



Improving Synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management – Independent Final evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Approach 1: Angola, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Paraguay, Senegal, Uganda

Approach 2: Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Colombia, Ecuador, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka, Togo, Viet Nam and Zambia.

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The Improving Synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management programme (SP&PFM) was implemented by ILO, UNICEF and the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) with the financial support of the EU. The programme had a total budget of €22.9 million and was implemented from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2023 (with a no cost extension from the original closing date of 31 May 2023). The Programme has now completed its activities and the only ongoing work relates to financial and administrative reporting (in addition to this evaluation).

The general objective of the Programme was to increase the population's universal social protection coverage in partner countries preferably, but not limited to, those benefiting from EU funded budget support operations. Specific objective 1 was to improve partner countries' design and financing of social protection systems in support of their efforts towards SDGs 1 and 10. Specific objective 2 was to support governments implement and monitor effective gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive social protection systems and programmed for all while ensuring financial sustainability and macroeconomic stability. Specific objective 3 envisaged assisting partner countries to develop and apply shock-sensitive social protection programmes and systems adapted to the needs of those living in protracted fragility and crises, including forcibly displaced persons.

Present situation of the project

The programme is completed. Implementation ended on 30 September 2023. Full closure expected January 2024.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The main objectives of this evaluation were to provide the IPs, relevant services of the European Union, and the interested stakeholders with an overall independent assessment of the performance of the Programme, paying particular attention to its different levels of results measured against its expected objectives; and the reasons underpinning such results; and key lessons learned, good practices, conclusions, and related recommendations to improve future interventions.

This final independent evaluation covers the whole period of SP&PFM's implementation from 1 October 2019 to 30 September



2023. The geographical scope of the evaluation comprises work done at the global-level and in the 24 countries supported through Approach 1 and Approach 2.

The main users of this final independent evaluation are:

- National stakeholders in the countries benefiting from the Programme, including constituents (government institutions and social partners);
- Implementing partners of the programme namely ILO, UNICEF and the GCSPP and its member organisations;
- The thematic and geographical units at DG INTPA and EU Delegations, dealing with social protection, public finance management and its interdependencies, or having social protection and PFM related actions and those interested in engaging in the future; and

Development partners and relevant other UN agencies at international level and from EU MS that are seeking policy coherence in the context of support to social protection systems, including the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation adopts the ILO’s Evaluation Guidelines as the basic evaluation framework. It was conducted in accordance with ILO standard policies and procedures, complies with evaluation norms and follows ethical safeguards, in line with ILO and UNICEF policies. The evaluation applied a mixed methods approach, collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data. We adopted a cluster-like approach to the evaluation, i.e. an envelope of evaluations of projects combined into a single evaluation based on, in our case, a thematic scope. Whilst we do highlight activities carried out in many of the participating countries, it must be kept in mind that we are not evaluating any particular country or any particular activity. The evaluation was participatory in nature, based on the principles of representation. This allowed for triangulation of information to increase the validity and rigor of the evaluation findings and analysis, and the ability to capture the achievement of expected and unexpected outcomes.

Methodology included desk reviews, interviews with key stakeholders and thematic case studies. The main limitations of the

evaluation are that, as with a standard end-of-project evaluation, it is reliant on the data available and it is not possible to use more sophisticated evaluation methodologies to assess links between project work and outcomes (e.g., process tracing, outcome harvesting). Given the size of the overall project and the limited time and budget allowed for the evaluation, the focus was on lessons learned in relation to the overall design, implementation and impact of the programme.

Despite the short period allowed for the evaluation and the fact much of it was conducted after many project staff had terminated, the Team Leaders and National Evaluators were able to speak to most of the key stakeholders at national level. No particular risks of bias appear to have arisen and the evaluation team have been able to speak to a wide range of stakeholders.

A limitation of the evaluation is the limited data available, especially in relation to SP&PFM's impact. While the M&E indicators include many useful indicators to measure outputs (number of studies, number of people trained etc), there are fewer indicators of the longer-term impact, thereby leading to questions of attribution.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Overall, we conclude that SP&PFM was able to implement a very wide range of activities and a significant proportion of the activities originally planned. Given the complex nature of the project and, in particular, the fact that it was implemented during the COVID pandemic, this required considerable ability and commitment from the IPs and their staff at global, regional and national levels.

Relevance

SP&PFM was very relevant to all stakeholders. Almost all those interviewed confirmed that it was very relevant to their work. This applied to the IPs and at global and national level.

Programme design

SP&PFM's design and intervention logic was realistic and appropriate, particularly in relation to the pre-selected Approach 1 countries and the cross-cutting activities. The combination of a top-down programme with clear strategic objectives, including bringing in aspects of PFM (which in a social protection context is relatively novel) and the bottom-up demand led design worked overall



although it made for a somewhat complex and diverse programme. Given the demand-led approach at national level, activities necessarily reflected country priorities and varied significantly depending on the country context. We conclude that overall, there was coherence (rather than pressure) between a global thematic programme and a series of country projects approach tailored naturally to the country's context.

Coherence

There was a high level of compatibility of SP&PFM interventions with other SP interventions in each country. Because SP&PFM's national projects were designed by the IPs (who were very active in the countries involved) in conjunction with the national stakeholders and the fact that they were approved by a steering committee with government representatives, the national projects were designed to be coherent with other SP work that was going on in the country. In particular, the IPs often included activities in this project which were also co-funded (either at the time or later) by other social protection projects thereby increasing the funding available and ensuring coherence.

Effectiveness

The Programme has implemented a very wide range of activities and has achieved the majority of planned activities. In general, persons interviewed at a national level suggested that 90 per cent or more of activities had been implemented. Of the A1 final reports, seven (Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Paraguay, Senegal, Uganda) classified overall delivery assessment as 'highly satisfactory'. This means that Implementation of almost all (>80 per cent) outputs has been delivered and almost all (>80 per cent) indicator milestones have been met. One (Burkina Faso) reported implementation as satisfactory (60-80 per cent of activities implemented). In general, the final reports indicate that most national targets have been met. For the A1 countries which were examined in detail, our assessment is in line with the self-evaluation for Burkina Faso and Nepal although, given the very difficult context, the self-assessment for Ethiopia looks optimistic.

In a number of cases, data is not (yet) available in line with original indicators. In any case, while it is relatively easy to measure outputs,

it is much more difficult to measure outcomes and to link these outcomes to SP&PFM's activities. As was suggested in the Evaluability Review, a more qualitative approach to evaluation (e.g., process tracing or most significant change) might have been adopted but this would have had to be planned for from an early stage.

Effectiveness of management arrangements

Such a large-scale and complex Programme involved very considerable administrative inputs. It appears that all three IPs initially underestimated the work involved. Once the project management unit was established in the ILO, this facilitated SP&PFM's implementation, which in general appears to have been effective and efficient. Feedback about the day-to-day administration of the Programme from a national level was positive.

Efficiency

On the basis of the financial information provided, expenditure (which includes committed expenditure) is very close to 100 per cent of allocation, with only limited variation under different subheads. It would appear that the Programme's funds and outputs were used appropriately and generally delivered in a timely manner. SP&PFM was able to deliver a high proportion of planned activities despite the COVID pandemic. Whilst there were some delays and rescheduling due to COVID, this does not seem to have impacted significantly on delivery. The Programme was able to call on high quality technical support and to use human resources in an appropriate manner. Overall, we conclude that the Programme has delivered results in an economic and timely way.

Impact

We can see some significant impacts from SP&PFM's work particularly in A1 countries. The support for disability identification in Cambodia led to almost 290,000 people with disabilities being identified, with Nepal using a similar process for making payments to nearly 200,000 PwD there. The Social Security Fund in Nepal, whose launch coincided with the launch of SP&PFM, now has 18,000 participating employers in the scheme with 800,000 enrolled members.



In the A2 countries, as one might expect given the small funding and short duration of the projects, the impact was more limited. However, in Sri Lanka, a temporary fund for hospitality workers was created when the “Easter Sunday attacks” and COVID dried up the tourism industry. There is hope that this experience will be turned into a formal unemployment insurance in the future.

Sustainability

The sustainability of SP&PFM varies across different countries, and is influenced by factors such as funding, country presence of Implementing Partners, political stability, and changing priorities, with varying levels of continuity and challenges in the different countries.

In some A1 countries, the continuation of activities initiated by SP&PFM is anticipated, with evidence of certain countries having secured funding for future social protection projects, which could help sustain the progress made under SP&PFM. UNICEF and ILO have an established presence in these countries. UNICEF, in particular, are likely to continue to work on many areas begun under SP&PFM. For ILO, this is also likely, especially in those countries where there is an on-going ILO presence. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions may also provide an opportunity at country level to continue the work of the Programme (e.g. Angola, Cambodia, Nepal, Paraguay).

In other countries, political instability and changed political priorities have created uncertainty regarding the future sustainability of SP&PFM activities.

In some approach 2 countries, SP&PFM’s outputs will be taken forward (e.g., Peru). Those we spoke to in Sri Lanka were hopeful that a sustainable unemployment insurance scheme covering all sectors will be established in the near future.” In others, there appears to be less prospect of sustainability.

At a global level, there are plans to take forward some of the global outputs such as the multiplier study both through the Global Accelerator and USP 2030 (Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals). However, we recommend that the EU and IPs should each review the global outputs (and any national outputs which might be



transferable) to ensure that these are appropriately integrated into their ongoing work.

In relation to cross-cutting issues of social dialogue, International labour standards, gender and disability inclusion:

- i) The social partners were actively involved in SP&PFM’s implementation, particularly in A1 countries;
- ii) ILO standards such as Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) were drawn on in the design and implementation of the Programme;
- iii) Although gender was considered in the design, there were important missed opportunities to further integrate and mainstream gender equality/inclusion;
- iv) A number of national projects focussed on disability (see case study at Annex 2).

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Recommendations

Follow up to current project

1. The EU and IPs should review knowledge outcomes at a global level and also those at a national level which may be transferable (e.g. the Paraguay PFM assessment system, Zambian informal sector program, Cambodia DMIS) to ensure that they are integrated into their future work.

Design of future global projects

2. The donor(s) should be realistic in what can be achieved in the lifetime of a Project, usually a maximum of 3 years. Prioritizing quality over quantity is advisable: focusing on a narrower scope would allow it to concentrate resources on a smaller number of countries to maximize impact, rather than spreading resources too thin, leading to more superficial achievements.
3. In any future project of this size and type, the IPs should design a simpler M&E and reporting system with a smaller number of common indicators/targets which can be quickly updated and reported.
4. In any future project of this size and type, the IPs should design and implement a more coherent and timely evaluation

	<p>system (preferably with one evaluation team responsible throughout) and should include in the design an element of qualitative evaluation so that the impact of project work can be examined in more detail.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Any future project should reflect specific agreement between the recipient Government and the results that will be achieved from the programme.6. Projects should include a specific gender dimension and set out a mechanism to ensure that implementation is actually gender focused.7. Any future EU-funded project of this size and type should require a financial commitment from the host government to progressively increase its funding of the proposed activities so that by programme's end the host government is fully financing the activity.8. Any future programme should seriously add value by engaging CSO's to work on social accountability and advocacy including at the grass-roots level.9. In any future EU INTPA-funded programme of this scale, INTPA, the implementing partners and relevant EU delegations should engage at the planning and early implementation stages to ensure that EU delegations are involved to the maximum possible extent in project design and implementation.
Main lessons learned and good practices	Lessons learned <p><i>Lesson learned 1:</i> Governments are often more open to working with UN agencies than with private sector companies.</p> <p><i>Lesson learned 2:</i> Although gender was considered in the design and there was some evidence of gender-inclusion in the indicators and associated outputs, there were important missed opportunities to further integrate and mainstream gender equality/inclusion.</p> Policy-related lessons <p><i>Lesson learned 3:</i> There is a need to continue working on registration programmes to facilitate access to social protection.</p> <p><i>Lesson learned 4:</i> It is important to consider the peculiarities of the informal sector to successfully expand social protection to the informal sector.</p>



Implementation related lessons

Lesson learned 5: The effectiveness of SP&PFM was significantly enhanced by the involvement of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) as an Implementing Partner. Evidence showed a clear added value of using a third party to work at grass-roots level to initiate a bottom-up approach to advocacy, giving a sense of ownership of the process to communities.

Emerging Good Practices

Good practice 1: Integrating public finance management into social protection work at country level through the development of a tool to evaluate the public finance management's social protection delivery (Paraguay).

Good practice 2: Disability identification - Supporting the development and implementation of disability identification systems (linked to Programme activities in Cambodia and Nepal) is a good practice which allows PWD to have access to cash benefits and to a wider range of health and social services.