



International
Labour
Organization

**SAFETY
+
HEALTH
FOR ALL**



► Safety + Health for All plantation Workers in Nepal

October 2024

Nepal Key Achievements

Background

Tea and cardamom are the major exporting products of Nepal. In 2023, Nepal tea exports were worth 30 million USD, while cardamom exports were worth 61 million US. During the harvest/picking season, up to 350,000 workers are employed in the tea sector, most of them as seasonal or daily workers.

Around 100,000 workers are found in processing cardamom units and 61,000 farmers in cardamom production, primarily from family farm-based enterprises covering 21,960 families. The tea and cardamom sectors are experiencing a decline in labour force due to poor working conditions and low wages. This has led to a rise in women workers,



The traditional processing of drying cardamom



Cardamom Farm

with around 90% women workers in tea gardens and cardamom processing factories. Plantation workers face significant occupational risks, including unguarded machinery, dust exposure, exposure to agrochemicals and heat, and accidents due to difficult terrain and challenging

weather conditions. Heat stress can significantly affect workers, provoking heatstroke, and even death. Long-term exposure to harmful chemicals can also lead to chronic diseases affecting the cardiovascular, respiratory, and kidney systems. Injuries from insects, snakes, leech bites, and tool cuts are also common, and workers also report work-related diseases like back and joint pain. Malnutrition is also a public health issue in the sector. The plantation sector is a particularly vulnerable area for women, who are often subjected to various forms of workplace harassment, including sexual harassment and discrimination.

The lack of a robust social dialogue mechanism between workers and management in the plantation sector is escalating the existing issues. Plantation wages exacerbate tension, as the daily wage model is criticized for its instability and inability to provide a living wage for workers. The promotion of workers' dignity, recognition of their contributions, and their involvement in workplace practices can foster a resilient and impactful sector.

At institutional level, Occupational safety and health (OSH) inspections are rarely conducted in the tea and cardamom sectors, due to limited human and financial resources of the Labour offices. The Government OSH system also needs to be strengthened to reinforce the legal provisions and provide a safe and healthy working environment for all workers.



Worker working without safety gloves, carrying weight on head

► The ILO response

The project main objective is to create a conducive policy environment at national, provincial and municipal level together with an effective social dialogue platform at the field level, where management and workers can collaboratively promote a safe and healthy working environment. Towards this objective, the project generated knowledge on constraints and opportunities to improve the safety and health of workers in tea and cardamom sectors; strengthened relevant national and local institutions to better promote and protect the safety and health workers in Nepal and strengthened workplace and industry level practices and initiatives to promote the safety and health of workers

► Project partners

- Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS)
- Department of Labour and Occupational Safety (DoLOS)
- Government's Occupational Safety and Health Centre (OSH Centre)
- Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and its sectoral associations of tea and cardamom
- Central Tea Cooperatives Federation Ltd. (CTCF) Nepal
- Joint Trade Union Coordination Centre (JTUCC)
- All Nepal Federation of Trade Unions (ANTUF)
- General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT)
- Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC)
- OSH Professionals Nepal (OSHNP)

► Major achievements of the project

Strengthening the knowledge base on OSH

- **Two assessment reports** on OSH and its linkages with freedom of association and discrimination issues were drafted covering the tea and cardamom sectors in Nepal and include actionable recommendations to promote a safe and healthy working environment in these sectors.
- **A study on pesticide use in tea and vegetable farming** in the project target municipality of Suryodaya in Ilam district was carried out. Recommendations from this research will help the Municipality and its farmers to ensure the safe use of pesticides and promote alternative agricultural methods.

Supporting the development of a conducive policy environment

- ▶ The ILO supported MoLESS to set up a **national OSH tripartite committee** that was then responsible for the development of first National OSH Programme of Nepal.
- ▶ The **National OSH Programme** setting concrete priorities to improve the safety and health of workers was adopted in 2024.
- ▶ In parallel, the ILO raised awareness of the two **ILO Fundamental OSH Conventions** (C. 155 and C. 187) through cartoon videos, briefs, and booklets and conducted a **legal gap assessment** on law and practices related to these Conventions. This work accompanies the Government's plan to **ratify** these Fundamental Conventions by 2026 and implement their provisions in practice.
- ▶ The ILO also provided technical support to MoLESS to develop a **National List of Occupational Diseases**. For this list to be actionable in practice, further work on reporting and notification of diseases is required and the ILO supported a **mapping of the recording and notification of occupational accidents and diseases** in Nepal.



Consultation process at Koshi Province

Building the capacity of state and municipal institutions



OSH day celebration with Minister of Labour and ILO director and launching ILO's Poster

- ▶ **Sustainable capacity strengthening** in OSH and labour inspection was organized for the national OSH Centre, Labour and Employment Offices, universities, and OSH professional organizations. A pool of 92 trainers was formed among government, employers' organizations, workers' organizations, concerned government offices and universities.



Practical session of training on OSH inspection at construction site

- ▶ **Capacity building of the labour inspectorate:** A participatory needs assessment of the labour inspectorate was conducted and led to the development of an action plan by labour officials to improve OSH inspection practices. This was coupled with two practical capacity building sessions on OSH inspection in construction, manufacturing, and plantation sectors.
- ▶ The ILO also worked with the **Municipality of Suryodaya** to improve OSH through the formation of ward-level (subdivision of the municipality) OSH committees, municipal level OSH tripartite committees, and drafted OSH technical guidelines for the tea sector within the municipality.

Strengthening workplace and industry level practices and initiatives to promote the safety and health of plantation workers

► Setting up bipartite OSH committees:

Comprehensive workplace level interventions in the tea and large cardamom industries, as well as with smallholder farmers, resulted in the setup of bipartite OSH committees in **55 tea and cardamom enterprises**. These committees developed clear action plans and reported 3 to 4 low-cost improvements in each enterprise, benefiting at least **10,623 workers**. Once set up, these committees were trained on technical OSH issues, as well as on their roles and responsibilities as bipartite OSH committee members.



Tea farmer wearing gumboots and apron during plucking



Sitting arrangement at workplace after training

► With the association of tea cooperatives (CTCF), and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI), the ILO supported the development of **voluntary guidelines on OSH for the plantation sectors**. The guidelines were adopted by **25 cooperatives**, affiliated with CTCF and **30 enterprises**, affiliated with FNCCI. These enterprises then conducted OSH risk assessments and prepared subsequent action plans to improve OSH conditions. A total of **2,450** workers working in these enterprises participated in the ILO participatory action programmes (called WIND and WISE) to help create home-grown, low-cost/no-cost solutions for immediate improvements based on locally sustainable measures.

The project has reached out to the total 5,856 participants (3385 male, 2471 female), 394 government officials, 3993 workers and 1469 employers, through the means of different OSH related project interventions till July 2024.

► Donor

ILO/Japan Multi-bilateral Programme

► Duration

1 December 2020 – 31 December 2024

► Geographical focus Nepal Component

The project works at the national and provincial levels. The pilot interventions are focused on the following districts: Ilam, Panchthar, Dhankuta, Jhapa, and Taplejung.

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