

## Myanmar

### Update on the context and situation of children

Myanmar continues to attract significant, and largely negative, international attention, primarily due to the situation of the Rohingya and the events of August 2017 in Rakhine State. In contrast, key milestones underpinning improvements in the situation of children in the country have been achieved, the most notable being the enacting of the Child Rights Law on 24 July. This multi-faceted context continues to provide challenges and opportunities for UNICEF's work in the country.

The situation in Rakhine State has been further complicated by a major escalation of conflict between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and the Arakan Army, commencing in January 2019. Around 45,000 people, mainly ethnic Rakhine, have been displaced, exacerbating the challenges around access to populations in need.

There has been little progress in establishing conditions that would allow the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya refugees currently in Bangladesh. The main barrier is the lack of progress in addressing fundamental rights, including citizenship and freedom of movement, both of which have a knock-on effect limiting opportunities for livelihoods, education, and access to health and other essential services. There is also the major issue of restoration of land and housing. These barriers also limit the feasibility of closing the camps for the internally displaced population from the inter-communal conflict of 2012. In November the Government launched the 'National Strategy on Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of IDP camps'. This strategy, applicable to all IDPs in conflict-affected areas, including Kachin and Shan States, is based on international standards and principles and is thus an important reference point for humanitarian and development partners, when considering how best to support the resettlement of displaced populations in Myanmar.

A unilateral ceasefire declared by the Myanmar military in December 2018 resulted in a calmer situation in Kachin for much of the year. However over 107,000 people remained displaced. The ceasefire was not extended beyond 21st September and episodic fighting continues to take place.

Providing humanitarian response in all three conflict locations continues to be challenging, due to restrictions on access and the fluid and temporary nature of some of the displacements.

In September the final report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IIFFM) on Myanmar, mandated by the Human Rights Council, was published. The report concluded that 'equitable, sustainable economic development in Rakhine is impossible unless and until all restrictions on the Rohingya are lifted'. Similarly, it found that discrimination and marginalization are common threads experienced by many of the ethnic groups in the country. It concluded that the Government of Myanmar can do far more to move the democratic transition forward. The IIFFM has now handed over to the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

In November The Gambia filed a case at the International Court of Justice against Myanmar. The case was heard in December 2019, with the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leading the Myanmar delegation in her capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On 24th July the new Child Rights Law was enacted. This was a major milestone, following several years of preparation and advocacy, and it brings Myanmar legislation largely in line with international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Under the new law, all children born in Myanmar are guaranteed the fundamental and unconditional right to register at birth. With the establishment of a minimum age of marriage (18 years) and of employment (14 years), the value and vulnerabilities of childhood are recognized and helps allow children be children. All forms of violence against children are prohibited. Myanmar also ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

The Poverty Report - Myanmar Living Conditions Survey 2017 was launched in June. The main finding is that poverty declined substantially, from 48.2 percent in 2005 to 24.8 percent in 2017. However, vulnerability, defined as a consumption profile above the poverty line but very close to it, making the household very likely to fall into poverty in case of a shock, has increased, with a third of the population highly vulnerable. Poverty remains largely a rural phenomenon, with 90% of the poor living in rural areas. Nevertheless, poverty density and vulnerability increased in urban areas. Chin and Rakhine States remain the poorest in terms of population percentage, however the largest numbers of poor are found in Ayeyarwaddy and Sagaing Regions and Shan State. Poor households have almost two times more children than non-poor households, resulting in a higher child dependency ratio: 67.6 percent for poor households compared with 46.6 percent for non-poor households. Poor households are also more likely to have a head of household who is disabled or has little or no education.

During 2019, UNICEF released results from several secondary analyses of data from the 2014 Census, 2015 Demographic Health Survey, and 2016 Global School Based Health Survey (GSHS). The report on migration showed nearly 1 in every 5

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young people aged 15-24 has migrated from their place of birth either internally or externally. Migration amongst young people is increasing, with the driving force being employment opportunities. Nearly one in ten children between the ages of 5 and 17 years old is engaged in some form of work. The report on school violence and bullying in Myanmar showed that, out of 96 countries that participate in the GSHS, Myanmar is the only country with an increasing prevalence trend across all violence-related variables (i.e. physical attacks, physical fights and bullying). Psychological bullying is more commonly reported in Myanmar compared to regional and global estimates, however sexual bullying is less frequently reported. Another report showed adolescent intimate partner violence is quite prevalent in Myanmar, perpetuated by strong negative gender norms. The report dispels several long-standing myths surrounding adolescent behaviour in relation to intimate partner violence and help seeking behaviour. This can guide improved preventative and supportive actions in the future. The final report showed how education can be a protective factor in relation to teenage pregnancy and child marriage. Second decade education helps delay sexual debut among adolescents, as well as child marriage.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

The 2019 Annual Management Plan (AMP) priority results were a mix of programmatic and operational priorities, primarily based on management mechanisms and processes to support the implementation of activities in the Multi-Year Work Plan 2018-19 while reflecting developments in the country during 2018. The priorities included those in the Rakhine Response Plan, and key management needs, related to the need to adjust UNICEF's presence and function in its field offices and in the capital Nay Pyi Taw.

In January, the High-Level Forum on "realizing Myanmar's Development Vision for Every Child", attended by the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the UNICEF Executive Director Ms. Henrietta H. Fore provided a platform for reiterating Government commitment to put children first in the country's development agenda. The identification of priority indicators for children, as part of the National Indicator Framework linked to the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan 2018-2030, provides a basis for monitoring and holding government accountable in the future.

The enactment of the Child Rights Law in July 2019 was a major milestone for children in Myanmar. Whilst the process of reviewing and redrafting the law began in 2011, led by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, with UNICEF support, a major push was required in 2019 as the Bill was debated in the Parliament. An accelerated effort was required to advocate on the contested areas of the Bill such as the right to birth registration, minimum age of marriage, and protection of children against all forms of physical violence. UNICEF and partners came together to build a strong evidence-based case for maintaining the provisions, framed by the principle of best interests of children. In coordination with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, UNICEF conducted an informal roundtable discussion with champion Parliamentarians, providing them with arguments based on international law. UNICEF's advocacy messages were adopted by the parliamentarians, most of them women, and they debated the contentious issues in the Parliament on behalf of the children in Myanmar. UNICEF has begun supporting the preparation of the rules and procedures that will help operationalise the Law.

During 2019, strategies were prepared for achieving more integrated approaches to Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Adolescents. The ECD strategy note was developed to guide UNICEF's efforts to strengthen an integrated approach to addressing early childhood development over the coming years with a focus on the first 1,000 days. Similarly, the Adolescent Development and Participation strategy note was developed to build on and strengthen the current UNICEF's programmes by giving increased visibility to and working towards realizing the rights of adolescents in Myanmar. These are facilitating a more coordinated approach to these two key areas of the country programme, which is operationalised through the 2020-21 work-plans, prepared in consultation with the Government.

For ECD, the conceptual framework is based on the notion of 'nurturing care', bringing together components of good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregivers, opportunities for early learning, security and safety. These components are organised into four multi-sectoral intervention packages: first 1,000 days; early learning and protection; multi-generational nurturing care; family support and strengthening. Contributions will come from all five outcome areas, and programme effectiveness capacity, including communications for development and advocacy. Shan State was selected as the focus area for UNICEF support, while technical support at the national level included integration of early stimulation and responsive feeding into the revised maternal and child health handbook and new infant and young child feeding guidelines.

The Adolescents Strategy focuses on development and participation and uses a gender lens throughout the development of the theory of change, key interventions and actions. The strategy is designed around three key areas affecting adolescents: their family situation, education, and position in their communities. Priority interventions are focused on: enhancing parenting skills relevant for adolescents; supportive social services particularly for adolescents in institutions and/or without families; safe, clean and green schools; options for non-formal and alternative education for those unable to attend formal schools; support to community initiatives by adolescents. These interventions are supported by an over-arching advocacy strategy to enhance national attention to adolescents and facilitate their participation in national decision-making.

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UNICEF supported development of the costed sector plan for social protection (CSPSP) in Myanmar and is providing high-level advocacy and coordination support for strengthening and expanding child-sensitive social protection systems. UNICEF continued to provide technical support for the roll out of the national Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (MCCT) programme. This flagship social protection programme provides monthly cash benefit to pregnant women and children up to two years of age. In 2019 the programme benefitted over 200,000 and now operates in 5 areas (Chin, Rakhine, Naga self-administered area, Kayin, Kayah). UNICEF supported a country-led formative evaluation of the MCCT programme in Rakhine and Chin States, to generate credible evidence on the performance of the programme, that will inform the further roll out and scale up. The Government has taken the decision to expand to the two most populated areas of the country, namely Ayeyarwaddy Region and Shan State, from 2020. UNICEF supported Myanmar in conducting a study in strengthening capacity to develop risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection for resilience.

One aim of the MCCT programme is to improve the nutritional status of children, by targeting children during the first 1,000 days. UNICEF played a key role in promoting a multi-sectoral approach for nutrition, as set out in the Myanmar Multisectoral National Plan of Action on Nutrition (MSNPAN). UNICEF became the chair of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) UN network, that facilitates close collaboration among UN agencies including FAO, WFP and WHO. UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) on the development of a national social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategy and toolkit for nutrition that will be available in 2020. Innovative SBCC efforts for nutrition continued, building upon the successful multi-media campaign on exclusive breastfeeding, leading to MOHS adopting the campaign in its own annual Nutrition Promotion Month. UNICEF is also partnering with private sector companies, to promote improved conditions for breastfeeding mothers in the workplace. Capacity to treat malnourished children in the health system is gradually improving. Through Government health facilities alone, a total of 1,352 children with SAM were treated as per national IMAM protocol compared to only 163 SAM children in 2018. With support from UNICEF, both Government health centers and Out-Patient Programmes implemented by humanitarian partners were able to treat 5,769 children with SAM, almost double that of last year (2,740 children). Government health facilities meeting IMAM performance standards also increased from 76 percent in 2018 to 90 percent in 2019. This year, a total of 26,963 mothers were reached with IYCF counselling by trained Government health staff and implementing humanitarian partners, compared to 21,028 mothers in 2018.

UNICEF partnered with the Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health and the Myanmar Paediatric Society to improve quality of care in 21 district hospitals in four deprived states/regions, achieving a 42% reduction in newborn mortality among admitted children.

Following a targeted Measles-Rubella (MR) + bivalent Oral Polio Vaccine (bOPV) campaign which took place in October, a nationwide MR supplementary immunization campaign was conducted in November with over 90% children in the targeted age group of 9 months to 65 months receiving the vaccine. These campaigns were just one part of an extensive collaboration between UNICEF, WHO, MoHS and GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance. UNICEF is a key partner for GAVI in the implementation of its funding for health systems strengthening, including cold chain infrastructure strengthening, cold chain expansion, immunization logistics information management system strengthening and capacity building of Cold Chain Key Persons. During 2019 there were no reported stock outs at any level and there was improvement of the coverage of third dose of pentavalent vaccine increasing from 89% last year to 91% this year. However, pockets of poorly-reached populations remain, including in areas of armed conflict, which are vulnerable to the resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccine-derived Polio virus outbreak was reported from the villages of Hpa-pun township, Kayin State, where immunization coverage was below 40% according to MOHS. UNICEF and WHO supported MOHS for an immediate outbreak response in surrounding townships, targeting 300,000 children. UNICEF played a key role in supporting immunization in non-government-controlled areas in coordination with MoHS, WHO and local Ethnic Health Organizations. Cold chain depot construction was completed in Sittwe, Rakhine to enhance vaccine delivery in humanitarian response.

Myanmar is increasing its attention to the issue of sanitation and particularly the elimination of open defecation. UNICEF is the lead agency supporting the rural WASH sector and provided significant support to the development of a new National Rural Sanitation Policy and Costed Implementation Plan. Under the global Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) initiative, Myanmar is one of 48 countries that made commitments as part of the Mutual Accountability Mechanism. These commitments include increased political prioritization, evidence-based decision-making, and national planning processes.

UNICEF also supported the use of the WASH Bottleneck Analysis Tool in two states, supporting the development of sub-national plans to improve WASH services to communities.

UNICEF's support to education is primarily shaped by the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2022 and the National Early Childhood Care and Development Strategic Plan 2018-2022. UNICEF is now focusing on three areas: early childhood development and learning; inclusive education; alternative education options for children out of formal schools. For early learning, and to promote early literacy particularly for children from ethnic areas, UNICEF supported the development of a set of 10 bilingual storybooks in Myanmar and 25 ethnic languages which were distributed to 415,000 young children aged 3-5 years. The storybooks feature varied themes, like nature and friendship, are gender sensitive, and developmentally-, culturally- and linguistically-appropriate. Supporting an inclusive approach for ethnic children also extends to primary level,

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where UNICEF has supported material development for the local curriculum in Mon, Kayin, Kachin, Kayah and Chin states. The teaching and learning materials contain local knowledge and are written in 25 different ethnic languages, benefiting over 20,000 children. Over 24,000 teachers from Rakhine, Chin and Kachin States participated in continuing professional development opportunities, such as School-based In-service Teacher Education (SITE), Child Friendly Schools (CFS) teacher training and head teacher training. In 81 pilot townships, over 7,000 out-of-school children gained access to non-formal primary education, providing opportunities to pursue alternative life pathways. A total of 137 adolescents (60 girls) completed the three-year non-formal middle school education (NFME) pilot programme. A formal evaluation of the NFME pilot programme was completed this year, leading to a Government decision to scale up.

Education is one programme area having key gender mainstreaming components in alignment with UNICEF's Gender Action Plan, namely: 1) reaching gender parity in enrolment, completion, and learning outcomes for girls and boys in ECD services, primary and secondary; 2) gender equality in teacher education and management systems; and 3) girls' secondary education and skills. UNICEF has supported efforts to make the life skills component in alternative education curriculum more gender responsive, including the addition of sessions on reproductive health, with content tailored to suit different age ranges. Space has also been given for adolescents to meet and discuss their needs and challenges in schools, including societal gender norms and stereotypes perpetuated in the classroom teaching and learning, and, ultimately, contributing to girls' and boys' retention and completion of education. In humanitarian situations, the location of temporary learning centres and non-formal education centres have been chosen to facilitate equal access for boys and girls. WASH facilities cater for appropriate menstrual hygiene management.

Gender issues have also been at the core of UNICEF's joint programme with UNFPA, supported by the Government of Canada, to address sexual and reproductive health and rights, with action against sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices. The two organisations have collaborated in their support to develop integrated child protection-GBV case management SOPs, to help ensure that cases are handled by trained community-based staff who can ensure timely referral to specialized services for the necessary care and support. UNICEF also supported Myanmar's active participation in the ASEAN-led End Violence Against Children (EVAC) campaign. A mid-term review of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on EVAC was successfully conducted, with over 100 participants from Government bodies and NGOs. UNICEF's evidence-generation effort on VAC was accelerated, especially in the area of violence against children and adolescents. UNICEF and IPs are using the outcomes to adopt the global violence-prevention framework of INSPIRE for adolescent-targeted CPIE activities to go beyond general sensitization and develop locally-relevant evidence-based VAC programming.

With the on-going conflicts in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan States, humanitarian assistance in all sectors was a significant feature of UNICEF's work in 2019, in line with the Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal. Humanitarian needs were addressed by the four sectors of health & nutrition, WASH, child protection, and education. Monitoring has shown a wide variation in coverage against the HAC targets, ranging from 98% for children and women with access to health care, to just 6% for adolescents accessing post-primary education opportunities. Overall achievement was around 40%. This is partly a reflection of the funding available to support the HAC being just 35% of the target. However, there is also an issue relating to target populations which in some cases have increased significantly due to a change in UNICEF global guidance on how they are to be calculated. The WASH target population increased by a factor of almost 5, from 117,570 in 2018 to 573,384 in 2019. Similarly, the target number of children aged 3 to 10 years accessing pre-primary or primary learning opportunities increased almost threefold, from 37,000 in 2018 to 105,409 in 2019. This has added to the challenge of realistic planning and monitoring of HAC targets.

UNICEF's engagement in the three conflict-affected states went beyond humanitarian response and included key initiatives that help build a foundation for longer-term development, as well as build bridges between the affected communities. One example is the new education initiative in Rakhine, *Learning Together*, which was launched in mid-2019 with DFID funding support, aimed at encouraging children to learn and contribute to an inclusive environment through educational activities. In 2020, the initiative will reach 40,000 children in 163 schools. All components of Learning Together take into account consideration for gender equality. Under the *reading together* component, one of the criteria for selection of book titles and training for teachers and education officials is gender equality. The component to *promote hygiene together* includes a separate toilet for girls and boys. The *playing sports together* component challenges gender stereotype in sports and encourages boys and girls to fully benefit from the recreation kits. The *supporting teachers together* component provides vehicles for transporting teachers, especially female teachers, to school where safety and security are of big concern. The last component, *going to school together*, geographically targets only Maungdaw and Buthidaung, where the gender parity index shows that girls are far more disadvantaged than boys: Secondary data indicates that the ratio of female to male student is very low in those townships, especially in Maungdaw with the lowest Gender Parity Index (GPI) in the country: 0.73 at primary and 0.25 at lower/upper secondary level (the acceptable range is from 0.97 to 1.03) (Plan International and REACH, 2015, Joint Education Sector Needs Assessment, North Rakhine State, Myanmar). Under this component, UNICEF works with a local partner to identify girls and boys who are out of school in the vicinity of 20 target schools, provide support to prepare their (re)integration into school, engage adolescent girls and boys to take proactive role in the project activities, and engage with both mothers and fathers, as well as other family members and community leaders to support boys' and girls' education.

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Despite UNICEF's plan to increase support for durable solutions, several factors inhibited progress in 2019: first the escalating conflict in Rakhine State with significant access restrictions placed an additional burden on humanitarian actors and meant that there was not a conducive environment for return or resettlement; second, the delay in the approval of the Government's National Strategy for the Closure of Camps. UNICEF continues to seek durable solutions for conflict-affected communities both through system-strengthening activities in development programmes and through humanitarian activities that include community resilience, localization when possible, and improving technical capacity.

UNICEF worked toward better mainstreaming of child-centered DRR and climate change into internal and sectoral strategies by conducting a programme review process and supporting the development of the first 'UNICEF Climate Change Action Plan in East Asia Pacific.' Support was provided for mainstreaming of DRR/CC into Education and WASH sections to inform programming and identify concrete opportunities. Access restrictions were a significant barrier to this work in Rakhine and Kachin States. UNICEF carried out several impactful advocacy measures for child-sensitive DRR/CC through new awareness-raising activities and outreach events. Together with World Vision and Plan International, UNICEF supported youth consultations across Myanmar to ensure the voices of youth will contribute to the upcoming Asian Ministerial Conference on DRR (AMCDRR) to be held in Australia in 2020.

This year has seen the completion of school construction in Rakhine that has been on-going since 2015, funded by the Governments of Japan, Denmark, and the European Union. 24 schools were reconstructed or rehabilitated, thus making it a total of 116 schools improved, benefitting 38,000 children. UNICEF led the development of joint advocacy on education, technical and vocational education, and training for children in Rakhine. The focus was on removing barriers to children's access to education; expanding critical interventions; providing policy support to the Myanmar government and cross-border support with partners in Bangladesh.

Myanmar's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is an encouraging step towards the elimination of grave violations against children. However, both the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and several ethnic armed groups remain listed in the Secretary General's Report. UNICEF continued in its role as co-chair of the inter-agency Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), to work with the various parties towards the goal of delisting. Preparatory negotiations to develop the Joint Commitments to end under-age recruitment with 4 listed non-state actors (NSAs) started. Closer coordination and collaboration were initiated with the Office of Special Representative to Secretary General (OSRSG) on Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and its mechanism at country level. In August, UNICEF, with UNFPA and IOM as part of the UN Action-funded joint activity, organized a workshop with the OSRSG (i.e. CAAC and CRSV) to identify potential areas of joint advocacy and action to address sexual violence in conflict. UNICEF is closely engaged on the CRSV agenda and is ensuring close synergies between two agenda, which has resulted in an alignment of positions from both CRSV and CAAC mechanisms on how to engage with the GoM effectively.

UNICEF plays a leading role in working with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), as well as key organizations for differently abled persons, in promoting the rights of children with disabilities. With the technical and financial support provided through the EU/UNICEF cross-regional migration programme, the Government of Myanmar (under the joint leadership of the Department of Rehabilitation and Department of Social Welfare, the MSWRR) has embarked on the process to develop an MoU with the Government of Thailand on cross-border framework on protection of children affected by migration. UNICEF was able to ensure strong government ownership and political commitment and through the process of developing the MoU, a whole-of-Government approach to the cross-border child protection agenda was clearly demonstrated. UNICEF is providing Technical Assistance to develop the National Strategic Plan for mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UNICEF has provided technical support to the Department of Rehabilitation of MSWRR in the preparatory work for the registration/certification of Persons with Disabilities (PwD), which is a foundation for the planned disabilities grant. At the end of 2019, the work accelerated with the approval of a pilot registration/certification in 3 townships of 3 States/Regions. UNICEF has again confirmed technical assistance, scaled-up fund-raising initiatives to ensure more support to the department and deployed staff to contribute to the training sessions for local staff.

Finally, mention should be made of UNICEF's decision to shift the location of its country office in Myanmar from the present location in the largest city, Yangon, to the official capital of the country and main location of the Government ministries, Nay Pyi Taw. The aim is to better facilitate closer collaboration between UNICEF and government staff in the implementation of the country programme. The shift is also in line with similar moves made by several sister UN agencies. A 'One UN' approach is being adopted, including the use of common premises. Following an extensive process of consultations, Myanmar Country Office submitted a revised country programme management plan, approved by the Regional Office. Phase 1 of the move began in the last quarter of 2019, and Phase 2 is planned for July 2020.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

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Two major evaluations this year contributed to important lessons learned that will guide future programming. The first is the formative evaluation of the Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (MCCT) programme. This country-led evaluation was designed to produce lessons learned from the initial phase of the programme, in Chin and Rakhine, which could then inform the planned scale up of the programme countrywide. The MCCT is the flagship social protection programme of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, so the evaluation also has wider applicability to inform other national social protection initiatives. The evaluation produced four key recommendations:

- Integration and coordination amongst different departments and ministries needs to be strengthened through clearer designation of roles and responsibilities.
- Investment should be made into IT-based options to replace paper-based systems, to better facilitate management of larger beneficiary databases, process timely payments and support monitoring and evaluation.
- Since the broader aim of the MCCT is to improve nutritional status of children and mothers, more work is required on the social and behavioural change communications (SBCC) package, to ensure better understanding by the various communities in a culturally and ethnically diverse context. As well as targeting pregnant women and young mothers, the SBCC package should target and involve male community members, to promote and gender appropriate and shared approach to child wellbeing.
- Limited operations funds and shortages of field personnel caused implementation gaps that reduced effectiveness and efficiency. Certain key responsibilities were neglected. This needs immediate attention if the scale up is to be effective.

These recommendations were validated by the various partners supporting MCCT. In 2020, MCCT will expand to the two most populous areas of the country: Ayeyarwady Region and Shan State, so the results of the evaluation are crucial to ensure a successful scale up.

The second evaluation was on the non-formal middle school education programme (NFMSE). According to the 2014 census over 2 million children age 13-17 are missing out on schooling. Non-formal approaches aimed at bringing children back into education and/or providing them with skills that will equip them for adult life. Thus, the findings of the evaluation will make a key contribution to the Government's scale up plans for alternative education options. The key findings of the evaluation were that NFMSE was:

- Relevant to the education goals, priorities and policies of the MoE and the needs of out-of-school children in Myanmar.
- Effective in ensuring vulnerable children receive an opportunity to complete middle school.
- Efficient in achieving its outputs and has demonstrated an effective partnership model applicable in increasing access to middle school equivalency education for vulnerable children

These findings help justify the launch of the alternative education policy framework, which includes opportunities for private, non-state service providers to also take up roles and support the introduction of NFMSE in areas where government may not be able to immediately expand to.

Air pollution is an important emerging area for UNICEF programming. UNICEF worked with partners to host the first Partner Meeting on Air Pollution, which took place in Yangon in May. The UNICEF Mongolia Representative participated in the event, to share experience and help shape the way forward. UNICEF and U Reporters partnered with UNDP /EU/Oredoo/Connect University/West Yangon University for several days of outreach for 2019's World Environment Day focused on the theme "Beat Air Pollution". UNICEF and Save the Children facilitated the participation of key Government staff from ministries responsible for health and the environment to attend a regional conference on air pollution and child health, which took place in Mongolia in October. A scoping study on air pollution was carried out and the results will be presented in early 2020, to help shape the future action plan.

One exciting innovation developed during the year was the 'Banana Bag'. This initiative, supported by a generous donation from the Shenzhen World Health Foundation, initially considered the introduction of the 'Baby Box' concept, as used in several other countries around the world. However, intensive participatory engagement with mothers of young children led to rethinking the concept, to be more focused on promoting good nutrition practices at the time of introducing complementary feeding after the 6-month period of exclusive breast feeding. The Banana Bag, which doubles as a play mat, contains several items to promote and support such practices. Prototypes have been produced, piloted and will now be refined and made ready for larger scale production and distribution in 2020.

UNICEF also supported innovation through its partnership with Telenor, to introduce electronic Vital Registration (eVR), including the use of tablet-based birth and death registration by front-line health staff. This is being piloted in Mon State and the feedback from the health staff is encouraging. Midwives use the tablets to collect/share vital data with the Township Medical Officer, who then reviews data online and issue the certificate. The mobile system allows for faster and

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safer registration, while reaching more children.

The process for the preparation of the revised CPMP, as mentioned in Section 2, included a review of programme strategies, to ensure that the resulting management plan matched the required programme direction. It was found that the programme strategies remained relevant in addressing key child rights issues in the country. However, the limited full-time presence of UNICEF in the capital Nay Pyi Taw meant less than optimal engagement with government counterparts. Also, it was found that UNICEF's field presence was not being used as effectively as it might, with recommendations regarding greater delegation of authority to the field level, improved clarity over roles and responsibilities of field and country office staff, and improved methods for tracking budgets and expenditure at field level. The subsequent CPMP has addressed these issues and mechanisms will be put in place to operationalize the management decisions in 2020.