

# ▶ *i*-eval Flash news

The ILO Evaluation Office is pleased to share the twenty-ninth edition of *i*-eval Flash news. Through this triannual electronic bulletin, we provide readers with updates, news and information on publications and upcoming events related to evaluation.



## Conducting evaluations under challenging conditions

▶ by Guy Thijs, Director

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak continues to bring significant disruption and human suffering forcing us all to rethink our role in ensuring ILO's work can continue and contribute to solutions. The need for teleworking and restrictions on travel make it nearly impossible to move staff and consultants across regions and within countries. Even before the onset of this crisis, the Evaluation Office (EVAL) had been reviewing how it could reduce travel for evaluation work based on budgetary and environmental concerns. Various studies show that travel is a substantial component of the evaluation budget but nevertheless important for a participatory evaluation process involving constituents and other beneficiaries.

In light of the above, EVAL has identified nine key scenarios in a risk matrix on how to conduct evaluations. Within those risk-based scenarios, reliance on online interview and survey methods and the use of national consultants to conduct fieldwork have taken higher prominence. Early experience already shows that these methods, however, do not come without challenges and trade-offs. For instance, the use of online methods requires a robust database with contact details of constituents and beneficiaries. The list of stakeholders should clearly indicate the role and degree of involvement of each stakeholder in the project to facilitate prioritisation of interviews. The growing demand for national consultants and domestic travel restrictions is also bound to put pressure on their availability. Moreover, constituents and beneficiaries might not always be equipped or have the connectivity to undertake virtual interviews. Finally, in all these efforts to adjust, an assessment of whether the adaptation will compromise quality standards below acceptable levels will be necessary.

Responding to the new and emerging demands on the function, EVAL released on March 20 an internal guidance note on how to conduct and manage ongoing and planned evaluations in these challenging circumstances or, if necessary, to delay or cancel them.

The note is a living and informal guidance and will be subject to revisions as new developments unfold. ILO colleagues can consult the document [here](#). Others interested in ILO's experience on this matter can contact [eval@ilo.org](mailto:eval@ilo.org).

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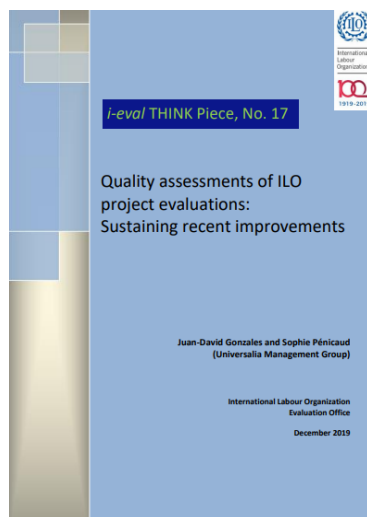
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## ► Innovation & Research

### Completed studies

#### Think Piece: Quality assessments of ILO project evaluations: Sustaining recent improvements





 EVAL is accountable for the independence and quality of all independent evaluations. Since 2007, EVAL has regularly commissioned quality appraisals of decentralized project evaluations. A Think Piece on the most recent quality assessments of the ILO project evaluations was recently completed. It presents and discusses the ILO's Quality Assurance system and tools and

addresses the broader evaluation process on which the ILO relies to operationalize its decentralized evaluation system. While the Think Piece describes that the quality of project evaluation have improved over time, it identifies several challenges and opportunities for refectation. These include the independence of Regional Evaluation Officers, the use of evaluations, the credibility of methodological approaches and the resources allocated to evaluations.

#### Synthesis reviews to support Governing Body mandated high-level evaluations

Over the last few years it has become common practice for the EVAL to undertake synthesis reviews of relevant project evaluations of subjects under analyses. In the first quarter of 2020, EVAL completed two of such reviews to inform the upcoming high-level evaluations of sustainable enterprises and of decent work country programmes in Latin America. An additional synthesis review is planned for the high-level evaluation on ILO's research and knowledge management strategies and approaches. These mandated evaluations will be presented to the Governing Body for approval during its last Session of the year. The following synthesis reviews are available upon request ([eval@ilo.org](mailto:eval@ilo.org)):

- Synthesis Review of ILO's Programme of Work in Support of Decent Work in the Andean Countries of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela 2016-2019
- Synthesis Review of Project Evaluations: Promoting Sustainable Enterprises (2014-19)

### Planned and ongoing studies

#### Decent work results and effectiveness of ILO operations: Meta-analysis of development cooperation evaluations and review of methodology and approach

EVAL has conducted four biennial meta-analyses of independent project evaluations since 2011 covering the periods [2009-2010](#); [2011-2012](#), [2013-2016](#) and [2017-2018](#) to provide feedback on the ILO's effectiveness in advancing decent work.

Continuing this established practice, EVAL now undertakes annual reviews and is currently reviewing the period of 2019. The study will yield results on the ILO's operational performance which is linked to the implementation of development cooperation. It will also feed into EVAL's annual assessment of the ILO's overall effectiveness as part of the 2019-20 Annual Evaluation Report.

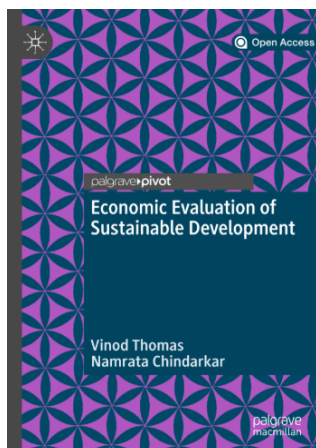
The on-going meta-analysis will also review the current approach, methodology and performance criteria to asses its applicability on a rolling-basis. Proposed adjustments will give due consideration to the current development cooperation concerns, such as the 2030 Agenda, UN system joint programming, United Nations Cooperation Frameworks, and the recently launched UN system-wide Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). The detailed report will be published in September 2020.

#### The ILO response to employment repercussions during times of economic crises: What worked, with what results and how transferable are lessons to the COVID-19 pandemic?

As part of a new *i-eval* In-focus series that complement the existing *i-eval* Think Piece series which focus more on methodological topics, EVAL is conducting a preliminary review of evidence from evaluation reports to identify sound lessons learned and good practices on the ILO's response to employment consequences of economic crises and other incidents of serious distress. Based on rigorous and systematic analysis of available evaluative information, the review will aim to pave the way for a more extensive synthesis report on relevant lessons learned.

## New Books and Articles on Evaluation

**Economic Evaluation of Sustainable Development** By Vinod Thomas and Namrata Chindarkar



*Summary from Palgrave Macmillan,* "This book presents methods to evaluate sustainable development using economic tools. The focus on sustainable development takes the reader beyond economic growth to encompass inclusion, environmental stewardship and good governance."

### COVID-19: Implications for evaluation

EVAL developed guidance on how to help plan and manage evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance also encourages colleagues to build a community of shared experiences on how to best implement them. They are currently accessible to ILO staff, however we invite external individuals to email [eval@ilo.org](mailto:eval@ilo.org) to request a copy.

- [Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO](#)
- [Sharing experience on the implications of COVID-19 on evaluations](#)

*Other useful resources:*

- [Evaluation Implications of the Coronavirus Global Health Pandemic Emergency](#) by MQ Patton
- [Tips on how to conduct phone surveys](#)

## ► News from the Departments

### Social Protection Department

#### Learning from evaluation results to support strategic programming and development cooperation

The ILO's social protection interventions have been the subject of evaluations in terms of the ILO's strategy and through its development cooperation projects. In 2017, EVAL undertook a [High-level independent evaluation of the ILO's Strategy and actions for creating and extending social protection floors 2012-2017](#). The evaluation highlighted the relevance and sustainability of the ILO's work in the field of social protection both at the global and country levels. It also highlighted the coherent and comprehensive framework that forms the basis for its interventions, in addition to the highly effective intervention model, the efficiency of delivery of its services, and the satisfaction of constituents and stakeholders with the contributions of the

ILO. Moreover, the evaluation's recommendations helped improve the impact of the ILO's support to its constituents and stakeholders.

Additionally, EVAL undertook a synthesis review to review lessons learned from ILO interventions in social protection for the period 2012-2018. The findings of both the high-level independent evaluation and the synthesis review have also informed the Office's report for the Recurrent discussion on social protection (social security) which will be submitted to the next Session of the International Labour Conference.

In this context, a [mid-term independent evaluation of the Inclusive Growth, Social Protection and Jobs Programme: An ILO-IRISH-Aid Partnership Programme \(2016-2021\)](#) was completed in February 2020. This ILO-Irish Aid programme aims to support countries to strengthen national social protection policies, promote resilience and access to services and employment opportunities for poor and vulnerable people, thereby contributing to inclusive economic growth. This project also supports the [ILO's Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All](#).

The evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the programme's interventions from 2016-2019 and provided recommendations on project improvement and organizational learning. Overall, the evaluation assessed outputs and activities in the five project countries, namely Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Viet Nam and Zambia and at the global level. Four evaluation field visits were made (Malawi, Tanzania and Zanzibar, Viet Nam and Zambia), while in-depth interviews were conducted for Mozambique and the global component to gather information on the progress of the programme's implementation. The evaluation collected quantitative and qualitative data and included a comprehensive review of relevant documentation, 86 semi-structured interviews or focus discussions and surveys.

#### Key findings:

- *Relevance:* The programme overall remains relevant in addressing country needs and priorities and contributing to the development of national social protection systems and policies.
- *Effectiveness:* By supporting constituents in improving their social protection systems and raising awareness among key stakeholders, the country components are making contributions towards the programme's objective and the ILO Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All. However, evidence of linkages between social protection and employment-intensive programmes was partial. The evaluation found that coordination and

communication should be enhanced to strengthen knowledge sharing between the different country components and progress reporting.

- *Efficiency:* The programme had produced 80-90 percent of the expected outputs foreseen to be completed by mid-way. However, strict delivery rate targets, which did not take account of staffing commitments, was brought up by programme teams as affecting programme implementation.
- *Impact and sustainability:* The programme is expected to have lasting impact through its focus on developing policies, strategic plans, integrated frameworks and monitoring and evaluation tools for basic social protection. While the TRANSFORM as a learning tool is clearly having impact, its sustainability will depend on continued support from development partners.
- *Gender and disability-inclusion:* While these cross-cutting issues feature in some aspects of the programme, there was a need to enhance mainstreaming to ensure that gender is better integrated in the programme's outputs and activities.

### Key recommendations:

- Devise a strategy and mechanisms to improve coordination, communication and knowledge sharing and to foster greater collaboration among the different project countries, as well as between the country components, Decent Work Country Teams and ILO headquarters.
- Strengthen the synergies between the social protection and the employment intensive investment components of the programme.
- Continue to develop the capacity building programme TRANSFORM to raise awareness and share knowledge about social protection, including efforts to institutionalize the initiative to ensure its sustainability.
- Take more measures towards inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women and persons with disabilities, across the programme's outputs and activities.
- Strengthen programme monitoring and reporting.

*How can the evaluation help support the future implementation of the programme?*

Based on detailed terms of reference drawn up in a very participatory manner, this evaluation process was particularly useful in providing an up-to-date operational and contextual picture of the programme in each country. It has helped to bridge the different parts of the programme

scattered across regions and continents, and thus contributed to the strengthening of its collaborative dynamic.

The recommendations from the evaluation have allowed to adjust certain mechanisms, managerial or operational, considered too heavy or counter-productive, insufficiently inclusive or strategic in relation to the objectives of the programme. In the meantime, preparation of the management response to the recommendations of the evaluation is underway. It will provide key actions that can be integrated into the work plans of the country and global components. These include among others:

- The implementation of collaborative mechanisms to strengthen overall coordination and to produce more strategic reports and to share good practices through a dedicated website;
- The revision of the logical framework to enhance the linkages between the employment intensive investments components and social protection;
- The possible extension of TRANSFORM to other regions; and
- The development of a joint SOCPRO and DEVINVEST approach to the gender analysis of the programme.

## ► News from the Regions

### Europe and Central Asia

#### Azerbaijan making progress to achieve the SDGs and Decent Work through economic growth

The regional office for Europe and Central Asia undertook seven independent and internal project evaluations over the past year. Many of those projects supported, and continue to support, crucial development interventions that relate to employment policy, governance, vulnerable groups and migration. The region considers evaluation as a necessary tool to inform how we can do better as a region and organization in order to best serve the ILO's tripartite constituents and beneficiaries.



One of these informative evaluations was the recently completed [independent final evaluation of an RBSA-funded project, entitled “Increased progress in attaining SDGs through the promotion of Decent Work and inclusive economic growth in rural and urban areas in Azerbaijan.”](#) The project was implemented from 2017-2019 and was meant to assist Azerbaijan help achieve its commitments to [Decent Work](#) and the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). In that sense, the project was innovative because it linked traditional ILO issues and themes, such as social dialogue and international labour standards, with the localized SDG agenda for Azerbaijan. The approach is particularly topical for the country as it strongly pledged to achieve the SDGs: it established the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development and has accomplished tangible progress towards the SDGs, particularly in the areas of poverty reduction, economic growth and global partnership for sustainable development.

The main objectives of the project were as follows:

- Develop the capacities of constituents to design and implement policies, programmes and strategies in the realm of youth employment and formalization as the main SDG accelerators in Azerbaijan;
- Provide policy advice to strengthen the analytical and reporting capacities of the government to identify progress and gaps in areas related to the Decent Work Agenda and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth); and
- Support the constituents to actively engage in collaborative mechanisms and partnerships with national and international actors to exchange knowledge and improve coordination of activities aimed at achieving the SDGs.

### Key findings:

- The project's activities aimed at improving [constituents' capacity to support the development of a policy framework on youth employment and formalization](#) are highly likely to have a lasting and positive impact.
- [The Government's capacity to identify progress and gaps in areas related to the Decent Work Agenda and the SDGs](#) has improved as a result of the project's activities. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population (MLSPP) expressed confidence that the ILO-provided training strengthened the Government's ability to conduct quality progress assessments.
- The project played an important role in [increasing constituents' engagement in activities](#)

[that are aimed at achieving the SDGs.](#) As a part of a concerted one-UN effort, the project activities advanced the constituents' capacity to advocate for SDGs and decent work agenda and actively engage in constructive discussions between the UN and the Government. The project served as a key vehicle to strengthen the social partners' capacity to effectively advocate for the inclusion of decent work issues in national sustainable development plans.

- The project made limited contribution to advance the ILO's cross-cutting policy drivers on [environmental sustainability](#) and [gender and non-discrimination](#). Notable progress was made in strengthening [social dialogue](#) and advancing [international labour standards](#).
- The project would [benefit from the development of a Theory of Change \(TOC\)](#) to better illustrate the relationships between results and to build a coherent picture of ILO's contribution to the SDGs and linkages to the ILO's Programme & Budget and to Azerbaijan's DWCP. The ILO Policy guidelines for evaluation advises that the reconstruction of a TOC based on the project documentation, facilitates the assessment of the project's achievements.

### Key recommendations

- To the extent possible, ILO [capacity building interventions](#) should be interactive, they should encourage individual participation and critical thinking. Participation in the capacity building activities should include constituents that are located in rural areas and empower them to represent vulnerable groups that they serve at the national policy level.
- [Gender and non-discrimination](#) considerations should be mainstreamed in all ILO interventions and adapted to Azerbaijan's context. Programmes in rural areas must be designed in a way that is considerate of the needs of women and persons with disabilities. Focus group discussion can be used for preliminary assessment to decide on the most appropriate ways to accommodate the needs of women and persons with disabilities to enable them to effectively participate and benefit from entrepreneurship promotion courses.
- The ILO, in collaboration with its partners, should encourage and facilitate Azerbaijan's [greater participation in the South-South](#)

cooperation. Peer-to-peer exchange of best practices on a range of subjects, traditionally seen as artificially imposed and thus unfeasible, can be highly effective.

- Future projects should give greater prominence to the issue of [environmental sustainability](#) and mainstream it in all ILO interventions. Interactive seminars, workshops, blended learning and peer learning can be good tools of grounding environmental sustainability principles in the context of Azerbaijan, both in urban and rural areas.

The recommendations from the evaluation are timely and their uptake is considered high, given the fact that their implementation will inform the development of Azerbaijan's upcoming DWCP.

## ► **EVAL Highlights**

### **Public access to management responses to evaluation recommendations**

As part of EVAL's efforts to be as transparent as possible, the evaluation database [i-eval Discovery](#) now also displays all management responses to independent evaluation recommendations that have been completed since 2018 in our [Automated Management Response System \(AMRS\)](#). This effort allows all ILO colleagues, constituents and donors to have full access to relevant evaluation documentation. Management responses function as an accountability tool for managers to report action on recommendations. It is therefore imperative that management responses are completed with accuracy and thoughtful attention. In addition, EVAL synthesizes the results of management responses in its [Annual Evaluation Report](#) on a yearly basis for discussion and review by the Governing Body.

### **Share your experience on evaluation**

As part of its knowledge sharing platform, EVAL created [i-eval Cloud](#): A portal to facilitate knowledge sharing among all ILO staff. We welcome colleagues to read or upload information on a variety of topics, including: evaluation use, suggested improvements to [i-eval Discovery](#), overviews of individual quality appraisals of project evaluations and experience in coping with evaluations that face challenges posed by the current COVID-19 crisis. The knowledge generated from [i-eval Cloud](#) will strengthen information sharing, reporting and organizational learning.

## **Communicating evaluation results**

Understanding that communications play a central in advocating for the use of evaluation results, EVAL has increased efforts over the past few months to organize more dissemination events. On 19 February, EVAL hosted a blended webinar and face-to-face dissemination and discussion event with the Department of Partnerships and Field Support (PARDEV) on the findings from the recent [High-level evaluation of the ILO's public-private partnerships](#). The aim was to discuss how the evaluation can inform the future work of the organization in using PPPs to advance the ILO objectives, The event attracted over 40 participants from field and headquarters.

Similarly, in late January, EVAL partnered with the Geneva Evaluation Society to host an event on integrating communications in evaluation, specifically on how communications can be used to optimally support the evaluation process. An expert, Dr. O'Neil, challenged assumptions of how communications "works" for evaluations and proposed solutions based on his experience as both a communicator and evaluator.



Ms Vejs-Kjeldgaard (Director of PARDEV), Mr Thijs (Director of EVAL) and Mr Wichmand (Senior Evaluation Officer, EVAL) presenting the results of the high-level evaluation of public-private partnership to staff located in the field and in HQ.



From left to right: Dr O'Neil and Mr Thijs (Director of EVAL) hosting an event in HQ on integrating communications in evaluation.

## ► Learning activities and events

### Training programme for ILO Constituents on evaluation in the SDG era

EVAL is working in close collaboration with the ILO International Training Centre to produce a multi-media training package to facilitate mainstreaming of the training content within existing capacity-building programmes of the ILO for its constituents at global, regional and national levels. The training kit is composed of a user guide, training material, learning sheets and templates. The kit will be ready for dissemination by May 2020. It will be available both in hard copy and in electronic format via [EVAL's website](#).

### Calling all evaluation consultants: Complete the self-induction programme



EVAL welcomes all prospective ILO evaluators to undertake the [self-induction programme for evaluation consultants](#). The programme's purpose is to help evaluators increase their familiarity with the unique aspects of the ILO's mandate, its [evaluation policy \(2017\)](#) and [evaluation strategy \(2018\)](#). The self-induction programme takes one-hour to complete and is structured into two parts. Almost 100 evaluators have already completed the programme. Upon completion, evaluators receive an attestation of completion that they can include in future expressions of interest for ILO evaluation assignments to [eval@ilo.org](mailto:eval@ilo.org).

#### COVID-19

*The ILO Evaluation Office wishes the full safety and well-being of all colleagues, constituents, partners and members of the general public during this unprecedented time of crisis that we face together.*

### Sharing evaluation experience on COVID-19 to international networks

On 3 April, the directors of the evaluation offices for the ILO and UNDP presented their shared organizational experiences and guidance on how to conduct evaluations during the current COVID-19 crisis to the OECD DAC EvalNet. The event, entitled "The impacts of COVID-19 containment measures on evaluation units", took place via webinar and was attended by 120 members, including many from the donor community.

## ► UNEG developments

### ILO/UNEG work on the revamped United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

In collaboration with the [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\)](#), EVAL is actively involved in developing a tool to support the evaluability assessment (EA) of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). The ILO, on behalf of UNEG, has engaged with an international monitoring and evaluation expert to support its development under the joint management of the ILO and Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. The EA tool will ensure that the measurement of progress to achieving UNSDCF results will be possible. The final UNSDCF evaluation will be able to yield robust evidence on results and move learning to the forefront in the next programme cycle. Moreover, EVAL, through the Regional Evaluation Officer in Asia and the Pacific (also co-chair of the UNEDAP) is leading the pilot of the recently released evaluation guidelines in the UNCF evaluation in Mongolia.

### External knowledge sharing, conferences, courses and webinars

[European Evaluation Society](#): The 14th biennial conference will take place in Copenhagen from 21-25 September. The focus will be on "Evaluation in an Uncertain World: Complexity, Legitimacy and Ethics".

[American Evaluation Association](#): The annual conference will take place from 26-31 October 2020. This year's theme is "How will you shine your light" in evaluation practice?

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