Independent evaluation of the first phase of the ILO global flagship programme on building social protection floors for all (2016 – 2020)

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Asia and the Pacific: Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. Africa: Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Zambia. Europe and Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan. Arab States: Occupied Palestinian Territory. Latin America and the Caribbean: El Salvador, Honduras and Paraguay.

Evaluation date: 28 September 2021

Evaluation type: Thematic

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: Social Protection Department (SOCPRO)

Technical Office: Social Protection Department (SOCPRO)

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DC Symbol: Not applicable

Evaluation budget: US$ 43,800

Key Words: Social protection

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	This report presents the independent evaluation of the ILO's Global Flagship Programme on "Building Social Protection Floors for All". The ILO launched the Programme in 2016 to provide the Office with a coherent structure to mobilize and channel resources for social protection, to achieve and consolidate results and impact, and to make social protection floors (SPFs) a national reality in member States. The strategy of the Programme was endorsed by the Governing Body in 2016, with a first phase spanning over a period of 5 years (2016-2020).
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The purpose of the evaluation is to take stock of achievements and lessons learned of the first phase of the Programme and to provide recommendations for the second phase of the Programme, due to start in 2021. The evaluation covered the criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Data collection and analysis relied on mixed methods (desk review, interviews, country case studies, observation, surveys, stakeholder workshop) to ensure consistency and reliability.
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation developed its assessment and conclusions from various sources. It drew as extensively as possible on pre-existing data, comparisons, and where necessary on primary research. The evaluation followed a multi-level approach allowing for data triangulation especially when no proper baseline was established. The methodology adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods that were designed to ensure safety and to follow protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic.[1]

The evaluation used the following data collection instruments:

- Secondary resources
- Observation
- Virtual Interviews
- Case studies
- Online surveys
- Stakeholder workshop

As with all evaluations, there were some limitations regarding this methodology. In this case, there was the very unusual circumstance

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[1] ILO. 2020a. *Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO. An internal guide on adapting to the situation*. Geneva.

of a global pandemic occurring during the evaluation, as well as other more common constraints.

- **COVID-19:** Due to the pandemic, the evaluation took advantage of virtual tools, including for national consultants and country case studies. However, this is likely to have limited data collection.

- **Resources and schedule:** The timing and resources for an evaluation of this magnitude and complexity were limited.

- **Scope and quality of data:** The quality of the assessment was dependent on the access to participants, pre-existing documents, and information, which was not exhaustive.

- **Lack of comprehensive results framework:** The Programme did not develop and monitor a comprehensive results framework, limiting the capability to assess results against targets.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Main findings

A. Relevance

The fundamental right to social security is set out in international legal instruments and in the ILO's normative social security framework, including the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). The Flagship Programme contributes to supporting countries in achieving and maintaining the human right to social security for all members of society.

The international development context provides strong legitimacy to the rationale and objectives of the Programme. The ILO estimates that only 46.9 per cent of the world's population is effectively protected by a social protection system in at least one area. The importance of social protection is reflected in several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Programme aims to

support SDG 1.3 and 3.8, among other, and integrates the principles of gender equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Programme was designed after extensive consultations with the ILO staff and constituents. It contributes to the ILO's Programme and Budget outcomes. However, some pillars of the programme are not reflected in the results framework. Furthermore, indicators are not disaggregated. Lessons from the first phase of Programme implementation suggest also revisiting some components of the Theory of Change.
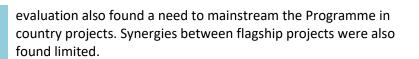
B. Coherence

The Programme coordinates with several key international initiatives and partnerships on social protection. These collaborations facilitate information exchange as well as the development of common tools and joint programming sometimes. However, there remains different social protection models across United Nations partners and with International Financial Institutions. Additional efforts are needed for the Programme to contribute to improving global coherence on social protection.

The Programme has established some bridges with other flagship programmes and initiatives across the ILO. There is room to continue strengthening collaborations, notably in relation to Recommendation 2015, (No 204).

The evaluation noted that the Programme's design allows for flexibility in responding to country demands and in mobilizing resources. However, this contributes to making the perimeter of the Programme unclear. There is significant uncertainty and lack of understanding in the organization about the positioning of the Programme. Many evaluation informants called for more clarity in articulating the Programme, both in terms of geographic and thematic scopes, but also overall construct and relationship with the SOCPRO Department. Similarly, evaluation interviews and survey respondents pointed out room for stronger coordination between the Flagship Programme and flagship projects. The

evaluation also found a need to mainstream the Programme in country projects. Synergies between flagship projects were also found limited.

C. Effectiveness

At national level, the Programme has provided support to twenty-one priority countries as well as to a larger pool of countries. At country level, the Programme's approach is based on a three-steps model for which specific targets were originally formulated. Overall, ten out of twenty-one priority countries have adopted a national social protection strategy; thirteen countries have designed or reformed their social protection schemes, close to the initial target of fourteen; and sixteen countries have improved the operations of their social protection system, more than the double of the original target.

At global level, the Programme has strengthened cross-country policy support, including by establishing a Technical Support Facility which was found delivering swift and quality support. There is a demand for further strengthening and capacitating cross-country support, including at regional level. The Programme has also developed a range of global knowledge products and data services that have been accessed and used. Flagship projects could more systematically contribute to the development and dissemination of global products and data services by mainstreaming such objectives in PRODOCs. The Programme has contributed to expand global partnerships with a range of actors. However, there is room to further support workers' and employers' networks, including at country level, as well as partnerships with IFIs.

Various monitoring mechanisms have been installed to inform Programme management and facilitate institutional learning. The Programme has created a promising public database, the Results Monitoring Tool, to monitor and present achievements of country projects. However, the adoption of the tool by country teams requires additional efforts.

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The evaluation also explored areas of support that would be required from the Programme and flagship projects in the future. The ILO staff rank *Informal economy*, *Financing of social protection*, and *Unemployment* as overall priority areas for knowledge development and support.

D. Efficiency

The Technical Support Facility offers a case example of cost-effective modality installed by the Programme to deliver support. Other measures to ensure cost-effectiveness were identified through flagship projects carrying out activities jointly, sharing administrative staff, or benefiting from outputs delivered by one or another project. However, such arrangements originate from sound management practices at country level rather than from being specifically designed and induced by the Programme.

The Programme has benefited from being established by the ILO's Director General with institutional support from DDG/P and PARDEV. Coordination of the ILO's flagship programmes by DDG/P has been beneficial and fostered mutual support, but evaluation informants pointed out room for increased strategic guidance and advice on the design and operationalization of the programmes.

The Programme installed a governance structure allowing constituents and partners to inform implementation. Participating constituents commended the annual consultations carried out by the Programme. However, involvement of national constituents in Programme implementation at country level was found to be strengthened.

The Flagship Programme has installed a Management Group for Flagship programme projects managed at HQ and in the field. Informants at HQ referred consistently to inadequate staffing for programme management and coordination related functions, such as partnerships development, communications, knowledge management, and reporting. The Programme was established without the ILO dedicating specific capacity to this initiative.

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Management arrangements and operations were found to confront limited resources.

E. Impact

The evaluation found evidence of the Programme's contributing to improve the social protection situation for millions of people. However, impact monitoring has been very partial and there is no evidence that the Programme has achieved the impact objectives stated in the strategy. Despite confronting a significant lack of visibility, the Programme has contributed to improving the positioning of the ILO on social protection. A factor frequently reported as having constrained the Programme in achieving results is the shallow interface between the Programme and Flagship Projects.

F. Sustainability

The Programme has contributed to achieving sustainable outcomes owing among other to a conceptual approach aiming for institutional and legislative change. The Programme has contributed to strengthen social dialogue at country level. However, there is evidence of constituents calling for being more strongly involved in social protection reforms and for benefiting from capacity development to contribute to the social dialogue. There is also room for the Programme to contribute enhancing social dialogue on social protection at regional and global levels. The Programme has been highly successful in mobilizing resources to support priority as well as other countries. However, the sustainability of some allocations is uncertain.

Conclusions

The Programme strategy was found relevant but the conceptual framework incomplete, lacking inter alia a communication pillar to promote more strongly social protection, increase the visibility of the Programme, improve its understanding among the ILO staff and external partners, and facilitate its application by country projects.

The Programme is compatible with other social protection interventions implemented in countries, sectors, or institutions. Room remains for the ILO to leverage the Programme to exert stronger leadership and improve global coherence on social protection. The Programme has achieved part of the intended policy changes. Knowledge development and resource partnerships have contributed to achieving outcomes. There is demand from the ILO's constituents for stronger contribution to Programme implementation at country level for more ambitious and thorough capacity development on social protection. The Programme has developed a tool to consolidate results, but adoption has been very partial preventing the ILO from providing a clear picture about the ILO's contribution to the SDGs on social protection. The management, coordination, and governance of the Programme was efficient to achieve the intended results but has confronted limited resources and a continuously expanding Programme's scope and scale. Various communication initiatives were designed and implemented, with contribution sometimes of the GTT and external partners, but needs have remained high for more regular communication. The Programme has generated positive higher-level effects, but impact monitoring was incomplete. The Programme has leveraged national ownership to achieve sustainable outcomes and triggered demand for increased support.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Recommendations	**Recommendation 1** The ILO needs to refine the theory of change and results measurement framework based on the lessons learned from the first phase and new challenges that need to be addressed in the second phase. **Recommendation 2** The ILO needs to increase understanding of the Flagship Programme and improving ownership among ILO staff and constituents. Communication should be strengthened on policy directions and concrete Programme results. The thematic and geographic scopes of the Programme should be clarified. Linkages between the

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overarching Programme and country and thematic projects should be refined. ILO should also better explain the contribution of the Flagship Programme to the ILC conclusions on social security, and to the ILO Programme and Budget and Agenda 2030.

Recommendation 3
The ILO needs to build capacities across the Global Technical Team on social protection and specialized areas of work (e.g. health, financing, informal economy). Capacity development should also cover project management, partnership development, and resource mobilization. Furthermore, the Programme should provide support to the GTT on using the results monitoring tool for evidence-based communication and knowledge sharing, among others, and on further mainstreaming the Programme in country projects.

Recommendation 4
The ILO should increase the sustainability of the Flagship Programme by leveraging on existing projects to develop larger and longer-term partnerships and by developing pooled funding mechanisms. The Programme should further engage donors and partners through structured funding dialogues and specific networks that need to be properly resourced to achieve results and impact.

Recommendation 5
The ILO should clarify the position of Flagships in its Result Based Programme Framework (SP, PB) and ensure that proper monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements are put in place for adequate accountability and organizational learning purposes.

Main lessons learned and good practices	**Lessons learned** **Lesson 1**: Social protection reform is a long-term change process that benefits from sustained communications, among other. While the Programme envisioned in its early design stage to focus a pillar on advocacy and communications, this was not taken up in the strategy. The Programme has made efforts to advocate for social protection and has effectively communicated on social protection floors through various modalities and instruments. However, the lack of a dedicated pillar or programme outcome and limited capacities have

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(i) lowered the reach and visibility of the Programme at country level; and (ii) left significant room for increasing advocacy and communication on social protection floors in flagship countries.

Lesson 2: The lack of a comprehensive results framework that encompasses all intended outcomes of the Programme, and particularly the global pillars, and is taken up and mainstreamed as appropriate in flagship projects reduces the opportunity for a shared ownership of the stated outcomes. Furthermore, it induces extra efforts to consolidate results, and to scale and manage knowledge created at country level.

Lesson 3: Designing and operationalizing a coherent impact monitoring framework that covers different types of strategic, legal and policy, and technical interventions throughout the world is likely to confront data gaps in many countries. Impact monitoring requires dedicated and integrated efforts, including institutional development and capacity building at country level with project partners that can benefit from being considered as one specific component of project interventions.

Lesson 4: Systematizing the use of a Results Monitoring Tool (RMT) requires devising and implementing a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond the improvement of an IT platform and delivery of trainings. It also needs to consider mainstreaming the tool in (i) PRODOCs and therefore establishing a minimum level of consistency between the project results framework and Project Monitoring Plan, and the RMT; (ii) job descriptions so as to make explicit the responsibility to ensure that the RMT is kept up to date; (iii) the work plans of the offices; (iv) and in resource mobilization and advocacy efforts, including with development of joint branding and communication tools, success stories, champions, etc.

Lesson 5: The rapid growth of the Programme and an expanding GTT increased the need for a solid induction process to speed up on-boarding and shorten the learning curve, and to facilitate the adoption of a common body of knowledge that can contribute to contextualized service delivery but consistent quality across the GTT. This creates also additional opportunities for fostering knowledge sharing among GTT members with a view to tap an enlarged pool of

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experiences and expertise and country situation. This also puts into light a growing knowledge management agenda for the Programme.

Emerging good practices

Emerging good practice 1: Developing opportunity documents that specify the resources required to achieve the objectives of the programme and to support target countries or technical approaches, contributes to resource mobilization and to the visibility of country situations. Turning these documents into more dynamic web pages through a digital map can help to ensure that requirements are kept up to date and provide further room to engage with donors.

Emerging good practice 2: The gathering of experiences and consolidation of approaches into technical tools such as those supported by the Programme's opportunity documents contribute to the development of visible service lines. Service lines, a.k.a. signature services or signature solutions, can be tailored and adapted to different country contexts and types of situations, while contributing to institutionalize past good practices, facilitate consistent quality, accelerate onboarding of new staff, install a common language and shared know-how, and present predictable support to constituents. Over time, signature services can help to establish a brand and to harness knowledge around credentials, lessons learned, best experts, external resources, and partners.

Emerging good practice 3: The added value of a conceptual framework that provides the organization with a consistent approach to programming and to supporting constituents is enhanced by an approach that is results-oriented. By targeting the adoption of strategies, policies and legislative acts, the Programme aims for ambitious objectives that are not entirely in its sphere of control, but which strengthen the likelihood of impact of the interventions and of sustainable outcomes.

Emerging good practice 4: The establishment of a global Technical Support Facility contributes to reduce the overall administrative costs of recruitments, avoid repeated induction periods, and prevent knowledge loss compared to relying on external short-term consultants. Furthermore, TSF staff can contribute with their expertise to support cross-cutting activities that can benefit the

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entire organization or larger pools of projects such as commenting on policy positions, reviewing project proposals, or informing knowledge products. The capability to regionalize the TSF to respond to more specific agendas and place experts closer to the countries they support brings increased potential and added value to this initiative.

Emerging good practice 5: Formulating flagship projects in the form of joint programmes implemented with other UN partners maximizes the comparative advantages of each organization and helps to cut across ministries to create synergies. Placing the coordination of joint programmes under the UNRC has contributed to elevate the visibility of the social protection agenda and to reach out to high-level policy makers, including in the ministry of finance.

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