

Occupational safety & health changes through the building code

This is an intervention summary from the MSD for employment (MSD4E) landscape assessment.

The intervention successfully advocated for changes in the building code to include inspections of working conditions on building sites. These changes create an incentive and framework for contractors in the construction sector to invest in basic occupational safety and health measures to protect informal workers on construction sites, contributing to improved job quality.

Background information

Project	Promoting Decent Work in Rwanda's Informal Economy (Boneza Umurimo)
Funder	Sida
Implementer	ILO
Contact	Steve Hartrich (hartrich@ilo.org)
Rural or urban?	Urban
Sectors	Infrastructure
Intended employment outcomes	Job quality
Target group (end beneficiaries)	Women and youth (18-35)
Cross-cutting priorities	Gender
Years of operation	2018-2019

What constraints did the intervention aim to address?

Decent work (rules and norms) in the labour market system specifically for construction (not the general labour market system). There was a missing inspection mechanism for occupational health and safety.

Note 1: The initial entry point was the Labour policy (rules and norms) for the wider labour market system, however it became clear that the Ministry of Labour had never undertaken inspections for labour law compliance. In response, the project pivoted to the Rwanda Housing Authority, which has a narrower mandate but does carry out building inspections on every significant construction site, for which contractors need to comply.

Note 2: The market system analysis published integrates the construction market system and the labour market for construction and positions key constraints in terms of rules and

norms: (1) laws, (2) enforcement; and (3) procurement. This analysis also identified this intervention as a potential area to pursue.

Which market actor partners did the intervention work with?

1. Rwanda Housing Authority (RHA) (sets building code)
2. Construction firms/employers
3. Institution of Engineers Rwanda (IER)
4. Informal workers on construction sites

What were the intended behaviour changes for these partners?

1. **RHA:** Change the building code and work with the Rwanda Institution of Engineers to jointly agree on new forms for building code inspections that include inspecting working conditions as a regular process. These changes were introduced by the intervention at the same time the building code was being revised. The RHA also trained inspectors on how to monitor labour conditions and was holding workshops and running outreach to firms and workers to raise awareness of the new requirements.
2. **Construction firms:** Investment in basic occupational safety and health measures to avoid penalties.
3. **IER:** Training manuals and outreach activities to inform and influence engineers working in construction firms to take the regulations seriously. Developed a 'compliance risk case' to pitch to construction firms on the reasons they should invest in better OSH for workers.
4. **Workers:** Adopt safer practices and benefit from better protections.

Intervention: ILO explained the problem, cited accident statistics, and RHA took up the challenge. The process was enabled by a knowledgeable and well-connected consultant (a locally-based architect) who had deep networks and trust across the sector, including key ministries and contractors.

How sustainable are these behaviour changes?

Adopt: it is currently unclear to what extent construction firms have changed their practices in response.

Policy/'respond': the changes supported by the intervention are still in the building code, four years after adoption.

What were the intervention's key results?

- Changes to the building code to include inspections of working conditions on building sites.

<i>Has a third party been involved in measuring these results?</i>	Yes
<i>Is the partner behaviour change the sole/major/minor contributing factor towards the employment-related outcome you've reported? (i.e. are there other contributing factors?)</i>	Major
<i>Results chain available?</i>	Yes

What is one lesson learned from this work?

- This intervention demonstrates that policy changes are possible, even in a relatively short timeframe, under certain conditions and the right timing. In this case, a proactive housing authority was key to introducing new inspections focused on labour in existing processes. Additionally, the building code was being updated at the same time the idea came to fruition.
- A key insight from a project perspective is that finding this opportunity required the team to let go of the Ministry of Labour as the 'theoretical' actor to play that function, and instead search the particular market system in question (construction) for a higher will, higher skill actor. In part, this realisation came from speaking with construction firms and hearing how seriously they took existing inspections - signalling that policy changes through that enforcement mechanism would be more likely to impact workplace behaviours.

Relevant project documents

- Market systems analysis: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/laying-foundation-better-working-conditions>

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