Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are at the heart of local and national economies. They are a source of economic growth, wealth and jobs and can make an essential contribution to social and economic development. However, increasing competitiveness does not always go hand in hand with improved working conditions or sustainable livelihoods - decent work and competitive enterprises are often presented as if they were in opposition to each other. Indeed, there is often an assumption that actions towards the improvement of working conditions or safety are burdensome for enterprises.

In actuality, such investments can yield real business returns and a ‘business case’ exists. Furthermore, in an era of extensive globalization, multi-national enterprises and international buyers often struggle to ensure that decent work is implemented along the full extent of supply chains. Ensuring that suppliers comply with contractual and legal requirements and effectively consider sustainability has become a protracted and difficult task.

In this environment, a socially responsible continuous drive for increased job quality, and productivity can be a challenge.

**FACTS AND FIGURES**

**Partners:**
The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO); the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD); Swiss COOP; Business and Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI).

**Beneficiary Countries:**
Colombia, Ghana, South Africa, China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam

**Timeframe:**
2009 - 2013

**Budget:** USD 19 million

**THE RESPONSE**

Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) is a practical training and in-factory counseling programme that improves productivity and working conditions in SMEs. The product demonstrates best international practice in the manufacturing and service sectors and helps SMEs to participate in global supply chains.

The training is relevant whether applied to start-ups, established companies struggling to maintain market share, or dynamic firms with large ambitions. On-site consultations and classroom training are combined to address the individual needs of companies. Through the application of proven lean-manufacturing techniques and improvements in worker-manager cooperation, production efficiency is boosted and enterprise performance increased.

The training modules include: (i) Workplace cooperation; (ii) Quality – managing continuous improvement; (iii) Productivity through cleaner production; (iv) Workforce management for cooperation and business success; and, (v) Safety and health at work: a platform for productivity. ILO works with national and local social partners to promote and deliver the training.

MNEs and international buyers, by partnering with the ILO, have an opportunity to provide suppliers with access to the SCORE training programme and thus help suppliers address challenges in conditions at work, productivity and product quality, as well as to increase consumer confidence.

Training activities under SCORE have been complemented by an ILO research project that contributes to the development of intervention models and policy guidance on how to identify and raise awareness of synergies between higher productivity, improved skills, working conditions and occupational safety and health.

Messages delivered through SCORE are reiterated at the global level through advocacy. An array of methods are used including social marketing campaigns that promote positive workplace practices and the engagement of national counterparts, such as labour inspectorates.
Workers benefit from more decent work opportunities in a healthier workplace converging with national standards. Concurrently, companies wishing to ensure the wellbeing of workers along their supply chains are supported to do so.

SMEs that participate in SCORE training increase their opportunities to gain access to national and global markets through meeting buyer and national labour law requirements. Furthermore, SMEs attain increased productivity and quality in tandem with more committed employees. SCORE training costs can be recovered in one month, representing excellent value for money.

National and international buyers benefit from more competitive suppliers concurrently with lower risk of bad SME supplier practice. Once SMEs recognize the benefits gained through good working conditions and a safe working environment, the challenges of ensuring supplier compliance with contractual and legal requirements are reduced.