



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation
Office

Independent Review of the ILO-Flanders Technical Cooperation Fund (2016-20)

Quick Facts

Countries: Global and India, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa

Evaluation Mode: *Final Independent Review*

Administrative Office: *ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL) Geneva*

Technical Office: *PARDEV, ILO, Geneva*

Evaluation Manager: *Mini Thakur*

Evaluation Consultant(s): *Dr Theo van der Loop*

Project Code: **GLO/16/18/FLA**

Donor(s) & Budget: Govt of Flanders, (2016-20): USD 3,015,785 for 6 ongoing/closed projects and USD 1,297,869 for recently approved projects)

Keywords: *Worker rights, Trade Arrangements, Care economy, Sustainable Supply Chains, HIV/AIDS counselling, Decent Work on plantations, Social Economy, Skills development.*

Background & Context

This *Independent Review* is mandated under the Cooperation agreement between the Government of Flanders and the International Labour Organization (dated 7 March 2016) and conducted in accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Independent Review of the ILO/Flanders Technical Cooperation Fund. It provides a brief overview of the ILO-Flanders cooperation since 2001 and shows that the cooperation between the Government of Flanders

(GoF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) has existed for nearly 30 years.

The review however particularly looks at the projects which fall under the 2016 Agreement (2016-2020) and this concerns nine projects of which three have been recently approved. These projects are:

- **GLO/14/05/FLA:** Worker rights in globalising economies: assessment of labour provisions in trade and investment arrangements
- **GLO/15/42/FLA:** Decent Work and the Care Economy: Recognizing, rewarding and redistributing care work
- **IND/18/51/FLA:** Paving the way for a sustainable natural stone industry in India
- **MOZ/16/50/FLA:** Scaling up the Voluntary Counselling and Testing at Work (VCT@Work) Initiative in Mozambique
- **MWI/17/050/FLA:** Promoting decent work on tea plantations in Malawi's Thyolo District
- **ZAF/16/01/FLA:** Development of a social economy Policy in South Africa. (*Bilateral Technical Cooperation Project: GoF-ILO*).
- **ZAF/19/01/FLA:** Assessing social capabilities for new technologies, innovation and job creation. Pilot project in South Africa
- **GLO/20/02/FLA:** Apprenticeships Development for Universal Lifelong Learning and Training (ADULT)
- **GLO/20/23/FLA:** Inclusive Trade and Decent Work: Supportive Domestic Policies for Better Social, Labour Market and Sustainable Enterprise Outcomes (SUPPORT).

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The primary purpose of the present Independent Review is to provide advice to the Government of Flanders and ILO concerning the future directions of cooperation under the ILO/Flanders Trust Fund. The Review is divided in two components: Component 1: Review of performance of current projects (2016-

2020), and Component 2: Review of the cooperation mechanism governing the Trust Fund.

Methodology of evaluation

The methodology includes a Desk study, primary data collection through in-depth interviews and discussions which were all conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data analysis and reporting. Overall, 29 persons were interviewed.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The findings of the review are categorized according to the seven review criteria used throughout this report. The **Relevance** of the nine projects under review to the local and national contexts and needs and/or to global issues, as well as to the mandate and priorities of the Government of Flanders (GoF) and the ILO is overall quite high. Most of the nine projects also adhere to the thematic focus on decent work for women and youth and on social dialogue as laid down in the 2016 ILO-GoF Agreement although the thematic focus chosen is somewhat broad in the sense that they are important cross-cutting issues within any ILO project. The geographic focus on Southern Africa in the Agreement is adhered to by four projects, while four others are global, and one is in India.

The selection of projects is loosely identified in several steps in the 2016 Agreement and in practice is a joint task between ILO and GoF whereby the PRM has a pivotal role in reviewing proposals, the Flanders Representative to the UN in Geneva in actively contacting ILO staff concerning topics or projects, and PARDEV in liaising between the GoF and ILO's respective administrative units. Several factors were important for the selection of the current projects, such as networking, alignment to the bilateral country programmes of Flanders or to ILO's Centenary Initiative, and concerns over the use of child labour in India. That the project selection is not done in an institutionalized manner with for example a full-fledged Call for Proposals is logical because the resulting increase in the workload seems not proportional to the size of the average project budget and it would require a further tightening of thematic focus while the spirit of the cooperation seems that of a joint selection procedure. That being said, the

selection process can sometimes be quite long and even then, in the end not result in an approval.

In terms of internal **Coherence**, the nine projects were generally well aligned with ongoing other ILO interventions either of ILO Country Offices, ILO Centenary initiatives, the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work, and other UN Agencies. In terms of external coherence there are many examples of the way in which Flanders and ILO coordinate with similar interventions by other agencies.

Effectiveness has been discussed only for the six projects that are completed or are in their final phases. Most of these projects have a running time of between two and three years, which was found to have been adequate for most of the outcomes specified in the PRODOC although in many cases a no-cost extension was required. The geographic coverage differs substantially between projects with two global projects, one with a nation-wide and three with sub-national coverage. In terms of outputs, the six projects produced several major and/or landmark publications which are widely used and quoted, i.e. the Trade Handbook, the Care report and the Green paper on the social economy.

The Trust Fund as a whole is managed through the annual Programme Review Meeting (PRM) alternately held in Brussels and Geneva, and the projects themselves are managed varyingly by the administrative unit of ILO in Geneva, the ILO Country Offices and CTAs or NPCs. Tripartite project advisory or steering committees are important to engage the national constituents. Technical reporting has generally been complete, while the financial reports are still activity-based; however, ILO's tools have now changed, and the financial reporting for the *new* projects will be outcome-based. The Trust Fund can also have a catalytic nature in terms of being able to provide seed funding and funding for imminent opportunities (e.g. the India project). While the Malawi and Mozambique projects could rather be considered as spin-offs of the GoF respective bilateral country programmes, the global trade and care projects were innovative with landmark publications.

Involving Flemish expertise on a voluntary basis has also been laid down in the 2016 Agreement. In the past this seems to have happened more often than in recent years, but in the three new projects several

Flemish organisations are mentioned and the participation of the KU Leuven in the international Advisory Committee of the Trade project will continue in the follow-up project (SUPPORT). Stimulating internships was hampered by the difference in the way internships are organised in Flanders from that by the ILO.

In terms of comparable donors, the GoF seems to be the only Non-State Government that provides substantial funds for implementing projects, while comparable cooperation modalities investigated were the ILO-Sida Partnership Agreement, the ILO/Korea Partnership Programme and the GoF-UNESCO Trust Fund.

The promotion of Gender Equality is also mentioned in the 2016 Agreement, and as a cross-cutting issue in the ILO it is fully ingrained in the way ILO operates from project document to evaluations.

The widely varying projects did encounter a number of **constraining factors**, of which the limited project staff was the most important one. A variety of other constraints were discussed in the report. Among the **Success factors** again the longer-term presence of a CTA or NPC was most important while various other success factors are discussed in the main report.

Overall the **Efficiency** of the projects was satisfactory generally following the rules and regulations of the ILO financial monitoring systems. Due to the relatively modest *average* budget for the six projects, it was decided to have only very few staff members and thus a very low staff budget. The efficiency of the Trust Fund as a whole can be somewhat improved as the yearly closing balances systematically showed a substantial positive balance in the past five years. The regularity of the transfer of the yearly contribution of the Government of Flanders to the Trust Fund is a very Good Practice. The ILO clearly leveraged its strengths in all projects to enhance cost-efficiency involving regular ILO staff in Geneva, the ILO Country Offices and the Decent Work Team (DWT) in Pretoria. In addition, cost-efficiency was also leveraged in specific ways, in particular in the shape of joint funding in several projects. Striking a balance between operational projects and projects to support standard setting work at HQ depends in the first place on the priorities of the Government of Flanders, and in the second instance on the current financing

situation within ILO as judged by PARDEV. In general, the administrative and financial workload is often almost similar for small projects than for larger projects making larger projects more cost-efficient as well as more likely to be exposed to independent evaluation according to ILO's evaluation policy. Time efficiency was satisfactory although there were various delays as a result of the constraining factors mentioned and sometimes as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. No-cost extensions were approved for four projects.

With respect to **Results**, Table 2 of the main report provides the completion rates and highlights for the outcomes and key result areas. In terms of impact, capacity building, awareness raising, advocacy campaigns were important. Ownership of the projects varied among the six projects but was overall satisfactory.

For reasons of **Sustainability** projects are expected to have an 'Exit strategy', but this was lacking in all project documents while sustainability itself was discussed only in three of these documents. With respect to *a possible alternative model* that would better fit the cooperation the Review found that the Trust fund is the right vehicle for the goals set both by the GoF and by the ILO. The review proposes several principles, i.e. the thematic and geographic focus, the size of the projects and possible strategic cooperation versus individual projects. The recommendation from the review is to wait with allotting funds to a new project until the recommendations of the present review have been discussed between Flanders and the ILO at the next PRM which is recommended to be held in the last quarter of 2020. It is also recommended to explore the possibilities of having a project on migration in the country in North or East Africa that will be selected by the GoF as a new priority country. Generally, the average size of projects is advised to be increased whereby staff could be funded. Small projects can then still be used for flexible interventions following current events or new priorities. In view of the disadvantage mentioned of support to broader programmes (i.e. reduced visibility and control), it is not advised to put *all* the available funding in for example one of the five Flagship Programmes of the ILO, but it might be tried once and then evaluated.

The last of the seven review criteria is *Visibility* and the review advises to place logos on the cover of all documents produced, to have a visibility and communication plan, including an updated project website, and to enhance communication with the representatives and offices of GoF and ILO in the countries where the projects are implemented.

Recommendations

- 1) **Continue with the Trust Fund modality because it has shown to have a significant relevance** not only for the local and national contexts and needs in project countries and for global issues, but also for the achievement of the goals of the two partners of the cooperation, the Government of Flanders and ILO.
- 2) **Increase the involvement of key stakeholders at all stages of the project** including in the writing of the project document, and this includes in particular the country representatives of GoF and ILO and the tripartite constituents (even in global projects since there are various *regional* employers and workers' organisations).
- 3) **Maintain a high level of attention for issues related to Gender Equality** and make sure they are included in all the M&E tools, such as **Log Frame, Theory of Change and Risk Analysis**. In future projects pay attention to **the disability inclusion component and to non-discrimination**.
- 4) **Enhance timely coordination on the organisation of major events** especially those where landmark reports and other achievements are to be launched and disseminated (use draft reports for the preparation when the published versions are not yet available).
- 5) **Move as much as possible to projects with a larger average size in terms of budget**, and make sure that each project **employs dedicated staff for the duration of the project** (e.g. a national project officer).
- 6) **Organize a Programme Review Meeting (PRM) in the last quarter of 2020 and decide on the present review's recommendations** as well as **discuss a new project to be funded**; ILO should thereby make sure that key project staff will attend the PRM in person or online.
- 7) **Stimulate to conduct in every project regular meetings of the Project Steering/Advisory Committee**, monitor the quality of technical reporting, and use outcome-based budgeting (IRIS) as much as possible for financial reporting.
- 8) **Maintain in each project those activities that can enhance the impact of the project and the ownership among tripartite constituents**, such as capacity building, awareness raising and advocacy campaigns, and make clear plans for the sustainability of the project by developing an exit strategy in each project.
- 9) **Focus on the latest priorities of the GoF when selecting new projects** and based on that quickly approve a new project which should be tightly aligned to ILO's ongoing programmes and related to specific CPOs/DWCPs and to specific Policy Outcomes whereby the financing needs of PARDEV can be taken into account. **A few alternatives are proposed as follows:**
 - A project on migration in the North or East African country selected by GoF (possibly combined with skills development and possibly aligned to IPEC+);
 - Fund part of a broader programme, in particular one of the five Flagship programmes of the ILO, and evaluate immediately what impact this has on GoF's preferences for visibility and control over the funds in terms of adherence to its policy goals.
 - Small projects can be used for flexible interventions following current events or new priorities.
 - Reconsider possible second phases of recently completed projects, such as the Malawi project (Collective Bargaining Agreement guidance and capacity building) and the Care project (Women at Work and Future of Work initiatives); however, the fact that the projects have by now been closed may not make it easy to 'follow-through' in practice.
- 10) **Intensify cooperation with the Netherlands-Flanders Covenant entitled the 'TruStone Initiative'** by the project in India (that will still run for another year).

- 11) **Make clear contingency plans to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic** in terms of preparing partners for online meetings, involving national project staff and coping with inevitable delays.
- 12) **Include a clear and detailed visibility and communication plan**, including plans for an updated project website, in each project document; this can be adhered to only in the larger projects.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

LL1: In order for the priorities of the GoF to make a difference in the selection of projects they could be made more specific beyond the mainstreamed cross-cutting issues of the ILO.

LL2: An important lesson is the importance of a dedicated full-time project manager for the overall duration of the project. Project coordination, research, communication, event organization and direct technical assistance in the field are substantive and time-consuming activities per se.

LL3: Make sure that each and every project has a proper and systematic Results Framework, Log Frame, Theory of Change and Risk Analysis, as well as a visibility and communication plan and a website and that coordination is done through a PSC/PAC.

GP1: The Good Practice is the close alignment not only to the local and national contexts and needs in project countries and to global issues, but also to the achievement of the goals of the two partners of the cooperation, the Government of Flanders and ILO.

GP2: The Trust Fund provides a good practice in that project identification is done jointly by GoF and ILO and that there is flexibility to include projects that respond to immediate needs.