

Update on the context and situation of children

2019 saw the children of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) continuing to face risks from the effects of climate change and frequent natural hazards, food insecurity and insufficient national capacity to provide life-saving basic services such as health care; nutrition; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). On the INFORM Global Risk Index, DPRK was classified as being at high risk of humanitarian crisis, ranking 38 out of 191 countries. Despite humanitarian exemptions from economic sanctions, there were continued shortages of the financial resources and essential supplies needed to address the most pressing life-threatening circumstances.

In 2019, the inter-agency Needs and Priorities document estimated 11 million people, (43.4 per cent of the population) The 2019 Global Hunger Index showed improvement, with DPRK moving from 109 out of 119 countries in 2018 to 92 out of 117, but hunger levels were still classified as 'serious'. The population – including the most vulnerable, 1.7 million children under age 5 – remains exposed to risks from inadequate emergency preparedness and response capacities. In addition, Tropical Cyclone Lingling hit DPRK in September 2019, causing population displacement in three provinces and damage to agricultural crops, households and WASH facilities.

The humanitarian situation in DPRK has been overlooked by the rest of the world. The geopolitical situation affects humanitarian donor contributions, primarily channelled through United Nations agencies and international NGOs. DPRK has the lowest per capita aid in the region, despite being the last country classified in the low income group. Humanitarian funding requirements for children – focusing on essential needs – were less than 50 per cent fulfilled over the past six years.

In 2019, a participatory Situation Analysis of Children and Women (SitAn) was finalized and presented to national and humanitarian partners during the Midterm Review (MTR) of the DPRK–UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2017–2021. Given limited data availability, the evidence from UNICEF-supported surveys, equity analysis and evaluations, combined with cooperation with the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and analysed from a rights-based perspective, makes the SitAn currently the most comprehensive source of knowledge on the situation of children in DPRK. The joint SitAn confirmed that significant advances have been made in the realization of children's and women's rights in recent years.

The MTR 2019 reported that UNICEF DPRK was supporting the delivery of results which were greater than committed to in the Country Programme Document (CPD). This particularly applied to coverage support for nutrition, health and WASH interventions aimed at further reducing child and maternal morbidity and mortality.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) programme drove a reduction to three per cent in under-five children suffering from acute malnutrition and to 19 per cent suffering from stunting. In 2019, around 140,000 children were estimated to suffer from undernutrition and need treatment; of these, 30,000 faced an increased risk of death. The situation of child malnutrition was monitored through screening of mid-upper arm circumference through Child Health Days that reached around 1.5 million under-five children twice annually. Marked disparities in nutrition between rural/urban areas, wealth index groups and provinces need addressing. Stunting prevalence in the lowest wealth group is double that in the highest wealth group, and the wasting prevalence is three times higher.

In a situation where one in three people in the country do not have safely managed drinking water and 23.5 per cent of the population drink water from contaminated sources, the Ministry of Urban Management (MoUM) provided safely managed water to an estimated 703,200 people through UNICEF-supported community-led water supply systems and maintenance during the first three years of the programme cycle. However, excreta from 90 per cent of on-site sanitation facilities is still used unsafely in rural areas. Children under age 5 living in households that drink contaminated water are three times more likely to be wasted as children living in households with access to safe drinking water. Under-five children using unimproved sanitation also have diarrhoea 36 per cent more often than those using improved sanitation, and diarrhoea is a leading childhood killer globally.

UNICEF-supported coverage of the national Integrated Management of Newborn and Childhood Illnesses (IMNCI) programme and early achievement of emergency obstetric and neonatal care (EmONC) targets crucially contributed to reducing under-five mortality to an estimated range of 15–18 per 1,000 live births, per 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and national data respectively. However, over 80 per cent of under-five deaths are infant deaths, clearly indicating the need to focus on maternal and neonatal health. This will require improving the quality of services provided during pregnancy and delivery, focusing especially on births in rural areas not occurring in health facilities (13 per cent). Medical personnel in DPRK's extensive health-care system require more training to improve service quality and management information systems on health supplies need strengthening.

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DPRK has made strides in strengthening the legal and policy framework for women's and children's rights in recent years. The Government has ratified several global conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities. Key priority recommendations from treaty bodies include access to data, disability rights and empowerment of women. In accordance with the CRC Committee's General Comment No. 19 of 2016 on public budgeting for the realization of child rights, detailed information on Government budget allocation for child survival and optimal development is needed to identify funding gaps and facilitate opportunities to mobilize external resources.

Besides strengthening implementation of recommendations from treaty bodies and development of equity-focused policies in social sectors, localizing Agenda 2030 and tracking those goals and targets considered most relevant to DPRK's needs, especially for child-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was crucial. In 2019, DPRK established a National SDGs Implementation Task Force, facilitated by CBS, to advance the process of voluntary national review in 2020, which will benefit from UNICEF support on data availability related to children, including from the 2017 DPRK MICS, programme evaluations and 2019 SitAn results.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Health

In 2019, UNICEF provided material, financial and technical support to MoPH, which resulted in strong progress towards reducing neonatal, infant, childhood and maternal deaths and illnesses. Exceptional achievements were made in immunization, with the Measles–Rubella (MR) campaign reaching over 5 million children and routine immunization covering about 300,000 infants with full courses of 11 vaccine doses and 310,000 pregnant women with tetanus vaccination (overall coverage of 98 per cent). Per the MTR, despite funding shortfalls for mother and child health and obstetric care, the CPD targets for EmONC services in Convergence Counties were achieved and 450,000 children under 5 in 50 priority counties had access to essential medicines against key childhood killers. System capacities were strengthened through almost 900 health professionals receiving face-to-face or remote training, and further development of guidelines and tools on tuberculosis and neonatal and childhood illnesses; early disability support; and management of pregnancy and childbirth, vaccines and health supplies.

High routine immunization coverage was maintained nationally, with coverage of diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus (DPT3), and meningococcal vaccines in 2019 above 97 per cent. DPT3 coverage above 94 per cent nationwide demonstrates equitable access to vaccination for over 300,000 children annually, without gender differences. Thanks to a strong collaborative effort by MoPH, the World Health Organization and UNICEF country and regional offices, with the support of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and Gavi funding, 5,322,430 children aged 9 months to 15 years and 544,115 females aged 16–18 were vaccinated during the MR vaccine introduction campaign, which reached 99 per cent coverage according to preliminary results. Validation is under way through a coverage evaluation survey conducted with support from CBS, and UNICEF and World Health Organization Regional Office specialists.

DPRK also achieved high standards in maintaining vaccine quality, with overall aggregate performance of 82 per cent in an Effective Vaccine Management assessment. To ensure that quality vaccines are maintained throughout the supply chain in difficult terrain where grid electricity often fails, a total of 778 solar-direct-drive refrigerators were installed in county and village hospitals. The Central Medical Warehouse in Pyongyang was refurbished to increase capacity and quality to meet a newly drafted five-year Effective Vaccine Management improvement plan's standards.

In total, 6.2 million people in 50 priority counties, including 450,000 children under 5, had access to essential medicines for the treatment of prevalent basic medical conditions. In addition, an estimated 52,000 pregnant women were reached with antenatal care and the establishment of basic and comprehensive obstetric services. The landmark partnership on disability-inclusive programming in health launched in 2018 with MoPH and the Korean Federation for the Protection of the Disabled supported early screening through new screening and intervention units, tools and training on early detection and intervention. Implementing partner Humanity and Inclusion's withdrawal from DPRK at the end of 2019 created project continuity challenges for 2020 but alternative strategies were identified to integrate disability screening and early interventions into existing MoPH IMNCI and nursery school platforms with continued United Nations Partnership for the Rights of People with Disabilities support.

Integration of DPRK's tuberculosis detection into the IMNCI protocol was finalized in 2019 with guidelines and training of health workers in tuberculosis case management. Some 60 paediatricians covering all 11 provinces and nine UNICEF Convergence Counties; 433 clinicians/paediatricians covering 201 counties; and 370 household doctors in nine UNICEF Convergence Counties were trained. The Integrated Management of Pregnancy and Childbirth Computerized Training Tool was adapted and translated to disseminate Integrated Management of Pregnancy and Childbirth knowledge to household doctors and other health professionals through the DPRK tele-education system.

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In 2019, DPRK was again affected by a cyclone, resulting in 6,362 people being displaced in South and North Hamgyong, and South Hwanghae. Close surveillance of diarrhoeal cases was carried out by the Health Sector Working Group (co-led by UNICEF) in view of looming food insecurity and water scarcity.

Nutrition

Coverage of CMAM far exceeded the 2017–2021 country programme target of 89 sites nationwide. Despite funding constraints, MoPH, with UNICEF support, sustained high coverage of life-saving malnutrition treatment through 189 CMAM sites in 203 of the 210 areas, cities, counties and districts. This high coverage with extensive screening, identification and referral of under-five children with acute malnutrition resulted in more than 92,330 children with severe acute malnutrition with or without complications, or moderate acute malnutrition with concurrent illnesses being successfully treated in 2019. Per CBS Child Data Management Unit (CDMU) data, almost all children treated (99 per cent) fully recovered from malnutrition.

MoPH's twice-yearly Child Health Days reached 1.5 million under-5 children across the country with low-cost, high-impact nutrition interventions including vitamin A supplementation and nutrition screening. In addition, nearly 500,000 children aged 6–23 months received multiple-micronutrient powder supplements for home use to prevent micronutrient deficiencies. However, due to funding constraints, only around 44,000 pregnant and lactating women received multiple-micronutrient tablets for six months, significantly below the planned target for 2019.

The Nutrition Sector Working Group led by UNICEF with World Food Programme (WFP) as the co-lead continued to facilitate effective coordination among humanitarian partners. In close cooperation with WFP and sector partners, preventive and curative life-saving nutrition services were sustained while responding to emergencies such as Tropical Cyclone Lingling. Using Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocations, UNICEF was able to initiate a swift response.

To enhance the quality and coordination of multisectoral approaches to improve the nutritional status of children and women in DPRK, MoPH, with UNICEF support, led the successful development of a five-year National Nutrition Strategy in coordination with relevant sectors and Government line bureaux including the Academy of Medical Science (AMS), Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) and Grand People's Study House (GPSH). The strategy is undergoing final review by relevant Government institutions. Once endorsed, it will be a guiding framework for nutrition programming in DPRK.

With UNICEF support, first-ever raw salt iodization has started in DPRK after the potassium iodate required for iodizing raw salt was imported. Iodine deficiency has long-lasting adverse effects on both pregnancy outcomes and child cognitive development. The State Planning Commission and Salt Bureau, with AMS support, are now producing around 10,000 tons of iodized salt for human consumption. Pregnant and lactating women, and children will be the main targets. To strengthen efforts to control iodine deficiency disorders, a national strategy, technical guidelines and standard operating procedures on raw salt iodization were developed and salt producers were trained. Despite these achievements, several challenges lie ahead, including difficulties bringing salt iodization materials into the country.

Through collaboration with MoPH, ICN, GPSH and the Technical Working Group, successful implementation of the two-year follow-up action plan developed in 2018 to address CMAM programme evaluation recommendations continued to produce results. Under the plan, malnutrition treatment protocols and training packages were reviewed and updated with the latest research and experiences to meet national and international standards. As a result, the quality of the nutrition treatment programme has been enhanced and its utilization maximized.

In partnership with MoPH, ICN and GPSH, health-care providers' technical knowledge and skills in malnutrition treatment and Nutrition in Emergencies were enhanced and upgraded. The training of 31 provincial and Convergence Counties' CMAM focal points using a Training of Trainers methodology made it possible to provide hands-on training to around 3,000 health workers at different levels. This was achieved with UNICEF technical and financial support. Similarly, 60 programme managers and health workers from two disaster-prone provinces, North Hamgyong and South Hwanghae, had their awareness and practical skills on nutrition programming during emergencies enhanced. Access to knowledge and nutrition information for 6,300 health workers, university lecturers and pregnant women was improved, using the GPSH tele-advocacy system and MoPH telemedicine approaches.

In 2020, UNICEF support will sustain high malnutrition treatment and micronutrient supplementation coverage. Meanwhile, optimal infant and young child feeding counselling, and adolescent and maternal nutrition services will be scaled up based on recommendations of the 2019 country programme MTR. This will be achieved through integration into antenatal care and EmONC platforms while strengthening evidence generation on the nutritional status of adolescent girls and mothers to inform future programming.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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During the first three years of the country programme, about half a million people with water services disrupted by the chronic humanitarian situation and recurrent natural disasters were reached with new and rehabilitated longer-term water supply systems. In 2019 alone, UNICEF direct humanitarian support reached a combined catchment population of 515,600 people by supporting installation of 10 new and rehabilitation of 14 existing water supply systems. With completion of seven new water systems and the repair and rehabilitation of another seven, humanitarian support in WASH improved the quality of life for about 135,200 people and prevented disease and death, especially among vulnerable young children, women and the elderly.

Under the leadership of MoUM, a multisectoral Five-Year National WASH Implementation Strategy drafted in 2018 was validated in April 2019 with participation of all relevant ministries and agencies such as MoPH, the Ministry of Agriculture, academia and WASH sector partners. However, the strategy is yet to be endorsed and launched, as it is going through a rigorous process of alignment with the new five-year strategy for national economic development.

Completion of pilot collection of routine data for WASH SDGs in UNICEF-supported Convergence Counties and availability of reliable data has greatly facilitated focusing the UNICEF WASH programme in 2020 to target the most vulnerable children and women.

UNICEF collaborated with Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) to support the Government and mobilize the sector to advance the agenda of safely managed sanitation services and elimination of virtual open defecation in the country.

At national level, UNICEF, in partnership with SDC, supported MoUM to organize a peer-to-peer National Sanitation Learning Event which brought together five ministries and seven other Government agencies including academia, plus three county People's Committees and nine international organizations. At operational level, UNICEF supported MoUM and Pyongyang University of Agriculture to experiment with safe and optimal composting methods; on development of technical designs and guidelines on composting; on urine-diverting dry toilets (UDDTs); and in piloting 1,000 UDDTs and composting in three counties. This allowed testing of the efficacy of the UDDTs and treatment methods as safely managed sanitation solutions while optimally recovering nutrients for re-use in agriculture.

As part of a continuing response to the WASH evaluation conducted in 2017, 113 provincial engineers were trained on computer-aided design of water supply networks, 48 county technicians were trained on improved construction methodology and 71 managers and caretakers were trained on routine operation and maintenance of water supply systems.

UNICEF led the Sector Working Group, with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Concern Worldwide as co-chairs and MoUM as a member in all its meetings, and also coordinated preparedness and response. UNICEF always maintains pre-positioned WASH relief supplies for 10,000 families to enable swift response to emergencies. Through CERF allocations, UNICEF supported water and hygiene kits for at least 6,200 mother-child pairs with severe acute malnutrition undergoing treatment at 28 county hospitals.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Lingling, UNICEF received additional funding from CERF to support an estimated 440 flood-affected families in Yonggwang County in South Hamgyong with relief items, and 89,500 people – including an estimated 22,000 children – linking emergency response with restoration of longer-term water services and clean drinking water and hygiene supplies.

In 2020, in line with MTR recommendations, UNICEF WASH will continue to support safely managed drinking water and sanitation services with renewed focus on strengthening quality of services, multisectoral coordination and approaches, programme integration, behaviour change and social mobilization. The programme will also intensify support on data and evidence generation and will continue scaling up the piloting of routine monitoring of WASH in households, schools and health facilities nationwide.

Evidence-driven programming and policy influence

In 2019, UNICEF continued successfully focusing on equity-focused humanitarian programme development for children, with the strategic positioning of a joint evidence and learning agenda with the Government of DPRK. Coinciding with the 2017–2021 country programme MTR, a series of further analysis products (FAR) of the 2017 DPRK MICS were launched and the new SitAn presented. The FAR comprise advanced analysis of deprivations affecting children based on rural/urban, gender and household wealth variables, as well as a series of Provincial Profiles comparing performance against an index of social indicators with a visual, easily understandable traffic light system display for decision makers. The SitAn capitalized on new evidence and positive contextual developments through holistic and rights-based analysis of progress in rights realization for children and highlighted gaps for advocacy and action, including from the perspective of the CRC, the Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

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The analyses in FAR and the SitAn represent not only an evidence base for equity-focused programming but also an unprecedented level of trust and openness to dialogue on the existence of disparities and ways to address them. All national counterpart institutions for UNICEF programmes participated in joint data interpretation and role-pattern analysis to establish rights and capacity gaps. Signs of strong ownership and follow-up in planning of interventions emerged, especially in the WASH sector. For example, FAR findings on WASH-related disparities and the impacts of unsafe water and sanitation on the nutrition and health status of children were presented by CBS in national Sanitation Learning Days at MoUM's request and propelled the increasing focus on safe sanitation solutions. Elsewhere, the FAR and SitAn were used explicitly to inform both the WASH Five-Year Strategy and the Nutrition Strategy 2019–2023, which are pending approval.

The strong partnership with CBS continued expanding with the availability of routine statistical data from the CDMU throughout the first year of an expanded memorandum of understanding with UNICEF. The joint work also focused on strengthening CBS's lead role among Government institutions on child evidence and included the pilot collection of routine data for WASH SDGs with MoUM, MoPH and the Education Commission, and a coverage evaluation survey for the MR campaign. The WASH initiative filled data gaps on water and sanitation facilities in households and all education and health facilities in nine Convergence Counties using an existing administrative survey mechanism, and cemented UNICEF DPRK's role as a WASH knowledge management champion in the East Asia and Pacific region. The MR immunization coverage evaluation survey was co-led with MoPH (which previously carried out immunization surveys alone). MoPH acknowledged the contribution to quality results that resulted from technical cooperation with CBS and additional quality assurance by a mission from the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) Planning and Monitoring team.

With these initiatives and results, UNICEF knowledge leadership on both children in DPRK and the country's situation in general was acknowledged by a number of humanitarian and donor partners. SDC, for instance, invited UNICEF to its midterm programme review to present its analyses, leading to increased funding to fight malnutrition in DPRK. UNICEF co-lead a United Nations country team Gender Scorecard exercise with the United Nations Population Fund and was designated to lead the newly formed Results Working Group to support planning, monitoring and evaluation of United Nations and inter-agency humanitarian programmes. As in 2018, the evidence and analysis contributed by UNICEF significantly defined the humanitarian country team 2019 Needs and Priorities document and enabled effective sector coordination leadership or co-leadership by UNICEF WASH, Health and Nutrition teams.

Advocacy and international support for child rights

Throughout 2019, UNICEF conducted advocacy and partnership development activities, using the Humanitarian Appeal for Children (HAC), new evidence from the FAR and SitAn, and the thirtieth anniversary of the CRC to promote commitment to the realization of child rights. In March, for the first time under the current country programme, a visit of National Committees for UNICEF was organized, with representatives of Finnish, Icelandic and Swedish National Committees gaining firsthand insight into UNICEF convergent programming. In July, the Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific, accompanied by the New York Headquarters Director of Emergency Programmes and the Head of Private Partnerships Division in Seoul, Republic of Korea (RoK), visited Pyongyang, Ryanggang and North Hamgyong Provinces to observe the humanitarian situation and hold discussions with relevant Government officials.

CRC@30 was marked with a schoolchildren's competition on the theme 'for every child, dreams', participated in by children from Pyongyang and nine Convergence Counties. The 20 November CRC event attended by children, Government officials and resident diplomatic/donor representatives was used to highlight both progress for children and gaps. The UNICEF message that Governments must do the utmost in their power to prioritize the well-being of children, using every available means, was relayed in national media coverage. Needs of children were also highlighted during celebrations of global days and campaigns related to handwashing and breastfeeding, and two rounds of Child Health Days, to which resident international actors were invited and given firsthand impressions of UNICEF-supported response on the ground. A mission from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency was co-hosted by WFP and UNICEF to showcase convergence of programmes among United Nations sister agencies.

Two support missions by UNICEF EAPRO Communications Specialists helped strengthen external reflection of programmatic results and continued needs in the form of human interest stories and photos, including amplification of CRC@30 celebrations and actions during Child Health Days. As a result of the engagement and multiple channels of advocacy used by UNICEF leadership at country, regional and global levels, the declining funding trend was stabilized. The 2019 HAC, although appealing for a higher sum than the 2018 HAC, closed with a funding gap of 33 per cent, compared to 69 per cent in 2018. Also, at the end of the third year of the CPD, underfunding of the regular humanitarian programmes for 2017–2021 dipped below 30 per cent, thanks notably to support from Gavi and the RoK Government and National Committee for UNICEF. Notwithstanding these positive trends, funds remain inadequate to cover the needs of children in nutrition, essential medicines, neonatal and obstetric care, and WASH services.

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Lessons Learned and Innovations

The DPRK-UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2017–2021 MTR was held in August 2019 with EAPRO support. Participants included senior Government officials, UNICEF senior staff from EAPRO (including the Deputy Regional Director), and all UNICEF DPRK programme staff, officers from other United Nations agencies and NGOs, along with members of the diplomatic corps. The MTR, which included the presentation of the new SitAn and a series of equity analysis products based on MICS data, was hailed by the United Nations and donor community as a programme milestone conducted with an unprecedented breadth of evidence and levels of openness and participation for the DPRK context.

The MTR report was presented to the Government mid-October and met with appreciation for the delivery of UNICEF-supported results for children greater than those committed in the CPD (IMNCI, CMAM, emergency response). Other jointly noted high-level areas of achievement and need for continued cooperation included the following.

Balancing humanitarian and life-saving supplies with high-quality technical assistance for equity. Supporting the delivery of essential services, including the provision of critical and life-saving supplies, has been at the centre of the country programme. This has led to change for children that exceeded targets, while systemically advancing the capacity of service providers and caregivers to identify, analyse and address humanitarian needs and risks and to deliver vital life-saving services to the most vulnerable.

Strong cross-sectoral and integrated approaches applied to reduce vulnerability. The country programme emphasizes strong cross-sectoral and integrated approaches to reduce multidimensional vulnerability in DPRK. The focus of this approach has been through application of the 'first 1,000 days of life' approach, linking nutrition, health and WASH interventions in nine Convergence Counties. The MTR found that in the Convergence Counties there had been more synergistic actions across the programmes, particularly in relation to capacity development, including more frequent monitoring and supportive supervision. The MTR found that there was a need for more cross-sectoral communication and formative research, ongoing monitoring and a strong commitment by Government and UNICEF to demonstrate the benefits to children's survival and healthy development of stronger coordination and more integrated programming at local level.

Improved availability, quality and use of disaggregated data to better analyse the situation of children and women. A particular emphasis was placed in the first half of the country programme on supporting the Government of DPRK to improve the availability, quality and use of disaggregated data to better analyse the situation of children and women. These efforts, including conducting the 2017 MICS, have informed policy and strategy development, and improved design, equity-focused targeting, implementation and monitoring of services, particularly for those left farthest behind.

The MTR found that the programme focus on Health, Nutrition and WASH, supplemented with efforts to strengthen the quality and use of data and evidence for children, remained valid and should continue until the end of the country programme. Most of the strategic focus and emphases of the programmes were found to be solidly grounded and contributing to significant achievements for children and women, particularly those most vulnerable. The MTR highlighted the need for three overall strategic modifications to the country programme approach to enhance its effectiveness to support the Government in achieving greater results for children, particularly the most vulnerable:

1. Accelerate the move beyond access to services to a greater focus on quality of systems and services.
2. Strengthen integration, collaboration and multisectoral approaches.
3. Intensify support to fill gaps in timely data, evidence and analysis.

The follow-up to these opportunities, together with the Country Programme Evaluation slated for 2020, will form the key programme process priorities of 2020 and lead into the development of the next CPD for 2022–2026. In addition, sustaining compliance with audit recommendations closed in 2019 will remain crucial to UNICEF support in the specific DPRK context. This concerns continued advocacy to the Government about the need for expanded and flexible access to areas and people, while adhering to humanitarian principles in delivering vital services to children in areas without or with partial access. Concomitantly, it is necessary to maintain the strong UNICEF set-up for field monitoring and supportive supervision finalized in 2019, which comprises third-party monitoring, automated tracking of monitoring performance indicators and recommendations, as well as production of annual and monthly monitoring reports to mitigate risks, enhance assurance and increase accountability to donor partners.

Operations and accountability requirements in the specific humanitarian environment continued posing challenges. In relation to Government, improved access; follow-through with equity-focused draft strategies on WASH and Nutrition; flexible cooperation with technical-level counterparts; the need for more frequent and disaggregated routine data; and access to national policies and public finance information will form the 2020 advocacy agenda. Externally, challenges

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remain regarding in-country cash availability and unintended consequences of sanctions, which slowed down supplies and programme delivery, despite marked improvement thanks to Implementation Assistance Notice No. 7 of 2018, which aimed to operationalize exemption from international sanctions for United Nations humanitarian action. Continued efforts on proactive compliant approaches in the given set-up, along with field visits for all stakeholders providing insight into the situation on the ground, will remain important to advance the fuller realization of child rights.

It is clear that strengthened external communication and advocacy highlighting the real situation and need to support children and women is required to sustain UNICEF DPRK's combination of life-saving humanitarian programmes and its advocacy for social development. UNICEF DPRK communication expertise, including for in-country cross-sectoral communication on the 'first 1,000 days of life' approach, linking nutrition, health and WASH, and other child rights areas, is limited by the context and depends on Regional Office support. Going forward, ways to expand capacities for outreach and communication, including for the mobilization of crucial resources, need to be found if UNICEF is to support increased delivery on promises to children.