

Extending OSH Protection to Informal Economy Workplaces in Cambodia

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Introduction:

Many workers in Cambodia are working in informal economy workplaces such as home workplaces, street vending, transportation services, or unregistered small construction sites. Cambodian Labour Law does not yet cover the workers in the informal economy. Workers in this sector have received little OSH protection or service despite the fact that they are facing many safety and health risks. The Government of Cambodia assigns Department of Occupational Health and Safety (DOHS) of Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) to extend practical OSH protection measures to informal economy workers in Cambodia.

Cambodia has widely applied participatory training approaches as a practical means to increase the coverage of OSH services to informal economy workplaces. In view of the limited number of government inspectors and safety and health officials, DOHS promoted self-help OSH improvement actions at the workplace level. Participatory, action-oriented training provided practical support for informal economy workplaces. For example, WISH (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) training programme, as a typical participatory training programme, trained many Cambodian OSH trainers for helping home workers. WISH programme was formulated with the technical assistance through ILO's Informal Economy, Employment, and Poverty Reduction Project from 2004 – 2006.

Methods:

Participatory, action-oriented training methodologies were fully applied learning from previous OSH experiences and achievements in several countries in Asia. In particular, informal economy workplaces were encouraged to start with low-cost, feasible improvements learning from existing local good examples. The OSH trainers played active facilitator roles to support participating workplaces. Figure 1 shows these practical steps taken to expand participatory training into informal economy workplaces.

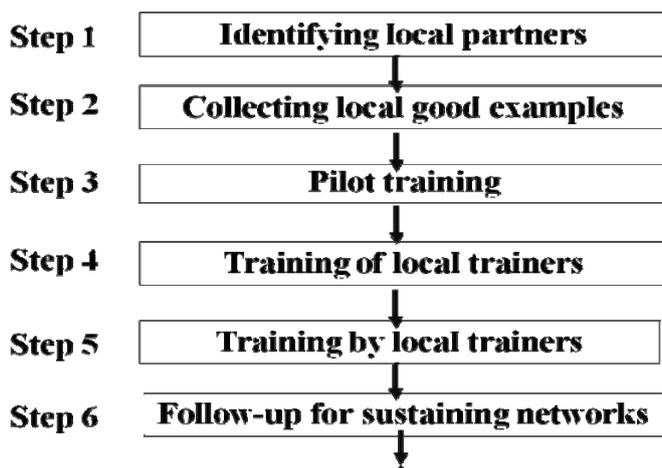


Figure 1. Steps taken to expand participatory training into informal economy workplaces

There were three target worker groups in this project. They were: home workers, workers in small construction sites, and farmers. In addition to WISH programme, two participatory training programmes: (1) WISCON (Work Improvements in Small Construction Sites) and (2) WIND (Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development) programmes were widely applied to training workers in small construction sites, and farmers.

The DOHS-ILO team in cooperation with workers' and employers' organizations and NGOs visited many informal economy workplaces and collect Cambodian good examples. The collected good examples were used as practical training materials. As the next step, a pilot participatory training course was organized by using the collected good examples as training materials. The participants were trained to find practical improvement points in their workplaces. Participatory training tools such as illustrated action-checklists (Figure 2), or group work methods (Figure 3) facilitated active discussions among training participants and assisted them in identifying practical solutions.

21. Increase natural ventilation by having more openings, windows or open doorways.

Do you propose action ?

No Yes Priority

Remarks:.....



22. Provide adequate clothes and personal protective equipment such as glasses, shoes, and gloves.

Do you propose action ?

No Yes Priority

Remarks:.....



23. Provide at least two unobstructed exits from rooms and enough fire extinguishers.

Do you propose action ?

No Yes Priority

Remarks:.....



Figure 2. Example of Action-checklist for home workers

The next important step was to train local OSH trainers. Representatives of the government, workers' and employers' organizations and NGOs became participatory OSH trainers and started training informal economy workers through their channels. DOHS in cooperation with the ILO has organized follow-up visits and achievements workshops in order to facilitate exchanging experiences among the OSH trainers and to maintain and expand the trainer networks.

Results:

Four Training-Of-Trainer (TOT) courses were held in Phnom Penh for Central provinces, Siem Reap for Western provinces, Kratie for North-eastern provinces, and Battambang for North-western provinces. Participatory OSH trainer networks have constantly increased nation-wide coverage. This expansion was possible because of practicality of participatory training programmes. New partner agencies have joined our network in the course of participatory training development. The Ministry of Women Affairs joined the network in 2008, trained their own OSH trainers and expanded training coverage through their networks to support women workers.

Trained Cambodian OSH trainers have successfully trained many informal economy workplaces. As of April 2008, more than 3,000 workers in the informal economy were trained through the established participatory trainer networks. Trained workers in the informal economy improved safety, health and working conditions by

using available low-cost materials. Their improvement examples are shown in Figure 4. It should be noted that workers in informal economy workplaces themselves, and not specialists or trainers, identified the improvement ideas and made positive changes.

The government (DOHS) spent efforts to maintain and strengthen the established trainer networks comprising workers, employers, and NGOs as well the government. DOHS made follow-up visits to trainers and trained workers to confirm their improvement actions and regularly organized achievement workshops in order to facilitate exchanging improvement experiences among the trainers and trainees (Figure 5).

The first National OSH Profile of Cambodia described the achievement of participatory training programmes for informal economy workplaces. These participatory training approaches will be adopted in the first Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan (2008 – 2012) of Cambodia that should launch in mid 2008. The established participatory training programmes would expand further with having stronger national policy support. The positive experiences and achievements have been widely shared with other ASEAN countries and publicized in international OSH conferences and journals.



Figure 3. Checklist exercise in a home workplace (left) and group discussion to find low-cost solutions (right)



Figure 4. Improvement examples after participatory training; elevated workstation for farmers to avoid strenuous forward bending posture (left) and a guard to prevent falling down accidents in a construction site (right).

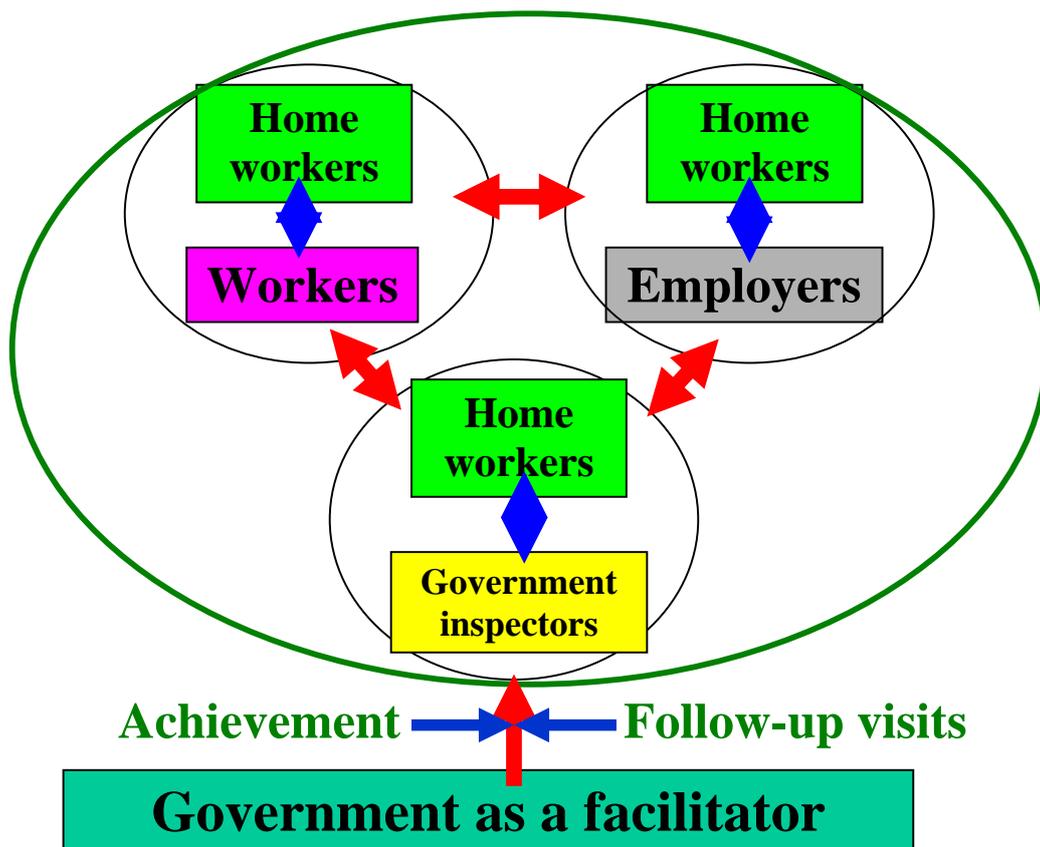


Figure 5. Reaching home workers through people's networks

Discussions:

The trained Cambodia trainers reached many informal economy workplaces through their own networks. Participatory training methodologies focusing on good practice approaches and low-cost improvement measures were useful for supporting workers' improvement actions. These participatory training programme experiences are planned to be incorporated into the 1st OSH Master Plan of Cambodia and will be increasingly applied as a practical measure to assist workers in informal economy workplaces.

References:

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