

Local Empowerment through Economic Development and Reconciliation Project (LEED+)

DFAT Management Response to Partner-led Independent Evaluation – December 2023

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been engaged in LEED work in Sri Lanka since 2010, with several initiatives preceding the LEED+ Project. LEED+ aimed to continue scaling up previous phase activities in the fruits, vegetables, and fishery sectors targeting vulnerable communities, with a special focus on women, and scaling and policy development.

The overall objective of the Project was to “enhanced resilience, inclusive and sustainable growth of targeted communities in selected areas of the Northern Province.” The project had four outcome areas:

1. Improved productivity, efficiency, quality of products produced by the Coops, MSME and processed food sectors;
2. Improved decent work opportunities for targeted communities including women and People with Disabilities;
3. Enhanced participation in decision-making by women and people with disabilities within the MSMEs, Coops in fruit, vegetable, fishery and processed food sectors and community; and
4. Local Economic Development approach or its elements adapted into development programmes by relevant government agencies and private sector organizations.

The areas of implementation were the five districts of Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, namely, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Jaffna, and Mannar. The Project was implemented from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023, with a six month extension to 31 December 2023 for Outcome # 4. The total budget of the project was USD6,588,969, jointly funded by the Australian Government (AUD4,220,000) and the Norwegian Government (30 million Norwegian Kroner).

The evaluation found that the LEED+ delivered significant benefits for its participants, and its outcomes were closely aligned with Australia’s Aid investment Plan for Sri Lanka (2015-2019) and COVID Response Development Plan (CRDP; 2020-23), the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and ILO’s Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP 2018-2024).

DFAT’s response to the Independent Evaluation: DFAT agrees with each of the nine evaluation recommendations noting that the project itself and DFAT’s funding have concluded, and implementation will be carried forward by ILO in accordance with its own management response, and by DFAT in other projects where relevant.

Recommendation	Response	Action Plan	Timeframe
1. Results Framework: In developing the Results Framework, attention should be paid to develop SMART indicators where the requisite data and information could be readily collected, and that the indicators demonstrate changes attributed by the Project.	Agree	DFAT will ensure that implementing partners of all our investments/programs use DFAT’s Monitoring and Evaluation Standards to guide the content and quality of their Results Framework.	N/A
2. Value Chains Future work on value chains should ensure comprehensive analysis of all	Agree	DFAT will consider this recommendation in the design of any future interventions of	N/A

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<p>segments of the value chain to identify deficiencies that hinder improvements to the end product; concomitantly, business development services should be made available to overcome deficiencies in the value chains.</p>		<p>a similar nature. We will advise the partners of the new proposed gender investment (in design) and ensure that they follow this recommendation.</p>	
<p>3. Cost of Production of commodities As the market linkage models are highly influenced by the commodity prices and imports, it is recommended that in future interventions, particularly in agriculture and aquaculture, a programme be launched to develop cost of production models for commodities.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider this recommendation in the design of any future interventions and ongoing programs of a similar nature. We will work with the Market Development facility (MDF) program and ensure that they follow this recommendation in their interventions.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>4. Data collection The Project has developed market linkage models which are replicable. There is potential to develop these models further to be incorporated into development strategies and policies. In agriculture, there is a vast untapped body of data from the farmer fields on yields and expenses. It is recommended that the Project invests to collect these data from as many farmers as possible and analyse the data to provide evidence, including cost benefit analysis, of robustness of the market linkage models. The Development Officers in the Divisional Secretariats could be mobilised, with the concurrence of the Divisional Secretaries, for collection of these data, which have a planning value for Divisional Secretaries as well. It is also recommended that qualitative outcome information of human wellbeing and social development are also collected. Similarly, the irrigation tank rehabilitation through cash-for work will provide very useful information on returns on investment, as a potential replicable model.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider this recommendation in the design of any future interventions and ongoing programs of a similar nature. We will ask partners, especially the MDF program to collect and analyse the indicated data and use it for their planning and interventions. Also, request them to share those data with relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>5. Assessment of MSME and SME beneficiaries</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider this recommendation in the design</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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<p>The Project has supported 631 beneficiaries in MSME, SME and self-employment; a detailed assessment of a representative 47 sample of these beneficiaries would be useful for incorporating these models into development strategies as well as to provide any improvements that are necessary for the models.</p>		<p>of any future interventions or ongoing programs of a similar nature, especially the new design of the gender investment and the ongoing MDF program.</p>	
<p>6. Focus of Gender and Inclusion In future, Project's with focus on gender and inclusion should consider the following: (a) As an inception activity, prepare the gender and inclusion strategy setting out the principles and clear criteria for selection of beneficiaries. (b) Activities on gender and inclusion should not be conducted as standalone activities; rather inclusion of social mobilisation (self-help approach or equivalent models), psycho-social interventions, and savings and lending at community level should be integrated into gender and inclusion agenda to ensure sustainability of the interventions. (c) Activities on gender and inclusion needs regular technical back-stopping by trained staff; it is important that appropriate trained staff are available for mentoring and monitoring of interventions involving gender and inclusion so that the actions can be sustained by the community once the project is over. (d) The work of the Department of Manpower & Employment has shown difficulties of PwDs maintaining their jobs; detailed analysis of the background to this situation and the reasons for the situation will be useful to map out any future interventions involving job placements for PwDs.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider how this recommendation will be incorporated in the design of gender investment and any similar future interventions. We will also request partners to consider conducting research on challenges and opportunities facing PwDs.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>7. Support to the Department of Cooperatives In regard to activities with the Cooperatives, it is recommended that (a) the Project facilitates a dialogue between higher level Cooperatives and the</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider this recommendation in the design of any future interventions such as the new design of the gender investment, including possible options for working</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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<p>Provincial Department of Cooperative (PDoC) in order to agree on the way ahead with some of the Project interventions; and (b) the Project, in consultation with the PDoC should explore focussing Project's assistance towards improving business strategic planning, value chains and related areas, and the overall vision of the cooperatives.</p>		<p>with the cooperatives and provincial governments.</p>	
<p>8. Field-level monitoring Field-level monitoring needs to be strengthened as the evaluation noted shortcoming in the monitoring of MSMEs; in addition, monitoring of agricultural activities is left with the private sector who have done a commendable service in providing inputs and extension services. The main interest of the private sector is to buy raw material for their business; the Project should complement this by undertaking outcome monitoring to capture changes in human wellbeing and social wellbeing. Connected to this is the need to support the private sector to ensure that the farmers maintain their loyalty in the linkages that have been established by the Project.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider this recommendation and ensure that partners are conducting close monitoring of their activities in ongoing DFAT programs and any future relevant interventions.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>9. Reporting Reporting is lengthy and complex; it is difficult to extract key information from the Annual Reports. A clear and concise statement on the status of indicators would be very useful in addition to any narratives that are provided. Furthermore, reporting on the actions to support the relevant SDG Goals is scanty, and it is recommended that the Annual Report has a separate section on SDG contributions.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT will consider this recommendation and inform all partners of ongoing and future programs to provide clear and concise reports with all relevant data to inform the status of the interventions as per the identified indicators of the program.</p>	<p>N/A</p>