Executive summary

The year under review was the first year of implementation of the 2017–2021 country programme of cooperation (CP) between the Government of Lao PDR and UNICEF. Rolling work plans (RWPs) for 2017–2018 were signed with 14 implementing partners (12 government ministries and two mass organizations) to deliver results for children.

The year was marked by several important achievements:

- The 4th polio outbreak response assessment mission in February 2017 concluded that the transmission of polio virus in Lao PDR has ceased. UNICEF Lao PDR significantly contributed to this achievement by supporting the national polio outbreak response plan; implementing 10 rounds of supplementary immunization activities (SIAs); advocacy, communication, innovative social mobilization; procurement of vaccines; strengthening supply and logistics management; and cold chain improvement.

- To strengthen routine immunization and ensure sustainability of the immunization programme, UNICEF Lao PDR supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) and partners to develop and endorse the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) Transition Plan.

- Multi-sector coordination in national nutrition response was further strengthened through establishment of provincial and district nutrition coordination committees in 10 of 18 provinces. The third national nutrition forum and first-ever national nutrition symposium resulting in the launch of the national nutrition social and behaviour change communication plan and support for nationwide implementation of the Decree on the Code of Marketing of BreastMilk Substitutes.

- The second joint sector review on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) – jointly hosted by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, MoH and UNICEF Lao PDR – assessed the performance of key government ministries (health, public works, education and environment); adopted Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators; and called for enhanced WASH partnership, efficiency and sustainability.

- The second Lao social indicator survey (LSIS II) data collection process, based on UNICEF’s multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS), was successfully completed in November 2017. This will provide up-to-date information to monitor the country’s eighth national socioeconomic development plan (NSEDP) and the SDGs, as well as informing the process of voluntary national review (VNR) in 2018.

- UNICEF Lao PDR established a strong partnership with the National Assembly (NA) around the theme ‘Strengthening parliamentarians involvement for better results for children’. The issues in focus in 2017 were 1) Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, 2) early childhood education (ECE), 3) elimination of open defecation (EOD), 4) child trafficking and 5) public finance for children.
• The process for reporting on the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), addressing children in armed conflict; and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, was launched by the deputy prime minister and president of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC), reflecting the country’s commitment to the Committee on the Rights of the Child process. This commitment was further strengthened during the visit of UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in November 2017 – the first visit to Lao PDR by an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in a decade.

UNICEF also made progress on the office ‘greening’ project for energy efficiency and cost savings. UNICEF Lao PDR joined other UN agencies in the ‘moving together’ carpooling-fleet management initiative, achieving positive results. This initiative was described in UNICEF’s Public Partnership Division publication entitled “UN Coherence in Action Delivering Results for Children”.

The visibility of children’s priorities in the country was enhanced through several high-level visits hosted by UNICEF in Lao PDR in 2017, including a visit by the Queen of Belgium, who is honorary president of UNICEF Belgium’s National Committee (NatCom), Princess Lamia bin Majet Al Saud of Alwaleed Philanthropies, members of the Japanese NGO Vaccines for the World’s Children (JCV) and the UNICEF Australia NatCom.

The European Union (EU) and UNICEF Lao PDR further strengthened their partnership by entering into a new cooperation agreement related to EU education sector budget support (2018-2021), whereby UNICEF Lao PDR will provide complementary technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). In addition, a national information platform for nutrition (NiPN) 2018–2021 initiative, was jointly developed by the EU and UNICEF as an integral part of their Partnership for Improved Nutrition in Lao PDR.

On the operational front, the office achieved excellent results as well. All five audit recommendations from 2016 were closed. UNICEF Lao PDR utilized 100 per cent of funds from expiring grants as well as from non-grant funds. All donor reports were submitted on time. At end-2017 there were no outstanding direct cash transfers (DCTs) for more than nine months.

**Humanitarian assistance**

Although Lao PDR experienced no major humanitarian situation in 2017, sporadic incidents were caused by a prolonged and heavy rainy season and several tropical storms in the region. Heavy rainfall, associated with tropical storm SONCA-17 (25th–28th July) and further heavy rains lasting until 5 August, resulted in flooding in 20 districts of six provinces (Attapeu, Borikhamxay, Champasak, Saravane, Oudomxay, and Xayabury). Of the six, three provinces (Attapeu, Saravane, and Champasak) were most affected. In August a World Food Programme field assessment found that a total of 25,454 people (8,145 children) had been affected.

Neither UNICEF nor other UN agencies received a request from the central government to provide support to the affected population. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), through provincial and district disaster prevention and control committees, provided the affected population with cash assistance, food and animal feed. However, UNICEF Lao PDR provided WASH emergency supplies (prepositioned in 13 provinces) in response to requests by provincial governments. WASH emergency supply items included water buckets, jerry cans, water purifying tablets, coagulant (alum), chlorine granules and soap.
As WASH cluster lead, UNICEF Lao PDR updated WASH preparedness and response plans. The cluster also updated capacity-mapping and 3W matrix of partners. UNICEF Lao PDR actively participated in and facilitated finalizing the inter-agency contingency plan (IACP) in May, 2017, organized by the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office and the Government. UNICEF also participated in a larger crisis simulation in early September, organized by the British Embassy in Vientiane and Bangkok.

With UNICEF Regional Office support, UNICEF Lao PDR organized a half-day emergency preparedness and response (EPR) training for all staff in May, 2017, focused on the roll-out of UNICEF’s new emergency preparedness guidelines and EPR platform in 2018. Two staff members from UNICEF Lao PDR participated in the regional humanitarian action workshop, and two staff members in a regional rapid response roster, training and simulation exercise held in Thailand in September 2017.

**Equity in practice**

The Lao PDR's NSEDP for 2016–2020 aims for graduation from least-developed country (LDC) status, and the creation of a conducive environment for the well-being of children and young people. Fifty-nine percent of the country’s population is under the age of 25.

Due to strong government commitment, Lao PDR made good progress towards achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since 1990, the poverty rate has declined from 46 per cent to 23 per cent and the country has exceeded its national MDG target for education (98 per cent) by achieving 99 per cent net enrolment. There was also significant progress on reducing under-five mortality (from 162 in 1990 to 66 in 2015), based on the latest estimate by the UN Inter-agency Group on Child Mortality. However, other MDG targets – such as eliminating hunger and improving nutrition – were not met.

To deepen understanding of deprivations and inequities, a multiple overlapping deprivation analysis was carried out by the National Economic Research Institute, Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and UNICEF Lao PDR, with technical support from the Economic Policy Research Institute and UNICEF’s Innocenti Office of Research. The resulting analysis highlighted that child poverty and deprivation are geographically concentrated in certain provinces located in the north (Oudomxay, Phongsaly, Houaphan), centre (Savannakhet) and south of the country (Saravan, Sekong, Attapeu), with more modest deprivation levels in the capital city of Vientiane.

The analysis found that around 90 per cent of children under the age of five in Lao PDR suffer from at least one deprivation, and 34 per cent of children experience multiple and overlapping deprivations. Deprivations among young children were particularly high in health, nutrition, water and sanitation and protection from violence. The analysis showed that multiple overlapping deprivations are more likely to occur, and have more serious adverse effects, among socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

To address these inequities and overlapping deprivations among children, the new CP 2017–2021 prioritized provinces and districts with challenging child development indicators. While the programme operates at the national level in the areas of policy advocacy and capacity strengthening, activities to improve service delivery and modelling focus on seven selected provinces where children experience high level of overlapping deprivation and inequities. It seeks to develop synergies among UNICEF programmes and Government sectoral
interventions, in a convergent and integrated manner, to achieve holistic development of the most disadvantaged children in remote communities of Lao PDR.

**Strategic Plan 2018–2021**

The overall goal of UNICEF Lao PDR’s Country Programme is to ensure that children, especially the most disadvantaged, fully enjoy their rights to survival, development and protection. The programme balances support to upstream policy work with capacity strengthening for service delivery and creation of demand for services in disadvantaged communities. The global UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 provides a fresh framework to align UNICEF Lao PDR’s programme priorities.

In line with the Strategic Plan, the country programme employs six mutually reinforcing strategies: (1) evidence-generation and advocacy for policy dialogue to inform and strengthen national policies, laws, budgets and standards; (2) institutional and human capacity strengthening for policy development and execution; (3) communication for development, to promote healthy practices and social norms and facilitate community mobilization and ownership; (4) service delivery, to ensure that community demand is met through strengthened, integrated outreach services and operational capacities, including essential commodities and supplies; (5) broad partnerships for children to ensure aid effectiveness in line with the Vientiane Declaration II on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, 2016–2025, South-South cooperation, and to leverage resources for children; and (6) innovation, to support programme implementation, communication and monitoring of results, including through social media and mobile technology.

**Emerging areas of importance**

**Accelerate integrated early childhood development (ECD).** The new CP for 2017–2021 identified a more holistic approach to early childhood development (ECD) as a strategic priority, through which intersectoral programme convergence will be further enhanced, to effectively support young children’s holistic development and learning.

This approach is based on global evidence stressing the critical importance of a positive environment in the early years of life for children’s development. The strategy is in line with the SDGs, specifically SDG 4.2, which highlights ECD as a foundation for achieving many other goals. It is also aligned with the East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office theme: ‘Early Moments Matter’.

Based on lessons learned and good practices, the current CP takes a two-fold approach to addressing intersectoral challenges in a coordinated manner. Geographical convergence is promoted through identification of seven priority provinces where children are most deprived of their rights to survival and development. By carrying out UNICEF programme interventions in these priority provinces across sectors – health, nutrition, WASH and education – children and their families and communities are receiving greater support for accessing basic services. These concerted efforts are not only being applied to supply-side interventions, but also to demand creation and capacity development of provincial and district authorities, families and communities. UNICEF Lao PDR will further enhance geographic convergence in the coming years, including planned integration and strengthening of child protection-related work on the ground.

Programmatic convergence will also enable a holistic approach to ECD. Acknowledging the essential contribution that parents and caregivers make to young children’s development,
UNICEF Lao PDR embarked on a comprehensive parenting programme aimed at equipping parents and caregivers with understanding, skills and commitment to ensure optimal ECD for their children and minimize their risk.

In partnership with the Lao Women’s Union (LWU), UNICEF Lao PDR prepared a concept note for developing a holistic parenting programme package in 2017. Key stakeholders, including line ministries (Health/Water, Education, Labour and Social Welfare, Information, Culture and Tourism), the national radio station, the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), a mass organization); NGO partners (Plan International and Save the Children International), were also involved in its development.

The parenting programme package will be developed and launched in 2018 in selected priority provinces. Its design and implementation will take fully into consideration issues of gender, equity and social and community dynamics, thereby enabling intended behaviour change among individuals, communities and the society at large. Modelling in priority provinces will be accompanied by evidence-generation and analysis to support national scale-up.

**Summary notes and acronyms**

- **ASEAN** Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- **AWP** annual work plan
- **C4D** communication for development
- **CLTS** community-led total sanitation
- **CMT** country management team
- **COSO-ERM** Committee of Sponsoring Organisations of the Treadway Commission – Enterprise Risk Management
- **CPD** country programme document
- **CPT** Common procurement team
- **CRC** Convention on the Rights of the Child
- **CSO** civil society organization
- **DCT** direct cash transfer
- **DVD** digital video discs
- **DWAp** district-wide approach
- **EAPRO** East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)
- **ECD** early childhood development
- **ECE** early childhood education
- **EOD** elimination of open defecation
- **EPI** expanded programme of immunization
- **ESDP** Education sector development plan
- **EU** European Union
- **GAVI** Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
- **GFS** gravity-fed system
- **HACT** harmonized approach to cash transfers
- **HAPiS** hygiene action led by pupils in schools
- **ICT** Information and communication technology
- **IMNCI** integrated management of new-born and childhood illnesses
- **IPSAS** International public sector accounting standards
- **IVR** interactive voice response
- **IYCF** infant & young child feeding
- **JCV** Vaccines for the World’s Children
- **Lao PDR** Lao People’s Democratic Republic
Following the successful district-wide approach to eliminate open defecation (EOD) in Borikhamxay Province, community sanitation intervention was expanded to new districts in Phongsaly, Savannakhet and Saravane provinces. The capacity of frontline staff in line ministries was strengthened through training and orientation on community-led total sanitation (CLTS). Fifty-six government staff from provincial and district school health task forces were trained as trainers, and 50 pre-primary school teachers were trained on hygiene action led by pupils in schools (HAPiS) in Savannakhet and Oudomxay provinces. Twenty-one government staff members were trained on CLTS, and 780 teachers from 195 primary schools in focus provinces were also trained on operation and maintenance of WASH facilities in schools and use of the ‘Blue Box’ teaching aid, which includes information on menstrual hygiene management (MHM).
Construction was a major supply component in 2017. UNICEF Lao PDR successfully hosted a meeting on planning and management of construction projects in UNICEF-supported programmes and operations, led by UNICEF’s Supply Division, with participation by UNICEF staff members and government counterparts from the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) and the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA).

With UNICEF support, 188 pre-primary teachers and school principals (151 females) enhanced their knowledge and pedagogical skills through experience-exchange workshops and on-the-job training, benefiting 3,120 students (1,450 girls). In addition, 227 primary teachers were continuously coached by trained pedagogical advisors, through which 20,000 students (9,235 girls) enjoyed an improved teaching and learning environment. In partnership with the Lao Women’s Union (LWU), parenting education enabled knowledge and skills enhancement of 2,436 (1,477 female) parents and care-givers in remote communities, bringing about positive behaviour changes to support children’s holistic learning and development. This experience will be documented for further scaling-up of the district-wide approach and contributing to strengthening national systems and sustainability.

**Evidence generation, policy dialogue and advocacy**

UNICEF Lao PDR established a strong partnership with the National Assembly (NA), and organized an orientation session for its members on ‘strengthening Parliamentarian’s involvement for better results for children’ in 2017. This meeting was attended by about 100 Assembly members from all 18 provinces. The orientation was held to update legislators about the situation of children in Lao PDR and the SDGs, and inform Assembly members about key policies affecting child development in Lao PDR.

The issues presented and discussed were: 1) Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, 2) early childhood education, 3) elimination of open defecation (EOD), 4) child trafficking and 5) public finance for children. Policy briefs and advocacy messages on immunization, nutrition, handwashing, open defecation, violence against children and early childhood education were also printed and distributed for further dissemination at both the national and provincial levels.

As a result of this orientation, the issue of the budget allocations for the health and education sectors was actively discussed and debated during the recent 4th Ordinary Session, and the approved budget set aside 21 per cent of total government expenditure for these sectors (13.3 per cent for education and 7.7 per cent for health). The parliamentarians were made aware of the importance of investing in social sectors, particularly health and education, to enable the country’s next generation and workforce to boost national economic and social development. In addition, the National Assembly approved a law on prevention and control of communicable diseases during its 4th Ordinary Session that includes issues related to nutrition, water and sanitation.

**Partnerships**

The EU and UNICEF in Lao PDR have had a long-standing partnership on nutrition since 2011, through a joint project on maternal and young child nutrition security in Asia. This joint nutrition initiative contributed to the formulation of an ambitious ‘partnership for improved nutrition in Lao PDR’, in which the EU and UNICEF jointly lead support for the Lao Government to improve nutrition governance at both at the national and sub-national levels. The EU delegation is also the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) donor convenor, while UNICEF is the UN convenor. Together the EU delegation and UNICEF co-convene quarterly meetings of development partners on food and nutrition security.
The third national nutrition forum, chaired by the deputy prime minister and co-chaired by the Minister of Health, EU and UNICEF, took place on 2 November 2017, and was followed by the first-ever national nutrition symposium. The launch of the national nutrition social and behavioural change communication plan and the national decree on the code of marketing of breast milk substitutes both took place at the third nutrition forum.

This work is a component of a wider partnership between the EU delegation and UNICEF in Lao PDR, following the global partnership dialogue between the European Commission and UNICEF held in October 2015 in Brussels. As suggested by the outcome document, the EU delegation and UNICEF Lao PDR have ‘localized’ the partnership and dialogue, focusing on areas of common interest (such as nutrition, education, child rights, data and evidence generation and budget support) and established a mechanism of joint bi-annual reviews. In this context, a new initiative was developed in the area of education, through which UNICEF will accompany the EU’s sector budget support with complementary activities to strengthen the education system.

**External communication and public advocacy**

UNICEF Lao PDR hosted several high-level visits in 2017: The Queen of Belgium, as honorary president of the UNICEF Belgium National Committee; Princess Lamia bin Majet Al Saud of Alwaleed Philanthropies; members of the NGO, Vaccines for the World’s Children (JCV) and the UNICEF Australia National Committee. These visits helped to raise the profile of children’s priorities in Lao PDR.

The high-level launch for the reporting process on the Convention on the Rights of the Child optional protocols on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, organized under the auspices of the Commission for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC), along with the submission of the country’s periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, constituted important steps toward implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the optional protocols in Lao PDR. The launch, chaired by the deputy prime minister and president of the NCAWMC, reflected the country’s commitment to generating information on these critical issues.

UNICEF continued to provide technical support to the Ministry of Health to fulfil sector commitments of the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) high-level meeting. The Minister of Health led the Lao delegation and participated in the SWA high-level meeting in Washington DC in April, 2017. The meeting was an opportunity for development partners, especially UNICEF and World Bank, to advocate with the Minister of Health about links between stunting and other forms of malnutrition with lack of WASH facilities, and the need for behaviour change in sanitation and hygiene. By end-2017 the country’s comprehensive WASH policy was in the final stage, waiting for final government endorsement, and development of a rural WASH strategy and national WASH-in-schools (WinS) standards was on-going.

**Identification and promotion of innovation**

During the polio outbreak, UNICEF Lao PDR responded to the Government’s call by advocating and engaging with government leaders at all levels, and community leaders in villages. Communication and social mobilization was another priority, along with technical assistance in planning, monitoring and supervision and procurement of polio vaccines.
Two key lessons learned during the outbreak response were: 1) the role of the LFN and the LWU as mass organizations with national outreach, in community mobilization, and 2) recognition of significant equity gaps among ethnic groups, which became a strategic base for prioritizing subsequent supplementary and routine immunization interventions.

With these lessons learned, UNICEF Lao PDR applied innovation approaches in communication and used technology to deliver immunization messages through multiple platforms to reach out to under-served ethnic communities affected by language barriers, poor literacy and limited access to mass media. The process included: 1) translating child health counselling flipcharts into audio visual materials in several languages; 2) use of inexpensive USB and micro SD cards; 3) broadcasting via low-cost projectors, megaphones and mobile phones; 4) in high-risk provinces, counselling messages were put on the smartphones of health workers and village leaders; and 5) use of interactive voice recording (IVR) for outreach monitoring, to ensure broad coverage.

Preparation and adaptation of all IEC materials to ensure culturally appropriateness and involvement by end-users had a positive impact on mobilization and participation of people of different backgrounds during polio vaccination campaigns. Training of health workers and community volunteers in interpersonal communication and social mobilization increased their knowledge and confidence when delivering immunization messages.

**Service delivery**

WASH services, including accessible and gender-sensitive latrines and group handwashing stations, were provided to 85 primary schools. In addition, 19,188 children – including 9,164 girls from 195 primary schools and 1,269 children (629 girls) from 50 pre-primary schools – in focus provinces have access to and use of group hand-washing facilities through HAPiS initiatives. With UNICEF’s direct support, an additional 3,341 people (1,584 females) in rural areas gained access to improved sources of water, through the construction of 10 gravity-fed systems and boreholes, with support from UNICEF.

UNICEF also supported the achievement by Pakkading District in Borikhamxay Province of open defecation-free (ODF) status in 2017. Through the district-wide approach, an additional 114,000 people (57,000 female) now live in ODF communities in Borikhamxay and Saravan Provinces.

To enhance equitable access to ECE services, in coordination with the MoES and village education development committees (VEDC), 20 new community-based school readiness (CBSR) centres were established and started operations in remote communities of two provinces, benefiting 521 children (280 girls). Intensive support to the responsible provincial education and sports services and district education and sports bureaus, strengthening their capacity and strong engagement through VEDCs was provided to ensure ownership and sustainability of CBSR centres.

Digital and social media continued to reach out to benefit of children and women, efficiently channelling through Facebook, YouTube, Twitter the ECD programme ‘My Village’ on secured digital SD cards and mobile speakers, in an effort to reach out to the most isolated children and women. The IVR and memory card projects for outreach monitoring are actively engaged in the health and nutrition sector, with the potential for a transition to the RapidPro platform.

**Human rights-based approach to cooperation**
The NCAWMC began the reporting process on the Convention on the Rights of the Child optional protocols on involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Lao PDR’s state party report on the optional protocols is due for submission in 2018. The NCAWMC conducted awareness-raising activities and gathered data from consultations, interviews and administrative reports. Child protection sectoral analyses were updated to inform the report on implementation status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols in Lao PDR. The launch marked UNICEF’s consistent high-level advocacy and partnership with the Government to ensure that children’s rights are upheld across the sectors.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children made a nine-day visit to Lao PDR from November 8‒16, 2017. This was the first visit to the country by an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in nearly a decade. The Government placed high importance on the visit, and UNICEF was invited to provide technical support throughout the visit. Facilitated by the NCAWMC, the Special Rapporteur held a series of meetings with key stakeholders, including: government ministries, the UN country team, development partners, mass organizations, international NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. She also visited schools, shelters and centres where she met and interacted with children of various backgrounds as well as victims of abuse and exploitation.

The Special Rapporteur concluded that Lao PDR has taken positive steps to address the plight of sale and sexual exploitation of children in the country through specific legislation and incipient regional cooperation. She highlighted three areas of utmost concern and pressing need for action, namely the sale and trafficking of children for sexual and labour exploitation, child and forced marriages and the prostitution of children. She recommended that Lao PDR tackle the problem of impunity for these crimes and develop an integrated national child protection system that provides care and recovery for child victims.

**Gender equality**

UNICEF’s WASH programme applies a gender lens to benefit women and girls. Latrines were designed to be gender-sensitive and safe. The provision of water tanks and tapsat latrines minimizes, and in many cases, eliminates, the need to carry water— a task typically assigned to girls— thus freeing up their time. Gender-segregated latrines and child-friendly handwashing stations are essential parts of the programme for practicing daily group handwashing. Under the HAPI S programme supported by UNICEF Lao PDR, 19,188 children (9,164 girls) from 195 schools in focus provinces now practice daily group handwashing with soap at critical times.

Menstruation is rarely discussed in Lao PDR. UNICEF was one of the first to draw attention to the need for menstrual hygiene management in schools. The design of WinS facilities addresses adolescent girls’ need for access to gender-segregated latrines to ensure their privacy and safety. Schools also help meet the hygiene and sanitation needs of menstruating girls, such as availability of water, soap, waste bins and sanitary pads.

With UNICEF support, the Lao Women’s Union (LWU) at both district and community levels has been coordinating the implementation of community-led total sanitation in one district of Borikhamxay Province. The capacity building and empowerment of women led to mobilizing communities to improve hygiene and sanitation. LWU members are part of district facilitator teams and play an important role in mobilizing communities.
Furthermore, to improve water management and increase the number of women participating in WASH committees (WASHCOM), which provide an opportunity to influence community decision-making processes, UNICEF Lao PDR supported the development of a standard operating procedure for WASHCOMs that require women’s equal participation and support gender-segregated latrine design standards.

**Environmental sustainability**

Lao PDR continued to experience the effects of climate change, and the population was affected by unpredictable weather patterns. The country is observing longer dry seasons that impact food production and create scarcity of drinking water due to the drying up of dug wells and springs, while the rainy season is shorter and more intense, delivering unforeseen impacts to communities such as flash floods, landslides and road destruction, temporary isolation and potential disease outbreaks. Deforestation, mining activities, large scale farming practices characterized by high water demand and pesticide use, are some examples that are contributing to the depletion of finite water resource that require careful management. Children are the most affected by the adverse effects of climate change; specifically prolonged drought and flooding, limiting their access to clean water, intake of nutritional food, health status and access to social services, education and child-friendly environments and protection.

To safeguard investments for children and their families, UNICEF has adopted diverse strategies to cope with current environmental conditions: (1) greater technical design scrutiny of water systems, to ensure consideration of the climate resilience aspect of service delivery, such as installing hand pumps with raised platforms in schools and flood-prone communities to protect them from floods and save energy, since water from the pumps flows into school tanks by gravity; (2) rainwater jars for rain water collection and ferro cement water tanks, instead of large, reinforced cement concrete tanks for spring-fed water supply systems; (3) carrying out community-based disaster risk reduction in 10 flood-prone villages to increase resilience and better prepare for and respond to disasters.

UNICEF continued to implementation the ‘Office Greening’ policy in 2017. Solar energy is used for all office lighting and to run servers and computers. Staffs are encouraged to save energy and resources by using less air conditioning, using office vehicles efficiently and printing fewer documents and emails. UNICEF continued the fleet-sharing initiative with other UN agencies, thus reducing vehicle costs.

**Effective leadership**

The year under review was the first year of implementing the new country programme, which includes seven outcomes: five for programmes, one for management and one for programme effectiveness. The outcomes are measured by 20 outcome indicators and 54 output indicators.

Using the results-based management (RBM) approach to plan, implement and monitor interventions for children, together with all key implementing partners, 10 rolling workplans for 2017-2018 were signed with 12 ministries and two mass organizations during the first quarter, with an allocation of around US$10.9 million for implementation of activities in 2017.

UNICEF Lao PDR was audited by the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations in June 2016, resulting in five recommendations that were shared with the Office in January 2017 (one high-priority and four medium priority recommendations). UNICEF sought to take action in a timely manner, and all five recommendations were closed by December 2017. The internal audit
constituted a good opportunity for ensuring improvement in the system.

UNICEF used both programme and operations management indicators as key management tools for monitoring office performance. Performance management reports were regularly shared every Friday and discussed during heads of sections meeting Monday mornings and monthly country management team (CMT) meetings.

The annual management plan for 2017 was submitted on time; the annual management plan review took place on 13 December 2017. The review was participatory and consultative, addressing key priority areas for 2018 including, but not limited to, provincial-level coordination (capacity building, data and convergence), risk management, office communications and resource mobilization strategy and staff wellbeing.

**Financial resources management**

UNICEF Lao PDR continued to implement its internal finance policy by setting-up indicators that were closely monitored and reported monthly to the country management team.

The office dashboard was monitored regularly to ensure segregation of duties and take immediate action as necessary. It also served to monitor budget utilization, outstanding items (open bank items, GR/IR), outstanding DCT and travel authorizations. The harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) assurance plan was closely monitored each month, and progress shared with the UNICEF Regional Office.

With the introduction of eZHACT in late October, VISION role mapping and the table of authority were reviewed and updated. Monthly bank reconciliation was satisfactory and all open items closed during account closure.

In collaboration with other UN agencies, UNICEF Lao PDR negotiated a preferential exchange rate from US dollars to Lao Kip. As a result, UNICEF had gained US$3,912 cash on foreign exchange transactions by end October, in comparison with the rate proposed by New York.

Utilization rates for regular resources were 100 per cent and other resources close to 96 per cent in 2017. Outstanding DCT over six months were very low, with no quarters ending with DCT over nine months. Other key achievements are noted below.

- Six out of seven spot-checks completed
- Strengthened implementing partners’ financial management system by providing technical support and practical recommendations for active monitoring, for utmost transparency
- Completed three financial management trainings for 65 partners in June 2017
- Initiated a pilot project - developing a financial manual in accordance with international public sector accounting standards for the MoH national immunization programme, to replace current financial management processes
- Periodically identified financial and operational risks, in accordance with the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission/Enterprise Risk Management (COSO-ERM) and UNICEF guidelines
- Timely completion of minimum requirements for spot-checks and micro-assessments.

**Fundraising and donor relations**

UNICEF Lao PDR drafted its resource mobilization strategy in 2017. Fourteen donor proposals were submitted in 2017, of which seven secured funding; five responses were still awaited at
year-end.

UNICEF Lao PDR hosted several high-level visits in 2017: The Queen of Belgium and honorary president of the UNICEF Belgium National Committee; Princess Lamia bin Majet Al Saud of Alwaleed Philanthropies; members of the JCV; and the UNICEF Australia National Committee. The visits raised the profile of children in Lao PDR and attracted additional funding.

UNICEF Lao PDR was selected to provide complementary technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) through the EU’s Education Sector Budget Support (2018-2021). In addition, an initiative for a national information platform for nutrition during the same timeframe was jointly developed by the EU and UNICEF as an integral part of the national nutrition programme, supported by the EU/UNICEF partnership for improved nutrition.

In addition to strong partnership with the EU, UNICEF Australia and UNICEF Lao PDR also entered a multi-year partnership through UNICEF Australia’s international programme strategy (2018-2020), of which UNICEF Lao PDR is one of six priority countries. The main areas of collaboration include nutrition, early childhood development and education, WinS and ECD centres and child protection, with a focus on child justice and disability.

During 2017, 32 narrative donor reports and fund utilization reports were due, all of which 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.

**Evaluation and research**

Evaluation management is guided by UNICEF’s evaluation policy and regional evaluation strategy. In light of the new CP2017-2021 and its costed evaluation plan, UNICEF Lao PDR’s plan for research, impact monitoring and evaluation was developed in the beginning of 2017, outlining research and evaluations required to generate knowledge and thus inform policy, programme and strategies.

The evaluations conducted followed UN Evaluation Group guidelines and criteria; they were conducted by an independent consultant and managed by the chief of the office’s planning, monitoring and evaluation section, with overall guidance by the Representative. Technical support and quality assurance was provided in timely manner by the UNICEF Regional Office whenever requested.

The current country programme development process was informed by various evaluations and research conducted in previous years. The ‘My Village’ - ECD TV programme evaluation report was finalized in 2017. Its main purpose was to highlight findings and conclusions on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the television programme, to inform planning and decision-making. The key findings are being used to develop a ‘parenting education package for Lao PDR, focusing on early childhood development. Key findings have were also shared with the MoES and the Education Sector Working Group, to maximize the availability and utilization of knowledge and information.

Regular follow-up on the implementation of recommendations, management responses and actions is carried out by UNICEF Lao PDR; discussions take place at country management team meetings and subsequently updated.
In 2018 a formative evaluation for scaling-up of the equity-focused, community-based school readiness programme as an entry point for holistic early childhood development is planned, to contribute to learning and knowledge-sharing on equity-focused programming, policies and plans.

**Efficiency gains and cost savings**

In collaboration with other UN agencies UNICEF continued to use a common long-term agreement (LTA) signed between UN agencies and one Internet provider for information and communication technology (ICT) services, resulting in savings of an estimated US$5,000 per year for UNICEF.

UNICEF Lao PDR also renewed a long-term agreement for two years with provincial transport companies. To ensure the security of staff travelling with rental cars, all drivers have certificates delivered by UNDSS after training, and only cars selected by UNDSS are used.

Electricity is one of the largest office expenses. In 2016, UNICEF Lao PDR replaced all fluorescent light bulbs with LED (light-emitting diode) lights. In late December 2016 and beginning January 2017, entire office was equipped with occupancy sensors. The office received a grant from the greening and accessibility fund, amounting to US$50,000, to install a solar panel system. The system became fully functional in end-August 2017. The second phase, with support from the UNICEF Regional Office, will be completed during the first quarter of 2018. In terms of savings, a 20 per cent reduction in electricity consumption was noticed before the solar panel installation, and an evaluation is ongoing through a water and electricity audit with a specialized company. The result of this audit is expected in January 2018.

Lao PDR is one of the pilot countries for fleet management. The project started in September 2016, when UNICEF and other UN agencies (UN Development Programme, World Health Organization and World Food Programme) began to pool vehicles. The UN Country Team reviewed a trend analysis on the pilot project, and found that fleet sharing is contributing to a reduction in the number of UN cars used, as well as reducing fuel consumption by one third. To be fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly, UNICEF Lao PDR will replace one vehicle with a hybrid car starting in January 2018.

**Supply management**

The office continued to maintain effective support to CP supply needs and Government procurement services. An annual supply plan was developed during the first quarter, updated quarterly, and shared with sections throughout the year. Information such as (1) a supply timeframe for each procurement method, (2) technical specifications, (3) standard format for supply forms, and (4) a list of LTAs and services were available on the office shared drive.

The supply team also provided support to programme colleagues on raising sales orders, purchase requisitions, and problem-solving. A kick-off meeting and site visits with programme and contractors were part of the process of clarifying construction documents, construction quality and sharing lessons learnt.

UNICEF continued to participate in the common procurement team with other UN agencies. In 2017, the CPT made significant progress on joint procurement activities, such as an initiative on arranging LTAs for (1) travel services, (2) Internet services and (3) tax-exempt fuel.
In 2017 UNICEF Lao PDR procured supplies, equipment and procurement services, including for a total value of **US$5,552,883.00**.

UNICEF Lao PDR procured supplies, equipment and services with a total value of **US$2,809,309.52**, as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lao PDR 2017</th>
<th>Value of all supply input (goods &amp; services)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Programme supplies – including international freight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Operation supplies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Construction works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total value of supplies in 2017:</strong></td>
<td><strong>US$ 2,809,309.52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During 2017 the value of procurement services amounted **US$ 2,743,573.48**. Vaccines, largely funded by GAVI, cost **US$ 1,907,754.64**, or **69.53 per cent** of the total while **US$835,818.84** in vaccine procurement, or **30.47 per cent**, was funded by Lao Government.

The Supply team continued to build on good procurement practices, namely: (1) allowing end-users to provide detailed inputs for technical requirements and join in goods inspections, resulting in end-users taking more responsibility; (2) conducting public bid openings, enabling suppliers to participate and observe and enhancing transparency; (3) informing unsuccessful bidders in writing, to keep suppliers informed on the tender results and build trust, efficiency and transparency into the procurement process; and (4) continuing market surveys at the central and provincial levels to ensure the existence of, and access to, sufficient, appropriate and qualified suppliers and contractors.

### Security for staff and premises

The main security concern in Lao PDR is the limited capacity of security services provided by the local contractor for the office and residences of international staff members. All UN agencies, in collaboration with UNDSS, are making an effort to ensure that staff and premises are secured.

Several meetings took place with the security company, with a very little improvement observed. The UN Department of Security and Safety (UNDSS) continued to closely monitor the security situation, by making frequent visits to the office and staff residences to guarantee their security, since the security provider is below standard. The security company is planning to increase its price as of 1 January 2018, and the operations management team will discuss all issues at that time. If the new price is accepted, the OMT will ensure that payment increases go to the guards directly.
Daily routine checks were undertaken by UNDSS, with regular visits at international residences, to ensure all security measures were in place, including the presence of security guards and that all houses were in compliance with minimum operating residential security standards.

All drivers participated in refresher training to enhance their driving skills, and underwent regular medical check-ups. All field vehicles and essential staff were equipped with satellite phones and VHF radios, and all staff were asked to have approved security clearances prior to travelling.

The UNICEF office and staff residences were equipped with cameras and closed circuit television surrounding the office, as well as alarm systems in each office to reinforce security measures. The system functions 24 hours a day; the operations manager and ICT officer are the focal points.

Human resources

In line with recruitment for the new country programme, which received PBR approval in September 2017, 12 regular posts were finalized, six of which were carried over from 2016. The current workforce includes 52 staff in total: 12 international professionals, 20 national officers and 20 general services staff.

UNICEF continued to ensure that recruitment of consultants is competitive and in line with organizational policy. A revised standard operating procedure was approved by the country management team in March 2017, in line with the most recent audit recommendation.

During the reporting period, the human resources (HR) unit handled five separation cases due to resignation, one separation case due to retirement, and two separation cases related to post abolition. In addition, four international professional staff members were transferred to other duty stations. A total of 16 fixed-term contracts were renewed for staff (eleven for local staff, and five for international professionals).

As of February 2017, 92 per cent of staff had completed the 2016 performance appraisal system/Achieve requirements. The Performance Appraisal system functions “Achieve” for work planning and the mid-year parts are completed by 100%.

New HR tools/systems were implemented smoothly, including Achieve, MyCase, TMS for online recruitment and on-boarding, simplifying processes and allowing more time for staff to focus the more strategic side of HR work.

A total of US$4,000 received from the UNICEF Regional Office was used for training in competency-based interviews, with participation by 14 staff members, training on eTools for all staff and team-building for all staff, combined with the annual management review meeting held on 13 December 2017. Training in performance management, one of the key planned training sessions for all staff, was postponed until the first quarter of 2018.

Effective use of information and communication technology

In 2017, the ICT team continued its support by setting up cloud-based office automation tools, the innovative business solution that supports efficient and effective implementation of office core functions and programme implementation. Cloud-based office automation tools such as Office365, Outlook, Skype for Business, OneDrive, SharePoint were fully functional in 2017. Training in eTools began with two main modules: trip management and partnership management.
The failure-over internet connectivity and high-availability firewall contribute to the success and sustainability of programme communication and exchange via cooperate applications, email, and web conferencing, VISION and financial management. The availability of universal Wi-Fi provides a wireless connection to corporate office systems, promoting mobility and cost-effectiveness. Using the UN Common LTA for Internet service providers also contributes to cost-saving. Migration to Windows 10 was 100 per cent achieved on office desktops/laptops. The Hyper-V host platform, holding multiple virtual servers for ICT functions, was a main cost effectiveness solution.

RapidPro – an open-source communication platform was introduced in the office for the programme section to use as a tool that could be customized to connect citizens and critical services to benefit the most disadvantaged children.

Part of the ‘go green’ initiative involving LED lights and light sensors, a 24KW/Hour solar energy system was installed with six inverters and 96 solar panels on the office roof, contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions by roughly 26 tons per year. Solar energy covers the power loads in the data centre, some computer devices and office night lighting, which helps to reduce electrical power usage cost.

UNICEF also received funding from the Regional Office to implement the second phase of the solar energy system, which will cover the entire office by the first quarter of 2018.

Programme components from RAM

ANALYSIS BY OUTCOME AND OUTPUT RESULTS

OUTCOME 1 By 2021, national policy environment and systems are improved for disadvantaged children, guided by knowledge and data

Analytical statement of progress
The advocacy, communication and partnerships programme worked closely with all programme sections and related ministry counterparts to support its communication objectives – from community-level behavioural change to national advocacy aimed at policy development. At the international level, the programme contributed to leverage funding and commitments on behalf of children in Lao PDR.

Visibility of children’s priorities in the country was enhanced through several high-level visits hosted by UNICEF in Lao PDR, including visits of Queen Mathilde of Belgium, honorary president of UNICEF Belgium’s National Committee; Princess Lamia bin Majet Al Saud of Alwaleed Philanthropies; members of the JCV and the UNICEF Australia National Committee.

In 2017 UNICEF Lao PDR and partners implemented a visibility plan to highlight the EU’s critical support for nutrition-related actions to improve nutrition outcomes in the country. Through a wide range of advocacy, public awareness, social media and interpersonal communication, the office managed to improve beneficiaries’ level of understanding about the range of services provided to improve their nutrition status.

Efforts were also made to increase the knowledge and capacity of mass organisations (particularly the LFNC) on issues affecting children in nutrition, health, sanitation, protection and
early childhood education, and to promote actions for children through national, provincial and village networks.

A partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was formalized in 2017 to support the Government to respond to international commitments and treaties for children and to position children in SDG implementation in Lao PDR.

**OUTPUT 1** By 2021, a broad range of partners for children established through advocacy, communication and resource mobilisation

**Analytical statement of progress**

UNICEF Lao PDR established a broad range of partnerships for children, locally and internationally, through advocacy, communication and resource mobilization. UNICEF Lao PDR worked closely with mass organizations such as the LFNC and LWU to reach children in remote areas, especially those from minority ethnic groups. Within the agreed work plan between UNICEF Lao PDR and UNICEF Australia/Minerals and Mines Group partnership, UNICEF supported the Lao Women’s Union and health authorities at the provincial and district levels to organize targeted advocacy meetings with provincial and district leaders and departmental and coordination structures, such as provincial and district administrations, mothers and children committees and village leaders.

With support from the EU and UNICEF, the LFNC organized a nutrition workshop and training for 66 of its officials in 18 provinces in Vientiane, and in December 2017, it conducted advocacy and awareness campaigns (in rural areas of Xiengkhouang and Saravan provinces) on issues related to child survival, development and protection.

In 2017, UNICEF supported a high-level Ministry of Foreign Affairs delegation to participate in the UN General Assembly Session and other meetings related to the SDGs and children, and supported a consultation for drafting a voluntary national review on the SDGs. UNICEF Lao PDR also supported the production of promotional material on the SDGs, such as notebooks and calendars with SDGs information.

**OUTPUT 2** By the end of 2021, social norms and behaviours related to child survival, development and protection are improved through effectively coordinated C4D initiatives, technical oversight and institutional capacity building

**Analytical statement of progress**

To respond to community needs, a participatory workshop with all key stakeholders was conducted on 29 November 2017 using existing evidence as well as participants’ experiences to define key areas of the parenting package, develop a theory of change to guide action and lay the foundation for its development. It brought together government representatives, national and international organizations and community representatives to reflect on content, delivery, branding and supporting activities in a participatory manner, thus creating buy-in and responding to participants’ needs. The workshop to define priority areas, modalities and implementation of a comprehensive and sustainable parenting package for improved child wellbeing took place under the leadership of the LWU, with participation by line ministries, mass organizations and international NGOs.
Following communication for development interventions in 2017, improved capacity of health workers and LWU health volunteers to provide education and counselling support on infant and young child feeding (IYCF)/WASH practices for pregnant and lactating women and caregivers of children under two years of age was reported in the seven focus provinces.

**OUTPUT 3** By the end of 2021 key communication outlets (media, mass organisations, youth media) have increased capacity to advocate for child rights.

**Analytical statement of progress:**
The Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism and other key partners for media and communication activities worked together to conduct media training on child rights and supported the youth media initiative to promote the participation of young people in public life. Children's issues, along with government and UNICEF interventions, were regularly featured in the media in 2017, including radio, TV and newspapers in both Lao and English. Lao mass media has now a Facebook page (Media Laos), which serves as a powerful tool for disseminating information on development and child rights-related issues.

During 2017 UNICEF continued its support to youth media initiatives in all 18 provinces, promoting youth participation in radio programmes and social media channels. The youth media Facebook page has now 8,195 likes. In each province, at least 10 young people were expected to be trained yearly, however, the number rose to 15 as more young people expressed their interest in being trained as young reporters. Despite the limited resources available, youth radio is still functioning and promoting issues related to child rights.

‘My Village’, the first-ever television programme for young children in Lao PDR, now includes 41 episodes, which were broadcast by both central and provincial TV stations. Children and teachers in pre-schools in far-distant rural areas also enjoyed ECD TV and conducted teaching and learning activities in pre-schools and kindergarten.

**OUTPUT 4** Effective and efficient management of the communication programme.

**Analytical statement of progress**
1. Periodic and timely field visits were conducted to monitor project activities, organized visits from UNICEF National Committees visits, and attended workshops and trainings.
2. Consultants were contracted to support graphic design, photography, translation, artwork, editing, video and radio production, story writing and data analysis to support project implementation.

**OUTCOME 2** By 2021, children, especially most disadvantaged and in hard-to-reach areas, have access to quality early childhood and basic education services, and complete the basic education cycle with improved learning outcomes.

**Analytical statement of progress**
Following the achievement of the MDG on universal access to primary education with gender parity, Lao PDR has made positive and steady progress in quantitative and qualitative improvement across the education sector. The education management information system (EMIS) showed that the rising trend in ECE enrolment (ages 3-5) continued in 2017, reaching 52.7 per cent (boys 52.5; girls 52.8). The percentage of new entrants in Grade 1 with ECE
experience increased from 51.2 in 2016 to 61.7 in 2017. Both the primary repetition rate and drop-out rate continuously declined, from 5.8 per cent to 4.1 per cent (boys 4.8; girls 3.4) and from 7.8 per cent to 4.4 per cent (boys 4.7; girls 4.1), respectively. The continued rise in primary school survival rates, which increased from 79.6 per cent in 2016 to 81.1 per cent in 2017 (boys 79.7; girls 82.6), was accompanied by increases in the lower-secondary gross enrolment rate: from 78.1 per cent in 2016 to 82.9 per cent in 2017 (boys 85.1; girls 80.5).

Although these achievements met annual targets, 25 per cent of five-year-old children remain left behind, lacking access to ECE services, with significant disparities between urban and rural locations and among ethnic groups. This could explain the persistently high repetition rates in early grades (Grade 1: 9.2; Grade 2: 4.3) and drop-out (Grade 1: 6.9; Grade 2: 3.6). While girls are less vulnerable throughout primary school, their situation become worse in lower-secondary where gender disparity is significant. Ongoing loss of students across the system highlights concerns about education quality; meeting the lower-secondary target will require further efforts to address losses in primary education.

The CP education programme for 2017 –2021 was designed based on the above-mentioned rationale, and aims to tackle key obstacles to the achievement of enhanced, equitable access and learning of children in ECE and basic education. The programme directly contributes to ongoing education reform, based on the eighth education sector development plan (ESDP), and the NSEDP and the SDGs. Due to ongoing restructuring within the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), programme operation in 2017 required a flexible approach and timely adjustments. UNICEF mitigated the risk of delays in programme implementation through close communication with MoES.

During the first year of the current CP in 2017, continued MoES-UNICEF’s joint efforts for results-based sector planning and development was further enhanced. The costed education and sport information management system (ESMIS) strategic development plan for 2018-2022 was developed and officially endorsed. An institutional development plan for the Institute for Education Administration Development (IFead) was finalized and the ECE costed action plan for 2018-2022 was developed in alignment with the eighth ESDP. UNICEF played a leading role in supporting the MoES with all of these national plans, building on solid situation analyses and engaging all key departments and development partners, to facilitate a harmonized approach. These efforts will inform MoES annual workplans and the upcoming ESDP mid-term review (MTR), scheduled for 2018, through the education sector working group mechanism.

Continuous capacity building of the MoES on SDG4 advancement took place in coordination with UNICEF EAPRO and UNESCO Bangkok, through engagement in the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030, and the SDG4 regional workshop on South-South cooperation in Malaysia. Agreed follow-up actions were taken by the MoES, with support from UNICEF, UNESCO and other development partners, through the education sector working group.

Evidence-based policy advocacy resulted in MoESactions. UNICEF-supported reviews of primary student learning outcomes, the student assessment system and pedagogical supervision system led the MoES to develop a coherent national policy framework on student learning assessment, which is currently underway, with UNICEF support. In addition, a review by the MoES/UNICEF/Australian Government partnership for textbook management and system strengthening served to inform the national textbook policy.
OUTPUT 1 By 2021, national and sub-national government ministries and other key stakeholders have improved capacity to implement and monitor inclusive, equitable and quality ECE services.

Analytical statement of progress
During 2017 significant achievements were made in system enhancement. With UNICEF’s support the SRCs were revised, one of the first revisions made in the East-Aria and Pacific region. Based on the revised SRCs, the national pre-primary curriculum and teachers’ guides were revised enabling enhanced quality, relevance, age-appropriateness and continuum to the primary level. The revised curriculum will be rolled-out after a pilot in 2018.

With support from UNICEF Lao PDR and NGOs, ECE quality standards for kindergartens, pre-primary classes and community-based ECE centres were developed. Setting national standards through a common framework across the three types of ECE services will enable a more systematic approach to quality assurance. The standards will be piloted in 2018, prior to finalization.

UNICEF promoted results-based planning by developing a costed ECE action plan aligned with ESDP, based on in-depth analysis of the ECE sub-sector and sector finance. This effort will inform the MTR of the ESDP, planned for 2018. UNICEF supported ensuring full engagement of relevant line departments in the MoES, contributing to their ownership, coordination and capacity building.

Quality improvement of pre-primary schools was strengthened in remote and disadvantaged communities. With UNICEF’s support, 188 pre-primary teachers and school principals (151 females) enhanced their knowledge and skills through experience-exchange workshops and training, which benefited 3,120 students (1,450 girls). UNICEF provided 141 ECE toolkits and storybook sets to all 141 pre-primary classes in six districts in three provinces, benefiting 3,011 children (1,822 girls). The DESBs and PESSs in the same districts/provinces were assisted to strengthen their capacity for monitoring and mentoring support, including their school visits.

Joint efforts by the MoES and UNICEF to enhance equitable access to quality ECE programmes were further advanced through an alternative approach. In coordination with the MoES and VEDCs, 20 new CBSR centres were established and began operating in remote communities in two provinces, benefiting 521 children (280 girls). Intensive support was provided to these new target districts/provinces as a key strategy to make the centres fully operational. Strong community engagement through VEDCs was ensured for ownership and sustainability of CBSR centres. A formative evaluation of this alternative ECE model will be conducted in 2019, prior to possible mainstreaming and enhanced investment in CBSR.

UNICEF’s partnership with the LWU further advanced a holistic approach to ECD. Parenting education was conducted in five districts in Saravan Province, delivering key behaviour change messages to support children’s learning and development. This benefited 2,436 parents and care-givers (1,477 females). Based on this experience, development of a more holistic cross-sectoral parenting education package was initiated with LWU and NGO partners, to be launched in 2018.

Overall, the programme is on track for both qualitative and quantitative targets. Intensive capacity-building efforts made with the new target districts and provinces proved to be strategic for achieving programme results.
OUTPUT 2 By 2021, national and sub-national Government Ministries and other key stakeholders have improved capacity to implement and monitor inclusive, equitable and quality basic education services, focusing on early grades.

Analytical statement of progress
During 2017 evidence-based education quality reform was further advanced. UNICEF supported three analytical reports – on primary student learning outcomes; the student assessment system and the pedagogical supervision system – that were officially endorsed by the MoES for publication. Based on these reviews, MoES, UNICEF with other development partners started to develop a coherent national assessment policy framework for general education. This will help to ensure the alignment of relevant policies, learning standards, curriculum and materials, teacher education, classroom practices and quality assurance. The policy framework is expected to be finalized in 2018.

With UNICEF’s support, and based on a comprehensive EMIS situation analysis, the costed ESMIS strategic development plan 2018-2022 was developed and officially endorsed by MoES. In coordination with Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and EU, the plan has enabled MoES to take a more systematic and harmonized approach to overall management the ongoing information system development in the sector, including SDG4 localization. System strengthening in education administration was advanced through finalization of the IFEAD institutional development plan. All concerned MoES line departments and development partners were engaged, through the education sector working group, in ensuring a coordinated approach.

Focused efforts by the MoES and UNICEF to improve the quality of primary education continued in remote and disadvantaged communities during 2017. Some 20,000 primary students (9,235 girls) attending 227 primary schools enjoyed an improved teaching-learning experience by teachers, assisted by PAs. UNICEF supported training of the PAs for school outreach. In addition, 226 school principals were oriented on data management, strengthening their skills. The six new target DESBs and three PESSs obtained UNICEF support through capacity building to enable them to better assist the primary schools in their catchment areas.

In the transition from the previous to the new country programme, solid documentation of the previous years’ support and necessary evidence generation was further enhanced. A review of the MoES/UNICEF/Australian Government partnership on strengthening the textbook management system was completed; its key findings and recommendations informed finalization and implementation of the new national textbook policy. A draft study on out-of-school children was prepared, through collaboration with UNICEF EAPRO and UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics; it awaits validation and finalization in early 2018. In partnership with UNICEF EAPRO and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, the SouthEastAsia primary learning metrics field trial report and capacity building plan were completed, presenting strategic pathways for the main survey. For the new country programme, the process of designing the MoES-UNICEF education programme baseline survey got underway in 2017; data collection is scheduled for February 2018.

The Programme is on track, with some delays experienced in development of the learning assessment system and sub-national/school-level work. For assessment-related work, timely implementation was a challenge, mainly attributable to the highly complex nature of work and engagement of multiple stakeholders. More robust coordination led by MoES is necessary. For
sub-national/school-level work, limited capacity among DESBs/PESSs was found to be a critical factor. UNICEF will continue to provide focused support to address these bottlenecks in 2018.

OUTPUT 3 Effective and efficient management of the Education Programme.

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF Lao PDR efficiently mobilized necessary technical expertise, through staff and partnerships, to provide effective strategic and technical advice, strengthen partners’ capacity, engage in partnerships and effectively and efficiently manage the implementation of this programme component.

OUTCOME 3 By 2021, more children and women in Lao PDR, especially most vulnerable and hard-to-reach, utilise quality essential health and nutrition services and benefit from positive care practices during pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF, with high level political commitment of the Lao PDR Government, continued to scale-up efforts to achieve universal health coverage and increase awareness of the need for strong and resilient health and nutrition systems, especially for the most disadvantaged populations. In 2017, steady progress was made toward reducing child and maternal mortality. The UN estimates the current under-five mortality to be 64 per 1,000 live births (IGME 2105), against a national target of 40 by 2020; while the maternal mortality ratio is estimated at 190, against a target of 160 per 100,000 live births. Reductions in stunting prevalence among children under five years of age also continued – measured by the Lao child anthropometric assessment survey in 2015 at 36 per cent –down from 44 per cent, as measured by the MICS in 2012.

Significant policy level achievements were also made in 2017. Key highlights include UNICEF’s technical and advocacy support for the drafting and review process of an immunization law to achieve universal coverage of immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases, as well as for the Decree on the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, which will be submitted for the prime minister’s signature in the first quarter of 2018. High-level advocacy and leadership on nutrition was maintained through the national nutrition forum and the first-ever nutrition symposium, in partnership with EU and other development partners. The secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee received UNICEF support to promote multisectoral coordination for nutrition, involving health, agriculture, education and planning. As co-convener, with the EU, of the development partners group for food and nutrition security, UNICEF provided support for the annual stakeholder mapping exercise of nutrition partners’ programmes in the country and strengthened capacity of the SUN focal point in the Ministry of Health. Data on financial gaps is currently being used to advocate with the Government for an increased allocation of the domestic budget to nutrition for 2018 and beyond. Sustainable financing for child health services was secured with the adoption of the GAVI transition plan, which provides a roadmap for Lao PDR’s transition to a fully self-financing immunization programme by 2021. National guidelines on micronutrients were drafted through UNICEF support to the Nutrition Centre. The guidelines provide clinical guidance for health providers on protocols for preventing and treating micronutrient deficiencies, and will be rolled out nationwide in 2018.

Children and women, especially those children who are hardest to reach, continue to have increasing access to health and nutrition services. Increased coverage of immunization services, in collaboration with WHO, was attained with the help of outreach campaign activities,
effective vaccine management and disease surveillance. An integrated national measles/rubella and polio campaign was implemented, during which 702,768 children under five were vaccinated, resulting in a national coverage level of 98 and 95 per cent, respectively. Polio virus transmission was successfully interrupted, and to further strengthen children’s immunity, vaccination with inactivated polio virus vaccine was intensified in four targeted provinces. The second dose of measles/rubella vaccine was successfully introduced to increase overall population immunity, especially among children under two. Rotavirus and HPV vaccine introduction applications were approved for 2019.

As part of UNICEF’s effort to ensure health access for the most remote communities, a reproductive maternal, nutrition and child health (RMNCH) essential service package for community-level health and nutrition, as well as a national scale-up plan for integrated management of newborn and childhood illnesses (IMNCI) services were developed, in close collaboration with WHO and the United Nations Population Fund, through the UN joint programme. A roadmap was developed for early essential new-born care roadmap, with UNICEF and WHO support, including ‘kangaroo mother care’ for management of pre-term or low birthweight newborns.

The country’s health system was strengthened at the district level through bottleneck analysis and intensified planning and monitoring, in collaboration with Luxembourg Development, and the IYCF programme was expanded to nine districts. Integrated management of acute malnutrition guidelines were developed to support health facility managers and health workers to deliver quality treatment services for children under five with severe acute malnutrition. The guidelines provide clinical guidance, tools and job aids for in-patient, out-patient and community active case finding.

A strategic plan for social/behavioural change communication was developed in collaboration with other nutrition partners, such as the EU, to promote adequate community-level nutrition practices. Immunization and health messages in local languages were also developed, using a real-time IVR system for outreach monitoring and micro cards for increasing health knowledge, with the aim of improving outreach monitoring and health education in Luangnamtha and Savannakhet provinces. With these innovations, frontline health providers and community health agents possess enhanced interpersonal communication skills for promoting health and nutrition practices across 32 districts in 13 provinces.

Among the key remaining challenges is the limited capacity of frontline workers to increase access to and demand for integrated maternal and child health and nutrition services for the unreached. Insufficient community participation in planning, implementation and monitoring, and limited communication tools for ethnic languages also reduced the impact of interventions. Health and nutrition information systems and the district health information system remain inadequate. The sub-national/provincial coordination mechanism for health and nutrition will continue to receive attention, in order to strengthen capacity to deliver integrated services, especially for underserved communities in hard-to-reach areas. The National Nutrition Committee Secretariat’s limited capacity to provide strategic guidance and multisectoral planning support to provincial nutrition committees will continue to be addressed in 2018.

**OUTPUT 1** Effective & Efficient management of the Health & Nutrition programme

**Analytical statement of progress**
New staff that joined UNICEF’s health and nutrition section in 2017 contributed to the effective implementation and management of the UNICEF Lao PDR health and nutrition programme:

- Chief of Health and Nutrition (January 2017)
- NOB – nutrition officer (January 2017)
- International immunization specialist (March 2017)
- Programme assistant (March 2017)
- International UN joint programme coordinator (September 2017).

Recruitment of additional staff (NOB – health officer and NOB – nutrition officer) is ongoing, and should be completed in early 2018.

**OUTPUT 2** By 2021, strengthened health sector capacity for integrated MNCH service delivery

**Analytical Statement of Progress**

The essential RMNCH service package was developed with support from UNICEF, WHO and other partners. It outlines the services that should be provided along the continuum of care and at what level. With UNICEF support, institutionalization of the community health system was identified as an important element of health sector reform. As part of developing the strategic action plan for community health service delivery, the MoH convened its first national consultative meeting. South-South cooperation with Thailand and Vietnam received support from UNICEF; study tours to these countries were organized, examining issues such as community health care for minority ethnic groups and remote communities. Country experiences were presented and discussions were held on how to learn from good practice and adapt such experiences to the Lao context.

UNICEF supported strengthening of district health systems, and planning meetings were conducted in Savannakhet and Bokeo provinces. Bottleneck analysis, planning and monitoring exercises were conducted with district health managers; the process was documented and disseminated in an MoH report.

UNICEF served as the convening and administrative agency for UN joint programme coordination on RMNCH, resulting in strengthening the MoH through key processes and events, including a joint field visit with the donor and MoH to Savannakhet Province.

Advocacy for increased domestic funding for prioritized interventions resulted in increased funds for key interventions. However, the increase mainly covered increased operational costs, and financial gaps are still significant for quality health services at all levels.

The IMNCI assessment was conducted, and its findings led to clear recommendations for immediate, short-term and medium-term actions. The scale-up plan for IMNCI, including community-IMNCI interventions, focuses on skills-building for front-line health workers, improved referral systems, developing a standardized toolkit and improving community care behaviours and practices. An immediate action by the MoH was the procurement and promotion of the use of zinc with oral rehydration solution to manage diarrhoea.

Lao PDR’s early essential newborn care roadmap was developed with UNICEF/WHO support, and included ‘Kangaroo mother care’ for managing preterm/low birthweight new-borns. UNICEF initiated discussions about establishing a centre of excellence for maternal and new-born care in 2018. Community newborn care also received support, and the Centre for Information and Education is currently developing a package of materials on this topic, with UNICEF support
Funding was successfully mobilized from the HNA Group through the proposal submission for UNICEF Lao PDR to support the MoH by reaching women and children in 11 provinces, including for facility-based emergency obstetric and new-born care.

The IVR/SD card pilot project for outreach monitoring and health education was scaled-up to all five districts in Luangnamtha and four districts in Savannakhet, and provides feedback.

OUTPUT 3 By 2021, improved MOH capacity for EPI

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF supported the national immunization programme to implement routine and supplementary immunization activities:

Supplementary immunization activities. One integrated national measles/rubella and polio campaign was carried out in January 2017; 702,768 children under the age of five were vaccinated, achieving national coverage of 98 per cent and 95 per cent, respectively. Polio virus transmission was successfully interrupted, and to further strengthen children’s immunity vaccination with inactivated polio virus vaccine was intensified in four targeted provinces.

Routine immunization: UNICEF provided technical assistance for the design of the Lao PDR GAVI transition plan in 2017 and preparations for the Gavi board meeting, held 28-to-30 November. In line with the transition plan, an Immunization Law was drafted and debated at the provincial level. Rotavirus and human papilloma vaccine (HPV) vaccine introduction applications were approved for 2019. Measles/rubella second dose was successfully introduced to increase the population’s immunity, especially children under two-years-old.

Advocacy and communication for immunization: LWU front-in e health providers and community health agents were trained in interpersonal communication skills across 32 districts in 13 provinces.

Vaccines and cold chain procurement: Through procurement services, 179 refrigerators, cold chain spare parts and all routine vaccines for the Government of Lao PDR were provided. UNICEF procured and donated 664,000 doses of BCG vaccines, in line with the MOH vaccine procurement plan.

OUTPUT 4 By 2021, strengthened multisectoral capacity for scaling up nutrition interventions

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF worked with other UN agencies to consolidate progress on strengthening institutional arrangements for the National Nutrition Committee, and provided support for the establishment of provincial and district coordination committees and secretariats. The Committee’s secretariat received support to conduct progress review meetings and produce six monthly reports, and the Committee received support to convene key sectors (health, agriculture, education and planning) for the annual Nutrition Forum, at which progress toward NPAN targets was reported.

A key achievement of the third national nutrition forum was the development of an outcome statement on nutrition that reaffirmed commitments by government and development partners to support the processes needed to scale up nutrition actions at the provincial and district levels.
The forum provides a space for sharing information and strengthens the willingness of sub-national stakeholders to commit to follow-up actions at the provincial level that support scaling up of nutrition interventions.

As co-conveners of the Development Partners Group for food and nutrition security, the EU and UNICEF convened three of the four planned quarterly meetings to share updates on multi-sectoral coordination with other development partners, to ensure harmonized support for implementation of the national nutrition strategy.

UNICEF provided technical support to strengthen the capacity of the SUN focal point in the MoH to manage SUN meetings every six weeks and supported an update of the Lao country profile in the 2017 SUN progress report.

Support was provided by UNICEF for the annual stakeholder mapping exercise. Programmatic and financial information was used to inform the progress report presented by the MoH at the third national nutrition forum. Data on financial gaps is currently being used to advocate with the Lao Government for increasing the domestic budget allocation for nutrition in 2018 and beyond.

The decree on the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes was drafted with support from UNICEF, and will be submitted for the prime minister’s signature in early 2018.

UNICEF support to the Nutrition Centre contributed to the drafting of national micronutrient guidelines, which provide clinical guidance for health providers on protocols for preventing and treating micronutrient deficiencies.

A social and behaviour change plan for nutrition was drafted to serve as a ‘living document’, enhanced by information gained through qualitative research being carried out by different partners and line ministries.

Guidelines on integrated management of acute malnutrition were developed to support health facility managers and health workers to deliver quality treatment for children under five with severe acute malnutrition. The guidelines provide clinical guidance, tools and job aids for inpatient, out-patient and community active case finding.

Despite these achievements, progress remains slow in two key areas that could delay implementation of nutrition action at the sub-national level:

(i) Weak nutrition information systems at the national, provincial and district levels to inform planning and targeting of interventions.

(ii) Limited technical capacity of the NNC Secretariat to provide strategic guidance and multisectoral planning support to provincial nutrition committees.

OUTCOME 4 By 2021, children in Lao PDR are better protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation

Analytical statement of progress
During 2017 the child protection programme made strategic efforts to combine upstream work on policy development with modelling of service delivery for women and children. This approach contributed to a more balanced development of child protection in Lao PDR, characterized by strengthened capacity for law enforcement and availability of prevention and response services
for children, enabling them to survive and thrive in an enabling environment free from abuse, neglect, violence, stigma and exploitation.

The NCAWMC sponsored a high-profile launch for the reporting process on two CRC Optional Protocols (children in armed conflict and child trafficking, prostitution and pornography). The launch was chaired by the deputy prime minister and president of the Committee and attended by 31 vice-ministers or vice-governors, reflecting the country’s commitment to generating information on these sensitive, but critical, issues. The NCAWMC conducted awareness-raising activities and gathered data from consultations, interviews and administrative reports. Child protection sectoral analysis was updated to inform reporting on the status of implementation of the CRC and its optional protocols in Lao PDR. The launch reflected UNICEF’s consistent high-level advocacy and partnership with the Government to ensure that children’s rights are upheld.

The Committee facilitated a nine-day visit to Lao PDR by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on the sale and sexual exploitation of children – the first visit by an UN Special Rapporteur to the country in nearly a decade, reflecting increased openness by the Government to address child rights issues. The SR held a series of meetings with relevant stakeholders including government ministries, the UNCT, development partners, mass organizations, INGOs, CSOs and the private sector. She also visited schools, shelters and centres where she met and interacted with children from various backgrounds and victims of abuse and exploitation. The SR concluded that Lao PDR has made good progress on child protection but needs to do more to tackle serious problems such as child trafficking, forced marriage, prostitution, online sexual abuse and sexual exploitation by travellers and tourists.

2017 marked an important milestone in UNICEF’s work on parenting. A workshop on ‘Comprehensive and sustainable parenting package for improved child wellbeing’ was hosted by the LWU, with participation by all UNICEF programme sections and their key implementation partners (including the MOE, MOH, NCAWMC, Lao National Radio, youth media, and Lao Front). The workshop led to buy-in to the parenting education programme by government counterparts, who gained knowledge on the significance of integrated early childhood development and the role of communication for development in facilitating behaviour change. Consensus was reached on priority areas and communication modalities for development of the parenting education package. Messages promoting behaviour change related to key child protection issues (such as birth registration, violence against children and child marriage) were identified as major components of the parenting education package, to be delivered through communication for development.

As part of its long-term efforts to support the social work profession in Lao PDR, UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to develop a training manual for para-social workers, in collaboration with the National University of Laos. In late 2017 the draft was being tested and simplified to meet the needs of Ministry staff, para-social workers and volunteers at the district and village levels.

**OUTPUT 1** By 2021, strengthened national capacity to legislate, plan and budget for scaling up interventions that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation

**Analytical statement of progress**

Major headway was made in 2017 in the area of juvenile justice, with funds from UNICEF Australia. With coordination by the juvenile justice committee for children, a sub-committee responsible for developing a training manual on child rights and justice for children was formed,
consisting of members from the Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Justice, People’s Supreme Court and People’s Supreme Prosecutor. A multi-stakeholder workshop was organized in Dec 2017 to agree on an outline and key content for the manual, which will eventually be integrated into curricula at the Police Academy and the central-level research and training institute for judges and prosecutors.

The programme continued to support capacity building of law enforcement officers, social welfare staff and concerned officials to implement newly approved laws, particularly those on juvenile criminal procedure and on preventing and combating violence against women and children. Altogether 415 officials (122 females) judges, judicial assistants, prosecutors, police officers and social welfare sector staff from 17 provinces and Vientiane Capital City received orientation on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the new Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedures.

UNICEF developed a report on rapid assessment of children without parental care, for finalization by the MoLSW. The report's recommendations will inform the development of national alternative care guidelines for children, in alignment with international guidelines, to be carried out in 2018.

The NCAWMC organized a high-level launching of the reporting process for the state party report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. The launch was chaired by the deputy prime minister, and included participation by 13 vice-ministers and 18 vice-governors. The launch served as an orientation for high-level officials on government obligations related to implementing and reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols, and responding to the concluding observations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

As a follow-up to the national survey on violence against children, a multi-sectoral response plan was developed by NCAWMC, in consultation with multiple stakeholders. The resulting multisectoral commitment and operational plan established three priority actions to respond to violence against children: i) enhancing the enabling environment; ii) preventing violence against children and iii) responding to violence against children. Emphasis was placed on the need to ensure implementation of the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children and the national plan of action on prevention and elimination of violence against women and children 2014–2020.

UNICEF presented the project on adoption, with support from the French Embassy, and discussed the challenges of implementing the Adoption Decree at the roundtable organized by the US Ambassador for the visiting U.S. Special Advisor on Children's Issues Susan Jacobs in Feb 2017. Diplomats from French, Canadian and Australian Embassies participated in the meeting. Consensus was reached that promoting ratification of The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption by the Lao government is a future priority.

**OUTPUT 2** By 2021, the Government and other key stakeholders have the capacity to implement and monitor family support and community-based child care and protection services

**Analytical statement of progress**

In 2017 the programme started to develop and pilot community-based preventive and responsive service models for vulnerable children, especially children in contact with the law as offenders, victims or witnesses. With the funding from Australia, the Secretariat for the Juvenile
Justice Coordination Committee started the project on legal and social assistance for children in contact with the law in 15 target villages in Saythany district of the capital city. A training module and referral flow chart for use by officials and para-legal volunteers for children in contact with the law was developed. For the first time a village-based legal aid clinic for children became available to ensure that children in contact with the law have access to justice. The project provided a platform for cross-sectoral collaboration between the Juvenile Justice Committee for Children and the NCAWMC, setting a good example by leveraging resources from the Government, the UN, international NGOs and social/private sector to provide legal services for women and children at the village level.

The Ministry of Justice piloted a community-based diversion programme in four villages in Vientiane City and Savannakhet Province to demonstrate a model of community support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child offenders; the model will be scaled up based on lessons learnt. The project strengthened the capacity of local authorities and community members for applying the laws, principles and procedures of community-based diversion. Village chiefs, members of mediation committees and volunteers from project sites received training on facilitating family conferences, to help families with children in conflict with the law develop practical diversion plans.

The programme supported responsive services for women and child victims of violence and trafficking. In March 2017, with funding from the EU, the LWU conducted training on knowledge and skills such as identifying victims, counselling, recovery and reintegration services for the staff at the Vientiane-based centre as well as LWU staff in 14 provinces. Basic equipment, such as bedding for victims and a computer-based telephone system, was provided to improve the quality of Centre services – including an upgrade to the hotline for reporting violence and trafficking.

To address the cross-cutting issue of child disability, consensus was reached with the MoLSW on piloting a family support service model through a combined advocacy, screening, care, referral and rehabilitation service in Savannakhet and Xiengkhouang provinces. The Ministry indicated that the experience generated from this pilot will inform the national strategy on disability, currently underdevelopment.

**OUTPUT 3** Effective and efficient management of the Child Protection Programme

**Analytical statement of progress**
Quarterly meetings with programme partners, as well as mid-year and annual reviews, contributed to better understanding of the status, constraints and changes required for implementation of the 2017/2018 child protection work plan.

Joint field assessment trips with MoLSW staff led to evidence-based development of funding proposals for children with a disability, which received a commitment for support from the UNICEF Australia National Committee.

The child protection programme provided technical support to government partners by facilitating the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children through consultations with various stakeholders and a review of technical papers. The capacity of UNICEF staff and government partners in the area of community-based diversion and violence against children was strengthened through participation in regional consultations, training workshops and exchanges of experiences with counterparts from other countries.
The child protection programme played an instrumental role in coordinating cross-sectoral collaboration between the Juvenile Justice Committee for Children and the NCAWMC in order to leverage resources from the Government, UN, international NGOs and the private sector to provide legal services for women and children at the village level.

OUTCOME 5 By 2021, the most disadvantaged children and their families have equitable access to and use of sustainable improved water sources, sanitation facilities, and adopt hygiene practices

Analytical statement of progress
Lao PDR made progress toward increasing access to improved sources of water and sanitation. According to the 2017 update of the WHO/UNICEF joint monitoring programme, access to and use of improved sources of water within 30 minutes travel distance reached 80.4 per cent, while access to improved sanitation reached 72.6 per cent. Still, more efforts are needed if the country is to achieve its SDG targets, especially for sanitation.

UNICEF took the lead in supporting the Government in improving the WASH enabling environment. Overarching WASH policy was awaiting final Government endorsement at end-2017. With UNICEF support, the development of a rural WASH strategy to address current gaps and challenges to equitable access and sustainable WASH services progressed during 2017. The second WASH joint sector review was held in September, 2017, and led to a consensus on establishing a national WASH committee, in line with the WASH policy, and encouraged the formation of provincial- and district-level planning and coordination committees along the same lines. UNICEF also worked with partners to develop standards for WASH in schools.

A Lao delegation led by the Minister of Health and including senior official from the Ministry of Public Works and Transport participated in the Sanitation and Water for All high-level meeting in Washington, D.C. in April, 2017. The Minister expressed the Government’s commitment to increase investment in rural WASH.

With UNICEF support 3,341 people (1,584 females) in rural areas gained access to improved source of water in Phongsaly, Saravan and Savannakhet provinces. A total of 6,237 primary school children, including 3,041 girls at 85 schools, now have access to gender-segregated and accessible school latrines equipped with handwashing stations and improved source of water in Saravane and Savannakhet provinces. A total of 19,188 children (9,164 girls) are practicing improved hygiene behaviours on a daily basis as a result of HAPiS activities at 195 primary schools, while 1,269 children (629 girls)at 50 pre-primary schools also practice the same in focus provinces.

Through the district-wide approach to scaling-up sanitation, during 2017 a total of 114,000 people (57,000 female) now live in ODF communities; one additional district in Borikhamxay Province also became open defecation-free.

UNICEF played a key role in the WASH technical working group, which brings together WASH partners from Government and international organizations working in Lao PDR and in 2017, as in the past, UNICEF Lao PDR updated the interagency standing committee contingency plan.

UNICEF was also the lead for WASH cluster coordination. With UNICEF support life-saving WASH items were prepositioned in 13 provinces to enable immediate response after the onset of disaster. Through the Government system, UNICEF responded to victims of flood and fire,
OUTPUT 1 By 2021, Ministries and departments at national and sub national level have increased capacity to deliver and monitor water, sanitation services and promote hygiene behaviors among children in rural primary schools and ECD centres.

Analytical statement of progress:

With UNICEF’s direct support in 2017, a total of 6,237 primary school children, including 3,041 girls in 85 primary schools in Saravane and Savannakhet provinces directly benefitted from WASH services in schools, including the provision of gender-segregated and accessible school latrines for boys, girls and disabled children equipped with handwashing stations, as well as access to improved sources of drinking water. A total of 19,188 children, including 9,164 girls, are practicing daily routine behaviours such as hand-washing with soap in groups, using and cleaning toilets, drinking safe water and cleaning school compounds, through HAPiS implementation.

A longitudinal study to measure the impacts of WinS on pupils’ absenteeism has concluded. UNICEF Lao PDR contracted Emory University to undertake the study, which included 100 sample schools (50 intervention and 50 control schools) selected for the study. The findings showed that schools with that met more than 76 per cent of WinS criteria registered 24 per cent less absenteeism than other schools, and absenteeism was 28 per cent higher for students attending schools that met less than 50 per cent of WinS. In addition, students at schools meeting most WinS criteria had lower rates of diarrhoea (by 39 per cent) than those in schools meeting fewer WinS criteria. The study also shows positive results on behaviour change, including significant improvements in group hand-washing and toilet use, contributing to the retention of children in schools as demonstrated in the data analysis conducted by Emory University. Evidence shows that habit formation for hygiene practices in schools took place across all 50 intervention schools.

56 staff from provincial and district school health task forces were trained as trainers on HAPiS. School-level training was conducted at 150 primary schools, and 50 pre-primary school teachers were trained on HAPiS in Saravane and Savannakhet provinces. Some 780 teachers from 195 primary schools were trained on operations and management and the ‘Blue Box’ tool, including MHM, in Saravane, Savannakhet and Oudomxay provinces.

With support from UNICEF and Germany’s international aid agency, GIZ, the MoES pre-tested the three-star approach guideline, which helps schools meet the essential criteria for a healthy and protective learning environment. Some 207 sets of Blue Box were printed and delivered to target provinces for distribution to select schools, after training on use of the materials.

UNICEF hosted a three-day bi-regional construction management workshop in September 2017 in Vientiane, and also supported participation by a Lao delegation in the WASH in schools international learning exchange held in Myanmar.

OUTPUT 2 By 2021, Ministries and departments at national and sub national level have increased capacity to create demand for, and deliver and monitor water, sanitation services and promote hygiene behaviour in rural communities

Analytical statement of progress
An estimated 3,341 people (1,584 females) in remote rural areas gained access to improved sources of water in three provinces (Phongsaly, Saravan and Savannakhet) through the provision of gravity-fed systems in five villages of Mai District, Phongsaly Province, and the drilling of boreholes in three villages of Sephon District in Savannakhet Province and two villages of Ta Oi District in Saravan Province. Feasibility studies were ongoing in the remaining villages.

The second WASH joint sector review was successfully conducted by the Ministry of Transportation and Public Works and the MoH. The meeting enabled partners working in urban and rural WASH to gain a better understanding regarding alignment with various Government initiatives in water supply and sanitation, enhancing partnerships and ensuring efficiency and sustainability. The review also touched on current issues related to sector policy and strategy, institutional arrangements, sector financing and monitoring.

UNICEF developed a first draft of a rural WASH strategy and presented it to partners for review and comments, which were positive. The strategy will serve to guide effective implementation of WASH interventions in rural areas, strengthening capacity for management and monitoring, gradually overcoming current shortcomings in design, capacity and quality of service.

UNICEF worked with relevant partners to develop a standard operating procedure for the WASH Committee. Documentation of the process for achieving the country's first ODF districts is ongoing.

Following the success of the district-wide approach to scaling-up sanitation in Borikhamxay Province, UNICEF expanded its support to two additional provinces and three more districts. Capacity building efforts on the community approach to total sanitation/CLTS enabled provincial and district teams to create demand for sanitation and link communities to local suppliers. As a result, 113 villages were declared ODF, benefiting 114,569 people, in 2017. One more district in Borikhamxay was also verified as ODF, and preparations were underway for declaration in early January 2018.

UNICEF also worked with the MoES and MoH to continue raising awareness of the importance of water and sanitation, hand-washing with soap and menstrual hygiene by using global platforms such as World Water Day, Global Handwashing Day, Menstrual Hygiene Day and World Toilet Day.

**OUTPUT 3** By 2021, Government partners have strengthened capacity to better prepare and respond to humanitarian situation and build resilience to climate change in an innovative and coordinated way

**Analytical statement of progress**

WASH-related items such as water buckets, jerry cans, water purifying tablets, coagulant (alum), chlorine granules, soaps etc. were prepositioned in 13 provinces (three northern provinces, five central provinces and five southern provinces) of Lao PDR. Prepositioning these items aims to ensure faster response during emergencies to affected populations.

Emergency life-saving items and other supplies were distributed to 2,405 people affected by fires and floods in two districts of Saravane Province.

Nine staff from different provincial and district line departments and 50 members of 10 village
disaster prevention units received training on community-based disaster and risk reduction. Action plan to raise awareness on the risk for each village were developed in 10 villages of Khamkeurt and Viengthong districts in Borikhamxay Province. In late 2017 UNICEF was procuring disaster prevention kits to be distributed to the village units.

Training on the benefits of ferro-cement water tanks was offered to 18 government health officials from provincial and district health departments in Phongsaly Province, and local masons were trained to construct ferro-cement tanks, which will also be used for rain water harvesting as an alternative source of water in areas where traditional water sources are not available.

UNICEF organized WASH cluster meetings to review and update the cluster contingency plan, and the WASH component of the interagency standing committee contingency plan was updated. UNICEF and its MoH counterpart participated in the emergency simulation exercise.

**OUTPUT 4 Effective and efficient management of the WASH Programme**

**Analytical statement of progress:**
UNICEF support included providing technical expertise, strategic guidance and coordination to strengthen partners’ capacity for effective project management, implementation and utilization of funds, as per the agreed multiyear workplan. Progress was reviewed with partners. The WinS programme funded by DFAT Australia was completed; funds fully utilized and target exceeded. Donor reports submitted on time. UNICEF organized monthly section meetings to: review roles and responsibilities of team members to deliver results on time, discuss work/life balance and encouraged staff members to take leave.

The section developed a monitoring plan, conducted field visits as planned and introduced a weekly reporting system from the field. Apart from monitoring the work from Vientiane, the section also deployed two consultants (under SSA) in Saravane and Savanakhet provinces to provide technical support and monitor progress on the ground. This facilitated address issues immediately and saved the cost of travel from Vientiane to project provinces. The WhatsApp working chat groups was introduced into field monitoring work for latrine construction and water systems, involving contractors, UNICEF staff, consultants and government counterparts in sharing information, photos, videos and messages and tackling issues on the ground. This real-time monitoring mechanism allowed for greater transparency, improved quality control, quick turnaround when actions/decisions were required and instant dissemination of information to all stakeholders. This resulted in an improvement in the quality of construction, time-saving and consistency of reporting across the board. Additionally, travel costs and time needed for additional field trips was significantly reduced – from about five trips per site to three.

**OUTCOME 6 By 2021, national policy environment and systems are improved for disadvantaged children, guided by knowledge and data**

**Analytical statement of progress**
UNICEF’s work on social inclusion focused on supporting the collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data for policy dialogue, planning and advocacy for public finance for children. UNICEF supported strengthening the national monitoring and evaluation framework for the country’s NSEDP 2016–2020 and the SDGs. Lao PDR has made good progress toward localizing
the SDGs, with strong Government commitment. To support SDG 17.18, on collecting disaggregated data to assess progress, UNICEF strengthened the capacity of the Lao Statistics Bureau to conduct the LSIS II, based on the MICS 6.

The LSIS II is a nation-wide household survey with a sample size of 23,400, covering all 18 provinces in Laos. UNICEF made significant efforts to ensuring timely financial and technical support to the LSB to successfully complete this survey.

LSIS II results will provide up-to-date information for monitoring progress on the NSEDP, provincial development plans and the SDGs. It will also provide the data needed to help meet the country’s goal of graduating from LDC status and with the voluntary national reviews to be presented at the high-level political forum in 2018. Data analysis, with support from UNICEF’s global and regional MICS teams was completed in December. The data is expected to be released in early 2018 and disseminated at various levels, with policy and advocacy messages centred on the realization of child rights.

To raise the profile of children and create an enabling environment for child-friendly policies and plans, UNICEF Lao PDR, in partnership with the NA, held an orientation session on ‘strengthening parliamentarians Involvement for better results for children’. The main objectives were to update legislators on the situation of children in Lao PDR, provide information on the SDGs and other key issues related to children and their policy implications. Among issues presented and discussed were: the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, ECE, EOD, child trafficking and public finance for children. Policy briefs and advocacy materials on key issues affecting children were printed and disseminated to members of the NA. As a result of this orientation, the issue of the budget allocations for the health and education sectors was actively discussed and debated during the recent 4th NA ordinary session, and were subsequently approved with meaningful increases. Together the sectors will receive 21 per cent of total government expenditures (13.3 percent for education and 7.7 percent for health sector).

Key members of the NA’s social and cultural committee had an opportunity to conduct joint field monitoring and oversight visits with the UNICEF team in Vientiane Province and Xiengkhouang in 2017, to better understand the situation on the ground and be able to debate and raise the issue in parliamentary sessions. The communities, especially children, benefited from this visit through direct interaction with parliamentarians, raising issues that affect their full potential development.

Efforts were also made to strengthen routine administrative sub-national data systems to obtain more frequent and reliable data for monitoring the situation of children. An assessment of UNICEF’s role in strengthening administrative systems and related mechanisms for collection, analysis and use of information at sub-national levels provided some strategic recommendations, which have been shared with related partners to improve coordination in coming years.

Together with the National Institute for Economic Research and UNICEF, a national research framework was developed and disseminated in November 2017. This overarching and forward-looking research framework will facilitate the generation of evidence to inform policy making, planning and sharing of learning and knowledge. The framework’s development serves as a reference document to guide socio-economic research with respect to the implementation of Lao PDR’s Vision 2030, Strategy 2025 and the 8th NSEDP. The process of analysing the ‘child budget’ was also begun, involving advocacy around public finance for children, to support the Government to increase the allocation and monitoring of budget expenditure for social sectors contributing to the realization of children’s rights.
Partnership with the MPI, as an inter-sectoral ministry, played a critical role in ensuring smooth coordination among key implementing partners and UNICEF. As a part of strengthening the public finance management system, relevant ministries at the national and sub-national levels were trained on financial management, including the harmonized approach to cash transfers.

The main constraint faced during this period was the change in Government structure, which caused slight delays in some planned activities, but were subsequently addressed through follow-up meetings and coordination.

Key priorities for next year will be completing the LSIS II survey findings report and its dissemination with key policy advocacy messages; strengthening sub-national coordination, planning and monitoring in seven focus provinces; child budget analysis; and supporting the voluntary national review report for the SDGs.

**OUTPUT 1** By 2021, disaggregated data from surveys and administrative data available to inform policy, planning and monitoring

**Analytical statement of progress:**
Implementation of the LSIS was a key priority in 2017. UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the Lao Statistics Bureau to collect quality data in a timely manner. The data was generated at the provincial level, disaggregated by age, gender, residence, wealth quantile and ethnic group.

A broad range of partnership was established to support LSIS II, including financial support from various development partners (United States Agency for International Development, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, EU) and other UN agencies (United Nations Population Fund and World Food Programme).

Data collection was completed by 25 survey teams (175 persons divided into seven-person teams including three or four women per team) from central, provincial and district Statistics Bureau offices and the ministries of health and education who gathered data from 1,165 clusters in 18 provinces in early November 2017. Efficiency and effectiveness were improved by the use of computer-assisted personal interviewing for the first time in Lao PDR, contributing to building institutional capacity in the LSB.

The survey process was closely monitored by the national steering committee, and continuous support was provided by UNICEF (at the country, regional and global levels) throughout the survey.

To strengthen routine data collection, UNICEF supported the development of a provincial online database using DevInfo in three focus provinces (Saravan, Attapeu, and Savannakhet). In the remaining four provinces an online provincial database will be established in 2018. This effort represents an important milestone for strengthening sub-national planning, coordination and monitoring.

Staff from UNICEF’s policy, monitoring and evaluation programme (PME) provided technical support for conducting strategic programme evaluations, studies and analyses for other
programmes. The PME team successfully supported various cross-sectoral initiatives, including organizing internal and external programme and management reviews and field monitoring, including roll-out of the eTool.

OUTPUT 2 By 2021, enhanced capacity for child poverty and equity analysis

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF Lao PDR established a strong partnership with the National Assembly’s (NA) social and cultural committee, with the aim of building capacity on child rights issues by keeping parliamentarians informed about children’s needs, especially those in remote areas. In 2017 UNICEF held an orientation meeting with Assembly members to strengthen parliamentarians involvement in achieving better results for children, attended by 70 NA members from all 18 provinces. The orientation aimed to raise awareness about key issues related to children, using data and analysis on multiple overlapping deprivations and child poverty. One of key discussions was on how to balance high economic growth and social development. This orientation helped them to understand importance of public finance for children to address inequities and child poverty.

Joint monitoring and oversight visits by NA members and UNICEF were conducted to support the polio campaign in Vientiane and Xiengkhouang provinces in early 2017. The outcomes were fed back to the concerned ministries to stimulate better delivery quality services for the most disadvantaged women and children.

UNICEF Lao PDR supported enhancing the capacity of national research institutions to conduct equity-focused studies and analysis. Several were completed and their findings disseminated among stakeholders. A study and report on out-of-school children, aimed at analysing and quantifying the impact of key determinants affecting these children was finalized in 2017.

With support from the UNICEF Regional Office, UNICEF Lao PDR also held several consultation meetings with the Ministry of Finance, MPI and other relevant development partners to strengthen public finance for children. As part of this endeavour, a child budget analysis was initiated and should be completed in early 2018. Based on this analysis, budget briefs and other materials will be developed for advocacy and policy dialogue to leverage public finance for children in Lao PDR.

UNICEF and the MPI undertook joint visits to six focus provinces and discussed programme modalities with provincial authorities to strengthen provincial coordination, planning and monitoring.

OUTPUT 3 Effective and efficient management of the PME Programme

Analytical statement of progress
With funding made available from the EU on improved nutrition in Lao PDR from UNICEF Australia on nutrition, ECE and WASH; and from thematic funds UNICEF Lao PDR ensured that cross-sectoral and operations staff provided quality technical support for implementation of the CP. Office-wide initiatives, such as high-level donor visits, were supported through cross-sectoral funding, resulting in additional funding.
All donor reports were submitted on time. No DCTs were outstanding for more than nine months and very few for more than six months.

OUTCOME 7 Management Outcome

Analytical statement of progress

UNICEF Lao PDR made a significant contribution as a member of the operations management team. The business operations strategy was finalized in February 2017, articulating the shared vision and common strategic priorities of the UN Country Team in Lao PDR for 2017–2021 in five key operational areas: procurement; human resources; information and communication technologies; finance; and logistics and facility services, including common premises. Common LTAs signed between UN agencies and service providers contributed to significant savings for all agencies.

Lao PDR is one of the countries piloting the carpooling system, resulting in a significant decrease in the use of vehicles. The number of kilometres driven declined by 25 per cent compared to 2015, before the pilot began; fuel consumption declined by one third (resulting in savings of approximately US$10,000 per year); and the carbon footprint was reduced by 9,900 kg of CO₂ per year. UNICEF Lao PDR is contributing with four vehicles included in the pool.

UNICEF is fully involved in the greening project, having installed a solar panel system, LED lamps and sensors in the office, resulting in a decrease in electricity consumption. Comparing 2015 to 2016, a 20 per cent reduction in electricity use was registered since the solar panel installation. The first phase of solar panel installation was completed in August 2015, covering the server room and some offices. The second phase will start in January 2018 to cover the rest of the office. By March–April 2018, the office should be fully covered by the solar power system.

UNICEF Lao PDR continued its good performance on staff recruitment by finalizing most of the recruitments within the lead time of 90 days. For consultant recruitments, the office has continued to follow established processes (from advertisement, interview to reference check) before signing contracts.

The HACT assurance plan was followed-up closely, with quarterly reports to the Regional Office. Efforts are needed to ensure quality assurance and improve follow-up on recommendations from programme visits, micro-assessments, audits and spot-checks. All five audit recommendations from the 2016 internal audit were closed.

To build partners’ capacity in finances and improve the quality of documents and reporting, four training sessions involving 108 participants were organized in North, South and Central Laos.

UNICEF Lao PDR has invested in supporting staff development through external training, online training and group training, such as eTools, competency-based interview and Windows 10.

The Office continues to closely monitor implementation of the recommendations from the last global staff survey. Recommendations are submitted by an ad-hoc committee to the CMT. An action plan will be developed to implement the recommendations, and progress will be monitored by the CMT. The joint consultative committee is functional; quarterly meetings with management and the staff association are held to discuss issues related to the staff and the office. The office successfully closed all audit recommendations in 2017.
OUTPUT 1 Governance and Systems exist to support the direction of country operations.

Analytical statement of progress

In June 2016, UNICEF Lao PDR was audited by the Office of Internal Audit; findings and preliminary recommendations were shared with for comments. The final report, with five recommendations (two high-priority and three medium-priority) was also shared. To ensure that all five recommendations are closed by the end of 2017, UNICEF developed an action plan, which was monitored regularly by the CMT to ensure that all points were addressed and the recommendations were closed. All five audit recommendations from the 2016 internal audit were closed successfully by the end of 2017.

The HACT assurance plan was closely monitored. Progress was shared with sections weekly during section chiefs meetings, on a monthly basis with the CMT and quarterly with the Regional Office. In accordance with the global LTA, one partner receiving more than US$100,000 was scheduled to be micro-assessed during the third week of December 2017; and two partners receiving more than US$500,000 will be audited by an external audit firm in early 2018.

UNICEF Lao PDR organized an internal office annual management plan review meeting on 14 December 2016, with participation by all staff. Based on the discussions and reference to the new guidelines developed by UNICEF’s Field Results Group, the Office reached a decision to focus on five key priorities in 2017, including management and programme priorities, which are: i) implementation of the new CP through modalities combining implementation through line ministries with implementation in seven priority provinces; ii) expand partnerships with existing and potential partners and fund-raise for children and for UNICEF; iii) raise the visibility of children and of UNICEF’s work through donor visits and key programme actions; iv) strengthen programme effectiveness and efficiency, including cross-sectoral coordination and field monitoring; and v) support team-building and staff development.

organized midyear programme and management review meeting took place on 8 August 2017, with the objectives of: i) providing UNICEF global/regional updates, ii) reviewing progress and bottlenecks to date, iii) discussing key programme adjustment and priorities for the remainder of 2017, iv) reviewing annual management plan indicators and v) discussing the 2017 global staff survey report and follow up actions. Significant achievements in 2017 were noted during the meeting.

UNICEF Lao PDR continued to apply rules and regulations and standard operating procedures for consultant recruitments, enabling the office to select the best candidates and avoid single sourcing. The Office also relied on rosters from the Regional Office and HQ to select candidates, when necessary.

The business continuity plan was updated in early December 2017, in accordance with the new format shared recently by HQ.
OUTPUT 2 Stewardship of Financial Resources creates the conditions to pursue country operations.

Analytical statement of progress

UNICEF Lao PDR continued to work very closely with the Global Shared Service Centre (GSSC) based in Budapest, and the Division of Finance and Administration in New York to ensure that all payments and other financial matters (especially cash transfer processes, staff entitlements, and other payments, bank reconciliations and salary payments are in line with UNICEF policies, and processed in a timely manner. With the shift of some finance functions and master data to the GSSC, the operations manager, human resources and finance staff were able to concentrate more on the quality of documents, spot checks and quality assurance through greater support for programme and counterpart staff, and closely monitor all office indicators in Insight.

The HACT assurance plan was approved during the first quarter of 2017, with very clear targets for all HACT activities for the year, e.g., the number of spot-checks, micro-assessments and audits in relation to the amount transferred and risk level of each partner. UNICEF Lao PDR continued to invest in capacity building by organizing formal trainings all over the country, and on-the-job training during spot-checks and micro-assessments.

In 2017 four formal financial trainings were organized in North, South and Central regions to build capacity of partner staff. This year, along with training for finance staff, other key officials within partner structures (director generals, in some cases) also received training to ensure that they fully understand the process, including documentation, disbursement mechanisms and reporting.

Seven spot-checks were conducted, as planned by end-October, one micro-assessment was planned for late December for one partner receiving more than US$100,000, and two scheduled audits will be conducted in early 2018 for two partners receiving more than US$500,000 in 2017.

Risk mitigation plans are in place to ensure that the funds disbursed are used as planned, by selecting payment methods per the risks and regular field monitoring visits. Key performance indicators are monitored, reviewed and followed up regularly. The performance management report is used for monitoring all indicators: timely DCT liquidation within six months, open travel authorizations for more than 15 days, open commitments (purchase orders, fond commitments) and segregation of duties.

The segregation of duty is monitored closely to ensure mitigation of any violation, as needed, and that no violation can occur without an explanation. All conflicting roles within the office are mitigated.

The introduction of eZHACT was a useful opportunity for ensuring that all programme staff, especially section chiefs and programme officers, are involved in all transactions related to their specific funding, and will present a good opportunity to expand Vision access to all staff, starting January 2018.

The introduction of eTools represents another useful opportunity to ensure the quality of programme visits and reporting.
OUTPUT 3 Human resources have the capacities, skills, morale and motivation to support country operations.

Analytical statement of progress
UNICEF Lao PDR continued its successful programme of ‘Friday learning sessions’, which are one-hour classes designed to provide key hands-on skills to improve staff performance, and to encourage and share with staff all on-line training opportunities. Four important trainings were held in 2017, with participation by all staff: three were face-to-face trainings, and one was an online training: competency-based interviewing, eZHACT, eTools and iv) Windows 10 (online training).

Achieve, the new performance appraisal system started in 2016, is ongoing and UNICEF Lao PDR will ensure that 100 per cent of staff completed the end-year assessment on time. The joint consultative committee met three times to discuss issues related to staff and propose solutions. Along with the 2017 global staff survey results, the Office has put together all recommendations from the ad-hoc group for close follow-up by the CMT.

UNICEF Lao PDR performed very well on staff recruitments finalizing seven positions in 2017 related to the new CP and some vacancies. Recruitment is ongoing and will be completed by end-December 2017.

OUTCOME 8 Country programme is effectively and efficiently planned, coordinated, implemented and monitored to achieve results for children.

Analytical statement of progress
2017 was the first year of implementing the new CP, which has seven outcomes, including five programme outcomes and one each for management and programme effectiveness. These outcomes are to be measured by 20 outcome indicators.

The CP has a total of 20 outputs and 54 output indicators to measure the achievement of results. RWPs for 2017-2018 included 140 activities to be implemented by UNICEF Lao PDR over the two years.

A mid-year review took place on 8 August 2017 with participation by all staff. The highlights of the review were: i) advance coordination to work with priority provinces, both on programmes and operations, including provincial coordination mechanisms, programme reviews, monitoring and evaluation, HACT and field monitoring; ii) improve routine data systems (all sectors), cross-sectoral linkages and capacity building; iii) strengthen fund mobilization and enhance inter-sectoral funding flexibility (cross-cutting areas); iv) enhance cross-sectoral collaboration and linkages, including, e.g., WASH and WinS, violence against children, birth registration and disability; v) reporting and monitoring on Convention on the Rights of the Child compliance; and vi) strengthen C4D to support programmes and in-house capacity building. Discussions on field monitoring and evaluation led to a switch from paper-based field trip planning to on-line planning, for better coordination and support.

To improve work planning, partnership and trip management, an eTool support mission took place in October 2017 to standardize, automate and centralize these processes, which were manual, decentralized and paper-based. The office reached a consensus on starting the eTool process with trip management.
Programme and operations management indicators were reviewed regularly as key management tools for tracking office performance. Performance management reports were regularly shared, each Friday, during discussions on indicators at heads of section meeting each Monday morning, and at monthly CMT meetings.

The annual management plan for 2017 was submitted on time and reviewed twice – during the mid-year review on 8 August 2017 and the annual review on 13 December 2017, with participation by all staff, to assess progress against planned targets and results.

To attract more funding, UNICEF Lao PDR hosted visits from high-level delegations, such as: Saudi Princes (January 2017, representing Prince Alwaleed Foundation for measles & rubella campaign); the Queen of Belgium (February 2017, as honorary president of UNICEF Belgium NatCom), and the UNICEF Australia National Committee. Those activities raised the profile of Lao PDR internationally and attracted additional funding for the country’s children.

UNICEF Lao PDR utilized 100 per cent of funds from expiring grants and non-grants in 2017, achieving a high utilization rate by year’s-end. Donor reports were submitted on time. DCTs were kept to a minimum; none were outstanding for more than nine months by the end of 2017 and very few for more than six months – despite a large quantity of disbursements during the second half of 2017.

**OUTPUT 1** By 20221, UNICEF staff and partners are provided guidance, tools and resources to effectively design, plan and monitor programmes.

**Analytical statement of progress**

Regular programme coordination was carried out during programme coordination meetings held every two months and at Monday morning section head meetings to coordinate programme work and ensure efficient and effective programme implementation.

Programme coordination meetings during the first quarter of 2017 focused on developing 2017-2018 RWP’s. Consultation meetings in early 2017 used the results-based management approach to plan, implement and monitor interventions for children together with all key implementing partners. A multisectoral work plan was developed with the LWU, along with joint planning of education, nutrition and WASH interventions in selected provinces, to maximize results. Two new implementing partners for the 2017/2018 RWP were the LFNC and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Several consultation meetings took place to draft RWPs for 2017-2018, for which the total budget allocation for 2017 amounted to approximately US$10 million. The meetings involved: MoH (covering health, nutrition and WASH); MoES (on education and WASH); juvenile justice committee (Ministry of Justice, Supreme Court, prosecutor general) and MoLSW (on child protection); LWU(multi-sectoral); LFNC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (related to advocacy and communication); as well as theMPI, NA and National Institute of Economic Research (on policy and planning).

As part of cross-sectoral linkages, the health and nutrition and WASH programmes worked closely to ensure that WASH interventions contribute to stunting reduction. Integrated education and WASH programming began with identification of three target provinces and two districts per province for convergence of activities and joint proposal development, resulting in funding for
integrated ECE and WASH interventions in target provinces through the UNICEF Australia NatCom.

UNICEF Lao PDR carried out sectoral meetings with key implementing partners in health, nutrition, education, WASH, child protection and PME during the last two weeks of November and first week of December 2017, culminating in an annual review hosted by MPI with participation by all sectors. The review highlighted achievements and challenges faced for implementing the 2017-2018 work plan. Issues to be addressed include provincial level coordination, availability and use of data, resource mobilization and social communicating for behaviour change.

**OUTPUT 2** By 2021, Strategies to address crosscutting issues related to child rights are developed and applied.

**Analytical statement of progress**

To respond to communities’ needs, a participatory workshop with all key stakeholders was conducted on 29 November 2017, using existing evidence and participants’ experiences to: define key areas of the parenting package, develop a theory of change to guide action and lay down the foundations for its development. The workshop brought together Government representatives, national and international organizations and representatives from intervention communities to reflect on content, delivery, branding and support activities in a participatory manner, thus creating buy-in and responding to participants’ needs. The workshop took place under the leadership of the LWU, with participation by line ministries, mass organizations and International NGOs.

Once the tools and delivery modalities have been defined, they will be pre-tested with target communities to ensure that they are appropriate and effective. Amendments will be made as per pre-test feedback.

Once finalized, the tools and any supporting materials and activities will be disseminated and applied as effectively as possible. This requires careful planning that addresses the training and supervision mechanisms required to support facilitators, development of an appropriate M&E framework that allows for monitoring of progress and assessment of needed changes and a roll-out strategy for implementation.

Throughout these phases, a participatory approach will be maintained, ensuring regular stakeholder engagement.

**OUTPUT 3** Cross Sectoral Programme Support

**Analytical statement of progress**

With funding made available by the EU for improved nutrition in Lao PDR; from UNICEF Australia on nutrition, ECE and WASH and from thematic funds, UNICEF Lao PDR ensured that cross-sectoral and operations staff provided quality technical support for CP implementation. Cross-sectoral funding also supported office-wide initiatives such as high-level donor visits that yielded additional funding for UNICEF.

All donor reports were submitted on time. There were no DCTs outstanding for more than nine months and very few for more than six months.
Evaluation and research

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<td>Integrated Management of New-born and Childhood Illnesses Assessment</td>
<td>2017/008</td>
<td>Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of UNICEF’s Role and Capacity Regarding Strengthening of Administrative System</td>
<td>2017/005</td>
<td>Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence Against Children Survey</td>
<td>2017/007</td>
<td>Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wins Research</td>
<td>2017/006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out-of-School Children in Lao PDR</td>
<td>2017/004</td>
<td>Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of the pedagogical support system for primary education in Lao PDR</td>
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Lessons learned

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Programme documents

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