

# DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS



UNITED NATIONS  
LAO PDR



## End-line Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme: Leaving no-one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR

Final Evaluation Report



JOINT SDG FUND

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## **Acknowledgements**

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The outcome of the Evaluation is much richer as a result of everyone’s excellent contributions, and of the comprehensive feedback provided on an earlier draft of this report. Any deficiencies that remain are the Evaluators’ own.

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31 August 2022

## Executive summary

### Background to the Evaluation

This is a **Final Evaluation** of the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) “Leaving no-one behind: establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”, which began in January 2020 and ended (except for its separate DFAT-funded component<sup>1</sup>) on 30 June 2022. By gathering the lessons learned during the Programme implementation and the proposition of strategic and operational recommendations, this Evaluation aims to inform both the implementation and allocation of resources for similar programmes in the future and the Government’s social protection initiatives and policies. The intended audience of the Evaluation includes, as primary users, the UN Country Team and the line ministries of the Government engaged in social protection, and, as secondary users, the funders of the UNJP, namely the Joint SDG Fund and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The **key objectives** of the final Evaluation are:

- a. To assess the extent to which the expected results have been attained during the implementation of the Programme. In particular, the Evaluation provides insights on:
  - i. the contribution to improving the situation of vulnerable groups identified in the UNJP programme document (ProDoc), with a focus on disability,
  - ii. contribution to SDG acceleration, and
  - iii. contribution to UN reforms, including UNCT coherence.
- b. To assess the added value of a joint UN approach to programming.
- c. To document good practices and generate evidence-based lessons and recommendations to strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation.
- d. To explore sustainability of the Mother and Early Childhood Grants (MECG) interventions in terms of the likelihood to be sustained, scaled up or continue after the UNJP life cycle
- e. To identify gaps, critical lessons learned, and main challenges, and provide recommendations on addressing these challenges and pursuing opportunities and recommend key practices that should be incorporated in the future.

The original intention of the Evaluation, as described in the ToR (see Annex 1), was to cover all five of the **DAC-OECD criteria** (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact), plus a number of cross-cutting themes. However, there were significant delays in awarding and signing the contract, as a result of which the duration was cut in half, to just three months. It was therefore agreed during contract negotiations that the Evaluation framework should be reduced in scope, to concentrate on just three of the DAC-OECD criteria (efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability) plus the cross-cutting themes, and that it should have a particular focus on two main issues: the extent of collaboration between UN agencies and the advancement towards achievement of the SDGs.

**Methodologically**, the Evaluation drew on a comprehensive desk review of available documentation, on key informant interviews (KII) and on focus group discussion (FGD). Given the reduced timeframe for the Evaluation, there was no quantitative data collection through household survey approaches. A three-day field visit was held to one of the districts hosting the MECG pilot.

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<sup>1</sup> The DFAT-funded component will continue to 31 October 2022, although individual MECG recipients will continue to receive payments through the MECG pilot until early 2023.

## Country context

Lao PDR is a **lower middle-income country** with a GDP per capita of US\$2,460 (2018). The country has a population of 7.2 million<sup>2</sup> of whom over a third (36.7 per cent) are under 15 years and only 3.7 per cent are 65 or over. The economy had seen significant growth with GDP growth averaging 7.7 per cent over the last decade. However, due to the economic impact of COVID-19, growth slowed significantly, to 0.5 per cent in 2020, but turned positive again in 2021 growing by 2.5 percentage points<sup>3</sup>. Heightened risk of debt distress in 2022, compounded by the fallout of the global fuel, food and financial crisis induced by the conflict in Ukraine, may however portend further slowdowns in growth.

**Poverty** in Lao PDR has fallen significantly (according to the national poverty measure), from 23.4 per cent in 2012 to 18.6 per cent in 2020. But food and nutrition insecurity are still pressing problems among low-income households in rural areas that rely mostly on home-produced foods. Further, Lao PDR is exposed to high climate and disaster risks, including floods, landslides, droughts, and tropical storms and cyclones, which have negative impacts especially on the poor and vulnerable. Recognized as vulnerable to climate change impacts, Lao PDR ranked 142 out of 181 countries in the 2020 ND-GAIN Index based on a combination of political, geographic, and social factors<sup>4</sup>. Vast stretches of land are also heavily contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO).

In Lao PDR, there are several challenges affecting the **social protection system**. They include a high degree of fragmentation, lack of compliance and enforcement in the formal economy, limited coverage (e.g., there are no schemes specifically targeting people with disabilities), and inconsistent and unclear financing of non-contributory schemes, with a weak Chart of Accounts (CoA) that does not allocate budget expenditures to social protection and associated laws. These are further compounded in the current post-COVID context: limited and shrinking fiscal space, and a constrained monetary policy adopted by the government due to high debt stress and foreign exchange shortages.

Whilst the **budgetary allocation** to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) is relatively high compared with that to other line ministries, a large proportion of the budget is not for life-course social welfare<sup>5</sup>. Only 1.6 per cent of GDP is allocated to social protection – and a mere 0.1 per cent if health (0.9 per cent) and social security (0.6 per cent) are excluded. To date, Lao PDR's investment in social protection is still the lowest in the region and among the lowest in the world. The recent update to ADB's Social Protection Indicator (forthcoming), shows that Lao PDR has the lowest index in the entire Asia region. Current budgets are certainly insufficient to meet the aspirations of universal coverage. The systems that underpin social protection in the country also require significant strengthening. In the context of the UNJP, it is important to emphasise that Lao PDR currently has no non-contributory cash transfer institutionalised in or implemented by any Government ministry or agency. This means that the UNJP has to build from a low base.

## The UN Joint Programme

The UNJP aims to support the Government of Lao PDR to implement the **National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025**, which defines a vision for sustainable access to social protection for all Lao people. The UNJP aims to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive social welfare (initially prioritising

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<sup>2</sup> Estimate based on the 2015 Census (UNFPA)

<sup>3</sup> [GDP growth \(annual %\) - Lao PDR | Data \(worldbank.org\)](https://data.worldbank.org/ny/gdp-growth-annual-lao-pdr)

<sup>4</sup> <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/15505-Lao%20PDR%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf>. The ND-GAIN Index ranks 181 countries using a score which calculates a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges as well as their readiness to improve resilience.

<sup>5</sup> This Evaluation Report adopts the terminology used in the three pillars of Lao PDR's NSPS: namely "health insurance", "social security" (i.e. funded at least partly from an individual's own contributions) and "social welfare" (i.e. funded from general Government revenue).

## Executive summary

mothers and young infants), to ensure sustainable sources of financing for social welfare and to develop systems that will provide the eventual basis for a comprehensive suite of programmes protecting against vulnerabilities through the life-course.

The **participating UN agencies** in the UNJP are:

- ILO: The lead agency which supports the implementation of the NSPS.
- UNICEF: Supports the design and operationalization of an integrated cash transfers for pregnant women and children.
- UNCDF: Supports the government on PFM reforms and to develop a blended finance solution for the NSPS.

The UNJP is **funded** by Joint UN SDG Fund (USD 2 million), DFAT (AUD 1.1 million) and UN agency contributions with a combined value of USD 240,432.

The **direct beneficiaries** of the UNJP fall into two categories:

- 1) the Government and national partners involved in the implementation of the NSPS at central and sub-national levels, who will benefit from improved capacity and knowledge to better plan, manage and implement the NSPS; and
- 2) the pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months benefiting from the MCEG pilot.

The **Theory of Change** is that implementing the activities identified in the results framework and work plan will lead to the outcomes of: strengthened Government capacity and improved policy; proof of concept of the MCEG and related services which will be scalable; and a strategy for the development of a funding envelope and innovative financing options for the future social protection system.

### Findings: Efficiency

Despite the unavoidable consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNJP has been able to successfully deliver most of the outputs defined in the Programme's design document **within the designated timeframe and budget**. This is greatly to the credit of the implementing partners.

**Administration** of the UNJP has been greatly facilitated through the recruitment by ILO of a dedicated Programme Manager and Technical Adviser, who assured day-to-day operational coordination. On the occasions where higher-level, more strategic coordination was required (for example to resolve confusions around roles and responsibilities of the implementing partners), this was undertaken by the UNRCO. Financially, the Programme seems to have run efficiently, though, operationally, the delivery of payments to MCEG recipients has suffered from two challenges:

- Identifying an appropriate Payment Service Provider (PSP) delayed the start-up of the pilot in Attapeu.
- The administratively demanding process of transferring funds from MoLSW to the PSP, Star FinTech, continues to delay timely payments to MCEG recipients.

The **agencies engaged in the Joint Programme** had clear and specific roles to deliver three inter-related but separate results – social protection policy and capacity building (ILO), social protection financing (UNCDF) and piloting a mother and child focussed cash transfer (UNICEF). Although the work of the three agencies was, by and large, undertaken independently, the Programme's design emphasises the synergistic nature of the three result areas. Indeed, there are several examples of closer collaborative work where this was necessary, including the development of the training-of-trainer curriculum (ILO and UNICEF), the fiduciary risk study of payment delivery options (ILO, UNICEF and UNCDF) and proposals for Chart of Accounts disaggregation (UNCDF and ILO).

Joint **UN agency collaboration** around social protection encouragingly also went beyond those agencies immediately implicated in the UNJP. This is manifested in the joint UN response to COVID-19, where the full UN Country Team was engaged in the drafting of a Note on “Developing a Shock-Responsive National Social Protection System to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis in Lao PDR”. The impetus generated by this further led to the preliminary development of a joined-up UN “Position Paper on Social Protection in Lao PDR: Building a National Social Protection System”, all fully coherent with the “UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026”. The work of the UNJP was also consistent with ongoing work in the area of social protection being undertaken (albeit on a small scale) by Government, other development partners and NGOs.

### **Findings: Effectiveness**

The Evaluators assess that a significant majority of the desired outputs have been **fully or substantially achieved** (see Annex 5 for more detail). The adoption of intuitive and flexible solutions to COVID-19 by the Programme enabled it to continue to deliver results under a difficult implementation environment.

Under **Result 1**, a National Social Protection Commission (NSPC) was established and legally ratified in December 2021. The UNJP drafted a roadmap/implementation plan for the NSPS which has been formally submitted to the NSPC. A total of six capacity building events were organised and held; and, largely in response to COVID-19, the UNJP invested in the development of a social protection curriculum for training a cadre of trainers to deliver social protection awareness learning in the future. The UNJP also developed a modelling tool, a monitoring framework, and an analysis of the economic impact of public investment in social protection in Lao PDR, together with an impressive array of communications and advocacy materials.

Under **Result 2**, work on the Chart of Accounts has progressed to the stage of active discussion between MoLSW and Ministry of Finance on the inclusion of 13 specific codes that will facilitate the implementation of key elements of the NSPS. Work on a National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) has developed an innovative proposal for broadening the fiscal envelope for investment in social protection. A business plan and an accompanying guidance note on the capitalisation of a NSPF has been officially submitted and a debt financing study completed.

Under **Result 3**, considerable effort went into ensuring the design of the pilot in a difficult environment. The design, which is founded on working through Government structures and building Government capacity, had to be undertaken remotely due to COVID-19. Clear and concise operational guidelines were developed along with training modules which were used to train staff at district and village level. The scale and duration of the pilot was significantly expanded through co-financing from Australia, which enabled the MCEG to extend its geographic coverage (from two districts to three), increase the number of recipients (from 1,400 to 2,596) and to extend the duration of coverage (from June 2022 to early 2023). However, because of delays largely resulting from COVID-19, 45 per cent of those registered have yet to be paid.

### **Findings: Sustainability**

Overall, the Evaluation finds that the activities of the UNJP are **not sustainable** without further support. The UNJP has consistently emphasised the importance of working with and through Government structures and systems wherever possible. This is commendable and essential to ensuring the continuity of the Programme’s activities, but it is not sufficient.

Whilst this Evaluation fails to find convincing evidence of **sustainability**, it is not a criticism of the implementing partners, nor of their performance in delivering the Programme, but rather a reflection of the unrealistic expectations of what a small, 30-month Programme can genuinely

deliver, especially in the midst of a domestic financial crisis. The UNJP should be seen as a step in a consistent and progressive process towards a comprehensive social protection floor for Lao PDR.

### **Findings: Cross-cutting issues**

The Evaluation found little evidence of an explicit focus on the **cross-cutting issues** of human rights, child rights, disability, climate change, DRR and gender equality. However, the promotion of social protection floors is fully coherent with human rights; and the focus of the MECG on pregnant women and young infants should promote child rights, including that of identity through birth registration. The fact that the MECG transfers are provided to the mother should also help to empower women, and the Evaluation Team heard anecdotal evidence that mothers do feel empowered by the cash transfer and that this tends to reduce rather than exacerbate any intra-household tensions. However, the gender impacts of cash transfers are more nuanced, and it will be important to monitor carefully any negative gender impacts. The UNJP focus on building capacity and systems should also serve to lay the foundation for more adaptive and flexible forms of social protection that could potentially underpin future responses to shocks and disasters, including those that are climate related.

### **Conclusions**

The conclusions of the Evaluation are presented in the form of responses to main Evaluation Questions set out in the Evaluation Objectives.

**Have the expected results been attained?** The Evaluators assess that a significant majority of the desired outputs have been fully or substantially achieved. Generally, there are significant levels of satisfaction with the Programme's achievements, expressed by the Government authorities at different levels, the implementing partners, the other development partners and the beneficiaries of the MECG. In terms of the three specific sub-questions under this Objective:

- There appears to have been little explicit focus on **disability**, but there is scope to use the MECG as a model for a similar disability grant.
- It is unrealistic to expect a Programme of this limited duration and value to demonstrate any meaningful direct impact in the **achievement of the SDGs**. But the UNJP may have positively contributed to a process which ultimately achieves the SDGs by 2030, as long as continued development partner and reciprocal Government support is committed.
- **UNCT coherence** around social protection encouragingly went beyond those agencies immediately implicated in the UNJP. This is manifested in the joint UN Note on "Developing a Shock-Responsive National Social Protection System to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis in Lao PDR" and subsequent UN "Position Paper on Social Protection in Lao PDR: Building a National Social Protection System".

**What is the added value of a Joint UN approach?** The combined inter-agency approach enabled the comparative advantage of the three participating agencies – ILO, UNICEF and UNCDF – to be brought together and increased the overall efficiency of the delivery of the Programme. This arrangement was enabled by the oversight role played by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO). A comparison of approaches adopted in other countries highlights the value of the UNRCO's role in organising and coordinating inter-agency collaboration.

**What is the sustainability of the MECG component?** Overall, the Evaluation finds that the MECG is not sustainable without further support. This is primarily the result an ambitious design of the short duration programme and disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is, nevertheless, clear potential for an MECG pilot to play a pivotal role in promoting a neutral advocacy approach to learning, training, awareness building and nurturing political will. However, under the current fiscal

constraints facing the Government, funding will need to come from development partners, at least in the short and probably medium term.

**What are the lessons and recommendations?** These are set out separately below.

## **Lessons**

**Working within Government structures is the right approach** and is especially pertinent in the political economy context of Lao PDR.

However, this approach needs a **longer time horizon with a degree of consistency and persistence** that is not easily deliverable within a typical short duration programme. The experience gained from the implementation of the UNJP re-affirms the ubiquitous lesson that short term project-centric approaches offer limited opportunities, potential and scope for achieving meaningful progress in the implementation of a fledgling NSPS.

The approach also requires a degree of **reciprocity to achieve sustainable improvements**. While development partners can provide technical expertise and support the development of capacities and systems, the host government needs to ensure, as a minimum, an adequate recurrent fiscal base and appropriate human resources. Ongoing work will be required to guarantee these.

There is a need for **more persistent and continuous advocacy engagement** to build awareness and understanding with stakeholder that have the influence to reform policy and manage fiscal space. In Lao PDR this means engaging further with the National Assembly as well as provincial and district political leaders. Evidence across the global amplifies the key message that, for fiscal space to be created, there first has to be political will.

An **MECG pilot** can play a pivotal role in promoting a neutral advocacy approach to learning, training, awareness building and nurturing political will. However, under the current fiscal constraints facing the Government, funding will need to come from development partners.

**Follow-up support from development partners is needed**, without it the achievements of the current Programme are likely to be short lived. The level of political commitment to the establishment of a social welfare system that could have a national impact on reducing poverty, improving maternal and child nutrition, increasing human capital development and achieving the SDGs, is still below the tipping point needed to invoke the level of fiscal commitment needed. Further support is urgently required to maintain the momentum and to be ready to seize the moment when the opportunity for establishing a comprehensive social protection floor eventually presents itself.

The **NSPF Business Plan** produced under the UNJP sets out a comprehensive framework for an umbrella fund for all three pillars of social protection in Lao PDR. The Fund represents a valuable conceptual architecture to aspire towards, but the immediate need is to assemble the basic building blocks.

The UNJP has underlined the **importance of a consistent in-country presence**.

A final lesson goes back to the **UNJP's design**. It is important to be realistic about what can be achieved through a small, short term programme. The UNJP failed to achieve the transformative changes that it targeted not because of inherent weaknesses in delivery, but because the targets were set unrealistically high. The achievements of the Programme are significant, but it was over-ambitious to expect them to be sustainable in the given timeframe.



## **Recommendations**

### **UN Country Team**

The UNCT should **jointly advocate** for funding of a follow-up phase to the UNJP to ensure that the momentum for reform is maintained.

A follow-up programme should pay closer attention to the **prevailing political consensus** regarding the prioritisation of fiscal support for social welfare. It should focus on the primary challenge of building awareness, understanding and political commitment for the introduction of broad-based social welfare instruments.

An **expanded and extended MCEG pilot** should be central to this design. This initiative should be designed as an open-ended pilot with a phased rollout rather than closed experiment. To ensure piloting is used effectively as a learning and advocacy tool it needs to include a well designed and implemented M&E component which is linked to a strategic communication and advocacy plan that is sensitive to the political environment.

A **collaborative partnership approach** which pulls together financial resources of a number of development partners and the technical expertise of specialist UN agencies would add significance and value to learning and advocacy communications generated by a more meaningful pilot.

A more meaningful investment in a MCEG pilot would justify and benefit from the establishment of a **dedicated Programme Management Unit** (PMU) with a designated full-time team leader and small team of dedicated specialists, located within MoLSW and closely supporting the NSPC.

### **Government line ministries**

To justify further development partner support, it is essential that the **Government demonstrate its commitment** to the reforms that have been initiated by the UNJP.

In terms of **reciprocity**, the Government must make a strong case to the development partners that it is fully committed, in the longer term, to a national programme of support to pregnant women and mothers of young infants, even if it is not in a position to make the necessary financial commitments in the short term.

There is little value in all the effort that have been taken so far in developing the NSPS unless there is **a firm commitment to implement the key instruments**, of which the MCEG has been widely projected as the 'flagship'.

### **UN Joint SDG Fund**

One of the key lessons from the UNJP, which the broader UN should recognise, has been the **important role of the UNRCO** in programme design, reporting and resolving any incoherencies in approach. This engagement of the UNRCO should be a requirement for all UN joint programmes.

The **UNRCO should host regular meetings** with the entire UNCT and other international partners to coordinate the design and implementation and share lessons learnt. This could extend significantly further than just the areas of social protection tackled by the UNJP.

### **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

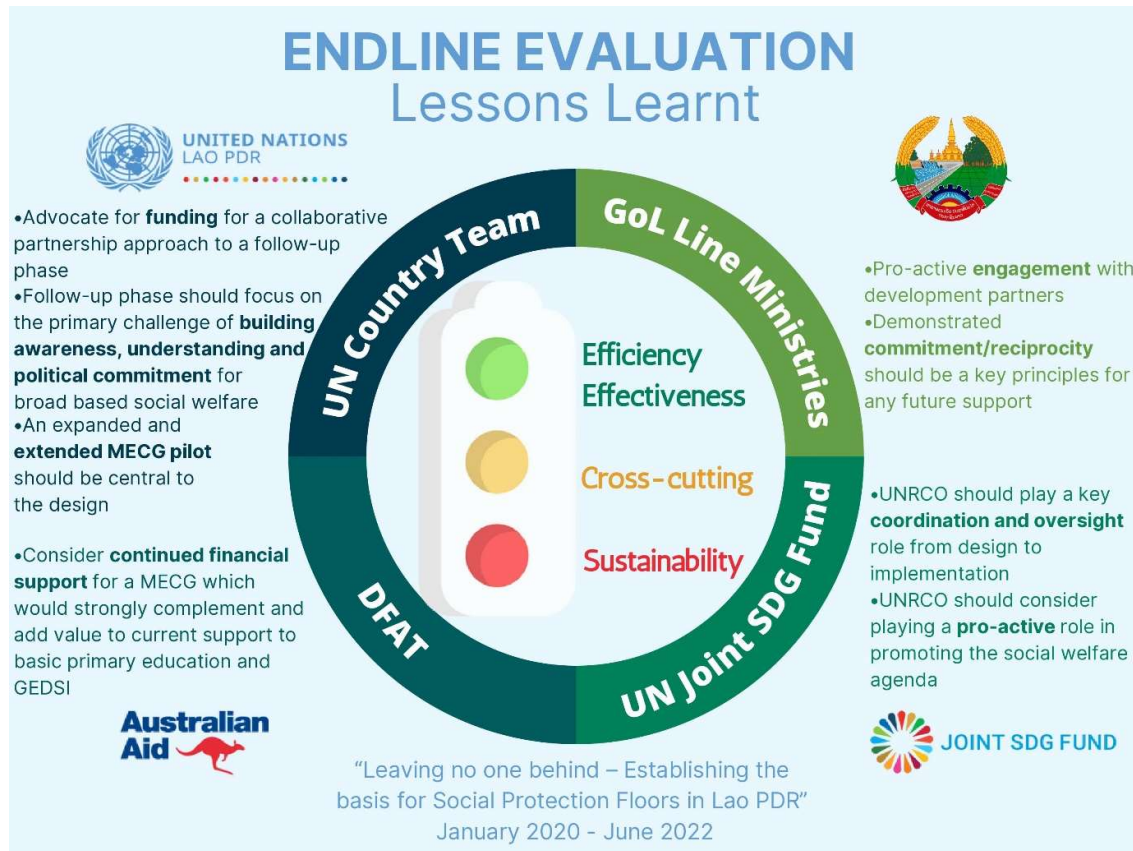
Because of the low level of political will and fiscal commitment to the development of the social welfare pillar of the NSPS, a **continuation of development partner support to the sector is justified**.

DFAT has been engaging with social protection in Laos over the past decade. Through its track record, DFAT has established itself as a trusted and respected partner in the area of social

protection. For this reason and because it is a key funder of the MEGC pilot, **DFAT should continue its engagement** in the important area of social protection, where it has the opportunity to be a key driver of change.

DFAT support to a future MEGC is strongly justified by, and highly complementary with, DFAT’s substantial **on-going investments in primary education**. The only way to maximise investment in primary education is to address poverty, malnutrition and poor health before formal education starts. This is exactly **what the MEGC does**.

These recommendations are summarised in the following infographic.



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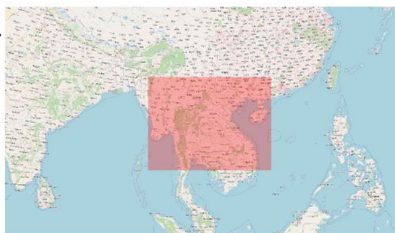
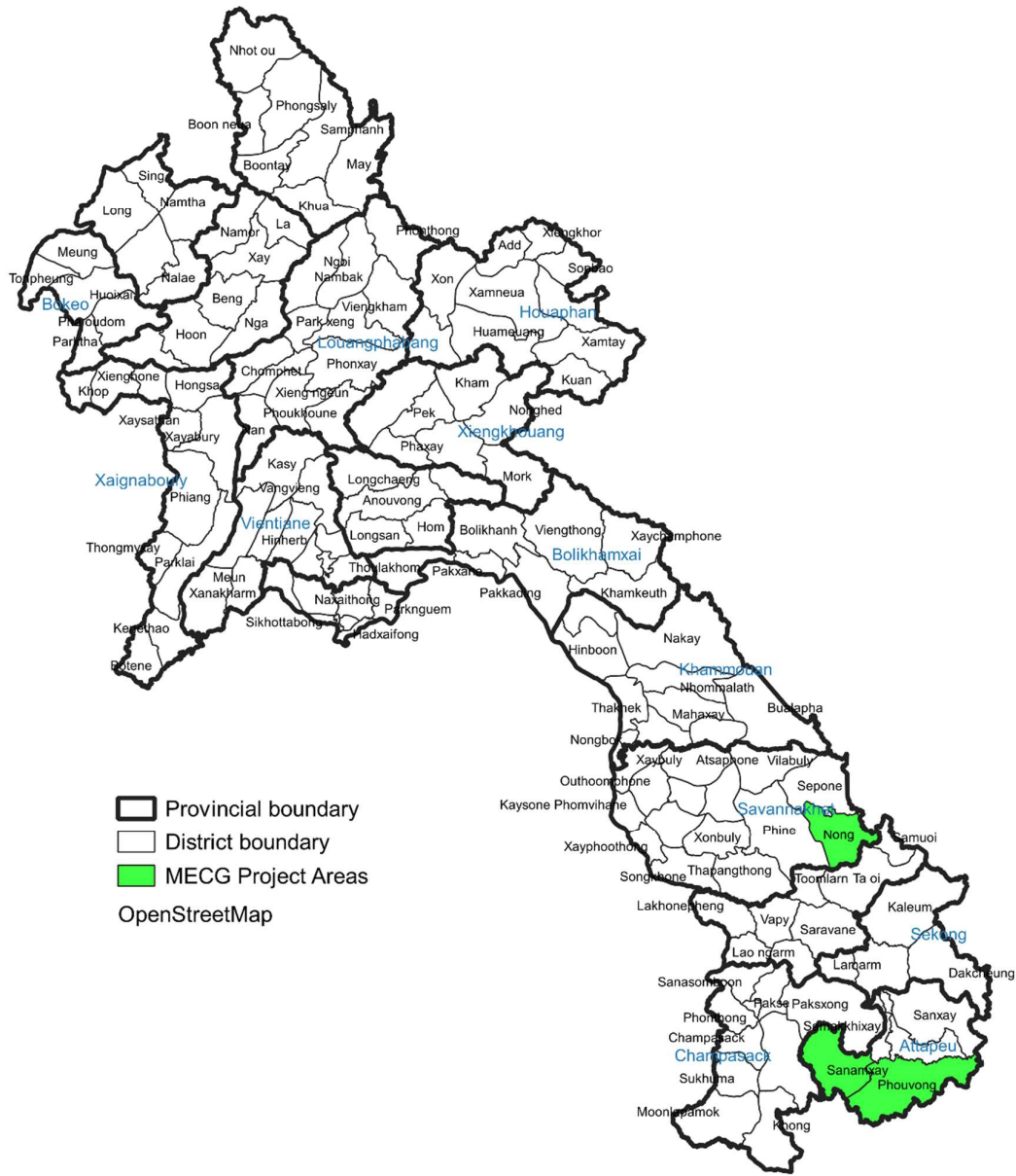
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## Acronyms

ABND	Assessment-Based National Dialogue on Social Protection
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CoA	Chart of Accounts
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DAC-OECD	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DHS	Demographic Household Survey
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGE	General Government Expenditure
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAK	Lao kip (national currency)
Lao PDR	Lao People’s Democratic Republic
LARLP	Laos-Australia Rural Livelihoods Program
LECS	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey
LSB	Lao Statistics Bureau
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MECG	Mother and Early Childhood Grant
MIS	Management Information System
MoLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NHI	National Health Insurance
NHIB	National Health Insurance Bureau
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
NSPC	National Social Protection Commission
NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
PFM	Public Finance Management
PMT	Proxy Means Test
PSP	Payment Service Provider
RAP	Rapid Assessment Protocol
RLP	Resilient Livelihoods Program
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPF	Social Protection Floor
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNJP	United Nations Joint Programme
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

# Map of MEGC areas

## MEGC project (SDG and DFAT funds)



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

This is a final Evaluation of the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) “Leaving no-one behind: establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”, which terminated (except for the DFAT-funded component<sup>6</sup>) on 30 June 2022. The direct beneficiaries of the UNJP are: the Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare (MoLSW) and other national partners involved in the implementation of the NSPS; the Ministry of Health (MoH), especially at district at village level, involved in the delivery of the Mother & Early Childhood Grant (MECG) pilot, as well as, pregnant women and children aged under 12 months who are recipients of the cash transfer and the integrated social services and welfare package provided through the MECG pilot.

By gathering the lessons learnt during the Programme implementation and the proposition of strategic and operational recommendations, this Evaluation aims to inform both the formulation and allocation of resources for similar programmes in the future and the Government’s social protection initiatives and policies. Table 1 sets out the key users and intended use of the Evaluation.

**Table 1 - Users of the Evaluation**

User	Intended use
<b>Primary users</b>	
UN Country Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability and learning from the UNJP, to inform the design and implementation of future social protection interventions.</li> <li>• Inform decision-making for the UNCT in terms of programmatic design and resource allocation based on assessment of performance.</li> <li>• Inform UNCT on how to most effectively support the Government of Lao PDR and key stakeholders to improve social protection.</li> </ul>
Line Ministries – Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability on achievements of the initiative</li> <li>• Inform on UNCT’s commitment to continue improving its programming in support social protection in Lao</li> <li>• Reflect on Evaluation findings in as much as they also relate to jointly implemented programmes</li> <li>• Engage together with UNCT in the response to the Evaluation recommendations</li> <li>• Provide the necessary information for potential scale up of the interventions to other provinces and districts.</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary users</b>	
Joint SDG Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability and learning from the UNJP</li> <li>• Inform on areas that need support and improvements to better support results for SDGs and social protection that can be used in funding decisions</li> <li>• Provide objective evidence on UNCT’s commitment to learning and improving social protection in Lao PDR</li> </ul>
DFAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability and learning from the UNJP</li> <li>• Inform on areas that need support and improvements to better support results for SDGs and social protection that can be used in funding decisions</li> <li>• Provide objective evidence on UNCT’s commitment to learning and improving social protection in Lao PDR</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> The DFAT-funded component will continue to 31 October 2022, although individual MECG recipients will continue to receive payments through the MECG pilot until early 2023.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

The key objectives of the final Evaluation are:

- a. To assess the extent to which the expected results have been attained during the implementation of the Programme. In particular, the Evaluation provides insights on (i) the contribution to improving the situation of vulnerable groups identified in the UNJP programme document (ProDoc), with a focus on disability, (ii) contribution to SDG acceleration, and (iii) contribution to UN reforms, including UNCT coherence.
- b. To assess the added value of a joint UN approach to programming.
- c. To document good practices and generate evidence-based lessons and recommendations to strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation.
- d. To explore sustainability of the (MECG) interventions in terms of the likelihood to be sustained, scaled up or continue after the UNJP life cycle
- e. To identify gaps, critical lessons learned, and main challenges, and provide recommendations on addressing these challenges and pursuing opportunities and recommend key practices that should be incorporated in the future.

The Evaluation will consider how human rights, child rights, and gender equity have been mainstreamed within the UNJP.

## 1.3 Scope of the Evaluation

The intended duration of this Evaluation exercise was substantially reduced due to delays in the contractual process and the need to complete the exercise within the current financial year. The Evaluation was very limited in time, with only two weeks designated for in-country investigations. The reduced timeframe necessitated a review and revision of the original terms of reference and has led to a significant reduction in the expectations of what the Evaluation could deliver in terms of the depth of analysis (see section 1.4).

The Evaluation focuses on the implementation of the UNJP between January 2020 to June 2022, in other words the entirety of its duration. The Evaluation covers the UNJP conceptualization, design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of results and engaged with a range of programme stakeholders. The Evaluation assesses the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the Programme; explores the key factors that have contributed to the achievement or non-achievement of planned results including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic; addresses crosscutting issues of gender equality and women's empowerment and human rights; and considers the forging of partnership at different levels, including with Government, donors, UN agencies, and communities.

## 1.4 Evaluation framework

The original intention of the Evaluation, as described in the ToR (see Annex 1), was to cover all five of the DAC-OECD criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact), plus a number of cross-cutting themes. However, there were significant delays in awarding and signing the contract: the ToR envisaged a start in March 2022, and that “the full Evaluation process will last six months”. In reality, the contract was only finalised in June 2022, three months late; and – because for contractual reasons the Evaluation has to be fully completed by the end of August 2022 at the very latest – the duration was cut in half, to just three months.

It was therefore agreed during contract negotiations that the Evaluation framework should be reduced in scope, to concentrate on just three of the DAC-OECD criteria (efficiency, effectiveness



## Introduction

and sustainability) plus the cross-cutting themes, and should have a particular focus on two main issues, which are **highlighted in bold** in the list of agreed questions below:

### Efficiency

- To what extent has the Programme delivered results in an economic and timely way. In what way had the COVID-19 pandemic affected Programme implementation?
- What factors have contributed to increase/decrease the efficiency of the Programme?
  - What type of (administrative, financial, coordination and managerial) obstacles did the joint programme face and to what extent have these affected its efficiency?
- **To what extent did the Programme activities reinforce synergies amongst UN agencies to achieve optimal utilization of available resources?**
  - Did the Programme complement other initiatives (by other NGOs, national organizations, local Government)?

### Effectiveness

- To what extent have the UN agencies and implementing partners participating in the joint programme contributed added value to solve the development challenges stated in the Programme document?
- To what extent have the expected results been realized through the Programme?
  - Did the Programme reach the expected targets, indicators and results? To what extent were the 3 transformative results achieved?
  - To what extent are the partners and intended beneficiaries satisfied with the results?
- What factors have contributed to the Programme results achieved?
- **To what extent has the UNJP contributed to accelerating the SDGs at the national level?**
- What lessons can be learned from the best practices' achievements, challenges, and constraints of the Programme in relation to "strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation"?

### Sustainability

- To what extent are the intervention results likely to continue after the funding has been withdrawn?
- What mechanisms were set up to ensure the continuity of the Programme's activities and results?
- To what extent have institutions and stakeholders taken and shown ownership of the action objectives? Are there willingness and capacity to sustain financing at the end of the intervention? To what extent are they actively engaged in the activities of the action?

To the extent possible, the Evaluation will also consider the following cross-cutting themes:

### Humans Rights approach, Gender equity, disabilities and COVID-19 response

- To what extent human rights, child rights, climate change, DRR, and gender equality and equity have been addressed within the program?
- To what extent is the Programme and intervention disability-inclusive? To what extent did support to data collection and analysis, registries, and information system feature disability?
- What were the program's response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic? What were the lessons learned from this?

Despite the reduction in scope, the assignment still provides valuable insights and learnings. It was felt that the issue of relevance had been well covered at the design stage of the UNJP; and that it was perhaps in any case too early for a meaningful assessment of impact.

Annex 2 contains the Evaluation matrix that explains how each Evaluation question was assessed, through which indicators, and with which methods and sources.

## 1.5 Methodology

The methodology was designed based on a preliminary document review and consultations with some key stakeholders in order to propose a methodological design adapted to the UNJP, the availability of information and limitations found, and to choose collection tools that would satisfy the need for information and would allow any information gaps to be filled.

Given the shortage of time, the Evaluation Team substantially adopted the methodology set out in the ToR, which was appropriate to the task. It was agreed there would be no quantitative household survey to collect primary data, but rather that the Evaluation Team would draw on available quantitative data from recent publications, reviews, research, studies, progress reports, situation reports, national datasets, surveys, and other sources. Qualitative data collection and analysis methods with a range of stakeholders were used to facilitate triangulation of data, including document review, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and focus group discussions.

### 1.5.1 Data collection

Key stakeholders involved in the data collection were selected from Joint SDG Fund and other UN staff, key national and sub-national government agencies, and other relevant partners such as development partners, civil society organizations and NGOs. Annex 3 contains a full list of stakeholders who were consulted during the Evaluation.

Specifically, the Evaluation drew on the following methods:

- Comprehensive desk review of available documentation.
- Key informant interviews (KII) – with staff representatives of UN agencies, government officials, local authorities, development partners, civil society organizations, NGOs, community leaders, and others.
- Focus group discussion (FGD) – with programme implementers, service providers and beneficiaries.

Given the reduced timeframe for the Evaluation, there was no quantitative data collection through household survey approaches.

A field trip was undertaken to elicit information from provincial, district and community levels. Due to the reduced timeframe and for logistical reasons, Nong district in Savannakhet was selected for the trip, even though payment deliveries to recipients are still at an early stage. The Evaluation Team met and interviewed the Provincial Director for Labour and Social Welfare and the District Labour and Social Welfare and District Health offices. Visits were made to three villages in the district, where meetings were organised through the Village Health Centres with groups of MCEG recipients. A total of 30 MCEG recipients (all female) were met. The Evaluation Team (comprising John Rook and Chanthaneth Phakaisone) was accompanied by Amphayvan Chanmany and Soudalath Silichamophone from UNICEF; and an official from the Provincial Department of Labour & Social Welfare also accompanied the Team to Nong district. The itinerary was as follows:

**Wednesday, 13 July 2022:**

- Fly Vientiane to Savannakhet.
- Visited and interviewed Mdm Phavanh Bualuanglath, Director General of Provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare.
- Traveled by road to Nong district.
- Visited and interviewed Mr Phengma Loythilath, District Health Director and Mdm Thongbay Vouthisavath, District Labour & Social Welfare Director.

**Thursday, 14 July 2022:**

- Traveled by road to Tangalai village for an interview with the health workers (1 female & 1 male) at the Village Health Centre (VHC).
- Traveled by road, ferry, and foot to Tangalai Num & Neau villages for a focus group discussion with 10 MECG recipients (all women).
- Traveled by road to Tanalai Kao village for focus group discussion with 10 MECG recipients (all women).

**Friday, 15 July 2022:**

- Traveled to Dongnasan Village Health Centre for an interview with one health worker (female).
- At the same village, held focus group discussion with 9 MECG recipients (all female).
- Travelled by road to Savannakhet.

**Saturday, 16 July 2022:**

- Fly to Vientiane Capital.

The data collection relied on semi-structured tools, drawn from the questions in the Evaluation matrix as appropriate for the specific stakeholders (see Annex 4).

### 1.5.2 Data analysis

The Team employed a multi-layered approach to data analysis, relying primarily on qualitative feedback from the KIIs and FGDs to verify and validate the literature review and to triangulate and cross-reference key findings.

### 1.5.3 Evaluation norms and ethical considerations

The Evaluation conformed to guidelines and standards set by the UN and UNICEF. The assessment was guided by UNICEF's revised Evaluation Policy (2018), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN system (2008), UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020), UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator (2018), UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation (2014), and UNICEF-adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards (2017).

This Evaluation and the tools used to respond to the research questions were designed with respect, beneficence and non-maleficence and justice to all participants in line with a human rights-based approach and ethical evidence generation. Participants provided their informed consent, were provided an outline of the purpose of the study, and were given an assurance that their participation was not compulsory, that they were free to not participate with no negative consequences, and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. There was no compensation for participation and information was provided about the affiliation of the researcher, the direct and



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indirect benefits of participation, and affirmations that participants could pause or end the interview at any time, refuse any question, and that their responses will be kept anonymous. When meeting in KIIs and FGDs, the consultant sought informed consent from all participants before proceeding with the interviews after reiterating the main points of consent. All collected data was saved securely and all responses were anonymised for confidentiality purposes. The Evaluators ensured that respondents were aged 18+, and anyone younger was not allowed to proceed with the interview/survey. This evaluation underwent an ethics review and sought research ethics approval from UNICEF. The approval letter can be found in Annex 6.

## 2 Context

### 2.1 Country context

Lao PDR is a lower middle-income country with a GDP per capita of US\$2,460 (2018). The country has a population of 7.2 million<sup>7</sup> of whom over a third (36.7 per cent) are under 15 years and only 3.7 per cent are 65 or over. The economy had seen significant growth with GDP growth averaging 7.7 per cent over the last decade.

However, due to the economic impact of COVID-19, growth slowed significantly, to 0.5 per cent in 2020, but turned positive again in 2021 growing by 2.5 percentage points<sup>8</sup>. Heightened risk of debt distress in 2022, compounded by the fallout of the global fuel, food and financial crisis induced by the conflict in Ukraine, may however portend further slowdowns in growth.

Poverty has fallen significantly (according to the national poverty measure), from 23.4 per cent in 2012 to 18.6 per cent in 2020. But food and nutrition insecurity are still pressing problems among low-income households in rural areas that rely mostly on home-produced foods. Almost one in five Laotians experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2018. This constitutes a major impediment to normal growth and development for children and impedes an active and healthy life for adults. Rural populations are at the highest risk of food insecurity, mostly due to adverse weather and poor agricultural performance. While urban dwellers have hitherto been more protected, they are nonetheless vulnerable to price volatility and market instability, problems which were exposed by COVID-19 and may be exacerbated in the coming months.

Research by Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF shows that 50 per cent of all children suffer from three or more indicators of deprivation further aggravated by persistent geographical disparities based on ethnicity, language, gender, age, educational attainment, disability, and social-economic status<sup>9</sup>. Malnutrition is a critical issue, with stunting affecting 33 per cent of children under five (2017). Stunting prevalence is lowest in Vientiane Capital (13.6 per cent) and highest in Phongsaly Province (54 per cent). While both men and women have limited access to health services, especially in rural areas, due to women's child-bearing roles, this lack of access to services disproportionately impacts women and their risk of dying<sup>10</sup>.

Education remains the main determinant of poverty. People living in households headed by a person with no formal education have the highest poverty headcount rate at 34.6 per cent, more than ten times higher than the poverty rate among people in households headed by those who have at least completed secondary education. Working the land, or being unemployed, is a second key determinant of poverty. Poverty remains very high among households headed by a person primarily engaged in family agriculture, at 24.6 per cent in 2018, compared to a national average of 18.3 per cent. They also constitute a large share of jobseekers: about 90 per cent of unemployed household heads were previously in agricultural activities and seasonally unemployed. Thirdly, poverty remains higher among minority groups, especially among the Hmong-lumien and Mon-Khmer (almost one in two in 2018). Between 2012 and 2018, the poverty rate of the Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, and Chine-Tibet declined by almost one-third: in the same period, poverty has only decreased by 15 per cent among the Hmong-lumien<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Estimate based on the 2015 Census (UNFPA)

<sup>8</sup> [GDP growth \(annual %\) - Lao PDR | Data \(worldbank.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau (2018).

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (2019).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2015).

Further, Lao PDR is exposed to high climate and disaster risks, including floods, landslides, droughts, and tropical storms and cyclones, which have negative impacts especially on the poor and vulnerable. Recognized as vulnerable to climate change impacts, Lao PDR ranked 142 out of 181 countries in the 2020 ND-GAIN Index based on a combination of political, geographic, and social factors<sup>12</sup>. Vast stretches of land are also heavily contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO).

## 2.2 Existing social protection

In Lao PDR, there are several challenges affecting the social protection system. They include a high degree of fragmentation, lack of compliance and enforcement in the formal economy, limited coverage (e.g., there are no schemes specifically targeting people with disabilities), and inconsistent and unclear financing of non-contributory schemes, with a weak Chart of Accounts that does not allocate budget expenditures to social protection and associated laws. These are further compounded in the current post-COVID-19 context: limited and shrinking fiscal space, and a constrained monetary policy adopted by the Government due to high debt stress and foreign exchange shortages.

The Assessment-Based National Dialogue on Social Protection (ABND) conducted in Lao PDR in 2015/16 with support from the UN found that “Currently, no social welfare/assistance programmes provide long term regular cash benefits to the poor and vulnerable. The need remains for discussion and planning with regard to the potential introduction of (legally defined) cash entitlements, which could form an integral part of the wider social protection system and fill a crucial Social Protection Floor gap”<sup>13</sup>.

Lao PDR is at the initial stages of developing its social protection system. Existing social protection provisions consist mainly of the following:

- Contributory social security for formally employed workers and voluntarily insured persons, including health insurance - National Social Security Fund (NSSF).
- National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) which provides almost universal coverage, including free health care for the poor, for those in maternity, and for children younger than five years.
- Social assistance or social welfare, providing ad-hoc disaster relief and scattered in-kind support to specific vulnerable groups.
- Education-related schemes providing free education, scholarships, and school meals.
- poverty reduction and livelihood schemes, such as those of the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF); and
- Small-scale pilots of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) supporting education and health outcomes.

These schemes do not yet form part of an integrated, on-budget, strategic approach to social protection but are planned and implemented by diverse line ministries and agencies, often with donor funding and support. Contributory social security is channelled through the NSSF, which provides public and formal private sector workers with pensions and a range of other support. The NSSF also provides funding to the National Health Insurance Board (NHIB) which administers the NHIS for all people, including the poor as well as informal and formal workers. Significantly, in the context of the UNJP and its focus on pillar three of the NSPS, Lao PDR currently does not have an

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<sup>12</sup> <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/15505-Lao%20PDR%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf>. The ND-GAIN Index ranks 181 countries using a score which calculates a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges as well as their readiness to improve resilience.

<sup>13</sup> ILO (2017a).

equivalent institutional structure for financing and managing non-contributory social welfare provision. This means that the UNJP has had to build from a low base.

Whilst the budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) is relatively high compared with that to other line ministries, a large proportion of the budget is not for life-course social welfare<sup>14</sup>. Only 1.6 per cent of GDP is allocated to social protection – and a mere 0.1 per cent if health (0.9 per cent) and social security (0.6 per cent) are excluded<sup>15</sup>. To date, Lao PDR's investment in social protection is still the lowest in the region and among the lowest in the world. The recent update to ADB's Social Protection Indicator (forthcoming), shows that Lao PDR has the lowest index in the entire Asia region<sup>16</sup>. Current budgets are certainly insufficient to meet the aspirations of universal coverage – see section 2.3.

Furthermore, the World Bank's Social Protection Assessment<sup>17</sup> finds that “social protection spending in Lao PDR is becoming less pro-poor, due to the predominance of social insurance in the social protection mix”. Generous Government contributions to social security, targeted at formal workers, and hence better-off individuals, represent almost 90 per cent of the total budget for social protection. The bias between poor and non-poor is further widening, as spending on social security has increased steadily since 2009, while spending on social welfare has suffered a downward trend. Whilst a strong social security system is not necessarily regressive, the current situation in Lao PDR is that the informal sector is largely excluded from participating, so the Government contributions substantially favour those in the formal sectors.

The systems that underpin social protection in the country also require significant strengthening. The World Bank Assessment<sup>18</sup> concludes that “Lao PDR falls behind in South and East Asia on critical indicators for efficient and effective delivery of social protection programs”. Limited coverage of national ID prevents the Government from using a unique identifier to authenticate identity of applicants or to keep track of who is receiving which benefits. Financial inclusion, through access to bank accounts and mobile money, is also limited (29 per cent), which makes digital delivery of payment challenging. However, comparatively high mobile phone ownership (73 per cent) could be the basis for enabling online and digital services, including digital payment delivery and active communications with applicants and beneficiaries.

## 2.3 Policy context

The 9<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP)<sup>19</sup> sets out the Government's priorities for the post-COVID-19 period (2021-2025). It has six main outcomes:

1. Continuous quality, stable and sustainable economic growth achieved;
2. Improved quality of human resources to meet development, research capacity, science and technology needs, and create value-added production and services;
3. Enhanced well-being of the people;
4. Environmental protection enhanced and disaster risks reduced;
5. Engagement in regional and international cooperation and integration is enhanced with robust infrastructure and effective utilisation of national potentials and geographical advantages;

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<sup>14</sup> This Evaluation Report adopts the terminology used in the three pillars of Lao PDR's NSPS: namely “health insurance”, “social security” (i.e. funded at least partly from an individual's own contributions) and “social welfare” (i.e. funded from general Government revenue).

<sup>15</sup> ADB (2019).

<sup>16</sup> ADB (forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> World Bank (2022a).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> GoL (2020a).

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6. Public governance and administration are improved, and society is equal, fair, and protected by effective rule of law.

Social protection falls predominantly under Outcome 3, but can also contribute to Outcomes 1, 2 and 6.

The Government has re-emphasised its commitment to social protection in its National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), which states: “The Government of Lao PDR is therefore committed to gradually aiming for universal coverage in social protection, according to the available resources and the given socio-economic context, and to working towards building a much-needed social protection floor that protects all Lao people from socioeconomic shocks, environmental disasters and vulnerabilities”. The NSPS has three pillars: health insurance, social security, and social welfare; it sets out an overall objective for each one (or two objectives in the case of social security), and it recommends a number of Activities to achieve each objective. The activities under social welfare broadly follow the stages of the life-course, with the first one being to “Provide services and benefits to pregnant women and to children”.

The Programme Document of the UNJP presents the following summary: “The main objective of the UN Joint Programme is to support the Government in the implementation of the new National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025, through an approach focused on systems development and implemented through the MECG. The UNJP is based on the new Government-led NSPS with strong national institutional buy-in. The UNJP will include a focus on ensuring that SP funding is on-budget and that additional traditional and non-traditional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to secure sustainability of the NSPS. The MECG will act as a model for SP provision which can be tested and scaled nationally in the future, with the learning from the experience feeding into potential subsequent interventions targeting other vulnerable groups including the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrants and informal workers”.

## 2.4 UN Joint Programme

This is an end of programme Evaluation that aims to cover the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) “Leaving no one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”. The Programme aims to support the Government of Lao PDR to implement the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), which defines a vision for sustainable access to social protection for all Lao people. It was adopted by Decree No.224/PM in April 2020. The stated objective of the UNJP is “to support the Government in the implementation of the new NSPS, through an approach focused on systems development. The UNJP supports two integrated components: (i) Institutional development through support to MoLSW, and (ii) Design and implementation of the MECG through a pilot initiative and grant demonstration”.

The UNJP thus supports the implementation of the NSPS through an approach focused on system development and piloting through the MECG. It aims thereby to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive social welfare (initially prioritising mothers and young infants), to ensure sustainable sources of financing for social welfare and to develop systems that will provide the eventual basis for a comprehensive suite of programmes protecting against vulnerabilities through the life-course.

The participating UN agencies in the Joint Programme are:

- ILO: The lead agency which supports the implementation of the NSPS.
- UNICEF: Supports the design and operationalization of an integrated cash transfers for pregnant women and children
- UNCDF: Supports the Government on PFM reforms and to develop a blended finance solution for the NSPS.



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The UNJP is funded by the Joint UN SDG Fund (USD 2 million), DFAT (AUD 1.1 million) and UN agency contributions with a combined value of USD 240,432.

The UNJP will contribute to the SDGs 1.3, 2.2, 16.9 and 17.3. It is based on the new Government-led NSPS with strong national institutional buy-in. The UNJP focuses on ensuring that social protection funding is on-budget and that additional traditional and non-traditional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to implement the NSPS. The MECG acts as a model for social protection provision, which can be tested and scaled nationally in the future. The learning from experience feeds into potential subsequent interventions protecting against other life-course vulnerabilities such as old age, disability, informality, unemployment, migration, displacement and so on.

The MECG pilot, with its integrated package of services, will have direct impacts on maternal and infant health and nutrition, which should lay the foundation for a national infant grant. But it will also inform the development of the necessary delivery systems for a broader future range of life-course programmes envisaged under the NSPS social welfare pillar.

Alongside this, the UNJP is designing a financing strategy for the NSPS, which will assess various options to mobilise financing for social protection both domestically and from external sources. The options include a National Social Protection Fund – as a first for the region – which blends different traditional and innovative financing sources and explores maximising the return on investment through capital markets. The options also consider increasing contributory revenues through making social security benefits more reliable and attractive, harmonisation of social security and tax payments for informal workers through a mono-tax mechanism, integrating diverse and *ad hoc* donor interventions through a basket funding or pooled funding mechanism, among others. The UNJP has also placed a significant emphasis on the development of new Chart of Accounts that is compliant with international standards and conventions, and which will allow better tracking and reporting of social protection expenditure.

Finally, the UNJP is strengthening the governance and coordination structures for social protection through capacity building, establishment of collaboration mechanisms and administrative support.

The innovative elements of the UNJP are thus: (i) the development of a consolidated system under the auspices of a single ministry that carries the unique mandate for social protection in Lao PDR, (ii) the adoption of a value chain approach to social protection delivery, (iii) the proofing of this approach through the MECG pilot, (iv) the linkage between cash transfers and other services, particularly community-based social welfare, child protection services, birth registration and parenting education, and (v) ensuring that social protection funding is on budget and that additional traditional and non-traditional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to sustainably implement the NSPS.

The implementation of the UNJP is led by MoLSW in partnership with relevant ministries, provincial and district authorities, and the UN in Lao PDR. The implementation period was from January 2020 to June 2022. It was expected to strengthen Government capacity to implement the NSPS and expand social protection coverage to further groups (including scaling up the MECG), through: (i) developing the capacity of the National Social Protection Commission (NSPC) and other key partners, (ii) learning from the experience of the MECG pilot and (iii) developing a more sustainable financial basis for the social protection system. By creating the conditions to expand social protection coverage beyond 2022, the UNJP was also expected to contribute to accelerate Lao PDR's capacity to reach the targets expressed under SDGs 1.3, 2.2, 16.9 and 17.3.

The direct beneficiaries of the UNJP are the Government and national partners involved in the implementation of the NSPS at central and sub-national levels, who will benefit from improved capacity and knowledge to better plan, manage and implement the NSPS. A second category of

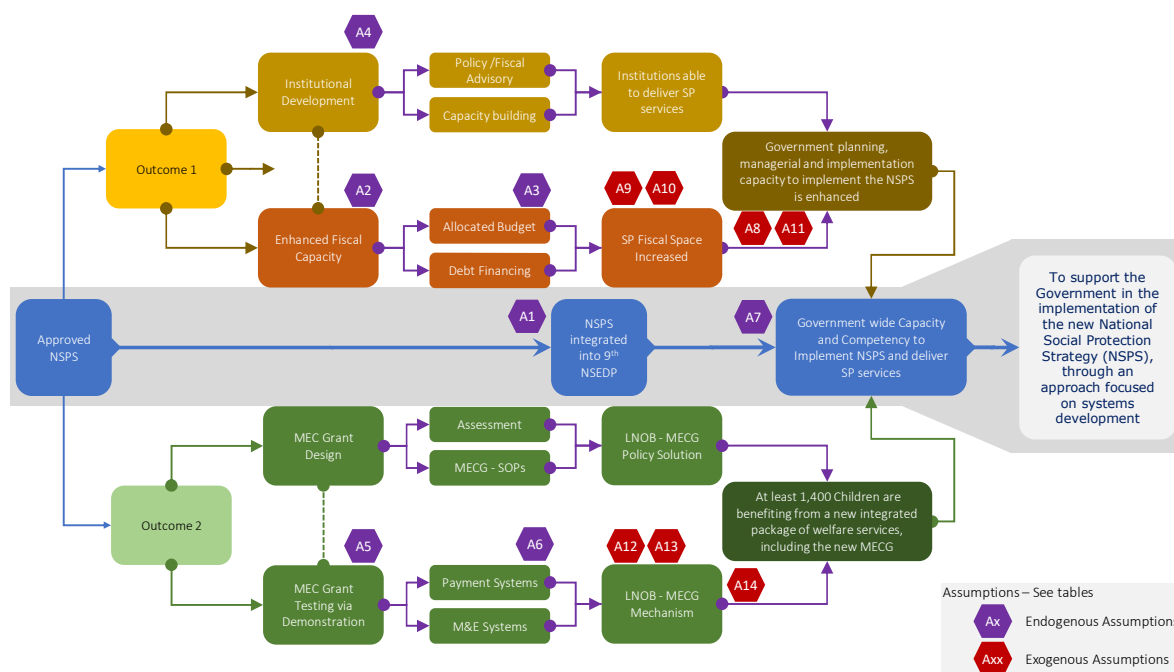
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direct beneficiaries includes the pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months benefiting from the MCEG pilot who will be receiving the cash transfer and the integrated social services and welfare package, specifically over 2,500 pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months in three pilot districts (Sanamxay and Phouvong districts in Attapeu province and Nong district in Savannakhet province).

## 2.5 Theory of Change

The theory of change (ToC) of the UNJP is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - UNJP Theory of Change



Source: UNJP Programme Document

The ToC is that implementing the activities identified in the results framework and work plan will lead to the outcomes which will involve strengthened Government capacity and improved policy; proof of concept of the MCEG and related services which will be scalable; and the development of a funding envelope and innovative financing options for the future social protection system. The UNJP will thus assist the Government to build an overall system capitalized through blending public sector budget, development assistance and non-traditional sources, to identify and test new channels for cash transfers, immediately resulting in a positive impact on pregnant women, mothers, and children under 12 months multiplying its effects across SDGs targets.

The assumptions serving as the basis for the ToC are the following:

- Supporting the piloting of the MCEG and respective monitoring and evaluation helps demonstrate the feasibility and impact of a cash transfer that can be introduced to legislators for additional funding that will secure buy-in and scale up of MCEG.
- An integrated mechanism that associates cash and in-kind services is the best approach to enhance the impact of social protection services in child and family wellbeing, including the impact on chronic malnutrition and responsive parenting.



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- The use of modern delivery options (including innovative and context-tailored payment mechanisms) will impact the efficiency, transparency and public perception of the system and enhance political support for the expansion of social protection.
- The design of an innovative funding mechanism is essential to create the pathway towards a sustainable system; contribute to a more coherent use of development assistance and create conditions for additional investment from the Government and the national long term ownership of the system.

Both the policy and financing areas of the Programme risk being impacted by exogenous risks that reflect internal Government decision-making and global economic trends respectively. Within this context two specific sets of assumptions have been identified during the design process in relation to the above-mentioned risks. In addition to evaluating the degree to which the ToC has been validated, the Evaluation will also consider other key Evaluation questions relating to fostering collaboration between UN agencies and achievement of the SDGs at national level.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Efficiency

- To what extent has the Programme delivered results in an economic and timely way?

Despite the unavoidable consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNJP has been able to successfully deliver most of the outputs defined in the Programme's design document within the designated timeframe and budget. This is greatly to the credit of the implementing partners.

The complexity of adapting to COVID-19 inevitably engendered delays, and the timeframe for the Programme was accordingly extended: in the case of the UNJP funding for an additional six months to end-June 2022, and in the case of DFAT funding for a further four months beyond that to end-October 2022. The initial budgets were not increased, but there was some internal reallocation of resources between budget lines (within approved thresholds) which allowed sufficient flexibility to change the Programme's *modus operandi* to reflect the changed circumstances. Overall, a majority of outputs have been fully or substantially achieved, which reflects positively both on the perseverance of the implementers and on the adaptability of those funding the Programme. A number of those interviewed commented that there had been clear communication about the delays and modifications.

- In what way had the COVID-19 pandemic affected Programme implementation?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent need to enforce control measures to limit the spread of the virus which were necessary over a substantial duration of the Programme, have presented challenges for the implementation of the UNJP. While some activities and events were disrupted, the Programme was able to adapt to the prevailing situation through the adoption of innovative approaches including reliance on remote engagement measures. The adoption of intuitive and flexible solutions by the Programme enabled it to continue to deliver results under a difficult implementation environment.

In respect of strengthening capacity for the implementation of the NSPS, COVID-19 restrictions resulted in an initial disruption of planned capacity and awareness building events. But the adoption of remote methods for training and the use of social media for awareness dissemination ensured that the UNJP was nonetheless able to deliver most prescribed outputs. The COVID-19 pandemic also triggered the design of an innovative 'training of trainers' approach to develop a cadre of national mentors in social protection, an initiative that probably otherwise would not have been introduced, but which promises increased sustainability for the future.

In respect of the MECG, the initiative to provide remote support to the registration of recipients was particularly helpful in salvaging a potentially much more negative outcome. Nonetheless, constraints which restricted the ability of programme staff to fully engage face to face with district level social welfare and health teams has adversely affect the level of preparedness for the execution of the pilot and was a factor in the delays encountered in its implementation, including the delivery of payments. However, it is difficult to envisage how these consequences could have been avoided under the exceptional circumstance created by the pandemic.

- What factors have contributed to increase/decrease the efficiency of the Programme?

The combined inter-agency approach enabled the comparative advantage of the three participating agencies – ILO, UNICEF and UNCDF – to be brought together and increased the overall efficiency of the delivery of the Programme. This arrangement was partly enabled by the oversight role played by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) which provided an objective forum for the selection and

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engagement of apposite agencies to address specific aspects of the Joint Programme. A comparison with approaches adopted in other countries highlights the value of the UNRCO's role in organising and coordinating inter-agency collaboration.

The MoLSW and Ministry of Health, the UNJP's immediate Government counterparts, through which programme activities are endorsed and implemented, have limited resources both in terms of budgetary allocations and human capital which limits capacity to deliver their mandates efficiently. While a key rationale of the UNJP was to strengthen implementation capacity, current constraints have had an impact on the delivery performance of the Programme, particularly with respect to the implementation of the MECG. Apart from the wider challenge imposed by limited budgetary and human resources, specific challenges such as a rigorous decision-making and payment processing has had negative consequences in terms of the implementation of the Programme. The combination of a flexible and adaptive approach and the good working relationship and the high degree of trust which the Programme has established with the MoLSW and Ministry of Health at national, provincial, district and village levels has significantly helped to mitigate these challenges.

- What type of (administrative, financial, coordination and managerial) obstacles did the joint programme face and to what extent have these affected its efficiency?

Administration of the UNJP has been greatly facilitated through the recruitment by ILO of a dedicated Programme Manager and Technical Adviser. She has overseen day-to-day management of the different components of the Programme and had assured the consolidation of regular reporting with great efficiency.

Financially, the Programme seems to have run efficiently. There were some complexities involved in integrating the funding from DFAT, which meant that in the end this could not be channelled through the UNJP, and rather had to go through UNICEF Australia. Operationally this appears not to have caused a problem. The Joint SDG Fund is also to be commended for the flexibility it accorded in responding to the delays caused by COVID-19 and in allowing a degree of flexibility between budget-lines to overcome these challenges.

Day-to-day operational coordination was assured by the Programme Manager. On the occasions where higher-level, more strategic coordination was required (for example to resolve confusions around roles and responsibilities of the implementing partners), this was undertaken by the UNRCO. The role of the UNRCO was important in supporting the agencies to coordinate and solve coordination issues for example in identifying the service provider for cash delivery, where there were initially divergent viewpoints.

Operationally, the delivery of payments to MECG recipients has suffered from two challenges:

- Identifying an appropriate Payment Service Provider (PSP) delayed the start-up of the pilot in Attapeu. This was eventually resolved when Star FinTech were appointed based on their pre-existing role as the PSP for the World Bank's 'Reducing Rural Poverty & Malnutrition' programme (itself a good example of cross-learning from work already undertaken by another key partner).
- The administratively demanding process of transferring funds from MoLSW to Star FinTech continues to delay timely payments to MECG recipients.

It is difficult to isolate the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in these two challenges, but it has undoubtedly exacerbated them. The ultimate result is that some 1,186 out of a total of 2,596 recipients (45 per cent) have yet to receive their first payment. Delayed payments have meant that first payments have had to be cumulated into the equivalent of 6 monthly amounts (900,000 KIP). Experience in other countries has shown that beneficiaries receiving a substantial lump-sum are less likely to spend the transfer on their child's health and more likely to invest instead in an income-

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generating activity. This may mean that a large number of children will not benefit from the regularity of cash transfers through the first 270 days of life and undermines the potential benefits of the grants on mother and child health and nutrition. At the time this report is being drafted, these delays continue to hamper the timely disbursement of payments.

- **To what extent did the Programme activities reinforce synergies amongst UN agencies to achieve optimal utilization of available resources<sup>20</sup>?**

A joined-up UN approach to the delivery of development assistance makes a lot of sense bearing in mind the range of specialised agencies and the multi-dimensional nature of development challenges. Under the Joint Programme, the UN was able to combine knowledge, experience and expertise from three specialist agencies. The agencies engaged in the Joint Programme had clear and specific roles to deliver three inter-related but separate results – social protection policy and capacity building (ILO), social protection financing (UNCDF) and piloting a mother and child focussed cash transfer (UNICEF). Although the work of the three agencies was, by and large, undertaken independently, the Programme’s design emphasises the synergistic nature of the three result areas. In addition to their individual result-oriented focus, there are several examples of closer collaboration where this was necessary. These include the development of the training of trainer curriculum (ILO and UNICEF), the fiduciary risk study of payment delivery options (ILO, UNICEF and UNCDF) and proposals for Chart of Accounts (CoA) disaggregation (UNCDF and ILO).

Joint UN agency collaboration around social protection encouragingly also went beyond those agencies immediately implicated in the UNJP. This is manifested in the joint UN response to COVID-19, where the full UN Country Team was implicated in the drafting of a Note on “Developing a Shock-Responsive National Social Protection System to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis in Lao PDR”. The impetus generated by this further led to the preliminary development of a joined-up UN “Position Paper on Social Protection in Lao PDR: Building a National Social Protection System”: this is a working draft that sets out the areas where multiple UN agencies have contributed, and can potentially contribute, to the NSPS. The UNJP has most likely contributed to the aspirations of the “UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026”, where social protection is a key component of the strategic priority of “Inclusive Prosperity”, with the participation of the following UN agencies: ILO, IOM, UNCDF, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.

- **Did the Programme complement other initiatives (by other NGOs, national organizations, local Government)?**

Social protection is nascent in Lao PDR. It is only in recent years that the Government has begun to recognise the potential of social welfare, and specifically cash transfers, to underpin inclusive growth, perhaps based in part on an increased awareness of similar developments in neighbouring countries. It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the recognition of this need, by revealing the vulnerability of a large proportion of the population.

Some development partners have been encouraging moves in the direction of social welfare to particular groups over the past decade. In 2012, for example, DFAT began a rural development engagement in with multiple components, including social protection and sustainable livelihoods, the Laos-Australia Rural Livelihoods Program (LARLP). This programme first investigated a Senior Citizens’ Allowance pilot, implemented a graduation component called Resilient Livelihoods for the Poor (RLP), and provided social protection policy support to MoLSW. The Senior Citizens’ Allowance was ultimately dropped given the political and financial challenges at the time; but RLP and the social protection policy work continued to be funded until 2017. As a result, DFAT then began the

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<sup>20</sup> This was identified as one of the two key areas of focus for the Evaluation.

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design, with MoLSW, of a grant for mothers and young children, which eventually led to their support to the UNJP.

World Bank in Lao PDR also evolved towards a similar approach of cash transfers for nutritional support to the next generation of Laotians, as a result of its previous engagements in the areas of food security, livelihoods and disaster response. It has recently designed and implemented a Reducing Rural Poverty and Malnutrition programme to support the design and implementation of a nutrition-sensitive social welfare programme to improve nutrition behaviours and enhance the convergence of nutrition-focused interventions. This has a number of differences from the UNJP's MCEG (while sharing similar objectives): it works through the Ministry of Agriculture rather than MoLSW; the cash transfer is conditional upon compliance to certain behaviours; and it is poverty-targeted using Proxy Means Testing (PMT) rather than universal. But there is potential to derive cross-learning from these differences, rather than seeing them as contradictory.

WFP is engaged with school meals; it adapted some of these during COVID-19 school closures to take-home rations for families identified as the most vulnerable; and it has started testing climate smart approaches in five model villages to enhance community resilience to climate change, while supporting community-driven school feeding. It is also coordinating and facilitating a joint programme with FAO, UNICEF, UN Women, Red Cross and Red Crescent (German Red Cross and IFRC) and other NGOs on shock responsive social protection. Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provided the funds for a one-time wage subsidy through ILO's multi-donor and multi-country programme "Protect Garment Workers Affected by COVID-19".

NGOs have also been active in this area for several years, but on a relatively small scale. Oxfam, for example, works with four local partners including the Informal Worker Advancement Association and the Laos Federation Trade Union to support improved social protection for marginalised workers, especially women. Humanity & Inclusion also works with a range of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities to enhance the delivery of services, including in the area of social protection and inclusive education. Save the Children also has a number of related projects, particularly oriented towards child protection, with a focus on Sayaboury and Luang Prabang provinces.

The UNJP's work on the CoA also coincided with, and complemented, other initiatives around broader PFM reforms in the country, led by IMF and World Bank and strongly supported by the EU. This is likely to have had positive spin-offs, both in terms of raising the profile of social protection financing in PFM reform, and in terms of ensuring harmonisation between parallel initiatives to ensure that Government social protection expenditure can be mapped to international coding standards such as IPSAS and COFOG. Indeed, it is hoped that the CoA reforms in MoLSW may provide a model that can be replicated in other Ministries for this purpose.

## 3.2 Effectiveness

- To what extent have the UN agencies and implementing partners participating in the joint programme contributed added value to solve the development challenges stated in the programme document?

There was an interesting evolution in the way that the UN agencies contributed, which may be instructive for future joint programming. Some of this goes back to the genesis of the UNJP. The initial programme document (and corresponding Results Framework and Theory of Change) had two distinct outcomes: (i) enhanced Government capacity to implement the NSPS and (ii) 2000 pregnant women and children under 12 months benefiting from a new integrated package of welfare services. Yet there were always the three UN agencies involved. The expectation seemed to be that responsibility for delivering the outcomes would be shared in a kind of team effort, perhaps with ILO

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taking overall responsibility for the first outcome, UNICEF for the second, and UNCDF contributing to both outcomes (e.g. the financial aspects of Government capacity-building and the cash delivery and financial inclusion aspects of the integrated package). This appears to have led to some confusion and disagreement in the early stages of the UNJP (not helped presumably by the fact that there had been significant staff turnover in the respective agencies and in the UNRCO).

An attempt was then made to develop a “value chain approach” to the UNJP, with UNCDF responsible for the “supply side” (i.e. the funding), ILO for the “social protection ecosystem” (i.e. the policy, regulatory and capacity environment), and UNICEF for the “demand side delivery systems” (i.e. the integrated package of services to beneficiaries). But it is not clear that this was very intuitive, especially to Government, and it did not appear to resolve the perception of overlapping responsibilities between the different agencies that had slightly complicated the early stages of implementation.

Fortuitously, it seems that the UN Joint SDG Fund, for its own visibility purposes, subsequently asked each UNJP to develop three “transformative results” that each programme intended to achieve. This provided the opportunity for the Lao PDR UNJP to develop three distinct results, which, from then forwards, it used to manage implementation and to report on achievements. The three transformative results were much more closely tied to the competencies and responsibilities of the respective UN agencies, which seems to have simplified collaboration and to have improved the operational relationships between them: ILO for the “enhanced Government capacities”; UNCDF for the “sustainability of financing”; and UNICEF for the “integrated welfare package for mothers and young children”.

This much clearer division of responsibilities may have resulted in some missed opportunities for cross-fertilisation and exchange, for example in the choice of a private sector financial service provider for the MECG pilot instead of strengthening the existing Intra-Government Fiscal Transfer System. But it smoothed the interaction between the UN agencies in delivering the UNJP and provides some potentially valuable lessons for future joint programmes. It is important to recognise that a Joint Programme is made up of different players with (deliberately) very different skill sets and mandates, whose collaborative strength derives from allocating them the tasks that are best suited to them, rather than through mixing them together and expecting that there will automatically be synergies that will result in fluidity of teamwork.

- To what extent have the expected results been realized through the Programme?

As discussed below, the Programme has largely achieved the specific outputs, indicators and targets defined in the design document. See Annex 5 for a detailed assessment of the degree of achievement of each individual output in the UNJP’s Results Framework.

- Did the Programme reach the expected targets, indicators and results? To what extent were the three transformative<sup>21</sup> results achieved?

### **Result 1 – ‘Enhanced Government capacities to implement the NSPS’.**

The delivery of this result is primarily the responsibility of ILO under the UNJP. The stated outputs and deliverables under this result have been achieved despite disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>21</sup> It is questionable as to whether the three expected results have the gravity to be termed transformative. To reach that status, the result would need to be assessed in a longer timeframe to assess whether they have made a significant and sustained difference and hence achieved a transformative status. At this stage it is too early to presume that the three result are, or will be, transformative.



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A National Social Protection Commission (NSPC), which is prescribed in the NSPS, was established and legally ratified in December 2021 (outcome indicator 1.1). The Commission provides inter-ministerial coordinating structure to oversee the implementation of the NSPS. To facilitate this task, the UNJP drafted a roadmap and implementation plan for the NSPS which has been submitted to the NSPC (output indicator 1.1.3). Adoption of the document, which has funding and cost implications for Government, is pending.

In terms of capacity building (output indicators 1.1.1 and 1.1.2), a total of six capacity building events were organised and held (matching the target). These included one national level and three provincial events to build capacity to implement to NSPS. Stakeholders included the NSPC, MoLSW and other pertinent bodies. The provincial workshops focused on peer-learning events with experience sharing from other ASEAN countries including Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, provincial events were limited to nine northern provinces. Remote methods were employed to ensure delivery of these awareness building events. Over 200 individuals, including over 60 women, have participated and benefited (exceeding the target number overall, but with a slightly lower proportion of female participants than anticipated). Following the relaxation of travel restrictions, a high-level visit was organised to study the child grant system in the Philippines.

In response to the challenge of organising online training, the UNJP invested in the development of a social protection curriculum for training a cadre of trainers to deliver social protection awareness learning in the future. Twenty-five individuals from Government, civil society and development partners participated in a training-of-trainers (TOT) workshop in June 2022.

In terms of building awareness and understanding of social protection the UNJP has invested in the development of a number of strategic products which have contributed to this objective. These include the following substantive pieces of work:

- A modelling tool to assess the cost implications of different elements of the social welfare pillar of the NSPS (output indicator 1.2.3) was developed and used to prepare medium term expenditure forecasts for the NSPS (output 1.4.2).
- A monitoring framework to assist in assessing progress towards the achievement of SDG 1.3 and the delivery of the NSPS (output indicator 1.3.1). This has not yet been formally 'adopted' as specified in the output indicator.
- Analysis of the economic impact of public investment in social protection in Lao PDR (output indicator 1.2.1).

In addition to these formal outputs, the UNJP has also developed an impressive range of communications materials, which it has deployed to good effect. These have included blogs, articles and news items on:

- The inauguration of NSPS and the launch of UNJP
- Turning crisis into opportunity: A pathway to greater UN collaboration
- Ensuring that children get a good start to life
- Lao PDR moving to establish the basis for social protection floors
- Making social protection payments modern, simple and more reliable in Lao PDR
- Cash Assistance Programme for Pregnant Women and Newborns
- The UNJP Closing event

and videos on:

- MoLSW leads the development of a social protection system in Lao PDR
- UN's support to social protection in Lao PDR
- Australia's support to social protection in Lao PDR

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- Strengthening the national social protection system
- Social assistance pilot for pregnant women and newborn children
- Joint UN and Government of Lao PDR work on social protection

While one of the three ‘transformative’ results of the Programme is gender specific, little explicit attention appears to be given to gender and other cross cutting issues (social inclusion, human-rights, etc.) in the specific social protection research and costing products (output indicators 1.2.2 and 1.2.4). There is limited mention of gender-based violence in the latter; but there is no evidence of the “separate discussion of gender issues” that is stipulated as the means of verification for these two indicators.

A series of social media activities were developed and organised to build wider awareness and understanding of social protection within the wider public (output indicator 1.2.5). Several of these events generated significant feedback and engagement from the public and highlight the potential of social media for awareness building and advocacy.

**Result 2** – *‘Contribute to ensuring social protection funding is on-budget and designing a mechanism whereby additional sources of finance are mobilised and blended with public sector allocations to ensure sustainability of the NSPS’.*

The delivery of this result is primarily the responsibility of UNCDF under the UNJP. Although couched in indefinite terms (‘contribute towards’), this results area is perhaps the most challenging of the three and certain specified outputs are, given the prevailing level of political will and fiscal environment, extremely optimistic. Nevertheless, significant steps have been achieved towards widening the mindsets on the need and scope for the adoption of innovative approach to social protection financing.

Work on the Chart of Accounts (CoA) to facilitate the allocation of public funds to specific NSPS activities has progressed to the stage of active discussion between MoLSW and Ministry of Finance on the inclusion of 13 specific codes that will facilitate the implementation of key elements of the NSPS. However, the proposed codes have not yet been adopted (output indicator 1.4.1), and budget allocations for the NSPS (output indicator 1.4.3<sup>22</sup>) – especially pillar 3 of social welfare – remain negligible and constrained by the perceived lack of fiscal space for increased allocations.

Work on the design and promotion of a National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) has developed an innovative proposal for broadening the fiscal envelope for investment in social protection. A business plan (outputs 1.5.1 and 1.5.6<sup>23</sup>) and an accompanying guidance note on the capitalisation (1.5.2) of a NSPF has been officially submitted and a debt financing study has been completed (output indicator 1.5.3). However, as yet there are no indications that the Government of Lao PDR will adopt and provide the legislation to enable to NSPF to be launched (output indicator 1.5.4). Finally, there is no evidence of a NSPF prospectus (output indicator 1.5.5).

**Result 3** – *‘At least 2,000 pregnant women and children aged 0 – 12 months are benefiting from a new integrated welfare package consisting of the MCEG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration’.*

The delivery of this result is primarily the responsibility of UNICEF under the UNJP.

Considerable effort went into ensuring the design of the pilot in a difficult environment which restricted access, travel and communications. The design, which is founded on working through

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<sup>22</sup> It was perhaps overly ambitious to include the “initial budget allocation for the NSPS” as an output indicator for the UNJP. It is something which was always going to be well beyond the control of the Programme.

<sup>23</sup> It is not clear to the Evaluators what the intended difference was between these two outputs.

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Government structures and building Government capacity, had to be undertaken remotely due to COVID-19. Clear and concise operational guidelines were developed for the design and a series of training modules covering the key aspects of the pilot – registration, payments, complaints and grievances and MIS – were developed and used to train relevant staff at district and village level (output indicators 2.1.1, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.3.1).

Gender, child rights and other social inclusion issues were incorporated in the design of the pilot based on guidance from the CEDAW Committee and CRC.

The scale and duration of the pilot was significantly expanded through co-financing contribution of USD 833,460 from Australia. This support enabled the MECG to extend its geographic coverage (from two districts to three), increase the number of recipients (from 1,400<sup>24</sup> to 2,596<sup>25</sup>) and to extend the duration of coverage (from June 2022 to early 2023).

COVID-19 restrictions continued into the implementation phase and necessitated the introduction of a remote support strategy for registration. Nevertheless, despite all the efforts the UNJP employed to circumvent the delays and complications associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, it still has had an impact on the delivery of the pilot.

Despite serious challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, by June/June 2022 the UNJP had registered (output indicator 2.4.1<sup>26</sup>) 2,596 pregnant women and mothers of children under the age of 12 months across three of the poorest areas in Lao PDR – Sanamxay and Phouvong districts in Attapeu province and Nong district in Savannakhet province (output indicator 2.4.1). However, payments have been initiated to only 55 per cent (1,410) of women who have been registered.

Implementing MECG through existing district and village level government health and social welfare structures has kept operational costs low and is the right approach to foster adoption and sustainability. However, delivery of the MECG through these structures has highlighted the challenges of (a) working in a low-capacity environment, (b) the limited effectiveness of a single, stand alone, short duration programme and (c) the need for more resilient support to ensure adoption and sustainability.

The pilot is intended to be a proof-of-concept learning exercise aimed at promoting and guiding the adoption and delivery of future social transfer programmes. However, there is no formal M&E structure (output indicator 2.5.1) for the pilot and a MECG-specific impact evaluation has not been carried out (output indicator 2.5.2). This limits the ability to assess the effectiveness of the pilot against intended impacts such as improved maternal and child health and nutrition, increased uptake of early childhood wellbeing services and expanded birth registration. To utilise the pilot to build awareness and advocacy for the continuation and expansion of the MECG and other social transfers to vulnerable groups it would have been preferable if the UNJP had invested more in developing and disseminating robust evidence on the effectiveness of the pilot in achieving its intended impacts.

Interviews with staff at three village health centres indicated that they are supportive of the MECG initiative and saw that it has encouraged increased attendance from pregnant women and newborn children. However, they recognised that their engagement in the pilot added to their workload. In this respect it was noted that while the official health centre register was kept up to date, dates of

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<sup>24</sup> The minimum target as per original UNJP programme document. With the addition of DFAT funding, the target was increased to “at least 2,000”, a figure that in reality will have been exceeded.

<sup>25</sup> As per UNJP final annual report draft.

<sup>26</sup> Output indicator 2.4.1 refers to ‘children registered’ but in practice it is the mother or mother to be who is registered, receives the registration book and receive the payment. The children are the intended and ultimate beneficiaries but are not the registered recipients.

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health centre visits are not being recorded, either on the MCEG registration cards or in the MIS data entry tablets. Rather contradictorily, some village health workers saw wider potential in the use of tablets as a way of digitising health attendance records.

In terms of the MCEG's MIS, while a digitalised reporting system was designed, IT equipment procured and field staff trained in data entry, the MIS is currently primarily used as a registration and payment tool. Field data on health centre attendance and treatment as well as grievances and complaints are not entered into the system.

Interviews with three groups of recipients in Nong district highlighted a number of strengths and weaknesses of the pilot:

- Recipients had a clear awareness of the rationale of the cash transfers and reported primarily utilising payments for the benefit of newborn children (most women only started receiving payment after their child was born). Purchasing baby formula, rice and other foodstuffs is the predominant use. Some also reported purchasing baby clothes as well as diapers.
- Recipients generally reported that decisions on how to utilise the payments was done in consultation with their partners and that their partners were supportive of the need to use the payments to benefit the newborn child.
- Unlike anecdotal reporting from Attapeu, the payments in Nong did not result in decisions to take more time off before or after childbirth. Most women reported returning to work on their own farms after only 10 days of rest. This helps to explain the decision of many to purchase baby formula. The difference in practices between Attapeu and Nong recipients could be explained by the fact that the anecdotal reports from Attapeu are from women who work as labourers on other people's land (banana plantations) while recipients in Nong district tend to cultivate their own land.
- Discussions highlighted the need for more intensive, reiterative, and persistent engagement with recipients than a pilot with limited resources is able to provide. Many recipients were not aware of some the basic facts regarding the grant (next date of payment, value of next payment, duration of the payments). Rather than viewing the payments as social welfare, which should be regular, predictable and long term, there is a valid perception that the payments are simply a windfall. This is emphasised by the consolidation of early payments and the limited duration of the payments.

Payment delivery has been especially challenging due to the remoteness and lack of market integration of the pilot locations. Initial expectations to primarily deliver payments through the Star FinTech mobile banking solution had to be revised due to limited mobile phone ownership amongst recipients and gender-related concerns regarding reliance on phones belonging to other members of the household. Although Star FinTech had already been engaged to deliver payments, it is reported (by the service provider) that only around 20 to 30 per cent of payment are made via mobile phones; however, judging from a rapid review of partial payment records, even this estimate looks optimistic. As a result, the bulk of cash transfers are hand-delivered at village level by the service provider who has to finance and organise their district outlets to arrange these payments through village heads. Partly due to the fact that there is no regular payment schedule, which would indicate a prescribed payment date, the task of ensuring that all recipients attend payment events is problematic and requires considerable engagement with the village head's office. Planning payment deliveries is further complicated by delays in the service provider receiving funds from MoLSW.

In terms of birth registration, village and district health staff explained that, at least in Nong district (which is poor and remote), the majority of births already occur in village health facilities attended by a midwife. Upon giving birth, mothers are issued with a birth record which is then used to

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formally register the birth of the child at the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) district office. In addition, the MoHA undertakes an annual village-to-village exercise to update birth registrations and Family Books (a birth certificate is a pre-requisite for the inclusion of a child in the Family Book, which is the essential registration document). Nevertheless, according to UNICEF<sup>27</sup>, only 60 per cent of children under 1 year have birth certificates in Lao PDR, compared with 64 per cent in Cambodia, 78 per cent in Myanmar and 88 per cent in Viet Nam, which suggests there is scope for improvement. The MECG does not provide any direct incentive to register births; and, in any case, the scale of the pilot is too small to make any measurable impact on the SDG indicator at national level.

- To what extent are the partners and intended beneficiaries satisfied with the results?

Generally, there are significant levels of satisfaction with the Programme's achievements:

- UN partners – The three UN implementing partners and the UNRCO all indicate that they are broadly satisfied with what the Programme has achieved. They recognise that there have been challenges to collaboration and coordination, but all have made significant efforts to overcome these. All agree that the role of the UNRCO has been important: first in overseeing the coherent design of the UNJP, and subsequently in terms of ensuring openness and exchange. The obligation for Joint SDG Fund programmes to report through the UNRCO is seen as a significant strength, ensuring better inter-agency collaboration than is necessarily the case on other approaches to joint programming. All partners also recognise that they now have a better understanding of the roles, strengths, and weaknesses of the other partners, and have thereby strengthened the manner in which they interact.
- MoLSW – In interviews with the DGs for Cabinet, Planning and Social Welfare they all expressed appreciation of the assistance provided through the UNJP.
  - DG Cabinet raised issues about the immediate relevance of some of the initiatives undertaken within results area 2 (on financing) and raised a question as to why focus was given to the creation of a new NSPF when a National Social Welfare Fund had already been decreed by law but remained dormant.
  - DG Cabinet also commented that proposals developed under the CoA study were initially very ambitious but through further consultation the number of codes has been reduced to a more pragmatic level.
  - DG Planning emphasised the need to mobilise resources for social protection and promote voluntary social security. He indicated that priority would be given to ensuring the allocation of funds to ensure the functioning of the NSPC.
  - DG Social Welfare strongly supported the concept of the MECG and expressed the need to expand it, although he stated that the fiscal space to do so was not currently available, at least from Government resources.
- District and Village Level – Interviews with staff at three village health centres indicated that they were supportive of the MECG initiative and saw that it encouraged increased attendance from pregnant women and newborn children. They recognised that their engagement in the pilot added to their workload, but felt that this was a positive evolution.
- MECG recipients – Interviews with MECG recipients in Nong indicated enthusiastic support for the cash transfers provided by the pilot. However, delays in the delivery of the payments have been a cause for concern. It is evident that recipients view the cash transfer as a windfall rather than a predictable and regular transfer that will continue. As reported

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<sup>27</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/birth-registration/>

## Findings

earlier, recipients interviewed in Nong district expressed limited knowledge of the when they would receive the next payment and how much it would be.

- What factors have contributed to the Programme results achieved?

The UNJP came at a propitious time, coinciding with the adoption of the NSPS. This Strategy – while very broad in its ambitions for social welfare – nonetheless provided for a range of interventions across the life-course, including a focus on pregnant women and infants that the UNJP was able to capitalise on. It also offered key entry points for support to MoLSW, which had been tasked with an important role under the NSPS and which therefore welcomed the timely technical assistance offered by the UNJP.

Engaging specialist UN agencies with the necessary experience and expertise to address each of the transformative results areas has contributed significantly to the UNJP’s achievements. And the coordination and oversight function of the UNRCO has ensured an effective and efficient structure for collaborative engagement which could potentially be emulated on other UN joint programmes.

Co-funding support from Australia enabled the UNJP to expand the coverage and extend the duration of the MECG pilot. Pilot locations were expanded from two districts to three districts, the number of recipient mothers and mothers was expanded from 1,400<sup>28</sup> to 2,596 and the duration of the pilot was extended to early 2023.

Good working relations and a high degree of trust between the Government and the implementing partners has countered the challenges of working through capacity-constrained national counterpart agencies from village to national level.

- To what extent has the UNJP contributed to accelerating the SDGs at the national level<sup>29</sup>?

The UNJP was intended to contribute to the achievement of four SDGs in Lao PDR:

- 1.3 – Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable
- 2.2 – By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons
- 16.9 – By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
- 17.3 – Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

The key requirements for providing a significant contribution to accelerating SDG 1.3 at national level are political will, fiscal commitment and delivery capacity. Although the UNJP touches on each of these, the scale and duration of the support provided through the Programme is insufficient in terms of the magnitude of the challenge. This is a well-recognised yet still common failing of a short duration project-based approach to development. The capacity building events to build awareness and understanding of social protection were essentially one-off initiatives and the UNJP was not the first (and probably will not be the last) development initiative to provide such support. The UNJP’s work on developing a cadre of social protection trainers could have a more lasting impact; but unless an institutional framework is found and a recurrent budget provided to support the fledgling initiative, it is likely to dissipate. A promising start has been made, with growing indications of

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<sup>28</sup> The original target of the UNJP was “at least 1,400 beneficiaries”. With the addition of DFAT funding, the target was increased to “at least 2,000 beneficiaries”. The current expectation is for 2,596 beneficiaries.

<sup>29</sup> This was identified as one of the two key areas of focus for the Evaluation.

## Findings

Government wanting to show leadership and to present on progress made. But this requires follow-up, for which the prospects are still uncertain.

Similarly, it is difficult to see how other efforts to build capacity, such as developing the NSPS costing tool or the NSPS/SDG 1.3 monitoring framework, will survive long enough to see practical application since prospects for any meaningful increase in resource allocations to develop the individual social welfare components of the NSPS remain aspirational in the short term.

In terms of political will, the engagement of parliamentarians from the National Assembly (which was facilitated by the UNRCO) has been positive; but it too needs to be maintained and repeated.

While the MECG will directly increase social protection support to reduce stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and to address the nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women among its recipients (SDG 2.2) and can be expected to have some impact on birth registration (SDG 16.9), the number of recipients is negligible in terms of the overall need, and the support provided is not lasting. The UNJP is currently providing social welfare support to only some 2,500 recipients (and even then only 55 per cent of them have started receiving payments). Unless the pilot continues, this number will fall back to zero in early 2023 once all children currently covered by the pilot reach the age of 12 months.

Finally, in terms of SDG 17.3 (“to mobilize additional financial resources”), the UNJP’s efforts to define a more sophisticated CoA may have limited application value while the fiscal space for anything beyond social security for public sector employees remains severely constrained. And although proposals for a National Social Protection Fund provide an opportunity to explore alternative ways to fund social protection, the concept itself is arguably too ambitious to gain immediate support.

In conclusion, it was probably unrealistic to expect a programme of this limited duration and value to demonstrate any meaningful direct impact in terms of the achievement of the SDGs. It has however contributed in a positive way to a process which may ultimately permit Lao PDR to achieve the specified SDGs by 2030, if continuing support can be guaranteed to consolidate these fledgeling initiatives.

- What lessons can be learned from the best practices’ achievements, challenges, and constraints of the Programme in relation to “strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation”?

The principal lesson gained from the UNJP is a reiteration and reinforcement of the already recognised need for long term, consistent, advocacy-based support to transform the NSPS from a set of principles to a set of practices. Until political will has reached its ‘tipping point’ and triggered the commitment of fiscal resources to implement the measures defined in the NSPS, priority needs to be given to building political awareness and understanding of the importance and role of social welfare (non-contributory social welfare). Piloting can play a key role in this respect, but it needs to be designed as a ‘proof-of-concept’ exercise with a strong evidence-building and advocacy focus.

As mentioned already, there is a strong rationale for pooling the specialist resources that the UN system can offer to address multi-dimensional development challenges. The UNJP has shown the benefits of bring together expertise on NSPS governance, social protection financing and piloting child and nutrition focused social transfers. To maximise their efficiency and effectiveness such initiatives need to be coordinated at a high level, such as through the UNRCO.

Working with and through Government structures and systems is appropriate and should support adoption and sustainability; but a proper and full prior assessment of this capacity is needed to

ensure programmes are tailored to context. This has implications for the duration, content and approach of the Programme.

### 3.3 Sustainability

- To what extent are the intervention results likely to continue after the funding has been withdrawn?

Sustainability is the ‘Holy Grail’ for all development assistance. However, as this report has already illustrated, the potential, opportunity and scope for a short duration programme in a nascent sector like social protection to make even a modest impact is extremely limited. This is amply illustrated by numerous global examples but also by specific past experience in Lao PDR, such as the DFAT funded Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (SPSL) under the wider Laos-Australia Rural Livelihoods Programme (LARLP) umbrella. This conclusion is not unique to the UNJP but is common to many endline evaluations of project-based development assistance in the social protection sector.

Whilst this Evaluation fails to find substantial convincing evidence of sustainability, it is not intended as a criticism of the implementing partners, nor of their performance in delivering the Programme. All three partners have shown considerable energy, innovation and determination; the outputs of the Programme have been of a high quality and have been welcomed by Government at an important time. But it is unrealistic to expect that a small, 30-month programme can genuinely deliver sustainable improvements to social protection delivery capacity, can realistically be expected to unlock extra fiscal space (especially in the midst of a domestic financial crisis), or can convincingly demonstrate the potential national impacts of inclusive life-course social protection. The UNJP should be seen as one more small step in a slow process towards a comprehensive social protection floor for Lao PDR.

There has been valuable progress on a number of fronts under the UNJP, but unfortunately this is not irreversible. Past experience, for example under LARLP, has shown that small gains can be quickly dissipated if support is not ongoing: the UNJP has had to repeat many of the earlier activities of LARLP (piloting; investment case for social protection; awareness-raising; study tours; Government staff training; advocacy; etc.), merely to regain lost ground. There is a danger that the same will happen after the UNJP. What is most important in terms of sustainability, therefore, is to try to identify mechanisms that will keep the support coming. The UN agencies are well placed to do this and have already built a degree of trust with Government that would make such support very welcome. But they will need to obtain a level of funding to continue the technical support, to maintain the MECG pilot so that a compelling evidence base can be constructed, and to continue to advocate. Only then will they be able to opportunistically seize the moment – whenever it eventually arrives – to capitalise on this early groundwork.

#### **Result 1 – ‘Enhanced Government capacities to implement the NSPS’.**

Capacity strengthening in a sector that receives a low priority in terms of public resource allocation is challenging. Specific improvements in methods and tools – such as the NSPS RoadMap, the SDG 1.3 Monitoring Matrix, etc. – provide useful and tangible assets to improve management and delivery; but they depend ultimately on the adequacy of fiscal resources and skilled capacity to see them serve their purpose and be effectively utilised.

Building awareness and understanding is the foundation stone for the progression of social protection, especially at this early stage of development. However, the ability of a project-based approach to make a meaningful and lasting difference in building both the necessary support base



## Findings

for public investment and the skill base to design and implement policies and programmes is constrained by the short duration of such development assistance.

The 'training of trainers' is a positive and progressive initiative in terms of moving towards ensuring more continuous engagement in social protection understanding and awareness building but without attention on providing an institutional framework and a source for recurrent budget support, it is unrealistic to expect this initiative to perform much beyond the lifespan of the Programme.

**Result 2** – *'Contribute to ensuring social protection funding is on-budget and designing a mechanism whereby additional sources of finance are mobilised and blended with public sector allocations to ensure sustainability of the NSPS'.*

The innovative work on investigating alternative funding sources for the NSPS as a whole and for pillar 3 (social welfare) in particular is constructive but highly ambitious considering the current fiscal environment. As stressed already, the concept of a social protection wide fund, which incorporates social security and social welfare, will require substantial deliberation and follow up engagement if it is to progress beyond its conceptual phase. Without some form of continuation of support from UNCDF, this seems unlikely.

There are positive signals that the much more practical work on the CoA will lead to some fundamental and sustainable changes in the structure of the social welfare budget. MoLSW are clearly following up the introduction of limited and pragmatic reforms with the Ministry of Finance. However, until the fiscal resources are provided to finance the key components of the social welfare pillar of the NSPS, these reforms will remain essentially hollow.

**Result 3** – *'At least 2,000 pregnant women and children aged 0 – 12 months are benefiting from a new integrated welfare package consisting of the MECG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration'.*

At the time of drafting this report, expectations for the continuity of the MECG pilot are bleak and, even if funding was sourced to extend the duration or expand the coverage, the pilot would need to be re-initiated since registration of eligible candidates terminated in June, when the available financial allocation was utilised. This means that by early 2023, there will be no active recipients of the MECG.

Apart from its immediate and direct impact on maternal and child wellbeing of the, albeit very limited number of, recipients, the MECG pilot is a potentially powerful advocacy and awareness tool which could provide the focal point for building political support for a broader child benefit initiative and hence realising at least one tangible component of the third pillar of the NSPS.

The country's deteriorating debt position makes it clear that the Government is not able to allocate fiscal resources to allow the MECG pilot to continue. This being the case, prospects for a restart of the pilot rest on the decision of development partners who consider social protection to be a priority for the social and economic development of the country. Even should a potential donor emerge soon, it will take time before funds can be released and the pilot restarted.

In the context of the sustainability of any future investment in the MECG, experience from the current pilot emphasises the need for greater attention to be paid to strengthen the Government-based registration system, finding a pragmatic and low cost solution to payment delivery (perhaps using existing Government channels), widening SBCC content and engagement, and developing advocacy oriented M&E that will capture lessons to build a compelling investment case for scale-up.

## Findings

- What mechanisms were set up to ensure the continuity of the Programme's activities and results?

The UNJP has consistently emphasised the importance of working with and through Government structures and systems wherever possible. This is extremely commendable and is essential to ensuring the continuity of the Programme's activities, but it is not sufficient. Sustainability is a partnership process and requires a degree of reciprocity. While development partners can provide technical expertise and support the development of capacities and systems, the host government needs to ensure, as a minimum, an adequate recurrent fiscal base and appropriate human resources. As already mentioned above, the development of improved methods and tools provides the potential for improved management and delivery, but these improvements cannot be realised unless the host body has the resources to utilise them.

- To what extent have institutions and stakeholders taken and shown ownership of the action objectives?

The Lao PDR Government has a tradition for strong ownership of development assistance support. MoLSW's collaboration with the UNJP has been in keeping with this tradition. While fiscal resources and human capital are limited, the level of engagement with the Programme has been consistent throughout the Programme.

Establishing a formal legal basis for the NSPS and for the NSPC are significant political steps towards the creating of a wider and more comprehensive social protection system, but they are insufficient on their own to deliver it.

- Are there willingness and capacity to sustain financing at the end of the intervention?

The establishment of a legal basis for the NSPS and the restructuring of the CoA indicate a degree of political willingness to develop more comprehensive social protection systems. However, for the time being, this willingness is mostly directed towards strengthening social security provision to public sector workers. Significant fiscal constraints, exacerbated in recent months by a weakening currency and worsening national debt position, mean that there is little if any capacity for increasing fiscal provisions to social security, let alone introducing meaningful social welfare measures in the short to medium term.

- To what extent are they actively engaged in the activities of the action?

There is clear participation and engagement from the Government in at least the oversight and the management of the delivery of the Programme's activities. Indicators of this include:

- Capacity building events have also been well attended, and MoLSW has played an increasingly prominent role in fronting such events.
- MoLSW is directly responsible for the delivery of MECG fund to the payment service provider.
- MoLSW staff have been actively engaged in discussions and dialogue related to the development of specific tools such as the NSPS RoadMap and the SDG1.3 monitoring matrix.
- District and village level social welfare and health department staff are directly engaged in the registration and validation of MECG recipients.

### 3.4 Cross-cutting issues

- To what extent human rights, child rights, climate change, DRR, and gender equality and equity have been addressed within the program?

There is little explicit reference to how the various cross-cutting issues of interest were integrated into the UNJP. The MCEG design is said to be addressing these concerns but there is limited evidence of specific or deliberate consideration.

More generally, however, the promotion of social protection floors is fully coherent with a human rights approach; and the focus of the MCEG on pregnant women and young infants should promote child rights, including that of identity through birth registration. The fact that the MCEG transfers are provided to the mother should also help to empower women, though the gender impacts of cash transfers are more nuanced, and it will be important to monitor carefully any negative gender impacts. The fact that the MCEG transfers are unconditional and universal is already less likely to impose additional burdens on women in ensuring compliance. And the Evaluation Team heard anecdotal evidence that mothers do feel empowered by the cash transfer and that this tends to reduce rather than exacerbate any intra-household tensions. However, the M&E system should in future be designed to corroborate such findings through quantitative analysis.

The UNJP focus on building capacity and systems should also serve to lay the foundation for more adaptive and flexible forms of social protection that could potentially underpin future responses to shocks and disasters, including those that are climate related.

- To what extent is the Programme and intervention disability-inclusive? To what extent did support to data collection and analysis, registries, and information system feature disability?

UNICEF – separately from the UNJP – has undertaken a fact-finding study on disability and old age, which it hopes will inform the design of other life-course social welfare programmes under pillar 3 of the NSPS, based on the delivery systems developed for the MCEG. But the UNJP itself has not placed a major emphasis on disability. In this context it is important to remember that the initial focus of the UNJP on pregnant women and young infants was one that was agreed with MoLSW.

- What were the program’s response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic? What were the lessons learned from this?

Lao PDR was unusual in having made only very limited use of social assistance as a response to COVID-19, perhaps in part because of the absence of existing social welfare programmes. Apart from the operationalisation of the MCEG pilot (which had already been planned prior to the pandemic), the only cash transfers were to 16,000 workers in the garment industry<sup>30</sup>. There does appear to be a growing recognition in Government of the potential role of social welfare, perhaps accelerated by the impacts of COVID-19, but there is little indication of a systematic move towards establishing mechanisms for shock-responsive social protection.

The UNJP has contributed to this debate both through its Note to the Government on “Developing a Shock-Responsive National Social Protection System to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis in Lao PDR”, and through its work on demonstrating how the UNJP contributed directly to supporting all five of the necessary preparedness measures needed for robust shock response (coordination, targeting, delivery, information systems and financing).

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<sup>30</sup> This initiative was quite independent of the UNJP, although ILO was involved.

## 4 Conclusions

The conclusions are presented in the form of responses to three of the five main Evaluation Questions set out in the Evaluation Objectives, namely:

- a. To assess the extent to which the **expected results have been attained** during the implementation of the Programme. In particular, the Evaluation provides insights on (i) the contribution to improving the situation of vulnerable groups identified in the UNJP programme document (ProDoc), with a focus on disability, (ii) contribution to SDG acceleration, and (iii) contribution to UN reforms, including UNCT coherence.
- b. To assess the **added value of a joint UN approach** to programming.
- c. To explore **sustainability of the MEGC interventions** in terms of the likelihood to be sustained, scaled up or continue after the UNJP life cycle

The remaining two Evaluation Questions, namely the formulation of lessons and recommendations, are then presented in the following two sections (5 and 6) of the report.

### 4.1 Have the expected results been attained?

The Evaluators assess that a significant majority of the desired outputs have been **fully or substantially achieved** (see Annex 5 for more detail). While some activities and events were disrupted by COVID-19, the Programme was able to adapt to the prevailing situation through the adoption of innovative approaches including reliance on remote engagement measures. This enabled the UNJP to continue to deliver results under a difficult implementation environment.

Under **Result 1**, largely the responsibility of ILO, a National Social Protection Commission (NSPC), which is prescribed in the NSPS, was established and legally ratified in December 2021. The UNJP drafted a roadmap/implementation plan for the NSPS which has been formally submitted to the NSPC. A total of six capacity building events were organised and held; and, largely in response to COVID-19, the UNJP invested in the development of a social protection curriculum for training a cadre of trainers to deliver social protection awareness learning in the future. The UNJP also developed a modelling tool, a monitoring framework, and an analysis of the economic impact of public investment in social protection in Lao PDR, together with an impressive array of communications and advocacy materials.

Under **Result 2**, largely the domain of UNCDF, work on the Chart of Accounts (CoA) to facilitate the allocation of public funds to specific NSPS activities has progressed to the stage of active discussion between MoLSW and Ministry of Finance on the inclusion of 13 specific codes that will facilitate the implementation of key elements of the NSPS. Work on the design and promotion of a National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) has developed an innovative proposal for broadening the fiscal envelope for investment in social protection. A business plan and an accompanying guidance note on the capitalisation of a NSPF has been officially submitted and a debt financing study completed.

Under **Result 3**, the responsibility of UNICEF, considerable effort went into ensuring the design of the pilot in a difficult environment which restricted access, travel and communications. The design, which is founded on working through Government structures and building Government capacity, had to be undertaken remotely due to COVID-19. Clear and concise operational guidelines were developed for the design and a series of training modules covering the key aspects of the pilot – registration, payments, complaints and grievances and MIS – were developed and used to train relevant staff at district and village level. The scale and duration of the pilot was significantly expanded through co-financing from Australia, which enabled the MEGC to extend its geographic

coverage (from two districts to three), increase the number of recipients (from 1,400 to 2,596) and to extend the duration of coverage (from June 2022 to early 2023). However, because of delays largely resulting from COVID-19, forty-five per cent of those registered have yet been paid.

Generally, there are significant levels of **satisfaction** with the Programme's achievements, expressed by the Government authorities at different levels, the implementing partners, the other development partners and the beneficiaries of the MECG.

In terms of the three specific sub-questions under this Objective, there appears to have been little focus on disability. This resulted substantially from the Government's decision to focus initially on a different set of life-course vulnerabilities, namely that of pregnant women and young infants. But there is scope to use the same systems as have been developed for the MECG for the establishment in future of a similar disability grant and links to a package of appropriate services.

The UNJP was intended to advance four of the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDG) in Lao PDR: SDGs 1.3, 2.2, 16.9 and 17.3. However, it was probably unrealistic to expect a Programme of this limited duration and value to demonstrate any meaningful direct impact in terms of the achievement of the SDGs. But the UNJP has nonetheless contributed in a positive way to a process which may ultimately permit Lao PDR to achieve the specified SDGs by 2030, if continuing support can be guaranteed to consolidate the fledgeling initiatives undertaken by the UNJP.

**UNCT coherence** around social protection encouragingly went beyond those agencies immediately implicated in the UNJP. This is manifested in the joint UN response to COVID-19, where the full UNCT was engaged in the drafting of a Note on "Developing a Shock-Responsive National Social Protection System to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis in Lao PDR". The impetus generated by this further led to the preliminary development of a joined-up UN "Position Paper on Social Protection in Lao PDR: Building a National Social Protection System", all fully coherent with the "UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026".

## 4.2 What is the added value of a Joint UN approach?

The Evaluation concludes that the delivery of the UNJP by multiple agencies has been **efficient and effective**. Despite the unavoidable consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Programme has been able to successfully deliver most of the outputs defined in the Programme's design document within the designated timeframe and budget. This is greatly to the credit of the implementing partners, especially in the Laotian context where policy changes can be expected to occur only slowly, and where social welfare is starting from a very low base.

The combined **inter-agency approach** enabled the comparative advantage of the three participating agencies – ILO, UNICEF and UNCDF – to be brought together and increased the overall efficiency of the delivery of the Programme. This arrangement was facilitated by the oversight role played by the UNRCO, which provided an objective forum for the selection and engagement of apposite agencies to address specific aspects of the Joint Programme. A comparison with approaches adopted in other countries highlights the value of the UNRCO's role in organising and coordinating inter-agency collaboration.

**Administration** of the UNJP has been greatly facilitated through the recruitment by ILO of a dedicated Programme Manager and Technical Adviser, who assured day-to-day operational coordination. On the occasions where higher-level, more strategic coordination was required (for example to resolve confusions around roles and responsibilities of the implementing partners), this was undertaken by the UNRCO.

The **agencies engaged in the Joint Programme** had clear and specific roles to deliver three inter-related but separate results: social protection policy and capacity building (ILO), social protection financing (UNCDF) and piloting a mother and child focussed cash transfer (UNICEF). Although the work of the three agencies was, by and large, undertaken independently, the Programme's design emphasises the synergistic nature of the three result areas. Indeed, there are several examples of closer collaborative work where this was necessary, including the development of the training-of-trainer curriculum (ILO and UNICEF), the fiduciary risk study of payment delivery options (ILO, UNICEF and UNCDF) and proposals for Chart of Accounts disaggregation (UNCDF and ILO).

### 4.3 What is the sustainability of the MCEG component?

Overall, the Evaluation finds that, in general, the activities of the UNJP are **not sustainable** without further support. This includes the MCEG. The UNJP has consistently emphasised the importance of working with and through Government structures and systems wherever possible. This is commendable and is essential to ensuring the continuity of the Programme's activities, but it is not sufficient. Sustainability is a partnership process and requires a degree of reciprocity. While development partners can provide technical expertise and support the development of capacities and systems, the host government needs to ensure, as a minimum, an adequate recurrent fiscal base and appropriate human resources. Ongoing work will be required to guarantee these.

Whilst this Evaluation fails to find substantial convincing evidence of **sustainability**, it is not intended as a criticism of the implementing partners, nor of their performance in delivering the Programme. All three partners have shown considerable energy, innovation and determination; the outputs of the Programme have been of a high quality and have been welcomed by Government at an important time. But it is unrealistic and unreasonable to expect a small, limited duration, MCEG pilot to enable sustainable improvements in social welfare delivery capacity, provide substantive empirical evidence of impact or unlock the necessary fiscal space. The combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current domestic financial crisis significantly exacerbated this challenge. There is a clear potential for an MCEG pilot to play a pivotal role in promoting a neutral advocacy approach to learning, training, awareness building and nurturing political will. However, under the current fiscal constraints facing the Government, funding will need to come from development partners, at least in the short and probably medium term.

## 5 Lessons

Without any follow-up support, the achievements of the current programme are likely to be short lived. Despite the adoption of the NSPS and the establishment of the NSPC, the level of political commitment to the establishment of a social welfare system, that could have a national impact on reducing poverty, improving maternal and child nutrition, increasing human capital development, and achieving the SDGs, is far below the tipping point to invoke the level of fiscal commitment needed.

Working within existing Government structures is challenging when resource commitments and capacity are limited but the UNJP has clearly adopted the right approach in terms of building capacity, promoting ownership, nurturing trust and encouraging the adoption of new initiatives, all of which are especially pertinent in the political context of Lao PDR. This approach however requires substantial time to realise sustainable results and re-states the ubiquitous lesson that short term project-centric approaches offer limited opportunities, potential and scope for achieving meaningful progress in the implementation of a fledgling NSPS.

However, this approach needs a longer time horizon with a degree of consistency and persistence that is not easily deliverable within a typical short duration programme. The experience gained from the implementation of the UNJP re-affirms the ubiquitous lesson that short term project-centric approaches offer limited opportunities, potential and scope for achieving meaningful progress in the implementation of a fledgling NSPS.

The approach also requires a degree of reciprocity to achieve sustainable improvements. While development partners can provide technical expertise and support the development of capacities and systems, the host government needs to ensure, as a minimum, an adequate recurrent fiscal base and appropriate human resources. Ongoing work will be required to guarantee these.

There is a need for more persistent and continuous advocacy engagement to build awareness and understanding with stakeholders that have the influence to reform policy and manage fiscal space. In Lao PDR this means engaging further with the National Assembly as well as provincial and district political leaders. Evidence across the global amplifies the key message that, for fiscal space to be created, there first has to be political will. Building political will is highly context-sensitive, and approaches need to be adapted to suit the political structure of the specific country. It can be relatively low cost, but it requires a long term commitment, persistency and consistent messaging over a sustained period.

An MCEG pilot can play a pivotal role in promoting a neutral advocacy approach to learning, training, awareness building and nurturing political will. However, under the current fiscal constraints facing the Government, funding will need to come from development partners, at least in the short term. To be effective in generating evidence and influencing political mindsets the pilot initiative will need to be meaningful in scale and in duration (at least 5 years with a preparedness to extend).

Incorporating a gradual geographic or age eligibility expansion into the design might help promote awareness of the role of a pilot as the first step in implementing a broader programme, rather than as just a fixed term experiment (which the current pilot essentially is).

The Business Plan produced under the UNJP sets out a comprehensive framework for an umbrella fund for all three pillars of social protection in Lao PDR. This would have channelled the funding from multiple sources through a central National Social Protection Fund, for disbursement to multiple programmes. However, some of the sources of the funding are not yet assured (lottery, philanthropy, sin taxes) and others would be dependent on Government contributions (bonds, contributions from development partners) which are not yet guaranteed. The Fund represents a



## *Lessons*

valuable conceptual architecture to aspire towards, but the immediate need is to assemble the basic building blocks.

The UNJP has underlined the importance of a consistent in-country presence. Both ILO and UNICEF have well-established offices in Lao PDR and have long been recognised as important partners in the country's development. It would be beneficial if UNCDF, who also have a strong track-record in Lao PDR, could establish a similar level of physical presence: much of its technical support through the UNJP had to be delivered remotely, with a strong reliance on the one technical specialist based in-country, which presented challenges especially with the restrictions on travel imposed by COVID-19.

A final lesson goes back to joint programme design. It is important to be realistic about what can be achieved through a small, short term programme. The UNJP failed to achieve the transformative changes that it targeted not because of inherent weaknesses in delivery, but because the targets were set unrealistically high. The achievements of the Programme are significant, but it was over-ambitious to expect them to be sustainable in the given timeframe. Further support is urgently required to maintain the momentum and to be ready to seize the moment when the opportunity for establishing a comprehensive social protection floor eventually presents itself. The UNJP should always have been seen as just one further step towards that goal.



## 6 Recommendations

The recommendations below are set out according to the identified audience for the Evaluation.

### 6.1 UN Country Team

The UNCT (including a broader range of agencies than just the three engaged in the UNJP) has fully recognised the importance of jointly supporting social protection in Lao PDR. The UN is well placed to assure such support as a result of their substantial in-country presence, the complementary expertise of the different agencies and the degree of trust they have built with Government counterparts. They should jointly advocate for funding of a follow-up phase to the UNJP to ensure that the momentum for reform is maintained.

A follow-up programme should pay closer attention to the prevailing political consensus regarding the prioritisation of fiscal support for social welfare. It should focus on the primary challenge of building awareness, understanding and political commitment for the introduction of broad-based social welfare instruments, of which a mother and early childhood grant offers demonstrable potential in terms of poverty reduction, improved maternal and early childhood nutrition, as well as wider benefits through human capital development and economic multiplier/fiscal stimulus effects.

An expanded and extended MCEG pilot should be central to this design. This initiative should be designed as an open-ended pilot with a phased rollout rather than closed experiment. To ensure piloting is used effectively as a learning and advocacy tool it needs to include a well designed and implemented M&E component which is linked to a strategic political environment sensitive communication and advocacy plan. The evidence-building would also draw lessons from the parallel World Bank initiative in the north of the country, to share experiences in a formalised manner, to objectively compare the different modalities and to help to evolve a common approach endorsed by the Government

A collaborative partnership approach which pulls together financial resources of a number of development partners and the technical expertise of specialist UN agencies would add significance and value to learning and advocacy communications generated by a more meaningful pilot. A redesigned pilot would provide opportunities for trialling innovation such as alternative payment delivery systems, integration of stronger SBCC and diversified use of village health centre tablets (for example in digitising health registers). It would thereby consolidate the excellent work that has gone into recognising the importance of an “integrated package” of services alongside the cash transfer. The MCEG approach to integration is exemplary and should not be lost.

A more meaningful investment in a MCEG pilot would justify and benefit from the establishment of a dedicated Programme Management Unit (PMU) with a designated full-time team leader and small team of dedicated specialists, located within MoLSW and closely supporting the NSPC. This would mean that there was already in place a core technical unit that could react opportunistically at the first signs of increased Government commitment to the social welfare pillar.

## 6.2 Government line ministries

However, to justify further development partner support, it is essential that the Government demonstrate its commitment to the reforms that have been initiated by the. As a minimum, MoLSW must:

- Manifest its responsibility by giving official approval to the numerous manuals, tools and frameworks that have been developed under the UNJP.
- Continue the operational processes, in particular the regular meetings of the NSPC, that have been initiated.
- Negotiate with the Ministry of Finance to complete the necessary reforms on the CoA and to continue to work towards implementation of a Joint National Social Protection Fund.
- Ensure that the impetus of the training-of-trainers initiative is maintained, and that training is extended nationwide over time.

Finally, in terms of reciprocity, the Government needs to make a strong case to the development partners that it is fully committed, in the longer term, to a national programme of support to pregnant women and mothers of young infants, even if it is not in a position to make the necessary financial commitments in the short term. If it were able to offer assurances that the Government would commit at least matching funds at the end of a five-year period, then there is much more chance that a donor would contribute to the start-up costs and initial funding. There is little value in all the effort that have been taken so far in developing the NSPS unless there is a firm commitment to implement the key instruments, of which the MECG has been widely projected as the ‘flagship’.

## 6.3 UN Joint SDG Fund

One of the key lessons from the UNJP, which the broader UN should recognise, has been the important role of the UNRCO in programme design, reporting and resolving any incoherencies in approach. This engagement of the UNRCO should be a requirement for all UN joint programmes, whether funded through the Joint SDG Fund or not. The Evaluation Team has encountered other UN joint programmes which lacked the degree of collaboration manifested by the UNJP in Lao PDR. Similar joint initiatives in other countries appear essentially the result of a short term inter-agency truce to collaborate in the preparation of a joint proposal to access funding: once the funding is committed, each agency returns to execute its own independent components with little regard for complementarity or coherence. Of course, the UNJP in Lao PDR encountered internal challenges, which are inevitable when agencies with different skills, philosophies and mandates interact; but the fact that it overcame these to deliver an effective programme of support is testament both to the agency staff involved and, in no small part, to the role of the UNRCO in ensuring that problems were quickly identified and resolved.

In Laos, the UNRCO should host regular meetings with the entire UNCT and other international partners to coordinate the design and implementation and share lessons learnt. This could extend significantly further than just the areas of social protection tackled by the UNJP: there are a number of other aspects of social development in Lao PDR, such as disability inclusion, for example, where other UN agencies are currently leading the inter-agency collaboration, but which could be more appropriately coordinated by the UNRCO.

## 6.4 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Because of the low level of political will and fiscal commitment to the development of the social welfare pillar of the NSPS, a continuation of development partner support to the sector is justified if

## Recommendations

development partners are themselves convinced that an investment in social welfare is an investment in future wellbeing, resilience and prosperity. Presumably they do, since they initiated and engaged in the current programme.

DFAT has been engaging with social protection in Laos over the past decade, beginning with LARLP in 2012. This included the Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods (SPSL) component, which initiated policy dialogue with MoLSW on a mother and early childhood grant and undertook a detailed cost and benefit assessment. A follow-on initiative through DFAT, working with MoLSW, led to the design a mother and early childhood cash transfer pilot, which eventually led to their support to the UNJP. Through its past engagement and its funding of the MECG pilot, it is strongly urged that DFAT should consider continuing its support to the establishment of a mother and early childhood grant in Lao PDR. Through its track record, DFAT has established itself as a trusted and respected partner in the area of social protection and therefore has the opportunity to be a key driver of change.

DFAT support to a future MECG is also strongly justified by, and highly complementary with, its substantial on-going investments in primary education. Chronic malnutrition during early childhood, and especially the first 1000 days, causes irremediable damage to a child's development, physically manifested in Lao PDR's very high rates of stunting, but reflected in more fundamental cognitive (linguistic, psychological and intellectual) deficiencies. If a child is chronically malnourished, it will never reach its full intellectual potential, no matter how much is invested in improving the quality of education. The highest returns on investment in human capital development occur in pre-school years; before formal education starts. When high stunting rates are so pervasive, they have an impact on the economy and are a barrier to future economic growth. The only way to maximise investment in primary education is to address poverty, malnutrition and poor health before the formal education starts. This is what the MECG is designed to do. An important element is to build a convincing investment case, building from the analysis that the UN Joint Programme has initiated<sup>31</sup>.

Supporting the continuation of the MECG pilot also provides an entry point for DFAT support to improved wider national systems for implementing social welfare (e.g. for registration and enrolment, delivery of cash, integration with services, grievances, communications, M&E and so on), which could then be used in the longer term for social protection programmes that target other vulnerabilities (such as disability) and other life-course stages, and can underpin future shock response.

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<sup>31</sup> A 2013 study in Cambodia [CARD, 2013] estimated that more than half of young Cambodian children face higher than normal risk of death. More than 60,000 deaths over the next decade (i.e. around 30 per cent of all childhood mortality in Cambodia), are linked to the mother's or the child's nutrition status. This represents an economic burden today and into the future. The same study calculated that the annual losses in potential economic output associated with childhood malnutrition were equivalent to approximately USD 419 million or 2.6 per cent of total annual GDP in 2013 [CARD 2013], representing a loss to the economy of far more than the cost of implementing a comprehensive social protection floor, including a universal child grant for the first 1000 days! The same is even more likely to be true in Lao PDR, where stunting rates are even higher.

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## Annex 1 Terms of Reference

### TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTS.



Requesting Section: Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation

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#### **TITLE: Terms of Reference for the end line Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme "Leaving no one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR"**

##### **1. Country Context**

Lao PDR is a lower middle-income country with a GDP per capita of US\$2,460 (2018). The country has a population of 7.2 million of whom over a third (36.7 per cent) are under 15 years and only 3.7 per cent are 65 or over.

The economy has seen significant growth with GDP growth averaging 7.7 per cent over the last decade. However due to the economic impact of COVID-19, the Lao national GDP is expected to contract significantly, by 4.8 per cent in 2020 and 1.1 per cent in 2021 as estimated by World Bank. This may decline further in the case of a protracted economic crisis.

Poverty has fallen significantly (according to the national poverty measure) 23.4 per cent (2012) to 18.6 per cent in 2020. Research by UNICEF shows that 50 per cent of all children suffer from 3 or more indicators of deprivation further aggravated by persistent geographical disparities based on ethnicity, language, gender, age, educational attainment, disability, and social-economic status.

Malnutrition is a critical issue, with stunting affecting 33 per cent of children under five (2017). Stunting prevalence is lowest in Vientiane Capital (13.6 per cent) and highest in Phongsaly Province (54 per cent). Children in rural areas without roads, whose mothers have no education and from the poorest quintile are two to three times more likely to suffer from stunting than children in urban settings, with high educated mothers and from the richest quintile.

The maternal mortality rate also remains high, at 185 per 100,000 births (2017), the highest in the region. While both men and women have limited access to health services, especially in rural areas, due to women's child-bearing roles, this lack of access to services disproportionately impacts women and their risk of dying.

In Lao PDR, there are several challenges affecting the social protection system, i.e., the system is fragmented, lack of compliance and enforcement in the formal economy, limited coverage (e.g. there are no schemes specifically targeting people with disabilities), and inconsistent and unclear financing of non-contributory schemes.

Based on the Assessment-Based National Dialogue on Social Protection (ABND) conducted in Lao PDR 2015-2016 with support from the UN, while several schemes aim to provide access to nutrition, education and health care for children, due to the limited coverage and often inadequate amount of funding of these schemes, children do not yet enjoy adequate and guaranteed access to these essential goods and services.

Lao PDR is at the initial stages of developing its social protection system. Existing social protection provisions consist mainly of the following:<sup>32</sup>

- contributory social security for formal workers and voluntarily insured persons, including health insurance - National Social Security Fund (NSSF).
- National Health Insurance Scheme which provides almost universal coverage, including free health care for the poor, for those in maternity, and for children younger than five years.
- social assistance or social welfare, providing ad-hoc disaster relief and scattered in-kind support to specific vulnerable groups.
- education-related schemes providing free education, scholarships, and school meals.
- poverty reduction and livelihood schemes, such as those of the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF); and
- small-scale pilots of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) supporting education and health outcomes.

These schemes do not yet form part of an integrated on-budget strategic approach to social protection but are planned and implemented by diverse line ministries and agencies, often with donor funding and support. The formal social security insurance scheme under the NSSF covers workers for medical benefits; pensions; employment injury; occupational disease and non-work-related disease (including long term disability); sickness; maternity; and survivor's benefits. The NSSF provides health coverage to the formal public and private sector, while the National Health Insurance Board provides health care coverage to informal workers.

Only 1.6 per cent of GDP is allocated to social protection – a mere 0.7 per cent if health (0.9 per cent) is excluded. To date, Lao PDR's investment in social protection is still the lowest in the region and among the lowest in the world.

## **2. Background to the program to be evaluated**

This Terms of Reference (ToR) outlines the purpose and scope of an end of programme/project evaluation that aims to cover the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) "Leaving no one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR". The project aims to support the Government of Lao PDR to implement the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025, which defines a vision for sustainable access to social protection for all Lao people. It was adopted by Decree No.224/PM in April 2020. The UNJP supports the implementation of the strategy through an approach focused on system development and implemented through the MECG. The UNJP will contribute to the SDGs 1.3, 2.2, 16.9 and 17.3.

The JP is based on the new government-led National Social Protection Strategy with strong national institutional buy-in. The JP focuses on ensuring that SP funding is on-budget and that additional traditional and non-traditional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to implement the NSPS. The MECG acts as a model for SP provision, which can be tested and scaled nationally in the future. The learning from experience feeds into potential subsequent interventions targeting other vulnerable groups, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrants, and informal workers.

The innovative elements of this JP are:

- (i) the development of a consolidated system under the auspices of a single ministry that carries the unique mandate for social protection in Lao PDR,
- (ii) the link between cash transfers and other services, particularly community-based social welfare, child protection services, birth registration and parenting education and,

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<sup>32</sup> This section draws on the Assessment Based National Dialogue prepared by ILO in conjunction with the GoL.

(iii) the focus being placed on assuring that SP funding is on budget and that additional traditional and non-traditional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to sustainably implement the NSPS

The implementation of the UNJP was led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) in partnership with relevant ministries, provincial and district authorities, and the UN in Lao PDR. The implementation period is from January 2020 to June 2022.

The UNJP contributes to the implementation of the NSPS, which was adopted for the first time in Lao PDR. It is expected to lead to a position in 2022 where the GoL capacity to implement the NSPS and to roll out social protection coverage to further groups (including scaling up the MECG) is expanded, having developed the capacity of the National Social Protection Commission (NSPC) and other key partners, learned from the experience of the MECG pilot and developed a more sustainable financial basis for the social protection system. By creating the conditions to expand social protection coverage beyond 2022, the UNJP is also expected to contribute to accelerate Lao PDR's capacity to reach the targets expressed under SDGs 1.3 and 2.2.

The participating UN agencies in the Joint Programme are:

**ILO:** The lead agency which supports the implementation of the NSPS.

**UNICEF:** Supports the design and operationalization of an integrated cash transfers for pregnant women and children

**UNCDF:** Supports the government on PFM reforms and to develop a blended finance solution for the NSPS. Joint UN SDG fund and DFAT funds this initiative.

The direct beneficiaries of the UNJP are the Government and national partners involved in the implementation of the NSPS at central and sub-national levels, and pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months benefiting from the MECG program who will be receiving the cash transfer and the integrated social services and welfare package. It is planned to cover 2,000 pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months in three pilot districts (tentatively selected as Sanamxay and Phouvong districts in Attapeu province and Nong district in Savannakhet province).

### **Theory of Change (ToC)**

The theory of change (ToC) (annex 7) of the project is that implementing the activities identified in the results framework and work plan will lead to the outcomes which will involve strengthened GoL capacity and improved policy; proof-of-concept of the MECG and related services which will be scalable; and the development of a funding envelope and innovative financing options for the future social protection system. The JP will thus assist the Government to build an overall system capitalized through blending public sector budget, development assistance and non-traditional sources, to identify and test new channels for cash-transfers, immediately resulting in a positive impact on pregnant women, mothers, and children under 12 months multiplying its effects across SDGs targets.

The assumptions serving as the basis for this proposal are the following:

- Supporting the piloting of the MECG and respective monitoring/evaluation helps demonstrate the feasibility and impact of a cash transfer that can be introduced to legislators for additional funding that will secure buy-in and scale up of MECG.
- An integrated mechanism that associates cash and in-kind services is the best approach to enhance the impact of social protection services in child and family wellbeing, including the impact on chronic malnutrition and responsive parenting.
- The use of modern delivery options (including innovative and context-tailored payment mechanisms) will impact the efficiency, transparency and public perception of the system and enhance political support for the expansion of social protection.



- The design of an innovative funding mechanism is essential to create the pathway towards a sustainable system; contribute to a more coherent use of ODA and create conditions for additional investment from the Government and the national long term ownership of the system.

Both the policy and discrete financing areas of the project may be duly impacted upon by exogenous risks that reflect internal government decision-making and global economic trends respectively. Within this context two specific sets of assumptions have been identified during the design process in relation to the above-mentioned risks.

### **Key Expected results of the project**

The UNJP expects to achieve 3 transformative results in the national social protection system.

Transformative Result 1: By the end of the JP, enhance government planning, managerial and implementation capacities (including leadership and co-ordination) to implement the NSPS. This is essential to ensure that social protection is embedded in national plans, allowing for gradual but significant expansion of coverage.

Transformative Result 2: By the end of the JP, contribute to ensuring that social protection funding is on-budget and designing a mechanism whereby additional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to ensure sustainability of the NSPS.

Transformative Result 3: By the end of the JP, 2,000 pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months are benefiting from a new integrated welfare package consisting of the MECG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration. Once implemented, the integrated welfare package can provide a wholesome approach to graduating out of poverty, while the MECG infrastructure (such as beneficiary registration system, MIS, social worker network, payment system, among others) can act as a model to be adapted and scaled up in future, with the lessons feeding into subsequent interventions for other vulnerable groups like the elderly, people with disabilities, migrants and informal workers.

- Furthermore, it also seeks to achieve and strengthen coherence of the UNCT and cooperation among UN agencies in delivering support to national partners e.g. as was done through the development of joint UN policy recommendations on developing a shock-responsive social protection system to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

The specific outcomes are (i) strengthened government technical and fiscal capacity combined with improved policy environment for social protection, (ii) proof of concept of the MECG and related services, designed to be scalable and continual via the system's uptake by the Government

### **Outcome 1: Government planning, managerial and implementation capacity (including leadership and coordination) to implement the NSPS is enhanced**

- Output 1.1 – Members of the NSP Committee and other relevant national stakeholders better understand social protection-related topics and how programs are designed
- Output 1.2 – Awareness and understanding of Government officials of the impact of social protection and domestic resource allocation is enhanced
- Output 1.3 – NSPS M&E Framework developed and aligned with SDG 1.3 global measurement methodology
- Output 1.4 – Mechanisms for predictable public sector budget allocations and on-budget conduits for ODA earmarked budget support and IDA associated grants or loans are developed within the PFMR framework and introduction of the new PFMIS
- Output 1.5 – NSPF proof of concept, development frameworks and implementation pathways formulated including NSPF capitalization plan to provide viable funding for the implementation of the NSPS.

This outcome will contribute to SDG targets 1.3 and 17.3.

**Outcome 2: At least 2,000 pregnant women and children under 12 months are benefiting from a new integrated package of welfare services, including the new MECG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration.**

- Output 2.1: Roadmap for the design and implementation of the MECG concluded.
- Output 2.2: MIS for the MECG designed.
- Output 2.3: Institutions and different agents prepared for the implementation of the MECG.
- Output 2.4: MECG piloted in three of the poorest districts.
- Output 2.5: MECG M&E framework developed and being implemented

### **3. Objectives, purpose, and scope of the Evaluation**

By gathering the lessons learned during the programme implementation and the proposition of strategic and operational, this Evaluation aims to inform the implementation and allocation of resources for similar programmes in the future and the Government SP initiatives and policies.

The key objectives of the final Evaluation are:

- a. To assess the extent to which the expected results have been attained during the implementation of the programme. In particular, the Evaluation shall provide insights on (i) the contribution to improving the situation of vulnerable groups identified in the JP document (ProDoc), with a focus on disability, (ii) contribution to SDG acceleration, and (iii) contribution to UN reforms, including, UNCT coherence.
- b. Assess the added value of a joint UN approach to programming
- c. To document good practices and generate evidence-based lessons and recommendations to strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation.
- d. Explore sustainability of the Mother and Early Childhood Grants project interventions in terms of the likelihood to be sustained, scaled up or continue after project life cycle
- e. To identify gaps, critical lessons learned, and main challenges, and provide recommendations on addressing these challenges and pursuing opportunities and recommend key practices that should be incorporated in the future.

The Evaluation will mainstream how human rights, child rights, and gender equity have been addressed within the JP.

#### **Evaluation scope**

The Evaluation will focus on the implementation of the UNJP between January 2020 to June 2022. The Evaluation will cover the UNJP conceptualization, design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of results and will engage all programme stakeholders. The Evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the programme; explore the key factors that have contributed to the achievement or non-achievement of planned results including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic; addressing crosscutting issues of gender equality and women's empowerment and human rights; and forging partnership at different levels, including with Government, donors, UN agencies, and communities.

The Evaluation will also consult key stakeholders from national institutions, development agencies, implementing partners, CSOs at the national and sub-national levels. Depending on COVID-19 restrictions, the base of work will be done remotely.

**Key users and intended use**

User	Intended use
<b>Primary users</b>	
UN Country Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability and learning from the UNJP, to inform the design and implementation of future SP/JP interventions.</li> <li>• Inform decision-making for the UNCT in terms of programmatic design and resource allocation based on assessment of performance.</li> <li>• Inform UNCT on how to most effectively support the Government of Lao PDR and key stakeholders to improve SP.</li> </ul>
Line Ministries – Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability on achievements of the initiative</li> <li>• Inform on UNCT’s commitment to continue improving its programming in support SP in Lao</li> <li>• Reflect on Evaluation findings in as much as they also relate to jointly implemented programmes</li> <li>• Engage together with UNCT in the response to the Evaluation recommendations</li> <li>• Provide the necessary information for potential scale up of the interventions to other provinces and districts.</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary users</b>	
Joint SDG Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability and learning from the UNJP</li> <li>• Inform on areas that need support and improvements to better support results for SDGs and SP that can be used in funding decisions</li> <li>• Provide objective evidence on UNCT's commitment to learning and improving social protection in Lao PDR</li> </ul>
DFAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide accountability and learning from the UNJP</li> <li>• Inform on areas that need support and improvements to better support results for SDGs and SP that can be used in funding decisions</li> <li>• Provide objective evidence on UNCT's commitment to learning and improving social protection in Lao PDR.</li> </ul>

**4. Evaluation questions and criteria**

The Evaluation will apply the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The Evaluation criteria and questions will analyze the extent to which human rights, child rights, and gender equality and equity have been addressed within the program.

The Evaluation will provide evidence-based analysis to answer the following questions.

**Relevance:**

- To what extent was the programme design in line with the national development priorities, the national social protection strategy, the needs of national stakeholders and beneficiaries?
- Is the ToC for programme components adequately described and is there clarity of logic across the results levels?
- To what extent are results, indicators, and activities measurable?
  - Are indicators in place? Have the indicators been defined (e.g. numerators and denominators) with clearly understood standards? Has a target value for the indicator been provided at Outcome and Output levels?

- Are the indicators reliable for decision making for the programme improvements?
- To what extent are cross-cutting priorities (namely: Gender, Disability and DRR) and equity measurable against clear targets?
- To what extent did the program design target persons with disabilities?
- To what extent have the implementing partners participating in the joint programme contributed added value to solve the development challenges stated in the programme document?
- In what way had the COVID-19 pandemic affected project relevance and to what extent did the project make adjustments to remain or to be even more relevant?
  
- **Efficiency** To what extent has the programme delivered results in an economic and timely way. Put it #1 EQ for the criteria?
- What factors have contributed to increase/decrease the efficiency of the programme?
  - What type of (administrative, financial, coordination and managerial) obstacles did the joint programme face and to what extent have these affected its efficiency?
- To what extent did the programme activities reinforce synergies amongst UN agencies to achieve optimal utilization of available resources?
  - Did the programme complement other initiatives (by other NGOs, national organizations, local Government)?
- To what extent was the joint programme's management model (governance and decision-making structure, i.e. lead agency, Joint Programme Coordinator, Programme Advisory Committee and its Secretariat, financial management and allocation of resources, i.e. one work plan, one budget) efficient in comparison to the development results attained?

**Effectiveness:**

- To what extent have the expected results been realized through the programme?
  - Did the programme reach the expected targets, indicators and results? To what extent were the 3 transformative results achieved?
  - To what extent are the partners and intended beneficiaries satisfied with the results?
- What factors have contributed to the programme results achieved.
- To what extent has the JP contributed to accelerating the SDGs at the national level?
- To what extent has the joint programme contributed to the advancement and the progress of fostering national ownership processes and outcomes (the design and implementation of National Development Plans, Public Policies, UNDAF, etc.)
- To which extent did the program contribute to support inclusion of persons with disabilities via:
  - Ensuring basic income security
  - Coverage of health care costs, including rehabilitation and assistive devices
  - Coverage of disability-related costs, including community support services
  - Facilitate access to inclusive early childhood development, education, and work/livelihood

**Impact:**

- What is the likely impact (positive or negative, intended, and unintended) on Government and national partners involved in the implementation of the NSPS at central and sub-national level?
- What is the likely impact (positive or negative, intended, and unintended) on partners and stakeholders?
- What lessons can be learned from the best practices' achievements, challenges, and constraints of the program in relation to "strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation"?

**Sustainability:**

- To what extent are the intervention results likely to continue after the funding has been withdrawn?
- What mechanisms were set up to ensure the continuity of the programme's activities and results?

- To what extent have institutions and stakeholders taken and shown ownership of the action objectives? Are there willingness and capacity to sustain financing at the end of the intervention? To what extent are they actively engaged in the activities of the action?

#### **Humans Rights approach, Gender equity , disabilities and COVID-19 response**

- To what extent human rights, child rights, climate change, DRR, and gender equality and equity have been addressed within the program?
- To what extent is the program and intervention disability-inclusive? To what extent did support to data collection and analysis, registries, and information system feature disability?
- What were the program’s response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic? What were the lessons learned from this?

#### **5. Evaluation methodology<sup>33</sup> and approach**

Based on the objectives of the Evaluation, this section indicates broad guidelines on methods and processes for the Evaluation. Methodological rigor will be given significant consideration in the assessment of proposals. Hence bidders are invited to interrogate the approach and methodology proffered in the ToR and improve on it or propose an approach they deem more appropriate. In their proposal, the bidder should clearly refer to triangulation, sampling plan, ethical consideration, and methodological limitations and mitigation measures. Bidders are encouraged to also demonstrate methodological expertise in evaluating initiatives related to the focus areas.

This Evaluation should follow a participatory, utilization-focused, and theory-based approach, with mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) of data collection and analysis. Under a utilization-focused approach, the Evaluation will facilitate senior management decision-making on developing future initiatives.

The Evaluation team will need to draw on available quantitative data from recent publications, reviews, research, studies, progress reports, situation reports, national datasets, surveys, and other sources. Bidders will be encouraged to propose any feasible stakeholder consultation approaches that could generate useful quantitative data on key issues and help form qualitative inquiry areas.

Multiple and high-quality data collection and analysis methods with a range of stakeholders should be used to facilitate triangulation of data. These may include document review, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, a survey with frontline workers/beneficiaries, and consultative workshops or focus group discussions. Key stakeholders to be involved in the data collection should be selected from Joint SDG Fund and other UN staff, key national and sub-national government agencies, and other relevant partners such as civil society organizations/NGOs. Case studies may also be considered to understand recurrent patterns.

In consultation with the Evaluation manager and reference group, the selected consultant(s) will develop a detailed methodology for the assignment, with prioritized Evaluation questions from those in the framework above. The methodology will be further refined in the inception phase, based on the findings of the Evaluability Assessment and consideration of constraints posed by the country context.

The Evaluation Team will be expected to conform to guidelines and standards set by the UN the [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\) Norms and Standards for Evaluation \(2016\)](#), [UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN system \(2008\)](#), [UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation \(2020\)](#), [UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator \(2018\)](#), and [UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation \(2014\)](#).

#### **Data collection methods**

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<sup>33</sup> Bidders are required to present their best ideas as part of the technical proposal. The quality of the methodology section will, together with the quality of the proposed team, determine whether a bidder is deemed technically qualified. Consequently, this Methodology section is intentionally under-detailed.

At a minimum, the Evaluation will draw on the following methods:

- **Comprehensive desk review** of available documentation – UNJP Implementation Strategy and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, annual reports, UNJP communication tools, and products, UNJP support materials and training, UNJP guidelines, researches, and studies. Key government documents also need to be reviewed, SDG reports, government statistics and publications.
- **Stakeholders mapping and analysis.** It is useful to identify and categorize the programme key stakeholders, their role, and level of involvement in achieving the objectives. This mapping can also aid when sampling and targeting the information sources for this Evaluation.
- **Interviews and focus group discussion.** It is important to note that data collection might need to be done remotely in case of travel/ movement restrictions due to COVID-19. Innovative and appropriate remote data collection methods need to be proposed and considered from the onset. Given the COVID-19 context, the inception phase will occur without field visits from the Evaluation team. According to the COVID-19 situation evolution, the Evaluation team might be able to access local areas during the data collection. In case that is not feasible, consultation with local stakeholders and beneficiaries shall be made remotely.
  - The Evaluation team shall conduct individual key informant interviews with staff representatives of UN agencies, government officials, local authorities, implementing partners, Civil society organizations, NGOs, beneficiaries, community leaders, and other partners (the bidder shall indicate the field work and provinces to visit for data consultation).
- **Household survey.** A survey can be launched to complement the evidence collected through the above-mentioned data collection tools.

Data collection and analysis should be human rights-based and gender-sensitive. Any data collected should be disaggregated by age, gender, state/region, disability, etc., where possible. Data triangulation will be of crucial importance. Data analysis should also include aspects of gender, equity, and human rights into consideration.

A sampling strategy should be included in the Technical Proposal, setting out how institutions and organizations, and different stakeholder groups will be sampled. This applies to both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

### **Gender and Human Rights, Child Rights**

Human Rights, child rights, and gender equality will be incorporated in the Evaluation through a mainstreaming approach to these issues in the Evaluation questions, data collection processes, and analysis. In the conclusions of the Evaluation, the Evaluation Team will draw out specific findings and recommendations on human rights, child rights, and gender equity. The conduct of the Evaluation will be guided by the UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation (2014).

### **Ethical considerations**

The bidder will set out how they expect the Evaluation process to be designed and undertaken in accordance with ethical guidelines as set out in UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020). During the Evaluation process, full compliance with all UNEG ethical guidelines will be required. All informants should be offered the option of confidentiality for all methods used. Dissemination or exposure of results and any interim products must follow the rules agreed upon in the contract. In general, unauthorized disclosure is prohibited. Any sensitive issues or concerns should be raised, as soon as they are identified, with the Evaluation management team. (See annex 6 for Ethical Code of Conduct)

### **DELIVERABLES**

- i. An inception report presents the short evaluability assessment, and the complete methodology approach to conducting the work, with all tools fully drafted. All design issues under discussion to that point to be answered, any revisions to the issues and questions, and issues of reference group role and supervisory quality assurance.

The Inception Report will be key in confirming a mutual understanding of what is to be evaluated, including additional insights into executing the Evaluation. At this stage, Evaluators will refine and verify Evaluation questions, confirm the scope of the Evaluation, further improve on the methodology proposed in the ToR, and their own Evaluation proposal to strengthen its rigor and develop and validate Evaluation instruments.

The report will include, among other elements: i) short evaluability assessment, ii) Evaluation purpose and scope, confirmation of objectives of the Evaluation; iii) Evaluation criteria and questions; iv) Evaluation methodology (i.e., sampling criteria, stakeholders mapping), along with a description of data collection methods and data sources (incl. a rationale for their selection), v) an Evaluation matrix that identifies descriptive and normative questions and criteria for evaluating evidence, data analysis methods and a data analysis plan, a discussion on how to enhance the reliability and validity of Evaluation conclusions, a description of the quality review process, a discussion on the limitations of the methodology and ethical considerations; vi) proposed structure of the final report; vii) Evaluation work plan, and deliverables timeline; viii) detailed Evaluation budget; ix) annexes (i.e., draft data collection instruments, for example, questionnaires, with a data collection toolkit, matrix for Evaluation questions, data collection toolkit, data analysis framework); and x) a summary of the Evaluation process (Evaluation briefing note) for external communication purposes;

- ii. Presentation with preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations. After the data collection process, the Evaluation team shall present the preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations that can feed into the CP prioritization process.

The presentation should include findings from the desk review and data collection (primary and secondary), with an initial attempt to triangulate findings. The presentation should also present a matrix of data collected for responding to each Evaluation question and point to gaps that challenged the data collection phase.

- iii. Draft and final report. The report shall comply with the UNEG Evaluation standards of ideally 40 pages but not more than 50 plus executive summary and annexes (the Executive Summary both in English and Lao) that will be revised until approved.
- iv. An Infographic with the main Evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned. That is distinct from the executive Summary in the Evaluation report and it is intended for a broader, non-technical and non-UN audience. The infographic shall be produced in both English and Lao.

Important notes:

- i. Monitoring deliverables about work progress are not listed but will be periodically required.
- ii. Page limits, if any, to be established during the inception period. In general, there will not be artificial limits, but the report should aim for conciseness, readability, and visual appeal.
- iii. All deliverables must be in professional-level standard English, and they must be language-edited/proof-read by a native speaker.

## 6. Duration

## Annex 1: Terms of Reference

It is expected that the full Evaluation process will last six months. Nevertheless, Evaluation deliverables will be produced and available throughout the process:

Step	Timing	Due date (indicative)
Kick off telecon / Videocon	As soon as possible after the team is contracted	First week in Feb 2022
Desk review - Development of the draft inception report	Two weeks after kick-off	Third week in Feb 2022
Comments and QA on inception report draft (including ethical clearance for data collection tools)	One week after the draft submitted	Last week in Feb 2022
Final inception report with obtained ethical clearance	One week after the comments	First week in Mar 2022
Pilot data collection tools	One week after the IR is approved	Third week in Mar 2022
Adjust data collection tools	One week after the piloting	Last week in Mar 2022
Data collection: KIIs, FGDs, survey	1 month after inception report	April – May 2022
Draft Evaluation report	Two weeks after data collection is finalized	Last week in May 2022
Comments and QA on draft	Two weeks after submission of draft	Second week in June 2022
Final report produced	Two weeks after comments	End of June 2022
Infographic and an animated video	Two weeks after comments	Second week in July 2022

### 7. Qualification requirements or Specialized skills/experience Required:

This contract will be awarded to an organization and not to an individual or team of individuals not sponsored by an institution.

A consortium of 2 or more institutions may make a joint bid. In this case, there must be a lead institution named that will be the sole point of contact with UN for contract management purposes.

The firm must have a history of working in Lao. If a consortium, at least one partner must have a history of working in Lao.

#### Team Leader

##### a) Mandatory requirements

- Master's degree in International Development, Social/Public policy, Public Administration, Development Programme & Evaluation, or any related social science discipline.
- A minimum of 12 years of overall professional experience
- Excellent understanding of evaluation principles and methodologies, including capacity in an array of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods
- A minimum of 8 evaluations led at the program and/or outcome levels with international organizations.
- Experience in conducting evaluations for UN agencies or major bilateral donor country programs, and familiarity with UNEG Norms and Standards
- Strong English report writing skills and a track record of producing high quality reports



**b) Desirable requirements**

- Experience in conducting joint programme evaluations of UN organizations is strongly preferred
- Previous experience of working in Lao PDR is strongly preferred
- Experience in leading and managing SDG program evaluations is strongly preferred
- Ability to communicate in Lao with professional standard is an asset, if not, the firm(s) shall provide a translator for interviews when needed

**Team member**

**a) Mandatory requirements**

- Master's degree in International Development, Public Administration, Development Programme & Evaluation, or any related social science discipline.
- Minimum 5 years of technical expertise in the field of evaluation focused on international development, development programming, and implementation.
- Proven experience in conducting evaluations of programmes with international organizations.
- Experience in implementing a range of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and methods in programme evaluations.

**b) Desirable requirements**

- Preferably, the team member should be a national consultant based in Lao PDR. He/she needs to have a good command of Lao in both written and spoken communication.
- Knowledge of the United Nations System mandate and the political, cultural, and economic contexts of the region and the country.

Given the COVID-19 situation, it is desired that both team members are based in Lao, if not possible, at least one team member shall be based in Lao, and the technical proposal shall detail in the methodology how to conduct the process remotely.

In the review of the RFP, while adequate consideration will be given to the technical methodology, significant weighting will be given to the quality, experience and relevance of individuals who will be involved in the Evaluation.

**8. Evaluation process and methods**

Each proposal will be assessed first on its technical merits and subsequently on its price. In making the final decision, the UNCT considers both **Technical and Financial Proposals**. The Evaluation Team first reviews the Technical Proposals followed by a review of the Financial Proposals of the technically compliant firms. The proposal obtaining the highest overall score after adding the Technical and Financial Proposals scores together that offers the best value for money will be recommended for the awarding of the contract.

**The Technical Proposal should include but not be limited to the following:**

**a) Request for Proposals for Services Form**

**b) Presentation of the Bidding Institution** or institutions if a consortium (maximum two institutions will be accepted as part of the consortium), including:

- Name of the institution.
- Date and country of registration/incorporation.
- Summary of corporate structure and business areas.
- Corporate directions and experience.
- Location of offices or agents relevant to this proposal.
- Number and type of employees.

- In case of a consortium of institutions, the above-listed elements shall be provided for each consortium members in addition to the signed consortium agreement; and
- In case of a consortium, one only must be identified as the organization lead in dealing with the UNCT.

c) **Narrative Description of the Bidding Institution's Experience and Capacity** in the following areas:

- CPEs or equivalent for UN agency
- Strategic evaluations of complex programs for UN agencies or major bilateral donor Country Programmes
- Previous assignments in developing countries in general, but preferably in Lao PDR
- Previous and current assignments using UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation.
- General work plan based on the one proposed in the ToR, with comments and proposed adjustments, if any; and
- Detailed timetable by activity (it must be consistent with the general work plan and the financial proposal).

d) **Relevant References** of the proposer (past and ongoing assignments) in the past five years. UN may contact references persons for feedback on services provided by the proposers.

e) **Samples or Links to Samples of Previous Relevant Work** listed as reference of the proposer (at least three), on which the proposed key personnel directly and actively contributed or authored.

f) **Methodology**. It should minimize repeating what is stated in the ToR. There is no minimum or maximum length. If in doubt, ensure sufficient detail.

g) **Work Plan**, which will include as a minimum requirement the following:

- General work plan based on the one proposed in the ToR, with comments and proposed adjustments, if any; and
- Detailed timetable by activity (it must be consistent with the general work plan and the financial proposal).

h) **Evaluation Team**:

- Summary presentation of proposed experts against the required qualifications and experience described in ToR.
- Description of support staff (number and profile of research and administrative assistants etc.).
- Level of effort of proposed experts by activity (it must be consistent with the financial proposal); and
- CV of each expert proposed to carry out the Evaluation.

The Technical Proposal will be submitted in hard copy and electronic (PDF) format.

Please note that the assignment's duration will be from March 2022 to June 2022, and it is foreseen that the Team Leader and the Team Expert/Team Members will devote roughly half of their time to the Evaluation. The presence of a conflict of interest of any kind (e.g., having worked for or partnered with UNCT in Lao on the design or implementation phase of the current Country Programme will automatically disqualify prospective candidates from consideration).

**The Financial Proposal should include but not be limited to the following:**

- a) **Resource Costs**: Daily rate multiplied by the number of days of the experts involved in the Evaluation.
- b) **Conference or Workshop Costs (if any)**: Indicate nature and breakdown if possible.
- c) **Travel Costs**: All travel costs should be included as a lump sum fixed cost. For all travel costs, the UNJP will pay as per the lump sum fixed costs provided in the proposal. A breakdown of the lump sum travel costs should be provided in the financial proposal.

d) **Any Other Costs (if any):** Indicate nature and breakdown.

e) **Recent Financial Audit Report:** Report should have been carried out in the past two years and be certified by a reputable audit organization.

The financial proposal must be fully separated from the technical proposal. Costs will be formulated in US\$ and free of all taxes.

Each valid proposal will be assessed by an Evaluation panel first on its technical merits and subsequently on its price. The weight allocated to the technical proposal is 70 % (i.e. 70 out of 100 points). To be further considered for the financial Evaluation a minimum score of 48 points is required. Only proposals with a score of 48 or more points in the technical Evaluation will be financially evaluated (i.e. the financial proposal will be opened). For further details and the distribution of points kindly refer to **table 1** below.

The weight allocated to the financial proposal is 30 % as per the following: the maximum number of 30 points will be allotted to the lowest technically compliant proposal. All other price proposals will receive points in inverse proportion to the lowest price. Commercial proposals should be submitted on an all-inclusive basis for providing the contracted deliverables as described in the TOR.

The proposal(s) obtaining the overall highest score after adding the scores for the technical and financial proposals is the proposal that offers best value for money and will be recommended for award of the contract.

**Table 1: Evaluation Criteria and distribution of points**

CATEGORY	Max. Points
<b>1. OVERALL RESPONSE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of and responsiveness to the requirements <b>(5)</b></li> <li>• Understanding of scope, objectives, and completeness of response <b>(10)</b></li> </ul>	<b>15</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of the proposed approach and methodology <b>(10)</b></li> <li>• Quality of proposed implementation plan, i.e., how the bidder will undertake each task, and time-schedules <b>(10)</b></li> <li>• Risk assessment - recognition of the peripheral problems and methods to prevent and manage peripheral problems/quality controls <b>(5)</b></li> </ul>	<b>25</b>
<b>3. PROPOSED TEAM and ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team members - relevant experience, skills &amp; competencies <b>(10)</b></li> <li>• Professional expertise, knowledge and experience with similar programmes, contracts, clients, and consulting assignments <b>(20)</b></li> </ul>	<b>30</b>
<b>TOTAL POINTS FOR TECHNICAL PROPOSAL</b> (min. passing score = 49 points)	<b>70</b>
<b>4. FINANCIAL PROPOSAL – as per Annex C</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full marks are allocated to the lowest priced proposal. The financial scores of the other proposals will be in inverse proportion to the lowest price.</li> </ul>	<b>30</b>
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>100</b>

## 9. Administrative issues

- Bidders are requested to provide a detailed technical proposal in **Annex C** – Technical proposal response form.
- Bidders are requested to provide a detailed cost proposal in **Annex D** – Financial proposal response form.
- The bidder is requested to provide an all-inclusive cost in the financial proposal. The bidder is reminded to factor in all cost implications for the required service/assignment.
- The bidder is required to include the estimate cost of travel in the financial proposal noting that i) travel cost shall be calculated based on the most direct route and economy class travel, regardless of the length of travel and ii) costs for accommodation, meal and incidentals shall not exceed applicable daily subsistence allowance (DSA) rates, depending on the location, as promulgated by the International Civil Service Commission (<https://icsc.un.org/>).
- Unexpected travels shall be treated as above.

### **EVALUATION MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENT**

The following summaries set out the main roles and responsibilities for those involved in the Evaluation.

**The Evaluation Team (ET):** leading role and responsibilities include:

#### **Team Leader**

- Delivering against the Evaluation requirements set out in the ToR and ensuring these are compliant with UN standards
- Ensuring deliverables (see above) are completed within agreed timeframes, budget, and quality standards
- Responding to, and factoring in, stakeholder feedback in redrafting deliverables

#### **Team Member**

- Contributing technical inputs to all deliverables and helping ensure requirements & standards are met
- Assuming lead role in specific technical and / or cross cutting areas as assigned by the team leader, and contributing analysis on these areas

#### **The Evaluation Manager**

The RC shall organize the Evaluation management and UNICEF will administer the process jointly with ILO.

Primary functions include:

- Help develop scoping for the Evaluation
- Set out and update a detailed plan for the process, and day to day management and communication of this process with stakeholders
- Leads on recruitment of the Evaluation Team, and provides supervision and support to the ET
- Day-to-day oversight and management of the Evaluation process and budget, in coordination with EMG members and other key stakeholders. Leading on quality assurance throughout the process, assuring the quality and independence of the Evaluation and guarantee its alignment with UNEG Norms and Standards and Ethical Guidelines and other relevant procedures, managing stakeholder engagement in this (gathering and collating feedback), and ET performance against ToR deliverables

#### **The Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)**

An Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) should be set up and comprise a small group of key UN internal stakeholders led by the RC and including the in-country PUNOs. Primary responsibilities include:

- Make decisions on scope, timing, and resourcing of the Evaluation
- Conduct consultations with Government and partners as appropriate
- Contributions to, and approval of, the ToR
- Select candidates for the ERG (see below)

- Ensuring lists of contacts, data and information is prepared for the ET, organising the in-country introduction of the Evaluation team, arranging interviews, briefings, meetings
- Agreeing and scheduling field visits; providing logistical and admin support
- Contributing to Quality Assurance through comments and feedback on draft deliverables
- Develop the Evaluation Management Response in consultation with stakeholders, with the Representative signing off on this and monitoring progress in the coming two years

### Quality Assurance

Quality assurance through the process will be undertaken by:

- **UNICEF in consultation with ILO**, leading on quality assurance of all deliverables, will provide quality assurance in line with UNEG Norms and Standards and Ethical Guidelines and other relevant procedures checking that the Evaluation methodologies, findings and conclusions are relevant and recommendations are implementable, and contribute to the dissemination of the Evaluation findings and follow-up on the management response. S/he will review the initial deliverables (such as draft inception report, first draft of the final report) and work with ET on necessary revisions to ensure the deliverables meet minimum quality standards. Once the minimum standards are met, the Evaluation Manager requests feedback from stakeholders, consolidates all comments from Reference Group, Regional Evaluation Advisor and other RO staff and key stakeholders on a response matrix and requests the ET to indicate actions taken against each comment in the production of the penultimate, and final draft.
- **ERG** provides provide comments and substantive feedback to ensure the quality – from a technical point of view – of key Evaluation deliverables including the inception report and draft report.
- **The RC is** responsible for final quality assurance checking and final sign off on all deliverables of the Evaluation

### 10. Payment Schedule

No.	Payment	Tentative schedule	Remarks
1.	30%	One month from the start	upon approval of the inception report
2.	30%	Three months from the start	upon receipt of draft versions of all deliverables
3.	40%	Six months from the start	upon acceptance of all final deliverables

- The payment schedule must be based on completed deliverables.
- If the bidder wishes to propose an alternative payment schedule, it must be included in the financial proposal. The final payment schedule is to be reviewed and agreed with Joint SDG Fund.
- Payment terms 30 days net upon receipt of approved invoice.

### 11. Any other Information

#### Annex 1: Inception Report structure

The Inception Report ensures that the Evaluation team has a clear understanding of the TOR of the Evaluation. It translates the TOR into an operational plan which determines how the Evaluation will be carried out. The Inception Report forms the agreement between the Evaluation Manager and the Evaluation team on the operational plan for the Evaluation. The structure for the inception report is:

- **Table of contents**
- **Abbreviations and acronyms**
- **Introduction**
  - Purpose of the Country Programme Evaluation
  - Scope of the Evaluation
- **Country context**
  - Highlight key features of the country context which are relevant to Social Protection

- Identify any key changes in context during the period being covered by the Evaluation (e.g. any conflicts or disasters, major changes in policies affecting children etc.)
- **UN Joint Programme**
  - UN Joint programme in context of UN response
  - UN Joint programme strategy, objectives, goals, reach and achievements
- **Stakeholder analysis**
  - Identify key stakeholders, their interests and how they will be involved in the Evaluation
- **Evaluation Approach and Methodology**
  - State the Evaluation approach and rationale for the approach with reference to the degree of stakeholder participation
  - State the Evaluation questions which the Evaluation will address; if these differ substantially from those noted in the Terms of Reference, indicate why they have been changed.
  - Indicators
  - Sources of data and data collection methods
  - Data analysis approach and tools to be used to answer the Evaluation questions
  - (If applicable) Sampling strategy or plan and rationale for it
  - Limitations
- **Quality assurance**
  - Sets out the key quality assurance milestones, processes, and responsibilities for QA of the Evaluation
- **Work Plan**
  - Indicate timing of key steps and deliverables for the Evaluation
  - Outline responsibilities of each member of the Evaluation team and level of effort
- **Annexes**
  - Terms of Reference
  - Bibliography
  - Evaluation matrix (Evaluation questions, indicators, data sources and data collection methods)
  - Draft data collection tools/ instruments (e.g. Key Informant Interview protocols, draft survey instruments)

## Annex 2: Evaluation Report Format

Report length: 40-50 pages excluding annexes

- **Executive Summary (up to 4 pages)**
- **Acknowledgments**
- **Table of contents**
- **Abbreviations and acronyms**
- **Map**
- **Introduction (6-7 pages)**
  - Purpose of the Country Programme Evaluation
  - Scope of the Evaluation
  - Methodology and approach to the Evaluation
- **Country context and UNJP (6-7 pages)**
  - Draw from the appropriate sections of the Inception Report, with relevant updates based on the subsequent fieldwork and analysis
- **Findings (25-30 pages)**
  - Answers to each of the Evaluation questions
- **Conclusions (5- 6 pages)**
- **Lessons (3-4 pages)**
- **Recommendations (3-4 pages)**
- **Annexes**



## *Annex 1: Terms of Reference*

- Terms of Reference
- Inception Report including Evaluation Matrix
- Bibliography
- (As appropriate) methodological tools (including the reconstructed Theory of Change)

## Annex 2 Evaluation Matrix

Criterion	Evaluation question	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Sources of information	Collection methods
Efficiency	In what way had the COVID-19 pandemic affected Programme implementation?	Evidence of adoption of COVID-19 mitigation strategies	Specific changes to implementation made in response to COVID-19	National policy and strategy documents Documents and frameworks of the Programme	Document review KIIs FGDs
	What factors have contributed to increase/decrease the efficiency of the Programme? What type of (administrative, financial, coordination and managerial) obstacles did the joint programme face and to what extent have these affected its efficiency?	Evidence of successes and failures during implementation; the reasons for these; and reactions to them	Identification of challenges and achievements in terms of operations, disbursement, collaboration, etc.	Meeting minutes, e-mails, information from interviews and FGDs Quarterly reports; annual reports	
	<b>To what extent did the Programme activities reinforce synergies amongst UN agencies to achieve optimal utilization of available resources?</b>	Evidence of collaboration between UN agencies	Joint publications Joint tools Joint communications		
	Did the Programme complement other initiatives	Evidence in the programmatic frameworks	Specific reference to other initiatives by partners		



Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Criterion	Evaluation question	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Sources of information	Collection methods
	(by other NGOs, national organizations, local Government)?	and documents that the Programme is explicitly aligned with government priorities and other complementary initiatives	Changes to design and implementation in response to other initiatives		
Effectiveness	To what extent have the UN agencies and implementing partners participating in the joint programme contributed added value to solve the development challenges stated in the programme document?	Complementary roles of different UN partners	Evidence of agreements to collaborate and sharing of responsibilities according to comparative advantage  Joint reports and other outputs published by more than one agency		
	To what extent have the expected results been realized through the Programme? Did the Programme reach the expected targets, indicators and results? To what extent were the 3 transformative results achieved?	Achievement of targets in the results framework	Reports of progress against results framework indicators		
	To what extent are the partners and intended	Degree of expressed satisfaction with programme results	Expressed satisfaction from key stakeholders		

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Criterion	Evaluation question	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Sources of information	Collection methods
	beneficiaries satisfied with the results?				
	What factors have contributed to the Programme results achieved?	Evidence of successful interventions	Reports/minutes of capacity building, research, communications outputs, etc.		
	<b>To what extent has the UNJP contributed to accelerating the SDGs at the national level?</b>	Progress made towards achievement of targeted SDGs (1.3, 2.2, 16.9 and 17.3)	Achievement of progress against specified targets (SDGs 1.3, 2.2, 16.9 and 17.3)		
	What lessons can be learned from the best practices' achievements, challenges, and constraints of the Programme in relation to "strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy 2025 implementation"?	Evidence of direct contributions to the process of NSPS implementation	Publication of Roadmap, costed implementation plan, public events, M&E framework		
Sustainability	To what extent are the intervention results likely to continue after the funding has been withdrawn?	Evidence of participation/consultation of government stakeholders in the development of the Programme	Number of government participants in the development of the Programme; references to government participation and/or comments received		

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Criterion	Evaluation question	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Sources of information	Collection methods
		Evidence of Government ownership of objectives  Degree of engagement by Government staff	Business plan, pathway report, debt financing strategy and medium term expenditure forecast for NSPS		
	What mechanisms were set up to ensure the continuity of the Programme's activities and results?	Legislation, plans and budgets agreed for future continuation and expansion  Adoption of programme outputs by Government	National budgets and accounts  Legislation  Embedded programme outputs in government IT systems/databases		
Gender	To what extent has gender equality and equity been addressed within the program?	Evidence of specific attention to gender equality and equity	Research on gender issues published and reflected in NSPS costed plan and M&E framework  Disaggregated data on numbers of beneficiaries, trainees, etc.		
Human rights	To what extent have human rights and child rights been addressed within the program?	Evidence of specific attention to human rights and child rights	Debates and discussion on human rights approach to inclusive social protection		

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Criterion	Evaluation question	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Sources of information	Collection methods
Disability	To what extent have disability and inclusion been addressed within the program?	Evidence of specific attention to disability	Systems in place for identification and registration of disability		
Shock-responsiveness	To what extent has shock response been addressed within the program?	Evidence of lessons learnt from COVID-19 response  Degree to which shock-responsiveness was built into MCEG design	Lessons learnt analysis  Documents referring to adaptive/shock-responsive social protection  Design document of MCEG		

## Annex 3 List of persons met

Key Informant / Group	Evaluation Team Member(s) <sup>34</sup>
<b>UN Resident Coordinator's Office</b>	
Mr. Matthew David Johnson-Idan, Senior Economist and UNJP Focal Point <a href="mailto:matthew.johnson-idan@un.org">matthew.johnson-idan@un.org</a>	NF
<b>Donor</b>	
Ms. Bounmy Souvannalath, Education Programme Officer, DFAT – Bounmy.Souvannalath@dfat.gov.au, Ph:020 5553 8747	NF
<b>ILO</b>	
Mr. Nuno Cunha, Senior Social Protection Specialist <a href="mailto:cunhan@ilo.org">cunhan@ilo.org</a>	NF/JR
Ms. Loveleen De, Programme Manager <a href="mailto:del@ilo.org">del@ilo.org</a>	NF/JR
<b>UNICEF</b>	
Ms. Maryam Abdu, Chief of Social Policy <a href="mailto:mabdu@unicef.org">mabdu@unicef.org</a>	NF
Ms. Amphayvan Chanmany, National Project Coordinator <a href="mailto:achanmany@unicef.org">achanmany@unicef.org</a>	JR
Cedric Javary, Consultant for MECG, <a href="mailto:cjavary@unicef.org">cjavary@unicef.org</a>	JR
Mr. Boualiane Obmalay, Provincial Project Coordinator <a href="mailto:bobmalay@unicef.org">bobmalay@unicef.org</a>	JR/CP
<b>UNCDF</b>	
Mr. Paul Martin, Regional Technical Advisor <a href="mailto:paul.martin@uncdf.org">paul.martin@uncdf.org</a>	NF/JR
Mr. Thilaphong Oudomsine, Project Coordinator <a href="mailto:thilaphong.oudomsine@uncdf.org">thilaphong.oudomsine@uncdf.org</a>	NF/JR
<b>Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare</b>	
Mr. Vilayphong Sisomvang, DG of Planning and International Cooperation Department <a href="mailto:vilayphongs@gmail.com">vilayphongs@gmail.com</a>	JR/CP
Mr. Thipphasone, DDG of Planning and International Cooperation Department	JR/CP
Mr. Vongkham Phanthanouvong, DG of Social Welfare Department <a href="mailto:vphanthanouvong@gmail.com">vphanthanouvong@gmail.com</a> Ph:020 5441 1929	JR/CP
Mr. Khamsouk Somphavong, of Division, Social Welfare Department, <a href="mailto:ksomphavong@gmail.com">ksomphavong@gmail.com</a> , Ph:020 5581 6030	JR/CP
Mr. Bounghod Chanthavone, DG of Cabinet Office <a href="mailto:bgchanthavone@gmail.com">bgchanthavone@gmail.com</a> Ph:020 5562 6414	JR/CP
Mr. Aenoy LATSAVONG, DDG of Cabinet Office <a href="mailto:Aenoy.Lat@hotmail.com">Aenoy.Lat@hotmail.com</a> Ph:020 2248 8993	JR/CP
<b>Star FinTech (payment service provider)</b>	
Mdm Khamkieng, Deputy Director, Finance	JR/CP
Mdm Sengdean, Technical staff	
<b>LTS Ventures (mobile banking consultants)</b>	
Mr Tim Scheffmann ( <a href="mailto:tim.scheffmann@gmail.com">tim.scheffmann@gmail.com</a> )	JR/CP
<b>Savannakhet Provincial Labour &amp; Social Welfare Department</b>	
Mdm Phavanh Bualuanglath, Director-General, Labour & Social Welfare	JR/CP
<b>Nong District Office</b>	
Mdm Mdm Thongbay Vouthisavath, Director, Labour & Social Welfare	JR/CP
Mr Phengma Loythilath, Director, Health Services	JR/CP
<b>Village Level Focus Group Discussions with . . .</b>	
Village Chiefs / Naiban	JR/CP
Village Health Centre teams	
MECG Recipients (29, all female)	

<sup>34</sup> NF – Nicholas Freeland (Team Leader) / JR – John Rook / CP – Chanthaneth Phakaysone

## Annex 4 Data collection tools

### UNJP Evaluation – Questionnaire for Key Informant Interview

**Stakeholder category:** Payment Service Providers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is XXX, part of a team of three Consultants who have been asked to undertake an independent end-line Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme called “Leaving no-one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”, one component of which was the Mother and Early Childhood Grant (MECG). Our objective is to establish what the Programme has achieved, how well it has performed, what have been the outputs, and what lessons we can learn from this.

We guarantee that any information you provide in the course of this interview will be treated with strict confidentiality, and that your name will not be cited. We estimate that we shall need roughly 45 to 60 minutes for the discussion. Do I have your permission to start the interview?

#### A: Background Information

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. Organisation:
4. Contact details:

#### B: Questions

In what ways have you been involved in the Programme?

Were you consulted during the design of the Programme?

Can you describe the current status of the payment delivery system for the MECG?

Can you identify the key achievement that have been made in terms of payments delivery during implementation, the reasons for these, and any reactions to them?

Can you identify and give some examples of the challenges you have faced in establishing an efficient, effective, sustainable and low-cost payment delivery system during implementation, the reasons for these, and any reactions to them?

Do you feel that the Programme is well aligned with government priorities and other complementary initiatives in terms of payment delivery systems?

Did COVID-19 impose any challenges and, if so, what was their impact and were any remedial measures identified?

Are you satisfied with the results and outcomes of the Programme?

Can you provide evidence of successful and innovative interventions?

Are there any other comments, suggestions, insights about the Programme that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time and for your insights!

## UNJP Evaluation – Questionnaire for Key Informant Interviews

**Stakeholder category:** Government staff (all levels); implementing partners; funders

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is XXX, part of a team of three Consultants who have been asked to undertake an independent end-line Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme called “Leaving no-one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”. Our objective is to establish what the Programme has achieved, how well it has performed, what have been the outputs, and what lessons we can learn from this.

We guarantee that any information you provide in the course of this interview will be treated with strict confidentiality, and that your name will not be cited. We estimate that we shall need roughly 45 to 60 minutes for the discussion. Do I have your permission to start the interview?

### A: Background Information

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. Organisation:
4. Contact details:

### B: Engagement

In what ways have you been involved in the Programme?

### C: Efficiency

Can you give some examples of achievements during implementation, the reasons for these, and any reactions to them?

Can you give some examples of challenges during implementation, the reasons for these, and any reactions to them?

Can you provide any evidence of collaboration between UN agencies?

Do you feel that the Programme is well aligned with government priorities and other complementary initiatives?

How well did the Programme respond to the challenges imposed by COVID-19?

### D: Effectiveness

How do you perceive the complementary roles of the different UN partners in delivering the Programme?

To what extent has the Programme achieved the following results – please can you give some examples to illustrate this? *[Note: provide prompts from Results Framework if necessary]*

- Result 1: government planning, managerial and implementation capacities (including leadership and co-ordination) to implement the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) are enhanced
- Result 2: social protection funding is on-budget and a mechanism designed whereby additional sources of finance are mobilized and blended with public sector budget allocations to ensure sustainability of the NSPS.

#### *Annex 4: Data collection tools*

- Result 3: 2,000 pregnant women and children aged 0-12 months are benefiting from a new integrated welfare package consisting of the MECG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration.

Are you satisfied with the results and outcomes of the Programme?

Can you provide evidence of successful and innovative interventions?

Do you feel that the Programme has contributed to progress towards the achievement of the following targeted SDGs:

- 1.3 – Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable
- 2.2 – By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons
- 16.9 – By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
- 17.3 – Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

#### **E: Sustainability**

Were you properly consulted during the design of the Programme?

Does the Programme properly reflect the objectives of the Government?

To what extent have Government staff been engaged in the delivery of the Programme?

Are there any changes to any of the following which indicate Government ownership for future continuation and expansion of Programme activities?

- Legislation
- Action plans
- Budgetary allocation

Can you give any examples of where the government has adopted outputs of the Programme (e.g. tools, systems, processes, guidelines) into its own operations or systems?

Is it likely that the Government will take the MECG pilot forward and expand it to national coverage?

#### **F: Cross-cutting**

Can you provide any evidence of specific attention to gender equality and equity?

Can you provide any evidence of specific attention to human rights and child rights?

Can you provide any evidence of specific attention to disability?

Can you provide any evidence of lessons learnt from COVID-19 response?

Was sufficiently flexibility built into the design of the Programme components to respond to shocks?

#### **G: Conclusion**

Are there any other comments, suggestions, insights about the Programme that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time and for your insights!



## UNJP Evaluation – Questionnaire for Focus Group Discussions

**Stakeholder category:** Programme implementers; health workers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this discussion. My name is XXX, part of a team of three Consultants who have been asked to undertake an independent end-line Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme called “Leaving no-one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”. One component of this Programme is the Mother and Early Childhood Grant pilot. Our objective is to establish what the Programme has achieved, how well it has performed, what have been the outputs, and what lessons we can learn from this.

We guarantee that any information you provide in the course of this discussion will be treated with strict confidentiality, and that your names will not be cited. We estimate that we shall need roughly 45 to 60 minutes for the discussion. Do I have your permission to start the meeting?

### A: Background Information

1. Participant type:
2. Number of participants: Total, of which (Female) (Male)
2. Location:

### B: Questions

In what ways have you been involved in the Programme?

Were you consulted during the design of the Programme?

Can you give some examples of achievements during implementation, the reasons for these, and any reactions to them?

Can you give some examples of challenges during implementation, the reasons for these, and any reactions to them?

Do you feel that the Programme is well aligned with government priorities and other complementary initiatives?

How well did the Programme respond to the challenges imposed by COVID-19?

Are you satisfied with the results and outcomes of the Programme?

Can you provide evidence of successful and innovative interventions?

Are there any examples of problems with the Programme (e.g. tensions in the household or the community, misuse of the cash transfer)?

How have beneficiaries of the Programme used the money they have received?

Has the Programme allowed them to access other services, such as health, welfare, family planning?

Have the beneficiaries of the Programme registered the birth of their children?

Are there any other comments, suggestions, insights about the Programme that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time and for your insights!

## UNJP Evaluation – Questionnaire for Focus Group Discussions

**Stakeholder category:** MECG beneficiaries

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this discussion. My name is XXX, part of a team of three Consultants who have been asked to undertake an independent end-line Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme called “Leaving no-one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR”. One component of this Programme is the Mother and Early Childhood Grant (MECG) pilot. Our objective is to establish what the Programme has achieved, how well it has performed, what have been the outputs, and what lessons we can learn from this.

We guarantee that any information you provide in the course of this discussion will be treated with strict confidentiality, and that your names will not be cited. We estimate that we shall need roughly 45 to 60 minutes for the discussion. Do I have your permission to start the meeting?

### A: Background Information

1. Participant type:
2. Number of participants: Total, of which (Female) (Male)
2. Location:

### B: Questions

Are you a recipient / beneficiary of MECG?

When did you first hear about MECG?

Why do you think you were chosen to receive the money?

What did you have to do, in order to register?

What documents did you need provide?

Did all other pregnant women in your village/community also receive the MECG?

How often are the payments made?

Do the payments arrive on time?

How many payments have you received so far from the MECG?

How much money did you receive each time?

Is that enough?

How is the money paid to you?

Do you know if the payments will continue and, if so, for how much longer?

How do you decide how the money will be spent? Do you decide, does your husband decide or do you both decide?

*Annex 4: Data collection tools*

What have/do you spend the money on? How many of you used the money you received for the following purposes:

- (a) to buy more food (what)
- (b) to buy better food (what)
- (c) to buy chickens or livestock to rear
- (d) to buy things to resell in your village to make more money
- (e) to pay back debts
- (f) to pay for schooling
- (g) to pay for transport (where to?)
- (h) to attend *baccis* or social events
- (i) to pay for things to take to the temple
- (j) to buy *lao khao* or beer?

Has the money helped you to get better health care? Explain how.

Do you have to give your husband any of the money? If so, what does he spend it on?

Does receiving the money create any problems for you within your house?

Have you registered the birth of your child(ren)?

Have you inoculated your child(ren)?

Did you have to pay a fee to become a beneficiary of the MECG, or to receive each payment?

If you had a problem with the MECG, what would you do?

Does the money you get ever create problems for you in your household? In your community?

Does anyone check on how you spend the money?

Has it made a difference to your life?

Are there any other comments, suggestions, insights about the MECG that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time and for your insights!

## Annex 5 Achievements against the UNJP Results Framework

<b>Key:</b>	Fully achieved
	Substantially achieved
	Not achieved, or only partially achieved

Result / Indicators	Baseline	2020 Target	2021 Target	Means of Verification	Comments on Achievement
<b>Outcome 1. Government planning, managerial and implementation capacity (including leadership and coordination) to implement the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) is enhanced</b>					
Outcome indicator 1.1: Fully operational NSPC	No	No	yes	Reports of the Committee meetings	Only one meeting held to date – no minutes available
<b>Output 1.1. Members of the NSP Committee and other relevant national stakeholders better understand social protection-related topics and how programs are designed</b>					
Output indicator 1.1.1: Number of capacity building events organized	0	2	4	Reports of the events	
Output indicator 1.1.2: # of participants in capacity building events (broken down by gender)	0	75 (at least 40 women)	75 (at least 40 women)	Reports of the events	Women marginally under-represented in events
Output indicator 1.1.3: Adoption of a Roadmap on implementation of the NSPS	0	The Roadmap to implement the NSPS is developed	The Roadmap to implement the NSPS is adopted	Final version of the adopted Roadmap	The Roadmap has not yet been officially “adopted”

Annex 5: Achievements against the UNJP Results Framework

<b>Output 1.2. Awareness and understanding of Government officials on the impact of social protection and domestic resource allocation is enhanced</b>					
Output indicator 1.2.1: Research on the role of SP in Lao PDR completed	0	0	1	Study published	
Output indicator 1.2.2: Gender-issues addressed in research	n/a	0	1	Separate discussion of gender issues in plan	No evidence of "separate discussion"
Output indicator 1.2.3: Costed plan for the NSPS prepared	0	Costed plan for the NSPS developed	Costed plan for the NSPS published	Plan published	
Output indicator 1.2.4: Gender-issues addressed in the costed plan	n/a	0	1	Separate discussion of gender issues in plan	No evidence of "separate discussion"
Output indicator 1.2.5: # of public events organised	0	0	2	Reports of the Events	
<b>Output 1.3. NSPS M&amp;E Framework developed and aligned with SDG 1.3 global measurement methodology</b>					
Output indicator 1.3.1: Adoption of the NSPS M&E Framework	0	0	1	Report of the adopted framework	M&E framework not yet formally "adopted"
<b>Output 1.4. Mechanisms for predictable public sector budget allocations and on-budget conduits for ODA earmarked budget support and IDA associated grants or loans are developed within the PFMR framework and introduction of the new PFMIS</b>					
Output indicator 1.4.1: # of Expenditure Assignment Codes adopted for SP	0	1	3	SNA and PFMIS	Discussions with MoF still ongoing
Output indicator 1.4.2: Medium Term Expenditure Forecast for NSPS	0	0	1	Internal Policy Document	

Annex 5: Achievements against the UNJP Results Framework

Output indicator 1.4.3: Budget Allocation for NSPS	n/a	n/a	Initial annual tranche (x% of GDP) to be determined 2020	Annual budget law	Indicator over-ambitious: beyond control of UNJP
<b>Output 1.5. National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) proof of concept, development frameworks and implementation pathways formulated incusing NSPF capitalization plan to provide viability funding for the implementation of the NSPS</b>					
Output indicator 1.5.1: Adoption of a Business Plan for NSPF	n/a	n/a	Business Plan	Internal document	
Output indicator 1.5.2: Adoption of a Pathways report for NSPF establishment	n/a	Initial mapping complete	n/a	Internal document	Report completed, but not "adopted"
Output indicator 1.5.3: Completion of Debt financing study for NSPF capitalization	n/a	-	Report issued	Internal document	
Output indicator 1.5.4: Availability of draft Legal documents for NSPF	n/a	-	Document set issued	Internal document	No evidence of legal documents
Output indicator 1.5.5: Launch of NSPF Prospectus	n/a	-	Document set issued and event organized and implemented	Internal document and Matching Event for NSPF potential investors	Prospectus has not yet been approved or launched.
Output indicator 1.5.6: Availability of the agreed Business Plan for NSPF	n/a	n/a	Business Plan agreed	Internal document	But not clear how this differs from 1.5.1?
<b>Outcome 2. At least 2,000 pregnant women and children under 12 months are benefiting from a new integrated package of welfare services, including the new Mother and Early Childhood Grant, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration.</b>					

Annex 5: Achievements against the UNJP Results Framework

Outcome indicator 2.1: # of children receiving cash grant in the targeted districts	0	0	2,000 children and/or pregnant women under 12 months received cash grant	MoLSW Reports	Payment delays mean that 45% of registered mothers have not yet been paid
Outcome indicator 2.2: # of children with access to related social services	0	0	2,000 children and/or pregnant women under 12 months access related social services (cumulatively)	Programme reports	Data recorded at Village Health centres but not transferred to MIS yet.
<b>Output 2.1. Roadmap for the design and implementation of the MCEG concluded</b>					
Output indicator 2.1.1: MEC Grant Modality assessment	no	assessment is undertaken	(target achieved in Year 1)	Report	
<b>Output 2.2. Management Information System (MIS) for the MCEG designed</b>					
Output indicator 2.2.1: Operations Manual for the MCEG available and approved	no	yes	yes	Operations Manual	Ops Manual available
Indicator 2.2.2: Proposal for the definition of the model of integration finalized	no	yes	yes	Technical Note	Not clear what this refers to.
<b>Output 2.3. Institutions and different agents prepared for the implementation</b>					
Output indicator 2.3.1: # of staff trained at central and local level	0	50	100	Training Reports	Training undertaken but capacity to implement still restricted.
<b>Output 2.4. MCEG piloted in at least one of the poorest districts</b>					
Output indicator 2.4.1:	0	50	2,000	Program Reports	

Annex 5: Achievements against the UNJP Results Framework

# of children registered					
Output indicator 2.4.2: # of children assessed for social welfare needs	0%	0%	100%	Program Reports	Data available at Village Health Centre but not transferred to MIS.
<b>Output 2.5. MCEG M&amp;E framework developed and being implemented</b>					
Output indicator 2.5.1: M&E Framework for the MCEG adopted and being implemented	no	no	yes	Annual MCEG Program Reports	Not clear that all components of the M&E are fully operational
Output indicator 2.5.2: MCEG evaluation	no	no	MCEG evaluation is undertaken	Evaluation Report	No separate MCEG evaluation undertaken



## Annex 6 Research Ethics Approval Letter



### Research Ethics Approval

July 6, 2022

Koorosh Raffi  
P.O. Box 2-154  
Bangkok 10200 Thailand

RE: Ethics Review findings for: *Inception Report of End line evaluation of the UN Joint Programme: Leaving no-one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR*

Dear Koorosh Raffi,

Protocols for the protection of human subjects in the above study were assessed by an independent Multi-Country Evaluation Specialist (MCES)<sup>1</sup>. This study's human subjects' protection protocols, as stated in the materials submitted, received **ethics review approval**.

You, the evaluation team lead, and your project staff remain responsible for ensuring compliance with the feedback provided to ensure full ethical compliance that is in line with UNICEF rules and regulations. Those responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- ensuring prompt reporting to the MCES of proposed changes in this study's design, risks, consent, or other human protection protocols and providing copies of any revised materials;
- conducting the research activity in accordance with the terms of the approval until any proposed changes have been reviewed and approved by the MCES, except when necessary to mitigate hazards to subjects;
- promptly reporting any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others in the course of this study;
- notifying MCES when your study is completed.

Sincerely,

Xin Xin Yang  
Multi Country Evaluation Specialist

cc: Wassana Kulpisithicharoen and Catalina Salazar Silva,

<sup>1</sup> Multi Country Evaluation Specialist based in China: Xin Xin Yang.