

Annual Report 2019

Accelerating
Results for Every
Child in Bhutan



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“To prepare for the 21st century, we have to invest in our children. Bhutanese are extremely capable people, and with the right opportunities and guidance, I have no doubt that Bhutanese children will achieve their full potential.”

His Majesty The King
Sherubtse College, Trashigang
October 14, 2019



THE CHILD MANDALA

THE CHILD MANDALA – A VISION FOR THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN IN BHUTAN

Mandala is a symbolic representation of the universe, an idea that life is never ending, in which everything is connected and interdependent. Drawing inspiration from this concept, the Child Mandala represents our collective journey in ensuring the wellbeing of children in Bhutan. It is grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

In this Mandala:

- ❖ Children are at the center of focus.
- ❖ The flower petals represent children's physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing.
- ❖ The triangles in four directions represent the guiding principles of Child Rights, which are:
 - [Best Interest of the Child](#), that is when adults make decisions, they need to consider the impacts on children and ensure their wellbeing.
 - [Non-Discrimination](#) means all children are treated equally.
 - [Survival and Development](#), that is all children survive and thrive.
 - [Respect Views of the Child](#) means adults listen to children for their views.
- ❖ The squares represent the support required in ensuring the rights of children. This support ensures that children are happy, safe from harm, healthy, learning, playing and heard.
- ❖ The last three circles represent those responsible for providing the care and support, namely:
 - Families as duty-bearers to ensure the love and care children need.
 - Community members or, where applicable the extended family, to provide appropriate direction and guidance to children.
 - The State to ensure that all appropriate legal, administrative measures and services are available to help children grow to their full potential.

In summary, the Child Mandala represents a guide to ensure the wellbeing and happiness of children. And it requires everyone to work together through partnership and collaboration.

[Bhutan signed the CRC on 4th of June 1990 and ratified it on 1st of August 1990.](#)

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ACRONYMS

C4D	Communication for Development
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EndVAC	End Violence Against Children
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization
MCH	Mother and Child Health
NYP	National Youth Policy
PCV	Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine
RGOB	Royal Government of Bhutan
SATO	Safe Toilet
SGD	Sustainable Development Goals
UNSDPF	United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

[*All data sourced and reported in this report is official government data.](#)

FOREWORD

2019 was a year of new beginnings. UNICEF Bhutan started its new programme cycle, 2019-2023 with a strong focus on accelerating efforts to reach more children and young people to ensure that every child has the best start in life, is healthy, learning and safe from harm.

The government renewed its commitment to the full implementation of the Convention of the Rights of Child, joining other nations across the world to celebrate the Convention's 30th anniversary. The recommitment assured the political will deemed vital to ensure the wellbeing of children in Bhutan.

UNICEF Bhutan turned 45 in 2019, a solemn juncture to reflect on the last four and half decades of working for the children of Bhutan. The relaunch of the Child Mandala, a vision that guides the efforts of all duty bearers for the wellbeing of children in Bhutan, is a call to ensure that our children, no matter where they are, do not get left behind as the country graduates to a lower middle-income country in 2023.

In 2019, the Country Office successfully completed the first year of the programme cycle, which focuses on addressing 'the last mile.'

We embarked on ground-breaking initiatives that build the foundation of a child's development. For example, we supported the Ministry of Health's work on 1,000 golden days, an endeavour to provide all interventions required in the crucial first 1,000 days of a child's life, a time of tremendous potential and enormous vulnerability. Throughout the year, our close collaboration with partners, including UN sister agencies, has helped us focus our attention on the country's most vulnerable children and women, helping Bhutan to stay on track to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite considerable progress, much remains to be done. We will continue to work on the ground with innovative interventions. For instance, the development of a ten-year inclusive education roadmap, an Early Childhood Care and Development action plan, and increased focus on demand creation in water, sanitation and hygiene will ensure all children survive and thrive. Upstream work has already been initiated through training of key policy makers and stakeholders on Social Policy, and revision of policies and legislation in health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), education and child protection.



The trust of our many strategic partners and donors makes everything we do possible. We are grateful for their support and I want to emphasize again my commitment, and the commitment of UNICEF, to use all of these opportunities to continue to make the most efficient use of the resources entrusted to us to accelerate results for children.

The Annual Report 2019: Accelerating results for every child in Bhutan highlights our efforts to accelerate results for every child in Bhutan. This report describes UNICEF's continued commitment and the progress we made together with the Royal Government of Bhutan and partners to achieve results for children. It features stories from the field where our work has made a difference to the lives of the most vulnerable children.

As we embark on yet another journey together with our partners and the people of Bhutan, it is my pleasure to share with you the story of our work for children in 2019.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.

Dr Will Parks
Representative
UNICEF Bhutan Country Office



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNICEF Bhutan Country Office turned 45 in 2019. It was the first year of UNICEF Bhutan's new Country Programme, which focuses on addressing the last mile and is aligned with the Royal Government of Bhutan's 12th Five-Year Plan (2019-2023). By the end of the Plan, Bhutan aspires to graduate to a lower middle-income country.

In 2019, UNICEF together with its partners and donors continued to accelerate its efforts to sustain the progress made thus far and to ensure that no child gets left behind in the country's transition.

The following are some of the significant achievements and challenges.

Significant achievements

Health: UNICEF's support to mother and child health continued to save the lives of children including newborns. Newborn deaths reduced from 18 to 16 and infant deaths from 27 to 25 per 1,000 live births. In 2019, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to develop the Accelerating Mother and Child Health policy, a trail blazing initiative, which when implemented in 2020 will holistically address the foundational needs of a child from conception to two years.

UNICEF's supported the introduction of two new vaccines: the Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine – to prevent pneumonia in children – benefitted 13,000 infants; while the Seasonal Influenza Vaccine – for five high risk population groups – benefitted 19,500 children and 13,000 pregnant women in 2019.

Children are now screened for developmental delays and disabilities with the introduction of the UNICEF-supported Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool. Over 60,000 children under five are set to benefit every year when the tool is rolled out nationwide.

Education: Enrollment to Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is gaining momentum and steadily increasing for children aged 3-5 years. To ensure no child misses an opportunity to play and learn, UNICEF is continuing its support in piloting alternative models of mobile ECCD opportunities in seven districts. This is one of the initiatives taken towards achieving the government's target to double ECCD coverage of children aged 3-5 years from 25 percent today to at least 50 percent by 2024.

More children are attending schools with the country recording a primary education net enrolment rate of 91.2 percent (90.3 male, 92.9 female) in 2019. Nine out of ten school-aged children are availing basic education and at 93.8 percent, Bhutan has almost met the target of 95 percent secondary education completion for 2019.

Efforts to make education more inclusive continued and in 2019, more than 800 children with disabilities had access to education in 18 schools across the country. The government approved the National Disability Policy in 2019, which will accelerate efforts towards an inclusive society.

Child protection: UNICEF is a leading partner of the Government and civil society to strengthen the child protection system at all levels. The National Plan of Action for Child Protection is being implemented with key institutions, including law enforcement and the justice system is making significant improvements in implementing child protection legislation. The establishment of Women and Child Protection Units at police stations, Child and Family Bench at the courts and the improved capacity of the social service workforce have enhanced protection services.

Challenges

Despite progress, challenges remain.

Health and Nutrition: One in five children are stunted and two in five, anaemic. One third of adolescent girls are anaemic, a risk factor for intergenerational nutrition deprivation. Infant deaths contribute to almost 44 percent of under five deaths and only 72 percent of the population have access to basic sanitation services. About 21 percent of children aged 2-9 years have at least one form of disability but early detection and the needs of children with disabilities are not sufficiently addressed.

Education: About 8,174 children between 6-19-year-olds are estimated to have never attended school. Quality of education needs special attention. The 2017 Programme for International Student Assessment for Development report reveals that learning outcomes of children in Bhutan are much lower than some of the best performing countries in the world. Bhutan's students scored 45.3 percent in Reading literacy, 38.8 percent in Mathematics literacy, and 45.1 percent in Scientific literacy. Learning outcomes of children with disabilities are even worse. They lack a modified curriculum, specialized teachers and appropriate assessment tools. High school graduates find it hard to get employment due to the mismatch between learning and demands of the job market.

One in 10 children do not complete basic education. The highest repetition rate was in grades VII at 12.8 percent, and VI and IX, at 12 percent each. The Gender Parity Index is 1.03 for pre-primary to basic education compared to 89 for tertiary education.

Only 25 percent had access to ECCD in 2019. Children with disabilities, in hard-to-reach communities, and migrant and nomadic children are yet to gain access.

Protection from violence and exploitation: Children in Bhutan are still affected by a range of violent acts, affecting both girls and boys. More than six out of 10 children experienced some form of physical violence at least once. More than two in three children reported experiencing physical violence in school and three in four children in day schools reported violent disciplinary actions by teachers. Corporal punishment is also used by teachers in monastic institutions. Two key concerns are parents' and teachers' acceptance of violence as a method to discipline and their lack of knowledge of the harm it has on the cognitive and emotional development of children. Nearly one in eight children (12.8 percent) experienced sexual violence at least once (boys, 11.9 percent; girls, 13.5 percent), with more than half between 13 and 17 years at the hands of peers.¹

For many families, monastic schools are a source of support for their most basic needs. A baseline study found that there are 13,373 religious persons in 248 institutions today. A significant number are children with disabilities. The main protection issue for child monks and nuns are associated with living conditions and nutrition, which impact their overall development and wellbeing.

Challenges to effective implementation of protection and justice legislation remain. Inconsistencies in legislative provisions require immediate attention. The availability and capacities of personnel to implement child protection programmes remains limited. Coordination at national and sub-national levels needs strengthening and more needs to be done to create awareness on child protection issues.

To address these challenges, the Government renewed its commitment to the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Child in 2019 coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the Convention.

¹ Study on Violence against Children in Bhutan, 2016

PROGRESS IN NUMBERS

HEALTH & NUTRITION

- 13,000 infants protected against pneumonia from Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine
- 19,500 children and 13,000 pregnant women benefitted from influenza vaccine
- 2,000 children aged 0-5 years vaccinated with Oral Polio Vaccine and 8,500 people between 9 months to 45 years vaccinated against measles during a catch-up campaign in four northern districts
- Bhutan now one of only three countries in the region to achieve control of Hepatitis B infection among children under five
- Micronutrient powder for young children aged 6-23 months introduced for the first time
- 274 health workers in 139 health centres of nine districts using the Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool for early detection and management of milestone delays and disabilities for children aged 10 weeks to sixty months
- 60 new health workers and more than 100 local leaders and religious persons sensitized on child nutrition



WASH

- 92 teachers from remote schools gained the skills to sustain clean water and safe sanitation services
- 4,090 more children (2,079 females) provided access to safe drinking water in 17 schools across 12 districts
- 23,762 children (50% female) benefitted from improved handwashing facilities in 76 schools across 4 districts
- 10,075 more people living in newly certified Open Defecation Free communities taking the total to 45.4% of the whole population
- 184,000 sanitary pads distributed in 105 remote schools including three special institutions and 17 nunneries across the country



ECCD

- 31 ECCD centres for 600 children in 14 districts constructed and rehabilitated
- 7,187 children (3,556 female) reached by a nationwide parenting programme



EDUCATION

- More than 700 children (90 female) in monastic institutions availed English literacy and numeracy classes
- More than 800 children with disabilities accessed education in 18 schools across the country



CHILD PROTECTION

- 1,500 children in monastic institutions availed child protection services
- 398 children (93 female) benefitted from Women and Child Protection Unit Services in 14 districts
- 36 students (25 female) have enrolled in Bhutan's first ever Bachelors of Arts programme in Social Work



ADAP

- 52,083 (26,551 females) adolescents and youth availed adolescent friendly services
- 127 out of school youth (49 females) equipped with skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship
- 5,493 volunteers (2,929 females) enhanced their knowledge on youth engagement and in recognizing and responding to violence against children
- 1,000 adolescents (350 females) trained to do coding and programming using technology



ADVOCACY

- 2,081,137 individuals reached through our social media platforms



One of Bhutan’s first trained immunization technicians

Saving lives and resources for the country



▶ *Pema Zangmo is the first female EPI technician in the country.*

Thirty-eight-year-old Pema Zangmo started her career in 2004 as an electrician in remote Lhuentse Hospital, central Bhutan. Never did she imagine that one day she would be managing a Regional Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) store in Gelephu, which provides lifesaving vaccines and equipment for thousands of children and mothers across six districts of the central region.

Not only is Pema one of the few trained EPI technicians in the country, she is also the first female to join the field. “I feel very proud and privileged to be doing such important work,” said Pema, a mother of three.

As an EPI technician, trained with UNICEF support, Pema and her colleagues at the store ensure that health facilities and outreach clinics in the region do not run out of vaccines and injection devices. “Every morning and evening, I also record vaccine

temperatures,” said Pema. “I do physical stock checking of the vaccines, and as well as calculate the wastage.”

But what Pema is most proud of is how she and her colleague were able to fix a 30m³ -capacity walk-in cooler for vaccines in 2016.

“The walk-in cooler had broken down and was not in use for two months. The government would have to spend a huge amount of money to fix it,” she said. “But we did it! With a help of a local electrician, we fixed the cooler and it is functioning well even today. We not only saved time but also resources for the country, by not having to send it outside Bhutan for repair and maintenance.”

This is the result of a 2016 training for two EPI technicians, including Pema, in India on cold chain equipment repair and maintenance. The training was supported by UNICEF and Japan Committee, Vaccines for the World’s Children. “I am happy that as an EPI technician, I am able to contribute in my little ways, and support timely immunization services for the children of Bhutan,” she said. “Being a mother makes the job even more meaningful and satisfying.” So far, ten EPI technicians have been trained – two in 2016, four in 2017 and four in 2018.

But there are many challenges still. Pema says there are only two trained EPI technicians managing and catering to the needs of six districts in central Bhutan, which means six district hospitals and over 50 basic health units. “Sometimes, it is challenging. We can’t attend to the needs of health facilities on time because of the shortage of trained workers and the distance required to travel to the facilities,” said Pema. “But I hope that this will change, and we will have many more trained EPI technicians on board.”

EVERY CHILD SURVIVES AND THRIVES



▶ A nurse administers the Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine after it was introduced nationwide.

Technicians like Pema have helped Bhutan make commendable progress in immunization. The country successfully introduced two more vaccines in 2019, the Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) and the Seasonal influenza vaccine to protect children against pneumonia and influenza. In 2019, PCV benefited about 13,000 children and influenza vaccine, about 19,500 children and 13,000 pregnant women. UNICEF supported in developing training and communication materials, training of health workers and procurement of the vaccines at a cheaper rate.

In line with the focus on reaching the last mile and to sustain Bhutan's elimination of measles and polio

free status, a catch-up vaccination campaign was held among high-risk population groups along the northern border in 2019. A total of 8,500 people between 9 months to 45 years in four districts of Paro, Gasa, Lhuentse and Trashiyangtse were vaccinated against measles. Also, 2,000 children aged 0-5 years were vaccinated with Oral Polio Vaccine in the same areas. In July, Bhutan became one of three countries in the region to achieve control of Hepatitis B infection among children under five.

Since 2008, UNICEF has been providing Hepatitis B monovalent vaccine, which is given within 24 hours of birth to prevent infection from the mother.



▶ Rigpa Yeshey, who was with his mother at the launch climbed on stage and played with the sprinkles packet that was just launched in Samtse.

UNICEF also provides rapid testing kits for triple elimination of Hepatitis B, HIV and Syphilis to all pregnant woman to test twice during their antenatal period.

The first 1,000 “golden” days in a child’s life is a critical phase and to ensure every child survives and thrives, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to develop a new “Accelerating Mother and Child Health” policy to be launched in early 2020.

The policy will deliver an integrated set of health and developmental interventions for every mother and child. The backbone of the policy will be conditional cash transfers given to mothers in rural communities, private and corporate organizations who are not entitled to six months paid maternity

leave. This will also enable these mothers to stay home and breastfeed their babies. The policy brings together all interventions that are required for every mother and child. It builds on and consolidates existing healthcare services, which were further strengthened in 2019.

More newborns including preterm and low birth weight babies are surviving and thriving because of the services provided by 626 health workers of 29 hospitals in nine districts. The Ministry of Health trained an additional 126 health workers from three hospitals in 2019 with support from UNICEF.

Over 60,000 children under five will benefit every year with the introduction of the Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool. A total of 274 health

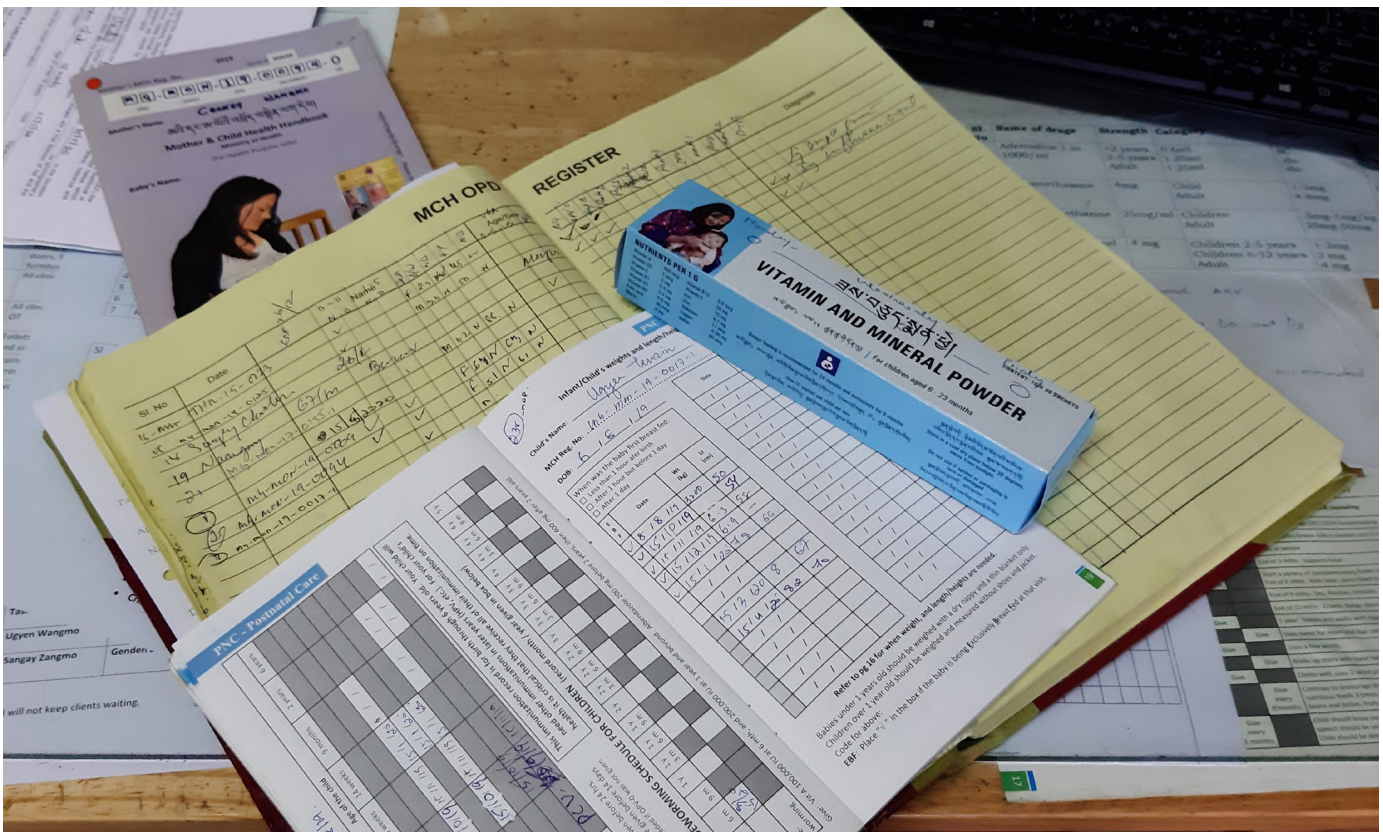
workers in 139 health centres of nine districts use the tool today to screen for early detection and management of milestone delays and disabilities for children aged 10 weeks to sixty months.

To prevent micronutrient deficiencies among children aged 6-23 months and to address the high burden of malnutrition among children, UNICEF and the Ministry of Health introduced micronutrient powder for young children aged 6-23 months in 2019. Micronutrient powder is a pack of 15 essential minerals and vitamins, which is added to a young child's food. The initiative will go nationwide in 2020.

But addressing malnutrition also needs improvement in feeding practices, which calls for behavioral change among children, adolescents, parents and caregivers. A comprehensive communication for development (C4D) action plan and a draft C4D material package was developed in 2019. More than 60 new health workers and about 100 local leaders

and religious persons were sensitized on child nutrition. Over 100 health workers were trained on Inter-Personal Communication on maternal and child health and nutrition education. With the supply and distribution of 25 television sets to health facilities, parents and caregivers frequenting these facilities now have access to audiovisual materials to enhance their knowledge and awareness on maternal and child health.

With an increasing focus on the second decade of life, UNICEF is partnering with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders to conduct a 'stocktaking' exercise to assess the status of adolescent health and nutrition programmes covering policies, infrastructure, service packages and human resources. Agencies working for and with adolescents were mapped to determine optimal use of services and to develop a 'common minimum package' for adolescents to be delivered at all possible opportunities.



▶ The micronutrient powder is a pack of 15 essential minerals and vitamins, which is added to a young child's food.

Reaching the unreached: Pre-school for children in remote Lungo village

UNICEF, Ministry of Education and the community establish the first-ever early childhood care and development centre in the hard-to-reach village of Lungo in Laya, northern Bhutan



▶ *The Early Childhood Care and Development Centre is the first centre in Lungo village in Laya, northern Bhutan.*

Lungo is one of the most remote settlements in Bhutan at almost 4,000 meters above sea level. There is no road to Lungo. People trek for two days - up and down, traversing, descending and ascending through mountains and rivers - to get to Laya gewog (block) and then to Lungo village.

And in this far-flung village, surrounded by snow-capped mountains and yaks, lies a centre for early childhood care and development (ECCD) filled with the laughter of children between the ages of 3 to 5.

UNICEF and the Ministry of Education opened the centre in April 2019 thus providing an opportunity to more than 15 children of Lungo village to have the best start in life. This is the first time that an ECCD has been set-up at such a remote and hard-to-reach community at a high altitude. The temperature drops to minus 6-degree Celsius even during Spring.

The centre was built with support from UNICEF and the nomadic community, which makes this centre even more special due to the strong sense of local



ownership. Since its inception, the centre has developed into a lively place where children and families learn, share and play together from 9am until 2pm. The centre caters to 64 households with a catchment area of three villages, including Lungo.

“We are very happy that our children can come together, play, interact with each other and learn,” said Pego, a 32-year old mother of one of the children attending ECCD for the first time. Pego said the children usually followed their parents to herd the yaks, moving from one pastureland to another and didn’t have the opportunity to interact and play with other children. “We are also busy with our work that we could hardly give them quality time,” she said.



EVERY CHILD LEARNS

The opening of an ECCD centre in Lungo, Gasa is one of the many efforts made to ensure no child is left behind in accessing learning opportunities. Within a short span of time, Bhutan has made impressive progress in providing essential Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) services to children. From three percent in 2011, access increased to 25 percent in 2019. On average, 1,000 new children gained access to ECCD centres every year in the past five years.

However, much remains to be done.

Only one in every four preschool-aged children has access to quality early learning opportunities to promote early stimulation and learning through play in 2019. UNICEF and the Ministry of Education carried out a study 'Early Childhood Care and Development in Bhutan: A Case for Investment' in 2017. This report presents a compelling case for the need to increasingly invest in ECCD programmes, with an emphasis on quality, equity and sustainability.

A child's most important steps happen before they set foot in a primary school. By their fifth birthday, children's brains are 90 percent developed and the foundations for success at school and in adulthood are in place. This makes a child's early years a critical window of opportunity – to set the foundations for life-long success, first at school, and later in life.

In 2019, UNICEF supported its partners in the construction and rehabilitation of 31 more ECCD centres for about 600 children in 14 districts and expanded its coverage through six more mobile facilitators for 90 children in seven districts. About 70 children in remote communities now have access to water and sanitation facilities in four ECCD centres. Twenty-four mobile ECCD facilitators were trained and a nationwide parenting education training was rolled out reaching 7,187 children (3,556 female) in 319 centres.



To ensure all children in Bhutan have access to high quality and equitable ECCD interventions from the time of conception up to the first eight years of life, UNICEF is working with Ministry of Education to develop Bhutan's first Multisectoral ECCD Strategic Action Plan. This effort will address the current lack of convergence and collaboration among key agencies and ensure that synergies are sought in going forward to address inequities in health, ability, achievement, opportunities, and long-term success.

For children and youth who missed school or dropped out of the education system, there are limited opportunities to start or continue their learning within the existing system. To address this gap, UNICEF supported the Ministry to develop and finalize Bhutan's first Non-Formal Education Equivalency Framework in 2019. This framework provides the foundation to create flexible pathways to learning through formal, non-formal, and vocational education. The main objective of the support is to ensure that the framework provides learners with the knowledge, skills and values to thrive in any chosen platform.

However, making alternative learning pathways a reality will require supportive guidelines, curriculum, and other systemic interventions before full implementation.

UNICEF also supported the development of Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers, which was launched in 2019. Besides creating inclusive classrooms, teachers will be using Information and Communication Technology in planning, preparing, and delivering lessons, thereby making learning more engaging for children.

UNICEF trained more than 50 teachers to support the learning needs of Children with Disabilities in 18 schools with special education needs and two specialized schools. Inclusive education principles and ideas were integrated in the 18-month Post

Graduate Diploma in Education in one of the two teacher training colleges. Through this initiative, teacher graduates will be equipped to support the learning needs of children and adolescents with disabilities. The Cabinet approved the first National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in August 2019, which was drafted in consultation with Persons with Disabilities among other stakeholders.

More than 300 children (90 female) in monastic institutions are availing English Literacy and Numeracy classes with the training of 30 additional teachers in interactive teaching approaches. To counter increasing non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes among monks and nuns, UNICEF has supported the piloting of a physical education programme in 12 monastic institutions.



► Coinciding with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the first-ever National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was launched on December 3, 2019.

Rada Monastery's Child Protection Champion

When Nim Dorji was 15 years old, he decided to become a monk. Born without a left hand, he did not believe he could contribute to his society. At 17, Nim is now the Child Protection focal person at Rada Losel Sharabling Monastery in Wangdue Phodrang district and strives to rid his community of violence.

Nim is one of the 44 young monks who attended the Child Protection and Participation Rollout Training from 3-4 July in 2018. The training is based on a training package developed jointly by UNICEF and five partners including the Central Monastic Body and Bhutan Nuns Foundation in 2017.

The training aims to build the capacities of children and adolescents on child protection and how to prevent and respond to violence against children. The training was organized by the Central Monastic Body in collaboration with UNICEF. Between 2017-2019, more than 3,000 young monks and nuns in 38 monasteries and nunneries, gained the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from violence and exploitation.

Nim Dorji wanted to become a monk since he was a young boy. He said: "My family was financially unstable. My parents are farmers and with 6 children to feed, life was difficult." He said he wanted to support his family not only financially but also spiritually. After completing 7th grade from Samtengang Central School, he enrolled as a monk at the Monastery. Currently, Nim supports his family through the money he earns when performing rituals.

Through the training, Nim said he learned about the laws that protect children from violence and of institutions he could report to if his rights were violated. He said he learned that everyone under 18 years is a child, including children with disabilities. "In our monastery we have children with speech impairment and those that have physical disabilities.



I know that these laws will protect me and others who have physical disabilities."

Towards the end of the two days training, monks appoint a Child Protection focal person. To convince his friends of his capability and commitment, he promised he would try to solve their issues and prevent violence in the monastery. "Three of us had volunteered and our friends had voted for us. I won by 3 votes," he said proudly.



Nine months after being elected as the focal person, he continues to educate his friends on their rights and encourages them to speak up if they are abused. He said: “If our teachers hit students until they are physically bruised or humiliate them, it is my duty to inform the principal or the Child Care and Protection Office.”

Nim continues to fulfill his duties as a Child Protection focal person. “There were many monks

elder to me last year who were able to help me fulfill my duties. But now, there are many young children who need my support even more.”

Nim Dorji dreams to become a senior monk and help communities. He concludes: “There may be children in villages who suffer from violence at home. I want to help them in the future.”

EVERY CHILD IS PROTECTED FROM VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Nim Dorji is among some 6,000 children growing up in monastic institutions across the country today. In 2019, UNICEF supported the provision of child protection services to 1,500 children. Children in monastic institutions face unique challenges and need support in several areas of health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and child protection. To ensure convergence and cross-sectoral collaboration, UNICEF has mapped the interventions provided to all monastic institutions and nunneries.

Child protection challenges are however, not limited to monastic institutions and cut across all age groups. In 2019, UNICEF and its partners developed Bhutan's first public communication campaign to end violence against children, to change negative social norms and to promote positive parenting and disciplining at home and in schools. The campaign will be rolled out in 2020.

To ensure Justice for Children, UNICEF continued to support the Royal Bhutan Police to expand the number of Women and Child Protection Units and Desks. One desk was established in 2019, bringing the total number of districts providing child-friendly policing services to 14 out of 20. A total of 398 children (93 female) benefited from these services.

UNICEF and the National Commission for Women and Children are also working together to develop the first National Child Policy on wellbeing and protection.

Together with five partner agencies including Civil Society Organizations, UNICEF implemented the national training package on child protection and participation in 2019. More than 1,500 child monks and nuns are trained to recognize and report issues of violence, abuse and exploitation. Nuns in all 28 nunneries now have the knowledge and skills to prevent and respond to violence against children. Through a UNICEF-supported training, there are 78 child protection focal points (an adult and a child) in 39 monastic institutions and nunneries for children to access child-friendly reporting mechanisms.

To address the critical gap in the availability of a skilled social service workforce in the social protection sector, UNICEF and the Royal University of Bhutan launched a four-year Bachelor of Arts in Social Work at the Samtse College of Education. A total of 36 students (25 females) have enrolled into the programme to become Bhutan's first cohort of professional social workers when they graduate in 2022.



▶ Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering opens an international conference on "emerging social work practices and education," at the Samtse College of Education.



▶ Student advocates create awareness on menstrual hygiene and proper disposal of sanitary waste.

Youth Advocates for Sanitary Waste Management

It was time for action! Students all over Bhutan visited local communities to raise awareness on the environmental impact of poor sanitary waste management as part of the Red Dot Campaign organized on Menstrual Hygiene Day.

Seventeen-year-old Tashi Choden led the team from Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School in Thimphu to engage the Lungtenphug Army housing community in conversation about menstrual hygiene and proper disposal of sanitary waste. The student advocates were confident and void of any inhibition as they spoke to the nervous, giggling women who had gathered for the campaign.

Tashi compares this against how excited she and her friends were to start menstruating. “Getting our period meant that we were finally growing up and that meant a lot to us as kids. In fact, I was elated when I got my first period.” But her excitement

passed when she had to go to school during her periods. She recalls not wanting to attend classes in case she leaks or having to ask for help in hushed tones lest the boys should hear her. She didn’t feel the school was a safe space for her when she was menstruating.

She attributes this to a multitude of factors. “We all grew up with the idea that you are ‘dirty’ if you are menstruating. Our culture had us believe that menstruation is bad karma.”

Tashi’s beliefs are backed up by more than 60 percent of adolescent schoolgirls who stated that they believed menstruating women and girls shouldn’t enter shrines in a study on Menstrual Hygiene Management among adolescent schoolgirls and nuns carried out by UNICEF Bhutan and the Ministry of Education in 2017.



She added that she heard that in some cultures, women and girls are removed from their own house during their period. “All of this made us feel shameful - not just talking about it but also about having it.”

However, Tashi feels there has been constant effort from the government and schools to conduct awareness campaigns online and in real life. These helped quash misinformation about menstruation and disseminate accurate and helpful information regarding menstrual hygiene management. “In my previous school, female teachers would gather the girls in the hall and teach us how to use pads through demonstrations while giving us the period talk. When you see women, who speak so freely about menstruation, it lifts the veil of shame and taboo, and encourages you to feel free to talk about it.”

“I was really lucky to be the person this year who advocates for the Red Dot Campaign,” remarked Tashi. The student group had to prepare themselves to answer any questions people may ask them about

menstrual hygiene management. The theme was ‘It’s time for action’ so Tashi and her friends had to prepare material on proper disposal of sanitary waste as well. “The environmental impact of sanitary waste was right in front of us, but we didn’t realize it until we had to take up the responsibility of advocacy.”

The environmental aspect of sanitary waste caught nationwide attention, including that of the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr Lotay Tshering, who is also a doctor.

In a video showing his support for the campaign, the Lyonchhen said: “Any bodily fluid, once out of the body, becomes a source of infection, which is why women must learn to dispose sanitary waste properly. Men must also understand that menstruation is a normal physiological process and there is nothing negative or dirty about it. It is also the responsibility of the government to support menstrual hygiene education and proper sanitary waste management.”

EVERY CHILD LIVES IN A SAFE AND CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Youth advocates like Tashi and her friends across the country were catalytic in debunking the myths around menstruation. Their advocacy efforts called for action to enhance Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in every school, enhance sanitary facilities and education of boys on the empathy they need to show girls regarding menstrual health and hygiene among others.

To improve menstrual hygiene practices in schools and nunneries, the Ministry of Education with the support of UNICEF launched the 'Red Dot Campaign' on Menstrual Hygiene Management Day in 2019 to promote disaggregation of used sanitary pads before disposal. To address the issue of access and non-affordability, around 184,000 sanitary pads were distributed in 105 remote schools including three special institutions and 17 nunneries across the country.

Efforts to ensure safe drinking water were intensified with about 4,090 children (2,079 girls) provided with access to safe drinking water in 2019

following the installation of multi-stage filtration with UV water treatment systems in 17 schools across 12 districts. A total of 23,762 children, half of them female, benefitted from improved handwashing facilities in 76 schools across four districts.

In partnership with the Ministry of Health and SNV, demand promotion in Sarpang district engaged 6,110 households to invest in improved sanitation. On World Toilet Day, two more districts and 12 blocks were certified as open defecation free for achieving 100 percent improved sanitation. By the end of 2019, around 18,075 more people were living in newly certified Open Defecation Free communities taking the total to 45.4 percent of the whole population.

Addressing equitable access and use for children remains a priority. A total of 173 child monks and nuns in three monastic institutions now have inclusive toilets that provide safe drinking water with handwashing facilities and water heating systems.



▶ Tsiirang and Trongsa dzongkhags were recognised for achieving the status of Open Defecation Free and 100 percent improved sanitation coverage on World Toilet Day in Shompangkha Gewog, Sarpang.

While infrastructure is a critical support to ensure every child lives in a safe and clean environment, there is as much need to sustain the access, quality and equity of the services provided so far. A total of 92 teachers from remote schools were provided the skills to sustain clean water and safe sanitation services, while support staff from 44 schools and

eight health facilities from 11 districts were trained to operate and maintain WASH facilities. Planners and architects were informed on construction guidelines for persons with disabilities and 80 nuns and 1,175 monks empowered to promote safe water supply across 23 monasteries and two nunneries in Western Bhutan.



► Today, 173 child monks and nuns in three monastic institutions have access to inclusive toilets.

EVERY CHILD HAS AN EQUITABLE CHANCE

UNICEF Bhutan forged new partnerships with non-traditional partners in 2019 and initiated discussions with the Department of National Budget on child budgeting and public finance for children. Advocating for child-focused policies and increased investment in children, UNICEF Country Office held discussions with the government and Parliament on strengthening awareness and knowledge on Public Finance for Children.

Capacity of Parliamentarians, government officials and civil society representatives was enhanced in decision-making through trainings on Social Policy and Social Protection, along with the tools for Policy Analysis and Review. A beneficial offshoot of the training was the introduction of a Social Policy module within the Social Science courses at Sherubtse College.

UNICEF supported 11 Government officials including four females to learn about the efficacy of Nepal's

conditional cash transfer (CCT) mechanism, including fund disbursement, social outcomes brought about by CCT, challenges and lesson learnt. The visit was facilitated in preparation of the 1,000 golden days policy that will be rolled out in 2020.

Three Members of Parliament and a youth representative, who attended the 3rd South Asia Parliamentarian Platform in Sri Lanka signed the Columbo Declaration to further realize child rights in South Asia through provision of greater investments in children and by formulating and implementing child-friendly policies and legislation.

To reach the unreached, UNICEF joined the Ministry of Health and Gross National Happiness Commission in supporting Tarayana Foundation, a civil society organization, to pilot a community engagement initiative in five hard-to-reach communities of Samtse and Sarpang Districts.



▶ Three Members of Parliament and a youth representative at the 3rd South Asia Parliamentarian Platform in Sri Lanka.

Youth Matters!

24 youth were engaged to review the 2011 national youth policy for revision

Thimphu, Bhutan. 2020: Tandin Wangmo, a college student, had never heard about the National Youth Policy. Today, she is part of an initiative to review the policy. “I’m proud to contribute to the revision of National Youth Policy,” she said. “I feel that I’ve made a difference.”

Tandin was part of a 9-day camp conducted in Thimphu to review the National Youth Policy 2011 (NYP). A total of 24 participants from the Youth Initiative, a youth group, deliberated on ways to improve the policy. On 24 January 2020, they presented their recommendations to the stakeholders.

As a teacher trainee, Tandin said that schools often undermine the importance of Value Education and Physical Education classes. “During my teaching practice, I was disheartened because many education and physical education classes were substituted with other subjects showing the importance given to academics only.” She added that their recommendations included Special Education Needs and the importance of grooming skills in children.

Some participants also put forward recommendations for a smooth transition from school to work. Tshering Denkar, a college student, said that applying what is learned in school was difficult. “We believe young people should be trained in accordance with the job market and opportunities for job apprenticeship should also be created.”

Tshering also said that agriculture should be encouraged in schools to tackle social stigma and enable young people to gain skills.



▶▶ *Participants from the Youth Initiative discuss the National Youth Policy.*

Participants believed that the policy should address cybercrime and the negative impact of television on youth through media literacy programmes. They also highlighted the importance of addressing common youth-related issues such as, mental health, substance abuse, poor nutrition, menstrual health, abortion and suicide.

As part of the camp, the participants also interacted with representatives from the Department of Youth and Sports (DYS), the Gross National Happiness Commission, the Centre for Bhutan Studies and former policy makers. They also visited the Parliament to understand the proceedings and procedure of law making. The recommendations from the group of students and job seekers will be shared with the DYS and UNICEF to be incorporated in the revised policy before submitting it to the Gross National Commission Secretariat for screening. The camp was facilitated by Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy in collaboration with UNICEF Bhutan and DYS.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION

A critical window of opportunity is to support youth and adolescents, who make up more than half of the country's population.



▶ About 1,000 adolescents learnt coding, programming and negotiation skills by using technology.

In 2019, UNICEF supported the Government to commence the drafting of the first ever National Child Policy and review the outdated National Youth Policy of 2011. These two policies will provide the strategic framework and approach to ensure that coordinated investments in critical areas of child development, health, education, youth participation, protection and civic engagement all result in an environment where a child can thrive and grow, and where adolescents and young people are provided with the rights skills and opportunities to transition from school to work.

The four integrated youth centres engaged around 5,000 young people, more than half of whom were female to acquire foundational skills required to

transition from school to work or to help them connect with employers. Together, the four centres provided services to 52,083 young people (26,551 females) in 2019. Two new services were also introduced at the centres - entrepreneurship education and digital literacy training.

The entrepreneurship education was provided to 127 out-of-school youth (49 females), to equip them with the skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship such as proposal writing and business idea generation. About 1,000 adolescents (350 females) were trained to do coding and programming and enhance critical thinking, problem solving and negotiation skills and build teamwork by using technology. These centres are critical in providing learning opportunities and

skills to children who are out-of-school and from marginalized groups.

Youth volunteers are critical partners of change for UNICEF. In 2019, UNICEF partnered with over

5,493 volunteers (2,929 females) from various youth groups, engaged them in a series of workshops and training, which enhanced their knowledge on youth engagement, and in recognizing and responding to violence against children.



▶ On International Volunteer Day, 35 volunteers participated in a day long day consultation on developing action plans to address gender equality, sanitation and hygiene, climate action and nutrition.

BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL CHANGE

One of UNICEF's most important legacies is the organization's contribution to 'social mobilization' to rally partners, donors, governments, religious bodies, professional associations, and community and youth organizations to demand and amplify results for children.

To improve infant and young child feeding practices and address high stunting and anaemia prevalence among women, children and adolescents, a comprehensive Communication for Development (C4D) action plan and a draft C4D material package to support demand promotion was developed in 2019. The dissemination of these communication materials will inform parents and caregivers of the need to provide nutritious food to children so that they grow into healthy citizens.

As powerful and persuasive actors in a community to bring about behavioral change, more than 60 new health workers and more than 100 local leaders and religious persons were sensitized on child nutrition. To break the communication barrier and ensure parents and caregivers understand the benefits of child nutrition, over 100 health workers were trained on Inter-Personal Communication on maternal and child health and nutrition education.

With the supply and distribution of 25 television sets to various health facilities, parents and caregivers frequenting these facilities now have increased access to audiovisual materials to increase their knowledge on maternal and child health and nutrition.



▶ UNICEF, Health Ministry and Tarayana Foundation officials consult residents of a village in Tading, Samtse on their issues and aspiration for children.

Three joint multi agency owned C4D action plans with interactive communication materials to support social and behavior change on mother and child health, care and protection were put in place. The action plan and draft C4D materials specifically for “Accelerated Mother and Child Health” focuses on the importance of the first 1,000 golden days of children’s lives (from conception to the second birthday) and the interventions required for the well-being of the mother and the child during this period. The government will roll out the 1,000 golden days policy in early 2020 with a conditional cash transfer scheme to enable mothers, who do not get paid six months maternity leave, to stay home and breastfeed their newborns.

Communication materials for the “End Violence Against Children” (EndVAC) campaign and for an inclusive society campaign were developed and

stakeholder consultations held. This has resulted in enhanced understanding, confidence and clarity among various agencies on how to work together to communicate and engage children, parents and caregivers, decision-makers and communities in a consistent and collaborative way and achieve results efficiently and effectively.

The relaunch of the Child Mandala, a vision that guides the efforts of all duty bearers for the wellbeing of all children in Bhutan on the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has significantly enhanced the society’s understanding of the Convention. By culturally contextualizing the rights of the child, the Child Mandala resonates with Bhutan’s society, increases awareness and reminds all duty bearers of their responsibilities towards children.



► Families in Tading gewog in Samtse district commit to improve the wellbeing of children in their community.

Schooling in tents

After a windstorm struck Daksa Primary School in Mongar



Three weeks after they began their new academic year, a windstorm struck Daksa Primary School in Gongdue, Mongar damaging most of the school structures on February 28, 2019. The school lost the roofs of its three academic blocks, an administration block and a dining hall to the windstorm. Most structures were old and needed renovation, according to the school administration. Worried, the school administration informed the district education sector for help.

Half a day later, UNICEF’s disaster support kit arrived from its eastern region centre in Trashigang. The pitching of eight tents to open a temporary

school was completed in a day with the help of 30 people from the district, Daksa village and school. “We were fortunate to receive an immediate response from the authority concerned,” officiating principal, Jamtsho said. “We were worried that it would take not less than two weeks to build temporary sheds.”

Jamtsho explained that the tents and support kits reduced pressure on the community and saved resources to build temporary structures. “It was cost effective and took less time to set up the tents.”

The officiating principal said the school could have lost at least 14 instructional days if the school was to

develop their own temporary shelters. “The school planned to build a temporary shed using CGI sheets, but it could have been risky and time consuming.” The temporary tents house classes from PP to VI and an office for the teachers. There are 92 students enrolled from the gewog, of which 60 are boarders.

“The students thoroughly enjoyed their classes during the first whole week. It was like taking the

whole school to a different and new environment,” said a teacher, Jamyang Loday. “I felt like I was teaching in a new class with this whole different set up. We could see the excitement in students.” Construction and renovation of the damaged structures were completed in a month’s time. The new structures were built with new techniques that will reduce the damage if such disasters happen in future.



Story courtesy: Kuensel. The story was published in Kuensel, the national daily on May 27, 2019.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The country office did not receive emergency funding in 2019, but UNICEF plays a strategic role in supporting and working with different UN Agencies when an emergency strikes. UNICEF has also prepositioned emergency supplies in strategic regional hubs inside Bhutan.

When the ECCD centre in Nakeything, Lhuentse, suffered structural damage due to a flash flood, UNICEF's 'ECCD in a box' was dispatched immediately helping facilitators to create a safe learning environment for 27 preschool children (14 girls) to ensure their quick return to learning and playing.

To improve the preparedness for WASH in Emergencies, guidelines were developed, and work has begun to develop guidelines on inclusive public toilet design.

Two focal points from the Ministry of Education received training from the Asia Disaster Preparedness Center and the Ministry's institutional capacity in disaster risk management was further enhanced with the establishment of a separate Education Emergency Operations Center.

UNICEF's Preparedness and Response Plan was developed to strengthen local and institutional capacity of Education, Health, Nutrition and Child Protection sectors to prepare for and respond to disasters through a convergent approach.



ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN'S WELLBEING



▶ Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering signs the Global Pledge: *For every child, every right*, to mark the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Child.

UNICEF Bhutan harnessed the many advocacy opportunities during national events and international days throughout the year. At these events, UNICEF's role was highlighted through numerous keynote addresses, speeches, media releases, and interaction with partners and participants. Our one-on-one advocacy meetings with the newly elected Cabinet Ministers, parliamentarians and local government officials has led to increased understanding and genuine appreciation of UNICEF's work in Bhutan and our ongoing collaboration with partners.

UNICEF supported the Government in celebrating the 2019 International Youth Day that brought together a wide range of partners including the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour. This demonstrates the commitment of the Royal Government of Bhutan towards a holistic approach to address issues affecting youth such as

unemployment and health. UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia commissioned a regionwide study on the skills that youth need to succeed in the future. Taking forward the recommendations from the study and supporting the Government in establishing a systematic approach to youth issues will be a key area of focus in 2020 for UNICEF Bhutan.

The Government renewed its commitment to the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Child on World Children's Day, making Bhutan one of the 109 countries to align to the "*Global Pledge: For every child, every right*," and among the 68 that lit up monuments in blue for child rights.

An explanatory video about the Mandala enhanced people's understanding on the rights of children and their responsibilities in protecting these rights. A documentary "*30 Years of Child Rights, Bhutan's Story*" highlighted the progress Bhutan has made with UNICEF's support to the lives of children since



► Changangkha Lhakhang in Thimphu where all newborns are blessed was among the three monuments lit up in blue on November 20.

it signed and ratified the Convention. These videos were broadcast on national television and social media platforms, increasing awareness of UNICEF's work.

UNICEF Bhutan continued to use traditional and social media channels to efficiently advance key messages. There were 32 media stories mentioning

UNICEF and one Op-Ed by the Representative on World Children's Day. The Country Office's social media platforms continued to grow. Our total reach increased by 42 percent to 2,081,137 and the country office has the second-highest number of female supporters in the region (as a proportion of followers).



▶ The Buddha Doderma Statue at Kuenselphodrang is one of the biggest Buddha statues in the world and dedicated to the 60th birth anniversary celebration of His Majesty The Fourth King.



▶ Education Minister JB Rai and UNICEF Representative Dr Will Parks sign the pledge to protect child rights in Bhutan.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROGRESS



▶ Teachers and resource persons at the Wangsel School for the Deaf sign thank you to a family from Dubai for supporting the development of sign language in Bhutan.

UNICEF Bhutan played an instrumental role in leveraging millions of dollars for Bhutan from the Global Fund, GAVI, Vaccines for the World's Children, and Global Partnerships for Education. The Country Office continued engagement with donors and UNICEF National Committees through ongoing communication, field visits, high quality donor reports, and as well as development of new proposals. The Office successfully hosted visits from the Czech and Korea National Committees, donors from United Arab Emirates, and a photo mission from Regional Office in Nepal. These visits have resulted in more commitment of resources for the Country Office and increased visibility of UNICEF Bhutan's works. The total resources mobilized in 2019 was about USD 2 million.

UNICEF continues to be the key partner of the Government and civil society organizations (CSOs). As just one example, UNICEF has partnered with the Department of Youth and Sports, Central Monastic Body, CSOs Ability Bhutan Society, RENEW, Youth Development Fund, and Bhutan Nuns Foundation to build the capacities of young people, social service professionals, parents and caregivers of children with disabilities on prevention and response to violence against children. UNICEF also engaged with the Young Bhutan Network, which consists of 15 youth groups, to reach out to children and adolescents to recognize and report violence against children in their community.

Harnessing the power of business and markets for children

Even though Bhutan's corporate and private sector is relatively small-scale, the Country Office has commenced discussion on possible partnerships with Tashi Cell, Bhutan Telecom, and Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries. The two telecom service providers partnered with UNICEF to send messages on child rights through bulk SMS to their clients on World Children's Day.

Further discussions with these and other potential corporate partners are planned for 2020. Bhutan is one of few countries that has secured the Lixil Partnership through an NGO for the installation of Safe Toilet (SATO) technology, which could be an entry-point to develop relationships with the corporate sector.



▶ A thousand butter lamps were lit to mark the 30th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of Child.

DELIVERING AS ONE



▶ Heads of UN agencies at a panel discussion on the national broadcaster, Bhutan Broadcasting Service to celebrate the UN Day.

As a strong actor in the UN Country Team, UNICEF continues to fully support the Delivering as One approach and embrace the acceleration in UN coherence and reform. This includes UNICEF's leadership of the UN Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group and in programmatic Inter-Agency Task Teams under the new UNSDPF in coordination with other UN Agencies.

UNICEF contributed to strengthening key components of the UN's 'Delivering as One' approach in Bhutan, including training in the

prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse to implementing partners and UN Country Team members and staff. In gender, UNICEF led the development of National Standing Operating Procedures for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence.

UNICEF supported the National Commission for Children and Women by seconding an international consultant to enhance the capacity of the gender division in collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA, WHO and UNODC.

UNICEF, UNDP and WHO successfully mobilized funds from United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which supported the Government in strengthening its policy environment for persons with disabilities.

Together with UNDP, UNICEF Bhutan strengthened the Government’s SDG Committee’s understanding and capacity in their monitoring and oversight role. UNICEF and UNDP supported the Government in designing the SDG dashboard – an integrated data visualization system to collate and display Gross National Happiness (GNH), SDGs and Five-Year Plan indicators – which will provide high frequency,

reliable data to allow stakeholders to track Bhutan’s progress on GNH, SDGs and the Plan to make evidence-based decisions.

UNICEF commenced discussions with WFP and FAO on a comprehensive approach to nutrition and food security linked to commercial agricultural development.

Finally, UNICEF partnered with the Resident Coordinator’s Office to organize the first ever “One UN” event during the World AIDS Day where people living with HIV shared their stories of going public with their HIV status.



▶ The UN Country Team at a retreat in Thimphu.

Photo courtesy: Resident Coordinator’s Office

LOOKING AHEAD: A NEW DECADE OF ACTION

Bhutan has made impressive progress in social areas over the last decades. Based on these achievements, the country is striving to complete the last mile and graduate into a lower middle-income country by the end of the current plan in 2023.

To sustain the changes made to the lives of children, UNICEF will continue working with the Royal Government of Bhutan and its partners to accelerate actions for children's wellbeing.

The new decade we are embarking upon is a decade of impact and acceleration. It calls for action to overcome the socio-economic challenges that constrain the country.

Bhutan remains a young democracy, with a need to strengthen governance for child rights and forms of democratic engagement, particularly among women. The country faces several challenges to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including disparities between population subgroups by wealth quintile, location, gender, age, contravening SDG 10 and challenging the "last mile" of development. Bhutan is one of the smallest economies in the world but is also one of the fastest-growing economies. Coupled with supportive fiscal and monetary policy, it has maintained solid macroeconomic performance in the past years.

However, ensuring the sustainability of Bhutan's economy remains a challenge, with growth driven primarily by the public and capital-intensive sectors. A high dependence on the hydropower sector, which inherently generates low national employment opportunities, present a further risk for macroeconomic instability. The agriculture sector, critical for livelihoods of the rural poor, continues to be challenged by low growth rates. Transport and other infrastructure are limited. Supply chains face complications given the rugged topography and the

market scale is very small. The impending transition of Bhutan into lower-middle-income status will result in increasingly reduced bilateral support to the country putting social sector achievements at risk. Overall, economic vulnerability thus remains high.

UNICEF Bhutan has heightened its focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized children. Agreement has been reached for UNICEF to join UNDP's support for local governance through which UNICEF will improve subnational child data sources to better identify those left behind and build capacity of district administrations and communities to improve planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring to achieve results for children and adolescents. UNICEF continues to focus on mobilizing additional resources, using enterprise risk management to monitor risks, maintaining and building alliances with key partners, and enhancing public finance for children across all programme components.

Bhutan is among the most vulnerable countries, in the region and around the world, to impacts of likely climate change and natural disasters. The Government has identified climate change mitigation as one of its core results areas for the 12th Plan to address negative impacts that Bhutan potentially faces. Strengthening disaster preparedness and management together with climate change action will be an increasing focus of UNICEF's support to the RGoB and development partners.

In 2020, Bhutan marks 30 year of signing the Convention on the Rights of Child. As one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention, Bhutan's commitment has been demonstrated in the significant achievements in the area of child rights.

UNICEF looks forward to continuing this story, that started 45 years ago with the Royal Government of Bhutan.



UNICEF Bhutan team would like to thank our partners who supported us in 2019:

Andorran National Committee for UNICEF
Czech National Committee for UNICEF
GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance
German National Committee for UNICEF
The Federal Republic of Germany
Hong Kong National Committee for UNICEF
Japan National Committee for UNICEF
Government of Japan
Japan Committee for UNICEF (COOP Sapporo)
Japan Committee, Vaccines for the World's Children
Korean National Committee for UNICEF
Government of South Korea
Lego Foundation
New Zealand Committee for UNICEF
Swedish Committee for UNICEF
Swiss Committee for UNICEF
The Government of Switzerland
UNICEF Gulf Office, Dubai
United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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