



Accelerating Progress towards an Integrated and Modernized Social Protection System for All in Thailand (United Nations Joint Programme on Social Protection for All in Thailand)

QUICK FACTS

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Background & Context

Background and project description

The present report presents the findings of the *Final Joint Independent Evaluation* of the programme entitled *Accelerating Progress towards an Integrated and Modernized Social Protection System for All in Thailand (United Nations Joint Programme on Social Protection for All in Thailand)*. It is implemented in Thailand by four Partner UN Organizations (PUNOs), notable ILO, IOM, UNICEF and UN Women, and funded by the UN Joint SDG Fund (US\$ 1,999,815) as well as Co-funding by the PUNOs (US\$ 662,000). The JP has a total duration of 30 months including a no-cost extension from 1 January 2020 until 30 June 2022. The overall objective of the JP is to enhance and integrate Thailand's social protection system, and reach those being left behind, especially the more vulnerable groups, such as children, elders, informal workers, migrant workers, and people with disabilities.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The main purpose of this evaluation is to promote accountability to key stakeholders, including the Government of Thailand and the donor and to enhance learning within the four PUNO and other key stakeholders. The scope of the Evaluation covers all three Outcomes of the JP, as well as the entire programme period from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2022. The geographical scope of the programme covers the country of Thailand. The main clients include the four PUNOs, the Government Counterparts (MSDHS, MoL, NESDC, MoF and others), Social Partners, Civil Society Organizations, Research Institutes and the UN Joint SDG Fund.

Methodology of evaluation

The methodology includes a desk study of the relevant documents, primary data collection through interviews with 33 stakeholders which were all conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data analysis and reporting. It also includes a critical reflection process by the key stakeholders in particular through two online stakeholders' workshops and the inputs by stakeholders to the draft report. Key deliverables are the inception report, the presentation of findings at two virtual validation workshops, the draft report, and the final report taking into consideration the feedback on the draft report.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The present Evaluation found with respect to the first evaluation criteria, **Relevance**, that the UN Joint Programme (JP) is highly Relevant and that its objectives respond to the needs of key stakeholders in Thailand. In addition, all stakeholders interviewed underlined that the JP was very timely, as almost simultaneously COVID increased attention for Social Protection (SP), the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) was developing the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023 – 2027), and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) was in need of enhancing the Management Information System (MIS) for the Child Support Grant (CSG) due to the policy expansion in 2019. The alignment of the JP to the priorities of the Thai Government was very clear, in particular with the new 13th Plan (Milestone 9), and with the policies of the MSDHS (including DCY) and the Ministry of Labour (including SSO). Alignment was much less clear in the case of the Employers' and Workers' Organisations in Thailand. It was further found that the JP was clearly relevant to the country programmes of the four Partner UN Organizations (PUNOs) as well as for the UN as a whole in Thailand, through its UNSDCF (2022-2026).

On the **Validity of Design**, it was found that strategies of the UNJP were adequate to enhance Thailand's social protection system, and to reach certain population groups who are being left behind. The need for a Diagnostic Review on SP (SPDR) arose through the long-standing dialogue between UNICEF and MSDHS, while ILO had been working on the Social Protection Floor (SPF). For the design consultations were mainly held with the MSDHS. The program's logic included in the Theory of Change and the Outcome Statement with three Outcomes and 10 Outputs are straightforward and logical in itself. The three Outcomes themselves are quite diverse, but the logic behind that is rationalised by aiming for an enhanced evidence-base needed for a system review (Outcome 1) as well as targeting

certain gaps in the system, in particular those left behind (Outcome 2 on the CSG and Outcome 3 on domestic workers). The original timeframe of just two years (2020-2021) was not realistic to push for a complete social protection system reform, nor to complete all the deliverables identified especially also due to the delays caused by the pandemic.

With respect to *Coherence*, it was found that the cooperation between the four PUNOs coordinated by ILO as the lead agency was effective to achieve the expected results including the support from the UN Resident Coordinator Office (RCO). The cooperation with government organisations was particularly close with the MSDHS, MoL and NESDC. The engagement with the Employers' and Workers Organisations was more incidental, and that with CSOs was directed at specific activities. The JP also cooperated closely with two research institutes. By its very nature the JP implemented by four PUNOs contributed to UN reforms including UN Country Team (UNCT) coherence by acting as a kind of platform within the UN to advocate for social protection which demonstrated how the UN can offer integrated policy advice to the government.

The *Effectiveness* of the JP will be more than satisfactory at the end of June 2022 as the interventions are expected to achieve most of its expected results and outputs. Nevertheless, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of activities were delayed, and a few activities were abandoned. Several key achievements for the programme as a whole were highlighted, such as the substantial awareness raising and exchange of information on social protection among many stakeholders, the extension of the evidence-base, and the formulation of proposals for solutions of problems and gaps in the social protection system. With respect to Outcome 1, the Thailand Social Protection Diagnostic Review (SPDR) based on six background studies and a series of workshops with many stakeholders is a major achievement and significantly provided inputs to the 13th Plan. The indicator for Outcome 2, scale up of CSG coverage to 2 million by end 2021, was substantially surpassed, with 2.35 million children (48.6% girls) registered in April 2022. The JP/UNICEF provided technical assistance to the DCY to improve the capacity of the Management Information System (MIS) of the CSG, and to enhance the design of the CSG grant itself. In addition, the implementation and scaling-up of the CSG and the Disability Grant was supported. The indicator for Outcome 3 is to design/test policy options to ensure a more effective coverage of domestic workers (incl. migrants) which is still a work in progress, and includes a national policy review by UN Women/ILO on social protection for Domestic Workers.

A number of *challenges* have been identified by the evaluation which were encountered by the JP during its implementation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the particularly large number of stakeholders to be coordinated, the great diversity in types of workers, perceptions on migrant workers, and some minor coordination issues among PUNOs. The main *success factors* which contributed to achieve the progress described in the above include the timeliness of the JP, the solid engagement from the beginning with the MSDHS, the constructive role played by MoL/SSO, the strong networking activities, the combined legitimacy and credibility of the four PUNOs, and the high commitment of the Programme Team of the four PUNOs and of the NPC. The management arrangements also contributed to that, including the meetings of the PSC, the meetings called by the RCO in the inception phase, and the many ad hoc meetings of PUNO staff often coordinated by the NPC. The stakeholders interviewed were quite

satisfied with the quality of the tools, advice, workshops and trainings delivered by the project, and the JP was much valued for bringing in the international perspective and attention for vulnerable groups.

The *Efficiency of Resource Use* was satisfactory to achieve the results of the JP. The original project period of two years was relatively short, though, for the intended outcomes, and the resources from the Joint SDG Fund to be divided over four UN agencies were relatively modest with a total of almost USD 2 million. The budget was enlarged with co-funding by the four PUNOs in the form of staff expertise (in total USD 662,000). The largest amount of the original budget (Joint SDG Fund plus Co-funding) was allotted to the activities per se (contractual services and transfers/grants to counterparts) amounting to almost 50%, followed by staff costs (35%). Overall spending has been slow in the first 1.5 years due to the pandemic and the fact that the NPC started in May 2020 but picked up rapidly in 2022. By the end of April 2022, the Expenditures for Outcomes 1 and 3 amounted to just over 90% of their respective budgets and for Outcome 2 it was about 50%; most of the balance has already been committed or scheduled to be spent before the end of June. There was only one dedicated staff member in the project (the NPC) and most stakeholders underlined that it would have been more efficient to have a larger dedicated project team. Due to the delays mentioned, a no-cost extension of six months was granted by the donor. Reporting was timely including a comprehensive Risk Management Matrix.

With respect to *Impact*, it was found that in order to change the entire social protection system of a country would take many more years, but the JP has made several important steps into such a direction. The JP has done very substantial work on background and diagnostic studies creating a solid evidence-base for potential policy reforms. For the future, Milestone 9 of the 13th Plan is crucial, and significantly the JP provides a set of Recommendations as well as practical steps to support the implementation of this Plan's targets and objectives. An increase in the actual coverage of social protection schemes is difficult to measure and it principally depends on the Thai Government for approving the extensions of such schemes. With respect to Outcome 2, the increase in the CSG coverage to 2.35 million may not be directly attributable to the JP itself, but the long-standing partnership between MSDHS and UNICEF certainly contributed to it. In addition, advocacy for CSG was enhanced, and the available fiscal space investigated. The further increase to Universal Coverage of the CSG is already endorsed by the National Child and Youth Committee, and the JP developed policy options to implement it. Concerning Outcome 3, the MoL/SSO is investigating the inclusion of domestic workers in the Social Security Act; the UNJP is contributing to that through the study on Domestic Workers.

A significant impact of the JP is the enhanced networking among the different stakeholders through workshops and training courses, advocacy and communication. The JP also had an impact on certain specific issues that received attention in the news, in particular the policy brief on the COVID-19 Response, the advocacy of UNICEF with the MSDHS leading to top-ups of several grants, the review of the new National Pension Fund proposed by the MoF, and the review of the proposal by the MoL on the SSF. Institutional attitudes and mindset have also been influenced by the JP through the different activities undertaken in the areas of social dialogue, awareness raising and capacity development at the MSDHS and the SSO/MoL, as well as through the diagnostic studies presented. The project support was for certain elements institutionalised by government agencies, for example the diagnostic review



was used for the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan, concerning the CSG the support from UNICEF and the UNJP has been institutionalised in the MSDHS. Concerning Outcome 3 it is more difficult to arrive at conclusions on institutionalisation as some work is still going on. Upscaling will principally depend on the implementation of the 13th Plan, while the scaling up to universal coverage of the CSG awaits cabinet approval. Replication of the JP design could be done in other similar Middle-Income Countries, and the MSDHS has already requested UNICEF's support with the replication of the MIS of CSG to their other programmes. In this sense the JP was certainly catalytic in setting in motion other developments whereby the government brought in their own funding.

On *Sustainability*, it was found that there are some activities, results and effects that are expected to continue after the programme has ended on 30 June 2022. Crucially, social protection has now been included in the 13th Plan and therefore it will be prioritised by the Royal Thai Government for implementation in the coming years. In addition, networks and informal groupings among key national stakeholders and among individual staff members have been established and have the potential to sustain. It is foreseen that the four PUNOs in Bangkok will continue to work with the relevant Government Organisations, and in particular UNICEF and ILO have made budget reservations for that. A specific example of sustainability is that the NESDC has requested budget from the Budget Bureau of the PM Office to continue the training in social budgeting initiated by the JP. The evaluation further found that *ownership* differs per outcome and among the key stakeholders involved in the JP. The MSDHS has clearly taken ownership of parts of the JP but does not yet own the Social Protection Diagnostic Review (SPDR) and its Recommendations in particular because they still need to be formally launched in June 2022, and because some of these recommendations have budget implications. With respect to the CSG, the DCY/MSDHS clearly has ownership of it for many years already and UNICEF has a long-standing close alliance with this department. Ownership of the JP has not developed as much in the MoL although the SSO does indeed own the activities related to pensions. Ownership among CSOs and employers' and workers' organisations has not developed.

With respect to the *Cross-cutting Issues*, it was found that tripartite dialogue was not specifically targeted. To be sure, the employers' and workers' organisations were already deeply involved in a different project funded by SSO and implemented by the ILO on actuarial Issues for pension reform (2019-2023). The UNJP has contributed to gender-equality in a few specific areas through several targeted activities (e.g. the Gender-Impact assessment, the National Policy Review on social protection for Domestic Workers and the GRB-trainings). The four PUNOs have mainstreamed gender issues into their regular programmes, and the Programme Team is clearly gender sensitive. However, several stakeholders indicated that attention for gender-inequality could have been more systematic, for example through a comprehensive gender strategy with dedicated resources developed at the outset of the programme. The project has also contributed to non-discrimination in one particular area as the advocacy work and communication strategy of the JP/IOM in cooperation with MoL and the CSO Community has led to a more positive perception vis-a-vis migrant workers among parts of the Thai population. While disability inclusion was not part of the design of the JP, it is one of the elements in the Social Protection System, and JP/UNICEF has undertaken several activities e.g. on the Disability Grant and on Children with Disabilities liaising with the National Committee on Disability.

Recommendations

1. Establish a Pathway to keep the momentum of the UN Joint Programme (JP) going and to differentiate between Short-term urgent priorities (Recommendations 2 and 3 below), and the medium/longer-term recommendations, such as the integration of coverage. The pathway should cover all seven Recommendations of the SPDR (Annex 6).
2. Set-up an Independent Coordination Body or Mechanism for social protection, for example an Inter-Ministerial Body, to coordinate all 23 government agencies now involved in social protection schemes, which can also serve as platform for communication and Knowledge Management and sharing. Include in this process as much as possible also the relevant social partners and CSOs. It might be useful to investigate in how far the National Social Welfare Committee (NSCW) could be revitalized to serve as such a coordinating body with respect to social protection issues.
3. Extend Coverage to Workers in all Sectors, and pay specific attention to SMEs, informal sector, Domestic and Migrant Workers (especially Portability of benefits), Elderly people, and Workers aged between 55 to 60 years old, and their retirement plans. Examine thereby if increasing social protection and portability of benefits will enhance the use of more regular channels by migrant workers in other words in how far it is a tool to reduce irregular migration.
4. Raise awareness of and educate the workers through advocacy campaigns and communication strategies on issues around social protection (e.g. Pension), and in particular explain clearly the benefits under the Social Security Fund to them.
5. Involve Workers' and Employers' Organisations (EO/WO) and CSOs more systematically in future interventions, possibly including a CSO Coalition, and arrange for Capacity building of the staff from EO and WO on social protection.
6. Develop a Gender Equality Strategy in any follow-up intervention and allocate dedicated resources to this strategy. Take into consideration Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB), increasing gender-disaggregated data, Domestic work, and Care economy. In addition, engage gender focal points in different ministries so they can be supported to undertake gender advocacy on social protection issues across an entire ministry.
7. Conduct the Launch of the Synthesis Report of the Social Protection Diagnostic Review (SPDR) before the end of the project in June in order to consolidate the achievements of the JP and to solidify the networking around social protection issues with government, EO/WO, CSOs, academic institutions, donors and UN agencies.
8. Discuss with the Joint SDG Fund the possibility for a new Joint Programme on social protection in Thailand, considering the catalytic nature of the present programme, which resulted for example in the RTG bringing in their own funding for the MIS of the CSG.
9. The UNCT should consider a separate Working Group (WG) on social protection co-led by ILO and UNICEF, whereby this JP can serve as an example, as it has operated as a de facto Working Group, and has cooperated well with the Thai Government which has referred to it as "the latest flagship partnership".