



Evaluation Summary



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Support to Resettlement and Reconciliation (SURAR) through the United Nations Joint Programme for Peace Project

Quick Facts

Countries: Sri Lanka

Final Evaluation: 09/07/2021-30/09/2021

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Administrative Office: CO-Colombo

Technical Office: COOP

Evaluation Manager: Aye Pearl Hlaing

Evaluation Consultant: Dr. Udan Fernando and Ms. Hasini Haputhanthri

Project End: March 31 2021 (no cost extension till 30 September 2021)

Project Code: LKA/19/03/USA

Donor & Project Budget: United States- Department of State (US DOS), USD 543,210

This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has not been professionally edited, but has undergone quality control by the ILO Evaluation Office.

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

Introduction: The final independent evaluation of the Support to Resettlement and Reconciliation through the United Nations Joint Programme for Peace (SURAR) project was undertaken in line with the funding agreement between UN and ILO and in accordance with the ILO evaluation policy. The Independent Final Evaluation assessed overall project progress against the intended objective/outcomes, validity of the theory of change as the project's key challenges, lessons learnt and provide recommendations for improved delivery of quality works in similar future ILO and other related projects.

The evaluation was carried out by an external independent evaluator (comprised of a Team Leader and Team Member) in close consultation with the project and key stakeholders in Sri Lanka. Responsibility for management of the evaluation was with the ILO's Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Entrepreneurship and MSME support/SCORE project, based at the ILO Liaison Office in Myanmar who had no prior involvement in the project, with oversight provided by the ILO Evaluation Office. The evaluation was carried out from 9 July 2021 to 30 September 2021.

The project: Under the framework of the UN's Joint Programme for Peace (JPP), the project aimed to provide timely and strategically focused assistance towards two peacebuilding priorities that tackle core grievances of the minority Tamil community. The interventions were designed to contribute towards securing and sustaining the peacebuilding process, through helping to build trust and confidence amongst the Tamil community in the direction in which the country is moving. The JPP was a new and innovative initiative, launched in April 2019 by the Government of Sri Lanka and the UN. Within the time frame of eighteen months the UN looked to deliver high impact results by supporting the two interventions i) Scaling-up ongoing livelihood support through engaging cooperatives and the private sector, as part of a holistic package of resettlement assistance designed to enable dignified and sustainable returns for lands released by the military; and ii) Kick starting the process of working in a joined-up way on reconciliation, through the introduction of an innovative service tracking tool to monitor and incentivise improvements in ability of front-line institutions to deliver public services in the Tamil language.

Under the resettlement and social cohesion pillars of the JPP, ILO Support to Resettlement and Reconciliation through the United Nations Joint Programme for Peace Project (SURAR) funded by United States- Department of State (US DOS) is aimed to help advance the resettlement of returned Tamils through livelihood support and support reconciliation efforts through improving the delivery of services in Tamil language by front-line institutions targeted 900 conflict-affected and resettled households with high vulnerability, including female-headed households, conflict-affected youth, and persons with disabilities in Tellipalai in Jaffna district, Pachchilaipalli (Palai) in Kilinochchi, and Maritiméattu in Mullaitivu. ILO intends to draw on its extensive experience working with cooperatives and the private sector to promote sustainable economic opportunities for resettling families in three of these target locations.

The overall objective, outcomes and outputs of the project:

The Overall project outcome statement: Contributing to sustainable peace in Sri Lanka by harnessing support from multiple partners for strategic, coherent and sustainable support to fast-track the advancement of priority transitional justice and confidence building measures, guided by the PPP. Under the above two outcomes were expected to be realized through the project: **Outcome 1:** The State prioritizes sustainable return, resettlement and/or local integration of conflict-displaced persons (IDPs, IDP returnees, and refugee returnees) in a safe and dignified manner to rebuild lives and communities (Output: The UN in Sri Lanka provides strategic, coherent, timely and targeted support towards the resettlement process in the

Northern Province with an emphasis on ensuring durable solutions and promoting confidence in the process) and **Outcome 2** Positive relationships and mutual understanding between and among different groups, and between groups and the state, contribute to peaceful co-existence and a sense of belonging in Sri Lanka (Output: The UN in Sri Lanka provides strategic, coherent, timely and targeted support to strengthen reconciliation and social cohesion).

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

Purpose

The main purpose of the final independent evaluation was to promote accountability to key stakeholders and donor, and to enhance learning within the ILO and key stakeholders. The findings will be used to improve design and implementation of future relevant projects/programs. The results will also feed into the review of JPP.

The project's performance was reviewed with strict regard to six evaluation criteria: 1) relevance and strategic fit, 2) coherence (validity of the design), 3) effectiveness, 4) efficiency, 5) impact orientation and 6) sustainability. An additional criterion was used to capture cross cutting themes such as gender and vulnerability with special reference to disability. The relevant tripartite constituents and key stakeholders were consulted and their inputs were taken into consideration throughout the evaluation process.

The evaluation was expected to:

- I. Independently assess project progress against the results framework;
- II. Inform the ILO and UN on how the current project strategy is working, and provide recommendations on what could be changed to increase the likelihood that the project reaches its objectives;
- III. List the project's key challenges through independent organizational and operational arrangements by in-country partners and how these challenges can be addressed;
- IV. Inform the ILO and UN on feasibility of sustainability strategy of SURAR in Sri Lanka; and,
- V. Identify good practices and lessons learned that would contribute to learning and knowledge development of the ILO and project stakeholders.

Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation covered work carried out in three Northern Districts of Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu (on Outcome 1) and at national level (Outcome 2). The project period covered in the evaluation is from the inception (September 2019) to June 30 2021 (as far as records and reports are concerned) and 31st July 2021 (as far as comments on activities received from primary stakeholders, i.e. the six cooperatives, beneficiaries and private sector partners). This cut-off point was necessary given the continuation of some project activities till September 2021. The evaluation covered expected (i.e. planned) and unexpected results in terms of non-planned outputs and outcomes (i.e. side effects or externalities). Some of these unexpected changes were relevant as the ones planned. Therefore, the evaluation reflected on them for learning purposes.

The clients of the evaluation were:

- I. Key stakeholders involved in the project including government stakeholders in Sri Lanka;
- II. ILO backstopping Unit and other relevant entities at HQ; and the donors

- III. Project staff, ILO Country Office and UNDP/UN RCO in Colombo.

Methodology of evaluation

Overall, a method of appreciative inquiry was used for the evaluation, especially in the context of COVID 19 pandemic and its repercussions as well as the change of governments (with different policy approaches on peace building) at the very start of the project. The evaluation had to be guided by these context factors in proposing a feasible methodology and carry out the evaluation in accordance with the safety guidelines in place. It was clear that due to the COVID 19, some methodologies such as field visits with extensive discussions with beneficiaries were not feasible. Hence the resorting to online platforms and telephone for communication. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders at beneficiary levels, cooperatives, government agencies, partnering private companies, consultants, ILO and UN RCO / UNDP staff were carried out in addition to review of project documents.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The implementation of the project was severely impeded by the lockdowns and travel restrictions relating to three waves of Covid 19 and adverse climatic and weather conditions. Hence the project performance should be interpreted taking into account of the above significant constraints. As some of the operations of the project are not yet completed it is premature to make a comprehensive conclusion. However, the following findings can be made taking into account the activities, outputs and results that can be observed as of 30 June 2021. It should be noted that certain aspects below related to Outcome 2 cannot be commented on as the work is yet to be completed.

- a. Relevance: The project had been well positioned within the broader policies of the Sri Lankan government (on peace, reconciliation and resettlement), broader policies and programmatic priorities of the ILO as well as the UN, including SDG 8 and 16. As such, the project intervention had proved to be relevant, timely and strategically catering to the needs and priorities of Sri Lanka as well as the two agencies that collaborated.
- b. Coherence: The indicators in Outcome 1 level are coherent and captures gender disaggregated data and data pertaining to vulnerable communities successfully. In Outcome 2, outcome level indicators are derived directly from the original Monitoring Plan¹, and needs to be adapted better to capture the improvisation after the change of government policy on peace and SURAR contributions. SURAR had successfully built past ILO experiences of LEED, LEED+ and Empower Project drawing from their networks and lessons learned. It creates satisfactory synergies with other UN bodies and counterpart government institutions and compliments the overall ongoing work of these organisations.
- c. Effectiveness: As far as effectiveness is concerned the activities carried out under Outcome 1 have

¹ Annex 4: Project Monitoring Plan, June 2019, Result Framework for the JPP (draft)

reached the targeted areas and numbers (also with due emphasis on vulnerabilities such as FHH, PwD and the poor), generating the targeted value chains to generate livelihoods (except Coir which is to be launched shortly), while establishing and strengthening cooperatives (as per target) with collaborations with the private sector (as per target) for market linkages and under the ownership of the DoCD. At an attribution level, the livelihood support by ILO is considered significant by the government officials as well as beneficiaries as the support from others have been on infrastructure. It is premature to assess effectiveness of Outcome 2 since activities are still under way. From what has been achieved it has created good rapport with stakeholders and has effectively complemented their work by developing a simplified tracking tool. Capacities in the ministry for consultative processes have somewhat enhanced. There is a considerable attribution gap between the potential results of outcome 2 activities and the overall goal of reconciliation and improved relationships between groups.

- d. **Efficiency:** From an efficiency point of view, the project had performed well in utilizing limited financial and human resources to achieve target objectives. Given the challenges brought about by COVID, the project has managed time effectively as well. Considerable savings have been made and are being re-channeled to replicate activities among beneficiary communities. Resource management is excellent.
- e. **Impact:** Two value chains, Ground Nut and Dry Fish, have recorded positive results with income where 63% and 100% (target was 50%) of the beneficiaries have earned beyond the targeted income levels. Banana harvest and sales is expected in August onwards. Coir production is yet to be launched. In regard to Outcome 1, a reasonable probability to generate further impact can be expected given the market linkages established. On outcome 2, it is premature to assess impact as the activities have not been completed.
- f. **Sustainability:** Three out of four value chains (except coir) are rolling out well with supportive market linkages. The coir production is due but the market linkage is established. The Department of Cooperative Development(DoCD) asserts its role as the overall custodian of the project after the withdrawal and assured its' nurturing role of cooperatives. As such, the initiatives under Outcome 1 shows a high level of sustainability. However, a comprehensive exit plan, taking into account the remaining work of the project needs to be formulated as a basis for handover of responsibilities to the DoCD and private sector companies. Outcome 2 needs clear exit strategies to ensure the results of the completed survey are properly disseminated, used effectively in advocacy strategies and stakeholders follow up and build on the intervention.
- g. **Special aspects:** Cross cutting themes (gender, disability and vulnerability) have been successfully addressed by employing simple clear and transparent methodologies such as the scoring system. The project demonstrates high sensitivity mainstreaming

gender issues and the inclusion of marginalized groups within its target communities. It collects gender disaggregated data systematically and use them properly for project activities. Overall the project shows a remarkable degree of integration of human rights, inclusion of vulnerable groups and gender.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that SURAR has contributed well towards the Outcome 1 with some limited pending work to be completed. Outcome 2 has been substantially affected by the COVID induced delays and restrictions (primarily the complete or partial closures and work from arrangements in government offices to be surveyed throughout the implementation period) and only the pilot survey has been completed. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the degree of contribution towards its outcome, which is set at a higher level, directly derived from PPP indicator. Even if the activities are completed, it may not be possible to attribute the impacts clearly due to attribution gap. Furthermore, outcome 2 geared towards contributing to PPP. Although the SURAR contributes 15% of its resources to outcome 2, these activities are complemented by other activities conducted by RCO and UNDP. A more accurate assessment of outcome 2 activities will have to be evaluated in relation to these other activities, which is beyond the scope of SURAR evaluation. Overall, the project could have benefited from interaction between the two outcomes by capitalizing on synergies and opportunities to create dialogue platforms between state and conflict affected communities as well as North South dialogue of farming communities, cooperative and market linkages. Further, models for mainstreaming dialogue into economic and livelihood activities could have been explored, had the project been more long term.

The overall outcome of SURAR is “Contributing to sustainable peace in Sri Lanka by harnessing support from multiple partners for strategic, coherent and sustainable support to fast-track the advancement of priority transitional justice and confidence building measures, guided by the PPP”. Creating sustainable peace after protracted conflict requires addressing deep-rooted attitudinal, relational and structural causes of conflict within a multi-cultural society. It requires a long-term holistic approach that recognizes the need to adapt set strategies for varying context changes to play an accompanying role to communities in their way to recovery and state structures attempting to be more inclusive. Given its limitations of time and resources, and the unexpected challenges of political change and pandemic, it has taken steady steps towards achieving some of its objectives. A more long-term concentrated effort is required to achieve the said objectives to a satisfactory degree.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

As mentioned before, the completion of project cycles of different sub-components of the project is at different levels. The extended project period is till end of September 2021. With a yet another wave of Covid-19 is being on the rise it is doubtful if the remaining project work can be duly completed by end September 2021.

Recommendation 1(Main Recommendation): For the donors and ILO and UNDP/UN RCO to explore another extension of the project for a period of three to six months from October

2021 to carry out the particular incomplete tasks. (RCO has indicated that it can only provide technical support which is now complete, as the RCO is not an implementing body. The implementation aspect has shifted from ILO to UNDP upon signing of a UN to UN agreement between the ILO and UNDP.²)

Recommendation 2(Outcome 1): *Banana Cultivation:* Consolidate the work at the harvest period (taking place in August 2021 onwards) and coordinate / monitor the marketing linkage taking place between the farmers / cooperative and Keels (JKMS). Introduce corrective action if the market linkage is not taking place as expected. A final phasing out plan is made between ILO, cooperative concerned and the DoCD to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Recommendation 3(Outcome 1): *Ground Nut Cultivation:* David Gram wishes to organize the demonstrations in the Maha Season (from October 2021 to Jan/Feb 2021) as a crucial component of their technical advice to the farmers. This activity should be coordinated between David Gram and the farmers / cooperative. In addition, the completion of the Processing Center in Mulaitivu needs to be monitored and coordinated. A final phasing out plan is made between ILO, cooperative concerned, David Gram and the DoCD to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Recommendation 4(Outcome 1) : *Coir Processing:* The production process is to be launched, coordinated and monitored. A final phasing out plan is made between ILO, cooperative concerned, Tropicair and the DoCD to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Recommendation 5(Outcome 1): *Dry Fish:* The dry fish project had taken off the ground well. But it needs a further round of monitoring to assess the success of the first round is an exceptional one and that can be sustained. Accordingly, effect corrective measures. A final phasing out plan is made between ILO, cooperative concerned, JDCSUF and the DoCD to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Recommendation 6(Outcome 1): *Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion:* Create spaces for activities that lead to improvements of relationships between different group through market linkages with the South and also by linking with cooperatives, farmer groups from the South.

Recommendation 7(Main recommendation): For ILO, RCO and UNDP, create a proper exit strategy for language related activities where the achievements are taken over by other stakeholders in the event there is no continuation of the project activities. (RCO has indicated that exit strategy is dependent on the commitment of to continue funding beyond the scope of the project through its SDG 16 governance portfolio.³)

Recommendation 8(Outcome 2): *Service delivery tracking system:* For donors, given the delays and restrictions caused by COVID 19, no cost extension to complete the survey and effectively disseminate results to stakeholders.

Recommendation 9(Outcome 2): *Advocacy strategy:* Use results of the survey effectively in advocating for language inclusion and raising awareness as well as increasing the number of Tamil speaking state officials, or practical solutions such as outsourcing language and translation services and clear and measurable incentives for bilingual officers. An award scheme may not be realistic given the contextual challenges.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

It is still premature to identify the lessons learned and good practices from the project. However, the following lessons learned (LLs) and good practices (GPs) are discerned from the work carried out so far.

LL 1: Sound efforts of identifying and targeting of the most significant need/s of the beneficiaries – Livelihoods -- have brought about positive results of successful outreach of the beneficiaries who required the livelihood support most.

LL 2: Sound efforts of identifying and targeting of the most significant areas and locations for the project have brought about positive results of successful outreach of the beneficiaries who required the livelihood support most.

LL3: Economic activity per se may not lead to social cohesion unless inclusive processes that facilitate community change and spaces for inter-community dialogue are not created, built in to the activities. Economic empowerment does not necessarily lead to trust, improved relationships or attitudinal change.

LL4: Recognizing the attribution gap between outputs and outcomes in peacebuilding projects, difference between resettlement and reconciliation not being clearly defined

LL5: Short term projects (less than 3-4 years) may not be able to address deep-rooted attitudinal, relational and structural issues related to peacebuilding, social cohesion, involving trust-building, improving relationships and institutionalizing inclusive strategies to a satisfactory degree.

GP 1: SURAR project's deliberate efforts of identifying and targeting of the most significant need/s of the beneficiaries – Livelihoods -- have brought about positive results of successful outreach.

GP 2: SURAR project's deliberate efforts of identifying and targeting of the most significant areas where resettlement process takes place with a long history of spells of displacement have taken place have brought about positive results of successful outreach.

GP3: SURAR project's focus on a restorative approach than a retributive approach by addressing the need for economic stability of resettling communities is a successful approach to stay engaged and contribute positively in a volatile political context which may not be conducive to addressing other peacebuilding issues related to transitional justice, reparation and reconciliation.

GP4: The Scoring System developed by defining clear criteria and scores in the selection of beneficiaries (women in cultivation/women in decision making bodies) has given a simple, clear and a precise methodology to mainstream gender issues effectively.

² Feedback, Janeen Fernando, Reconciliation and Development Analyst, RCO, 07.09.2021

³ Feedback, Janeen Fernando, Reconciliation and Development Analyst, RCO, 07.09.2021