



# Evaluation Summary



International  
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## “EMPOWER: Building peace through the economic empowerment of women in Sri Lanka (EMPOWER)”

### Quick Facts

**Countries:** Sri Lanka

**Final Evaluation:** February 26, 2020

**Evaluation Mode:** Independent

**Administrative Office:** ILO Country Office Sri Lanka (CO- Sri Lanka)

**Technical Office:** DWT/CO-New Delhi

**Evaluation Manager:** Rattanaporn Pounpattana, M&E Officer, ILO ROAP

**Evaluation Consultant(s):** Rema N Balasundaram

**Project Code:** LKA/17/03/UND

**Donor(s) & Budget:** UN PBF (USD 2,000,000)

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, local economic development, jobs for peace, cooperatives, livelihood resilience, SMEs

### Background & Context

#### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure:

The EMPOWER project in Sri Lanka aims to increase access to economic empowerment, social integration, resilience and peacebuilding participation for 350 female former combatants and other disadvantaged and conflict-affected women members of the Puthukkudiyiruppu Women Entrepreneurs' Cooperative Society (PTK). These will be done through a cooperative enterprise engagement with new markets, networks and opportunities that opened

up as a result of an improved post conflict environment. The project took place in Mullaitivu one of the most isolated and war affected Northern districts of Sri Lanka, from January 2018 to June 2019 (and extended to December, 2019).

The project has two outcomes: 1) Female former combatant and other conflict-affected women increase their economic contribution through effectively accessing new market opportunities, resources, and information that have opened as a result of the more peaceful environment, and; 2) Female former combatant and other conflict-affected women leverage their increased social status to be a leading voice in the region's private sectors' contribution to peace building.

ILO was the lead recipient organization and the World Food Programme was the additional recipient Organization. The Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) Women Entrepreneurs' Cooperative-- a rural Cooperativewas the implementing partner.

#### Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The purpose of the End Term Evaluation is to assess the extent to which project objectives have been achieved, to identify lessons learned, and offer recommendations for future initiatives. The scope of the evaluation is project implementation from project start in January 2018 to project completion in December 2019. The primary end users of the evaluation findings is the ILO Country Office in Colombo and the key stakeholders involved in the project. Secondary parties making use of the results of the evaluation will include ILO technical departments, DWT-New Delhi and ROAP. The evaluation also

strives to provide a forward looking perspective to inform program planning and decision making for financing of job for peace programs for the ILO and WFP going forward.

### **Methodology of evaluation**

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach applying qualitative analytical tools, using the OECD DAC principles, the UNEG Norms and Standards, and the ILO Evaluation Guidelines, with a special emphasis and adaptation of the ILO Handbook on How to Design, Monitor and Evaluate Peacebuilding results in Jobs and Peace and Resilience Programme. The evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluator having no conflict of interest in the EMPOWER project.

The evaluation considers a series of questions related to six evaluation criteria: relevance, coherent, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, impact. It also explore aspects related to risks and resilience and other special aspects including gender equality, disability inclusion and social dialogue. The evaluation is based on qualitative research, drawing on an in-depth review of project files and documents. A field visit to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu was conducted between November 2 and November 11, 2019, and validation workshops were held in the field and at ILO Colombo offices as a debriefing towards the end of the mission. During the field visit in Sri Lanka, more than 60 informants were interviewed through focus groups and KIIs.

## **Main Findings & Conclusions**

### **High relevance with alignment to stakeholder needs and the national strategy:**

The project built relevance at multiple levels at inception, and ensured its relevance throughout the project cycle till completion. Early measures included the alignment to both supply and demand side relevance built to the PBF donor, ILO, WFP, and the Government of Sri Lanka national strategies and plans. The project was relevant because it designs to revive the local economies in the Northern province that have been plagued by high poverty rate. The

project also was relevant because of its aims to provide technical assistance to vulnerable sections of the population particularly the ex combatant women. The ILO identified a niche area to support local communities in terms of sustainable livelihoods options through a capacity building approach built through a rural women's cooperative. The EMPOWER project provided clear linkages to the sustenance of peace, with the manner in which, it led a catalytic transformation of women's empowerment through small loans paid to SMEs, and cooperative members, to build and sustain economic empowerment.

The project addressed the root cause of conflict "lack of opportunity" for ex combatant and marginalized women in a post conflict zone. This was done by integrating cooperatives in a "bottom up" peacebuilding approach where the self-help cooperatives and community based organizations are involved to support livelihoods, providing social services, and backing women-owned small scale businesses. It also helped raise the importance of linking peacebuilding initiatives with a cooperative movement, and prioritize jobs, skills, and employment as the building blocks of resilience. The EMPOWER project targeted women in a low rate labour participation area like the Northern Province, which was a key design element that contributed in large measure to impact. All stakeholders believe that the EMPOWER project was relevant and had already contribute a positive impact through the activities implemented by the PTK Cooperative.

### **Effectiveness (of project implementation and management arrangements):**

The ILO intervention was not as effective as envisaged at inception, largely due to multiple factors. These included the absence of an well-designed M&E framework, weak monitoring systems, low institutional and organizational capacity; constraints faced by both the field teams and the PTK Cooperative, and inefficiencies in financial and administrative support at the ILO Country Office. The inadequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks and indicator design both output and outcome levels resulted in the paucity of project information and in the inability to document comprehensive picture of

project progress and achievements, the team's inability to report on the results achieved, and the failure to recognize both results and different results across different beneficiary groups. The monitoring reports and project progress reports documented inputs that seemed to be measures of compliance rather than reporting on actual outcomes and outputs that had been achieved. Effectiveness of the monitoring system must be assessed at two levels, the first was the manner in which the team built in both an internal review and an audit process, on a demand basis during the implementation to help work through project performance issues. The other level was the monitoring and evaluation frameworks which seemed weak. The weak M&E framework resulted in poor documentation of the project achievements, which were found to be several according to the interview with the PTK cooperative members and beneficiaries. The project achieved several outputs, and in some cases overachieved outcome targets. These include the growth of the private sector through the growth of both SMEs and the PTK through increased membership, and the ability for the PTK- to build resilience in the community through the creation of jobs by each PTK-members SME and the provision of loan. The group discussions with the PTK members and women beneficiaries saw a high level of confidence which was an indication of empowerment that had been achieved as a result of the project interventions and activities including the provision of small loans, capacity building and technical vocational support. The increase in annual income of the PTK Cooperative reported by the project for outcome 1, is one indication of PTK growth during the first few months.

### **Sustainability:**

Sustainability of the EMPOWER project was questioned at every aspect, from the rushed concept design, to the project's choice of the financing instrument. Addressing the root causes of conflict, peacebuilding and economic empowerment require long term programming timeframes and multiple measures of sustainability built in at all levels. The project's decision to go with a funding instrument that is of short term, is not commensurate with its targeted long-term outcomes and results.

Government officials at provincial and divisional levels were critical about the Institutional and financial sustainability of the project. An official commented that mechanisms and strategies for sustainability should have been established since the design stage. Project reports flagged the absence of a viable sustainability plan for the PTK Cooperative itself and the need to ensure reliability and feasibility in its operational planning tools. Careful design elements that allow measures to attain and build sustainability in a cost effective manner are key to good programming.

Despite the above issues, the project was able to achieve some level of program sustainability in some aspects. These include its agro-centric focus, the established links between women-led SMEs and the private sector player and market demand of its agricultural products. It is this element that will remain sustained even after the EMPOWER project ends.

### **Efficiency of project management strategies:**

The first few months of the project cycle were plagued with project implementation delays due to multiple factors, delay in project funding, procurement delays, and failure of the team to foresee and mitigate environmental, operational, financial and market risks in the region. An inadequate assessment and management of the operational and environmental project risks and their timely mitigation measures was lacking both in design and at inception of the project. These project implementation delays proved costly given the short term duration of the project.

The efficiency was hampered by several issues, including the project design, management and oversight. The rushed proposal approval process hindered complementarity and linkage between the project partners and thwart careful project design, which are critical elements to programming. The evaluation identified that there was a need for a more systematic design and implementation approach based on rigorous country analysis, risks and assessment and operationally sound baselines to ensure greater coherence and effectiveness of donor support. Given the project implementation delays, and the large volume of funding that was available towards the middle of 2019, the PBF team provided both

adaptability and flexibility in providing a no cost extension to the project giving them a period of six months, and allowing a project completion of December, 2019. Despite this, financial outlays showed that almost 25 percent funds would not be utilized as planned at completion. Despite these issues, the project had over achieved several outcomes and results, especially in the context of private sector led growth.

### Potential impact

Measuring potential impact of this project was not easy. Short to medium term potential impact may at best be reflected. The EMPOWER project was able to catalyze the private sector led growth in a low growth post conflict environment like Mullaitivu.

Discussions with the PTK members, at different levels, the PTK Board members, PTK beneficiaries, change management agents, and Government officials from both the Agricultural Division, the Provincial Cooperative Division, and the Government Agent, reiterated the importance of the programme inputs from EMPOWER to the community in Mullaitivu and its potential impact.

One of the impact of the EMPOWER project was the economic empowerment of the ex combatant women which were enhanced through project agro centric intervention measures and inputs, as well as the establishment of the effective linkages with the Private sector conglomerate Hayleys Agro, the SME growth, and the growth of the loan profiles. While such impact data and records are not found in the reviewed project documents, the discussions with the Bank Manager and PTK members during the field visit indicated that more than 90 percent of the loans had been repaid. Other observed impact was that the PTK-member SMEs were able to create jobs, and enhance local employment with an average of 1 to 5 daily wage workers, or in some instances even greater numbers of 5-10 workers, being hired per SME, depending on seasonality of the crops and the SME activity that had been built.

### Special aspects to be considered

The design elements of the project that targeted ex combatant women, women-headed farming

households, disabled, war widows, marginalized and vulnerable women, with a self-help cooperative and community based organizations was the winning strategy in supporting and promoting livelihoods, empowering the community at large. The project interventions enabled them to find their voice in decision making, and enhancing social dialogue in an otherwise marginalized environment. The project's strengthening of small scale businesses and SMEs serve as the long lasting measures towards peace building and enhancement of peace.

The project's effort in gender equality and disability inclusion were apparent in the membership of the PTK Women's cooperative and the beneficiaries of the EMPOWER project. PTK beneficiaries themselves are ex combatants who suffered injuries and deal with disabilities of different kinds. During the discussions, more than 20 percent of the women who attended the discussions for the end term evaluation were disabled in some way or another.

In addition, gender-responsive services were provided by the PTK members for their peers. In 2019, the PTK members who were trained as change agents, supported victims of gender based violence in the community by referring them to public institutions and other support mechanisms. The change agents also helped provide a voice for marginalized groups in the local community. The support included female entrepreneurs being linked with the Chamber of Commerce (CC) in Jaffina. Through this network the women receive opportunities to participate in training on Food Quality, Hygiene, Management and Packaging provided by CC. The Chamber of Commerce also continues to provide business development service and training to the PTK Women's Cooperative.

## Recommendations and lessons learned

### Main recommendations and follow-up

1. ILO, WFP, and PBF should document of project results and good practices and achievements, with multiple knowledge products from inception of the project.
2. ILO must build its own financing facility for women's empowerment in poverty-stricken zones

in Sri Lanka, with an agro centric focus through cooperatives.

3. The project must build Sustainability dimensions at the inception and during the implementation of the Project at all levels
4. Design monitoring processes and results frameworks that reflect the relevance of the Theory of Change outcome profiles
5. ILO Headquarters should have an enhanced role in formulating guidance tools with conflict assessment at country level.

### Lessons Learned

The PBF modality was that of a short term financing instrument with long term planned outcomes, which was a disconnect

Given the ILO mission and mandate and the recognition that DWCPs and its tenets require long term planning, the project's decision to go with UNPBF's IRF-- a funding instrument that is of short term, is not commensurate both with its targeted long-term outcomes and results, and with the context that required long term programming and planning instruments. Although the IRF provided an extension of six months, this was not adequate to complete all the project commitments and this led to a fair percentage of funds having to be returned to the PBF Secretariat Office.

### Good practice

The used value chain approach with a coordinated measure with local actors made immense value to address the root causes of the conflict, especially focused on ex-combatant women and women with disabilities.