



## ILO's Cluster of Interventions funded under RBSA round 2020-21 (improved employment opportunities COVID response focused) – Independent Final Cluster evaluation

### QUICK FACTS

**Countries:** Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste, Viet Nam

**Evaluation date:** 31 July 2023

**Evaluation type:** RBSA

**Evaluation timing:** Final

**Administrative Office:** ILO Country Office, Bangladesh; ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives; ILO Country Office for Indonesia and Timor-Leste; and ILO Country Office, Viet Nam

**Technical Office:** BGD 101: Skills, Migration, Gender, Enterprise, ACTEMP, and ACTRAV Specialist's in DWT Delhi and ILO Headquarters; LKA 102 and 107: DWT Delhi; TLS 176: DWT ROAP, Employment Department, EMPINVEST, and DEVINVEST; and VNM 128: DWT Bangkok

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**DC Symbol:** BGD/20/01/RBS, LKA/20/02/RBS, TLS/20/01/RBS, and VNM/20/01/RBS

**Donor(s) & budget:** Regular Budget Supplementary Account (RBSA); Budget: US\$ 2,015,000 (including: Bangladesh 500,000 USD; Sri Lanka 485,000 USD; Timor Leste 550,000 USD; and Viet Nam 480,000 USD)

*Key Words:* Decent Work and improved employment opportunities, COVID-Response, Migrant Workers, Host Communities, Employment Intensive Public Works, Rural Poor, Skills Development, Recognition of Prior learning, Policy Design, Gender Equality, South-East and South Asia. [Use themes as provided in i-eval Discovery](#)

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

<p><b>Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure</b></p>	<p>The clustered evaluation concerned four RBSA interventions focussed specifically on improved employment opportunities in diverse environments through different sets of interventions in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Viet Nam. Each intervention was originally designed for 15-months starting in late 2020, but various no-cost extensions were implemented, and the last intervention was completed in December 2022. The four RBSA interventions contribute to the relevant Country Program Outcomes (CPO) and the titles of the interventions are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Bangladesh: Improved Economic Opportunities for the Host Communities of Cox's Bazar: Exploring Ways and Piloting Intervention for Program Formulation (CPO BGD101). implementation of the national skills development policy.</i></li> <li>2) <i>Sri Lanka: Skilling Sri Lankan migrant workers affected by COVID-19 for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship (CPO LKA102 and CPO LKA107).</i></li> <li>3) <i>Timor Leste: Supporting recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through employment intensive emergency public works for the rural poor and vulnerable in Timor-Leste (CPO TLS176).</i></li> <li>4) <i>Viet Nam: Equal Opportunity in Post COVID-19 Recovery: Making Structural Transformation Work for All (CPO VNM128 and CPO VNM826).</i></li> </ol> <p>The interventions were implemented by the respective ILO Country Offices under the overall support from ROAP in Bangkok.</p>
<p><b>Present situation of the project</b></p>	<p>The four RBSA interventions have already been completed some time ago; the last one (Timor Leste) was completed in December 2022.</p>
<p><b>Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation</b></p>	<p>The present evaluation's purpose is to have overall organization learning from the experiences of the four interventions as well as for accountability of the results planned to be achieved. The scope of the Evaluation covers the four RBSA interventions in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Viet Nam. The evaluation also examines the Project's performance in relation to all relevant ILO's cross-cutting issues including gender equality and non-discrimination. The main clients include the relevant programming officers of ILO's Country Offices in the Asia Pacific region as well as the ILO ROAP and ILO's Headquarters.</p>
<p><b>Methodology of evaluation</b></p>	<p>The methodology includes a desk study of the relevant documents and primary data collection through online interviews with 38 Stakeholders (42% female). The participatory methodology further includes a critical reflection process by the key stakeholders in</p>

particular through the online stakeholders' workshop and the inputs by stakeholders to the draft report. Key deliverables are the inception report, the preliminary presentation of findings at the online stakeholders' workshop, the draft report, and the present final report taking into consideration the feedback on the draft report.

## MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The Evaluation found that the four interventions were highly **relevant** for the targeted groups bearing in mind the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The **Design** was in part determined by the RBSA Guidelines in 2020 specifying a maximum allocation of \$600,000 with an implementation period that should not exceed 15 months.

A high degree of **Coherence** was found between the interventions and the existing efforts of the ILO Country Offices either building on previous projects or cooperating directly with (in part) simultaneously implemented projects. The coherence with the existing efforts of tripartite partners was found to be mixed.

On **Effectiveness**, the interventions were generally found to be quite effective in achieving the desired results in their own way. While in Timor Leste a direct contribution was made towards an increase in employment during crisis times, in the other countries the contribution was more indirect: In Bangladesh through building the capacity of local tripartite constituents and enterprise development; in Sri Lanka through institutional capacity development related to skills development; and in Viet Nam through providing accurate statistics informing policies and innovative work on informality. Some common challenges were found, such as delays due to COVID-19, the limited timeframe of RBSA interventions, and coordination with many stakeholders. The challenges by country varied: In Bangladesh it was difficult in the initial stages to get the engagement of local stakeholders in Cox's Bazar for the proposed activities with the host communities as this was a novel approach. Sri Lanka was hit during the implementation by a deep economic and social crisis. In Timor Leste the COVID-19 measures were particularly severe with the GoTL declaring a three-month State of Emergency in 2020. In Viet Nam the important work



with the high level Central Economic Commission (CEC) was not anticipated leading to some budget reallocations. Overall, it was found that the ILO teams have responded swiftly and adequately to most of these challenges.

The Enabling or Success Factors are summarized as follows: the great achievement by PARTNERSHIPS to have and to maintain unearmarked funds via RBSA; the realisation among all stakeholders of the importance of Decent Work in times of crises and the widely felt commitment to target the vulnerable groups; the high commitment and competence of the ILO staff involved and of ILO Country Offices; and the flexibility of the RBSA funding modality including supporting the continuity of activities and staff.

The **Efficiency** of resource use varied with the expenditure rate varying from over 99% in in Timor Leste and Viet Nam, to 84% in Bangladesh and just 64% in Sri Lanka in particular due to the economic crisis and the severe currency depreciation in early 2022. Most of the expenditures were spent on subcontracts, seminars and training (55 - 75%), followed by 'staff' (20 - 35%). While only the Bangladesh intervention was completed within the original timeframe of 15 months, the longest no-cost extensions were for Sri Lanka (1 year) and Timor Leste (14 months).

The four interventions were assessed to have different types of **Impact** on the existing problem which they were designed to address. In Bangladesh ILO's presence in Cox's Bazar was for the first time established and triggered other DC interventions, and Local Economic Development was enhanced. In Sri Lanka several steps were made towards the implementation of (e-)RPL and the Skills Passport for migrant workers, while one workers' organisation targeting women (CWW) was firmly established thanks to the intervention. In Timor Leste the intervention provided substantial direct employment and wages for the most affected rural poor. In Viet Nam the intervention has placed 'informality' squarely in the spotlight, and the CEC is now employing insights from the RBSA activities, while statistical information on informality was institutionalized in the legislation and capacity building was implemented within GSO and MOLISA. Overall, impact could at

times have been enhanced by more systematic capacity building of the tripartite constituents.

The efforts and progress made by the interventions showed substantial signs of **Sustainability**. Most of the interventions for example laid grounds to mobilise further resources. In Bangladesh it directly led to two new DC projects in Cox's Bazar: one funded by GAC of CAD 44 million and one by the Netherlands of US\$ 2.3 million. In Sri Lanka there were synergies between three ILO projects that were implemented partly simultaneously, and agreements on the way forward were discussed at a multi-stakeholder forum in January 2022. In Timor Leste the intervention was a rapid response benefitting those most affected by the pandemic aligned to the multi-year R4D programme funded by DFAT. In Viet Nam there were synergies with the outcome-based ILO-Sida partnership sharing certain activities as well as with a new ILO project on productivity funded by SECO and NORAD.

Another key indicator of sustainability is *ownership*. Although the limited project period of initially 15 months may not in itself be sufficient to arrive at genuine ownership, some signs could still be assessed in each country of government organisations taking charge, for example, the lessons learned in Sri Lanka on migration provided feedback into the revision of the National Labour Migration Policy; several stakeholders mentioned that their staff is benefiting from the learning-by-cooperating with ILO experts; and in Viet Nam the questions on Informality were permanently included in the Questionnaire of the periodic Labour Force Survey and the Quarterly reports of GSO/MOLISA will continue to include the Infographics version.

With respect to the **Cross-Cutting Issues** the evaluation found that all interventions were designed in a **gender** sensitive and inclusive manner as this was also a condition in the RBSA Guidance. In some cases, it was taken a step further, while in other cases prohibitive challenges were encountered of which specific examples are detailed in the report. For all four interventions it was found that data were mostly gender disaggregated and gender mainstreaming was common. However, only in Sri Lanka certain activities were

explicitly targeted at women, and in future interventions this should be enhanced including a dedicated budget. **People with disability** and other special needs were mainly not explicitly included in the interventions, except in Timor Leste. The impact on the **environment** of the interventions was not considered.

The normative context and the impact of **International Labour Standards (ILS)** have not played a central role in the four interventions. ILO Conventions were not specifically targeted and only in Viet Nam national consultants were engaged to support the national reporting on the newly ratified Conventions No. 159 and 88, while planned work for promoting Convention No. 160 was not undertaken. On the whole **tripartite** inputs were included in the design of the interventions, and **Social Dialogue** was then used in most workshops. Furthermore, the four interventions were contributing to SDGs 8, 1 and 4.

## RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

### Main findings & Conclusions

- 1) **Continue, and if possible, expand the RBSA Fund** as it is a highly appreciated funding modality for its flexibility and relatively low-cost procedures especially also in the context of crisis when the interventions are (even) more likely to target selected highly affected vulnerable groups. A related recommendation is to **explore the possibility of having a longer timeframe of the RBSA interventions** especially for such activities as policy making, statistics work, etc. However, the RBSA Guidance for the new Round 1 in 2022-2023 has already followed-up earlier recommendations to that effect and has increased the maximum to 24 months. At the same time, it was found in the present evaluation that under certain circumstances a longer timeframe is less necessary as other interventions were already in place to take over (e.g., Bangladesh).
- 2) **Continue to conduct regular evaluations of RBSA interventions**, preferably clustered, and thereby “Strengthen the RBSA learning capacity” (cf. ILO Review of the RBSA funding modality, 2020). In addition, **a stronger results framework** would allow for a better assessment of RBSA achievements.
- 3) **Continue with the practice of RBSA interventions to build on other (earlier) ILO interventions and on established networks**



**and partnerships within the CO** as this has shown to be an important enabling factor in the present evaluation in all its diversity among the four countries.

4) **Involve the workers' and employers' organisations more systematically in future interventions** and provide **capacity building** to key staff including a minimum number of female staff members and allocate **dedicated funding**. This recommendation is aligned with those of the HLE on ILO's COVID-19 Response 2020-22 (in particular Nos. 1, 5 and 6; cf. Annex 10).

5) **Maintain the possibility of No-Cost Extensions within RBSA** as delays are likely amidst a crisis context, including pandemic and economic crisis. The present evaluation has shown that the ILO COs provide detailed reasons for the need of extensions in their requests. In addition, RBSA has the advantage that closely related key activities can be added during an extension (such as the upgrade of the IRMIS jointly with the Prime Minister's Office in Timor Leste and the cooperation with the new Centre for Working Women, CWW, in Sri Lanka).

6) **Maintain the flexibility in management arrangements** as is now common in RBSA interventions whereby CO technical staff is assigned depending on the proposal's topic and technical and networking experience of the staff, supported by the involvement of Programme Officers in the programming and administration of RBSA interventions.

7) **Make sure that each intervention has an updated ILO website** where all the links to the latest reports, outputs, videos and other relevant material of the interventions are available to enhance knowledge sharing including the exchange of Good Practices.

8) **Include a sustainability workshop ('Closing Event')** as was conducted in Bangladesh in all RBSA interventions in order to consolidate the outcomes by discussing long-term strategies with key stakeholders and to investigate ways to keep the momentum going created by the RBSA intervention.

9) **Continue to use a Gender Equality Strategy from the design stage onwards**, including gender mainstreaming but also activities targeted specifically at women and make sure to allocate dedicated resources to this Strategy.



**Main lessons learned and good practices**

- **LL1** – ‘Thinking out of the box’ in forging new key partnerships is a Lesson Learned in all four interventions amidst the crisis context using the RBSA funding as leverage.
- **LL2** – No-Cost Extensions are an important tool to enhance impact especially amidst a crisis context.
- **GP1** – It is a Good Practice to conduct regular clustered and other evaluations of RBSA-funded interventions in order to strengthen RBSA’s learning capacity.
- **GP2** – It is a Good Practice to build on other (earlier) ILO interventions and on established networks and partnerships of the ILO Country Offices.