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ADDRESSING DECENT WORK DEFICITS AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO RIGHTS IN MALAWI'S TOBACCO SECTOR (ADDRESS) PROJECT – INDEPENDENT FINAL EVALUATION

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Malawi

Evaluation date: 14 November 2025

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (*CO-Lusaka*)

Technical Office: Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR)

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Key Words: Malawi, tenancy system, child labour, forced labour, decent work, social dialogue, tobacco

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The **ADDRESS Project** (“Addressing Decent Work Deficits and Improving Access to Rights in Malawi’s Tobacco Sector”) was designed to tackle entrenched labour rights challenges in Malawi’s tobacco industry, one of the country’s most economically significant yet socially problematic sectors. Tobacco accounts for 60% of Malawi’s exports and employs over 600,000 people, but is characterized by tenancy labour, debt bondage, child labour, forced labour, poor occupational safety and health, and widespread informality.

Purpose and Objectives

The project’s overarching purpose was to ensure that government, employers, and workers’ organizations effectively addressed decent work deficits in the tobacco sector and guaranteed access to fundamental rights at work. Specific objectives included:

- Supporting **labour law reform**, notably the abolition of tenancy labour and strengthened enforcement.
- Building the capacity of tripartite constituents for **effective social dialogue**.
- Piloting interventions to reduce **child labour and forced labour**, while promoting occupational safety and health.
- Facilitating **economic diversification** to reduce reliance on tobacco and enhance food security.

Intervention Logic / Theory of Change

The project was anchored in the ILO’s Global Integrated Strategy (2019), structured around three pillars:

1. **Enabling policy environment** – legal reforms, policy frameworks, and institutional capacity to enforce labour rights.
2. **Strengthened social dialogue** – empowering unions, employers, and government to negotiate and resolve disputes.

3. **Direct community action** – grassroots structures such as cooperatives, child labour committees, and social dialogue committees to deliver tangible improvements.

This dual approach—policy and institutional strengthening at national level, combined with grassroots empowerment—was intended to generate systemic change in Malawi’s tobacco sector, reduce decent work deficits, and promote sustainable livelihoods.

Geographic Coverage and Target Groups

The project operated in **four districts** (Lilongwe, Kasungu, Mzimba, and Mchinji), targeting:

- Tobacco farmers, tenant workers, casual labourers, and children engaged in child labour.
- Government ministries (especially Labour), employers’ and workers’ organizations (ECAM, MCTU, TOAWUM), cooperatives, and community-level structures (Social Dialogue Committees, Community Child Labour Committees, Community Child Protection Committees).

Management and Funding

- Duration: October 2021 – November 2025.
- Donor: Government of Norway (budget NOK 17,500,000).
- Administrative oversight: ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique (CO-Lusaka).
- Technical backstopping: ILO Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR).
- Implementation partners: Ministry of Labour, Tobacco Commission, employers’ and workers’ organizations.

Present situation of the project

Implementation Status: By November 2025, the ADDRESS project had completed its planned activities, including tenancy system assessments, awareness campaigns, and multi-stakeholder dialogues.

Achievements: The project influenced national discourse on tenancy reform, strengthened union and civil society capacity, and

	piloted community-based child labour monitoring mechanisms. It also contributed to improved knowledge among farmers and workers about rights and obligations. Challenges: Persistent structural issues such as entrenched poverty, informality in the tobacco sector, and weak enforcement of labour laws limited the depth of impact. COVID-19 disruptions also caused delays in implementation and reduced opportunities for in-person dialogue. Current Context: The project's outputs remain relevant, with national stakeholders continuing to debate tenancy abolition and child labour reduction strategies. Gains in awareness and dialogue are visible, but institutionalization of reforms requires sustained support and integration into broader rural development and social protection frameworks.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The final evaluation of the ADDRESS Project was conducted to assess the project's overall performance in achieving its intended outcomes and to generate evidence-based insights for accountability, learning, and future programming. Purpose • To evaluate the relevance of the project design and objectives in relation to Malawi's national priorities, ILO strategic outcomes, and community needs. • To assess the effectiveness of the project in improving working conditions, advancing policy reforms, and strengthening stakeholder capacity. • To examine efficiency in resource utilization, coordination, and adaptive management. • To analyse sustainability of outcomes, particularly the institutionalization of reforms and stakeholder ownership.

	• To identify contributions to broader impacts such as reduced child and forced labour, improved livelihoods, and strengthened social dialogue. • To document lessons learned and good practices for replication in Malawi and similar contexts. Scope • Covered the full implementation period: October 2021 – November 2025. • Geographical focus: four districts (Lilongwe, Kasungu, Mzimba, and Mchinji), representing the core areas of tenancy labour and child labour in the tobacco sector. • Beneficiaries assessed included tobacco farmers, tenant workers, casual labourers, children engaged in child labour, government ministries, employers' and workers' organizations, cooperatives, and community-level structures. Clients and Users • ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL) – primary client ensuring accountability and quality control. • ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (CO-Lusaka) – responsible for project oversight and implementation. • Donor – Government of Norway, through the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe. • National stakeholders – Ministry of Labour, Tobacco Commission, employers' and workers' organizations (ECAM, MCTU, TOAWUM), and civil society partners. • These actors are expected to use the evaluation findings to strengthen accountability, inform policy dialogue, and guide future programming in Malawi's agricultural and rural economy.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, and guided by participatory, utilization-focused, gender-responsive, and rights-based principles.

Data Collection Methods & Sample Size

- **Beneficiary survey:** Conducted with **199 individual tobacco workers** across the four target districts (Lilongwe, Kasungu, Mzimba, and Mchinji).
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** **14 FGDs** held, engaging approximately **160 participants** (farmers, tenant workers, women, and youth).
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** **27 KIIs** conducted with government officials, employers' and workers' organizations, community leaders, and donor representatives.
- **Document review:** Project reports, policy papers, and relevant literature.
- **SWOT analysis:** Used to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Study Limitations and Mitigation Measures

- **Absence of tailored baseline and comparable endline dataset:** Limited ability to conduct strict statistical comparisons over time.
 - *Mitigation:* Reliance on qualitative methods, triangulated data sources, and trend analysis to assess change.
- **Absence of SMART indicators across the input–output–outcome–impact results chain:** Constrained higher-level OECD-DAC assessments.
 - *Mitigation:* Use of proxy indicators, qualitative triangulation, contribution analysis, and SWOT analysis to approximate systemic results.
- **High mobility of tobacco workers:** Many participate for only one agricultural season and then relocate, making respondents difficult to trace.
 - *Mitigation:* Extended follow-up, use of community informants, and targeted tracing to reach mobile workers.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Relevance & Strategic Fit

- Strong alignment with Malawi's national priorities, particularly **tenancy abolition** and **child labour reduction**.
- Consistent with ILO Programme & Budget Outcomes (1, 3, 7) and **SDG 8**, while contributing to SDGs 1, 2, and 10.
- Responsive to tripartite constituents' needs (government, employers, workers).
- Gap: Limited progress in **financial literacy** and **livelihood diversification**.

Coherence & Complementarity

- Complemented other ILO initiatives such as **ACCEL Africa** and **SKILL-UP**.
- Improved coordination with government institutions and social partners.
- Gap: Weak **inter-ministerial collaboration** (Labour, Agriculture, Trade).

Effectiveness (per outcomes)

Outcome 1: Strengthened knowledge among government, employers, and workers' organizations

- Diagnostic studies and legislative gap analysis informed reforms.
- Awareness campaigns raised visibility of labour rights issues.
- Gap: Limited financial literacy and livelihood diversification training.

Outcome 2: Improved enabling policy environment

- **Tenancy labour abolished** under amended labour law.
- Child labour policy developed for the tobacco industry and TAMA Farmers Trust.
- Technical advice supported ratification of ILO conventions and workplace compliance monitoring.
- Gap: Enforcement consistency remains weak; inter-ministerial collaboration limited.

Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity of government and social partners for effective social dialogue

- **TOAWUM revitalized:** 78 branches, 8,400 members.
- Bipartite/tripartite dialogue forums facilitated negotiation and dispute resolution.
- Employers' organizations (ECAM) engaged in compliance and advocacy.
- Gap: Weak **MEL systems** constrained adaptive management.

Outcome 4: Mitigated decent work deficits and improved working conditions in targeted districts

- **Eight cooperatives registered**, diversifying livelihoods into sorghum and maize seed multiplication.
- **Community Child Labour Committees (CCLCs)** achieved 100% awareness in Mchinji District.
- Standard employment contracts piloted for farmers.
- Behavioural change evident through community-led monitoring of child and forced labour.
- Gap: Only **14.1% of workers reported improved livelihoods**, showing limited diversification and market linkages.

Efficiency

- Resources generally used effectively despite **inflation and currency devaluation**.
- Gap: **Delays in fund disbursement**, logistical gaps, and weak risk management reduced efficiency.

Impact Orientation

- Systemic reforms achieved: **tenancy abolition**, strengthened labour law enforcement.
- Behavioural change promoted via child labour committees, forced labour committees, and cooperatives.
- Gap: Livelihood diversification and market linkages remain limited in scale.

Sustainability

- Strengthened national capacity for sustainable labour market governance (NSO labour data systems, institutional competencies).
- Institutional anchors in unions and cooperatives reinforced.
- Community-led monitoring enhanced social sustainability.
- Gap: Risks remain around **enforcement consistency**, **financial literacy**, and **donor dependence**.

Cross cutting → Gender, social dialogue & sustainable transition:

The ADDRESS project reinforced a gender-responsive, socially cohesive, and sustainably transitioning rural labour system—advancing women’s empowerment, strengthening tripartite dialogue, and building community and institutional mechanisms to sustain decent work, despite persistent structural, economic, and climate-related constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1: Strengthen Enforcement of Tenancy Abolition Amended Employment Law** → Intensify inspections, prosecute violations, publish compliance scorecards.
- **Recommendation 2: Integrate Outcome and Impact-Level Indicators in Project Design** → Future projects should include outcome and impact indicators for robust monitoring of transformative change.
- **Recommendation 3: Strengthen Financial Capacity, Risk Management and Efficiency** → Strengthen financial management systems by improving fund flow efficiency, enhancing local partner management capacities, mitigating currency risks, and establishing clear contingency arrangements to ensure predictable project operations.
- **Recommendation 4: Consolidate Child Labour Monitoring Systems (CLMS)**

	→ Institutionalize CLMS with motorcycles and digital reporting tools. • Recommendation 5: Strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Systems. → Deploy mobile-based MEL applications for real-time reporting. • Recommendation 6: Expand Financial Literacy and Livelihood Diversification → Limited livelihood improvements suggest the need to scale up financial literacy training and livelihood diversification initiatives. • Recommendation 7: Strengthen Gender- and Inclusion-Responsive Leadership Programming → Institutionalize gender-transformative and inclusive leadership frameworks to strengthen women's and persons with disabilities' participation across cooperatives, value chains, and community structures. • Recommendation 8: Integrate Environmental Sustainability Across Value Chains and Livelihoods → Embed environmental sustainability across value chains, livelihoods, and decent work initiatives to enhance climate resilience in agro-based rural communities.
Main lessons learned and good practices	Key Lessons Learned • Policy–practice alignment is critical → Legal reforms must be backed by consistent enforcement and institutional support. • Integrated approaches deliver sustainability → Linking tenancy abolition, value-chain diversification, climate resilience, and gender inclusion ensures systemic impact. • Leveraging community radio platforms: Using community radio platforms proved highly effective for raising awareness on tenancy labour abolition, workers' rights,

and child labour, highlighting the value of localized media in driving social dialogue and behaviour change.

- **Community leadership drives accountability** → Local committees and cooperatives transformed awareness and reinforced protection of child and worker rights.
- **Livelihood diversification reduces child labour risks** → Alternative income sources improved resilience and reduced reliance on child labour.
- **Women are central to child protection** → Women's active engagement in monitoring systems strengthened cohesion and productivity.

Good Practices

- **Revitalization of TOAWUM** → Expanded to 78 branches, 8,400 members; improved bargaining and representation.
- **Community Child Labour Committees (CCLCs)** → Achieved 100% awareness in Mchinji; effective in monitoring and reporting.
- **Cooperative Formation & Diversification** → Eight cooperatives registered; promoted other value chains such as sorghum and maize seed multiplication as alternatives to tobacco.
- **Visible ILO Presence in Communities** → Direct engagement enhanced legitimacy and compliance with labour standards.
- **Gender-Responsive Training** → Women reported equal or higher awareness; strengthened participation in cooperatives and monitoring systems.