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Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation: through South-South Cooperation

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This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has not been professionally edited, but has undergone quality control by the ILO Evaluation Office.

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List of Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CHN	China
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DWT	Decent Work Technical Team
GLO/23/17/CHN	ILO/China Social Protection Project
ILO	International Labour Organization
CO	ILO Country Office
HQ	ILO Headquarters
ILS	International Labour Standards
LSSO	Lao Social Security Organization
MOHRSS	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (China)
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
NSSF	National Social Security Fund (Kenya)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee Evaluation Criteria
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
ROAP	ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPF	Social Protection Floor
SSC	South–South Cooperation
SSTC	South–South and Triangular Cooperation
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
USD	United States Dollar

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Finally, the evaluator emphasizes that the findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report are those of the evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Labour Organization or its constituents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Project Background and Context

The ILO/China South–South Cooperation Project supports efforts in Lao PDR and Kenya to strengthen institutional capacity, policy frameworks and administrative systems aimed at extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. The project operates through three interlinked outcome areas: (i) global knowledge development and South–South cooperation frameworks; (ii) regional and cross-country exchange mechanisms; and (iii) national-level systems strengthening and technical advisory support.

The project is situated within complex structural contexts characterized by high levels of informal employment, administrative fragmentation, fiscal constraints, and evolving policy environments. It aligns with ILO strategic objectives on universal social protection and decent work, and contributes to national reform agendas in both countries.

At mid-term, the project has delivered a substantial share of planned outputs and has positioned itself as a credible technical partner within national reform processes.

2. Purpose, Scope and Methodology of the Evaluation

This mid-term evaluation was conducted for accountability, organizational learning and forward-looking improvement. The primary users include the ILO project team, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, relevant country offices, national counterparts, and development partners.

The evaluation covers the period from project inception to mid-term and includes analysis of global, regional and national components in Lao PDR and Kenya.

The evaluation was guided by fourteen evaluation questions structured around the OECD/DAC 2019 criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and cross-cutting dimensions (potential impact, gender equality and inclusion, and tripartism).

A mixed-methods approach was applied, including document review, semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and triangulation of qualitative and documentary evidence. Given the mid-term timing, assessment of impact focuses on early outcome trends and the plausibility of contribution rather than attribution (Mayne, 2011).¹ Additional methodological details are provided in the main report and supporting annexes.

The evaluation adhered to ILO evaluation norms and UNEG standards, including principles of independence, non-attribution, ethical safeguards, and gender-sensitive inquiry. Methodological limitations include the formative stage of reforms and reliance on stakeholder perspectives in contexts where institutional change is ongoing.

¹ Mayne, J. 2011. *Contribution Analysis*.

3. Main Findings

Overall Assessment

At mid-term, the project is strategically relevant and operationally effective in delivering outputs across all outcome areas. It has successfully positioned itself within national social protection reform processes and facilitated meaningful South–South exchange.

Early institutional shifts are observable in both countries. However, the central strategic challenge for the second half of implementation is institutionalization: ensuring that technical cooperation inputs translate into formally embedded policies, administrative procedures and sustained system-level change.

Interviews with senior institutional counterparts confirmed that legal completion, budget integration and internal technical capacity remain decisive factors for full system operationalization.

Relevance

Relevance is high and remains high. The project aligns closely with national priorities in Lao PDR and Kenya regarding expansion of social protection coverage to informal economy workers. It is fully consistent with ILO strategic frameworks and global commitments to universal social protection.

The remaining relevance question concerns sequencing and depth of domestic ownership required to sustain reforms beyond project support.

Coherence

The project demonstrates strong coherence with other ILO interventions and national reform initiatives. South–South cooperation adds strategic value by providing practical policy reference models and facilitating peer learning.

The systemic challenge lies in ensuring that knowledge exchange translates into sustained administrative reform. Structured follow-up and institutional anchoring mechanisms are required to maximize long-term coherence gains.

Effectiveness

Outputs across Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 have largely been delivered as planned, with acceptable quality and timeliness.

Early outcome-level changes include strengthened policy dialogue, enhanced technical awareness within social security institutions, and improved cross-country knowledge exchange. Evidence supports a plausible contribution to emerging reform processes; however, institutional behaviour change remains at a formative stage.

Facilitating factors include strong technical backstopping and stakeholder engagement. Constraining factors include administrative capacity limitations, staff turnover and broader fiscal conditions.

Efficiency

Financial, human and institutional resources have generally been utilized efficiently. Management and coordination arrangements are functional and supportive of implementation.

Efficiency gains during the second half of implementation will depend on prioritization and sequencing of activities toward institutional consolidation rather than continued activity expansion.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the most critical strategic variable at mid-term.

Institutional ownership is developing, but the durability of results depends on formal policy adoption, budget allocation and integration of technical tools into routine administrative systems.

Without deliberate embedding measures, early gains risk remaining project-supported rather than system-integrated.

Cross-Cutting Dimensions

Potential Impact: Early shifts in institutional awareness and policy dialogue suggest credible reform momentum. Measurable expansion of coverage cannot yet be confirmed at mid-term.

Gender Equality and Inclusion: Gender and inclusion principles are reflected in project design and discourse. However, systematic gender-disaggregated monitoring and analysis of differential effects require strengthening to substantiate equity outcomes.

Tripartism and Social Dialogue: Employers' and workers' organizations are engaged in dialogue processes, though depth of engagement varies and co-design roles could be further strengthened.

No significant unintended negative effects were identified.

4. Conclusions

The project is strategically relevant and technically sound. It has successfully initiated institutional dialogue and capacity development processes aligned with national reform agendas.

The defining strategic issue for the second half of implementation is consolidation. Sustained impact will depend on formalization of reforms, strengthened institutional ownership, and integration of project-supported tools into national administrative systems.

Absent deliberate institutional embedding, reform gains may remain dependent on project support.

5. Lessons Learned

- South–South cooperation yields strongest results when coupled with structured national follow-up mechanisms.
- Capacity development must operate simultaneously at individual, organizational and system

levels to achieve durable reform.

- Early and continuous institutional buy-in significantly enhances reform sustainability in complex administrative environments.

6. Emerging Good Practices

The evaluation identified several emerging good practices that may inform future South–South cooperation initiatives on social protection.

Structured cross-country policy dialogue platforms. The project successfully facilitated structured exchanges between policymakers and technical experts from different regions, enabling countries to share practical experiences on extending social protection to workers in the informal economy. These platforms created opportunities for mutual learning and helped situate national reforms within broader international policy debates.

Peer learning approaches combining technical exchange with institutional reflection. A notable feature of the project was the use of peer learning formats that combined technical knowledge sharing with reflection on institutional challenges and policy implementation pathways. This approach helped stakeholders translate global policy concepts into context-specific strategies and fostered ownership of reform processes.

Integrated technical advisory and capacity development support at national level. At the country level, the project combined technical advisory services with capacity development activities targeting government institutions and national stakeholders. This integrated approach strengthened policy dialogue, supported institutional learning, and contributed to building a foundation for future reforms aimed at expanding social protection coverage.

7. Recommendations (Summary List)

1. Prioritize institutionalization of key technical outputs through formal policy adoption and administrative embedding.
2. Strengthen gender-responsive monitoring systems and disaggregation mechanisms.
3. Formalize structured follow-up mechanisms for South–South cooperation activities.
4. Enhance structured engagement of social partners in implementation and monitoring processes.
5. Integrate sustainability-oriented sequencing into second-half work planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background and Context

Expanding access to social protection remains a central challenge for many developing economies, particularly for workers in the informal economy. Globally, more than half of the world's population lacks access to adequate social protection coverage, leaving millions of workers and their families vulnerable to economic shocks, health crises, and income insecurity. These challenges are especially pronounced in countries where informal employment constitutes a large share of the labour market and where institutional and administrative capacities to extend coverage remain limited.

In both Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Kenya, the majority of workers are engaged in the informal economy, often outside formal labour protections and contributory social security schemes. Informal workers frequently face barriers to accessing social protection systems due to factors such as limited awareness of available schemes, fragmented administrative systems, weak enforcement mechanisms, and limited institutional capacity to register and manage informal workers within national social security systems. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these vulnerabilities, highlighting the critical need for inclusive social protection systems capable of reaching workers beyond the formal labour market.

In response to these challenges, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China (MoHRSS) initiated a partnership aimed at supporting the extension of social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy through South-South cooperation and digital transformation. The project "Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation through South-South Cooperation" (GLO/23/17/CHN) was launched in December 2023 with financial support from the Government of China.

The project represents part of a broader effort by the ILO to promote universal social protection and decent work through development cooperation programmes aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1.3 on implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and SDG 8 on promoting decent work for all. Through this initiative, the project aims to strengthen institutional capacities, enhance social protection delivery systems, and facilitate policy learning across regions by sharing China's experience in expanding social security coverage and digitalizing social protection systems.

The partnership between the ILO and China has evolved over several years through voluntary contributions and South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms. Within this framework, the project leverages China's experience in expanding social security coverage, strengthening administrative systems, and developing digital solutions for social protection management. These experiences are considered particularly relevant for countries seeking to extend coverage to workers in the informal economy while modernizing administrative systems and improving service delivery.

The project was formally launched during a high-level event in Nairobi in October 2024, bringing together representatives from China, Kenya, Lao PDR, and the ILO. The launch event provided an opportunity for stakeholders to exchange experiences, discuss innovative approaches to extending social protection, and promote collaboration between governments, employers' organizations, workers' organizations, and representatives of workers in the informal economy.

Following the project launch, an amendment to the partnership agreement between the ILO and MoHRSS was signed, increasing the total project funding to USD 2 million and extending the project duration until December 2026.

Within the broader development cooperation framework of the ILO, the project contributes to strengthening national social protection systems in Lao PDR and Kenya by addressing key institutional and operational challenges related to extending coverage to informal workers (ILO, 2012).² At the same time, the project seeks to promote regional learning and knowledge exchange through South-South cooperation between countries in Asia and Africa.

The project therefore operates at the intersection of three key development priorities:

1. expanding social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy;
2. strengthening institutional capacity and digital transformation of social protection systems; and
3. facilitating cross-regional knowledge exchange through South-South cooperation.

In Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the labour market is characterized by a high prevalence of informal employment, particularly in agriculture, small-scale trade, and household enterprises. While the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) has expanded coverage in recent years, social security coverage remains concentrated among workers in the formal sector. A large share of workers in the informal economy remain outside contributory social security schemes, reflecting structural challenges related to limited administrative capacity, geographic dispersion of workers, and low levels of awareness of social protection programmes.

Similarly, in Kenya, informal employment accounts for a substantial proportion of total employment, particularly in sectors such as small-scale trade, transport, and services. According to national labour market statistics, the informal economy represents the dominant form of employment for a majority of workers. Despite ongoing reforms aimed at expanding social protection systems, many informal workers remain excluded from contributory social security and health insurance schemes due to irregular incomes, administrative barriers, and limited institutional outreach.

These structural characteristics of labour markets in both countries underscore the importance of strengthening institutional capacities, improving administrative systems, and developing innovative approaches to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

The selection of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Kenya reflects the project's objective of promoting cross-regional learning on extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. Both countries face structural challenges related to the high prevalence of informal employment and limited coverage of contributory social protection schemes. At the same time, each country is engaged in ongoing reforms aimed at strengthening social protection systems and improving institutional capacity for extending coverage to underserved populations. By supporting initiatives in both an Asian and an African context, the project seeks to facilitate South-South knowledge exchange and policy learning across regions, while enabling the sharing of experiences on institutional reforms, digital transformation, and strategies for extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

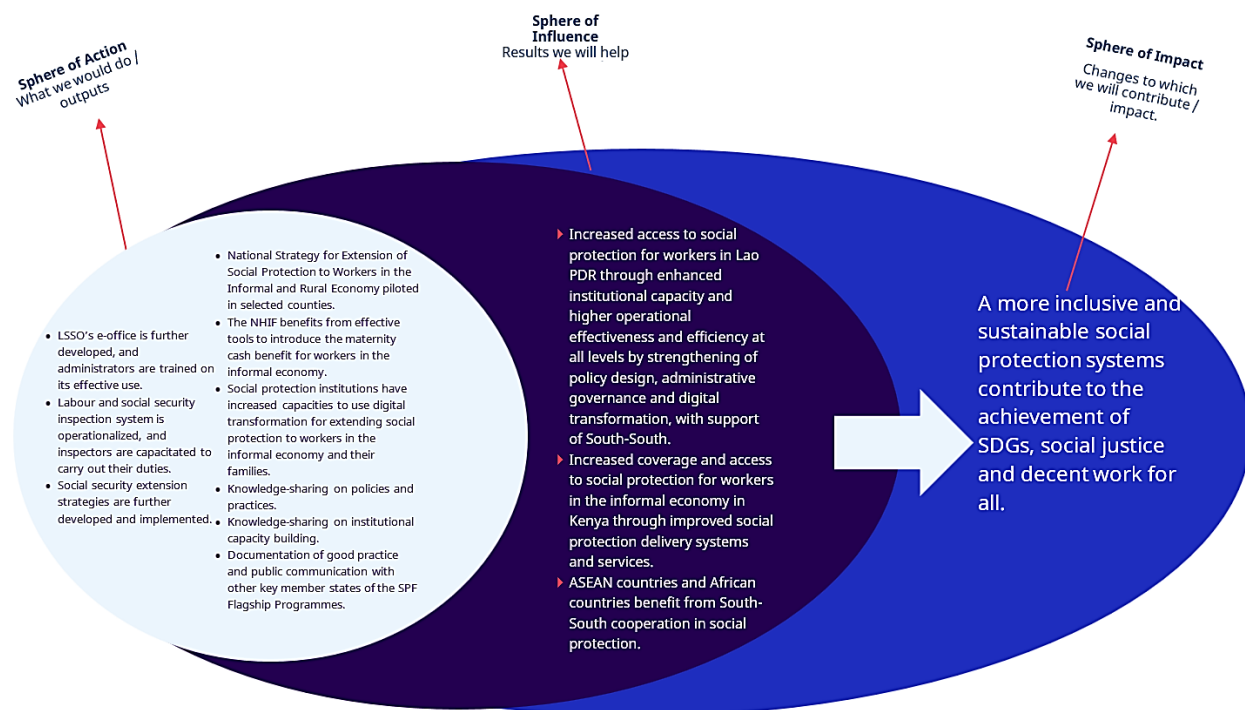
² ILO. *Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202*.

1.2. Project Description and Theory of Change

The project “Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation through South–South Cooperation” (GLO/23/17/CHN) is a three-year development cooperation initiative implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) from December 2023 to December 2026. The project is funded by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MoHRSS) of the People’s Republic of China, with a total budget of USD 2 million.

The overall objective of the project is to improve the social protection situation of workers in the informal economy in Lao PDR and Kenya, while contributing to broader global efforts to achieve universal social protection coverage and decent work for all. Please see Figure 1 for the visual representation of the project’s TOC. In particular, the project seeks to strengthen institutional capacities, improve service delivery systems, and leverage digital technologies to expand access to social protection schemes among workers who are traditionally excluded from formal social security systems.

Figure 1: Theory of Change Visualization



Source: Adapted from the Project Document and Results Framework (January 2026)

The project builds on the ILO’s long-standing commitment to promoting social protection as a fundamental component of social justice and inclusive economic development. It also aligns with international policy frameworks, including the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1.3 on implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and SDG 8 on promoting decent work and economic growth.

A distinctive feature of the project is its emphasis on South–South cooperation, which serves as a mechanism for facilitating knowledge exchange and policy learning among countries facing similar development challenges. Through this approach, the project seeks to leverage China’s experience in expanding social security coverage and implementing digital transformation within social protection systems. By promoting peer learning between China, Lao PDR, and Kenya, the project aims to strengthen national capacities and promote innovative solutions for extending coverage to workers in the informal economy.

1.3 Intervention Logic

The intervention logic of the project is based on the premise that *expanding social protection coverage for workers in the informal economy requires both institutional strengthening and innovative delivery mechanisms*, including the use of digital technologies and improved administrative systems. At the same time, effective extension of coverage depends on strong coordination among national institutions, engagement of tripartite constituents, and sustained policy dialogue.

Figure 2. Project Intervention Logic Diagram



Source: Own graphic.

To address these challenges, the project combines technical assistance, institutional capacity development, policy support, and knowledge exchange across three interconnected outcome areas as reflected in Figure 2.

At the impact level, the project contributes to the broader development objective of building more inclusive and sustainable social protection systems that support social justice and decent work for all.

At the outcome level, the project focuses on three main results:

1. **Increased coverage and access to social protection for workers in the informal economy in Lao PDR**, achieved through strengthened institutional capacity, improved administrative systems, and enhanced digital transformation of the social security system.
2. **Improved social protection delivery systems and services in Kenya**, enabling the extension of social protection schemes to workers in the informal economy through strengthened institutional capacity, policy support, and digital solutions.
3. **Promotion of South–South cooperation on social protection**, facilitating knowledge exchange between countries in Asia and Africa and enabling the dissemination of good practices in social protection coverage and digital transformation.

These outcomes are supported through a set of outputs and activities designed to strengthen institutional systems, enhance policy frameworks, and promote cross-country learning.

Geographic Scope and Beneficiaries

The project operates in two beneficiary countries:

- **Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)**
- **Kenya**

Within these countries, the project works primarily with national institutions responsible for social protection policy and administration, including ministries responsible for labour and social protection, social security agencies, and relevant implementing partners.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the project are workers and their families in the informal economy, who are expected to benefit from improved access to social protection systems, expanded coverage of social security schemes, and improved delivery of social protection services.

Key Outputs and Activities

In Lao PDR, the project focuses primarily on strengthening the capacity of the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) to expand social protection coverage and improve administrative efficiency. Activities under this component include the development and enhancement of digital infrastructure, such as the LSSO mobile application, e-office systems, and data-sharing interfaces with other government systems. The project also supports capacity-building initiatives for national and provincial administrators responsible for managing these digital systems.

Another important component in Lao PDR relates to strengthening the labour and social security inspection system, including the development of inspection information systems and training of inspectors to improve compliance with social security regulations. In addition, the project supports the development and implementation of strategies to extend social security coverage, including outreach initiatives targeting workers in rural areas and the informal economy.

In Kenya, the project focuses on strengthening social protection delivery mechanisms and supporting the implementation of national strategies aimed at extending coverage to informal economy workers. One key area of work involves supporting the National Strategy for the Extension of Social Protection to Workers in the Informal and Rural Economy, including piloting implementation approaches in selected counties.

The project also supports the development of tools and institutional capacities necessary for introducing maternity cash benefits for workers in the informal economy, including strengthening the operational capacity of social protection institutions responsible for delivering these benefits (ILO, 2015).³

In addition, the project supports initiatives aimed at enhancing the digital transformation of social protection institutions, including strengthening information systems and promoting improved coordination across agencies responsible for social protection delivery.

South–South Cooperation Component

A core feature of the project is the promotion of South–South cooperation between Asian and African countries on issues related to social protection and digital transformation.

This component includes the organization of knowledge-sharing workshops, study visits, and regional exchanges involving social protection experts and practitioners. Through these activities, the project aims to facilitate the sharing of policy experiences, administrative practices, and digital solutions that have proven effective in expanding social protection coverage in different contexts.

The project also supports the documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, including the preparation of policy briefs, guidance materials, and communication products intended to promote learning among countries participating in the ILO’s Social Protection Floors Flagship Programme.

1.4. Project Implementation Status and Key Developments

The project officially commenced in December 2023 with a planned duration of 36 months (2023–2026). The project is implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) with funding from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) of the People’s Republic of China, and is currently at the mid-point of implementation at the time of this evaluation.

Since its launch, the project has focused on supporting national institutions responsible for social protection policy and administration in Lao PDR and Kenya, while also facilitating knowledge exchange through South–South cooperation mechanisms involving China and other partner countries.

Project Start-Up and Initial Implementation Phase

The initial implementation phase during 2023–2024 focused primarily on establishing the institutional foundations necessary for project delivery. Key start-up activities included the operationalization of the project management structure, engagement with national implementing partners, and the development

³ ILO. *Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation No. 204*.

of detailed implementation plans aligned with the project's results framework.

In both Lao PDR and Kenya, the project worked closely with relevant national institutions responsible for social protection systems, including ministries responsible for labour and social protection, social security institutions, and other implementing partners. Early activities focused on identifying priority areas for technical assistance, aligning project activities with national policy frameworks, and establishing coordination mechanisms among project stakeholders.

The project also began to initiate technical work aimed at strengthening institutional capacities and supporting the digital transformation of social protection delivery systems. These early activities were particularly important for ensuring that subsequent interventions could build upon an established institutional foundation.

Implementation Progress in Lao PDR

In Lao PDR, the project focuses primarily on strengthening the institutional and operational capacity of the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) to extend social protection coverage and improve the efficiency of social security administration.

A key component of the project involves supporting the digital transformation of the social security system, including the development and strengthening of digital infrastructure used by LSSO. Activities under this component include technical assistance for improving the LSSO digital architecture, including the development of a mobile application, an e-office system, and the establishment of data interfaces between the social security system and other public information systems. These digital systems are intended to improve administrative efficiency, facilitate data exchange across government institutions, and support improved service delivery for social security beneficiaries.

In parallel with these digital transformation initiatives, the project also supports efforts to strengthen labour and social security inspection systems, including the development of a new inspection information system and capacity-building initiatives for inspectors responsible for monitoring compliance with social security regulations. Training activities have been conducted for national and local government staff to strengthen their capacity to operate these new systems and to support the implementation of inspection activities aimed at improving compliance.

The project further supports the development and implementation of strategies to extend social security coverage, including technical assistance to design and pilot approaches for expanding social security coverage among workers in the informal economy. These activities include stakeholder workshops, technical consultations, and training activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of national and local actors involved in the design and implementation of social security extension strategies.

Implementation Progress in Kenya

In Kenya, the project focuses on supporting national and sub-national institutions responsible for social protection delivery in strengthening mechanisms to extend coverage to workers in the informal economy.

A central component of the Kenya intervention involves supporting the implementation of the National Strategy for the Extension of Social Protection to Workers in the Informal and Rural Economy. The project

provides technical support for piloting implementation approaches in selected counties, including activities aimed at strengthening coordination between national and county authorities responsible for implementing the strategy.

Project activities in Kenya also focus on supporting the development of tools and institutional capacities needed to introduce maternity cash benefits for workers in the informal economy, including strengthening the operational capacity of relevant social protection institutions responsible for administering these benefits. These activities build upon earlier feasibility studies conducted by the ILO and support the development of institutional systems required to deliver these benefits in an integrated manner with existing health insurance and social protection schemes.

In addition, the project contributes to strengthening digital transformation efforts within social protection institutions, including support for initiatives aimed at improving electronic management information systems and enhancing coordination across institutions responsible for social protection delivery.

South–South Cooperation Activities

An important cross-cutting dimension of the project involves the promotion of South–South cooperation on social protection, with the objective of facilitating knowledge exchange among countries facing similar challenges in extending social protection to workers in the informal economy.

This component includes the organization of regional workshops, knowledge-sharing activities, and study visits involving practitioners and policy makers from countries in Asia and Africa. These activities are designed to facilitate the exchange of experiences related to social security policy design, institutional capacity building, and the digital transformation of social protection systems.

The project also supports the documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, including the development of policy briefs, technical guidance materials, and communication products intended to support knowledge sharing within the ILO’s Social Protection Floors Flagship Programme and among partner countries.

Overall Progress and Implementation Context

At the time of the mid-term evaluation, the project has made progress in initiating a range of activities across its three outcome areas, including technical assistance, institutional capacity-building, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. These milestones are summarized in Table 1 below.

However, as the project is currently at the mid-point of its implementation period, many activities are still in the process of being implemented and several planned outputs remain under development. In particular, some initiatives related to digital transformation, policy piloting, and knowledge dissemination are expected to generate more substantive results during the second half of the project implementation period.

The mid-term evaluation therefore provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which project implementation is progressing in line with the intended intervention logic and to identify potential adjustments that could strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of project outcomes during the remaining implementation period.

Table 1. Key Project Milestones

Period	Key milestone	Significance for project implementation
December 2023	Project commencement	Formal start of the ILO/China Partnership project on extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in Lao PDR and Kenya.
2024 (first half)	Project start-up and operationalization	Initial implementation arrangements established, including coordination with ILO offices, national partners and technical units; early technical activities initiated.
24 October 2024	Official project launch in Nairobi, Kenya	High-level launch event brought together representatives from China, Kenya, Lao PDR and the ILO, raising the project's visibility and reinforcing the South–South cooperation dimension.
24 October 2024	Amendment to partnership agreement signed	Additional funding was confirmed, bringing the total project budget to USD 2 million, and the project duration was extended to December 2026.
11–12 November 2024	Report launch and workshop on social security in Lao PDR	Key technical studies were presented and discussed with stakeholders, contributing to policy dialogue and national learning on social protection extension.
2024–2025	Implementation of country-level technical activities	Project activities advanced in Lao PDR and Kenya in areas such as digital transformation, inspection systems, county action planning, awareness raising, and support to social protection extension strategies.
2024–2025	The research activity conducted under the South–South collaboration component	Research collaboration with academic institutions to synthesize experiences in expanding social security coverage for informal workers and develop recommendations to improve social security system design in Kenya and Lao PDR.
24–25 September 2025	Digital transformation report launch and technical workshop in Lao PDR	Findings from the digital readiness and service delivery assessment were shared, alongside policy dialogue on adapting lessons from China and other countries.
26 September 2025	Project Advisory Committee meeting in Lao PDR	Stakeholders reviewed implementation progress, discussed challenges and identified priorities for the next implementation period.
29 September – 1 October 2025	High-level delegation visit from the project development partner to Lao PDR	The delegation met with the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) to review project progress and discuss future cooperation. During the visit, the LSSO demonstrated the first mobile social security application developed with support from the ILO–China Partnership Project, highlighting progress in digital service delivery.
24–28 November 2025	Kenya study visit to China	Kenyan delegation engaged in peer learning on social security administration, service delivery and digital transformation, strengthening the South–South

		cooperation component.
12 December 2025	Launch of Lao PDR's first social security mobile application	Marked an important milestone in the project's support to digital transformation and improved accessibility of social security services, particularly for informal and rural workers.
Early 2026	Mid-term evaluation conducted	Assessment undertaken to review progress, identify lessons, and inform strategic adjustments for the remainder of the project period.

1.5 Cross-Cutting Issues

Cross-cutting considerations, particularly gender equality and social inclusion, were incorporated into the project design and implementation in line with the International Labour Organization's commitment to promoting inclusive and equitable social protection systems.

At the design stage, the project recognized that workers in the informal economy—particularly women, migrant workers, and workers in vulnerable employment—face structural barriers in accessing social protection systems. The intervention logic therefore includes activities aimed at improving outreach, awareness raising, and institutional capacities to extend social protection coverage to populations traditionally excluded from formal systems.

The project results framework incorporates indicators that allow for the disaggregation of beneficiaries by gender, particularly with regard to membership in social security schemes and participation in awareness-raising activities. This reflects the recognition that expanding social protection coverage requires targeted efforts to reach women workers who are disproportionately represented in the informal economy.

In Kenya, gender considerations are particularly relevant in relation to the project's support for the development of maternity cash benefits for workers in the informal economy, which seeks to address gaps in income protection for women during maternity. This component reflects broader national policy efforts to strengthen gender-responsive social protection systems.

The project also acknowledges the importance of inclusive approaches that consider the needs of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, particularly in activities related to the extension of social protection coverage in the informal economy. For example, mapping exercises and stakeholder engagement activities in Kenya include informal economy associations and collective structures representing diverse groups of workers.

While the integration of gender and social inclusion considerations is reflected in project design and activities, the extent to which these considerations are systematically incorporated into implementation and monitoring processes varies across project components. This issue is further examined in the evaluation findings.

1.6 Roles and Responsibilities of the ILO and Key Stakeholders

The project is implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with national

institutions responsible for social protection policy and administration in Lao PDR and Kenya, with financial support from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) of the People's Republic of China.

The ILO plays the central role in overall project management, technical guidance, and coordination, drawing on its normative mandate and technical expertise in social protection and labour market governance. The project is implemented under the leadership of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), in collaboration with ILO country offices and technical specialists working on social protection.

At the national level, implementation is carried out in close collaboration with government institutions responsible for social protection systems.

In Lao PDR, the primary implementing partner is the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO), which is responsible for administering social security schemes and implementing reforms aimed at extending coverage to workers in the informal economy. The project provides technical assistance to LSSO to strengthen institutional capacity, improve administrative systems, and support the digital transformation of social security services.

In Kenya, the project collaborates with several national institutions responsible for social protection policy and implementation, including agencies responsible for social security, social health insurance, social assistance programmes, and labour market governance. Activities involve both national-level policy engagement and pilot implementation initiatives at the county level aimed at testing approaches to extending social protection coverage to informal economy workers.

In addition to government institutions, the project engages a range of tripartite constituents and stakeholders, including workers' and employers' organizations, informal economy associations, civil society organizations, and research institutions. These actors contribute to project activities such as policy dialogue, capacity-building initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, and knowledge-sharing events.

Finally, the project promotes collaboration with international partners and research institutions, particularly in the context of South–South cooperation initiatives that facilitate knowledge exchange on social protection policy design, digital transformation, and institutional capacity building.

Through these partnerships, the project seeks to strengthen national ownership of social protection reforms while facilitating cross-country learning and the dissemination of good practices in extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

2. EVALUATION BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

This report presents the findings of the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the project *“Promoting Social Protection Coverage and Decent Work for Workers in the Informal Economy through South–South Cooperation”* (GLO/23/17/CHN). The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the ILO Evaluation Policy (2022) and relevant ILO evaluation guidelines and quality standards.

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and emerging results of the project at mid-term, and to identify lessons learned and recommendations to inform the remaining implementation period. In line with ILO evaluation practice, the evaluation serves three main objectives:

- **Accountability** – assessing the extent to which the project is progressing toward its intended results and objectives.
- **Learning and project improvement** – identifying good practices, challenges and lessons that can inform adjustments during the remaining implementation period.
- **Knowledge generation** – contributing to institutional learning within the ILO and among partners on approaches to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy through South–South cooperation.

The evaluation also aims to support evidence-based decision-making by the ILO and project partners regarding strategic priorities, implementation modalities and potential scaling of relevant approaches.

2.2 Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covers the implementation of the project from its inception in December 2023 through early 2026, corresponding to the mid-point of the project implementation period.

Geographically, the evaluation covers project activities implemented in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Kenya, as well as the broader South–South cooperation component facilitated through collaboration between participating countries and Chinese institutions.

The evaluation examines the project’s progress in achieving its intended results related to:

- strengthening institutional capacity for extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy
- promoting knowledge exchange and policy learning through South–South cooperation; and
- supporting digital transformation and improved service delivery in social protection systems.

In accordance with ILO evaluation requirements, the evaluation integrates a cross-cutting analysis of key policy priorities, including:

- gender equality and non-discrimination,
- disability inclusion,
- social dialogue and tripartism,

- contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1.3 on social protection systems, and
- sustainability and potential medium- to long-term effects of capacity development activities.

The evaluation assesses progress against the project's results framework and theory of change, taking into account the broader institutional, policy and socio-economic contexts in which the project operates.

2.3 Evaluation Clients and Intended Users

The evaluation was commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in accordance with the organization's evaluation policy and procedures.

The primary clients and intended users of the evaluation include:

- the **ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)**, which oversees the project;
- the **project management team** responsible for implementation;
- relevant **ILO technical departments and country offices** involved in project delivery;
- the **Government of the People's Republic of China**, which provides financial support to the project; and
- **national stakeholders and implementing partners in Lao PDR and Kenya**, including government institutions responsible for social protection and labour administration.

The findings and recommendations of the evaluation are intended to inform strategic and operational decision-making during the remaining implementation period, as well as contribute to broader institutional learning on extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

2.4 Evaluation Process and Timeline

The evaluation was conducted between January and March 2026, following the evaluation approach and methodology outlined in the approved Inception Report.

The evaluation process consisted of several sequential stages:

1) Inception phase (January 2026)

The evaluation began with a comprehensive document review, including the project document, annual progress reports, workplans, monitoring data and relevant policy and programme documents. Based on this review, an **Inception Report** was prepared outlining the evaluation methodology, evaluation matrix, data collection tools and stakeholder interview plan.

2) Data collection phase (January–February 2026)

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives of government institutions, ILO staff, project partners and technical experts involved in project implementation. Interviews were conducted remotely in accordance with the evaluation design.

3) Analysis phase (February 2026)

Data collected through document review and stakeholder consultations were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of stakeholder perspectives with review of project documentation and monitoring data.

4) **Reporting phase (February–March 2026)**

Based on the analysis of the collected evidence, the evaluator prepared the Draft Mid-Term Evaluation Report, which was shared with the ILO and relevant stakeholders for comments. Following the review process, the Final Evaluation Report was prepared incorporating feedback received during the validation stage.

2.5 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The evaluation was guided by the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, in accordance with the ILO Evaluation Policy (2022) and relevant ILO evaluation guidelines. The evaluation examined the project's performance across the following core criteria:

- **Relevance** – the extent to which the project design and objectives are aligned with national priorities, beneficiary needs, and the strategic frameworks of the ILO and project partners.
- **Effectiveness** – the extent to which the project is achieving or is likely to achieve its intended outputs and outcomes.
- **Efficiency** – the extent to which project resources have been used in an economical and timely manner to achieve results.
- **Sustainability** – the likelihood that project benefits and institutional capacities will continue beyond the project's completion.
- **Impact (emerging effects)** – the extent to which the project contributes to broader institutional changes, policy development, and progress toward extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

The evaluation questions were derived from the Terms of Reference (TOR) presented in Annex I and further refined during the inception phase through the development of an evaluation matrix linking each criterion to specific questions, indicators, data sources and data collection methods. The evaluation matrix guided the overall analytical framework of the evaluation and is presented in Annex II of this report.

Across the five evaluation criteria, the evaluation examined key dimensions of project performance, including:

- 1) the relevance of the project's design and theory of change in relation to national social protection priorities in Lao PDR and Kenya;
- 2) the effectiveness of project activities in strengthening institutional capacity and supporting policy development related to social protection extension;
- 3) the efficiency of implementation arrangements, coordination mechanisms and resource use;
- 4) the sustainability of capacity development efforts and institutional reforms supported by the project; and
- 5) the project's contribution to broader knowledge exchange and policy learning through South–South cooperation.

2.6 Integration of Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination

In line with ILO evaluation policy and guidance on gender-responsive evaluation, the evaluation integrated gender equality and non-discrimination considerations across the evaluation criteria and questions (ILO, 2020).⁴

Specifically, the evaluation examined:

- the extent to which gender equality considerations were integrated into the project's design and theory of change;
- whether project activities addressed gender-related barriers to social protection coverage, particularly for women working in the informal economy;
- the degree to which project activities promoted inclusive participation of women and other vulnerable groups in training, capacity-building and policy dialogue activities; and
- whether monitoring and reporting mechanisms captured gender-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators.

The evaluation also considered broader issues of non-discrimination and inclusiveness, including the extent to which project interventions addressed the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as workers in the informal economy who often face barriers to accessing social protection systems.

2.7 Cross-Cutting Themes

Consistent with ILO evaluation guidance, the evaluation incorporated analysis of several cross-cutting themes relevant to the project's objectives and the ILO's normative mandate.

These included:

- **Tripartism and social dialogue** – examining the extent to which tripartite stakeholders, including workers' and employers' organizations, were engaged in project activities and policy discussions related to social protection reform.
- **International Labour Standards (ILS)** – considering how the project contributes to promoting ILO principles and standards related to social protection, decent work and labour rights.
- **Gender equality and disability inclusion** – assessing the degree to which the project promotes inclusive approaches to extending social protection coverage.
- **Environmental sustainability** – where relevant, examining whether environmental considerations are reflected in project activities or policy dialogue.
- **Sustainability of capacity development efforts** – assessing the potential **medium- and long-term effects** of training, institutional strengthening and knowledge exchange activities supported by the project.

These cross-cutting dimensions were integrated throughout the evaluation questions and analytical framework, ensuring that the evaluation assessed not only the achievement of project outputs but also broader institutional and systemic changes supported by the project.

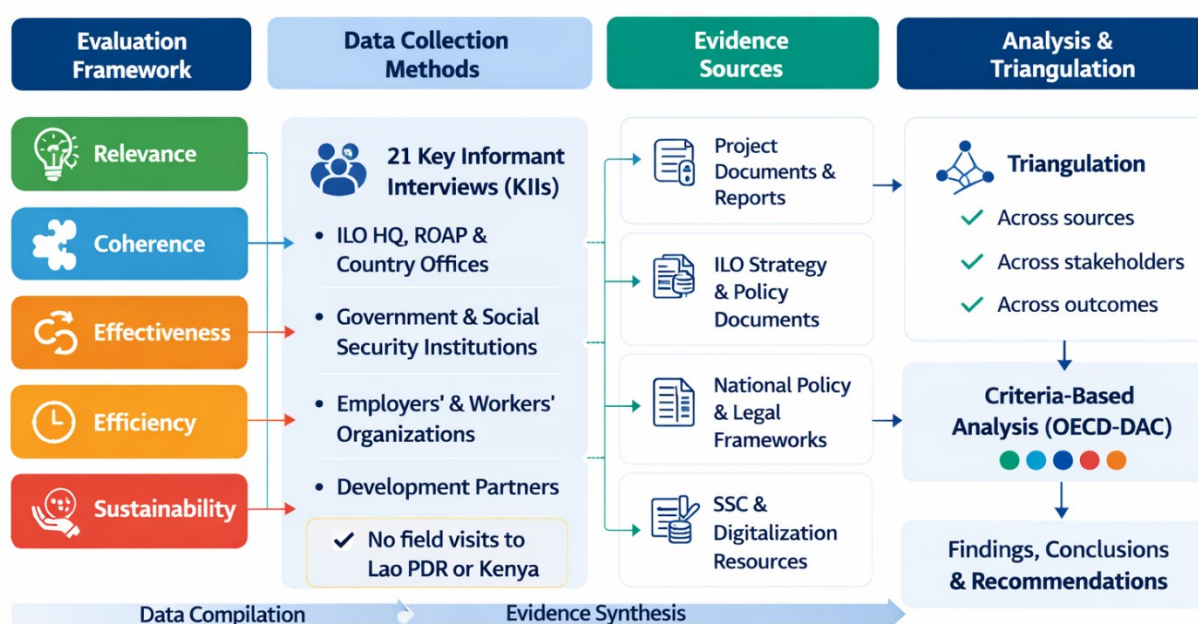
⁴ ILO. *Integrating Gender Equality in Monitoring and Evaluation*.

3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Evaluation Approach

This evaluation applied a mixed-methods, theory-informed evaluation approach consistent with the ILO Evaluation Policy (2022)⁵ and the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation (UNEG, 2020). The approach combined qualitative and documentary evidence to assess the project's performance against the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and emerging impact (OECD-DAC, 2019)⁶ as illustrated in **Figure 3**. The full evaluation matrix linking evaluation questions, indicators, data sources and analytical methods is presented in **Annex II (Evaluation Matrix)**.

Figure 3. Overview of the Evaluation Methodological Approach



Source: Author's elaboration based on the evaluation methodology described in the Inception Report.

Given the mid-term nature of the evaluation, the analytical focus was on:

- progress toward project outputs and early outcomes;
- enabling and constraining factors influencing implementation;
- institutional trajectory and reform processes supported by the project; and
- the plausibility of the project's contribution to broader policy and institutional changes.

The evaluation was guided by the project's theory of change and results framework, examining the extent to which project activities are contributing to strengthening institutional capacities for extending social

⁵ ILO. 2022. *ILO Evaluation Policy*.

⁶ OECD-DAC. 2019. *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation*.

protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

A structured triangulation framework was applied linking documentary evidence, stakeholder interviews and analysis of policy and institutional developments. The evaluation focused on contribution rather than attribution, recognizing that systemic institutional reforms in social protection typically involve multiple actors and longer time horizons.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The evaluation relied on multiple sources of evidence, enabling triangulation of findings across different types of data.

Document Review

A comprehensive document review was conducted to understand the project's design, implementation progress and results to date. Key documents reviewed included:

- project document and logical framework;
- annual progress reports and workplans;
- technical reports, training materials and knowledge products;
- policy briefs and study tour documentation;
- monitoring data and internal project documentation; and
- relevant national policy and strategy documents related to social protection.

Documentary evidence units were systematically extracted and analysed to assess the relationship between project outputs, institutional developments and emerging outcome-level changes. The list of documents reviewed as part of the evaluation is presented in Annex IV (Documents Reviewed).

Stakeholder Selection

Stakeholders were selected based on their institutional role, level of involvement in project implementation, and relevance to specific evaluation questions. The evaluation applied a tiered prioritization approach, focusing primarily on key informants from ILO project management structures, government institutions responsible for social protection policy and administration, and representatives of workers' and employers' organizations. Additional consultations were conducted with development partners, research institutions, and other stakeholders involved in South–South cooperation activities. This approach ensured balanced representation of institutional perspectives while maintaining feasibility within the evaluation timeframe. A detailed list of stakeholders consulted during the evaluation is provided in **Annex III (List of Persons Interviewed)**.

In total, 21 stakeholders were consulted (see Table 2) across the global, regional and national levels, including representatives of government institutions, ILO staff, social partners, development partners and civil society organizations in Lao PDR and Kenya, ensuring balanced representation of key actors involved in project design, implementation and results.

Table 2. Stakeholder consultation coverage by category and geography

Stakeholder Category	Lao PDR	Kenya	Global	Total
<i>Government</i>	4	3	–	7
<i>ILO staff</i>	3	1	3	7
<i>Development partners</i>	–	–	1	1
<i>Social partners (Workers & Employers)</i>	2	2	–	4
<i>Other stakeholders (NGO / civil society / beneficiaries)</i>	1	1	–	2
Total interviews	10	7	4	21

Semi-Structured Stakeholder Interviews

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in the project. Interviews were conducted with representatives from:

- ILO headquarters, regional and country offices;
- government institutions responsible for social protection policy and administration in Lao PDR and Kenya;
- representatives of workers' and employers' organizations; and
- project partners and technical experts.

Interview guides were aligned with the evaluation question matrix, ensuring systematic coverage of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and cross-cutting themes. The detailed interview guides used during stakeholder consultations are provided in **Annex V (Interview Guides)**.

All interviews were conducted under non-attribution conditions, in accordance with ILO evaluation ethical standards.

Triangulation Strategy

Triangulation was applied systematically across three main sources of evidence:

- documentary evidence and project monitoring data;
- stakeholder perspectives collected through interviews; and
- analysis of institutional and policy developments in the participating countries.

No major findings were based on single-source evidence. Where discrepancies arose between stakeholder perceptions and documentary evidence, findings were framed cautiously and interpreted within the broader institutional context.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The evaluation questions were structured around the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and guided the overall analytical framework of the evaluation (see Table 3). The criteria examined included:

- relevance
- effectiveness

- efficiency
- sustainability
- emerging impact

Findings were analysed at the level of each evaluation criterion and subsequently synthesized into overall conclusions regarding the merit and value of the project.

Where evidence suggested broader institutional or policy changes, the evaluation applied contribution analysis logic to assess the plausibility of the project's contribution. The evaluation did not attempt to attribute systemic policy reforms solely to project activities, recognizing the influence of multiple actors and contextual factors.

3.4 Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

In line with ILO evaluation guidance, the evaluation incorporated analysis of several cross-cutting dimensions throughout the methodological framework.

Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination

Gender considerations were integrated into the evaluation design, interview protocols and analytical framework. Interview questions included prompts related to:

- the participation of women in project activities;
- gender-specific barriers to social protection access; and
- the extent to which project interventions addressed gender equality considerations.

Where available, project monitoring data were reviewed for sex-disaggregated information, although such data were not systematically available across all activities.

Tripartism and Social Dialogue

The evaluation assessed the extent to which tripartite stakeholders were engaged in project activities and policy dialogue processes. Interviews included representatives of government institutions, employers' organizations and workers' organizations to assess the quality and depth of stakeholder engagement.

Capacity Development and Institutional Sustainability

The evaluation examined capacity development efforts across three levels:

- individual capacity (knowledge and skills development);
- organizational capacity (institutional practices and procedures); and
- system-level capacity (policy frameworks and institutional coordination).

Particular attention was given to the potential sustainability and institutionalization of capacities developed through project interventions.

3.5 Methodological Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Several methodological limitations were identified and addressed during the evaluation.

Mid-term timing

As the evaluation was conducted at the midpoint of project implementation, many institutional reform processes remain ongoing and impact-level effects cannot yet be verified.

Mitigation: The evaluation focused on assessing implementation progress, institutional trajectory and the plausibility of emerging outcomes.

Reliance on stakeholder perceptions

Institutional changes are often reported qualitatively through stakeholder perspectives.

Mitigation: Findings were systematically triangulated with documentary evidence to reduce reliance on perception-based information.

Data limitations

In some instances, monitoring data — particularly gender-disaggregated outcome data — were limited.

Mitigation: Findings were framed cautiously and data gaps were explicitly identified.

Attribution constraints

Social protection reform processes involve multiple actors and policy initiatives.

Mitigation: The evaluation applied a contribution-focused analytical approach, avoiding causal attribution claims.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The evaluation adhered to the ethical principles and standards of the ILO evaluation function, including:

- independence of judgement;
- confidentiality and anonymity of informants;
- voluntary participation in interviews;
- avoidance of conflicts of interest; and
- respectful and culturally appropriate engagement with stakeholders.

Interview responses were treated on a non-attributable basis, and information collected during the evaluation was used solely for the purpose of the evaluation.

Table 3. Evaluation criteria and analytical focus

OECD-DAC Evaluation Criterion	Analytical Focus in This Evaluation	Key Aspects Assessed
Relevance	Alignment of the project with national priorities, ILO strategies, and needs of workers in the informal economy.	Policy alignment with national social protection strategies in Kenya and Lao PDR; alignment with ILO Decent Work priorities; responsiveness to needs of informal economy workers.
Effectiveness	Extent to which planned outputs and outcomes have been achieved during the first phase of implementation.	Delivery of key outputs; institutional strengthening; knowledge exchange between countries; early evidence of policy influence.
Efficiency	Efficiency of implementation arrangements and use of financial and human resources.	Coordination between ILO headquarters and country offices; use of technical cooperation modalities; timeliness of implementation.
Sustainability	Likelihood that project results will continue beyond the project's lifetime.	Institutional ownership by national partners; integration of project outputs into national policy frameworks; continued capacity within implementing institutions.
Coherence	Consistency and complementarity with other ILO and development partner initiatives.	Alignment with national social protection programmes; complementarity with other development partners; coherence with ILO normative frameworks.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings of the evaluation based on triangulated evidence from document review, stakeholder interviews and analysis of project monitoring documentation. The findings are organized according to the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, with cross-cutting analysis of gender equality, tripartite engagement, international labour standards, environmental sustainability and capacity development.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the project demonstrates high relevance, satisfactory coherence, satisfactory effectiveness in terms of output delivery, generally satisfactory efficiency, and emerging but not yet fully institutionalized sustainability prospects. Table 4 provides a synthesized overview of the evaluation's overall assessment of the project across the OECD-DAC criteria. The ratings reflect the triangulated evidence from document review, stakeholder consultations, and administrative data analyzed during the evaluation.

At mid-term, most observed changes relate to institutional orientation, policy dialogue and planning processes, rather than measurable beneficiary-level outcomes. This pattern is consistent with the project's systems-strengthening theory of change and the relatively early stage of implementation.

No unintended negative outcomes were identified during the evaluation, although some implementation risks were noted related to the institutionalization of outputs and monitoring of intermediate outcome indicators.

Table 4. Summary assessment of project performance by evaluation criterion

Evaluation Criterion	Overall Assessment	Key Evidence	Implications
Relevance	 High	Strong alignment with national social protection priorities in Lao PDR and Kenya and with ILO strategic frameworks; demand from governments for extending social protection to informal economy workers.	Project design remains highly relevant to national policy agendas and development partner priorities.
Coherence	 High	Project complements national social protection reforms and aligns with ILO normative frameworks and ongoing development partner initiatives.	Continued coordination with national and international partners can maximize synergies and avoid duplication.
Effectiveness	 Moderate to High	Key outputs delivered including knowledge exchange, policy dialogue and capacity development; early policy influence observed but full outcomes still emerging due to project mid-term stage.	Continued support is needed to consolidate early institutional gains.
Efficiency	 Moderate	Implementation arrangements	Improved coordination

		generally effective, but coordination across global, regional and national components sometimes required additional alignment.	mechanisms may enhance efficiency in the remaining implementation period.
Sustainability	 Moderate	Evidence of institutional uptake in partner institutions, but sustainability depends on continued national commitment and integration into government systems.	Stronger institutional anchoring and resource mobilization will support sustainability.

Given the multi-country nature of the project, the evaluation examined implementation experiences in Lao PDR and Kenya to identify similarities, differences and emerging lessons regarding national-level engagement and institutional uptake. The table below provides a comparative overview of the two country contexts before presenting the detailed findings.

Table 5. Comparison of project implementation in Lao PDR and Kenya

Dimension	Lao PDR	Kenya
Policy context	Social protection expansion focused on extending coverage to informal economy workers and migrant workers through emerging national systems.	Social protection system more established, with ongoing reforms aimed at expanding coverage and strengthening institutional coordination.
Project focus	Strengthening policy dialogue and technical support for extending social protection coverage to informal economy workers.	Supporting policy discussions and institutional strengthening related to social protection extension mechanisms.
Institutional engagement	Strong collaboration with government institutions responsible for social protection policy development.	Engagement with national institutions responsible for social protection and labour policy.
Capacity development	Workshops and technical exchanges supporting institutional knowledge and policy dialogue.	Stakeholder engagement and learning activities supporting knowledge exchange and policy reflection.
Early results observed	Increased awareness and dialogue on extending social protection to informal economy workers.	Strengthened discussion around policy coordination and institutional roles in social protection expansion.
Challenges identified	Institutional capacity constraints and evolving policy frameworks.	Coordination challenges across institutions and policy actors.
Sustainability prospects	Dependent on continued government engagement and integration into national policy processes.	Likely to benefit from existing institutional structures but requires continued coordination and policy commitment.

The findings presented in this section are based on triangulation of evidence from document review, stakeholder interviews and administrative project data. The analytical synthesis of evidence is summarized in **Annex VIII (Findings–Conclusions–Recommendations Matrix)**.

4.1 RELEVANCE

4.1.1 Overall Relevance Assessment

At mid-term, the project is assessed as **highly relevant** in both Lao PDR and Kenya. Triangulated evidence from the project document, annual progress reports (2024–2025), county-level planning instruments in Kenya, and stakeholder interviews at national and sub-national levels indicates that the intervention addresses structural constraints limiting the extension of social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

These constraints include:

- administrative fragmentation
- limited enforcement capacity
- digital system interoperability gaps
- weak operationalization of policy frameworks at decentralized levels.

In **Lao PDR**, documentary review of policy briefs and workshop reports confirms that inspection strengthening, contribution compliance mechanisms, and digital modernization roadmaps correspond directly to reform priorities articulated by national institutions.

In Kenya, the development and validation of **County Social Protection Action Plans in Busia, Kisumu, and Mombasa** respond to recognized implementation gaps between national social protection commitments and devolved execution responsibilities. County officials interviewed during the evaluation confirmed that prior to the intervention, structured planning tools linking informal economy priorities to operational county-level measures were limited.

The **South–South cooperation (SSC)** component further enhances relevance by linking domestic reform ambitions with exposure to China’s unified social security administration model (United Nations, 2019).⁷ While contextual differences limit direct transferability, stakeholders reported that exchanges contributed to reframing reform discussions around system integration, administrative efficiency and digital system development.

Alignment with ILO strategic priorities on **universal social protection floors (SDG 1.3)** and the formalization of the informal economy further reinforces the project’s relevance.

No major contextual changes during the reporting period were identified that would reduce the salience of the intervention. While the project conceptually targets vulnerable informal workers—including women—the operational articulation of gender-responsive strategies and indicators could be strengthened to enhance traceability of gender-specific outcomes.

Overall, the relevance of the project at mid-term remains **high**.

4.1.2 Responses to specific questions sought in the Evaluation Matrix relating to relevance:

⁷ UN. *Buenos Aires Outcome Document (BAPA+40)*.

Alignment with National Priorities and Policy Context (EQ1/R1)

The evaluation finds that the project demonstrates a high level of relevance to national social protection priorities in both Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Kenya, particularly with regard to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

In both countries, the expansion of social protection coverage to informal and vulnerable workers has been identified as a key policy objective in national development strategies and social protection reforms. In Lao PDR, the government has been pursuing reforms aimed at strengthening the national social security system and improving coverage for workers outside the formal employment sector. The Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) has been working to expand the reach of contributory schemes while addressing administrative and institutional challenges associated with enrolling workers in the informal economy.

Similarly, in Kenya, extending social protection coverage remains a major policy priority within broader national social protection strategies and labour market reforms. The high prevalence of informal employment in Kenya creates structural challenges for traditional contributory social security systems. According to national labour market statistics and international estimates, informal employment accounts for more than 80 per cent of total employment in Kenya, underscoring the need for innovative approaches to expanding coverage.

Against this background, the project's focus on strengthening institutional capacity and promoting policy dialogue on extending social protection to workers in the informal economy is well aligned with the reform priorities of both governments. Stakeholder interviews conducted during the evaluation confirmed that project activities correspond closely with the policy challenges faced by national institutions responsible for social protection administration.

Stakeholders from government institutions and implementing partners emphasized that the project has contributed to strengthening dialogue around the institutional and operational dimensions of extending social protection coverage, including issues related to registration systems, administrative coordination, and strategies for engaging workers outside formal employment arrangements.

The evaluation also finds that the cross-regional design of the project, which brings together country experiences from Asia and Africa, further enhances the relevance of the intervention. Both Lao PDR and Kenya face similar structural challenges related to high levels of informal employment, limited fiscal space for expanding social protection systems, and institutional constraints affecting coverage expansion. As such, the project provides an opportunity for countries to exchange experiences and lessons learned on addressing these challenges.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the project responds directly to the policy needs and institutional reform agendas of participating countries, making it highly relevant within the national social protection contexts of Lao PDR and Kenya.

Alignment with ILO Mandate and Strategic Priorities (EQ2/R2)

The evaluation finds that the project is well aligned with the International Labour Organization's strategic priorities and normative mandate, particularly with regard to the promotion of universal social protection

and the extension of coverage to workers in the informal economy (ILO, 2021).⁸

The expansion of social protection coverage is a central element of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and is closely linked to the organization's efforts to promote inclusive labour markets and reduce vulnerability among workers. The project contributes directly to these objectives by supporting national efforts to strengthen social protection systems and improve institutional capacity for extending coverage to underserved populations.

The project's objectives are also consistent with international commitments related to social protection expansion, including the broader global agenda on universal social protection and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1.3, which calls for the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all.

Project documentation indicates that the intervention was designed to contribute to these broader international commitments by supporting policy reforms, strengthening institutional capacity, and facilitating knowledge exchange on innovative approaches to social protection administration.

The evaluation also notes that the project reflects the ILO's normative mandate through its emphasis on inclusive social protection systems and rights-based approaches to social protection governance. By focusing on extending coverage to workers in the informal economy, the project addresses a key gap in many national social protection systems, where large segments of the workforce remain outside contributory schemes.

In addition, the project incorporates a South–South cooperation (SSC) component, which facilitates knowledge exchange between participating countries and China. This component is intended to promote cross-regional learning on social protection governance and administrative innovations, including digitalization and institutional coordination mechanisms.

Stakeholder interviews conducted during the evaluation indicated that participants valued the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries facing similar challenges in expanding social protection coverage. These exchanges contributed to a broader understanding of potential policy options and institutional reforms that could be adapted to national contexts.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the project is strongly aligned with the ILO's strategic priorities and normative mandate, as well as with international policy frameworks related to social protection expansion.

4.2 COHERENCE

4.2.1 Overall Coherence Assessment

At mid-term, coherence is assessed as **satisfactory to strong**.

Evidence from project documentation, coordination records and stakeholder interviews indicates that the intervention builds upon ongoing ILO advisory engagements in social protection systems strengthening

⁸ ILO. *World Social Protection Report*.

rather than operating as a stand-alone initiative.

Internally, outputs such as training curricula, policy briefs and digital modernization dialogues align with existing ILO workstreams related to:

- social protection governance
- extension of social protection coverage
- informal economy formalization.

However, monitoring documentation does not consistently map this project's outputs against other concurrent ILO interventions through shared indicators or joint implementation mechanisms. This represents primarily a documentation gap rather than structural misalignment.

Externally, the project aligns with national reform trajectories in both countries and does not appear to duplicate major donor-supported initiatives.

In Kenya, the county-level action planning approach complements national social protection frameworks. In Lao PDR, digital modernization discussions are embedded within broader institutional reform processes.

The South–South cooperation component is embedded within institutional reform processes rather than treated as a stand-alone exchange activity. However, systematic documentation of how lessons from China are translated into context-specific reform milestones remains limited.

Overall, coherence is assessed as **satisfactory**, with opportunities to strengthen documentation of complementarities and reform adaptation pathways.

4.2.2 Responses to specific questions sought in the Evaluation Matrix relating to coherence:

Coherence with National Policies and Other Development Initiatives (EQ3/C1)

The evaluation finds that the project demonstrates a high level of coherence with national social protection policies and with broader development initiatives in both Lao PDR and Kenya.

In Lao PDR, the project complements ongoing efforts by the Government and development partners to strengthen the national social security system and improve coverage for workers outside formal employment. These efforts include reforms aimed at strengthening the administrative capacity of the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO), improving registration systems, and promoting greater institutional coordination among agencies responsible for labour and social protection policies.

Stakeholder interviews conducted during the evaluation indicated that project activities were well aligned with these ongoing reform efforts. In particular, technical exchanges, policy dialogues, and capacity development activities supported by the project were perceived as contributing to ongoing discussions regarding institutional reforms and strategies for extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

Similarly, in Kenya, the project is coherent with national social protection priorities and with broader

initiatives aimed at strengthening the country's social protection system. Kenya has been implementing a range of social protection programmes, including contributory and non-contributory schemes designed to improve social protection coverage among vulnerable populations. However, as in many countries, extending coverage to workers in the informal economy remains a major policy challenge.

The project complements these national efforts by supporting policy dialogue, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting coordination among stakeholders involved in social protection governance. Interviews with government officials and project stakeholders indicated that the project has contributed to strengthening awareness of the policy and institutional challenges associated with expanding social protection coverage.

The evaluation also finds that the project demonstrates internal coherence within the ILO's broader programme of work on social protection and decent work. The project's objectives and activities are consistent with the ILO's wider efforts to promote inclusive social protection systems, strengthen labour market institutions, and support the implementation of national social protection strategies.

Overall, the project appears to complement rather than duplicate existing initiatives. The intervention contributes to strengthening ongoing reform processes and reinforces the role of the ILO as a technical partner supporting national social protection reforms.

Coherence and Strategic Value of South–South Cooperation (EQ4/C2)

The evaluation finds that the project's South–South cooperation (SSC) component contributes positively to cross-regional knowledge exchange, although mechanisms for translating learning into concrete policy actions remain at an early stage.

The project was designed to promote cross-regional learning on social protection governance by facilitating exchanges between participating countries and China. Through study visits, policy dialogue platforms, and technical exchanges, stakeholders were exposed to experiences related to social protection administration, digitalization of social security systems, and strategies for extending coverage to workers outside formal employment.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation highlighted that these exchanges provided valuable opportunities to learn from alternative institutional models and implementation experiences. In particular, exposure to different approaches to social protection administration and system integration contributed to a broader understanding of possible reform pathways.

However, the evaluation also finds that the translation of these learning experiences into concrete policy reforms remains limited at the current stage of implementation. While study tours and exchanges contributed to raising awareness and stimulating policy discussions, systematic mechanisms for documenting lessons learned and integrating them into national reform processes appear to be less developed.

In some cases, stakeholders indicated that the outcomes of South–South exchanges were discussed informally within institutions but were not always formally integrated into policy planning or institutional reform frameworks. This suggests that while the SSC component adds strategic value to the project, stronger follow-up mechanisms may be needed to ensure that knowledge generated through these

exchanges is effectively translated into policy or institutional changes.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation finds that the SSC component contributes positively to the overall coherence of the project by facilitating cross-regional dialogue on shared challenges related to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. The exchange of experiences between countries facing similar structural challenges helps to broaden the range of policy options available to national stakeholders.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the project's South–South cooperation component represents an important mechanism for promoting policy learning and cross-regional dialogue, although further efforts may be required to strengthen the institutionalization of knowledge.

4.3 EFFECTIVENESS

4.3.1 Overall Effectiveness Assessment

At mid-term, effectiveness is assessed as **satisfactory** in terms of output delivery and emerging in terms of outcome-level change, consistent with the project's systems-strengthening theory of change.

The intervention logic assumes that institutional capacity development, administrative coordination and digital modernization dialogue will precede measurable expansion of social protection coverage.

Documentary review confirms that major planned outputs—including:

- training workshops
- policy briefs
- county-level action plans
- study tours
- digital governance dialogues

have been delivered largely as scheduled.

Stakeholders consistently acknowledged the technical quality and policy relevance of project outputs.

Early outcome-level changes are observable primarily in institutional orientation and planning behaviour.

In Kenya, county-level Social Protection Action Plans have introduced structured planning instruments capable of influencing future budget integration and coordination among county departments.

In Lao PDR, institutional actors referenced increased understanding of system interoperability and unified administrative models following South–South cooperation exchanges.

Institutional counterparts confirmed that digital modernization outputs are technically advanced, though full deployment remains dependent on legal clarity, institutional mandates and internal technical capacity.

Measurable expansion of social protection coverage cannot yet be observed at mid-term, which is

consistent with the project's institutional reform orientation and implementation timeline.

4.3.2 Early Outcome-Level Changes

Early changes observed during the evaluation are institutionally oriented rather than beneficiary-level outcomes.

Evidence suggests that the project has contributed to strengthening inter-agency dialogue and administrative awareness of informal economy coverage gaps.

In Kenya, county officials confirmed that the action planning process improved coordination across departments responsible for social protection, labour and social services.

However, evidence of budget allocations or programme expansion directly linked to the action plans remains emerging.

In Lao PDR, exposure to unified digital platforms stimulated internal reform discussions related to social security administration.

Formal policy adoption or implemented system upgrades directly resulting from these exchanges were not yet documented at mid-term.

The evaluation therefore assesses the project's contribution to outcome-level changes as plausible but still evolving.

4.3.3 Responses to specific questions sought in the terms of reference relating to effectiveness:

Delivery of Planned Outputs (EQ5/E1)

The evaluation finds that the project has **largely delivered the planned outputs during the period under review**, with most key activities implemented in accordance with the project workplans and annual progress reports.

According to project documentation and implementation reports reviewed during the evaluation, the project has implemented a range of activities aimed at strengthening institutional capacity and facilitating policy dialogue on extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. These activities include policy workshops, technical consultations, capacity development initiatives, and South–South cooperation exchanges.

In both Lao PDR and Kenya, stakeholders reported that project activities have contributed to strengthening dialogue among institutions responsible for social protection policy and administration. Interviews with government representatives and implementing partners indicated that the project provided opportunities for stakeholders to discuss institutional challenges associated with expanding coverage to informal economy workers, including issues related to registration systems, administrative coordination, and policy design.

The evaluation also notes that capacity development activities have been implemented as planned,

including training workshops and technical exchanges designed to strengthen the knowledge and skills of government officials and social protection administrators. These activities were generally perceived by stakeholders as useful in improving understanding of institutional challenges and potential policy solutions related to extending social protection coverage.

The evaluation found that capacity development occurred at multiple levels, including individual learning, institutional engagement, and system-level knowledge exchange. Table 6 summarizes these main capacity development results observed during project implementation.

Table 6. Capacity Development Results Observed During the Project

Capacity Development Level	Evidence from Evaluation
Individual level	Training workshops, policy dialogue sessions, and knowledge exchange activities contributed to increased awareness and understanding among government officials and technical stakeholders involved in social protection policy development.
Institutional level	Engagement with national institutions responsible for social protection supported policy discussions, institutional coordination, and strengthened dialogue around extending social protection coverage.
System level	The project facilitated regional learning and South–South knowledge exchange between participating countries, contributing to broader discussions on extending social protection to informal economy workers.

In addition to national-level activities, the project also supported cross-regional learning through South–South cooperation exchanges involving stakeholders from participating countries. These exchanges were designed to promote the sharing of experiences related to social protection governance and the administration of social security systems.

Overall, the evaluation finds that **implementation progress at the output level has been satisfactory**, with most planned activities delivered within the reporting period.

However, as is common in institutional reform initiatives, the evaluation also notes that the delivery of outputs does not automatically translate into immediate changes in institutional practices or policy outcomes. The full effects of capacity development activities and policy dialogue processes often emerge over a longer time horizon.

Progress Toward Intended Outcomes (EQ6/E2)

The evaluation finds that the project has contributed to early institutional changes related to policy dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and awareness of challenges associated with extending social protection coverage, although measurable outcome-level changes remain limited at the mid-term stage.

In both participating countries, the project has supported discussions on strategies for expanding social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation indicated that project activities contributed to strengthening dialogue among institutions involved in

social protection governance, including government agencies responsible for labour, social protection, and social security administration.

In Lao PDR, the project has contributed to strengthening engagement between the Lao Social Security Organization and other government stakeholders involved in social protection policy discussions. These interactions have helped to raise awareness of institutional challenges associated with extending coverage to workers outside the formal economy.

Similarly, in Kenya, project-supported activities facilitated dialogue among stakeholders involved in social protection administration and policy development. Stakeholders indicated that these discussions contributed to improving understanding of the institutional and operational barriers that currently limit the expansion of social protection coverage.

However, the evaluation also finds that **observable outcome-level changes remain at an early stage**, which is consistent with the project's mid-term stage of implementation. Institutional reforms related to social protection systems often require extended timeframes due to the complexity of administrative, regulatory, and financial arrangements involved in expanding coverage.

Furthermore, the project focuses primarily on strengthening institutional capacity and policy dialogue rather than directly delivering social protection services. As a result, many of the expected outcomes relate to institutional processes and policy development, which typically evolve gradually.

The evaluation therefore concludes that the project is contributing to institutional reform processes and policy discussions, although measurable changes in social protection coverage or service delivery cannot yet be expected at this stage of implementation.

Contribution of South–South Cooperation to Institutional Learning (EQ7/E3)

The evaluation finds that the South–South cooperation component of the project has contributed positively to knowledge exchange and institutional learning among participating stakeholders, although its contribution to concrete policy changes remains difficult to assess at the mid-term stage.

Through study visit, technical exchanges, and dialogue platforms, stakeholders from participating countries were exposed to experiences and institutional approaches related to social protection governance. These exchanges provided opportunities to learn about administrative practices, policy reforms, and strategies for expanding social protection systems.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation highlighted that these exchanges helped broaden their understanding of how different countries address similar challenges related to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. Exposure to alternative institutional models was seen as particularly valuable for stimulating policy discussions and generating ideas for potential reforms.

However, the evaluation also finds that **the direct influence of these exchanges on national policy reforms remains difficult to measure**. While stakeholders reported that the exchanges contributed to learning and awareness, the translation of these insights into concrete policy actions or institutional reforms appears to be at an early stage.

This is not unusual in South–South cooperation initiatives, where the primary objective is often to facilitate knowledge exchange and policy learning rather than immediate policy adoption. The influence of such exchanges on institutional reforms typically emerges gradually as stakeholders reflect on lessons learned and consider how they may be adapted to national contexts.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation concludes that the South–South cooperation component has **added value to the project by facilitating cross-regional dialogue and knowledge exchange on social protection governance**. These exchanges have contributed to strengthening relationships among participating institutions and expanding the range of policy options considered by stakeholders.

4.4 EFFICIENCY

4.4.1 Overall Efficiency Assessment

Financial documentation reviewed indicates that expenditure patterns are broadly aligned with planned outputs at mid-term.

No significant structural under-expenditure or budget reallocations suggesting systemic inefficiency were identified in available financial reports.

Budget execution appears consistent with the stage of implementation, although detailed cost-output ratio analysis (for example, cost per training participant or cost per policy product) is not systematically available.

The project’s operational model—focused primarily on institutional dialogue, technical advisory services and knowledge exchange—supports a relatively cost-effective approach compared to capital-intensive interventions.

Human resource deployment appears proportionate to the scale of activities implemented.

Stakeholders generally reported timely coordination and adequate technical responsiveness from the project team.

While financial reporting follows the project’s output–activity–based budget structure, further alignment between expenditure reporting and output-level monitoring indicators could strengthen value-for-money analysis during the remaining implementation period.

Overall, efficiency is assessed as **satisfactory**.

4.4.2 Responses to specific questions sought in the Evaluation Matrix relating to efficiency:

Efficiency of Implementation Arrangements (EQ8/F1)

The evaluation finds that the project’s **implementation arrangements have generally enabled timely delivery of planned activities**, although certain coordination and operational challenges typical of multi-country initiatives have been observed.

The project is implemented through collaboration between the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, national counterparts in Lao PDR and Kenya, and other participating institutions involved in social protection governance. The management structure includes coordination among ILO technical specialists, national government partners, and project stakeholders responsible for implementing specific activities.

Interviews conducted during the evaluation indicate that this structure has generally functioned effectively in facilitating the organization of project activities, including training workshops, policy dialogues, and South–South cooperation exchanges. Stakeholders noted that the involvement of national institutions in planning and implementing activities contributed to ensuring that project interventions remained relevant to national priorities.

At the same time, stakeholders also highlighted that coordination across multiple institutions and countries requires significant administrative effort. Organizing cross-regional exchanges and coordinating activities among various government agencies occasionally resulted in delays related to scheduling, logistics, or stakeholder availability. However, these challenges are typical for international technical cooperation projects and do not appear to have significantly affected the overall implementation progress of the project.

The evaluation also notes that the ILO’s technical expertise and convening role contributed positively to the implementation process. The organization’s experience in social protection policy and institutional development enabled it to facilitate dialogue among national stakeholders and provide technical guidance on policy issues.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the project’s **implementation arrangements have been broadly effective in supporting the delivery of planned activities**, and that institutional coordination mechanisms have functioned satisfactorily during the period under review.

Efficiency of Resource Use (EQ9/F2)

The evaluation finds that project resources have been **utilized in a manner broadly consistent with planned activities and implementation progress**, although the monitoring system provides limited information for assessing cost-efficiency in detail.

Review of project documentation and progress reports indicates that expenditures have generally corresponded with the implementation of planned outputs, including capacity development activities, policy dialogue events, and South–South cooperation exchanges. These activities constitute the primary mechanisms through which the project seeks to achieve its objectives of strengthening institutional capacity and facilitating policy learning.

However, the evaluation also finds that the project’s monitoring framework focuses primarily on tracking activities and outputs rather than systematically linking financial expenditures with performance indicators. As a result, it is difficult to conduct a detailed assessment of value-for-money or cost-efficiency based on available monitoring data.

This limitation is not uncommon in technical cooperation projects that focus on institutional development and capacity building, where many outcomes relate to policy dialogue and knowledge exchange rather than directly measurable service delivery outputs.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation generally perceived the project as making effective use of available resources, particularly in facilitating cross-regional learning and supporting policy discussions among institutions involved in social protection governance.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that **project resources appear to have been utilized efficiently in relation to the activities implemented**, although improvements in monitoring systems could strengthen the ability to assess cost-efficiency in future project phases.

4.5 SUSTAINABILITY

4.5.1 Overall Sustainability Assessment

The project's systems-strengthening orientation enhances sustainability prospects by reinforcing existing institutional structures rather than creating parallel mechanisms.

However, sustainability will depend on several key institutionalization steps (UNEG, 2020), including:

- integration of County Social Protection Action Plans into formal budget cycles in Kenya
- endorsement of digital modernization roadmaps in Lao PDR
- establishment of training-of-trainers mechanisms
- formal documentation of post-South–South cooperation reform adaptation pathways.

At mid-term, institutional ownership appears **emerging but not yet fully embedded within formal administrative instruments**.

Future sustainability will depend largely on the extent to which project outputs are translated into formal policy decisions, administrative procedures and national reform programmes.

4.5.2 Responses to specific questions sought in the Evaluation Matrix relating to sustainability:

Sustainability of Institutional Reforms and Policy Processes (EQ10/S1)

The evaluation finds that the project has contributed to **strengthening institutional dialogue and policy processes related to extending social protection coverage**, although the long-term sustainability of these reforms will depend on continued institutional commitment and integration of project-supported initiatives into national policy frameworks.

In both Lao PDR and Kenya, the project has facilitated discussions among stakeholders involved in social protection governance, including government agencies responsible for labour, social protection, and social security administration. These interactions have contributed to raising awareness of the institutional challenges associated with extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy and have encouraged dialogue on possible policy responses.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation indicated that the project has helped to strengthen engagement among institutions responsible for social protection policies. In particular, project-supported activities have provided platforms for discussing policy options and institutional reforms aimed at expanding coverage to underserved populations.

However, the evaluation also finds that many of the institutional reforms supported by the project remain at an early stage of development. As a result, the sustainability of these efforts will depend on whether the policy discussions and institutional initiatives supported by the project are translated into formal policy measures, administrative reforms, or operational changes within national social protection systems.

The sustainability of project results is therefore closely linked to the degree to which national institutions continue to prioritize social protection reforms and allocate resources for their implementation. Institutional ownership among national stakeholders appears to be emerging, but further efforts may be required to ensure that project-supported initiatives become fully integrated into national policy frameworks.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the **prospects for sustainability of institutional reforms are promising but not yet fully secured**, as many reform processes supported by the project are still evolving.

Sustainability of Capacity Development Results (EQ11/S2)

The evaluation finds that the project has contributed to strengthening the knowledge and awareness of stakeholders involved in social protection governance, although the sustainability of these capacity development results will depend on the extent to which knowledge and skills gained through project activities are institutionalized within participating organizations.

Capacity development activities supported by the project include training workshops, technical exchanges, and policy dialogue events aimed at strengthening the understanding of social protection challenges and reform options among government officials and institutional stakeholders (ILO, 2020).⁹

Participants interviewed during the evaluation generally reported that these activities contributed to improving their understanding of institutional challenges associated with extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. Stakeholders also noted that the exchanges provided opportunities to learn about alternative approaches to social protection administration and governance.

However, the evaluation also finds that **mechanisms for institutionalizing knowledge generated through project activities appear to be limited**. In many cases, knowledge gained through training workshops or exchanges remains with individual participants rather than being systematically incorporated into institutional training programmes, policy development processes, or organizational learning mechanisms.

This situation is common in capacity development initiatives, where the sustainability of results depends not only on the quality of training activities but also on the extent to which institutions create structures that allow knowledge to be retained, shared, and applied over time.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation finds that the project has laid a foundation for strengthening institutional capacity, particularly by raising awareness among key stakeholders and encouraging dialogue on social protection reforms.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the **sustainability of capacity development results will depend on continued institutional engagement and the integration of project-supported learning into national**

⁹ ILO. *ILO Strategy on Capacity Development*.

training and policy processes.

4.6 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

4.6.1 Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion (EQ12/X1)

The evaluation finds that gender equality considerations were integrated at the conceptual level of the project design, although the operationalization of gender-responsive monitoring and reporting remains limited during the implementation period reviewed.

Project documentation indicates that gender equality was recognized as an important cross-cutting principle, consistent with the ILO's commitment to promoting inclusive social protection systems that address the needs of vulnerable populations, including women working in the informal economy. Given that women are often disproportionately represented in informal employment, extending social protection coverage to informal workers has important implications for reducing gender-related vulnerabilities in labour markets.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation generally acknowledged the relevance of addressing gender disparities within social protection systems. However, the evaluation finds that **specific mechanisms for systematically integrating gender considerations into project monitoring frameworks appear limited**. In particular, the monitoring system does not consistently capture sex-disaggregated data or track gender-specific outcomes associated with project activities.

Similarly, explicit references to disability inclusion in project implementation were limited in available documentation and stakeholder discussions. While the project's overall objective of expanding social protection coverage contributes indirectly to improving access to protection for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, specific measures aimed at addressing disability-related barriers were not prominently reflected in project activities during the period under review.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that **gender equality and disability inclusion were recognized in project design but remain only partially operationalized in implementation and monitoring practices**. Strengthening gender-responsive indicators and ensuring systematic collection of disaggregated data could enhance the project's ability to demonstrate its contribution to inclusive social protection systems.

4.6.2 Tripartism and Social Dialogue (EQ13/X2)

The evaluation finds that the project reflects the ILO's tripartite principles by promoting dialogue among government institutions and stakeholders involved in social protection governance, although the degree of engagement of workers' and employers' organizations varies across activities and country contexts.

The promotion of tripartite dialogue is a core element of the ILO's institutional mandate. In the context of social protection reforms, effective stakeholder engagement can play an important role in ensuring that policy reforms reflect the perspectives of different actors within labour markets.

In both Lao PDR and Kenya, project-supported activities facilitated discussions among government stakeholders responsible for labour, social protection, and social security administration. These interactions contributed to strengthening dialogue on institutional challenges associated with expanding

social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy.

However, the evaluation also finds that **the participation of workers' and employers' organizations in project activities appears uneven across countries and activities**. While certain consultations and dialogues included broader stakeholder participation, engagement with social partners was not consistently structured throughout all project activities.

Stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation emphasized the importance of strengthening tripartite engagement in future phases of social protection reform processes. Greater involvement of workers' and employers' organizations could help ensure that policy reforms are informed by the perspectives of labour market actors and contribute to strengthening the legitimacy of reform initiatives.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the project reflects the principles of social dialogue and stakeholder engagement, although further efforts could be made to strengthen the systematic participation of tripartite constituents in project-supported policy discussions.

4.6.3 International Labour Standards and Normative Alignment (EQ14/X3)

The evaluation finds that the project contributes indirectly to the promotion of international labour standards related to social protection, particularly through its focus on strengthening national social protection systems and expanding coverage to workers in the informal economy.

The ILO's normative framework includes a number of standards relevant to social protection, including the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), which calls for the establishment of nationally defined social protection floors guaranteeing access to essential health care and basic income security throughout the life cycle.

By supporting national discussions on extending social protection coverage and strengthening institutional capacity for social protection administration, the project contributes to advancing the objectives reflected in these international standards. In particular, efforts aimed at expanding coverage to workers in the informal economy are consistent with global commitments to promoting universal social protection.

However, the evaluation also finds that **explicit references to international labour standards within project implementation activities and documentation appear relatively limited**. While the normative principles underlying the project are consistent with ILO standards, these links are not always systematically articulated in project communication materials or policy dialogue processes.

Strengthening the explicit integration of international labour standards in project activities could enhance the visibility of the ILO's normative mandate and reinforce the role of international standards as a guiding framework for national social protection reforms.

4.6.4 Capacity Development

Capacity development constitutes a central dimension of the project's intervention logic.

Evidence suggests that capacity strengthening is occurring primarily at the **institutional and**

organizational levels, through technical workshops, policy dialogue platforms and knowledge exchange activities.

At the **individual level**, stakeholders reported improved understanding of digital social security administration models and planning approaches for extending social protection coverage to informal economy workers.

However, systematic monitoring of capacity development outcomes remains limited. The sustainability of newly developed capacities will depend on their integration into institutional training systems, administrative procedures and policy frameworks.

4.6.5 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability was not a primary focus of the intervention design. No adverse environmental implications were identified in the documentation reviewed.

Given the institutional nature of project activities, environmental risks appear minimal.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions presented below synthesize the evaluation findings across the OECD-DAC criteria and reflect the overall assessment of the project's performance. The logical linkage between findings, conclusions and recommendations is documented in **Annex VIII (Findings–Conclusions–Recommendations Matrix)**.

5.1 Criterion-Level Conclusions

Conclusion 1 – Relevance

The project remains **highly relevant** at mid-term in both Lao PDR and Kenya. The intervention addresses structurally identified bottlenecks limiting the extension of social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy, including administrative fragmentation, enforcement constraints, digital interoperability gaps, and sub-national implementation challenges. Activities are aligned with nationally articulated reform priorities and correspond to institutional demand rather than externally driven agendas. Alignment with ILO strategic priorities on universal social protection and formalization further reinforces continued relevance. While gender equality is conceptually embedded in the focus on informal economy workers, operational traceability of gender-responsive strategies could be strengthened.

Conclusion 2 – Coherence

The project demonstrates **satisfactory to strong coherence** both internally within the ILO portfolio and externally within national reform ecosystems. The intervention builds on existing advisory engagements and avoids duplication with parallel initiatives. The South–South and triangular cooperation component is integrated within institutional reform processes rather than treated as a stand-alone exchange activity. However, documentation of portfolio complementarities and systematic articulation of adaptation pathways from South–South exchanges could be strengthened to enhance visibility and strategic coherence.

Conclusion 3 – Effectiveness

At mid-term, effectiveness is assessed as **satisfactory in terms of output delivery and emerging in terms of outcome-level change**. Planned outputs—including training activities, policy briefs, county-level action plans, and South–South exchanges—have been largely delivered as scheduled and are perceived as technically relevant by stakeholders. Early outcome-level changes are observable primarily at the level of institutional orientation, coordination, and planning behaviour. Measurable expansion of social protection coverage or service delivery improvements directly attributable to the project remains limited at this stage, which is consistent with the reform-oriented nature of the intervention and its systems-strengthening theory of change. Strengthened tracking of intermediate adoption indicators would enhance outcome monitoring during the remaining implementation period.

Conclusion 4 – Efficiency

Efficiency at mid-term is assessed as **satisfactory**. Financial and human resources have been deployed broadly in line with planned activities, and no major structural inefficiencies were identified. The project's reliance on knowledge exchange, capacity development, and institutional dialogue supports a

proportionate and cost-conscious operational model. At the same time, strengthening the analytical linkage between expenditure reporting and output-level monitoring indicators could further support value-for-money analysis and organizational learning during the remaining implementation period.

Conclusion 5 – Sustainability

Sustainability prospects are assessed as **moderately promising**, contingent upon the institutional embedding of project-supported instruments and reform processes. The systems-strengthening orientation enhances durability by reinforcing existing institutional frameworks rather than creating parallel mechanisms. However, the sustainability of results will depend on formal integration of county-level action plans into budgetary and monitoring cycles in Kenya, translation of digital modernization dialogue into endorsed institutional roadmaps in Lao PDR, and the establishment of structured follow-up and knowledge retention mechanisms. Without such embedding, risks of partial institutionalization remain.

Conclusion 6 – Cross-Cutting Issues

The project demonstrates **plausible early contribution to institutional reform momentum**, though measurable impact at beneficiary level is not yet observable at mid-term. Gender equality and inclusion are conceptually integrated but insufficiently supported by systematic disaggregated monitoring data. Tripartite engagement is present but variably documented, with stronger government engagement than structured evidence of employers' and workers' influence in reform processes. Strengthening documentation and analytical integration of these dimensions would enhance compliance with ILO normative principles.

5.2 Cross-Cutting Strategic Conclusions

Strategic Conclusion A – the project is operating within a realistic reform timeframe

The project's results profile reflects the expected sequencing of systems-strengthening interventions: output delivery and institutional orientation precede measurable coverage expansion. At mid-term, the intervention appears to be on a plausible reform trajectory, provided that institutional adoption pathways are actively supported in the second half of implementation. The absence of measurable beneficiary-level impact at this stage does not indicate underperformance but underscores the importance of tracking intermediate reform milestones.

Strategic Conclusion B – the primary risk is not delivery, but institutionalization

The evaluation finds no major structural delivery failure. The central implementation risk lies in the transition from technical dialogue and planning instruments to formalized institutional embedding. Without structured follow-up mechanisms, action plans, exchange lessons, and training outputs risk remaining at the level of documented outputs rather than operationalized reforms.

Strategic Conclusion C – South–South Cooperation adds strategic orientation, but requires stronger adaptation mechanisms

The SSTC component contributes to reform orientation, exposure to scalable administrative models, and

political signaling around modernization. However, its long-term contribution depends on systematic translation of exchange insights into context-specific institutional milestones. Establishing clearer adaptation tracking mechanisms would significantly enhance the project's contribution narrative and sustainability.

Strategic Conclusion D – monitoring architecture needs to evolve from output tracking to adoption tracking

The current monitoring architecture is primarily output-oriented and does not sufficiently capture institutional adoption pathways or intermediate reform milestones. Strengthening intermediate indicators would enhance not only accountability but also the robustness of contribution analysis and triangulation in future evaluation stages. Strengthening intermediate adoption indicators will not only enhance accountability but also improve the robustness of contribution analysis and triangulation in future evaluation stages.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons learned and emerging good practices were identified through the analysis of project implementation experiences and are intended to inform the design and implementation of future ILO technical cooperation interventions.

Lesson 1: South–South Cooperation requires structured institutional follow-through

Context: The project successfully facilitated South–South exchanges, including study tours and technical dialogue platforms.

Lesson: South–South cooperation generates strongest reform traction when exchange activities are followed by structured national action planning and institutional integration mechanisms.

Applicability: This lesson applies to other ILO South–South or triangular cooperation initiatives where knowledge exchange is intended to inform policy or administrative reform.

Implication: Future projects should embed follow-up frameworks within exchange design to ensure translation of learning into institutional change.

Lesson 2: Institutionalization must be designed from the outset, not the end

Context: The project delivered quality technical outputs; however, embedding into formal administrative systems remains ongoing.

Lesson: Sustainability of technical cooperation interventions depends on early planning for policy adoption, procedural integration and budgetary anchoring rather than relying on post-hoc consolidation.

Applicability: Relevant to social protection reform projects operating in administratively complex or resource-constrained environments.

Implication: Institutional embedding strategies should be integrated into work planning from project inception.

Lesson 3: Capacity Development is durable only when it operates across system levels

Context: Capacity development efforts improved technical awareness and dialogue.

Lesson: Capacity development initiatives are more likely to produce sustainable reform when they simultaneously target individual competencies, organizational procedures and system-level governance arrangements.

Applicability: Applicable to ILO projects supporting institutional reform in social protection and other governance areas.

Implication: Training activities should be linked explicitly to institutional mandates and operational reforms.

Lesson 4: Early stakeholder buy-in reduces reform friction

Context: Institutional engagement varied in depth across settings.

Lesson: Early and sustained engagement of key institutional actors and social partners reduces implementation friction and enhances reform ownership.

Applicability: Particularly relevant in multi-stakeholder governance contexts involving tripartite actors.

Implication: Structured stakeholder mapping and engagement strategies should precede or accompany technical advisory inputs.

7. EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

Good Practice 1: Structured cross-country policy dialogue platforms

Description: The project established structured cross-country policy dialogue platforms that combined technical exchange with institutional reflection.

Why It Works: These platforms fostered peer learning while contextualizing lessons within national reform realities.

Replicability: This model can be replicated in other South–South cooperation initiatives where institutional reform is the objective.

Target Users: ILO technical units, regional offices, and national institutions engaged in policy reform.

Good Practice 2: Integrated Technical Advisory and Capacity Development Approach

Description: The project combined advisory services, dialogue facilitation and capacity development within a coherent reform support model.

Why It Works: This integrated approach strengthened technical understanding while simultaneously promoting institutional ownership.

Replicability: Suitable for social protection and governance reform projects in low- and middle-income contexts.

Target Users: ILO project teams and development partners implementing institutional strengthening programmes.

Good Practice 3: Linking South–South Learning to National Reform Agendas

Description: Exchange activities were aligned with specific reform themes relevant to national priorities.

Why It Works: Alignment with ongoing policy discussions increased the practical value of international exposure.

Replicability: Particularly relevant for triangular cooperation models seeking to move beyond study visits toward reform influence.

Target Users: ILO South–South cooperation programmes and multi-country reform initiatives.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are derived from the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation and aim to strengthen institutionalization, sustainability, and results monitoring during the remaining implementation period. The recommendations follow directly from the evaluation conclusions and are presented as stand-alone actionable statements in accordance with ILO evaluation guidelines. Their analytical derivation is summarized in **Annex VIII (Findings–Conclusions–Recommendations Table)**.

They are addressed to relevant ILO units and national counterparts responsible for project implementation and policy engagement. Each recommendation indicates the suggested priority level, implementation timeframe and indicative resource implications.

Recommendation 1: Prioritize Institutional Embedding of Key Reform Outputs

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Effectiveness and Sustainability criteria (Sections 4.3 and 4.5) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5
Recommendation	The project should prioritize formal institutionalization of key technical outputs through policy adoption, administrative integration and formal procedural anchoring.
This includes supporting national counterparts to:	▪ Translate technical tools into formal guidelines or regulations ▪ Embed digital and administrative innovations into routine workflows ▪ Secure official endorsement or policy referencing where relevant
Addressed to:	ILO Project Management; ILO Technical Backstopping Unit; National Social Security Institutions
Priority:	High
Timeframe:	Short- to Medium-Term
Resource Implication:	Medium

Recommendation 2: Introduce a Structured Sustainability and Exit-Oriented Work Plan

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Sustainability and Efficiency criteria (Sections 4.5 and 4.4) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5
Recommendation	The project should develop a structured sustainability and exit-oriented implementation plan that identifies the steps required to ensure that key reform processes and institutional capacities are maintained beyond the project period.
This includes:	▪ Identifying priority reform elements requiring continued institutional support ▪ Clarifying transition arrangements between project support and national institutional ownership ▪ Aligning sustainability planning with national policy processes
Addressed to:	ILO Project Management; ILO Regional Office
Priority:	High
Timeframe:	Short-Term

Resource Implication:	Low to Medium
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Recommendation 3: Formalize Follow-Up Mechanisms for South–South Cooperation

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Effectiveness and Coherence criteria (Sections 4.3 and 4.2) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5
Recommendation	The project should formalize follow-up mechanisms for South–South cooperation activities to ensure that knowledge exchange and peer learning translate into sustained institutional learning and policy application.
This includes:	▪ Developing structured follow-up processes after technical exchanges ▪ Documenting lessons learned and policy insights ▪ Supporting continued cross-country dialogue between participating institutions
Addressed to:	ILO Project Team; National Counterparts
Priority:	Medium
Timeframe:	Short- to Medium-Term
Resource Implication:	Low to Medium

Recommendation 4: Strengthen Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evidence Systems

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Effectiveness and Relevance criteria (Sections 4.3 and 4.1) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5
Recommendation	The project should further strengthen gender-responsive monitoring and evidence generation in order to better understand how social protection reforms affect women and men differently, within the scope of ongoing policy dialogue, research and institutional capacity-building activities.
This includes:	▪ Incorporating gender-disaggregated analysis in research, policy dialogue and knowledge products where feasible ▪ Integrating gender considerations into monitoring and reporting processes where relevant ▪ Ensuring that policy discussions and institutional capacity-building activities consider gender equality implications
Addressed to:	ILO Project Team; National Institutions
Priority:	Medium
Timeframe:	Medium-Term
Resource Implication:	Low to Medium

Recommendation 5: Deepen Structured Engagement of Social Partners

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Coherence and Effectiveness criteria (Sections 4.2 and 4.3) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5

Recommendation	The project should deepen structured engagement with workers' and employers' organizations in policy dialogue and implementation processes related to social protection reforms.
This includes:	▪ Strengthening consultation mechanisms ▪ Supporting participation of social partners in policy dialogue ▪ Enhancing awareness of reform processes among social partner institutions
Addressed to:	ILO Project Team; National Tripartite Institutions
Priority:	Medium
Timeframe:	Medium-Term
Resource Implication:	Low-Medium

Recommendation 6: Consolidate Capacity Development Across Institutional Levels

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Effectiveness and Sustainability criteria (Sections 4.3 and 4.5) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5
Recommendation	The project should consolidate capacity development initiatives across individual, institutional and system levels to ensure that training activities translate into sustained institutional capabilities.
This includes:	▪ Strengthening institutional knowledge management ▪ Embedding training results within organizational procedures ▪ Supporting continued peer learning across institutions
Addressed to:	ILO Project Team; National Social Protection Institutions
Priority:	Medium
Timeframe:	Medium-Term
Resource Implication:	Medium

Recommendation 7: Enhance Results Framework Clarity at Outcome Level

Element	Description
Based on	Findings presented under Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency criteria (Sections 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4) and related evaluation conclusions in Section 5
Recommendation	The project should further refine the results framework to strengthen clarity regarding outcome-level indicators and facilitate more systematic monitoring of policy-level progress.
This includes:	▪ Clarifying outcome indicators ▪ Aligning monitoring tools with policy reform processes ▪ Strengthening reporting mechanisms on policy outcomes
Addressed to:	ILO Project Management; Technical Backstopping Unit
Priority:	Medium
Timeframe:	Short-Term
Resource Implication:	Low

ANNEX I – Terms of Reference



International Labour Organization (ILO)

TERMS OF REFERENCE Mid-Term Evaluation

Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation: through South-South Cooperation

Project Title	Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation: through South-South Cooperation
ILO Project Codes	GLO/23/17/CHN
Geographic Scope	Lao PDR, Kenya
Administrative Unit in charge of the Project	RO-Asia and the Pacific, DWT/CO-Bangkok
Technical Backstopping Unit	DWT/CO-Bangkok, DWT/CO-Pretoria, CO-Dar es Salaam
Type of Evaluation	External collaborator
Timing of Evaluation	Mid-Term
Project Period	December 2023 – December 2026
Total Project Budget	USD 2 million
Funding Agency	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, China

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I. Background and Justification

1. The ILO and China have a long-standing partnership that has intensified in recent years thanks to South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) and voluntary contributions by China to the ILO's Development Cooperation Programme.
2. The ILO began integrating Chinese experience and approaches on social protection and digital transformation in its development cooperation programmes with tripartite constituents in Lao PDR and Kenya. This is signified by the partnership agreement between the ILO with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MoHRSS) of China in December 2023, initiating the ILO/China Partnership Programme on Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation through SSTC, with 1 million USD financial support.
3. On October 24, 2024, the launch event for the project took place in Nairobi, with high level delegation from China, Kenya, Lao PDR, and ILO. The purpose of project launch was to raise the visibility of social protection through South-South collaboration and peer-to-peer exchange between governments, workers and employers while bringing in also representations of workers from the informal economy. During this period, the Chinese high-level delegation, representing donor, held working meetings with the ILO, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kenya, and NSSF, among other departments. Vice Minister of Human Resources and Social Security of China, Mr. Li Zhong, delivered a keynote speech at the event, emphasizing the significance of the project. The formal launch of the project was followed by the signing of amendment to the partnership agreement between the ILO and the MOHRSS, solidifying the commitment of China and the ILO to work together on expanding social protection coverage and leveraging digital transformation in Kenya and Lao PDR. Upon the signing of the amendment, the project received an additional 1 million dollars, making a total of 2 million USD financial support, and the project end date was extended to December 2026.

4. Currently, over half of the world's population has no access to social protection. This is particularly concerning in Lao PDR and Kenya. The situation is even worse for those working in the informal economy, which accounts for the majority of the workforce in both countries. Informality can leave workers and their families vulnerable to economic shocks and health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgency of establishing universal and effective social protection systems to support vulnerable populations, particularly those working in the informal economy. Furthermore, leveraging digital technologies is crucial in the modern era to enhance policy design, financing, delivery mechanisms, and information dissemination for social protection programs.
5. The main objective of the project is to improve the social protection situation for workers in the informal economy in Lao PDR and Kenya while contributing to the achievement of related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the vision of social justice and decent work for all. It also aims at leveraging digital technologies to improve access, efficiency, and effectiveness of social protection programs. Through partnerships, the project also facilitates South-South collaboration, enabling the sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise among ASEAN and African countries. In particular, China's experience in expanding social security coverage, enhancing management information systems, and adopting digital solutions in social security administration and services holds significant relevance for the two target countries. As such, the project aims to foster continuous learning and facilitate South-South exchanges, leveraging China's successful practices in social protection.
6. In Lao PDR, the project aims to increase coverage and access to social protection for workers in the informal economy through enhanced institutional capacity and operational effectiveness and efficiency at all levels by strengthening of the policy design, administrative governance and the digital transformation. The key outputs include: LSSO digital system is further developed, and administrators are trained on its effective use; Labour and social security inspection system is operationalized and inspectors are capacitated to carry out their duties; Social security extension strategies are further developed and implemented.
7. In Kenya, the project aims to increase coverage and access to social protection for workers in the informal economy through improved social protection delivery systems and services. The key outputs include: National Strategy for Extension of Social Protection to Workers in the Informal and Rural Economy piloted in selected counties; The Social Health Authority benefits from effective tools to introduce the maternity cash benefit for workers in the informal economy; Social protection institutions have increased capacities to use digital transformation for extending social protection to workers in the informal economy and their families.

8. Promotion of South-South Cooperation in extending Social Protection within the ASEAN countries and African countries, the key outputs include: Enhance knowledge-sharing on social protection coverage and specific benefit design in selected sectors with high levels of informality; Knowledge-sharing on institutional capacity building on digital transformation for social protection agencies; Documentation of good practice and public communication with other key member states of the SPF Flagship Programme.

Progress to date:

The project started its implementation in Dec 2023. The current project manager was appointed in September 2024.

The project supported a workshop in October 2024 in Kenya with high-level delegates from China, Kenya, the Lao PDR, and the ILO. The workshop featured several presentations on key topics, including successful models, innovative approaches, and the role of digital technologies in advancing social protection systems. A plenary discussion with key stakeholders from the participating countries followed the presentations. Subsequently, an interactive session was organized at the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), where delegates engaged in further discussions on social security fund management in Kenya.

In Lao PDR, the project has supported efforts to expand social security coverage through **3 main areas of work**. **First**, the project supported the Lao Social Security Organisation to develop and procure the systems and software for a new mobile app for the NSSF. This was supported by the development of interoperable systems – APIs or Application programming interfaces – to allow for automatic and systematic data sharing within the NSSF system and with other public databases and systems. **Second**, the project provided technical support to the development of the inspections function of the NSSF, through technical inputs to drafting training manuals, SOPs and guidelines. These are expected to be used by LSSO in its efforts to increase compliance with the Social Security Law and help to increase social security coverage among workers in formal enterprises. **Third**, the project expanded social security coverage in rural areas through the “mobile office”; a service that visits villages, raises awareness among villagers, and registers them on the spot. As part of this, the project also trained provincial and district staff of LSSO to sustain these efforts in future.

The project also supported the Report Launching and Workshop on Social Security in Lao PDR in November 2024. The workshop presented the key findings and insights from the two reports (“Understanding informality and expanding social security coverage in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic” and “Home-based Workers’ Access to Social Security in Vientiane Capital”). The workshop also provides an opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of social protection in Laos and discuss LSSO’s practices to Increase coverage and observing Its Impact in the village. The event included field visits to the LSSO District Office and the clean agriculture (cabbage farmers) group.

The project supported the assessment of the ecosystem for digital transformation of the

social security system and service delivery optimization in Lao PDR, with a comprehensive study and report. The report, entitled “Enhancing Social Security Accessibility in Lao PDR: A Road Map for LSSO’s Digital Transformation and Service Delivery Optimization”, was officially launched during the workshop in Lao PDR in September 2025. During the workshop, presentations entitled “Practices of China’s Social Insurance Digital Transformation”, and “Digital Transformation and the Adaptive Reform of China’s Social Security System” were delivered. Both presentations shared insights into China’s efforts and experiences in advancing digital transformation within the social protection sector.

The Project Advisory Committee meeting in Lao PDR was held in September 2025, to present the project implementation progress including challenges and solutions, and to discuss the work plan and way ahead for the coming year.

Since June 2025, the project has been collaborating with the China Social Security Association to conduct a research study entitled “Expanding Social Security Coverage in Informal Economy: China’s Experiences and Lessons.” The study aims to summarize China’s experience in extending social protection to informal employment, while also analysing the situations in Kenya and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to develop policy recommendations that promote South–South cooperation and knowledge sharing. The research is currently underway.

The project is coordinating and organizing a study tour to China for representatives from Kenya, with a focus on the digital transformation of the social security system. The visit aims to share China’s best practices and successful experiences in digital transformation, and to support beneficiary country in exploring digitalization pathways suited to their national contexts. The visit is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2025.

An ILO Brief titled “South-South cooperation for extension of social protection to workers in the informal economy: The case of Kenya and Lao People’s Democratic Republic” was published with the support of the project.

An ILO Brief titled “People’s Republic of China: The Social Insurance Public Service Platform” was published with the support of the project. It introduces China’s experience and practices in social insurance digital transformation, promotes the project’s vision, and deepens South-South cooperation.

The mid-term evaluation will assess the period from December 2023 to December 2025.

II. Objectives of Mid-term Evaluation

The overall purpose of this exercise is to assess, evaluate and provide actionable

guidance on the project's **relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness**¹⁰, and **potential impact and sustainability**. This will not only help strengthen internal learning and promote accountability in project management and implementation but also help inform the case for future work in this area, including under a possible project extension.

➤ **Specifically, this mid-term evaluation will focus on two core objectives:**

1. Evaluate project progress achieved to date, focusing on project outputs and potential impact.
2. Comment and suggest realistic improvements to the project in its remaining period, including possible adjustments to strategy, activities and management to maximise impact, effectiveness and sustainability.
3. Identify lessons learned and good practices, as well as formulate recommendations to inform any adjustments to the next phase of the project implementation approach.

III. Evaluation Scope

1. Operational scope: The evaluation will cover the period from December 2023 to December 2025.
2. Geographical scope:
 - All project activities that took place in Lao PDR with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO), National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Federation of Trade Unions.
 - All project activities that took place in Kenya with Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Federation of Kenya Employers, Central Organization of Trade Unions and other key partners.
3. Audience: The primary intended audiences of the evaluation are the ILO (including the project team, the ILO Offices in Lao PDR and Kenya) and the development partner. Secondary audiences may include relevant ILO workers and employers representatives, development partners and Project Advisory Committee Members.

¹⁰ Effectiveness will include assessing progress to date and whether the project is likely to achieve its planned objectives. If not, why and what should be adjusted? Efficiency will also include management effectiveness, i.e. whether the project has adequate capacity and support to implement all required activities/ tasks.

IV. Evaluation Criteria and Questions

1. The evaluation should address key ILO evaluation criteria laid out in the 4th edition of the ILO's ["Policy Guidelines for Evaluation \(2020\)"](#). These include Relevance; progress and effectiveness; efficiency of resource use; effectiveness of management arrangements; sustainability; and impact as defined in the project design.
2. Gender equality and non-discrimination, international labour standards, social dialogue and a just transition towards environmental sustainability, which were established as crosscutting policy drivers in the ILO's Strategic Plan for 2018–21, are now fully embedded in the policy outcomes of the [Programme of Work for 2020–21](#). As such they must be considered as a cross-cutting concern throughout the methodology, deliverables and final report of the evaluation. To the extent possible, data collection and analysis should be disaggregated by sex (as described in the ILO Evaluation Policy Guidelines and relevant Guidance Notes).
3. It is expected that the evaluation will address all of the questions detailed below to the extent possible. The evaluator may adapt the evaluation criteria and questions, but any fundamental changes must be agreed upon in advance between the ILO and the evaluator. The evaluation instruments (to be summarised by the evaluator in the inception report) must identify the general areas of focus listed here as well as other priority aspects to be addressed in the evaluation.

➤ **Suggested evaluation criteria and evaluation questions are summarised below:**

Potential questions (to be discussed and agreed)

	Theme	Questions (long list)	Notes
1	Relevance	• To what extent has the project addressed the needs and priorities of the tripartite constituents in Lao PDR, Kenya and other relevant stakeholders (as identified in the project document)? • To what extent have constituents / relevant stakeholders been involved in the (design and) implementation of the project /project workplan? • To what extent does the project take into account gender equality mainstreaming in the design, the institutional arrangements, roles, capacity and commitment of tripartite constituents in Lao PDR and Kenya?	

2	Coherence	• To what extent has the project synergized with other ILO initiatives in this area to promote universal social protection? • To what extent has the project synergized with the policy guidelines and related initiatives of Lao PDR and Kenya?	
3	Effectiveness	• To What extent has the ILO-China project made progress towards its intended objective, outcomes and outputs? • How effectively have project strategies contributed to the achievement and sustainability of project outputs? • To what extent are constituents and key stakeholders satisfied with project services/output¹¹? • To what extent has the project identified and engaged with the right stakeholders to achieve its objectives? • What key challenges have constrained the effectiveness of project activities, and what measures have been taken to address them? • What should be strengthened to increase effectiveness of the project implementation and management?	
4	Efficiency	• Has the allocation of financial, human, institutional and technical resources been optimal for achieving project outputs? • Are project staffing structures and resourcing of activities contributing to quality of performance and impact? • Have project activities been completed on-time/according to sequencing anticipated by	

¹¹ Full list of relevant stakeholders will be shared with the consultant.

		the project document? If not, what factors have hindered timely delivery and what countermeasures have been taken to address them?	
5	Impact and Sustainability	What impact has the project achieved to date? Did the project develop an Exit Strategy to sustain its results and impacts after the end of ILO support? If, yes, is the proposed strategy realistic and effective?	
6	Cross Cutting Issues	To What extent are project management and implementation guided by tripartite dialogue and contribute to international labour standards (ILS) and gender equality and non-discrimination?	

V. Methodology and Deliverables

1. The evaluation will comply with ILO's evaluation norms and standards and will follow ethical safeguards as specified in the ILO's evaluation procedures. For reference, the ILO adheres to the United Nations (UN) system of evaluation norms and standards as well as to the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.
2. The evaluation will apply qualitative and quantitative participatory approaches to gather data and information from project stakeholders. When collecting data, the evaluation will make use of the techniques listed below, with data triangulated to increase the validity and rigor of evaluation findings.
3. All in-country data collection will be conducted online/virtually, with logistical, translation and administrative support from the ILO project team as required.
4. Key stakeholders from the Project Advisory Committee will be informed and consulted in the design of the evaluation, and the views of a wide range of project stakeholders will be solicited in the consultation and data collection stage.
5. The evaluation will be carried out by an external evaluator in three phases, as follows:

Phase	Activity Description	Deliverable	Timeframe & No. work Days	Notes
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Inception Phase	(a) Define the methodology and approach for the evaluation (b) conduct comprehensive review and analysis (against key evaluation questions) of relevant materials including project document(s), budgets and work plans, progress reports, project publications, etc. (c) draft the evaluation Inception report (including the evaluation approach, data collection tools and the evaluation workplan)	Inception report (approx. 3 pages)	November 2025 (2 days)	<i>Inception report will comprise a draft evaluation matrix (outlining the methodological approach, questionnaires, evaluation study tools and results of the initial desk review</i>
Consultation and Data Collection	Key informant interviews / stakeholder consultations with ILO/project staff, tripartite constituents, and other relevant stakeholders, to validate information already collected and gain new insight and feedback. See Annexes for more information.	Summary report of stakeholder consultation (approx. 4 pages)	November 2025 (6 days)	

Reporting	Based on information and data collected, produce an evaluation report and submit to the ILO project manager.¹² The report should include: - answers to the key evaluation questions - actionable, forward-looking recommendations for improving the project - assessment of the value and justification for a possible project extension The evaluator will also be expected to provide short briefing and presentation (i.e. PowerPoint) of findings to key project/ILO staff.	Evaluation report Presentation briefing the report	November 2025 (5 days)	
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¹² After ILO has reviewed and provided comments on the report, the evaluator will consolidate, finalize and submit for final approval. The quality of the report and evaluation summary will be assessed against the ILO Checklists 5, 6, 7, and 8 (Annex 1). ILO will disseminate the final evaluation report to the project's donor and other relevant internal and external stakeholders.

6. The evaluator will be expected as part of the assignment to devise a detailed methodology for this evaluation, based on these Terms of Reference (TOR), for prior agreement and approval of the ILO.
7. The methodology must include key questions and sub-question(s), detailed methods, data collection instruments and data analysis plans. It must clearly specify the limitations of each of the chosen evaluation methods, including those related to representation of specific group of stakeholders. Selection of stakeholders for consultation will be discussed and agreed with the project manager at this stage, also.¹³
8. Once the methodology is agreed, the evaluator will prepare the inception report, in consultation with the project manager.
9. It is expected that the evaluator will work to the highest evaluation standards and codes of conduct and follow ILO and United Nations (UN) evaluation standards and norms.
10. All relevant and useful references, data and information sources for the evaluation will be provided to the consultant before the beginning of the assignment.

V. Management Arrangement and Duration

In line with ILO guidance for evaluations, the evaluation will be conducted by an external consultant under the guidance of the ILO/China Partnership programme manager. A highly qualified external consultant –with no prior connection to the project- will be commissioned to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation will be funded entirely from the ILO-China project budget.

- **The key responsibilities of the Project Team include the following:**
- Draft and finalize the evaluation TOR upon receiving inputs from key stakeholders;
 - Review CVs and proposals of consultants applying for the role of evaluator, and select the evaluator to conduct the evaluation;
 - Provide project background documents to the selected evaluator;
 - Coordinate with the ILO-China project team and other stakeholders for interviews and online meetings for the evaluator;
 - Circulate the draft evaluation report to all concerned stakeholders for their comments;
 - Review and provide comments on the draft evaluation report; and

¹³ Purposive sampling –i.e. the use of subjective but informed judgment- may be applied when selecting stakeholders.

- Consolidate comments on the draft evaluation and send them back to the evaluator.
- **Timeframe:** the evaluation should be conducted between **24 November 2025 and 12 December 2025**. The final report is due 12 December 2025.

VI. Qualifications

A consultant with the relevant experience and qualifications is being sought. Desired skills and competencies:

- ✓ Not been previously involved with ILO's project or work with the ILO-China Partnership Programme;
- ✓ University Degree with minimum 3 years of relevant Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) experience, including significant experience with UN development cooperation projects;
- ✓ Demonstrated technical expertise in evaluation methodologies and demonstrated skills and experience in undertaking evaluations of similar projects;
- ✓ Strong background in the areas of organizational and institutional capacity building and Results-Based Management and Monitoring;
- ✓ Extensive knowledge of, and experience in applying, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies;
- ✓ Excellent analytical skills and communication skills;
- ✓ Demonstrated excellent report writing skills in English;
- ✓ Knowledge of ILO's role and mandate and its tripartite structure as well as UN evaluation norms and UN programming is desirable;
- ✓ Prior professional experience in social protection issues would be an advantage.

VII. Legal and Ethical Matters

The evaluation will comply with UN Norms and Standards. The TOR is accompanied by the code of conduct for carrying out the evaluations. UNEG ethical guidelines will be followed. It is important that the evaluator has no links to project management or any other conflict of interest that would interfere with the independence of evaluation.

VIII. Annexes

Annex 1: Relevant ILO Policies and guidelines

- ILO Policy Guidelines for evaluation: Principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations, 3rd ed. (Aug. 2017)
http://www.ilo.ch/eval/Evaluationpolicy/WCMS_571339/lang--en/index.htm
- Code of conduct form (To be signed by the evaluators)
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_206205/lang--en/index.htm
- Checklist No.3 Writing the inception report
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165972/lang--en/index.htm
- Checklist 5 preparing the evaluation report
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165967/lang--en/index.htm
- Checklist 6 rating the quality of evaluation report
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165968/lang--en/index.htm
- Template for lessons learnt and Emerging Good Practices
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_206158/lang--en/index.htm
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_206159/lang--en/index.htm
- Guidance note 7 Stakeholders participation in the ILO evaluation
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165986/lang--en/index.htm
- Guidance note 4 Integrating gender equality in M&E of projects
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165986/lang--en/index.htm
- Template for evaluation title page
https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_166357/lang--en/index.htm
- Template for evaluation summary
<http://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/edmas/eval/template-summary-en.doc>

Annex 2: Further project information (key resources)

1. Project Document (2023)
2. Progress Report (December 2024)
3. Workplan for 2025
4. List of Deliverables for year 2024 and 2025

Annex 3. Online Stakeholder consultations

Stakeholders	Purpose/ Objective	Remarks
ROAP: Project team	To gain an in-depth understanding of the project's design, implementation	

	process, key achievements, challenges, and measures.	
Funding partner: International Cooperation Department of Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China	To assess the project's relevance, strategic alignment, and overall performance from the funding partner's perspective.	
Lao PDR: LSSO (management, representative from relevant division)	To gain an in-depth understanding of the project's implementation, impact, challenges, and measures in the beneficiary country.	
Lao PDR: Project team	To gain an in-depth understanding of the project's implementation, impact, challenges, and measures in the beneficiary country.	
Kenya: Representatives from National Social Security Fund, National Social Protection Secretariat, and other relevant departments	To gain an in-depth understanding of the project's implementation, impact, challenges, and measures in the beneficiary country	
Kenya: Project team	To gain an in-depth understanding of the project's implementation, impact, challenges, and measures in the beneficiary country	

ANNEX II – Evaluation Questions and Analytical Framework

RELEVANCE

Evaluation Question	Judgement Criteria	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods	Stakeholders	Analysis & Assessment	Related Findings
EQ1. <i>To what extent is the project design and implementation aligned with national priorities and needs related to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in Lao PDR and Kenya?</i>	- Consistency with national SP strategies - Stakeholder perceptions of relevance	PRODOC; national SP strategies; DWCPs; APRs	Desk review; KIIs	Government counterparts (LSSO central + provincial; relevant ministries); County government stakeholders; Employers' and workers' organizations; ILO COs; ILO ROAP.	Comparative analysis and triangulation	R1
EQ2. <i>To what extent does the project remain relevant to ILO strategies, Decent Work Country Programmes, and global commitments on universal social protection and decent work?</i>	Alignment with ILO SP flagship and SDG 1.3	ILO strategies; PRODOC; KIIs	Desk review; KIIs	ILO HQ/RO/CO staff. Workers' representatives and informal economy associations; CSOs engaged in outreach/awareness; employers' and workers' organizations; relevant government units; ILO CO.	Document analysis	R2

COHERENCE

Evaluation Question	Judgement Criteria	Data Sources	Methods	Stakeholders	Analysis	Related Findings
EQ3. <i>How coherent is the project with other ILO interventions and relevant national and regional</i>	- Complementarity - Synergies - Absence of	ILO portfolio docs; APRs; KIIs	Desk review; KIIs	ILO staff; national counterparts	Mapping and triangulation	C1

<i>initiatives in social protection, digital transformation, and formalization?</i>	duplication					
EQ4. <i>To what extent does South–South and triangular cooperation, including learning from China’s experience, add value and promote synergies in project implementation?</i>	• Relevance of China experience • Degree of contextual adaptation	SSC briefs; study tour reports; KIIs	Desk review; KIIs	ILO; MoHRSS; national partners	Contribution analysis	C2

EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluation Question	Judgement Criteria	Data Sources	Methods	Stakeholders	Analysis	Related Findings
EQ5. <i>To what extent are project outputs being delivered as planned, with adequate quality and timeliness, across Outcomes 1, 2 and 3?</i>	• Delivery vs workplans • Quality/usability of outputs • Timeliness	APRs; workplans; outputs	Desk review	ILO project team	Output performance assessment	E1
EQ6. <i>What early outcome-level changes are observable at mid-term in relation to institutional capacity, systems strengthening, policy development, and service delivery?</i>	• Evidence of institutional/system changes	APRs; technical reports; KIIs	Desk review; KIIs	Government; ILO staff. LSSO central and provincial offices; relevant Kenya national and county stakeholders (pending); ILO COs; tripartite constituents; CSOs (where relevant).	ToC-based analysis	E2
EQ7. <i>What internal and external factors have facilitated or constrained progress towards the</i>	• Internal/external facilitating factors	KIIs; APRs	KIIs	All stakeholder groups above, including EOs/WOs and sub-national implementers.	Thematic analysis	E3

<i>intended results?</i>						
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EFFICIENCY

Evaluation Question	Judgement Criteria	Data Sources	Methods	Stakeholders	Analysis	Related Findings
EQ8. <i>How efficiently have financial, human, and institutional resources been utilized to deliver outputs and support South–South cooperation activities?</i>	• Timeliness • Adequacy of coordination	APRs; workplans; KIIs	Desk review; KIIs	ILO project management; implementing institutions (LSSO; Kenya counterparts); SSC partners (MoHRSS/Chinese institutions); relevant coordination partners.	Process analysis	F1
EQ9. <i>How effective are the project’s management, coordination, and partnership arrangements in supporting timely and efficient implementation?</i>	• Clarity of roles • Coordination effectiveness	Governance docs; KIIs	KIIs	ILO; partners	Comparative analysis	F2

SUSTAINABILITY

Evaluation Question	Judgement Criteria	Data Sources	Methods	Stakeholders	Analysis	Related Findings
EQ10. <i>To what extent are the project’s approaches and results likely to be sustained beyond the project period, including through institutional ownership, capacity development, and policy integration?</i>	• Ownership • Capacity retention • Policy integration	Policy docs; KIIs	Desk review; KIIs	Government institutions (central + sub-national); EOs/WOs; ILO; SSC partners; where relevant CSOs.	Forward-looking assessment	S1
EQ11. <i>What measures could enhance the sustainability and scalability of project interventions during the second half of</i>	• Feasibility of measures • Scalability	KIIs; APRs	KIIs	Decision-makers	Scenario analysis	S2

implementation?	potential					
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CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Evaluation Question	Judgement Criteria	Data Sources	Methods	Stakeholders	Analysis	Related Findings
EQ12. <i>What early signs of change (intended or unintended) are emerging at mid-term in terms of coverage expansion, access to services, administrative performance, or institutional behaviour, and how plausible is the project's contribution to these changes?</i>	• Early signs of change • Plausibility of contribution	APRs; KIIs; reports	Desk review; KIIs	Government implementers (including provincial/county levels); EOs/WOs; ILO; SSC partners; CSOs/worker associations (where relevant).	Contribution analysis	X1
EQ13. <i>To what extent has the project integrated gender equality and inclusion, particularly with respect to women and vulnerable groups among informal economy workers, and what early differential effects or barriers are evident?</i>	• Integration in design/implementation • Differential effects/barriers	PRODOC; KIIs; outputs	Desk review; KIIs	ILO; CSOs; worker reps	Gender-responsive analysis	X2
EQ14. <i>To what extent are employers' and workers' organizations meaningfully engaged in project design, implementation, and learning processes, and how has tripartite dialogue influenced ownership and results?</i>	• Engagement of E/WO • Influence on ownership/results	Meeting records; KIIs	KIIs	Employers' & workers' orgs; ILO	Institutional analysis	X3

ANNEX III – List of Persons Interviewed

No.	Name	Organization	Position / Role	Country	Stakeholder Category	Mode of Interview
1	Feng Tian	International Labour Organization (ILO) ROAP	Project Manager	Regional	ILO Project Management	Online interview
2	Jingyi Qin	International Labour Organization (ILO) ROAP	South-South Programme Officer	Regional	ILO Project Management	Online interview
3	Kenichi Hirose	International Labour Organization (ILO) ROAP	Specialist	Regional	ILO Technical Staff	Online interview
4	Xiaoyan Qian	International Labour Organization (ILO) ROAP	Director, ILO Country Office for the Lao PDR	Regional	ILO CO Management	Online interview
5	Wang Jianyu	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China	Director, International Cooperation Department	Inter-country	Development Cooperation/Donor Representative	Online interview
6	Loveleen De	International Labour Organization (ILO)	Program Manager and Technical Advisor	Lao PDR – National	ILO National Programme Coordination	Online interview
7	Noutthong Alounthong	International Labour Organization (ILO)	National Project Coordinator	Lao PDR – National	ILO National Programme Coordination	Online interview
8	Nathalie Both	International Labour Organization (ILO)	Program Manager and Technical Advisor	Lao PDR – National	ILO National Programme Coordination	Online interview
9	Hellen Magutu	International Labour Organization (ILO)	National Programme Coordinator	Kenya – National	ILO National Programme Coordination	Online interview
10	Chomyaeng Phengthongsawat	Lao Social Security Organisation (LSSO)	Director-General	Lao PDR – National	National government institution – Lao PDR	Online interview
11	Representative	Lao Social Security Organisation (LSSO)	Chief, Planning Division	Lao PDR – National	National government institution – Lao PDR	Online interview
12	Representative	Lao Social Security Organisation (LSSO)	IT Division	Lao PDR – National	National government institution – Lao PDR	Online interview
13	Representative	Lao Social Security Organisation (LSSO)	Legal Division	Lao PDR – National	National government institution – Lao PDR	Online interview
14	Peter Ombasa	State Department of Social Protection and Senior Citizen Affairs	Assistant Director	Kenya – National	National government institution – Kenya	Online interview

15	Millicent Awiti	National Social Security Fund (NSSF)	General Manager	Kenya – National	National government institution – Kenya	Online interview
16	Dancan Omondi	Federation of Kenya Employers	Projects Manager	Kenya – National	Employers' Organization	Online interview
17	Lincoln Aveza	Central Organization Trade Union (COTU)	Industrial Relations Officer	Kenya – National	Workers' Organization	Online interview
18	Lamphan Nanthapanya	Informal Workers Advancement Association (IWAA)	Director	Lao PDR – National	Beneficiary	Online interview
19	Maurice Mishodi	Dunga Beach Management Unit in Kisumu	Chairman	Kenya – National	Beneficiary	Online interview

ANNEX IV – Documents Reviewed

This annex presents the **key project and contextual documents reviewed** during the evaluation. Documents are mapped against **evaluation questions and analytical themes** to ensure systematic and transparent evidence use, in line with ILO Evaluation Policy and UNEG standards.

A. Core Project Documents

Document	Source	Coverage / Analytical Use	Evaluation Questions Informed
Project Document (GLO/23/17/CHN)	ILO	Project rationale, objectives, results framework, governance, assumptions	EQ1, EQ2, EQ3, EQ5, EQ10.
Logframe (latest version)	ILO	Outputs, outcomes, indicators, assumptions	EQ5, EQ6, EQ10
Terms of Reference – MTE	ILO	Evaluation purpose, scope, criteria, cross-cutting requirements	All
External Collaboration Contract (ECC)	ILO	Deliverables, timeline, evaluator obligations	EQ8, EQ9
Project Factsheet (Sept 2025)	ILO	Public-facing project narrative, coherence with mandate	EQ1, EQ3

B. Monitoring, Planning and Reporting Documents

Document	Source	Coverage / Analytical Use	Evaluation Questions Informed
Annual Progress Report 2024	ILO	Implementation progress, outputs delivered, challenges	EQ5, EQ7, EQ8
Annual Progress Report 2025	ILO	Updated progress, emerging results, adaptations	EQ5, EQ6, EQ7
Project Workplan (May 2025)	ILO	Planned activities, sequencing, resource allocation	EQ5, EQ8
Project Workplan (Jan 2026)	ILO	Revised planning, adaptive management	EQ8, EQ9

C. Outcome 1 – Lao PDR (Outputs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3)

Document	Source	Coverage / Analytical Use	Evaluation Questions Informed
Output 1.1 Overview	ILO / LSSO	Digitalisation strategy, system design, API/app development	EQ5, EQ6, EQ12
Situation Analysis & Roadmap (March 2025)	ILO / LSSO	Used to assess institutional readiness, sequencing of reforms, and the consistency between policy intent, system design, and implementation feasibility at mid-term.	EQ2, EQ6, EQ10
Inspection MIS Report & Guidelines	ILO / LSSO	Reviewed to assess administrative capacity development, operational uptake, and early institutional changes related to governance and service delivery.	EQ5, EQ6
Training Curricula & Materials	ILO	Capacity development, institutional strengthening	EQ6, EQ10
CSO & Outreach Reports	CSOs / ILO	Engagement with informal economy groups	EQ2, EQ12, EQ13

D. Outcome 2 – Kenya

Document	Source	Coverage / Analytical Use	Evaluation Questions Informed
County Social Protection Action Plans (Busia, Kisumu, Mombasa)	County Govern ments / ILO	Reviewed to assess coherence between national policy objectives and county-level planning, the practical usability of action plans as implementation tools, and evidence of ownership and integration into county planning processes.	EQ1, EQ6, EQ10
Policy Briefs on SP Extension in Kenya	ILO	Used to assess national policy coherence, alignment with informal economy priorities, and consistency with county-level realities and capacities.	EQ1, EQ3, EQ2

E. Outcome 3 – South–South Cooperation / China

Document	Source	Coverage / Analytical Use	Evaluation Questions Informed
ILO Brief: China Unified Social Security Platform	ILO	Analyzed to assess the nature of learning transmitted (policy, technical, institutional) and its relevance and adaptability to the Lao PDR and Kenya contexts.	EQ4, EQ12
SSC Policy Brief (Kenya & Lao PDR)	ILO	Reviewed to assess knowledge exchange modalities, evidence of contextual adaptation versus replication, and early indications of uptake or influence in partner countries.	EQ4, EQ6
Study Tour Reports & Agendas	ILO / Partners	Knowledge exchange processes, adaptation	EQ4, EQ8
Research Plan (China)	Chinese Partner	Used to assess analytical depth, relevance to partner country needs, and contribution to evidence-based learning under the SSC component.	EQ4, EQ12

F. Cross-cutting, Institutional and Contextual Documents

Document	Source	Coverage / Analytical Use	Evaluation Questions Informed
Decent Work Country Programmes (Lao PDR, Kenya)	ILO	Strategic alignment	EQ1, EQ3
National Social Protection Strategies	Govern ments	Policy relevance, sustainability	EQ1, EQ10
ILO Social Protection Flagship & Policy Frameworks	ILO	Normative alignment	EQ2, EQ3
Communications & Knowledge Products	ILO	Visibility, learning, dissemination	EQ3, EQ12

ANNEX V – Interview Guides

Purpose of the Interview Guides

Semi-structured interview guides were developed to support stakeholder consultations conducted during the evaluation. The guides were designed to ensure systematic coverage of the evaluation questions while allowing flexibility to probe emerging issues. Questions were adapted slightly depending on stakeholder roles (ILO staff, government counterparts, social partners, and technical partners).

The guides are aligned with:

- The **evaluation questions and criteria** set out in Section 2.5;
- The **Evaluation Matrix (Annex II)**;
- ILO Evaluation Policy and UNEG norms, including ethical standards.

A. Core Interview Questions (Applied Across All Stakeholder Groups)

These core questions will be used, with probing adapted to each stakeholder group.

1. Relevance

- How does the project align with current priorities and needs related to extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in your context?
- Are there any important needs or constraints that the project design does not sufficiently address?

2. Coherence

- How does this project fit with other ongoing initiatives in social protection, digital transformation, or formalization?
- In your view, how well does the project leverage South–South or triangular cooperation, particularly learning from China’s experience?

3. Effectiveness

- What progress has been made so far toward achieving the project’s outputs and objectives?
- Which outputs or activities have been most useful or influential to date?
- What key factors have supported or constrained progress?

4. Efficiency

- How would you assess the efficiency of project implementation, including coordination, communication, and use of resources?
- Are there any bottlenecks or duplication that could be addressed in the second half of implementation?

5. Sustainability and Forward-looking Issues

- To what extent are the changes supported by the project likely to be sustained beyond the project period?
- What additional measures would help strengthen sustainability or scalability?

6. Cross-cutting Issues

- What early signs of change (intended or unintended) have you observed as a result of the project?
- How has the project addressed gender equality, inclusion, and the needs of vulnerable groups within the informal economy?
- How have employers' and workers' organizations been engaged, and how has tripartite dialogue influenced results or ownership?

B. ILO Stakeholders (HQ, ROAP, Country Offices)

Additional probes:

- How effective are the project's governance and coordination arrangements across HQ, regional and country levels?
- How has adaptive management been applied in response to emerging challenges or opportunities?
- How does this project complement the broader ILO portfolio on social protection and digital transformation?

C. Government and Implementing Partners – Lao PDR (LSSO, Ministries)

Additional probes:

- How have the LSSO digitalization initiatives supported by the project affected administrative processes related to registration, contribution management, or service delivery for informal economy workers?
- To what extent does the current digital system design respond to the practical realities of informal economy participation, and what gaps remain?
- How have insights from South–South cooperation activities influenced specific design or implementation choices within LSSO systems?

D. Government and Implementing Partners – Kenya (National and County Levels)

Additional probes:

- How have the county social protection action plans developed under the project been used to inform planning, coordination, or implementation at county level?
- What practical constraints have counties faced in translating action plans into concrete activities, and how has the project responded to these constraints?
- To what extent do national-level policy discussions and guidance align with the realities and capacities observed at county level?

E. South–South Cooperation Partners (China / MoHRSS / Technical Institutions)

Additional probes:

- Which specific elements of China’s experience in extending social protection coverage were prioritized for sharing through this project, and why?
- What factors have influenced whether knowledge shared through SSC activities has been adapted or applied in Lao PDR and Kenya?
- How could SSC modalities be adjusted in the second half of the project to better support contextual adaptation and sustainability?

F. Employers’ and Workers’ Organizations (Tripartite Constituents)

Additional probes:

- How have employers’ and workers’ organizations been involved in project design, implementation, or learning activities?
- To what extent does the project address labour market realities and incentives for informal workers?
- How has social dialogue influenced project relevance, ownership, or sustainability?

G. Civil Society Organizations and Informal Economy Worker Associations

Additional probes:

- How relevant are the project’s interventions to the needs of informal economy workers you represent or work with?
- Have you observed any early changes in awareness, access, or engagement with social protection systems?
- What barriers remain for women or vulnerable groups within the informal economy?

Ethical Considerations

All interviews will be conducted in line with:

- UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation;
- ILO Code of Conduct for Evaluators.

Participation will be voluntary, informed consent will be obtained, and responses will be treated confidentially and reported in an anonymized manne

ANNEX VI – Lessons Learned

Lesson Learned 1: South–South Cooperation Requires Structured Institutional Follow-Through

ILO Lesson Learned Template	
Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation	
Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN	
Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov	
Date: 03.03.2026	
The following lesson learned has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.	
LL Element	Text
Brief description of lesson learned (link to specific action or task)	South–South cooperation activities, such as study tours and policy dialogues, generate the greatest reform impact when they are accompanied by structured follow-up mechanisms that translate learning into national action plans and institutional reforms.
Context and any related preconditions	The project facilitated study tours and policy dialogue platforms involving Lao PDR, Kenya, and China. These exchanges enabled exposure to China's experience in expanding social security coverage and digital administration.
Targeted users / Beneficiaries	ILO project teams designing South–South cooperation initiatives, national social protection institutions, and development partners engaged in institutional reform programmes.
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	Without structured follow-up mechanisms, knowledge exchange risks remaining informational rather than transformational, limiting translation of learning into operational policy change.
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	Exchange activities helped stimulate policy dialogue and interest in digital and administrative reforms, creating opportunities for institutional learning.
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	Future South–South cooperation initiatives should integrate follow-up frameworks into project design, including institutional action plans and monitoring mechanisms.

Lesson Learned 2: Institutionalization Must Be Designed from the Outset

ILO Lesson Learned Template	
Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation	
Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN	
Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov	
Date: 03.03.2026	
The following lesson learned has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.	
LL Element	Text
Brief description of lesson learned (link to specific action or task)	Sustainability of technical cooperation interventions depends on early planning for policy adoption, administrative integration, and financial anchoring rather than relying on consolidation at later stages of implementation.
Context and any related preconditions	The project delivered technical outputs and capacity-building activities supporting social protection reform. However, embedding these outputs into formal administrative systems remains ongoing.
Targeted users / Beneficiaries	ILO technical cooperation projects supporting institutional reform, government social protection institutions, and development partners engaged in governance strengthening programmes.
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	When institutional embedding is not planned from the outset, technical outputs may remain advisory rather than operational within government systems.
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	Project technical assistance contributed to dialogue on reform options and institutional modernization in partner countries.
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	Future projects should incorporate institutionalization strategies within work plans and results frameworks from the beginning of implementation.

Lesson Learned 3: Capacity Development Is Sustainable Only When It Operates Across System Levels

ILO Lesson Learned Template	
Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation	
Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN	
Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov	
Date: 03.03.2026	
The following lesson learned has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.	
LL Element	Text
Brief description of lesson learned (link to specific action or task)	Capacity development interventions produce more durable results when they target individual competencies, organizational procedures, and system-level governance arrangements simultaneously.
Context and any related preconditions	The project implemented training activities and technical exchanges aimed at strengthening institutional knowledge on social protection coverage and digital systems.
Targeted users / Beneficiaries	Government social protection institutions, technical cooperation projects supporting institutional reform, and development partners engaged in governance capacity development.
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	Training activities focused only on individuals may not lead to systemic institutional change unless accompanied by organizational and procedural reforms.
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	Capacity-building activities increased awareness of policy options and administrative modernization approaches among institutional stakeholders.
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	Capacity development strategies should integrate training with institutional process reform and governance strengthening initiatives.

Lesson Learned 4: Early Stakeholder Engagement Reduces Reform Friction

ILO Lesson Learned Template	
Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov Date: 03.03.2026 The following lesson learned has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text explaining the lesson may be included in the full evaluation report.	
LL Element	Text
Brief description of lesson learned (link to specific action or task)	Early and sustained engagement of key institutional stakeholders and social partners strengthens reform ownership and reduces implementation challenges.
Context and any related preconditions	Project implementation involved multiple stakeholders, including government institutions and social partners in Lao PDR and Kenya.
Targeted users / Beneficiaries	ILO technical cooperation programmes operating in multi-stakeholder governance environments.
Challenges /negative lessons - Causal factors	When stakeholder engagement occurs late or remains limited, reform processes may encounter resistance or slow adoption.
Success / Positive Issues - Causal factors	Engagement with national institutions and tripartite actors supported dialogue on social protection expansion and policy development.
ILO Administrative Issues (staff, resources, design, implementation)	Future projects should include structured stakeholder mapping and engagement strategies during early implementation stages.

ANNEX VII – Emerging good practices

Good Practice 1: Structured Cross-Country Policy Dialogue Platforms

ILO Emerging Good Practice Template	
Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation	
Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN	
Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov	
Date: 03.03.2026	
The following emerging good practice has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text can be found in the full evaluation report.	
GP Element	Text
Brief summary of the good practice (link to project goal or specific deliverable, background, purpose, etc.)	The project established structured cross-country policy dialogue platforms bringing together policymakers, social protection administrators, and technical experts from Lao PDR, Kenya, and China to exchange experiences on extending social protection coverage and digital administrative systems.
Relevant conditions and Context: limitations or advice in terms of applicability and replicability	The dialogue platforms were implemented within the context of South–South cooperation and supported by technical facilitation from the ILO. The effectiveness of this practice depends on the presence of ongoing national reform processes where international learning can be integrated into policy discussions.
Establish a clear cause-effect relationship	By combining peer exchange with structured reflection sessions, the platforms enabled participating institutions to contextualize international experiences and identify relevant reform options for their national social protection systems.
Indicate measurable impact and targeted beneficiaries	The dialogue platforms contributed to strengthened institutional awareness of policy options and digital administration approaches among participating institutions in Lao PDR and Kenya. Beneficiaries include national social protection authorities and policy stakeholders engaged in system reform.
Potential for replication and by whom	This model can be replicated by ILO technical cooperation programmes and other development partners implementing South–South cooperation initiatives focused on institutional reform.
Upward links to higher ILO Goals (DWCPs, Country Programme Outcomes or ILO's Strategic Programme Framework)	The practice contributes to the promotion of universal social protection and aligns with Decent Work Country Programme priorities related to strengthening social protection systems.
Other documents or relevant comments	Project study tour reports and technical briefs provide further documentation of these exchanges.

Good Practice 2: Integrated Technical Advisory and Capacity Development Approach

ILO Emerging Good Practice Template

Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation

Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN

Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov

Date: 03.03.2026

The following emerging good practice has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text can be found in the full evaluation report.

GP Element	Text
Brief summary of the good practice (link to project goal or specific deliverable, background, purpose, etc.)	The project combined policy advisory support, technical dialogue facilitation, and capacity development activities to support institutional strengthening in social protection administration.
Relevant conditions and Context: limitations or advice in terms of applicability and replicability	This integrated approach was implemented in collaboration with national institutions responsible for social protection governance. Its effectiveness depends on strong institutional engagement and alignment with national reform agendas.
Establish a clear cause-effect relationship	Combining advisory services with training and dialogue platforms enabled stakeholders to develop both conceptual understanding and operational capacity related to social protection reforms.
Indicate measurable impact and targeted beneficiaries	Institutional stakeholders reported improved awareness of policy options, administrative modernization strategies, and approaches to expanding social protection coverage. Beneficiaries include government social protection institutions and policy actors.
Potential for replication and by whom	The integrated approach can be replicated in other technical cooperation projects focused on governance reforms, particularly within social protection and labour market policy areas.
Upward links to higher ILO Goals (DWCPs, Country Programme Outcomes or ILO's Strategic Programme Framework)	Supports ILO strategic objectives related to strengthening national social protection systems and promoting decent work outcomes.
Other documents or relevant comments	Training reports, workshop documentation, and technical outputs provide evidence of implementation.

Good Practice 3: Linking South–South Learning to National Reform Agendas

ILO Emerging Good Practice Template

Project Title: Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Kenya and leveraging digital transformation through South-South Cooperation

Project TC/SYMBOL: GLO/23/17/CHN

Name of Evaluator: Dr. Bobur Nazarmuhamedov

Date: 03.03.2026

The following emerging good practice has been identified during the course of the evaluation. Further text can be found in the full evaluation report.

GP Element	Text
Brief summary of the good practice (link to project goal or specific deliverable, background, purpose, etc.)	The project aligned South–South exchange activities with ongoing national reform discussions related to extending social protection coverage and digital system modernization.
Relevant conditions and Context: limitations or advice in terms of applicability and replicability	The effectiveness of this practice depends on identifying reform themes that correspond directly with national policy priorities and institutional needs.
Establish a clear cause-effect relationship	By aligning exchange activities with national reform agendas, international learning opportunities were more likely to inform policy discussions and institutional planning processes.
Indicate measurable impact and targeted beneficiaries	National stakeholders reported that exposure to international experiences contributed to policy dialogue on administrative modernization and social protection coverage expansion.
Potential for replication and by whom	This approach can be replicated in South–South cooperation initiatives seeking to strengthen the policy relevance of international exchanges.
Upward links to higher ILO Goals (DWCPs, Country Programme Outcomes or ILO's Strategic Programme Framework)	Contributes to strengthening national capacities for implementing universal social protection policies in line with ILO strategic priorities.
Other documents or relevant comments	Policy briefs and project workshop documentation provide supporting evidence.

Annex VIII. Findings–Conclusions–Recommendations Matrix

	Key Findings	Strategic Conclusions	Recommendations
1	The project addresses structural constraints affecting the extension of social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy in both Lao PDR and Kenya.	The project demonstrates high strategic relevance in both country contexts and remains aligned with national reform priorities and international commitments on universal social protection.	Continue supporting national reforms on extending social protection coverage, with a focus on operationalizing institutional reforms identified during the project.
2	The intervention aligns with ILO strategic priorities and contributes to SDG 1.3 on universal social protection.	The project is well aligned with the ILO normative mandate and global policy frameworks, reinforcing the organization's role as a technical partner in social protection reform.	Strengthen the explicit integration of international labour standards and the Social Protection Floors framework within project communication and policy dialogue.
3	Project activities complement existing ILO workstreams and national reform initiatives.	The intervention demonstrates satisfactory internal and external coherence, reinforcing existing institutional processes rather than creating parallel mechanisms.	Improve documentation of complementarities between this project and other ILO social protection initiatives to strengthen visibility of institutional synergies.
4	South–South cooperation exchanges facilitated knowledge exchange but translation into policy reforms remains limited.	South–South cooperation provides valuable institutional learning opportunities, but mechanisms for converting learning into policy reform pathways remain underdeveloped.	Establish follow-up mechanisms to document lessons learned from exchanges and link them to national reform milestones.
5	Most planned outputs were delivered according to workplans, including training, policy dialogue and study tours.	Implementation performance is satisfactory at the output level, demonstrating effective delivery of planned project activities.	Maintain implementation momentum while strengthening monitoring of intermediate outcome indicators.
6	Early results are observable primarily in institutional awareness, policy dialogue and planning instruments rather than beneficiary-level outcomes.	The project is contributing to institutional reform processes, consistent with its systems-strengthening theory of change, but outcome-level changes remain emerging at mid-term.	Develop indicators to track intermediate institutional changes, such as policy adoption, administrative reforms and planning integration.
7	County Social Protection Action Plans in Kenya improved planning coordination at sub-national level.	Project-supported planning instruments demonstrate potential to influence future policy implementation and resource allocation.	Support integration of County Social Protection Action Plans into formal county budgeting and planning cycles.
8	Expenditure patterns are broadly aligned with implementation progress, although cost-efficiency monitoring remains limited.	Resource utilization appears generally efficient, although monitoring systems provide limited information on value-for-money.	Strengthen the linkage between financial expenditure and performance indicators in project monitoring frameworks.

9	Institutional ownership of project outputs is emerging but not yet fully embedded in formal policy frameworks.	Sustainability prospects are promising but not yet fully secured, as institutionalization processes remain ongoing.	Support formal adoption of project-supported policy instruments and administrative reforms within national frameworks.
10	Capacity development activities improved awareness but knowledge retention mechanisms remain limited.	Capacity development results are visible at the individual level but require stronger institutional embedding.	Develop training-of-trainers approaches and institutional training systems to sustain capacity development outcomes.
11	Gender equality considerations are conceptually embedded but operational monitoring remains limited.	Gender integration is present but insufficiently operationalized in monitoring systems.	Strengthen gender-responsive indicators and systematically collect sex-disaggregated data.
12	Engagement of tripartite constituents varies across activities and contexts.	The project reflects ILO principles of social dialogue, but systematic engagement of social partners could be strengthened.	Increase structured participation of workers' and employers' organizations in policy dialogue activities.
13	Capacity development constitutes a central dimension of the intervention logic.	Capacity strengthening contributes to institutional learning but requires stronger monitoring of outcomes.	Introduce mechanisms for monitoring institutional application of knowledge gained through project activities.

ANNEX IX: Bibliography

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