

## UNDP-UN JP MTR Management Response

### Management response to the Mid-Term Review of UN Joint Programme “Building the resilience of communities affected by the Aral Sea disaster through a Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region”

Project Title: **Building the resilience of communities affected by the Aral Sea disaster through a Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region**

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#### Context, background and findings

##### **a) The programme is relevant to national and regional priorities.**

The development of the Aral Sea region is a strong priority for the government of Uzbekistan. It adopted the *State Programme for the Development of the Aral Sea Region 2017-2021*, which focuses on measures to improve the socio-economic condition and quality of life of people living in Karakalpakstan. To ensure a reliable and stable financing of the implementation of these measures, this programme plans the establishment of a fund for the development of the Aral Sea basin. Uzbekistan is also part of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), which was established in 1992 with the purpose of improving the social, economic, and ecological situation in the basin of the Aral Sea. The UN joint programme is much aligned with government strategies and priorities for the development of the Aral Sea region. It was developed in close collaboration with government partners and it is a direct response to national priorities and the government is strongly committed to the programme. According to the UN Resident Coordinator, the government recently committed to finance the Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund (MPHSTF) for the Aral Sea region for about USD 5 to 10M per year.

##### **b) The approach ensured that the programme address the needs of targeted beneficiaries**

Beneficiaries were identified through a needs assessment and mapping exercise conducted at the outset of the programme. It included a social survey of 1,600 households in 8 selected districts of the region and 8 focus groups with local authorities and civil society representatives. The assessment covered the development of agriculture and its priority directions; social infrastructure; education system; healthcare system; eco logic situation; gender aspects of employment; and social risks and security. The assessment identified potential risks and threats to the life of the population of the Aral Sea region. The prevailing risks in all 8 districts were tension in the labor market and unemployment, unfavorable ecological situation, and provision of quality drinking water. Based on this assessment of needs and priorities, a roadmap for programmatic interventions in the Aral Sea region to address human insecurities in a holistic

way was developed. It ensured that the programme address the needs of targeted beneficiaries, including women, men and vulnerable groups.

**c) The conceptual design of the programme is coherent and logical.**

The *Results Framework* formulated during the design phase presents a coherent and logical “*chain of results*”, which detailed a list of planned activities to reach a set of 12 expected outputs, which in turn will contribute to the achievement of the overall two objectives of the programme. The project document provides a useful “*blue print*” for the project team to guide the implementation of the programme. The overall strategy of this programme is twofold: (1) for the short and medium terms, start the programme with an identification of the targeted beneficiaries through a needs assessment, establish a roadmap for interventions to be supported by the programme, and pilot innovative projects to address human security needs in selected communities, including the sustainable management and conservation of natural resources and the enhancement of primary healthcare services; and (2) for the long term, develop, establish, develop capacities and institutionalize a well-coordinated sustainable Multi-Partner Human Security Trust Fund (MPHSTF) to finance the human security-based development in the Aral Sea region.

**Effectiveness**

**d) The programme has been effective and should meet its targets.**

Overall, the programme has been successful and it is on its way to meet its targets set at the formulation stage in the planned timeframe. The achievements will certainly contribute towards achieving the programme objectives. A mix of training activities, investments in social infrastructure projects, support to private sector development, regional development planning, and strengthening government health services, are contributing to the first objective that is “*to address human security needs of the population affected by the Aral Sea disaster at the local and national levels.*” The formulation of a MPHSTF for the Aral Sea region with the related training of people and the promotion and communication on this financial mechanism has been successful so far and will contribute “*to establish a well-coordinated financial mechanism for implementing and sustainable financing of human security initiatives as a way to promote and mainstream the human security approach in the region*”, which is the second objective of the project. This financial mechanism is expected to be established by the end of 2018. Four critical success factors explain this effectiveness: (1) the programme is flexible and was able to mobilize additional resources and expand its reach in the Aral Sea region; (2) based on an assessment conducted at the outset of the programme, it is a responsive programme to communities needs and priorities; (3) There is an effective collaboration between the government and UN agencies; and (4) the programme is implemented by a strong technical team mostly based in Nukus and mostly from the Aral Sea region.

**e) The programme has been successful in mobilizing communities and volunteers.**

The process of conducting a needs assessment followed by planning interventions to be supported by the programme that are responsive to needs and priorities of communities, contributed to a strong community mobilization around social infrastructure projects. Moreover, under output 1.5, the programme has been developing a successful volunteerism model in healthcare targeting 2,000 community health volunteers from various parts of the Aral Sea region. This approach has already expanded social impacts of the programme throughout the region and more is expected before the end of the programme. A policy brief has been prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to promote the benefits of this volunteer model and secure the institutionalization of volunteering in healthcare. Mobilizing communities and volunteerism are emerging models on this programme, which needs to be communicated and promoted in other parts in the region and throughout Uzbekistan.

**f) An innovative financing solution for socio-economic development is emerging.**

The programme has been testing an innovative approach for private sector development. Instead of providing grants, the programme in close collaboration with local authorities and partners (Ministries, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, NGOs), lend equipment to small businesses with further transfer of equipment providing they meet their targets specified in MOUs signed between the beneficiaries and UNDP. The programme also provides training to develop business capacities and access to microfinance institutions via the Business Women Association, commercial banks and local government authorities. The aim is to establish small businesses and scale-up their operations, while being used as demonstrations for upscaling and replication. So far, 9 small business projects got the support from the programme, which has resulted in the creation of about 30 jobs. It is a successful initiative, which is also well aligned with the current government priority – 2018 is the year of innovative and technological entrepreneurship.

### ***Efficiency***

#### **g) The management arrangements are fully adequate for implementing the programme**

The programme is managed by a simple management structure and it is implemented by a good team of specialists. All with clear roles and responsibilities. The Programme Board (PB) provides a good oversight on the implementation of the programme, including fulfilling a linkage role between the programme and related government ministries and agencies. The Programme Manager reports to the PB. The UN agencies and the government have been discussing the most effective way to respond to the development challenges of this region; the option of setting up a MPHSTF was chosen and it remains the best option to scale-up development efforts in the region. The quality of programme deliverables is good.

#### **h) The disbursement of the contributions to the programme is behind the implementation timeline and may not be fully expended by the end of the programme in May 2019.**

Programme expenditures are prudently and efficiently engaged. Despite that no baseline exists to compare the cost of the programme with, when analyzing the list of results achieved with what the programme has spent so far, it is a cost-effective programme. The programme was able to mobilize additional sources of funding representing an extra 35% of the original budget of USD 2.9M. These additional sources of funding have provided valuable resources to implement more social infrastructure projects for communities facing the most significant human security challenges in the Aral Sea region; increasing the positive social impacts of the programme. In line with guidelines from each donor, financial reports are prepared annually and are provided to the respective donors. Regarding the main donor (UNTFHS), certified financial statements from each UN agency are provided annually as part of the annual progress reports. In the meantime, only 39% of the total budget has been spent as of May 31, 2018 versus an elapsed time of 67%. It is unlikely that the entire budget to finance the programme be expended by the end of May 2019.

#### **i) The M&E system has too many indicators and targets to monitor and report on, rendering the M&E function time consuming and of limited added value**

The extensive M&E system in place has been producing good progress reports. However, with a total of 69 indicators and 48 targets to monitor, too much information is collected with some redundancies. These indicators to measure the progress made by the programme are mostly SMART. There are generally Specific and easily Measurable and are also Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. However, there are too many indicators and targets, which renders the monitoring function of the programme complicated and time consuming for limited added value. For instance, instead of 4 indicators to measure the progress made in completing the baseline survey (output 1.1), one indicator should be enough. The same can be said for measuring output 2.2, which is done currently with five indicators and where one indicator should be enough. In some cases, their relevance is limited. Measuring a number of consultations or a number of missions and study tours are poor indicators to measure how well a programme has been achieving its

objectives. In the meantime, no indicators were identified to monitor/measure the progress made at the objective level.

**j) The programme has been effective in communicating and promoting the human security concept with the development of good communication materials and the organization of multiple events.**

The programme has run an effective communication campaign in promoting the concept of human security. The programme certainly complies with the requirement to communicate and share knowledge on the human security approach required by UNTFHS. A full list of communication/promotional materials have been produced and related activities conducted. One result of this good communication/promotion is the fact that the programme had been able to mobilize additional sources of funding.

**k) The programme enjoys good partnerships with national, regional and local governments as well as with community leaders.**

There is a clear strategy in place to build/develop partnerships and the programme implementation team has been focusing on this since day one of the programme. It has already resulted in additional sources of funding for the current programme to finance extra social infrastructure initiatives and in a good collaboration with government ministries and agencies at national, regional and local levels, particularly to move the establishment of the MPHSTF forward. Key steps have already taken place such as the establishment by the government of an Inter-Agency Working Group with its action plan, the development and approval of a roadmap to establish the MPHSTF and, according to the UN Resident Coordinator, the recent decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan to fund this trust fund at a USD 5 to 10M level per year. The next critical step should be the official launch of the MPHSTF that is being prepared to be done at a high-level event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on the 1st of November 2018 in New York.

**Sustainability**

**l) Key programme achievements should be sustainable; mostly through institutionalization and /or ownership by communities.**

The prospects for the long-term sustainability of programme achievements are good. The programme has been a direct response to communities needs and priorities and is highly relevant in the context of the government *State Programme for the Development of the Aral Sea Region 2017-2021*, which focuses on measures to improve the socio-economic condition and quality of life of people living in Karakalpakstan. Key achievements of the programme are being institutionalized along the implementation. The key steps to establish a MPHSTF such as developing a concept, TORs, roadmap and financing the trust fund have been done under the leadership of the government through an Inter-Agency Working Group set-up by the Cabinet of Ministers. The process is “owned” by the government. It clearly shows the government commitment to the objectives of the programme and the establishment and functioning of the MPHSTF as a financial mechanism to invest in the development of the Aral Sea region.

At the community level, social infrastructure projects that are responded to needs are also “owned” by the respective communities. Providing drinking water to a community, which will replace collecting water from irrigation channels is more than welcome by the community and they should mobilize themselves to maintain these infrastructures after the completion of the programme. The same can be said for the new school built to replace an old dilapidated school in the community of Adai in the district of Muynak, or the provision of a power supply system to electrify a community in the district of Takhtakupir.

Finally, the training in business development resulted in the launch of few business initiatives (bakery, beauty salon, processing and packaging agricultural products, clothing manufacture, printing, honey production, etc.) with some financial support from local authorities – but no financial support from this programme. Most of them should become sustainable businesses, including the creation of local jobs

already estimated at about 30. These young entrepreneurs are keen to develop their businesses in their local communities and proud of creating local jobs.

**m) A model for regional development is emerging; it should be replicable.**

Replicating and scaling-up programme achievements was key criteria to justify the rationale of this programme. It was designed as an innovative programme seeking to apply integrated principle to interventions planning. By assessing the chain of causes and effects of insecurities of targeted communities and designing interventions that would address these cause-effect mechanisms, it was expected that it would expand livelihoods opportunities, improve health facilities and agriculture opportunities and make governance systems better responsive to individuals and communities. Establishing a MPHSTF is key for replicating the achievements of the programme. Assuming that this trust fund will officially launched as planned in September 2018, this financial instrument should be operational to finance development in the Aral Sea region as of 2019. It is expected that financing development activities for the entire region would build on lessons learned and experiences from initiatives funded by the UN joint programme such as social infrastructure projects and business development.

**Recommendations and management response**

<b>Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 1.</b>				
<b>It is recommended to expand the awareness and promotion of the human security approach and the establishment of the MPHSTF in Karakalpakstan</b>				
The programme has already conducted numerous activities to raise awareness and knowledge and train local community leaders and local authorities in Karakalpakstan on the human security approach. In addition, the programme has also supported activities to demonstrate this approach through the implementation of the social-infrastructure projects in some communities. As we are approaching the launch of the MPHSTF as the main financial instrument to finance and invest in the development of the region, it is recommended to expand the promotion of this approach throughout the republic of Karakalpakstan using concrete examples from social infrastructure projects supported by the programme. The focus should be on what is a MPHSTF, what it will do and how it will work. The more aware all Karakalpak communities will be about this approach, the better chance this financial mechanism will work.				
<b>Management response:</b> <i>fully agree</i>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking <sup>1</sup>	
			Comments	Status <sup>2</sup>
1.1 Develop different awareness raising materials (e.g. a short animation video clip, Brochure, infographics, etc. about human security approach and MPHSTF) and distribute/showcase at the level of communities in order to raise local awareness.	April 2019	UN JP Team		On going
1.2 Conduct more training at grassroots level and also to the further regional leaders through the Presidential Academy on Human Security Concept, the structure and role of the MPHSTF	March 2019	UN JP Team		On going

<sup>1</sup> If the TE is uploaded to the ERC, the status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

<sup>2</sup> Status of Implementation: Completed, Partially Completed, Pending.

in funding and investing for the development of the region with demonstration of practical examples of the UN Joint Programme.				
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**Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 2.**

**It is recommended to increase the promotion of the MPHSTF to the international donor community.**

As the programme is expected to be established by the end of 2018, it is recommended to increase the promotion with the international donor community. The programme has already done a lot, has a lot of materials, and has a good network in place to reach out this community. Reinforcing the communications to this network of donors is recommended in order to maximize the chance of potential donors pledging their support to this initiative as early as possible.

**Management response:** *fully agree*

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Conduct High level event (side event) by the Government of Uzbekistan at the UN HQ with the participation of member-states and international donors and finance institutions to present MPHSTF for Aral Sea region	December - 2018	UN JP Team	Concept of the event is developed and agreed by inputs of the UN HSU, UNDP MPTF, UNDP CO and Government of Uzbekistan. The exact date of the event is to be identified by the Uzb mission to UN.	Partially completed
2.2 Develop resource mobilization strategy/plan of the MPHSTF for Aral Sea region	May - 2019	UN JP Team		Pending
2.3 Continuous promotion of the MPHSTF and conduct regular negotiations with donors, both in-country and abroad, to mobilize resources to the Fund	May -2019	UN JP Team		Ongoing

**Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 3.**

**It is recommended to add to the risk log the risk “lack of interest from international donors in participating and financing the MPHSTF”.**

The review conducted for this evaluation reveals that one missing risk is the potential for a lack of interest from the international donor community to participate and finance the MPHSTF. To fully succeed in sustaining its achievements over the medium and long term, particularly the sustainability of the MPHSTF, the programme needs the involvement of other donors. The current plan is to officially establish the trust fund by the end of 2018. The partners of the programme, including the government, need pledges from other donors to support the overall strategy for an integrated development strategy of the Aral Sea region financed by a MPHSTF. It is important to monitor this risk as part of risk management of the programme.

**Management response:** *fully agree*

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking
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			Comments	Status
3.1 The potential risk of the lack of interest from the international donor community to participate and finance the MPTF will be incorporated into the Fund's Risk Ranking Matrix with indication of the risk mitigation measures.	December - 2018	UN JP Team		Pending
<p><b>Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 4.</b>  <b>It is recommended to conduct a study of existing policy and legislative frameworks to identify gaps and barriers, which could hamper the implementation of a human security approach.</b>  The government is fully committed to the establishment of the MPHSTF, which will apply the principles of human security. The programme has been demonstrating the benefits of such an approach through social infrastructure projects responding to local communities needs and priorities. A model is emerging for the development of Karakalpakstan. However, to replicate this approach in other parts of the country, there is the need to know how compatible this approach is vis-à-vis the policy and the legislative frameworks in place in Uzbekistan. It is recommended that this programme conduct a study of these frameworks, assess their compatibility with the implementation of the concept of human security and identify any gaps and barriers, which would hamper the scaling-up of such an approach.</p>				
<b>Management response:</b> <i>fully agree</i>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Conduct a research on study of existing policy and legislative frameworks and identify gaps and barriers that may hamper implementation of the HS approach	April 2019	UN JP Team	An Expert will be hired on short term basis for conducting the research	Pending
4.2 On the basis of developed recommendations, work out a new training module and conduct training on HS approach at national and regional levels	April –May 2019	UN JP Team		Pending
<p><b>Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 5.</b>  <b>It is recommended to expand the piloting of private sector development.</b>  The programme initiated a small private sector development, testing an innovative approach. Instead of providing cash grants, the programme in close collaboration with local authorities provide equipment to small businesses to scale-up their operations and provide access to microfinance institutions via the Business Women Association. For each initiative, an MOU is signed between the UN Joint Programme and the beneficiary, which include a business plan to describe the business venture, the equipment that is provided, and business indicators to measure the performance of the business. Once, the beneficiary complies/meets the target indicators, the UN joint programme officially transfers the equipment/machinery ownership to the beneficiary and notifies the local government office (Khakimyat). So far, 9 small business projects got the support from the programme, which has resulted in the creation of about 30 jobs. It is recommended that the programme expand this pilot, including the promotion of technological and innovative entrepreneurship, which is also a priority of the Government (2018 is the year of innovative and technological entrepreneurship). Then, lessons learned and best practices should be identified for replicating the model once the MPHSTF will be established.</p>				
<b>Management response:</b> <i>fully agree</i>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	

			Comments	Status
5.1 The programme supported 3 technological innovative business projects namely, food (vegetables and fruits) storage, shoe manufacturing shop and milk processing shop, that expected to function by the end of 2018. In the next year 2019, it is envisioned to create at least 2 technological innovative projects in agriculture, production and service delivery.	April 2019	UN JP Team		Ongoing
5.2 The project best-practices on this area will be also promoted through the MPHSTF for possible funding by other donors	May - 2019	UN JP Team		Pending
<b>Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 6.</b> <b>If there is a remaining budget as of May 2019, it is recommended that the timeline of the programme be extended.</b> The total level of disbursement is behind when compared with the overall implementation timeline (39% vs. 67%). From an objective point of view, 37% of the budget for objective 1 has been spent so far but only 18% for objective 2, including a budget of over USD 300,000 left for supporting the establishment of the MPHSTF (objective 2). If there is a remaining budget as of May 2019, it is recommended that the timeline of the programme be extended, using this time to consolidate achievements of the programme; particularly the start-up phase of establishing the MPHSTF.				
<b>Management response:</b> <i>fully agree</i>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
6.1 The programme extension topic will be brought for discussion and approval in an upcoming UN JP Board Meeting to be hold at the end of the year.	January - 2019	UN JP Team	OL to MOE has been sent to organize the board meeting on December 14 <sup>th</sup> , one of the topics for discussion is review the possibility of the Programme extension.	Ongoing
6.2 Based on the UN JP Board Meeting decision, respective agreements will be made with UNTFHS; the Programme budget will be adjusted for the following periods as per the extension timeframes.	February - 2019	UN JP Team		Pending
<b>Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 7.</b>				



**It is recommended to review the M&E system in place and reduce the number of indicators and targets to simplify the monitoring and reporting functions.**

The extensive M&E system in place has been producing good progress reports. However, too much information is collected with some redundancies. The entire reporting mechanism produces good but extensive progress reports. It is recommended that the M&E function be streamlined and focus mostly on collecting information that is used to draft the annual progress reports. In particular, it is recommended to reduce the number of indicators and targets to simplify the monitoring and reporting function without changing the current quality of reporting progress.

**Management response:** Partially agree/ Given the fact that adjusting the M&E indicators approved by all partners including the Gov't and Donor, it is proposed to keep reporting on the already set indicators.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
7.1 The UN JP management will apply RBM tools in developing annual progress reports, make it straight to point and less extensive without changing the UNTFHS and UNDP reporting guidelines and template	April - 2019	UN JP Team		Pending

**Mid-term Evaluation recommendation 8.**

**It is recommended to expand the financial section in progress reports to include the full financial status of the programme.**

Financial information is mostly provided by donor. There is no consolidated financial summary presenting the total financing of the programme in one place. It is recommended to expand the section on "financial status" in the annual progress reports to report this consolidated financial information presenting actual disbursements against the overall budget. All this information exists internally, it is a matter of reporting it to all through progress reports and show how cost-effective is this programme.

**Management response:** Partially agree. UN JP will be develop the consolidated financial report based on the main Donor's template (Results Monitoring table), where all activities of the all donors will be included and financial status report provided.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
8.1 UN JP will be developing the consolidated financial report based on the main Donor's template (Results Monitoring table), where all activities of the all donors will be included and financial status report provided.	May - 2019	UN JP Team	The consolidated finance report has been prepared and submitted in the process of budget revision in the context of the second annual progress report submission to HSU in October 2018.	On going

			<p>The consolidated report (Results Monitoring table) includes additional funds from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Coca Cola Foundation and the UNDP Funding Window. Overall, the total budget of the Programme has increased for \$ 520,000.</p>	
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