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Lesotho





Humanitarian Situation Report No. 3

Reporting Period: April to June 2021

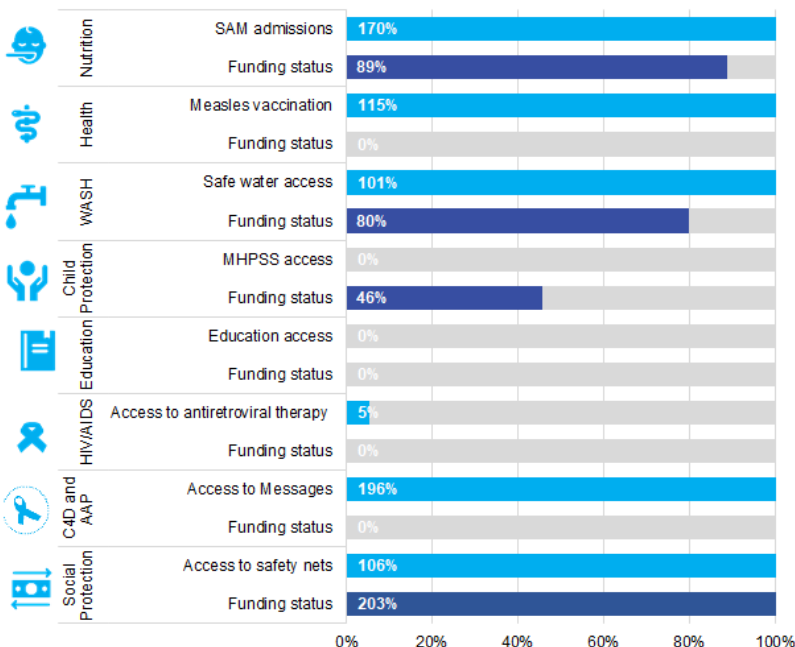
Highlights

- Lesotho’s humanitarian situation has worsened with the increase of COVID-19 confirmed cases and deaths, including two outbreaks at schools in Butha Buthe and Leribe reported in June. This increase of confirmed cases has exceeded the WHO threshold of resurgence >20% increase in new cases. Thus, the country has entered the third wave of the pandemic, with community transmission of the Delta variant reported.
- 37,648 persons have received their first doses of the COVID-19 vaccines (100% utilization). A further delivery of 36,000 doses was made in May, and second dose vaccination is underway. Health care workers and persons with comorbidities in Maseru District were prioritized.
- UNICEF enhanced demand creation for COVID-19 vaccines, including addressing vaccine hesitancy, with messaging reaching over 450,000 people.
- In 2021, UNICEF has so far received US\$ 6.5 million for the social protection sector. However, UNICEF still requires US\$ 2 million to respond to the humanitarian needs in the other sectors urgently.

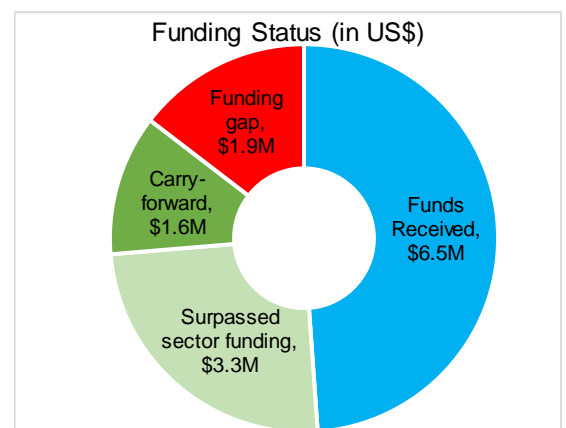
Situation in Numbers

-  **321,000** children in need of humanitarian assistance (UNICEF 2021 HAC)
-  **766,000** people in need (Lesotho VAC)
-  **321,000** Children to be reached (UNICEF 2021 HAC)
-  **383,000** People to be reached (UNICEF 2021 HAC)

UNICEF’s Response and Funding Status



UNICEF Appeal 2021 US\$ 6.7 million



Funding Overview and Partnerships

In 2021, UNICEF is appealing for US\$ 6.7 million to meet the humanitarian needs of children and women affected by and at risk due to climate change (drought and flooding) and the impacts of COVID-19 in Lesothoⁱ. So far, funds received are from the EU, which has responded with US\$ 6.5 millionⁱⁱ, for social protection for cash transfers to households enrolled in the child grant programme and provision of PPEs for sector frontline workers. Ongoing response for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Nutrition and Child Protection sectors is funded mainly through US\$ 1.5 million received late last year from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), as indicated in a previous situation reportⁱⁱⁱ. Ongoing response in schools, including improving hand hygiene for learners, back-to-school campaigns, and procurement of PPEs for learners and teachers, is supported through funds received in 2020 from Global Partnership for Education (GPE). No further funding was received in this reporting quarter.

UNICEF expresses its sincere gratitude to these donors for the contributions received. Unfortunately, the 2021 HAC still has a funding gap of US\$ 2 million (29%). Without additional funding, UNICEF will be unable to reach children, adolescents, and their families in urgent need due to the impact of both COVID-19 and climate change. Sectors underfunded include WASH, Child Protection, Education, C4D, Nutrition, Health, and HIV/AIDS.

Situation Overview and Humanitarian Needs

Climatic shocks, declining economic growth, and the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be critical factors contributing to increasing humanitarian needs in Lesotho. The estimated number of people in need is 766,000 (38% of the population), of which 582,000 people are in rural areas and 184,000 people in urban areas^{iv}.

Since June, the country has witnessed an explosive increase of new COVID-19 cases, mainly in Butha Buthe, Leribe, and Maseru, which exceeded the WHO threshold of resurgence of >20% increase in new cases. Thus, the country has entered the third wave of the pandemic, with community transmission of the Delta variant reported. There were three outbreaks at schools in Butha Buthe, Leribe, and Maseru reported in June. As of 29th June, most cases had happened in 21 schools in Leribe (473 cases confirmed), 7 in Butha Buthe (43 cases confirmed), and in Maseru (15 cases confirmed). As of the end of June, Lesotho had a cumulative of 11,416 cases and 329 deaths.

The Education sector continues to be one of the most affected sectors. As of 12th April 2021, all primary and secondary grades had reopened, including pre-primary, following a phased reopening of schools that began on 3rd March 2021. However, schools then closed for winter break two days earlier than the planned date due to resurging cases of COVID in schools. The June Ministry of Education Situation Report indicated that 11 schools in Leribe and Botha-Bothe districts had COVID outbreaks. Out of the 11 schools, 3 (Khethisa High School, Molapo High School, and Hlotse High School) closed abruptly following the spiraling cases, and this disrupted the education of approximately 2,882 learners. As all public schools are on a shift system, there is an increasing risk of a widening learning loss among close to 450,000 learners enrolled in public schools. Hence the need to adapt a hybrid learning model can allow a combination of distance learning modalities in parallel with in-class learning to fill the gap when learners are alternating school attendance by days.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

Health

UNICEF continues providing financial and technical support to the Government of Lesotho with the vaccine delivery, distribution, and vaccination rollout countrywide. In the second quarter of 2021, support was given towards the distribution and vaccination rollout using the 36,000 of the first batch doses of AstraZeneca vaccines in March through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) facility. With this vaccine, a 10-dose vial was able to vaccinate almost 12 persons, so a total of 37,648 persons were vaccinated. Of these, 20,267 persons were health care workers, and 17,381 were persons with comorbidities in Maseru District. In May, UNICEF supported the delivery of an additional 36,000 AstraZeneca to administrate the second dose of those vaccinated in March. The administration of these vaccines is ongoing.

Furthermore, UNICEF provided technical support for the deployment of 174 units of cold chain equipment for 173 out of 216 health facilities, ensuring adequate cold chain capacity for both COVID19 vaccines and routine vaccination. In addition, UNICEF facilitated the donation of 560 packages (4mg tabs/PAC- 5*10) of dexamethasone as part of COVID19 treatment.

UNICEF continued its support to maintain the maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) services despite the secondary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, UNICEF is promoting child health services for demand generation and advocacy to the Government of Lesotho to maintain a high-level commitment to essential health services. In the second quarter of 2021, 7,296 children were vaccinated with the first dose of the measles vaccine.

To enhance continuity of health services, the C4D team has targeted 11 health care facilities in 6 districts where 1400 caregivers of children aged 0-24 months are being tracked to ensure that their children complete the routine immunization calendar. This process, which entails the education of the caregivers on child health issues, is carried out through messaging of continuity of essential healthcare services and discussions with frontline workers (100) to ensure COVID-19 humanitarian programming.

Nutrition

UNICEF provided 2,009 children with therapeutic nutrition support out of approximately 5,500 children in need. UNICEF also provided 15,137 pregnant women with iron folate supplements and 15,534 children (6-59 months) with Vitamin A supplementation. Over 3,303 caregivers of children under five received counseling on infant and young child feeding (IYCF). UNICEF continued with joint supportive supervision and mentoring to health care workers assigned to the pediatric wards responsible for treating severe acute malnutrition (SAM) cases. This revealed no reported stockout of SAM commodities and that staff received on-the-job training monthly in 17 inpatient care facilities. Regular supportive supervision and mentorship are critical to ensure optimum adherence to treatment protocols due to the high turnover of healthcare workers. In addition, UNICEF worked with partners to strengthen community-based nutrition information and referral systems through active case finding at community and health facilities reaching approximately 43,038 children under the age of five years conducted by village health workers. Furthermore, UNICEF procured 6,000 salter scales to facilitate community growth monitoring sessions. To date, 5,394 (out of 6000) salter scales have been distributed in 9 districts.

HIV/AIDS

UNICEF worked with the government and civil society organizations to support demand creation and advocacy for essential quality HIV services to children, adolescents, and pregnant and lactating mothers, including adolescent mothers. UNICEF supported the integration of COVID 19 in HIV programs for young people through social accountability and mentorship program for pregnant and breastfeeding adolescent girls

and young women. As reported in the previous report, 433 young mothers have reached (psychosocial support and education on sexual, reproductive, maternal, and infant health and positive parenting and HIV prevention support). Furthermore, 98% of the infants in the programme remained HIV-free at 18 months.

WASH

With FCDO funding, UNICEF commissioned rehabilitation and construction of 78 water systems out of 650 systems that needed rehabilitation in seven drought-affected districts, which will benefit over 100,000 people with sustainable water. In 2021, 27 additional systems were completed in the second quarter, benefitting 53,797 additional persons in communities, schools, and clinics. In addition, UNICEF continued working with partners (World Vision International and Lesotho Red Cross Society) to improve hand hygiene for learners for schools. Targeting 800 schools (over 40% of schools in Lesotho), each school will have a durable group handwashing station and training on hygiene behaviour for learners, teachers, and school boards. In the second quarter of 2021, hand washing stations were installed in 478 other schools, and an additional 106,255 learners were trained on hand hygiene behaviour change.

Child Protection

The second quarter of 2021 focused on strengthening community-based structures and building the capacity of the social service workforce to respond to and mitigate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Children (VAC). UNICEF supported the training of trainers for 30 Social Service Workforce on trauma counseling and play therapy. The trained personnel will cascade the skills to the social service workforce in care facilities, community councils, and other platforms handling cases of children during emergencies. In addition, 14 village child justice committees have been trained to increase the alternative dispute resolution measures to children in conflict with the law at the community level and affording victims a chance to avoid long justice processes and, as a result, enable them to start healing process. Twenty community-based organizations from Butha-Buthe and Maseru have been strengthened to fight against COVID-19 GBV related stigma and discrimination. These structures were composed of 10 chiefs, 6 community councillors, 13 village headmen, 26 farmers, 22 young people, 11 religious' leaders, and 21 community policing forums.

Education

In the second quarter of the year, UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to ensure safe school operations. After overcoming setbacks in procurement, the MOET has finally awarded the contract to procure 734,370 facemasks, and production is currently underway. The facemasks will be distributed in the third quarter and will benefit a total of 367,185 learners. In addition, several COVID outbreaks that affected schools in Butha-Buthe, Leribe, and Maseru UNICEF, have collaborated with MOET, MOH, and district RCCE teams to identify significant gaps in the schools' adherence to COVID-19 protocols and come up with mitigation measures. To bridge the learning gap, 206 audio lessons and 54 video lessons were uploaded on the online learning platform, the Learning Passport, to ensure that learners can continue learning even when schools are closed. So far, 2,206 teachers have been registered on the platform to create content that learners can access to continue learning.

Social Protection

As reported in the first quarter, with support from the European Union, 47,974 households under the Child Grant Programme were provided with cash top-ups for three months to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. In addition, 5,115 new vulnerable households were enrolled in the programme, receiving a payment for the first time. The intervention is complemented with COVID-19 solid prevention messaging and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provision for frontline staff to ensure safe and uninterrupted distribution of much-needed cash transfers to vulnerable households.

C4D, Community Engagement, and Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP)

UNICEF uses various platforms, including radio, social media, community engagement, Risk Communication, and Community Engagement (RCCE) forums at district and community levels to increase awareness of COVID-19 prevention and protection. In this quarter, more than 450,000 people were reached with messaging on COVID-19, including vaccination. Outreach included social media, community forums to discuss COVID-19, and radio slots to discuss vaccine hesitancy and promote acceptance. UNICEF provided technical support to the national COVID-19 Vaccine Demand Generation Group to uptake the vaccine 2nd dose among health workers and people with comorbidities by building upon the over 95% uptake achieved during dose 1 coverage. A survey to understand the general concerns amongst populations that had not yet received the vaccine and those who had received it was conducted in 6 districts. Approximately 1900 people were interviewed to understand their motivations and communications gaps around COVID-19 and the vaccine. Likewise, a social media listening exercise was also linked to the survey where various posts were analysed to determine what information people want around COVID-19 and the vaccine.

UNICEF ran a one-month social media campaign to create and educate the public on the COVID-19 vaccine reaching close to 200 000 people who expressed their views on the vaccine. These processes have resulted in the review of the messaging, including the demand creation plan and the development of pamphlets. UNICEF has also supported the Ministries of Health and Education in 2 districts (Leribe and Butha-Butha) where there have been outbreaks in schools. Activities have included awareness sessions in schools targeting students and teachers. To ensure community engagement, awareness sessions have also been held with schools' boards (34) in districts, including chiefs and councillors, to ensure safe learning by children. Finally, with most learners being out of school in 2020, C4D intensified messaging in communities to enhance safe return to schools. Through this engagement, the district RCCE teams established community platforms to engage with schools and set up mechanisms for ensuring schools operate safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Radio programmes and community meetings were held to get feedback from communities to establish issues of concern and to respond

Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination, and Strategy

UNICEF is leading the UN support to the Government of Lesotho to coordinate WASH, Education, and Social Protection through the Disaster Management Authority. In addition, UNICEF is providing technical and financial support to ministries – Ministry of Water, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Health, to improve humanitarian coordination. UNICEF also acts as a secretariat for the health partners group that oversees and coordinates the international support to the COVID-19 response.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

The second phase of COVID-19 vaccinations begins: <https://lestimes.com/second-phase-of-covid-vaccinations-begins/>

I got vaccinated. A story of a 44-year-old, Me' Puseletso Lekholoane, from Maseru.
<https://web.facebook.com/www.uniceflesotho/posts/2672117139753691>

Next SitRep: 30th September 2021

UNICEF Lesotho HAC Page: <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/lesotho.html>

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Summary of Programme Results

Sector	Overall needs	2021 target	Total results*
Nutrition			
# of primary caregivers of children aged 0 to 23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counseling	n.d	10,000	6,503
# of children aged 6 to 59 months with severe acute malnutrition admitted for treatment	nd*	2,500	4,259
Health			
# of children aged 6 to 59 months vaccinated against measles	nd	12,600	14,486
# of children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities	nd	262,000	0
WASH			
# of people accessing the agreed quantity of safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene	n.d	80,000	86,146
# of children accessing appropriate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces	321,000	321,000	170,814
Child Protection			
# of children and caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support	n.d	15,000	0
# of women, girls, and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention, and response interventions	160,000	75,000	317
Social protection and cash transfers			
# of households reached with cash transfers through an existing government system where UNICEF provided technical assistance and funding	n.d	50,000	53,089
Education			
# of children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning	n.d.	184,000	0
HIV/AIDS			
# of pregnant and lactating women living with HIV receiving antiretroviral therapy	n.d.	8,200	0
C4D, community engagement, and AAP			
# of people reached with messages on access to services	766,000	383,000	750,000
# of people who shared their concerns and asked questions/clarifications to address their needs through established feedback mechanisms	n.d	0	0

Funding Status*

Sector	Requirements	Funds available		Funding gap	
		Received Current Year	Carry-Over	\$	%
Nutrition	180,000	0	160,000	20,000	11
Health	150,000	0	0	150,000	100
WASH	1,550,000	0	1,240,000	310,000	20
Child Protection, GBViE and PSEA	350,000	0	160,000	190,000	54
Education	850,000	0	0	850,000	100
HIV/AIDS	150,000	0	0	150,000	100
Social Protection	3,200,000	6,500,000	0	0	0
C4D, Community Engagement and AAP	200,000	0	0	200,000	100
Cluster Coordination	70,000	0	0	70,000	100
Total	6,700,000	6,500,000	1,560,000	1,940,000	29

* As defined in Humanitarian Appeal of 01/01/2021 for 12 months

ⁱ UNICEF Lesotho Humanitarian Appeal for Children. <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/lesotho>

ⁱⁱ This amount surpasses the appeal amount in UNICEF Lesotho HAC 2021 for this sector by US\$ 3.3 million, hence the indication of overfunding in the funding graph.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF Lesotho Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2 Mar-Dec 2020

^{iv} Lesotho IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis: July 2020- March 2021. Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee, August 2020