In 2013, which marked 40 years of supporting the Government of Lao PDR, UNICEF continued to be highly involved in the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and joined the European Union (EU) Delegation in co-chairing the associated Development Partners Group. After several years of advocacy by development partners, the Government established a multi-sectoral National Nutrition Committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. In close partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNICEF played the central coordination role for the UN Agencies and development partners in providing technical support for the development of a new Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan. In this process, and with funding from the EU, UNICEF provided technical and advocacy support for the action plan to adopt a convergent approach, focusing on a limited number of evidence-based interventions and addressing sanitation as a critical nutrition sensitive intervention.

Guided by the principles of A Promise Renewed, UNICEF used national data to advocate for increased national resource allocation and strengthened policies for priorities interventions, pointing out that an estimated 34 children under-five still die daily from preventable and treatable conditions. After a series of high level advocacy meetings coordinated by UNICEF in association with other development partners, and with reference to A Promise Renewed, the Government for the first time allocated national budget for the procurement of vaccines (US$367,000 including US$257,000 for traditional vaccines) and tripled the budget for health outreach – a major step towards sustainable and predictable funding for preventative services.

The Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS), launched in 2013, was a combined Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 4 and Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) for which UNICEF was the largest of ten development partners who provided financial and technical support. The LSIS generated disaggregated social data at the provincial level for the first time and is a constant reference for the Government and development partners. The survey highlighted the marked disparities across the country for all indicators based on geography, gender, education level and language group. For example a child born in Phongsaly province is 4.7 times more likely to die before the age of five as compared to a child born in Vientiane. Findings from the LSIS have provided critical input for the 3rd Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Progress Report, for the Mid-Term Review of the Seventh Five-Year National Social Economic Development Plan and for sector reform processes.

In addressing Violence Against Children, a Prime Ministerial decree established a national committee to oversee the first national survey on all forms of violence against children, and the National Commission for Mothers and Children has committed to developing a comprehensive response plan including the extensive use of mass media.

UNICEF strengthened its partnerships with civil society in the area of water, sanitation, birth registration, health and nutrition, with other Development Partners (most notably the EU) in addressing off-track MDG 1, and with the private sector, having received funding from Mining and Metal Group (MMG) to promote the use of micronutrient powder.
Children in Lao PDR continue to be affected by multiple and overlapping deprivations. Data shows that disparities are widening despite the fast growing economy. Populations of rural areas without road access, from the poorest quintile and families with uneducated or poorly educated women are highly disadvantaged across all social indicators.

While there has been high economic growth - currently 8.2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - the 2013 International Monetary Fund report indicated that the Government is experiencing a serious fiscal deficit estimated at 6.5 per cent of GDP. There are signs that the economy is overheating, with inflation increasing while income inequality is widening. Government liquidity is tight due to a doubling of public sector employee compensation and high capital spending. There are increasing delays in payment of civil servant wages.

In nutrition, the high prevalence of stunting in children poses a challenge. An estimated 44 per cent of children under five years of age were stunted in 2011/12, down from 48 per cent in 2006. The annual rate of reduction is insufficient to achieve national nutrition-related targets. An analysis supported by UNICEF in 2013 shows that the burden of malnutrition on the national economy may be some $197 million annually, representing about 2.4 per cent of GDP.

The key determinants of stunting are high levels of adolescent pregnancy and maternal undernutrition, poor infant and young child feeding practices, especially suboptimal breastfeeding, poor dietary diversity among children and pregnant/postpartum women, food insecurity, little or no education among mothers, and an inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene situation. Whilst the regulatory framework to support implementation of the Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes remains weak, the Ministry of Health, with support from UNICEF, will develop a Nutrition Law that will reflect Lao PDR’s international commitment with regard to the Code.

Despite significant declines over the past 20 years, Lao PDR still has one of the highest child mortality levels in South-East Asia. The under-five mortality rate decreased from 170 per 1,000 live births in 1992 to 79 per 1,000 in 2011, largely due to improvements in socio-economic conditions combined with increased coverage of immunization, breastfeeding and other high impact interventions. Children in the poorest quintile are up to four times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than those from the richest. Most of the child deaths – estimated to be between 17 and 44 per day – are preventable or treatable with high-impact, low-cost interventions. An estimated 10 per cent of under-five deaths are still due to diarrhoea. The data shows a strong association between access to improved water and sanitation and the rates of diarrhoea, underweight and stunting. Despite progress in increasing access to key interventions, most interventions reach on average less than half the child population.

Lao PDR still has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the region, at an estimated 357 deaths per 100,000 live births. Anaemia and undernutrition affect a significant proportion of women, which increases the risk of maternal morbidity and mortality and low birth weight babies. Lao PDR also has the highest adolescent birth rate in the East Asia and Pacific region at 110 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19.

HIV prevalence, although still low, shows a rising trend and is by no means under control, with an estimated 1,000 new infections a year.
Lao PDR has steadily increased access to **improved drinking water sources** (70 per cent in 2011/12) but will need to accelerate progress to reach the 80 per cent national target by 2015. Primary schools have seen a rise in access to improved water sources: from 39 per cent of schools in 2009 to 53 per cent of schools in 2013. Primary school access to improved sanitation has not progressed, with 41 per cent of schools having improved sanitation in 2009 and 42 per cent in 2013. The rate of access to improved sanitation for the general population is increasing but some 38 per cent of the total population still practise open defecation, with the highest provincial rate being in Saravane province at 77 per cent. Inequity is far more glaring in sanitation than in water coverage, with 8 per cent of the poorest quintile having access to improved sanitation compared to 98 per cent of the richest quintile. Four out of five households do not dispose of children’s faeces correctly and hygienically.

**Early Childhood Education (ECE)** programmes provide access to a third of all children aged three to five years, but the rates of attendance are very low and the quality of most ECE programmes is low, especially in rural areas. Nonetheless, children attending preschool are likely to be developmentally ahead of their peers who did not attending preschool, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

There has been a significant 13 per cent increase in the number of three to five year-old children accessing ECE services nationwide since 2008, although these are inequitably distributed and continue to favour wealthier urban households. Whilst the quality of ECE programmes remains low, there is evidence that children attending these services are better prepared for participation and learning in grades 1 and 2.

**Primary education** coverage is high, with a net enrolment ratio of 96.8 per cent and a gender parity index of 0.95. However, inefficiencies constrain progress towards universal primary education. Challenges to be addressed include increasing the survival rates to grade five – currently 71 per cent – ensuring children enter school at the right age, and increasing the net attendance rates amongst poorer groups. These challenges have a strong correlation to children’s low learning outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy, as noted by the 11 per cent of students in grade 4 who cannot read a simple text in the Lao language (Programme d’Analyse des Systemes Educatifs de la Confimen).

References:

Lao Social Indicator Survey 2011
MDG Progress Report for Lao PDR 2013
World Bank Development Indicators, 2011
UNICEF Situation Analysis 2013

**Country Programme Analytical Overview**

In 2013, the ‘Situation of Women and Children’ report provided a whole programme analysis with a specific focus on identifying the barriers and bottlenecks affecting the most disadvantaged children. The report provided the basis for discussions at the Mid-Term Review (MTR) with the Government of Lao and partners in September 2013. The report contained a set of recommendations that build on UNICEF’s areas of comparative advantage and help to guide the strategic focus in 2014-2015:
1. Continue to strengthen the generation and use of evidence and support the evaluation of pilots to inform decision-making for policies, plans and budgets;
2. Increase south-south cooperation to share technical expertise to inform policy options and strategic investment decisions;
3. Accelerate the shift towards institutional capacity building;
4. Transition to more selective investment in services;
5. Continue to contribute to strengthening coordination and contributing to Sector Plans;
6. Further maximise learning from sectoral and multi sectoral programmes at all levels and feed into key Government reforms such as decentralisation.

Throughout 2013, UNICEF continued to use analysis of the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) to shape its advocacy and programme response, and this was instrumental in informing the consultation process with partners. In addition, almost all programmes worked to produce a Theory of Change to map out pathways of change, and to identify pre-conditions, assumptions and required partnerships. These maps and narratives underpin the draft work plans with Government in 2014-2015 and help facilitate a more strategic focus and longer term planning.

The bottleneck analysis in the Situation Analysis and additional analysis was used during key policy and programme events. It was well-accepted and has stimulated demand for more data and evidence.

Numerous partners and the Government used the UNICEF-supported analysis to inform their own discussions and processes. The 2013 Lao PDR Interim MDG report, Round Table Meeting background materials, presentations in technical working groups, GAVI missions, and SUN teleconferences made extensive reference to the LSIS data and to UNICEF’s analysis. As a result, UNICEF is increasingly seen as a knowledge leader on issues affecting children and the number of requests to UNICEF for data and analysis and for technical support for drafting or reviewing joint reports from the Government and development partners has increased substantially.

**Effective Advocacy**

*Fully met benchmarks*

As part of its normative and technical support role, UNICEF worked closely with the Government to help ensure that children’s issues are fully considered in the national policy and legal agenda. UNICEF made extensive use of national data and global evidence and produced advocacy materials in Lao, and worked in partnership with UN agencies, development partners and civil society.

In the area of Health, a particular noteworthy achievement was the increased national budget allocation to traditional vaccines to approximately US$236,000 based on UNICEF’s leadership in coordinating support and advocacy with other development partners. UNICEF developed a position paper on “Building an Accessible and Sustainable Community-Level Health Worker System in Lao PDR” to support advocacy for an equity-focused rationale for the development of a community health worker programme.

In Nutrition, based on an advocacy workshop in Viet Nam, Lao PDR committed to developing a National Law on the Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes (as part of the new Nutrition Law) in order to protect breastfeeding. UNICEF worked with the Ministry
of Home Affairs, in partnership with Save the Children, to advocate for extending maternity leave for civil servants, with the result that the Lao National Assembly voted to extend maternity leave provisions of the National Labour Law from the current 90 days (12.75 weeks) to 105 days (15 weeks).

A National (Multi-Sectoral) Coordination Committee on Nutrition was established under the Deputy Prime Minister after several years of advocacy from UNICEF and other Development Partners. UNICEF, in partnership with WFP and IFAD, successfully advocated for a new Multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan to adopt a convergent, multi-sectoral approach focusing on a limited number of evidence-based interventions. UNICEF successfully advocated for civil society to be included in the Government’s consultation process for developing the Action Plan.

In the area of WASH, UNICEF cited global evidence and national data, in successfully advocating for sanitation to be recognized as an essential element for addressing undernutrition and to feature prominently in the Multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan.

In the area of Education, an Issues Paper on “Community Based Early Childhood Education Programming” developed by UNICEF has served to strengthen the Ministry of Education and Sports’ (MoES) efforts to allocate a greater funding envelope to this critical sub-sector. UNICEF successfully advocated for five television stations to broadcast the TV programme “My Village” 12 times a week free of charge.

In the area of Child Protection, UNICEF advocated for the establishment of a National Steering Committee to lead a national study on violence against children and for a National Authority on Adoption to oversee an Adoption Decree being drafted in compliance with international standards.

In Social Policy, UNICEF made extensive use of the LSIS data to make numerous PowerPoint presentations to the UN, to development partners, to the NGO community and at Government meetings to highlight the need to address issues of equity and to respond to geographic and ethnic linguistic disparities.

### Capacity Development

*Partially met benchmarks*

A more systematic approach to capacity development continues to pose major challenges for the Lao Government and for development partners. Challenges include the absence of systematic planning, analysis and monitoring, unclear staff roles and job descriptions, low levels of accountability and limited diagnosis of capacity development gaps and needs.

With regard to capacity building, the ‘UNICEF-Government of Lao PDR Country Programme of Cooperation 2012-2015 Mid-Term Review Report’ noted the need to move away from service delivery towards “a more sophisticated and analytical approach to capacity building (as identified by MoRES)”.

In 2013, UNICEF supported a number of encouraging initiatives to address capacity development. The Education Programme was able to **link its capacity development efforts to the Education Sector Development Plan Mid-Term Review**. The Education programme also developed an innovative model for building capacity for district
planning and budgeting and bringing together facilitation skills with technical education administrative and management skills.

UNICEF supported a ‘Nutrition Capacity Development Assessment’ that reviewed issues of capacity in the Ministries of Education and Sport, Agriculture and Forestry, and Health.

In the area of Child Protection, the focus on a systems approach requires that capacity development is the central programme strategy. There is a structured long-term plan to build awareness of what a child protection system entails; for example, recent support for the ‘Situation Analysis for Child Protection’ undertaken with the Government and partners. Another example is the competency assessment, where partners were coached to use and analyse the results of a self-administered competency assessment tool.

UNICEF also continued to invest in training and partnerships to add capacity and broaden the skills within key ministries and departments. For example, UNICEF provided two-tiered technical support to the Ministry of Health and Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) for social development research. UNICEF also partnered with the DevInfo Support group for capacity development in relation to the Education Management Information System Unit, which has strengthened the skills of mid-level technical staff. MoES developed sufficient skills in-house that it was able to conducted additional training on its own for education staff as well as members of the National Assembly, the Lao Women’s Union and the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Through a series of five workshops, UNICEF systematically developed the capacity of local media and artists to produce an Early Childhood Development (ECD) television programme – My Village – which was launched in September 2013. The 15-episode series is being produced in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, Youth, Culture and Tourism, MoES, national television and the private television channel Lao Star.

Looking ahead, the findings from the MTR will further guide the implementation of capacity development initiatives for the remainder of the cycle, with the aim of increasing ownership and sustainability. UNICEF will continue to focus on the broader capacity of institutions and counterparts to advance the fulfilment of children’s rights.

**Communication for Development**

*Mostly met benchmarks*

UNICEF continued to support a systematic, evidence-based approach to Communication for Development (C4D) to address social and behavioural issues in health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection and humanitarian interventions. The approach takes the view that policies, services and people involved must play a supportive, synergistic role in creating an enabling environment where behaviours can be sustained by becoming the overall, societal norm. At the heart is the ‘community-based approach’ – meaning deliberate efforts to engage entire communities in collective action. C4D programming has shifted away from approaches that rely primarily on the production of information materials towards a socio-ecological model that attempts to account for a broader range of environmental and sociological influences.
UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Health to support the development of a comprehensive Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) programme through the development of national guidelines and communication strategies focusing on community-based promotion of adequate IYCF/WASH practices. UNICEF also promoted the introduction of micronutrient supplements for children under the same context.

In 2012-2013, an exclusive breastfeeding media promotion strategy was implemented nationwide, together with community-level counselling in target areas. These interventions were modelled on a strategy implemented in 2009-2010 that is credited with increasing the country’s exclusive breastfeeding rate from 26 per cent in 2006 to 40 per cent in 2012. C4D approaches were also incorporated into the implementation of Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition in southern provinces with the poorest nutritional indicators.

Strategies are also under development to promote good hygiene practices in schools, reinforcing the recent revision of a training package, on ‘Community Dialogue for Rural Water Supply and Hygiene Promotion’.

In order to increase the reach of high-impact interventions and interpersonal access to health information, UNICEF developed a position paper on ‘Building an Accessible and Sustainable Community-Level Health Worker System in Lao PDR’. Based on global evidence of good practice, this paper sets out an equity-focused rationale for the development of a sustainable cadre of community health workers in order to address urban and rural disparity in access and coverage, and increase the delivery of high-impact interventions and appropriate information through regular community-level engagement with educated health counsellors.

With UNICEF support, 13 provincial youth radio shows and two provincial youth TV programmes are being broadcast. Since 2004, youth radio programmes have been broadcast in four primary ethnic languages. These are linked to listener groups aimed at allowing young people to discuss programme content with their peers. Youth radio remains one of the rare spaces in which young people can express their views with relative freedom, including on a variety of issues traditionally considered sensitive.

UNICEF supported the creation of an ECD television programme – My Village – launched in September 2013. The 15-episode series was produced in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, MoES, Lao National Television and the private television station, Lao Star Channel.

Episode: There are numbers everywhere (with English subtitles)
http://youtu.be/Eczgtn78u0Q

Making My Village: Behind the Scenes:
http://youtu.be/pPeNe-dBlb4

**Service Delivery**

*Partially met benchmarks*

There are significant persistent gaps in service delivery requiring UNICEF support as it continues to advocate for Government investment. This requires careful analysis, given the fiscal constraints and size of the gaps across multiple sectors. The MTR recommendations cite that "UNICEF needs to balance its short- and long-term
commitments for children in Lao PDR, and as such, in 2014-2015, UNICEF’s investments need to continually transition to from investments in service delivery to prioritising pilots, knowledge management, policy advice, and capacity development.”

With reference to UNICEF’s mandated role of technical support, a major lesson learned is that purely providing supplies does not in itself have a major impact unless they are accompanied by Government-UNICEF partnership and participation in policy development, and in planning and system strengthening. Isolated inputs, such as commodities and operational costs for service delivery, do not translate into sustainable and equitable programmes for children, particularly where there are numerous capacity gaps.

Key areas for service delivery in Health and Nutrition included the delivery of immunization, Vitamin A and de-worming services for children aged under five, and iron folic acid for pregnant and postpartum women. Lao PDR has recorded a continued decline in its child mortality as a result of increased coverage in immunization (33 per cent in 2006 increasing to 55 per cent in 2012 for measles) and Vitamin A (19 per cent in 2006 increasing to 59 per cent in 2012), as well as improved child care practices, such as breastfeeding (26 per cent in 2006 increasing to 40 per cent in 2012). UNICEF is supporting the pilot of two operational models for the delivery of micronutrient powder via the public and private sector.

The WASH programme constructed water and sanitation facilities in 127 schools in 2013. The construction of additional facilities for more than 300 primary schools is planned for 2014-2015, focusing on the most educationally disadvantaged districts in the Lao PDR. UNICEF has developed standard sanitation facility designs, including access for children with disabilities, which help promote inclusive education. UNICEF support to WASH in Schools extends beyond the ‘provision of basic facilities’ to promoting an approach to the construction process that contributes to planning for a holistic positive learning environment.

In Education, UNICEF supports a pilot community-based school readiness programme that seeks to demonstrate how remote areas can most effectively benefit from relevant ECE services. UNICEF has initiated the procurement of student textbooks for grade 1 and 2 students nationwide, coupled with a review of the MoES curriculum material procurement and distribution systems.

The MTR highlighted the increased effectiveness of UNICEF focusing on fewer areas but supporting them well. As progress is made, as in the case of reducing infant mortality rates, further progress becomes more difficult, requiring a more refined and strategic systems approach. Unpredictable funding and the resulting negative impact on service delivery shows that State funding for proven cost-effective service delivery strategies must increase to ensure sustainable progress.

**Strategic Partnerships**

*Mostly met benchmarks*

Through its convening role, UNICEF supports the Lao Government by mobilising partnerships to leverage resources and to advocate on behalf of children and women.

In 2013, UNICEF initiated a multi-year partnership between the International Institute for Educational Planning and MoES, as a means of developing a sustainable approach to
institutional capacity development in education planning and management.

Within the national aid coordination mechanisms, UNICEF co-chairs the Education Sector Working Group with Australia, and Focal Group 1 in the same sector on Basic Education. UNICEF also co-chairs an informal Child Protection Network with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN and other development Partners. In the area of nutrition, UNICEF co-chairs the Development Partners Group with the EU, as part of the SUN Movement. In addition, UNICEF is in the WASH Sector Working Group chaired by Department of Health and Hygiene Promotion under Ministry of Health. Through active participation in all of these coordination mechanisms, UNICEF shares global experience and evidence and advocates for priority action.

Within the Interagency Contingency Plan, UNICEF leads the WASH, Nutrition and Child Protection Clusters and co-leads the Education Cluster with Save the Children. In 2013, all cluster preparedness plans were updated.

In 2013, UNICEF expanded its partnership with civil society in WASH, Child Protection and Health and Nutrition as a strategy to support the Government to achieve its goals at the sub-national level.

UNICEF established a new partnership with the Ministry of Health, a private sector partner (i.e. MMG) and Population Services International and British Columbia University to support the development of delivery mechanisms for multiple micronutrient powder in Savannakhet, Saravane and Attapeu provinces.

The partnership model with CARE International in Phongsaly – one of the most remote and difficult to access areas of the country – aims to link communities with Government health services. It highlights the extreme challenges of accessing remote, ethnically diverse areas and gaining the confidence and trust of women to access maternal and child health services. The baseline analysis identifies gender barriers as a key constraint and points to the need for a much deeper understanding of local context and village dynamics. The partnership with CARE points to the challenges the health sector faces in taking a pure health services delivery approach, and the need for healthcare workers to be both male and female, speak local languages, and have the time and motivation to build a relationship with the communities they serve. The MTR process identified the resource and capacity constraints that inhibit the health sector at provincial, district and health centre level from achieving significant results. It also highlighted the critical role that NGOs play in promoting more integrated models of community empowerment and addressing local priorities.

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process also contributed to expanding the partner base and the space available for advocacy around children’s issues through the Government-Development Partners Round Table process, in particular. Cooperation with other UN agencies in the pursuit of UN coherence will remain a key priority for the UNICEF Country Programme through the implementation of joint UN programmes.

**Knowledge Management**

*Mostly met benchmarks*
The objectives of the UNICEF Lao Office’s knowledge management strategy are to ensure complementariness synergies between key interventions, and to facilitate the sharing of good practice, evidence and tools.

Knowledge management strategies also draw on sectoral and cross sectoral networking within the sectors, research, studies and surveys jointly undertaken with partners, and engagement with national and sub-national Government partners, donors, NGOs and civil society. To facilitate external knowledge management, UNICEF has supported primary and secondary data analysis and research to generate evidence for planning, as well as analysis of programme constraints.

The Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS), launched in 2013, was a combined Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 4 and Demographic and Health Survey for which UNICEF was the largest of 11 development partners. The survey generated disaggregated social data for the provincial level for the first time. The LSIS provided critical inputs for the 3rd MDG Progress Report, as well as the MTR of the Seventh Five-Year National Social Economic Development Plan and sector reform processes. LSIS data was also used to conduct a number of further analyses feeding into the National Human Development Report and reinforcing the focus on equitable social and economic development.

The Assessment on the Economic Consequences of Undernutrition in Lao PDR informed high-level dialogue at the Government-Development Partners Round Table Meeting, leading to key decisions to accelerate high-impact nutrition interventions. The launch of the Study on Child Well-being and Disparities in Lao PDR was followed by the initiation of the Multiple and Overlapping Deprivation Analysis to update the profile of vulnerable children.

UNICEF also supports active knowledge sharing through sectoral technical working groups, and by providing technical assistance for the standardization of indicators for management information systems.

UNICEF also promotes improved knowledge management (generation and sharing) within the sectors. For example, in the education sector UNICEF facilitated collaboration with development partners and MoES to undertake a ‘Barriers to Education’ Study in 2012, with a clear emphasis on building research capacity. In the WASH sector UNICEF supported a WASH in Schools baseline study and will carry out further research to support the expansion of school WASH.

UNICEF is in a unique position to assist the Government to maximise the utilisation of data collected and to help strengthen links between planning and budgeting for children. In this context, UNICEF will increase its own capacity to continue to provide high-quality technical expertise in research and evidence-based advocacy with a specific focus on child well-being and poverty, equity and disparity.

**Human Rights Based Approach to Cooperation**

*Partially met benchmarks*

The Country Programme aims to support Government efforts to realize the rights of all children in Lao PDR. It is guided by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). A human rights-based approach to programming (HRBAP) has been adopted throughout the
country programme cycle. The programme focuses on strengthening the capacities of those in positions of authority (‘duty bearers’) to understand and fulfil their obligations, and making them more accountable for the realization of the rights of children and women whilst at the same time empowering and increasing the capacities of the most vulnerable and excluded (‘right holders’) to claim their rights equitably, without discrimination.

The Country Programme also supports the UNDAF goal of promotion of human rights in conformity with the Millennium Declaration and in line with the work undertaken by the UN Country Team in Lao PDR. HRBAP was applied to the MTR process and used to inform and develop Theory of Change Pathways for the achievement of long-term programme results. The HRBAP was further integrated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all programme components.

As a consequence of the Country Programme’s efforts to support dissemination of the Convention of the Rights of the Child at all levels, awareness and knowledge among decision-makers and communities of child rights have increased substantially. The application of the HRBAP will continue to be a priority for the remainder of the Country Programme cycle as a means to achieving equity. The strengthening of participatory development processes and the clarification of roles and responsibilities for upholding child and women’s rights will remain a focus for programme implementation.

**Gender Equality**

*Partially met benchmarks*

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to the realisation of children’s rights, and gender mainstreaming is an explicit and implicit strategy of the UNICEF Country Programme.

Gender analysis is systematically undertaken as a part of all vulnerability and deprivation analysis conducted within the broader remit of the Country Programme. The Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) has provided robust sex and age-disaggregated data that has informed the equity dimension of the UNICEF Lao PDR Programme. An analysis of LSIS from a gender perspective confirmed the importance of mothers’ education as a key predictor of health and educational outcomes, and highlighted key constraints in the lack of gender-disaggregated data for the WASH sector. UNICEF planning for 2014 will include a number of qualitative studies to go beyond the numbers from LSIS to better understand women’s complex vulnerabilities and multiple disparities.

In 2013, UNICEF undertook a number of pieces of formative research to inform communication and social marketing strategies for WASH in Schools, Infant and Young Child Feeding, and Multiple Micronutrient Powders. These have all integrated gender analysis into the research design, including providing opportunities for women’s voices to be heard. UNICEF’s partnership with CARE International in Lao PDR has generated a strong qualitative baseline that identifies key gender- and ethnic-related barriers to women and children accessing essential health and nutrition services. Working through Women’s Groups as an entry point for nutrition and maternal and child health is generating a holistic model for linking changes in women’s status with the improved health and well-being of women and their families. Through this partnership and other partner networks, UNICEF is strengthening the learning and documentation of gender- and ethnic-sensitive community models that have fed into national discussion of models
of health service delivery and community-based workers.

UNICEF has provided technical support to a number of studies and assessments that form the preparatory basis for State Reporting on the CEDAW in 2014. As part of the Joint UN Team on HIV, UNICEF contributed to the first-ever Gender Assessment of the National HIV Programme. In addition, UNICEF’s preparatory work on the first National Prevalence Study on Violence against Children includes a strong gender dimension, particularly around the ethics of data gathering on sexual violence. The ‘Assessment of Mediation Practices as they Relate to Children’ also highlighted major concerns related to case handling of sexual violence against girls. UNICEF works with the National Commission for Mothers and Children and the LSB, and these studies form a body of evidence that can highlight progress made and challenges to moving towards gender equality in Lao PDR.

UNICEF’s continued support to the development of a Vital Registration System in Lao PDR, and its work to strengthen the Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes create some of the underlying policy environment necessary to advance towards gender equality.

**Environmental Sustainability**

*Partially met benchmarks*

Lao PDR has been identified as the 42nd most vulnerable country in the world to climate change, mostly due to the sensitivity and exposure to climate-related hazards. In particular, flooding threaten environmental sustainability and results in the destruction of farmland, erosion, landslides and droughts. These challenges threaten to undermine development progress and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

It is extremely important that national and subnational planning processes incorporate the need to mitigate the risk of disasters, since disasters have disproportionate and irreversible consequences on children and women. Therefore, UNICEF Lao PDR has gradually scaled up its support to the relevant ministries, departments and agencies in the areas of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA). DRR is identified as a crosscutting issue in the narrative of the 2012-2015 Country Programme Document.

The Study on ‘Child Well-being and Disparities in Lao PDR’, finalized in 2013, and the ‘2010 Lao National Risk Profile’ enabled UNICEF to finalize the ‘Lao Child-Centred Risk Analysis’. The Analysis allows a clear identification of geographical locations where risks are likely to be high and overlapping. Based on this analysis, geographic focus, programme strategy, prioritization and rights holders of the Country Programme are now more clearly identifiable, and this is expected to provide an important input to the mainstreaming of DRR and CCA across the Country Programme.

In 2013, UNICEF sustained its partnership with Lao Red Cross, giving the organization expertise in responding to vulnerabilities triggered by natural disasters and climate change. As a direct result of this partnership, community-based DRR (CBDRR) activities were conducted in Saravane, Xekong, Borikhamxay and Khammouane provinces. Among other results of this partnership, 100 Village Disaster Preparedness Units received training in CBDRR, giving communities the capacity to prepare disaster preparedness plans.

In the area of extreme weather event mitigation, UNICEF continued to collaborate closely
with the Ministry of Health and National Disaster Management Office to pre-position relief items at national and provincial level. As a result of this partnership, approximately 15,000 people received WASH items in three southern provinces affected by flooding in October 2013.

**South-South and Triangular Cooperation**

Mdm. Khempheng Pholsena, Minister to the Prime Minister’s Office, led the four-member Lao PDR delegation to the Second High Level Meeting on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights in Asia and the Pacific hosted by the Indian Government and supported by UNICEF.

The meeting outcome document – a ‘New Delhi Declaration’, renewing Governments’ commitments to the rights of children and pledging to support each other in the achievement of those rights – was adopted unanimously by Asian and Pacific States attending the conference. The Delhi Declaration set out a series of recommendations that will serve as a roadmap for future cooperation, including collaboration on ways to improve the collection of data on children, and the undertaking of multi-country research and studies into children’s issues and the best means to address them.

The Declaration addresses the need for adequate investments in education, job creation and social participation to address the different threats and challenges faced by adolescents, and to eliminate violence against children and adolescents. It also recommends that governments seek meaningful participation by adolescents in decision-making, and improve access, quality, and relevance of lower secondary education and vocational training, to strengthen adolescents’ job prospects, including those of adolescent girls.

At the conference the Lao delegation discussed opportunities for South-South Cooperation with the Governments of Mongolia, Viet Nam and Thailand.

The Declaration can be found here: www.hlmdelhi2013.org
Narrative Analysis by Programme Component Results and Intermediate Results
Lao People's Dem Rep. - 2460

PC 1 - Communication

On-track

PCR 2460/A0/04/100 By end 2015, families and communities, especially in areas that are remote, poor and populated by underserved ethnic groups, have increased demand for, and better access to, quality social services, within a supportive public and media environment.

Progress:
The communication environment is changing in Lao PDR, with more than three quarters of the population having access to a mobile phone and watching television at least once a week. While television has overtaken radio as the main source of information, it should be noted that Thai channels are quite popular. Internet use remains low and confined to urban areas. Social media is at an early stage and unlike neighbouring countries there is virtually no political activity on social media; it is clearly popular among young people, with most Facebook users under the age of 25.

Radio remains a proven effective delivery channel in many rural locations where audiences are hard to reach or where the target language can be easily broadcast to local populations. Lao National Radio effectively covers more than 85 per cent of the country. Lao National Radio broadcasts programmes in Lao and three other languages - Akha, Khmu and Hmong - on shortwave radio.

This public and media environment results in challenges, particularly to reach remote and poor populations, but also opportunities to increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of issues related to UNICEF Lao PDR’s development objectives. Advocacy work is also done through the United Nation’s Communication Group, with nutrition being the common theme.

At the national level, UNICEF supports the Centre for Information and Education on Health, building capacity to conduct research, information, education and communication materials production, and health promotion activities through its network of health workers and community volunteers. The Centre for Information and Education on Health is leading a working group of Government and international counterparts to implement a comprehensive Infant and Young Child Feeding programme, including the promotion of good maternal nutrition, appropriate feeding, hygiene promotion, and the delivery of micronutrient supplements for young children. The exclusive breastfeeding component of this package, using community-level counselling and media reinforcement, was credited with increasing the country’s exclusive breastfeeding rate from 26 per cent in 2006 to 40 per cent in 2012.

Strategic communication approaches are also being supported in the implementation of the Ministry of Health’s Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition programme which is ongoing in select southern provinces.

UNICEF is similarly supporting the Ministry of Education and the Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply (Nam Saat) under the Ministry of Health to develop programmes promoting good hygiene practices in schools as well as a training package on ‘Community Dialogue for Rural Water Supply and Hygiene Promotion’.

On-track

IR 2460/A0/04/100/001 By the end of 2013 adolescents and young people (boys and girls) have increased opportunities, confidence to participate in advocacy for their rights through radio and television.

Progress:
Youth participation, particularly youth radio and youth TV, is a key activity of the Lao National Radio and the Children Cultural Centre, under the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism.

Started in 2004, the youth radio programmes are broadcast in four languages in 13 provinces and are linked to listeners’ groups where young people can discuss the programmes’ contents; youth radios remain one of the rare spaces where young people can express their views with relative freedom.

The impact of the Youth Radio network goes beyond broadcasts as the young communicators are often requested to engage in dialogue with officials and visitors from abroad.

Provincial young reporters are very enthusiastic and motivated. They work during the weekend to produce and broadcast youth radio. Provincial authorities understand more about the importance of youth radio and provide
guidance, technical and some financial support. With UNICEF support, 180 young reporters improve their skills every year through workshops; all 13 provincial youth radio have their own Facebook pages to promote not only the radio, but related programme or communication initiatives, for example the Early Childhood Development TV programme for young children. In addition, dozens of young reporters (equal number of girls and boys) were trained on Early Childhood Development principles and youth radio programmes on ECD were being broadcast. Youth TV by and for young people was also broadcast every week.

Progress was hindered somewhat due to lack of funding, especially to facilitate local travel for young reporters, and also due to officials and young reporters moving in their career or education; however, regular training took place for newcomers.

IR 2460/A0/04/100/002 Capacity of Lao national and provincial journalists in reporting on children issues improved through orientation, training and field visits to UNICEF-supported programmes.

Progress:
Given the lack of good TV programmes for young children in Lao PDR, the Office launched a major Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiative, which resulted in the broadcast of a TV programme including captivating story-telling, inspirational songs and creative TV claymation series. The programme is produced in cooperation with the Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the national television and private TV channel Lao Star.

This ECD communication project is unique for UNICEF and a “first” in Laos. It brings together some of the most talented, open-minded and creative local media and at the same time builds capacity in new youth. It was a first and very important step for Laos PDR in meeting some of the holistic needs of infants, young children and their families.

Prior to the formal launch of the TV series in September 2013 under the title "My Village", several workshops were organized in 2012 and 2013, with the participation of local artists, Government officials, NGOs, including people with disabilities.

The exercise was also a good advocacy tool through media coverage, thus creating fundraising opportunities.

Apart from the ECD initiative, UNICEF and its partners featured prominently in the media (especially the Vientiane Times) on a regular basis, mostly through events taking place in the capital, but also joint articles and field visits.

However some challenges remain, such as conflicts of timing and priorities between officials and UNICEF in the implementation of the activities, or Government’s concerns about procedures linked to field visits and censoring. This issue is being addressed through better cooperation regarding field visits, opening the way for further advocacy for UNICEF and the United Nations’ Communication Group.

No major adjustments are anticipated to the current plan, although field trips for local media could be increased.

IR 2460/A0/04/100/003 IR 3. Programme Support. 1. Staff are secure with salary and other entitlement in 2012. 2. Periodic and timely field visits are conducted to monitor project activities, organize National Committee visits, attend workshops and trainings.3. Consultants are contracted to support graphic design, photography, translation, artwork, editing, video and radio production, story writing and data analysis to support project implementation.

Progress:
UNICEF provided human resource support through this 'Intermediate Result' with the funds utilized in this IR to mainly help the organization contribute to the achievement of other IRs within the programme component, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation.
PCR 2460/A0/04/200 By 2015, the most disadvantaged children will be developmentally prepared for right-age entry into school, survive through last primary grade and make the transition into lower secondary education.

**Progress:**
During 2013, Lao PDR continued to see increasing numbers of children benefit from early childhood development services- an increase of 4.4 per cent from 2012 to 2013. Unfortunately, progress of children’s completion rates within primary education remains slow and 70.6 per cent of girls and boys completed a full five years of primary schooling in 2013 as compared to 67.2 per cent in 2012 (69 per cent of girls and 65.6 per cent of boys). In recognition of the unattainable primary completion rate target initially set in the Education Sector Development Plan (2010-2015), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) have revised their 2015 target to 80 per cent. This resulted in a corresponding revision of the UNICEF Education Programme target in order to align with the Education Sector Development Plan.

UNICEF contributed to an extensive Mid-Term Review of the national Education Sector Development Plan (2010-2015) in 2013, which resulted in the identification of priorities for the sector over the coming two years. This review, coupled with UNICEF’s own appraisal of its Education Programme (also conducted in mid-2013), informed changes to the strategic focus of the Programme and its corresponding Workplan for 2014/15. A key strategic shift is to invest in strengthening decentralized education systems and processes, as a means of ensuring more effective and efficient support to school services. UNICEF and the MoES agreed on the selection of four priority districts in which UNICEF will focus its technical and financial assistance over 2013-2015 as a means of generating knowledge on district-wide school improvement initiatives. As an initial step, UNICEF assistance in 2013 resulted in the development of annual costed sector plans in each of these four ‘demonstration’ Districts, as a means of encouraging greater coordination of education sector investment as well as a means of identifying improvements required within the current decentralized planning and budgeting system. This led to the launch of a revision process of the national district education planning guidelines and associated plan format, to ensure alignment between the school, district and provincial costed planning processes. A key barrier constraining the achievement of sustainable results in basic education is that of insufficient Government budget allocation to ‘non-wage recurrent cost’ items within the education sector including school block grants and administrative budgets for decentralized education services.

A further significant change for the Education Programme is UNICEF’s ‘retirement’ from the position of co-chair to the Education Sector Working Group as of January 2014. Following six years as co-chair to the Education Sector Working Group, UNICEF seeks to encourage a rotation of this function amongst Development Partners. UNICEF will however continue to co-chair the Focal Group on Basic Education through to 2015 and engage actively within the Informal Education Partners Group.

The initiation in 2013 of a large-scale textbook procurement initiative for grade one and two students nationwide, allowed for a technical review of the current Government curriculum material procurement and distribution system which will inform the further provision of support to textbook procurement and distribution planned by Australia, the European Union and JICA. It is expected that this work will continue to take a large focus of the Education Programme’s support over 2014. Another area of significant programme focus over 2014 and 2015 is that of a multi-partner WASH in Schools initiative, which will undertake a rigorous study to determine the impact of introducing hand-washing routines within schools in Saravane Province.

**IR 2460/A0/04/200/001** By the end of 2013, Government has the capacity to effectively coordinate, plan, implement and monitor education sector development with strengthened focus on most remote and vulnerable populations.

**Progress:**
A substantive, field-based review of District Education Sector Planning processes conducted by UNICEF and the MoES over 2013 identified limitations in the current system, notably in the coordination of the process between school/district and provincial levels and formats used. As a result of this initial review, a multi-Departmental MoES team have initiated work on revising guidelines for district education planning and are seeking to consolidate disparate development partner initiatives into a common approach.

Lao EDUInfo, a data presentation platform, was successfully integrated within the Educational Management Information System over this reporting period and utilized in the production of the Ministry of Education and Sports’ annual 2012/13 report and statistical bulletin. Further, three provinces and the districts within them were trained in the use of Lao EDUInfo for their planning and reporting obligations. Over 2014, UNICEF will support the consolidation of this tool within one province to ensure its use within the annual planning and budgeting process. Further, UNICEF will seek to support the integration of school facility mapping within the tool.

UNICEF supported the outlining of a partnership arrangement between the International Institute of Education...
and Planning and the Ministry of Education and Sports, as a means of developing a common training platform on education administration, management and planning. This will form a core area of UNICEF support over 2014/15 and will require linkages with development partners also engaged in support to human resource development in education management (notably the European Union, Australian Government).

Over 2014/15, UNICEF will dedicate considerable resources towards the development of the 8th national Education Sector Development Plan (2016-2020), drawing on the recommendations from the Mid-Term Review of the current ESDP supported in 2013 and additional sub-national consultations.

**IR 2460/A0/04/200/002** Pre-school aged children, especially girls in educationally disadvantaged communities, are better prepared for school.

**Progress:**
2013 was the final year of UNICEF’s support to strengthening the kindergarten curriculum, which resulted in a fully-revised three year curriculum. The revised teacher’s guidebook more explicitly promotes a child-centred learning approach. In recognition of the importance of targeting efforts on those who stand to benefit the most from early childhood education, UNICEF shifted its strategy as of 2013 to focus assistance towards pre-primary classes and community based services in remote, rural areas. In light of this, a paper on “Community Based Approaches to Early Childhood Education Services” was produced to inform the MoES and Development Partners on best practice in this area.

A community-based school readiness programme continued implementation in 27 remote communities of Luangnamtha and Saravane Provinces over 2013. This allowed 394 four and five year children to participate in formal early learning and development activities. As evidenced from a joint UNICEF/MoES study (Laos Cohort Study on Attendance at Pre-Primary and Learning, October 2013), children participating in this initiative attended more regularly and performed better in grades one and two than those who had not participated in the pilot. The curriculum framework for this nine month programme was revised following extensive monitoring in 2012/13 and is more relevant to children’s remote, rural communities. Further, the curriculum more explicitly focusses on strengthening children’s language comprehension and problem-solving skills. Early childhood education staff in two provinces have improved their skills in the delivery of an orientation package for parents which accompanies the community based school readiness programme.

A continued challenge is the sustainable delivery of early childhood education services, with this sub-sector continuing to receive insufficient budget to meet policy commitments. This is particularly felt at sub-national levels, where limited technical staff are available to provide support and guidance to services. A priority for the Education Programme over the 2014/15 period will be the development of standards for early childhood education services as a means of assisting the MoES in ensuring quality.

**IR 2460/A0/04/200/003** Primary and secondary school-aged children, especially girls in educationally disadvantaged communities, are enrolled in and complete primary and secondary education that uses a life-skills approach (A life-skills approach uses participatory child-centred teaching and learning techniques to teach life skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving and active listening and content areas such as hygiene and health education, prevention of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, disaster risk reduction, seasonal prevention).

**Progress:**
During 2013, UNICEF continued support to the dissemination of the national Education Quality Standards for Primary and Secondary Education including training for key provincial and district officials in three provinces. In 2014 and 2015, UNICEF will support the integration of these standards within costed School Development Plans in four districts. UNICEF will also assist in updating an Education Quality Standards implementation package to ensure their feasibility for the most disadvantaged districts and schools.

In recognition of the extensive support that Australia is planning in teacher education, UNICEF has shifted support from teacher training towards the demonstration of innovative early grade literacy approaches at district level. A multi-year partnership between the Ministry of Education and Sports, UNICEF and a non-profit children’s book company, Big Brother Mouse, will be initiated in 2014 for the procurement of story books and the strengthening of teacher capacity in the management of classroom reading corners. This partnership follows a successful children’s book writing workshop held in March 2013 which resulted in the development of 12 Lao stories for young children. This work complements UNICEF’s support to the procurement and distribution of student textbooks to all grade one and two students nationwide, initiated in 2013.
UNICEF will increase support for the Education Sector Working Group Focal Group 1 (Basic Education) in 2014/15 and the Technical Working Groups within this. As such, UNICEF will ensure that research and analysis supported by the Programme and other Development Partners in 2013 - notably the Millennium Development Goal Report - are used to inform sector policy reform discussions.

Through the provision of science and math teachers' kits to 22 lower secondary schools and teacher capacity building, UNICEF has sought to improve secondary students' learning outcomes in these areas. The MTR of the Education Programme in 2013 resulted in a decision to end UNICEF's support to secondary education in order to focus more exclusively on the early primary grades over the coming two years. Subsequently, this output and its' initial indicators for lower secondary education were revised to remove reference to support for the secondary education sub-sector.

IR 2460/A0/04/200/004 Effective and efficient management of the Education programme.

**Progress:** UNICEF provided human resource support through this 'Intermediate Result' with the funds utilized to ensure the organization contributes to the achievement of programme IR's, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation

**PC 3 - Health and nutrition**

**PCR 2460/A0/04/300** By 2015, the programme will achieve an enhanced policy environment, increased coverage of quality services (MNCH, Nutrition, HIV), and improved practices by individuals, families and communities, with particular emphasis on the most remote and vulnerable populations, resulting in healthier children and mothers.

**Progress:**

The 2011-2012 Lao Social Indicator Survey revealed a significant decline in child mortality rates that could be attributed to improvements in the socio-economic conditions and increased coverage with high-impact interventions, in particular immunization and exclusive breastfeeding which are being supported by UNICEF. Coverage with other child survival interventions saw improvements but the reach with many is below 50 per cent.

Furthermore, large disparities in child mortality and access to services across socio-economic groups, by ethnicity, provinces, and educational level of mothers are reported.

Lao PDR is off track for the MDG 1. Undernutrition is annually implicated in an estimated 5,000 under-five deaths and GDP losses amounting to US$200 million. Chronic undernutrition represents the biggest challenge, with an estimated 363,000 (44 per cent) of children under-five stunted.

Maternal and child health (MCH) and nutrition policies and strategies in Lao PDR are quite comprehensive in terms of high impact interventions included, but suffer from unclear functional and budget assignment, and are not supported by domestic resources. Therefore, their implementation is patchy with many of the MCH services not reaching the most vulnerable children and women.

The bottleneck analysis for Lao PDR conducted by UNICEF suggests four main determinants of slow policy operationalization:

- **Financing:** low Government health expenditures (< 1 per cent of GDP) and overreliance on largely unpredictable external support for core service delivery inputs, such as essential commodities and recurrent costs;
- **Management and coordination:** unclear functional and budget assignment within the Ministry of Health (MOH) and between national and subnational level for MCH service delivery, compounded by the MoH and health development partners preference for project-type support;
- **Availability of services:** frequent disruptions in service delivery due to supply and logistics management issues, lack of operational budgets to support delivery modalities for hard-to-reach populations (e.g. outreach, community-based programmes) and shortage of qualified service providers, especially in rural remote areas;
- **Care practices, including care-seeking:** poor utilization of health services due to geographic, financial and social barriers; weak linkages between communities and primary health care service providers.
Available data suggest positive trends for all three indicators of the Health and Nutrition programme component result: health administrative data reveal increases in both immunization and antenatal care coverage, and the establishment of the National Nutrition Committee under the Prime Minister's office in July 2013 created political space for discussing multisectoral approaches to nutrition.

UNICEF advocacy and technical inputs in the process of 2012-2013 health reforms and multi-sectoral food and nutrition security action planning translated into greater attention to child survival and nutrition and increased domestic budgets for traditional vaccines, health outreach and community health workers. An unfavourable fiscal outlook for 2014 may affect these positive developments and lead to disruptions in immunization, micronutrient supplementation, deworming and other essential services for children and women.

The 2014-2015 workplans between the Government and UNICEF, as well as UNICEF advocacy and resource mobilization plans, aim to improve organizational capacities for delivering immunization and nutrition interventions and to soften the potential negative impact of fiscal austerity.

IR 2460/A0/04/300/001 By the end of 2013, women and children under five, especially those most hard to reach and living in remote areas, have increased access to and use of quality integrated MCH and nutrition services.

Progress:
All 3 IR indicators are on track. UNICEF worked through the health sector coordination mechanisms and the Joint UN programme to engage in policy dialogue and action planning relevant for child survival agenda. UNICEF supported a Benchmarking Assessment for Newborn Care which informed the development of a National Early Essential Newborn Care Strategy and Action Plan which is designed to address high neonatal mortality rates.

The delivery of essential MCH services to the most remote populations was strengthened through the development and testing of a new micro-planning process. Using the Expanded Programme of Immunization as a platform, the guideline was adopted as the national standard and scale-up plans are being developed for 2014. Micro-planning specifically addresses key bottlenecks in management and coordination, supplies and quality to ensure integrated MCH services reach the most underserved populations.

UNICEF's partnership with CARE International in Lao PDR to support service delivery and strengthen linkages to remote ethnic communities generated good practices on the approaches and resources needed to improve women's and children's health. The importance of building up community networks such as Women's Groups to galvanise action to improve mother and child health was documented. The use of female ethnic translators emerged as a critical factoring enabling the voices and perspectives of ethnic women to be heard by health service providers and sub-national health planners and managers. This learning a substantive part of UNICEF's technical inputs into the development of a new national cadre of Community Health Workers.

UNICEF’s contribution in target provinces to the creation and placement of community level midwives is in line with national targets. Following the MTR, UNICEF will phase-out support for facility-based capacity building and consolidate efforts on integrated outreach as the primary delivery mechanism for child survival interventions.

IR 2460/A0/04/300/002 By the end of 2013, women and children under five, especially those most hard to reach and living in remote areas, have increased access to and use of quality integrated equitable immunization services.

Progress:
Out of 2 IR indicators, 1 is on track and 1, although constrained, is slowly improving.
Major 2013 achievements include: validation for maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination, maintenance of polio free status, increased domestic fund allocation to the procurement of vaccines and operational costs for outreach, and the introduction of pneumococcal vaccine into routine immunization processes.

An increased allocation of Government resources for traditional vaccines – from US$22,800 in 2012 to US$236,222 in 2013 - following extensive UNICEF advocacy, was extremely important in the context of declining and highly unpredictable external resources. In the framework of the Effective Vaccines and Cold Chain Management Action Plan, UNICEF contributed to development of the management and supervisory capacity in two northern provinces.

In 11 months of 2013, over 142,201 of children under 1 year of age were vaccinated with BCG, 143,159 with
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DPT3, 134,357 with measles/rubella vaccine. The first round of Vitamin A supplementation and deworming resulted in 91 per cent coverage (> 676,000) of children 6-59 months old. Over 483,000 women of child-bearing age received immunization against tetanus. UNICEF’s contribution to this included:
- promoting use of data for programming at the central and sub-national levels;
- operational costs for health outreach in target provinces;
- procurement of vaccines and syringes, including procurement services from domestic and GAVI funds.

Significant variations in immunization coverage, with many districts not reaching 80 per cent in 2012 and 2013, remain a challenge and result in periodic outbreaks. To contain these outbreaks, in March 2013 UNICEF supported a multi-antigen (OPV, DT, TD, MR) campaign which reached 96 per cent of targeted children under 15 years of age.

The second half of 2013 saw stock out of BCG and MR vaccine at the central level for more than a month. This is due to delay releasing of the Government funds for vaccines.

**IR 2460/A0/04/300/003** By the end of 2015 women and children under five, especially those most hard to reach and living in remote areas, have increased understanding, access to and use of quality nutrition interventions

**Progress:**
Out of 3 IR indicators, 2 are on track and 1 is constrained.

Two significant actions by the Government of Lao PDR, the establishment of a National Nutrition Committee under the Prime Minister’s Office and the development of a multi-sectoral food and nutrition security action plan were key advocacy milestones for UNICEF, together with the UN Country Team and the European Union. UNICEF undertook the coordinating role within the UN Task Team for multi-sectoral action planning. UNICEF’s close engagement with the Government SUN focal point and the secretariat to the National Nutrition Committee contributed to improved understanding and increased application of SUN framework to national level discussions on nutrition and to six-weekly conference calls with the Global SUN secretariat.

A capacity needs assessment for nutrition highlighted the challenges of implementing nutrition interventions in different sectors: unclear accountabilities at national and subnational levels and a mismatch between strategic plans and available resources. The assessment’s recommendations informed the 2014-2015 UNICEF/MOH workplan development, resources mobilisation and partnership strategy with UN, donors and civil society. Other UNICEF-supported studies, analysis and evaluations have informed health sector planning in the areas of infant and young child feeding, micronutrients and the management of acute malnutrition.

An external evaluation of Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition recommended consolidation in hot-spot areas and prioritization of IYCF promotion to prevent undernutrition.

In efforts to address high levels of iron deficient anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies in young children, UNICEF supported the development of a multi-stakeholder partnership involving public and private sectors. This partnership, involving Population Services International, University of British Columbia and Mines and Minerals Group is developing an effective, scalable and sustainable delivery strategy for micronutrient powders for children. A series of formative research actions were undertaken within this partnership, which proved extremely useful and informed the development of IYCF/micronutrient powder strategic communication plan.

**IR 2460/A0/04/300/004** By the end of 2013, children and pregnant women, including women living with HIV, will have access to and receive quality services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and treatment in Luangnamtha, Vientiane Capital and Savannakhet.

**Progress:**
Two of the three indicators for this IR are constrained.

A partnership with Lao Positive Health Association was developed to strengthen access to treatment, care and support for women and children living with HIV and affected by AIDS and to strengthen linkages between civil society organizations and health providers in order to reach key affected populations. Based on a Community-based Care and Support model developed in 2011, Peer Counsellors have provided both facility-based and community-based support services that enable access to antiretroviral drugs and psychosocial support. A partnership with local organizations has filled this service delivery gap in the short term. UNICEF continues to advocate for the development of a child-sensitive social welfare system.
The operational pilot on Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV was assessed earlier than planned after facing serious bottlenecks in the delivery of HIV testing services. This assessment generated clear evidence that the enabling environment for PMTCT was not sufficiently supportive to allow the pilot to function. A national strategy and costed action plan was identified as necessary to clearly define a national HIV testing strategy for PMTCT and clear functional roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. UNICEF technical support for a costing model provided the basis for a strategic decision-making process on PMTCT. The costing tool was presented as a best practice in two regional fora on PMTCT. The strategic planning meetings in 2013 supported by UNICEF and other development partners led to a recent ministerial reassignment of the responsible department for PMTCT and some improved clarity of functional roles and assignment for the National PMTCT programme.

UNICEF provided technical inputs into the UNAIDS Gender Assessment of the National HIV programme, which forms part of the country dialogue process under the new Global Fund financing model and may support resource mobilization for national programmes such as PMTCT.

**IR 2460/A0/04/300/005 Effective & Efficient management of the Health & Nutrition programme**

**Progress:**
UNICEF provided human resource support through this 'Intermediate Result' with the funds utilized in this IR to mainly help the organization contribute to the achievement of other IRs within the programme component, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation.

**PC 4 - Child protection**

**PCR 2460/A0/04/400** By 2015, children in the Lao PDR are protected against abuse, exploitation, violence, neglect and discrimination through the development of a legal, regulatory and social welfare system.

**Progress:**
UNICEF with the Government of Lao PDR, in close partnership with the Child Protection Working Group, and UNDAF Outcome Group on Governance made a strategic shift in 2012 towards a more comprehensive systems-based approach to child protection focusing on integrating child protection into the broader child welfare and justice systems.

Since this shift, UNICEF’s direct contribution has been to advocate and support new working mechanisms and partnerships, which emphasize a more coordinated sector-wide approach to child protection. Key results through UNICEF support included: the establishment of a Cabinet led-coordination mechanism within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to oversee and manage the development of the child and family welfare system; the creation of a Protection Emergency Cluster Coordination Mechanism, co-chaired by UNICEF and Save the Children; the finalization of a draft Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedure through a broad cross-sectoral consultation process; increased Government commitment to promote restorative justice models and to establish pre-trial and post-trial diversion options, and; Government commitment to conduct a National Prevalence Study on Violence against Children in 2014 – a first for Lao PDR. UNICEF was also the key driver behind a formal agreement between the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the National University of Laos to officially establish and professionalize social work in Lao PDR.

Key studies are ongoing to establish a baseline for child protection system strengthening. These include a Situational Analysis of Adolescents and Young People (with UNFPA, UNESCO and WHO), an Assessment of Child Mediation Practices, and two assessments to map both the Child Justice and Child and Family Welfare Systems. Each of these studies is a first for Lao PDR and will be completed early 2014.

Key constraints/bottlenecks in establishing a child protection system that were found in 2013 include: 1) structural and organizational changes within key line ministries that influenced implementation and hinder
effective coordination between the child justice and child and family welfare sectors; 2) limited availability of child protection data to inform policy and legislative reviews and drafting processes; 3) lack of an established social work profession, and; 4) lack of family–support and community-based child protection services.

In 2014, the programme will focus on completing the studies initiated in 2013 and establishing a baseline for further policy and legislative reform on child protection. New partnerships will also be established with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems development, and the Lao Bar Association to improve legal representation for children in contact with the law (pilot). Initial negotiations will be conducted to establish community-based diversion options as alternatives to deprivation of liberty (pilot) and the #End violence against Children initiative will be adapted and launched in Lao PDR to complement the implementation of the first National Prevalence Study on Violence against Children.

IR 2460/A0/04/400/001 By 2015, a child sensitive and gender appropriate child justice system established in line with international standards better protecting children in conflict with the law, victims and witnesses of crime.

Progress:
UNICEF is the lead agency supporting the Government to develop a child sensitive and gender appropriate child justice system as part of the Government Legal Sector Master Plan in partnership with UNDP, UNODC and other bi-laterals. Key results achieved through UNICEF support in 2013 included the following.

- The finalization of a draft Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedures which was submitted to the National Assembly for a first review in December 2013. The law was drafted in direct consultation with adolescents and young people and went through six public hearings and two rounds of consultations with lawyers and member of the National Assembly. The draft law includes child-friendly and gender appropriate provisions based on international standards on children in contact with the law (offenders, victims and witnesses).
- The completion of an Assessment of Existing Mediation Practices involving Children with recommendations for the revision of existing Guidelines on Child Mediation.
- The completion of the pilot phase for the implementation of a Comprehensive Mapping and Assessment of the child justice system (to be completed in the first quarter of 2014).
- Enhanced cooperation and collaboration between the justice and social welfare sectors through inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms (Juvenile Justice coordination committee) and consultation processes (law drafting committees and technical review committees) which led to improved understanding on child protection issues and more comprehensive cross-sector response to children in contact with the law.

Key constraints/bottlenecks are the continued lack of accurate, disaggregated data and limited diversion options and services available for children in contact with the law.

In 2014, the programme will focus on: 1) strengthening the capacities of justice professionals to apply child-sensitive and gender appropriate investigation and court procedures; 2) establishing community-based alternatives to deprivation of liberty as diversion options (pilot), and; 3) improved legal and social assistance to all children in contact with the law (pilot).

IR 2460/A0/04/400/002 By 2015, the most vulnerable and marginalized children and their families are better protected by a child and family welfare system.

Progress:
With UNICEF’s support, a draft Decree on National and Inter-country which is in compliance with substantive provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption was finalized and will be submitted for review by the Government in early 2014. Data collection for the Assessment of the Child and Welfare System was completed and is being analysed. A draft report with key findings and recommendations will be presented in early 2014 to the Government for review.

The Government has committed to conduct the first National Prevalence Study on Violence against Children in 2014 and preparatory work, including field testing of questionnaires was conducted. An agreement to prevent and combat trafficking in persons was finalized with the Government of China (to be signed early 2014). A National Directory of Essential Services for Children and Youth, a first for Lao PDR, was finalized and was distributed nationally through line ministries, international NGOs, local associations and youth networks.

An agreement was signed between the National University of Laos and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to equip, graduate and place qualified social workers in the child and family welfare sector by 2015.
Key constraints/bottlenecks are the continued lack of accurate, disaggregated data and, lack of family-support and community-based child protection services.

In 2014 the programme will focus on establishing a new partnership with the MoHA and Plan International on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems development; adapting and establishing the global #Endviolence against Children initiative in Lao PDR to complement the implementation of the first National Prevalence Study on Violence against Children; completing the Assessment of the Child and Family Welfare System and providing further policy and technical guidance for the establishment of a social work profession in Lao PDR.

**IR 2460/A0/04/400/003 Effective and efficient management of the Child Protection Programme.**

**Progress:**
UNICEF provided human resource support through this 'Intermediate Result' with the funds utilized in this IR to mainly help the organization contribute to the achievement of other IRs within the programme component, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation.

**IR 2460/A0/04/400/004 By the end of 2013, national and sub-national Government have strengthened capacity to collect, analyse and use evidence that will support equity-focused policies, plans and budgets.**

**Progress:**
UNICEF remained as a key partner to the National Commission on Mothers and Children (NCMC). UNICEF, with Save the Children, provided extensive technical support to develop a National Implementation Plan to respond to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to Lao PDR. The plan was developed through national and provincial inter-ministerial consultative and participatory processes and will serve as the road map and a basis for monitoring progress on CRC implementation in preparation for the next State Party report due in December 2016. With UNICEF’s technical and financial support, the first State Party Reports on the two Optional Protocols to the CRC were finalized. Both reports benefitted from the inputs of stakeholders (national and provincial inter-ministerial counterparts, development partners, INGOs and university students) through national and provincial consultations.

The Minister to the Prime Minister’s Office led the four-member Lao PDR delegation to the Second High Level Meeting on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights in Asia and the Pacific hosted by the Indian Government and supported by UNICEF. The meeting outcome document - ‘New Delhi Declaration’, renewed Governments’ commitments to the rights of children and pledging to support each other in the achievement of those rights – was adopted unanimously by Asian and Pacific nations attending the conference. The New Delhi Declaration sets out a series of recommendations that will serve as a roadmap for future cooperation, including collaboration on ways to improve the collection of data on children, and the undertaking of multi-country research and studies into children’s issues and the best means to address them.

The Declaration addresses the need for adequate investments in education, job creation and social participation to address the different threats and challenges faced by adolescents, and to eliminate violence against children and adolescents. It also recommends that governments seek meaningful participation by adolescents in decision-making, and improve access, quality, and relevance of lower secondary education and vocational training, to strengthen adolescents’ job prospects, including those of adolescent girls.

At the conference the Lao Delegation discussed opportunities for South-South Cooperation with the Governments of Mongolia, Viet Nam and Thailand.

Key constraints/bottlenecks are the limited institutional clarity or understanding of key concepts such as sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. These concepts are often confused with trafficking. Further, the limited availability of data makes it difficult to develop appropriate response plans and monitoring frameworks.

In 2014, the programme will focus on supporting NCMC to conduct provincial and national consultations on the implementation of the CRC to support the preparation of the Government’s third periodic report due to be submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016.
**PC 5 - Water, sanitation and hygiene**

**PCR 2460/A0/04/500** By 2015 children’s health and development will benefit from equitable and sustainable access to, and use of, safe water and basic sanitation, with particular emphasis on reaching rural remote areas.

**Progress:**
At policy level, UNICEF financed, and with development partners provided technical assistance to the Government for the Development of a National Plan of Action on Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene. This Plan was approved in September 2012 and launched in September 2013, and provides a four year national framework for sector development.

Coordination in the WASH sector is undertaken by the WASH Technical Working Group (TWG). The current TWG was formed by merging the previous TWG informal group with the official Technical Assessment Team. The WASH TWG is formally recognized as a subgroup of MoH TWG, and is chaired by the MoH Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion. All Sector stakeholders including the Government, UN and I/NGOS (including UNICEF, Ministry of Health/Nam Saat, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, MoES, Water and Sanitation Programme/WSP, WHO, SNV, and Plan) are members.

The WASH programme participated in development of the Inter-Agency Contingency Plan (IACP) for emergency response in Lao PDR. The WASH cluster contingency plan was updated and is part of the IACP. Pre-positioned emergency supplies were used in response to flooding in southern provinces. A partnership with the Lao Red Cross was initiated for Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction activities in 100 villages in two southern provinces, and later expanded to 67 flood-prone villages in two additional provinces.

UNICEF, Plan International, SNV and World Bank-WSP agreed to launch joint studies on sanitation demand and marketing to be completed by mid-2014. In addition, WASH partners are standardizing community approaches to rural sanitation and efforts were made to develop an operational Programme Guideline for scaling up rural sanitation.

Another strategic partnership was initiated with the Government of Australia, bringing together UNICEF, WFP, MoH and MoES to implement WASH in Schools activities in educationally disadvantaged districts. Activities include the provision of WASH facilities, the pilot of a hygiene promotion package and a research component to gather evidence to support improved delivery and implementation. A baseline study on WASH in schools was initiated to map children’s and teachers’ responses to the availability or non-availability of facilities. Gender-specific, disability-friendly, disaster-resilient designs for school WASH facilities were prepared and tested. Designs for constructions from 2014 onwards were revised and finalized.

A community dialogue review taking into account gender-specific needs was conducted to create community ownership for sustainable service delivery. A guide and communication materials were developed and are available for printing.

UNICEF and WHO are supporting MoES to revise the Hygiene Education Toolkit through consultation. New activities and teaching materials were developed and trialled, incorporating recommendations from the evaluation of the previous version of the toolkit. The finalized toolkit will be used as teaching aid to support hygiene education in the primary school curriculum, and will be distributed as part of the WASH in Schools partnership.

An assessment of implementing partners revealed low capacity, highlighting that only two provinces in the entire country are able to fully implement the provision of facilities programmes. The remoteness of some target schools, the inadequate funding for WASH in communities and the non-existence of a nationally adopted operational guideline for rural sanitation interventions were causes of additional constraints.

**IR 2460/A0/04/500/001** : National and Subnational line ministries and departments have strengthened political commitment, accountability and capacity to develop and adopt evidence based equitable and gender-sensitive policies, budgeted plans for scaling up of WASH interventions to promote safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and good hygiene practices.

**Progress:**
UNICEF, in partnership with sector stakeholders, contributed to the design and approval of the National Plan of Action for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene by Ministry of Health. The Plan is designed to promote community ownership of water and sanitation facilities and to set objectives and strategies to attain MDG
targets. The Plan was approved in 2012, launched in 2013 and preparations commenced for a donor resource mobilization conference for rural WASH.

Progress was made in improving WASH data quality. The National Water and Sanitation Sector Assessment for Laos was initiated by MoH. UNICEF and WHO provided technical resources and information technology equipment for the development of a WASH database. UNICEF completed a draft analysis of the Lao Social Indicator Survey findings in relation to and links with Health, Nutrition and Education. The data indicated that increasing access to sanitation facilities does not increase their use, and strong correlations between the rates of open defecation, stunting and the education level of household head were found.

UNICEF supported formal recognition of the WASH TWG as a subgroup of MoH TWG, and it is chaired by the MoH Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion. Meetings were held on a monthly basis and are the platform for sector coordination where UNICEF is the key partner.

WASH partners are supporting the Government in standardizing community approaches to rural sanitation and the development of an operational guideline for implementation. Community dialogue materials and tools were revised, taking into account gender-specific needs. A manual and communication materials were developed to support implementation and are ready for printing. Training was organized for Government counterparts in select provinces.

UNICEF and WHO provided technical assistance to the Government and partners to revise the national Water Quality Standards. A draft of the Standards was completed and translated to Lao.

IR 2460/A0/04/500/002 WASH partners use strengthened coordination mechanisms to better plan, budget, implement and monitor activities related to Humanitarian Situation and Disaster Risk Reduction.

Progress:
UNICEF participated in the development of the Inter-agency Contingency Plan for Emergency Response in Lao PDR. The programme updated the WASH cluster contingency plan, which is now part of the IACP. As part of the preparedness response, UNICEF supported the Government to pre-position supplies to respond to the needs of approximately 40,000 to 50,000 people, with a focus on women and children. UNICEF allocated resources for the immediate field mobility of Government staff to distribute emergency supplies to affected communities. UNICEF has adequate capacity to handle level-one emergencies, as the majority of UNICEF WASH professional staff are trained on needs assessments, coordination and emergency response.

UNICEF maintained partnerships with civil society on DRR and preparedness through the financial support of USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. In 2012, UNICEF signed a Project Cooperation Agreement with the Lao Red Cross to implement Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) in 100 villages across Saravane and Sekong provinces. The Agreement was extended in 2013 to cover 67 flood-prone villages in Borikhamxay and Khammouane provinces. This partnership built local capacity in terms of disaster risk reduction, for example in establishing Village Disaster Preparedness Units. It was difficult to follow up activities after the training at local level, and establish whether the skills and knowledge gained during training are being utilized as anticipated. The lesson learnt from this partnership is that UNICEF needs to liaise with provincial and district level agencies to monitor the effectiveness of the programme.

WASH programme partners have supported the WASH TWG to strengthen its capacity in the coordination and monitoring of WASH interventions. The TWG will assume the shape of a WASH cluster in case of an emergency. The Sphere book on minimum standards for humanitarian response was translated into Lao and will be reviewed and finalized for dissemination at provincial and district level.

IR 2460/A0/04/500/003 Families and communities in 21 poorest districts have access to and use improved water supply and sanitation facilities including health centres.

Progress:
Of the 21 districts planned, the UNICEF WASH programme has provided water supply sources to 65 villages in 11 districts of Phongsaly, Luangprabang, Xiengkuang and Savannakhet provinces. The total beneficiary population, including women and children, is 30,680. Progress in community WASH was slower due to the shortage of resources. In quarter three of 2013, funds were raised for additional activities in communities in Saravane, Attapeu and Xiengkuang provinces. Water supply provision activities are expected to start in early 2014.
Improvement of WASH facilities in health centres (improved water, separate sanitation facilities for women and men and improvement of sanitary conditions) was conducted in 10 health centres in two districts of Luangnamtha province, benefiting 37,725 people.

In rural sanitation, UNICEF focused on developing a national-level partnership with World Bank-WSP, Plan International and SNV to establish a national framework for community approaches to total sanitation. Studies on the demand and supply chain have started and are expected to be completed by the second quarter of 2014. This partnership aims at supporting the enabling environment necessary for demand and supply to grow freely and reinforce each other, as foreseen in the National Plan of Action.

UNICEF is working with the Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology organization on consolidating communication materials and providing technical support on household water treatment, including the promotion of bio-sand filters. Selected technical staff from Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Saravane, Sekong and Attapeu provinces attended 'Low cost sanitation technology' training at Central Nam Saat as part of technical support and capacity building for Nam Saat.

The 'Community Dialogue Manual' was revised and pre-tested. As part of the capacity building strategy for Nam Saat, 240 trainees from eight provinces attended training on effective use of the manual.

**IR 2460/A0/04/500/004** Children and teachers in schools of educationally most disadvantaged 60 Education for All–Fast Track Initiative districts have access to and use improved water sources and separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys.

**Progress:**
The multi-partner WASH in Schools initiative, which begun in 2013 and will remain a significant programme focus for 2014 and 2015, is providing WASH facilities at scale, alongside a rigorous research component to determine the impact of introducing hygiene promotion to primary schools. UNICEF completed the physical construction of improved water supply systems in 272 primary schools, and provided 225 schools with improved sanitation facilities. This activity has benefited 34,133 children in 41 of the most educationally disadvantaged districts distributed across 11 provinces. A baseline study on the operation, maintenance and use of WASH facilities in schools is ongoing. The results of the study will help UNICEF to further improve the sustainability of school WASH facilities.

UNICEF developed new WASH facility designs for primary schools in consultation with MoES, Government of Australia and the World Bank. The new designs respond to the needs of children with disabilities, gender, and risks associated with extreme climatic events, particularly floods. The design of a mass handwashing table was completed and approved as part of the new WASH facilities design. A pilot site for construction in Vientiane was selected.

An operation and maintenance manual for a water and sanitation facilities was finalized and is waiting for official approval and printing. This activity was conducted in consultation with Government counterparts, namely Nam Saat and MoES.

UNICEF and WHO are supporting MoES to revise the Hygiene Education Toolkit (‘Blue Box’) through consultation among all key stakeholders. New activities and teaching and learning materials were developed and trialled in selected schools for a month. Inputs from teachers will be consolidated for finalization of the materials, with their subsequent integration in the Pre-Service Teacher Education programme. In addition, at the request of Ministry of Education, UNICEF printed 1,000 hygiene toolkits for primary schools in target provinces.

**IR 2460/A0/04/500/005** IR 5. Programme Support

**Progress:**
UNICEF provided human resource support through this ‘Intermediate Result’ with the funds utilized in this IR to mainly help the organization contribute to the achievement of other IRs within the programme component, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation.
By 2015, children, young people and women have their rights fulfilled through a strengthened knowledge, policy, legislative and budgetary environment.

**Progress:**
A key achievement in 2013 was the support given to the Government to launch the Lao Social Indicator Survey and to use it in the development, planning and monitoring of the situation of children and women. The LSIS informed the third MDG Progress Report and the Mid-Term Review of the National Social Economic Development Plan, as well as the health sector reform processes. LSIS data was also used to inform analysis feeding into the National Human Development Report, reinforcing the focus on equitable social and economic development.

Further analysis of the LSIS has begun and a number of studies are already complete, such as: (a) "An Assessment of the Economic Consequences of Undernutrition in Lao PDR", which informs high-level dialogue at the Government-Development Partners Round Table Meeting, leading to key decisions on accelerating high-impact nutrition interventions; (b) The 'Multiple and Overlapping Deprivation Analysis', which helps to update the profile of vulnerable children.

Both studies are being reviewed to contribute towards the 5th National Human Development Report which seeks to analyse the trends and possible causes of growing inequality, as well as the limited impact of economic growth on human development, especially in rural areas.

In addition, an assessment of civil and birth registration was completed in advance of Lao PDR’s participation in the Asia Pacific High Level Meeting on Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics. The 'Study on Child Well-being and Disparities in Lao PDR' informed policy dialogues to leverage resources to reduce disparity, including through CRC State Party Reporting, the Government-Development Partners Round Table Meeting and National Development Plan, and the Government/UNICEF Country Programme Document 2012-2015. The study triggered a vital shift in the discourse on disparity and equity in Lao PDR; an issue that was previously considered controversial. These findings were reconfirmed by the new LSIS data.

Key challenges - by programme – in 2013 included: the disconnect between national and subnational planning and budgeting processes, the lack of clarity in budget allocation decisions; a weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for the monitoring the National Social Economic Plan; the lack of a sub sector working group on statistics, M&E and research and decentralized planning and budgeting; the time involved in finalizing the Lao LSIS report, including printing and approval, resulting in a delay in regional LSIS dissemination; and the workload and demands from all development partners related to a number of Government institutions such as National Economic and Research Institutes.

In 2014-15, the focus will be on completing activities initiated in 2013, in particular with the Lao Statistics Bureau and National Economic Research Institute, as well as seeking opportunities for more collaboration with MoHA and Ministry of Finance. The programme will work through these partnerships to ensure that disaggregated data are used for key research that informs inclusive social and economic development strategies that benefit children.

**IR 2460/A0/04/600/001** By the end of 2013, national and sub-national Government have strengthened capacity to collect, analyse and use evidence that will support equity-focused policies, plans and budgets.

**Progress:**
The Lao Social Indicator Survey (combined MICS 4 and DHS Survey) was launched on 4 July 2013. The Survey generated data at the provincial level, enabling further analysis of disparity to support policy advocacy and investment for children. LSIS served as the main data source for the draft National MDG Report and Mid-Term Review of the 7th National Social Economic Development Plan 2011-2015, which highlights widening disparities in the social development sectors as key barriers to achieving the MDGs and graduating from Least Developed Country status by 2020. LSIS highlighted major gaps in policy and implementation, and confirmed the key barriers identified by the health and education programmes, such as the need to further increase budget allocation at the sector level, and also the need to improve the re-allocation of and cost-efficiency / effectiveness of interventions at the sub-sector level. LSIS was selected by UNICEF headquarters as a good practice and reviewed in MICS 4 evaluation. Through South-South cooperation, the Government has exchanged experiences with the Government of Mongolia, which has decided to conduct a combined MICS 4 and DHS Survey.
An Assessment of the Economic Consequences of Undernutrition’ also informed high-level dialogue at the Government-Development Partners Round Table Meeting, leading to key decisions on accelerating high-impact nutrition interventions.

The ‘Study on Child Well-being and Disparities in Lao PDR’ has set the stage for child poverty issues to become prominent in policy dialogue, and the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) has helped update the profile of vulnerable children.

An assessment of civil and birth registration in partnership with Plan International was completed in advance of Lao PDR’s participation in the Asia Pacific High Level Meeting on Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.

The LaoInfo version 7 National Socio-Economic Database was institutionalized to manage and present data from key national surveys, as well as data from routine and administrative data collection systems, including the Lao Early Warning System.

A proposal to extend maternity leave as part of the Civil Servants Law review process was developed for debate. The proposal is to extend the maternity leave period to six months for both the civil service and private sectors, and to consider the possible introduction of paternity leave. The Lao National Assembly voted to extend maternity leave provisions of the National Labour Law from the current 90 days (12.75 weeks) to 105 days (15 weeks) in accordance with the International Labour Organization Convention.

**IR 2460/A0/04/600/002 Effective & Efficient management of the social policy programme.**

**Progress:**
UNICEF provided human resource support through this ‘Intermediate Result’ with the funds utilized in this IR to mainly help the organization contribute to the achievement of other IRs within the programme component, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation.

**PCR 2460/A0/04/650 By 2015, strengthened subnational capacity for evidence-based and integrated planning, budgeting and monitoring to enhance delivery of social services.**

**Progress:**
The Government continued its efforts on decentralization through its ‘three builds’ strategy: build the province as the strategic unit; build the district to be the overall strengthening unit; and build the village to be the development unit. The initiative covers 15 key sectors (at central level), 51 districts, and 109 villages.

The Office entered into a partnership with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), opening up opportunities for UNICEF to engage more strategically in the Governance Sector Working Group as well as the broader decentralization process accelerated by the Government. Formative research was conducted in advance of workplan formulation to assess the partnerships, the comparative advantage of UNICEF and links to the other programmes.

A desk review of UNICEF support to decentralised planning and budgeting and ToC pathway was undertaken, which served as essential background for the MTR. As a follow-up, discussions are underway with the Health and Education Sections to strengthen the links between Operational Expenditure Block Grants (OEBG) and sectoral work on decentralized planning and budgeting. In the fiscal year 2013/2014, OEBG will be scaled up to all districts through National Governance and Public Administration Reform (NGPAR)/UNCDF funds, while UNICEF and UNCDF will continue to cost-share in Sing district.

A dialogue with the Ministry of Finance was initiated as a result of the participation of an inter-ministerial delegation in the East Asia and Pacific Conference on Public Finance, Social Policies and Children. The meeting, for the first time, facilitated dialogue between the Ministry of Finance and line ministries in addressing disparities that affect children.

As a focal point to the UN Joint Programme to Support an Effective Lao National Assembly, the Social Policy Programme contributed to strengthening the awareness of parliamentarians of children’s issues, and provided technical support to the mid-term and final evaluations.
Nevertheless, a lack of sufficient staff capacity (at both central and sub-national level) associated with the recent upgrading of MoHA to Ministry status to pose challenges for implementation.

IR 2460/A0/04/650/001 By 2013, children, young people and women, especially those most vulnerable, have their rights fulfilled through strengthened sub-national capacity to use data and existing planning mechanisms as well as discretionary budget to deliver social services to the remote areas.

Progress:
A Coordination workshop in Luangnamtha was supported with the involvement of key stakeholders including NCMC, MoHA, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), MoES, MoH, the National Leading Committee on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, UNCDF, INGOs, as well as provincial Government and sectoral departments.

A MoHA/UNICEF/UNCDF joint causality analysis and Operational Expenditure Block Grants workshop was conducted for Luangnamtha Province, with a specific focus on one district (Sing). The follow up of OEBG in Sing district was monitored, and issues affecting integrated planning and budgeting were discussed with MoHA to facilitate communication and the accountability relationship between the central and sub-national levels.

Furthermore, top-up funds from UNICEF facilitated the link between local administration and sectoral plans that supports the prioritization and equitable delivery of basic social services in Sing district.

UNICEF continued to document the experience of the health and education sectors in supporting decentralized planning and budgeting processes and how they link to local government processes. Key bottlenecks persist: the lack of capacity for basic planning, particularly at district level; the lack of clarity related to budget envelopes and limited coordination mechanisms. There is a clear need for investment in nationally led processes rather than donor planning systems and greater coordination within and across the social sector. The education district planning and budgeting pilot will contribute to building knowledge in this area.

UNICEF supported the participation of an inter-ministerial delegation to attend the East Asia and Pacific Conference on Public Finance, Social Policies and Children, with the objective to facilitate dialogue between the Ministry of Finance and line ministries in addressing disparities that affect children.

IR 2460/A0/04/650/002 Effective & Efficient management of the Learning zone programme.

Progress:
UNICEF provided human resource support through this ‘Intermediate Result’ with the funds utilized in this IR to mainly help the organization contribute to the achievement of other IRs within the programme component, or across Programme components in the country programme of cooperation.

PC 800 - Cross-sectoral costs

PCR 2460/A0/04/700 Effective and efficient programme performance.

Progress:
In 2013 UNICEF Lao PDR contributed substantively to the finalization of the MDG Report, which was launched mid-year. The report drew heavily on the Lao Social Indicator Survey which was also launched mid-year. The LSIS was instrumental in informing the discussions on MDG progress and key advocacy messages in the Government Development Partner consultative forum. The secondary analysis was used as a key input to the background documents for the Provincial Round Table meeting in June 2013 and the High Level Round Table Meeting in November 2014. The analysis contributed to the continued need to focus on the off track indicators which reflect the widening inequality; more targeted investment in the health and education, and to establish an inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms for nutrition.

UNICEF's primary and secondary analysis of the LSIS data formed the basis of the new Situation of Women and Children Report that was drafted in September 2013 in preparation for the Mid-Term Review of the Government of Lao-UNICEF Country Programme. The report incorporated the new equity focused situation analysis and each programme area included the determinants analysis.
In September 2013, the Government of Lao PDR and UNICEF held the final meeting to approve the Mid-Term Review, which brought together the findings from a number of technical review discussions with partners and distilled the main findings and recommendations of the 2013 Situation Analysis and thematic Studies, Surveys and Evaluations conducted since the beginning of 2012. The MTR meeting identified UNICEF’s increasing role in the country as a knowledge leader and concluded that there should be an increased focus on:
1. The generation and use of evidence and support the evaluation of pilots to inform decision-making for policies, plans and budgets;
2. South-south cooperation to share technical expertise to inform policy options and strategic investment decisions;
3. Accelerating the shift towards institutional capacity building;
4. Transitioning to more selective investment in services;
5. Strengthening coordination and contributing to Sector Plans;
6. Maximising learning from sectoral and multi sectoral programmes at all levels.

UNICEF continued to participate in and responded to multiple changes in the external aid management environment and in UNICEF global programme processes, including the review of the UNDAF Joint Action Plan and the revisions to the Ministry of Investment and Planning developed an online Aid Management database that captures Overseas Development Assistance financial contribution to individual MDGs and sectors. The Government of Lao PDR and Development Partner discussion forum was dominated by discussions of the contribution of civil society and the International Monetary Fund report that highlighted a growing fiscal deficit. There are concerns about the level of inflation, income inequalities are widening and the fiscal deficit is estimated to have widened to 6.5 per cent of GDP. This is largely due to a doubling of public sector employee compensation and high capital spending. The impact will be a call to curb on capital investments and public sector benefits.

**IR 2460/A0/04/700/001 Strengthen Programme Coordination.**

**Progress:**
To respond to the changes in UNICEF’s global programme processes and the external environment, the Office revised or developed new country Office policies, guidance, learning opportunities and knowledge management processes.

The Office supported a combined *Programme and Policy Process and Theory of Change* Workshop with all programme and some operations staff. The workshop focused on UNICEF’s role and mandate, partnerships and development a vision and pathway of change and planning for the Mid-Term Review of the Country programme. Following the workshop, nearly all programme developed more detailed programme specific *Theory of Change* and *Results Chains*. These were invaluable in helping to shape workplans for the remaining two years of the country programme.

There was a focus on strengthening the interface between the cross sectorial functions in the Office; external communications, communication for development, social policy, advocacy, M&E and knowledge management. The chiefs of the cross sectoral functions came together to start mapping out new work processes for identifying and providing an additional quality assurance process for; flagship publications, research and advocacy priorities, high visibility and high risk initiatives and pilot projects. Following a consultative process in the Office a set of work processes and tools were developed and are being slowly introduced.

The internal Quality Assurance Network (iQAN) continued to provide a platform for Office focal points, such as gender, to influence and ensure the quality of donor proposals, terms of reference and workplans. The iQAN provided comments to each programme section, reviewing their *Theory of Change* and *Multi Year Work Plans*. A results based management consultant was recruited to provide on-line coaching to programmes to improve the ‘if then’ logic of the results change, the formulation of results statements and indicators. It is hoped that this will contribute to continually raising the quality of results based programming in 2014.

The Programme Coordination Committee continued to encourage new ways of reporting on determinants and analysis of learning from field monitoring and from spot checks. There was a greater use of photo essays and visual forms of reporting.

**IR 2460/A0/04/700/002 Media and External Relations.**
**Progress:**
The Communications Section produced around 30 human interest stories as well as videos (i.e. Global Handwashing Day) and photo essays (i.e. Community Based Pre-School) covering a range of examples of UNICEF’s work for donor reports, proposals and for online promotion. Use of social media tools, namely Facebook and Twitter, was intensified, as was the use of the country blog page. The website build is close to completion with the planned ‘go live’ date of early February 2014.

A dissemination package was prepared for the Lao Social Indicator Survey, including factsheets, finalisation of the edited LSIS report and an accompanying video. Other studies, such as the Child Well-Being and Disparities Study, were also edited and promoted to external audiences. The ‘Making of My Village’, the flagship ECD TV show, was completed and broadcast in Lao PDR, as well as put on YouTube.

Donor visits were coordinated and supported, including the Japanese, New Zealand, Australian and Finnish National Committees. A visit by GAVI was also co-organised with WHO, which included a major event in Vientiane and film crews from BBC and Channel 7 News (Australia).

Office-wide communication and resource mobilisation strategies were developed and programme sections identified specific advocacy objectives, as a result of internal planning meetings. In addition, planning tools were created, such as a forward planning calendar, to better map out future activities.

UNICEF also contributed articles to the English language newspaper Vientiane Times as part of a cooperation with World Vision, Plan and ChildFund.

UNICEF was an active participant in the UN Communication Group meetings and initiatives (UN advocacy, UN newsletter, events, etc.), including coordination of a media field trip on food and nutrition security, a factsheet and UN Lao website support.

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### PCR 2460/A0/04/800 Effective and efficient programme management and operations support.

**Progress:**
A rolling three year Annual Management Plan (RAMP) was developed in 2011, to cover the last year of the previous Country Programme and the first two years of the four-year Country Programme 2012-2015, up to the mid-term review. Progress against the plan was reviewed at the start of 2012 and again early in 2013 and the results modified and strengthened. The RAMP focuses on five key programme results, covering the cross-cutting areas of: establishing the ‘learning’ zone office; equity and level 3 monitoring; strategic partnerships; advocacy; and emergency preparedness and response; The five key management results cover: UN coherence and alignment with Government aid effectiveness; resource mobilisation; heads of sections leading the change and supporting a coaching culture; revised work processes and VISION implementation; and audit preparation and process. Good progress was made across all results.

Given that there was an Audit in 2012 there was a significant focus on using the Audit follow up as an opportunity to strengthen systems and processes around programme and operations management. As a result, the Office closed the year with strengthened and well-documented work processes, enhanced programme monitoring, and increased delegation to Programme Results Managers.

Although there were no major emergencies in Lao PDR in 2013, the Office continued to maintain its capacity to respond and was actively involved in strengthening the Inter Agency Contingency Plans and the Cluster mechanism. The Business Continuity Plan was tested and updated, and UNICEF participated fully in an UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) led inter-agency emergency simulation.

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### IR 2460/A0/04/800/001 Governance and Systems.

**Progress:**
The Office used the audit preparation and follow up process as an opportunity to strengthen governance and oversight mechanisms in general. The audit visit was very constructive, with helpful guidance provided by the audit team, and in 2013 there was active follow up to issues raised. The Country Management Team (CMT) met regularly and monitored key performance indicators that, making good use of the Performance Management
System data. The Programme Coordination Committee continued to function well, reviewing progress against key result areas using effective monthly reporting tools, and incorporating learning sessions around programme areas of cross-cutting interest. The rolling Annual Management Plan was updated at the start of the year with good participation of all staff. The key programme and management results took into account actions to address the areas that were identified as high risk in the Office Risk Assessment exercise, which correspond to the areas covered by the internal audit report. The Business Continuity Plan was updated to reflect changes with the transition to the VISION system, and off-site tests were conducted to ensure continuing remote access to the office systems.

IR 2460/A0/04/800/002 Financial Resources and Stewardship.

Progress:
2013 was a year of consolidating progress in implementing changes to work processes as a result of introducing VISION as the main operating system. Most major processes and associated forms that were redesigned functioned well, and the process of using routing slips to both test the process and to support staff to know which step to go to next, is well established. The Performance Management System was used to generate reports for programme meetings on a regular basis. The office continued to work on improving its Cash Transfer processes and follow up on audit recommendations. As a result, the guidelines and tools for processing payments to Government and conducting Spot Checks were strengthened, with enhanced monitoring and oversight by management. The Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) task force met on a regular basis and was attended by both the Operations Officer and Deputy Representative. The feedback from the spot checks was shared in the Programme Coordination Committee on bi-monthly basis. In addition, the Office key performance indicators, monitored monthly by the Programme Coordination Committee, and at the Country Management team meetings, ensured that cash transfer balances were kept within the 9-month aging target. Utilisation rates of donor grants and the full use of expiring funds were monitored regularly. The Office submitted all donor proposals, and all donor reports on time. The Office hosted # visits from donors interested to continue support to the country programme.

IR 2460/A0/04/800/003 Human Capacity

Progress:
This was the last year of the Office rolling three-year Human Resources Development Plan which started in 2011 and continued to be implemented to support the programmatic changes in the country programme. Training sessions on 'Management Skills Development' and 'Coaching and Performance Management' were jointly conducted by the Operations Manager and the Chair of Staff Association. The Office continued to institute a successful programme of Friday earning Sessions, which are one-Hour classes designed to provide key hands-on skills with the focus on improvement of staff performance. This process was linked to the introduction and implementing of the new operating system, VISION, and an increased delegation of authority to the programme result managers. The Office will continue to support improved setting of individual work and development objectives, building on the trainings and materials provided. During 2013 there were many WebEx sessions to introduce new work procedures and processes or clarify on improving the management of DCT/HACT and to achieve improved 2013 year-end closure processes, etc. These WebEx sessions were very useful to clarify and understand the new initiatives and to resolve recurring problems experienced by field offices worldwide. The sessions were effective as well as cost-saving, and connected UNICEF headquarters staff and those from the field office, with the result being networks among those of the same profession to share and resolve common problems.

The Performance Appraisal system functioned well with good compliance on completion by the deadlines. However, due to staff transfers to other duty stations the completion of Performance Evaluation Reports by 31 March was affected and the rate went down from 100 per cent in the previous year to 92 per cent in 2013. The Staff Association continued to be active. The Joint Consultative Committee meetings between the Staff Association and management were held regularly.
Effective Governance Structure

The Rolling Annual Management Plan (RAMP) was updated in 2013. The RAMP defines priority Programme and Management Objectives and describes Office policies and procedures developed by the Country Management Team (CMT) with the participation of all staff. The Annual Management Plan was updated on an on-going basis and serves as a basic orientation document for new staff.

The key results identified in the RAMP were designed to mitigate against programme, operational and hazard risks. The five Key Management Results and Priorities in the RAMP 2013 were: (1) Audit Recommendation follow-up; (2) Resource Mobilization; (3) Promoting a Learning Culture; (4) MTR (and Management Review), and; (5) Quality Assurance (via ‘Internal Quality Assurance Network’). Monthly CMT meetings were used to review programme against plans and targets.

In 2013, the MTR was conducted with the Government and a final workshop was held to review and approve the MTR conclusions and recommendations.

The final observations of the internal audit conducted in 2012 were received in a final report in March 2013. The audit was very constructive, with helpful guidance provided by the audit team, and in 2013 there was active follow-up on issues raised. The internal audit made seven recommendations, identified as medium priority across the areas of governance, programme management and operations support. A detailed Audit Response Action Plan was developed and implemented to address the audit recommendations and this provided an opportunity to strengthen systems and processes around programme and operations management. As a result, the Office closed the year with strengthened and well documented work processes, enhanced programme monitoring, and increased delegation to Programme Results Managers.

The CMT met regularly and monitored key performance indicators, making good use of the Performance Management System data. The Programme Coordination Committee continued to function well, reviewing progress against key result areas using effective monthly reporting tools, and incorporating learning sessions around programme areas of crosscutting interest.

Although there were no major emergencies in Lao PDR in 2013, the Office continued to maintain its capacity to respond, and was actively involved in strengthening the Inter Agency Contingency Plans and the Cluster mechanism. The Business Continuity Plan (BCP) was tested and updated, and UNICEF participated fully in an OCHA-led inter-agency emergency simulation. Within the Interagency Contingency Plan, UNICEF leads the WASH, Nutrition and Child Protection Clusters and co-leads the Education Cluster with Save the Children. In 2013, all cluster preparedness plans were updated.

The key programme and management results took into account action to address the areas identified as high-risk in the Office Risk Assessment exercise, which correspond to the areas covered by the internal audit report. The BCP was updated to reflect changes with the transition to the VISION system, and off-site tests were conducted to ensure continuing remote access to the office systems.
Strategic Risk Management


The Monitoring Results for Equity Systems (MoRES) Task Force analysed access to and use of data, made bottleneck analyses, and promoted evidence-based advocacy and programming. The Office had already established the use of Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) and Minimum Operating Residential Security Standards in 2012, and all cars have satellite phones and are MOSS-compliant. The administration, under the Operations Manager, carried out six-monthly fire drills conducted with four fire wardens to cover all parts of the office.

All staff completed Basic Security in the Field training and up-to-date data was maintained by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. Emergency Preparedness and Response has remained crucial since the Ketsana Typhoon crisis as has streamlining Disaster Risk Reduction as a cross-cutting development function of all programme related monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of emergency interventions, as well as the Business Continuity Plan. The BCP was tested and updated regularly during 2013. The Emergency Task Force (ETF) monitored the implementation of the BCP, and has the mandate to advise the CMT on key issues and information that needs to be communicated to all staff during emerging emergencies. Market surveys for local supply capacity and formalization of stand-by arrangements for procurements were undertaken.

UNICEF continued active participation in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for Disaster Preparedness and Response, and in the UN cross-sectoral team and coordinating mechanism. UNICEF also actively participated in the UN to develop an IASC Preparedness Plan (IACP), which was endorsed on 13 February 2013. The ETF established electronic updates for Early Warning and Early Action and benefits by learning from other countries’ experience in managing emergency responses. As envisioned in the IACP, and to ensure UNICEF was well-prepared for the wet season, the following steps were taken:

- All Cluster Leads convened their clusters ahead of the wet season to review their cluster plan, prepositioned stockpile list, 3W matrix and cluster contact list, and revert with the updated documents or a confirmation that the documents remain the same, to the Resident Coordinator’s Office.
- The Information Management Network convened and updated the common operational datasets and consolidated the overall contact list, and reverted with the updated documents and datasets, or a confirmation that the documents remain the same, to the Resident Coordinator’s Office.
- The Emergency Communications Team completed their work plan and terms of reference, as well as key preparedness activities outlined in their work plan. The final work plan and terms of reference were sent to the Resident Coordinator’s Office on time.

The Emergency Task Force continued monitoring potential disasters with a view to providing early warning as outlined in its terms of reference.

Evaluation

The Office focused on strengthening the link between the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) and advocacy. This was a key theme of the MTR. As a result, a
A cross-sectoral ‘Strategic Knowledge and Evidence for Advocacy, Policy and Programme’ (SKEAPP) team was established in 2013 as a response to a growing need for more coordinated and planned cooperation between sections in the Office.

The purpose of SKEAPP is to provide assessment of projects before commitments are made, to improve coordination and planning of projects cross-sectorally, and to prioritise the use of in-house technical expertise within an overall framework and planning strategy. Therefore, SKEAPP primarily serves: (1) to define Standard Operating Procedures with supporting tools and guidelines for planning of cross-sectoral projects, and; (2) to serve as a review body that assess the specific needs and characteristics of each project before committing to them.

Reports to the Programme Coordination Committee and the CMT on the implementation of the IMEP were made on a regular basis. To ensure high-quality studies, assessments and evaluations, the Office continued to use the internal Quality Assurance Network to review all Terms of Reference and the workplans of each section. The members of the Quality Assurance Network are the Office focal points for cross-cutting issues such as gender, equity, aid effectiveness, youth and adolescence, and monitoring and evaluation.

The final version of Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) Report was launched in July 2013 in partnership with UNFPA and 10 other development partners. The Lao version of the LSIS report is expected to be completed in early 2014. LSIS findings are perceived as useful sources of information by the Government, development agencies and international NGOs. In addition, LSIS findings have also been used for monitoring progress towards the MDGs and the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

A joint UN evaluation among UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO) and WFP on the Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) was conducted in March 2013 in two southern provinces, Attapeu and Saravane. The primary objectives of the evaluation were to: (a) analyse the relevance of UN agency-funded activities to the Lao PDR context, and the extent to which they have contributed to the integration of CMAM into the national health system; (b) assess the effectiveness of CMAM activities supported by UN agencies in terms of improved nutritional indicators (if insufficient data is unavailable, develop recommendations for improved data collection); (c) identify challenges, opportunities, gaps, promising practices and lessons learned in CMAM implementation in particular regard to CMAM integration into the health system, and; (d) formulate recommendations and distil lessons to guide future scaling up of CMAM in Lao PDR.

### Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology

2013 continued to see a good and stable Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system in support of VISION/SAP access and operations. The 02MB primary link was efficiently utilized to support all connections such as VISION/SAP, Lotus Notes email, Webex sessions, video conferencing, intranet and internet. Late in the year, a secondary internet service provider link was placed to support the high availability of the system. 3G internet access was broadly used as a telecommunication tool by staff on field missions to collaborate and accelerate programme results.

Security enhancement continued to strengthen secure access to office systems and data, in addition to the ICT policies provided to all users for the acceptable use of the ICT system and information. The policy on bandwidth utilization was put into action for the
optimal use of the office systems.

ICT colleagues from UN agencies met and discussed the best use of common UN systems such as HF/VHF radio frequencies, satellite phones and the terminal for data communications approaching the Delivery as One. Contracting with the same service provider for firewall configuration and control between UN House and UNICEF made the system more efficient in terms of data backup locations at both sides.

Backup and replication software, known as Veeam, was in place to support data backup of hyper-v hosts and virtual machine servers. Support was also given to the UNICEF Regional Office for setting up the inter-country backup and replication over the wide area network. The work and experience was documented and shared with other UNICEF regions for the use of ICT Disaster Recovery Plan.

The Direct Order Long Term Agreement was the channel for all ICT equipment procured and used by UNICEF staff, which strengthened the compliance with ICT standards and policy set by UNICEF New York headquarters. The disposal of ICT equipment was done through the Property Survey Board and focused on best use by donating to Government counterparts to support programme implementation. A ‘Four Year Equipment Replacement Plan’ was created concerning the status of ICT equipment operated at the office, which provided a convenient view of each section’s budget plan.

ICT roll-outs were completed on time. User support and service delivery were prioritised to make ICT technologies part of the success of the programme implementation. The roll-out of the Hyper-V host was successfully implemented with value added to the cost effectiveness approach by reducing the physical servers from eight to two servers that were able to manage multiple virtual machine servers.

## Fund-raising and Donor Relations

The UNICEF Lao Office developed a resource mobilization strategy for 2012-2013, and through the identification of opportunities, proactive engagement with donors and the development of Funding Proposals and Concept Notes, successfully mobilized over US$2 million.

The strategy introduced a number of supporting tools, such as ‘donor toolkits’ for UNICEF National Committees. The Education Toolkit was successful in raising funds from the UNICEF National Committees in Korea, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

In the area of support for fundraising activities, UNICEF Lao PDR welcomed a number of UNICEF National Committees in 2013, including those of Japan, the United Kingdom, Finland, New Zealand, Germany and Australia.

Major donors are the Australian Government, the European Union and the UNICEF National Committees of Australia and Japan. The Australian Government has allocated US$10.5 million to support a programme for WASH in schools and the European Union is the major donor for nutrition.

The private sector is starting to play a role in producing results for children in Lao PDR. In a ‘first’ for the Office, the Health and Nutrition programme is developing a partnership with MMG for the introduction of micronutrient supplements for young children, in
cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the NGO Population Services International. It is worth noting that mining is the most important sector for foreign investors in Lao PDR, just ahead of electricity generation.

In 2013, 26 donor reports and human interest stories were due, and all were prepared and submitted on time. The Office’s internal monitoring and quality assurance system for ensuring quality and timeliness of reporting continued to be implemented, and the quality of donor reports continued to be generally high.

In addition to funds, UNICEF was pleased to receive technical support through a fully-funded UN Volunteer supported by the Irish Government, as well as a KOICA Multilateral Cooperation Officer supported by the Government of Korea – both of whom provided support to the Health and Nutrition Programme.

The Office is working with donors to provide evidence and data to ensure that direct donor support targets the most vulnerable, especially children and women, in the most efficient and effective way.

Funds were optimally utilized based on the agreed Multi-Year Workplan with implementing partners (IPs). Monthly monitoring indicator updates informed the programme sections on the latest status of funding utilization.

At monthly programme meetings, the use of funds was monitored closely to avoid unnecessary requests for grant extensions.

In 2014, the Lao Office will seek to increase funding from existing donors and will also work to identify new donors.

**Management of Financial and Other Assets**

**Audit Summary:** The Lao PDR Office underwent an internal audit in 2012, with the final observation report received in March 2013. The internal audit made seven recommendations – all identified as “medium priority” – across the areas of governance, programme management and operations. A detailed Audit Response Action Plan was developed and implemented by the Office to address the audit recommendations, this provided an opportunity to strengthen systems and processes around programme and operations management. As a result, the Office closed the year with strengthened and well documented work processes, enhanced programme monitoring, and increased delegation to Programme Results Managers.

**Country Management Team:** The CMT met monthly and played a monitoring and oversight role to improve contribution management, budget control and financial procedures, bank reconciliations, accounting and liquidation of cash assistance. It reviewed progress against the regional Key Performance Indicators, and reported promptly with clear explanations when quarterly regional indicators were not met. The CMT is also responsible for developing and monitoring the implementation of the RAMP and its 2013 meetings were used to review progress against plans and targets. The RAMP was updated in 2013 and defined priority Programme and Management Objectives, as well as key Office policies and procedures as developed by the CMT with the participation of all staff.
Progress Against Key Performance Indicators: The Office carefully monitored Key Performance Indicators and planned the use of funds to have the most significant impact:

• 80 per cent Regular Resources spent (goal at least 95 per cent); funds were intentionally saved for roll-over to 2014 to cover priority needs that were foreseen;

• 67 per cent of grants were used within the original duration of the grant life (goal - 100 per cent); one significant grant for publishing school text books was extended so that printing could be thoroughly managed;

• 69 per cent of Other Resources-Emergency were within the original life of grant (goal - 95 per cent) for community-based disaster risk reduction (N.B. the grant was extended for more effective use of funds);

• 0 per cent of outstanding DCTs were over 9 months at the end of 2013 (goal - less than 5 per cent).

HACT UPDATE

Overview: The HACT policy requires offices to systematically assess the level of risk before making cash transfers to a given partner, and to adjust their method of funding and assurance practices accordingly. The Lao PDR HACT plan was developed and implemented as an assurance plan to satisfy the CMT that cash transfers have been used appropriately. Assurance activities include spot checks (or periodic on-site financial reviews), programme monitoring and scheduled audits, as needed. The assurance strategy includes at least one financial audit for each implementing partner that is expected to receive a minimum of US$500,000 within the programme cycle. The Office also seeks to coordinate with other UN Agencies through the UN Joint HACT Task Force, Co-Chaired by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, to ensure the efficient and effective use of resources.

Micro-assessments: The Office conducted micro-assessments for six IPs in 2006, which were followed by micro-assessments of a further 19 IPs in 2009 as a joint UN effort. An additional eight micro-assessments are planned for the first quarter of 2014

HACT Internal Coordination and Oversight: The Office established a HACT Task Force that includes all Programme Assistants, the Planning and Monitoring Officer, the Senior Budget Assistant, Finance Assistant and the Operation Manager. Periodically, the Deputy Representative and Representative also joined the Task Force Meetings to remain appraised of HACT issues, and ensuring all concerned of the importance of HACT. The Task Force held minuted monthly meetings immediately before the monthly Programme Coordination Committee meetings. The Task Force also shared an update on HACT assurance plan implementation at monthly CMT meetings, at which monitoring and oversight roles are planned’. HACT was also a standard agenda item on for Section Chief meetings.


HACT Training: UNICEF conducts HACT training for all IPs, both as stand-alone activities and as additions to other workshops. In 2013, three training sessions were conducted by the WASH, Child Protection and Health and Nutrition Sections. A joint training session by Communication, Health and Nutrition and Education Programmes is planned for January 2014.

Supply Management
The Office continued to maintain effective support to the supply needs of the Country Programme, and to Procurement Services to the Government. An Annual Supply Plan was developed in the first quarter, and quarterly updates were shared with relevant programme sections during the year. Some useful information such as supply timeframe for each procurement method, technical specifications, and price lists is available on a shared drive for all staff.

One year after the Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION) roll-out, the Supply team reviewed and updated supply work flow processes and supply request forms. The Supply team provided support to programme colleagues on raising Sales Orders, Purchase Requisition, and assisted programmes in solving problems, for example, with Service Entry Sheets and payment requests. The Help Desk was contacted for any problems which could not be resolved locally. The Supply team continued effective learning through knowledge exchange with other UNICEF Offices to maximize the benefits of the system.

Continuing support was extended to IPs on procurement through the Government, including: (i) assistance on reviewing solicitation documents; (ii) participation during bid opening and evaluation, and; (iii) support during contract implementation and monitoring.

In addition, the Supply team delivered procurement training to eight new IPs that included a full proposal for WASH in Schools support by the Government of Australia.

UNICEF continued its participation in the Common Procurement Team (CPT) with other UN agencies. In 2013, the CPT made significant progress on joint procurement activities such as an initiative on arranging Long Term Arrangements for supplies and services including ICT equipment, translation and travel. UNICEF was acknowledged as the leading Agency on procurement through the Government.

A large project commenced to create, print and distribute text books to all primary schools. A technical review of all 28 printing houses in the country took place, in terms of capacity including human resources, which will inform the most efficient way to print and distribute the text books throughout the country.

The Supply unit continued to build good procurement practices, including: (i) allowing end users to provide detailed inputs for technical requirements and joining goods inspections, resulting in end users taking more responsibility; (ii) conducting public bid openings, enabling suppliers to participate and observe and enhancing transparency; (iii) informing unsuccessful bidders in writing, to keep suppliers up-to-date on the tender results and build trust in the efficiency and transparency of the procurement process; (iv) continuing market surveys at central and provincial levels to ensure the existence of and access to sufficient, appropriate and qualified suppliers and contractors; and (v) successfully receiving Expression of Interests for specific and unique needs for the construction category, ensuring that a sufficient number of contractors to participate when doing the bid invitation and that only qualified contractors are invited.

Human Resources

2013 was the last year of the Office’s three-year rolling Human Resources Development Plan, which continued to build staff knowledge and capacity in emerging programmatic and operational areas. Two internal courses on ‘Management Skills Development’ and ‘Coaching and Performance Management’ were jointly conducted by the Operations Manager and the Chair of the Staff Association. The Office continued to institute a
successful programme of Friday Learning Sessions, which are designed to provide key hands-on skills building. This process supported the introduction and implementation of the new operating system, VISION, and the increased delegation of authority to the programme result managers. Priorities for Office-wide learning in 2014 have been identified through the Country Programme’s MTR and will form the basis for the next Human Resources Development Plan. Office-wide learning also benefitted from the considerable individual learning opportunities over 2013, as staff were required to share their individual learning with others upon return to the Office and as per the Office’s Individual Learning Request form.

The Office will continue to support improved setting of individual work and development objectives, building on the training and materials provided. During 2013 there were many WebEx sessions to introduce new work procedures and processes or to clarify or improve the management of the management of DCT/HACT and to achieve improved Year-end closure processes. These WebEx sessions were very useful in clarifying the new initiatives and in resolving recurring problems experienced by field offices worldwide. The sessions were also been effective as cost saving measures and they facilitate connections with New York Headquarters.

The Mid Term Management Review provided an opportunity to review the results-based approach to human capacity and discuss the staffing mix and profile. The Regional HR Officer and Regional Operations Officer both supported an active consultation process with the whole Office to review human capacity requirements.

The Performance Appraisal system functioned well, with good compliance on completion by deadlines. However, the completion of Performance Evaluation Reports by 31 March was affected by staff transfers to other duty stations and the rate went down from 100 per cent to 92 per cent. The Peer Support Volunteer system continued to function well and staff are aware of this resource. The JCC meetings between the Staff Association and management had planned to meet quarterly to address issues of general staff concern but managed to meet only three times. There was active follow-up to the Global Staff Survey in the Rolling Management Plan and a staff team-building retreat with the whole Office was organized to strengthen understanding between colleagues.

Staff are aware of the 10 minimum standards for HIV in the workplan and observe the standards.

**Efficiency Gains and Cost Savings**

The Rolling Management Plan included a strategy and practical measures for efficiency gains in resource use, and costs savings and reductions. The measures implemented include:

- Half-day meetings involving only UNICEF staff held outside the Office do not include lunch;
- Meetings involving only UNICEF staff held outside the Office use low-cost venues. The Office explored using the INGO Centre (i.e. Save the Children International, CORD Centre) and the International Cooperation Training Centre;
- Staff attending workshops in Bangkok returned to Lao PDR on the evening flight on the last day of the workshop unless there were well-founded reasons to stay until the next day. Lao Government counterparts at the same workshop or conference
who wish to return at a later date may do so, but DSA only covered the relevant training or workshop days;
• Options for traveling on budget airlines (for example, Nok Air, Air Asia, Bangkok Airways).

The Representative and the Deputy review all international travel requests and approved only those considered to be essential. Cost savings are estimated to be $5,000 to $10,000 per year.

**Changes in AMP & CPMP**

The final priorities for the Annual Management Plan in 2014, will be developed through an Annual Management Review Workshop planned for February 2014. Programme and management priorities will be designed to address significant risks, and to implement the MTR recommendations.

Special priorities for 2014, as part of the regular programme planning cycle, will be the development of the UNDAF, UNICEF’s Country Programme Document and the Country Programme Management Plan for the 2016-2020 programme cycle.

HACT will be a priority, as well as the full implementation of new supply monitoring procedures.

In follow-up to the MTR recommendations, strengthening cross-sectoral programming will be a priority, including WASH in Schools (WASH and Education Programme and the Supply Sections), and expanded attention to addressing undernutrition (Health and Nutrition, and WASH Programmes).

It is already envisioned by the CMT that a mid-2014 review of staffing will be held in light of the funding situation. While there is funding for all staff supported by Regular Resources for two years, staff funded from Other Resources currently have contracts only until the end of 2014.

**Summary Notes and Acronyms**

Summary Notes and Acronyms

BCP – Business Continuity Plan
C4D - Communication for Development
CB-DRR - Community based Disaster Risk Reduction
CCA – Climate Change Adaptation
CEDAW - Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPD - Country Programme Document
CMAM - Community Management of Acute Malnutrition
CMT - Country Management Team
CPT - Common Procurement Team
CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHS – Demographic and Health Survey
DRR - Disaster Risk Reduction
ECD - Early Childhood Development
ECE - Early Childhood Education
ETF - Emergency Task Force
EU - European Union
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization
GAVI - Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
HACT - Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRBAP - Human Rights-Based Approach
IACP - Inter-Agency Contingency Plan
IASC – Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICT - Information and Communication Technology
IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development
IMEP – Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
INGO - International Non-Government Organisations
IP(s) - Implementing Partner(s)
IYCF - Infant and Young Child Feeding
KOICA - Korea International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR - The Lao People's Democratic Republic
LSB - Lao Statistics Bureau
LSIS - Lao Social Indicator Survey
M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG - Millennium Development Goals
MICS - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MMG - Minerals and Metals Group
MoES - Ministry of Education and Sport
MOH – Ministry of Health
MOHA – Ministry of Home Affairs
MoRES - Monitoring Results for Equity System
MOSS - Minimum Operating Security Standards
MTR - Mid-Term Review
NCMC - National Commission on Mothers and Children
NERI - National Economic Research Institute
NGOs - Non-Governmental Organisations
OEBG - Operational Expenditure Block Grants
RAMP - Rolling Annual Management Plan
SKEAPP - Strategic Knowledge and Evidence for Advocacy, Policy and Programme (UNICEF)
SUN – Scaling Up Nutrition initiative
TWG – Technical Working Group
UN – United Nations
UNCDF - United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDAF - United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund
US$ - United States Dollar
VISION - Virtual Integrated System of Information
WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP - World Food Programme
WHO - World Health Organization
WSP – Water and Sanitation Project (multi-donor initiative)
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