

TRAINING FOR RURAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (TREE)

This Information Note presents the Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which aims to promote rural employment using a community-based approach to skills development. It outlines some of the challenges faced in efforts to improve rural livelihoods, presents an overview of the TREE programme, describes some national experiences in implementing TREE and summarizes the programme's contribution to supporting the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. It is intended to inform ILO constituents, skills development specialists and training practitioners about the programme and its potential to support national rural skills initiatives.

The challenges of promoting rural employment

The challenges facing rural areas – in which three-quarters of the world's poor reside – are a pressing concern for national governments and international organizations. Decent work deficits are severe and are exacerbated by the lack of access to social protection, low rural incomes, absence of labour law coverage and a high degree of informality. Rural areas face additional barriers which hinder economic growth, including weak labour market institutions, inadequate infrastructure, fewer educational opportunities and underinvestment.¹ While agriculture is still the main economic activity in rural areas, its nature, and the extent to which it is balanced by off-farm activities, varies from country to country. Formal wage employment is scarce and self-employment and micro-enterprises dominate, both of which are more likely to be in the informal economy.² Importantly, certain segments of the population are more vulnerable than others in terms of their ability to access quality employment, including women, persons with disabilities and young people. For example, 48 per cent of women living in rural areas in Cambodia cannot read or write, compared to 14 per cent of their male counterparts, representing a higher barrier for women in accessing training and decent work.³

¹ ILO: *Policy Brief: Skills for rural employment and development* (Geneva, 2014).

² ILO: *Rural skills training: A generic manual on Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE)* (Geneva, 2009), p. 25; ILO: *Informal economy*, <http://www.ilo.org/employment/units/emp-invest/informal-economy/lang-en/index.htm> [accessed 3 Jan. 2017].

³ ILO: *Investing in skills for socio-economic empowerment of rural women*, Gender and Rural Employment Policy Brief Series, No. 4 (Geneva, 2010), p. 1.

Skills development and training is a key factor in tackling the challenges of rural poverty. By promoting employability – particularly of vulnerable groups – and enhancing income-earning opportunities, skills training can lift women and men out of poverty and promote sustainable rural livelihoods. However, education and training in rural areas encounter particular hurdles, including:

- both financial and non-financial barriers to attending training programmes (such as high transport costs and poor infrastructure)
- high levels of illiteracy and low levels of basic education
- unqualified teachers and inadequate equipment
- gender roles which discourage women and girls from accessing education, such as childcare responsibilities
- detachment from employers' needs leading to a mismatch between skills supply and labour market demand.⁴

These issues are overlapping and cross-cutting. Therefore, successful promotion of skills development in rural areas must entail an integrated response in order to contribute to the reduction of rural poverty and the empowerment of both women and men in rural communities.

TREE methodology

As a means to address these challenges, the ILO developed the Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) programme. By linking community-based economic opportunities with the

⁴ ILO: *Policy Brief: Skills for rural employment and development* (Geneva, 2014), p. 2.

necessary training and post-training support, and by engaging the relevant institutional partners, TREE serves as a vehicle for improving economic opportunities and income security.

The TREE methodology involves four different processes, as shown in Figure 1 below. The four processes do not have to occur in a linear manner, but can overlap.

The methodology uses a systems approach which addresses the macro, meso and micro levels. At the macro level, TREE helps to create a policy and regulatory environment which supports

provided are wide-ranging, from vocational and business skills, to literacy and leadership training. Beneficiaries can expect a rapid return on their training, since it is directly linked to both their specific training requirements and the local economic environment. Finally, depending on need, each of the four processes, as outlined in Figure 1, benefits from different ILO tools and ILO expertise.⁷ Therefore, through skills development and the engagement of the local community and social partners, TREE contributes to the improved productivity, employability and income security of rural men and women.

Figure 1: The four processes and relevant activities of the TREE methodology

| Process and relevant activities | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Institutional organization and planning | Economic opportunities and training needs assessment | Training design, organization and delivery | Post-training support for micro-enterprise development and wage employment |
| Initial assessment of policy environment and needs | Collection and analysis of information and assessment of labour market demand | Design content and develop curricula | Facilitating access to wage or self-employment |
| Orientation of stakeholders and partners | Socio-economic profile of the community and community mobilization | Selection of trainees and training of trainers | Providing support for small business start-up |
| Establishing appropriate TREE management and governance systems | Identification of economic opportunities and training needs assessment | Delivery of training | Facilitating access to credit, advisory services, marketing, technology, etc. |
| Capacity building | Developing feasibility studies and training proposals | Continued training in the workplace | Providing support for the formation of groups Set up measures to support TREE graduates |

Source: *TREE Manual*, 2009, p. 24.

local economic activities; at the meso level, it strengthens the institutional capacity of social partners and non-governmental organizations to provide appropriate training and support; and, at the micro level, it offers rural men and women the relevant skills training and follow-up support that they need.⁵

The TREE methodology has many intrinsic advantages. Its value-added compared to conventional technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes is its engagement with local communities and social partners, identification of economic opportunities before the implementation of training and the provision of post-training support.⁶ It can work outside the formal skills system as well as with it. Moreover, TREE offers a large degree of flexibility, both in the type of training provided and in its adaptability to different target groups. The type of skills

National experiences

TREE has been implemented in more than 20 countries, applying its principles of needs analysis, local community participation and engagement with institutional partners to different economic and social settings. The generic *TREE Manual* has been adapted to specific country and regional contexts, as in the case of the Philippines and the Pacific, and it has also been translated into local dialects in Sri Lanka to facilitate the implementation of the methodology.

In terms of results, TREE has been effective in promoting income generation across different contexts, including post-disaster areas. For example, following Sri Lanka's tsunami in 2004, the implementation of TREE reached 840 beneficiaries and raised the average monthly income of families from

⁵ ILO: *ILO Technical Cooperation Intervention Model Series: Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE)* (Geneva, 2011), p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ ILO: *Rural skills training: A generic manual on training for rural economic empowerment (TREE)* (Geneva, 2009), pp. 19–27.

1,500–3,000 rupees (Rs) to Rs 5,000–7,500. In the Philippines, 2,280 beneficiaries received training, with 95 per cent seeing their average monthly income increase by 105 per cent.⁸

TREE has also proven successful in reaching a variety of target groups, such as youth, women and persons with disabilities. The TREE project in Pakistan's Punjab Province and Northwest Frontier Province provided a wide range of skills training at the local level, including vocational training, literacy and business management training. Women constituted 34 per cent of the participants in the vocational training and comprised 724 out of the 746 who completed literacy training. At the end of the project, 91 per cent of the women who attended the training and literacy courses were able to find wage or self-employment, and the project can boast of having mainstreamed women into the local economy.⁹ Similar success stories are found for youth in a project supported by the Danish Commission in Zimbabwe, Benin and Burkina Faso. For example, in Zimbabwe, approximately 5,500 young people benefited from training across nine fields of economic activity, and approximately 4,200 received micro-finance and post-training business development support.¹⁰ In Burkina Faso, persons with disabilities comprised 16 per cent of the total participants and were integrated into the overall training programmes, and the project also provided disability awareness sessions.¹¹

Across the wealth of experiences gained from different TREE projects, several advantages of its method emerge, along with different lessons learned. These cover four main areas, detailed below, and demonstrate TREE's added value.

Relevance of skills training to local needs

One advantage of the TREE model is that the initial assessment of local economic opportunities guarantees that the subsequent training offered matches the market demand. Rather than providing standard training courses with predefined curricula, TREE adapts to local needs and ensures rapid returns on the skills training provided. For example, in Zimbabwe, the mapping exercise identified several fields of economic activity, including fish farming, poultry and horticulture, and the new farming techniques acquired through the training programme led to better yields and higher incomes for low-income youth.¹² The adaptability of the train-

ing provided by TREE is further demonstrated in its relevance to the informal economy. In post-war Liberia, for instance, weak training institutions and the prevalence of the informal economy meant that skills training was provided only by apprenticeships and on-the-job training in the informal sector. The 2010 TREE intervention in Liberia was able to offer skills training that was delivered outside the informal economy in a broader institutional context, while still ensuring the provision of skills for income-generating opportunities in the informal economy.¹³

Benefits of local ownership

The careful identification of capable partners and relevant beneficiaries is vital for a successful project, while readily available technical assistance and easy access to ILO specialists has been shown to improve implementation success. The inclusion of local institutions and partners in the various stages of training design, delivery and post-training support enhances their commitment, improves the success of the project and encourages cross-linkages and the development of trust between the different actors. One reason why the ILO–Danish Commission project in Zimbabwe is hailed as a best practice model is due to the high level of ownership at the national, district and local levels, which contributed to the project surpassing its targets. In tandem with TREE's inclusive approach is its emphasis on capacity building. This includes the training of TREE trainers and facilitators as well as encouraging the formation of business associations, savings and credit groups, cooperatives and community groups to ensure the long-term sustainability of the intervention.

Post-training support

A key component of TREE programmes is the provision of post-training support – including mentoring and personal development training – along with other forms of guidance which help beneficiaries face the realities of running a business or working in an enterprise for the first time. Coupled with the post-training support was an emphasis on harmonizing micro-finance schemes with training activities and creating clear expectations and understanding of how micro-finance works. In this regard, mapping of financial services, financial education for beneficiaries and creating links with financial institutions to provide affordable loans are important ways in which TREE's post-training phase can contribute to successful employment and income generation.

⁸ ILO: *ILO Technical Cooperation Intervention Model Series: Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE)* (Geneva, 2011).

⁹ ILO: *Country Paper: Pakistan – on the use and impact of TREE methodology in Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) Project in Pakistan* (Geneva, n.d.).

¹⁰ ILO: *Skills for youth employment and rural development in Western and Southern Africa (Zimbabwe Component): Independent final evaluation* (Geneva, 2015), pp. 22–24.

¹¹ ILO: *Rural skills training: A generic manual on Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE)* (Geneva, 2009), p. 127.

¹² AUC-AfDB-UNECA Joint Secretariat Support Office: *Youth and employment: Progress and results of the five initiatives recommended by the Africa Commission by mid-2013* (Africa Commission, 2013).

¹³ A. Gorham: *Training for rural economic empowerment: Implementing the ILO's TREE approach in Liberia* (Monrovia, 2010).

Sustainability and replicability

The sustainability and replicability of TREE is linked not only to the beneficiaries and local community partners, but also to the political will at the national level. TREE requires a conducive policy environment and several countries have incorporated TREE into their national policies. For example, TREE was incorporated as a methodology in Sri Lanka's rural vocational training and, following the success of TREE in Pakistan, the Government used its methodology in its "Skilling Pakistan" National Skills Development Strategy. Such institutionalization encompasses a financial commitment from governments, as well as enterprise development support and the harmonization of long-term and short-term training programmes.¹⁴

TREE and the ILO's Decent Work Agenda

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda encompasses the four pillars of employment creation, rights at work, social protection and

social dialogue. The TREE methodology plays a catalytic role in supporting the transitions of men and women in rural areas into decent work. Its primary means of achieving this goal is as a tool for skills development: it provides the necessary training to access the labour market and, as a result, lifts workers out of poverty through employment and income generation. Furthermore, its focus on disadvantaged groups, such as women, young people and persons with disabilities, ensures that growth is inclusive, and its engagement with local stakeholders and social partners enhances the relevance of the training interventions. Moreover, the TREE methodology's emphasis on quality employment links to other areas of the ILO's work. For example, the elimination of child labour, promoting safe working conditions through occupational safety and health and facilitating access to microfinance are ways in which TREE embeds itself in the ILO's mandate to promote decent work. As such, the TREE methodology contributes to sustaining the ILO's leadership role in the area of skills development.

¹⁴ ILO: *ILO Technical Cooperation Intervention Model Series: Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE)* (Geneva, 2011), p. 8.

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For more information on links between education and training and productive and decent work, visit the **Global Public–Private Knowledge Sharing Platform on Skills for Employment**, initiated by the ILO and benefiting from the support and collaboration of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank.

<http://www.skillsforemployment.org/KSP/en/index.htm>

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