

HOW CAN MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR MINIMUM LIVELIHOOD GUARANTEE HELP ADDRESS CHILD MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY?

This brief summarises some features of management information system (MIS) for minimum livelihood guarantee (or *Dibao*), and considers how it can be reformed to better address child multidimensional poverty. *Dibao* is one of the eight social assistance programmes in China. *Dibao*, together with assistance to extremely poor families (or *Tekun*), are the core means-tested programmes that provide cash and in-kind transfers. In principle, complementary supports relevant to addressing multidimensional poverty are available through four programmes covering healthcare, housing, education and job seeking support. Two other social assistance programmes provide temporary support in times of disasters, or for accidents and unexpected household difficulties.

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Tackling multidimensional poverty through MIS integration

Global experience shows that management information systems (MISs) can be purposely created to address multidimensional poverty. Integrated MIS combined with strong "case management" of beneficiaries can broaden access to multiple social services and address multidimensional poverty. Key to this has been to integrate multiple MISs, i.e. integration of MISs within each social assistance programme, across social programmes in multiple service sectors, and across wider government information platforms.

In Brazil, Chile, Turkey and Uruguay, MISs have been integrated to increasingly act as gateways enabling people to access services beyond individual programmes, to include a fuller range of social supports. Case management by social workers ensure referrals to complementary services targeted to different vulnerable groups, such as children, pregnant women, and people with disabilities, etc. For example, Uruguay's MIS, which won an award for excellence in public management, not only underpins a cash transfer programme, like *Dibao*, but also incorporates a high-quality case management across social sector programmes.

Dibao's operational processes

Dibao's MIS data sources and uses are linked to *Dibao's* operational processes. Applicants become beneficiaries in *Dibao* broadly in four steps (or 19 sub-steps), as illustrated in Figure 1, with some variations across the country due to *Dibao's* decentralised implementation. The first step is the submission of the application, supporting information and acceptance by the local government office. Second, there is a means testing step to determine eligibility, obtain community validation and any grievance redress. Third, the verification and approval step consists of a review by the county/district civil affairs department, spot-checks on at least 30 per cent of applicants, and publication of results in the community for seven days, after which applicants are notified and a list of approved beneficiaries is submitted to the county/district finance department. The final step is payment and management, which entails cash transfers to beneficiaries, dynamic management of the list of beneficiaries to enrol newly eligible beneficiaries and remove newly ineligible beneficiaries, and the management and reconciliation of funds. The operational processes involve the collection, analysis, sharing, storage and management of substantial amounts of data on families.

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Figure 1:
Dibao
operational
processes

01 Application

- 1 **Application submitted with relevant documents to town/subdistrict office where their *Hukou* is located**
Head of household/agent
- 2 **Review application documents for completeness**
Town government/subdistrict office
- 3 **Accept the complete applications and inform agent/applicant**
Town government/subdistrict office
- 4 **Reject incomplete applications and inform agent/applicant to submit required documents**
Town government/subdistrict office

10 **Approved applications submitted to county/district civil affairs department**
Town/district government & resident/village committee

9 **Rejected applicants dissatisfied with decision appeal for review**
Town/district government & resident/village committee

8 **Applicants informed about results of means test and community meeting**
Town/district government & resident/village committee

7 **Publishing results of the community meeting**
Town/district government & resident/village committee & resident reps

6 **Community "democratization" meeting to verify applicants**
Town/district government & resident/village committee & resident reps

5 **Resident/village committee staff conduct means test**
Town government/subdistrict office & resident/village committee

02 Means Test

03 Approval

11 **Review the results of the means test and community meeting**
County/district civil affairs department

12 **Conduct a spot check of not less than 30% of the applicants**
County/district civil affairs department

13 **Publish review results for seven days in town/street and community for seven days**
County/district civil affairs department

14 **Applicants informed about results of approval**
County/district civil affairs department

15 **Approved applicants submitted to finance department**
County/district civil affairs department

19 **Management of funds and reconciliation**
County/district finance department

18 **Update recipients (exits and add new ones)**
County/district civil affairs department

17 **Recipients cash out their payments**
County/district finance department

16 **Payroll is prepared and submitted to the financial institutions**
County/district finance department

04 Payments

Source: Chirchir, R. and H. Hu (2019). *Review of Global Management Information System Practices: Lessons for China*. UNICEF, China.

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Dibao's management information system

Dibao's MIS contains data on around 53 million people in rural and urban areas in 2017. The data includes: family profiles and information; family income and property information; marital status and disability status of family members living together; and other information stipulated by the regulations.

As illustrated in Figure 2, there are two main MISs: an integrated registry of *Dibao* beneficiaries, that the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) hosts at national level by consolidating data from MISs across the country; and a related database called the Household Income and Asset Verification System (HIAVS) which is used to check applicants' information.¹ Other MISs exist for other social programmes. The case of Zhangjiagang City *Dibao* MIS and linkage to HIAVS is discussed in Box 1.

Box 1: Zhangjiagang City, Jiangsu Province *Dibao* MIS

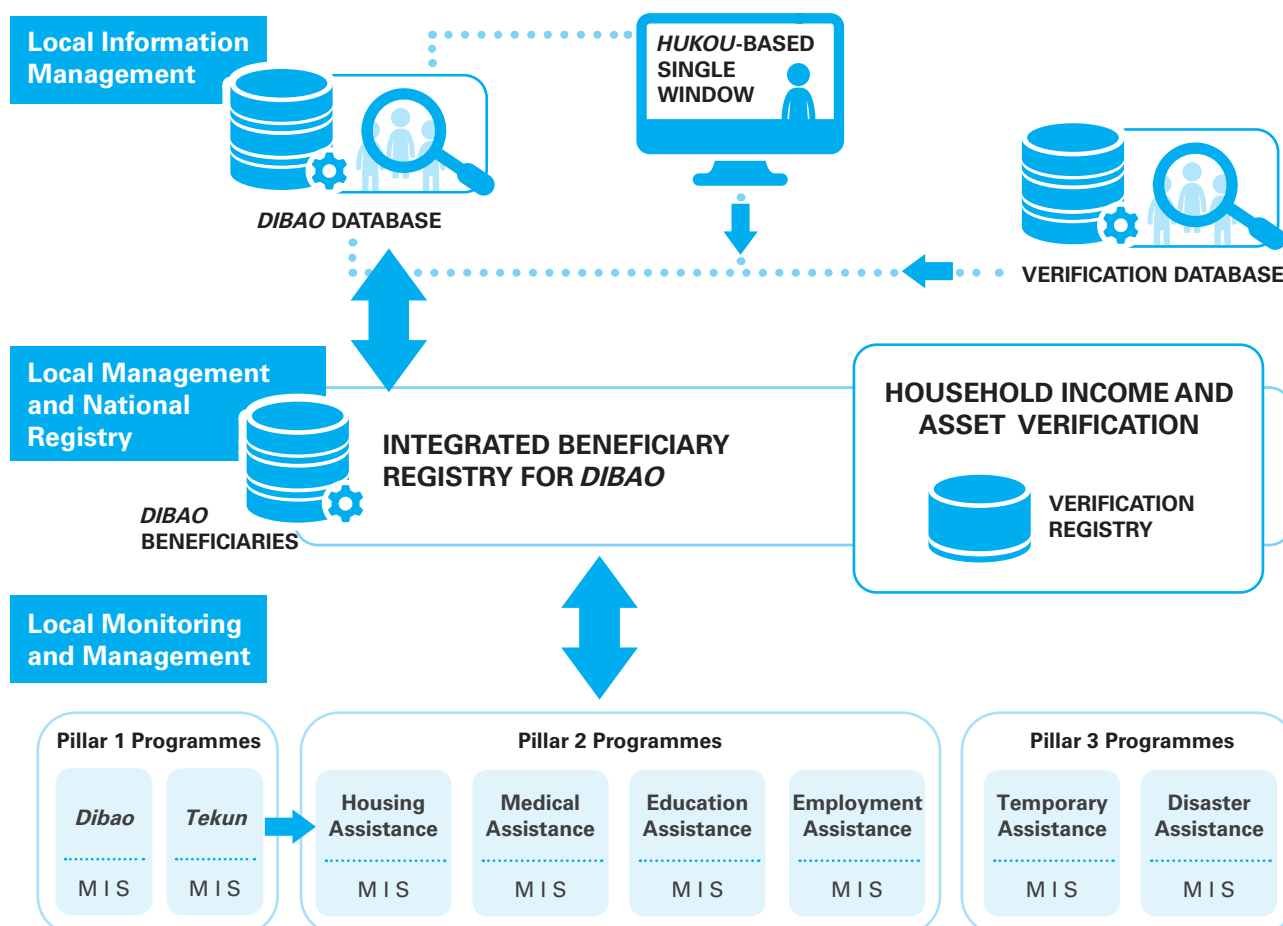
Zhangjiagang has built a comprehensive MIS that supports data collection, processing and reporting. The MIS supports two main functions: (i) policy about social assistance programmes; and (ii) targeting social assistance benefits. The social policy enquiry module provides access to information on minimum livelihood guarantee, temporary relief and other relevant social assistance policy documents, thus helping extend social policy to each town (street) and village (community). The targeting module provides an online facility to access data on applicants and beneficiaries across the city. The MIS aids in decision-making through dashboards and smart reports overlaid with geographic information system functionality, thus supporting China's Strategy of Targeted Poverty Alleviation.

A network of MISs exists following the administrative structure of Township, County (Municipality), Province and National level. The MIS-function at the national level is quite basic, and timely data analysis and regular reporting to stakeholders is still a challenge. This is compounded by inconsistent data standards and information verification procedures that make it harder to achieve a smooth information exchange and integration. MCA recommends a unified HIAVS framework, which some local governments have adopted and customised to local contexts, and an integrated MIS should build on these lessons to ensure full implementation. There is an overall lack of a national framework for integrating the diverse information systems across the country.

¹—This uses data such as from household registration administration (to check the family members), tax administration (to check tax payments), vehicle administration (to check vehicle ownership), employment and social insurance administration (to check employment status and social insurance enrolment), bank, commercial insurance and stock services (to check the saving, insurance purchase and stock trading).

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Figure 2: China's current information management landscape



Source: Chirchir, R. and H. Hu (2019). *Review of Global Management Information System Practices: Lessons for China*. UNICEF, China.

Integration with other social sector MISs

Different government departments have regular information exchanges, meetings and discussions. At the central level, the MCA has established the national social assistance ministerial-level joint meeting with participation of 23 departments. At the provincial, municipal and county levels, respectively, inter-departmental coordination mechanisms have been set up.

The *Dibao* MIS does not contain information from other social assistance programmes. This is because the information for each social assistance application needs to be confirmed and updated manually in most areas. Consequently, overall, the automatic sharing of beneficiaries' information between *Dibao*, *Tekun* and other social assistance programmes has not been established. Although it may be automatically linked at local levels and in some cities, this is generally not common and information is mostly shared manually across departments, and the response often takes 3-5 working days.

The underlying rationale for the Government's Strategy of Targeted Poverty Alleviation is to coordinate poverty alleviation strategies, accurately measure household poverty status, and ensure effective project arrangements, responsible use of funds, and adequate deployment of personnel at the local

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level. An integrated MIS can leverage on the Strategy of Targeted Poverty Alleviation because it could improve efficiency and coordination of social assistance programmes.

The national ID is essential to identify applicants of social assistance. By law, household registration (*Hukou* registration) is required to gain a Resident Identity Card. Although the coverage of the digital ID is very high, applicants for the social assistance programmes are required to register at their place of *Hukou* registration, which makes it difficult for urban migrants to access social assistance. If HIAVS is fully integrated into the MIS, and a suitable policy review to support integration is done, it would allow people to apply for social assistance anywhere, and with information exchanged through IMIS, the means test could still be applied.

Considering that social assistance is implemented by multiple government departments at the central and local levels, there is a need to strengthen coordination to enhance delivery of overall assistance. The coordination is a prerequisite for the design and development of an integrated MIS for social assistance. Current coordination challenges include: issues in balancing regional development; fragmentation in delivery of social assistance programmes; supervision and management for accurate and effective administration of social allowances.

Areas to focus for integrating MISs include:

- Interoperability standards would be needed to ensure that different MISs can communicate with each other, and that guidelines are aligned with China's broader e-government standards.
- Data standardization would be needed for national reporting, which is especially important given *Dibao's* localized implementation.
- ICT infrastructure and connectivity would need to be upgraded in all regions to support the additional functions.
- Data privacy and security standards would need to be enhanced, especially if linking databases across provinces, cities, districts, counties and towns, including access control, data encryption, intrusion prevention, virus prevention, security audit, controls against unauthorised data sharing of beneficiary information, and protections against violation of privacy and covert surveillance.
- Capacity strengthening and training would be needed at all MIS operational levels, including on the management, operation and maintenance of the system; data security; and policies and regulations.

Conclusion

The current system of determining eligibility for social assistance in China depends on income poverty. An integrated MIS can strengthen measurement and monitoring of multidimensional poverty, by collecting and tracking education, health and living conditions, such as electricity, sanitary toilets, safe drinking water, cooking fuel, assets, housing, etc. The same data can be combined with enhanced case management of beneficiaries by social workers to deliver targeted services from multiple social assistance programmes to reduce multidimensional poverty.

This brief draws on analysis and findings in Chirchir, R. and H. Hu (2019). *Review of Global Management Information System Practices: Lessons for China*. UNICEF, China.