Global markets provide unprecedented opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing and emerging economies – and full advantage is not yet being taken of these markets. If SMEs could increase their participation in global markets, the benefits to businesses – and those who work in them – would be significantly increased, with positive multiplier effects for the economy, society and the environment. Problems with product quality, productivity, waste and pollution, workplace safety and health, and human resources management, all reduce SME competitiveness and hamper participation in global supply chains. They also have a negative impact on the environment. From the standpoint of the lead buyers, including multinational enterprises (MNEs) and large national buyers that often purchase from SMEs, these problems represent risks, ranging from supply chain disruption to damage to brand reputation and a loss of consumer confidence. Investing in responsible and sustainable enterprise practices in SMEs is a way of addressing the root causes of these problems, thereby achieving real returns for MNEs, for the SMEs from whom they buy, and for those who work in them.

A previous SCORE partnership saw COOP, a Swiss retail group and member of BSCI, sponsor SCORE training for three of their Chinese suppliers in 2011 and 2012. Given the success of this project (as outlined below), a further partnership with BSCI has been developed to expand access to this training. This new partnership involves 10 SMEs in China, employing up to 2,500 workers, trained in SCORE. All enterprises are in the supply chains of BSCI members.

To support this intervention and as part of a sustainability strategy that ensures the independent delivery of SME upgrading services, the overall SCORE programme – funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) – is working to create a network of trainers that will be able to continue providing high-quality training services in China and six other countries (China, Colombia, Ghana, South Africa, India, Viet Nam and Indonesia). This network is being built through the implementation of “training of trainer” courses and refresher sessions for the benefit of SCORE training coordination institutions and local service providers.

THE RESPONSE

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

The training is equally relevant to start-ups, established companies struggling to maintain market share, and dynamic firms with big ambitions. Based on proven lean-manufacturing techniques and the development of worker-manager cooperation, the training boosts production efficiency and enterprise performance with on-site consultations helping to address the individual needs of companies.

The ILO has partnered with the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) as part of its implementation of the SCORE training programme. BSCI is a business-driven initiative of the Foreign Trade Association (FTA) that supports companies committed to improving working conditions in global supply chains.

FACTS AND FIGURES

| Partners:          | COOP Switzerland; Foreign Trade Association (FTA) |
| Beneficiary country: | China |
| Timeframe:        | 2013 – May 2014 |
| Budget:           | USD 80,000 |
BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

By partnering with the ILO and gaining access to the SCORE programme, lead buyers are able to have a real and positive impact on improving working conditions throughout global supply chains.

Suppliers engaging in SCORE training benefit from more efficient workplaces, improved product quality, greater dialogue between workers and managers, increased worker motivation, lower absenteeism rates, and safer and healthier working conditions.

Workers benefit from greater decent work opportunities in healthier workplaces.