

Update on the context and situation of children

Nepal continued its transition to a federal state, implementing the provisions of the 2015 Constitution which moved Nepal from a long history of unitary governance to becoming the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal in 2018, including the establishment of seven new states and 753 local municipal governments each with elected officials. Nepal now has three key tiers of government: federal; provincial and local, with each level possessing executive, legislative and budgetary powers, and judicial functions due to an ambitious decentralization, devolution and de-concentration agenda requiring new legislations, institutions, administrative procedures and technical capacities at all levels. While the federalization process is expected to result in more equitable participation of different groups in society and holds the potential for an improvement in the outreach and delivery of services given increased accountability of locally elected officials, the transition poses significant political and operational challenges until the system becomes fully functional. To date limited institutional and organizational capacity at provincial and municipal levels in particular continuing needs for clarity of the shared roles and authority at Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels pose major challenges for programme implementation.

Nepal ranked 147 out of 189 countries globally in the 2019 Human Development Report. Multi-dimensional poverty reduced from 64.7 percent in 2006 to 44.2 percent in 2015 (OPHI 2016) dropping by an average of two percentage points per year. The government aims to reduce the percentage of people living below the poverty line to 4.9 percent and to reduce multi-dimensional poverty to 10 percent by 2030. While Nepal has made impressive progress across all social indicators, socio-economic disparities and inequities remain significant and especially impact women, girls and communities perceived as belonging to lower castes

Nepal's main economic challenge is the lack of in-country employment opportunities for young people. While estimated GDP grew at 7.1 per cent in 2019, the economy is still heavily reliant on remittances from abroad. With massive external migration of primarily young men migrating as faced with youth unemployment at home, many children have at least one parent living abroad. While improving their economic situation, traditional family structures are altered, with related implications for the wellbeing of children. Other important issues that are changing Nepalese society include the growing rate of urbanization and the tension between tradition and modernity that many children face, especially with growing exposure to social media and connectivity.

Nepal is vulnerable to climate-induced, natural disasters and air pollution with an estimated 37 per cent of Nepalis exposed to climate-related impacts. Ranking 46 out of 191 countries in the global index for (humanitarian) risk management (INFORM) and graded 5 (out of 10) on the index, Nepal remains in a group of high-risk countries prone to emergencies. The prolonged 2019 monsoon triggered serious flooding in 35 districts, killing at least 51 children, affecting more than 410,000 people, of which approximately 142,200 are children, and causing many landslides that disrupted everyday life.

The major child health challenge is the disparity in access to and quality of health care. For example, neonatal mortality was 15 per 1,000 live births in Province 4 compared to almost three times as many (41) in Province 7, in the Far West (NDHS 2016). The coverage of measles and rubella 2nd dose among children 12-23 months ranged from 60 per cent in Province 3 to 85 per cent in Province 5 (HMIS). The National Health Policy endorsed in 2019, prioritizes maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services for left-behind areas and groups. A significant dengue outbreak resulted in 12,100 reported cases across the country, including many children. Measles re-emerged with 399 recorded cases while diarrhoea remained a continuous threat to Nepal's children with a total of 14,691 acute gastro-enteritis cases reported.

With the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey reporting 36 per cent of under five-year-olds as stunted, child malnutrition continues to be a major concern and a priority of Government-UNICEF cooperation. Nepal demonstrated global nutrition leadership through the successful hosting of the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Global Gathering in November 2019 and through all three tiers of government committing to implement the national Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (2018-2022).

Nepal made significant progress towards Open Defecation Free status. However, water quality remains a significant challenge with many Nepali households' water contaminated with *E. coli* bacteria. Improving the quality of drinking water is a government priority with forthcoming policy advances that include guidelines on water quality monitoring and the pioneering promotion of "water safe communities".

The National Education Policy was endorsed, and the Comprehensive School Safety Master Plan and its operational guidelines were approved and rolled out to 131 municipalities. The School Sector Development Programme (2016-2021) was revised and is being implemented for a final year under the new system of governance. However, more than 300,000

children were out of school in 2018/19 with most of them having to work to supplement their families' livelihoods. Barriers to quality education include limited mother tongue education and the limited integration of children with disabilities in schools.

Child protection issues include: child marriage, child labour with limited progress for a practise deemed socially acceptable and absence of stringent clear laws for the violators; limited welfare services for children in contact with the justice system; and inadequate services due to the lack of Government designated personnel. There has been progress in combatting child marriage and corporal punishment. Both issues are increasingly socially unacceptable, and violations are being prosecuted.

The Government committed to expand the Child Grant and to make the social protection system more shock-responsive. For the latter, the National Disaster Management Policy (2018) promotes social protection at times of natural disasters and emergencies. The new Prime Minister's Employment Program aims to provide public sector jobs to unemployed youth.

fifteenth five-year plan towards Nepal becoming a middle-income country and achieving the SDGs. The plan identifies improved health care, school education and water supply as transformational social sector programmes while calling for efforts to combat child labour, trafficking, violent discipline, online abuse, child marriage and other forms of violence against children.

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF provided technical support to the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) in development and revision of policies and guidelines. UNICEF supported to develop Safe Motherhood Newborn Health Roadmap (2019–2030), the Reproductive Health Act and regulations, and revise the guidelines on Maternal Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response and Maternal Newborn Health Referral. These revised documents establish standards and provide guidance for managing maternal and child health programme in the newly federalized context. At local level, UNICEF with national NGOs supported 24 municipalities to prepare three-year costed plans for maternal and child health through bottleneck analysis. Concurrently, the exercise strengthens planning skills of health workers and advocates for additional resources for health. In 2019, UNICEF focused on improving quality of care through implementation of Quality Improvement initiative in health facility at different levels. Health workers conducted self-assessment to identify gaps and developed action plans to overcome challenges in their health facilities. UNICEF strengthened 15 birthing centres in one of the remotest areas by providing equipment such as delivery beds, delivery sets and warmers for newborns and pregnant women and on-site trainings to improve access to and quality of maternal and newborn services.

Regarding child health, UNICEF supported MoHP to revise immunization session microplanning, the data quality self-assessment and the full immunization declaration guidelines, and the Community/Facility-Based Integrated Management of Newborn and Childhood Illness guidelines as important tools for improving child immunization. The increasing number of measles cases in Nepal in 2018 and 2019 highlighted the need to sensitize, engage and advocate with municipalities on vaccination beyond infancy. In 2019, UNICEF developed advocacy packages on immunization to encourage them to dedicate sufficient funding for immunization and a media advocacy package to sensitize the media on the benefits of immunization. In addition, UNICEF established technical support units in the four provinces with the least immunization coverage. These units have immunization coordinators, vaccine supply and cold chains, and data management, communication and social mobilization consultants to strengthen provincial and municipalities' immunization services. UNICEF supported Gavi's Cold Chain Equipment Optimization Platform programme to install 290 refrigerators at 185 health facilities contributing to efficient supply chains.

To improve adolescent health, UNICEF supported MoHP to roll out the National Adolescent Health and Development Strategy (2018) at provincial and municipal levels. This strategy contains eight components where UNICEF provide both technical and financial support in four components, adolescent mental health, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health and HIV/STI. UNICEF and WHO supported the development of the Strategy's implementation plan in the federalized context. In addition, UNICEF supported review of adolescent friendly health services ensuring participation of adolescents to address their needs. To reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV, UNICEF advocated and supported the government in prevention of the mother-to-child transmission of HIV together with training of health personnel, mentoring and monitoring. UNICEF supported the government to develop child and adolescent mental health training packages for doctors, nurses and paramedics and facilitated the testing of the packages on more than 100 cases. It established a good basis to address mental health issues among children and adolescents.

The review of public health expenditure on maternal and child health and establishment of performance dashboards helped monitor public health financing, logistics and health information for MoHP and municipalities for better planning with budget allocation. UNICEF also provided technical and financial support to health facilities in remote areas to implement District Health Information Software 2 (online reporting) contributing to improving completeness and timeliness of reporting. Lastly, UNICEF supported capacity building of doctor-trainers on the Integrated Management of Adolescents and Adult

Illness including on emergency preparedness and response to equip them with advanced knowledge on case management skills.

Nutrition

Major focus in 2019 was engaging municipalities to implement the Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (2018–2022). The 2018 and 2019 declaration of commitment by 308 municipalities to nutrition-friendly local governance elicited their commitment to increase funding to combat malnutrition. UNICEF supported this initiative in municipalities where undernutrition is a serious problem. UNICEF and MoHP guidance to the 308 municipalities on integrated programme planning increased their commitment to scale up the integrated management of acute malnutrition, and include infant and young child feeding, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in their programmes.

Advocacy from UNICEF led to increased municipal contributions for nutrition interventions. A total of \$6.5 million was allocated for the 308 municipalities to implement the MSNP in FY 2018/19, comprising \$3.4 million from the European Union and UNICEF, \$2.4 million from the municipalities and \$0.7 million from the federal government. This funding mainstreams MSNP interventions into municipal programmes. UNICEF enhanced the capacity of representatives from the government's Nutrition and Food Security Steering Committee, the National Planning Commission, all seven provinces, the 308 MSNP municipalities and their 2,752 wards through training and orientation on multi-sector planning, fund allocation, implementation, monitoring and web-based reporting.

UNICEF's support for the procurement of vitamin A capsules continued in 2019 and led to the achievement of 81 per cent coverage of all infants aged 6 to 59 months during vitamin A campaigns.

Education

UNICEF continued to strengthen Nepal's education system so that all children, and especially the most disadvantaged, benefit from improved access, participation and learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education. UNICEF also continued to coordinate with all levels of government, particularly given the delay in a new Federal Education Act.

UNICEF supported the National Planning Commission (NPC) to develop draft national ECD strategy (2019-2030). This strategy will help to improve collaborative effort from relevant ministries and stakeholders to ensure holistic early childhood development.

'Local Level Integrated ECD Planning Package' was developed under leadership of MOFAGA and participation from Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Health and Population, and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens. So far 61 rural-/municipalities have developed local level integrated ECD plans. UNICEF supported MOEST and NHIECC on parenting initiative which will be promoted through education and health platform.

UNICEF assisted the government to achieve 78 per cent of the key performance targets of its School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) covering enrolment, retention and learning outcomes (up from 70 per cent in 2018). A major achievement was the enrolment of 373,567 out-of-school children (including 167,238 girls), which resulted in a decline in the number of out-of-school children from 328,593 in 2017/18 to 309,737 in 2018/19.

As part of the local education group, UNICEF supported the federal government to i) carry out the mid-term review of the SSDP, ii) produce a roadmap for the implementation of SSDP under the new federal structure in its remaining period, and iii) finalize the ToR for developing the next sector plan. At the municipal level it supported the use of school report cards to strengthen planning and accountability and the computation of the equity index for all 753 local governments, facilitating the preparation of equity strategy implementation plans in the 40 municipalities ranked lowest against this index to utilize additional resources allocated by the federal government.

UNICEF is promoting use of Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) through summative and formative assessment to ensure the holistic development of children. UNICEF is supporting the Education Review Office (ERO) on national assessment based on ELDS with support from ROSA. ERO is sampling 10-15 districts each year and has assessed 40 districts to date. For the formative assessment, UNICEF is supporting CEHRD to develop ELDS report cards to assess child's development and learning, support ECD teachers to plan for remedial activities, and communicate with parents on age-appropriate development.

In disability-inclusive education (IE), UNICEF launched activities in 327 schools covering 16 municipalities, targeting over 30,000 children. UNICEF also supported the successful scoping mission of the global Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI)

and helped initiate the Inclusive Education Approach Paper with the government to inform the next Education Sector Plan.

UNICEF continued to support second-chance education, particularly for adolescents. UNICEF is working with the government and UNESCO to develop an equivalency framework to recognize and certify learning outcomes of non-formal education. In partnership with local governments, UNICEF supported 632 non-formal education classes through the Girls' Access to Education program in eight districts, reaching 15,085 out-of-school adolescent girls, of whom 7,013 completed the full cycle of non-formal education and 6,593 were mainstreamed into formal education.

UNICEF supported MoEST to produce its Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Minimum Package and Guidelines. These documents have been endorsed by the government and rolled out in 131 municipalities, resulting in increased disaster resilience in 7,132 schools in areas most affected by the 2015 earthquakes. Towards implementing the minimum package, UNICEF and its partners supported 168 municipalities to integrate disaster risk management plans in 363 school improvement plans.

Water Sanitation and Hygiene

UNICEF supported the government to achieve strategic results under WASH Programme especially in the area of Sanitation, WASH Planning, and Water Quality. In an effort to reduce open defecation, 347,492 people (175,485 females, 172,007 male) gained access to basic sanitation facilities as a result of direct UNICEF-supported programme. This significantly contributes to drastic reduction in open defecation both at national and regional levels as per ROSA analysis, Nepal achievement in sanitation contributes to 20% of the regional results. However, sustainability of ODF remains a significant issue as various internal studies conducted by UNICEF and other partners showed a slippage rate (i.e., going back to open defecation) of 3.0 to 6.0 per cent nationally. The slippage rate could be as high as 15 per cent in some of the communities especially in less advantaged areas of Province 2 (Terai) inhabited with high population of Dalit community (the most disadvantaged community).

UNICEF is closely working with the Government to put in place a mechanism for monitoring and sustaining ODF and promoting post ODF activities towards SDG target for sanitation. In this regard, UNICEF supported the government to hold sanitation industry consultation with private sector and established a formal partnership with the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI) towards holding private companies involved in sanitation and water supply more accountable. The consultation also examined willingness to pay for sanitation services and ongoing initiatives in collaboration with private sector.

UNICEF provided strategic support to the Government to prepare road map for the country to develop long-term climate-sensitive costed WASH Plans at local level for all 753 local government units. The overall purpose of the exercise is to create enabling environment for accelerating progress on achieving SDGs through improved planning, increased and effective resource allocation and use, and effective monitoring and coordination. The Federal government in close coordination with all stakeholders developed guidelines and a training package in line with the national WASH Sector Development Plan (2016-2030) to build the capacity of provincial and local governments on development of the WASH Plan. Development of WASH Plans is ongoing in 55 local governments with direct support from UNICEF (four already completed), while additional indirect technical support from UNICEF is provided to 103 local governments in Province 5 where provincial and local government have allocated over US\$ 1 million for the effort. UNICEF will continue to advocate with government and other stakeholders for scaling up the initiative in other provinces.

UNICEF successfully piloted an innovative concept of "water safe community" in 17 communities with official certification of one ward as water safe. The concept ensure access to safe drinking water meets the SDG requirement e.g., safe, sustainable, and available when needed within the premises. UNICEF also supported 37 local governments to establish a water quality monitoring mechanism. UNICEF will document and advocate scaling-up this innovative approach to localize SDGs at community and local government levels.

In addition to above strategic results, UNICEF also supported the Government for upstream work (WASH Act, development of guidelines and protocol for water quality monitoring mechanism, water safe communities, standards for WASH in Health Care Facilities), capacitating all seven provinces in WASH in Emergency, flood response in Province 2, and provision of WASH facilities in communities and schools.

Child Protection:

UNICEF Nepal's advocacy and technical support to the Central Child Justice Committee, the National Child Rights Council and the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC) has resulted in major improvements in child protection legislation and policies. The Administration of Child Justice Procedures Regulation was endorsed by the Supreme Court, introducing critically needed procedures to support diversion processes and paving the way to restorative justice including non-custodial measures and reinsertion support for children in conflict with the law.

Advocacy by UNICEF and civil society organizations led the MoWCSC to issue guidelines for municipalities to actively engage in programmes addressing child marriage. This initiative has led to federal and provincial governments allocating funds specifically addressing the issue. During 2019, 2590 adolescents (1928 girls) participated in a youth-empowerment program based on the "Rupantaran" social transformation methodology aiming at changing and challenging harmful social norms, gender-based violence, promote girls' education and gender equality.

To ensure improved protection of children and adolescents from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, UNICEF leveraged its expertise in the fields of protection, education, emergency and behaviour change communication reaching 5,500 teachers, community members and representatives from province and local levels with guidance on child protection and specific actions they can take to prevent and respond to violence against children.

UNICEF in collaboration with implementing partners strengthened complaint mechanisms on gender-based violence and child protection for students in line with the government's 2017 complaint hearing procedures. This initiative is replicated beyond the targeted local government units.

UNICEF supported cross-border collaboration between India and Nepal to prevent, intercept and reintegrate children at risk of trafficking and survivors with their families being trafficked or survivors.

Fourteen municipalities developed case management plans for 5,966 working children (2,963 girls) out of which 74 children (20 girls) were reintegrated into their families. And 321 working children (164 girls) were enrolled in formal or non-formal school. Additionally, advocacy by UNICEF, ILO and other partners resulted in leveraging \$650,000 from federal government to implement the National Master Plan on Child Labour (2018-2028).

The efforts of UNICEF, the National Child Rights Council and civil society organizations has led to family reintegration of a total of 150 children unnecessarily placed in institutional care between 2017 and 2019 including 82 children (55 girls) in 2019.

UNICEF-supported the training and orientations of 333 police, judges, public attorneys, district registrars and other officials on child justice, psychosocial support, the management of the online GBV database, and victim assistance and witness protection. These programmes were run in collaboration with justice agencies and focused on dealing with women and children-related cases in a gender and child-friendly way. This support contributed to an increase in the number of reported women and children-related cases concerning rape, child marriage and domestic violence increasing from 14,796 in 2017/18 to 22,435 cases in 2018/19 (50% increase).

Social Policy Evidence and Evaluation

With the government and other development partners, UNICEF continued to strengthen the government's social support programmes.

As chair since 2017 of the Development Partners' Social Protection Task Team, UNICEF coordinated and collaborated with the European Union, the World Bank, DFID, ILO and other stakeholders to provide harmonized social protection support to the government. Further, UNICEF provided technical support to the National Planning Commission to develop and draft a national integrated social protection framework for more coordinated social protection.

The Child Grant Programme, providing child support grants to needy families in fourteen districts, has been implemented with support from UNICEF since 2010. A 2019 assessment of the programme found that it improved the nutritional status of children and empowered mothers. Subsequently, with technical support from UNICEF, the government allocated an additional \$14.4 million to extend the programme to seven more districts covering additional 350,000 children under the age of five years. And with the government and Save the Children, UNICEF orientated 1,476 municipal officials and civil society organizations from four of the new districts on the programme.

UNICEF provided technical support to Province 2 to strengthen the implementation of the Child Grant Programme and social protection programme for girls by providing eight social protection coordinators.

UNICEF continued supporting the national social protection system to become more resilient and inclusive. Two high level discussions were held on shock responsive and adaptive social protection policies for government and development partner personnel while another such event discussed the findings of the large-scale 'Coverage Survey Analysis and Testing of Social Security Registries' in flood and drought-vulnerable areas.

With the government and development partners, in September 2019 UNICEF held an international conference on 'Resilient Social Protection for an Inclusive future'. The 150 Nepalese government officials, researchers and international practitioners

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shared experiences on strengthening social protection.

UNICEF signed a new agreement with the European Union to advance the 'public finance for children agenda'. UNICEF used this new funding to produce an overall budget analysis and education budget brief. The brief supported UNICEF's engagement in the education Sector Wide Approach (SWAp).

UNICEF, in coordination with Department of National ID and Civil Registration (DoNIDCR), has been periodically conducting SMS and IVER surveys among beneficiaries of child grant in Bajhang and Rautahat, Achham districts to monitor receipt of child grant by the beneficiaries in the three districts two rounds were conducted in 2019 and major findings were shared with the department. The SMS survey in July 2019 revealed that around 51% of the beneficiaries in one district reported they have not received because the distribution has not taken place. This was extremely helpful to follow up by the federal government.

The baseline and early impact analysis of the child grant has been used to influence expansion of the child grant. Similarly the coverage analysis of social assistance has been instrumental in advocating for strengthening programme implementation. The Multi-Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS) expected to conclude in March 2020, will be used in strategic communication with key partners about defining child poverty and in decision making process on multi-dimensional poverty analysis.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

The Country Programme's equity focus within the broader framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cross-cutting priority on "Leaving no one behind", aims to support the new municipal governments to reach all parts of their communities with child-friendly services. To achieve this, the current Country Programme focus is on 50 priority rural and urban municipalities, in addition to support at the federal level. Priority municipalities were selected based on the level of child deprivation and geographic location. UNICEF supports municipal governments as they strengthen their capacity and governance to deliver child-friendly services through providing technical assistance and best practice examples during the municipal government planning and budgeting processes. In 2019, UNICEF supported all 50 municipalities to develop their annual plans and budgets, resulting in an increased focus on children in allocation municipal resources.

One major enabling factor in this achievement has been the advent of the federal structure. Federalism has meant greater engagement with local officials and has resulted in support being provided directly to government officials responsible for implementation. The result has been a noticeable improvement in the accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness of government plans and budgets due to the transition to Federalism.

While the programme's innovative, rights-based approach has been successful in supporting the initial stages of the federalization process and in influencing concrete action for children at municipal and provincial levels, programme implementation to date has also highlighted challenges related to the human resource and financial cost of providing intensive support across 50 highly diverse and geographically dispersed municipalities. UNICEF's challenges arise from limited human resources, in addition to the lack of earmarked donor funding to sustain and fund this important effort. The upcoming mid-term review will undertake a thorough review of the approach, taking into account the baseline carried out in 2019 as well as the broader and the UNICEF specific capacity needs assessment.

Learning from the 2019 flood response:

In 2019 floods affected parts of the Terai region in Nepal. These floods exposed several shortcomings in data collection and management within the existing cluster mechanism. The primary problem arose from the lack of coordinated baseline data availability. Proxies were used to ensure that the impact of the flood could be effectively measured. However, while systems for data preparedness has been scaled-up in recent years, including by the Index for Risk Management (INFORM) process and cluster assessments, gaps remain. For example, challenges for clusters in interpreting pre-crisis data and extrapolating relevant preparedness and emergency response interventions for the populations in need. The effect of this was felt the most in the nutrition sector, with data on child nutritional status hard to separate from pre-existing nutrition challenges and deterioration due to flooding.

The key lesson from this experience was the need for greater levels of cooperation and preparedness on pre-crisis data gathering and benchmarking among Government, UN agencies and other cluster partners, especially for the preparedness and data management for the geographic areas that are often affected by flooding and other natural disasters. As disasters occur with regularity in these areas it is both appropriate and best practice to proactively gather data annually before the onset of the monsoon season. For UNICEF this data would pertain primarily to children, in order to be able to identify the specific impact a flood has on the children in that area.

To address this lesson, UNICEF and the UN system have created a new, inter-agency, preparedness programme. This has identified a series of outputs that are essential to ensure the highest level of disaster preparedness can take place. These include: (i) a joint analysis of the humanitarian concerns that are most likely to need addressing through preparedness and response actions. (ii) A defined and agreed list of essential minimum preparedness actions. (iii) defined and agreed parameters for cash-based interventions and division of responsibility. Finally, a comprehensive monitoring and learning framework must be established in order to measure and understand the effectiveness of the preparedness actions and the corresponding reduction in humanitarian needs.

UNICEF is playing an active and ongoing role in the development, management and implementation of this programme and anticipates significant improvements in the reduction of disaster risk among vulnerable children and the Nepali communities.