



Strengthening Social and Solidarity Economy Policy in Asia – Final internal evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Regional, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea

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Administrative Office: Cooperatives Unit
(COOP)

Technical Office: Cooperatives Unit (COOP)

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Key Words: social and solidarity economy, enterprises, decent work, sustainable development, Asia

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The Strengthening Social and Solidarity Economy Policy in Asia project (RAS/19/02/KOR) was undertaken by the ILO, with the implementing partner, Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency (KoSEA) and two sub-contractors, Center for Social Innovation Education and Research (CSIER), Seoul National University for the Research component and Underdogs (Korean social enterprise specialized in training) for the Capacity-building. The project aimed to enhance the understanding of ILO constituents and other relevant stakeholders on the SSE in six countries in Asia (China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Republic of Korea) and to provide technical support to countries to develop and/or mainstream SSE in their national development policies and programmes. The project operationalized the objective through two components: research and capacity-building. The research aimed to map the SSE landscape in six countries with an analytical framework and identify policy challenges and preliminary pathways for strengthening the SSE in the region. The capacity-building component aimed to equip policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders with common understanding on values and contributions of the SSE to decent work and sustainable and inclusive development.

Present situation of the project

The project started in June 2019 and ended, following a twelve-month cost extension in June 2021 (The project's initial duration was 18 months but it was granted a no-cost extension until June 30, 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and initial delays in project implementation).

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

This final evaluation aimed to assess the project by: (i) providing an internal assessment of the *performance* of the project; (ii) assessing the *outcomes* of the project, and (iii) identifying *good practices* and draw *lessons* and forward-looking *recommendations*. The evaluation covers all activities and components of the project for the period from June 2019 to June 2021, and it is intended to serve both accountability and learning purposes.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation consisted of a desk review, interviews, and a quantitative and qualitative assessment of data (i.e. participant list, project documents, tools). The interviews were conducted with representatives of tripartite constituents, regional organizations, former project staff, enterprise specialists and project officers in ILO field offices. Due to time constraints, interviews were undertaken with a limited number of participants (19), and a workshop could not be held to discuss key evaluation findings with stakeholders.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Relevance and strategic fit of the project

The findings highlight the relevance of the project with development plans, constituents' needs, and the overall programme of the ILO. There are a few shortcomings that need to be borne in mind, however. Firstly, the limited involvement of social partners in the overarching

design of the programme, and the finding that many respondents lacked an understanding of the relationship among the project's objectives, outcomes, and outputs. This may be due to the absence of an articulated, and clearly communicated, overarching Theory of Change that is used as a basis for determining the relevance of the specific activities.

Coherence

The project has internal coherence, involving enterprise specialists and relevant technical staff in ILO field offices, which contributed to enhancing the capacities of field staff on the SSE. It emerges from the interviews, however, that synergies between the programmes could be improved. The project was not able to fully leverage the ILO contributions, through its comparative advantages (such as international labour standards, and the ILO's Decent Work Agenda) partly due to the project implementors' (KoSEA, sub-contractors) lack of knowledge about the ILO. Regarding external coherence, there was some collaboration with partner institutions, but their level of involvement could have been strengthened in the design and implementation stages.

Validity of the project design

A concept note detailing the background, rationale, and outcomes and a budget was provided while a project strategy including a theory of change, risk analysis and feasibility assessment were missing. They could have been useful to monitor, track and evaluate the effectiveness of the project against its outcomes. The project title "Strengthening Social and Solidarity Economy in Asia" and its objectives may have been overly ambitious considering that very few policies on SSE are in place in the region, and the understanding around the SSE is in its initial stages in Asia. The inclusion of an employment dimension was not realistic, considering that the concept of the SSE is not well established and obtaining data on employment is challenging due to the scarcity of data and difficulty in measurement.

Effectiveness

Most of the outcome and output targets have been achieved. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic challenges, the project duration was extended for six months, and activities were converted to a hybrid (conference) and online (workshop) formats. Despite the challenges, the ILO carried out the project activities successfully in cooperation with implementing partner and sub-contractors. A mapping of the SSE landscape and good practices in six Asian countries were shared, creating a foundation for mainstreaming SSE in policies and programmes. Policymakers, practitioners, and relevant stakeholders were better equipped with a common understanding of values and contribution of SSE to decent work.

Efficiency of resource use and management arrangements

The project has made an efficient resource use, achieving all the project outputs in a timely manner. However, the project did not generate any savings from the project activities and there was no budget allocated for follow-up and communication and dissemination activities. The complex management structure (ILO, implementing partner, sub-contractor, researchers) made it difficult to monitor,

track expenditures and redirect savings to other priority activities. The involvement of the implementing agency (KoSEA) resulted in additional costs, while its role may have been redundant and unnecessary (overlapping with the role of the ILO project team).

Impact orientation

The impacts at the country level vary considerably depending on the level of interest and willingness of national stakeholders to engage in the topic. While project outputs have been successfully achieved, it may be too early to assess the long-term impact of the project, given that developing or adopting legislations and policies is a lengthy process, that often extends beyond lifespan of a project.

Sustainability

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the sustainability of project activities in two important ways: it led to renewed interest from stakeholders on the SSE's role in COVID-19 response and recovery. However, the travel restrictions have limited face-to-face interactions, that are key to community building and mutual learning. Whether the net benefits of the intervention are likely to continue or not is contingent upon the stakeholders' commitment, and external factors, such as the political and economic conditions. The upcoming general discussion on the SSE at the 110th International Labour Conference in June 2022 and the continuation of the efforts through the second phase of the project will help sustain the gains from this project in the long-term.

Cross-cutting issues

The project has sufficiently incorporated and addressed gender and social dialogue elements while some others, such as disability, International Labour Standards and other vulnerable groups have only been marginally addressed. This may be due to the lack of consideration of the cross-cutting issues in the project design and in the monitoring framework and the implementing partner's lack of knowledge of the ILO's normative framework and decent work considerations. There were several efforts from the ILO project team toward addressing these concerns with mixed results.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Recommendations

The recommendations can be presented in four areas:

Programming:

1. Strengthen the programme-wide theory of change (project team, high, medium-term, low)*
2. Develop clear knowledge and risk management strategy (project team, high, long-term, low)
3. Improve design and implementation of the budget (project team, high, medium-term, low)
4. Develop and implement a knowledge management strategy (project team and consultants, medium, medium-term, low)
5. Allow for better use of in-house know-how and expertise (project team, high, medium-term, medium)

Coherence:

6. Ensure better integration of decent work considerations (project team, and consultants, high, medium-term, medium)

7. Recommendation 7: Develop and implement a knowledge management strategy (project team and consultants, medium, medium-term, low)

Visibility:

8. Strengthen communication and dissemination activities (project team, medium, long-term, medium)

Collaboration and Sustainability:

9. Strengthen the involvement of ILO country office, constituents, and partners (project team, medium, long-term, medium)
10. Strengthen the sustainability of the project (project team, medium, long-term, high)

**In parenthesis: who is called upon to act; priority or importance (high, medium, low); time frame for implementation (short-term, medium-term, long-term, not applicable); resource implications (e.g. low, medium, high)*

Main lessons learned and good practices

The main lessons learned and the good practices emerging from the project are presented below.

Lessons learned:

- Tripartite approach is effective in leveraging the potential of the SSE to address unmet needs.
- Effort is needed to establish procedures to guarantee a robust knowledge management strategy.
- There is a room for improvement on the efficiency in the use of the budget.
- Establishing a risk management strategy could have led to a better mitigation of potential risks.
- The research methodology did not sufficiently capture SSE organizations operating in the informal economy.
- There is a need to increase the capacity of ILO's country offices in the region on the SSE.

Good practices:

- The online capacity-building workshop was a good practice. Its innovate approaches (i.e. virtual study tours) could serve as a good practice and learning opportunity for the second phase of the project and other projects.
- The project team, implementing partner and sub-contractors effectively implemented the COVID-19 contingency plans, and converted the conference into a hybrid, and workshop in an online format.
- The project's follow-up activities deepened the engagement with national stakeholders to cultivate national dialogue and foster national ownership of the project outcomes.
- The project staff recognized the need for stronger communication of the findings from the research and capacity building components of the project and produced a project video and a series of policy briefs that were disseminated widely through the ILO website and presented at national and regional workshops.