It is my pleasure to share with you the UNICEF Afghanistan 2017 Annual Report, featuring stories told through the eyes of Afghans most impacted by our work across the country. Everyday life for women and children in Afghanistan can be extremely daunting. Armed conflict and insecurity resulted in 2,480 child casualties during the first three quarters of 2017 alone, and the number of uprooted children continues to rise. Waves of violence have caused sustained levels of displacement, with over 360,000 people fleeing their homes in 2017. At the same time, Afghanistan saw the return of more than 550,000 people from Pakistan and Iran during the year, many of whom arrived without documentation.

For babies born in today’s Afghanistan, violence is just one of many hardships. The number of children that died before reaching their fifth birthday was 80,000 in 2017: four of five of these children did not survive the first year of life. Though a significant improvement compared to mortality rates a decade ago, this figure is still high in comparison to other countries in the region. Only 63 per cent of Afghan children are fully protected from vaccine-preventable diseases. Afghanistan continues to be one of three remaining countries in the world where polio is endemic, with 14 cases registered in 2017. Only 40 per cent of households have access to improved sanitation facilities, leaving families vulnerable to unnecessary disease.

Those who survive their earliest years often do not thrive. Two of every five children (41 per cent) in the country are stunted and 1.2 million are malnourished. Without the right nutritional intake for their physical and mental well-being, they will struggle to reach their full potential. Education, particularly for girls, is more of a privilege than a right, with 3.5 million children out of school, missing vital learning opportunities. Girls comprise 75 per cent of this group.

In this environment, protecting children from grave rights violations mostly associated with conflict and displacement, while also delivering on priority development goals, is challenging. But there is still opportunity and hope, as reflected by the children themselves. Girls dedicated to learning and receiving an education, despite the obstacles; committed health workers providing life-saving nutritional and health services; polio vaccinators risking their lives going door to door, determined to reach every child; young people speaking out and eager to play a role in the future of their country. These are but a few examples of the many courageous and resilient Afghans making a positive difference for themselves and their people.

In this annual report, we present the main results achieved by UNICEF for the Afghan people in 2017, in close collaboration with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, civil society organizations, community and religious leaders, groups of adolescents, and other partners and donors.

In many ways, violence dominates the conversation about Afghanistan. The individual voices and faces of people, particularly women and children, are often lost within this noise. UNICEF Afghanistan wants to change this narrative. Our most important role is to care for children so that they may be loved as they deserve and be given choices in their life. You will read stories of hope, resilience and dedication – despite the odds, progress is being made.

The year 2017 was particularly significant for UNICEF as we sharpened the focus of our five-year Country Programme of Cooperation (2015-2019) with the Government. Our programme in Afghanistan now involves a larger-scale humanitarian response that incorporates a nexus to development and resilience building. Country programme results were also streamlined and aligned with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, the National Priority Programmes and the global Sustainable Development Goals to which Afghanistan has committed. Greater programme intensity will be applied to achieve four headline results: i) eradicate polio; ii) increase immunization coverage by strengthening routine vaccinations; iii) decrease the number and percentage of girls out of school at every age; and iv) prevent all forms of malnutrition.

I would like to thank our donor partners for their sustained funding, continual engagement and feedback on our work, and dedicated partnership to realizing the rights of women and children across the country. By helping to positively change the lives of women and children in Afghanistan, together we are showing that progress is possible. Every life has immeasurable value and we have a moral imperative to protect past investments and tackle the many challenges every day.

As we embark on the new year of 2018, it is my fervent hope for a more peaceful Afghanistan. I assure you that UNICEF will continue its tireless efforts to champion the rights of voiceless Afghan women and children, ensuring their needs, hopes and dream are heard.
1 in 18 Afghan children fail to reach their first birthday

46% of children aged 12 to 23 months have not received their basic vaccines

Afghanistan is still battling polio with 14 cases reported in 2017

2 in 5 children cannot reach full mental or physical development

1 in every 4 children is underweight

1.3 million children under 5 years require treatment for acute malnutrition

Almost 50% of improved drinking water sources are contaminated with fecal matter

Over 4 million people still practice open defecation

3.5 million children are ‘out-of-school’ of which 75% are girls

Only 19% of females under 15 years are literate

A third of girls are married before their 18th birthday

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1. as of 30 January 2018
OVER 1.5 MILLION
adolescent girls attending school received iron and folic acid supplements

900,000 pregnant women & children benefited from health services

OVER 3.5 M children received teaching & learning materials

224,900 children have been treated for severe acute malnutrition

FOUR districts were declared open-defecation free

3,695 children and young persons returned from Iran reunited with their families

9.9 MILLION children under 5 immunized against polio during each of the four national immunization days

177,400 students benefiting from a school water supply & toilets

6 MILLION women vaccinated against tetanus

6 million women vaccinated against tetanus

7 8
Afghanistan’s women and children faced enormous challenges in 2017 – especially the poorest and most vulnerable children, who are always at the greatest risk in times of conflict and insecurity. Against this backdrop, UNICEF supported the Government of Afghanistan and partners to deliver results and remains steadfast in its commitment to realizing the rights of all children everywhere. UNICEF is also committed to achieving the vision of the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a world in which no child is left behind. To improve coordination and facilitate robust contingency planning, UNICEF continued to lead the nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) clusters, child protection sub-cluster and co-lead the Education in Emergency Working Group.
Girls’ education is not only a moral imperative but an economic necessity.
Amina’s youth is betrayed only by the hardship she has faced. Taken out of school at 12, she was married by 14 and within four years had given birth to three daughters. While pregnant with her fourth, her husband, an electrician, was electrocuted and died on the job.

Just as it seemed that things could not get worse, Amina’s in-laws tried to take away her daughters and force her out of their family home in Kabul, where they had moved from Parwan, a neighbouring province west of the Afghan capital.

Unable to bear the thought of a life without her children, Amina went to court to gain custody: an arduous process that took seven years.

Without money for public transport, Amina would walk for an hour to attend court appearances and endure jibes from men who ridiculed her as a single woman who refused to pay bribes.

Amina’s marriage had not been an easy one and her husband never allowed her to work outside the home, but with court proceedings under way and a family to support, she took a job at a kindergarten earning 5,000 Afs (US$73.5) per month.

That’s where she first heard about a remedial programme for women to give them a second chance at education.

Amina was 25 years-old with a sixth grade education and in the middle of a custody battle when she decided to sign up for learning classes run in the Parwandoo area of Kabul.

“It was very difficult to start but my teachers and other classmates made it possible by helping me. I love all subjects. I like it that most of my classmates are close to my age. They give me confidence and encouragement,” says Amina, who is now in 10th grade and on track to get her high school diploma in another year and a half.

Afghanistan has an established accelerated learning programme which offers a community-based ‘fast-track’ route for out-of-school and over-age (10–15) girls to complete their primary education (Grade 6). In addition, some 3,000 women aged 10–30, including married women, are being supported to complete high school and earn diplomas issued by the Ministry of Education.

“If not for this programme, I don’t know what would have happened to me and my daughters,” said Amina.

“It was always my dream to return to school one day. I [inquired at] public schools but none of them would take me at this age.”

Thanks to these remedial classes, Amina is catching up on what her early marriage forced her to leave behind. She attends classes six hours a day, six days a week and diligently does her homework every night.

Having overcome tremendous odds, Amina is striving to help her daughters to achieve their dreams: “I want to work hard to make money and provide for my daughters. I want to make sure they will have good education and successful lives. I don’t want them to get married young.”
3.5 MILLION
students have received teaching & learning materials

More children in school
UNICEF continued to focus on the enrollment and retention of the most vulnerable children, specifically those out of school and girls. Over 6,000 community-based schools and accelerated learning centres were established or maintained, benefitting over 176,700 students (49 per cent girls). Over 3.5 million children received teaching and learning materials. Additional supplies were purchased for more than one million children, which will be distributed in 2018. A total of 598 community and school-based preschool classes reached 15,300 children aged 4 to 6 (62 per cent girls). UNICEF also completed construction of an additional five schools – bringing the total to 85 schools constructed out of 70– providing over 26,000 children access to education in previously under-served areas.

Educational opportunities for girls
Successful UNICEF advocacy has put education for girls on the national policy agenda. A comprehensive first draft of a girls’ education strategy and policy was finalized. Girls’ education is now a flagship programme for the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and partners. Representatives from school committees (shuras) in 13 provinces were trained to promote access to learning and enrollment of out-of-school girls.

Quality learning
In collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF contributed to the nationwide curriculum reform process and supported 966 female students to reach a minimum grade 14 qualification and benefit from enrollment into teacher training centres. Over 1,700 newly recruited community-based education teachers were trained and provided with innovative materials, enabling them to improve their classroom-based teaching methodologies and in turn, student learning outcomes.

National education policy & programmes
UNICEF has been the coordinating agency for Afghanistan’s education sector among development partners since August 2017. Its important work in this capacity contributed to the finalization of the Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2021, which prioritizes improved quality and relevance of education, equitable access to education and efficient and transparent management. The initial findings of a UNICEF supported nationwide out-of-school study informed the community based education policy currently under finalization by the Ministry of Education, guiding its focus to provinces with the highest number of out-of-school girls. UNICEF continued its role as Supervising entity and supported the Ministry of Education to implement the Global Partnership for Education programme, which guides on-budget support to the implementation of the National Education Sector Plan. Furthermore, UNICEF and UNESCO led the Education Thematic Pillar in 2017 which contributed to the document on One United Nations for Afghanistan.

Emergency response
UNICEF co-leads the Education in Emergencies working group together with the Ministry of Education and Save the Children, which supports coordination of humanitarian response and leads advocacy efforts. Over 180,000 children were reached with emergency education intervention with the support of 20 organizations. UNICEF support alone benefited more than 69,500 children. Afghanistan was also chosen to become a potential recipient of the Education Cannot Wait pooled fund.
Children are #NOTATARGET
Children in the village of Mizra Walang, Sar-i-Pul Province, Northern Afghanistan have experienced things no child should ever have to.

The village, home to some 470 families, was attacked by armed groups resulting in the death and kidnapping of several residents. Surviving children fled their homes to nearby Sar-i-Pul city, traumatised and devastated.

UNICEF immediately mobilized Tabish, a social health education organization, to provide the displaced families with psychosocial support in coordination with the Child Protection Action Network (CPAN).

“Children and women are seriously traumatized and have difficulty talking,” says Zahira, a psychological counsellor with Tabish and trained to work with women and children. “They cry, have nightmares, and are in shock. But when we talk with them and let them speak out their pain, they cry and feel better. Children attach themselves to their mothers. Their mothers say they also feel scared. At the mere sound of a door, they try to grab their children and run.”

Tabish deployed a team of four psychological counsellors to assess the situation and provide psychosocial support through the establishment of child friendly spaces, where individual and group counselling sessions were provided.

As many as 457 families relocated to the city, finding shelter in mosques or with relatives and friends, with little more than the clothes on their backs.

To meet the needs of the displaced families, UNICEF also provided hygiene and dignity kits to prevent the spread of disease. However, addressing the psychological distress will be much more long term.

Among the families separated during the flight at least 25 lost family members and an estimated 88 children were left without care and support. The stories the counsellors hear are shocking. In one family, five children aged 3 to 17 lost both their parents. The youngest, Sajad, was injured in by the bullet that killed his mother. The children are now being cared for by their uncle, Mohammad, who said that his deceased brother was an innocent bystander in the tragedy. “Nawroz was a contracted teacher in the village earning 4,000 Afs (USD 60) per month and just doing his best to keep his family happy.”

Nooria, another psychological counsellor, describes how 18-year-old Pary Gull is being helped to cope with the death of her brother-in-law who was shot right in front of her. “During the first meeting she had difficulty in talking and felt that something was stuck in her throat which prevented her from talking and eating,” said Nooria. “However after receiving two sessions, she expressed that she is feeling better and will continue to visit us for counselling.”

The recent events have been life-changing for the affected villagers of Mizra Walang. UNICEF and its partners continue to work to provide assistance to the children caught up in a conflict not of their making. Children are NOT AT TARGET
Monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict

From January to September 2017, 437 individual child recruitment cases were reported and 2,477 child casualties, of which 687 children died and 1,790 were injured. There were reports of 105 attacks on schools and 70 on hospitals. Monitoring and reporting UN grave violations is conducted closely with the Human Rights Division of UNAMA.

Prevention of child recruitment into armed groups

A total of 11 child protection units were established in 2017 as part of the national police in 32 provinces. These units helped to prevent the recruitment of 1,411 children into armed groups.

Emergency response

A total of 52,239 children benefited from psychosocial support through child-friendly spaces and community-based support. Of these children, 3,781 received specialized case management. In 2017, 3,695 young adolescents that were forced to return from Iran were identified and helped to reunite with their families and relatives.

Birth registration

In partnership with the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Department, 416,367 infants were registered in 2017, about 47 per cent of whom were girls. Child protection action networks: Community-based child protection groups were strengthened in 33 provinces and 110 districts; they reported 4,982 cases of violence against children and referred victims to appropriate services. Cases include rape and child sexual abuse, child marriage and those that come into conflict with the law.
UNICEF’s mobile health teams are often the only lifeline for women & children
“Many children are orphans here. Many men live without their wives. That’s because they couldn’t reach health facilities when they gave birth or when they were sick,” says 80-year-old Mohammad Mussa, a lifelong resident of Baqalak village in the Central Highlands of Afghanistan.

Mohammad, who lost his wife during childbirth said: “I witnessed the death of many villagers, young women, and children. Even my own wife. She died while giving birth to our child because I couldn’t take her to a clinic.”

When winter settles in across Bamyan province, heavy snow blankets every pathway of this remote and mountainous region, making the nearest health care facilities inaccessible for at least six months.

“We had pregnant women who we carried on donkeys to try to reach the nearest clinic, which is a four hours away. Many of them and their children died,” he says as he takes a deep breath.

But access to health facilities is a challenge on clear summer days, too. With communities scattered across vast distances and no basic infrastructure to connect them, large sections of Afghanistan’s rural population still lacks access to essential health care services.

UNICEF-supported mobile health teams are often the only lifeline for women and children in some of the country’s most remote districts. While it is still hard for them to access some of the villages in the depths of winter, they provide health and referral services to isolated communities.

A team is typically composed of a midwife, a nurse, and a vaccinator who provides routine immunizations to children and tetanus vaccines to pregnant women. Today, they are in the village of Ali-Beig, nestled in the Fuladi valley and surrounded by the soaring Koh-i-Baba Mountains, the western extension of the Hindu Kush mountain range that stretches into northern Pakistan. They visit the village at least once a month.

Holding her baby boy, 34-year-old Fatima has just returned from the village mosque where a mobile health team has set up for the day.

“My son has been running a fever for several days now. Thanks to the mobile health team I could take him in for a check-up. He’s been given medicines and I hope he recovers soon,” says Fatima, frowning with motherly concern. “If they didn’t visit our village, I am sure I wouldn’t have been able to go to the clinic, which is too far away.”

Women from neighbouring villages also come to Ali-Beig when they know the mobile health team is in town.

Alongside the neonatal and maternal health care, the teams play an essential role in immunizing remote communities who often cannot travel long distances to get vaccinated. The results are indisputable: To date, every child in the village under the age of two has been immunized.

“If our children are healthy, they can study better and become better people,” says Sharifa, 55, another long-time resident of the village who lost two of her children to measles in the past.
Immunization
More than 1.2 million children younger than 1 were vaccinated and around 6 million women of childbearing age accessed immunization services through the timely provision of vaccines and non-vaccine supplies. A total of 232 supervisors, cold chain technicians and managers were trained on vaccine cold chain management across the country. Afghanistan also will introduce a new rotavirus vaccine in 2018 and plans for this were finalized. The Ministry of Public Health was also supported to plan and forecast needed vaccines and related supplies, which was critical to having no stock outs.

Maternal and child health
An estimated 900,000 pregnant women and children younger than 5 benefited from life-saving health interventions, provided through 71 mobile health teams. Some 343 health facilities received ambulances and newborn care equipment. With more than a third of child deaths in Afghanistan due to preventable illnesses of pneumonia and diarrhoea, UNICEF completed training of 22,300 community health workers on community case management of childhood illness, and specifically on zinc and oral rehydration salt packs to manage childhood diarrhoea.

Planning, data and evidence
A national quality of care assessment of basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric and neonatal care was finalized; the data is critical to identifying areas for improvement and system-wide issues related to maternal and neonatal health and for the quality of care at facilities. Provincial scorecards that provide health indicators for maternal and child health were produced quarterly and acted as an important tool for government and partners to monitor and improve health care.
When we eradicate polio, it will be one of the great achievements in history.
Afghanistan’s female polio vaccination social mobilisers are in a unique position. As more women than ever are working to eradicate one of the world’s oldest diseases, they are all the while peacefully and unintentionally leading a social revolution that is chipping away at taboos against women who work. This evolution of the role of women in urban Afghan society has been almost accidental because the rationale is so practical.

In a country where interaction between men and women is restricted, female health workers who approach stay-at-home-mothers are likely to be more successful. They also take on the job for a variety of reasons, from wanting to help children, to earning a regular salary, to a desire to carve out a larger public role for women. They are helping the worldwide polio programme overcome its last significant hurdle: eradicating the disease in Afghanistan.

“Everyone tells me this work is important for the children and Afghanistan. But many don’t know how important it is for women too.” —Leila, polio social mobilizer, Jalalabad.

Since 2014, when UNICEF began emphasizing the hiring of women for the polio programme, the number of social mobilizers—Afghan staff who go door-to-door to educate families about the dangers of polio—has increased from about 12 per cent of the workforce to nearly 30 per cent in 2017. The goal is for this cadre to be 80 per cent female.

“You can almost say it’s become ‘normal’ to see women going door-to-door in Kandahar during polio campaigns. Few people ask what we are doing anymore,” said Hosna Reza*, a newly recruited social mobilizers. “I tell families about polio and I feel they respect my advice.”

Hiring women to work with children would not be news in most parts of the world. But in Afghanistan, where customs have long excluded women from the public workforce, it is a meaningful development. UNICEF supports nearly 1,700 women as front-line polio health workers in Afghanistan: one of Afghanistan’s largest female workforces.

Today, women are vaccinating children directly and the results are clear. In Jalalabad, where nearly all the social mobilizers are women, the rate of recovery of ‘missed children’ was 69 per cent during in 2017. Compare that to Kunar, a province adjacent to Jalalabad with a more rural and traditional population whose cadre of social mobilizers are nearly all men, where the rate of recovery was only about 50 per cent.
9.9 MILLION
children under 5 immunized against polio during each of the four national immunization days

Vaccine procurement and management
UNICEF procured and distributed some 111.2 million doses of polio vaccine and provided cold chain equipment including more than 91,000 ice packs, 5,700 vaccine carriers, 2,200 cold boxes and nearly 100 freezers. To improve skills and knowledge for vaccine management, 222 regional and provincial cold chain personnel were also trained in 2017.

Immunization communication network
In total, 7,500 mobilizers were deployed across 45 of 50 very high-risk districts. Mobilizers register eligible children, track vaccination status, refer unvaccinated to routine immunization and recover missed children, while continuously promoting health-seeking practices. New social research conducted with Harvard University suggested an improvement in attitudes among Afghans towards vaccination with more caregivers intending to accept polio vaccine every time (from 77 per cent in 2014 to 88 per cent in 2017).

Monitoring
Real-time performance monitoring by internal and external monitors allowed for data to be used for action to address performance issues. A call centre and expanded telephone surveys are some of the innovative ways information is being collected.

Behaviour change
The polio communications unit supports the Government of Afghanistan to support eradication efforts through a combination of special events and earned and paid media. Important partnerships were created with BBC Media Action, VOA, and PACT Communications. Together, these three stations, which reach about 50% of the prime time Pashto radio listening audience, created about two hours of polio-related radio content per week. The extent of the unit’s engagement with Afghan media is apparent through metrics such as media monitoring reports which show that about 300 polio related stories appeared each month. Special events with polio links included the annual Spageez cricket tournament, the most-watched TV event in the country, which at its final match in September also hosted the inauguration of a national polio vaccination campaign.

89.2% is the average recovery rate for absent children

37% are female

111.2 MILLION
Doses of polio drops procured and distributed

Full-time social mobilisers employed to educate communities about polio
A country’s development needs brainpower & children need nourishment to feed the future
Farzana* is an outgoing and confident student in Herat, Afghanistan’s third largest city. The 16-year-old enjoys school and works hard, but it hasn’t always been this way. Last year, she went to the doctor to talk about extreme fatigue that was impacting her studies and the overall quality of her life.

“I was always tired and exhausted,” she says. “I felt sleepy during class and didn’t want to gather with my friends.”

Farzana was prescribed iron and folic acid supplements by a doctor but for the young woman’s low-income family—her mother is a housewife and her father is self-employed working different jobs—the cost of the medicine was prohibitively high and they couldn’t afford it.

A few months later, Farzana learned that the Ministries of Education and Public Health planned to start distributing weekly iron and folic acid supplements (WIFS) at her school. The new initiative, which launched in March 2016, now aims to reach some 1.6 million adolescent girls, including nearly 290,000 girls in the western provinces of Herat, Ghor, Farah and Badghis, where the effects of war and drought have taken a serious toll on families’ nutritional status. It is estimated that one in three adolescent girls in Afghanistan are anaemic, and, as in Farzana’s case, the cost of supplementation is a burden many can’t bear.

At Farzana’s school, approximately 1,800 girls are now benefiting from this important nutritional supplement.

“Before I started the tablets, I preferred to be on my own. It was hard to pay attention at school,” Farzana says. “Now I take care to do my lessons and homework, and spend more time with friends.”

When the WIFS programme was introduced at the Mahjuba Herawi Girls School in Herat, most students didn’t know what the supplements were for. Information sessions taught the girls about the importance of iron and folic acid and how they could improve their lives. Farzana’s experience with anaemia led her to become a WIFS ‘champion’, a group of young women at school who volunteer to help families in their community understand why the supplements are so important for their adolescent girls.

But even though key male and female figures in the community were trained on WIFS distribution before the project began, some families still didn’t understand why their daughters needed the tablets. This is where the WIFS ‘champions’ begin their important work.

“I met these families and told them my story, what the doctor told me, and how these tablets can prevent the harmful effects of anaemia,” Farzana says. “Hearing the facts through a friend of their daughter’s helped convince the parents to let their own daughters take the supplements.”

Bahar, 16, is in Grade 11 at Kowsar School in Herat. “Since I started taking these tablets weekly, I have felt more comfortable when having my period. I used to feel very sluggish but now I feel much better.”
8.5 MILLION children under 5 received vitamin A supplementation

Treatment of severe acute malnutrition
A total of 224,938 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition were treated in 1,028 health facilities, up from 878 facilities, in 34 provinces. UNICEF provided 2,303 metric tonnes (166,860 cartons) of ready-to-use therapeutic foods and related life-saving supplies and equipment as well as supportive supervision and training for health workers.

Commitments to tackling malnutrition
The Government of Afghanistan has demonstrated its commitment to preventing malnutrition and stunting by becoming the 60th country to sign up to the global Scaling Up Nutrition movement in October 2017. The Government also launched the Food Security and Nutrition Agenda to focus efforts on tackling malnutrition and stunting from the highest levels through to the community and individual child and citizen.

Malnutrition prevention
More than 1.5 million girls in school received iron folic acid tablets in 33 provinces to help reduce levels of anaemia. A community nutrition package that provides critical information on proper maternal and young child nutrition and feeding practices, along with health and hygiene messages, was finalized and will be rolled out in 2018.

National nutrition surveillance
Data was collected and analyzed from 175 health facility and 868 community sites as part of the National Nutrition Surveillance System. Data on child anthropometry, height and weight, as well as on young child feeding practices, including breastfeeding, helped inform early warning on any nutrition indicators requiring action.

Emergency response
UNICEF is the lead of the nutrition cluster and works to coordinate humanitarian response and leadership on surveys and assessments. Some 40,600 children returning from Pakistan received a package of nutrition services including vitamin A supplementation, deworming, screening and referral to health facilities for treatment of malnutrition.

**AGHANISTAN JOINED THE SCALING UP NUTRITION MOVEMENT**

224,900 CHILDREN with severe acute malnutrition treated

OVER 1.5 MILLION school-going adolescent girls received iron and folic acid supplements, reducing likelihood of anaemia
All children have the right to clean water, basic sanitation & hygiene
A village in the mountainous heartland of Afghanistan has become a model for ending open defecation in a country where only 12 per cent of the population have access to safe and sanitary toilets. Home to just 120 families and a four-hour drive to the nearest city, the village of Toop Sayed has experienced sweeping changes since a group of local women took the lead in implementing what is known as a Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) initiative to end open defecation.

“When we started the initiative, nobody believed it would be successful. Villagers thought it was nonsense and didn’t want to cooperate with us,” says Khadija, a local resident who is part of a group of women who have been instrumental in leading the way to improving sanitation in the village. “Women here have a lot of work to do, but we decided to become members of the village Family Health Action Group and lead this initiative,” she says, looking over proudly at her friend Fatima, a fellow volunteer, who nods her head in agreement. But as the health and well-being of families and children improved, attitudes have changed. “My family members and children don’t get sick now, the village is also quite clean and we don’t see human faeces in open areas,” says Abdul Ali, one of the village residents. “In the past we didn’t realize what were the causes of the diseases plaguing us. Many children died from diarrhoea and the consequences of a lack of sanitation. We spent so much money taking them to the hospital in the city, hours away,” says 75-year-old Haji Karim. “During hard winters, we couldn’t go anywhere at all and watched our children die in front of our eyes. All of this because of a lack of information.”

The premise of CLTS is that unless the community itself drives and owns the process of changing attitudes and behaviour, it will not be sustainable. CLTS focuses on behavioural change by making people aware of the link between their faeces and disease—and then triggering shame and disgust towards the health risks of open defecation, so that the community gets inspired to come up with its own local solutions.

Today, the village is fully on board. Mohammad Jawad, a resident, is building a sanitary latrine for his house. “I decided to build a safe latrine because now we know that many of the diseases are caused by human faeces,” he says. “Now everybody in our village wants to be part of the effort to stop open defecation.” His wife, Zahra, is helping him build it. “We know that we should build a sanitary latrine a few metres away from our house, especially away from the kitchen and sources of drinking water, to keep harmful germs and at a distance,” she says.

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298,800
people now have access to safe water

Access to water
Across 21 provinces and 172 communities, some 298,800 people gained access to improved water sources. About three quarters of the new systems are either solar powered or gravity-fed piped.

Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)
Open-defecation free status has been reached for some 657 communities across Afghanistan, benefiting an estimated 272,000 people – almost three times more than in 2016. More than 6,688 families constructed a new toilet and 29,249 improved their facilities. The first open-defecation free district was celebrated in early November (Nili, Daikundi Province) and another three districts have been declared open-defecation free since. This district-wide approach ensures that even the remotest and most hard-to-reach communities of a district also benefit from the CLTS efforts.

WASH in Schools
More than 177,400 students benefited from gender-separated sanitation facilities and drinking water systems in their schools. Menstrual hygiene management guidebooks to help teaching in this area were developed and the first-ever Girls’ Hygiene Day in Afghanistan was celebrated in the presence of the First Lady.

Emergency response
UNICEF leads the WASH humanitarian cluster with 32 active partners. Together with its implementing partners, UNICEF responded to 53 emergency events reaching more than 149,000 people with safe water, some 62,600 people with improved sanitation and 161,622 people with hygiene promotion including establishment of a place for handwashing with soap and water.
The role of men & boys is critical in supporting girls’
METE THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN TEACHERS SUPPORTED BY UNICEF

“We are the first group of teachers to graduate from this programme and it's going to make big changes”

HASINA, 19

We hardly finish high school, but we did it. I believe many girls will follow in our footsteps.”

We hardly finish high school, but we did it. I believe many girls will follow in our footsteps.”

HASINA, 19

Many people refuse to send their daughters to school because of the lack of female teachers. This will help to change that.

HOMEYRA, 22

Afghanistan ranks among the lowest countries in the gender equality index. Violence against women and girls is rife, and the vast majority doesn’t go to school. The literacy rate for women is among the lowest in the world.

UNICEF Afghanistan is committed to gender equality as core to its mission to realize the rights of all children, especially the most disadvantaged, and its efforts to contribute to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Women make up 50 per cent of the Afghan population and the stability of the nation and improvements of conditions for women and girls is critical for the future of the country.

UNICEF Afghanistan works to address gender inequality across its programme. A cross-sectoral gender focus facilitates collaboration and efficiencies that improve more than one outcome. For example, girls’ schooling helps to prevent child marriage, and provides a protective space. High prevalence of anaemia among adolescent girls impacts their ability to survive childbirth, especially when it is coupled with high rates of early marriage. The ability of adolescent girls to safely manage their monthly menstrual cycle in privacy and with dignity is fundamental to their health, and psychosocial well-being.

UNICEF Afghanistan works tirelessly to promote gender equality across its programmes in many ways, including:

- Widening the participation of young girls in formal and informal schooling
- Supporting female teachers and vaccinators
- Promoting adolescent health through provision of iron and folic acid in schools to prevent anaemia
- Providing sanitation facilities separated by gender and menstrual hygiene management to encourage girls to enroll and stay in school
- Preventing child marriage
- Supporting quality maternal care
- Creating equality in access to health and nutrition services.
Within the framework of ‘One United Nations’, UNICEF Afghanistan works to support government national priorities and deliver results for children through partnerships and collaborative efforts with national and local governments, United Nations agencies, civil society and donors. Strong partnership continues between the World Health Organization and UNICEF for polio eradication, and in the education sector, a partnership with UNESCO was established in 2017 to undertake curriculum reform.

The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation programme brings together government, an NGO called DACAAR and UNICEF to allow for monitoring and corrective action in real time by qualified engineers. In collaboration with World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Afghan Food Security and Nutrition secretariat was created at the office of the Chief Executive Officer to facilitate ongoing work in malnutrition prevention; joint advocacy led to Afghanistan joining the Scaling Up Nutrition movement in 2017. There is also very close collaboration between UNICEF, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, International Organization for Migration and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in addressing humanitarian issues, especially regarding Afghans returning from Pakistan and Iran and internally displaced persons.

Partnerships with government donors, foundations and UNICEF National Committees have been critical, not only in providing financial support but helping to amplify the voices of countless women and children across the country.
In 2017, public advocacy through UNICEF Afghanistan’s combined digital platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Medium) reached more than 5 million people with compelling multimedia content on child rights from across the country in all sectors. UNICEF Afghanistan’s Facebook fan base has grown to over 245,000 and in the past year there has been a five-fold increase in Twitter followers to over 24,000. The fan base across digital platforms continues to grow every day.
On behalf of the women and children in Afghanistan, UNICEF would like to thank the following donor partners:

Experience Bibi Atika's life through virtual reality and how education has changed her life.

WeTheFuture: The power of sports to shape the future of adolescents.

Deported & scared for his future: One Afghan teen migrant's story.

Teacher, health worker, life saver. Meet Adela, a real life wonder woman in Afghanistan.

You can watch these videos by visiting: https://www.youtube.com/user/UNICEFAfghanistanKBL
UNICEF Afghanistan strives to reach the most vulnerable women and children wherever they may be across the country. Functioning out of a main office in Kabul and five zonal offices (in Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad and Kandahar) that cover all regions, along with outposts in eight locations, some 370 national and international professional staff are working with partners and communities to make a difference.

Effectiveness and efficiency in programme delivery is paramount and getting the best value for money, or resources spent versus results they buy, is always in the forefront. Procurement of supplies is done in a competitive and transparent manner and UNICEF uses its economies of scale to get the best prices, ensuring quality through coordination with our supply division based out of Copenhagen.

In 2017, UNICEF Afghanistan procured over US$103 million of supplies and services. This was accomplished not without challenges, and extended closures of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border resulted in delays of supply deliveries. Alternative shipping routes through Iran were explored, highlighting the need for flexibility. UNICEF Afghanistan also initiated several projects in 2017 to significantly reduce its long-term environmental footprint through the planned consumption of less fuel and reduced emissions of its office and guesthouse premises thanks to solar power usage and improved vehicle management systems.

There are many risks to operating in Afghanistan, especially linked to security, which affects delivery and monitoring to certain areas. Community engagement through local influencers and community structures helps mitigate some of these risks. The use of contracted third party monitors and extenders from the communities themselves helps expand UNICEF’s reach and understanding of what is happening on the ground.

There are also risks related to cash transfers to partners. UNICEF works through a mechanism called the ‘harmonized approach to cash transfers’ that sets out scope and frequency of assurance activities, including spot checks and audits, depending on size and frequency of disbursements, while also working with partners to build their ability to manage money effectively.

There will always be challenges and an element of risk to operating in a country like Afghanistan but by anticipating issues and putting in place plans to address them, UNICEF Afghanistan strives to ensure our programmes consistently reach all vulnerable women and children.
UNICEF Afghanistan will continue to be the voice for women and children in 2018 and beyond. In collaboration with the Government and our many donors and other partners, our focus will be to leave no child behind. We will be in the communities, providing services, and at the ‘table’ with Government, to strengthen systems to ensure we focus on getting results for the people we serve.

We will look to bring our programmes closer together and ensure that we integrate our responses across humanitarian and development divides, sectors and geographically for greater impact. The challenges are many, but together we can make a difference for every woman and child.

Despite the odds, progress has been made. Despite the odds, progress will continue. Together, we can change the narrative for children in Afghanistan.
#FOREVERYCHILD