



Evaluation Summary



International
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Skills for local economic development (SKILLED) in Sri Lanka – Final independent evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: *Sri Lanka*

Final Evaluation: *25 September-13 October, 2017*

Mode of Evaluation: *Independent*

Administrative Office: *ILO Colombo*

Technical Office: *ILO Emp Skills*

Evaluation Manager: *Raviprapa Srisartsanarat*

Evaluation Consultant: *Sandy Wark*

Project End: *May 2018*

Project Code: *SRL/12/01/EEC*

Donor & Project Budget: *EU, €2,000,000
(approximately US\$2,680,000)*

Keywords: *Vocational Training, Employment,
Post-conflict Zones Sri Lanka, Youth*

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure The SKILLED project is part of the European Union Support to District Development Programme (EU-SDDP), a €60 million programme, which began implementation in July 2012 and is scheduled to finish by May 2018. The EU-SDDP aims to contribute to poverty reduction in North and East of Sri Lanka and to bridge the socio-economic gap post conflict. The ILO and IFC are lead implementing organisations for Component 2 of EU SDDP- Local Economic Development. The component addresses challenges hindering private

sector development in four target districts: Vavuniya, Mannar, Batticaloa and Ampara. The objective of SKILLED, the ILO sub-component, was to improve access to quality vocational training through support to at least 60% of the Registered Training Providers.

Present Situation of the Project To reach its objective, ILO implemented activities to assist vocational training centres deliver demand driven courses, to build the capacity of centre instructors and managers to conduct quality training, to encourage district vocational training stakeholders to use collective strategies to promote vocational training and employment services and to enable districts to establish and manage Public Employment Services Centres.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The purpose of the final evaluation is to provide project management, the ILO, the donor and other stakeholders with an independent assessment the project's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability and to identify key lessons learnt and good practices.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation reviewed all activities carried out by SKILLED from the project start in 2012 until September 2017. The primary sources of data for analysis came from project documentation, key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGD) with participants in project activities. The evaluator consulted vocational training and employment authorities, local government authorities, vocational training centre managers and trainers, Public Employment Service

centre personnel, and participants in vocational training and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programs in the four districts targeted by the project as well as national level partners in Colombo.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Alignment with stakeholder needs

SKILLED was well-aligned with government policies and plans on the development of vocational training. Stakeholders expressed high levels of satisfaction with project services, especially the budgetary support for training programs. They also identified some gaps; from the perspective of some local authorities, the project could have been more strategic to local economic development by doing more to match training to the skill requirements of more forward-looking, higher value-added local economic development strategies. Some youth participants in training programs also expressed the need for additional language instruction and follow-up support to find a job or establish themselves in self-employment activities.

Achievement of planned outputs and outcomes

Near the end of the project, SKILLED had met or had surpassed most of its quantitative targets related to vocational training delivery, capacity building and establishing employment services. Achievements of outcomes related to employment are likely more mitigated due to a variety of factors. Current data on employment outcomes is likewise weak.

Among the types of support offered to vocational training centres, centre equipment upgrades were critical to improve the quality of vocational training by enabling more practical, hands-on forms of instruction. In addition, SKILLED support for outreach and career orientation campaigns in rural sub districts and subsidies for trainee out-of-pocket expenses were especially successful strategies for increasing access to vocational training by low income groups in its four target districts. By making it possible for new courses to be offered by existing vocational training providers, the project contributed to increasing the supply and diversity of course offerings in the target districts. The RPL activity offered already practicing tradespersons

official recognition of their skills and pathways to higher earnings and greater social recognition.

Factors affecting implementation

The actual quality of training was affected by issues such as the relevance of national curriculum, late delivery of equipment, the availability qualified, Tamil-speaking instructors, and deficiencies in post training support to trainees.

Various external factors such as the centralization of vocational training authorities, the local economic environment and its effect on the job market, and participant attitudes toward training and employment posed challenges affecting the performance of SKILLED. Centralization of vocational training administration contributed to slow spending rates, reflecting implementation delays and cancelled activities. The project put in place a number of effective strategies to mitigate some of these factors.

Coordination with key partners

National counterparts expressed satisfaction with the project management's coordination and communication with their organisations. SKILLED yielded only a few examples of effective collaboration with other EU-SDDP implementing agencies. Barriers to greater cooperation identified by the agencies include: time constraints due to the shortened implementation period, the delay in the development of District Development Plans might have guided joint investments, differences in institutional practices, lack of commitment, and the geographic disbursement of EU SDDP activities, especially following the expansion of project target districts.

Visibility strategy

SKILLED incorporated strategies that offered visibility to the EU as the EU-SDDP donor. Even though the EU-SDDP outsourced the management of communication activities, ILO visibility related actions still required significant time investments from its program managers.

Mainstreaming of gender and labour standards

The ILO largely missed an opportunity to promote core values of the organization by not having

stronger strategies to mainstream gender and respect for International Labour Standards in vocational training and employment programs. Workplace safety, a key labour standard, was addressed fairly comprehensively by the project but other awareness-raising on labour rights was largely absent from programs.

Effectiveness of monitoring systems

SKILLED monitoring systems did not initially establish adequate data collection systems to measure progress against its key indicators and enable good reporting on progress. After the mid-term evaluation, the project took steps to improve the data available on SKILLED beneficiaries and made additional efforts to build the beneficiary monitoring capacity of some of its vocational training partners.

Efficiency of project management strategies

SKILLED capitalized on experienced national program staff to implement the project and based them close to project activities where they were able to provide support efficiently to the project's main partners. The cost of this project management structure was relatively low and allowed a reasonable proportion of the project budget to be dedicated to programs rather than administration. The centralization of vocational training administration in Colombo was an impediment to greater project efficiency, more so given the distance of senior program staff from the capital and relatively weak support from the ILO Colombo office. SKILLED was implemented by experienced national ILO staff with relevant skills and knowledge of the target districts. Senior program officers provided effective support to stakeholders in the field but were less effective managing vocational training authorities in Colombo and collecting data on its activities.

Project spending lagged throughout the project, reflecting delays in implementation; at its current rate, the ILO is unlikely to expend its entire budget. The percentage of project budget spent on program costs versus administrative costs was reasonable and program expenditures were focused on stakeholders' high priority areas.

Sustainability

SKILLED put in place many good strategies to promote sustainability. Choices made by the project to work with well-established vocational training centres and offer skills certification through the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) system were good strategies to foster sustainability. Both public and private partners are likely to sustain the training courses that were supported by SKILLED but some of the value-added elements paid for by the project will most likely be dropped, affecting access by low income groups. Improvements related to training equipment upgrades will be more lasting.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

For Vocational Training providers and future ILO programs that seek to enhance vocational training and employment outcomes of participants:

- Offer additional opportunities for instruction to develop language skills. For Tamil speakers, greater proficiency in Sinhala was identified as a priority so that trainees are more comfortable seeking employment outside Tamil-speaking areas where employment opportunities are greater. (6.1.1)
- Provide more guidance on job-search strategies during the period of vocational training. (6.1.2)
- Depending on the size of the center, at least one human resource should be dedicated to developing linkages with employers in the relevant sectors covered by the vocational training sectors. (6.1.3)
- Ensure that all trainees access on-the-job training. This should be a function of a dedicated staff person (could be the same staff person as for the point above). (6.1.4)
- Provide more systematic support to link course graduates intending to pursue self-employment to credit and business support services. (6.1.5)
- Track employment outcomes of trainees more systematically and use data to improve job placement services. (6.1.6)
- Involve employers in design and delivery of training programs. (6.1.7)

- Include guidance on job search and employability in career guidance programs. (6.1.8)

Recommendations for Vocational Training Authorities to increase the Relevance and Effectiveness of Vocational Training Programs at the district level

- Create technical and professional pathways before O and A level exams (in line with current Government policy). (6.2.1)
- Decentralize more authority for strategic planning and administration of vocational training programs to the provincial or district levels. At these levels, link local economic development planning and skills development strategies. (6.2.2)
- Engage employer federations in key economic sectors (national and sub-national levels) in determining priority investments in skills development programs. (6.2.3)
- Develop more flexible and demand driven modalities for vocational training. Provide public funding for the development and delivery of short tailored courses that respond to emerging employment opportunities in the private sector. Allow private sector training providers to compete for funding. (6.2.4)
- Fund local NGOs that are effective in training out-of-school youth for job opportunities. Establish a scholarships for disadvantaged youth to access training delivered by either public or private sector institutions in demand-oriented skills areas. (6.2.5)
- Expand apprenticeship programs by providing incentives for industry to train more workers in the workplace. (6.2.6)
- Conduct targeted outreach and awareness raising campaigns on workforce development for girls; (6.2.7)
- Include parents as targets/participants in career guidance programs; (6.2.8)
- Post training, encourage registration by self-employed trades people by providing incentives and access to support programs. (Example, participation in online directories of trades persons, access to government contracts, access to credit) (6.2.9)

Recommendations to ILO to improve management of future district level programs

- In future district level projects with strong interaction with central administration authorities, reinforce program support in Colombo; (6.3.1)
- Ensure a reasonable balance between male and female program managers in future technical assistance programs to district level stakeholders; (6.3.2)
- Mainstream awareness on fundamental principles and rights at work in all programs (6.3.3)
- To improve project monitoring, develop a monitoring and evaluation plan early in project implementation with clear indicators and targets; refer back to indicators and targets clearly when reporting results; when project monitoring requires extensive data collection (example, large number of beneficiaries; outcomes of project services to be tracked), allocate dedicated personal for monitoring and evaluation.(6.3.4)

Recommendations to UN agencies to promote more effective collaboration

- In future joint programs, conduct joint planning exercises during design and/or early implementation stages to identify synergies and plan for collaboration. Integrate indicators on collaboration in program performance monitoring frameworks to be followed-up in regular monitoring activities. (6.4.1)

Among the lessons learned of the project are the following:

- To expand access to vocational training, targeted awareness raising and orientation programs are needed to overcome negative perceptions of some trades by Sri Lankan youth in general and females in particular.
- To implement successful joint programs that create synergies among implementing organization, coordination meetings are not sufficient. UN agencies need to have intentional strategies and plans on collaboration. They also need to be held accountable for following through on these strategies and plans.