



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation Unit

Promoting Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in Bangladesh – Final evaluation

Quick Facts

Country: Bangladesh

Final Evaluation: 21st July 2015

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Administrative Office: CO Dhaka

Technical Office: Declaration

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Project End: June 30, 2015

Project Code: BGD/11/50/USA

Donor & Project Budget: US Labour Department, USD 1,476,437

Keywords: *Fundamental principles and rights at work, labour standards*

Background & Context

Project purpose, logic and structure

The Project was implemented in Bangladesh between January 2012 and June 2015. It has the following intervention logic:

i) To contribute to an improved legal framework conforming with the ILO conventions 87 and 98 (*immediate objective 1*), an assessment was to be made, as well as reports on Freedom of Association (FoA) and collective bargaining (CB), contributions to national action plans and the drafting of laws. These would all address the shortcomings in the Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) 2006, especially regarding FoA and CB rights.

ii) In order to contribute to enhanced freedom and capacity of workers and their representatives to exercise their rights in practice (*Immediate Objective 2*) – mappings of trade unions in the

RMG, mechanisms for easier registration of unions were to be undertaken, as well as capacity building and education for trade unions to exercise their labour rights and responsibilities, and setting up mechanisms to handle complaints and to address discrimination against unions.

iii) In order to contribute to the establishment of labour-management cooperation at the enterprise level (*Immediate objective 3*), training programs and enterprise level agreements were to be implemented.

The project staff, at the time of the evaluation, consisted of an international Project Coordinator recruited in July 2014 who also oversaw two other projects; and a National Project Officer who worked in the Project from the start-up. An international Chief Technical Adviser acted as the head for all ILO projects in the Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry in the country (The FPRW project CTA, recruited in January 2012, left in November 2013 after 23 months).

Present Situation of the Project

The project closed down on 30th June 2015.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The stated purpose of the evaluation includes a number of issues, i.e. to ascertain whether and to what extent the Project has achieved its objectives; how it has been implemented; how it is perceived and valued by target groups and stakeholders; whether expected results are occurring (or have occurred) based on performance data; whether the project design is appropriate; and the degree to which the project's management structure is effective and its operations efficient.

The scope of the evaluation includes an assessment of all outcomes and activities carried out as per the project documents from the start until the closing. The expected clients of the evaluation are the project management, ILO the Government of Bangladesh and social partners in Bangladesh, and the USDOL. It is also expected that the tripartite constituents and other partners involved in the Project will find use of the results of the evaluation.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation criteria that were applied are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability and the evaluation instrument consisted of a number of detailed questions that helped inform the development of the evaluation methodology. The methods that were used to gather information and data and arrive at conclusions are as follows:

Carrying out a comprehensive documentation review; developing the Inception report; undertaking key informant interviews; making field visits and observations; holding meetings and carrying out focus group discussions and individual interviews (the latter with trade union officials and members, factory workers and factory inspectors); corresponding through e-mails with key informants; holding a Validation workshop at the end of the data gathering phase in Dhaka (in which the preliminary findings were presented and discussed with the key constituent representatives and stakeholders); followed by data analysis based on the triangulation of data from the interviews and documents and, finally, reporting and addressing comments and inputs for the final evaluation report.

Main Findings and Conclusions

The evaluation found that the Outputs intended to contribute to an improved legal framework (Objective 1); and enhanced freedom and capacity of workers (Objective 2) were reached - but a number of circumstances affected the reach and level of effectiveness of the outputs and objective on labour-management cooperation established at the enterprise level (Objective 3).

The following were concluded:

The project's goals were ambitious. In terms of effectiveness, the Project has contributed to increased learning, more open discussions about Freedom of Association in the RMG sector particularly, workers' rights and work place management. It has brought up to discussion what genuine representation really means, and involved stakeholders in debates about selection criteria for training and capacity building, and women's participation.

Still, the Project was not as effective as it could have been. Regarding gender concerns, more could have been done to increase effectiveness, in particular ensuring that the training programmes were adapted to the fact that 85 percent of the production workers in the RMG sector are young women with low levels of education, and who before they became factory workers lived in poverty in rural, and often remote, areas.

Project implementation may have been easier to manage, if a Logical Framework Analysis (or any other had been used by the Project, preferably developed with participation of key stakeholders). It was also found that Project was not adequately staffed to allow for handling of a proper monitoring and evaluation system, and most of the time and resources were used to implement activities. The existing project monitoring and evaluation matrix is poorly designed but the reporting was generally done as required.

ILO is commended for the initiative to carry out the Mapping of the trade unions aimed at guiding the formation of the Project's training/capacity building programme, but the actual activity as well as its findings was a bone of contention which resulted in a delay, and a gap of several months, between the first and the second training program.

The Project management and its constituents and Partners are commended for carrying out the training programmes involving many persons from all constituent categories and stakeholders. The percentage of female participation was not very far from the desired 50 percent (41 percent in average). The issue of genuine representation by RMG unions/factory workers in the programme and nominations in training

programmes has been openly discussed in the Project and needs more attention in the future.

The evaluation concluded that several important issues regarding the targeted (ultimate) beneficiaries were missing in the current Project and the ILO and its future development partners.

It was found that the (original) duration of the Project was two years - which clearly is not a realistic time frame for the objectives it was set to achieve. Even with the no-cost extensions, the Project was not able to fully achieve objective 2, and even less objective 3. Freedom of Association may occur as a result of a small technical cooperation project, in a country where it is as weak as in Bangladesh, and perhaps particularly in the RMG industry. The designers of the project were well aware of this and most probably also the Development Partner, but opined that by setting the “rib high” it would demonstrate the importance of the activities, mainly to the GoB. The immediate objectives could have served as development objectives in their own right (not immediate objectives as they were termed) to which FPRW, FRLR and BWPB all could have contributed.

The five core evaluation criteria were applied and it was concluded that the Project in its overall content and outlook were relevant and suited with the aim to contribute to improved legal frameworks, freedom of association, and labour management cooperation. This was also indicated in the early diagnostic study results, and the subsequent mapping of trade unions. However, implementation of some of the capacity building activities was less relevant and not fully adapted to the prevailing conditions and circumstances in Bangladesh, e.g. the interest based negotiation training component with tripartite participation. It was also concluded that the capacity building would have been more relevant if it had been better adapted to women's working environment and social circumstances (life realities) in the RMG industry.

Three cost-extensions were granted to enable to Project to have longer time to use the funds and carry out more activities, indicating that at least the comprehensive training programme was not as efficient as it should/could have been. It was found that the Project's contributions to the legal

framework (objective 1) were efficient in the sense that technical inputs and policy advocacy were provided under the FPRW Project, and came from both ILO Headquarters and the Project in close cooperation with the Better Work Programme Bangladesh (BWPB). The IBN training and services rendered (financed partly through a separate funding agreement) stands out as not being cost-efficient as it was not continued and no internal evaluation has been made to document/analyse the factors or reasons it could not be followed up.

This evaluation found that the Project did not reach all the way in terms of generating full impact from its activities/outputs as aspired, partly because the ambitions were set high on one hand (the 2nd and 3rd objectives) but perhaps too low in terms of some qualitative aspects/outputs discussed in this report in relation to quality in capacity building. The Project should be credited, though, for making contributions to policy change (the BLA amendment), which in turn may have impact in the longer term. It has also imparted increased knowledge and awareness among its stakeholders and trainee participants, some which were collected through participant evaluations during trainings, and in the evaluation's interviews, among others.

Sustainability in evaluations is, among other, concerned with assessing whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn – however in the current scenario, donor funding will continue through the newly planned Project (funding from the Danish and Swedish Governments) and some of the activity components of the FPRW and the FRLR projects will continue. The activity areas that will continue are a systematic approach to workplace cooperation and grievance handling, transparent mechanism for preventing (receiving, recording, handling) and resolving disputes, among others.

cooperation projects. These questions need to be asked: Would it be feasible for ILO to focus on providing deeper knowledge to fewer issues to increase quality? Would it be acceptable by the development partners? How do the national stakeholders view this issue?

- The Project design lacked in activities/outputs to acquire, use and spread knowledge about the ultimate stakeholders, the majority of whom are women. This was a flaw and the Project could have been more effective in its training programme for instance if more information and knowledge about their working conditions and living environment had been used more strategically.
- Time is a scarce resource for development project practitioners. The ILO headquarters and ILO CO in Dhaka should learn from the issues that were debated internally, described in this report. While mapping or no mapping was debated, the Project lost valuable time and implementation was delayed. And when the CTA left, time was also “lost” as the ILO was looking for an international expert instead of finding a solution locally for the management of the Project.
- The Project staff tried its best to stay in good relationships with the many actors, including harmonising the views among actors within the ILO itself. Not enough was invested at the start-up on how to go about the selection/nomination/participation of trade union federations and unions. The questions about genuine union representation in the RMG (to participate in the project’s activities) should have been highest on the agenda for all stakeholders and in fact the CTA was concerned about this, while it has appeared that ACTRAV wished to thread the conventional path and lean on NCCWE only/mainly, at least at first. The difficulties and complexities that exist in Bangladesh are all too well known within the organisation – especially through its long standing (complicated) working relationship within the RMGs employers through TC projects, notably BGMEA from the earlier IPEC programme implementation.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Correct short-comings (dysfunctions) regarding FoA in the RMG sector

Recommendation 2. Promote genuine trade union representation for increased effectiveness

Recommendation 3. Improve relevance and quality in capacity development activities

Recommendation 4. Address gender concerns and women workers issues

Recommendation 5. Improve Project design: create more realistic expectations and sustainability components; set realistic and time-bound goals; ensure quality in logical framework, risk analysis and development of SMART indicators

Recommendation 6. Conduct mappings used in technical cooperation projects to identify context and set qualitative benchmarks

Recommendation 7. Address funding sustainability

Lessons learned and emerging good practices can be found in the full report.