

INTERIM REPORT TO STEERING COMMITTEE

Pilot Project on Skill Development, Certification, Upgrading, and Recognition

Abu Dhabi Dialogue Permanent Office



مركز الحوار بين الدول الآسيوية المرسلة والمستقبلة للعمالة
Abu Dhabi Dialogue among the Asian Labor-Sending and Receiving Countries

September 29, 2015

Executive Summary

Since April 2015, the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Labor (UAE-MOL) pilot project—*Skill Development, Certification, Upgrading, and Recognition*—has increasingly collaborated with multi-sector partners in government, private sector, and international organizations to examine the impact of an integrated certification and recognition of skills on workers’ human capital skills, productivity and wages. More specifically, the UAE MOL is now working closely with the NQA-accredited center in Chennai, India, JAS 1 (training provider), and all participating employers in the recruitment, selection, training, testing, and certification of selected workers for the purpose of the pilot project. Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development Corporation (SDC), the recently NQA-accredited center in Colombo, Sri Lanka will also be ready to work with participating employer, while the training center in Pakistan is expected to be official reviewed and visited over the coming months. The close participation and engagement of all stakeholders have not only enabled us to continuously meet our targeted objectives, but also deepened our policy perspectives on labor admission and mobility.

The UAE MOL *3rd Interim Report to Steering Committee* provides a most-up-to date development, challenges, and proposed action plans to achieve expected project delivery. It also highlights completed and under-process milestones, administrative and scientific challenges, action and coordination plans required from all key stakeholders to facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue on labor market upskilling objectives in the UAE.

Pilot Project Overview

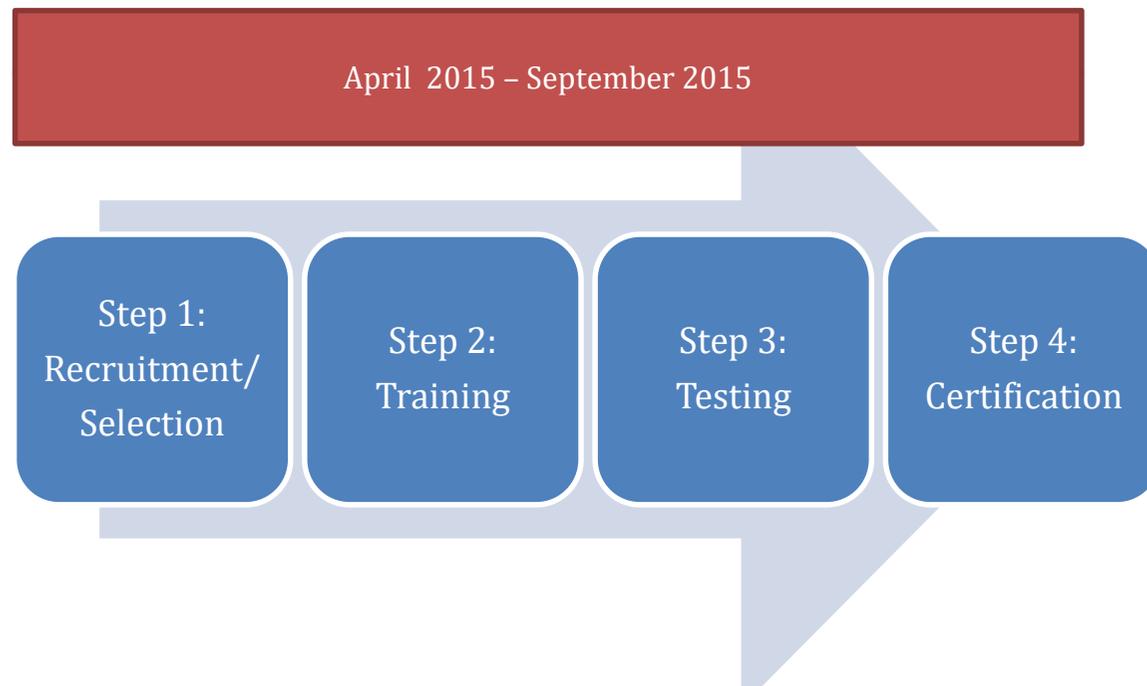
The governments of Kuwait and the UAE have initiated a pilot project to examine the effects of an integrated approach to the development, certification, documented upgrading and recognition of construction and service workers’ skills on human capital formation, workers’ welfare, income potential, and labor productivity to inform policy areas of labor admission and labor mobility.

The UAE and Kuwait have actively cooperated with the governments of the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and more recently Sri Lanka to conduct a pilot project by identifying a group of construction and service workers recruited by UAE and Kuwait employers in pre-selected construction and service occupations. The project aims to: (1) test workers to be certified as qualified for the jobs they were recruited to perform on the basis of occupational standards developed by the respective UAE and Kuwait qualifications authorities; (2) offer workers the opportunity to be periodically tested and certified for upgraded skills; (3) document accumulated skills throughout employment; and (4) enter into agreements with the participating origin countries on the mutual recognition of upgraded skills.

The sample will be monitored to identify and measure the impact of pilot activities in terms of the desired outcomes. Pilot implementation has already been supported by international training and certification service providers operating (Jas 1), international organizations (the World Bank, IOM, ILO, Swiss Agency for Development Corporation) and a group of researchers (Zayed University, New York

University Abu Dhabi, Center for Global Development) to conduct and monitor impact assessment activities and report on findings.

Pilot Project Process



Government partners: ADD receiving and sending member states, National Qualification Authority, Quality Conformity Council
Int'l Organizations: World Bank, IOM, ILO, Swiss Agency for Development Corporation
Employers: ETA-ASCON, Ghantoot, Al Habtoor, and Arabtec

Pilot Project Milestones

Over the past six months, the UAE MOL’s pilot project has achieved the following important milestones: (1) pilot recruitment commencement in Chennai, India; (2) completion of survey methodology; (3) accreditation process for participating training centers in India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan; and (4) approval of Level 1 testing materials for the pilot project.

Key Milestones (February 2015- April 2015)	
Pilot Recruitment Commencement in Chennai, India	All participating pilot project employers are expected to conduct multiple recruitment visits in India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. For example, two participating employers –namely Arabtec and Al Habtoor –have already started recruiting 60 steel fixers and masons since last March 2015 in Chennai India. Other pilot employers, including ETA-ASCON and Ghantoot, have also confirmed their recruitment schedules with JAS 1 for next month. These four employers have previously committed to recruit at least 500 construction workers for the pilot project, a process which will materialize over the next three months.
Completion of Survey Methodology	The Scientific Committee has already submitted a comprehensive survey questionnaire to the Project Management committee, capturing the workers’ overall profile (i.e demographic background, employment and income prospects, assets and debts, skills and expectations, social networks and well-being). The final draft will be assessed by the Executive Team for final review and approval.
Accreditation Process for Participating Training Centers in India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan	The National Qualification Authority (NQA) has officially accredited the training centers in Chennai, India and is scheduled to conduct official visits and accreditation for Sri Lanka (May 4- 6, 2015) and Pakistan (mid May 2015). Once these training centers become accredited by NQA and the existing industry occupational standards, participating pilot employers will then be able to recruit construction workers from these respective labor source countries.
Approval of Level 1 Testing Materials for the Pilot Project	The Abu Dhabi Quality Conformity Council (AD-QCC) authorities have recently reviewed and confirmed the final versions of the Level 1 Testing Materials for the pilot project. These

	testing materials have been examined based on UAE occupational standards, as well as industry-related practices.
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Scientific Committees' Current Status

The most critical part of the pilot project's implementation process revolves around the roles and functions of the Scientific Committee in administering a comprehensive survey in Chennai, India. The following table highlights key updates from the Scientific Committee members:

Key Updates from the Scientific Committee Members	
Scientific Design	The initial design had each of four (4) construction companies providing 500 workers (for a total of 2000) to be a part of the skills training evaluation project. A suggested change in design has been approved, where each of the companies provide a list of 700 workers each qualified to be accepted, but 500 of that total is randomly selected to actually go to the companies in the UAE. Currently, 3 of the 4 companies have agreed to this expansion in the design while one has declined but is being approached by the ministry. The interviews will cover all 700 of the qualified applicants – in India and in the UAE.
Survey Administration Changes	<p>Over the past few weeks, the Scientific Committee members have spent considerable time and expense expanding the questionnaires to enable deeper and more thorough analysis upon receipt of various data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Nyarko's research grant, a Ph.D student was hired to work on the questionnaire • The Ph.D student has also completed the IRB processes at both NYU Abu Dhabi and the process is near completion at NYU in New York. • The committee is planning on funding, with their research grants, a Ph.D student to go to India to supervise the randomizations and the interviewing firm. <p>An expanded survey instrument has been constructed and is attached.</p>

Survey Implementation Process	<p>The Scientific Committee recently contracted with a company in India to conduct the surveys of workers in India. The survey team has visited JAS1 in Chennai to become acquainted with the processes.</p> <p>The funding for these initial set of surveys has been secured from NYU through Nyarko research grants. One big concern is whether the NYU processes can process the checks to the Indian survey firm before the first interviews begin on May 1st.</p> <p>The Scientific Committee is now awaiting word from the ministry on processing funding for further phases of the interviewing.</p>
Recruitment/Selection Schedules in India	<p>Based on company schedules, the following recruitment dates have been identified from our participating employers.</p> <p>ETA-ASCON: 1st Week of June 2015</p> <p>Ghantoot: 2nd Week of May 2015</p> <p>Arabtec: 1st Week of May 2015</p> <p>Al Habtoor: 3rd Week of May 2015</p>

Under Process Objectives

Several objectives have also remained under process and are subjected to final discussion among the key stakeholders (see Table below). These particular targets will be discussed during a private meeting with the relevant government authorities in the UAE.

Under Process Targets (February 2015- April 2015)		Expected Deadline (Decision)
Testing Locations	<p>The UAE MOL, the Scientific Committee, and the Abu Dhabi Quality Conformity Council need to fully determine if testing/assessment will be conducted in labor source countries or in the United Arab Emirates.</p>	<p>May 2015</p>
Certification	<p>The National Qualification Authority and JAS 1 need to finalize</p>	<p>May 2015</p>

	the actual procedure of issuing certification to participating construction workers in the pilot project.	
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Projected Challenges

While the pilot project has continued to achieve its expected milestones, several projected challenges have also been identified: (1) recruitment schedules and data collection’s impact on project timing and delivery; (2) an employer’s objection to randomization factor procedure; and (3) quality control issues on testing.

First, recruitment schedules and expansive data collection process can pose some timing constraints on the pilot project. For example, the Scientific Committee members have previously agreed to test 2,000 construction workers as a sample size; however, with some recent amendments (see section on Scientific Committee’s Current Status on page 5), they have decided to increase the sample size up to 6,000 construction workers, including 4,000 non-pilot workers as main controlled groups. This particular amendment may delay our initially agreed timeline and deliverables due to both extensive data collection and interviews, which will be both conducted in India and the United Arab Emirates. This particular methodological approach, however, can further enrich the scientific study by carefully eliminating sample biases and increasing the robustness of sample.

Second, the Scientific Committee members have proposed to integrate a randomization factor to eliminate sampling biases and increase scientific rigor of the pilot project testing. In particular, the MOL has asked employers if they could interview 700 construction workers (instead of the initial 500 workers) and then the Scientific Committee would randomly select for the employers the final 500 pilot workers, who will be trained, tested, and certified under the pilot project. The challenge, however, is that employers will be required to interview an additional 200 employers, which ETA-ASCON has opposed due to some timing and cost-related constraints. Other employers including Ghantoot, Al Habtoor, Arabtec have agreed on this proposed amendment.

Third, quality control concerns have also been identified throughout the pilot project discussion. While the current testing materials have been primarily prepared by the training provider, JAS 1 and officially approved by the Quality Conformity Council (QCC), a leading testing agency’s additional review may further increase the quality of the testing materials both in regional and global occupational labor standards.

Although these particular challenges can pose some constraints on the Scientific Committee, the MOL and other participating employers will continue to discuss alternative options to remedy these aforementioned concerns.

Scheduled Action Plans

Given the aforementioned milestones and challenges, the following action plans will be executed in order to ensure effective project delivery. The UAE MOL will further share with Steering Committee members all survey methodologies and reporting for final review and approval. Their comments will not only be valuable, but also offer important insights on how to examine the real impact of integrated approach to training, testing and certification on workers' productivity, wage, and mobility in the long run.

Action Plans (February 2015- April 2015)	
UAE MOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinate with all stakeholders regarding their action plans, challenges, and timeline ▪ Update all stakeholders regarding the pilot project development and status ▪ Review survey methodologies and implementation strategies ▪ Finalize and submit official surveys and methodology to MOL prior to implementation ▪ Update MOL regarding recent amendments (final sampling figures, subcontracting with an Indian research company in Chennai) ▪ Review and accredit training/assessment centers in Sri Lanka and Pakistan based on existing UAE government and industry occupational standards ▪ Develop the certification process for UAE accredited training centers ▪ Finalize plans on implementing testing materials and procedures (i.e. assessors, certifiers) ▪ Develop Level 2 Testing Materials for future implementation ▪ Coordinate with employers and government authorities in reviewing and accrediting training/assessment centers in Pakistan and Sri Lanka ▪ Support QCC's technical implementation of testing materials, if conducted in India ▪ Select, interview and commit at least 500 construction workers for the pilot project ▪ Collaborate with employers on the randomization factor requirement
Scientific Committee	
National Qualification Authority	
Quality Conformity Council	
JAS 1	
Employers	



