



Evaluation Summary



International
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Strengthening Social Security Office capacities in policy design with a focus on research and actuarial services, Thailand – Independent final evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: *Thailand*

Final Evaluation: *8 October 2024*

Evaluation Mode: *Independent*

Administrative Office: *ILO Country Office for Thailand, Lao PDR, and Cambodia*

Technical Office: *ILO DWT Team for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific and Actuarial Services Unit of the Social Protection Department*

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Project Code: *THA/19/01/THA*

Donor(s) & Budget: *Government of Thailand, Social Security Office, USD 1,354,000*

Keywords: *Social insurance, actuarial services, gender-responsive social security policy, duty-bearer-funded model, social protection*

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The ILO project "Strengthening Social Security Office capacities in policy design with a focus on research and actuarial services, Thailand", funded by the Social Security Office (SSO) of Thailand, was launched in 2019 with the goal of enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of Thailand's social security system.

The project aimed to strengthen the SSO's capacity for policy design, with a specific focus on research and actuarial services. The project aligned with the objectives of the Thai 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-22), Milestone 9 of the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-27), and the 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036), as well as national efforts to adapt social protection to meet the challenges of an ageing population and the high proportion of informal workers. The project was built around three main outcomes: (1) the establishment of the Actuarial Bureau (AB), (2) the development of gender-responsive social security policy reforms, and (3) raising public awareness about social security schemes.

The main partner of the Project is the Thailand Social Security Office. The Project also includes collaboration with other stakeholders who directly or indirectly involved in the topic of social protection, including other government departments, workers' and employer's organizations, research institutes and other national and international organizations. The project also works with academic partners e.g. Mahidol University (and its actuarial science department) for the delivery of an elective course.

Present Situation of the Project

The project completed its work in September 2024.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure project accountability and learn from the experience of the project which is valuable for ILO constituents and key stakeholders. The evaluation does this by assessing the achievement of the project against its plan and identifying challenges and any external factors that may have affected the project and its implementation.

The evaluation adopts the ILO's Evaluation Guidelines as the basic evaluation framework and was conducted in accordance with OECD/DAC criteria—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. It also assessed cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and disability inclusion. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection included a desk review of project documents, and key informant interviews with stakeholders (SSO, ILO project team, technical specialists, and social partners). A stakeholder workshop was also held to validate findings. The evaluation framework was based on ILO's Results-Based Management system and adhered to the UN Evaluation Group's ethical guidelines, ensuring representation, informed consent, and confidentiality throughout the process.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with ILO standard policies and procedures, and complied with evaluation norms and followed ethical safeguards.

The methodology included:

- **Desk review** of project documents, reports, studies, and data sources
- **Examination of the project's Logical Framework (LogFrame)** and reconstruction of the Theory of Change (ToC) based on the LogFrame, since the ToC was absent, to assess the underlying assumptions and causal pathways.
- **Key informant interviews** were conducted with a total of 24 participants, comprising tripartite constituents, the ILO project team, technical specialists, SSO representatives, social partners, and external collaborators. Of these, 42% were male and 58% were female. Interviewees were selected based on their relevance to project activities, expertise in social protection and policy development, balanced representation of different groups, availability, diversity, and their specific roles in the project.
- **Stakeholder workshop** for critical reflection, validation of findings, and dissemination of the final report.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance

The project was highly relevant to Thailand's national goals and aligned with key strategic frameworks, including the Thailand 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP). By focusing on actuarial capacity building and evidence-based policy design, the project directly addressed the SSO's need to enhance its social protection mechanisms in response to an ageing population and economic challenges. The

project's objectives were well aligned with the Thai government's policy priorities, particularly the extension of social protection to vulnerable populations, including informal workers.

However, the project was perhaps overambitious and included too many activities. Given the length of the project, it would have been advisable to build in the possibility of revising the activities over time. The project was also based on the assumption that the provision of quality advice would lead to policy change and did not sufficiently take account of the need to factor in the complex political and socio-economic context. We have identified this as a lesson learned for the ILO.

Coherence

The project demonstrated strong coherence with other ILO and UN initiatives in Thailand, including the UN Joint Programme on Social Protection. It also aligned with broader international labour standards, particularly the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, No. 102. The project successfully coordinated with national stakeholders, including Mahidol University, which played a pivotal role in strengthening actuarial education and capacity. However, the limited integration of some communication strategies into the broader SSO organizational framework presented challenges in achieving a fully coherent implementation.

Effectiveness

The project was effective in achieving several of its key objectives, particularly in building the SSO's capacity in actuarial science and policy design. The development of the Actuarial Bureau (AB) and the delivery of actuarial training were notable achievements, equipping SSO staff with essential skills. However, delays in the formal establishment of the AB, due to external approval processes, hindered the project's ability to fully realize this outcome within the project timeline. The project also contributed to policy design efforts through high-quality actuarial reports,

although some recommendations were only partially adopted by SSO.

Efficiency

The project efficiently utilized its USD 1,354,000 budget by leveraging the UN Joint Programme on Social Protection for All, providing critical technical support and saving resources. The use of a duty-bearer-funded modality, where the SSO directly financed the ILO's technical assistance, is an innovative practice that allowed for focused and context-specific support.

However, resource allocation for interpretation services and coordination support was initially underestimated, which affected intellectual exchange with SSO staff and impacted coordination. COVID-19 reduced the Chief Technical Adviser's (CTA) on-site presence, limiting coaching and opportunities to strengthen intellectual and social capitals. Delays in establishing the Actuarial Bureau (AB) highlighted the need to anticipate bureaucratic complexities in future planning.

Impact

The project had a substantial impact on building actuarial and research capacity within the SSO. By equipping staff with new skills and creating the foundation for the AB, the project contributed to long-term improvements in Thailand's social security system. Collaboration with Mahidol University also created a lasting impact by strengthening the pipeline of actuarial professionals in Thailand, which is expected to benefit both the public and private sectors. However, translating technical outputs into immediate policy reforms remains a challenge, as policy changes are influenced by broader political and economic factors.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the project's outcomes largely depends on the formal establishment of the Actuarial Bureau (AB). While the project has laid the groundwork, the approval process has been delayed, posing a risk to the long-term

institutionalization of actuarial functions within the SSO. The training provided to SSO staff is expected to have a lasting impact, but ensuring that the AB is formally recognized is critical for sustaining these gains. Additionally, the partnership with Mahidol University offers a sustainable model for capacity building in actuarial science.

Cross-Cutting Issues

The project integrated gender equality and disability inclusion, focusing on extending social protection to vulnerable groups, such as informal workers and domestic workers, with notable efforts to strengthen maternity benefits. However, the absence of a thorough gender analysis limited full mainstreaming of gender concerns.

Disability inclusion was addressed through occupational health and safety measures, though a more explicit focus on the needs of persons with disabilities would have improved the project's impact.

The project also aligned with international labour standards, supporting Thailand's aspirations for OECD membership, and contributed to several Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 1.3 on social protection.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

One of the key lessons learned is the importance of designing projects that take into account the broader political and socio-economic context. The project's assumption that high-quality outputs would naturally lead to policy changes did not fully account for these complexities.

The duty-bearer-funded modality, in which the SSO directly financed the ILO's technical assistance, emerged as a good practice. This model allowed for tailored, in-depth support and should be considered for replication not only in new projects within the SSO and other government agencies but also expanded to other countries. However, future projects should ensure a more focused scope and realistic timelines to avoid overextension.

Recommendations

Main recommendations and follow-up

- 1. Establish the Actuarial Bureau:** The SSO should prioritize the formal establishment of the AB to ensure the sustainability of the actuarial capacity built through the project.
- 2. Engage Senior-Level Communication between ILO and SSO:** ILO at the senior management level should continue engaging with SSO leadership to ensure that the long-term strategic priorities of both organizations are aligned. This collaboration can help reinforce project achievements and explore new areas of support.
- 3. Replicate the Duty-Bearer-Funded Modality:** The ILO should replicate the innovative duty-bearer-funded model to future projects within the SSO and other government agencies, as well as in other countries. This approach not only allows for tailored technical assistance but also fosters strong stakeholder ownership, engagement, and alignment with institutional and national priorities.