

OUT OF THE HEAT

How many organizations introduced child workers to on-the-job safety and health protection



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THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVE: Making children and families aware of unsafe work practices and hazards, removing children where possible or giving them, their parents or employers ways to improve the conditions.

Occupational safety and health interventions

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: A series of provincial-level child labour surveys in 2005-2006 found many children out of school because they needed to work. Of them, many were working in inappropriate conditions. In Samut Sakhon, for instance, of 643 sampled child workers, 182 were in hazardous employment. In Tak province, 141 of 320 child workers had “direct” or “direct and intensive” contact with chemical substances. In Udon Thani, of 600 sampled child workers, 540 were working in hazardous conditions (another 30 in the worst forms of child labour). The living conditions, sanitation and the environment in many of their workplaces were found to be substandard. Most of them were hired as daily-wage workers, earning less than the required minimum wage and working longer than eight hours per day. They carried heavy loads, worked without protective gear, worked with toxic chemicals and pesticides, worked long hours in the hot sun and during school hours. Most were migrant children or children of foreign migrants, though not all. They were in fishing, agriculture and domestic work.

Those in the worst forms of child labour needed to be removed. But children aged 15-17 are allowed to do light work that does not interrupt their overall development, including accessing education. Many of the surveyed children were in jobs that had hazardous tasks or conditions that could be separated from them, keeping them safer. There was a need to both make employers aware of safety issues and children aged 15-17 aware of dangers to their health and their right to be protected from them when working.

THE RESPONSE: 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) included a component focused on raising awareness of occupational safety and health (OSH) issues to people in home-based work, in micro and small-scale enterprises and in agriculture. The project set up cooperation mechanisms between employers, migrant worker families and social networks in six targeted project provinces to help improve the quality of life for working families and their working children.

THE PROCESS: The ILO-IPEC project set out in various directions in each province, depending on the child labour situation. But essentially, the objective was to provide families with training or awareness on OSH issues, particularly to learn correct procedures for handling hazardous substances and using protective equipment. The training also included raising awareness about the danger of allowing children to work with or around hazardous materials.

Samut Sakhon province

The Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN), an NGO working with the foreign migrant communities in the province, provided OSH training for adolescent and adult migrant workers on work hazards. LPN provided outreach awareness education to young migrant workers aged 15-17 on workplace safety; they offered advice to young people on work that is in line with the Labour Protection Act. They also provided information on their legal rights as well as human trafficking-related issues so that they can better protect themselves. LPN staff and volunteers mobilized working children and youth to gather at a venue



in their neighbourhoods on Sundays, their day off, to participate in meaningful activities that touched on safety and protection and avoiding hazardous work. In addition, a monthly group discussion on the same topics took place with some 10-15 child workers after their work hours. A number of them repeatedly joined the group sessions. Some of the young persons have also become volunteer watchdogs in their communities, reporting cases of exploitation and/or abuse to LPN.



LPN also integrated OSH messages into playgroups and little plays that the staff and volunteers conducted at its learning centre. When LPN staff conducted outreach visits to migrant workers' home, they generally handed out leaflets of their own making that highlighted OSH issues.

The Provincial Office of Labour Protection and Welfare (PLPW) organized a series of on-site trainings on OSH, legal rights occupational safety, life skills and social security entitlements for young migrant workers at selected small-scale factories. The PLPW and the Provincial Office of Labour (POL) also trained employers on OSH and the work a 15-17 year old can do according to the Labour Protection Act. In addition, the PLPW and the POL along with a technical team from the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM), Chulalongkorn University, organized a competition for "Good Factories" among small-and medium-scale seafood processing facilities. The contest was aimed to promote role models for employers in creating and maintaining safe and decent working conditions for the workers.

Songkhla and Pattani provinces

The Provincial Committee of the Women and Child Labour Assistance Centre with members who are heads of government agencies (including the Provincial Labour Protection and Welfare Office) and owners of companies, took charge of the ILO-IPEC project. Some 55 existing OSH volunteers (35 in Songkhla and 20 in Pattani) were made aware of child labour issues in order to expand their responsibility to include the monitoring of child workers. The OSH volunteers participated in a series of training workshops that covered OSH issues, labour laws, health promotion and children's rights. These resource teams then further organized sensitizing workshops with seafood-processing workers, seafood-processing supervisors, village leaders from coastal fishing communities and leaders of migrant fishing-related workers. The workshop encouraged the participants to discuss their work, problems, obstacles, roles and responsibilities as well as case handling in helping child labourers.

After a training session with employers to sensitize them on the importance of working children's health care and well-being, collaborating employers allowed the Planned Parenthood's medical mobile unit to provide services and brochures of relevant information in their workplaces. In addition, awareness-raising activities, including safe-work-for youth, were conducted at small-scale workplaces employing child and adult workers who do not possess a health care card.

A manual on work safety for community-based micro and small-scale seafood processing enterprises was developed to also be an easy safe-work checklist in line with OSH standards but adapted to the local context. Produced with help from a technical team from the Occupational Safety and Health Institute in Songkhla province, it gives examples of how a work area should be set up. Based on the Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development (WIND), which is an ILO training manual that responds to the needs of home workers and provides practical, easy-to-implement ideas to improve their safety, health and working

conditions, the illustrated manual/checklist was adapted to the local context and reflects the practical experience in home worker training used in Thailand and Viet Nam.

Tak province

For children aged 15-17 working in the field production of flowers, fruits, vegetables and other crops in two districts, the ILO-IPEC project provided appropriate skills training for hazard-free agriculture. Younger children at risk of the worst forms of child labour were identified and referred to schools or learning centres.

The Mae Sot Civil Society Group mobilized several employers in the agriculture sector to address the problem of hazardous work and child labour in the ILO-IPEC project's targeted areas. They convinced employers and local partners to allow their employees to become migrant health volunteers.

The migrant worker volunteers were then trained on basic health and hygiene, OSH and environmental health for the community. They also were trained over a period of time on prevention of child labour through education and improvement of working conditions with their employers as well as survey skills, leadership and communications methods to promote health and well-being. Part of their role was to reach out to child labourers and convince their families to stop using children in hazardous work and to send them to school. District health officers used a standard Ministry of Public Health manual and an adaptation of the Migrant Workers' Health Manual to devise the curriculum for the volunteer training. The training manual was translated into Burmese language with adaptation to local contexts and the needs of migrant worker communities. The training included a field visit to the "Green Village", a model for migrant community health and hygiene management elsewhere in the province.

Health examinations for employers, workers and community members in the agriculture sector were conducted to determine levels of risk in chemical use as well as to assess the child and maternal health status. A survey was conducted on the agricultural process, the use of labour and the use of chemicals in the area that was fed into a database to be used in drafting a curriculum outline, training materials and identifying target groups for withdrawal from a hazardous work condition.

Workshops and trainings for employers, migrant workers and migrant community health volunteers on OSH management in the workplace and on environmental health management in agricultural communities were organized.

Field visits to role-model plantations participating in the project (within the province) for plantation owners, subcontract farmers and migrant workers were organized, enabling an exchange of ideas and approaches that continued after the visits through the network of cooperation they established. Worker families who practised good environmental management and proper care for their children in terms of education, health and life skills were given certificates of merit.

The migrant health volunteers organized awareness raising on OSH, hazardous chemical use, environmental health and hygiene on such occasions as Migrant Children's Day.



But changing attitudes on children working remained a challenge. “We found out that children had to work side by side with their parents in order to sustain their family living. This may be their way of life. Later, we tried to change their attitude that children at this age should go to school instead of work in the farms. They started to understand better. However, there are still some workers who don’t see the importance,” says Akradej Pa-ai, a healthcare worker with the Chong Kap Tambon Administration Office. “Children follow their parents. If parents know how

to use pesticide the safe way, children should not have any problem,” she adds.

Udon Thani province

A Working Group on Health Promotion was set up with 20 members from related agencies to provide guidance and recommendations.

Rural families working in the agricultural sector were then invited to training seminars on OSH issues and provided knowledge on the correct procedures for handling hazardous substances and using protective equipment. The training included awareness on the danger of allowing children to work with - or even around - hazardous materials. Other trainings, community forums and educational campaigns were conducted to raise awareness among community members, children at risk and their families and the general public.

A series of one- and two-day training workshops for 100 local health officials and community health volunteers were conducted. Topics covered OSH as well as child labour, child rights, health care, services, labour laws, the role of volunteers and vigilance networks but with a focus on occupational health for farming communities. A training curriculum and guidelines for OSH services and practices were customized for the purpose. The same participants were brought back two months later for a follow-up workshop to raise their awareness on hazardous child labour and to monitor what is happening with the targeted children.

Project partners also used the ILO’s Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development (WIND) training programme on safety, health and working conditions in agriculture.¹ The action-oriented training programme for improving farmers’ safety, health and working conditions was used to promote OSH in targeted agricultural communities to encourage discussions with farming families. Resource persons from the Office of Occupational Safety and Health Region 12 provided training workshops for three batches of catalyst teachers and community health volunteers to apply the tool in their neighbourhood.

¹ The training materials can be freely downloaded from www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/publications/lang--en/docName--WCMS_099075/index.htm



Public health teams and local health centres organized health examinations for working children and their family members working in agriculture to determine the chemical exposure risk level and to assess their health status. Similar examinations were done with working children in the service and commercial sectors. The Provincial Office of Public Health and the PLPW analysed health hazards in the agriculture, service and commercial sectors and prepared OSH training

materials and services for targeted children. Training sessions were organized through schools and communities.

The PLPW also organized a seminar in a hotel to sensitize domestic worker employers on OSH issues in the home. They distributed leaflets on how to treat young domestic workers in the household.

National level

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The 1998 Labour Protection Act identified in its Ministerial Regulation No. 6 the types of work that are defined as hazardous and that cannot be performed by anyone younger than 18. The list, however, had become outdated and the National Policy and Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, endorsed in 2009, called for an updating of the list. The Department of Labour Protection and Welfare thus established a subcommittee to update the hazardous work list in May 2010. The hazardous occupations list will be annexed to the Labour Protection Act. To support the updating process, the ILO-IPEC manual *Eliminating Hazardous Child Labour Step by Step* was translated into Thai. The guide is user friendly and practical in outlining the six steps for how countries can determine what constitutes hazardous child labour in their context.

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- In Thailand, OSH is still mainly focused on the medium- and large-scale industrial sector. OSH protection is not available to people working in home-based work, in micro-enterprises, in small-sized enterprises and in the informal economy. The impact and sustainability of this intervention by the Planned Parenthood Association in this unregulated sector of industry will rely on provincial stakeholders to continue it.
- The success in mobilizing multistakeholders, particularly employers, in the agriculture sector to address the hazardous work conditions remains small in scale because the approach was dependent upon close, personal relationships.

- The attitude of parents who prioritize the income from children working above an education for them because the family needs income remains an issue.

OUTCOMES:

Samut Sakhon province

- 500 girls and boys working in seafood-processing factories were reached with training on safe work and information on how they can best protect themselves.
- 300 employers of small-scaled factories were mobilized to improve and monitor working conditions of their workers.

Songkhla and Pattani provinces

- Seminars for a total of 45 OSH volunteers were conducted (20 volunteers in Pattani and 35 in Songkhla) to discuss experiences, obstacles and work methods.
- A training session on OSH and hazardous work was conducted with small groups of deep-sea fishing workers in Songkhla province.
- Awareness education was promoted among 1,415 at-risk students in both provinces.
- 466 child workers received basic health-care series and information on OSH issues.
- A total of 507 children and 490 adult labourers received information and examinations from 23 mobile clinics. Planned Parenthood's medical mobile units reached 440 children in Songkhla and 265 working children in Pattani with health care services and OSH information.
- Around 180 owners and employers of targeted enterprises used the safety manual to improve working conditions in their premises.
- The Planned Parenthood conducted two workshops on safe-work checklists for 180 entrepreneurs of small-scale fish-processing workplaces (160 household enterprises in Songkhla and 20 in Pattani).

The workplace training seemed to have reverberating impact. "These workers normally did not wear gloves and boots while working. They preferred it that way," explains Che-U-Seng Che-Su, a volunteer trainer in Pattani province. "Their physical condition deteriorated. After the training, the youth understood more about the labour law as well as occupational safety and health. For example, the weight-lifting limits for males and females. Recently, when I went to the harbour, I noticed that they had improved their working conditions a lot. Now, they are wearing gloves and boots when they sort the fish."

Tak province

- 53 migrant health volunteers were trained on basic health and hygiene, OSH and environmental health for the community. The migrant health volunteers were instructed in knowledge on basic health and OSH issues as well as on community surveying, leadership and communication skills to promote health and well-being and other relevant messages to their local community. These skills

will enhance their ability to reach out to child labourers and convince families to stop using children in hazardous work situations and, ideally, send them to schools.

- Health screenings for chemical levels were conducted on 3 plantation owners and 182 migrant worker families. Among them, 329 children were screened and 261 aged 15-17 were targeted for removal from a hazardous work condition and either referred to a school or learning centre or efforts were made to improve the work environment. Around 52 per cent of 166 working children were found at high risk and needed to be withdrawn from their hazardous work conditions.
- The Mae Sot Civil Society supported health and education services for 504 migrant children in the targeted areas, which was difficult for other agencies, particularly government officials, to reach.

“They also taught about self-prevention of pesticides, its poison and related diseases. Prevention is a must. We have to wear a long-sleeve shirt, mask, glasses, hats, shoes when spraying pesticide. In case of direct contact, we need to clean with water and soap. After spraying, we need to take a bath, dipping water from head to toes, apply soap all over the body.” says a migrant worker in Tak province.

“Changes happened after the trainings. I shared the knowledge with my colleagues. Health problems have improved. Physical cleanliness is also improved,” adds another migrant worker in Tak province.

Udon Thani province

- 114 local health officials and community health volunteers were trained in OSH issues, using the ILO’s WIND tool kit.
- 100 employers of domestic workers attended a sensitization seminar.
- 150 working students and their family members in agricultural communities, who were anxious about having been exposed to chemical substances in their work in commercial agricultural activities, were provided with a blood testing.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- A health-related approach is a workable entry point to gain access to hard-to-reach target groups. It is also an appropriate approach to gain positive support from stakeholders.
- Having a catalyzing local organization mobilize agencies to provide OHS services to targeted beneficiaries was effective in all participating provinces.
- While there are many forms of hazardous child labour in each locality, a sector approach can focus common efforts among collaborators to develop applicable methods and tools in mitigating child labour problems constructively.
- If withdrawing children from a work situation is not a possible option, removing them from the hazardous portion of the work or improving the work condition can be the next best strategy.