



Evaluation Summary



International Labour Office

Evaluation Office

Economic Empowerment & HIV Vulnerability Reduction along Transport Corridors in Southern Africa (CEEP) Project - Independent Final Evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries:	Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia & Zimbabwe;
Final Evaluation:	1 st Oct. – 13 th Nov. 2015;
Evaluation Mode:	Independent;
Administrative Office:	DWT/CO-Pretoria;
Technical Office:	ILO/AIDS;
Evaluation Manager:	Gugsa Farice;
Evaluation Consultant(s):	Stanley Karuga;
Project Code:	RAF/10/04M/SID;
Donor(s) & Budget:	SIDA (US\$ 7.816, 790);

Keywords:

Southern Africa region, transport corridor, economic empowerment, gender equality, men and women, HIV and AIDS vulnerability prevention.

Background & Context

Summary of Project Purpose, Logic & Structure

The Southern and Eastern African region has been one of the epicenters of HIV & AIDS. Some of the important factors underpinning high rate of HIV infections and AIDS in the region include poverty – resulting in the adoption of desperate survival strategies that expose people – especially women to risks of HIV infection; and high mobility especially along road transport corridors as well as at cross-border points where mobile workers including truck drivers, migrant and sex workers intermingle freely with the rest of the people living within the vicinity of these areas. Gender inequality further complicates the situation resulting in women bearing the biggest burden of HIV infection and AIDS.

It is against this backdrop that CEEP was launched in March 2011 as a “build-on” initiative of the previous ILO/SIDA initiative on “HIV Prevention and Impact Mitigation in the World of Work in Sub-Saharan Africa”. The development objective of the project was “to

contribute to the Southern Africa Development Community’s goal of ‘controlling and reversing the HIV and AIDS epidemic as shown by the Millennium Development goals and Universal Access commitments by 2015’ through the world of work” by reducing HIV and AIDS vulnerability through promoting the economic empowerment (EE) and gender equality (GE) model through three (3) main objectives: (i) Immediate Objective 1: “Policy makers and promoters make evidence-based decisions to mainstream the economic empowerment (EE) model into HIV and AIDS regional and national agendas”; (ii) Immediate Objective 2: “To economically empower targeted men and women along selected transport corridors by increasing the availability of economic services to prevent and mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS in selected transport corridors”; and (iii) Immediate Objective 3: “To reduce HIV vulnerability by increasing access to effective HIV and AIDS prevention and impact mitigation and social services provided by targeted operators (including member-based organizations such as cooperatives; informal associations; Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises along selected transport corridors”.

The EE response model that was applied uses a three-pronged approach. (i) The macro level - where the project aims at fostering the enabling environment by influencing the direction of national and regional HIV & AIDS policy frameworks, strategies and action plans towards incorporating economic empowerment as a complementary strategy to existing HIV prevention and mitigation strategies in the project areas through advocacy and evidence-based knowledge sharing; (ii) The meso level - where it aims at building the capacity of business support structures (BSS) and socio-economic organizations – SOEs to enable them to provide education and skills to their constituents in areas of HIV prevention and business development,

including access to micro-credit; and (iii) the micro level –where the project aims at capacitating members of BSSs - the men and women working in the informal economy and those vulnerable to HIV infection including commercial sex workers through enabling them to start and improve their businesses and thereby their socio-economic status, promote gender equality as well as increasing access to effective HIV prevention and mitigation services.

The project covers six countries comprising Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Originally, the project was focusing on 5 HIV infection “hot spot” sites in each of the countries, but was later expanded to include other sites within 100 KMs radius from the earmarked “hot spots”. The project is managed by a twelve (12) member team of ILO staff comprising one (1) Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), six (6) National Project Coordinator –NPCs (one in each country); one Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officer; one (1) EE Officer – handling the project’s innovation fund; and three (3) support staff (one Finance and Administration Officer, and two drivers).

Present Situation of the Project

The project was initially designed as a two-year project (January 2011 to December 2012). The project is however now a five-year initiative running from January 2011 to January 2016 following three separate extensions. Firstly, “cost extension” in August 2012 by 1½ years. Secondly, “no-cost extension” in June 2014 by ½ year. Thirdly, “cost extension” in December 2014 by a further 11 months. Thus the project has two months to its planned expiry date. The project was funded by SIDA with at a total budget of US\$ 7,816,790. However, due to the depreciation of Swedish Kroner against the US dollar, the actual budget reduced to US\$ 7,750,602.

Purpose, Scope and Clients of the Evaluation

The main purpose of the evaluation are to assess: (i) the effects of the project and the level of achievement in relation to planned targets; (ii) project management and implementation arrangements including assessment of the appropriateness of the strategy chosen, as well as the validity of the EE approach that was used; (iii) sustainability of project activities; and (iv) achievement of overall project goal and contributions to regional impacts – mainly in terms of behavioural change towards less risky sexual practices and reduction in new HIV infections. Further, and based

on the detailed analysis of available data and information, distil lessons learned and make recommendations for possible follow-up initiative in the same project areas or elsewhere.

Methodology of Evaluation

While a participatory approach was used with various categories of stakeholders being given equal and free opportunity to air their views, the methodology was based on the following research tools: (i) *Desk review* of key relevant documents; (ii) *field-level interviews* with key informants across all categories of stakeholders based on “one-on-one”, focused-group discussion, skype and telephonic interviews. The Mission made contact with a total of 278 people - with women accounting for approximately 68%; (iii) *Independent observations* by the Mission during field visits in the six (6) beneficiary countries; and (iv) *Responses and comments* by participants during the “end-of-mission debriefing session” held in on 31st October 2015 at the ILO Office (Pretoria). Due to time limitations, the Mission made use of focused group discussions more than any other field interview method so as to capture as many respondents as possible.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance and strategic fit: The objective and activities of the project are no doubt highly relevant and strategically in line with the socio-economic aspirations of virtually all stakeholders including the target beneficiaries, SADC, policies and strategies of the respective national governments, the ILO strategic policy framework, development agenda of SIDA in the region; UNAIDS and other relevant UN and non-UN agencies.

Validity of project design: This was found to have been largely logical and coherent based on a number of key criteria including foundational information base upon which the project was conceptualized and designed; extent of consultations with constituents and other stakeholders during project design and implementation; efficacy of the EE development model adopted and applied; adequacy of intervention mix and plausibility of causal linkage between project objective, planned outputs, anticipated outcomes and impact; definitional clarity of performance indicators; Gender sensitivity of project interventions and activities; and sustainability of project activities beyond its life span. However, the timeline for the project was rather

inadequate even with the extensions for a number of reasons which includes the long term nature of impact of some of the interventions especially policy re-orientation towards incorporation of the EE and GE model into policy frameworks and inculcation of behavioural change away from risky sexual practices. Other factors included the apparent lack of strong BSSs in some of the countries and/or the weak capacity to offer requisite non-financial services.

Project progress and effectiveness of performance:

Despite facing a number of external-oriented challenges including the wide geographical coverage; budgetary limitations; lack of apex level BSSs, harsh climatic and economic conditions in some countries; and weak institutional capacity for coordination of informal sector activities at the provincial level e.g. in Malawi and South Africa; the project actually performed quite well. Out of its 44 planned targets, the project achieved 41 or about 93% of total planned targets – surpassing some of the targets by remarkable margins of up to 588%. The Mission attributed its good performance to a number of key factors. These included the high relevance of its interventions - hence stakeholder “buy-in”, support and ownership; strong and consistent use of strategic partnership and collaboration with relevant stakeholders; adequate technical and managerial capabilities of all project team members, high teamwork spirit and commitment to project ideals; and effective technical and administrative back-stopping by relevant ILO offices - especially DWT (Pretoria Co), and ILO/AIDS and ILO/EMP-COOP Units in Geneva.

Effectiveness of management arrangements: The Mission also found the management arrangement used to have been quite effective towards delivering on project development aspirations. In particular, the use of both Project Advisory Committees (PACs) and the PAC-Loans Committees and having NPCs in each country, as well as consistent collaboration with strategic partners played a key role in project performance. The project management team consistently embraced and applied participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches in all aspects of project implementation and also disaggregated data by gender where necessary and possible. However, the Mission observed the following issues. Firstly, the semi-manual nature of the M&E system rendering the functions to be relatively more laborious, slow and inefficient. Secondly, the project’s over-ambition in terms of trackable indicators of achievements. Thirdly, lack of a formal exit plan from

the early stages of project implementation. Fourthly, lack of a common and formal communication strategy to provide clear guidance to the project team on strategic and effective communication approaches.

Adequacy and efficiency of resource use: While the Mission considered the timeline to have been somewhat inadequate given the complexity of the project from the point of view of its geographical scope, the multiplicity of stakeholders involved, and the long term nature of some of the interventions as indicated earlier, the rest of the resources (human and financial) were generally adequate and were also used quite effectively and efficiently. The project team members were not only generally qualified for their respective positions, but also committed to project work. While financial disbursements were timely and in line with work plans, the project team also applied fairly stringent and competitive procurement procedures. The project has so far utilized US\$ 7,705,512.60 or about 99.4% leaving a very small balance of US\$ 45,089.40. Additionally, the project also performed quite well in leveraging external resources having attracted an additional US\$ 2,895,507 from other strategic partners.

Impact orientation and sustainability: Prospects for sustainability of project activities is strongly and well founded on a number of factors. These includes the mainstreaming of the EE model into national and regional HIV & AIDS policy agendas; capacity building of business support structures; economic empowerment of target beneficiaries through the project’s revolving fund using local micro-financial institutions for group-based lending; involvement of stakeholders at various levels including the PAC and PAC Loans Committee for enhanced ownership and support; inculcation of savings culture and behavioural change away from risky sexual behaviour; and public-private partnership building and collaboration. The project is already having impact at the political, socio and economic arena. Some of the key achievements include; (i) 22 national policies now referring to the EE model as a strategy for addressing vulnerability to HIV infection; (ii) 16 development frameworks now referring to gender equality (GE) as a complementary strategy for HIV prevention; (iii) 176 EE, GE and HIV & AIDS vulnerability reduction programmes have been initiated; (iv) an estimated 88,040 people reached through EE, GE, HIV and AIDS programmes initiated by stakeholders and partners; (v) an estimated 147,225 stakeholder and/or partners provided with strategic information and technical assistance on EE and GE as an

HIV & AIDS vulnerability reduction approach; (vi) 249 BSSs trained on EE and GE as an HIV and AIDS vulnerability reduction approach”; (vii) an estimated of 11,255 beneficiaries trained on EE and GE as an HIV and AIDS vulnerability reduction approach; (viii) an estimated of 9,289 beneficiaries referred to HIV and gender-related services; and (ix) an estimated 15,858 jobs created – with women accounting for about 56% of total beneficiaries.

Key lessons Learned: These includes:

(i) That relevance of interventions and implementation approaches play a vital role in stakeholder “buy-in” and support of project activities; (ii) That the EE & GE model is an effective and sustainable approach for addressing vulnerability to HIV infection and mitigation of impact of AIDS; (iii) That economic empowerment only by way of provision of business finance to informal economy MSME business starters without complementary business and financial skills training is not a sustainable approach and is likely to have limited and/or short-lived impact; (iv) That HIV and AIDS vulnerability reduction interventions without economic empowerment is unlikely to attract or elicit interest from informal economy stakeholders – primarily because poverty underpins risky sexual behavioural practices. Economic empowerment is critical to wards reduction of HIV and AIDS vulnerability especially for women as it provides alternative sources of livelihood instead of resulting to transactional sex for income; (v) That influencing policy agenda and their operationalization, and inculcating behavioural change are by nature long term interventions and require adequate time to facilitate sustainability and generate impact; (vi) That five (5) days one-off training of informal sector actors (who often have low literacy level and low business and financial skills) is inadequate and should (besides incorporating a strong training module in market intelligence gathering and market access support components) be complemented with follow-up refresher sessions, mentorship programmes and experiential learning for effective sustainability of entrepreneurship development; (vii) That the so called “unbankable” informal sector entrepreneurs can be “bankable” with carefully tailored sensitization, capacity building and financial support interventions; (viii) That individual-group based loans (given to the individual through his or her group) works better than group-loans (given to a group

to invest jointly) in terms of speed of utilization, management and repayment (as the former approach avoids bureaucracies associated with the dynamics of group decision-making processes); (ix) That working closely with local partners (e.g. through PAC) is an effective means towards ownership, support and sustainability of project activities; (x) That proactive building of PPPs (with a wide range of local, national, regional and international organizations) is an important strategy for resource mobilizing, ownership and sustainability and should remain a core principle of all ILO projects and programmes; (xi) That strategic thinking should always be accorded to programming of activities to avoid too many revisions of resource requirements (time, human and other physical, as well as finance); (xii) That for effectiveness, the focus or the entry point should be both spouses (young men and women) as it proofed more effective compared to focus on women alone; (xiii) That for more effectiveness, mainstreaming of the EE model should in future be cascaded to work plans level instead of leaving it at the policy level, where, as experience has shown, may have lesser chances of being implemented; (xiv) That both exit and communication strategies should always form part and parcel of project design and that the two should always be prepared early enough to guide project management teams on effective and efficient exit processes and communication approaches and strategies. The following are the key recommendations:

Recommendations

(I) CURRENT PHASE:

A: Recommended Actions for the Project

1. **Prepare exit strategy and/or plan for the current phase** so as to provide a clear framework and process for closure and also to ensure common understanding on the transition and handover processes among key stakeholders across all participating countries;
2. **Conduct project closure workshop** for the current phase to disseminate and share key project information with stakeholders especially with respect to performance results in relation to targets, experiences, good practices, lessons learned, emerging impacts of the project and way forward for possible future phase.

(II) POSSIBLE FUTURE PHASE:

B: Recommended Actions for ILO

3. **Subject to availability of donor funding (including by Sida and/or other possible donors) and in close consultation with respective national stakeholders, develop project document for an expanded CEEP model-based project** for replication within the same six participating countries and also in other countries along the target transport corridors that are likely to have a contagious effect on the gains made through the project including Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Kenya targeting poor communities that are vulnerable to HIV infection due to lack of economic empowerment. The project document should at least include lessons learned during the current phase; relevant baseline data and clearly defined; time-bound and “not-so” ambitious trackable indicators of achievements; implementation plan matrix and responsible actors; stronger project components in terms of mentorship, experiential learning and market intelligence/market access interventions; more detailed and elaborate consultative framework with a wider range of potential implementation partners e.g. UN Women, local BSSs, and MFIs; an effective and executable PPP strategy towards maximizing leveraging of external support/resources e.g. through more frequent road shows and trade fairs; project communication strategy; and a clear exit plan. The focus should also be on the spouses (both young men and women) as this proved to be more effective compared to focusing on women alone.
4. **Provide for an automated M&E system** in project design to make the work on data collection, analysis and reporting more efficient, effective and less laborious for all involved parties including the PMU.
5. **Provide for adequate number of qualified staff** for more effective implementation and management of the project;

C: Recommended Actions for Donors

6. **Conduct a thorough review of project design** to ensure that it meets donor’s requirements in relation to all aspects including present priorities, budget provisions, activity programming and costing;

7. **Provide sufficient financial support for replication of an expanded CEEP model-based type of project** in the current participating countries and other relevant areas as mentioned above once satisfied with contents of the PRODoc;
8. **Provide for adequate implementation period** (at least 5 years) to allow enough time for implementation and observation of effects on behaviour and policy implementation, and also avoid the need for unplanned extensions;
9. **Appoint donor representatives** in project steering committee meetings.

D: Recommended Actions for the Project

10. **Conduct more regular monitoring, reporting and consultative project meetings** (at least biannual although quarterly would be better) to allow donor representatives to be fully informed of progress on project implementation, arising issues and planned actions. This should include the undertaking of tracer studies to track performance and impact and report to stakeholders including the donor (s).

E: Recommended Actions for Participating Governments and other National Stakeholders

11. **Ensure consistency of membership and participants in PAC meetings;**
12. **Promote formation and support development of sustainable cooperatives and/or association apex organisations and local-level BSSs as well as SHGs;**
13. **Ensure that mainstreaming of the EE model is cascaded to the level of work plans** of relevant government institutions (i.e. beyond policy level for more effectiveness);
14. **Recruit BSS membership, mentor and provide requisite second tier capacity building to members;**
15. **Strengthen capacity building of BSSs and their members in the areas of Financial Services and Business Management** to enhance chances of loan repayments.