Regional Brief

UNICEF in the Dry Zone

Delivering Change for Children
Working for a better future for all

Challenges in the Dry Zone

Myanmar’s Dry Zone includes parts of Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway regions and is home to around 5 million children. Droughts as well as localised intense flash floods contribute to ongoing food insecurity in many farming areas. Chronic underdevelopment and poverty in rural, hard to reach and remote communities result in poor outcomes for many children in health, education, water and sanitation, and child protection. Acute malnutrition rates are among the highest in Myanmar. In Magway Region, just under a fifth of children are moderately underweight. In Sagaing Region, under five child mortality is 68 of 1,000 children and one in seven children have not received immunization. Child employment (aged 11-17) is around 20 percent in Myanmar’s main agricultural corridor, including the Dry Zone. High levels of out-migration from the area contribute to shifting care arrangements for children that can expose them to child protection concerns.

How we help

Boosting Health and Nutrition
Building the foundations for long term improvements.
Together with partners, UNICEF supports the national health system to achieve stronger results in maternal and child health. Trainings for paediatricians and basic health staff, expanded child vaccination and cold chain support, as well as support to tackle under-nutrition and activities promoting exclusive breast-feeding are among our key activities in the Dry Zone. We also support Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV, including support for an open medical records system that is significantly improving patient care systems and facilitating efficient data collection.

Improving Water and Sanitation
Using the sun to brighten village life. Many villages, schools and health centres in rural Magway suffer water shortages and a lack of WASH facilities, exacerbating the health and nutrition challenges of residents. UNICEF along with the government and partners is focusing efforts on delivering solar-powered community-led water and sanitation facilities to communities with the greatest need, as well as hygiene awareness activities.

Expanding Child Protection
Keeping children safe from harm. UNICEF and partners are supporting the government to expand the social work case management system to respond to cases where
children suffer violence, abuse or neglect. With our support, legal guidelines have been developed on child protection, and members of communities, the medical system, government departments and the legal and justice system are better placed to support vulnerable children. A pilot foster care and family unification project in Mandalay is helping vulnerable children stay in the care of appropriate caregivers and it is hoped that this approach will expand to other parts of the country. Children in conflict with the law benefit from child protection trainings for police personnel and judges, and from appropriate interview rooms in courts. UNICEF in Mandalay also supports the reintegration into society of former child soldiers from the national army.

Raising Education Outcomes
UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education to strengthen the education system in the Dry Zone, including with teacher training initiatives that are now being led by the government. We provide technical support for 21st century skills learning and for the expansion of non-formal education opportunities that provide second chances for children who have dropped out of school.

COVID-19 Response
Since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Myanmar on 23 March 2020, the number of cases has risen daily. Given the trend in other countries, there is a high risk that the number of cases will soar, and community transmission seems unavoidable. With limited health facilities and personnel, in particular in rural and/or conflict-affected townships in Dry Zone State, there is limited capacity to deal with a major disease outbreak.

UNICEF is working with Ministry of Health and Sport, Department of Rural Development, Department of Social Welfare and other Government and NGO counterparts with a focus on Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), as well as provision of essential life-saving services and supplies to fill critical gaps in delivery. This includes local procurement and distribution of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and WASH supplies, as well as technical assistance to local authorities and frontline staff.

Our team
UNICEF’s team in the Dry Zone is based in Mandalay, Myanmar’s second largest city with staff also located in Monywa and Khamti in Sagaing Region. Our focus across a wide area encompassing three regions with large areas of deprivation is to boost outcomes for children, women and communities through strengthening the Government systems that can deliver sustainable results in the sectors of health, water and sanitation, and child protection. The Dry Zone Field Office will close in June 2020, after which UNICEF will provide support from its new Country Office location in Nay Pyi Taw, which is just a few hours drive from both Mandalay and Magway regions.

Results for children in 2019

UNICEF continued to support the strengthening of the child protection case management system, with 96 cases handled over 2019, and continued technical support, including awareness raising reaching nearly 1,000 community members and over 200 school children.

47 children who were formerly associated with armed forces or groups received reintegration support including education, vocational training and psychosocial support.

Training and orientation on the measles and rubella (MR) vaccination campaign was conducted at the Region level in each of the 3 regions, with 6 high-risk townships selected to receive direct training.

2,273 staff from hotels and other accommodation were tested for HIV, as part of one of a series of voluntary counselling and testing campaigns, with positive cases referred to medical treatment.

13,078 people from 14 rural communities across Magway Region were able to access safe water within their households, through UNICEF’s support and partnership with Department of Rural Development.

A Community-Led Approach to Total Sanitation was triggered in 405 villages, with monitoring carried out to provide oversight of their progress towards being Open Defecation Free.