



# Evaluation Summary



International  
Labour  
Office

Evaluation Unit

## Improve nutrition, food safety, and food security for China's most vulnerable women and children - Midterm Evaluation

### Quick Facts

**Country:** *China*

**Final Evaluation:** *1/2012*

**Type :** *Independent*

**Technical Field :** *IFP/SAFEWORK*

**Evaluation Management :** *MDG Spanish Funds*

**Consultant :** *Rema Nair Balasundaram*

**Project Code :** *CPR/09/51/UND*

**Donateur :** *Fondes de MDG – US\$ 6,000,000*

**ILO:** 481,000 **WHO:** 1,735,540

**WFP:** 209,720 **UNICEF:** 1,080,629

**UNIDO:** 581,000 **UNDP:** 567,100

**UNESCO:** 418,880 **FAO:** 1,048,600

### Summary extracted from the main evaluation report

**Children, Food Security and Nutrition:** This thematic window operates across several regions. Twenty four programmes in five regions are working to halt preventable deaths caused by child hunger and poor nutrition. Interventions range from providing low cost nutritional packages that can save lives and promote healthy development to engaging with pregnant and lactating mothers ensuring they are healthy and aware of key nutrition issues. Advocacy for mainstreaming children's right to food into national plans and policies is also a key element of the fight against under nutrition. The MDG F allocated US\$134.5

million to 24 joint programmes in the area of children, food security and nutrition, and this area is the largest representing almost 20 percent of the MDG-F's work.

The Joint Programme aims to do the following:

1. Improve the evidence of women and children's food security and nutrition through a baseline study and mainstreaming of internationally recognized nutrition indicators in national maternal child health surveillance exercises.
2. Improve nutritional intake through the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding for six months; provision of nutritional supplements for women and children; and formulation of a national food fortification strategy.
3. Improve food safety, especially for child nutrition products, through introduction of international standards in production, processing, testing and preparation of food; awareness of food safety issues will be promoted through schools, consumer groups, women's groups and the media; and support to implementation of the new food safety law.
4. Gather the evidence gained through the demonstration projects in the pilot counties to build an advocacy package aimed at persuading policymakers to scale up interventions

### The Midterm Evaluation Framework:

Its objective was to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of CFSN activities in relation to stated objectives and to generate knowledge including the identification of best practices and lessons learned as well as conclusions and recommendations to

improve the implementation of the programme for the remaining period of implementation. The findings presented in this report are based on an in depth desk review of project/programme documents and on interviews with key programme informants and programme officials including a two-week mission to China. The methodology included the development of several evaluation instruments and tools to guide the entire data gathering and analysis process. The findings were triangulated with the use of multiple sources of information wherever possible and the evaluation report is structured around the OECD-DAC/UNEG /World Bank evaluation criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Results/Impacts and Sustainability, and an assessment of Coherence. A detailed inception report was formulated at commencement of the exercise and this is presented in the Annex of the report.

**Evaluation Findings:** This Evaluation presents its findings and takes into account the strategic importance of the Joint Programme in the context of the Government of China and its implications with a forward looking perspective. Given that the Monitoring framework of the MDG Fund provides for a review of Joint Programmes based on the results framework that was approved, this evaluation presents its findings in a more strategic context and goes beyond the Joint Programme.

**1. Programme and project Design of the MDG F Joint Programme on Children, Food Security and Nutrition:** Much of the planning and design of the MDGF Joint Programme on Children, Food Security and Nutrition was carried out almost as a top down approach as is typically carried out in programme and project design. With the net result that when UN agencies and national counterpart agencies had to handle operational issues in the field, they found that several programming aspects of planning and design failed to take into account the operational realities of the provinces in which the programmes had been planned. The Programme was found to have **overambitious programme objectives**, in terms of programme design, and chances of all the results being operationalized as planned seemed somewhat remote at the time of the midterm review. One example of this is the reduction of malnutrition, and undernutrition among women and children in China by a Programme in a three year duration seems an unlikely goal to achieve and the objective will need to be scaled back to make it more realistic. The design focused on the substance of

the project areas without paying attention to the novelty of a One-UN Joint Programme, and its funding and financial complexity. The result was an overly ambitious project given the time and effort required to comply with the financial regulations of the MDGF and each of the eight UN agencies along with the operating policies and procedures of four government ministries and 24 national partner agencies. Food security, Food safety, and Nutrition are three distinctly differing sectors with huge mandates of their own. In addition to this the Joint Programme also focused on Children, which is yet another dimension. The multidimensional nature of the four sectors speak to the enormity of the task in a complex country setting like that of China. Programme design did not take these complexities or additionalities of the sector thematic areas into account at concept stage. Unfortunately the results matrix and the monitoring reports were unable to capture the magnitude or complexities of issues and challenges that the teams on the ground had to face at inception and during implementation of the Joint Programme in its first year. Additionally the duration of the Joint Programme, of three years for realization of a vast number of tasks and inputs placed its own challenges for the teams on the ground.

**2. Coherence:** An assessment of coherence in the context of institutional, organizational and technical coherence was assessed on the basis of the programme inputs. Typically, one sees that when agencies clearly articulate strategies to ensure coherence, objectives and prioritization of agency inputs tend to be formally coherent with programme inputs. However, real and timely coherence presents a problem when agency inputs are meant to feed into policy making processes. In the case of the Joint Programme, several agencies both UN and partner agencies mentioned the challenges they faced in coordination at the field level suggesting that there were a few grey areas between providing information and programme inputs and taking a policy stand early in the programme. However, coherence between UN agencies engaged in the Joint Programme tended to be easier than that of coherence in delivery of programme inputs down the chain, especially at county and village level. Discussions with county agencies raised challenges faced in the absence of clear guidance and articulation of roles and responsibilities of divisions in some sector areas like food safety,

and nutrition. Given the paucity of time spent on the evaluation it was a difficult task to look into issues of coherence as a whole, but institutional coherence and organizational coherence seemed to be high at UN agency level at headquarters across the Joint Programme.

**3. Alignment and Relevance of the Joint Programme:** The MDGF Joint Programme on Children, Food Security and Nutrition was found to be fully aligned with the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year plans. Although the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan was signed in 2011, the current Joint Programme is more closely aligned to the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan given the clear prioritization for reducing the gaps in social inequalities and increasing basic health care coverage in the rural areas. The Joint Programme is also fully aligned with the UNDAF for China 2011-2015. The Joint Programme was found to be fully aligned with both planning cycles and its relevance was found to be high. Child Nutrition as rightly pointed out in the concept design of the Joint Programme, has not received any attention in China at national or international level, and remains of highest relevance. Additionally, food security, nutrition and food safety were all in line with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for China, particularly as identified in Outcomes 1 and 2. These areas also align themselves well with the government's goal to promote scientifically-based, people-centered, balanced development as articulated in the Five Year Plan. It was also for the first time, that the government explicitly proposed action on nutrition in its 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan (2006-2010). A discussion of relevance would not be complete without acknowledging the importance and attention brought to issues of food safety, food security, micronutrient deficiencies and food fortification in the country, in an integrated manner for the first time as a result of the establishment and implementation of the MDGF Joint Programme on children, food security and nutrition. The Joint Programme monitoring and reporting format did not allow for an integration and reporting of results of the Joint Programme as one unified whole, and therefore the more strategic results achieved by the Programme tend to get lost in the reports presented by the agencies. The Joint Programme team might consider providing a narrative section on results achieved for the Programme as an integrated

whole for future reporting to the MDGF Sect for the rest of the Programme period.

**4. Sustainability:** Despite strong ownership of design and institutionalization of early results where needed in the Joint Programme, sustainability measures in terms of design and next steps to be undertaken by the programme reflected a low level of sustainability. Given, China's strong ability to replicate and scale up results, the midterm evaluation is of the opinion that the current needs of the sectors namely food safety, and nutrition of women and children require measures that go beyond the Joint Programme. The Joint Programme has paved the way for drawing attention to these areas, however, the three year time frame and the number of programme interventions requiring attention demand a more rigorous and scientific approach that goes beyond the mandate of the Joint Programme and will need to be undertaken in collaboration with other major development partners like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Monitoring reports repeatedly speak of the paucity of financial and human resource capacity to undertake several aspects of the programme intervention. Some bureaus at county level especially agriculture (Wuding County) mentioned that they had not received funds for any programme implementation since inception of the programme. This Midterm review found that neither programme design nor programme inputs at national or provincial level took into account sustainable and meaningful measures for building sustainability in programme inputs for the future, and if they did these were not immediately apparent.

**5. Effectiveness and Results:** An analysis of effectiveness is led by the question, did the programme have the right objectives and did the programme carry out the intended activities and objectives in the right manner. An assessment of the above questions on effectiveness indicates that the relevance of the Joint Programme from a broad and national perspective of the current situation in China far outshone all the other evaluation criteria and pointed to relatively quick gains that could be reflected in terms of programme outcomes. However, paucity of reporting measures, poorly written progress reports, a weak monitoring instrument, poor monitoring capacity and processes, failure to

take into account time involved in planning, design and formulation of the baselines of each of the individual outcome areas within the sectors and thematic areas, and poor conceptualization of the multidimensional aspects of the programme plague the Joint Programme. Some of these factors were indicative of the poor start up and of programme operations and determining factors in not allowing the programme to get off the ground at did not allow for an integration and reporting of results of the Joint Programme as one unified whole, and therefore the more strategic results achieved by the Programme tend to get lost in the reports presented by the agencies.

**Recommendations:** This midterm review presents a set of recommendations that take into account the importance of the Joint Programme for the health and well being of the Peoples Republic of China. The Joint Programme served to raise the attention of development actors in the state on the importance of children, food security, food safety and nutrition in China. However, the duration of the Joint Programme was not adequate enough to handle all the Programme objectives that were defined at inception. This midterm review recommends the following immediate measures that should be considered by the Programme:

1. All UN Agencies and Partner Agencies are requested to review their budgets, and work plans and formulate an Accelerated Action Plan that takes into account the allocated budget lines to ensure that Programme objectives are realized by Project completion. In the absence of this, the Joint Programme may consider requesting a one time no cost extension of the Programme by the MDGF Sect, to allow for completion of programme goals and objectives.
2. The Joint Programme must work towards providing reports in a more coherent manner to allow for a realistic measurement of results achieved in the Programme by outcome areas as defined in the Concept Note. Additionally, the Programme must work to enhance quality of all progress reports by outcome area in a systematic manner to allow for information to be used by national authorities to work

towards scaling up measures before project completion.

3. The Joint Programme must consider working to formulate tools and measures that contribute to targeting health and nutrition education measures to the girl child and school going children aged 12 and above especially with reference to micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition.
4. The MidTerm Review recommends that the Ministry of Health and the Joint Programme consider establishing a Multilateral Financing Facility to continue the work that the Joint Programme has started for scaling up at country level with the collaboration of the Multilateral Development Banks in the area of Children, Food Security, Food Safety, and Nutrition.
5. The Joint Programme needs to consider establishing linkages within a South South Cooperation modus operandi with UN and MDBs in the South Asia Region to enhance understanding of handling Wasting trends in Malnutrition, and on food safety and Milk Production entities like that of Amul in India.
6. The Concept note very clearly talks about using evidence based interventions to reach vulnerable populations to better address food security and undernutrition in mothers and children. However, care must be taken to ensure that the results of baselines and data are carefully peer reviewed and interpreted in the right manner. Discussions with UN agencies and partners reflected the need for the Joint Programme to de-mystify and further explain some of the findings especially in the nutrition sector to produce a report with validity especially with the Joint Programme recommending scaling up measures.
7. The Midterm Review recommends that the Joint Programme reconsider adopting forward looking strategies in the Programme that would contribute to enhanced efficiency gains in the Programme like that taken by the Trade and Labor Unions in Wuding County, in identifying extended maternal leave facilities for mothers with newborns who worked in hazardous industrial zones and working to build legislature with smaller firms as well to assist them prolong breastfeeding practices.