



# Evaluation Summary



International  
Labour  
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Office

## *SKILL-UP Programme: Upgrading skills for the changing world of work – Final Evaluation*

### Quick Facts

**Countries:** *Global, Regional, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lebanon, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania*

**Final Evaluation:** *31 March 2021*

**Evaluation Mode:** *Independent*

**Administrative Office:** *Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS)*

**Technical Office:** *Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS)*

**Evaluation Manager:** *Jean-François Klein*

**Evaluation Consultant(s):** *orange & teal GmbH, Switzerland*

**Project Code:** *GLO/18/54/NOR, RAF/18/50/NOR, MWI/18/50/NOR, ETH/18/50/NOR, SEN/18/50/NOR, TZA/18/52/NOR, GHA/18/50/NOR, LBN/18/07/NOR*

**Donor(s) & Budget:** *Norway (US\$ 11.97 million)*

**Keywords:** *skills development, inclusion, migration, partnerships*

### Background & Context

#### *Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure*

##### *Programme overview*

The SKILL-UP Programme is an initiative jointly undertaken by the ILO and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme started in April 2018 and ended, following a twelve-month cost extension,

in December 2020. It was based on the Programme Cooperation Agreement 2018-2019 (PCA) between the ILO and the Government of Norway and funded with 12 million USD. Organisationally the programme was located in ILO's Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS), which was tasked with implementation and oversight.

The PCA 2018-2019's objective is to contribute to the ILO Programme & Budget (P&B) Outcome 1 "More and better jobs for inclusive growth and improved youth employment prospects." and Indicator 1.3: "Constituents have taken action on skills development systems, strategies and programmes to reduce skills mismatches and enhance access to the labour market." The programme aimed to assist ILO member states in preparing their skills systems to respond to the challenges and opportunities offered by emerging global drivers of change such as trade integration, technological change, and migration.

The programme consisted of interventions that were implemented at the country, regional and global level. The country components were implemented in Ethiopia, Ghana, Lebanon, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania. The regional component covered skills partnerships in Western Africa and Central Africa with a view to make migration more demand-led and informed. The interventions at the global level intended to have global reach beyond a given country or region, and included activities related to combatting modern slavery in Niger.

#### *Present Situation of the Programme*

The SKILL-UP Programme was completed in December 2020. A subsequent PCA 2020-21 between the ILO and Norway focuses on the same countries.

### ***Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation***

The purpose of the final evaluation is to serve accountability and learning. Furthermore, the evaluation is expected to provide recommendations for the future development and implementation of projects of this type and for consideration in the implementation of the next phase of this programme. The main clients of the evaluation are the ILO, the donor, and the constituents. It covers the entire duration (2018-2020) and all components.

### ***Methodology of evaluation***

These sources were used for the evaluation:

- Interviews: 114 persons, covering all components
- Survey: 122 participants, out of 458 persons invited; overall response rate of 27%
- Document review: Selection of the over 2,000 files that the ILO provided
- Data: Progress Reports, fund disbursement, Service Tracker and media downloads

Major milestones of the evaluation were the kick-off meeting with ILO stakeholders (18 December 2020), the approval of the Inception Report (3 February 2021), the workshop with representatives from the ILO and Norway (9 March 2021) and the approval of the evaluation report (31 March 2021). Apart from minor deviations the evaluation was implemented as planned.

## ***Main Findings & Conclusions***

### ***Relevance***

The findings have highlighted the relevance of the objectives and programme implementation of SKILL-UP with development plans, constituents' objectives, the overall programme of the ILO as well as the Norwegian Government. There are a few shortcomings that need to be borne in mind, however. Firstly, the limited involvement of social partners in the overarching design of the programme, and the finding that many respondents lacked an understanding of the relationship between its elements. In our understanding, this pointed to the absence of an articulated, and clearly communicated, overarching Theory of Change that is used as a basis for determining the relevance of specific activities. It is also related in some part to the ways in which the constituents are involved in decisions relating to the programme. Secondly, the evaluation has found that whilst most of the activities were considered relevant,

there were not sufficient spaces created to reflect on what may be unintended outcomes of certain decisions that are made. Thirdly, the need to consider the involvement of women in the design and management of the interventions may need to be critically reviewed given the relatively larger number of women who were unsure whether the interventions were aligned with their priorities.

### ***Coherence***

There is good internal coherence of the SKILL-UP Programme with other programmes of the ILO that are relevant for the skills domain. Specifically, the SCORE and BRIDGE programmes were mentioned several times and apparent interlinkages could be realised, including in Lebanon, Ghana, and Niger. It emerges from the interviews, however, that synergies between the programmes could be improved. The programme's consistency with international norms and standards is high, primarily because of ILO's own role in setting the latter and applying them in the delivery of its interventions. Regarding external coherence, we found that some opportunities for collaboration were seized but not systematically identified. The survey results show that ILO staff believe that internal coherence was ensured whilst the ratings for external coherence were somewhat more critical.

### ***Effectiveness***

The majority of the outcome and output targets are achieved, and the reasons provided for the dropped, delayed or otherwise unachieved items – waned interest by partner governments, political gridlock or turmoil, delays due to the pandemic – are reasonable. Most stakeholders believe that the interventions implemented under the programme have been successful, and that the objectives have been reached. Despite this overall very positive assessment, there were also critical voices. Some stakeholders see the work as “preparatory”, now requiring additional work to reach ultimate beneficiaries, while other criticise that the “groundwork” has been done, yet more systemic changes are still lacking. These observations are relevant, yet given the short time frame and oftentimes small component budgets it seems natural that change was not sweeping on both micro and macro level. Again, the programme could be better explained if its Theory of Change entailed a more strategic discussion on the sequencing of interventions. The fact that there is no information on the ultimate beneficiary impact is a shortfall of the

programme (although it should be noted that some tracer studies are still forthcoming).

### *Impact*

The long-term objective of the programme is to contribute to the P&B 2018-19 Outcome 1 and Indicator 1.3 (see above). The activity-based component of the two, related to Indicator 1.3, has clearly been fulfilled through the various SKILL-UP interventions. There is no evidence yet for the programme's contribution to "youth employment prospects", yet we believe that in theory such a contribution is likely, at least as soon as labour market conditions improve, and given enough time for systems-related development to manifest themselves in concrete improvements. Such time lags are even more true for contributions to "more and better jobs", an ambitious target for a skills development project. The fact that SKILL-UP has focused on growing economies makes a contribution to such aggregate employment effects more likely. While acknowledging that the selections of industries was taken based on the STED methodology, together with the stakeholders, we wonder if a stronger focus on "future of work" and "green" jobs could or should have been achieved.

### *Efficiency*

Several of the elements that were assessed to measure the extent to which the programme is efficient were rated positively. This holds true for the political, technical, and administrative support that the programme received from its stakeholders, the programme management structure, as well as the communication among the stakeholders. The outcome-based funding approach is appreciated both by the donor and the ILO for its flexibility and literature suggests that such "softly earmarked" approaches are overall efficient. Issues that undermined the programmes efficiency include the delays that it experienced to launch the activities, including those due to the initial appointment of staff as well as staff changes, coupled with the late fund disbursement dynamics. Several activities had thus to be implemented in the late stages of the programme, leaving little room to deliver, monitor, learn, and adapt the activities. The Covid-19 pandemic caused additional delays, yet the ILO's response to this external factor was considered to be effective by the majority of the ILO staff and this was also confirmed by constituents in interviews.

### *Sustainability*

The findings have highlighted that whilst the level of ownership of the SKILL-UP Programme is positive this does not directly equate to sustainability which is yet too early to assess. Interviewees were confident that a strong foundation for the current PCA 2020-21 has been created and highlighted the strong relationships between partners, the emphasis on building the structures and systems to drive skills development, the integration of interventions into the existing institutional offerings and the work that has been done with key players in the eco-system. However, the evaluation also highlighted the constraints that stakeholders may face in terms of time and finance to effectively participate in, and sustain, these processes. There was a view that there is a need to ensure that high level individuals from within partners are effectively brought on board such that they are aware of what may be expected of them and that this engagement takes place with partners across levels (national, regional and global). Finally, in realising these changes it is our view that the way in which the programme is being implemented in terms of the emphasis on capacity building and the development of resources is also contributing to the resilience of the structures.

### *Gender equity and inclusion*

Gender equity and inclusion is addressed to varying degrees across the country components, at the system level, the institutional level, and the intervention level. Ghana and Senegal were the only country components that included a focus on gender equity at all three of these levels. The programme components vary in the extent to which they meet gender mainstreaming goals. Niger and Lebanon, for instance, reflect on how to address factors that may prevent young women from accessing training. Tanzania's project focused on building capacity within the skills development system to support more inclusive outcomes and develop inclusive modular apprenticeship programmes. Respondents in the interviews in both Senegal and Ghana highlight the implementation of inclusivity-focused capacity building. The successes realised in this regard, for example in Malawi, highlight that increasing the number of women beneficiaries contributes to changing norms. Ethiopia is less explicit in its focus on gender although the component does include the development of an inclusion strategy and action plan for the skills development system in its logical framework. What is evident in this evaluation is how much work there still is (including harassment of young women seeking to enter certain sectors). This suggests the need for

further reflection on ways to strengthen the focus on building gender imperatives in social dialogues.

### *Tripartism*

Tripartism is embedded in the SKILL-UP Programme through its support for tripartism at the systems level, and well as through directly assisting institutions to implement more practical aspects of tripartite governance, such as the STED methodology. In terms of capacity building, most efforts focus on developing the skills required to implement sectoral skills councils, with the exception of Senegal, where the focus is specifically on developing a skills development strategy for the digital sector. Generally, the country components appear to include member states, employers' and workers' organisations in their implementation plans to at least some extent. The Malawi component, having built on existing collaboration, has the most clearly developed tripartite strategy and in particular in terms of their oversight role. This is also true, at least to some degree in Tanzania and specifically Zanzibar. In Ethiopia, Ghana, Lebanon, and Senegal the components typically include tripartite partners in the implementation.

### *Learnings*

Based on the learnings reported in the Progress Reports, as well as the interviews with ILO staff, these lessons learned can be identified:

- Consultation, participation, and collaboration are essential to design relevant interventions that reflect different interests and vantage points and necessary to contribute to ownership for project implementation. Yet they are insufficient to ensure sustainability.
- The outcome-based funding approach makes it easier to responding to constituents' requests flexibly but needs to be managed to minimise the risk of fragmentation. It can also contribute to reducing administrative overhead.
- Online forms of communication and capacity building have become commonplace in the SKILL-UP Programme. Whilst they can be very effective generally, several challenges need to be overcome for which close and active coordination with ILO's field offices is beneficial.
- For work-based learning schemes to be successful, they need to be adapted to the specific context in which the schemes are implemented, including the structure of the economy, the market challenges

that firms face and the opportunities that exist in these contexts, or the firm structure.

The SKILLS Innovation Facility can be highlighted as good practice; the evaluation found that the facility in its entirety, and the call in particular, are considered a great success by the interviewees. Additional learnings and good practice which were identified in the interviews and the survey, covering various technical, procedural and management issues, are documented in the report.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Main recommendations and follow-up***

#### *Recommendation 1: Strengthen the programme-wide Theory of Change*

We recommend strengthening the programme-wide ToC with a clear articulation how activities/outputs support the realisation of outcomes and contribute to impact. This should explain the interrelations of the country, regional and global components, and within the components (such as the work on skills systems and the selection of training for beneficiaries), explain the various assumptions which lead to behavioural change, and identify assumptions which are "at risk" and deserve particular attention. This will also assist to focus the monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) work related to the programme.

#### *Recommendation 2: Strengthen learning orientation*

We recommend developing a concept – covering responsibilities, timelines, milestones, and requisite resources – that defines and operationalises how learning will be gathered and disseminated during the next phase. The recommendation also extends to improving the M&E so that, for instance, it allows for comparison of the same activities across components; and that there are opportunities for different role players to engage and reflect critically upon successes and failures (without risking ramifications) in ways that strengthen practices and strategic approaches within the ILO and with partners. Supplementary capacity building might be required for the programme / component managers to ensure the reporting related to learning is pertinent and significant.

#### *Recommendation 3: Share and apply learnings regarding gender equality*

It is important that spaces be created to share the very good examples that are emerging so as to deepen the

understanding of meaningful gender mainstreaming across the programme.

*Recommendation 4: Identify good training practice*

Develop and implement a concept on how to identify good training practice. For instance, similar interventions might need to be applied in different contexts, or different interventions in similar contexts. The evidence produced needs to be comparable. This requires a strengthening of key mechanisms such as finalising the tracker technically to this end, and conceptualising the tool to support this learning process (e.g. how can trainings be compared, given different content, participants, labour markets)? Does information on the status before the training need to be included to learn about the effect or does benchmarking among trainings suffice? etc.).

*Recommendation 5: Adapt the evaluation approach to support learning processes*

We recommend that the ILO Evaluation Office initiates a discussion with Norad, SKILLS, and the SKILL-UP Programme management team as to what type of evaluation would best serve the needs of the evaluation stakeholders. This could be a final evaluation like the one which was just implemented; a formative evaluation which provides information as the programme is implemented; an evaluation which looks at a wider time span (including the PCA 2016-17, 2018-19, and 2020-21); or a combination of these types. If one of the first two types of evaluations (final evaluation, formative evaluation) serves the immediate needs best, we recommend the ILO Evaluation Office to further examine whether an impact evaluation could furnish additional insights for ILO's learning processes more broadly. The discussions should extend to the processes and the timing of the evaluation.

*Recommendation 6: Strengthen constituent engagement process*

It should be assessed whether and how a global structure (such as an overarching steering committee for SKILLS) could benefit engagement and coherence, without creating too much additional overhead. Second, the engagement process should ensure that space is created for constituents who have low institutional capacity to express their needs (this includes capacity building, ensuring local officials can support initiatives effectively as well as through informing global partners who can provide direct support to constituents where possible). Third, the engagement process could further extend to

beneficiary groups if there is a risk that they are not sufficiently represented by those stakeholders involved in the dialogues.

*Recommendation 7: Map the ecosystem, strengthen external coherence*

The ILO should undertake a practical and focused mapping of the landscape in all its components in order to strengthen coordination with other development partners and actors. This with a view to both actively bringing in – or working with – other development partners to support aspects of the programme so as to enhance the effectiveness of its interventions. In other cases, it may make sense to agree amongst partners ways to ensure that interventions complement each other such that ILO can focus on its strengths in terms of bringing in, and supporting constituents, building systems and signalling demand whilst others may focus on implementation within this context.

*Recommendation 8: Consolidate, complete, sustain results*

We recommend using the momentum that was created with the SKILL-UP Programme and to screen systematically during the design phase which activities of the programme necessitate additional resources to complete, consolidate, and sustain the results that were achieved hitherto. Activities for which inclusion targets could not be met during the past phase could be prioritised to improve SKILL-UP's relevance for ultimate beneficiaries. Notwithstanding, diverting attention to other interventions can be necessary if they are more relevant, including for SKILL's long-term strategy, and likelier to be more effective and efficient.