

Protecting mining workers' safety and health through South-South Cooperation between ILO, China and Zambia

The ILO, Ministry of Emergency Management of China and key stakeholders in Zambia joined hands in making a contribution towards protecting mining workers' safe and health in Zambia through a South-South Cooperation Programme on building the capacity of mining companies.

BEIJING (ILO News) – ILO, the Ministry of Emergency Management of China (MEM) and the Occupational Health and Safety Institute of Zambia (OHSI) jointly organized a 3-day Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) training for mining companies in Ndola, Zambia. The training attracted managers, OSH representatives, and safety and health experts of Chinese and local mining companies which in total employ over 10,000 workers in Zambia. Representatives of key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, Zambia Chamber of Mines, Mine Workers Union of Zambia, National Union of Miners and Allied Workers, and Workers' Compensation Fund Control Board also joined the training and made valuable guidance for future collaboration.

This training is a part of the South-South Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) Programme on mining safety training between ILO, China and Zambia under the ILO/MEM MOU on Work Safety under the overarching framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. The purpose of this SSTC programme is to build the work safety capacity of local mines in Zambia, including those invested by China.

Mining is one of the most dangerous sectors. China and Zambia are important mining countries. Both have made great progress in improving mining safety over the years. China is one of the largest trade partners of Africa. With the close economic ties between China and Zambia, it is important for the two countries to collaborate in the world of work and make sure the jobs created by Chinese investment are productive, safe and decent and will reach their full potential in contributing to local development, said Chang-Hee Lee, Director of ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia.

Starting from November 2022, the ILO and MEM started the SSTC Programme on mining safety capacity-building in collaboration with key stakeholders in Zambia. OHSI, the main implementation partner of this programme, mapped the training needs of seven mining companies, among which five are Chinese invested, and developed seven training modules on the subjects of Wellness programme, OSH Induction, Emergency Response, Gender Equality, Duties of employees and employers, and Health and Safety Committees. The training modules will be used by the mining companies in their daily operations, with the technical backstopping of OHSI. The key stakeholders in Zambia have made important contributions throughout this SSTC programme by providing seasoned advice and guidance.

“This is the first ILO SSTC programme between China and Africa, marking the beginning of a journey of working together to ensure safe and healthy workplaces and workers, a basic condition for decent work”. (quote of Chang-Hee Lee).

Wellington Chibebe, Director of ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, affirmed this SSTC programme as a very apt and timely initiative for Zambia. He expressed appreciation of the commitment of Chinese government in ensuring that the Chinese overseas companies have good OSH performance, respect local and international norms, and contribute to local social and economic development in the host countries.

Li Shengli, Deputy Director-General of the International Cooperation and Rescue Department of MEM, highlighted that the government of China gives high priority to ensuring work safety and protecting the rights of workers in the overseas enterprises which are invested by Chinese companies. MEM is ready to work with ILO and Zambian partners to contribute to building the work safety capacity of

mining enterprises in Zambia through sharing good practices and successful cases and making joint contributions to the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Let us work together to prevent mining work safety risks and accidents and protect mining workers' safety, health and decent work through strengthening South-South exchanges and collaboration.
(quote of Li Shengli)

Li Feixia, Senior Emerging Partners' Relations Officer of ILO, encouraged ILO partners in China and Zambia to collaborate in more South-South Cooperation, because such South-South learning can benefit both countries. She also introduced the modalities of ILO SSTC projects and how these projects can contribute to promotion of decent work.

At this training, stakeholders called for attention to the challenges facing Artisanal Small-scale Mining (ASM) sector in Zambia. Providing livelihoods to many families in Zambia, ASM sector is dominated by low-tech and labour-intensive mineral processing and extraction, high level of informality, OSH deficits, as well as ecological and public health concerns. Stakeholders welcome more future SSTC in mining sector, especially for building the capacity of Artisanal Small-scale Mining (ASM) sector.