluation: Apr 2011

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Technical Area: Youth employment

Evaluation Management: Ms. Pamornrat Pringsulaka, ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (ROAP)

Evaluation Team: Ms. Lotta Nycander and Ms. Tharanga Gunaratne

Project Start: January 2007

Project End: December 2010

Project Code: SRL/07/01/JPN;
SRL/07/04/JPN; SRL/08/01/JPN,
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09/02/JPN; SRL/09/03/JPN

Donor: Government of Japan (US\$ 1,473,750)

Keywords: Youth, women, men, decent work, employment creation, vocational training, capacity development, skills development, employability, labour market, gender, plantation sector, micro- and small entrepreneurship, youth resource centre.

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

This technical cooperation Project, named ILO-Japan Youth Employment Project for short, has been implemented in Sri Lanka's Sabaragamuwa Province and its two Districts of Ratnapura and Kegalle". It has been managed by a small team in the ILO office in

Colombo, and in the District Secretariat in Rathnapura District, Sabaragamuwa Province.

It has three immediate objectives:

- At the end of the project knowledge on youth employment will be improved and disseminated through involvement of ILO's tripartite constituents;
- At the end of the project, the capacity of labour market service providers, employment services, labour market institutions and tripartite constituents will be improved, strengthened and modernized to provide better services to youth; and
- At the end of the project a minimum of 6000 rural young women (50% women) and men have increased access to employment and labour market services for wage and self-employment through new tools and methodologies adapted to national circumstances.

Through reaching these objectives, the Project should contribute to the development objective, namely to an "Improved employability and Decent Work for young women and men in the Province of Sabaragamuwa".

The YEP has been executed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in close collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Affairs, as the focal Government agency in Sri Lanka, and with other government and private sector actors. The Project has been operated in

collaboration with a number of other agencies and organizations, with representation from national and district levels.

The National Programme Advisory Committee, headed by the Secretary to the Ministry of Youth Affairs, has assumed the role of guiding the Project in matters related to policy and implementation, and coordinating actions with other stakeholders through this platform. At district levels, a similar role has been assumed by the District Programme Advisory Committees, recently renamed Youth Employment Coordinating Committee.

Present situation of project

The Project came to an end at the end of 2010, after three years of implementation.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The main purposes of the evaluation are to assess the achievement of i) immediate objectives ii) emerging impact of the interventions, and iii) sustainability of the project's benefits and the local partners' strategy and capacity to sustain them.

As far as possible, the evaluation has taken into account all interventions since the start of the Project, the geographical coverage and the whole three-year period of implementation.

The principal clients are the ILO office and Project Management in Colombo, ILO constituents and partners in Sri Lanka, ILO ROAP, the ILO office and Decent Work Team (DWT) in Delhi, ILO Employment Sector, PARDEV and EVAL departments at ILO Headquarters, Geneva. Last, but certainly not least, the donor agency in Tokyo, Japan, is key client of this Evaluation.

Methodology of evaluation

Participatory and qualitative inquiry data gathering methods i.e. documentation review, questionnaires, in-depth interviews (also telephone/skype), field visits, FGDs and meetings. Project performance scoring/ranking and OECD/DAC evaluation criteria were applied.

Two Evaluation Workshops were organised at national (National Steering Committee) and provincial levels (Presentation of Findings). In the latter workshop, group work resulted in suggestions on the way forward and how achievements could be sustained beyond the completion of the Project.

The evaluation part focused on systems, structures, processes and institutional procedures to avoid undue focus on individuals or groups and to neutralize personal bias. The evaluation team spent ten days in Colombo and seven days in Sabaragamuwa province, where visits were made tea and rubber estate plantations in the Ratnapura and Kegalle districts.

The limitations to the evaluation were some difficulties in accessing some important project documentation (e.g. Work Plans) and meeting some of the key stakeholders for discussions/interviews (in Colombo).

Main Findings & Conclusions

The Youth Employment Project of the ILO/Japan Programme set out to contribute to poverty reduction in rural and estate communities, through improving young people's access to labour market institutions and information, decent work and vocational training. It has focused on disadvantaged youth in the plantation sector and rural areas adjacent to the plantations, addressing the needs and aspirations of youth regarding better jobs, more education and skills, and other opportunities to improve their lives.

The Project is an example of an ILO technical cooperation project that has set ambitious goals but having insufficient financial and human resources, and time at its disposal - to fully accomplish these goals.

Some delays in start-up of Projects are often inevitable. In the case of this Project, the delays were substantial, and started with the late recruitment of the CTA, and an unfinished project document. It continued with late start-up of field activities, resulting from delays in

signing the contract with e.g. PHDT – the main field implementing organization in the plantation sector. Following these delays, the evaluation team has been informed that there were quite some delays also in the actual payments for the implementation, by the PHDT.

The Project has, despite these and other challenges, had many positive effects and the Project staff and partners should be commended for their efforts and goodwill created, such as opening up of new grounds, raising awareness and broadening the appreciation/understanding for the issues surrounding youth and employment, specially among stakeholders in the Project Province. It has been able to inspire many to take action and contribute to the Project objectives.

The Project activities have also resulted in new job opportunities and increased employability among many young women and men - but perhaps most importantly it has put the spotlight on youth, highlighting issues that have been neglected prior to the Project.

National and district committees, focusing on youth employment and education have been established representing all concerned organisations. Youth information and resource centres and databases in the province and at district level have been set up - the latter in order to match the requirements of employers' with capacity and/or skills of youth. Training and employment have been provided. Further, the district governments, and some implementing agencies, have used its own funds to reach further to attempt to reach out to the youth.

Regarding the Project's attempts and success in reaching the three Project objectives, the following is the assessment of the evaluation team:

The Project has attained objectives 1 (enhanced knowledge) and 2 (capacity development among stakeholders). This is a good achievement, considering the many challenges that were met (mentioned in Section 5).

Notwithstanding the successes mentioned in this report (mostly outcomes of the two first objectives) it must be stated that when comparing the work and results intended to be achieved (Project Document, paragraph 2.1) there are a number of areas which the Project did not accomplish, for instance value chain work, setting up functional Business Development Services, micro finance and others related to entrepreneurship development. This is quite understandable as it was not a realistic scenario to materialize the vision of the Project Document. In this situation the evaluation would have expected that a Review at mid term, would have assisted the management to downsize the Project to a much more realistic level – with the agreement of the donor agency.

As for objective 3 (access to employment and services), it is assessed that although many of the outputs were delivered, the objective has not been fully reached. The one-year delay in starting up the Project has consequently caused delays in implementation of activities in the field (the plantations). The project manager/s did not manage some contracts with implementing agencies well, and there were quite some internal delays within the implementing agencies themselves. Insufficient monitoring and follow-up by the Project, coupled with insufficient resources during the latter part of 2010 are factors that have contributed to minimizing the benefits for the youth under the third objective.

Specific conclusions

Validity of Project design

Although it is stated in the Project Document that the indicators are SMART, they are in fact far from SMART and cannot be used to measure progress of attaining Immediate Objectives, as they are neither quantifiable nor time-bound. Only two indicators here are found to resemble any kind of "SMART-ness", namely two indicators toward immediate objective 3.

Relevance

The Project as a whole is highly relevant and in line with international and national policies

and strategies, including the policies of the development partner (the donor agency). The Project should be viewed as a pilot, and a testing of the policies created on youth employment, and those including references to youth employment in Sri Lanka. As policies were in place already at the onset, actual policy work was not focused on and very little efforts had consequently been put into policy matters.

The Project has also been relevant as a means to change attitudes. The staff and implementing agencies have made good efforts to attempt to change attitudes among stakeholders, and highlighting needs and aspirations of young women and men, not only regarding their job and education preferences, but also through giving the youth a voice. While several stakeholders have expressed the need for changed attitudes among youth – the evaluation team found that targeting the adults and their attitudes are as, or perhaps more, important.

Efficiency

The evaluation team has assessed that the Project has not been as efficient as it could have been, or used the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results. The Government of Japan has stated that it provided funds to the ILO already in 2007, and these should have been allocated over a four years period of implementation. Due to delays, first in recruitment of the CTA and other national staff (perhaps unavoidable due to circumstances) - the project period will end up having de facto only three years to operate.

It took nine months for the external cooperation contract with PHDT to be approved/signed, which led to further delays in implementation at field level. Many activities have been delayed and implemented for only one year (e.g. in the plantations in Kegalle district) and some activities were completed/implemented only very recently (e.g. training, training materials). Considering all these factors the actual implementation has been very short, indeed, which together have affected the quality of the results achieved. As

for the Project's delivery rate, most funds had been spent or committed at the time of the evaluation. The remaining funds would be used, among others, for holding a Closing Workshop as well as finalizing commitments to the implementing partners.

Effectiveness

The evaluation has assessed that not enough attention and systems were put in place to enable adequate monitoring of activities and outputs – which has had a bearing on the effectiveness and quality results of the Project.

Impact and sustainability

It would not be fair to expect impact as a result of this short-term (shortened by one year) Project, in terms of actual effect in its contribution to the longer-term objective. Nevertheless, the evaluation has attempted to identify those components of the Project that could have an impact on youth employment if continued beyond December 2011 - such as innovative solutions, established systems and/or new ideas evoking change of attitudes among stakeholders.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

- The Project staff should organize a Closing Workshop (1 day), inviting all the stakeholders to analyse accomplishments, contributing factors and the way forward and sustainability issues - with or without external financial and/or technical support;
- Fully logical Logical Framework Matrices should always accompany ILO Project Documents and these must be completed before the CTA/project managers are in place (see also Lesson Learned, Section 7);
- Much more realistic project documents/Logframes should be designed for youth employment in the future, focused on a few key areas. ILO should also keep up a dialogue with the donor agencies, about the real

challenges in reaching objectives when implementing individual, short-term national projects;

- ILO should - in future interventions involving Tamil youth in the plantation sector in Sri Lanka - address cross-cutting issues mentioned in this report - at design, implementation follow-up and monitoring stages;
- ILO should plan for specific monitoring (and evaluation) expertise/staff in future YE Projects in order to increase efficiency and off-load Project managers from the core monitoring work – thus better enabling project management;
- ILO should make all efforts to ensure that Project's stakeholders understand and are committed to the common mission and vision of the Project (if not obtained at the end of a Project, sustainability will be unlikely);
- The ILO should initiate a dialogue with the employers' federation and the trade unions in Sri Lanka to analyse their roles in the evaluated Project - with the aim of determining how they could be more active in eventual future YE Projects and fully contribute to the Project goals;
- ILO should pay more attention to quality assurance through more field testing and substantial monitoring of the activities of the implementing agencies, in particular their Training of Trainers (ToT or Cascade training);
- ILO should further strengthen its analysis of lessons learned and good practices from Youth Employment Projects, as well as lessons from projects and interventions of other organisations. In relation to the ILO Sri Lanka Concept Note (produced during the latter part of 2010) to solicit funds for continued activities in the same field in Sri Lanka – it is crucial that learning from the evaluated Project is

internalized (see Lessons learned, Section 7);

- ILO should support the formation of NVQs for a wider array of VT courses, especially for girls;
- ILO should encourage stakeholders to explore if vocational training options could be expanded to other industries. For instance value addition to gems through jewelry designing and setting. Institutions, such as IDB, to be consulted to identify suitable industries;
- ILO should support the integration of vocational training into the education curriculum, so that the younger generations are exposed into different vocations at a younger age. Themes such as non-traditional vocations for income generation should be introduced to youth at a younger age, before they leave school;
- ILO should support activities that also raise awareness on entrepreneurship, ideally while still in school; and
- ILO should continue support to the Labour Market Information Unit (Provincial Secretariat) established under the project to improve their information collection and dissemination services.

Important lessons learned

The following are some lessons to be learnt from the Project in Sri Lanka regarding Project design:

- ILO technical cooperation projects should not be funded or commenced on the basis of a Summary Project Outline (SPROUT) or even a Concept Note - but on regular Project Documents;
- Links between the core activity pillars should be more visible and their relationship clearly explained already in the design of future youth employment Projects - as different sectors often are involved. All project

staff and involved partners must understand these links and support their maintenance;

- Indicators in the LF should be SMART;
- Project Managers and other involved ILO staff should appreciate the use of indicators as instruments to measure progress and the difference between e.g. targets and indicators; and
- More realistic targets and time frames should be set and communicated to all involved.

The evaluation made the assessment that the Project management has not been able to generate and bring to light a shared vision of what should be achieved for the youth at the end of the Project. *The following are some examples:*

- One trade union, active in the plantations, has expressed strong dissatisfaction to the ILO regarding the Project's approach to support the formation of enterprise (business) groups among unemployed youth residing inside plantations; and
- Some plantation companies and estate supervisors involved in the Project, supported the idea to form sub-contracting groups among the unemployed youth for certain works to be out-sourced to small business groups inside the plantations, e.g. for cutting and clearing trees, and receive training on the use of machinery. However, the idea that the same youth could (if they wanted) seek jobs outside the plantations was not accepted. Representatives of one regional plantation company expressed great dissatisfaction with ILO's ideas to the evaluation team.

This conflict should have been solved amicably with the involvement of all parties, and the project manager (NPO) should have benefited from more assistance/advice by the former ILO

Director, and/or the workers representative in the ILO office in Delhi. As it were, work came to a complete standstill in one plantation – which ultimately and unfortunately not only resulted in loss of skills development and work opportunities for the youth, it also resulted in the situation building up to a conflict which even after six months remained unresolved (at the time of the evaluation).

Other lessons:

- ILO offices should always assign one programme officer to follow the project activities and support the management throughout, if required;
- Monitoring capacity must be ensured in future ILO projects, preferably as a Monitoring and Evaluation Expert, and the monitoring instruments must be known and shared by all project staff in regular meetings and communication with field staff;
- A much stronger implementing role assumed by the Regional Plantations Companies and their employed estate managers/supervisors – as they are key in making the required changes within the plantations and the industry;
- The selection of implementing partners should be based on their capacity to implement at field level, and the systems and procedures that they adopt in the process. If it is known that some agencies do not have sufficient capacity at the start – the ILO must either refrain from signing contracts with these, or ensure that expertise is contracted by these agencies to do the job;
- Integrated and realistic programmes need to be based on solid/applied field research. In the case of the evaluated Project, the Baseline survey was produced well after the start-up of the Project and the University Papers produced came late as well and did not

seem to really meet the research needs of the Project;

- The Project failed to produce an acceptable project review report at mid term (2009) for dissemination to all stakeholders. This is regrettable and an important lesson to the ILO - as it could have assisted the Project in its direction and help set priorities (in addition, it would greatly have assisted the final evaluation). This is a lost opportunity, as well as Project funds wasted for the contract of the external collaborator for a report that in the end was not endorsed by the ILO;
- The Project has included a multitude and diversity of activity areas, and the setting of targets and time frames have not been realistic, considering the number of staff to manage and monitor the Project. Thus, the evaluation team is viewing the Project as a pilot to draw learning and experience from – but not as a model for replication;
- ILO must ensure that a gender strategy first and foremost is part of the Project Document, and followed through in the implementation, as well as revised if required. A part of such a strategy is to ensure that the gender concept is not merely interpreted as a certain quantitative representation/participation of women in the Project – as gender concerns relate to both men and women and the roles and needs of both women and men, and girls and boys;
- ILO, together with its constituents, should pay much more attention to the significance of socio-cultural aspects, particularly when implementing projects where benefits are directed to a “minority” ethnic group - as in the case of this Project; and
- ILO already has some experience (mentioned in this report) in linking child labour to youth employment, already at the Project design stage. ILO

should thus ensure that such links are established in Project design, wherever this is relevant.