

Action-Oriented Support for Occupational Safety and Health Programs in Some Developing Countries in Asia

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Action-oriented support programs have been increasingly playing vital roles in promoting safety and health in developing countries in Asia. This paper studied achievements of 3 action-oriented support programs: the WISE program for small enterprises, the WIND program for farmers, and the POSITIVE program for workers and trade unions. Special attention was paid to how the programs have strengthened local efforts for sustainable actions in safety and health improvements. The results showed that there were significant achievements in action-oriented support programs in the region, including a large number of improvement examples, integration into government policies, and network support through employers' and workers' organizations. Participatory, action-oriented training tools such as action-checklists, local good example photos, and group work methods played key roles in the effective implementation of the programs. It was of note that there were a number of local efforts to extend the coverage of action-oriented support even to hard-to-reach workers such as home-based workers, rural workers, and ethnic minorities. The efforts included the equal participation in the training by female and male farmers, shortened and weekend training programs, photo sheets showing local good examples, and reasonable fee collection for better sustainability. In conclusion, action-oriented support programs provided local people with concrete means to promote safety and health improvements. The successful programs commonly focused on local initiatives and were built on local wisdom and resources.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Action-oriented support in occupational safety and health (OSH) programs has produced a number of positive results in various countries in Asia. A typical example showing the usefulness of such action-oriented support is given by the WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) training program developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO). This training program has proven effective in organizing training courses of 1–2 weeks for small enterprises in improving workplace conditions. Each course comprised a joint factory visit combined with a checklist exercise, evening workshops, and subsequent group work on planning and implementing practical improvements. Many WISE courses conducted in the Philippines, Thailand, and other countries have led to a large number of low-cost improvements in materials handling, work-stations, and physical environment (Batino, 1997; Kawakami, Batino, & Khai, 1999; Kogi, 1995, 1998; Tandhankul et al., 1995).

Much inspired by the WISE program, action-oriented support has spread into different workplaces in different countries. The WIND (Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development) training program for farmers in Vietnam (Kawakami, Khai, & Kogi, 1998; Khai, Kawakami, Kogi, & Son, 1996), and the POSITIVE program for trade unions in Pakistan (Japan International Labour Foundation [JILAF], 1998; Kogi & Kawakami, 1996) were formulated applying similar approaches making full use of action-oriented support. All these three programs are spreading within these countries and to some other countries in Asia. These experiences have confirmed that action-oriented support can mobilize locally available resources for practical risk-assessment followed by multi-area improvements. With this support, it has been demonstrated that existing networks of local people can be used to spread ready-to-use information in safety and health and train trainers with multiplier effects in many workplaces in developing countries in Asia.

Successful action-oriented support in different settings has applied common tools and methods such as action-checklists, group work dynamics, and learning from available good examples (Kogi & Kawakami, 1997). Appar-

ently, action-oriented support tools helped local people plan and implement practical steps suited to each local situation.

This common nature of effective support measures clearly reflect the international trends represented in recent ILO standards and guidelines. A number of ILO Conventions and codes of practice have been formulated to improve safety and health. Particularly, the Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and the Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161), emphasize employer-worker cooperation and multidisciplinary support for improving safety and health programs at both national and enterprise levels. To accelerate improvement efforts, recently the ILO launched its Global SafeWork Program, aiming at (a) protecting workers in hazardous jobs, (b) extending the safety and health coverage to the informal and rural sectors, (c) promoting workers' health and well-being, and (d) showing that protection pays. Action-oriented support measures implemented in different workplaces in Asia apparently are in line with these goals.

This paper discusses common features in action-oriented support measures that are effective within the existing conditions in some developing countries in Asia. For this purpose, on-going safety and health programs applying the aforementioned approaches were reviewed. Special attention was paid to how action-oriented support measures could strengthen local efforts for practical, sustainable improvements, and how these measures could spread through local networks.

2. MATERIALS

Types of action-oriented support measures that had been effective in training programs for small enterprises, workers, and farmers were reviewed. ILO programs as well as country programs in this regard were collected for the review. The programs included in the review were (a) WISE training activities in Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam; (b) WIND program for farmers in Vietnam; and (c) an action-oriented training program specifically designed for trade unions (known as POSITIVE) in Pakistan and Thailand. Implementers and collaborators for the programs included OSH centers, inspectors, employers' organizations, trade unions, universities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The scope of the WISE program was wide and included home-based workers as well as owners and workers of small enterprises. Table 1 provides an outline of the reviewed programs.

TABLE 1. Outlines of Reviewed Programs

Programs	Targets	Main Collaborators	Countries Covered
WISE	Small enterprises	Governments Employers' organizations	Philippines, Thailand Laos
	Home-based workers	NGOs and government	Thailand
POSITIVE	Workers	Trade unions	Pakistan, Thailand
WIND	Farmers	Local government units	Vietnam

Notes. WISE—Work Improvement in Small Enterprises, WIND—Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development, NGO—nongovernmental organization.

The WISE programs were widely applied as action-oriented support measures in many countries. The WISE method is based on group work dynamics. It starts with local good examples, applying action-checklists, and aiming at immediate solutions relying on local materials and resources. A number of WISE training courses were organized in the Philippines in 1994–1997 within the framework of an ILO/United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project (Batino, 1997). It has been used in various countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa to support self-help actions in small enterprises.

The POSITIVE program is an action-oriented training package, specifically designed for trade unions and workers. Much inspired by other participatory training methods like the WISE method, POSITIVE has been serving many workers and trade unions in the region and facilitated practical improvements at the initiative of workers. The POSITIVE program was produced by the collaborating efforts between the Japan International Labour Foundation (known as JILAF), the Institute for Science of Labour, and Pakistani trade unions (Kawakami et al., 1999; Kogi & Kawakami, 1996).

The WIND program has been known as a unique approach, aiming at joint improvement of living and working conditions of farmers. The WIND program was developed by the joint efforts between the Centre for Occupational Health and Environment of Can Tho Province in Vietnam and the Institute for Science of Labour in Japan (Kawakami et al., 1998; Khai et al., 1996). WIND developed its own action-checklist for assisting farmers in finding feasible action points. Group work methods were fully applied in the training program.

In the review, special attention was paid to (a) achievements of the programs, (b) training tools to strengthen local actions, and (c) measures to support sustained local actions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Achievements of the Programs

The action-oriented design of the WISE training program produced many unique achievements (Table 2). Experiences by Laotian employers to expand WISE are shown in Figure 1. Similar steps were taken in other action-oriented support programs. The WISE method has six principles:

1. Build on local practice,
2. Focus on achievements,
3. Link working conditions with other management goals,
4. Use learning-by-doing,
5. Exchange experiences,
6. Promote workers' involvement.

These principles have provided workable strategies in action-oriented training activities in Asia. The same principles were applied in training courses for home-based workers in Thailand, trade union training in Thailand, construction sites in Vietnam, and agricultural farms in Vietnam. The WISE training programs in different countries commonly consisted of action-checklist exercises, discussion of local examples, and group work on low-cost improvements. It should be noted that different partners such as employers,

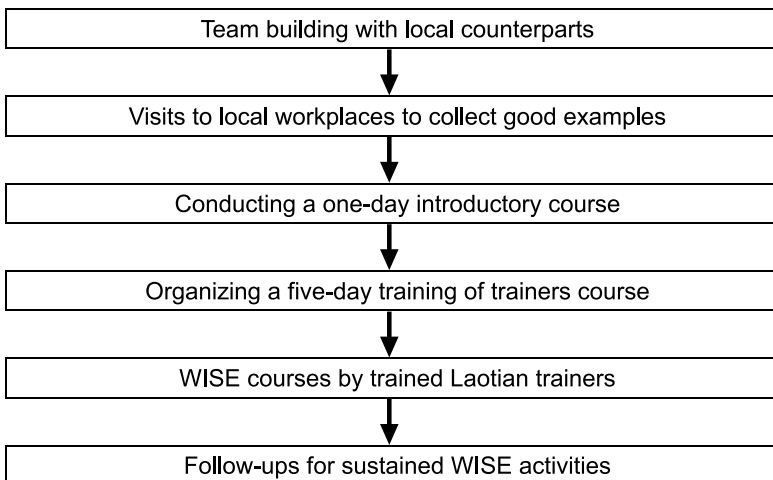


Figure 1. Steps taken by Laotian employers to form and expand WISE training activities.

TABLE 2. Major Achievements of the Programs

Achievements	Examples	Impact
Concrete safety and health improvements carried out using local resources	Over 2,000 improvements carried out in the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam	An increasing number of local workplaces adopting low-cost improvement methods
Local trainers trained	Inspectors, trade union members, members of employers' organizations, and NGOs	Organizing action-oriented training courses using available local resources
Network support established	Trade unions in Pakistan (POSITIVE), rural health centers in Vietnam (WIND), trade associations in Laos (WISE)	Spreading action-oriented support in a sustainable manner
Impact on the government policy	Integrating WISE into the government policy as a support measure to small enterprises in the Philippines and Vietnam	Advisory support services to small enterprises through government inspectors
Covering different occupations	Small enterprises in the Philippines, agriculture in Vietnam, home-based workers in Thailand, multinationals in Pakistan	Action-oriented support proved workable in different occupations and extending the coverage to many workplaces including the informal and rural sectors
Social dialogue between workers and employers promoted	Workers, trained by the POSITIVE program, proposed practical improvements and employers often accepted the workers' proposals	Joint improvement experiences in safety and health between employers and workers facilitated the dialogue between the two for better relationships

Notes. WISE—Work Improvement in Small Enterprises, WIND—Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development, NGO—nongovernmental organization.

workers, the government and NGOs applied the same action-oriented support measures to their own needs. Apparently, direct support to workplace action was the key for these achievements.

As shown in Figure 2, action-oriented support provided through WISE training courses facilitates stepwise improvements in small enterprises. Figure 3 shows a typical example of low-cost improvements in Vietnam. The first step was initiated by improvement options that can be done at low-cost. Practical ergonomic improvements such as clear passageways and

workstations were often seen. Initial success of low-cost improvements helped small enterprises to step onto the next step. Here, owners and workers paid increasing attention to multifaceted aspects of their working conditions, such as lighting, ventilation, electrical safety, and welfare facilities. In the third step, more expensive solutions, which need engineers' assistance, were selected. Obviously, low-cost solutions played key roles to attract owners and workers in small enterprises to enter safety and health improvements.

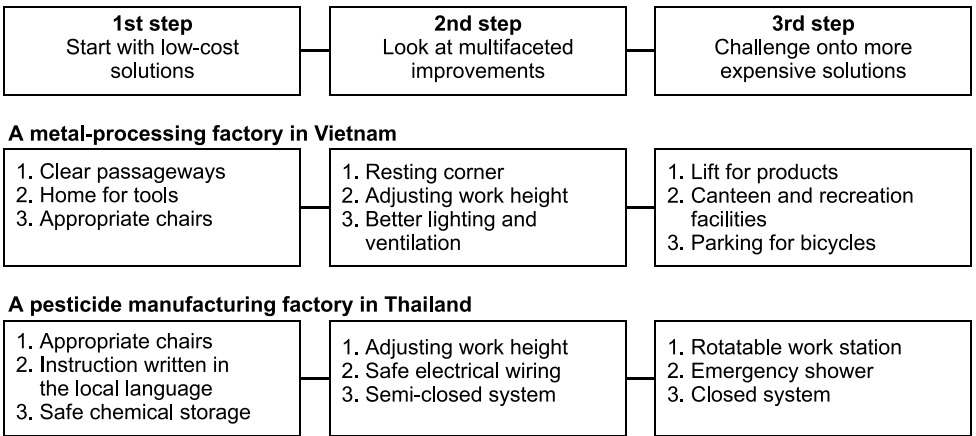


Figure 2. Common steps taken for implementing improvements in small enterprises after attending WISE training courses.



3a



3b

Figure 3. Improvements in a small metalworking factory in Vietnam, resulting from a WISE training course. Roller conveyor to carry heavy materials with a guard on rotating parts of the machine (3a). Wheeled container to carry their products (3b).

An interesting example of participatory action support was implemented in Vietnam. There the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) applied WISE methods to the training of labor inspectors. WISE played two important roles in assisting inspectors. First, the WISE training strengthened the technical backgrounds of inspectors in safety and health. Inspectors in Vietnam, dealing with many aspects of working conditions besides safety and health, needed to upgrade their practical knowledge and skills specifically on safety and health. The action-oriented nature of the WISE training courses fit this requirement. Second, the WISE training gave the participants useful insights to advisory roles of inspectors. Owners and workers in small enterprises, often expect inspectors to point out feasible improvement actions and assist the workplaces in developing practical improvement plans. Action-oriented support in the WISE program consolidated such advisory aspects of labor inspection.

Safety and health improvements expanded dialogue between workers and employers. The POSITIVE program represents a typical example how safety and health actions could be shared between workers and employers and promote their constructive dialogue. The improvement ideas in safety and health proposed by trained workers have focused on concrete actions that can be carried out using local inexpensive resources. This practicability

has convinced employers to support the proposals made by workers. Practical safety and health improvements established useful means for workers and employers to consolidate their relationship.

3.2. Training Tools Facilitate Action-Oriented Support

As shown in Table 3, practical training tools have facilitated local actions. Action-checklists were commonly used in the action-oriented training programs. Action-checklists helped participants to identify good action points and look at multiple technical areas. Group work discussions facilitated the exchange of different views of the training participants, aiming at reaching consensus in a given time, and identifying priority actions. Local good example photos provided clear guidance on what local people can do and what their priority needs are. Responding to immediate needs of local people, positive experiences of local actions helped develop and upgrade action-oriented training tools.

TABLE 3. Training Tools That Facilitate Local Actions

Tools	Purposes	Examples of Expected Results
Action-checklists	Assisting participants to look at good points and available solutions in the workplace	Quick identification of workable solutions using local resources
Local good example photos	Showing participants locally available solutions	Promote low-cost improvements for immediate solution
Group work dynamics	Mixing up different ideas to focus on priority actions	Participatory action for low-cost improvements
Trainers' manuals	Providing local trainers with practical guides for organizing participatory training courses	Local trainers multiplied participatory action support to a number of local workplaces

3.3. Sustaining Local Actions

As shown in Table 4, there were a variety of local efforts to extend the coverage by action-oriented support. The initiatives of local people have paved the way to providing safety and health services for hard-to-reach workers such as home-based workers, rural workers, and ethnic minorities.

The efforts of local people indicated three important aspects to increase the coverage: (a) accessibility to the training, (b) financial management, and (c) training tools.

TABLE 4. Efforts to Extend the Coverage

Difficulties	Support Measures	Effects
Workers needed permission from employers to attend the training (POSITIVE in Thailand)	A one-day training program developed and implemented at weekends	More workers attended the training
No budget for running training courses was available (WISE in Laos)	Charged participants fees to cover running costs	Sustainable training activities
Women farmers in rural districts too shy to join the training (WIND in Vietnam)	Selected a temple in their community as the training venue to facilitate women participation	Equal number of female and male farmers participated in the training
Audio-visual aids were not available in rural villages (WIND in Vietnam)	Photo-sheets designed to show local good examples	WIND trainers were able to organize short training courses in rural communities
Home-based workers (Thailand)	Develop a one-day training program and the training venue was set in their own community	Busy home-based workers were able to attend the safety and health training

Notes. WISE—Work Improvement in Small Enterprises, WIND—Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development.

For easier accessibility, both trade unions in Thailand and home-based workers in Thailand selected weekends for the training. For this purpose, a one-day short training program was tailored. This short training program allowed worker trainers to organize and conduct POSITIVE training courses on weekends. This arrangement was helpful for trade union members to participate in the POSITIVE training. Workers were able to attend the training without taking leave permissions from their employers. For the short course, training tools were also modified.

Laotian employers in small businesses applied marketing mechanisms for better financial management of the WISE training. They advertised the

training and collected small and reasonable fees from the training participants. The collected fees were used to cover the running costs of the training. This created significant impacts. First, the payment meant the strong commitment of the participants and promoted their active participation. Second, the trainers showed their enhanced accountability and had to guarantee quality of the training programs. Third, the fee collection opened the way to sustain the training activities without depending on external financial assistance.



4b



4a

Figure 4. Women farmers in Vietnam participating in a checklist exercise in a WIND training course (4a). Photo sheets showing local good examples enabled women farmers to form a group discussion at home (4b).

Action-oriented training tools have extended the coverage of the safety and health training. People needed training tools widely applicable in the local situation, for example, even in remote villages where electricity is not available. Photo-sheets showing local good examples met this need. In combination with action-checklists, the photo-sheets facilitated direct participation of a number of rural workers and families in the group discussion for the improvement (Figure 4). An action-checklist with illustrations as well as photo-sheets also enabled illiterate ethnic minorities in Vietnam to hold lively group discussions (Khai, Kawakami, Kogi, & Ngoan, 1998). It was apparent that widely applicable training tools strengthened local existing efforts for improving their working and living conditions.

The WIND program promoted equal participation of women and men for their joint initiative (Kawakami & Khai, 1997). As shown in Table 5, an equal number of women and men participated in the WIND training course. Equal emphasis on both working and living conditions was placed in the training. Accordingly, improvements relating to household and family-related activities as well as safety and health in their farms were carried out using low-cost ideas. It is encouraging to see that action-oriented support by WIND multiplied the improvement efforts of rural people.

TABLE 5. Improvements Carried Out After a WIND (Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development) Training Course (Kawakami, Batino, & Khai, 1999; Kawakami, Khai, & Kogi, 1998)

Area	Approximate Cost					Total
	US \$0	<US \$1	<US \$10	<US \$50	US \$50 >	
Ergonomic kitchen and eating facilities	9	5	6	3	1	24
Safe drinking water and sanitary facilities	10	4	9	0	0	23
Work and housing environment	5	3	2	4	0	14
Economy planning and income generation	1	0	3	5	5	14
Transporting agricultural products	2	1	4	3	1	11
Child care	1	0	0	1	0	2
Total	28	13	24	16	7	88

4. CONCLUSION

Action-oriented support for OSH has taken common steps. They are (a) to use participatory training methods; (b) to learn from local good examples, (c) to share the sense of achievements, and (d) to build networks for sustained actions. Action-oriented support has proven useful in different settings. Local people in Asia have wisdom, resources, and neighborhood cooperation for improving safety and health. It is essential for the successful safety and health programs to place clear focus on practical needs of local people (Kogi & Sen, 1987). Opportunities for participation can promote local initiatives for positive changes. Action-oriented support is essential for sustaining and accelerating such local initiatives.

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