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Towards fair and sustainable global supply chains: Promoting formalization and decent work for invisible workers in South Asia – Independent Final Evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka

Evaluation date: 30 August 2022

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO New Delhi, ROAP

Technical Office: DWT-Delhi, GED, INWORK, WORKQUALITY

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DC Symbol: RAS/17/06/JPN

Donor(s) & budget: Government of Japan; USD 2,400,000.00

Key Words: informal economy, global supply chains, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, South Asia, home-based workers, formalization, ILO Convention 177, invisible workers

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The project aims to contribute to promotion of decent work through the development of ethical and sustainable global supply chains - specifically for workers who are engaged at the lower tiers.

This will be achieved through improved and effective implementation of policies and regulations and strengthened governance for development of ethical and sustainable supply chains, and improved living and working conditions of home-based workers and other informal economy workers engaged in selected supply chains.

The project's means of action include generating evidence-based data on employment relationships and working conditions of home-based workers and other actors in selected supply chains through research, sharing the research findings with relevant stakeholders to discuss and agree on the way forward, enhancing the capacities of the key stakeholders, including government institutions, employers' and workers' organizations, international companies, and NGOs and academia, and policy advocacy by working with various stakeholders and media.

The project geographical coverage includes India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and is managed by a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), based in New Delhi, and one National Project Officers and Financial/Administrative Assistant each in India and Nepal.

Present situation of the project

The project implementation, which was planned for 2017 to 2020, had been extended to June 2022.

The project was preceded by the project on "Way out of informality in South Asia" (2012 – 2016), which aimed to formalizing the informal enterprises and micro businesses in selected sectors. It is also termed as second phase, built upon the achievements of the first phase, which is generated awareness among the tripartite constituents and other stakeholders on the significance of addressing informal economy in realizing sustainable and inclusive development.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The evaluation will be used to ensure accountability and to further the ILO's agenda of learning from the experiences of this project.

	<p>Key objectives of the independent final evaluation are: to assess the theory of change (TOC) of the project; to undertake an independent assessment of the project's achievements against its stated objective and result framework; to assess and identify factors affecting project implementation, positively and negatively, and implementation strategies of the project with regard to their potential effectiveness in achieving the project outcomes and impacts; to assess and determine</p> <p>Scope of the evaluation includes project implementation in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka in the period of 1 July 2017 – 31 December 2021.</p> <p>Primary clients of the evaluation include relevant government ministries and institutions, employers' and workers' organizations, other key stakeholders in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the project's team and main partners.</p>
Methodology of evaluation	<p>The methodology of data collection and analysis applied in the evaluation include desk review, in-depth interviews, and focus group interview. Purposive and non-probability sampling was applied to identify and cover the key stakeholders of the project from all categories.</p> <p>Due to the COVID-19 restriction, all interviews and FGDs were conducted virtually.</p>
MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	<p>The project's design, interventions, strategic focus on enhancing project's visibility, high quality of ILO's technical inputs, investment in local and community leadership development, and ability to adapt to the changes in working environment and modalities due to COVID-19 pandemic are key internal conditions that contribute positively to its relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency.</p> <p>The project objectives directly responded to the needs of the workers to be recognized and visible through organizing them for engaging in collective bargaining, and to enhance their wages, occupational safety and health (OSH). For the employers' membership-based organizations (EMBOs), the project objectives and interventions to enhance the capacity in the areas of OSH,</p>

business and financial literacy, compliance with national and local laws, access to national and international markets, and adoption of ethical standards were also highly relevant to micro, small and home-based members of the organization, who are at the lowest tier of the supply chains. For the government, the project objectives were relevant to the needs to remove policy blindness and enhancing coverage of existing legislations. The project also aligned with Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and contributed Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8, 9, 10, 12 and 17.

Mainstreaming gender in all project activities by conducting gender-specific research, addressing gender concerns in all training and capacity building programmes and knowledge products, the project managed to promote gender equality in a largely women home-based workers sector.

The project ability to adapt its design and delivery mechanisms to continue its operations through online activities has made it one of a few ILO projects, which continued its operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This modality were the reasons for under-utilization of the budget, which include savings due to conducting online trainings, workshops and meetings, and due to much less travel of project team. The project also managed to leverage resources from RBSA and RBTC in Nepal and India. Furthermore, data on direct and indirect beneficiaries is available in the project's annual Technical Progress Report (TPR) with sufficient details. In this regard, overall efficiency of the project is satisfactory, in particular, considering the initial delay in starting the project and disruptions due to COVID-19.

The use of social dialogue by the project has contributed positively to the project coherence, as it involves the constituents and stakeholders as members of working groups or as implementing partners.

External conditions that contributed positively to project relevance, coherence, and effectiveness include collaborative approach of social partners leading to greater ownership, high level of

commitment of the implementing partners, support from the governments of Nepal and UP, and donor's flexibility in fund allocation and project's duration.

The project was found to be innovative in its approaches in identifying, unionizing and building capacities of the home-based workers, who are highly invisible. The project has successfully demonstrated a model, which can contribute to formalization of the informal sector. While there are challenges related to ratification of C177 and engagement of international brands, the project has provided some very interesting lessons and good practices that have the potential to influence the future initiative in this specific area as well as other initiatives for formalization of the informal economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ratification of C177 must be included in the DWCP priorities of each country. 2. ILO to continue technical support to partners of this project. 3. Implementing partners must continue working on project objectives. 4. National working groups of TUs and MBOs must continue operating. 5. Implementing partners must improvise upon intervention strategy based on lessons learned from the project. 6. Finalization and publication of all knowledge products generated under the project.
Main lessons learned and good practices	<p>Lessons learned</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Innovative or experimental projects need to have a pilot phase and flexibility to adapt the project design. 2. Developing shared understanding of the project amongst key stakeholders in the initial phases of the project helps in enhancing effectiveness of the project. 3. A multi-dimensional and long-term approach is required to deal with the complex issue of HBWs (especially women) in the GSCs.

4. Special efforts are required enhance visibility of the invisible workers at the level of tripartite partners as well as within the ILO.
5. Supply chain disruptions directly impact the HBWs, who are also forced to absorb the losses because due to such disruptions.
6. Need non-conventional approach for HBWs, especially women, who needs additional livelihood and leadership development support to participate in the initiatives that promote Freedom of Association (FOA) and Collective Bargaining (CB).

Good practices

1. Participatory appraisal – Facilitative approach, rapport building with workers, helps in rapid situation assessment, and in reaching out to invisible and hidden workers.
2. Training on wages and wage settings in the context of piece rates.
3. OSH training using ILO's WISH methodology.
4. Training on financial literacy.
5. GET Ahead training.
6. Tripartite technical working group at the national level.
7. Informality diagnostics study.
8. Technical working groups at the national level.