

Republic of Kyrgyzstan

Part 1: Situation update in the country

Home to 2.1 million children, who make up 36.5 per cent of the population, in 2018 the Kyrgyz Republic continued its fragile progress towards state-building, amid both some positive signs and setbacks. Advancing children's rights in Kyrgyzstan is not straightforward, requiring UNICEF Kyrgyzstan to adjust its programme continuously to deliver on UNICEF's mandate and sustain earlier achievements.

A transition occurred in 2018, following the inauguration of a new, democratically elected president at the very end of 2017. The peaceful transfer of power following fair and peaceful elections is an important precedent for the region, and its significance cannot be overestimated. Nevertheless, the change in leadership generated turnover of personnel at all levels as a result of the dismissal or prosecution of most leading officials from the previous government. This, in turn led to the sudden discontinuation of previous strategic priorities and the publication of many new policy documents, often not developed on the basis of evidence. The change of government also generated a massive turnover of staff at other levels; with the corresponding challenges that this can often present.

Similarly, the Parliament continued to operate under rapidly changing policies without reference to checks and balances. Civil society representatives have highlighted that laws were typically adopted in 2018 with parliamentary majorities of over 90 per cent, making it impossible to discern the role of the opposition.

This state of affairs had a systemic impact on UNICEF Kyrgyzstan's activities. In March, implementation of a recently adopted law providing for a universal birth grant – a monthly benefit for all children from birth up to age three, and a monthly benefit for every child in families with three or more children between the ages of three and 16 – was first suspended and later cancelled, on the grounds of financial constraint. UNICEF Kyrgyzstan had worked extensively on the law and advocated its introduction. Attempts to restore the benefits using an evidence-based approach have not yet borne results.

In May public outcry following the brutal murder of a young woman after she was abducted for the purpose of marriage led to a government attempt to address the issue of child marriage and violence against girls in a structured manner. But as public attention shifted to other emergencies, efforts to systematize state action on this issue fell by the wayside. Following a similar pattern, multiple cases of deaths of children whose parents had emigrated from the country generated periodic, but short-lived, commitments to address the vulnerabilities experienced by this group of children.

In September, private and public scandals in the Ministry of Labour and Social Development led to the dismissal of the minister and her two deputy ministers, leaving behind no institutional

memory and requiring the re-initiation of sectoral policy.

Against this backdrop UNICEF Kyrgyzstan has resiliently attempted to maintain its core goals in line with the country programme and the United Nations development assistance framework (UNDAF), continuously adjusting to new developments. At the same time, the persistence of deep-rooted, weak governance structures has progressively led to the disengagement of international donors and funds, wary of the high risk that development gains can quickly be undone. Overall, the state's commitment to the 2030 agenda and the call to 'leave no child behind' remains nominal; 43.1 per cent of children under the age of six continue to live in households that are below the poverty line.

Labour migration continued to shape the country's social, political and economic structure. Over 10 per cent of the overall population live abroad, and while migrant remittances provide a vital source of wealth (35.6 per cent of gross domestic product), migration has a significant impact on children: both parents of 119,000 children in Kyrgyzstan are abroad. State policies to reduce the negative effects of migration on children and maximize positive impacts have repeatedly been announced as a priority; however, they remain far from implementation. Reforms in this field should include changes in all sectors of society, including border service, registry for vital statistics, social protection and access to justice, including much-needed improvements to the education system and provision of basic health services.

Kyrgyzstan also remains one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the region. During the winter of 2018 air pollution in Bishkek, the capital city, regularly exceeded World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for particulate matter (PM2.5) by a factor of 10 or more. According to independent monitoring by the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University and the MoveGreen NGO, in January 2018 the levels of PM2.5 in Bishkek exceeded the levels in Beijing – known as one of the most polluted cities in the world – by more than 20 times. Transport is estimated to account for over 60 per cent of air pollution in the city, given that there are more than half a million vehicles in Bishkek, most of which are old and do not undergo technical inspections. The other two main sources of pollution in Bishkek are heating (the central thermoelectric power plant, households and small businesses that use coal, tyres and other waste materials for heating) and the city's waste disposal sites, which produce clouds of toxic fumes.

The Government responded by adopting a list of 33 priority measures to safeguard the environment in Bishkek in June 2018, following efforts by an inter-agency working group. On a positive note, relations with neighbouring countries have improved remarkably, paving the way for increased economic exchange and improved protection of the rights of children from minority groups. In particular, relations with the Republic of Uzbekistan have significantly improved. There is a considerable Uzbek minority in the south of Kyrgyzstan, which in recent years has suffered attacks and discrimination. Improvement in the positive perception of relations between the two countries (from 19 per cent to 68 per cent in the last year) was a welcome development. Better relations with neighbours may potentially improve social cohesion, with positive effects on the consolidation of peace and development of an accountable governance system, able to provide services to all its citizens without distinction. Sustaining such progress and the prospects of cooperation with Tajikistan have become priorities for partners and international donors. Nevertheless, regional dynamics are still highly fragile, and small-scale incidents can escalate, easily undoing hard-gained progress.

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

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan played a key role in setting overall policy and fine-tuning the state agenda in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan directly supported the development of the national development strategy 2018–2040, which is closely aligned with the SDGs. Specific chapters of the strategy are dedicated to human capital development, health, nutrition, education, poverty reduction and child protection, with a specific focus on the most deprived and those left behind. Children and young people together make up 56 per cent of the population: the Government will pursue policies and actions to better protect children and strengthen young people as a ‘state asset’. The strategy, however, is yet to be unpacked through development and adoption of measurable actions with clear state investment and prioritization.

With regard to SDG adaptation, the national SDGs matrix was developed with clear roles and responsibilities for different ministries and state bodies and a requirement to provide good quality data to enable better tracking of the country’s efforts towards achieving Agenda 2030.

At the Government’s request, UNICEF also supported the generation of evidence and analysis to inform national policies and actions related to children and young people. The National Statistical Committee completed the collation of raw data from the multi-indicator cluster survey (MICS); the findings will serve as the baseline for many UNDAF indicators at the outcome level and for a number of SDG indicators.

In addition, with support from UNICEF Kyrgyzstan, the Ministry of Economics has been reforming the Government’s reporting system. These reforms cover: improvement of quarterly reporting on government monitoring, synchronization of reporting with tracking progress towards the SDGs and the introduction of performance assessments for individual ministries, to enhance accountability and comprehensively and systematically inform consolidated annual reports to the Parliament.

Achievements across programme areas sought to reinforce achievements at the institutional level.

With the support of development partners represented in Kyrgyzstan, including UNICEF, a 2019–2030 health sector strategy was developed and approved, incorporating a five-year action plan. The strategy adequately reflects priorities related to maternal and child health. As co-chair of the United Nations Country Team youth group, along with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF contributed to the development of a concept note on youth development through 2030. Another exemplary partnership with sister agencies was around food security and nutrition. UNICEF, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) worked together throughout the year, presented a common voice and provided coordinated technical assistance and advocacy for development of a food security and nutrition programme 2019–2023.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and other key institutions to address

healthcare concerns relating to children during 2018. Regulations, clinical protocols, standards, plans and tools were developed or endorsed, such as on post-natal care and screening adolescents to identify those using drugs. The mandatory health insurance fund introduced an indicator on post-natal home visits into the bonus system, to increase the salaries of family doctors. Amendments to the state procurement law are under discussion to enable procurement of medicines, vaccines, contraceptives and so on using more effective modalities, to ensure value for money and expand the coverage of essential supplies for the most vulnerable.

Further progress was achieved in addressing policy and legal gaps to protect the rights of children and young people living with HIV or AIDS. Agreement was reached that the current age-related barrier for HIV testing would be addressed through amendments to relevant legal acts.

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan partnered with governmental, social and religious organizations to support the MoH to promote immunization. In terms of systems-strengthening, great strides were made toward ensuring optimal functioning of cold chain systems in the immunization response in the Kyrgyz Republic. The first phase of the cold chain optimization platform was launched; the platform will cover all regions of the country.

To support improved vaccine coverage, a multi-sectoral coalition was formed and coordinated to implement the communication strategy on immunization, the work of which is guided by concerted strategic plans and learning modules.

In the nutrition field, UNICEF assisted in the development of draft amendments to the Law on Protection of Breastfeeding and Regulation of Breastmilk Substitutes. Hygienic requirements on manufacturing, storage, transportation and sale of iodized salt were developed. UNICEF assisted the Government to strengthen a regulatory platform on nutrition and to develop new food standards. A capacity development programme on infant and young child feeding was also conducted.

UNICEF provided technical support to the Government of Kyrgyzstan to introduce child development centres (CDCs). These centres will provide alternative early learning opportunities for young children, and promote nurturing and positive parenting across the country. UNICEF's support was focused on the national institutional level, through a package of legislative and regulatory reforms designed to enhance, extend and improve the nation's early childhood development / early childhood education (ECD/ECE) system. Currently, CDCs are being piloted in eight libraries and at kindergartens across the country, covering all provinces. By leveraging pre-existing infrastructure and professionals, the CDCs are intended to act as a cost-effective mechanism to extend government-guaranteed ECD/ECE services, both in terms of geographic accessibility and ensuring that the youngest age groups are reached.

By the end of 2018 some 62 target community-based kindergartens had improved their early childhood education methodology and were engaging parents in child development with a new curriculum aimed at promoting positive gender socialization, appreciation of diversity, and the development of peaceful and tolerant behaviour among children and parents. A total of 120 teachers had received training and learning materials to nurture attitudes and perceptions among 2,000 children free of negative and restrictive gender stereotypes. During training teachers reflected on their gender-based, divisive practices, and learned how to engage and support children's learning and interests without regard to gender identity. Teaching aids also

included three new Keremet Koch cartoon episodes, promoting inclusive and tolerant behaviour among children toward those of different ethnic backgrounds and children with disabilities and addressing gender stereotypes through games and learning. Furthermore, trained kindergarten teachers learned and applied skills to engage some 1,200 parents to supporting their child's early learning and education, with a focus on developing and nurturing inclusive and tolerant behaviours. The intervention specifically sought to increase fathers' engagement in child development, utilizing various methods to influence fathers' attitudes and perceptions with regard to gender-equal child development and the importance of supporting inclusive behaviours by their children from an early age.

In partnership with the Queen's University of Belfast, Ireland, UNICEF and its local partner the National Testing Centre of Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) designed research to estimate changes in perceptions and attitudes among parents, teachers and children to differences in ethnicity and gender. In addition to 33 target kindergartens 15 control kindergartens participated in the pre-test exercise in 2018. Post-test is expected in May 2019, with a follow up one year later in May 2020.

UNICEF also supported incorporation of this methodology in the national in-service kindergarten teacher training curriculum. To avoid influencing the control group, the new curriculum was not implemented in 2018, but is expected to be applied nationwide starting in mid-2019.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

In 2018 UNICEF and the MoES continued to implement multilingual and multicultural education in 18 schools in Batken *Oblast* (region). This enabled 1,750 children (947 girls,843 boys) to learn in multi-lingual classes in 18 target schools. Of the children reached, 43 per cent were from ethnic minorities (31 per cent Uzbek, 11 per cent Tajik, 1 per cent other ethnicities). UNICEF, in partnership with the Organization for Security and Co-operation of Europe's High Commission on National Minorities, continued to support activities to build capacity and enhance the expertise of education workers in Kyrgyzstan, both in schools and national education structures, through a regional school on multilingual and multicultural education. In 2018, the school covered all five Central Asian countries and Mongolia.

Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change, and with technical and financial support from UNICEF's Office of Innovation, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan conducted real-time mapping of connectivity to the internet at all 2,141 public schools in Kyrgyzstan. The Government used this tool to connect 30 schools to the internet in July, and has contracted a company to connect the remaining unconnected schools, using geolocation and other data included in the map. The Government made this decision to ensure that all schools in the country were connected to the Internet by the end of 2018, taking coverage from 67 per cent to 100 per cent. This tool is expected to help mobilize partners and resources to work together to reduce the digital divide in education. The 'school connectivity map' is aimed at promoting transparency in the education system and helping to improve the modern digital platform of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In 2018 UNICEF, in partnership with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the World Bank, supported the MoES to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the education sector. The analysis applied equity-related indicators to look at access, quality and efficiency of the national education system both as a whole (and separately at different levels), to inform elaboration of the sector development strategy beyond 2020. UNICEF also assisted with the further

digitalization of education, collaborating with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to strengthen Kyrgyzstan's education management information system, support it to develop student-level modules and integrate indicators that would enable monitoring of children at risk of dropping out. These activities were part of a government initiative to enhance digitalization and e-collaboration among state institutions tasked with service delivery to the population. Children were involved in the activities, which included pre-testing of an e-assessment tool in one district.

UNICEF served in 2018 as chair of the education development partner coordination council and as the coordinating agency for both the GPE and the education emergency coordination group (education cluster).

UNICEF partnered with the Red Crescent Society to model disaster risk reduction education in 10 schools in all seven provinces and the country's two main cities. More than 10,000 people—including school administrators, children and parents – gained new knowledge on undertaking vulnerability and capacity analysis, and practised safe behaviour skills through simulation exercises. Modelling results demonstrated the viability of the UNICEF-developed school-based disaster risk reduction (SBDRR) methodology and the possibility for scaling it up in Kyrgyzstan. UNICEF, Red Crescent and the MoES agreed to collaborate further in developing SBDRR and expanding its application to the country's remaining schools.

More than 5,000 children, parents and caregivers in each *oblast* in the country took part in a Caravan of Children's Games, where they learned 25 games that parents can use as a guide for spending time with their children to support their development. These games were organized by UNICEF, the State Agency for Youth, Physical Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Third World Nomad Games. The accessibility of the 25 games and the opportunities for self-expression that they provide will help to nurture the physical, emotional and cognitive development of children in Kyrgyzstan.

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

Due to high levels of labour migration some 119,000 children in Kyrgyzstan were 'left behind' when both parents migrated. UNICEF Kyrgyzstan has developed and assisted in the legislative process to draft a new and innovative mechanism to enable registration and regulation of temporary guardianship for such children. The system takes stock of lessons learned from Eastern Europe and envisages new backup systems to ensure that no child will ever be without necessary supervision.

During 2018 UNICEF conducted a rapid study on child marriage-related practices in two communities, to inform the development of a communication for development (C4D) roadmap to end child marriage in Kyrgyzstan. The draft roadmap and its theory of change were presented and discussed with representatives from relevant ministries and state agencies, gender experts, NGOs, United Nations agencies and development partners. At the meeting, it was agreed that the roadmap would be used as the framework for all interventions addressing child marriage in the country. A series of communication and advocacy products and events during the year sought to raise awareness and influence attitudes toward child and forced marriage, including production of an award-winning short film called 'Abduction' that was broadcast widely. In addition, more than 700 young girls and boys participated in celebrations of the International Day of the Girl Child in the city of Osh. Innovative live statue performances staged by schoolgirls and boys against gender-based violence drew public attention and

gained extensive social media support, with over 190,000 views, 3,000 likes, and 277 comments in support of ending forced and child marriages in the country.

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan provided key advice and support for the drafting of a comprehensive set of amendments to the Children's Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. Reforms included a prohibition on placing children in residential institutions housing more than 12 children and a new framework for national and inter-country adoption (developed through coordination between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development). Further amendments introduced a prohibition on corporal punishment and mechanisms to allow usage of diversion in the justice system as an alternative to detention.

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

On 22 October UNICEF Kyrgyzstan, in partnership with the University of Central Asia (UCA), organized the 'youth mountain forum' (YMF), a side event of the World Mountain Forum 2018. Participants from 13 countries took part in a discussion of climate change and generated ideas and solutions for a more sustainable future. The YMF provided a unique platform for young climate change ambassadors to present a collective voice on pressing issues of climate change and sustainable mountain development. The youth forum culminated in the development of a 'call to action' and presentation of key messages promoting youth and child-sensitive climate action during the opening of the World Mountain Forum, which was attended by high-level delegations from Mountain Partnership countries, government representatives and development partners.

UNICEF made menstrual hygiene management education materials accessible to 300 girls with hearing and visual impairments.

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

Progress was made in advancing the SDG agenda for poor and vulnerable children. UNICEF-led dialogue with national stakeholders and United Nations agencies led to a firm political commitment to extend the analysis of monetary poverty to include non-monetary dimensions. The state statistical system adopted a method for measuring multi-dimensional well-being for both children and the general population. Technical consultations resulted in a clear roadmap for institutionalizing non-monetary dimensions in national measurement and analysis of poverty. The strategic shift to an outcome-based approach will soon take place, enabling the measurement of actual deprivations experienced by children and their families in Kyrgyzstan in domains critical to their development. Robust measurement of monetary and non-monetary dimensions will now inform the policy reform agenda for achievement of SDG 1 and targets 1.2 and 1.3.

This initiative brought together policy makers, Government officials, development practitioners, academia, United Nations agencies and the World Bank under strong National Statistical Committee ownership. Work on public financing for children continued for social protection and expanded to the early childhood education system. Both sectors are state funded and critically important for reaching children: more than 700,000 children live below the poverty line, of whom nearly 200,000 are between five and seven years of age. This work is expected to deliver specific results in 2019 and beyond

With UNICEF support, the state agency on information and communication technologies conducted a comprehensive analysis of business processes concerning cash transfers at the birth of a child. The aim was to align this cash transfer system with the Ministry of Health's birth registration system, to simplify receipt of this entitlement by mothers. The findings also suggested linking these two systems with the Ministry of Education's databases on children in kindergartens and schools, to ensure an integrated approach and facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration.

A review of trends in allocation and actual expenditure for social protection for 2017–2018 and 2019 projections showed discrepancy and poor budgetary discipline in the area of social assistance. The budget was drawn up based on economic classifications rather than effectively implementing a programme-based approach.

Results tracking the size and efficiency of allocations were presented to key governmental and parliamentary decision makers. In December, a media session was held with the Ministry of Finance and expert participation. At this session the findings were circulated to the public. The media session brought together representatives of key mass media outlets to further accurate and accessible dissemination of budget data and trends.

Thus UNICEF's public finance work contributed to enhancing the analytical skills of key duty-bearers and overall budgetary transparency, to achieve greater accountability. In 2019 analysis will focus on linking budget allocations/expenditure to outcomes for child well-being.

Another area of major policy progress was child care and inclusive education: thanks to evidence-based advocacy by UNICEF and civil society actors, the president issued a set of policy recommendations on child care reform. One recommendation requests the Government to declare a moratorium on the establishment of new residential institutions in the country, and to divert financial resources from residential institutions to establishing family social services and developing inclusive education for children with disabilities.

As a result of successful advocacy by UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the coalition of disabled persons' organizations, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities was sent to the Parliament and recommended by all relevant committees. This led the Government to pay greater attention to and prioritize the disability-related agenda. UNICEF assisted with the development and piloting of a cross-sectoral programme on early identification and intervention for children with disabilities in Bishkek, and the development of a concept note on inclusive education. Using its strong expertise on equity in learning and inclusive education for all marginalized children, and building on its strong, multi-sectoral engagement spanning health, education, social policy and child protection, UNICEF was well-positioned to facilitate the national dialogue and provide technical assistance to the Government for elaborating its national concept note and implementation programme, with a costed action plan, on developing inclusive education in Kyrgyzstan (2019–2026). These draft policy documents were discussed extensively in public forums and among all stakeholders, and now await formal approval.

Youth and child-friendly local governance (YCFLG) principles are now being fully applied in 10 municipalities. Bridging duty-bearers and right-holders, adolescents and young people are now directly included in local development planning in these municipalities, and are proposing joint solutions to local issues, such as vulnerabilities to violence and conflict. As a result, 25 per cent of young people in the pilot YCFLG communities feel that school administrations, local

authorities and their parents now listen to them. Civic engagement has also resulted in a 31 per cent increase in peacebuilding competencies, critical thinking and collaborative action. UNICEF's advocacy also resulted in scaling up the YCFLG initiative to over 40 urban and rural municipalities. As part of the certification process, a set of child- and youth-friendliness indicators were launched in November.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Constraints

Certain issues relevant to the realization of children's rights in Kyrgyzstan remain unresolved from the Millennium Development Goals era, and require accelerated efforts to achieve the SDGs. These include: child poverty, infant and maternal mortality, violence against boys and girls, stigma and discrimination based on disability or HIV or AIDS status, poor learning achievement and youth unemployment. All of these factors are at risk of being aggravated by challenges that directly affect children and young people, such as: growing social and gender disparities, the fragile social fabric, violence, climate change, globalization and internal and external migration.

To address system inefficiencies and barriers that prevent children and their families from enjoying their basic rights, concerted efforts and strong partnerships are needed to push for evidence-based decision making, due enforcement of policies, equitable allocation and effective use of domestic resources with clear accountability for results and effective cross-sectoral coordination. Critical concerns for the social sector include: a weak system of governance, monitoring and evaluation and results-based management in the social sectors; the absence of programme budgeting in practice; and an unclear division of labour among central authorities and local self-governance bodies with regard to service provision to children and their families.

Lessons learned

Provision of micronutrient sprinkles: The success of a pilot programme providing micronutrient sprinkles in Talas Province prompted the scaling-up of the programme to all provinces (except Bishkek) beginning in June 2011. Between 2012 and 2018 the MoH provided micronutrient sprinkles, with support from UNICEF and other development partners. The sprinkles, known locally as Gulazyk, were provided to all infants aged 6–24 months as part of the broader national anaemia prevention and control strategy. The programme included a nutrition education component to encourage breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding.

The Gulazyk programme relied on three main channels: primary health care providers, village health committee volunteers and the mass media. The programme was supported by several policy documents, including the 2012–2018 health reform programme, and the 2015–2017 food security and nutrition programme. Analysis of data from national surveys on children's nutritional status conducted by the MoH, UNICEF, Centres for Disease Control and the National Statistical Committee between 2009 and 2013 indicated significant improvements in iron deficiency rates.

The Gulazyk programme was fully maintained by the Government and development partners at

national level until April 2014. After this time disruptions began to emerge in the provision of Gulazyk. Although integration of Gulazyk into infant and young child feeding practices in communities was considered effective, the procurement platforms required to sustain the practice were challenging. Procurement difficulties were further exacerbated by competing priorities related to high disease burden and limited capacity and resources at the national and local levels.

Despite the positive trends, as of 2018, the MoH ceased to procure Gulazyk. UNICEF issued a statement on behalf of development partners about the safety and effectiveness of multiple micronutrient powder and conducted a number of advocacy meetings. However, the MoH asserted that Gulazyk was registered as a biologically active supplement and thus not considered part of the essential medicines list. Moreover, the Ministry noted concern regarding the conclusions of recent Cochrane reviews and WHO guidelines. This literature pointed to the low quality of existing research methodology on the effectiveness of micronutrients, with high risk of deviation for various target groups during pregnancy and for the treatment of anaemia among mothers and children.

Despite investment and efforts by UNICEF and other development partners, the matter remains sensitive and had not been resolved by 2018. The Gulazyk programme offers valuable lessons in relation to outcomes. There is a need to engage the Government, especially the MoH, through a systems-strengthening approach under which ministry ownership of the programme is paramount. Such ownership would allow for critical analysis of the evidence on the positive impact of interventions, which could then be jointly investigated and agreed upon. More broadly, there is a clear need to place food security and nutrition firmly within a health system strengthening approach, supported by community- and home-based information and communication approaches.

Even within the context of a pilot programme, it is also clear that planning is crucial at scale and within current government budgets from the outset, to enable advocacy for further investment once evidence suggests high impact. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are essential when confirming and analysing data that will strengthen evidence-informed platforms for the institutionalization of programmes in line with Government priorities.

Moving forward, UNICEF recognizes its role as a consensus builder and the opportunity that this provides to leverage the best results for children. Members of the MoH experts group, responsible for approving the procurement of medicines, and the nutrition group, responsible for coordinating and promoting all nutrition-related activities in the Ministry are clearly motivated by competing ideologies and scientific theories. Nevertheless, compromise should be reached in the best interests of children in Kyrgyzstan. Building on UNICEF's knowledge base and constructive relationship with the Government, safe spaces for these dialogues and critical thinking could be fostered to address malnutrition and dietary deficiencies among mothers and children. Similarly, technical support could be provided on the budgetary implications of high-impact interventions and capacity analysis of systems to ensure that an enabling environment exists, and that systems have the capacity for scale-up and institutionalization.

These lessons will shape UNICEF's future investments, technical support and programming on nutrition. They provide valuable guidance for reflecting on what could have been done better and what is now possible, with new knowledge and understanding.

Volunteer initiative: Acknowledging the potential of 'people power', UNICEF Kyrgyzstan

launched the global volunteer initiative in January 2018 with a mandate to build or scale up volunteer programmes. Following the global 'Our UNICEF' initiative, in 2018 UNICEF launched a pilot project to engage university students as volunteers to support the country's safe schools programme, successfully implementing the volunteer initiative to scale up programme activities.

Implementation of the project consisted of five stages:

- Stage 1: Mobilization of volunteers and competitive selection process. Forty volunteers aged 18 to 25 were selected from 300 applicants
- Stage 2: Capacity building training for volunteers to engage with schools
- Stage 3: Volunteers undertook online activities, conducted an online advocacy campaign and simulation exercises and an online advocacy campaign to raise awareness about disaster risk reduction and the safe school programme
- Stage 4: Information session at the assigned schools. The volunteers provided high-quality information on the importance of DRR and safe behaviour skills to address various crisis scenarios
- Stage 5: Volunteers supported schools and teachers in conducting drills, as part of a disaster simulation exercise. They ensured that the drills were practised correctly and that children tested their safe behaviour skills in different crisis scenarios.

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan recruited committed and active volunteers who have been adding value to UNICEF even beyond the scope of support for the safe schools programme. Each group has delivered excellent results and contributions to the project, but some individual volunteers have shown a surprising degree of passion and devotion to volunteering for children and UNICEF. Volunteers who made outstanding contributions inside and outside the scope of the project received special awards.

As a result of the volunteer initiative, UNICEF school-based DRR modelling coverage doubled, which has informed future programme development,. In line with the project design agreed with the MoES, 10 schools were supported in two cities. In addition, one of the volunteers initiated safety activities in one more school in another city. Overall, 11,000 schoolchildren, 550 parents and 1,000 teachers were reached by the safe school volunteer initiative and improved their DRR knowledge and safe behaviour skills.

An accompanying media campaign mobilized more supporters of school preparedness. The number of followers on Instagram doubled in the three months following the launch of the volunteer initiative. The number of Facebook followers increased by at least 1,000 during the first phase of the project, and the total engagement rate from posts made by our volunteers was 33,295 'likes'.

Achievements of the pilot phase of the volunteer initiative in Kyrgyzstan were noted by UNICEF's Global Volunteers Office, which highlighted them on International Volunteers Day. and recommended that UNICEF Kyrgyzstan applied for the 'Inspire Awards' in 2019.

The major lesson learned from this initiative is that UNICEF Kyrgyzstan's capacity to scale up this kind of project must be strengthened, including recruitment of team members with experience working with large groups of volunteers and technical capacity to manage the scaling-up phase. Technical tools needed include an online selection system to receive and manage volunteer applications.

Capacity building is the best way not only to help volunteers understand what is expected and

what to expect, but also to sustain their motivation. For instance, some schools were not cooperative during the initial stages of the project and volunteers felt unwelcome and disappointed. Training on conflict management and how to interact with children could help to address this, as would preparing volunteers for the possibility that their initial contact with the school might be difficult.

Sustaining the motivation of volunteers throughout the project was one of the most important and demanding aspects of the initiative. Most of the volunteers were highly motivated at the beginning of the project, but as time went by some of this motivation was lost. This was particularly true for young people who had university exams and assignments. Future volunteering initiatives should consider providing supplementary activities to boost motivation, such as career talks, CV/cover letter workshops and competitions (such as the online advocacy campaign included in the pilot volunteer initiative). The award ceremony was also a good way to motivate volunteers and ensure a high retention rate.

Based on the results of UNICEF Kyrgyzstan's SkillShare workshop, the Global Volunteer Office will support an online application system to receive and manage volunteer applications. Capacity building training for volunteers will be expanded and include conflict management and child rights.

As a next step, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan will recruit an experienced team with sufficient experience in volunteer management to manage the scaling up of the project. Once the team has been formed, UNICEF will develop a detailed concept note on the 'safe school' volunteer programme, with expanded project components such as schools without violence. It is expected that by the end of 2019, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan will have 100 volunteers contributing to the realization of children's rights in the country.