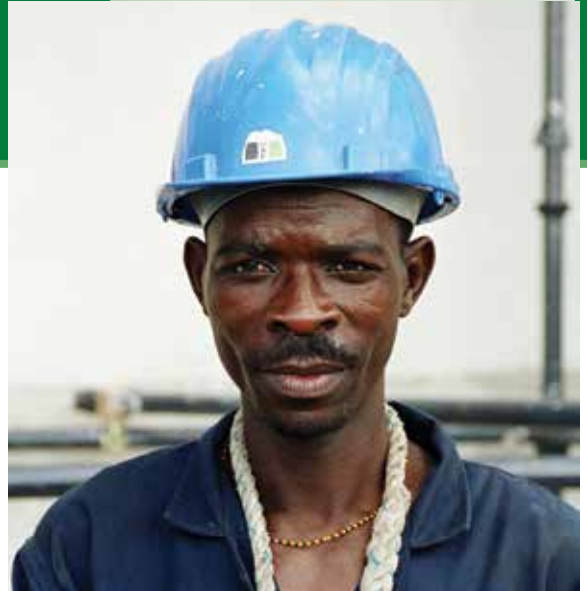


Promoting occupational health and safety in the building construction sector in Zambia



“Decent working conditions are at the heart of Zambia's transition to a green economy. Promoting safe and healthy working conditions is essential to enhancing and increasing productivity. This in turn has the potential to attract and retain a skilled, competent and motivated workforce.”

Decent and green jobs in the building construction sector

The building construction sector in Zambia has been identified as a potential driver for economic growth and green job creation. However, the sector is poorly regulated in terms of occupational safety and health (OSH).

According to the ILO's 2012 Zambia Country Profile on Occupational Safety and Health, the building construction industry reported 58 occupational fatalities between 2003 and 2007. This high number of fatalities, which ranked third behind the mining and quarrying and chemical sectors, can be attributed to, among other things, the structure of the industry and poor working conditions. Subcontracting is very common, which heightens the pressure of meeting deadlines, and increases the difficulties of co-ordinating work and ensuring site safety and health. Most of the workers are on temporary contracts, which compel them to work long hours in order to increase their earnings while work lasts. Compared to their counterparts on permanent contracts, workers on temporary contracts rarely have sufficient training or the experience necessary for the hazardous working environment on most construction sites. Furthermore, these workers often cannot refuse to work under unsafe conditions. The ILO estimates that 95% of accidents involve workers employed by subcontractors.

OSH challenges in Zambia

- Low levels of awareness and skills
- Lack of, or inadequate coverage of, OSH in vocational and technical courses
- Outdated legislation

OSH challenges in the building construction sector

Low levels of awareness and skills

A lack of familiarity with existing OSH frameworks among employers and workers has been identified as one of the main causes of (i) low rates of compliance; (ii) the high incidence of occupational accidents; and (iii) the lack of safety precautions in the workplace. In addition, most employers in the sector view OSH as a cost rather than an investment and thus pay very little attention to either its legal provisions or promotional aspects.

Inadequate coverage of OSH in vocational and technical courses

The majority of vocational and technical training institutions responsible for training artisans in various aspects of building construction have yet to integrate OSH into the training modules offered. Where such modules do exist, their coverage of important, relevant subject matter is scant. Consequently, artisans graduating from vocational training institutions have low levels of OSH awareness and do not have the necessary skills to conduct risk assessments and manage identified risks.

Outdated legislation

OSH in the construction sector is covered under the Factories Act, Act No. 2 of 1966. The Construction (Safety and Health) Regulations under the Act have not been reviewed since the Act was first implemented and consequently do not address the challenges and realities posed by current practices in the construction sector. In particular, subcontracting is a grey area in terms of duty-of-care for OSH.

Promoting OSH in the green building construction sector

Strengthening social dialogue and knowledge sharing

Creating safe and healthy workplaces starts with awareness creation and the sharing of knowledge regarding prevailing occupational hazards and risks. Therefore, one of the goals of the project is to work in close partnership with government, workers, employers, and representative organisations to develop an awareness-raising strategy that will highlight the responsibilities and obligations of employers and workers.

Revision of the regulatory framework

The existing legal framework, in particular the Construction (Safety and Health) Regulations contained in the Factories Act, will be revised and aligned with the ILO's Convention 167 on Safety and Health in Construction. The adoption of Convention 167 will address some of the gaps in the Construction (Safety and Health) Regulations, such as OSH management on the construction site. A case in point is the question of duty-of-care on construction sites where there may be several contractors working at the same time, or on construction sites where there is a principal contractor and one or more subcontractors.

Addressing OSH in Zambia

- Increase awareness of and tripartite dialogue on OSH
- Review the existing regulatory framework and promote the adoption of Convention 167 on Safety and Health in the Construction Sector by all construction role-players
- Strengthen OSH curricula in technical and vocational training institutions



Convention 167 on Safety and Health in Construction

The ILO's Convention 167, adopted in 1988, provides technical guidance on prevention and protection measures in the construction sector. These measures relate to the duties of the principal contractor regarding OSH on a construction site, as well as those of designers and planners of construction projects. Convention 167, if implemented properly, will have a positive impact on Zambia's construction sector by strengthening national OSH systems.

Convention 167 is supplemented by Recommendation 175 on Safety and Health in Construction. The ILO has also developed the OSH Code of Practice in Construction, which provides guidance on the implementation of the provisions of Convention 167 and Recommendation 175.



Strengthening and mainstreaming OSH in technical and vocational training

The training curriculum for construction-related courses at Thorn Park Construction Training Centre (TPCTC) will be updated to include OSH. To this extent, an OSH Training Manual on Construction Safety is currently under development by TPCTC in conjunction with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Security's Department of Occupational Safety and Health, the National Council for Construction and the EcoLusaka Project, which falls under the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland.

The OSH Training Manual on Construction Safety will serve as a guide for small- and medium-scale contractors.

The Zambia Green Jobs Programme is a partnership between the Government of Zambia, the United Nations System in Zambia, and public and private stakeholders. The Programme aims to support the creation of green jobs among micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Zambian building construction industry, while at the same time generating systemic change and contributing to the broader discussion on inclusive green growth and job creation in Zambia. The Zambia Green Jobs Programme is supported by the Government of Finland.

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