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Final Independent Evaluation of ILO E-Waste for Youth Employment in Limpopo Province Project

QUICK FACTS

Countries: South Africa

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Administrative Office: DWT/CO-Pretoria

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

This project aimed to address the dual challenges of high youth unemployment and unsustainable e-waste management by promoting a greener and more inclusive circular economy. Its intervention logic was built on two interrelated outcomes: (1) strengthening the e-waste management system and policy framework at provincial and municipal levels, and (2) increasing youth skills, employment, and entrepreneurship in the e-waste sector. The project's strategy combined policy and institutional support with direct enterprise development, using a mix of technical training in safe e-waste dismantling and processing, entrepreneurship training, provision of workspaces, tools and PPE, business registration support, and market linkages. Geographically, the project covered all 22 local municipalities in Limpopo Province. It was implemented by the ILO in close collaboration with key partners, including the national Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET), municipalities, TVET colleges, and the E-Waste Association of South Africa (EWASA), under a collaborative management structure coordinated through a Project Steering Committee.

Present situation of the project

The project closed at the end of March 2026 and handed over to the LEDET and EWASA who will in coordination with the other stakeholders, continue initiatives started under the project. The Project Steering Committee is expected to continue.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

This final independent evaluation assessed the performance of the Project in terms of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. It aimed to provide accountability to the donor and partners, document achievements and challenges, and extract lessons learned for future green jobs and circular economy initiatives. The evaluation covered the full project period (April 2025-March 2026) and all activities implemented in Limpopo Province, including all outputs, outcomes, and cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and social dialogue. Primary users include the ILO (Pretoria CO, DWT, ROAF, and HQ), the Government of Japan, and South African partners (DFFE, LEDET, municipalities, EWASA, and TVET colleges).

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the project. This design was chosen for its ability to triangulate findings, enhance credibility, and allow both measurement of results and in-depth understanding of contextual factors, processes, and stakeholder perceptions in a complex, short-duration pilot project.

Data collection included:

- Desk review of key project documents, progress reports, results framework data, three waves of beneficiary surveys, and relevant national policies.
- 28 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with diverse stakeholders (ILO staff, DFFE, LEDET, municipalities, EWASA, TVET colleges, and beneficiaries).
- An online community awareness survey that received 51 responses.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics for quantitative data, thematic analysis and sentiment analysis for qualitative data, and triangulation across all sources to validate findings. Major limitations included the short one-year project duration, which restricted observation of medium to long-term outcomes; reliance on self-reported data with potential optimism bias; and the evaluation being conducted immediately at project closure, limiting assessment of post-project sustainability.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Relevance

The project demonstrated high relevance, with strongly positive stakeholder sentiment (95%). However small in its scale, it addressed Limpopo Province's pressing dual challenges of high youth unemployment and unsustainable e-waste management by providing young people with technical skills in safe dismantling, entrepreneurship training, workspaces, tools, PPE, and market linkages. The project design aligned closely with national priorities, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations and the National Waste Management Strategy, as well as the UNSDCF and SDGs 5, 8, and 12. Stakeholders confirmed that it responded directly to real needs on the ground, with the project showing adaptability by slightly shifting some focus toward operational support.

Coherence

The project also performed strongly on coherence (85% positive sentiment). It complemented rather than duplicated existing initiatives by working through established structures involving LEDET, municipalities, EWASA, and TVET colleges. The Project Steering Committee served as an effective coordination platform, while partnerships enhanced synergies across policy frameworks. Alignment with national policies and the study tour to Japan further strengthened systemic coherence and potential for broader impact.

Effectiveness

On effectiveness, results were positive to mixed (75% positive). The project successfully trained 22 youth beneficiaries and supported enterprise initiation. By project closure, 52% of the supported enterprises were operational and 48% were in the establishment phase, with 76% achieving CIPC registration. Collectively, these businesses created 58 new jobs and employed 165 people in total. Community awareness also improved significantly, reaching 64% of surveyed respondents with an average knowledge gain of 8.56 out of 10. However, full income generation and licensing remained constrained by the short project timeframe and regulatory barriers.

Efficiency

Efficiency was assessed as mixed but leaning positive (65 -70%). Despite a modest USD 1.5 million budget and a compressed one-year implementation period, the project delivered good value for money through a lean team, strong stakeholder leveraging, and a high expenditure rate of 95%. Comprehensive support packages combining skills development and infrastructure were provided efficiently, though the tight timeline resulted in some rushed processes and delays in equipment delivery and licensing.

Impact & Sustainability

The project showed promising impact orientation (80% positive). At the individual level, beneficiaries experienced clear gains in technical and business skills, confidence, entrepreneurial agency, and empowerment, particularly for women participants. Institutionally, emerging impacts included greater integration of e-waste into municipal waste management planning, progress on TVET curriculum development, and strengthened relationships with local authorities. Broader environmental and policy-level changes remained prospective but indicated strong potential.

Sustainability was rated positively (80%). Key drivers included the retention of technical and business skills as permanent assets, ownership of containers by municipality rather than by individual, the formation of cooperatives, increasing municipal ownership, TVET integration, and complementary funding from EWASA. While local ownership and partnerships provided a solid foundation, risks persisted around licensing delays, infrastructure gaps, and working capital.

Cross-cutting Issues

Cross-cutting issues were addressed strongly (90% positive sentiment). Gender mainstreaming was effective, achieving approximately 45% female participation in a traditionally male-dominated sector, with women beneficiaries reporting safe environments and high confidence levels. Social dialogue was advanced through the tripartite-plus Project Steering Committee and cooperative structures, while environmental sustainability remained central to the intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main Recommendations

1. **Accelerate post-project compliance and infrastructure support:** Implement an immediate six-month transition support package focusing on licensing (especially SAPS and hazardous waste licences), infrastructure, shared transport/storage through the cooperative, and targeted working capital/credit linkages.
2. **Enhance resource mobilization for a differentiated scale-up programme:** Mobilize resources for a longer-term (2–3 years) scale-up, with differentiated support based on enterprise maturity, stronger integration with TVET systems, formal financing mechanisms, and potential expansion to other provinces.
3. **Strengthen gender transformative and inclusion elements in future projects:** Move beyond numerical targets to embed gender-transformative approaches, including gender analysis, GBV prevention, childcare considerations, and realistic equity targets with strong support measures.
4. **Mainstream e-waste into municipal policy and planning:** Support full integration of e-waste into Integrated Waste

	Management Plans (IWMPs), bylaws, and municipal performance plans, including dedicated budget lines. 5. Strengthen TVET and institutional capacity for long-term skills supply: Formalize partnerships with TVET colleges to roll out accredited short courses on e-waste management and establish them as ongoing training and incubation hubs.
Main lessons learned and good practices	<u>Lessons Learnt</u> 1. One-year project duration is too short for meaningful enterprise development in the e-waste sector. A longer time frame (minimum of 2-3 years) is required for consolidation and sustainable outcomes. 2. Infrastructure and working capital gaps severely limit the translation of training into viable businesses. 3. Regulatory compliance processes, particularly the SAPS Second-Hand Goods Licence and Waste Management & Transport Licences for hazardous waste, are major bottlenecks that must be addressed during project implementation. 4. Differentiated support is required for a heterogeneous beneficiary cohort (novices vs. those with prior experience, varying locations and economic situations). 5. Strong municipal and institutional relationships are foundational for sustainability, but they must be translated into concrete operational commitments and formalised handover mechanisms. <u>Good Practices</u> 1. Strategic placement of collection containers combined with community awareness campaigns: Positioning containers in high-access locations (e.g., near taxi ranks and residential areas) significantly improved collection efficiency and community participation. 2. Deliberate gender mainstreaming through targeted beneficiary selection (aiming for 60% women) and the formation of a cooperative. This helped pioneer women's participation in a traditionally male-dominated sector and enabled collective solutions to challenges like transport costs. 3. Holistic training model integrating technical skills (safe dismantling, sorting, and grading), business development training (SIYB/GYB), and direct industry exposure through facility



visits. This practical, comprehensive approach led to strong skills acquisition and high technical confidence among beneficiaries.