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# Integrate but How? Lessons from an Integrated Universal Child Grant in Bihar, India

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### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

India's potential to leverage its 'demographic dividend' hinges on its ability to ensure timely investments towards children and young people's cognitive and physical development. The COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts have affected the country's economic growth and development trajectory. Multiple lockdowns and disruptions to global supply chains have led to a sudden increase in poverty, a rise in informality in labour markets and losses in education. Available situation analyses suggest that negative coping strategies have also led to nutritional deficits, increased school dropout and exacerbated gender disparities (United Nations, 2020).

Overall social protection expenditure in India is as low as 2.7 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, spread across more than 900 social protection programmes spanning central and state governments (International Labour Organization, 2017). India's social protection system is highly fragmented and complex, posing a high risk of duplication, and the most vulnerable also tend to be excluded. Programmes vary considerably in terms of target populations and benefits and are managed by different line ministries, with no coordination mechanism. An integrated social protection system that consolidates and rationalizes existing programmes as well as delivery systems is critical to improve coverage and enable households to access and invest in education, health and social development for sustainable poverty reduction.

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Child-sensitive social protection policies aim to maximize children's development outcomes while minimizing unintended side effects (UNICEF, 2019). Combined with an integrated social protection system, such policies can facilitate child-centric service delivery and ensure that no child is left behind. Child-sensitive social protection policies aimed at tackling household risks and deprivations reach children throughout the life cycle and address the structural risks and vulnerabilities that drive intergenerational poverty. Thus, such policies provide an excellent entry point for high-return investments that have the potential to expand the development paradigm, enable inclusive social development and strengthen sustainable economic growth.

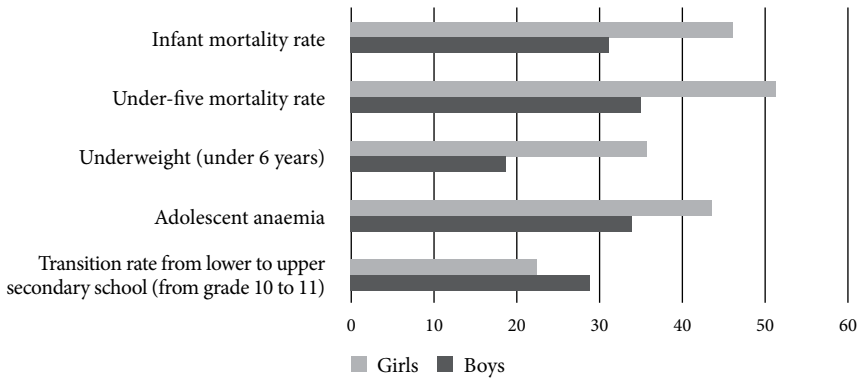
In this context, UNICEF India has been working with national and state governments towards building integrated social protection systems with a child-sensitive lens. UNICEF technical assistance focuses on strengthening the legal, policy, strategic and institutional framework for such a system; informing effective programme design and digital implementation systems, including integrated management information systems (MIS) and registries; and addressing demand-side barriers for children and their families.

In particular, in Bihar, UNICEF engaged as lead partner to the state government, advocating for the integration of cash transfer scheme designs; providing strategic implementation support and monitoring, evaluation and learning on the programme; and addressing gender-based gaps throughout the life cycle via a universal child grant for girls.

## **6.2. BACKGROUND**

Bihar is the poorest state in India, with 52 per cent of the population living in multidimensional poverty – more than twice the national average of 25 per cent (NITI Aayog, 2021). Further, India ranks 140 out of 156 countries on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, having slipped nine places over the course of the previous year (Sharma, Chawla & Karam, 2021). Within India, Bihar ranks lowest of all the states on gender inequality indices, including the Gender Vulnerability Index (Plan International, 2018).

The disadvantage for girls in Bihar begins early and continues throughout the life cycle, with worsening child sex ratios, persistent gaps in the transition to secondary school and a high prevalence of child marriage (*see Figure 6.1*). Adverse gender norms, which overlap with social, economic and structural challenges, weaken the development potential of girls and women in Bihar. Girls from rural areas, poor households, marginalized social castes and minority groups tend to be the most disadvantaged.

**Figure 6.1 Gender gap on some relevant indicators in Bihar, India, for 2016**

Source: Infant mortality rate and under-five mortality rate data are from Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (2017). Prevalence of underweight and adolescent anaemia data are from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, UNICEF and Population Council (2019). Secondary-level transition rate data are from DISE (n.d.).

UNICEF partnered with the Government of Bihar to revise the Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana, a girl child grant – intended to tackle child marriage – providing a cash benefit of 2,000 Indian rupees (about USD26) at birth for up to two girl children per family living below the poverty line. Following an extensive mapping and review of existing child grants and gaps in social protection provision, the Government of Bihar relaunched the grant as Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY) on 3 August 2018.

MKUY is an integrated universal child grant, intended to change gendered attitudes towards girl children. It incorporates six existing and four new interventions to address gender-based life cycle vulnerabilities for girls and young women from birth to 21 years of age. The 10 interventions, implemented through 23 age-specific cash grants, cumulatively provide a total of 54,100 Indian rupees (approximately USD700) over 21 years. The grants are designed as conditional cash transfers aimed at achieving a series of positive outcomes for girls, namely improved birth registration, full immunization, school retention and attendance until completion of and delayed age at marriage (*for more details on the design, see Table 6.1*).

The programme aims to reach 16 million girls annually, and at full coverage, it is estimated that MKUY will cost USD320 million (1 per cent of Bihar's gross domestic product), up from the USD180 million cost of the programmes that preceded it. All grants are made through direct bank transfers to the parent or child's bank account. Implementation responsibilities are shared across three government departments: the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) – plus nodal department to coordinate the programme – along with the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Education (DOE).

**Table 6.1 Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana programme structure, conditions and benefit values**

Grade/ age	Name of scheme operating under MKUY	Eligibility and conditions	Previous benefit size, per year (INR)	New benefit size under MKUY, per year (INR)	Estimated number of beneficiaries	Current estimated spend (INR, millions)	Proposed estimated spend (INR, millions)	Additional amount vis- à-vis current and proposed spends (INR, millions)	Managing line department
From birth to 3 months	Chief Minister's Girls Safety Grant	First two girls in a family  Income criteria eliminated	2,000 (one- off transfer)	2,000 (one- off transfer)	1,400,000	2,800	2,800	0	Social Welfare (and nodal dept.)
1st birthday	Chief Minister's Girls Safety Grant	First two girls in a family  Aadhaar registration	N/A	1,000 (one- off transfer)	1,400,000	0	1,400	1,400	Social Welfare (and nodal dept.)
2nd birthday	Total Immunization Grant	Full immunization	N/A	2,000 (one- off transfer)	1,400,000	0	2,800	2,800	Health
Grades 1–2	Chief Minister's Uniform Scheme for Girls	Minimum 75% school attendance	400	600	1,858,186	743.3	1,114.9	371.64	Education

Grade/ age	Name of scheme operating under MKUY	Eligibility and conditions	Previous benefit size, per year (INR)	New benefit size under MKUY, per year (INR)	Estimated number of beneficiaries	Current estimated spend (INR, millions)	Proposed estimated spend (INR, millions)	Additional amount vis- à-vis current and proposed spends (INR, millions)	Managing line department
Grades 3–4	Chief Minister's Uniform Scheme for Girls	Minimum 75% school attendance	500	700	3,029,421	1,514.7	2,120.6	605.9	Education
Grades 6–8	Chief Minister's Uniform Scheme for Girls	Minimum 75% school attendance	700	1,000	2,389,743	1,672.8	2,389.7	716.9	Education
Grades 9–12	Chief Minister's Uniform Scheme for Girls	Minimum 75% school attendance	1,000	1,500	1,242,767	1,242.8	1,864.1	621.4	Education
Grades 7–12	Chief Minister's Programme for Adolescent Girls' Health	Minimum 75% school attendance	150	300	2,822,684	423.4	846.8	423.4	Education
Unmarried girls who pass Grade 12	Chief Minister's Scheme to Encourage Girls to Pass Grade 12/End Child Marriage Grant	Completion of secondary school (Grade 12)  Unmarried at age 18	0	10,000 (one- off transfer)	250,000	0	2,500	2,500	Education

Grade/ age	Name of scheme operating under MKUY	Eligibility and conditions	Previous benefit size, per year (INR)	New benefit size under MKUY, per year (INR)	Estimated number of beneficiaries	Current estimated spend (INR, millions)	Proposed estimated spend (INR, millions)	Additional amount vis- à-vis current and proposed spends (INR, millions)	Managing line department
Girls who complete first / bachelor university degree	Chief Minister's Scheme to Encourage Girls to Attend University	Completion of undergraduate university degree  (No marriage condition)	0	25,000 (one- off transfer)	175,000	0	4,375	4,375	Education
<b>TOTAL (INR)</b>						<b>83,969.73</b>	<b>22,211.2</b>	<b>13,814.2</b>	

### **6.3. TRANSLATING INTENT INTO OUTCOMES: SUPPORTING ADMINISTRATIVE INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE**

With a strong commitment to translate intent into delivery, and jointly working with the three line departments implementing MKUY, UNICEF extended two sets of specific technical assistance to the Government of Bihar, namely for: (1) a scoping study for an integrated MIS; and (2) concurrent monitoring to support an efficient rollout of the integrated MIS. This article focuses on the development of the integrated MIS for the MKUY programme, further drawing on the first round of the concurrent monitoring (conducted from September to December 2019) to highlight supply-side barriers to integrated implementation across administrative levels.

### **6.4. DESIGN OF SCOPING STUDY TO DEVELOP TECHNICAL BLUEPRINT FOR INTEGRATED MIS**

UNICEF and the Government of Bihar jointly developed the concept note for the intended MIS, to articulate the vision, commitment and expectations of the stakeholders. The envisioned MIS would provide the Government with all of the information required to plan, manage, monitor and improve implementation of MKUY. This unique opportunity combined the three vital success factors necessary for any reform: (1) high-level political commitment; (2) evidence-informed strategy; and (3) coordinated efforts to promote integration of existing systems. However, these opportunities came alongside significant risks associated with: (1) institutionalizing and reinforcing intersectoral collaboration; (2) navigating the hurdles of data quality and gaps in a cross-sectoral undertaking; and (3) balancing the need for rapid reform with evidence-informed development.

The integrated MIS scoping study aimed to assess context, requirements and systems, and develop relevant recommendations for the Government of Bihar. These would provide a clear set of considerations to identify the most suitable MIS investment, to assess the scope of integrating existing systems, and to understand the necessity (or not) to completely overhaul the existing systems or simply integrate them.

The study adopted a participatory approach and triangulated information from multiple sources. The most vital data sources were consultations at the state, district and block level with political and administrative units across the implementing line departments. All implementing departments, as well as the government digital services agency (National Informatics Centre), provided helpful demonstrations of the various available sectoral MIS to feed into the mapping. Interviews took place with social service providers at schools and public health centres, and front-line functionaries from DOH and DSW were

other key informants. The data gathered were triangulated with analysis of the sectoral MIS and relevant documents and literature exploring eight key dimensions (*see Table 6.2*).

**Table 6.2 Mapping framework and data collection method for integrated MIS scoping study**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Area(s) to explore</b>	<b>Data</b>
<b>MIS Vision and Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government’s articulated vision and priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept note on integrated MIS for MKUY programme</li> <li>• Key stakeholder consultations</li> </ul>
<b>Political Appetite and Willingness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political appetite for an integrated MIS at various levels of government</li> <li>• Readiness of cross-sectoral counterparts to share data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder consultations at the state and district level</li> </ul>
<b>Programme Complexity and Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information needs for an integrated MIS</li> <li>• Main data sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme design documents and information on requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Existing Systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping existing MIS or electronic databases for each constituent programme in MKUY, including from departments like the Department of Finance</li> <li>• Mapping of data gaps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on trial of the existing databases/systems</li> <li>• Consultations with the data operators and managers to trace sources of information, challenges, risks, completion status, etc.</li> <li>• Metadata and, at a minimum, data fields in each data entry</li> </ul>
<b>Administrative and Monitoring Structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant departments/ stakeholders for data capture or compilation and how well data are transferred across different levels of government</li> <li>• Degree of decentralization of data entry and degree of centralization of data management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations with district- and block-level officials</li> <li>• Review of existing processes and functioning ability of these processes</li> <li>• Understanding of the integrated MIS for MKUY and its monitoring requirements</li> </ul>



<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Area(s) to explore</b>	<b>Data</b>
<b>Technological Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the capacity of technology development and management agencies within government</li> <li>• Sufficiency of in-house capacity; need for and role of external experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations with government information technology (IT) team/department</li> <li>• (Hands-on) review of existing systems to see how each functions and how it is linked with other existing systems (if at all)</li> </ul>
<b>Potential for Integration (Technology)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interoperability of existing sectoral MIS</li> <li>• Options and concerns for a unique identifier that can link the various systems</li> <li>• Anchoring and maintenance of an integrated MIS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations with data operators and managers</li> <li>• Consultations with government IT team/department</li> <li>• Some indication of server capabilities, privacy and other such issues</li> </ul>
<b>Human Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience and capacity of grassroots-level staff in the use of electronic systems</li> <li>• Training needs, and ease and attitudes towards the adoption of new systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder consultations with grassroots-level workers and relevant district- and state-level officials</li> <li>• Consultations at state level on future plans and any potential digitization of data related to MKUY</li> <li>• Exploration of limitations of grassroots-level capacity (strength and quality)</li> </ul>

In parallel, to provide formative recommendations to iteratively improve programme rollout, the concurrent monitoring – conducted as three rounds of assessment over the course of a year – sought to identify implementation bottlenecks. This article draws on the first round of assessment, which used document reviews, administrative data analysis, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to understand supply-side barriers to integrated implementation across administrative levels. A total of 67 interviews and 11 focus group discussions were conducted in two districts of the state based on divergent programme performance. Key informants included district- and block-level officials and front-line functionaries of DSW, DOH and DOE, as well as state-level actors responsible for implementation and oversight of MKUY.

## 6.5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While MKUY is inspired by the need to coherently address risks faced by girls in Bihar over the first 21 years of life, The concurrent monitoring identified several gaps and made recommendations for the programme delivery to align with this vision. To achieve a common, harmonized implementation approach, an integrated MIS was deemed essential.

*Programme design* – Findings of the concurrent monitoring assessment (first round) show that a few cash grants under the current programme could be more closely aligned with addressing the risks and vulnerabilities faced by the girl child during her life course. For instance, the immunization incentive is inconsistent with the absence of a gender gap in full immunization coverage in Bihar.

At the same time, however, a grant conditioned upon accessing nutrition services would be relevant to respond to the persistent gender gap in early childhood underweight and adolescent anaemia. Similarly, the sizeable transfer benefit conditioned upon completing Grade 12 would be better used to change behaviours at Grade 10, given the sharp fall in girls' transition from Grades 10 to 11. Rationalization and redistribution of the cash grants could free up resources to be channelled towards more appropriately designed grants or operational costs.

Further, the lack of verifiability of conditions potentially hampers anticipated behavioural changes. For instance, while remaining unmarried until at least 18 years of age is a condition of the penultimate cash grant, meeting the condition relies solely on self-declaration. This could potentially not only dilute the intention of the programme but also lead to adverse outcomes, like forced or hidden marriages, especially given the lack of behavioural change communication in the context of historically low birth and marriage registration levels in Bihar.

*Policy inputs and outreach* – The constituent cash grants of MKUY are planned, budgeted for and implemented by the three implementing line departments. While the life-cycle approach of MKUY was found to be broadly understood by stakeholders across departments at the state level, this awareness decreased at lower levels of administration, leading to the arbitrary application of eligibility criteria and messaging.

Lack of intensive inputs to create awareness, within and across departments, of key shifts introduced by the launch of MKUY mean that the programme runs the risk of being counterproductive, by reinforcing conventional gender norms and inequitable access. For example, front-line workers, who form the interface between the programme and community, were found to inadvertently reinforce the same regressive gender norms that MKUY seeks to address. For example, a field-level functionary would invite a family to enrol in the programme as the money could offset the cost of the girl's marriage and so on. Suggestions along the lines of 'Don't feel bad that a girl is born – you will get money' are also made, which is problematic. Common outreach materials were prepared by

DSW (via the nodal department), but communication campaigns by the three implementing line departments continued to be largely limited to their respective cash grants.

*Beneficiary enrolment* – Common enrolment forms with standardized information requirements were found to not exist, with each department instead prescribing its own enrolment form and data entry interface. Consequently, beneficiaries were initially required to apply separately for each cash grant, thus negating the potential to reduce any administrative burden and client inconvenience.

Working with UNICEF, the implementing line departments rapidly ramped up capacity to build enrolment and payment systems for the grants implemented by DSW, DOH and DOE and to scale the new grants – namely the birth grant, immunization grant and grant to end child marriage. For instance, given the challenges around documentation and verification, 85 per cent of the initial grant applications were rejected on account of the poor legibility of scanned forms, implying that better quality equipment and training would have a very real impact on programme performance.

The persistence of a siloed approach ultimately dilutes the intent of the MKUY programme, by failing to reinforce the life-cycle approach of supporting transitions at key stages throughout a girl's life. At the administrative level, important opportunities to improve operational efficiencies in low-resource settings by pooling resources (for example, staff, software, devices, business processes) remain untapped.

*Payment systems* – Although the payment function was found to be relatively well-integrated (with implementing line departments using the direct benefit platform, e-Kalyan), processes to trigger payments were found to vary considerably across departments, resulting in variable service quality across the cash grants. For instance, while the education grants can provide girls the longest exposure to MKUY, these grants are isolated from the life-cycle programmatic approach of MKUY. Although this does not affect uptake, it does dilute the objectives of the programme.

A unified payment system would avoid operational inefficiency and duplication of resources to deliver payments to the same beneficiaries. Further, there is a need to address the general lack of transparent feedback information on payment status, which may dampen demand for the programme.

*Monitoring and beneficiary data management* – The concurrent monitoring assessment reiterated the need for an integrated MIS as crucial to tracking beneficiary dropout and to addressing this issue with 'cash plus' interventions throughout the life cycle. While the MKUY programme is monitored at the state level, the monitoring needs to extend its focus beyond targets, to processes.

Further, common grievance redressal platforms were found to not exist for the programme. This was perhaps the weakest aspect of programme delivery at the time of the assessment.

*Demand-side challenges* – Community members were found to face many difficulties in accessing cheap bank accounts, a major issue that delays programme enrolment and benefit payments. Additionally, extensive and repetitive documentation is needed to enrol, and often there are mismatches in beneficiary particulars across documents, especially for new mothers. Obtaining Aadhaar cards for children (Aadhaar is India's unique national identification system) is another major issue.

### **6.5.1. Opportunities for improvement**

The concurrent monitoring assessment identified many opportunities for improvement, considering the most viable opportunities for reform. In an inter-agency setting, consolidating front office functions such as outreach, enrolment and eligibility requires longer time horizons owing to entrenched ways of working and inter-institutional dynamics. On the other hand, strengthening enrolment and monitoring via an integrated MIS presents a viable opportunity to harness the potential of integrated delivery in the short to medium term.

The scoping study outlines the following potential options to establish an integrated MIS for the MKUY programme within the complex institutional context described:

#### **6.5.1.1. Enablers for an integrated MIS for the MKUY programme**

Consultations revealed a strong commitment and intent to collaborate on the development of an integrated MIS for MKUY at higher levels within DSW, DOH and DOE in Bihar. The Government of Bihar's collective vision was ambitious but achievable with a stepwise plan to gradually develop an integrated MIS with all the capabilities to meet the state government's requirements. To achieve this overall goal, it would be critical to recognize the complexity of the task and develop smaller/shorter-term objectives for the development of the MIS.

#### **6.5.1.2. Challenges to a successful integrated MIS**

The study found that a stronger appreciation was needed of the specific inputs required for the integrated MIS as well as the time frame for operationalizing such a system. At the time, the quality of data was concerning in many of the available sectoral MIS. At the data entry stage, checks and balances to detect duplicate or fraudulent data were lacking. Further, the data for each cash grant were also captured and managed differently. DSW had populated a sophisticated e-portal. In contrast, DOE had stored basic information in individual CD-ROMs (lower secondary school grant) or individual Microsoft Excel spreadsheets (upper secondary school grant). Individual-level data for DOH grants (immunization grant, held files on reproductive and child health (RCH) paper-based registers. Several integrations, upgrades and pilots were under way simultaneously,

including the digitization of data at Anganwadi Centres (Integrated Child Development Centres), upgrades to the underused electronic-RCH portal and the integration of Aadhaar into data management for scholarship beneficiaries.

There was a strong case for an integrated MIS since multiple electronic databases or MIS were being used across departments. Some of these could deliver most of the functions envisioned by the Government of Bihar (*see Table 6.3*). Further, given the varying degrees of sophistication and the weak data quality, the scoping study strongly recommended against a social registry in the short term and encouraged the Government of Bihar to instead pursue the development of an integrated MIS. It was suggested that the system could leverage existing technology available through the MKUY, ICDS-Common Application Software, e-RCH and e-Kalyan (Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) payment) portals to minimize the time frame for developing a functional integrated MIS and to achieve this with minimal additional capacity and at the lowest possible cost.

**Table 6.3 Performance of existing systems against envisioned features of the integrated MIS**

Envisioned feature of the integrated MIS	DSW – MKUY (first two cash grants)	DSW – Common Application Software (CAS)	DOH – Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) MIS	e-Kalyan (DBT Payment Systems)
Real-time tracking and monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensive reporting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Data-sharing across departments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inter-database linkages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Good visual display	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Training module	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grievance redressal mechanism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SMS alerts and communication platform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Moreover, through the years, DOH and DSW had invested heavily in developing systems that work for them. DOH was funding a further investment to improve uptake of the RCH e-portal by providing application-based software on tablet

computers to Anganwadi Centres. Given these investments, it was unlikely that the implementing line departments would be willing to forego existing systems to adopt a new one, or to manage an additional system. Further, much of the burden of entering data into these existing systems was on the already stretched ICDS staff, who were having to work with multiple systems. The capacity challenges would make the implementation of yet another piece of software very demanding.

Simultaneously, the scoping study also identified other engagement opportunities to strengthen the fundamental building blocks that are necessary for an integrated MIS. These opportunities are: (1) evidence generation activities, like systems analysis and review of capacity assessments, to inform both the development and maintenance of the MIS over time; (2) supporting data preparation for integration; and (3) smart advocacy that combines new evidence with solid institutional capacity.

## **6.6. TAKEAWAYS AND POLICY PROCESS**

*Results achieved, ripple effects and ways forward* – Supporting the delivery of Bihar’s ambitious integrated child grant in an extremely resource-constrained setting provides crucial lessons in balancing the tensions between devising the most efficient and effective policy measures on the one hand and programme delivery on the other. The launch of MKUY prompted remarkable shifts in terms of policy-level integration – universalizing eligibility, removing poverty targeting and adopting a strong lifecycle and gender-transformative approach. Implementation research to support the programme’s effective rollout – and to expand coverage and strengthen institutional capacity in the longer term – was the key objective of the UNICEF technical assistance to the Government of Bihar.

With siloed implementation so persistent, the need to create a distinct operational identity for MKUY is highlighted. The lack of inputs to create awareness about MKUY within and across implementing line departments makes it harder to leverage the administrative efficiency gains that would otherwise be possible. Lack of a clear programme identity has as yet unclear implications for programme uptake, but it clearly does dilute programme intent. Programme monitoring at all levels needs to extend its focus beyond targets, to processes.

*High-level coordination* – Through sustained advocacy and by sharing the results of the concurrent monitoring assessment, UNICEF secured the Government of Bihar’s agreement to create a centralized steering unit for MKUY to streamline front office functions. Oftentimes eligibility criteria of constituent grants contrasted which were being reconciled through detailed programme guidelines. Strong high-level coordination will be key to the success of an integrated grant being implemented by multiple departments with multiple funding lines.

*Additional operational costs* – Some operational costs need to be set out under the three implementing line departments’ budgets to cover the ancillary costs involved in programme implementation, including to upgrade equipment to improve the efficiency of digital platforms and processes.

*Consistent information, education and communication materials* – Developing consistent information, education and communication materials across the departments should have been a straightforward choice for building a distinct operational identity for the MKUY programme. Such materials should be in line with the existing materials created by DSW, reinforcing the life-cycle message and carrying the programme’s branding, along with its goal of promoting the value of the girl child.

*Training and capacity building* – Gender sensitization of the social sector workforce is crucial to deliver a gender-transformative intervention and must be invested in. Directed orientation and engagement of front-line workers on the MKUY programme’s objectives, intent and implementation will be crucial in aligning programme delivery to programme objectives.

*Cash Plus interventions* – State-level provision for the engagement and integration of additional departments (like the Rural Development Department) to facilitate ancillary services (such as the assembly of Aadhaar cards) is also highly desirable. Further, in recognition of challenges in achieving the transformative impact expected of MKUY, UNICEF worked with the Government of Bihar to develop a cash plus programme. This provides complementary services around financial literacy, counselling for parents, age-appropriate life skills (through sports or adolescent clubs) and career coaching, creating an enabling environment through interventions at the individual, family/gatekeeper and community level to augment the MKUY programme outcomes.

*Integrated MIS* – The scoping study provided a phased approach to ensure that the integrated MIS is relevant and responsive to the needs and capacities of the various departments. This approach would allow sufficient time to build the envisioned MIS, while ensuring that a short-term monitoring system is in place for MKUY.

In Phase 1, the plan suggests integrating beneficiary data from primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school grants; using ICDS-CAS as a platform for installing similar modules for health and education monitoring at the local level; and using the existing DBT platform (e-Kalyan) to integrate programme enrolment and benefit payments within a common system. Phase 2 envisages extending the integrated MIS to encompass services and linking it to the civil registry.

The UNICEF technical assistance highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the Government of Bihar’s human, financial and technological capacities to adopt

and maintain an electronic database. Further, it opened new avenues for UNICEF engagement in the development and operationalization of the integrated MIS.

In response, UNICEF continued to work with the Government of Bihar to strengthen the integrated MIS, adopting a pragmatic approach. First, UNICEF worked with DOH to develop a web platform and build the capacity of MIS stakeholders to roll out the first three constituent grants of the MKUY programme. At the same time, DOE was digitizing data for about 2 million children in order to implement the education grants from enrolment through payment to grievance redressal, enabling the interdepartmental integration of all MKUY sub-grants.

UNICEF is now well-positioned to advocate for and promote integration of the cash grants across implementing line departments, and to enable longitudinal tracking of girls enrolled in or dropping out of the MKUY programme. As a result of government commitment and UNICEF assistance, the Government of Bihar has made significant strides in enriching the data ecosystem with child-level data and progressively fuller coverage of the integrated universal child grant.

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