



Evaluation Summary



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Building National Floors of Social Protection in Southern Africa - Independent Final Evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: *Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia*

Final Evaluation: *March 2017*

Evaluation Mode: *Independent*

Administrative Office: *CO Lusaka*

Technical Office: *Social Protection*

Evaluation Manager: *Darryl Crossman*

Evaluation Consultant(s): *Nicholas Freeland*

Project Code: *RAF/13/04/IRL*

Donor(s) & Budget: *USD 1,427,564*

Keywords: *Social policy, social protection and social security*

Background & Context

The project 'Building National Floors of Social Protection in Southern Africa' was designed to draw on international and regional expertise to provide technical support and lessons from the region in implementing basic social protection guarantees to Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. Associated with a regional peer learning process, this was intended to comprise practical assistance with specific economic feasibility studies, legal expertise, support to national dialogue processes and advice on the governance and administrative aspects of implementing national social protection floors. It was also to involve assistance with the design and development of integrated social

protection policies, strategies and implementation plans reflecting the principles of ILO Recommendation 202 (2012) on National Floors of Social Protection, as a contribution and in alignment with ongoing support by the ILO and all development partners.

The Project was designed to ensure that more people have access to a nationally defined set of gender- and HIV/AIDS-sensitive social protection guarantees within a more efficient and coherent national social security system. The Project objective is pursued through three main outcomes:

Outcome 1: Policies and innovative strategies for the implementation of a Social Protection Floor tailored to national circumstances are developed in the context of evidence based national dialogue in Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi;

Outcome 2: Improved legal, administrative and governance frameworks for the extension of social protection (including budget planning and national monitoring systems) are designed in line with international social security standards;

Outcome 3: Improved knowledge base and monitoring capacity on the implementation of Social Protection Floors in the three countries.

Present Situation of the Project

This three-year initiative commenced in January 2014 and ended in February 2017 after a short extension from the original end-date of December 2016. It was funded

by the Government of Ireland, through Irish Aid, with an overall budget of EUR1.2 million (equivalent to USD1,427,564 at prevailing exchange rates).

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The independent end-term evaluation of the project is undertaken in accordance with the ILO Evaluation Policy adopted by the Governing Body in November 2005, is to ascertain the extent to which project outcomes have been attained, to identify lessons learnt within the implementation period and to discuss recommendations for similar future interventions. This has particular relevance in this case, because a successor phase to the project is currently being formulated; and the findings from the end-term evaluation have the potential to inform the design of the new project.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation was carried out, by Nicholas Freeland, as per the schedule through a desk review and field visits to the implementing countries. The initial desk work included document reviews and remote discussions with key stakeholders such the ILO management and staff, partner Government ministries and other ILO constituents, UN Agencies, representatives of Irish Aid, other relevant bilateral donors, implementing partners, civil society and other key stakeholders, based on the data collection instrument of key evaluation questions.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The evaluation finds that the project was relevant to the strategic objectives of the governments of the three countries, to the approaches adopted at regional level by both SADC and the African Union, to the ambitions of the ILO in encouraging countries to work towards the establishment of social protection floors, to the orientation of other development partners, and – in the main – to Irish Aid policy, although it is worth mentioning that the scope of social protection encompassed by the project is considerably broader than the definition

included in Irish Aid's forthcoming Social Protection Strategy.

The validity of the design of the project was endorsed by the mid-term evaluation, and it was highlighted that there were initial misgivings by some of the national Irish Aid offices about the limited degree of consultation prior to the implementation of the regional project, and a consequent feeling that outcomes could have been better aligned to national interventions. But this lesson appears to have been learnt and better consultation occurred during the design of the next phase of the project. Gender and HIV/AIDS issues were properly addressed in the project design (and in subsequent interventions); and there was good consultation with tripartite constituents (governments, employers and worker representatives) both before and during the project.

In terms of effectiveness, the project has been remarkably successful in meeting its expected outputs and outcomes. It fully achieved all of the outputs under its first two outcomes. Under the third outcome, oriented around regional knowledge sharing, there was one output that was not met, and three that were only partially met. But, in reality, it had been agreed after the mid-term evaluation that these were either overly ambitious or were inappropriate. Of the regional outcomes, by far the most significant output was the suite of regional training modules, and these have duly been completed, albeit late in the life of the project. Overall the project team are to be congratulated on delivering a highly effective intervention. All the stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation, without exception, were extremely positive about the reactivity of the project staff and the quality of their technical inputs. Particularly appreciated were the responsiveness, the technical competence, the broad range of expertise, and the fact that the staff worked directly with counterpart staff, thus raising their capacity at the same time as delivering high-quality inputs.

The efficiency of resource use was high. Despite comparatively limited resources, the project has identified and nimbly exploited a number of strategic opportunities which have allowed it to have an impact greater than its scale would normally warrant. By involving itself at policy level, it has been able to influence senior officials in key government positions, at

the same time as encouraging commitment from development partners and mobilising support from other stakeholders such as civil society, the media, academia and parliamentarians. The project was also very judicious in choosing to coordinate high-visibility events, such as the social protection weeks in Mozambique and Zambia. To have genuinely moved the debate towards a greater acceptance of social protection floors in all of the three countries where it operated, and in the space of only three years, is a significant achievement for a project with just a handful of staff and a financial envelope of below USD1.5 million. Not all teams would have been able to emulate the impacts that this one achieved with comparatively scant resources. That they did is a reflection of their ability to identify potentially influential openings, to encourage effective partnerships and to leverage complementary resources to augment their own.

The measure of sustainability of the project at national level should be judged by the extent to which the essential components of a social protection floor are reflected in national strategies, policies and legislation. The project has successfully influenced the particular stage at which each country finds itself in the broad direction of a social protection floor: the review process of the Malawi National Social Support Programme (MNSSP) (including a series of thirteen stakeholder workshops); the similar evaluation of the National Basic Social Protection Strategy (ENSSB) and design of the new ENSSB 2019-2024 in Mozambique; and the comprehensive mapping, modelling and analysis that underpinned the development of the integrated framework for non-contributory social protection programmes in Zambia. At regional level, particularly in the important area of the training modules, there is still a need to ensure sustainability. The project, even while the modules have been under preparation, has already begun the process of ensuring this. The design process has been very inclusive of potential partners who have the ability to take the modules forward independently of project support. And, as well as being innovative in their transformational approach, the training modules are also innovative in that the project wants to institutionalize them with other partners, to ensure their sustainability beyond the life even of the next phase of the project.

In terms of impact, the project can claim an impressive record in opening up the debates around social protection to a more integrated, more rights-based and more universal, approach, that is fully consistent with ILO's values and vision. The gradual establishment of social protection floors in the three countries is likely to bear fruit over the longer term in reducing poverty, building resilience and improving the quality of employment.

These are all important national outcomes, resulting at least partly from the activities of the project. They reflect the fact that ILO broadens the space for social protection debate, bringing in different players apart from ministries of social welfare, and adding a dimension on contributory social protection, in the form of maternity benefits, pension reform, health protection, financing and systemic issues. The project has significantly supported evidence-based national debate through the many studies it has undertaken on the extension of social protection coverage, particularly to the informal economy.

It is premature to assess the project's impacts at regional level empirically, but the indications are positive. It concentrated its regional focus on the development of the suite of social protection training modules. These have been piloted, but not yet rigorously tested in the field, still less institutionalised within partner organisations as is the intention. But if the next phase of the project can achieve this, then the regional component too will be adjudged a success.

Recommendations

The project should continue its excellent work at country level, prioritising the same sort of activities as in the current phase, but equally maintaining the flexibility to enable it to be opportunistic if circumstances change. At the same time, it should redouble its efforts at regional level, reflecting the additional resources available. Opportunities for expanded work at this level include:

- 1) Additional technical support by the CTA, and cross-country missions by other project staff in their respective areas of expertise.
- 2) The rolling out of the regional training modules, initially to the project countries but possibly then

supporting wider dissemination to eastern and southern Africa through SADC and the African Union.

3) Thematic cross-country workshops or webinars, perhaps linked with the training modules, which identify topics of particular interest to a specific country, and then bring regional experts with experience in the topic to share experiences (e.g. informal sector coverage, maternity benefit, child support grants)

4) Focussed study tours to particular countries of interest, ensuring that the right individuals participate, that the objectives are clearly-defined, that the itinerary is well-planned, and that open exchange is encouraged.

5) Regional (and broader South-South) networking, communication and exchange, through a regular brief newsletter, possibly linked with SASPEN, where the communications officer extracts the necessary highlights from technical reports, thereby reducing the burden on the project's frontline technical staff.

6) Internal project retreats to brainstorm, share experience and identify potential areas for re-focus.

ILO should recognise the achievements of the project in terms of advancing social protection floors through a regional approach, and should think carefully about diluting that focus in the next phase through the broadening of geographical coverage and the introduction of a secondary objective on EIIPs. The project has been valuable largely because of its tight geographic and thematic orientation, using its limited resources very effectively. There is certainly scope in future to enlarge this approach to other regions, and to disseminate more widely some of the lessons and tools (in particular the training modules, once they have been tested and consolidated). But it is suggested that this should be the role of ILO Geneva, perhaps through its global flagship programme on social protection, rather than of the project. At the very least, ILO needs to carefully monitor the rationale for including Vietnam in a project that is primarily focussed on regional networking and learning within southern (and eastern) Africa.

Irish Aid should continually and critically review the implementation of the next phase, with particular attention to three potential issues of concern:

1) Coherence of project activities with the definition of social protection in its own imminent Social Protection Strategy paper, ensuring that the predominant orientation of the project is aligned to Irish Aid's focus on the very poorest in society.

2) The impact on effectiveness of the expanded geographical scope, and verification that the inclusion of Vietnam is adding value to a greater extent than would that of other possible Irish Aid KPCs within the Africa region.

3) Justification for the introduction within the same project of a second technical focus, on EIIP, which risks creating a parallel set of interventions with limited synergy, thereby diluting what has hitherto been an exclusive focus on the establishment of social protection floors.

Country specific recommendations are contained within the full report.

Lastly, a key lesson learned relates to the **project design and project management**. Here a more formal mechanisms should be put in place to encourage structured (and documented) communication on a regular basis between national Irish Aid offices and regional projects (whilst this should in no way prejudice the current informal exchanges); and that there should be an explicit definition of the roles and responsibilities of the Irish Aid country office *vis-à-vis* any co-located regional project, and of the separate ILO departments involved in management.