

Lesotho

Part 1: Situation update in the country

Lesotho is a small, landlocked country with a population of about 2 million, of whom 38 per cent are children under 18 years of age (Lesotho 2016 Population and Housing Census). It is classified as lower-middle-income country. As indicated in the 2017 Government of Lesotho (GoL) macro-economy budget brief, the country's gross domestic product was equivalent to roughly US\$3.2 billion in 2017/18. Over the last five years (2013/14–2017/18), average economic growth was 2.6 per cent. The budget brief noted that real GDP declined from US\$1,352 per capita in 2013/14 to US\$1,060 per capita in 2018/19. Budget deficits are projected at 4.2 per cent for 2018/19, down from 5.7 per cent in 2017/18. The country is heavily dependent on revenue from the South African Customs Union– the third-largest component of overall revenues. However, the budget brief projected that these revenues would decline from 17.5 per cent in 2017/18 to 14.9 per cent during 2018/19.

According to the 2018 budget brief, Lesotho invested about 16 per cent of its GDP and 32.7 per cent of its national budget in the social sectors (health, education, social development), mainly benefitting children and adolescents in 2018/19. However, this investment as a percentage of the national budget represents a decline from the 35.5 per cent invested in 2016/17. Investment in social protection declined both as a percentage of the national budget and of GDP: from 12.3 per cent and 7 per cent in 2014/15, respectively, to 10.4 per cent and 5.5 per cent in 2018/19.

Poverty and inequality remain key structural and entrenched issues. An estimated 57.1 per cent of the population live below the national poverty line of US\$1.50 a day (almost six of every 10 people). More than one in three (34 per cent) live below the food poverty line (extreme poverty) of US\$10.30 per adult per month, with disparities between the rural and urban population. Lesotho is ranked as one of the 10 most unequal countries in the world, with a Gini coefficient value of 0.54 (Lesotho 2017 CCA).

According to the 2018 child poverty report, about 65 per cent of all children in Lesotho are deprived simultaneously in three or more dimensions of well-being. Deprivation varies according to age group and dimension. Between 84 and 88 per cent of all children are deprived of housing; 17 per cent are deprived of primary education and 62 per cent of secondary education; 29-to-32 per cent are deprived of water; 64 per cent of children aged 0–23 months and 51 per cent of children aged 2–17 years are deprived of sanitation. The rate of overall deprivation is particularly high among boys (66.5 per cent) and in rural areas (72 per cent).

The under-five mortality rate declined from 117 per 1,000 live births in 2009 to 94 per 1,000 births in 2016 (2014 Lesotho demographic and health survey, LDHS). National levels of antenatal care are high (95 per cent for the first visit) and for delivery in a health facility (77 per cent – LDHS 2014). According to the Lesotho health sector management information system

(HMIS), the proportion of children under one year receiving measles vaccines was about 80 per cent (as of September 2018), a decrease from 90 per cent documented in the 2014 LDHS. Coverage for third dose of pentavalent vaccine was 84 per cent during the same period. However, it should be appreciated that Lesotho tends to report, on average, lower immunization coverage figures in administrative data compared to population-based surveys due to issues with reliable denominators derived from population projections. The proportion of the population that practices open defecation has also decreased, from 42 per cent in 2009 to 20 per cent (2016 Household Census Report), indicating slow progress.

Lesotho has the second highest HIV prevalence in the world, with 25 per cent of adult men and women aged 15–49 years living with HIV or AIDS. Children bear the brunt of the HIV epidemic. According to 2018 child poverty report, HIV affects 74 per cent of children aged 0–23 months. AIDS-related diseases are the third largest cause of death (8 per cent) among children aged 6–13 years. According to preliminary results of Lesotho’s population-based HIV impact assessment (LePHIA), the incidence of HIV remains a grave concern. The percentage of children aged 0–14 years and adolescent girls and boys aged 10–19 years living with HIV who are receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) has increased from an overall 58 per cent in 2016 to 73 per cent in 2018 for children aged 0–14 years, but decreased to 53.5 per cent for adolescents 15–19 years. The percentage of women who are pregnant living with HIV with lifelong access to ART for prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV and for their own health is alarmingly low (66 per cent), compared to neighbouring countries. The percentage of HIV-exposed infants tested for HIV within two months of birth rose from 85 per cent in 2017 to 88 per cent in 2018.

Although Lesotho has made considerable progress on enrolment, the education sector continues to face major challenges, including cohort survival in primary education – although according to the country’s education management information system (EMIS), the rate increased from 72 per cent to 86 per cent in 2017. Other challenges include the progression from primary to secondary school; net enrolment in secondary education in 2017 was 52.1 per cent for girls and only 34.6 per cent for boys. Boys in rural areas and children with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged. Gross enrolment in pre-primary education increased from 33 per cent in 2015 to 42.16 per cent in 2017. The repetition rate in primary education also declined slightly: from 9 per cent in 2014 to 8.5 per cent in 2017. The proportion of teachers knowledgeable about early childhood development (ECD) increased from 6.4 per cent in 2015 to 20 per cent in 2018.

In 2018 UNICEF Lesotho was selected as one of only four countries (and the only country in Eastern and Southern Africa, to participate in the Global Partnership for Education-funded better early learning and development at scale (BELDS) initiative, designed to support the systematic integration of early childhood care and education (ECCE) into national education sector planning and implementation cycles, including budget processes.

Recognizing the importance of efficiency gains in public expenditure, the GoL initiated reforms to strengthen public finance management and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through equity-based approaches, such as promoting accountability through community budget consultations. Given the importance of social protection as an instrument for improving the quality of life for people living in poverty, the Government continues to strengthen the social protection system.

Although the overall rate of investment in social protection declined in 2018/19, evidence-led

advocacy with policymakers and senior government officials, combined with UNICEF support to social protection systems-building, led the GoL to increase coverage of its child grant programme from 27,000 households to 37,738 households (44.4 percentage increase in coverage – equivalent to 108,412 children) by investing an additional US\$1.4 million. The Government also committed to progressively covering all eligible households, targeted through the national information system for social assistance (NISSA). This will be completed in the first quarter of 2019, and will enhance efficiency in social assistance programme management.

Several issues impact on the situation of children by affecting their access to basic social services. The country is characterized by political instability. Between 2012 and 2017, two successive coalition governments and three national elections collapsed. The Lesotho political economy study carried out in 2017 indicated that this instability seriously slowed down the implementation of policies, exacerbating weakness in accountability, frequent turnover of ministers and senior officials, weakening oversight by the legislative branch and enhancing political patronage. Weak accountability and inequitable development may affect economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability in Lesotho.

Lesotho has experienced successive climate shocks, such as recurrent droughts and floods, during the last 10 years. These negatively affect the livelihoods of people, particularly the most vulnerable, such as children and girls, exposing them to a wide range of economic, health, environmental and income-related risks and shocks. The last El Niño-induced drought in 2016, for example, affected an estimated 679,437 people, including 310,015 children in 135,887 households. UNICEF, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) collaborate to make the social protection system more shock-responsive.

The GoL is committed to addressing deprivation and disparities and promoting equality of opportunity for the most disadvantaged and excluded people, including the most vulnerable children. The country has adopted relevant national policies and legal frameworks and ratified all international and regional conventions and treaties to address deprivation and inequality in access to basic social services. UNICEF will continue to support the Government, based on its comparative advantage, expertise and lessons learned; other actors will address the remaining challenges. Support will also be rendered to the media, particularly training on reporting on child rights, as captured in the country advocacy and communication strategy.

Part 2: Major results, including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the country programme document

Goal area 1. Every child survives and thrives

This component of the UNICEF Lesotho Country Programme is aligned with and contributes to the results of UNICEF's global Strategic Plan 2018–2021, with a specific focus on goal area 1; outcome 7 of the Lesotho United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); the national strategic development plan (NSDP) priority on improving health, combating HIV and AIDS and reducing vulnerability; and SDGs 2 and 3.

Although no new data is available from population-based surveys to document the actual scale of progress in areas such as deliveries attended by skilled health personnel, newborns

receiving postnatal care services within two days of birth and stunting reduction, Lesotho has achieved some progress in expanding access to quality, high-impact interventions in health, nutrition and HIV nationwide. UNICEF's focus has been to support the health system at both central and decentralized levels to provide quality health, HIV and nutrition services.

Administrative data on the performance of the immunization programme shows that at least 80 per cent of children below one year of age had been vaccinated with the third dose of pentavalent and measles vaccines as of end-September. Penta-3 coverage performance in districts ranged from 69–100 per cent; six of 10 districts exceeded the 80 per cent threshold (LDHS 2014).

Lesotho's composite score on the effective vaccine management assessment improved from 48 per cent in 2014 to 71 per cent due to implementation of the 2015 improvement plan, including procurement and installation of cold chain equipment in health facilities. In 2018 the maternal, new-born and child health and nutrition communication strategy and plan were developed and endorsed through multi-stakeholder collaboration under the leadership of the Ministry of Health (MoH). Implementation of the strategy –including training of health workers and other government staff on social and behaviour change communication – will help to increase health and nutrition service uptake in communities and improve service quality. UNICEF also supported the training of 20 journalists to report on vaccine-preventable diseases prior to the introduction of Rota vaccine, with the aim of thwarting negative reporting on vaccines through the media.

In collaboration with the WFP, WHO, FAO and REACH, UNICEF supported finalization of the national food and nutrition strategy and action plan (pending GoL endorsement). The strategy includes point-of-use supplementation using micronutrient powders as a strategic action; formative research addressing feasibility and acceptability began in 2018 in the Butha Buthe and Mokhotlong districts. The results of this pilot will inform scale-up to all 10 districts in 2019. A total of 395 village health workers were trained on integrated community-based management of acute malnutrition, including a module on nutrition screening.

With UNICEF support, 1,223 children aged 6–59 months were admitted for treatment for severe acute malnutrition (SAM) during the year, against a planned SAM caseload of 1,554. Of these, 758 were reported as cured (622), 34 defaulted, 65 died (65) and 37 did not recover..

Strong advocacy was supported through Lesotho's King, including a high-level forum on early childhood nutrition in Southern Africa focusing on the severity of child malnutrition, its long-term implications and the linkages between poor human capital outcomes and unrealized economic growth. As part of the human capital project, Lesotho was awarded additional resources for nutrition-sensitive agriculture, the multisectoral nutrition programme, assessments and anthropometric measuring equipment.

UNICEF supported a bottleneck analysis on newborn care in the country and the development of an essential new-born action plan to address the country's poor performance on new-born survival (34 deaths/1,000 live births). UNICEF also supported the establishment of a perinatal death review system to help document and track causes of deaths in the early neonatal period, and to provide platforms for implementing death audits and developing action plans for quality improvement.

At least 73 per cent of children aged 0–14 years living with HIV are now estimated to be on

treatment—an increase from 58 per cent in 2015, a success achieved through UNICEF’s technical and financial support. Early infant diagnosis also progressed in 2018, with 88 per cent of HIV-exposed infants having received a test at two months—an increase from 85 per cent in 2017 (LePHIA 2017).

UNICEF successfully leveraged Global Fund assistance for adolescent girls and young women by providing technical assistance to the development and approval of the Government’s US\$1.5 million catalytic funding request. UNICEF continued to provide technical assistance to the Global Fund and its primary and sub-recipients to ensure high levels of effectiveness in programme implementation. UNICEF provided technical assistance to the strategic information technical working group for the development of national and sub-national targets for HIV prevention, treatment, and viral suppression. The targets were used to develop an HIV national strategic plan monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. UNICEF also supported the validation of HIV spectrum estimates in Lesotho, which indicated that mother-to-child transmission rates are currently 11 per cent after the breastfeeding period. UNICEF, WFP and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) are providing technical assistance to the National AIDS Commission to undertake nationally representative knowledge, attitudes, practices and norms (KAPN) research that will inform the development of a national social- and behaviour-change communication strategy in 2019 – a major milestone toward operationalization of the national strategic plan.

Along with partner agencies (UNFPA, UNAIDS, WHO), UNICEF supported the MoH to improve the coverage of PMTCT interventions through standardization and institutionalization of the village health worker programme. The programme facilitates community-based follow-ups for pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV. A major milestone in the reporting period was the revision of the 2014 village health worker policy. As a result, 30 village health coordinators and 86 village health supervisors were re-oriented on the revised programme, including HIV home-based care.

In partnership with the MoH, Help Lesotho and the four above-mentioned United Nations agencies, UNICEF piloted a peer-support programme for pregnant adolescents and young women, to encourage greater uptake of timely antenatal care and PMTCT services. The pilot will support the development of an evidence-informed minimum package of interventions for pregnant and breastfeeding adolescents. Preliminary results of the pilot, involving 151 pregnant adolescents in two districts, showed that 15 village support groups were established in different communities. Additionally, vast improvements were documented in comprehensive knowledge of HIV (from 36 per cent to 87 per cent) and access and use of condoms (from 37 per cent to 83 per cent).

UNICEF, in partnership with the non-governmental organizations Skillshare and Sentebale, empowered youths to advocate for quality health services for adolescents and young people in five districts through social accountability. Sixty-two youth advocates were trained to monitor adolescent-friendly health services (AFHS) in health centres in five districts. Similarly, 40 health service providers were trained on the national AFHS standards and the role of youth advocates in monitoring services. Results from the training will be available in January 2019, when the first interface meeting to monitor the quality of these services is held. As of the end of November, about 19,748 adolescents had been reached with comprehensive knowledge of HIV and prevention through a peer-to-peer support system.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to train 19 staff and 12

school leaders from three post-primary schools (with a student population of 1,000) on a positive behaviour and HIV prevention pilot, re-named 'child-friendly schools-plus'. By year's-end the programme had reported gains in addressing absenteeism and bullying, among other school-related behaviours. UNICEF intends to continue expanding the programme, in close collaboration with the ministry, to other post-primary schools.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

UNICEF Lesotho's work in education contributed to the achievement of SDG 4; UNICEF Strategic Plan goal area 2, UNDAF outcome 5; and the NSDP priority on enhancing the skills base and foundation for innovation.

Significant progress has been made toward improving the pre-primary education enrolment rate, which has increased by almost 10 per cent since the start of the country programme. While some of this increase is due to updated population statistics in the 2016 census, there is growing recognition in Lesotho of the importance of ECCE. In 2018, both the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and MoET committed to increasing resources in this area in the future. This momentum is expected to continue in 2019, as UNICEF recently launched the #EarlyMomentsMatter campaign in Lesotho with the First Lady as the champion, and participation by 3,000 people. The campaign was launched as an initiative of the multisectoral integrated ECCD committee, in which UNICEF is a participant. Campaign messages and advocacy strategies were developed collaboratively, and the initiative has strengthened joint action on ECCD in Lesotho. UNICEF provided technical support to the committee for organizing and rolling out the campaign. Facebook and Twitter were used extensively to highlight the launch; 3,700 visitors viewing UNICEF Lesotho's digital platforms.

UNICEF also initiated a partnership with the newly established Network for Early Childhood and Development of Lesotho (NECDOL). To date the partnership had engaged 856 parents in Quthing and Mohale's Hoek districts in communication for development (C4D) activities that promote the importance of ECCD. These are the districts with the lowest enrolment in ECCD. The network also trained 10 area resource teachers and 26 pre-school teachers (all women) in these districts on key aspects of ECCD and strategies for strengthening ECCD centres. As part of a national advocacy campaign, NECDOL initiated a weekly radio programme on early childhood development, and recently held a meeting with parliament's social cluster committee to advocate for increased resources for ECCD.

To improve the quality of early childhood services, UNICEF supported the Lesotho College of Education and MoET to develop the skills of 401 (395 female, six male) pre-school teachers. Those trained by the college (130; 128 female, two male) will graduate with a certificate in early childhood education, while those trained by the MoET (271; 271 female, four male) were taught how to teach young children and identify and refer children with disabilities. Key elements of these courses included: approaches to developing learning materials; child development; educational foundations; child and parent counselling and special educational needs; managing ECCD centres and community relations; health, nutrition and safety; as well as making the transition to primary school. The college has completed a self-evaluation review and submitted documentation required to establish a diploma in ECE to the Council on Higher Education. It is expected that the course will be approved by early 2019.

Although the National Assessment Report for 2018 was not available at the time of this reporting, it is expected that learning outcome targets will not be met. Repetition rates in

primary education remain a challenge, particularly for boys. UNICEF continues to emphasize teacher training as a strategy to improve the quality of education. To address the issue of education quality in primary schools and educational outcomes, UNICEF financially supported the training of 1,411 (1,171 female, 240 male) grade 4–6 teachers on literacy, numeracy and entrepreneurial and creativity skills, which form part of the new child-centred primary curriculum and complement the child-friendly school approach.

UNICEF continued to support MoET efforts to strengthen the EMIS, to facilitate access to data on the ECCD, primary and non-formal education (NFE) sub-sectors. UNICEF assistance included support to the existing system as well as the piloting of a new open-source digital system. With the full roll-out of the new system, it is expected that education data can also be fed back to communities and schools, response and reporting times will improve, operational costs will decrease and data quality will improve. Piloting data collection tools for the new system was carried out, involving the establishment of a technical team at MoET that is evaluating and refining the tools. In addition to the work undertaken on the new system, 2018 EMIS data collection is complete and statistics from 2017 are clean and were made available in September 2018.

Following interventions by UNICEF and the GPE, MoET held a joint sector review in 2018. It was acknowledged that there is a need to produce a shorter-term, three-year, strategy for implementing the education sector plan, with a more robust results and monitoring framework. Also in 2018, UNICEF– along with the MoET; Ministry of Gender, Youth and Sports (MGYS); and LCN– took part in a regional workshop on gender-responsive education sector planning at which partners committed to ensuring that the three-year strategy will strengthen gender analysis and strategies (particularly related to low enrolment and high dropouts among boys) and that this will be incorporated into the 2019 annual work plan. UNICEF provided technical assistance for the planning and execution of the joint sector review, as well as for development of a plan for strengthening gender-responsiveness in the education sector plan.

UNICEF partnered with the Lesotho Association of Non-Formal Education (LANFE), the Good Shepherd Sisters and the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre to establish 84 learning centres where out-of-school children, women and men can gain literacy and numeracy skills, enabling their integration into formal schooling.

Teaching and learning materials for the first four grades were developed with support from UNICEF, thus ensuring that the non-formal curriculum is aligned with the new formal integrated curriculum. UNICEF supported a programme specifically targeting herd-boys, the most disadvantaged group, especially in the mountainous districts where herding is the norm. In Mokhotlong, 1,668 herd boys benefitted from NFE. These programmes focus on promoting literacy and numeracy, but also offer herd-boys an opportunity to learn the primary and secondary curriculum, and even enrol in formal education. In addition, herd-boys are taught life skills (HIV prevention and care, personal hygiene, sexual and reproductive health and drug use prevention) as well as enterprise skills and technical skills, such as making artisanal crafts. In Semonkong and Ha Marakabei, the Good Shepherd Sisters enrolled 285 herd-boys, of whom seven entered secondary school. So far, 12,683 learners have been reached since the start of the UNICEF-supported programme. The 536 NFE teachers equipped in 2017 with content and pedagogical skills to teach out-of-school youth and adults continued to provide better quality non-formal education. More than 250 non-formal learners have sat for examinations across the country.

The cabinet approved inclusive and non-formal education policies in the final quarter of 2018, considerably strengthening the legislative and policy environments. It also means that UNICEF can now support the MoET and other actors to effectively implement NFE.

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

UNICEF Lesotho's work in child protection contributed to the achievement of UNICEF Strategic Plan goal area 3, UNDAF outcome 3 (governance, peace and institutions); and NSDP cross-cutting issues regarding promoting gender equality and protecting the interests and welfare of children, youth, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Lesotho has fostered an enabling environment that promotes respect for children's rights. UNICEF provided financial and technical assistance to the Government and civil society organizations to present combined reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Following a 12-year hiatus, in 2018 Lesotho honoured one of its key obligations: reporting on the progress of the Convention's implementation. The multisectoral concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child partly informed UNICEF's next country programme document. Through the national orphaned and vulnerable children coordinating committee, UNICEF facilitated strategic use of the concluding recommendations by governmental and non-governmental partners to inform new strategic documents and annual plans. Wider dissemination of the recommendations is scheduled for 2019.

Birth registration and issuance of birth certificates increased from 402,026 in 2017 to 495,566 in 2018. Of the 69,790 births registered in 2018, some 23,780 were children under five years of age. This increase is attributable to continued community sensitization undertaken jointly by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and UNICEF, and growing acknowledgement by the Government and its partners of the vital role of birth certificates in facilitating children's access to protection and welfare services. MoHA issued 21,065 national identity documents to 10,675 females and 10,390 males aged 16–18, facilitating their access to scholarships for higher education (among other benefits).

The acceleration of registration at birth, managed jointly by MoHA, UNICEF and other partners, will continue in 2019 and beyond with the aim of reaching the coverage target of 60 per cent set by the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. In readiness for 2019, UNICEF Lesotho supported three officials from the national identity and civil registry (NICR) and one from the Ministry of Local Government to participate in a study tour in Namibia. The tour provided insights on the successful rollout of the Namibian eBirth notification initiative, which services hard-to-reach children and families. The lessons learnt will equip the NICR and local government teams to accelerate under-five birth registration in Lesotho by establishing functional registration facilities at health centres.

UNICEF Lesotho supported the rollout of the global UNICEF #EndViolenceAgainstChildren and African Union-led 'end child marriage' (ECM) campaigns, the key component of which is community sensitization to promote positive cultural practices that help prevent violence and child marriage. During 2018 a community dialogue in Mpharane community council on ending child marriage, led by a UNICEF champion, brought together 400 chiefs, counsellors, teachers and children from surrounding villages. UNICEF Lesotho's Facebook and social media platforms also received a high volume of visits following the introduction of the daughter of the Kingdom's ruler as champion for the ECM campaign.

Lesotho began undertaking its first-ever comprehensive survey on violence against children in 2018, with technical and financial assistance from the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Columbia University, and under co-leadership by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and UNICEF. The survey will provide much-needed information on the nature and scope of violence against children. Its aim is to inform programming, interventions and advocacy on prevention and response to violence. Preliminary findings will be shared with partners during the first quarter of 2019.

To strengthen coordinated child protection service provision at national, district and community levels, 90 district child protection teams and auxiliary social workers and 115 Letsema Network members (including law enforcement officials, magistrates, social workers, chiefs and others) were trained in child-friendly referral approaches, childcare practices and psychosocial support. The Child Rights Network in Southern Africa (CRINSA), Catholic Relief Services and the regional psycho-social support initiative facilitated the course using draft justice for children referral mechanisms and standard operating procedures.

UNICEF helped to strengthen child participation through a shadow National Children's Parliament, which called for speedy enactment of the End Child Marriage Bill. In collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services and other partners, UNICEF supported the participation of 70 children from nine districts in preparatory sessions for the ongoing national reform process. Focusing on seven thematic areas proposed for reform, the children came up with 22 recommendations, eight of which were adopted by the respective thematic groups and presented to the plenary. It is envisaged that the children's voices will inform national strategic plans, budgetary allocations and advocacy as the country charts another five-year course in its journey toward sustainable development.

Relying on its comparative advantage in the policy arena, UNICEF Lesotho plans to support the Government to reduce violence against children through multisectoral prevention and response initiatives that promote development and enforcement of child rights laws and provision of quality, child-friendly social and justice services by a well-trained social service and law enforcement workforce. In so doing, UNICEF will have contributed to addressing at least eight of 17 SDGs.

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

This component is aligned with and contributes to the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021, specifically goal area 4; UNDAF outcome 7; NSDP 1 (improving health, combating HIV and AIDS and reducing vulnerability) and SDG 6.

Results from the 2016 census indicate a 10 per cent reduction in the proportion of the population practicing open defecation (from 30 per cent in 2014). Data from UNICEF-WHO joint monitoring programme estimates in 2017 show that 72 per cent of the population can access safe water within 30 minutes, 44 per cent have access to improved (not shared) sanitation services and only 2 per cent practise safe hygiene.

Very slow progress in rolling out the community-led total sanitation (CLTS) initiative meant that no new communities were certified open defecation-free in 2018. However, UNICEF advocacy resulted in the inclusion of community-led total sanitation in the draft sanitation policy document.

The Lesotho water and sanitation policy was revised to include community-led total sanitation as an approach to eradicate open defecation. Under revised policy statement nine (“facilitate safe sanitation for all Basotho”), specific reference is made to the implementation of CLTS approaches in rural and periurban communities. The Government is in the process of developing a financing strategy for rural sanitation through the Department of Rural Water and Sanitation. The strategy will include an assessment of different implementation packages or models to improve service delivery, as defined in the draft policy.

UNICEF also supported the development of community-led total sanitation implementation guidelines, which are waiting to be validated by key stakeholders. Thus no communities were triggered for CLTS during the year. UNICEF supported the development of guidelines on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector coordination and organized a multi-stakeholder validation workshop. It is expected that an enhanced sector coordination mechanism will improve planning of WASH interventions and monitoring of WASH SDG indicators.

UNICEF supported water quality surveillance training for 20 officers from the MOH’s environmental health department, which is expected to improve water quality monitoring. The skills development of five officials from the Water, Finance and Development Planning Ministries and a civil society partner will help to strengthen the enabling environment required for implementing WASH interventions effectively and efficiently. Subsequently, a WASH bottleneck analysis for Lesotho was conducted in the last quarter of 2018. The exercise was supported by UNICEF and included a wide range of stakeholders. Successful implementation of the bottleneck analysis and validation of WASH sectoral coordination guidelines will be leveraged in 2019 through increased support for the water commission to strengthen the enabling environment for WASH.

In partnership with World Vision, UNICEF supported implementation of school-led total sanitation (‘3-star’ approach) to provide a full complement of WASH services (including menstrual hygiene management) in 20 selected schools in the two districts of Maseru’s Hoek and Berea, including: educating 5,248 learners of sanitation and hygiene practices (including group hand-washing), toilet cleaning and menstrual hygiene. UNICEF also engaged an independent firm to improve WASH infrastructure: boreholes were equipped with solar pumps in six schools, ‘amalooloo’-type latrines were constructed at seven schools and hand-washing facilities were installed at eight schools. Seven district environmental health officials were also trained to apply the 3-star approach within the child-friendly school model.

In partnership with the Maseru City Council, a three-year campaign led by schools and communities in the city was launched. The aim is to prepare children to serve as change agents, advocating for policies and programmes that ensure that they reside in clean and safe environments.

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

The social policy component contributed to the achievement of UNICEF Strategic Plan goal area 5. It is directly linked to CRC Articles 4 and 26; CRC committee recommendations 11 and 13 (public finance for children and expansion social assistance programmes and NISSA); multiple SDGs (1, 5, 10, 16 and 17); NSDP key priority area 2 and UNDAF outcome 2.

According to the MoSD, about 131,552 children directly benefitted from the social protection system in 2018. Of these, 108,412 children from 37,738 households benefitted from the child

grant programme and the remaining number from the bursary programme for orphaned and vulnerable children. About 50 per cent of beneficiaries were girls. The Government allocated an additional US\$2 million to the social assistance programme in 2018. Evidence-led advocacy, improved public financed, strengthening of the social protection system and partnership with government ministries, the European Union, World Bank, private organizations, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies all contributed to the achievement of these results.

Considerable progress was made in strengthening the social protection system. The MoSD established 10 district-level social protection coordination committees; about 40 per cent of committee members are women. A social protection strategy implementation plan and M&E framework were finalized to support implementation, coordination and monitoring of social protection interventions. An additional 22 community councils implemented the integrated social safety nets approach. Cash payments through mobile technology reached 3,200 child grant beneficiary households, up from 2,000 in 2017. A seven-member MoSD mission gained knowledge on how to expand mobile payments in Lesotho through South-South cooperation with Kenya.

The MoSD incorporated four UNICEF-supported positions, thus strengthening its capacity to manage and implement social assistance programmes. In 2018, with UNICEF and European Union support, 115,000 households from 27 community councils were re-certified and 30,116 new households were included in the national information system for social assistance, bringing the total to 264,567 in 2018. By the first quarter of 2019, all rural households (about 320,000) will be included in the NISSA. Women played a key role in the selection of poor households. Ten MoSD staff members gained improved knowledge on the NISSA information management system, which was decentralized in three districts.

An integrated community development approach, using Citizen Service Centres, was implemented by 26 councils. A total of 1,733 citizens, including 351 children (50 per cent girls), were provided with public services through the centres. Four hundred savings and internal lending committees, with 7,519 (6,262 female, 1,257 male) members, were formed. The implementation of an intervention on sustainable poverty reduction through income generation, nutrition and access to public services (SPRINGS) helped poor households gain access to fresh produce through more than 7,000 keyhole gardens. To expedite poverty reduction, the MoSD prepared a community development plan to link cash assistance with livelihoods. Findings of a SPRINGS evaluation revealed that the combination of cash grants and livelihood assistances resulted in improved nutritional knowledge and consumption patterns, increased hygiene and sanitation levels and more money saved and borrowed (more than 100 and 70 percent increases, respectively, compared to the average).

Substantial progress was made in evidence-generation and improvement of public finance for children. A formal partnership with the MoF helped to influence social and economic policies, legislative measures and budgets for children. Budget allocation trends in key social sectors were made available to parliamentarians and citizens through the development of budget briefs in four key areas: macro-economy, health, education and social protection. An analytical report on the MoH's absorption capacity was drafted to identify and overcome related bottlenecks.

In addition, 23 Parliamentarians learned how to ask questions and get the desired answers during budget discussions. A broader consultation on the national budget allowed about 100 officials and citizens from the public sector, parliament, civil society, private sector and media to

raise their concerns with the MoF for the first time. A national 15-member resource team on public finance for children was established, and 25 officials received the knowledge required to enhance budget transparency.

UNICEF Lesotho collaborated with the World Bank to operationalize recommendations from performance expenditure reviews and public expenditure tracking survey on health, and to implement recommendations on fiscal space analysis. In addition, the MoF was supported to operationalize the budget transparency improvement action plan.

Noteworthy progress was made in strengthening the national M&E system for collection, analysis and dissemination of strategic information needed to plan and implement national policies. The GoL conducted a multiple indicator cluster survey after a 17-year hiatus. The survey will monitor the situation of children and achievement of the SDGs and its results will inform social policy and action. The report will be ready by the first quarter of 2019. Evidence on SPRINGS was generated to inform the national community development plan. Data gaps related to children in Lesotho were identified through a study on the Lesotho data landscape.

Gender

In 2018 UNICEF Lesotho's gender programming focused on addressing adolescent girls' access to health and education, HIV prevention and WASH, including menstrual health and gender-based violence. For example, UNICEF's work reached 19,748 adolescents (60 per cent girls) with comprehensive knowledge of HIV and prevention through a peer-to-peer system. A peer-support programme for 151 pregnant adolescents and young women received support to ensure greater uptake of timely antenatal care, sexual and reproductive health and PMTCT services. To address menstrual hygiene management and improve access to a full complement of WASH services, UNICEF and World Vision supported a gender-responsive, school-led total sanitation intervention in 20 selected schools in two districts. Gender-based violence, including bullying in schools and child marriage, are being addressed through the CFS-Plus pilot in three post-primary schools. Efforts to increase adolescents' access to education included partnering with LANFE, the Good Shepherd Sisters and the national Distance Learning Centre to establish 84 centres where out-of-school children –including herd-boys, women and men– gained literacy and numeracy skills, enabling them to enter formal schooling. This initiative helped to integrate seven herd-boys into secondary school after passing primary school leaving certificate examinations.

Humanitarian situation

No humanitarian situation required UNICEF response in 2018, but UNICEF Lesotho began emergency planning and preparedness for the anticipated drought season (from late November 2018 through to April 2019) due to the El Niño phenomenon. All preparedness actions are included in the new annual work plan 2019–2020.

Internally, UNICEF re-activated its emergency management team and completed a preparedness plan, as well as participating in coordination meetings of the Government's disaster management team. At end-2018 sectoral data were being collected, updated and reviewed to finalize sectoral contingency and response plans. Planned interventions will include provision of WASH facilities in communities and institutions, prevention of diarrhoeal diseases through strengthening sanitation and hygiene practices, and strengthening of nutrition surveillance for prevention and treatment of severe acute malnutrition.

Cross-cutting areas

Advocacy, communication and resource mobilization: The updated UNICEF Lesotho advocacy and communication strategy (2017/18) was key in guiding, most notably, the launch of the #EarlyMomentsMatter and #EndingChildMarriage campaigns, which contributed to gaining new partners such as the Maseru City Council and Limkokwing University, which are implementing a three-year 'safe and clean environments for cities' children strategy. UNICEF Lesotho also updated its resource mobilization strategy, leading to the adoption by Lesotho's Post Bank of the #EarlyMomentsMatter campaign and designation of mother/child spaces in its 14 branches.

Human rights: UNICEF supported the Government to present its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, updating information on the country's progress in improving child rights in Lesotho. The MoSD prepared a time-bound plan for implementing the Committee's recommendations. Support was also given to the Lesotho police's child and gender protection unit to report cases of human rights violations. UNICEF facilitated active and meaningful participation by 10,000 children in shadow children's parliaments and supported 10 community dialogues and two national dialogues on the national reform process. Twenty-five parliamentarians were oriented on approaches to realizing citizens' rights. The capacity of communities to claim their rights to basic social services was strengthened through C4D interventions. Citizen service centres were supported to provide communities with access to public services and information.

Disability: The Cabinet approved an inclusive education policy in the last quarter of 2018, and UNICEF will be supporting its implementation as of 2019. Work also started on the construction of disability-friendly WASH facilities at 20 schools, with UNICEF support. UNICEF continued its participation in the MoSD-led technical working group on people with disabilities. The group is addressing the data gap on disability, and supporting partners on the ground to address issues of quality of care in learning centres for children with disabilities.

Social and behaviour change: During 2018 UNICEF focused on advocating for a paradigm shift in C4D: from information, education and communication approaches to communication for social and behaviour change, especially in child survival and development, where the bulk of C4D work lies. This was seen through the adoption of an evidence-based national maternal and child health C4D strategy, which will promote 14 practices in maternal, new-born, child and adolescent health, nutrition and WASH. Major campaigns such as #EarlyMomentsMatter and #EndingChildMarriage were adopted and implemented by communities to raise awareness and provide communities with skills on ECD and address social norms that perpetuate violence against children.

Programme effectiveness

UNICEF Lesotho's country management team (CMT) improved tremendously on all performance scorecard indicators. Some of the key actions undertaken to achieve better results were centred around: monitoring indicators on the global scorecard, the compact with UNICEF Regional Office and the key regional and national priorities, the plan for research monitoring and evaluation, rolling work plans and enterprise risk management, through regular monthly country management team, programme and operations meetings. In addition, the office held mid-year and annual review meetings with counterparts and partners for programme

planning and reporting purposes.

Harmonized approach to cash transfer (HACT) activities were continuously monitored in line with revised HACT guidelines adopted in August 2018, to ensure cost-effective and quality results for children. Audit recommendations were reviewed by the CMT on a quarterly basis to ensure constant follow-up on open findings, with a view to closing them. All audit observations were closed in July 2018, and the office continues to sustain closed observations.

Specific attention to efficiency gains, cost reduction and savings were a consideration throughout the year. The hub continued to bring about more efficiency by freeing up finance staff time to focus on other key areas, such as HACT and local procurement, which culminated in enhanced capacity-building for staff and partners.

The supply unit continued to participate in MoH supply chain activities to strengthen its functioning and its collaboration with UNICEF, as well as to participate in the development of standard operating procedures for the supply chain and logistics of health commodities and quantification of health commodities, including immunization supplies. UNICEF Lesotho remains committed to gender parity. Gender balance among international staff is 40 per cent male, 60 per cent female; the general service staff is 45 per cent male and 55 per cent female; and gender parity in the national officer category is 22 per cent male to 78 per cent female. To effectively respond to emergency and other needs, staffing was complemented with temporary staff, consultants, volunteers and interns. The office promoted human capacity development through continuous learning.

UNICEF Lesotho continued to work closely with the local United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the operations management team to implement several security enhancements, as per the 2018 security plan.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Goal area 1: The availability of quality and timely data remains a bottleneck in Lesotho. There are discrepancies between the 2018 AIDS estimates, LePHIA estimates and district health information system (DHIS) 2 data. In response, UNICEF and Columbia University's ICAP programme provided technical assistance to strengthen MoH data management systems and engaged the private sector to comply with MoH reporting mechanisms. Additionally, the MoH received support for conducting a PMTCT data-mining exercise to address the poor quality of DHIS 2 data. The exercise revealed that all the registers are properly filled in at facility level, but challenges arise when aggregating results in monthly reporting forms. UNICEF, through the Joint UN Task Team on AIDS, supported the Ministry to assess data quality to determine the true number of people living with HIV, including women who are pregnant and those on treatment, to reconcile national data.

Despite improvements in outcome indicators, quality of care is also an important bottleneck for elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) of HIV and syphilis. As a response to reports that facilities were not dispensing nevirapine prophylaxis to HIV-exposed infants, UNICEF supported district sensitization meetings to discuss nevirapine dosing and HIV testing in the context of antenatal care, infant and young child feeding and early infant diagnosis. Additionally, a review of the new ARV guidelines for pregnant and breastfeeding women was

carried out, taking into account new evidence on the medication dolutegravir.

Limited coordination of adolescent interventions at both national and district levels was a constraint in 2018. This is further exacerbated by divisions within districts, and within districts between the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Global Fund, meaning that UNICEF has to partner with stakeholders that are allowed by the Government to implement in the selected district. Limited coordination, compounded by limited investments in primary prevention of HIV for adolescents and young people, led to minimal gains in reducing HIV incidence and MTCT among adolescent girls and young women, as well as in improving comprehensive knowledge of HIV (35 per cent), HIV testing (40.5 per cent) and access to quality, adolescent-friendly health services. As a response, UNICEF supported the MoH to coordinate HIV-sensitive interventions for adolescents through various technical working groups. UNICEF also provided technical assistance to the Global Fund and its primary and sub-recipients to ensure high levels of effectiveness in programme implementation.

UNICEF will continue to support the layering of HIV interventions, which is expected to improve coverage of HIV testing, condom promotion and HIV knowledge among adolescents. UNICEF will also expand access to these combination prevention measures through community structures, helping adolescents and young people to adopt behaviours that lower their risk of contracting HIV. A major focus for 2019 will be on strengthening adolescent participation in service delivery.

Poor data management and under-reporting during routine immunization was documented during the immunization data quality review implemented by UNICEF Lesotho and WHO. An improvement plan was developed to address this weakness. Weak vaccine and cold chain management practices also continue to be reported, and will be addressed within the effective vaccine management assessment improvement plan.

The delay in incorporating performance indicators for severe acute malnutrition in the DHIS 2 continued to weaken the overall nutrition surveillance system developed with UNICEF assistance in 2017. Inadequate coordination and leadership within government agencies for nutrition and WASH also slowed down achievement of results in these sectors.

Goal area 2: Constraints in 2018 included low budgetary allocations to the pre-school sub-sector and changing government leadership, affecting timely implementation of activities such as registering pre-schools and monitoring. Another contributing factor was the fact that the five ECCD officers that had previously been supported by UNICEF and were to be absorbed by MoET in 2018 had still not been recruited by end-2018, although the process was initiated. UNICEF will continue to engage with MOET on this matter to ensure that the officers are in place by early 2019. The launch of the #EarlyMomentsMatter campaign in November and related meetings with the Parliament's Social Cluster Committee, along with UNICEF advocacy, is expected to impact budget planning for 2019, increasing the proportion of the education budget allocated to ECE. UNICEF will continue to strengthen advocacy and planning efforts in this area. As part of the BELDS initiative, UNICEF will also undertake a funding gap analysis on ECE in 2019.

Challenges to human resources in MoET's ECCD unit had the knock-on effect of delaying finalization of early learning and development standards, which were due for completion by end-2018. But the curriculum review, which relies on their completion, had to be postponed to 2019. Two stakeholder meetings were held in preparation for the review.

The Lesotho College of Education's low annual intake of teacher-trainees continued to slow the increase in qualified ECE teachers. UNICEF expects that the launch of the ECD diploma in 2019 may address this issue, as it will be an accredited programme linked to a primary education qualification. UNICEF will advocate for accreditation of the diploma programme in early 2019, although this could mean that the first cohort of students will not be enrolled until 2020.

Data required for regular monitoring and reporting on key education indicators remains a challenge. UNICEF continues to strengthen the capacity of MoET's statistics unit, but statistics are still delayed by a year and retrieving data quickly from the existing EMIS is a major challenge. To improve the situation, UNICEF continued to pilot OpenEMIS, though the pilot was scaled down due to capacity issues at MoET. UNICEF plans to engage a consultant to strengthen capacity at the Ministry. A proof of concept based on the pilot will be developed and shared with the Government and partners. A plan for funding rollout and ongoing costs of the initiative will also be developed.

Although the inclusive education policy was approved, data on the situation of children with disabilities remains a constraint. UNICEF worked with key partners, including the MoSD, to plan a situation analysis of people with disabilities for early 2019.

Although the education sector continues to be allocated the highest proportion of the national budget, spending has been decreasing, both as a percentage of the national budget and GDP. As the education sector budget is mainly financed by Government with a small and declining source of funding from donors, this is a significant challenge for improving the quality of education. UNICEF is working with MOET through the local education group to prioritize quality improvement interventions in the next funding proposal submitted to GPE.

UNICEF continued to support teacher training and inspection to strengthen implementation of the new child-centred curriculum and the CFS framework. Progress on implementation of the CFS framework was slow in 2018, due in large part to budgetary constraints, but an implementation evaluation of CFS was begun. However, due to the current fiscal space, it is likely that budget will remain a constraint. For this reason, resource mobilization informed by the evaluation will be undertaken in 2019.

There is also a need to re-evaluate the approach to teacher training, as this has not yielded significant results. The conventional theory of change on teacher development does not automatically lead to improved performance and learning for children. In 2019 UNICEF will work with MoET to explore different approaches to teacher training, including coaching and mentoring, along with other elements of performance, including accountability through monitoring.

Social norms remain a challenge to non-formal education, as herding is both an economic and cultural phenomenon in Lesotho. UNICEF addressed this issue through C4D initiatives in communities where herding is prevalent, but resources for these activities are limited. A further challenge is the high turnover of teachers, as they are usually volunteers or paid a basic stipend. Implementation of the recently approved non-formal education policy will seek to address this challenge, as it includes provisions for improving teacher engagement and remuneration, as well as their work environment. NFE is severely affected by funding constraints in the education sector, and gains in this area depend on significant financial

resources from UNICEF and other partners. Resource mobilization efforts for this work will continue in 2019.

Goal area 3: Constraints in 2018 included low budgetary allocations for the child protection agenda. This has resulted in almost total dependence on MoSD on UNICEF funding to support two key positions and run programme activities, and means that a significant portion of the annual budget goes towards ministry-based staff salaries. UNICEF continued to lobby the ministry to accelerate the proposed absorption of the positions and increase funding for child protection. The advocacy bore fruit in that the ministry recently absorbed the two positions into its structure, creating opportunities for increased funding of programme interventions.

Another challenge has been poor communication between the MoSD, other ministries, UNICEF and civil society organizations around the ministry's implementation of activities. This created an unnecessary delay in the completion of, for example, the justice for children (J4C) referral mechanism and standard operating procedures, due to the ministry's decision to roll out the development of child protection case management and violence against children initiatives simultaneously. UNICEF will advocate for introduction of the J4C referral mechanisms and training modules in 2019.

The unavailability of robust, comprehensive data on violence against children continues to hamper proper planning and evidence-based programming at all levels. Findings from the 2018 survey on this topic will go a long way toward guiding the work of Government, development partners and civil society on violence against children. UNICEF continues to analyse emerging trends and support both the police's child and gender protection unit and the Ministry of Justice's children's court, to obtain credible statistics on children who have reported abuse and/or received justice services. Survey findings will also help establish a credible baseline for the child protection management information system, which in turn will build a strong case for the country to invest in protecting children from violence.

Lesotho plans to share findings from the survey on violence against children with partners during the first quarter of 2019. In support, UNICEF is organizing a joint webinar with the MoSD, the Ministry of Justice, ICAP, CDC and the UNICEF regional advisor on violence against children to provide guidance on the way forward. Data collected through the 2018 MICS – on child labour, birth registration and child marriage –will strengthen the body of knowledge on the status of child protection in the country and thus inform the proposed development of child protection indicators. A key lesson learned is that evidence is important for developing an effective child protection programme for children.

Slow dissemination and implementation of the CRC committee's concluding observations and recommendations, under the leadership of MoSD, was another constraint. Following presentation of the report to the UN in May 2018, stakeholders were not updated on the status of implementation of child rights in Lesotho. In response, UNICEF and the MoSD have prioritized multi-stakeholder dissemination sessions in 2019.

Goal area 4: Poor coordination and leadership by lead implementing government agencies continued to hinder progress in addressing open defecation through the community-led total sanitation approach. Continuous engagement has resulted in the inclusion of such approach in the draft policy document, but delays in formal ratification of the policy and implementation guidelines stalled implementation in 2018. In 2019, UNICEF Lesotho will continue to support the Government to address identified bottlenecks, with particular attention to developing and

implementing community-led and school-led total sanitation guidelines and standards.

Goal area 5: UNICEF learned three key lessons in 2018. First, building a shock-responsive social protection system is pivotal to addressing chronic and emergency shocks efficiently and effectively. For example, in 2017 and 2018 the Government increased the coverage of child grant beneficiary families. The rapid implementation of the expansion was possible due to NISSA and a readily available disbursement modality that facilitated rapid targeting and disbursement. Second, formalization of collaboration is key to strengthening programme implementation and accountability for children. UNICEF, with the Ministry of Finance, signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen public finance for children, which increased the rate of implementation, driven by increased ownership among ministry officials. Third, the programme implementation environment is dynamic; it changes with changes of leadership, time and contexts; therefore, for efficient and effective implementation of programmes, managers should always be watchful.

Most constraints were in the areas of the enabling environment and supply and demand. The social protection coordination mechanism is not yet functional due to frequent changes in leadership. Overall, system-building interventions and implementation of the community development model advanced slowly, in part due to lack of expertise in the MODS41 and the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftainship. Weak institutional accountability relationships between duty-bearers and service-receivers weaken the overall implementation of social protection programmes.

External interference delayed implementation of NISSA. After NISSA training began, some individuals who had not been selected as enumerators assembled and started demonstrating. The recruitment process had to be repeated, delaying implementation. The MoSD also has only a limited budget to expand the cash assistance programme vertically and horizontally. The Bureau of Statistics (BoS) is mandated to manage data and information, but lacks adequate human resources and budget to function effectively. To strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system, Lesotho needs an M&E policy; but such a policy does not yet exist. Weak accountability relationships between supervisors and supervisees at the BoS delayed implementation of the MICS survey. UNICEF and partners will help the Government to address these challenges and effectively implement planned programmes and associated interventions during the new country programme.

Programme effectiveness

Implementation of the Business Operating Strategy moved slowly in 2018; as a result many planned long-term agreements were not implemented, affecting office efficiency in several areas, such as travel. Implementation of technology for development is at the initial stage, and more support is needed from implementing partners. In addition, maintaining gender balance in the office proved to be a challenge, despite measures taken during the recruitment process. Another challenge in human resources related to implementation of the staff development committee plan, when some courses were cancelled. Neither the radio room nor VHF radios mounted in vehicles were functional during 2018, but the United Nations Department of Safety and Security hopes to restore operations of the radio room in 2019.

END/

