

LEARN AND EARN

How schools prepared students to seek out decent work



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THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVE: Teaching students entrepreneurial and vocational skills through actual income-earning enterprises and preparing them for a smoother school-to-work transition.

Facilitating school-to work transition: Income generating in school-based activities and awareness raising

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: Research had revealed a large number of children in schools who combine education with hazardous work; they need to earn an income in order to stay in school or to help their family. But in the north-eastern Udon Thani province and the northern province of Chiang Rai, many students engage in work that has potential negative impact on their development, such as tapping rubber trees in the hours after midnight until dawn or working in markets at late hours. There was a need to convince them and their families they should do other work that allowed them to get the critical sleep that children need to develop appropriately. There also was a need to provide income-generating options to young students who were at risk of leaving school in order to work - the research indicated about 5,000 students in four districts of Udon Thani were verging on dropping out.

THE RESPONSE: Working children in agriculture, the service sector or in domestic labour were given opportunity to pursue recreational activities, non-formal education, career counselling, skills development and apprenticeships that suited their interests.

THE PROCESS: The International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and its Project to Support National Action to Combat Child Labour and Its Worst Forms in Thailand (the ILO-IPEC project) worked with the Child and Youth Assembly of Udon Thani (CYA) to help teachers target 600 working or at-risk, students. Of them, 300 students were not yet working but very likely to leave school in order to work; the other 300 students were combining work and school.

The CYA took on the monitoring role for 15 schools in which there were working students and children at risk of dropping out. The agriculture and service-oriented work the students engaged in was mostly hazardous. Through the coordination of youth volunteers and NGO staff, students at risk of dropping out were supported through life skills training and awareness-raising activities to sensitize them on child rights, hazardous work and exploitative employment conditions. The point was to make the young people more aware of the dangers and the ways to protect themselves, including by staying in school. In addition, the project organized training and re-training workshops for teachers on similar topics to enable them to carry out a more effective role in protecting them against labour exploitation now and later in life.



“Day camps”, either during school hours or on the weekends, were arranged for approximately 100 students at a time (with five to ten teachers) to introduce them to labour laws, their rights and the risks of working in hazardous jobs or migrating to other provinces to look for jobs. The CYA volunteers conducted these camps, which lasted only a couple hours and involved resource persons from the Provincial Office of Labour Protection and Welfare (PLPW), and the Provincial Office of Public Health (POPH).

The CYA then arranged a study visit for 25 teachers (13 females) from 12 schools and 11 public health officers from the four target districts of the ILO-IPEC project to Chiang Rai to learn from teachers there on using a child-centred school-to-work (tawan songsang) curriculum that they had designed to keep students in school and to prepare them for transitioning into acceptable employment conditions (see the explanation of the curriculum further on). The visit gave the teachers from Udon Thani ideas on how the child labour problem can be addressed within the school environment. As a result, seven schools now operate school-based income-generating activities in addition to providing awareness education on unacceptable forms of child labour.

Following the study tour, teachers and community health volunteers were offered a two-day seminar on running safe work and vocational training activities. Together they conducted needs assessments with students who were working and those at-risk of dropping out to work. Students were asked what would interest them in terms of work enterprises. The teachers and school administrators developed and submitted proposals for “seed money” (US\$150 - \$300 provided by the CYA) to create income-generating activities that would teach students entrepreneurial and vocational skills.

The students who participated in the income-generating activities were selected based on their needs and aspiration to engage in entrepreneurial work.

The income-generating activities that were set up for students in grades 7-12 involved learning to grow mushrooms, make organic fertilizer tablets, propagate rubber saplings, raise fish and crickets (to sell as snack food), produce an herbal drink and market bottled water from a filtered spring that flows below the school grounds. Students could also learn skills such as hair dressing, manicure or traditional Thai massage. One community business group provided a group of students with the machine to produce the fertilizer tablets and the offer of a joint venture, which the students accepted. For the bottled water project, the school needed to first apply to the municipality authorities for funds to build a water-filtering tower.



In addition to the trade skills, students also learned bookkeeping, marketing theories and pricing from the teachers and local resource persons. They ran their operations outside of school hours or during lunchtime, although their enterprises operated from the school grounds. Some students would spend one or two extra hours in the evening and/or on the weekends working or in their apprenticeship. Profits were divided between the students and the school.

The students seem to have appreciated the new learning approach. “I enjoyed the mushroom growing that 12 of us in our group have learned to produce,” says Nuanprang Tingrungruang, a 15-year-old student at the Ban Sang Paen school. “We meet after lunch and at the end of the school day at the mushroom house. We divide among ourselves to take turns to tend the mushrooms, harvest the produce, pack and sell them, either at the school co-op shop or deliver to our regular community vendors. We sell the mushrooms for 40 baht per kilogramme to our school members and 60 baht per kilogramme to the vendors. I’m very happy in learning this enterprise with my friends.”

In some cases, the school linked students with trustworthy employers to learn vocational skills through internships. Volunteers from the community, such as artisans and skilled farmers, took on a student to teach them skills. Either the volunteer came to the school or the students went to their place of work.

The project organized two weekend camp sessions for working students (120 in total) on life skills, safe work and reproductive health issues in a forest-based training centre and campsite. The outdoor activities and discussions help impress upon the students useful knowledge for protecting themselves by knowing their rights and various risks when looking for a job and learning how to look for decent work.

The child-centred school-to-work (tawan songsang) curriculum

School teachers in northern Chiang Rai province knew that a large number of students who completed grade 9 would leave school to work. In their experience, the majority of students had little aspiration or chance for decent work. Leaving school early would force them in a potentially negative direction. Many didn't have legal identification or documentation, such as a birth registration or citizenship, which heightened their vulnerability to exploitation. Being unskilled, unprotected and poorly informed of the dangers, many of them would end up in the worst forms of child labour or trapped by traffickers. The teachers began exploring options to change that life course for as many children as possible.

With support from the ILO-IPEC project, seven NGOs and teachers from 42 schools in northern Chiang Rai formed an advocacy network, known as the Sunshine Group. Their advocacy work was complemented with a school-to-work curriculum, or tawan songsang, that they developed to confront their reality of young people leaving school too soon. The curriculum aims to strengthen the capacity of teachers to help monitor and prevent children at risk from leaving school to work or engaging in the worst forms of labour. A radio programme also was used to provide necessary information to working children and at-risk groups.

The curriculum provides guidelines on organizing activities to better prepare young people to make the transition from school to work and thus it aims to prevent young people from falling into the worst forms of child labour. It is a guideline for activities for students in grades 6-9, or aged 12-15 years. It emphasizes life skills training, vocational skills and other topics including labour law, human rights, decent work and skills to make decisions on choosing work. The curriculum uses a variety of techniques and learning processes. Students are encouraged to produce awareness-raising campaign materials on the worst forms of child labour.



The curriculum is divided into four modules:

1. The situation of the worst forms of child labour.
2. Principles on education, child labour and vocational skills, including the national plan and policies on education, quality education, Education for All and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. Guidelines for conducting awareness-raising activities on the worst forms of child labour and vocational skills.
4. An action plan for conducting awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the worst forms of child labour and vocational skills by activity.

“We have developed the *tawan songsang* curriculum, which any teacher can use right away in schools to raise awareness among the students,” says Anong Pilalai, a teacher in the Ban Huay Krai school in Chaing Rai province. “Students learn about their rights to receive labour protection. They are alert about the child labour situation and can find ways to safeguard themselves. We go into details on careers. The students conduct research about career options in the community. Next they do research about safe workplace - identifying the kinds of establishments that would be safe places for them to work in with decent employment conditions. They develop flyers about ethical employers to raise awareness on child labour with employers. Later we help them apply for apprenticeships.”

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- Some vocational skills training does not lead to gainful employment unless the trainees become very skilful.
- Entrepreneurial training may not always be an integral part of the school-based income-generating activities. This needs to be encouraged more so that trainees have opportunities to apply the knowledge in their future careers.

OUTCOMES:

- The school-to-work curriculum created by teachers in north-western Thailand and piloted in 42 schools in Chiang Rai was then piloted in 15 schools in southern Udon Thani province.
- 25 teachers in Udon Thani province were educated on how to monitor students at risk of leaving school in order to work.
- 600 students in Udon Thani province participated in activities that educated them on their rights and the risks of hazardous work.
- Seven schools in Udon Thani province now maintain income-generating activities for students and relationships with community trainers and volunteers who pass on their business knowledge to students.

“We adapt activities to fit our school, such as mushroom farming and fish rearing. The mushroom farm project is noteworthy because it requires only a one-time initial investment. After that, we just reap its produce for sale. Buyers are parents and teachers. They support this activity,” explains Banyad Cha-kote, a teacher with the Ban Sang Paen school in Udon Thani.



LESSONS LEARNED:

- Learning from other teachers who have dealt with the problem of students dropping out to work has enabled many other teachers and community members to replicate their recommended strategies for working with students at risk of leaving school.
- Building capacity of local resource persons, including teachers, community leaders and health volunteers, creates an effective child labour monitoring.
- Providing training opportunities and awareness-raising activities for working and at-risk students opens their minds to both career development as well as knowing the difference between exploitative or decent work.
- Although some vocational skills training may not lead to gainful careers, the merit of such training thus lies in learning entrepreneurial skills and team work as well as interpersonal skills.
- Partnership links between school-based and community-based income-generating groups should be further explored and developed with proper codes of conduct.