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Evaluation Office

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Independent Final Evaluation of the Productivity Ecosystems for Decent Work Programme

QUICK FACTS

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	The Productivity Ecosystems for Decent Work programme is a global ILO initiative that aims to address persistent productivity constraints while ensuring that productivity gains contribute to improved working conditions and decent work outcomes. Funded by SECO and NORAD, the programme is implemented from 2022 to 2026 in Ghana, South Africa, and Viet Nam, alongside a global component responsible for coordination, monitoring and evaluation, communication, and knowledge management. The programme adopts a systems-oriented and diagnostics-led approach, recognising that productivity and decent work are shaped by interconnected dynamics at macro (policy), meso (sectoral), and micro (enterprise) levels. Its logic is based on the assumption that sustainable productivity improvements require coordinated action across institutions, sectors, and enterprises, rather than isolated interventions. The programme is structured around two main outcomes: (i) Strengthening the capacity of governments, social partners, and key ministries to formulate and implement employment and productivity policies and frameworks; (ii) Addressing sectoral and enterprise-level constraints that limit productivity growth and decent work. Gender equality and environmental sustainability are mainstreamed throughout programme implementation. The programme structure includes country-level components in each pilot country, supported by a global coordination mechanism. Governance is ensured through Project Advisory Committees (PACs) in each country, bringing together government institutions, employers' and workers' organisations, and other key stakeholders to provide strategic guidance and oversight. At the global level, a Global Strategic Advisory Committee (GSAC) ensures coherence, learning, and alignment across countries. Country-level implementation was preceded by diagnostic assessments, stakeholder consultations, and policy and institutional reviews conducted in 2022. These informed the selection of priority sectors and the development of country-specific strategies within a shared global theory of change. The selected sectors include textile and garment and shea butter processing in Ghana; leather and footwear and automotive in South Africa; and wood and furniture and machine component manufacturing in Viet Nam.

Present situation of the project	The programme is currently in the implementation phase of Phase I (2022–2026), with activities underway across Ghana, South Africa, and Viet Nam.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	**Purpose**: To assess the programme against five OECD DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact) and provide lessons learned and forward-looking recommendations for the design and implementation of the next phase. **Scope**: The evaluation covers the global component and implementation in Ghana, South Africa, and Viet Nam from 2022 to 2026. **Clients**: The evaluation is intended for the ILO, programme donors (SECO and NORAD), and key programme stakeholders, including governments and social partners.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation followed OECD DAC and ILO guidelines, applying a theory-based approach grounded in the programme's Theory of Change to assess progress at macro, meso, and micro levels, with a focus on contribution rather than attribution. The methodology combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The key components of the evaluation approach include: • **Document review:** Design documents, country strategies, work plans, progress reports, budget data, and analytical studies were reviewed to inform evaluation questions and contextualise findings. • **Data review**: The M&E framework and existing datasets, including partner and enterprise surveys, were analysed to assess progress and identify patterns of change; availability of 2025 outcome data avoided the need for additional primary data collection. • **Interviews**: 108 stakeholders (39% women) were consulted through 65 interviews, conducted both face-to-face during visits to Ghana, South Africa, and Viet Nam (16–20 March 2026) and virtually with global stakeholders. • **Triangulation and analysis**: Findings were substantiated through systematic triangulation across documents, programme data, surveys, and interviews, alongside internal cross-checking within the evaluation team. • **Assessment of evidence**: The strength of findings was rated using qualitative confidence levels based on consistency, credibility, and sufficiency of data. • **Validation and reporting**: Stakeholder feedback was integrated throughout, including debriefings, a sense-checking workshop,

	structured review of the draft report, and a sharing session with broader stakeholders. Milestones of the evaluation were the kick-off meeting (28 January 2026), approval of the inception report (11 March 2026), the sense-checking workshop (31 March 2026), submission of the draft report (23 April 2026), the results sharing session (27 May 2026), and submission of the final report (29 May 2026).

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	The evaluation main findings are as follows: **Relevance:** The programme is highly relevant across all three pilot countries, with interventions closely aligned to national priorities, ILO frameworks and donor objectives around private sector development, employment, green growth, and decent work. Its demand-led and consultative design fostered strong stakeholder ownership and enabled interventions to respond to country-specific needs. Productivity proved to be a pragmatic and politically viable entry point for advancing decent work, while sector selection was grounded in rigorous diagnostics and stakeholder consultation. Stakeholders also valued the programme's focus on addressing key structural constraints to productivity and decent work across policy, sectoral and enterprise levels. However, concerns remained regarding the translation of productivity gains into broader decent work outcomes, with evidence of improvements in wages, worker representation and job quality remaining mixed. The broad scope and responsiveness of the programme contributed to perceptions of fragmentation, with activities dispersed across multiple actors and levels, sometimes obscuring the overall strategy and reducing strategic focus. Overall, the programme is highly relevant and well positioned, but would benefit from sharper prioritisation, stronger coherence, and a more explicit focus on demonstrating and communicating decent work outcomes. **Efficiency:** Efficiency is overall high, supported by improving financial delivery, a lean and effective decentralised management structure, strong technical support from programme staff, and productive coordination across global and country levels. Stakeholders consistently praised the quality, responsiveness and expertise of programme teams, while trust-based partnerships with national institutions and development partners helped extend reach and

maintain momentum. Governance structures, particularly the Programme Advisory Committees (PACs), were widely valued for fostering dialogue, alignment and stakeholder ownership. The programme also benefited from effective knowledge sharing and technical backstopping across ILO levels, while its monitoring system evolved into a useful tool for tracking progress and supporting adaptive management. However, resources remained weighted towards enterprise-level interventions, building on the programme's comparative advantage in generating visible results at firm level. Achieving more durable and systemic change in Phase II will require stronger investment in the policy and sectoral dimensions. Efficiency was also constrained by heavy reporting and compliance requirements, which increased transaction costs for programme teams and partners. While monitoring systems captured early results, evidence of higher-level systemic impact remained limited. External factors, including administrative procedures, institutional fragmentation, economic uncertainty and country-specific political dynamics, further increased transaction costs and required continuous adaptation to sustain implementation.

Effectiveness and Impact:
The programme has over-achieved most of its formal targets and generated tangible results, particularly at enterprise level, where improvements in management practices, productivity systems, and working conditions are well evidenced. Sector-level results are more uneven: Ghana's shea sector stands out as a strong example of institutional development, while in South Africa and Viet Nam progress has been more incremental, focusing on strengthening institutional capacities, enterprise support systems and sector coordination. Policy-level achievements represent important contributions to reform processes and more evidence-based dialogue on productivity and decent work. In Ghana, the programme strengthened productivity and labour policy discussions; in South Africa, it informed employment and industrial policy processes; and in Viet Nam, it supported employment and productivity reforms. However, across all three countries, the translation of these achievements into enacted, implemented and sustained policy change remains ongoing and dependent on broader political, institutional and administrative processes. A central limitation across countries is the weak integration between policy, sectoral, and enterprise-level interventions. While early linkages are emerging, they are not yet systematically operationalised, limiting the programme's ability to generate compounding, system-wide effects. Systemic impact is therefore not yet evident, which is

consistent with the programme's pilot nature, though early signals of change are present. Gender equality has been well integrated, with strong results in terms of women's participation, inclusive workplace practices, and targeted support to women in key sectors. Environmental sustainability has been more unevenly addressed. Viet Nam demonstrates more advanced and measurable progress through green productivity, energy efficiency and digital transformation initiatives.

While the programme has laid strong foundations for sustainable change, Phase II should place greater emphasis on deliberate cross-level integration to strengthen coherence, scaling and systemic impact.

Sustainability:

Sustainability prospects are generally positive across the three countries, underpinned by strong stakeholder ownership, institutional capacity building and the embedding of tools, approaches and practices within national institutions and partner organisations. At enterprise level, improvements in productivity, management practices and working conditions are likely to endure, as many firms have internalised new approaches and, in some cases, are independently investing to sustain and deepen improvements, signalling embedded behavioural change. At sector level, the institutional foundations established, particularly in Ghana's shea value chain, provide a credible basis for continuity, but many interventions are not yet sufficiently institutionalised within sector structures to support wider diffusion. Sector actors and business support organisations require stronger capacity to aggregate enterprise demand, provide services, coordinate collective action and feed learning into policy processes. Policy-level sustainability is most contingent, dependent on the completion of pending reform processes and sustained political commitment. Across all levels, the defining challenge is the same: interventions have achieved demonstrable depth within supported firms, sectors and institutions, they have not yet generated the institutional, market-based or policy mechanisms needed to drive adoption at scale. The programme has demonstrated that its approach works; Phase II must focus on institutionalising and scaling to achieve broader systemic change.

Conclusions: The programme has demonstrated clear value. Its conceptual framework, linking enterprise performance to sector institutions and national policy within an ecosystem model, is validated as analytically sound and operationally relevant, and the evidence confirms real improvements for supported enterprises and workers. In Phase I, the programme has built

	relationships, generated evidence, and tested approaches that provide a solid foundation for Phase II. The key challenge for Phase II is to move from breadth to depth: while Phase I successfully established relevance across multiple levels and actors, this breadth limited the focus and continuity needed for scaling; meanwhile weak integration across policy, sectoral and enterprise interventions reduced the programme's systemic impact. • **Relevance: Highly Satisfactory** — strong alignment & ownership; tension between relevance and focus • **Efficiency: Satisfactory** — high delivery efficiency; reporting burdens & governance gaps remain • **Effectiveness: Satisfactory** — real results across levels; cross-level integration is the gap • **Impact: Not rated; emerging contribution only** — early signals visible; systemic impact requires longer time horizon • **Sustainability: Moderately Satisfactory** — strong institutional ownership, enterprise change embedded; scaling remains the challenge

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES	
Main recommendations	The report provides recommendations at strategic and project-level, in line with the evaluation's overall scope: 1. Rebalance towards policy and meso-level engagement for sustainability 2. Develop and sharpen country-level ToCs based on Phase I learning 3. Prioritise deeper, more focused engagement on a limited number of priority constraints, alongside more targeted support to fewer high-potential partners, with stronger cross-level linkages 4. Prioritise capacity building and institutional strengthening of sector actors
Main lessons learned and good practices	The evaluation highlights a set of key lessons that reflect both the strengths of the programme's design and the challenges encountered in translating its systemic ambitions into practice: 1. Productivity is an effective and politically viable entry point for advancing decent work, but translating productivity gains into decent work outcomes requires deliberate design.

	2. A demand-led approach builds ownership but requires a strong strategic framework to prevent fragmentation. 3. Pilot-phase breadth is necessary for learning, but depth and focus are prerequisites for systemic impact. 4. Systemic change requires deliberate integration across levels — it does not emerge automatically from results at each level. The evaluation also identifies a number of promising practices that demonstrate effective approaches to achieving results across different contexts and may inform future scaling efforts: 1. Building worker and employer organisations simultaneously in informal sectors – Ghana, shea sector 2. Training of trainers to embed productivity approaches within national institutions – South Africa 3. Integrating digital and green transformation at enterprise level – Viet Nam