Improving China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection (USP China)

QUICK FACTS

Countries: China

Evaluation date: 26 March 2023

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO CO-Beijing

Technical Office: ROAP SOCPRO

Evaluation manager: Pranav PRASHAD

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DC Symbol: CHN/18/01/EUR

Donor(s) & budget: European Union EUR 2,300,000 (ca. USD 2,558,290)

Key Words: social security, social security administration, social security financing, digital divide, information technology, employment injury insurance, old age benefits, pension schemes, health insurance, maternity benefits, platform economy, conventions, ISSA, poverty, gender

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	Overall objectives: Strengthen China's institutional capacity to improve its social protection in terms of expanded coverage and the adequacy and financial sustainability of the pension schemes in support of the realization of international standards and the EU 2020 strategy. Specific objective [Outcome] 1: Contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old-age benefits Specific objectives [Outcome] 2: Contribute to the extension of social security coverage in China. The project sought to reach these outcomes by implementing diverse activities that can be classified as research, knowledge transfer, training, joint learning, under the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic. The management structure inlcuded two steering structures (with beneficiaries and with donor) and a lean ILO team located at the ILO CO-Beijing.
Present situation of the project	Finalized / Closed
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	Purpose: A) Accountability (how the project has helped China's DWCP to contribute to the improvement of the adequacy and sustainability of old age benefits and extend of the coverage of social security to workers in diverse forms of employment, with special attention to migrant workers and women; B) Improvement areas for technical advice to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security; C) Organizational learning, including better understanding of the social security environment in China and mechanisms to support it. Scope: China; covering the project implementation from 01 July 2019 to 31 December 2022. Clients: global and national stakeholders, the project and other ILO staff, and the donor.
Methodology of evaluation	Standard project evaluation with one international and one national expert interviewing available stakeholders mobilized by the project team according to OECD/DAC and ILO criteria and cross-cutting issues as well as long-list of questions by ILO, using video-conferencing tools. The national expert also assumed role of translator.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	The relevance of the project was high and remained high throughout the whole implementation period, for the Chinese beneficiary institutions at all levels (national, sub-national;

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tripartite). The project was highly relevant. It fully aligned with national development plans. The same degree of relevance was attributable to the EC and the ILO because of the joint interest in promoting international labour standards, in this case relating to social security.

Selected indicators for measuring outcomes were neither meaningful nor realistically set, and measurement of effectiveness therefore was not possible. In the absence of better information, based on the experience of the evaluator with implementing projects at policy level in China, it was assessed that what could realistically be achieved in practice has effectively been achieved by the project.

Considering the mere number of quality outputs the project has delivered during the period of implementation with the size of the team in place, the project is to be rated as highly efficient.

Because the project has a very comprehensive approach, it is somewhat limited with regard to achieving the depth required to establish patterns that have sufficient traction to be sustainable at end of project. There project had no exit strategy in place despite its initially limited duration. While seeds have been planted, proper cultivation and watering will remain important to secure sustainability. Follow-up therefore is recommended and may be integrated with the next phase now agreed with the EU.

The key external factor negatively affecting implementation was the Covid-19 pandemic which required susbstantial adaptation (in particular moving activities online) and was very well organized.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

| **Main findings & Conclusions** | 1) Enable the collaboration between the labour and social security administration and the healthcare security administration. [With a view of preparing ratification of Convention 102.] 2) Continue to support actuarial capacity building and develop a sustainable training mechanism. 3) Accelerate provision of materials to be provided by ACTRAV. 4) Catch up on promoting direct exchanges between social security administrations and tripartite constituents between the EU and China. 5) In future policy projects, define outcome indicators that measure quality of outcome, and consider |

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	process indicators which are important when outcomes are not easily specified in advance. 6) Ensure risk management registers are based on and align with project logframe to enable managing specific project risk. 7) Draw up exit strategies by end of year 1 or latest by mid term for future projects that are likely not to have a perspective for extension. 8) For impact measurement, establish trends for baselines against which impact measurement will be held. 9) Ensure all project managers, CTAs and key NPO staff undergo professional training in logframe analysis and planning and project management including risk management prior to deployment.
Main lessons learned and good practices	One lesson was learned: Project design and project management, including logframe design, selecting and gauging of indicators, risk management, etc. are skills that need to be acquired. Technical qualification for a specific area of intervention does not qualify for project design and management. Managers should not assume that they temselves, CTAs, or NPOs possess project management skills. Managers should also not assume that donor staff will find and correct any mistakes. A very successful project could formally not be rated as successful because indicator selection unnecessarily was erroneous, outcome was unnecessarily by definition unachievable, and logframe defective.

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