Capitalizing on Emerging Opportunities in a Virtual Environment

Engaging Workers and Civil Society to Strengthen Labor Law Enforcement

The project aims to promote the effective engagement by workers and CSOs with the government and employers to improve enforcement of labor laws, by attaining the following Long-Term Outcomes (LTO):

LTO 1: CSOs and/or workers accurately identify potential labor law violations in workplaces

LTO 2: CSOs and/or workers submit well-supported, well-articulated, justiciable claims to initiate inspections and seek legal remedies

LTO 3: CSOs and/or workers effectively track progress of claims

LTO 4: CSOs and/or workers engage with the government and employers to address potential labor law violations

Purpose
This multi-country project modified its methodologies and approaches to achieve targets without changing geographic scope or implementation targets.

Value
$8,050,000

Objective
Effective engagement by workers and civil society organizations with the government and employers to improve enforcement of labor laws

MEXICO

VALUE
$4,768,398

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE
APR 2020 – SEP 2022

APPROACH
Supporting workers and independent and democratic workers' organizations; generating applied research; and taking advantage of the opportunities generated by the 2019 labor reform process

SECTOR FOCUS
Automobiles, auto parts, aerospace, tires, service

PERU

VALUE
$1,046,417

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE
OCT 2018 – JUN 2021

APPROACH
Strengthening workers' and unions' capacity to identify and address potential violations of labor rights in the workplace and to develop strategies for political and union advocacy

SECTOR FOCUS
Agriculture, textiles

GEORGIA

VALUE
$1,994,173

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE
JAN 2019 – JUL 2022

APPROACH
Effectively engaging workers and CSOs with the Government of Georgia and employers, in urban and specified regional areas in high-risk sectors, through awareness-raising, capacity building, technical assistance, and social dialogue

SECTOR FOCUS
Construction, mining & metallurgy, agriculture, coal/oil/gas, bottled mineral water production, (then later during COVID) distribution, courier, service

COVID Challenge: The pandemic created emergent and recurring crises

HEALTH – Nature of factory work placed workers at risk of contracting COVID; workers faced mental health issues due to lockdown and stress from jobs lost.

ECONOMIC – Workers experienced reduced hours/salaries, furloughs, or dismissals due to temporary and permanent factory shutdowns; More than 2 million people lost their jobs in 2020-2021 due to the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic;

SOCIAL – Much of the project's success relied on recruitment of new workers to join and form unions. Lockdowns made most face-to-face interactions impossible, dramatically reducing the opportunity to build trust of the union system. Worker-employer roundtables that typically would be face-to-face meetings had to be held online. Social dialogue (LTO4) was curtailed due to pandemic restrictions for gatherings.

IMPACT

• Sparked high demand for labor law enforcement information, elevating the importance of this work. (ex: Hotline calls increased significantly and requests from workers who sought advice—as the project planned—was accelerated by the pandemic)

• Changed the way projects communicate and interact with partner organizations, beneficiaries, and government counterparts.

⚙️ Project Actions

TRANSITION TO VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT: Reprogrammed travel and event funds to support training to use technology, virtual training events, data plans/internet access/computers for labor leadership.

ADAPTED ACTIVITIES TO REMOTE IMPLEMENTATION: labor clinics, case tracking system, legal assistance, advocacy campaigns, training.

✔️ Best Practices

DEDICATE RESOURCES TO TRAIN USERS ON THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS: The project introduced worker-promoters, union leaders, and workers to the digital world, which propelled learning for people who otherwise would not have received this type of training. This training enabled remote service provision (e.g. legal assistance) to affiliates at remote locations, exchange of legal documents with workers and employers, and training. Use of ICT tools can be an effective means to expand linkages with new stakeholders.

BE FLEXIBLE IN MESSAGING: Hearing and understanding a shift in workers' greatest needs and concerns, the project shifted its messaging to include health and safety, in addition to communicating workers' rights.

EVALUATE METHODS OF COMMUNICATION: Community radio stations became the standard method of communicating with beneficiaries in rural areas about workers' rights, safety obligations of companies, and how to report violations to local labor authorities; some government officials engaged with the public via radio shows; Effective engagement of underserved communities through use of Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, television broadcasts, and videos on open, public free-to-air spaces.

ADAPT SECTOR FOCUS TO REFLECT DEMAND FOR PROJECT SERVICES: shifted to include non-high risk sectors, e.g. tourism, retail, distribution; the project's reach expanded well beyond its target for workers reached by shifting from leaflet distribution to AR campaigns in both classic and social media awareness raising far exceeded targets (hotline called, Facebook members) but legal support, courts claims monitoring, and investigations were slowed.

SUPPORT A FIELD-LED STRATEGY TO REPROGRAM ACTIVITY FUNDS AND INFORM OTHER STRATEGIC DECISIONS. Prioritize continued engagement with the people on the ground.

INVEST IN TOT FOR WORKER-PROMOTERS so that they can replicate the trainings in the workplace and reach more beneficiaries, contributing to sustainability and circumventing a reliance on technology. This builds the capacity of OSH specialists/champions at the regional level so that workers outside urban areas may rely on them instead of internet connection to seek advice.

⚠️ Limitations to Solutions

COMPUTER LITERACY – recognize that this varies largely by geography, profession, and gender.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY – where there is very limited cellular/internet service in remote areas, other solutions need to be attempted (e.g. pre-recorded trainings instead of live events). Where families had a shared smart phone, women tended to have less use of this technology.

COMFORT WITH TECHNOLOGY – even where people may have access to technology, their preferences should be respected. In urban areas tended to prefer information about their rights via social media whereas people in rural areas preferred something printed they could show their employer.

NOT ALL MEETINGS CAN BE VIRTUAL: Union-employer negotiations are built on trust and personal relationships, and therefore enjoyed less success when conducted virtually. Dispute resolution as well as the ability to establish new unions or build union membership are undermined by mistrust of the process.

LACK OF INCLUSION: Women and underserved communities were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and experienced different challenges during lockdowns. These populations were generally more difficult to access when activities shifted to a virtual strategy. Failure to include rural, female, and young workers threaten union membership and generational succession within unions.

Lessons learned

HYPER-LOCALIZATION There is no one size fits all solution for a project, country, or region. To the extent possible, solutions were adapted to the needs of stakeholders and beneficiaries depending on their location, abilities, and circumstances.

INCLUSION Targeting underserved communities and marginalized groups allows organizations to become more representative and inclusive, better prepared for generational renewal, and better able to advocate for non-discrimination with respect to employment. When shifting to a hybrid or virtual platform, be intentional to target these populations, ensuring participation continues at the same rate. Design and implement a GESI strategy with targets, goals, outcomes, and regular reporting requirements.

DATA COLLECTION Underreporting on MEL indicators, particularly in remote regions, resulted in a knowledge gap that left decision makers in the dark. Ensure data collectors are prepared and capable to collect and deliver data to decision makers to orient successful adaptations of project activities.

LIFE SKILLS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD Building the capacity of workers to interact and engage through virtual means by training on the use of digital tools and platforms has a lasting impact beyond the scope of the project.

BUILDING TRUST Facilitate direct engagement via face-to-face meetings whenever possible and in compliance with health regulations. This builds trust between workers and unions as well as unions and employers.

VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES Social media is an easy and common entry point for involving new workers. Advocacy/outreach campaigns were especially effective when moves from leaflets to virtual.