

▶ Investing in the future: Training service providers to offer support to the Myanmar garment industry

Over the past few years, the ILO-Garment Industry Project (ILO-GIP) has invested time and resources to develop the capacity of seven training service providers so they can deliver training on a wide range of labour-related topics to diverse stakeholders in the garment sector. By providing training to local service providers with a long-term presence in the country, the ILO-GIP has increased the sustainability of its investments and is ensuring the industry remains well supported in the future.

▶ Participating organizations

Capacity Building Initiative

The ILO-GIP trained the Capacity Building Initiative (CBI) to provide training on social dialogue – including workplace cooperation and collective bargaining to managers, workers and representatives of basic labour organizations (BLOs) or trade unions in the factories. The training programme reinforced the ability of the mandatory Workplace Coordinating Committee (WCC) to play a constructive role in the factories. CBI has also been trained to deliver supervisory skill training in collaboration with Aung Myin Hmu Training School using the tested ILO Better Work Supervisory Skills Training methodology.

Converge Safety

The ILO-GIP trained Converge Safety to deliver a five-day occupational health and safety (OSH) training course on building OSH systems, establishing management-workers OSH committees, conducting risk assessments, implementing fire, electrical and chemical safety procedures, and strengthening ergonomics, housekeeping and basic first aid capacities. The expertise of the ILO Better Work programme in Cambodia was used to increase the capacity of Converge Safety. The main goal of this programme is to enable factory-level bipartite committees to identify and manage the health and safety of workers in the garment sector.

CARE Myanmar

CARE provides a three-day training course on how to prevent workplace sexual harassment, develop and implement a sexual harassment policy and resolve related issues through the factory-level WCCs. CARE provides train-the-trainer coaching to participants, who then train workers in their factories and assist factories with sustainable policy development.

Marie Stopes International (Myanmar)

The ILO-GIP introduced Marie Stopes International (MSI) to the garment industry and increased its capacity to deliver bespoke sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to workers. MSI provides a five-day training course on various dimensions of SRH and related counselling skills, primarily targeting factory nurses and health workers. In addition, MSI provides a one-day peer training session for selected garment workers acting as “multipliers” in the factory and a one-hour awareness raising session on SRH. Finally, MSI has delivered SRH awareness raising sessions to a number of trade union leaders in the sector.

Kaizen Institute

The ILO-GIP has engaged the services of the Kaizen Institute to encourage selected factories to pay attention to productivity increases to promote sustainability; and to work with workers and trade union representatives on productivity gain sharing and how this links to collective bargaining. Kaizen Institute delivers monthly in-factory training to selected workers in strategic lines or departments and monthly seminars to deepen participants’ knowledge of concepts related to productivity issues.

The Fifth Pillar and the Legal Clinic Myanmar

The ILO-GIP has increased the knowledge of The Fifth Pillar and The Legal Clinic Myanmar on all matters related to the Myanmar Labour Law. Both organizations now provide awareness sessions on the Myanmar labour framework to groups of about 50 to 80 workers. Workers are provided with basic labour law booklets, which they can share with their colleagues in the factories. Workers are advised to refer any additional questions they have about the labour law to representatives of the WCC in their factory.



► Professional lessons for trainers

The training service providers said their participation in the ILO-GIP has helped them develop a better understanding of the way the garment sector operates. It has also given them an improved awareness of differences between the workplace culture in Myanmar's garment factories and the workplace culture in other workplaces.

"The nature of garment factory workers and office workers is different. Office workers do not want to do overtime over the weekend, but the garment workers complain if there is no overtime because they want to earn more. That's why they move from one factory to another. This is one way the culture differs."

The training service providers also recognised the importance of developing ways to improve social dialogue in order to develop better dynamics in the factories.

"There are very few opportunities for social dialogue in our context. Many problems originate from very small issues. Because there is no space to speak out about small issues, the problems become bigger. After delivering training to the workers at the factory, I know more about these matters and feel how important social dialogue is."

For training providers with extensive experience in not-for-profit and humanitarian contexts, working with businesses in the private sector presented them with some new challenges.

"It's my very first time working in the garment sector. I had to adjust to the different culture. I have to do a lot of advocacy work and convince the management that the training will provide a benefit over the long-term. Sometimes, we have to ask for help from the ILO-GIP and brand partners to get training dates. From this experience, I see an improvement in myself in coordination, advocacy and negotiation skills."

One participant from Converge Safety suggested the presence of the training providers in the factories has helped make communications between workers, their representatives and employers smoother and more productive.

"Now, we see that workers and management can negotiate between themselves to help bridge the communication gap. The transfer of soft skills has improved communication."

Several of the training service providers said that dealing with factory managers from different cultural backgrounds was initially challenging, but that over time they learned how to adapt their approach and communicate more effectively.

Changes in attitudes and practices



Participating in the ILO-GIP has led to an increased interest in the garment sector among workers from the seven service providers. They said their attitudes towards factory workers have changed because of their involvement.

One person from Mary Stopes International expressed a lasting commitment to ensure female factory workers get access to reproductive health care services and maternity leave. Other workers from this service provider have provided out-of-hours health support to factory workers. And importantly, they are all now sharing their experiences and new knowledge about the garment sector with other colleagues in their organization.

Training staff from other service providers said they have improved their critical thinking because of having to negotiate and problem-solve when dealing with participating garment factories, other organizations and colleagues. They believe this skill will be helpful for their organization going forward. And they have already started to apply what they have learned about social dialogue and workplace cooperation techniques within their own organizations.

"When we started providing social dialogue training, we found that participants used the training as a space to vent their feelings, anger and frustration. In the first part of the three-day training on workplace cooperation, there was a lot of uproar in the room. But in second part, the participants were able to control their emotions and interact in a more peaceful way. I think factory participants understand our training content and accept it in their heart. It makes me very satisfied."

More changes in attitudes and practices

"I used to hear the word 'garment' and automatically think of trade unions and strikes. I thought that the Labour Law only meant strikes. But after taking part in the ILO-GIP, I realised that issues cannot be solved only by quoting the labour laws or even by just raising awareness of these laws. Finding solutions needs skills and knowledge such as communication, active listening and good faith. Unfortunately, social dialogue is not seen as a priority within the garment sector."

With respect to occupational safety and health (OSH), safety officers and OSH policies, these are often in place in other sectors such as construction or oil and gas; but these are still rare in garment sector. With the support of the ILO-GIP, Converge Safety provided guidance to garment factories on how to set up OSH committees, train their management and workers on OSH issues and bring in good OSH practices. OSH concerns that factory workers have are now being discussed in bipartite committee meetings and solutions are more often jointly discovered. The ILO-GIP OSH training is comprehensive and trainees have been able to increase their knowledge in a short period of time. One worker from Converge Safety shared how heartening it was to see changes at the factory level. This service provider now hopes the entire sector can benefit from OSH training.



After the ILO-GIP, some factories asked the Kaizen Institute to provide additional productivity training. One factory achieved significant productivity improvements after just three days of training because of active participation and high levels of interest.

Perceived strengths of the project

- ▶ Some of the ILO-GIP training service providers received active participation from the factories and were able to deliver training without any delay because of the support they received from H&M. "We received active participation from H&M factories because of brand support. It is smoother and more convenient to convince factories to participate in our training. Coordination is going well."
- ▶ After attending the various train-the-trainer programmes that were developed and implemented by the ILO-GIP, attendees are now seen as "experts" in their respective topics.
- ▶ The reputation of the ILO-GIP participating factories is seen to have been enhanced.
- ▶ Although the participants in the various ILO-GIP training programmes (including management and workers) have different educational backgrounds, the training seems to have resulted in equal improvements in their knowledge of the main training concepts. It has proved useful for both.

Perceived gaps in the project

- ▶ Working with for-profit factories that are under pressure to meet tight production deadlines, it was often difficult for the ILO-GIP training service providers to schedule time for training activities. The factories frequently asked to postpone training dates at short notice.
- ▶ Given the complexity of the issues covered in the sessions, the ILO-GIP training was designed to be delivered over a number of days spread out over time. The factory-level participants were often randomly selected by management and tended to change from one training session to the next. This created barriers to achieving the training goals.

- ▶ The training delivery of the ILO-GIP was intended to start in 2018, but it was mostly rolled out in 2019. Training service providers have therefore struggled to deliver their respective agreed curricula.
- ▶ The current and evolving Myanmar legal environment created challenges for the application of the various concepts dealt with in the ILO-GIP trainings. For example, there is currently no prescribed law on sexual harassment. There is limited provision on collective bargaining. And the country's occupational health and safety law has only recently been approved and does not yet provide clear rules and regulations. A clear legal framework would facilitate compliance by management, as well as by workers and trade union representative in garment factories.
- ▶ The ILO-GIP is quite large in scope and complexity. The project has experienced implementation delays due to a number of factors: the large number of factories involved, the wide range of training topics covered, difficulty scheduling training at the factory level and the involvement of multiple implementing organizations. Originally, the project was intended to run for three years. This was ambitious. More time is needed to ensure the training is embedded in the different factory management systems.
- ▶ Given tight production targets, it is a reality that factories can only allow limited time for workers to attend training. To achieve the best impact, it may be better to focus the training on a more limited number of topics, perhaps targeting the specific needs of individual factories.
- ▶ Some training providers felt there was a lack of management cooperation and commitment to the training programmes because the training was provided free of charge. The ILO could ensure factories are truly interested before training commences, perhaps by requiring some investment of capital.

Looking to the future

Expanding services to participating factories

With the support received from the ILO-GIP, the Fifth Pillar is now offering workers counselling services and awareness sessions related to labour law. One participant from this organization expressed her future ambition:

“If I had the opportunity, I would like to set up a hotline for counselling workers on issues related to the labour law. Currently we receive many requests for advice through telephone calls and messages on Facebook. But we cannot respond adequately as we don't have enough time or resources. We can discuss generally but not in detail. If we could create a hotline and dedicate workers to this service, it would be much more effective. Our organization has a dream to implement this. I also would love to work on it.”



Accreditation for service providers

The ILO GIP training service providers noted that in Myanmar there is no formal school or university delivering accredited training on industrial relations and social dialogue. This presents a challenge for individuals who want to become qualified to offer services to the growing garment industry in Myanmar, as well as to the Myanmar labour market more broadly. Training service providers believe a diploma on industrial relations and social dialogue or supervisory skills is needed to help improve the level of professionalism for individuals working in this field. The ILO-GIP training service providers are concerned that delivering training by individuals and organizations with only limited knowledge of complex concepts, far from supporting the peaceful industrial development of Myanmar, might in fact create more difficulties for workers and employers.

Expanding training to the whole sector

The ILO-GIP has delivered its training programme in 20 garment factories that produce for international brands such as H&M and M&S. The support of these brands has been important and necessary to secure the engagement of these factories. The ILO-GIP training service providers reflected that even if there are some remaining gaps in the participating factories after receiving the ILO-GIP training, the gaps are much greater in other garment factories that are producing for the export market. They assessed that there are presently more than 600 garment factories in Myanmar and that the needs of many of these factories may be more urgent. They saw a need to support workers across the whole garment sector, including those in factories that do not have brand support.

Investing in further training for training service providers

The ILO-GIP training service providers said they hope to receive further training on advocacy skills to help ease their dealings with business owners and to improve their outreach in the private sector. Similarly, the ILO-GIP training service provider that focuses on sexual and reproductive health voiced their desire to learn more about industrial relations and social dialogue. They see this would benefit their ability to deliver their technical knowledge to the sector.



“Improving labour relations for decent work and sustainable development in the Myanmar garment industry” project (ILO-GIP). The ILO-GIP aimed to reduce poverty and empower women in Myanmar by improving labour relations, social dialogue and gender equality in the garment industry. The project received funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), H&M and Marks and Spencer. The project ran from July 2016 to May 2020. For more information, please visit <http://bit.ly/ilo-gip>