



Extending Social Protection to Herders with Enhanced Shock Responsiveness in Mongolia (United Nations Joint Programme on Social Protection for Herders, Mongolia)

QUICK FACTS

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Background & Context

Background and project description

This report presents the findings of the end of project evaluation of the “United Nations Joint Programme on Extending Social Protection to Herders with Enhanced Shock Responsiveness” in Mongolia.

The United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) on “Extending Social Protection to Herders with Enhanced Shock Responsiveness” had been implemented in close cooperation with the governmental and national counterparts for a period 2.5 years between February 2020 to June 2022. The UNJP’s total budget is USD 2,365,000. The SDG Fund has provided USD 1,990,000 and the remaining funds were contributed by PUNOs (in-kind contribution).

UNJP contributes to the achievement of the SDG 3, 8, 13, 17 by supporting the government and stakeholders to promote social protection, with focus on having more herders to be covered by social

protection schemes including social and health insurance and reducing their vulnerabilities to poverty and to extreme climate change.

The UNJP consists of the three sub-components (“outcomes”) as follows: Outcome 1 (with direct contributions of ILO and UNFPA) aimed to work towards “More herding men and women access to social and health insurance effectively”; Outcome 2 (with direct contributions of UNICEF and FAO) aimed to work towards “Institutional capacity strengthened to mainstream shock-responsiveness into the national social protection system”, and; Outcome 3 (led by ILO) aimed at promoting national dialogues to social protection floor and the formulation of social protection financing strategy for sustainable and adequate benefits for herding men, women, boys, and girls.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The main purpose of the final joint independent evaluation was to promote accountability of key stakeholders (e.g. Government of Mongolia and the United Nations Joint Programme) and to enhance the learning within the Participating United Nations Organizations and the key stakeholders. The evaluation’s objectives were to assess the coherence, relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the joint programme interventions, while identifying the supporting factors and constraints that have led to them, including strategies and implementation modalities chosen, and partnership arrangements and to assess the extent to which the joint programme management and coordination mechanisms adequately addressed the needs and implementation challenges and how effectively the joint programme management monitored joint programme performance and results. Therefore, it was vital to assess the extent and adequacy to which the joint programme management and coordination mechanisms addressed the needs of the target community and to identify the implementation challenges faced by Participating United Nations Organizations (PUNO). The evaluation was conducted between April and July 2022, by Training Evaluation Research Institute (TERI) . The evaluation has covered Ikh-Uul, Ider, Tes, Otgon, and Dorvoljin soums of Zavkhan aimag as they had been selected as the pilot region. The main users of this independent evaluation are PUNOs (ILO, UNICEF, FAO, UNFPA) and implementing partners for the purposes of providing accountability and learning from the JP.

Methodology of evaluation

Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies were used including desk review, key informants’ interviews and focus groups’ discussions. The evaluators conducted field missions to collect the UNJP data including Uliastai khot as Zavkhan aimag center and target soums as Ider, Ikh-Uul, Tes and Otgon soums in May of 2022. Dorvoljin soum had set travel restrictions (COVID related restrictions) during the timeframe of the field mission, therefore, the field mission to Dorvoljin soum had to be cancelled. However, online interviews and online meetings were conducted as an alternative.



Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance

The evaluation results confirm that UNJP is well aligned with the core needs in improvements of the social protection system and shock responsiveness policy for vulnerable herders' community. The herders' social insurance coverage objective was highly relevant in the context of Mongolia and aligned with national government priorities including the national government policy such as Vision-2050 of Mongolia as long-term policy to increase coverage of social insurance' up to 90 percent by 2025 and 99 percent by 2030. UNJP was relevant to respond to pandemics, although it was designed before the pandemic.

Design Validity

The overall theory of change and the rationale for the joint approach should have been made more explicit, together with a clearer shared understanding between the agencies as well as among national partners on why a joint approach would be more effective rather than three individual standalone components, as the evaluation found that there was a lack of clear shared understanding between the agencies as well as among national partners on their cooperation, to support the other's activities and to tie the interventions with each other. The UNJP needed to involve local counterparts actively into the programme design phase and consult the local counterparts to facilitate UNJP interventions at the local level. The baseline data of the social and health insurance coverage rate was taken from the national database that provide aggregated data at the national level, while the UNJP's interventions were only implemented at the piloting soum level.

Coherence

Each of the PUNOs had its role in implementing the UNJP in accordance with its organizational core mandate and each brought its unique expertise in achieving the Project objectives. The PUNOs tend to operate as individual agencies rather than one entity. The cooperation both with national and local governments were effective, in terms of compliance of sector policy and priority needs. The UNJP delivered significant share of its activities through a network of contracted partners at different levels. The PUNOs cooperated well with their respective social partners. The UNJP was implemented under the Resident Coordinator's Office to ensure that the UN collectively contributes towards achievement of the national sustainable development goals and targets. The UNRC and the Minister for Labour and Social Protection co-chair the

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Joint Programme Steering Committee to review the progress and to make relevant decisions. This was a very high-level Steering Committee compared to the other single UN agency programmes.

Effectiveness

With regards to effectiveness the “Quick win” approach” leads the stakeholders to reach the programme objectives effectively. This is an approach to use the existing structure and methodologies within the country instead of creating new structure. Therefore, the approach was effectively utilized in the case at hand. With regards to effectiveness, sub-components achieved its relevant objective and UNJP brought unintended positive changes along the way. UNJP over achieved its target (20%) of social insurance coverage of herders in the target soums as the actual achieved rate was 24.6%. The PUNOs worked effectively with partners and organizations to achieve expected results. The local governments’ capacity in the target soums had been strengthened in promoting the social and health insurance for herders and shock responsiveness. Both national and local governments and social partners satisfied with the quality of tools, technical advice, training, and other activities delivered by the UNJP.

Impact, and sustainability

The project contributed to the acceleration of the relevant SDGs at the national level. In the participatory evaluation, 86% of the total herders responded that social and health insurance is very important tool for risk resilience, while 58% responded that the UNJP interventions were highly effective in making the herders understand the benefits of the social and health insurance. The UNJP local counterparts were very confident that UNJP contributed greatly to strengthening the local government capacity towards the social protection and shock responsiveness issues of herders. As to the responses of the local partners in the participatory evaluation, 90% of the local counterparts responded that the UNJP had made a significant contribution to raising awareness of the importance of social and health insurance for herders.

The local partnership among the social partners brought positive impact in advocating the insurance benefits as well as it led the local institutions to team up for any other local activities. The UNJP conducted two studies on social protection and for policy reform: “Study on Herders’ Behaviour towards Social and Health Insurance” and “Social Protection Diagnostic Review and Financing Strategy (SPDR&FS)”. These studies identified issues in the current social protection scheme, policy gaps, implementation issues and suggested for further changes in the social protection systems and financing for social protection. Overall, the knowledge and understanding about the shock responsiveness among the stakeholders at the national and local levels were improved by the influence of UNJP.

Through piloting the Child Money Programme (CMP) in the pandemic, the CMP top-up benefit became a permanent for the nation even after the end of the pandemic. Empirical recommendations on the design and administration of shock-responsiveness measures in child money programme were provided to the Government of Mongolia based on the results of the

UNJP pilot programme. The UNJP's technical support in generation of solid evidence and high-level policy advocacy have resulted in continued vertical expansion of Government's flagship social protection programme for children throughout 2021 helping the families in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic challenges related to income and livelihood loss. The impact of the vertical expansion of the CMP has been validated through various studies and studies of development partners.

The local governments and implementing partners became the social and health insurance promoters as results of UNJP in the target soums. Prospects of sustainability of the training curriculum for the herders are high and the curriculums remain to be used by the training institutions in a sustainable manner after UNJP closing. RIMA tool will be used by the MOFALI and NEMA to mainstream a notion of resilience of pastoral communities into relevant reforms of national policies on shock-responsive social protection, climate change adaptation and disaster risk assessment. The building of local partnership was an important contribution by UNJP to the local institutional strengthening, therefore, the partnership culture planted by UNJP will be used for the future projects/programs at the local level

Efficiency

Although the UNJP's implementation period overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic period in Mongolia, it reached the objectives of the programme as a result of the effective implementation. The country was in a strict quarantine for one and half years from November, 2020 to December, and thus conducting meetings and trainings were not allowed all the way until end of 2021. As a result, UNJP faced implementation challenges that would ordinarily would not have been factor. However, challenges were overcome successfully by introducing on-line solutions.

The programme partners and the herders were satisfied with the technical experts and consultants procured to provide specific expertise in the relevant UNJP interventions. It was an indication that in terms of the human resources the UNJP was efficient. The PUNOs were composed of skilled and motivated managers with a high degree of credibility with partners. The financial impact of the JP in terms of the cost efficiency was not assessed. It is considerable that respective national government at the Ministerial level should appoint one focal point for the entire JP regardless of components to improve efficiency.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the next UNJP:

1. Improve the internal coordination mechanism to support each other's interventions to have added synergy. The economic empowerment activities should be tied into the social protection activities, especially the mainstreaming of social and health insurance. A future UNJP should bring the components together, and the potential of the joint approach needs to be spelled out more precisely by involving the local counterparts actively into the programme



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design phase and consult the local counterparts to facilitate UNJP interventions of different components to support each other to achieve shared objectives in an effective and efficient manner.

2. Design a monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management system to use among the PUNOs so that progress toward results, best practices, and lessons learned can be systematically tracked and reported to all stakeholders. A joint monitoring and evaluation could be conducted for all components at the same time for better efficiency and for improvements in coherence.

3. Track the financial efficiency for the next UNJP to find ways to quantify the joint programme efficiency as the programme is perceived to have resulted in cost savings through joint efforts.

4. The effective practice of the social partnership of organizations at the local level should be disseminated for any other further UN projects. Disseminate the non-conventional approaches of advocating herders' social and health insurance for other locations via contracted partners

Lessons learnt and good practices

LL1 The regular PUNO meetings should have consultative and consensus-based decisions in finding the interrelations of the sub-components and potential collaboration issues at the local level.

GP1 The non-conventional approaches of advocating herders' social and health insurance were tested with success The team working approach of the advocating the social and health insurance for herders was very effective

GP2 Provision of the pedigree animals for herders for better productivity was a success.