



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
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ILO-China project to expand employment services and enhance labour market information in Cambodia and LAO PDR- Final evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: Cambodia and Lao PDR

Final Evaluation: 15 September 2016

Evaluation Mode: Independent

Administrative Office: CO-Bangkok

Technical Office: DWT-Bangkok

Evaluation Manager: Ms. Sandra Yu

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Project Code: RAS/12/17CPR

Donor(s) & Budget: Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS), Peoples Republic of China: USD 1 million

Keywords: public employment services; labour market information; job centres; data collection, analysis and dissemination; market demand and linkages, jobseekers; social partners

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The **Development Objective** of the ILO/China SSC Project was to improve labour market efficiency and enhance linkages and information flows between job seekers and employers, which will contribute to the reduction of

unemployment and, ultimately, of poverty of Cambodia and Lao PDR.

The Immediate Objective 1 was to improve the quality and delivery of employment services provided by the responsible government institutions and their network of job centres to their clients; improve capacities of government, job centre officials and social partners.

The Immediate Objective 2 was to improve data collection, analysis and dissemination to allow for better job matching of the jobseekers with enterprises who need workers to fill their job vacancies.

Core to the Project's strategy and intervention logic was the strengthening of institutional and staff capacity of the respective public employment services to (i) increase jobseeker registrations, recording of job vacancies and job placements, especially through improved outreach to rural areas and (ii) improve the availability, credibility and use of labour market information (LMI). South-South cooperation was the principal underpinning project modality involving an extensive fact-finding programme in China, hands-on mentoring by a Chinese expert and learning visits to Thailand. The evaluation assessment was that progress was most advanced on Immediate Objective 1 in both countries, with less progress on Immediate Objective 2, albeit from quite different starting points.

The primary Project partners at country level were the National Employment Agency (NEA) of Cambodia; the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), particularly the Department of Skills Development and Employment (DSDE); the respective national employer associations (CAMFEBA in Cambodia and the LNCCI in Lao PDR; and selected national unions in Cambodia and the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU).

The project was overseen in both countries by a National Project Steering Committee established on a tripartite basis and serviced by the respective employment service institutions. Overall project management and administration was provided by the ILO Country Office in Bangkok, supported by the ILO Coordination Offices.

Present Situation of the Project

Although initially scheduled to begin in June 2013, the actual start date of the Project was January 2014. The current phase of the Project ended in April 2016. The principle donor has subsequently provided bridging finance to enable the convening of a regional (ASEAN) workshop on employment services in late 2016/early 2017, building on Project outcomes and lessons to date. Discussion is in progress about a second project phase which will also encompass social protection as a focus and Myanmar as a participating country.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the **relevance** of Project design; **effectiveness** (progress made against the performance plan as well as management and monitoring and evaluation arrangements); **efficiency** in use of resources; providing a basis to assess the **impact** and **sustainability** of Project outcomes to date in relation to policies, legislation, regulations, processes, capacities, behaviours of different actors and, ultimately, the individual lives of job seekers in Lao PDR and Cambodia.

In this context, the evaluation considered:

- progress in delivering against Project's immediate objectives, outcomes, expected outputs, indicators and targets
- the validity of the Project strategy and design as set out in the Project Document
- the effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that were in place
- strategic use and leverage of ILO/China SSC funds in support of Project implementation at all levels
- effectiveness of Project implementation and management arrangements at all levels (regional and national)
- the contribution of the Project to, and its synergies with, the respective DWCPs of Cambodia and Lao PDR
- how the Project has engaged with the tripartite constituents and direct beneficiaries in each country
- lessons learnt and good practices to inform future Project design and implementation, should a follow-up phase be agreed

- recommendations and/or the way forward for future efforts on employment services and LMI in the context of a follow-up phase of the Project.

Methodology of evaluation

A key feature of this evaluation was the synergy and value-addition derived from close integration with the reviews conducted of the respective Lao PDR and Cambodia DWCPs for the period 2011-2015.

The evaluation was conducted primarily as a qualitative participatory assessment of the implementation of the Project. The credibility and accuracy of review findings relied on open collaboration from the national tripartite constituents and other relevant stakeholders, including Project beneficiaries. Accordingly, the full, open and active participation of all key stakeholders was encouraged throughout the evaluation at all levels.

A semi-structured interview / engagement process involving Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was followed within the broad focus areas and assessment questions established for the evaluation.

Stakeholder consultations were underpinned by existing data and analysis available through Project documentation and other relevant national, regional and international sources.

The key evaluation phases were (i) a desk review of relevant documentation; (ii) interviews with relevant Bangkok-based ROAP, CO and DWT staff; and (iii) in-country missions in Cambodia and Lao PDR.

The primary clients of the evaluation were CO-Bangkok, DWT-Bangkok, ROAP and Government of the People's Republic of China.

Due to the overall timeframe and resource parameters within which the evaluation was carried out, there were certain areas in which there were limitations on the depth and scope of investigations. As a result, it was not possible to (i) engage with all the other relevant UN, international and governmental counterparts that would have been desirable to discuss synergies and assist with the triangulation of feedback; and (ii) conduct a more rigorous study of the changes in the quality of service delivery from a client perspective, ideally employing survey and focus group approaches.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance

Project relevance was examined through two lenses: (i) alignment with country priorities as demonstrated by national policy, legislation, strategies, plans and programmes and (ii) the degree of country ownership demonstrated around the Project and its outcomes. The Project was found to be highly relevant in both countries, with the delivery of high quality public employment services and LMI embedded in core national policies, strategies and plans, many of which have been renewed or launched in the past 12 months. Furthermore, solid evidence was available of country ownership of the Project and its outcomes (encompassing both the governmental institutions concerned as well as employer and trade union counterparts).

Effectiveness

Despite the unevenness of Project delivery as summarised in the full evaluation report, with the LMI component slower to progress in both countries, the Project can be assessed overall to have been effective, particularly with respect to improving the quality of delivery of employment services to jobseekers and employers. One important aspect of Project effectiveness has been the strengthening of foundations and generation of momentum, lessons and initial good practices for future development of employment services and LMI provision in both countries.

Particular areas noted as requiring specific in-depth attention in a second Project phase include the next steps in the development of LMI systems and related skills in both countries; the development of a national employment services strategy and phased increases in national budget support in Lao PDR; addressing the specific needs of women, migrant workers and persons with disability; and the documentation and dissemination of good practices to strengthen service quality and impact, including in a wider ASEAN context.

Efficiency

The achievements of the ILO/China SSC Project, as summarised in this report, have been supported by a relatively small resource base, both financial and human, during a short (and truncated) implementation period. One factor in the ability of the Project to deliver to the extent it did was the supplementation of the core financial contribution from China (USD 1 million over 28 months) by technical and administrative contributions in-kind from MoHRSS (especially in support of the China Study Tour), NEA and MoLSW/DSDE. The Project was also able to leverage supplementary funds from other ILO sources to support activities in key areas.

Information available to the evaluation from reports to the NPSC meetings and internal ILO reporting indicated that Project resources (human and financial) have been allocated in accordance with the Project objectives and outputs as set out in the Project Document in a strategic, economical and transparent manner. It is possible to track the application of Project resources through from inputs into outputs and results, as summarised in the full report. At the same time, the evaluation found scope to further improve the efficiency of Project delivery from financial and coherence perspectives. Examples provided in stakeholder feedback included the need to address (i) the tendency towards activity-by-activity approaches which was prevalent in the delivery of Project support; (ii) the impact on Project delivery of lack of coordination amongst and within relevant government ministries / agencies; (iii) the lack of coordination amongst international partners; and (iv) the need for greater integration of general employment and labour migration services.

Impact and sustainability

As the summary of Project implementation in the report indicates, there is clear evidence that the Project has had a positive 'added-value' impact on the capacity of both the NEA and MoLSW/DSDE to deliver effective employment services; reach out more widely to jobseekers and employers; and strengthen labour market information provision, albeit from very different starting points. The simplest indication of this impact in both countries is the bottom line increase documented in the registration of jobseekers and employment vacancies, as well as job placements, during the Project period. In the case of Cambodia, for example, the Project period saw vacancies recorded by the NEA increase by 322 percent over baselines; jobseeker registrations increase by 544 percent over baselines; and job placements increase by 628 % over baselines. These figures demonstrate enhanced NEA impact in linking skills with labour market requirements, with benefits to jobseekers and employers.

Feedback received from stakeholders in both countries linked such improvements to the improved outreach, supported by the Project to jobseekers and employers at provincial, district and community levels through means such as job fairs, employment forums, mobile teams and visits to school and tertiary institutions. The evaluation further strongly validated the value-addition of the South-South Cooperation modality underpinning the Project, including as a vehicle for knowledge-sharing across different country contexts. A clear demand was expressed by tripartite stakeholders for an expansion and deepening of such opportunities. The importance of paying attention

to institutional strengthening dimensions of capacity development, impact and sustainability was also highlighted.

Challenges, lessons and good practice

A number of challenges at general and country-specific levels were identified by the evaluation and are set out in the report, along with lessons learned and examples of current and emerging good practice which can be linked to Project objectives and contributions. Amongst the latter are the institutional model adopted by the NEA in Cambodia and its ongoing strengthening; the tripartite National Project Steering Committee (NPSC) model adopted to oversee the Project at country level; the use of district job fairs and job forums as a dual outreach and direct recruitment mechanism; the partnership developed by one provincial job centre with a national youth NGO to extend outreach at community level; the integration of employment and labour migration (MRC) services in another job centre; and the establishment of a network of youth focal points in selected trade unions in Cambodia.

Recommendations

Main recommendations and follow-up

Recommendation 1: Extend the ILO-China South-South Cooperation Project 2014-2015 for three years with an expanded budget as a key component of implementing employment creation and labour market information commitments under the DCWPs in both Lao PDR and Cambodia.

Recommendation 2: Continue the dual focus on employment services and labour market information in a next Project phase, but elevate the specific attention given to the strengthening (and in the Lao PDR case, establishment as required) of LMI systems and capacities.

Recommendation 4: Establish a new priority focus within the next phase of Project design on the integration of general employment and migrant labour services. This should encompass (i) steps to develop the necessary policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks and (ii) inclusion of such a priority within the long-term institutional development and resourcing plans of the NEA and MoLSW/DSDE.

Recommendation 5: Draw on the internationally-grounded service standards of the respective national public employment services to strengthen the quality of the wider

national employment services and LMI environment in both countries (public and private).

Recommendation 6: As part of the capacity development orientation of a next Project Phase, incorporate a specific focus on strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) policy, systems, processes and skills in the respective PES institutions, drawing *inter alia* on the approaches and lessons already developed in the NEA context to date.

Recommendation 7: Introduce an explicit focus on organisational development (OD) approaches into the next Project phase, with a view to sharpening awareness of the state of institutional 'health' and options for ways forward within the respective public sector environments.

Recommendation 8: Building on progress under the Project to date, consider next steps to (i) apply C.88 in practice and (ii) prioritise attention to its eventual ratification vs a vs C.122 and other relevant ILO Conventions.

Recommendation 9: Ensure that long-term sustainability policy, strategies and measures are in place by the end of the next Project period.

Recommendation 10: Continue the current Project management architecture and arrangements for the next phase, taking into the account the adjustments proposed under this recommendation in Section 9 (including an increase in resourcing for the Project management and administrative roles).

Benchmarks for future Project design

A set of benchmarks were further proposed to underpin the design of a next Project phase. These included ensuring:

- (i) joint formulation of the design to the extent possible to enhance ownership, commitment and common understandings, including in the areas of specific outputs and indicators
- (ii) integrated approaches to the ongoing development of operational policy, systems, procedures and staff capacity with respect to employment services and LMI, so that both components 'move in sync together'
- (iii) incorporating a deepening of the South-South cooperation/knowledge sharing dimensions of the Project, including through increased opportunities for Cambodia-Lao PDR mutual learning and support and engagement with other ASEAN countries
- (iv) enhanced synergies within and around the Project, including:
 - with other components of the respective DWCPs,

- between the relevant specialist and programme/project management staff in Bangkok
 - with other internationally-supported projects and initiatives
- (v) specific provision/requirements for strengthening the relationships within each country between relevant ministries, departments and agencies
- (vi) every aspect of Project design recognises and includes specific provision as appropriate for the strengthening of tripartite cooperation
- (vii) specific attention (reflected in Project outputs and indicators), to more systematically and visibly mainstreaming gender and address the particular needs and priorities persons with disability.