



Local Empowerment through Economic Development and Reconciliation Project (LEED+) – Final Independent Evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Sri Lanka

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Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO Sri Lanka Office

Technical Office: The Development and Investment Branch (DEVINVEST), ILO Cooperatives Unit (COOP), Small and Medium Enterprises Unit (SME)

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Key Words: [Use themes as provided in i-eval Discovery](#) final independent evaluation; local empowerment, economic development; reconciliation; sustainable income generation; gender and disability inclusion; scaling up; accountability and learning

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The LEED+ project aims to continue scaling up of the activities in the fruits, vegetables, and fishery sectors targeting the vulnerable communities, with a special focus on women, and scaling and policy development. The Overall objective of the Project is “*Enhanced resilience, inclusive and sustainable growth of targeted communities in selected areas of the Northern Province*”, which is to be achieved through four outcome areas, viz.,

- Improved productivity, efficiency, quality of products produced by the Coops, MSME and processed food sectors;
- Improved decent work opportunities for targeted communities including women and People with Disabilities;
- Enhanced participation in decision-making by women and people with disabilities (PwDs) within the MSMEs, Coops in fruit, vegetable, fishery and processed food sectors and community, and
- Local Economic Development approach or its elements adapted into development programmes by relevant government agencies and private sector organizations.

On project governance and management arrangements: At the provincial level, there is an advisory committee and a steering committee to support the implementation of the LEED+ project. There is one Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) who is based in Colombo (whose services cost shared with the ILO). Other key personnel include a National Project coordinator, Marketing and Supply Chain Specialist, Gender and Peace Building Officer, National Coordinator for Monitoring and Evaluation, and National project officer (for upscaling), and a National Coordinator for Communication.

The Project has been implemented from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023, and has been extended by six months for Outcome # 4. The budget is US Dollars 6,588,969 funded by the DFAT Australia and Norway.

Present situation of the project

This Project follows the Phase I of the Project and other initiatives which focused on contributing to reducing fragility in the post-conflict setting of Sri Lanka by creating decent work opportunities and supporting inclusive growth and reconciliation for vulnerable communities. The Phase I component was implemented in partnership with public and private sector partners, producer organizations, the National Chamber of Exporters, the Chambers of Commerce, the National Sea Food Exporters’ Association, Employers’ Federation of Ceylon, national and local organizations, and the national and provincial governments.

The current Project, LEED+ continued to be scaling up of the activities in the fruits and vegetable, and the fishery sectors targeting the vulnerable communities, with a special focus on women, and scaling



	<p>and policy development to have the widest possible impact in the target areas.</p>
<p>Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation</p>	<p>The main purpose of the evaluation is to ensure accountability and learning to the ILO constituents and stakeholders and learning for future programming. The main users of this evaluation are ILO’s constituents, national and international partners, Ministries/agencies of the Government of Sri Lanka, Cooperatives, SMEs, and the Private Sector. Other users are ILO Country Office in Colombo, ILO HQ, EMPLOYMENT, ENTERPRISES, ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific, and the donors.</p> <p><i>Scope of the evaluation:</i> The scope of the evaluation covered all interventions of the Project implemented from 1 July 2018 up to date in all districts in the Northern Province. The evaluation examined the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution of the capacity development and the provision of appropriate technology and economic infrastructures to cooperatives, farmer societies, MSMEs, towards generating sustained income, decent working conditions, and inclusion of women and PwDs in economic activities; • Incorporation of gender equality, disability, social norms and environment/climate change considerations into project implementation; • Assess, to the extent possible, project’s impact on mental health and wellbeing of the beneficiaries, including mechanisms set up to prevent and report of exploitation and abuse related to work; and • The linkage of the project to ILO’s programme and policy frameworks at the national and global levels, UNSDCF and national sustainable development strategy. <p>The target beneficiaries are women and persons with disabilities within the MSMEs in primary industries and informal sectors, cooperatives and community, youth, the poor and vulnerable who have been identified by the LEED+ project. The areas of implementation are the five districts of the Northern Province, namely, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Jaffna, and Mannar.</p>
<p>Methodology of evaluation</p>	<p>A mixed methods approach was used in this evaluation to enable triangulation of data from different sources. Initially, the stakeholders were mapped, and those to be engaged in the evaluation were identified by the Project. <u>Desk research</u> included collection of data and information from documents/reports generated by the Project, and other documents. Seventy-seven <u>key informants</u> (external) were interviewed, and eight <u>Focus Groups Discussions</u> were held in the five districts involving 93 beneficiaries (36 males/57 females). <u>Field visits</u> were undertaken to obtain first-hand knowledge of the interventions undertaken by the beneficiaries.</p>

The evaluation examined the extent to which the Project's gender and inclusion have been used and the way the project has enhanced the capacities of beneficiaries. The qualitative information collected was analysed and triangulated to derive trends and conclusions. During the interviews, ethical norms and principles were followed. The evaluation followed the guidelines of ILO during the assignment.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the Project aligns well with the national policies and priorities of Sri Lanka and contributed to the National Export Strategy of Sri Lanka (2018-2022). The Project directly addressed the needs of people in the Northern Province in terms of meeting their aspirations on improving their livelihoods, and the focus on vulnerable women and Persons with Disabilities aligns well with the Northern Provincial Council priorities. The Project aligned well with the priorities the Australian Aid Investment Programme for Sri Lanka 2015-2019, and Norway's regional development priorities and for promotion of gender equality and sustainable economic growth. Additionally, it was aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and ILO's Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP 2018-2024).

Successes of the Project can be attributed to its approach in forging partnerships with GoSL agencies and the private sector. The key factors that contributed to the achievements are (a) establishment of market linkages between the producers and the private sector entities, (b) Project's facilitation of providing technical and extension services to the farmers and to the fishers, (c) the Project's support for MSMEs/SMEs to obtain Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and GMP certification, and (d) capacity development of the stakeholders in business planning, and in some cases financial management. The cooperative system could have been better engaged to increase benefits to the members.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

1. **Results Framework:** develop SMART indicators where the requisite data and information could be readily collected, and that the indicators demonstrate changes attributed by the Project.
2. **Value Chains:** ensure comprehensive analysis of all segments of the value chain to identify deficiencies.
3. **Cost of Production of commodities:** a programme be launched to develop cost of production models for commodities.
4. **Data collection:** develop market linkage models further to be incorporated into development strategies and policies; invest to



collect these data from as many farmers as possible and analyse the data to provide evidence; qualitative outcome information of human wellbeing and social development are also collected.

- 5. **Assessment of MSME and SME beneficiaries:** a detailed assessment of a representative sample of beneficiaries would be useful for incorporating these models into development strategies as well as to provide any improvements that are necessary for the models.
- 6. **Focus of Gender and Inclusion:**
 - (a) Prepare the gender and inclusion strategy setting out the principles and clear criteria for selection of beneficiaries;
 - (b) Activities on gender and inclusion should not be conducted as standalone activities;
 - (c) Activities on gender and inclusion needs regular technical back-stopping by trained staff.
- 7. **Support to the Department of Cooperatives:** facilitate a dialogue between higher level Cooperatives and the Provincial Department of Cooperative (PDoC); and (b) explore focussing Project’s assistance towards improving business strategic planning, value chains and related areas, and the overall vision of the cooperatives.
- 8. **Field-level monitoring:** Field-level monitoring needs to be strengthened as the evaluation noted shortcoming in the monitoring of MSMEs; complement monitoring of agricultural activities with outcome monitoring to capture changes in human wellbeing and social wellbeing.
- 9. **Reporting:** A clear and concise statement on the status of indicators will be very useful in addition to any narratives that are provided. The A Report has a separate section on SDG contributions.

Main lessons learned and good practices

Lessons learned:

The Project facilitated the establishment of the chilly value chain; the producers would cultivate chillies and dry it; the dried chillies would be purchased by a private sector entity for making chillies powder and chillies flakes and other products. In order to provide evidence on the robustness



of the value chain, the Project should have calculated the cost of production of green chillies (as a part of the design of the mode). This intervention contributes to Outcome # 1 of the Project wherein improvements to income for the beneficiaries are envisaged.

Good Practices:

- Agricultural market linkage model introduced by the Project: The Project, through its partnership with the Private sector, facilitated provision of a package of services to the OFC farmers. The material inputs such as seed, fertilizer and other agrochemicals were provided on loan to the beneficiary. Extension services were provided regularly by the company, and the harvest was bought by the company thereby ensuring a 'commensurate' price to the beneficiary.
- Follow-up on job placements for PwDs (activity of a GoSL partner organisation of the Project): The Project, through its partnership with the Department of Manpower and Employment (DME), facilitated holding two job fairs in the Northern Province and in the Eastern Province. The purpose of the job fairs was to link the beneficiaries with employers.
- Linkage, greater understanding and working relationship between government departments induced by the Project: The project provided knowledge and skills to a wide range of stakeholders including relevant officers of the government on integrating gender and disability. The project supported *Department of Social Services (DoSS)*, to set up a database with complete information of PwDs in the northern province, develop the policy on PwDs and train the department officials on Sign language.
- Assisting returnees to de-mined holdings: Support marginalised communities to continue agricultural pursuits. Enhancing farmer loyalty: Supporting the farmers to maintain their loyalty to the supplier company.