



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND EXPERIENCES: LESSONS LEARNT FROM ESCO



Knowledge Management - Labour Migration Project - Phase 111

August 2016

Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DS	Divisional Secretariat
DO -FE	Development Officer –Foreign Employment (under MFE, attached to the Divisional Secretariats - responsible for labour migration)
ESCO	Eastern Self Reliant Community Awakening Organisation
FBR	Family Background Report
GN	Grama Niladhari (Village head, administrator)
GND	Grama Niladhari Division (lowest administrative structure; village)
LMPSL	Labour Migration Project Sri Lanka
MFE	Ministry of Foreign Employment
MIC	Migration Information Centre
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SLBFE	Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment
ToT	Training of Trainers

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1. Introduction

Eastern Self Reliant Community Awakening Organisation (henceforth referred to as “ESCO”) established in 1999 is based in Batticaloa. ESCO makes a tangible contribution towards child and young adolescent development in the Eastern Province within a framework of social protection. It has implemented many projects in order to uplift the standard of living of the community.

ESCO has been in partnership with SDC since 2014 and is currently implementing SDC’s safe labour migration project with a view to reducing the costs of labour migration. ESCO, through this project predominantly works in the areas of safe labour migration information, financial literacy, psycho social support and grievance/complaints handling.

This report is based on the lessons learnt and experiences gained through the field visit made to ESCO on 11.07.2016 and 12.07.2016.

2. District Information

Batticaloa District consists of 14 Divisional Secretariats. During 2014, the Safe Labour Migration project was implemented in 4 DS Divisions. In 2015, the project was expanded to 2 more DS divisions and was carried out in 6 DS Divisions. In 2016, two more new DS divisions were added and it is presently being implemented in 8 DS Divisions.¹

3. Disseminating information - Implementation strategy

ESCO disseminates information in relation to safe labour migration through following mechanisms.

(a.) Migration Information Centre

ESCO’s migration information Centre is equipped with manuals, books, leaflets in relation to safe labour migration. The trained (General SLM Information, Paralegal and Psychosocial) staff

¹ From March 2014 – February 2016, the safe labour migration project was implemented in Koralaipattu South, Koralaipattu Central, Koralaipattu West, Eravur Pattu, Manmunai West, Koralaipattu North (6 DS Divisions/30 GN Divisions). In addition to the above, from March 2016 –February 2017, the project commenced in another 2 new DS divisions –Koralaipattu and Manmunai North.

with required computer equipment and the enabling office facilities creates an atmosphere for clients to have face to face discussions and to seek advice and support through the MIC.

(b.) Trainers

ESCO provides training on safe labour migration to the following officers.

- Government Officials - DO-FEs, Grama Niladharis, Child rights Promotion Officers, DO-Economic Development (Working GNs), Women Development Officers, Counseling Assistants, Samurthy Officers
- School teachers / principals, Pre-school teachers, Public health Mid Wife (PHM), Psychiatric Social Workers (PSW)
- Members of the mediation board operating at the village level - Members of the mediation boards possess sufficient knowledge on migration and are able to mediate more effectively due to the training provided.
- Mowlavies and Mosque Society members - Safe labour migration sensitization programme is conducted to this community.
- Community Group leaders – such as members from RDS, WRDS, Youth clubs, Fisherman Society, Farmer Organisation, Village level Child development Committee, Civil Protection Group,

By involving different stakeholders - Government officials, school teachers, principals and Mowlavies/mosque society members, health officials and community group leaders, the sustainability can be assured even beyond the project period.

(c.) Community level meetings

- Migrant (Small) Group Meetings – Special meetings are conducted by ESCO with left behind and returnees whilst allowing the returnees to share their experiences. Furthermore, information on financial literacy are provided during these meetings.
- Community awareness Meetings – When Community based organisations (CBOs) hold meetings certain amount of time is allocated during such meetings for ESCO staff to provide safe labour migration information to the members of the community.

(d.) Public Forums

ESCO raises awareness at the community level by conducting Street dramas, distributing leaflets/ handouts and through public campaigns conducted at local markets, bus stands and during certain public functions.

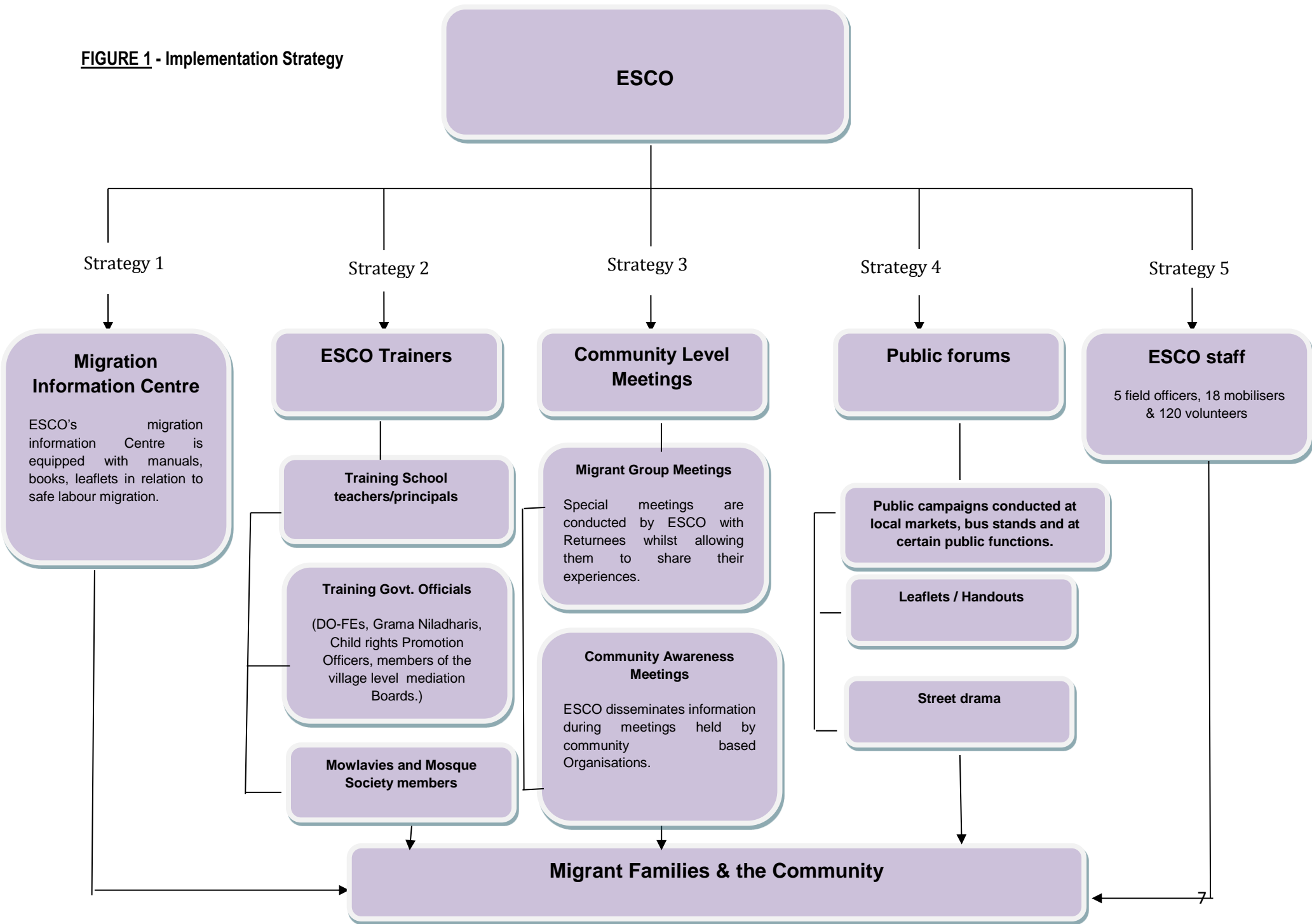
(e.) Trained staff

ESCO's staff comprises of 5 field officers, 18 mobilisers & 120 volunteers. The said staff as well as the trained volunteers are actively engaged in providing safe labour migration information at the grass root level.

Home visits are made by ESCO staff when required. ESCO further holds small meetings with migrant families at least once in every 2 months. Special meetings and discussions are held with women who applied for FBR. Information is further provided for the FBR rejected females as they are vulnerable & likely to migrate through illegal channels.

ESCO emphasised the importance of safe migration information reaching the vulnerable individuals such as female headed families, families with low income and families with two or more children. Such groups are likely to be exploited by the Middle man sub-agents. Hence, ESCO officers provide safe labour migration information and skills development facilities to improve the standard of their lives

FIGURE 1 - Implementation Strategy



4. Experiences with regard to Development Officers –Foreign Employment (DO-FE)

It is reported that 3 Development officers (DO-FEs) have been appointed per division to all 8 Divisions that ESCO implements the safe labour migration project

Experiences at the grassroots level indicate that DO-FEs have a limited focus and often confine their role to issuing FBRs, leaving little time to address complaints, requests for information or other concerns of the migrant workers and their families. ESCO further reports that once the FBR has been issued, no follow up action is generally made by the DO-FEs to determine whether the suggested caregiver actually provides for the children left behind.

5. Experiences with regard to Family Background Report (FBR)

DO-FEs are mainly fresh graduates, appointed through graduate schemes. ESCO reports that DO-FEs are reluctant to make decisions solely by themselves with regard to FBR. Reportedly, "Case conference approach" is adopted as a tool for collective decision making in Batticaloa district. DO-FEs along with the Child Protection Officers, Samurdhi Officers, Grama Niladharis get together and decide during a meeting whether the FBR should be issued to the individual concerned. This procedure is followed with regard to all applications made for FBR. It is further reported that this mechanism is also followed to avoid unnecessary threats posed to the DO-FEs from the sub-agents.

When the DO-FE approves/rejects the FBR he/she has to send a SMS to SLBFE stating the decision as per a circular issued by the MFE². However, it is reported that even if a DO-FE in the division sends a SMS to SLBFE rejecting a FBR, there have been instances where the rejected migrant worker has been able to migrate through the FBR approval of another DO-FE in another division. ESCO emphasizes the importance of having a proper mechanism set up by the SLBFE to monitor these irregularities.

² MFE/RAD/10/13 – Ministerial Circular 2015/1 – issued in June, 2015

6. Grievance Handling

ESCO has provided sufficient training on grievance handling to paralegals (ESCO Staff, volunteers) as well as selected Government Officials. Since Government officers are provided training, they are in a better position to provide basic services to the community even beyond the project period without the assistance and intervention of ESCO.

Furthermore, as members of the mediation boards at the village level are trained, they possess sufficient knowledge on migration and are able to mediate more effectively.

The complaints/grievances/information received through the aforesaid channels are processed/analyzed by ESCO. ESCO maintains records of all the complaints received through “complaint receiving forms”.

DO-FEs and Divisional secretaries also refer cases to ESCO. ESCO through its “problem analysis” mechanism attempts to solve the issue prior to making efforts to lodge a formal complaint at the SLBFE. Complex cases such as non-payment of wages, lack of communication from the migrant worker, issues involving recruitment agents are referred to SLBFE. Consular Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) handles issues involving deaths and repatriation of migrant workers.

ESCO further refers matters to the Legal aid commission in Batticaloa to obtain advice in certain cases.

District and divisional level paralegal follow up meetings hosted by ESCO creates a platform to learn and share experiences with regard to the issues encountered/complaints lodged by the migrant workers. These meetings are attended not only by ESCO staff, but also by Government Officials.

It has been reported that the SLBFE-Batticaloa has stopped receiving complaints³ from migrant workers and their families. Merely the complaint form is issued to the migrant worker requesting him/her to lodge the complaint at SLBFE-Colombo. The migrant worker often seeks advice and assistance from ESCO to lodge the complaint. Furthermore, prior to the inquiry at SLBFE, ESCO prepares the migrant worker for the inquiry.

³ Situation as at August 2016

7. Psycho-Social Support

3 senior field officers of ESCO have been trained as psycho-social counsellors training to deal with basic psycho social issues experienced by migrant workers and their families.

For each division one psycho social worker and a psychiatrist have been appointed by the Government to provide support to the migrant families requiring Psycho social assistance. ESCO makes referrals to these officers when required.

Following tools/programmes have been introduced by ESCO with a view to gathering information involving migrants and identifying/dealing with those requiring psycho-social assistance.

- “Tea Cup” Programme/Meetings - Migrant workers or their families gather in small groups at a residence during tea time to discuss issues involving Migrant workers and their families.
- “DEAL” Programme – Scenario specific therapy for the wellbeing and improvement of mental health of migrant families – “I-DEAL Programme” -for children, “BIG-DEAL Programme” - for youth, “ PARENTS-DEAL Programme” - for elders. These psycho-social activities enable to identify those requiring psycho-social assistance.

Furthermore, cases requiring psycho social support are also referred to ESCO by teachers. 5-10 minutes at school staff meetings are generally allocated to discuss about identified children of migrant workers who are experiencing problems, not attending school, or have lost focus on education etc. The identified children/families are subsequently referred to ESCO for Psycho social assistance.

8. Return & Re-integration

ESCO provides return and re-integration assistance through various mechanisms.

- ESCO Staff is trained on financial literacy to provide general advice/raise common awareness relating to remittances management to the migrant workers.
- Entrepreneurship training is conducted for returnees and family members of in-service migrant workers.
- ESCO links and refers identified families and returnees for NVQ Skill development training courses.
- ESCO further facilitates career guidance and vocational training programmes for the youth.

9. Unique experiences & Strategies

ESCO has developed its own unique implementation strategies. Disseminating information through Government Officials, teachers/principals, Mowlavies/ Mosque Society members, members of the mediation boards operating at the village level, can be viewed as a sustainable mechanism for disseminating information to the migrants as well as the members of the community.

ESCO identifies vulnerable families as well as FBR rejected females and provides safe labour migration information as they are likely to migrate through illegal channels.

ESCO's psycho social programmes (Eg: "Deal Programme") designed for identifying those requiring psycho social assistance as well as referrals made by school teachers are amongst the unique implementation strategies of ESCO pertaining to the psycho-social component.

10. Current advocacy issues

Following advocacy issues have been raised by ESCO.

(1.) The migrant worker is required to travel to SLBFE -Colombo for his/her inquiry on a number of occasions. Having to travel to Colombo from East on numerous occasions bearing their own travel expenses is challenging for the migrant worker. Furthermore, absence of recruitment agents during the inquiry prolongs inquiries. It is further reported that adequate interpretation is not being provided during the inquiry and that interpretation is more often provided by the recruitment agents themselves who are party to the inquiry.

(2.) SLBFE Batticaloa has stopped receiving complaints from the migrant workers. Merely the complaint form is provided by the decentralised SLBFE office in Batticaloa and consequently, the migrant worker often seeks the assistance of ESCO to lodge his/her complaint at the SLBFE-Colombo.