BUREAU OF INTERNATION LABOR AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF WORKER EMPOWERMENT AND WORKERS' VOICE, EQUITY, GENDER, AND SUSTAINABILITY FROM FOUR EVALUATIONS OF OTLA AND OCFT PROJECTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS

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This report describes the thematic analysis of findings related to worker empowerment, workers' voice, equity, gender, and sustainability from the four evaluations of the ILAB-funded labor rights programs in Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, and Uganda. Fieldwork for these four evaluations was conducted from March - June 2023. Integra Government Services International LLC, in partnership with Dexis, conducted these four independent evaluations and prepared this thematic analysis report in collaboration with the project team and stakeholders, and prepared the four respective evaluation reports according to the terms specified in its contract with the United States Department of Labor. The evaluation team would like to express sincere thanks to all the parties involved for their support and valuable contributions.

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ACRONYMS

ACW	Acceptable Working Conditions
AHK	All Hands in Kenya
BWE	Better Work Ethiopia
BWH	Better Work Haiti
CAPSA	Capacity Strengthening of Governments to Address Child Labor and/or Forced Labor
CMEP	Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
EO	Executive Order
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILS	International Labor Standards
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
OCFT	Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
OTLA	Office of Trade and Labor Affairs
PF	Palma Futuro
PICC	Performance Improvement Consultative Committee
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
POA	Partners of the Americas
SCS	Social Compliance System
USDOL	U.S. Department of Labor

1. PROJECT CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION

The Office of Trade and Labor Affairs (OTLA) in the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) within the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), among other objectives, works to improve labor law enforcement to protect workers' rights and promote a fair global playing field for workers in the United States and around the world. The Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) works to combat child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking by supporting technical cooperation projects around the world to conduct international research, policy engagement, technical cooperation, and awareness-raising. Please see the ILAB website for more information regarding OTLA and OCFT's broader scope of their respective missions. In support of these efforts, OTLA and OCFT have funded and managed technical assistance projects in more than 70 countries since 1995.

ILAB has also invested in performance evaluations of the technical assistance projects it funds. ILAB now seeks to identify trends and patterns in the findings presented in the performance evaluations of five projects in six countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, and Uganda, which are designed to improve labor law enforcement and compliance. To that end, ILAB contracted Integra Government Services International LLC in September 2022 to conduct a thematic analysis of the four evaluations. The five projects included in this synthesis review are diverse in their strategies and implementing environments, but all aim to improve the capacity of governments, workers, and employers to enforce and improve labor protections to meet International Labor Standards (ILS) and Acceptable Conditions of Work (ACW) with a particular focus on agro-export and apparel supply chains.

The evaluations of the labor rights projects encompass the interim performance evaluations of four projects located in Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, and Uganda, and a final performance evaluation of one project located in Colombia and Ecuador. It is essential that all stakeholders fully understand the contextual dynamics, the prevailing risks (post-pandemic, environmental, and conflict), opportunities, programmatic priorities for the remaining period of performance, and implications for future labor rights programs. Project interventions in Kenya, Ethiopia or Uganda addressed African communities, at least in a geographic sense and more directly with Kenya Capacity Strengthening of Governments to Address Child Labor and/or Forced Labor's (CAPSA) engagement with the East Africa Community. Project interventions in Haiti included participants from Afro-descendent populations and indigenous and Afro-indigenous populations in Colombia and Ecuador. The evaluations did not specifically ask about the extent to which the project interventions intentionally addressed these communities, but rather was part of the rationale for selecting this portfolio of projects because they were operating in these communities and ILAB wanted to learn about what works and does not work in these targeted communities.

2. PURPOSE OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The overall research objective of the thematic analysis report is to generate information and high-level promising practices and lessons learned from four performance evaluations and to synthesize and share culturally responsible learnings around the following themes: racial and gender equity, discrimination, worker empowerment, worker voice, and sustainability. The five ILAB-funded projects include:

- Better Work Ethiopia (BWE) in Ethiopia implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Better Work Haiti (BWH) in Haiti implemented by the ILO
- All Hands in Kenya (AHK) in Kenya implemented by the ILO
- CAPSA in Kenya and Uganda implemented by the ILO
- Palma Futuro (PF) in Colombia and Ecuador implemented by the Partners of the Americas (POA)

Our thematic analysis is based on information found in four evaluation reports conducted by Integra and Dexis and monitoring and evaluation data for the five projects selected for this review. Further insights were generated in learning events held on October 31 and November 7, 2023 that included participation of ILAB staff and the grantees, respectively. We present culturally responsive learnings from four evaluations across five projects that are being implemented in six countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, and Uganda.

2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To support this objective, we developed a set of research questions to guide the thematic analysis organized around the following five key themes that align with ILAB's key areas for institutional learning (Table 1):

1. Project Characteristics
2. Worker Empowerment
3. Equity
4. Worker Voice Context
5. Sustainability

Table 1: Research Questions

RESEARCH THEME	*What are the emerging high level good practices/lessons learned from the four projects and implementation experiences that can be applied in current and future programming in countries with similar characteristics?*

Project Characteristics	● What are the characteristics of the projects that were evaluated?
	
	   o Project descriptions (including locations, funding size, period of performance, and key project objectives)
	
	   o Key targets: underserved groups, direct participants, indirect participants, target institutions, supply chain actors
	
	   o Target sectors (apparel, agro-export supply chains including tea, palm oil, textiles and sugarcane)
	
	   o Intervention model (social compliance and/or governance)
	
	   o How the different projects address issues of equity and non-discrimination

Worker Empowerment	● Which project interventions were most effective at empowering workers?
	
	   o Under what circumstances, including specific sectors or supply chains, and for whom were they effective or not effective?
	
	   o What interventions were not effective at empowering workers?
	
	   o How can approaches to address worker empowerment be improved in future ILAB projects, including monitoring and evaluation approaches?

Equity and Non-Discrimination	● To what extent are project interventions equitably reaching and benefitting underserved populations and contributing to reduction of discrimination or harassment in the workplace?
	
	   o What are considered best practices for designing and implementing project interventions to equitably reach and benefit underserved populations and contribute to reducing discrimination or harassment in the workplace, with particular attention to gender-based discrimination and harassment?
	
	   o What are key areas for improvement when designing and implementing project interventions to equitably reach and benefit underserved populations and contribute to reducing discrimination or harassment in the workplace, with particular attention to gender-based discrimination and harassment?
	
	   o What are the steps that ILAB and its Grantees should take (or continue to take) to ensure technical assistance reaches and benefits these populations or contributes to reducing discrimination or harassment in the workplace, with particular attention to gender-based discrimination and harassment?

Worker Voice Context	• To what extent are workers aware of and perceiving their rights and acting to advance their rights in the respective sector/supply chains in the context of the ILAB projects?
	
	   o What factors, structures, processes, mechanisms, or cultural norms have the most influence on workers' perceptions, voice, and action to advance their rights in the respective sector/supply chains?
	
	   o What factors, structures, processes, mechanisms, or cultural norms have the least influence on workers' perceptions, voice, and action to advance their rights in the respective sector/supply chains?
	
	   o How do ILAB projects enable these factors?
	
	   o What are areas for improvement for ILAB projects to enable workers' perceptions, voices, and action to advance their rights?

Sustainability	• To what extent is it likely that project interventions will produce sustainable changes toward improving compliance with ILS and ACW in the respective industry/supply chain?
	
	   o What are the key factors enabling the likelihood of project sustainability?
	
	   o What are the key factors hindering the likelihood of project sustainability?

2.2 METHODS AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

We synthesized results, conclusions, and recommendations reported in each of the four evaluation reports, as well as additional secondary data pulled from relevant program documents to inform this thematic analysis. Primary qualitative data were collected as part of the four evaluations. Specific interview questions were asked of the respective evaluation respondents to inform not only each evaluation's objectives, but also for this thematic analysis. The qualitative data collected from the four evaluations are used to inform this analysis and were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis techniques in NVIVO software. The primary quantitative data collected for the BWE, BWH and PF[1] evaluations via a survey were also analyzed using descriptive statistics and compared to inform this thematic analysis. This additional primary data collection and analysis enabled the evaluation teams to validate the qualitative findings and to better inform key areas of ILAB's institutional learning questions around promoting and addressing worker empowerment, equity, worker voice context, and sustainability of interventions to achieve equity outcomes.

2.2.1   LIMITATIONS

A few limitations should be considered when reviewing the results and conclusions of this thematic analysis.

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[1] Survey implementation was not feasible for the Kenya (AHK and CAPSA) evaluation due to context-specific challenges that would have raised the risk for potential harm to respondents. Therefore, survey data for this evaluation is not included, but this thematic analysis presents results from survey questions from the other three evaluations.

Subjectivity and bias: The evaluations were carried out by different teams in varying contexts, so there are inevitable differences in perspectives, limitations, and findings. Data collection conditions varied across sites, and PMP/CMEPs for the projects included in the thematic analysis review vary in quality, which can lead to different interpretations because evaluators make assumptions based on their own observations, experience, and available information—all of which are subject to the limitations common to qualitative data collection methods, including selection, recall, and respondent bias. To mitigate this bias, the evaluation teams triangulated findings from desk reviews, evaluation reports, primary qualitative and quantitative data collection, and selected key informant interviews. Additionally, selection bias may have influenced the data collected as the participants in each evaluation were purposively selected to participate in the evaluation based on their role or profile, as determined in collaboration between the respective evaluation teams and implementers.

Causal impacts cannot be determined: This analysis assesses variations of project effectiveness across groups of projects with different characteristics. It cannot make statements regarding any causal effect of project characteristics and observed outcomes or results. All program evaluations, however, were conducted using similar methodologies and were subject to quality control by the Integra team to ensure consistency with evaluation principles. This thematic analysis draws from the reports' descriptions of project design and implementation to draw comparisons and highlight which factors were important in determining outcomes.

Dataset comparability: Even though many of the projects have similar designs, they are subject to different internal and external contextual factors that affect outcomes, which makes simple comparisons risky. Likewise, a successful practice in one project may not lead to the same degree of success in the context of another project. Given these considerations and to avoid the risk of "comparing apples with oranges," this thematic analysis focuses on the respective qualitative analyses. To aid in aggregating and synthesizing findings, the evaluation teams highlight contextual and other factors that may affect the validity of promising practices and lessons learned in this report.

Evaluation specific limitations: This thematic analysis draws on data collected and findings generated across four evaluation reports of ILAB-funded projects. This thematic analysis is subject to any limitations described in each component of each evaluation. For example, international and national investigations into abuses of workers in the tea sector affected employer-worker relations in other sectors so the evaluation team was advised by representatives of workers' and employers' organizations not to conduct the worker and manager survey in Kenya for the AHK project, so this data is unavailable for use in direct comparisons for this thematic analysis. This and other evaluation specific limitations should be considered when reviewing the findings and conclusions presented.

3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS RESULTS

These promising practices, learnings, and conclusions represent our assessment of patterns and trends in projects' level of effectiveness and relevance in influencing worker empowerment, workers' voice, gender and equity considerations, and sustainability, as well as our qualitative analysis of evaluators' comments on project implementation.

3.1 PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

What are the characteristics of the projects that were evaluated?

In this section, we present key aspects of each of the five projects evaluated across multiple countries. Table 2 presents a description of the projects, including their name, implementer, location, funding amount, period of performance and key project objectives. In Table 3, we present a description of each project's key targets, sector of focus, and intervention model.

Table 2. Description of Evaluated Projects

Project Name	Implementers	Location	Funding Amount	Period of Performance	Key Project Objectives
PF	Partners of the Americas	Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru	$6.0 million (2019) with $1.3 million cost extension (2023)	January 2019 - July 2024	1) Strengthen the capacity of private sector partners in the Colombian and Ecuadorian palm oil sector to implement a robust and sustainable social compliance system (SCS). 2) Increase understanding, at regional and global levels, of promising practices in SCS in palm oil supply chains.
CAPSA	ILO	Kenya and Uganda	$5.25 million	December 2019- December 2024	1) Improved enforcement of the legal framework and/or policies pertaining to child labor and/or forced labor and ACW violation 2) Improved

					assistance services for victims of child labor and/or forced labor
					3) Strengthened partnerships to accelerate progress in addressing child labor and/or forced labor and ACW violations
AHK	ILO	Kenya	$3.0 million	December 2020 - December 2024	1) Increased government effectiveness in improving compliance with ILS and ACW
					2) Increased employers' actions to improve compliance with ILS and ACW
					3) Increased engagement of civil society, including workers' organizations, government, and employers, to improve compliance with ILS and ACW
BWH	ILO	Haiti	$7.92 million (2017)[2]	December 2018 - December 2022	1) Increasing labor law compliance through the provision of advisory services to Government of Haiti and existing and new garment factories
					2) Strengthening worker-management committees through specialized training
					3) Improving worker empowerment across

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[2] DOL has funded the BWH program since 2010 totaling $21,233,555. The referent evaluation focused on the funding period between 2018 and 2022; funds were committed in 2017.

					the sector through promoting the representation of women, attracting business investment, and facilitating active coordination of national stakeholders 4) Promoting more inclusive working conditions and workforce by extending dialogue with key Haitian government institutions.
Gender Component of BWE	ILO	Ethiopia	$1.5 million	November 2020 - December 2025	1) More women workers advance in their in their jobs with higher positions and/or salary 2) Workplaces provide a safer and less discriminatory environment for women 3) Women workers' representation is augmented on labor issues in the workplace

Table 3. Description of Projects' Key Targets, Target Sectors, and Intervention Model

Project Name	Key Target Groups	Target Sectors	Intervention Model Types of Interventions
PF	Palm oil extracting companies; smallholder palm growers	Agro-export (palm oil)	Social compliance model Adoption of Social Compliance Systems (SCSs) by firms and small-scale suppliers and farmers Capacity building and

			training
			Localization efforts to link private sector to community development needs and create alliances to help stakeholders
			Knowledge sharing through peer-to-peer learning and dissemination of communications products
CAPSA	Government of Kenya and Uganda agencies; National level Committees for relevant topics (child labor, counter-trafficking in persons, children's services); Workers' organizations; Employers' organizations	Multiple sectors with a focus on reducing child labor	Governance model Capacity building and training to improve government policies, laws, monitoring, and enforcement Compliance with ILS and ACW and improve assistance services for victims of child and/or forced labor Localization approaches to strengthening partnerships and raising awareness
AHK	Government of Kenya ministries; employers' organizations; and workers' organizations	Agro-export (tea) and garment and textile	Governance model Capacity building and support of government agencies for policy development, monitoring and enforcement Partner with employers and their associations to improve ILS and ACW compliance Tripartite engagement with local partners including government, employers, workers, and CSOs
BWH	Factory workers in garment and textile	Garment and textile	Social compliance model Capacity building and

	factories; Government of Haiti ministries; employers' and workers' organizations		support of government agencies for monitoring and enforcement Establish resolution mechanisms between workers and employers Raise awareness of worker safety and discriminatory practices in factories
BWE	Women factory workers in garment and textile factories	Garment and textile	Social compliance model Tripartite engagement of government, employers and workers Empower women and underserved through building skills and leadership training Raise awareness of worker safety and discriminatory practices in factories; prevent and mitigate gender-based violence

3.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING WORKERS' VOICE

To what extent are workers aware of their rights and acting to advance their rights in the respective sector/supply chains in the context of the ILAB projects?

There are a wide array of factors, structures, processes, mechanisms, and cultural norms that influence worker perceptions, voice, and action to advance their rights in the respective sectors and supply chains. Workers' voice is understood to mean the capacity to implement purposeful action and pursue goals, free from the threat of retribution or violence. The evaluation findings provided early indications of which factors are significant in strengthening workers' voices. The absence or presence of these factors, listed below, affect the degree to which workers believed they were empowered to influence labor issues in the workplace.

- Strong labor laws and regulations
- Established and trusted workplace dialogue and grievance mechanisms
- Private sector policies in work sites that respect ACW and ILS,
- Open attitudes of senior and middle management towards workers and respect for workers' rights and organizations
- Workers' representative groups effectively working on behalf of workers
- Activities to strengthen workers' knowledge, skills, and individual agency

- Cultural and social norms regarding gender, power, and hierarchy in the workplace

Several of these factors are dynamically interrelated, for example, more open attitudes by management can create a virtuous cycle with strengthening individual agency. The objectives in three of the five projects, AHK, BWE, BWH, emphasize the importance of workers' representation in discussing labor issues in the workplace, whereas in the PF activities, individual workers' voice was less prominent under the social compliance systems in the workplaces. The CAPSA activities focus on improving compliance, assistance services, and partnerships to support victims of child labor and/or forced labor. Targeted training and knowledge sharing varied in effectiveness across projects in promoting awareness of workers' rights and best labor practices at the workplace level. For example, including middle management in training proved successful in Haiti and should be replicated in other projects. All projects except CAPSA included supporting workers' organizations or social compliance systems that increased the understanding of workers' rights.

The evaluators surveyed workers and/or workers' representatives in BWE, BWH and PF to assess to what extent they were more aware of their rights as compared to the previous two or three years (i.e., prior to project implementation) as well as their perception of workplace conditions. **Workers, on average, agreed or strongly agreed that they were more aware of their rights compared to two to three years ago (an average rating of 3.29).**

Training targeted at workers to disseminate knowledge about best labor practices and their rights as workers were well received by workers and project stakeholders and reportedly led to self-reported increases of awareness of rights. Additionally, workers generally agreed (an average rating of 3.15) that they sensed changes in the workplace compared to two to three years prior that they were being treated more fairly. However, on average, workers slightly disagreed (an average rating of 2.74) that the provisions and services in their workplace had improved over the prior two to three years, suggesting more observable improvements are needed.

Figure 1. Workers' Perceptions of Workplace Improvements and Awareness of Their Rights Across Three Projects
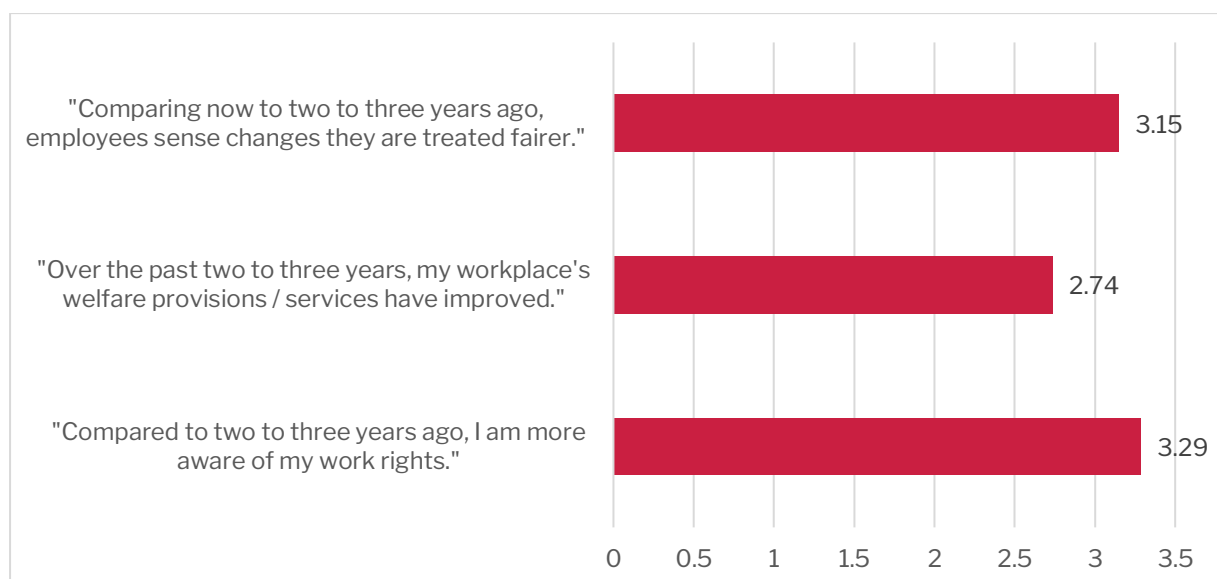
Each result includes responses from worker surveys implemented during the evaluation of PF (n=97), Better Work Haiti (n=100), and Better Work Ethiopia (n=53). The averages are weighted and demonstrate an aggregated average.

Scale: Strongly disagree=1; disagree=2; agree = 3; strongly agree = 4

Factors influencing workers' voices:

Findings from the evaluations do not reveal the extent to which training and capacity building support has led to strengthening workers' voices because there are limited opportunities for worker participants to provide direct feedback. Worker representatives in AHK, for example, were stymied in their ability to engage with workers in the tea sector while allegations of widespread abuse were being investigated. Workers interviewed in the BWH evaluation explained that even more training was needed to strengthen awareness among workers, as this was an effective approach to train those who were not previously aware of their rights. Workers said,

"Do more training on harassment, especially for workers, and on their right to work, because they are not fully aware of their rights."

- BWH Factory Worker

While training and knowledge sharing is an effective intervention to promote and increase awareness of workers' rights, it must be coupled with targeted action and engagement with those in power to promote, respect, realize, and enforce workers' rights. A workers' organization representative interviewed as part of the BWE evaluation also suggested,

"To solve rights related issues, the work needs to start from management. Middle management and executive supervisors follow the footsteps and actions of the senior managers. Thus, if the senior manager is changed, lower managers will also change because they lead by the senior management's example."

- Workers' Organization Representative, BWE

A key challenge that limited project effectiveness and reach to intended underserved populations is language barriers. In Ethiopia and Haiti, it was noted that language barriers limited underserved populations - i.e., factory workers - from fully engaging with project materials or in the workplace. For example, in Haiti, several stakeholders noted that project materials were made available in French, but not Haitian Creole, which limited access to those who did not understand French. In Ethiopia, factory workers raised concerns about their language skills and not being able to communicate with their supervisors or bosses. As explained by a factory worker interviewed as part of the BWE evaluation,

"We still need support to improve our language skills. We don't know English. I don't know how to communicate the challenges I encounter at my work to my English-speaking supervisors or communicate my immediate needs. Sometimes when we clash with our immediate

supervisors, our English-speaking supervisors yell at us and we get blamed because we can't explain our side. We are having challenges because we can't communicate our issues to our English-speaking bosses. So, it will be great if we get language training."

- Factory Worker, BWE

Strengthening the functioning of workers' organizations is considered an important channel to promote knowledge and awareness of workers' rights. The projects aimed to build their capacity and strengthen their functioning and representation capabilities. Workers from BWH reported, on average, high agreement that the established workers' organizations would likely be effective at improving knowledge around workers' rights, whereas workers from BWE indicated more mixed opinions, ranging between somewhat ineffective and somewhat effective. Overall, from the workers' survey, workers from BWE and BWH rated the groups (unions or employee associations) as "somewhat effective" (an average of 3.08) in improving workers' rights in the respective factories.

Key opportunities for ILAB to consider additional approaches to amplifying workers' voices:

- **Project interventions should directly engage with labor system actors who are in positions of power** (e.g., labor unions, employers, workplace leadership, among others) to lead behavior and culture change in the workplace, and to implement effective grievance mechanisms and to promote practices/rules that prohibit unacceptable conditions.
- **When socializing project activities with leadership and supervisors, grantees should stress the importance of two-way communication** to ensure that workers always have a mechanism to communicate effectively with management so they can better understand their rights and what is and is not acceptable in a workplace as per ILS.
- **Project materials should be translated into local languages, particularly the preferred language of target populations.** Additionally, if managers and workers speak different languages, all project materials and communications should be made available in the necessary language formats to be accessible for target audiences. This was validated during the learning events with ILAB staff, as translating materials to the preferred language of target populations is understood to be a standard practice of all ILAB-funded projects. For projects that engage with workers' organizations, they can address mandates that ensure translation services are available when needed for workers as part of their advocacy and representation roles.
- **Future activities would benefit from explicitly illustrating the model of behavior change underlying the intervention.** Most models of behavior change recognize the importance of knowledge, motivation, and skills (and frequently many other factors), and regardless of the specific model, sharing information alone is not sufficient to achieve behavior change. Several approaches to behavior change were evident but they were not explicitly stated as targets in the projects' strategies and designs. Under BWE, empowering women workers through leadership training and skills

development is an iterative process that very much depends upon the employers' commitments to change. The PF activities in Ecuador strongly motivated employers to integrate community development components. Under CAPSA, close coordination with national and local NGOs seemed to accelerate behavior change by increasing awareness of child labor. It is important that activities understand and address both worker and employer motivation in order to identify areas to leverage such motivations effectively to achieve behavior change in order to strengthen equitable workplaces. Integrating behavior change models and interventions can be promising approaches that ILAB should support;

- **Additional skills and leadership training may be needed to model desired behaviors by both workers and employers.** Such skills may include critical thinking, public speaking, conflict management, and keeping oneself safe from reprisals while undertaking advocacy, among others. ILAB and grantees should strengthen their use of behavior change models to improve the design of interventions to address the different components required to achieve desired behavior change in the workplace.

3.3 WORKER EMPOWERMENT

Which project interventions were most effective at empowering workers?

The five projects address worker empowerment through a variety of approaches that are aligned with the challenges workers face in different sectors. According to local partners and implementers, the more successful approaches include strengthening the capacities of workers' organizations, collaborating with community and women's organizations, and applying "listening-centered approaches" that utilize regular feedback from the workforce to understand their wants and needs, and to identify problems as soon as possible. Additionally, the gender-focused leadership training that is being implemented by BWE is also considered a successful approach. The four evaluation teams found that equity outcomes could not be measured at this stage of implementation because workplace mediation structures were not operational or at early stages of development.

The PF project is a multi-country project in Latin America designed to incentivize palm oil producers, extractors, small-scale suppliers and farmers to adopt SCSs that adhere to international standards of working conditions. By establishing and maintaining SCSs, employees and stakeholders in the supply chains benefit from the best practices and sharing of knowledge. Somewhat similarly, the CAPSA project incentivizes governments and partners to comply with international labor standards by addressing gaps in policy, legislation and enforcement that pertain to child labor and forced labor. These two approaches link the governments and employers' visible and enhanced compliance to the international benchmarks set by ILS and ACW with empowerment and protection of workers.

Three of the projects being implemented by ILO: BWE, BWH and AHK in Kenya prioritize strengthening the capacities of worker organizations with the ultimate

objective of strengthening worker empowerment, as defined by USDOL.[3] The technical approaches of these three projects share similarities but take into consideration local and external risks and opportunities. In general, these projects promote worker empowerment through these interventions:

- Utilizing listening-centered and multi-stakeholder dialogue approaches, such as employee exit interviews, jointly-conducted surveys with workers' representatives to mediate between employers and employers' organizations and workers and workers' organization to bridge and reconcile differences. Representing and addressing worker concerns through dialogue and listening-centered approaches that affirm the validity of employees' concerns and focus on building trust among the labor actors.
- Integrating the concerns of all labor actors, including private sector management and employers' associations to represent workers' rights and needs.
- Advocating for national policies that protect workers' rights and promoting the adherence to these national policies within the workplace to protect workers' rights.
- Ensuring that projects apply tripartite approaches to support effectiveness.
- Providing training and resources to governments for strengthening labor enforcement and compliance activities, improving the knowledge of workers' rights, and aligning with international labor standards.

A government representative interviewed for the BWE evaluation summarized,

"Additionally, workers unions often face opposition from management and government officials who may view them as a threat to their authority or profits. This can make it challenging for unions to effectively negotiate for better working conditions or secure legal protections for workers. Despite these challenges, the establishment of workers unions remains a critical tool for ensuring fair treatment and improving working conditions for all employees. By continuing to raise awareness and advocate for workers' rights, unions can help create a more equitable and just workplace for all."

- Government of Ethiopia Representative BWE

A factory worker in Haiti also acknowledged that the challenges workers' organizations face is the lack of respect from management and employers, suggesting for BWH to,

"Work with the unions so that the bosses can respect them."

- Factory Worker, BWH

In the apparel industry in Haiti, Ethiopia and Kenya, the effectiveness of workers' organizations is largely dependent upon respect and cooperation from employers and

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[3] The Department of Labor defines Empowerment and Representation as: Workers can form and join unions. Workers can engage in protected, concerted activity without fear of retaliation. Workers contribute to decisions about their work, how it is performed, and organizational direction (See referent document linked here).

key government representatives. Technical tripartite approaches to accelerating workers' empowerment are more effective when workers, employers and government partners share common understandings of workers' rights. In AHK, BWE and BWH, the government partners and employers often expressed different understandings of the roles and responsibilities for each of the key actors engaged in the workers' organizations in the textile and garment supply chains.

Stakeholders expressed their perceptions that government, employers and workers did not always share a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of representatives of workers' and the mandates of the workers' organizations. Some BWH stakeholders from government and employers' associations expressed uncertainty regarding the functions of workers' organizations and the Performance Improvement Consultative Committees (PICC), which is an enterprise level advisory committee comprised of an equal number of managers and workers.

In Ethiopia, diverse stakeholders in the apparel sector unions were closely aligned in their approaches to engaging with workers' organizations to promote the advancement of women and underserved populations into leadership roles. At an operational level, representatives of BWE-supported workers' committees said that it is important to provide time for workers to meet and a physical space for workers and organization staff to meet. To date, these workers' organizations are still negotiating with management to make this a priority and to allow workers the time to meet during paid hours - either during breaks or after work - with management's endorsement.

The rapid expansion of the palm oil industry in South America has drawn criticism for its unsustainable practices and impacts on local and indigenous communities, which in turn increases the need for effective social compliance practices to protect workers and reduce risks for vulnerable populations. The PF project in Colombia and Ecuador engages employers in the palm oil sector to implement robust and sustainable social compliance systems that raise awareness about child labor and forced labor practices and promote acceptable conditions of work. The PF activities indirectly contribute to fostering empowerment of workers by improving communication channels with workers and communities in the companies' supply chains. These activities did include workers of Afro-descendent and indigenous people in small rural communities and towns near to palm oil operations.

The CAPSA project in Kenya and Uganda does not have a sector-specific approach, rather the implementer engages umbrella organizations such as children's councils and children's caucuses to make local partners aware of issues related to child labor. Consistent tripartite engagement has been an overall strength of this project. The AHK project supports workers in the tea, textile and apparel industries by promoting the establishment of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) labor committees and social dialogue processes have been adopted across the sectors.

Factors influencing the effectiveness of how certain interventions address worker empowerment:

Explaining and socializing the mandates of workers' organizations with key government and private sector counterparts raises awareness of the roles and objectives of workers' organizations. In BWH, for example, the government and employers did not appear to be eager to engage with workers' organizations or unions. These partners were, however, supportive of the Performance Improvement

Consultative Committee (PICC), which is an enterprise level advisory committee comprised of an equal number of managers and workers. This approach to creating space for worker-manager dialogues was perceived positively by employers and government representatives.

Supporting workers' organizations requires adjustments in technical approaches when government and employers are unfamiliar with the roles, responsibilities, and rights of representatives of workers' organizations. It is important to allocate sufficient resources, time, and space for representatives to meet with workers on work sites before or after working hours because the workers often do not have access to adequate meeting spaces, as found in Ethiopia and Haiti.

Reporting and informal workplace feedback mechanisms were largely ineffective in preventing and mitigating discriminatory practices against marginalized groups and incidences of discrimination. The failure seems more related to the lack of any effective enforcement or trusted grievance mechanisms. Workers stated their reluctance to utilize mistrusted firm-level grievance mechanisms to address their claims in Kenya, Ethiopia and Haiti because they feared retaliation. The secondary reporting of widespread discrimination and workers' violations in the tea industry in Kenya suggests that managers and the private sector did not take preventive measures to address abuses in these sectors.

In the apparel industries in Ethiopia and the tea sector in Kenya, a fear of retaliation was reported by some stakeholders as an overriding concern of female workers, who either underreported or did not report incidences of workplace abuses. A middle management employer representative interviewed as part of the BWE evaluation explained,

> "Most workers are afraid to speak out about violations of their rights due to fear of retaliation from top management. They worry about losing their jobs or facing other forms of punishment if they speak out."

> - Employer Representative, BWE

Finally, across the four evaluations, there was evidence of **top-down sustainability planning that did not encourage local ownership or buy-in, which raises questions about the long-term potential of workers' organizations to strengthen worker empowerment**. In the AHK project, local partners were not involved in the design and approaches proposed in the implementer's sustainability plan; local partners described the sustainability plan as cumbersome and unrealistic.

Key opportunities for ILAB to strengthen worker empowerment in project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation:

- **Socializing the importance of workers' rights** and the benefits of engaging with workers' organizations should be socialized from top leadership to middle managers in human resources, accounting, legal and other administrative personnel who are responsible for adherence to corporate policies and labor regulations. Projects should incorporate these types of activities into their strategies.
- **Workers' empowerment is amplified through access to spaces for dialogue that include balanced representation from the private sector and workers' organizations.** The PICC committees in Haiti and OSH committees in Kenya

are regarded as potentially effective and efficient social dialogue platforms by private sector managers who participated in interviews conducted in Haiti and Kenya. ILAB can share best practices to encourage the selection of diverse worker representatives to these committees, which is important for ensuring that social dialogue processes are inclusive and deliver results that meet the needs of the full range of workers.

- **Social compliance systems approaches must have** because governments often have weak or non-functional enforcement mechanisms. This means implementers should focus on firm-level activities to underpin corporate compliance and reporting mechanisms that are trusted by workers. There are strong financial incentives for producers and suppliers to meet the global standards required by brands.

- **Throughout project implementation, ILAB and the grantee should establish pause and reflect sessions** to review indicators and adjust as needed, particularly in response to any project adaptations or external challenges that limit progress as originally designed. Stakeholders who participated in the ILAB learning events concurred that pause and reflect sessions are useful forums, which are described in detail in the Communications and Dissemination Plan prepared for ILAB.

- **Establish baseline understanding how feedback mechanisms in the workplace should function**, including how it can be accessed, procedures for following up and two-way communication about any complaints, the investigation and response process, how confidentiality is ensured, how data are monitored for trends and proactive intervention, and what actions have been taken to address grievances over what time period. This baseline is paramount to understanding the actual influence of ILAB-funded projects on strengthening grievance mechanisms, rather than relying solely on perceptions of usage. A representative from the Government of Ethiopia interviewed as part of the BWE evaluation also noted,

"While the project has made significant progress in addressing grievances and social issues, ongoing monitoring and evaluation can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that interventions are effective in achieving their intended outcomes."

- Government of Ethiopia Representative BWE

3.4 EQUITY, GENDER, AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

To what extent are project interventions equitably reaching and benefitting underserved populations and contributing to reduction of discrimination or harassment in the workplace?

For each evaluation, an equity and inclusion lens was applied to all evaluation questions and the evaluators assessed if and how each project was addressing equity and gender issues through mainstreaming or cross-cutting approaches. However, it is important to note that most of the five projects were not required to explicitly include gender and equity objectives in their design. BWE was the main exception, as it focused on improving opportunities for women to advance in the workplace and creating safer working environments for all workers, including women. The CAPSA

project in Kenya also included an objective to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, which is an important equity issue. Nonetheless, this exercise is intended to contribute to ILAB's learning agenda stemming from the new USG *Executive Order Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.[4]*

The evaluation team probed themes of racial and gender equity, governance, discrimination, capacity-building, and worker voice in apparel or agro-export supply chains, but there was no particular focus on African, Afro-descendant, indigenous or Afro-indigenous workers and communities. Other issues related to equity, in Kenya for example, include the use of contract or casual workers who do not receive benefits, which is higher among women than men.[5] Three projects, BWE, BWH, AHK, supported workers' rights perspectives in the apparel and/or tea industries that predominately employ women. In Haiti, many of the women workers live in geographically isolated areas and speak Creole as a primary language rather than French, which limits their opportunities to equally benefit from project activities, materials, or other interventions that were primarily delivered in French. PF activities in the palm sector in Ecuador and Colombia included some indigenous populations but the activities were not specifically designed to identify and potentially address any of these individual's or community's unique needs.

There is some evidence from the four evaluations of the five projects to suggest the project interventions are **reaching** underserved populations, including those that targeted training and capacity building efforts that directly engaged workers, or strengthening workers' organizations that served to convene with workers to hear, address, and advocate on behalf of their concerns. Other interventions directly address barriers that limited women's ability to participate in technical assistance activities. For example, certain interventions provide women with childcare or scheduled trainings during convenient times for women to be able to participate in the project activities. An implementing partner staff interviewed as part of the PF evaluation noted,

"In the case of the 'Palmas Arriba' women, technical assistance included having a 'nanny' to take care of the children. During field technical assistance, they were the main recipients of training, and the facilitator adapted to their schedules and needs."

- Implementing Partner Staff, PF

Although BWE targeted workers for trainings on sexual harassment and discrimination incidences in the workplace, it did not also follow up with middle-managers and leadership. An employer representative explained,

"Many factory owners and managers may not fully understand the importance of promoting gender equity in the workplace or may not

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[4] The development of this question was informed by the *Executive Order Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,* Executive Order No. 13985, Signed by U.S. President Joseph R. Biden, January 20, 2021. The USG has clarified its prioritization of gender equity most recently via Executive Orders 13985, 13988, and 14091.

[5] See ILO (2016) Non-standard Employment Around the World: Understanding Challenges, Shaping Prospects. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_534326.pdf

be aware of the specific challenges faced by women in the industry. Similarly, many workers may not be aware of their rights or may not feel empowered to speak out against discrimination or harassment."

- Employer Representative, BWE

Another employer representative interviewed as part of the BWE evaluation suggested,

"One approach could be to provide targeted training and awareness-raising activities for factory owners and managers, to help them better understand the importance of promoting gender equity and the specific challenges faced by women in the industry. This could include training on topics such as gender-sensitive management practices, preventing sexual harassment and violence, and promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes."

- Employer Representative, BWE

Factors influencing equity and gender results and outcomes:

Women and other underserved populations self-reported some benefits in observable reductions in discrimination and sexual harassment in BWE and BWH. Evaluators found that some women and underserved populations acknowledged they were more aware of their rights in the workplace. In BWE, women reported having greater access to professional development opportunities and promotion to supervisory positions. In BWH, middle management said they perceived fewer incidents of workplace discrimination and sexual harassment of workers, although there is no data to validate these claims. Workers said that fear of retaliation also could be a cause for a reduction in reported incidents of discrimination and sexual harassment.

BWE project design explicitly prioritizes advancing gender equity and women's economic empowerment in the Ethiopian apparel industry. Project activities reported results in addressing gender-based discrimination and violence, advocating for fair and equal treatment, and increasing access to skills training and professional development. BWE demonstrated results in promoting equal opportunities for women in the workplace and accelerating women's representation in leadership positions.

Gender and equity analyses can be used to assess, explore, and better understand key contextual issues, restrictive and enabling normative and structural barriers, and other important information that could be used to inform mainstreaming gender or equity in a project. For example, an implementing partner staff interviewed as part of the PF evaluation suggested,

"More analysis is needed on the topic of gender gaps in the palm industry; there is a division of labor based on gender."

- Implementing Partner staff, PF

Global best practices in addressing normative and structural barriers that limit women's and other marginalized groups' effective participation and benefit from activity interventions were not intentionally integrated into the project cycle. However, there were some instances in which these types of best practices were applied, such as scheduling training around women's household duties to accommodate their availability for participation. Other types of best practices would include engaging men to promote positive masculinities that empower women and reduce gender-based violence.

Three of the five projects did not have an intentional equity or gender strategy as part of its design and implementation although some of the other two projects' interventions did contribute to better gender and equity results. The AHK project received a low overall rating for gender equity in the absence of an in-depth gender and equity assessment and explicit approach to addressing acceptable conditions of work for women workers compared to men workers. An implementing partner representative interviewed as part of the PF evaluation explained that although gender was not considered in the project design, there were inherent gender issues with respect to the implementing environment that warranted attention,

"The gender issue was not contemplated in the project design. When you look at the [palm oil] sector, in most cases, there are some women in administrative positions while men are in the field. [On the farms] there is a precariousness of conditions for women, there are no bathrooms nearby, which creates conditions for harassment issues, among others."

- Implementing Partner Staff, PF

Key opportunities for ILAB to consider additional approaches and more intentional engagement of equity and gender in project activities:

- **ILAB can require that attention to gender and equity are mainstreamed into project designs during procurement processes** and utilize Requests for Information and other formal mechanisms to elicit feedback in the design stage. As each project is designed towards unique contextual and operating environments, as well as with their own objectives and outcomes, ILAB should consider requiring grantees to engage an equity or gender specialist to integrate mainstreamed attention to gender and equity issues in the design and implementation of specific interventions from an equity lens. This was validated during the second learning event, where ILAB staff described the need to embed considerations for gender and equity into the project design so from the beginning, grantees understand how they should address such issues, and it should not be considered an afterthought later in implementation.
- **By employing gender and equity analyses prior to project design, ILAB and grantees can better understand key gender and equity issues**, concerns, and areas for opportunity to inform project design. Integrating such analyses as part of project start-ups can inform the project's design, strategies, and targeting indicators in PMPs/CMEPs, and can be part of the post-award stakeholder validation phase.
- **For monitoring and evaluation efforts, ILAB can work with grantees to develop more relevant indicators in PMPs and CMEPs** to strengthen

measurement of equity outcomes and results. For all indicators, it is important to set realistic targets and report on milestones.

- **Based on the project's goals and planned outcomes to address gender and/or equity, indicators should be reported in the disaggregate and employ an intersectional approach.** To be able to capture differences between various types of target recipients or specific outcomes, indicators should collect key demographic data that allows for disaggregation by group and comparisons between groups. Indicators that measure individuals should collect and report out on key demographic data, such as gender, age, disability status, migrant status, rural-urban status, marital status, and socio-economic status, among others, as appropriate to the project design and theory of change.

- **ILAB can consider funding specific and separate research activities that examine key gender and equity gaps** in priority sectors or value chains in specific geographic areas and use the findings and recommendations from these activities to feed into future project design efforts.

- **Through interim and final evaluations, ILAB can continue to capture promising practices and lessons learned** with respect to advancing and strengthening gender and equity and disseminate good practices within ILAB and other funders and to current and future grantees implementing like projects.

3.5 SUSTAINABILITY

To what extent is it likely that project interventions will produce sustainable changes toward improving compliance with ILS and ACW in the respective industry/supply chain?

The evaluation teams ranked the likelihood of sustainability in the projects' performances, which highlighted the challenges and risks related to external factors common in all six countries: COVID-19, escalating energy costs, and disruptions in supply chains. BWE and BWH were affected by conflicts and violence, AHK's local partners were affected by investigations into abuses of workers in the tea sector, and PF's palm oil sector was hit with a phytosanitary disease. These contextual factors had an impact on the start-up and implementation of activities, which were delayed and hindered. Therefore, it is difficult to assess at this stage of the period of performance whether these projects will achieve their long-term outcomes and become sustainable.

Interventions targeted at capacity building efforts, particularly those to strengthen policy adherence, show progress toward sustained outcomes. The launch of functioning grievance mechanisms enables workers to realize their rights by reporting complaints or abuses, but they are only effective and sustainable to the extent that reports are taken seriously and that workers are comfortable using them. Additionally, it is noted that the sustainability of capacity building efforts can be undermined by shifting administrative interests or staff turnover, which is common in factory settings and, thus, of critical concern for the sustainability of project outcomes for those in factory settings. A factory worker interviewed for BWH evaluation explained that while trainings were useful,

"It's not enough because there are always new faces, so you always have to start over."

- Factory Worker, BWH

Examples from the five evaluated projects point to policy changes at both the government and workplace levels. For example, the CAPSA project worked with key counterparts to pass key national laws and local ordinances to strengthen child protection policies and guidelines and county-level bylaws. The AHK project worked with key partners in Kenya to adopt a minimum wage law, which enables workers to receive higher wages post-project implementation.

Securing committed partnerships that put forth both the will and funding to support project initiatives and outcomes is a key factor that can enable the sustainability of project outcomes. For example, the CAPSA project had committed government counterparts who expressed strong political will to address ACW, child labor, and forced labor issues. However, this political will did not translate into adequate funding commitments to sufficiently fund these activities, which may threaten the sustainability of the project's outcomes.

In the palm oil sector in Ecuador and Colombia, the implementer developed a strategic approach for improving the labor elements of a social compliance system by improving communication channels with workers and communities in the companies' supply chains, which likely contribute to making the SCS more sustainable.

The evaluation findings demonstrate how certain factors either enable or hinder the sustainability of project outcomes toward improving compliance with ILS and ACW. These factors are discussed here, with project examples, in addition to an overall discussion for how ILAB projects moving forward can strengthen the likelihood for sustainability for equity outcomes. There was not enough evidence, however, to suggest the likelihood for sustainability of any equity related outcomes at this stage.

Factors influencing sustainability of equity and gender outcomes:

- **Effective labor reforms, particularly those to strengthen policy adherence and raise worker awareness of their rights** hold some promise to sustain project outcomes as new and strengthened policies can continue regardless of project implementation status, staff turnover, or changing administrative interests.
- **Localization efforts to partner with community leaders, NGOs, CSOs and other donors** can strengthen or influence the sustainability of policy changes. Local partners involvement in supporting and monitoring compliance might ensure that such practices do not disappear. The localization approaches in PF encouraged community-development partnerships; this is a promising practice that could be scaled and replicated in the palm oil sector.
- **Private sector and government partners have incentives to comply with international ILS and ACW practices** because they increase access to global markets, help countries attain favorable trade agreements, and potentially increase both profits and tax revenue, which was evident in AHK, CAPSA, BWH and PF. These incentives seem likely to benefit workers, including women and underserved people but there is no direct measurement of this correlation.

- **Mutual understanding is needed between ILAB and partners regarding expectations for how and to what extent equity and gender should be addressed** in both project design and implementation. While attention to equity is implicit in programs addressing ACW and in sectors with high engagement of marginalized groups, several of the project staff and many of those interviewed across these evaluations explained that equity was not a project objective. Therefore, it is important to highlight the relationship and alignment between the ILS standard on non-discrimination and common understanding of "equity."

- **Several projects implemented activities at the workplace level to address, strengthen, and implement anti-discrimination and sexual harassment policies.** They may be sustained at the small-scale (i.e., within that workplace), but it is not clear that they can catalyze any larger-scale change. For example, BWE targeted strengthening grievance processes and addressing anti-discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. However, as described by a Government of Ethiopia Representative interviewed,

"By working with factory owners, managers, and workers, BWE can help to raise awareness about workers' rights and responsibilities and provide training and support to ensure that these rights are respected and upheld. BWE can also play a key role in advocating for policies, systems and practices that promote equity and reduce discrimination in the workplace. This could include strengthening current working relationships with government agencies like us and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement policies and programs that address discrimination and promote equity in the workplace, in this case in the factories. It's difficult to talk about sustainability at this time because the interventions are very limited in reach and a long-term follow-up on results is required."

- Government of Ethiopia Representative, BWE

Key opportunities for ILAB and grantees to strengthen the potential for project outcomes to sustainably address equity issues for both existing and new projects:

- **ILAB can share its expectations for addressing equity and present examples of best practices in project design, implementation, and reporting.** Grantees would benefit from better understanding the broader goal for integrating and addressing equity, and ILAB can provide grantees with this understanding and incentive to strengthen their integration of equity in project design and implementation.

- **ILAB should convene grantees to explain their expectations for addressing equity and provide background information based on multiple Executive Orders (EO)** and Presidential Memorandums issued by the Biden Administration to advance racial equity and support underserved communities through the federal government. Such EOs and Presidential Memorandums include the following:

- o <u>E.O. 13985</u> – Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
- o <u>E.O. 14020</u> – Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council
- o <u>E.O. 14025</u> – Worker Organizing and Empowerment
- o <u>E.O. 14035</u> – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce
- o <u>E.O. 14091</u> – EO on Further Advancing Racial Equity and Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
- o <u>Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) Persons Around the World</u>

- **In future procurements, ILAB should make explicit its expectations for addressing equity in project design and implementation.** Engaging labor and equity specialists to draft language to clearly articulate these expectations and review applications against these expectations should be considered.

- **Partners implementing activities should integrate an intentional equity and gender lens** into the project design and share evidence-based results to generate more evidence on the potential for sustainable outcomes tied to strengthening equity.

- **Equity considerations must be embedded into project monitoring and reporting mechanisms,** such as the PMP/CMEP and Technical Progress Reports. Such considerations, at the minimum, include disaggregating relevant existing indicators by sex or other key variables of interest and designing indicators specific to measuring equity outcomes, as determined during the project design phase. Integrating equity-specific indicators emphasizes the importance of such activities to be implemented and measured against, but also enables evaluators to assess a project's progress toward meeting equity expectations.

- **Government monitoring and enforcement of ILS and ACW is underfunded in all six countries,** but ILAB-funded technical support for capacity building and virtual training has improved adherence to international labor standards. Given the scant resources and high turnover of public employees, it is important to record and archive virtual trainings and corresponding iterative curriculum and to document lessons learned and promising practices to increase the likelihood of sustainable capacity building.

4. CONCLUSION

Several promising and effective practices were identified across the five activities to promote equity, gender, and anti-discrimination for workers across various sectors and countries. These practices included targeted capacity building efforts to strengthen compliance with workers' rights and policy, training to promote awareness of and adherence to workers' rights with both workers and upper management and leadership, integrating interventions that address prevalent discriminatory social norms and other barriers that limit women's and other marginalized groups' ability to benefit from their participation in project interventions, and strengthening workers' organizations to advocate for workers' concerns and rights while engaging with the private sector and government representatives.

The evaluations found areas for improvement in existing and future projects to better address equity and gender. Overall, PMPs and CMEPs currently lack the indicators and/or the level of granularity needed to assess the variability of change or impact by subsets of participants in many cases. Monitoring and evaluation efforts should be strengthened to better capture relevant indicators measuring intended equity outcomes and to report appropriately disaggregated data. In addition, ILAB should increase the intentionality of addressing equity goals (through clear language in requests for proposals, funding opportunity announcements, etc.). Addressing equity and gender norms requires an intentional focus on both systems and behavior change. While many activities currently focus on systems changes, they rarely assess the efficacy of the selected entry points and how successful approaches gained acceptance among stakeholders. There is less clarity in the selection of behavior change approaches. One key gap is the lack of a framework for the identification of entry and leverage points to shift normative behaviors in employer settings. Using such a framework will assist partners to ensure they have addressed all factors that support behavior change and not just some of them, which should increase the effectiveness of ILAB-supported interventions. Without a framework, partners (including industry and government stakeholders) also cannot clearly assess the progress and shifts over time.

Gender and equity analyses can be conducted prior to designing projects to better understand contextual issues and normative and structural barriers limiting women's or other marginalized groups' participation, and recommendations can inform project design. ILAB and grantees should consider engaging equity and gender specialists to inform the design of projects and project interventions. Finally, ILAB should make explicit their expectations for addressing gender and equity in project design and implementation to ensure expectations are mutually understood and that grantees can be specific in their interventions to address such expectations.

4.1 INSIGHTS FROM ILAB LEARNING EVENTS

The evaluation team facilitated two learning events to present this thematic analysis of worker empowerment and voice, gender, equity, and sustainability issues drawn from a synthesis of the four evaluation reports. The two learning events were held remotely on October 31, 2023, and November 7, 2023. The first learning event was conducted as a pause and reflect session for ILAB staff and the four project teams. The format included a brief overview of the methodology, presentation of findings and interactive discussions of the main themes. The second learning event was designed to encourage interactive discussions among ILAB and USDOL staff around

these themes and open a discussion for how to operationalize key areas of opportunity in future programming. The following takeaways were shared in the breakout discussion groups consolidated into three themes:

Theme 1: Worker Empowerment and Worker Voice

- Strengthening the capacity of workers' organizations is an important first step in long-term goals of improving workers' rights and empowerment;
- Utilizing tripartite approaches can be effective in socializing the importance of feedback mechanisms to resolve workers' grievances;
- Integrating behavior change models and interventions can be promising approaches that ILAB should support as they both give information and signal needed and important practices to the targeted population; and,
- Amplifying workers' voices is an important function of workers' organizations but sometimes the roles, responsibilities, and rights of the organizations are misunderstood by employers and government representatives.

Theme 2: Gender and Equity

- Understanding the principles of "do no harm" is important when mainstreaming gender-sensitive approaches;
- Identifying and supporting male champions is a recommended approach to implementing gender-sensitive programming;
- Employing an intersectional lens during program design and implementation is important as issues of discrimination and inequity can emerge between and among different social groups and identifiers, including but not limited to caste, ethnicities, age, ability status, and geographic isolation;
- Encouraging grantees to engage with gender and equity specialists to assist in designing programs with attention to these issues could be a best practice for ILAB to support mainstreaming gender and social inclusion into program design;
- ILAB can consider continuing to support grantees in implementing a gender and social inclusion analysis at the onset of each project by providing materials and training to assist grantees in implementing this analysis and using the results to inform program design; and,
- Conducting gender and social inclusion baseline assessments is a recommended practice prior to program design and should be coordinated with local partners and engage those with this expertise to embed into program design.

Theme 3: Sustainability

- Using local grants or subawards can build capacity of local partners with an emphasis on risk management and potentially leveraging matching donor funds;
- Extending the period of performance to longer than four years may be necessary for achieving targets for projects similar to these evaluated;
- Social dialogues and round-table discussions should be held frequently to update sustainability plans and assess external risks;
- Developing toolkits of best practices, templates, strategies and implementation approaches can be disseminated amongst partners to facilitate shared learning; and,

- Building trust with government partners is important so projects can support the reallocation of funds and scaling good practices. Participants noted that engaging government partners at all levels should be a priority, especially engaging those that are responsible for monitoring and compliance with labor standards. For example, under BWH's MAST activity, it is important to understand the dynamics driving high turnover of government employees so that activities can be designed with an awareness of these challenges.