

ILO Cooperation with ASEAN-OSHNET

Tsuyoshi Kawakami

ILO Subregional Office for East Asia, Thailand

1. Collaborative actions between ASEAN-OSHNET and ILO

ASEAN-OSHNET (ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network) is a network of government OSH departments of the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. ASEAN-OSHNET has taken concerted actions in policy, training, research and information in OSH. The ILO has been supporting its initiative as a collaborative partner agency and worked together at both national policy and workplace levels. Experiences and achievements of ASEAN-OSHNET are providing good examples in regional cooperation in Asia and other parts of the world.

2. Developing national OSH programmes referring to ILO Promotional Framework for OSH Convention

ASEAN countries have developed and implemented national OSH programmes referring to the ILO Convention Concerning the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No 187) adopted in 2006. The Convention promotes practical national OSH policy focusing on key OSH principles: (1) assessing risks, (2) combating risks at source, and (3) developing a national preventative safety and health culture. The ILO has supported ASEAN countries to take practical steps in developing national OSH profiles and programmes. Figure 1 shows these steps. Tripartite and inter-ministerial cooperation and consultation were promoted in the course of the national OSH programme development. The joint consultations facilitated exchanging information and experiences among different ministries and workers' and employers' organizations, and addressing broader aspects of national OSH needs. The taskforce team comprising different ministries and agencies confirmed their continuing collaboration for implementing the national OSH programmes in order to meet the committed national OSH goals.

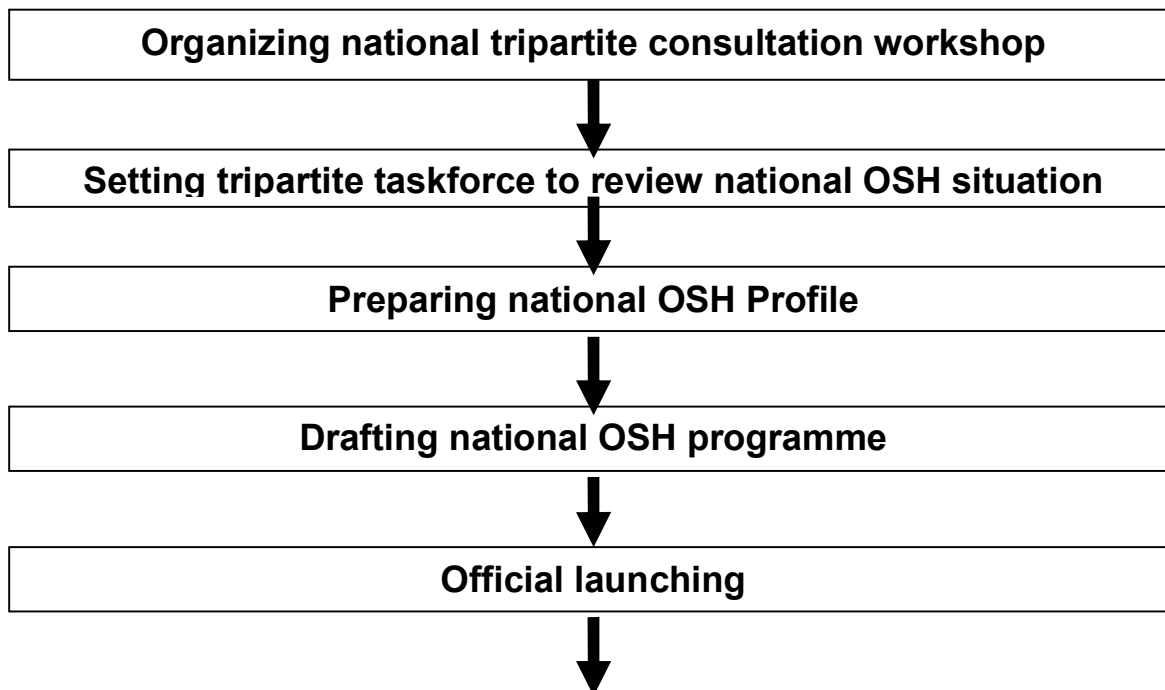


Figure 1. Common steps taken in developing national OSH programmes with ILO support

3. Major goals seen in ASEAN national OSH programmes

Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam have already launched their national OSH programmes. These programmes were designed reflecting both common priorities in the region and also special concerns of each country. The common priorities included: (1) strengthening OSH legal frameworks, (2) improving law compliance through strategic labour inspection, (3) supporting workplace-level OSH activities by employers and workers such as safety and health committees or risk-assessments, (4) preparing special programmes for the industry with high accident rates such as construction or mining, (5) reinforcing occupational accident and disease reporting, and (6) extending OSH protection to small enterprises, informal economy workplaces and rural sectors. ASEAN-OSHNET has promoted sharing good practices in the priority areas for mutual benefits.

4. Addressing emerging issues in different countries

Each country has also its own special concern in OSH. Indonesia, for example, is promoting joint improvements of OSH and business performance. Laos needs to strengthen the government OSH infrastructure at provincial level. The Philippines intends to strengthen OSH protection of overseas Filipino workers. Vietnam has been establishing a nationwide OSH service umbrella for farmers.

In response to each country's efforts and initiative, ILO technical cooperation has been supporting both national policy and workplace level actions and promoting positive interactions between policy and workplace levels (Figure 2). ILO labour standards, technical guidelines and training programmes have been widely applied as practical tools for technical cooperation to assist governments, workers and employers. The recent joint activities with ASEAN countries include: developing the nation's first OSH Master Plan, developing industrial physician training programmes (Cambodia), training workers' and employers' OSH trainers to assist small enterprises (Lao PDR), helping small enterprises develop preparedness plans against future Pandemic Human Influenza to protect their workers (Thailand), or strengthening the training methodologies and programmes in the national OSH training centre (Vietnam).

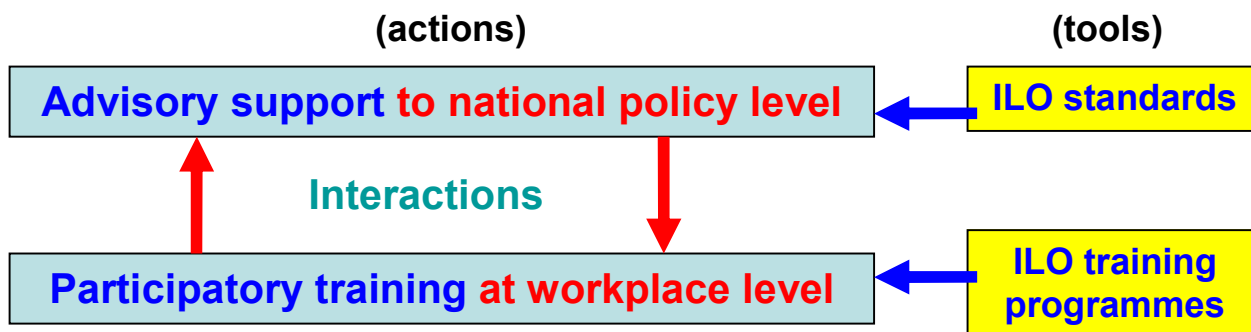


Figure 2. ILO technical cooperation in OSH

ASEAN countries and the ILO have been working together to address emerging OSH issues in the region. Health hazards caused by asbestos are an increasing concern in the region. ILO and WHO have been jointly supporting national actions of Thailand and Vietnam aiming to eliminate asbestos-related health hazards. Our survey has identified that asbestos-using companies want practical information on asbestos-free materials and technical advice from the government to replace asbestos-materials with asbestos-free materials. Promoting public awareness on asbestos-related health hazards, strengthening health surveillance, and establishing concerted national policies are noted as equally important.

Safety and health of migrant workers is another emerging issue in the region. The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand has launched a pioneer action in this regard and provided basic occupational health services through its Primary Care Units (PCU). PCUs at district level are gradually providing basic occupational health services such as risk-assessment, consultation and training for all people in the community. Self-employed workers and migrant workers are naturally covered.

United Nations agencies such as WHO, and FAO have taken concerted actions in order to protect people from

Avian and Future Pandemic Human Influenza. The ILO through its tripartite channels with governments, workers and employers is expected to strengthen practical preventive actions at workplace level. ILO has launched Avian and Human Influenza (AHI) and the Workplace Projects in Thailand and Indonesia aiming to: (1) reduce risks of Avian Influenza infection amongst poultry workers and farmers, and (2) protect workers and businesses in small enterprises from future Pandemic Human Influenza. The ILO is developing action-checklists which can support employers' and workers' actions to reduce their infection risks and protect their businesses under possible pandemic situations.

5. Extending OSH Protection to workplaces in the informal economy and rural sectors

Many countries in ASEAN have been extending practical OSH protection into informal economy and rural workplaces. Regional OSH Centres in the Ministry of Labour in Thailand, for example, have provided participatory, action-oriented training for small enterprises, and been extending their support into home workers, and farmers. Cambodia has formed a network among the government, workers, employers and NGOs and trained them as basic OSH trainers. The trained local OSH trainers used their human channels and reached a variety of informal economy workplaces such as home workplaces, small construction sites, or self-sustained farms. The government has played a facilitator role and constantly organized useful forums for the trainers to meet together for exchanging experiences.

Vietnam has trained many farmer OSH trainers. The trained farmer OSH trainers have trained their neighbouring farmers in simple and low-cost OSH improvement methods. The farmer trainers apply a participatory training programme called WIND (Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development) programme. The WIND programme was born in Vietnam within a technical cooperation programme between Vietnam and Japan and now widely used in Southeast Asian and Central Asian countries. In 2007, a Vietnamese WIND trainer visited Senegal in Western Africa and began the WIND training in Africa.

The Vietnamese government carefully sustained the WIND farmer volunteer system and established functioning support systems at national and provincial levels (Figure 3). Provincial governments provide technical support to farmer volunteers. In 2006, the central government incorporated the WIND farmer volunteer system into the nation's first OSH programme and has been extending the system into new provinces by using the national budget.

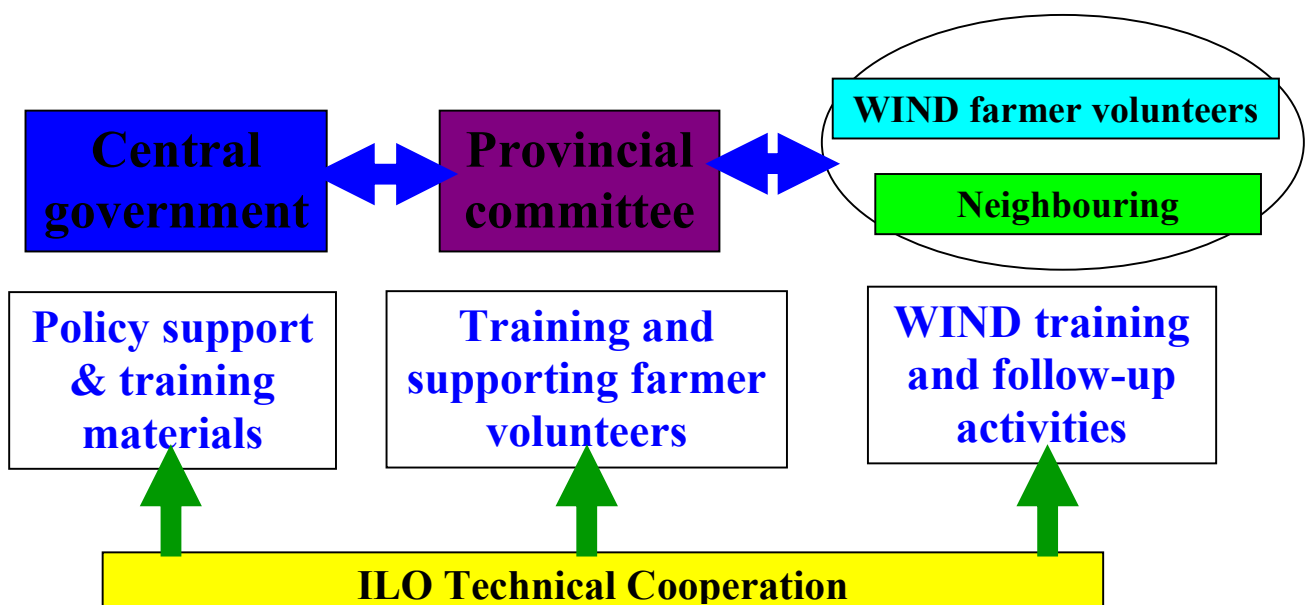


Figure 3. Government support to WIND farmer volunteers in Vietnam

6. Conclusions: Areas for cooperation

ASEAN countries have accumulated practical OSH experiences to support workers and employers and aim to consolidate their collaborative actions and programmes. Important areas for cooperation include: implementing established national OSH programmes effectively, documenting ASEAN OSH good practices, strengthening labour inspection systems, making further steps to eliminate asbestos-related health hazards, and extending OSH protection. Sharing practical OSH experiences in ASEAN with other regions, in particular with African countries, should be in the scope of future ASEAN actions. The ILO will continue to work together with ASEAN-OSHNET and support its commitment in providing adequate OSH protection for all workers and realizing Decent Work for All.

References

1. Leng Tong, Yi Kannitha, Chhay Vanna (2007) Participatory approaches to improving safety and health of farmers in Cambodia – Practical application of the WIND training programme – Asian-Pacific Newsletter on Occupational Health and Safety 14. No. 3, 56 – 57 pages.
2. Somkiat Siriruttanapruk and team (2006): Integrating occupational health services: A model developed with Thailand's Primary Care Units report, International Labour Office.
3. Kawakami, T., Khai, T.T., Kogi, K. (2006) WIND (Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development) Manual, Asian Version. Bangkok: International Labour Office; Cantho: Centre for Occupational Health and Environment. Available at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/library/download/pub05-14a.pdf>
4. Kogi, K. (2006) Low-cost risk reduction strategy for small workplaces: how can we spread good practices? *La Medicina del Lavoro*, 97, 303-311.
5. Kawakami T, Khai T, Kogi K (1998) Development and practice of the participatory action training programme (WIND) for improving working and living conditions of farmers in the Mekong Delta Area in Vietnam. *J Science Labour* 75: 51-63.

Contact address: Tsuyoshi Kawakami MD, email: kawakami@ilo.org