International Labour Organization

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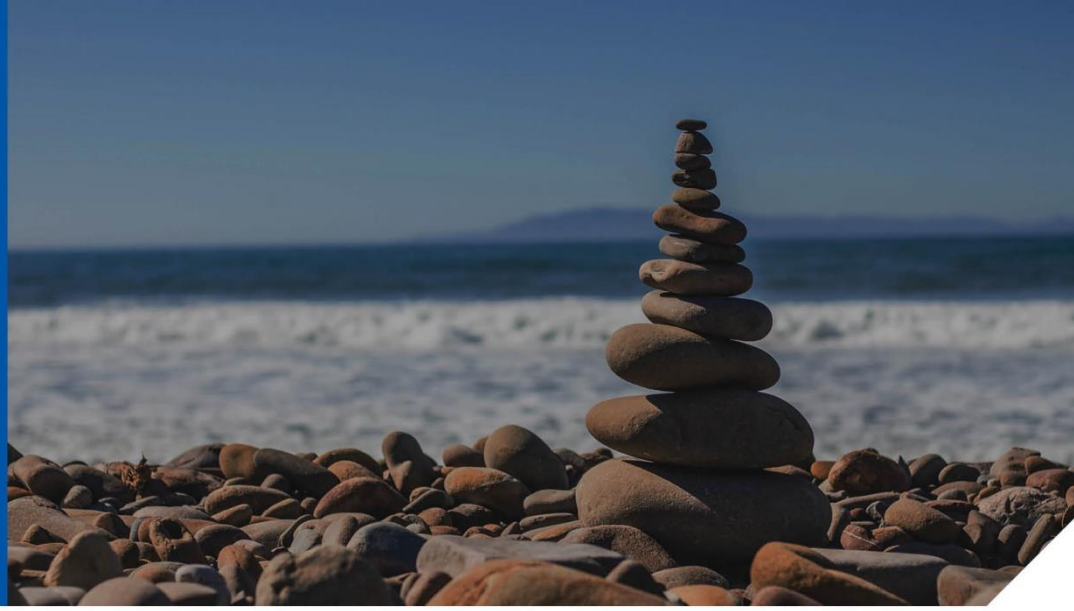

Final Evaluation of "Women in STEM Workforce Readiness "(Women in STEM) Program

QUICK FACTS

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Administrative Office: DWT/CO-Bangkok

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	Two major technical focus areas supported the sustainable enterprises development and skills' development components of the program. These were: (a) workforce readiness, including pre-employment skills assistance for women to facilitate the acquisition of demand-led STEM-related skills and with this improve their employability; and (b) workforce development, including skills upgrading - combining upskilling and reskilling initiatives - for women workers employed in entry level jobs in STEM sectors but with limited opportunities to advance in their careers. Within this context, the ILO's enterprise-based In Business (I-B) soft skills training model was central to the enterprise development component of the program. A broader skills' agenda that anchored these two technical areas was intended to make the skills and TVET system more inclusive and to respond to the needs of those who were under-served by the existing skills system.
Present situation of the project	While the implementation of the program did not see any immediate changes in national laws or policies, it helped the policymakers better understand the ways to promote STEM-related skills among women who would otherwise remain severely under-represented in this strategic growth sector for the Philippines (and Indonesia) as well as challenges they face in the fast-evolving platform economy. Due to the innovative nature of the project, many policymakers interested in addressing the Future of Work challenges got interested in WiS. Many initiatives were taken which at sight might lead to legislative and policy changes. Changes in national competency and/or qualification frameworks would constitute an important program contribution. Thanks to the positive collaboration of the WiS program with industry leaders in the Philippines backed by the strong research capacity of the ILO, the issue was brought up to the ILO by the industries with government partners. For Thailand, a rapid assessment on upskilling and reskilling needs for workers impacted by COVID-19 and IR 4.0 was commissioned in 2021. The findings and recommendations from this assessment were to make businesses and individuals whose future depends on skills development present, active and visible in policy formation; identify priority areas for actions or as policy-forming exercise in its own right; and to mobilize follow-up action through education and training

	institutions, public employment services and other institutions acting quickly within their own existing areas of competence. Women in STEM Indonesia designed and pioneered training on e-training development and delivery targeting BLKs/BBPLKs/BLKKs instructors, which received positive feedbacks from the Ministry of Manpower and the instructors. Learning from this experience, Ministry of Manpower is in the process of integrating the training into its e-platform for their future training modality. Although it is too early to identify the longer-term impact and sustainability of technical and soft skills training, initial anecdotal feedback from selected corporate partner training personnel indicates an attitudinal change among key HR staff around both the importance of increasing the number of women in STEM-related employment and the critical place and value of soft skills in the current rapidly evolving labour market in each of the focus countries. In the meantime, evaluative feedback indicated that the I-B training modules were well-received, with high levels of satisfaction overall and positive learning outcomes indicated. Likewise, a high proportion of trainee supervisors reported behavioural changes as a result of training.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	An external independent final evaluation was conducted over the period April – May 2022. It used a quantitative/qualitative process, drawing on a desk review of available documentation and interviews with a group of selected stakeholders in each of the three focus countries, as well as ILO specialist, Country Offices and program staff. The evaluation took into account the reorientation of program priorities and approach required by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as adjustments which were deemed required as a result of the implementation experience. The main purposes of the final evaluation were to fulfil the accountability to the donor and to the tripartite constituents, to serve internal organizational learning and for improvement of similar projects in the future. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the program had achieved its expected objectives as per the program logical framework, the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation, and the sustainability of the program impact. The final evaluation identified major challenges faced and action taken to address them, lessons learnt and good practices for both accountability and learning. The evaluation assessed the alignment

	of program interventions with ILO strategic objectives and policy outcomes as well as with existing Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), and other development frameworks. Lastly, the evaluation determined the coordination mechanisms with other ILO interventions. The evaluation covered the period of implementation of the Program from its start in December 2017 until the time of the final evaluation, covering key outputs and outcomes (including unexpected results). It involved discussions with ILO Program staff, national counterparts and development partners of the Program, the donor-JP Morgan Chase Foundation, and the ILO technical specialists based in Bangkok, Thailand.
Methodology of evaluation	Both qualitative and quantitative evaluation approaches were used for conducting the evaluation. The evaluation fieldwork was qualitative and participatory in nature, as far as the COVID-19 regime in place allowed. Qualitative information was obtained through one-on-one or group interviews as appropriate. Opinions coming from stakeholders improved and clarified the quantitative data obtained from project documents. Quantitative data were drawn from project documents including the Development Cooperation Progress Reports, Mid-term Evaluation Report and the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (MEP) and others. Data were disaggregated by sex where possible and appropriate. The gender dimension was considered as a cross-cutting concern throughout the evaluation. As women participation in STEM was the main focus of the program special attention was paid to this aspect. The needs of other vulnerable groups were also taken into account when considering initiatives towards an inclusive labour market. Social dialogue, international labour standards and a just environmental transition were likewise considered.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	<u>Relevance and strategic fit:</u> The Program identified high-growth sectors, automotive in Indonesia; Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Business Process Management (IT-BPM) in Philippines; and electrical and electronics sectors in Thailand respectively for intervention. However, because of contextual and implementation challenges, the Program shifted its focus to the ICT in Indonesia and subsequently included the e-commerce sector as part of its pandemic response.

Similarly, women in STEM-related work in the healthcare sector were further included in Thailand. The WiS program aimed to improve women acquisition and adoption of critical soft and technical STEM-related skills and, in this way, contribute to reduce the skills mismatches that affect workers' productivity and enterprises' competitiveness in this rapidly changing context. The program had a specific focus on institutional capacity and specific efforts were expected to ensure this translated into sustainability of the program's impacts. In order to embed learning at the institutional level, attention was given to supporting initiatives that would help direct beneficiaries to disseminate knowledge in their organizations and beyond.

As concerns potential program risks, the PRODOC recognised that capacity gaps among TVET institutions and private companies would require analysis and targeted attention under the program.

Coherence:

The STEM program was planned to closely align with research findings on STEM-related employment for women across ASEAN, building on ILO's learnings from past program implementations showing that women are significantly under-represented in the sub-region's STEM workforce.

Technical support for the design, development and implementation of the program was provided by the specialists in the DWT. Feedback from all levels indicated that this backstopping support was both responsive and effective. It also contributed to the key program design and planning decisions locally that were required as implementation progressed and as needs or issues became evident.

Effectiveness:

The program was effectively led and managed at the regional and national levels. The commitment, energy and innovative orientation of the program team was well-regarded by partners and was a key factor in the program's demonstrated ability to produce results, often in challenging and rapidly evolving circumstances.

One major external factor that influenced program planning and implementation was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A rapid adjustment of priorities and approaches was required across the whole WiS program, from March 2020 onwards, to respond to the changed circumstances. The evaluation finds that both Project Management, COs and the donor showed strong crisis management

in mitigating the challenges to the program's implementation caused by the pandemic and they managed to minimize the negative impact on the program, while keeping partner priorities in sight. The shift in orientation had three main components. These were prioritisation of online training capacities, skills and design within TVET institutions; a shift of focus from training/employment transition to the provision of job readiness training for TVET graduates; and piloting and moving company-based technical and In Business (I-B) soft skills training online. It is documented that the training has a positive impact on productivity as well as quality of production. This is by informants seen as a result of the better communication skills and a more inclusive and open management culture at the production floor level. There is also a positive impact on absenteeism and staff turnover. An expected improvement in career promotion possibilities post training is very limited also the participants do not report any increase in salary.

Interviews with selected public and private implementing partners indicated a strong commitment to the program at all levels.

In the Philippines, the reinforcement of the political, technical, financial and administrative engagement of key agencies, provided an important basis for the sustainability of program activities. A longer-term test in this context will be the extent to which program initiatives are carried forward through national budget and corporate resourcing, without any requirement for external resourcing, apart from ongoing technical support where necessary. The program has laid the foundation for this to take form.

In Indonesia and the Philippines, the national WiS program components were well integrated into the ILO's wider skills-related programming. In Thailand, the program constituted the major focus of skills engagement. The resulting synergies and mutual reinforcement contributed to overall program efficiency, impact and sustainability, through helping to maximise the efficient application of resources, through expanding stakeholder outreach and by ensuring that the lessons-learned were more widely shared.

<u>Efficiency of resource use:</u>

The budget spending was in line with ILO regulations and procedures as well as donor requirements and agreed budgets. The evaluation finds the administrative support adequate. Technical resources and expertise were accessed from several sources. Available

documentation and stakeholder feedback indicates that the technical support was adequate to meeting the program's requirements. Where program indicators and targets were not met, the issue was not a lack of technical resources, but rather the impact of larger contextual and capacity factors. In general, constituents request technical support rather than money.

Resource supplementation, through financial and in-kind contributions of partner agencies, was required to ensure that training activities could proceed at the agreed level. At the same time, it is apparent that the commitment of supplementary resources was an indication of the partners commitment to the program, thus constituting a potentially important factor in helping to ensure the sustainability of program's achievements. In the Philippines TESDA provided remarkably high governmental own contribution to the project this indicates the relevance of the program.

As concerns program governance, the PRODOC makes reference to the establishment of a regional Project Advisory Committee (PAC). However, the PAC was not established. The evaluation finds that a PAC could have contributed to creating stronger ownership of the overall program among constituents.

The evaluation finds that it would have strengthened the program implementation if a MEP had been developed and firstly had covered all elements of the program and secondly if it had been used for keeping the strategic view of the program.

<u>Impact orientation and sustainability:</u>

One key element of the program's sustainability strategy for its soft skills component is the taking on of responsibility, by national EOs, for the promotion and support of the delivery of the I-B program. The ECOP concluded an MOU with the ILO in 2019 to take on such a role in the Philippines; there was agreement in-principle to move in this direction by APINDO in Indonesia; and a MoU signed in March 2022 with ECOT in Thailand. The experience of ECOP illustrates the potential of I-B as both an important contributor to soft skills' development for women (and men) at a company level and as a promising element of membership services and expansion strategies. The identification of companies that function as carriers of ideas was a key element in the roll-out approach. The aim was that these companies would be long-term champions and "demonstrators" of the program, as well as a source of good practice advice and support

	for others. ECOP institutionalised I-B into the curriculum of its EO Academy to reinforce its sustainability. ECOP staff described I-B as a "game-changer" for helping to institutionalise its own gender and diversity commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES	
Main findings & Conclusions	Recommendation 1: The ILO is recommended to secure a stronger evidence-based program design that builds on the collective knowledge and experience of the national constituents and national and international experts. This might avoid a situation, such as occurred in the WiS project, where constant changes (beyond those obliged by the COVID-19 regime) were needed. Recommendation 2: The intent of the original objective remains valid as part of a holistic and comprehensive approach to promoting women in STEM and should be considered within the context of possible new and renewed regional and/or national skills' development, enterprise development and gender equality programs. Recommendation 3: The agreement with the donor envisaged the establishment of partnerships with TVET institutions and enterprises for traineeships and/or apprenticeships, but this did not materialise in full. The ILO is recommended to give priority to further development of its efforts for promoting mixed theoretical and practical training for VET/TVET students. Recommendation 4: The ILO is recommended to give priority to trainees getting insight into their basic rights and relevant information on occupational health and safety – also for working from home (e.g., ergonomics) and partners should be encouraged to ensure that the offered jobs are decent jobs. Recommendation 5: The evaluation recommends that ACTRAV (together with other relevant departments) to look into the possibility of supporting trade unions in developing policies in the field of TVET and skills development. In a world of work, where technologies are changing quickly and Industry 4.0 is moving forward, it is highly important that

	the trade unions are able to provide quality and evidence-based input to the discussion based on adopted trade union policies. Many trade unions do not have such a clearly defined policy on skills' development. <u>Recommendation 6:</u> The release of annual budget instalments was conditional on progress against KPIs. This affected the multi-year planning at a country level and conditioned the strategy the ILO developed to deliver outputs over the program's duration. Furthermore, it was reported to have affected staff turnover and led to the ILO issuing fixed-term contracts with a duration of often less than a year. It is recommended to commit funding for the full program period to accommodate for a strategic approach in program implementation. ILO is recommended to avoid short-term contracts as far as possible.
Main lessons learned and good practices	Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all training activities were transferred to on-line training. A lesson learned from this is that even efforts were made to moderate the training materials to fit to the new training approach. The experience showed that for most training activities the physical face-to-face training is preferred. A relatively high level of drop-out especially from long-term trainings was reported. Disability considerations are clearly an important factor for attention from a rights and inclusion perspective in any ILO engagement. The evaluation finds it encouraging to note that in Indonesia, the provisioning of sign language was included in the e-commerce training in the retail sector to enable participants with hearing disabilities to join the training. The evaluation see this as a positive emerging practice. The evaluation finds it a good emerging practise that the In-Business soft skills M&E approach in this program used Qualtrics survey software which enables the efficient gathering and rapid presentation of sex-disaggregated, company and country specific data from participants' training feedback. As well as indicating immediate perceptions of individual benefits from the program, the feedback has proven useful for both ILO program team training design considerations.