Project: Practical strategies for decent work in the informal economy: Work Improvement for Safe Homes (WISH) in Thailand, Cambodia and Mongolia

Donors: ILO Project on Informal Economy, Poverty and Employment (ILO Sub-regional Office-Bangkok) funded by United Kingdom Department for International Development

Project Description:
The WISH programme responds positively to the urgent need of home-based workers to provide technical support and practical measures in improving their safety, health and working conditions. WISH is a participatory and action-oriented training approach which was inspired by the ILO WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises). It promotes and demonstrates practical measures in improving safety, health and working conditions at the home-based workplace. This project involves implementing WISH programme in Thailand, Cambodia and Mongolia.

The objectives of the action programme are:
1. to disseminate information on simple, practical strategies on work improvement, including their productivity-enhancing results
2. to develop capacities among constituents to deliver messages, strategies and skills in work improvement in home-based work
3. to mobilize stakeholders around decent work agenda through concrete activities and interventions
4. to engender among informal economy workers a more concrete and experiential understanding of work improvement as a first step towards developing a constituency for decent work
5. to develop policies that promote occupational health and safety in both formal and informal economy

The availability of practical strategies for work improvement provides the following:
- An excellent starting point for realizing incremental but health-promoting changes in the informal economy
- A practical tool for stakeholders, such as trade unions and labour ministry, as they seek to deliver concrete services to workers found in homes and micro premises
- Concrete contribution towards decent work objectives on the enterprise or household level
- An experiential base from which informal economy workers understand and move forward towards building a constituency for better work conditions and decent work.

Over 250 homeworkers were trained each in Cambodia and Thailand not long after the trainers’ training input. In Mongolia, WISH is being implemented in markets, in remote areas of the countryside, and among entrepreneurs with disability. Trade unions, cooperatives, NGOs, self-help groups, employers associations, labour and health ministries have found these work improvement programmes an effective tool.

In addition to the enterprise-level impacts, policy impacts are realized as well:
In Mongolia and Cambodia, the government launched a National OSH policy which integrates technologies and actions appropriate to the informal economy. As many enterprises in Mongolia and Cambodia are small scale and are carried out in highly informal conditions, the National OSH Policy would be relevant to informal workplaces, including homes. Moreover, it clearly specifies
action to be introduced in the agricultural sector, small enterprises and the rest of the informal economy. Prior knowledge of practical work improvement methodologies, including WISH and its variants (WISE: Work Improvement in Small Enterprises, WISCON: Work Improvement in Small Construction, Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development: WIND), has made it easier for stakeholders to envisage improvement and inclusion of IE in one such national policy.

**Gender and Ethnic Component:**
Work improvement in homes is geared to a large extent to women who opt to do home-based work. WISH also takes into account the reproductive role of women and conveys strategies appropriate for pregnant women. Work improvement provisions suitable for men and women are provided. As it is illustrative, WISH makes it a point to show men and women performing similar tasks, thereby showing not only how work can be properly carried out by both but also conveying the message that women can perform functions that were traditionally ascribed to men. The powerful role of illustrations and imagery is harnessed to convey gender messages as well.

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