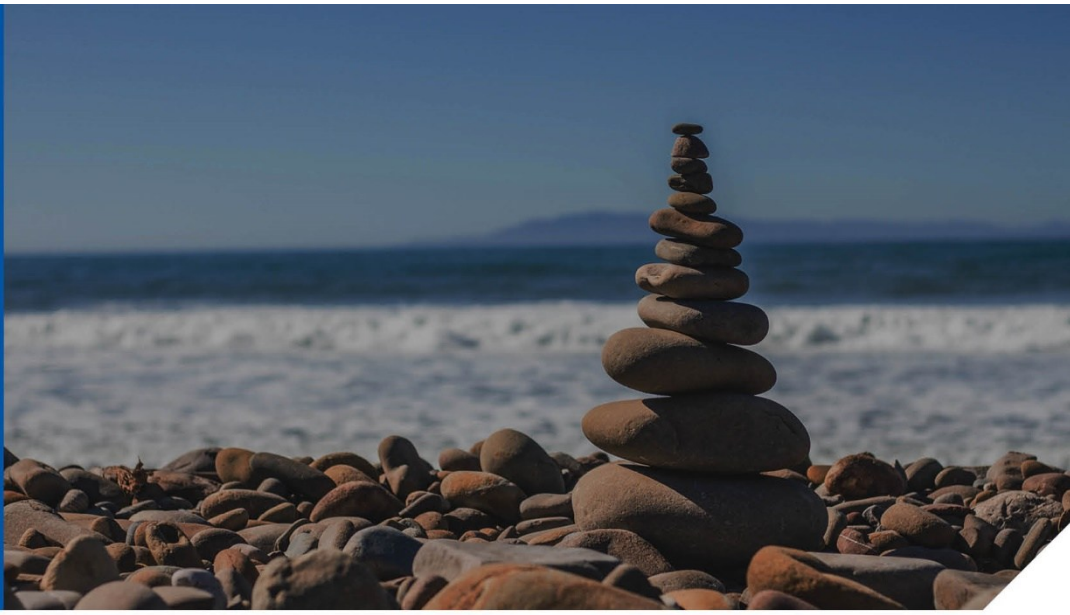
International Labour Organization

Evaluation Office

i-eval Discovery



Mid-Term Independent Evaluation of the Skills Development for Increased Employability Programme in Zambia

QUICK FACTS

Countries: *Zambia*

Evaluation date: *05 December 2025*

Evaluation type: *Project*

Evaluation timing: *Mid-term*

Administrative Office: *ILO Country Office in Lusaka*

Technical Office: *Decent Work Team Pretoria, Skills Branch, Geneva*

Evaluation manager: *Abderrahim El Moulat, Regional M&E Officer*

Evaluation consultant(s): *Dr. Edwin Ochieng Okul, PhD.*

DC Symbol: *ZMB/22/01/EUR*

Donor(s) & budget: US$ 7,645,000

Key Words: Skills Development, Decent Work, Employability, Enterprise, Market Linkages, Environmental Sustainability

This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has not been professionally edited,

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	The Skills Development for Increased Employability Programme (SDEP) was designed to strengthen Zambia's skills ecosystem by addressing systemic challenges in governance, training relevance, labour-market alignment, and institutional capacity. Its core purpose is to modernise the TEVET system so that young women and men acquire skills that match industry needs, ultimately improving employability, productivity, and national competitiveness. The programme's logic follows a clear results chain. Upstream reforms—such as revitalising the Skills Advisory Committee (SAC), operationalising Sector Skills Bodies (SSBs), and updating policies and occupational standards—create a coherent governance environment for coordinated skills development. Midstream interventions focus on enhancing training quality through competency-based curricula, strengthened quality assurance, upgraded institutional infrastructure, and improved trainer capacity. Downstream, the programme supports labour-market responsiveness through the development of a functional Labour Market Information System (LMIS), expanded industry partnerships, and work-based learning pathways. Structurally, SDEP is organised into three mutually reinforcing components: (1) strengthening governance and coordination, (2) improving training relevance and institutional quality, and (3) enhancing labour-market responsiveness and employability. Together, these components ensure that national systems are aligned, institutions are equipped to deliver modern training, and graduates can transition into decent work. The programme's systems-focused design positions Zambia for long-term, sustainable improvements in skills development.
Present situation of the project	At mid-term, the SDEP programme has significantly enhanced Zambia's skills governance framework, revitalizing the Skills Advisory Committee (SAC) and establishing functional Sector Skills Bodies (SSBs) across four priority sectors. These reforms have improved national coordination, aligning skills development with labor market needs. Several TEVET colleges have upgraded infrastructure and capacities, facilitating progress in curriculum development. However, downstream implementation is lagging due to procurement issues and staffing constraints. To translate upstream progress into better training delivery and learner outcomes, the upcoming phase will need accelerated procurement, improved sequencing, and enhanced coordination.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The Mid-Term independent Evaluation aimed to assess the SDEP programme's overall performance, strategic relevance, progress toward planned results, and the effectiveness of its governance, institutional, and labour-market interventions. Its scope covered all major components of the project, skills governance reforms, curriculum development, LMIS strengthening, institutional capacity-building, and

	industry engagement, while examining both upstream systemic changes and downstream implementation at selected TEVET institutions. The primary clients of the evaluation are the ILO, the EU Delegation, and the Government of Zambia, with additional users including TEVETA, Sector Skills Bodies, training institutions, employers' and workers' organisations, and national stakeholders responsible for advancing skills development and employability outcomes.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach based on OECD-DAC criteria to assess the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact orientation. It included a comprehensive desk review of relevant documents and a Theory of Change analysis to explore causal pathways from outputs to outcomes, identifying assumptions and risks. Primary data were gathered through interviews, focus groups, and site visits with diverse stakeholders, allowing for triangulation of perspectives on reforms and challenges. Site visits provided insights into infrastructure improvements and curriculum rollout. Iterative consultations ensured validation of findings, although limitations included gaps in downstream evidence and outcome-level data. The methodology offered a solid foundation for assessing progress and identifying areas for improvement during the ongoing implementation period.
MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	***Relevance:*** The project responds directly to Zambia's Vision 2030 and the National Development Plans (7th NDP and 8th NDP), both of which prioritise skills development and economic diversification. It also aligns with the African Union TEVET Strategy, the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, and global agendas such as the SDGs. Stakeholders consistently confirmed that the project addresses pressing national priorities of reducing youth unemployment, closing the skills mismatch, and strengthening TEVET governance. ***Coherence:*** At the strategic level, the project is well aligned with EU cooperation priorities and ILO's mandate on decent work and skills development. It complements other government-led reforms in TEVET. However, synergies with parallel donor-funded programmes, such as those supported by the World Bank and GIZ, have been limited. Opportunities for stronger coordination and leveraging of complementary resources have not been fully exploited, partly due to fragmented institutional frameworks. ***Effectiveness*:** Progress is most visible under Outcome 1 (governance strengthening) and Outcome 2 (industry engagement), where TEVETA has been supported to improve certification and research, and Sector Skills Bodies have been established in priority sectors. However, Outcome 3 is lagging behind. The rollout of updated curricula, work-based learning programmes, and equipment installation in training institutions has

	been delayed by procurement bottlenecks and underestimation of the scale of required resources. Consequently, direct benefits to trainees are yet to materialise as planned. ***Efficiency*****:** The project has not fully optimised use of its financial and human resources. Some areas remain underspent due to delayed activity start-up, while others, such as advisory committees, overspent against initial allocations. The lack of an inception phase, delays in appointing focal points, and absence of a dedicated M&E officer have reduced timeliness and created management inefficiencies. The small team's overstretch has compounded these challenges. ***Impact Orientation****:* Institutional reforms supported by the project, such as legal and regulatory changes, digitisation of TEVETA systems, and operationalisation of SSBs, are promising and likely to have long-term impact. However, because beneficiary-level activities (e.g., curricula delivery, apprenticeships) have only recently started, the project's direct contribution to employment and productivity outcomes is not yet visible. ***Sustainability*****:** By working through government structures and focal points, the project has embedded ownership and laid foundations for continuity. Nevertheless, the absence of dedicated budgets to support focal persons and heavy reliance on donor financing pose risks. Without further institutionalisation and domestic resourcing, there is a danger that gains may not be sustained beyond the project's lifespan. ***Cross-Cutting Issues:*** Enrolment of women and the creation of gender-sensitive facilities and services are progressing slowly, indicating that more deliberate measures are needed to achieve meaningful inclusion outcomes. The project therefore remains valid and strategically important. It has laid a strong foundation for systemic reforms but lags in translating these into tangible benefits for learners and employers.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES	
Recommendations	1. *Introduce a No-Cost Extension:* To address cumulative delays, a no-cost extension of at least 12 months is recommended for the consolidation of reforms, curriculum implementation, and the delivery of outputs like equipment installation and training. A costed extension may also be considered due to the significant infrastructure support costs. 2. *Strengthen private sector engagement in Sector Skills Bodies (SSBs).* Private sector engagement has been inconsistent. There is a need for streamlined engagement, clearer incentives, and practical demonstrations of value to maintain employer commitment. 3. *Expedite the finalisation of stalled legal reforms (Apprenticeship Act, Employment Code).* Delays in policy and legal reform have slowed progress and forced project teams to restart processes. Swift completion and enactment of reforms are needed

	to embed work-based learning and provide a durable legal framework for skills development. 4. *Expedite and consolidate competence-based training (CBT).* Institutional capacity assessments confirmed the need to shift fully to CBT. Adequate investment in curriculum redesign, staff re-training, and equipment is critical for aligning training with labour market needs. 5. *Safeguard institutional investments through maintenance and recurrent funding.* Colleges will benefit from infrastructure such as irrigation systems and specialised labs, but sustainability will depend on recurrent budgets for maintenance and continuous staff development. 6. *Mainstream gender more intentionally in male-dominated sectors.* No progress has been made in most areas, and gender mainstreaming has been less visible than youth inclusion. Future phases should implement stronger, targeted strategies to improve women's participation in sectors such as mining and energy. 7. *Institutionalise proactive risk management.* Risks such as procurement delays, policy bottlenecks, and weak employer participation are often addressed only after they occurred. A structured, proactive risk monitoring system should be built into programme planning to prevent similar setbacks. 8. *Strengthen Procurement and Operational Efficiency Mechanisms.* To enhance procurement and operational efficiency, the project should establish a streamlined procurement and management system with a time-bound plan, improved inter-unit coordination, and temporary boosts in administrative and monitoring capacities. This strategy intends to expedite outputs such as LMIS development and curriculum piloting, thereby improving absorption rates and ensuring timely delivery of activities.
Main lessons learned and good practices	***Lessons Learned*** 1. *Systemic focus yields long-term value.* Prioritising reforms such as CBT curricula, SSBs, and SAC revitalisation shows that systemic interventions create more durable results than isolated activities. 2. *Adequate time and sequencing are essential.* Ambitious legal and institutional reforms required starting almost from zero, underscoring the need for inception phases and realistic pacing. 3. *Stakeholder ownership strengthens sustainability.* The SAC and SSBs enabled government, employers, and workers to shape training priorities, ensuring curricula better reflect labour-market needs. 4. *Capacity-building must accompany infrastructure*. Institutions like Nortec and Chipata Trades stressed that equipment and facilities only yield lasting impact when paired with staff development and curriculum reform. 5. *Risk management should be proactive.* Procurement delays and policy bottlenecks were addressed too late, showing the importance of early monitoring and responsive mitigation systems.

	6. *Equity requires stronger intentionality.* Youth inclusion progressed well, but gender mainstreaming remained limited, especially in male-dominated sectors that require targeted strategies. ***Good Practices*** 1. **Revitalisation of dormant governance structures.** The project successfully reactivated the Skills Advisory Committee (SAC), which had been inactive since 2019. 2. **Operationalisation of Sector Skills Bodies (SSBs).** Establishing SSBs in agriculture, mining, energy, and tourism created structured tripartite platforms that produced critical skills lists and curricula, ensuring stronger alignment between training provision and industry needs. 3. **Institutional capacity-building linked with infrastructure.** Colleges such as Chipata Trades and Nortec paired infrastructure upgrades with curriculum and staff development, ensuring that physical investments translate into improved training delivery and better employability outcomes. 4. **Worker and employer voice in training relevance.** The project created spaces for workers to influence training priorities, while critical skills lists strengthened industry-relevant pathways, demonstrating how social dialogue anchors demand-driven training systems. 5. **Embedding monitoring systems into institutions.** The development of the LMIS strengthened national capacity to generate and use labour market data, and its integration into Ministry structures offers a sustainable tool for ongoing monitoring and policy planning. 6. **Stakeholder Engagement Fostering Ownership and Sustainability of Outcomes.** The project's structured engagement of ministries, TEVETA, employers, and training institutions through PSC and TWG platforms ensured relevant reforms and strengthened national ownership, improving prospects for sustainability. 7. **Sector Studies as a Basis for Planning and Informed Decision Making.** Analyses of key sectors revealed skills gaps and market demands that shaped curricula and WBL arrangements, advancing a shift from supply-driven to demand-led planning and improving labour market relevance.