

Joint SDG Fund  
PORTFOLIO ON INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROTECTION AND LNOB  
**Joint Programme 2020 Annual Progress Report**

## Cover page

**Country:** Lao PDR

**Joint Programme title:** Leaving no one behind: Establishing the basis for social protection floors in Lao PDR

**Short title:** Social Protection Floors in Lao PDR

**Start date** (month/year): 01 Jan 2020

**End date** (month/year): 31 Dec 2021

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**Budget** (Joint SDG Fund contribution): 2,000,000

**Overall budget** (with co-funding): 2,912,532

**Annual Financial Delivery Rate** (= Total JP expenditures / transferred funds x 100%): **45%**

**Rate of Committed Funding** (= Total JP commitments / transferred funds x 100%): **67%**

**Short description of the Joint Programme** (max 1 paragraph):

The main objective of the UN Joint Programme (UNJP or JP) 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 Mother and Early Childhood Grant (MECG). The JP is based on the new government-led NSPS with strong national institutional buy-in. The JP 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. By the end of the programme, the main expected results are that: a) Government planning, managerial, and implementation capacity (including leadership and coordination) to implement the NSPS is enhanced, and that b) 1,400 children aged 0-12 months are benefiting from a new integrated package of welfare services, including the new MECG, early childhood wellbeing services and support for birth registration.

## Executive summary

The Joint Programme – despite challenges and delays – managed to achieve key results and implement strategic activities planned for 2020. Most notably, the JP established a close and well working rapport with GoL institutions like the MoLSW. As a result, a Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) and a PAC Secretariat were established under the leadership of the MoLSW and supported by the JP. This is expected to facilitate the operationalization of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) and related SP programmes at the national and sub-national levels, and thereby also facilitates the execution of the JP’s work programme. The PAC is also expected to continue the oversight and coordination of social protection in Lao PDR beyond the duration of the JP. In this context, the JP and the MoLSW organized the joint inauguration of the NSPS, dissemination of the NSPS to provincial authorities and the official launching of the Joint Programme. This was a key event for the JP also, since it was attended by JP external stakeholders like development partner representatives from Australia and Germany.

In terms of the JP’s more granular work, the programme initiated the MECG programme pilot by developing and agreeing with the GoL and other stakeholders on the MECG’s design. Likewise, the work on SP financing commenced by assessing the SP-financing environment in Lao PDR and the viability of alternative SP financing options via capital markets. On top of its initial work programme, the JP managed to secure co-financing provided by the Australian Government through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to the amount of AUS\$ 1.1 million, which – amongst others – will provide the JP with the opportunity to aim for additional coverage of beneficiaries under the MECG pilot and an extended pilot for improved data collection and better-informed decision making by GoL. The COVID-19 pandemic and related prevention measures, however, impacted on the JP work programme and specifically the timeline of activities planned for 2020. The JP adapted to the situation by a) shifting indicator targets from 2020 to 2021 and b) arranging for blended presence/online activities like trainings and other capacity development measures, to enable international experience sharing and participation of international experts despite lock-down conditions.

## A. Annual Progress

### A.1 The overall approach

#### *Broader context and JP changes*

The JP is in the fortunate situation to have received co-financing from a bilateral development partner (DFAT) who provided additional funds for specific result areas. This co-financing arrangement enabled PUNOs to (plan to) implement a larger scale of the originally envisioned activities, (those related to SDG targets 1.3, 2.2 and 16.9) by adding an additional district to the MECG Pilot Test (JP output 2.4). This change in the JP's circumstances is neither expected to change the JP's overall approach nor its Theory of Change (ToC) but is likely to positively affect the 2021 targets of MECG related result indicators (e.g. output indicator 2.4.1 number of children registered) and potentially extend the pilot for a longer period of time in order to generate more evidence.

Similar to other programmes and contexts, the JP has been negatively affected by the onset and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related measures to limit the spread of the virus. Ironically though, the pandemic has further emphasised its imperative! The primary impact of the prevention measures has been and continues to be delays and limitations of various aspects of the JP's work programme implementation. For example, a number of originally planned events and activities had to be redesigned or postponed to a later stage. Also these changes in the JP's circumstances are neither expected to change the JP's overall approach nor its ToC. The JP however will adapt to this situation by introducing changes into a number of result indicator targets for 2020 and 2021 (see below).

#### *Ensuring that JP remains strategic and catalytic*

The JP is strongly aligned with and in support of the Lao PDR - UN Partnership Framework (UNPF) 2017-2021. Specifically, the JP via its implementation support for the MECG contributes to the UNPF's envisioned results on "more people have access to social protection benefits, in particular vulnerable groups" (UNPF outcome 2) as well as "people enjoy improved access to quality health services, and water, sanitation and hygiene" (UNPF outcome 5) and on "most vulnerable people benefit from improved food security and nutrition" (UNPF outcome 6). Moreover, the JP - through its strong support to the government to implement its National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) - is expected to partially contribute also to the UNPF in terms of its aspiration to support the government's "institutions and policies at national and local level support the delivery of quality services that better respond to people's needs." (UNPF outcome 7).

Under the leadership of the UNRCO and in alignment with the JP, the UNCT in Lao PDR prepared a joint policy note for the Government entitled, "Developing a shock-responsive national social protection system to respond to the COVID-19 crisis." The note promotes a system-building approach, in keeping with the NSPS 2025. In the Lao context of limited financial and institutional resources, this approach is expected to build and solidify a shock-responsive system in the long run, rather than diverting resources for temporary and ad hoc measures.

Also, as mentioned above under 'JP changes' the JP adapted in various ways to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the JP - in coordination with its government partners - has agreed to either reduce a number of activities that were planned to be implemented in 2020 or shift these partially to 2021. The number of trainings/capacity development activities that were planned for 2020 was slightly reduced and in turn the number of respective measures for 2021 was slightly increased. Moreover, the JP adapted to the COVID-19 related challenges - e.g. those related to travels to and from Lao PDR - to convene in-person meetings and trainings by instead arranging for mixed participations modes, whereby international participants/trainers connected online to the respective events, while national participants met in-person (in accordance with national health protocols). Overall, despite the mentioned challenges,

the JP managed to initiate and even finalize a number of crucial activities as planned. Therefore, the JP budget was not repurposed beyond the 20% threshold.

On September 30, 2020, in a major event to also officially launch the JP, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MoLSW) on behalf of the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) inaugurated the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025. While this was largely foreseen and planned, the GoL subsequently envisioned and requested a slightly stronger orientation of a limited number of JP activities towards the implementation of the NSPS 2025. For example, initially planned trainings of key GoL personnel on 'basic social protection concepts' will be re-defined and re-designed to serve a 'how to implement the NSPS 2025' purpose to provide social protection in response to lifecycle risks and shocks. Moreover, social protection is a priority policy area under the 9<sup>th</sup> Lao PDR National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025).

During the 3rd quarter of 2020, the UN Country Team - including the JP - prepared the draft "UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19" (SERP). Amongst others, the SERP proposed a number of critical social protection actions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and the corresponding prevention policies. Implementing the above-mentioned JP-supported MECG (outcome 2) will establish the operational nucleus to at least partially ease the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 (preventions measures) on the most vulnerable in the poorest districts of Lao PDR. This core JP activity started in late 2020 and will continue throughout 2021.

## A.2 Update on priority issues

### *SDG acceleration*

- The inauguration of the NSPS 2025, the initiation of a roadmap for the NSPS implementation as well as the establishment of the JP Secretariat under the leadership of the MoLSW are essential steps towards the development of a consolidated SP system under the auspices of a single ministry that carries the unique mandate for SP in Lao PDR and thereby accelerates the progress towards the SDG 1.3 target.
- The initiated pilot testing of the MECG scheme is expected to establish links between a cash transfer mechanism and related services like nutrition support, birth registration and parenting education and thereby accelerate progress towards the SDG 1.3, 2.2., and 16.9 targets.
- The already-finalized technical and policy advisory papers on dedicated Chart of Accounts (CoA) for SP-financing, the proposed policy options for financing of the planned National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) as well as the drafted NSPF business plan structure are key building blocks towards 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 and thereby jointly also accelerating progress towards SDG target 17.3.

### *Vulnerable groups*

- An analysis of the number of pregnant women and children under 6 months in Sanamxay district has been performed as a preparatory measure for the roll-out of the MECG pilot test in the district in early 2021.
- The minimum total number of individuals (i.e. pregnant women and/or children in poor districts) to be reached by the end of the programme's pilot phase is 1,400. However, as the programme received co-financing for this result area, it is likely that a larger number of pregnant women and/or children will be reached by the end of 2021 with possible extension into 2022. Ultimately, once the scheme reaches national saturation, almost 0.5 million mothers and children are expected to benefit from it.
- Although the MECG's eligibility criteria limit the coverage of the programme to mothers and children below 1 year of age, it is assumed that the MECG pilot project will provide an essential learning exercise for the GoL in terms of other future cash-transfer schemes for vulnerable groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, disaster victims, older persons etc.).

### *Gender marker*

Based on - amongst others - the results of design workshops with the GoL and PUNOs the finalized MECG design document further confirmed pregnant women and children below 12 months years of age (including children with disabilities) to be the scheme's primary target group. Moreover:

- Mothers will be the primary recipient of the cash grants as well as improved access to health and nutrition and other services including child protection, psychosocial support and birth registration;
- By combining the cash grants with access to appropriate services the scheme's design explicitly aims at improving the position of women during this vulnerable period and to improve outcomes, thus supporting women empowerment and gender equality.
- Given the MECG's focus on maternal and child health, maternal and child mortality are likewise expected to be reduced by the programme.

### *Human rights*

The JP integrated recommendations of the CEDAW Committee (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) and the CRC (Committee on the Rights of the Child) for Lao PDR into core MECG design elements and thereby ensured a sustainable implementation of these recommendations throughout the MECG. For example:

- Facilitating timely birth registrations of children, especially in rural and remote areas;
- Improving coverage of and access to health services and efforts to reduce the incidence of maternal and child mortality and malnutrition.
- Ultimately, the MECG - and later on other NSPS schemes building on the MECG experience - is expected to enhance service provider's (health, nutrition etc.) ability to provide adequate - in scale and quality - services to those entitled to it.

### *Partnerships*

The broad range of envisioned and planned partnerships as laid out in the JP's Project Document already materialized in the JP's first year of implementation. Highlights are as follows:

- GoL:
  - Central level: under the leadership of the MoLSW the GoL (including: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Health, Lao Social Security Organization and others) is not just fully represented in key JP decision-making and implementation body meetings (i.e. the Programme Advisory Committee and its Secretariat), but takes an active leadership role in these meetings and discussions;
  - Sub-national level: local government entities were consulted in the MECG design phase and agreed to be key partners in the scheme's pilot test.
- DPs:
  - The JP has worked with non-PUNO UN agencies in Lao PDR on several occasions, such as the UNCT policy note on shock responsiveness and presentation to GoL under RCO leadership, preparation of the SERF e.g. UNFPA-ILO led pillar on "Protecting People and Social Cohesion and Community Resilience (including Food Security, Social Protection)" as well as social protection related research and policy work done by UNDP and other agencies;
  - DFAT provided co-financing, e.g. for the up-scaling of the MECG pilot, thereby integrating its own work in this area with that of the UN;
  - The JP coordinates with the World Bank, which is pilot testing a scheme similar to the MECG in the northern part of the country, to leverage on synergies in the implementation process where possible and to ensure sustainability, scalability and ownership as well as learning by the government;
  - The JP collaborates the World Bank and the IMF in developing dedicated SP Chart of Accounts for SP on-budget procedures.

- South-south exchange / peer-learning:
  - Officials from the Royal Government of Cambodia presented at an SP capacity building event for the GoL in December 2020;
  - Officials from the Government of Thailand and UNICEF Myanmar presented the experiences of their respective cash transfer programs for mothers and children to the GoL during a first knowledge sharing experience in 2020.

### Strategic meetings

Type of event	Yes	No	Comments
JP launch event	<b>x</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Held jointly on 30 September 2020
Annual JP development partners'/donors' event*	<b>x</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*\* This refers to any event that included representatives of the Joint SDG Fund's global development partners/donors (Denmark, European Union, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.) Please note that this event can be held together with a launch event or other partners' event.*

### Funding and financing

- Additional funding of AUD 1.1 million from DFAT Australia was received to support the MECG pilot and the implementation of the NSPS.
- The JP assessed innovative SP financing options via national and international capital markets (e.g. SP Bonds) to complement domestic and ODA sources for social assistance program funding.

### Innovation, learning and sharing

In terms of the JP's learning and sharing plan, by end of 2020 the JP was moving from the "Identifying lessons learned" to the "Flagging emerging good practices" steps as illustrated in the Project Document's annex 6. Key lessons to be learned from innovations - for the Lao DPR context - are expected to emerge from:

1. The MECG pilot test - as a novelty for Lao PDR - integrates an un-conditional, geographical targeted<sup>1</sup> cash transfer approach with health, nutrition and child protection services as well as Behaviour Change Communication. The integration of these modalities is expected to provide lessons to be learned not just for the scaling-up of the scheme itself but ideally also for other planned social welfare schemes;
2. The planned National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) - as a first for the region - will integrate/blend various social welfare financing sources (domestic, ODA, capital markets) and thereby is expected to provide major lessons to be learned even beyond the Lao PDR context.

Both innovations are in early testing/assessment steps. Dissemination, sharing and reuse of lessons learned is expected for the 2nd half of 2021 and 2022.

### Strategic communications

The JP's strategic communication - by and large - materialized as laid out in the JP's project document: technical and thematic notes (e.g. jointly prepared with the UNCT), JP fact sheets, videos, press releases and a blog post were produced and disseminated since the JP's inception.

Beyond the usage of printed media, strategic communication esp. with the GoL materialized in scheduled meetings and discussions on thematic topics as well as to provide general/joint updates. Specific information can be found in Annex 3 of this report.

<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the World Bank's pilot test, which is applying conditionalities in terms of health and nutrition co-responsibilities and is a (poverty) proxy means tested programme.

## B. Annual Results

### Overall progress

- On track (expected annual results achieved)
  - Satisfactory (majority of expected annual results achieved)
  - Not-satisfactory (majority of expected annual results not yet achieved)
- Please, explain briefly:

The JP's overall progress by end of 2020 has been satisfactory. Due to the onset and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related prevention policies, a number of activities, targets and results planned for 2020 had to be rescheduled/shifted to 2021 (see below).

### Contribution to Fund's global results

- In terms of the Joint SDG Fund Outcome 1: "Integrated multi-sectoral policies to accelerate SDG achievement implemented with greater scope and scale", the JP continues to aim for greater scale e.g. by supporting the implementation of the MECG in at least two districts in the relatively poorer south of Lao PDR in 2021 (indicator 1.2). The MECG design document was finalized and validated by the GoL while the operational manual awaits validation. These two documents will guide the roll-out of trainings and field implementation in 2021. Cash transfers could not be delivered as initially planned due to ongoing discussions on transfer modalities to beneficiaries. The MoLSW with support from the Bank of Lao PDR and other GoL agencies as well as DPs are exploring various options to deliver the cash to beneficiaries in early 2021. The MECG scheme engendered ownership and commitment of GoL by involving them in all technical decisions concerning the pilot, as well as by exposing GoL stakeholders to a series of peer-learning events from countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar, where child grants are being implemented.
- The level of achievement of the Joint SDG Fund Outcome 2: "Additional financing leveraged to accelerate SDG achievement" the JP notes that the mentioned 2020 targets in terms of *Ratio of financing for integrated multi-sectoral solutions leveraged* (indicator 2.2) has yet to be established based on updated MoLSW budget expenditure figures for 2020.
- With regard to the three mentioned indicators for the Joint SDG Fund Output 3: "Integrated policy solutions for accelerating SDG progress implemented", no targets were anticipated for 2020 while the mentioned targets for 2021 continue to be realistic.
- Likewise, the two relevant indicators (4.2 and 4.3) for the Joint SDG Fund Output 4: "Integrated financing strategies for accelerating SDG progress implemented":
  - the target of 1 integrated financing strategy implemented with partners in the lead for 2021 continues to be realistic;
  - the target of 1 functioning partnership framework for integrated financing strategies to accelerate progress on SDGs made operational for 2021 continues to be achievable.

### JP Outputs and Outcomes

#### Achievements of expected outputs in 2020

- Output 1.1. Members of the NSP Committee and other relevant national stakeholders better understand social protection-related topics and how programs are designed:
  - Despite the mentioned challenges, capacity building (CB) events on SP basics for GoL counterparts were conducted in 2020. However, the overall number of CB events had to be reduced from 3 to 2 in 2020 due to COVID-19 related measures, while the respective target for 2021 therefore was raised from 3 to 4 events.
  - The drafting of the NSPS Roadmap was initiated in 2020 as originally planned. While it is expected that the Roadmap will become a "living document" – given SP reforms' character which requires numerous decisions throughout the reform process - it is expected that core elements and approaches defined in the draft Roadmap will be adopted in early 2021.

- Output 1.2. Awareness and understanding of Government officials on the impact of social protection and domestic resource allocation is enhanced:
  - The development of a costed plan for the NSPS implementation has been initiated in 2020 as planned and a first draft costing plan was produced and reviewed. The revised plan is going to be discussed with the JP secretariat in early 2021.
  - Due to the onset and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related prevention measures, it was agreed that the JP abstained from organizing public events in 2020 as was initially planned.
- Output 1.3. NSPS M&E Framework developed and aligned with SDG 1.3 global measurement methodology:
  - The development and adoption of an NSPS M&E framework was rescheduled to Q1 2021 due to a delay in the JP's overall onset and COVID-19 related limitations.
- 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 public financial management reform framework and introduction of the new public financial management information system:
  - Key preparatory activities for output indicator 1.4.1 have been initiated and finalized (e.g. SP 2017 expenditure review, Chart of Accounts SP Chapters and Sub-division codes have been developed and proposed and related technical/policy notes published and discussed with the key GoL partners.) The output indicator 1.4.1 target for 2020 (1 Expenditure Assignment Codes adopted for SP), however, was shifted and added to the 2021 target (now: 4 Expenditure Assignment Codes adopted for SP).
- Output 1.5. National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) proof of concept, development frameworks and implementation pathways formulated including NSPF capitalization plan to provide viability funding for the implementation of the NSPS:
  - The initial mapping in relation to Output indicator 1.5.1 (Adoption of a Business Plan for NSPF) was conducted and finalized in 2020 as originally planned.
- Output 2.1. Roadmap for the design and implementation of the MECG concluded:
  - The MECG Modality (i.e. of the institutional arrangements and the available payment mechanisms) assessment (indicator 2.1.1) was conducted and finalized in 2020 as originally planned.
- Output 2.2. Management Information System (MIS) for the MECG designed:
  - An Operations Manual for the MECG -including a proposed model of integration - was developed in 2020 as was originally planned and awaits its validation in early 2021, which will be followed by training of all relevant GoL entities at national and subnational level which are involved in the MECG's roll-out. (indicators 2.2.1 & 2.2.2).
- Output 2.3. Institutions and different agents prepared for the implementation:
  - Preparatory activities - e.g. IT materials for MIS, M&E and case management have been procured and a payment modality mission was organized - while the actual training of defined numbers of staff at central and local level (indicator 2.3.1) will be conducted in 2021. The respective annual targets therefore will be changed accordingly from 50 to 0 in 2020 and 100 to 150 in 2021.
- Output 2.4. MECG piloted in at least one of the poorest districts:
  - The roll out of the MECG pilot has been delayed due to ongoing discussions on the best delivery mechanism that will reduce leakages and ensure that the last mile payments are done in a transparent and accountable manner. The MoLSW with support from the Bank of Lao PDR and other government agencies are exploring various options for cash transfers in 2021. The targets for output indicators 2.4.1 (number of children registered) and 2.4.2 (number of children assessed for social welfare needs) for 2021 continue to be realistic and achievable.
- Output 2.5. MECG M&E framework developed and being implemented:

- An initial M&E framework for the MCEG pilot test has been developed and proposed as part of the draft MCEG operations manual. The framework will be adopted and utilized in early 2021.

#### Achievements of expected contributions to outcomes in 2020

- Given the belated start of the JP's implementation and the onset and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related prevention measures, contributions to outcomes are expected to be reportable only in 2021.

#### *Workplan*

JP workplan was modified

JP workplan was not modified

Explain briefly: The UNJP team slightly modified the UNJP programme document in the 4th quarter of 2020, resulting in minor changes to the workplan, budget (representing less than 20% of the total budget) and indicator targets for 2020 and 2021; for example, the number of capacity building measures as well as public awareness events planned for 2020 had to be reduced and shifted to 2021. Furthermore, the JP team plans to request a no-cost extension to the JP, to allow us to conduct a longer and larger pilot of the MCEG to better inform decision making by the GoL to also account for COVID-19 related delays and to provide the GoL and the JP the opportunity to continue expanding social protection in the country.

## C. Plan for the Next Year of implementation

### *Next year*

The main focus of the annual work plan:

- National SP system: conduct further trainings for GoL on SP basics and NSPS Roadmap; further elaborate on and consult with GoL and PUNOs regarding the NSPS Roadmap; further refine, consult and finalize NSPS costing model; conduct/finalize research and discuss results of study on impact of SP on Lao economy and society; depending on the COVID-19 situation conduct public awareness campaigns e.g. via a to-be-identified SP champion; develop an NSPS M&E framework aligned with SDG 1.3 reporting and provide capacity development for GoL on respective data collection and usage of M&E data;
- NSPS financing: develop SP expenditure and revenue Chart of Accounts (CoA) subdivisions/articles/nomenclature and finalize via MoLSW policy directive to MoF; actuary study on on-/off-budget SP system and identification of blended financing options for NSPF; further elaborate NSPF business plan via data collection, technical & policy papers and consultative meetings;
- MECG: facilitate decision making via studies and discussion on MECG's last-mile payment delivery mechanism; provide trainings on the MECG operations at national, provincial, district and village level; ensure availability of MECG pilot documentation/briefs for NSPC to prepare scaling-up process; ensure roll-out/usage of MECG MIS; conduct monthly registration of children and payment delivery as well as to ensure social workers conduct referral and case management activities; ensure usage of and learning from the MECG M&E framework.

The expected annual results for 2021 will - amongst others - reflect the changed output indicator targets for 2021 e.g. in terms of:

- A slightly increased number of implemented SP capacity development events at central and decentral levels, which will be geared towards the implementation of the - by then - finalized and further elaborated NSPS roadmap; jointly with the results of the study on economic and social impacts of SP and up-to-date data supplied by the NSPS' M&E framework the GoL will be in a position to understand, steer and - where necessary - adapt SP reform implementation;
- The GoL is also expected to have a comprehensive understanding of the NSPS' implementation costs (including roll-out cost). Although it is generally expected that sources of SP funding via domestic financing in the upcoming years will be rather limited, the GoL is expected to have a better understanding of the range of potential financing sources (including ODA and from capital market products), which could contribute to social welfare scheme funding via the by then operational NSWF, while the government will also be able to track SP-related revenue and expenditures through dedicated SP CoAs;
- We also expect that by the end of 2021 or early 2022 latest at a minimum of 1,400 children in at least two poor districts are registered into the MECG pilot and their families/mothers receive cash transfers and complementary services and participate in behaviour change communication activities; by then the MECG programme management and implementation units are expected to manage the scheme's operations assisted by a tailored and operational MIS, which will capture and provide relevant data collected via the MECG's M&E framework.

### *Towards the end of JP implementation*

- We expect that - via the above-mentioned work plan activities and related results - towards the end of 2021 / early 2022 the National Social Protection Committee (NSPC) will be fully established and operational;
- By the same token we expect that by the end of 2021 or early 2022 the GoL will be in a situation to scale-up an integrated early childhood welfare package, consisting of cash transfers and complementary health and nutrition services as well as behaviour change communication activities for the children's mothers/caretakers;
- In terms of further modifications of the overall JP the PUNOs are currently discussing the feasibility, necessity and opportunities of a no-cost extension of the programme to a) utilize the opportunity provided by the additional DFAT funding to expand the scope, scale and duration of the current JP activities, e.g. by expanding the MECG pilot to more than one district and providing the grant for a

longer period of time to have better M&E data and better decision making b) account for the COVID-19 related delays and c) provide the GoL and the JP with the opportunity to consolidate the JP's results with the implementation of the NSPS e.g. by ensuring gradual take-over and ownership of the various JP activities by the GoL.

### *Risks and mitigation measures*

- Contextual Risks:
  - The updated JP Risk Matrix will include one additional risk in terms of the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related GoL prevention measures/policies on the JP's work program. The risk is high and is likely to impose limitations especially in terms of (in-person) meetings and events as well as international travel (e.g. by external experts). As practiced already throughout the year 2020, mitigation measures will include - but not be limited to - arranging online/virtual participation options for international participants in trainings, meetings and other events.
  - Moreover, the risk of limited fiscal space availability for expanding coverage and building the national social protection system in the aftermath of the COVID-19 related economic crisis is considered to be high in terms of likelihood (while its impact is considered to be moderate). The JP would aim at mitigating the risk's impact by leveraging additional sources of funding via the planned NSPF.
- Programmatic Risks:
  - While all programmatic risks mentioned in the risk management plan continue to be relevant also for the 2021 period, the risk in relation to the length of the project period being insufficient to implement all activities - not at least due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 prevention measures - has actually already materialized. The PUNOs are therefore considering to potentially request a no-cost extension to ensure all planned activities are going to be implemented and all intended results are likely to materialize.

## Annex 1: Consolidated Annual Results

### 1. JP contribution to global programmatic results (annual)

#### Global Impact: Progress towards SDGs

List up to 3 main SDG targets that your Joint Programme primarily focused on in 2020

**SDG: 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

**SDG: 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

**SDG: 17.3** Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

#### **Global Outcome 1: Integrated multi-sectoral policies to accelerate SDG achievement implemented with greater scope and scale**

1.1 Did your Joint Programme contribute to implementation of integrated multi-sectoral policies that accelerate SDG progress in terms of scope<sup>2</sup> in 2020?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: The JP's focus is on promoting and supporting greater scope of integrated multi-sectoral policies rather than greater scale, since it aims at establishing new social welfare/assistance schemes in pilot districts, which are expected to be scaled up at national level in years to come.

1.2 Did your Joint Programme contribute to implementation of integrated multi-sectoral policies that accelerate SDG progress in terms of scale<sup>3</sup> in 2020? (if so, brief explanation)

Yes

No

Explain briefly: the JP used the period since its inception to prepare for *greater scale* e.g. by supporting the implementation of the MECG pilot in at least two districts in the relatively poorer south of Lao PDR in 2021 (indicator 1.2)

#### **Global Output 3: Integrated policy solutions for accelerating SDG progress implemented**

1.3 Number of innovative solutions tested in 2020

Total number disaggregated by % successful and unsuccessful: 0

Provide the list

Explain briefly: The period since the JP's inception has been used to prepare the testing of innovations in 2021: Amongst others a national social protection champion will be identified in collaboration with GoL, which ultimately aims at engendering ownership and commitment as well as advocacy for the GoL SP strategy.

1.4 Number of integrated policy solutions implemented with the national partners in lead in 2020

Total number: 0

Provide the list

Explain briefly: The period since the JP's inception has been used to prepare the implementation of integrated policy solutions (with national partners in lead) in 2021.

1.5 Did your Joint Programme contribute to strengthening of national capacities to implement integrated, cross-sectoral SDG accelerators in 2020?

Yes

No

<sup>2</sup>Scope=substantive expansion: additional thematic areas/components added, or mechanisms/systems replicated.

<sup>3</sup>Scale=geographical expansion: local solutions adopted at the regional and national level or a national solution adopted in one or more countries.

Explain briefly: Strengthening (i.e. trainings at national, provincial and district level on MECG operations) to implement integrated cross-sectoral SDG accelerators will commence in early 2021 with the roll-out of the MECG pilot in Attapeu province.

1.6 Did your Joint Programme develop a functioning partnership framework for integrated policy solutions to accelerate progress on SDGs in 2020?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: With the creation of the *Programme Advisory Committee* (PAC) and its Secretariat (led by the MoLSW) the JP developed a functioning partnership framework for integrated policy solutions to accelerate progress on SDGs in 2020.

## 2. Selected global performance indicators (annual)

2.1. Did your Joint Programme contribute to the improvement of overall UNCT coherence in 2020?

Yes, considerably contributed

Yes, contributed

No

Explain briefly: The JP contributed to drafting of the "UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19" as well as to the "Developing a Shock-Responsive National Social Protection System to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis in Lao PDR", which was prepared by the UNCT jointly with the JP.

2.2. Did your Joint Programme contribute to reduced transaction costs for participating UN agencies in their interaction with national/regional and local authorities and/or public entities compared to other Joint Programmes?

Yes,

No

N/A (if there are no other joint programmes in the country)

Explain briefly: The JP's joint interactions with Lao PDR entities at the various governance levels contribute to reduced transaction costs in the sense that the UNJP – based on a comparison of PUNOs' experiences from before the initiation of the JP with the current situation – facilitates outreach to and mobilization of stakeholders from new/different relevant sectors to collaborate more effectively and efficiently on SP issues. How this UNJP LNOB in Lao PDR experience compares to other JPs' experience is difficult to answer from an intra-JP vantage point.

2.3. Was your Joint Programme aligned with the UNCT Results Groups in 2020?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: The JP is strongly aligned with and in support of the Lao PDR - UN Partnership Framework (UNPF) 2017-2021, especially regarding the UNPF's outcomes 2, 5, 6, and 7.

2.4. Did your Joint Programme secure additional funding resources in 2020?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: The JP secured AUD 1.1 million co-financing from DFAT in support of the NSPS as well as the MECG implementation.

### 3. Results as per JP Results Framework (annual)

Result / Indicators	Baseline	Expected 2020 target	2020 Result	Reasons for variance from planned target (if any)	Expected 2021 target	Expected final target (if different from 2021)
<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	Yes	No	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 i onset and related prevention measures.	Yes	
<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 1.1.1 indicator: # of capacity building events organized	0	3	2	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	4	6
Output indicator 1.1.2: # of participants in capacity building events (broken down by gender)	0	75 (at least 40 women)	37 total (12 women)	The number of executed trainings in 2020 was lower than initially planned due to the COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	75 (at least 40 women)	150 (at least 80 women)
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 developed		The Roadmap to implement the NSPS is adopted	
<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	0		1	

Output indicator 1.2.2: Gender-issues addressed in research	n/a	0	0		1	
Output indicator 1.2.3: Costed plan for the NSPS prepared	0	0	Costed plan for the NSPS developed	2020 and 2021 targets have been designed to account for difference between the plan's development and approval processes	Costed plan for the NSPS published	
Output indicator 1.2.4: Gender-issues addressed in the costed plan	n/a	0	0		1	
Output indicator 1.2.5: # of public events organised	0	2	0	Due to GoL moratorium of public events to reduce COVID-19 related risks	2	
<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	1	0	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	1	
<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	0	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	4	
Output indicator 1.4.2: Medium Term Expenditure Forecast for NSPS	0	0	0		1	
Output indicator 1.4.3: Budget Allocation for NSPS	n/a	n/a	n/a		Initial annual tranche (x% of GDP) to be determined 2020	
<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	n/a		Business plan	

Output indicator 1.5.2: Adoption of a Pathways report for NSPF establishment	n/a	initial mapping complete	initial mapping complete		n/a	initial mapping complete
Output indicator 1.5.3: Completion of Debt financing study for NSPF	n/a	n/a	n/a		report issued	
Output indicator 1.5.4: Availability of draft Legal documents for NSPF capitalization	n/a	n/a	n/a		Document set issued	
Output indicator 1.5.5: Launch of NSPF Prospectus	n/a	n/a	n/a		Document set issued and event organized and implemented	
Output indicator 1.5.6: Availability of the agreed Business Plan for NSPF	n/a	n/a			Business Plan agreed	
<b>Outcome 2. At least 1,400 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>						
Outcome indicator 2.1: # of children receiving cash grant in the targeted district(s)	0	0	0		1,400	
Outcome indicator 2.2: # of children with access to related social services	0	500	0	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	1,400	
<b>Output 2.1. Roadmap for the design and implementation of the MECG concluded</b>						
Output indicator 2.1.1 MEC Grant Modality assessment	0	assessment is undertaken	assessment is undertaken		(target achieved in Year 1)	
<b>Output 2.2. Management Information System (MIS) for the MECG designed</b>						
Output indicator 2.2.1: Operations Manual (OM) for the MECG available and approved	0	yes	OM drafted	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	OM approved	

Indicator 2.2.2: Proposal for the definition of the model of integration finalized	0	yes	integration model prescribed in OM and finalized	To ensure thorough integration of the MECG preparation the integration model has been integrated into the OM	OM (incl. integration model) approved	
<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	0	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	150	
<b>Output 2.4. MECG piloted in at least one of the poorest districts</b>						
Output indicator 2.4.1: # of children registered	0	0	0		1,400	
Output indicator 2.4.2: % of children assessed for social welfare needs	0%	0%	0%		100%	
<b>Output 2.5. MECG M&amp;E framework developed and being implemented</b>						
Output indicator 2.5.1: M&E Framework for the MECG adopted and being implemented	no	yes	no	Various JP operational delays due to COVID-19 onset and related prevention measures.	yes	
Output indicator 2.5.2: MECG evaluation	no	no	no		MECG evaluation is undertaken	

## Annex 2: List of strategic documents

### Strategic documents that were produced by the JP

Title of the document	Date when finalized (MM/YY)	Brief description of the document and the role of the JP in finalizing it
<i>Design of the Mother and Early Childhood Grant pilot programme for Lao PDR.</i>	12/2020	The document describes the context and the core elements of the MECG (pilot text) scheme.
Draft Operational Manual "Mother and Early Childhood Grant (MECG) Pilot Programme for Lao PDR"	10/2020	The document describes the MECG's (pilot test) delivery mechanism in more detail, aiming at providing core operational information and orientation for MECG implementers.
Policy Paper "NSPF Financing options"	12/2020	The paper addresses key NSPF financing options incl. those related to capital market resources.
1st draft of "NSPS Roadmap. Bridging the NSPS with its Implementation"	12/2020	The Document provides milestones and a preliminary timeline for key activities to execute and decisions points to address in order to move the core elements of the NSPS closer to their respective implementation.
1st draft of "NSPS Costing Plan"	12/2020	The spreadsheet provides (simulations of) estimates for the NSPS social welfare schemes costs from a benefit level perspective and - at least partially - from a supply-side readiness and scheme roll-out costs perspective.

### Strategic documents for which JP provided contribution

Title of the document	Date when finalized (MM/YY)	Brief description of the document and the role of the JP in finalizing it
Developing A Shock Responsive National Social Protection System To Respond To The Covid-19 Crisis In Lao PDR. Briefing Note Prepared by the UN-Country Team for the Government of Lao PDR.	06/20	The briefing note explores social protection options to limit the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Lao people and to support the economic recovery. The authors argue to use the crisis response as an opportunity to reinforce existing SP plans, instead of using limited available resources in alternative or temporary plans, focusing instead on the principle of building back better. The JP provided technical drafting (aligned approach) and funding to the briefing note.

UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19. Proposed Offers prepared by the UN Country Team in Lao PDR.	09/20	This UN Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP) has been prepared by the UNCT in Lao PDR using its experience of development challenges globally and of the country context, as well as its partnership with GoL, DPs, CSOs, and the private sector. The SERP outlines key priorities that are required to provide immediate relief to the COVID-19 crisis in Lao PDR and lay the foundations for an inclusive and sustainable recovery. The JP provided technical input from a SP perspective during the drafting process.
National Social Protection Strategy 2025	04/20 (adopted)	While the NSPS was drafted prior to the start of the JP, the JP contributed to its launch to the public and dissemination to decentralised government departments and staff all over the country.

### Annex 3: Strategic communication results

3.1. Have you created a strategic communication plan for the Joint Programme?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: The JP’s Project Document in annex 5 details the JP’s communication plan in terms of communication guiding principles, key audiences, communication objectives and main communication activities.

3.2. What percentage of the annual budget towards communications was utilized from the total budget? (Note that the entire JP comms budget must be min 5% of the total JP budget)

Explain briefly: [3%] Limited communication activities (using DFAT co-funding) were conducted in 2020 as this was the initialisation stage of the JP. More activities, including public awareness events, towards increased donor visibility and MECG related comms are planned for 2021.

3.3. Have visibility outcomes increased due to the provided funding for JP strategic communications?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: Esp. subsequent to the official joint launch of the NSPS and JP on 30 September 2020.

3.4. Does the Country Profile Page on the Joint SDG Fund website contribute to your JP outreach?

Yes

No

Explain briefly: Difficult to quantify at the JP level, although it can be assumed that international actors/observers access information on the JP via the SDG Fund website.

3.5. How many articles (interviews, human interest stories, press releases, expert insights, etc) about your JP were published by an external media outlet (Non-UN published)?

Total number: >3

Explain briefly: The joint launch of the NSPS and official inauguration of the JP on 30 Sept 2020 was covered by national media and coordinated by MOLSW.

3.6. How many articles (interviews, human interest stories, press releases, expert insights, etc) about the Joint Programme were published by the UNCT and JP PUNOs?

Total number: 3

Explain briefly: Launch of the NSPS and official inauguration of the JP on 30 Sept 2020 was published by RCO, ILO and UNICEF.

3.7. Have you received an increase of social media followers?

Yes

No

Total number: (Not mandatory)

Explain briefly: The JP uses the RCO's official social media channels.

#### Multi-Media Faucets

Title of the document	Date when finalized (MM/YY)	Brief description and hyperlink (if it exists)
Blog post on "Turning crisis into opportunity: A pathway to greater UN collaboration"	07/20	The article provides insights into the UNCT's insights to and perspectives on the COVID-19 crisis in Lao PDR and highlights opportunities for joint UN collaboration in response to it and in support for the GoL <a href="https://www.jointsdgfund.org/index.php/article/turning-crisis-opportunity-pathway-greater-un-collaboration">https://www.jointsdgfund.org/index.php/article/turning-crisis-opportunity-pathway-greater-un-collaboration</a>
Factsheet on the UNJP	10/20	UNJP 2-page general UNJP LNOB in Lao PDR factsheet in English and Lao <a href="https://www.jointsdgfund.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Factsheet%20UNJPLaos%20Lao.pdf">https://www.jointsdgfund.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Factsheet%20UNJPLaos%20Lao.pdf</a>
Factsheet: "Updating the Chart of Accounts – Innovating Social Protection Financing in Lao PDR"	09/2020	Crisp overview of the JP's workstream on innovative SP financing and tracking of SP revenue and expenditures via Chart of Accounts Subdivisions: <a href="https://www.unctf.org/Download/AdminFileWithFilename?id=11706&amp;cultureId=127&amp;filename=sdg-winaunconf-factsheetcoaspdf">https://www.unctf.org/Download/AdminFileWithFilename?id=11706&amp;cultureId=127&amp;filename=sdg-winaunconf-factsheetcoaspdf</a>

Various SP promotion videos. (tbc)	12/2020	The JP produced three promotional videos on the different SP dimensions, which the JP addresses in its work program. The videos are in their respective finalization stage.
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*Social Media Campaigns*

<b>Title of the document</b>	<b>Type (FB/Twitter/LinkedIn/Etc.)</b>	<b>Brief description and hyperlink (if it exists)</b>
n/a at this stage of the JP		

## Annex 4: Updated JP Risk Management Matrix

Risks	Risk Level: (Likelihood x Impact)	Likelihood: Certain - 5 Likely - 4 Possible - 3 Unlikely - 2 Rare - 1	Impact: Essential - 5 Major - 4 Moderate - 3 Minor - 2 Insignificant - 1	Mitigating measures	Responsible Org./Person
<i>Contextual risks</i>					
GoL unable to earmark public finance to provide a predictable cash transfer towards social protection	8 (moderate)	4	2	JP develops innovative funding solutions	UNJP
Geographical remoteness of some areas & underdevelopment of communications and infrastructure in rural areas	12 (high)	4	3	Choice of pilot area	UNJP & GoL
Limited fiscal space available for expanding coverage and building the national social protection system in the aftermath of the COVID-19 related economic crisis	15 (high)	5	3	JP leverages additional sources of funding through the National Social Protection Fund planned under the UNJP and seeks extension in project timeframe, to provide time for economic recovery	UNRCO, ILO, UNICEF, UNCDF
COVID-19 pandemic and related GoL actions to limited related transmission risk continue to limit aspects of JP work programme that depend on face-to-face interactions (meetings, public events etc.)	15 (high)	5	3	GoL and PUNOs - whenever feasible - resort to arrange for mix in-person (e.g. for participants based in Lao PDR) and online (e.g. for international participants) participation/input options.	MoLSW/UNJP

<i>Programmatic risks</i>					
GoL decides not to proceed with childhood grant or delays implementation	15 (high)	2	5	UN agencies will use close relationships with key GoL agencies to advance project	ILO, UNICEF, UNCDF, UNRC
Capacity to implement cash grant limited	16 (high)	4	4	Capacity building and training activities	UNJP
Capacity to provide related social worker visits and services limited	9 (moderate)	3	3	Capacity building and training activities	UNJP
GoL does not cooperate with efforts to develop innovative financial solutions	9 (moderate)	3	3	Evidence-based advocacy	UNJP
GoL does not cooperate with efforts to develop budget classifications	12 (high)	3	4	Evidence-based advocacy	UNJP
Government agencies delay in engaging with the project	15 (high)	5	3	JP will prioritise planning and feasibility studies during the inception period	UNJP
Capacity building activities not translated into concrete actions	16 (high)	4	4	Test and evaluate effectiveness of capacity building initiatives	UNJP
Lack of coordination amongst PUNOs	6 (moderate)	3	2	UN RC will play a lead role in coordinating JP	UNRC
Project period will be insufficient to implement all activities	15 (high)	5	3	a) PUNOs will seek to leverage additional resources to ensure continuation of all aspects of project work;	ILO, UNICEF, UNCDF

				b) PUNOs will consider requesting no-cost extension to ensure all planned activities can be implemented and GoL can fully capitalize on respective results.	
<i>Institutional risks</i>					
NSPC is not fully established or has limited influence	9 (moderate)	3	3	JP will adopt multi-agency approach working with existing key stakeholders	UNJP
<i>Fiduciary risks</i>					
EF&C in MEGC last-mile payment mechanism	16 (high)	4	4	Fiduciary risk study to identify least EF&C prone payment mechanism	UNJP/ILO