

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Part 1: Situation update in the country

In 2018 the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) completed a mid-term review of its eighth national socio-economic development plan (NSED) 2016–2020, which aims to reduce poverty significantly and allow Laos to graduate from its least-developed country status by 2020. The review focused on localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its national targets and placed a strong emphasis on the achievement of off-track Millennium Development Goals, such as malnutrition and under-five mortality.

Lao PDR was among the first countries to localize the SDGs and integrate them into its national planning framework. The country successfully presented its voluntary national review at the 2018 high-level political forum. The review underscored government commitment to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and implementation and achievement of the SDGs, and was developed based on the principle of leaving no one behind. UNICEF supported the Government to generate new data in time for the review process.

With support from UNICEF, a government delegation attended the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) committee's 79th session in Geneva. Of the six areas highlighted by the committee that require urgent response, four relate to child protection: birth registration, children deprived of a family environment, children with disabilities and the optional protocols on sale of children, child prostitution and pornography.

Lao PDR's strong economic growth is driven primarily by the natural resources and energy sectors, which enabled the country to transition to lower-middle-income status in 2011. The economy grew at 7.5 percent between 2011 and 2013, but GDP growth was lower in 2018, at 6.5 percent. The human development index ranking for Lao PDR places the country in the 'medium' human development category, positioning it at 139 of 189 countries and territories examined in the World Bank's annual *Human Development Report*.

Poverty declined by half (from 46 per cent to 23 per cent) between 1992 and 2013. The latest evidence available in 2018, derived from the 2017 Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS II), suggests that considerable progress was made in several critical areas affecting children:

- Under-five mortality declined significantly, currently standing at 46 deaths per 1,000 live births, down from 79 per 1,000 live births in 2011
- Stunting decreased from 44 per cent to 33 per cent
- Access to improved water sources reached 83.9 per cent, with sharp disparities between urban and rural areas and rich and poor wealth quintiles: 78.3 per cent access to an improved water source in rural areas vs. 96.7 per cent in urban settings; only 58.4 per cent had access

among the poorest quintiles.

- The quality of water (tested for the first time in 2017) remains an issue, 86.3 per cent of the samples tested at household level (80.9 per cent in urban and 88.9 per cent in rural areas) contained E.-Coli bacteria
- National sanitation coverage reached 75.3 per cent (66.4 percent in rural areas vs. 95.4 percent in urban settings). Despite progress, 23.9 percent of the population continue to practice open defecation (32.6 percent in rural areas vs. 4.25 per cent in urban areas).
- More children are receiving early childhood education (ECE), which has had a positive impact on school readiness. The percentage of children aged 36–59 months attending early childhood education centres rose from 23 per cent in 2011 to 32 per cent in 2017.

Despite progress in a number of areas, disparities persist between households from different geographical regions, rural and urban areas, households with different wealth and education levels of mothers and between ethnic groups.

- Immunization coverage remains below the target of 90 per cent
- Water quality remains an issue – the vast majority of the samples tested at household level were found positive for E. Coli
- Almost 24 per cent of the population defecates in the open
- Two thirds of children under five years of age still lack access to ECE
- Birth registration of children under five declined by 2 percent since 2011, from 75 to 73 per cent in 2017
- The situation regarding child marriage has not shown great improvement. The percentage of women aged 20-to-49 years of age who marry before reaching the age of 15 dropped from 10.3 to 8.4 per cent, and that of women married before the age of 18 dropped from 37 to 32.7 per cent.
- Children in isolated rural areas whose mothers have no education and are from the poorest wealth quintile are two-to-three times more likely to suffer from stunting than children in urban settings with highly educated mothers and are from the richest quintile.
- Attendance at early childhood education is much higher in urban areas (almost 57 per cent) than in rural areas (gap of about 23 per cent).

The recently completed multiple overlapping deprivation analysis report also showed that despite considerable progress, children in Lao PDR still experience significant levels of deprivation. Only 12 percent of children experience no deprivation at all, while 70 per cent suffer from at least two deprivations. Half of all children experience three or more deprivations simultaneously. Stunted children have a higher rate and intensity of deprivation for all dimensions. Addressing multi-dimensional deprivation among children requires investment in human capital and inter-sectoral, convergent interventions that focus on nutrition, sanitation, early childhood development and health, especially for children living in isolated rural areas.

This will lead to leaving no one behind, more opportunities and better economic prospects for the children (Laos Generation 2030) and, ultimately, achieving the SDGs.

During 2018 Lao PDR faced the worst disaster in years, affecting Sanamxay District of Attapeu Province. Due to two months of excessive rain, a major dam overflowed on 23 July causing massive flash flooding that affected eight villages in Attapeu. The dam burst affected a total of 14,440 people of whom 7,068 (3,463 male, 3,605 female) ended up as displaced persons in temporary camps, including 3,038 children aged 0-17 years.

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

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF, with strong commitment from the Government of Lao PDR, continued its support to the Ministry of Health (MoH) to achieve universal health coverage and scaled-up nutrition interventions, while strengthening the health system through a focus on district and community health systems to reach the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach. The LSIS II, published in 2018, reported considerable progress toward reducing child mortality and improving the nutritional status of children under five. Under-five mortality was reported at 46 per 1,000 live births, approaching the national target of 40 in 2020. The decline in stunting prevalence among children under five years of age also continued, now at 33 per cent compared to 44 per cent in 2012. However, disparities remain: some of the northernmost and southernmost provinces still have high under-five mortality rates and high stunting prevalence. Geographical location, wealth quintiles, ethnicity and mother's education levels influenced child survival and development outcomes.

In health and nutrition, key policy achievements supported by UNICEF included passage of the Immunization Law by the National Assembly in June 2018, aimed at achieving 95 per cent vaccination coverage. A comprehensive multi-year immunization plan for 2019–2023 and a strategic plan to eliminate measles and rubella were also developed in 2018. UNICEF collaborated with the Gavi Alliance and the World Health Organization (WHO) to conduct a national immunization programme review. The review highlighted key priorities and a way forward for the remainder of the country programme, involving strengthened management of effective vaccines and cold chain and enhanced communication. Increased coverage of immunization services was attained through outreach campaigns. An integrated national measles/rubella and polio campaign was implemented in 90 high-risk districts, resulting in the vaccination of 454,494 (99 per cent) of children under five years. The measles/rubella second dose was successfully introduced to increase population immunity, especially among children under two years of age.

High-level advocacy on nutrition was maintained through the fourth national nutrition forum, held in partnership with the European Union (EU) and other development partners. In the forum's outcome statement, the Lao PDR Government and its development partners reaffirmed their commitment to increase the delivery of nutrition services and key nutrition messages into several sectoral systems, such as health, WASH, education and agriculture. To this end, UNICEF supported the revision of the Mother-Child Handbook, to reflect eight critical contact points for nutrition counselling along the health care continuum, and collaborated with other partners to define a set of skills and competencies for counselling on infant and young child

feeding.

Two case studies on the partnership for improved nutrition and the overall partnership between the EU and UNICEF were produced, in collaboration with the EU, and disseminated across EU and UNICEF platforms. The EU partnership was expanded further through the newly established nutrition information platform (NIPN) initiative.

In support of community-based primary health care, a community health system strategic action plan was developed to address inequities in health through increased community participation in the delivery of health services. To ensure access to quality services, the integrated management of new-born and child illness booklet was revised and a new teaching method for supervision and clinical training was introduced to improve the skills of frontline health workers.

As part of UNICEF's effort to ensure access to healthcare for the most remote communities, a district health system strengthening seven-step model was introduced, along with the development of modules and tools and capacity building for national facilitators.

To stimulate demand among ethnic communities UNICEF produced cartoon animations with immunization messages in local languages for distribution nationwide. In addition, immunization and health messages in local languages were developed using a real-time interactive voice response system and micro SD cards to increasing knowledge about health and improve outreach monitoring and health education. UNICEF supported training of health staff, village chiefs and volunteers to enhance their interpersonal communication skills for promoting optimal health and nutrition practices.

In collaboration with the Government of Luxembourg, UNICEF Lao PDR produced a video on reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health describing the joint programme's contribution to strengthening the health system. The video was disseminated during the country's Luang Prabang film festival.

With the Lao Women's Union and the MoH's centre for health information and education, during 2018 UNICEF laid the foundation for a comprehensive parenting package designed to engage parents and provide them with knowledge, skills and commitment to perform protective and nurturing early childhood development behaviours in all five domains of childcare: health, nutrition, responsive care-giving, security and safety and early learning. A desk review and rapid needs assessment was carried out, and a branding workshop organized to develop the narrative and key messages.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

In 2018 UNICEF and key development partners supported a mid-term review of the eighth education and sports sector development plan (ESDP), led by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). The review was informed by data from the education management information system and LSIS-II, also supported by UNICEF. This evidence-informed review facilitated the mainstreaming of SDG 4 into the sector plan and contributed to the mid-term review of the NSEDP and the SDG voluntary national review coordinated by the United Nations.

The mid-term review of Lao PDR's national development plan concluded that the education sector had made significant achievements, including improved rates in early childhood

education enrolment between 2015 and 2017 (from 43.2 to 52.7 per cent; boys 43.4 per cent, girls 43.2 per cent); a decline in primary repetition rates (from 5.8 to 4.1 per cent; boys 4.1 per cent, girls 3.4 per cent); and reduced primary school drop-out (from 5.2 to 4.4 per cent; boys 4.7 per cent, girls 4.1 per cent). As a consequence, there has been a constant rise in the primary survival rate, now at 81.1 per cent (boys 79.7 per cent, girls 82.6 per cent), contributing to an increased lower-secondary gross enrolment rate of 82.9 per cent (boys 85.1 per cent, girls 80.5 per cent) in 2017.

Nevertheless, the review also highlighted the presence of critical disparities at all levels of education. Children from poor families, non-Lao-Tai groups and mothers with limited education are lagging behind. Girls are particularly disadvantaged at the secondary level. Poor learning outcomes and skills acquisition present quality and efficiency constraints. The LSIS II survey found that only 25.2 per cent of children aged three-to-four years were found on track for literacy-numeracy development. The low rate of children with ECE experience attending first grade (51.1 per cent) and lack of school readiness explained high repetition rates for grade 1 (9.2 per cent) and drop-out (6.9 per cent). Addressing these inequities in access, participation and quality is essential to improving learning outcomes and skills development, requiring more efficient and equitable use of human and financial resources.

To address the above-mentioned challenges and inequities, in 2018 UNICEF continued to support the ongoing education reform to achieve equitable access and learning in early childhood education and basic education, supporting improved sector planning and system and capacity strengthening at both national and sub-national levels. Despite some adjustments required due to 2018 emergencies, UNICEF Lao PDR's equity-focused programme efforts successfully achieved key milestones and tangible results against the five-year targets of the country programme and in line with national sector priorities. UNICEF support significantly contributed to the achievement of increased equitable access, participation and quality of early childhood and basic education, leading to improved learning outcomes and skills development. UNICEF's pivotal role as education cluster lead during the emergency in Attapeu Province also contributed to ensuring continuous care and learning for flood-affected children in safe and secure environments, benefiting around 9,600 school-aged children.

In 2018 the early childhood education system was further strengthened through a revision of the pre-primary curriculum and teacher's guidebooks to integrate cognitive and non-cognitive skills development. The pilot phase was completed, attaining greater alignment with revised school readiness competencies and the primary curriculum. The pilot of ECE quality standards was also completed, informed by UNICEF's wealth of field experience. These achievements enabled enhanced quality, relevance, age-appropriateness and continuity at the primary level. Both pilot results will be used in 2019 to finalize plans for nationwide roll-out.

A national assessment policy framework for general education was developed with UNICEF's assistance and approved by the MoES in 2018. The framework was based on the previous years' UNICEF-supported comprehensive reviews of the learning assessment system and primary learning outcomes, demonstrating a successful example of evidence-based policy-making. The policy framework will lead to improved system effectiveness and coherence and teaching-learning practices by ensuring alignment between relevant policies, learning standards, curriculum and materials, teacher education, classroom practices and quality assurance.

Efforts by UNICEF to encourage a more systematic approach to continuous professional

development for pedagogical advisors (PAs) were initiated with the MoES in 2018. In partnership with the EU, UNICEF began by supporting a national upgrading programme for pedagogical advisers as an integral part of teachers' professional development strategy. The programme design, accompanied by hands-on training modules, was developed and piloted in 2018, to be finalized in 2019 for nationwide roll-out to all 600 pedagogical advisors in an effort to boost national competency standards. Combined with UNICEF's support for modelling PA centres in three disadvantaged provinces, this strategic support to institutional capacity development of the pedagogical advisor system represented an important milestone.

Monitoring results show that UNICEF's intensive efforts to build sub-national capacity led to improved pre-primary teaching and classroom management, benefiting 2,563 pre-primary students at 117 pre-primary schools (5.1 per cent of all public pre-primary schools) in three disadvantaged provinces, supported by teachers, school principals, pedagogical advisors and provincial and district education staff, all of whom received continuous professional development support through UNICEF.

UNICEF's assistance to sub-national level capacity building also contributed to narrowing operational capacity gaps at both the ECE and primary levels. Equitable access to ECE was enhanced UNICEF's technical and financial support for a community-based school readiness (CBSR) programme, enabling 1,156 children (girls 577) in 60 remote communities—0.8 per cent of the total five-year-old population—to access quality ECE opportunities. Nine CBSR centres previously supported by UNICEF were taken over by the MoES as government pre-primary schools, demonstrating government ownership and strengthening sustainability. Demand creation for the CBSR programme was enhanced by village education development committees, trained with UNICEF's support, which played a critical role in mobilizing community and parents/care-givers. This effort enhanced community ownership and accountability. A formative evaluation of the CBSR programme is scheduled in early 2019 to inform potential scale-up and mainstreaming.

In primary schools 1,689 teachers (979 females) at all 578 schools in six disadvantaged districts of three provinces (6.7 per cent of all public primary schools) received pedagogical support visits at least once a semester by provincial and district staff and pedagogical advisors, who were trained in effective pedagogical supervision and outreach planning through UNICEF assistance. Continuous monitoring results showed that 45,791 primary students (21,356 girls) benefited from better teaching and learning as a result.

UNICEF Lao PDR supported the development of an education and sports management information system for 2018–2022. Standards for the new system were developed and approved by the MoES in 2018, leading to greater data coherence and quality. A study on out-of-school children was validated through a national workshop and finalized for MoES approval. The LSIS-II in-depth analysis of education was initiated and served to inform the mid-term review of the sector development plan. In partnership with the organization of Southeast Asian education ministers, national capacity building for the main survey of South-East Asia primary learning metrics was undertaken, readying the country for data collection in early 2019.

An important new partnership between the Government, EU and UNICEF was officially launched in late 2018 under the EU-supported education budget support programme 2018–2021. UNICEF is the implementing partner for the complementary support programme to help achieve ESDP national targets. This was a result of more than a year of intensive consultations during 2017 and 2018 with line departments of the MoES, other related ministries and key

development partners. This partnership will further enhance equity-focused system strengthening, with a special emphasis on developing sub-national capacity.

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

Major achievements in child protection included the high-profile launch of a multi-sectoral response and operational plan, along with the full findings of the national violence against children survey. More than 20 media outlets covered the celebration of International Children's Day (June 1), and reported on the results of the survey and multi-sectoral plan, both developed with support from UNICEF.

Key programme results included positive changes in people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to violence against children. The LSIS II indicated a decline in the number of children aged 1–14 years who experienced violent physical punishment: from 77 per cent in 2011 to 69 per cent in 2017. It also reflected a sharp decline in the proportion of adult caregivers who believe that physical punishment is needed to raise a child: from 42 per cent to 25 per cent.

Other achievements included: expansion of legal, psychosocial and rehabilitation services to vulnerable children; establishment of new child protection networks in villages; and conducting training that benefitted 223 officials and Lao Women's Union (LWU) staff, 150 child protection network members and 64 para-social workers. This was accomplished by generating robust evidence on child protection, supporting coordination at all levels, rigorous awareness-raising and building individual and institutional capacity to implement child protection programmes.

Supported by UNICEF and with funding from the EU and the Australian Government, the Lao Women's Union, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) and the justice sector continued to strengthen national capacity to provide responsive services for victims of violence and trafficking and children in contact with law. During 2018 a total of 47 victims of received integration services. The legal aid clinic – a community-based service for women and children, was launched in Vientiane was replicated successfully in Xiengkhouang and Savannakhet provinces. Some 688 children benefitted from social and justice service delivery through UNICEF-assisted child protection programmes. The MoLSW also launched a family support service model for children with disabilities in both provinces. UNICEF supported the development of training modules for parents and local leaders on topics such as early screening, prevention and referral. A total of 109 children (female 44, male 65) with disabilities were identified and reached in preparation for the delivery of services.

Lao PDR reviewed its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and, with UNICEF support, submitted a report to the CRC committee. The Government was represented by a high-level multi-sectoral delegation led by a representative of the prime minister's office. UNICEF provided support to the government for preparation of the report and for the review. Concluding observations were issued in October 2018, highlighting priority actions to be taken. UNICEF supported the Government to translate and dissemination the concluding observations. In December 2018 UNICEF also supported a national consultation workshop to develop a multi-sectoral plan to ensure follow-up on the Committee's recommendations.

During 2018 the availability of data on child protection issues improved considerably, as a result of the full report on violence against children and the LSISI II, which included data on five major child protection indicators: birth registration, child discipline, child labour, early marriage

and attitudes toward domestic violence. This breakthrough greatly facilitated regular monitoring and reporting on key child protection issues in Lao PDR. However, data collection and management of child protection remains a challenge, and was identified as one of the key issues to be addressed by follow-up on the CRC committee recommendations.

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

In 2018, UNICEF supported the Government to develop a national strategy on rural WASH, national standards for WASH in schools and standard operating procedures for community WASH committees (WASHCOMs). WASH policy, strategy and standards are in the final stage and expected to be endorsed by the Government. UNICEF, together with Germany's international aid agency, supported the MoES to collect data from pre-primary and primary schools in three provinces, using '3-star' criteria and self-assessment forms. UNICEF took the initiative to work with partners (nongovernmental organizations such as SNV, Plan International, World Vision and Save the Children; the World Bank; and Lao PDR's rural development agency) to revise community-led total sanitation (CLTS) guidelines to incorporate the district-wide approach.

UNICEF worked with the MOES' department of early childhood education to adapt a hygiene package ('hygiene action led by pupils' – HAPiS) for primary schools. In addition, a trainer's manual and teacher's guide for pre-primary school were developed, and 14 provincial and district trainers were trained in three provinces. UNICEF also supported the general education department to develop a trainer's manual for delivering HAPiS in primary school, complementing the existing teacher's guide. Core HAPiS trainers from the MoES trained two provincial and six district trainers in Phongsaly Province, who in turn introduced hygiene promotion activities in targeted primary schools in Mai District of Phongsaly Province.

In 2018, with direct UNICEF support, an additional 2,093 children from 46 schools (primary and pre-primary) gained access to gender-segregated and accessible WASH facilities; 9,769 people (4,859 females) in 26 remote rural areas gained access to an improved water source; and 103 villages (including all of Khamkeut District in Borikhamxay Province) were declared open defecation-free, benefitting 89,025 people (43,186 females) as a result of improved capacity to implement the community-led total sanitation district-wide approach.

As part of institutional capacity building, three officials from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Public Works and Transport received training on 'WASH enabling environments' and WASH bottleneck analysis in Bangkok. The course strengthened participants' understanding of the importance of enabling environments to achieving national WASH targets and the SDGs, as well as their capacity to use the WASH bottleneck analysis tool to address key constraints to scaling up and sustaining quality WASH services. The trained officials will lead the process planned for next year.

As part of innovation, WhatsApp was used to monitor the construction of facilities using smart phones. Contractors and Government partners were included in the group, which shared real-time information with photos of implementation status taken in the field.

UNICEF Lao PDR's WASH programme applies a gender lens, to benefit women and girls. Latrines were designed to make them safe and gender-appropriate. The provision of water tanks and taps at latrines minimizes –and often eliminates –the need to carry water, a task mainly assigned to girls, thus freeing up their time. Gender-segregated latrines and child-

friendly handwashing stations are essential parts of the programme promoting daily group handwashing.

With UNICEF support, in 2018 the Lao Women's Union coordinated community-led total sanitation implementation in one district of Borikhamxay Province. The resulting capacity building and empowerment of women led to community mobilization for improving hygiene and sanitation in their villages. The Union's members are part of district facilitator teams and play a key role in community mobilization.

Further, to improve water management and increase women's participation in WASHCOMs – which play an influential role in community decision-making processes – UNICEF supported the development of a standard operating procedure for WASHCOMs that requires equal participation by women and supports gender-segregated latrine design standards.

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

During 2018 UNICEF Lao PDR continued to harness the power of data as a driver of change for children, coupled with several equity-focused policy analyses and discussions. It successfully strengthened sub-national planning and public financing for children, linking to young people's agenda for unleashing the unlimited potential of Lao Generation 2030. With support from UNICEF's global and regional data and statistics team and in collaboration with the Government, UN agencies and development partners, the LSIS II report was successfully completed. The findings were timely and used for the mid-term review of Lao PDR's NSEDP, the SDGs localisation framework, the voluntary national progress review and the review of several sectoral plans and strategies. The data will also be useful in informing preparations for the next NSEDP and reporting on the country's status as a least-developed country and prospects for graduation. Based on LSIS II data, several equity-focused secondary analyses were also carried out, including the multiple overlapping deprivation analysis, nutrition/stunting analysis, education analysis and provincial deprivation profile.

Efforts were also made to strengthen sub-national routine administrative data systems, to obtain more frequent, reliable and innovative data for monitoring the situation of children. In 2018 UNICEF supported the Lao Statistics Bureau to develop provincial databases and dashboards in four UNICEF priority provinces. With this step complete, all seven focus provinces of UNICEF's country programme have province-level databases for monitoring the socio-economic development plan.

UNICEF Lao PDR successfully partnered with the EU delegation to support Government implementation of the NIPN initiative, which offers Lao PDR an opportunity to bring existing nutrition-related information and data from all sectors together for analysis, to support the development of evidence-based policies and programmes for improving nutrition.

UNICEF supported a report on the SDGs and children ('measuring progress on child wellbeing in Lao PDR'), which was completed in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report was referred to frequently in the mid-term report on implementation of Lao PDR's NSEDP, and widely used during a high-level roundtable event and SDG discussions, and for setting the baseline for SDG target 1.2.2: reducing multidimensional child poverty by at least half and strengthening sub-national planning. It will further be used to inform preparations for the 9th NSEDP, orientation of decision-makers (including National Assembly members) and policy discussions. This

landmark report applied a life-cycle approach to identifying windows of opportunity for investment in children and young people. The key messages, focusing on ‘unleashing the unlimited potential of Lao generation 2030’ resonated with current national development plans and priorities, the SDGs and Lao PDR’s Vision 2030.

UNICEF worked closely with the MPI and provincial authorities in selected provinces to strengthen sub-national planning, monitoring and coordination for better results for children. This initiative sought to strengthen capacity for evidence-based subnational planning, budgeting, monitoring and coordination to address inequities and child poverty through a targeted approach. The concept notes and implementation modalities were agreed with a government partner and provincial authorities. This effort will continue to be a key UNICEF priority in 2019.

To strengthen public finance for children, a child budget analysis was undertaken, and subsequently budget briefs drafted. The key messages were conveyed during various national development agenda discussions and forums such as the NSEDP mid-term review, SDG localization framework and roundtable meetings. This work needs to be further strengthened to build both national and sub-national capacity.

Public advocacy

In 2018 UNICEF made important contributions to placing child rights at the forefront in Lao PDR by organizing a series of public advocacy initiatives to mark World Children’s Day (WCD) for the first time in the country. In collaboration with the national commission for the advancement of women, mothers and children, UNICEF organized a ‘fun-run’ for children and by children, which gathered more than 2,700 participants and helped to increase the visibility of and engagements with UNICEF’s social media channels. The deputy prime minister and several ministers attended the event. The ‘Go Blue’ video produced for the occasion was UNICEF Lao PDR’s best performer ever on social media (85,449 views) giving children’s issues and UNICEF’s work in Lao PDR wide domestic and external exposure.

On World Children’s Day, UNICEF also organized media “takeovers”, which successfully put children’s messages in the spotlight. Decision-makers and officials publicly renewed their commitment to making children’s rights a political priority by participating in all World Children’s Day events and signing the ‘blue’ petition. On 20 November, top-ranking national and UNICEF officials gathered to turn blue the most popular landmark monument Patouxay, in line with UNICEF’s global call to action.

In July 2018 UNICEF Lao PDR created a new Instagram account, which has outperformed Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Thanks to this new communication tool, UNICEF Lao PDR was able to drastically increase its social media engagement. Localized global content, emotional photos and coverage of relevant topics – such as response to the floods emergency and world children’s day– generated considerable interaction. About 2 million people were reached through social media channels throughout the year. In October, the new UNICEF Lao PDR website went live; one of the first in the region.

Throughout the year, UNICEF worked hand in hand with partners to raise awareness about child rights. Three workshops and community mobilizations on issues affecting children’s lives were organized with the Lao Front for National Development. In addition, 25 media staff were trained in collaboration with the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, and participated in several media visits with the aim of increasing the capacity of local media, professionals and

communities on issues affecting children.

In close collaboration with Lao National Radio, two youth media trainings were held in 2018, reaching 64 children and 52 adults, and the number of active youth media members reached 186. In addition, in preparation for world children's day, UNICEF Lao PDR facilitated two training workshops for 56 adolescents on the importance of this event, encouraging them to speak up and raise awareness about issues facing children in Laos.

UNICEF Lao PDR hosted a visit by the Finnish National Committee, which helped develop content for a fundraising campaign that contributed to raising UNICEF's profile in the country, and by the UK national committee, resulting in the production of a video on the cold chain used for the fundraising campaign 'Soccer Aid', which was disseminated through several media channels. In addition, visits by the executive directors and presidents of the board of five UNICEF national committees (Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania and Slovakia) led to fundraising opportunities, particularly in the area of youth participation. UNICEF LaoPDR strengthened its communication with donors, acknowledging their support through human interest stories, videos and photo essays with clear donor recognition. During 2018 a new resource mobilization strategy was developed.

Humanitarian response

UNICEF effectively and efficiently supported the response to the severe 2018 disaster affecting Sanamxay District, as well as early recovery and rehabilitation. Following two months of excessive rain, the Saddle Dam D overflowed on 23 July, causing massive flash flooding that affected eight villages in Attapeu Province. The dam burst affected 14,440 people, of whom 7,068 (3,463 male, 3,605 female, 3,038 children) were displaced and had to live in temporary camps.

UNICEF Lao PDR teams were among the first responders to the emergency and provided immediate, life-saving interventions in WASH, health and nutrition, education and child protection. UNICEF supported the rapid assessment and was an active participant in UN humanitarian efforts, leading the WASH and co-leading education and child protection clusters and actively participating in the health and shelter clusters. UNICEF also provided technical and financial support to the post-disaster needs assessment and worked closely with provincial authorities to shift to a district-wide approach in Sanamxay District, engaging both the displaced population and host communities, thus transitioning to regular programming and supporting the humanitarian/development nexus.

Water supply and sanitation facilities were among the most heavily affected by the typhoons and flooding. Sanamxay District was the most severely affected. Affected people were temporarily settled in six camps, where UNICEF reached 7,068 people with WASH essential items such as water buckets, jerry cans, tarpaulins, water purification tablets, soaps and IEC materials. As WASH cluster lead UNICEF held several weekly and monthly cluster meetings to coordinate the emergency response. UNICEF constructed water points, latrines, bath cubicles and handwashing facilities in six camps in Sanamxay District at the onset of the emergency. The post-disaster need assessment was conducted under the leadership of the MLSW, with support from United Nations and NGO partners and the World Bank. UNICEF led the WASH component of the assessment, conducted field assessments in six provinces and produced a draft report on WASH.

In response to the flood disaster, UNICEF worked closely with health and nutrition partners (WHO, UNFPA and the MoH) at both the central and provincial/district levels to deliver emergency health and nutrition interventions, including key support for coordination of the response with MoH. UNICEF supported immunization campaigns, including the administration of oral cholera vaccine which reached 13,311 people, including 1,754 children under five. To identify undernourished children for appropriate care and treatment 1,130 children aged 6–59 months were screened using the mid-upper arm circumference tool (target 1,929). Of those screened, 118 were found to be moderately acute malnourished and three severely acute malnourished, and received care and treatment. The interventions also included integrated outreach for health and nutrition promotion activities and management of diarrhoea and pneumonia.

UNICEF's pivotal role taken as education cluster lead during the emergency contributed to ensuring continuous care and learning for flood-affected children in safe and secure environments. Through the MoES "back to school" initiative, 9,600 children (early childhood education to upper-secondary) received UNICEF support for timely enrolment and continued their schooling in 25 temporary learning spaces. Moreover, in partnership with international NGOs (Save the Children, Plan International and ChildFund), an average of 270 children per day (aged 3–18) participated in six child-friendly spaces, helping them to regain a sense of normalcy. The work of the education cluster was acknowledged as a best model for delivering harmonized emergency assistance, and UNICEF's efforts led to the mobilization of additional resources to respond to humanitarian need in the education sector, including from the Australian Government and Irish Aid.

In addition to CFS services, UNICEF worked with district labour and social welfare staff to identify the most vulnerable children in the camps, especially orphans and children with disabilities. With initial funding from Korean Government, UNICEF began modelling a community-based support mechanism for families taking care of orphans in Attapeu Province. This pilot will contribute to strengthening the child protection system in Lao PDR in alignment with international guidelines.

In August UNICEF hosted a media visit to Sanamxay District to showcase its efforts in flood response, with a focus on health, nutrition and WASH interventions. Five media outlets were represented and more than 15 articles published as a result. In the aftermath of the floods, social-and behaviour-change communication activities were launched to promote hygiene practices and breastfeeding with affected populations; the content was disseminated through digital channels. Moreover, UNICEF Lao PDR facilitated visits by the United States (US) and Australian ambassadors to the project areas in Sanamxay to witness first-hand how UNICEF's interventions reached the most needy populations.

Additional resources for UNICEF's support to the emergency response in Attapeu between July and December 2018 were provided by the US Agency for International Development, the Government of Australia, Irish Aid, UNICEF Australia, and the Government of the Republic of Korea. Additional funding is expected from the Government of Japan to support emergency response and rehabilitation in education and WASH.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Lessons learned

One of the key lessons learned during 2018 was the importance of sub-national-level coordination. The capacities and information systems for sub-national level planning, monitoring and coordination need to be continuously strengthened to increase their effectiveness in addressing child deprivations in a coordinated and integrated manner. The use of participatory approaches when building capacity at the district level is necessary to ensure ownership.

There is a need for better targeting to reach the most disadvantaged children in remote and rural areas. The selection of programming areas and interventions will be based on the data and analysis that became available during 2018. The findings and provincial deprivation analysis revealed by the multi-dimensional overlapping deprivations analysis will serve as a guide for improve targeting and programme coverage.

The need for risk-informed sector planning and integration of disaster risk reduction in sector strategies and plans. The Attapeu emergency identified capacity gaps for emergency preparedness and response planning at both national and sub-national levels, which has created demand in the country for risk-informed development planning and programming to build resilient communities and achieve sustainable development and growth.

Constraints

The major constraint experienced in 2018 was the flood emergency in Attapeu Province and others, since it required UNICEF Lao PDR to divert some financial resources and staff and re-focus programme implementation. This led to delay and postponement of some activities and priorities planned for 2018.

While several efforts were made to enhance the capacity of service providers, duty-bearers and decision-makers these activities need to be continued with a stronger focus on system strengthening to ensure quality service delivery.

Coordinating programme planning and monitoring of results, especially at the sub-national level, requires significant efforts to bring the related sectors together in a coordinated, integrated and convergent approach to addressing multidimensional poverty and deprivation. This need was highlighted in the recent multiple overlapping deprivation analysis.

Several social norms and cultural barriers hinder the adoption of positive parenting practices and healthy behaviours. The parenting package was being finalized at end-2018, and will be implemented by the Lao Women's Union and other institutions to address these barriers.

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