

Bhutan

Part 1: Situation update in the country

In 2018, in line with its 12th Five Year Plan (12FYP) 2018-2022, the Royal Government of Bhutan reinforced its commitment to promote equality of opportunities for the most disadvantaged and excluded people, including the most vulnerable children, adolescents and women. With social inclusion and equity at the heart of Bhutan's national development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, Bhutan pursued its aspiration to graduate from the least developed country category and achieve lower-middle-income status during its 12FYP.

To realize Bhutan's social goals, the Government invested 26 per cent of its annual budget in social sector programmes to ensure free basic education and health services. This is critical in a country where children and adolescents comprise 38 per cent of an estimated 727,000 people, per the latest census figures. Nevertheless, in 2018 analyses conducted by the Royal Government of Bhutan in cooperation with the World Bank showed that economic vulnerability remains high, with growth driven primarily by the public and capital-intensive sectors.

Several issues require attention during UNICEF Bhutan's next programming cycle. Despite progress, one in five children are stunted and two in five children are anaemic in Bhutan. One third of adolescent girls are anaemic, a risk factor for inter-generational nutrition deprivation. Newborn mortality is high (17 per 1,000 live births), which contributes to about 70 per cent of infant mortality and 56 per cent of under-five mortality. Only 63 per cent of the population have access to basic sanitation services and 71 per cent of the population have access to improved sanitation services. The situation is worse for child monks and nuns.

These deprivations pose serious implications for early childhood development for affected children, exacerbated by the persistence of inequality and poverty, despite Bhutan's lower-middle-income aspirations. Children with disabilities are disadvantaged by weak mainstreaming of disability in sectoral programmes and stigma associated with disability.

Bhutan made progress in expanding access to education, especially primary education. In 2018, basic education net enrolment figures (up to class 10) were reported at 96 per cent (92.5 male, 99.1 female); the gender parity index to the same level stands at 1.06. At 94.8 per cent, Bhutan almost met the target of 95 per cent of secondary education completion rate set for 2018. The target for transition between primary and lower secondary education was met in

2018 at 95.4 per cent. Bhutan is investing considerable efforts to build on its progress in education by undertaking an ambitious set of systemic reforms designed to close gaps in student learning outcomes, school processes and education support systems. As stated in the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014-2024), this is aimed to ensure the education system performs at high levels of effectiveness and efficiency by 2024.

Nonetheless, the reform bodes potentially serious consequences for children. For example, part of the reform agenda to improve education quality is to establish 120 central schools with boarding facilities, including for children as young as six years old. This raises concerns for children's cultural development and psycho-social well-being, in contravention of children's right to family life as stipulated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. A main argument for the reform agenda was to rationalize public expenditure to education; increasing numbers of children going to boarding schools can exacerbate issues of peer violence and bullying. UNICEF Bhutan's position from the reform's inception was to advocate for children's rights to mitigate harm. UNICEF Bhutan supported the training of caregivers on various child right issues, and will continue to promote alternative options for central schools.

While enrolment in early childhood care and development for three to five year olds steadily rose (9 per cent in 2014 to 22 per cent in 2017), in 2018 only 23.4 percent of three to five year old children had access to early childhood care and development programmes. Children with disabilities, children in hard-to-reach communities, migrant children and nomadic children are yet to gain access. In 2018, to address the low enrolment in hard-to-reach communities UNICEF Bhutan supported the development of alternative models for early childhood care and development that were piloted in five districts. With the Government setting an ambitious target in the Bhutan Education Blueprint to reach at least 50 per cent by 2024, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal target will require substantial investments.

With the focus on 'reaching the last mile' and targeting vulnerable and un-reached groups such as children with disabilities, the 12FYP is highly commendable. More than 650 children with disabilities had access to education in 2018. However, education and care services for children with disabilities are still at a nascent stage, with only about 16 schools in Bhutan that cater to students with special educational needs. Poor learning outcomes at all levels of schooling raise serious concerns regarding the quality of education. The Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 envisions systemic shifts in education, but its implementation continues to be debated. In this context, the National Education Policy is still pending endorsement.

Building on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1981, the Royal Government of Bhutan took policy and legislative measures to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. While acknowledging Bhutan's progress, the Convention of the Rights of the Child Committee raised multiple issues in its 2017 review and concluding observations, drawing attention to the need for urgent measures regarding violence against children; harmful practices, especially in relation to child marriage; children with disabilities; education; and economic exploitation, including child labour and sexual exploitation.

Children in Bhutan are still affected by a range of violence, including physical, sexual and emotional, affecting both girls and boys across age groups. A 2016 UNICEF report determined that six out of 10 children (64 per cent) had experienced some form of physical violence at least once. Twice as many girls as boys were affected by physical violence. More than two out of three children reported they experienced physical violence at school, with three of four children in day school reporting they were violently disciplined by a teacher. Corporal punishment in the form of beatings is used by teachers in monastic institutions to discipline children with varying levels of severity. A key issue of concern is the acceptance of violence as a method of discipline by both parents and teachers, and lack of knowledge and understanding of the harm that violence has on the cognitive and emotional development of children. Nearly one in eight children (13 per cent) have experienced sexual violence at least once (boys, 12 per cent; girls, 14 per cent), over half between ages 13 and 17 years and at the hands of peers.

Meanwhile, an aspect of very young children living away from their families for extended periods is the participation of children in monastic education. Families look upon monasteries and nunneries as an opportunity for religious education for their children, but also as a source of support for their most basic needs. Administrative records maintained by the Council for Monastic Affairs indicate 7,240 monastic novices in 200 monastic schools and three nunneries. A considerable number of these are children with disabilities. The Council for Monastic Affairs' child protection strategy 2017-2022 states that the main protection issues for child monks and nuns are associated with living conditions in the monastic setting, which have an impact on their overall development and well-being.

On the ground, several national initiatives for protection of children have been introduced, and existing initiatives have been consolidated and strengthened. UNICEF Bhutan was a leading partner of the Royal Government of Bhutan and the civil society to strengthen the child protection system at national, district, and sub-district levels. The national plan of action for child protection (2013-2018), resulting from a comprehensive assessment of the child protection system in Bhutan, continued to be implemented in 2018. Several key institutions, including law enforcement and the justice system, have made improvements in terms of implementation of child protection legislation.

Establishment of women and child-protection units at police stations, and a child and family bench at the courts, are relevant examples. Availability and capacity of the social service workforce, notably within the National Commission for Women and Children, the Ministry of Education, Council for Monastic Affairs and civil society, improved in 2018. Standard operating procedures for vulnerable children, child victims and children in conflict with the law are now operational.

Despite progress, challenges to effective implementation of legislation remain. Inconsistencies in legislative provisions require immediate attention. One important challenge involves the availability and capacities of personnel to implement child protection programmes. The challenges to coordination among actors at national and sub-national levels are yet to be fully

addressed. While work has been initiated with children and adolescents, including addressing gender-related concerns, more needs to be done with adults and communities to create awareness about child protection issues. Negative social norms on concerns such as violence against children and child marriage continue to prevail.

Responding to these opportunities and deprivations, UNICEF Bhutan developed its new Country Programme Document 2019-2023, in full alignment with regional and global priorities, including the 12FYP, UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 which guided strategic programme reflection, the UNICEF Gender Action Plan Gap 2.0 and the Bhutan United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF) 2019-2023.

Part 2: Major Results including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

In the context of Delivering as One UN, 2018 marked the fifth and final year of the UNICEF Bhutan Country Programme Document and the common United Nations Country Programme 2014-2018. In 2018, the Royal Government of Bhutan approved the new five-year United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework 2019-2023, aligned with the 12FYP. As chair of the United Nations PME group and a key member of the operations management team, UNICEF Bhutan was among the leading agencies in the development process. The Sustainable Development Partnership benefited common Strategic Plan chapters with other United Nations agencies, addressing cross-sectoral aspects including disability, evidence generation and use and governance. Priority been given to alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, the 12FYP and other important national frameworks.

UNICEF Bhutan successfully completed its 2014-2018 programme cycle, achieving most and exceeding many of its targets by end 2018. The programme prepared the ground for UNICEF Bhutan's new Country Programme Document 2019-2023, approved by its executive board in September 2018. The new country programme document focuses on addressing 'the last mile' by embracing upstream policy partnerships while maintaining innovative service delivery on the ground, addressing the most vulnerable children and women. Specific consideration was given to Bhutan's potential graduation from least developed country to lower middle-income country status during the new programme cycle.

Recognizing the need to increase upstream policy, the new country programme document includes an outcome on social policy. The Country Programme Document 2019-2023 is fully aligned with regional and global priorities, including the 12FYP and UNICEF Bhutan's Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

In preparation for the new country programme, upstream work and focus on equity were accelerated during the current programme cycle, for example training key policy makers and stakeholders on social policy, increased engagement with the National Statistics Bureau on data and analysis, and sectoral support to development and revision of policies and legislation

in health, nutrition, WASH, education and child protection. The continued partnership with academia set the tone for UNICEF Bhutan's gradual shift to upstream work. Building on these achievements, the new country programme will focus on evidence-based policy making and accountability systems, to ensure timely and quality information for decision making.

UNICEF Bhutan continued to embrace key synergies across sectors, to address cross-cutting issues of early childhood, disability and adolescence. The country office mainstreamed gender across programmes and addressed gender dimensions of key deprivations. Considering the recommendations of the 2017 Regional Office for South Asia Gender Action Plan evaluation, UNICEF Bhutan conducted a gender programmatic review in 2018 which was reflected across all sectors.

Increasing demand was determined as a major strategic focus of the new country programme and the 12FYP. Throughout the year, communication for development was instrumental, including the implementation of a cross-sector communication for development strategy for child protection and well-being, addressing the whole spectrum of child rights; and the development of one for children with disabilities promoting positive social norms and practices, based on the findings of a 2017 knowledge, attitudes and practice survey. To address chronic malnutrition of children under five years old in Bhutan, the development of a national nutrition campaign is underway.

UNICEF Bhutan raised its advocacy and visibility profile, including two high-profile UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador visits and the appointment of UNICEF's first Bhutanese Youth Ambassador. These prominent figures support high-profile advocacy events and programmatic behaviour change strategies to raise awareness of UNICEF's work. UNICEF Bhutan continued engagement with donors and UNICEF national committees through ongoing communication, field visits, donor reports and new project proposals. In 2018, UNICEF Bhutan marked the highest number of visits by donors, national committees and Goodwill Ambassadors, from three visits in 2017 to seven in 2018. The country office hosted visits from UNICEF Czech Republic; New Zealand, Sweden, South Korea; Japan Committee "Vaccines for the World's Children; and the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board.

In addition to partnership building and advocacy, the visits resulted in higher resources for UNICEF Bhutan in 2018. UNICEF Bhutan's total other resources increased by 34 per cent from 2017, from US\$1.3 million in 2017 to US\$3.8 million in 2018. The number of UNICEF National Committees supporting UNICEF's work in Bhutan rose to nine from four in 2017, with new commitments from new UNICEF New Zealand; Hong Kong, Andorra, South Korea; and the United Arab Emirates Liaison Office of about US\$1.1 million. The resources were mobilized for newborn care, education and child protection programmes. UNICEF Bhutan also received funds from the Lego Foundation for early childhood care and development.

As Bhutan's expected transition from least developed country to lower-middle-income status led to reduced aid flows and partner presence in the country, UNICEF Bhutan successfully focused on leveraging additional resources for the Government from the Global Fund, GAVI

and the Global Partnership for Education. UNICEF Bhutan, United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization jointly mobilized funds from United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This will enable the Government to strengthen its policy environment for persons with disabilities.

The country office continued to use traditional and social media channels to efficiently advance UNICEF Bhutan's work in Bhutan. Increased collaboration with local journalists resulted in media houses reaching out for more stories on children, women and young people. This was evident on World Children's Day on November 20, when Bhutan's oldest and largest newspaper, Kuensel, and the nation's only television station, BBS, featured three media stories at the same time, covering online safety, rural sanitation and the announcement of UNICEF Bhutan's Youth Ambassador. It was unprecedented for any international organization present in Bhutan to receive such positive coverage.

On social media, UNICEF Bhutan's presence grew exponentially. UNICEF Bhutan's total Facebook reach tripled to about 1.12 million in 2018 from 464,000 in 2017. Twitter and Instagram pages are seeing strong engagement from a small and committed follower base. Key influencers, including ministers and officials, retweeted and shared UNICEF Bhutan's messages on Twitter. UNICEF Bhutan's new dynamic website was launched at the end of 2018 to allow the country office to share stories and information to the Bhutanese people and beyond.

To inspire and support the scale-up of innovative technologies and approaches to UNICEF Bhutan's work and that of partners, innovation initiatives were strengthened with partners across 20 districts. With the support of UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia, the country office developed an ambitious innovations road map, defining priorities for the new programme cycle 2019-2023. UNICEF Bhutan will develop innovative applications for alternative early childhood care and development models, and develop behaviour change material for nutrition in local languages, to build the capacity of service providers and systems to deliver results for children. Leveraging the Generation Unlimited partnership for young people in secondary education, skills and empowerment, UNICEF Bhutan focused on reaching out to the most vulnerable adolescents who are not in education, employment or training.

UNICEF Bhutan contributed to strengthen key components of the 'Delivering as One UN' approach, including a substantive contribution to the United Nations country team oversight and quality assurance; UNICEF's role as Chair of the United Nations Programme, Monitoring and Evaluation group to streamline review and planning processes; and its leadership roles for joint communications and media sensitization, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and ethics. UNICEF Bhutan fully embraced the United Nations reform agenda.

Effective and efficient delivery of programme results was strengthened through strategic review and rationalization processes. A business process review was spearheaded by UNICEF headquarters and UNICEF Regional Office South Asia in 2018. As a result, UNICEF Bhutan simplified programme and operational work processes. Streamlining the annual management

plan was emphasized, with focus on reviewing office committees; relieving the burden of joint programme, monitoring and evaluation with stronger capacity in the UN Resident Coordinator Office; establishing country-level and regional long-term agreements with vendors; and creating secondary vendors. The UNICEF Bhutan country office met and surpassed the global targets for both financial and programmatic assurance activities (at 100 per cent and 168 per cent respectively) in 2018.

A learning and training plan was developed and implemented, based on programme needs and in consultation with all staff. Staff members benefited from face-to-face and online training in key areas, focusing on technical and cross-sectorial skills. In collaboration with management, the staff association developed and implemented a workplan with focus on staff well-being.

Based on the 2017 Global Staff Survey and the 2018 Pulse Survey, the office management and staff association jointly developed an action plan for the three priority areas of work-life balance, personal empowerment and professional development. To empower all staff members and promote the office's speak-up culture, a 'VOICE' task force was created, an action plan was incorporated in the Global Staff Survey; and key activities were implemented including training on communication skills and career development.

UNICEF Bhutan regularly reviewed its programmatic and operational risks, identified relevant mitigation measures, updated its enterprise risk management systems and developed an emergency preparedness and response plan, aligned with the inter-agency contingency plan.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

In 2018, interventions supported by UNICEF Bhutan in newborn health contributed to reduction of under-five, infant and newborn mortality rates to 31 (from 33 in 2015), 26 (from 27 in 2015) and 17 (from 18 in 2015) per 1,000 live births respectively; institutional delivery rates increased to 93.6 percent. An estimated 50 per cent of new-borns were reached through quality early essential newborn care and kangaroo mother care, contributing to the reduction of neonatal mortality in the medium term.

UNICEF Bhutan in collaboration with Ministry of Health generated evidence to inform policies, strategies and programmes on maternal and child health and nutrition, and to support quality service delivery. Four studies were completed on: early essential newborn care and kangaroo mother care; communication skills of village health workers; the mother and baby-friendly health facility initiative; and growth monitoring. The assessment on early essential newborn care and kangaroo mother care revealed positive labour room practices: almost all full-term babies born in the three hospitals experienced skin-to-skin contact within one minute of birth, and breastfeeding is initiated within 15 minutes. However, only half of the pre-term and low birth weight babies received quality care.

An assessment of an interpersonal communication skills training for village health workers on maternal, neo-natal, child health and nutrition revealed that the workers support is recognized

by families, communities, local leaders and health care providers. However, there is a need to complement the communication training with provision of communication tools.

A mother- and baby-friendly health facility initiative was piloted in 2017 in two hospitals to improve nutrition and health care by protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding. The programme will be scaled up in the new programme cycle to enable periodic supervision and monitoring of quality, sustainable service delivery in all health facilities.

A study on the practices, knowledge, perception and attitudes of health workers and caregivers on growth monitoring revealed that they largely know the growth monitoring schedule and are aware of early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding as well as hygiene and sanitation. However, as they have limited knowledge on growth charts and self-monitoring, interventions have to be scaled up in this regard.

The rollout of the UNICEF Bhutan-supported web-based mother and child health tracking system enabled 55 health facilities to track patient information to the District Health Information System 2, including one third of women who were pregnant and newborns. This enabled programme managers to obtain real-time data at the national, district and health facility level to ensure reach, coverage and quality of mother and child health services.

UNICEF Bhutan's advocacy and policy support to strengthen early childhood nutrition by improving dietary diversity yielded a home fortification pilot in partnership with Ministry of Health. Multiple micro-nutrient powder/sprinkles for fortification of foods were piloted for 1,000 children aged six to 23 months in three districts with the highest malnutrition prevalence (Samtse, Dagana and Mongar). The project will reduce the rates of stunting and anaemia, increase dietary diversity and improve the quality of complementary foods. To support the initiative, a nation-wide nutrition campaign will be developed in 2019. UNICEF Bhutan supported the participation of a Bhutanese Ministry of Health delegation at the 2018 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation conference on 'Stop stunting: power of maternal nutrition' in Nepal, to accelerate nutritional care of women during pregnancy and postpartum.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and World Health Organization, UNICEF Bhutan worked to establish early infant diagnosis to test children born to mothers who are HIV positive within six weeks of life. Early infant diagnosis is important for detection and management of HIV for children infected in-utero, during delivery or through breastfeeding. The objective of the early infant diagnosis initiative is to achieve certification of zero vertical transmission of HIV/AIDS (i.e. transmission of a woman to her infant child) by 2020.

To ensure universal screening of children under five years old for any form of developmental delays and disability, a child-development screening tool developed by UNICEF Bhutan in collaboration with the ministries of health and education was endorsed by Ministry of Health's Ethical Review Board for inclusion in the revised mother and child health handbook in 2019.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

Access to equitable services for vulnerable groups and hard-to-reach children was enhanced by interventions in early childhood care and development and inclusive education. Pre-primary education surpassed the 2018 target at 23.4 per cent, with almost no gender disparity. However, the overall enrolment remained low as the concept of pre-primary education is relatively new in Bhutan, and the Government is yet to invest at a large scale. UNICEF Bhutan supported the sector in promoting early childhood care and development, focusing on children with disabilities in hard-to-reach communities and in nomadic cultures.

As coordinating agency, UNICEF Bhutan was instrumental in leveraging Global Partnership for Education funds managed by Save the Children. For best return on investment, UNICEF Bhutan advocated to form a multi-sector, national early childhood care and development steering committee for the new programme cycle. The development of holistic early childhood care and development programmes for zero to eight year olds will be a promoted adjustment, as early childhood care and development was previously focused on children three to five years old. Within the centre-based programme model, UNICEF Bhutan is exploring establishment of inclusive early childhood care and development programmes as well as alternative early childhood care and development. A workshop to conceptualize a pre-school framework brought together key early childhood care and development stakeholders to identify priority areas. A national early childhood care and development strategic plan of action is in the pipeline for development and endorsement.

In cooperation with Ministry of Education, UNICEF Bhutan was instrumental in the establishment of an education sector group which has since had a key role in the coordination of all stakeholders. Bhutan was supported by UNICEF headquarters and Regional Office South Asia, through regional workshop participation, to address gaps in the pre-primary sub-sector. A roadmap and action plan received high-level commitment from Bhutan's Ministry of Education secretary. UNICEF Bhutan developed an evidence-based, communication for development strategy to combat bottlenecks and barriers such as negative attitudes towards children with disabilities.

UNICEF Bhutan shifted focus in education from access to quality. For example, in 2018, to remove systemic barriers for children with disabilities by addressing school-level policy, culture and practices, UNICEF Bhutan supported the Ministry of Education in the development of standards for inclusive education and professional standards for teachers. UNICEF Bhutan initiated engagement with the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and on the national education assessment framework to measure learning outcomes at various levels of the education cycle. UNICEF Bhutan supported a study on repetition, drop-out and children who have never attended school, which will offer recommendations to address the needs of children who are out of school and those who are likely to drop out.

In 2018, a primary to lower secondary transition rate of 95.4 per cent was achieved, along with a secondary education completion rate of 94.8 per cent. Gender parity in education up to secondary levels was reached. With a literacy rate 67 per cent, Bhutan is close to achieving the

literacy rate target of 70 per cent.

A non-formal education equivalency framework was developed to expand pathways for learners by linking non-formal education to mainstream education and training systems. The framework will help learners gain access to education or training programmes to provide progressive and life-long learning opportunities.

In 2018, for the first time Bhutan received funds from the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for a joint initiative with United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization to support the Government's efforts to create an enabling environment for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is an important cross-sectoral and multi-agency achievement in addressing disability through a convergent approach, engaging people with disabilities in the development and implementation of policy reforms, focused on leaving no-one behind.

Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence and abuse

UNICEF Bhutan, the National Commission for Women and Children and partners focused on a child protection system perspective, rather than an issues-based approach. During the development of the new country programme document, UNICEF Bhutan identified key areas to strengthen the child protection system such as legislation, policies, social norms and service delivery mechanisms for children victims of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

As a result, UNICEF Bhutan provided technical assistance to the National Commission to review the National Plan of Action for Child Protection (2013-2018) and to develop the national child policy and the strategy and action plan on child well-being and protection. In 2018, as a result of UNICEF Bhutan's advocacy, the Government reviewed the National Plan. The findings will be used to develop and operationalize the new strategy (2019-2023) and action plan on child well-being and protection during the 12FYP.

UNICEF Bhutan focused on key policy and legislation, such the development of standardized operational procedures, as well as on the capacities of service providers, children, families and communities to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation through a standardized curriculum that was developed and institutionalized within Government and civil society organisations. In 2018, the national child policy was drafted, the 'Diversion of children in conflict with the law' national guidelines were developed, and standard operating procedures on the management of cases of women and children in difficult circumstances were elaborated. National standard operating procedures on child protection for children residing in monastic institutions and nunneries were developed in cooperation with the Central Monastic Body.

In line with its focus on strengthening the services and enabling environment for child protection, UNICEF Bhutan supported the Royal Bhutan Police to expand the number of women and child-protection units and desks. In 2018, two desks were established, bringing the total number of districts providing child friendly policing services to 13 out of 20. There was an

improvement in cross-sectoral coordination, case management and making the child protection desks child-friendly.

Towards strengthening evidence-based programming, the Government carried out a thematic analysis on violence in schools with UNICEF Bhutan support, using data of the 2016 study on violence against children and young people. The finding of the analysis will inform the design of the 'end violence' campaign in 2019.

In 2018, UNICEF Bhutan enhanced professional capacities with training on early identification, safe referrals and general child protection knowledge for those working with children. Social service professionals working in the field of disability, police and judicial personnel as well as immigration officers, teachers from monastic institutions and nunneries were trained on child protection and the national referral system. Towards enhancing the capacities of children and young people to prevent and protect themselves against violence, the standardized training curriculum on child protection and violence against children was developed and used to train children and young people.

In 2018, UNICEF Bhutan partnered with the Royal University of Bhutan to initiate professional social work education in the country. A bachelors' degree in social work is under development and will be launched in July 2019. A tailored six-month certificate course for current practitioners, who are mostly untrained, reached 45 practitioners during the year.

UNICEF Bhutan, through its adolescent development and participation programme, empowered adolescents to participate in civic affairs and to strengthen services. The programme collaborated with a host of government and non-government organization partners, United Nations agencies and youth groups across the country. Adolescent programming was aligned with the Generation Unlimited partnership (to achieve accelerated outcomes for young people in secondary education, skills and empowerment) and with the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia's "We the future" advocacy movement. UNICEF Bhutan contributed to the provision of adolescent-friendly services such as child protection, health, education and civic engagement through four integrated youth-friendly services centres, reaching over 50,000 adolescents and youth (56 per cent female; 44 per cent male) in 2018.

Contributing to Generation Unlimited, UNICEF Bhutan facilitated coordination and networking among adolescents by providing technical and financial resources to the Division of Youth and Sports under the Ministry of Education. The support strengthened the young Bhutan network with over 20,000 active volunteers across the country. Youth summits, festivals and exchange programmes were organized in close coordination with civil society organizations and other United Nations agencies. The programme worked with national partners to implement a standardized training programme for adolescents, reaching more than 6,000 young people, including 1,000 monks and nuns who gained knowledge and skills to protect themselves from violence and exploitation.

Goal area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

UNICEF Bhutan continued to work on WASH in schools with an increased focus on upstream interventions. In 2018, 3,500 students (50 per cent girls) in 15 schools gained access to safe drinking water supply with the installation of a multi-stage filtration system with ultraviolet disinfection, contributing to a national rate of 85 per cent of schools with safe drinking water.

The introduction of the 'tippy tap' system in schools increased the number of hand-washing stations from 57 per cent in 2013 to 79 per cent in 2017. The functionality of toilets in all schools improved from 74 per cent in 2014 to 84.5 per cent in 2018. According to a 2018 knowledge, attitudes and practices study, 97.3 per cent of the schools in the country now have trained school-health coordinators, against only 60 per cent in 2014.

A knowledge, attitudes and practices study on handwashing was conducted by Ministry of Education in collaboration with the UNICEF Bhutan. The aim of the study was to understand the status and challenges of handwashing in schools to improve facilities and practices in Bhutan. The study revealed an appropriate level of knowledge and attitudes for handwashing among students across ages and gender. However, facility gaps such as distance to the hand washing station, availability of functional water points and availability of soap, hamper the practice of 100 percent handwashing at critical times.

The WASH field note, "Menstrual hygiene management: The challenges facing students and nuns in Bhutan" was published and launched during the South Asian Conference on Sanitation. The publication was based on the knowledge, attitudes and practices study on menstrual hygiene management of adolescent-school girls and nuns in 2018, conducted in collaboration with Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, the Central Monastic Body and UNICEF Bhutan. The findings will be used to improve menstrual hygiene management in schools and nunneries.

UNICEF Bhutan continues to be one of the few development partners supporting the 400 monastic schools and 28 nunneries across the country, most of which lack basic water and sanitation facilities. UNICEF Bhutan intensified its collaboration with the Central Monastic Body to convert monastic schools, with an estimated 9,000 children, into centres of child-friendly learning and living.

An inclusive toilet design for child monks and nuns was developed and will be improved with focus on accessibility for children with disabilities, proper lightings and water-heating systems. UNICEF Bhutan supported the construction of water supply schemes in three monastic schools, and of toilets with handwashing and bathing facilities in two monastic schools. Twenty-five monastic schools and nunneries have been supported since the beginning of the programme cycle.

In cooperation with the Government and SNV, UNICEF Bhutan was a key supporter of the rural sanitation and hygiene programme, a subsidy-free and demand driven, community-led approach to total sanitation in rural communities. In 2018, additional 16,000 people from 3,220 households (85 communities) started using improved toilets as a result of direct UNICEF

Bhutan support. In total, these are 41 additional blocks (Gewogs) that were certified for achieving 100 per cent improved sanitation coverage during 2018, bringing the total number of blocks to 80 (39 per cent) nationwide. Around half of these blocks were supported by UNICEF Bhutan, and the remaining by SNV and Bhutan Red Cross.

A regional WASH challenge was jointly organized by UNICEF Bhutan and Building Resources Across Communities, to identify innovative solutions to promote the practice of handwashing with soap. The finale of the challenge observed top 12 teams from eight South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries, including Bhutan. The top scorers' ideas will be explored as pilots of WASH programmes.

In emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction, four ministries and 31 agencies were oriented on the existing disaster management contingency plan. A simulation exercise was conducted as a part of the training. Basic search and rescue training was provided to key staff who are engaged during emergencies. UNICEF Bhutan regularly reviewed its programmatic and operational risks, identified relevant mitigation measures and updated the enterprise risk management systems, and developed an emergency preparedness and response plan, aligned with the inter-agency contingency plan.

Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life

As part of its upstream efforts for children, youth, women and marginalized communities, UNICEF Bhutan focused on building the capacity of parliamentarians, civil servants, civil society organizations, adolescents and youth in governance and increased accountability, evidence-based policy and decision-making, and adolescent participation.

In 2018, two rounds of parliamentary elections took place, resulting in a transition to a new government in November 2018. In December 2018, UNICEF Bhutan presented briefing notes and discussed programme priorities with most of the cabinet's ministers, outlining synergies between UNICEF Bhutan's Country Programme Document and the new Government's ambitious socio-economic agenda for the coming legislation period. UNICEF Bhutan launched its cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and discussed relations with the private sector, amongst others.

Parliamentary capacity to review and analyse policies and legislation was enhanced, along with the formal registration of the Evaluation Association of Bhutan, the first official civil society organization dedicated to strengthening evaluation culture in the country. Data and evidence for strategic and targeted programming was generated through equity profiles. UNICEF Bhutan continued to work with the Royal University of Bhutan in Thimphu and Sherubtse College in eastern Bhutan to strengthen equity-focused policy making and programming.

The Government presented a voluntary national review of the Sustainable Development Goals to the Secretariat in 2018. Representing its people-centred philosophy of Gross National Happiness, aligned with the 2030 Agenda, Bhutan emphasized Sustainable Development Goal

awareness and sensitization, and carried out consultations with civil society organizations, the private sector and various sections of the society, including youth representatives. While the United Nations Development Programme was the lead agency for voluntary national review support to the Government, UNICEF Bhutan strongly supported the process, including the development of a child-focused analysis of Sustainable Development Goals in Bhutan, which positively influenced the voluntary national review process throughout. The analysis illustrated the benefits of focusing on the key areas affecting children, especially regarding multi-dimensional child poverty. To support data and evidence creation, UNICEF Bhutan will support the National Statistics Bureau in cooperation with other key partners to conduct a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in 2019/2020, which will inform monitoring of many Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

UNICEF Bhutan supported the participation of Bhutanese parliamentarians at the 'South Asia platform of parliamentarians for children' in Bangladesh in March, 2018. Parliamentarians in the region discussed child rights' issues and the critical role that parliamentarians can play for children in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, along with their potential advocacy role around UNICEF regional results and building public systems for children.

In cooperation with National Statistics Bureau, UNICEF Bhutan supported the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative based on the 2017 multi-dimensional poverty analysis in Bhutan, including on the status of children with disabilities. Findings will be used to advocate for social resource planning and distribution; initial discussions are underway with the Gross National Happiness Commission and Ministry of Finance.

UNICEF Bhutan was a key partner in the Government strengthening evaluation capacity and culture in the country. As a result, the Evaluation Association of Bhutan was formally registered as a mutual benefit organization in 2018. The Association will be a key partner with the Planning Commission in taking forward the evaluation agenda in the country. UNICEF Bhutan continued to support the improvement of evaluation quality and assisted the new organisation in developing its strategy for sustainability and a roadmap.

In 2018, UNICEF Bhutan did not conduct further evaluations. However, the new Country Programme Document 2019-2023, approved by the September board, drew extensively on the situation analysis of children, youth and women (2017) and other relevant surveys, studies and reports. The country programme document includes a costed evaluation plan which will be implemented from the first year of the new programme cycle, and will evaluate the impact of key UNICEF Bhutan programmes.

Towards enhancing youth participation in national development, UNICEF Bhutan continued to support the Government in building capacity of youth and adolescents to understand the Sustainable Development Goals and the 12FYP, and their role in contributing towards the achievement of these goals. Ensuring youth engagement, UNICEF supported a follow-up to the 2017 national Sustainable Development Goal youth consultation, with over 120 youth and adolescents from three regions participating, including from remote areas and vulnerable

backgrounds. This resulted in the participants advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals in the local planning.

Recognizing youth's potential in innovation and use of digital technology, UNICEF Bhutan partnered with the Youth Development Fund to encourage innovation among the participants of the 11th Golden Youth Camp in July. UNICEF Bhutan supported the fund to develop a website on youth and an innovation lab. This is a crucial step towards engaging youth through digital platforms to design, develop and implement youth-led projects and champion change in their communities. As a follow up of this initiative, the Youth Development Fund received 30 youth-led proposals, with UNICEF supporting three youth-led advocacy projects on online safety.

Partnership with youth networks was strengthened through active engagement of youth and adolescents in civic activities, including a series of programmes such as youth fora and summits, youth integrity and entrepreneurship programmes, providing them with skills to identify and articulate the issues that matter to them the most, and enabling them to directly engage with policymakers, parliamentarians, civil servants, and industry leaders to express their views and offer important suggestions on addressing problems faced by young people.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Overall, a key lesson learned was related to Bhutan's potential graduation from the status of a least-developed country to a lower-middle-income country: the continual withdrawal of traditional development partners and funding sources during the reporting year. Bhutan has maintained a strong macroeconomic performance, that trickles down to benefit many children and their families over the past two decades, but diminishing funding for the social sector puts results at risk. Acknowledging that support of development partners is required to sustain important socio-economic achievements, UNICEF Bhutan successfully leveraged additional resources for the Government from the Global Fund, GAVI and the Global Partnership for Education, among others. To ensure that declining resources do not strain social expenditure, upstream policy work and especially social policy engagement were crucial in 2018.

Bhutan faces disparities among socio-economic groups, a development constraint despite progress to improve key socio-economic indicators over the last decade, including meeting the Millennium Development Goals on reducing poverty, halving the proportion of underweight children, child mortality and maternal mortality.

But by wealth alone, average disparities between the richest and poorest quintiles are stark across sectors. Urban/rural inequity persists, underscored by disparities in multi-dimensional poverty index rates of 1.2 per cent in urban centres and 8.1 per cent in rural areas. During the preparation of its new country programme document, UNICEF Bhutan addressed the structural and other challenges that Bhutan faces, with increased up-stream policy and advocacy work, social policy and public finance for children.

Bhutan made progress in strengthening its governance during the reporting year, focusing on decentralization of services through a national decentralization policy that addresses the barriers to access by those who are hardest-to-reach. In line with these ambitions, the 12FYP foresees the potential allocation of 50 per cent of government resources at sub-national level. However, it will remain challenging to strengthen systems and institutions at the local level.

UNICEF Bhutan focused on addressing insufficient decentralized capacities for equity-based planning, service delivery and monitoring during the preparation of its country programme document. Initial discussions were undertaken with the Gross National Happiness Commission and the Ministry of Finance. Priority will be given to areas lagging in human development, including urban and rural settings, vulnerabilities between population sub-groups, by wealth quintile, location, gender, age, disability and other factors, challenging the “last mile” of development.

Against this backdrop, to ensure effective development programmes, UNICEF Bhutan enhanced cross-sectoral programming and mainstreamed cross-cutting issues in 2018. Examples include early childhood care and development with focus on early learning and disability, and child protection with a focus on children who live without parental care (including in boarding schools and monastic institutions).

In Bhutan, data scarcity limits programme planning, implementation and monitoring. A first assessment showed that almost half of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators cannot be measured due to a lack of baselines. Responding to these constraints, the Sustainable Development Goal monitoring process provided key lessons learned to engage in the statistical sector and step up dialogue and interventions around data collection in the country. The 12FYP focuses on decentralization and is thus a good opportunity to localize the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as map and monitor Sustainable Development Goal indicators at the local level.

In 2018, in line with the focus on upstream work in the new country programme document, UNICEF Bhutan increased engagement with the National Statistics Bureau on data and analysis, and increased support to development and revision of sector management information systems, including health and education. Partnerships with academia and training policy makers and stakeholders on social policy have set the tone for UNICEF Bhutan's gradual shift to upstream work and focus on equity. For the first time, an initial work agenda on public finance for children was discussed with the Ministry of Finance. Building on these achievements, the new country programme will focus on evidence-based policy making, information management and accountability systems, to ensure timely and quality information for decision making.

Recognizing the need to increase upstream policy, the new country programme includes an outcome on social policy. With the risk that budget allocation for the social sectors may not be reached, UNICEF Bhutan invested in building partners' capacity for evidence-based, gender-responsive policy and budgeting. The interventions intensify in the new programme, including

more support to the Ministry of Finance in public finance for children. Other components for an enabling environment such as the production, use and quality of evidence on vulnerable groups and high-level advocacy, will also be enhanced.

Bhutan is a seismically-active zones and vulnerable to earthquakes, along with other disasters. In the development of the country programme, UNICEF Bhutan emphasized disaster risk reduction and strengthened cross-sector linkages and coordination for emergency preparedness and response. In 2018, the establishment of an incident command system laid the foundation to improve communication, coordination and response mechanisms during emergencies at the national and district levels.

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