

UN BHUTAN COVID-19 SITREP # 6

22 MARCH 2021



COVID 19 has been described as the biggest challenge to humanity since WWII (1939-45) which closed with the foundation of the United Nations. Given the scale of this global COVID challenge, our world may need to go beyond simple categories of either optimism or pessimism. UN Bhutan is responding to the immediate needs of the people; the needs of the most vulnerable while strengthening economic resilience and building longer-term human capital in a comprehensive way so that we find new ways to 'Build Forward Better'

- Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator, Bhutan

1. Highlight of key achievements and advocacy messages

SITUATION IN NUMBERS (21 March 2021)

869 COVID-19 confirmed cases

1 Active case

1 Death

578,215 tested

- **One UN** – The UN in Bhutan (FAO, IFAD, ITC, UNDP, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC, WFP, and WHO) moved quickly and pro-actively to respond to COVID-19. In particular, UN agencies developed a joint response framework aligned with the “UN Framework for the Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19,” including both short-term measures to mitigate negative social and economic consequences along with medium- to long-term investments to strengthen the re-build and resilience to future crises.
- **One UN** – The UN in Bhutan received USD 300,000 from the UN Secretary-General’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund to support the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) in mitigating negative social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the UN in Bhutan recently received USD 872,000 from the Joint SDG Fund to help SDG implementation and financing COVID-19 recovery.
- **FAO** - Highlighting the importance of local production in terms of food safety, freshness, organic products, and increased varieties necessary for balanced nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO

developed and screened a 7-minute video on “We Are What We Eat”. This included messages from the Prime Minister, and the Ministers for Agriculture and Health.

- **UNDP** – UNDP supported the RGoB to conduct a Rapid Socioeconomic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Bhutan’s Tourism Sector to understand how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting individuals, households, and businesses engaged in Bhutan’s tourism sector for timely and targeted interventions. The study revealed deep, widespread and crosscutting impact on the lives of people working in the sector.
- **UNDP** – UNDP is supporting a study of the impact of COVID-19 on the manufacturing sector which will help identify short term measures to keep existing industries operational and explore longer-term reform measures to ensure that these industries thrive in a post COVID world.
- **UNDP** – UNDP has commenced support for MoH in distribution of 46 mobile cardiotocography devices (iCTGs) to some of the most rural parts of the country. The iCTGs will enhance access to healthcare by providing remote fetal wellbeing services. This initiative will provide quality obstetrics and gynecology services for 50 % of the total reported pregnancies in Bhutan each year, while reducing the need for travel and physical contact, leading to enhanced access to health services, reduced costs, and improved safety.
- **UNESCAP** – UNESCAP has been providing technical assistance to strengthen Bhutan’s capital markets since 2017. Following the success of the first-ever sovereign bond of Bhutan issued in September 2020, ESCAP jointly organized a technical workshop on capital market development in Bhutan with the Ministry of Finance on 24 November 2020. The workshop aimed to strengthen Bhutan’s fiscal management in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and diversify Bhutan’s financial sources further by leveraging private financing through green and sustainable bonds.
- **UNESCAP** – In response to further requests from Royal Security Exchange of Bhutan (RSEB), UNESCAP held a virtual workshop on digital finance transformation on 9 December 2020, to highlight the importance of a digital future for Bhutan’s capital markets. The workshop provided an opportunity to engage stakeholders and gather feedback on challenges in formulating policies including a proposed solution and roadmap for the implementation of bond digitalization.
- **UNESCAP** - To empower and strengthen the resilience of persons with disabilities for current and future pandemics, UNESCAP is developing a technical assistance and capacity development initiative with the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) to support policy development and programming in the areas of employment, TVET, social protection (including disability assessment), as well as skills training for CSOs engaging in disability inclusion activities.
- **UNFPA** - UNFPA’s Goodwill Ambassador, Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, made a nation-wide statement on national TV and in national newspapers, calling for an urgent need to prevent gender-based violence and address the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA disseminated messages weekly through the mediums of national TV, local channels and social media on preventing GBV and addressing SRHR issues, including the airing of a clip ‘Real Life Super Heroes,’ dedicated to frontline workers on World Humanitarian Day, through ‘Chik-Thuen’ - a programme dedicated to Bhutan’s COVID-19 response.
- **UNICEF** – Critical medical supplies procured and handed over to the MoH included 20,000 coveralls, 5,000 medical masks, 8,200 face shields, 150 handheld thermometers and 50 body bags. Additionally, 875,000 surgical masks, 16,000 coveralls, 500 gowns and 20,000 aprons were delivered to MoH in preparation for a second wave of COVID-19. Two RT-PCR machines and 1,000 kits reagents (Rapid Gold

test kits) for COVID-19 tests were procured and handed over to MoH. 22,500 COVID-19 tests were conducted using the UNICEF-provided RT-PCR machines and Taqpath kits.

- **UNICEF** - In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF trained 700 youth volunteers including Youth Service Center Managers, Scout leaders, and Community Based Support Service volunteers on COVID-19 prevention advisories, interpersonal communication skills, use of social media, mental health, GBV, domestic violence and child protection issues and advisories.
- **UNODC** - Recognizing the increasing vulnerabilities caused by the COVID-19 situation for the unemployed youth, women and economically affected families, UNODC is planning to conduct two trainings on Trafficking in Persons for the Royal Bhutan Police to ensure quick identification and investigation of TIP cases in Bhutan.
- **WFP** – WFP has received USD 52,700 as First Line of Defense (FLOD) funds targeted to support front line workers who are supporting the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In consultation with the RGoB, WFP is finalizing the activities to support the pandemic preparedness actions of the Government.
- **WFP** - WFP has allocated USD 200,000 to the RGoB and the Agriculture Economic Stimulus Plan as part of support to the Government’s Economic Contingency Plan. Funds will be directed to increase agricultural production through the provision of varied and high quality seeds, farming tools and improved farm practices for cultivation of nutritious cereals, fruits, vegetables and high-value commodities as per local agro-climates. Water efficiency will also be enhanced through the provision of efficient systems such as sprinklers, drips etc.
- **WHO** - WHO shipped in the first batch of testing reagents (1,000 reactions) to enhance diagnostic services followed by another shipment of 2,500 reactions. WHO also shipped in 440 protective goggles, 1920 N95 masks, 25,000 surgical gloves, 5,375 surgical gowns to supplement the limited number of PPEs that the RGoB had in stock to protect frontline health workers.
- **WFP** - WFP is assisting the RGoB in ensuring safe reopening of schools through the refurbishment of kitchen and stores and provision of infrastructures such as pallets, baskets, exhaust fans, etc. to improve food safety and quality management.
- **WFP** - As part of the safe reopening of schools and encouraging parents to send healthy, nutritious packed lunches for their children, a social media campaign on healthy packed-lunches is being initiated with the Government using the Healthy DrukYul platform.
- **WFP** – In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP, in collaboration with the Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA), is developing consumer-friendly communication materials to educate consumers about various aspects of food safety, hygiene & nutrition. This initiative aims to support the RGoB’s efforts to realize the vision of a Healthy DrukYul.

2. Brief summary of National Response

The RGoB's actions in steering the response to COVID-19 have been commendable. After the first positive case of COVID-19 on 5 March 2020, His Majesty the King personally guided implementation of the National Preparedness and Response Plan. Under His Majesty's guidance, the Prime Minister's Office, Ministries, agencies, local governments, the private sector and CSOs also reacted quickly to respond to the pandemic. This includes several key measures to help prevent the spread of the virus and formulate socioeconomic response and recovery programmes.

- **National Preparedness and Response Plan (NPRP).** To mount an effective and efficient response to COVID-19, the RGoB prepared the NPRP. This aims to enhance the health sector's capacity in surveillance, early detection, control and prevention, response, and recovery. The plan is being reviewed and updated as required by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for COVID-19.
- **Economic Contingency Plan (ECP).** The RGoB developed two phases of the ECP that detail both immediate and longer-term response actions to support economy recovery in key sectors. ECP I concentrated on construction ("Build Bhutan"), tourism ("Tourism Resilience"), and agriculture ("Food Self-sufficiency and Nutrition Security").
- **Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation Plan for Education in Emergency.** The Ministry of Education developed several new measures as part of its COVID-19 Response Plan, including an advisory note on precautionary and preventive measures and learning guidelines during an emergency for schools, ECCD, and Non-Formal Education/Community Learning Centres.
- **Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu.** The Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu provides direct income support to affected individuals. It has already been extended through December 2020 and represents a critical livelihood support in response to the crisis.
- **RMA Monetary Measures.** RMA has led multiple rounds of monetary response measures, including interest payment waivers, deferral of loan repayments, working capital loans at concessional rates, and targeted short-term microloans for CSIs.
- **GBV and Child Protection Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan.** The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) initiated the development of a national response plan targeting violence against women and children. The plan aims to prevent and respond to gender-related and child protection issues given the heightened risk during a public health emergency.

3. Key areas of Socioeconomic response

The UN Resident Coordinator is leading the overall UN response to COVID-19 in Bhutan based on five key pillars and supported by the technical guidance of UNDP.

3-1. Health First: Protecting health services and systems during the crisis

- **UNDP** – UNDP supported the MoH in developing and rolling out emergency IT solutions - the Gate Management System, the Quarantine App and the GIS Dashboard - deployed at border gates, to obtain real-time data to effectively monitor and rapidly respond to COVID-19, and provided 18 computers, three video conferencing equipment, six wifi routers and a printer to help run these systems.
- **UNDP** – UNDP procured and handed over 100,000 units of IIR Masks and 480 units of N95 masks for frontline health workers through its Global Procurement Support to the MoH.
- **UNDP** - UNDP is also supporting the procurement of ICT equipment to provide back-up for the Health Help Centre, an ICT-enabled health delivery system for emergency pre-hospital services, health advice and counseling. During COVID-19, the Health Help Center (HHC) established new hotline numbers for disseminating COVID-19 related information to the general public as well as addressing the health care needs and issues among the elderly.
- **UNDP** - UNDP is enhancing the RGoB's capacity to safely and more effectively manage health waste generated from COVID-19 healthcare, quarantine and isolation facilities by developing a health waste management system, which includes supporting the procurement of incinerators for three regional hospitals, developing Standard Operating Procedures(SOP) and providing training for health professionals. The incinerators have been delivered to Thimphu, Phuntsholing and Gelephu.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA mobilized additional resources for 4,200 PPE and sanitizers to enhance protection of maternal and child health service providers in health centers and front-line workers in the community.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA operationalized guidelines on SRMNCH (the Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health) services during COVID-19 lockdown. In addition, UNFPA sensitized 20 people from LGBTIQ community, 60 community-based volunteers on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and Gender-based Violence (GBV), including sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA trained 323 health workers comprising of medical/health officers, nurse midwives and programmes-in-charge on the interim operational guidelines on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH) regarding COVID-19.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA oriented 246 graduating students from Paro College of Education and 78 general nurse-midwife and health assistant graduates for GBV/SRH issues, including COVID-19 risk communication.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA supported the active engagement of Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (EmONC) focal points from 20 health district facilities to use a social media platform to seek advice and share experiences related to maternal health services during COVID-19.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA provided 1,000 PPE to Red Cross/Taxi Association members who serve as frontline responders during the COVID-19 lockdown. Hand sanitizers and PPEs worth USD 239,000 were also handed over to MoH.

- **UNICEF** - All the planned vaccines (133,000 doses BCG, 100,000 doses bOPV, 39,000 doses HepB, 68,000 doses MMR, 54,000 doses DTP, 86,000 doses Td, 15,360 doses HPV, 40,800 doses PCV and 73,000 doses Pentavalent vaccines) for routine immunization were procured on time, and the country has a buffer stock of six months. UNICEF also supported the procurement of 75,000 doses of influenza vaccine for high risk populations and 452,800 doses for the general population (80 percent of total population now vaccinated). To strengthen vaccine cold chain systems for quality immunization services, UNICEF supported the procurement of five deep freezers, 224 vaccine carriers and 400 numbers of 30-day temperature monitoring devices. Seven cold rooms and two refrigerated vans are being procured which are expected to be delivered in Q1, 2021.
- **UNICEF** - Over 95,000 people in public spaces, health care centres, schools and monastic institutions were reached with critical WASH supplies and services for prevention and control. 50,000 soap bars were procured and pre-positioned and 7,800 posters distributed to promote hand hygiene practices in the context of COVID-19 reaching a total of 51,352 children (27,231 F) in schools and 13,458 children (1,290 nuns) in monastic institutions. About 2,463 people and 6,222 health workers benefitted from 480 waste bins procured and distributed to 22 health centers.
- **UNICEF** - 5,285 health workers across the country have been reached with handwashing communication packages and 7,015 children (6,571 monks and 444 nuns) received soaps in 90 monastic institutions.
- **UNICEF** - 42 television sets used for dissemination of messages on prevention of COVID-19 at health facilities and five digital projectors used for conducting virtual meetings about COVID-19 responses were procured and delivered. Seven laptops were delivered to MoH to support data management for COVID-19 surveillance and risk communication interventions.
- **UNICEF** – A procurement plan for the new ADB grant of USD 1,019,047 (programmable amount) has been jointly developed by MoH and UNICEF. Based on the catalogues of the supply items (cold rooms, refrigerated mobile van, vehicles) and new developments, the procurement plan has been revised to facilitate reprogramming.
- **UNICEF** - 480 pedal operated waste bins colour-coded for different types of waste have been distributed to 22 hospitals benefiting about 3,400 outpatients/inpatients which is expected to help prevent and control infections within the healthcare settings.
- **UNICEF** - 400 fridge tags procured for supporting the COVID-19 pandemic response, and mainly to monitor the vaccination quality.
- **UNICEF** - UNICEF handed over 205 portable megaphones to the MoH, to support public engagement on COVID-19 prevention and containment measures by frontline workers and community communicators. These megaphones have been effective communication tools during lockdown which happened almost immediately after the handover. The megaphones have been used for coordinating crowds and ensuring physical distancing during the delivery of basic services such as shopping for food, waste disposal, etc.
- **UNICEF** - To continue essential health and nutrition services, briefing on the SOP for continuity of MCH services during COVID-19 is ongoing. The MoH has conducted several online and face-to-face trainings on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. So far, 550 participants (doctors, nurses and health workers) have been trained on the use of the MCH handbook and the Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool (BCDST) through Zoom.

- **UNICEF** - Based on a field visit to assess the continuity of nutrition services during COVID-19 an assessment of recently conducted online trainings is being done with technical support from UNICEF.
- **WFP** – WFP is working with the Department of Disaster Management (DDM) to strengthen data preparedness, by setting-up and assisting the implementation of the “72 Hour Rapid Assessment Approach” in DDM. WFP proposes that the 72-hour assessment approach be used for targeted assistance during the COVID-19 crisis. DDM and WFP can also leverage the 72-hour assessment datasets and visual data platforms to identify vulnerable groups, design and monitor shock-responsive social protection programmes for the RGoB at the Chiwog, Gewog, or Dzongkhag level.
- **WFP** - On behalf of the Ministry of Education(MoE), WFP has procured 4,520 reusable face masks and 1,130 face shields to be distributed to schools under the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme.
- **WHO** - WHO continues to support the MoH through technical and financial assistance. WHO also supported the sensitization of Desuungs (Volunteers) on COVID-19. Further, WHO supported the tabletop simulation exercise at the Phuntsholing border crossing to test preparedness and response. WHO technical officers provide support in developing contingency plans, high risk community assessments, review of SOPs and facilitation to attend different virtual learning classes regarding COVID-19.
- **WHO** - The National COVID-19 media team comprising officials from the MoH and WHO are the central coordinating body for all media-related materials and to validate all information related to COVID19 at the national level to fight myths and misinformation.
- **WHO** - WHO handed over two sets of NCD Kits to MoH to support the provision of essential health services.
- **WHO** - WHO provided technical expertise in drafting a Risk Communication Plan. WHO assisted in developing frequently asked questions and answers to meet the growing demand for information and to clarify any confusion regarding COVID-19 among the general population. WHO published the Q&A in the national newspaper – Kuensel.
- **WHO** - WHO supplied MCK tents that have been utilized for the establishment of temporary flu clinics across the country.
- **WHO** – To create awareness on preventive measures, WHO assisted the MoH in developing posters in two languages and these were disseminated on election notice boards in all districts.
- **UNFPA and UNICEF** - Together with UNFPA, UNICEF supported the MoH in providing 240 sets of dignity kits (face mask, T-shirt, umbrella, sanitary pads, soap and hand sanitizers) to youth, CBSS, Scouts and private sector volunteers in Phuntsholing, to support their community engagement initiatives on COVID-19, Dengue, GBV and domestic violence messaging.

3-2. Protecting people: Social protection and basic services

- **UNDP** - UNDP, in collaboration with Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, organized a Conversation Series titled “Reimagining Bhutan: Building Forward Better Beyond COVID” to generate ideas for “no-regret” recovery policies. The five-part panel discussions were focused on: Future of Education, Skills and Work; Future of Economy; Green Recovery; Social Protection, and; Anticipatory Governance, with the

online videos gaining over 15,000 views as of 31 December 2020. The summary of the discussions and key recommendations from each conversation has been collated in the form of a policy brief and disseminated to stakeholders in Government, civil society, private sector and academia.

- **UNFPA** – UNFPA supported the refurbishment of six emergency shelter homes during COVID-19 including standardization of procurement items, development of operational guides and training modules for shelter managers and volunteers.
- **UNFPA** - The centers which will serve as shelter home for survivors of gender-based violence were handed over with the basic amenities and equipment to the Dzongdas, who are also the Chairs of the Multi-Sectoral Task Force at the district level. UNFPA through DFAT funding (the Australian Government's Gender Equality Fund) is supporting RENEW to establish similar shelter homes in 5 other districts, Samtse, Sarpang, Zhemgang, Samdrup Jongkhar and Bumthang.
- **UNFPA**- UNFPA provided referral services for 35 survivors of GBV to avail shelter, psychosocial and medical services during lockdown.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA supported volunteers in several districts who helped over 60 cases of domestic violence with tele-counselling. Four women and three children were brought to an emergency shelter for protection during the lockdown.
- **UNFPA** – A GBV prevention package developed by UNFPA was integrated into the accelerated DeSuung (Guardian of Peace - National Volunteer) training programme. The 39th batch with 2,950 trainees (2,350 male and 600 female) was the first batch of DeSuung to receive and complete this training on 23 May. This GBV prevention module will now be a part of the national DeSuung training programme.
- **UNFPA** - In efforts to ensure meaningful engagement of youth, an online competition for sharing of young people's experiences on SRHR and GBV was conducted during the lockdown. The booklet titled 'Connecting Youth and Connecting Stories' is a collection of poems, stories and articles by young people, and has been disseminated to college libraries, and major decision makers for consideration of youth voices for future decisions to engage young people.
- **UNICEF** - To ensure continuity of national nutritional services, 63 health workers (30 male and 33 female) have been trained on micronutrient powder supplementation with Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) counselling using Zoom. Meanwhile, advocacy and promotion of IYCF including messages around breastfeeding practices are being done through social and broadcast media.
- **UNICEF** - Following an analysis of the distribution of Self-Instruction Materials (SIM) cards to 17,000 children identified as being unable to access any form of online or broadcast media, the Ministry of Education identified additional 15,135 children without access to online learning. UNICEF will continue supporting the distribution of SIM to the additional children bringing the total number supported with SIM to 32,135.
- **UNICEF** - In terms of access to service, 1,270 children (555 girls) and 437 (176 female) adults have been referred to counsellors in their respective districts and provided with counselling services through the Sherig Counselling online platform set up to provide counselling and psychosocial support in response to COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, since the reopening of schools for Class X and XII students from 1 July, and class IX and XI from 21 September 2020, 18,271 children (9,089 girls) have been reached through counselling classes.

- **UNICEF** - To ensure the availability of Psychosocial Support (PSS) services for children who are in schools, counsellors in 117 schools have started bi-monthly PSS sessions. The sessions are being conducted online and face-to-face (where allowed) and will run until end of December. Till date, it has reached 2465 children (1,399 girls).
- **UNICEF** - Technical support was provided to NCWC in developing posters addressing prevention and response to gender-based violence. These posters will be displayed at hospitals, flu clinics and election display boards in all districts. 5,000 pamphlets for frontline workers and nonspecialized service providers responding to GBV have also been developed and disseminated to about 2,900 Desuungs who are currently undergoing training. Prevention and response to GBV have been incorporated into their training manual.
- **UNICEF** - Since May, around 500 trained scout leaders (290 female) have been trained and engaged in organizing online campaigns and educating the public in their respective districts on the importance of maintaining physical distance, wearing masks, and washing hands.
- **UNICEF** - To support home-based learning and promote COVID-19 prevention practices, an ECCD parenting booklet and handwashing soaps were distributed to 9,188 ECCD children (4,602 girls) across all districts.
- **UNICEF** - In partnership with UNICEF Regional Office and the International Policy Centre for Policy growth-IIPCI a Policy Brief on 'Child-sensitive cash transfers in Bhutan' has been developed using the National Statistics Bureau data. The brief examines the macro-economic impacts, focusing on some COVID-19 related issues, such as informal workers and how social protection (SP) measures for informal workers are part of the COVID-19 responses, or how SP responses could be beneficial to these groups. Subsequently a guideline on best practices for deploying social protection policies to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemics is planned.
- **UNICEF** – A report on the “Evaluation of Early Childhood Care and Development Programme in Bhutan” was launched on 10 October by MoE, Education Secretary, and UNICEF Bhutan Representative. Together with the launch of the ECCD Evaluation the social media campaign on “Life of an ECCD facilitator during COVID-19” booklet was launched which compiles 63 stories shared on social media from facilitators across all 20 districts.
- **UNICEF** - To ensure support for ECCD facilitators in the field during the pandemic, a webinar on 'Responding to ECCD children and their Needs— Children and Caregiver Support during COVID-19' was held on 30 September. The webinar was jointly hosted by UNICEF Bhutan and the MoE and focused on cross-sectoral collaboration between education and child protection. The webinar reached 218 participants, with 211 attending from the 20 districts of the country.
- **UNICEF**- UNICEF supported the development of the Education in Emergency (EiE) COVID-19 Response Plan Phase II and the EiE Guidelines for Reopening of schools/centres, implementation of the Adapted and Prioritized curriculum, and Examination, Assessment and Checklist. EiE Guidelines are now used widely as Standard Operating Procedures by all that have a stake in education continuity.
- **UNICEF** - IEC materials were developed and disseminated (300 different IEC materials TV spots with lifesaving messages on COVID-19 protocols pandemic) and the procurement of 205 portable handheld

megaphones helped in crowd coordination and information dissemination. COVID-19 prevention and containment messages were incorporated in the MoE's e-learning programme (handwashing, physical distancing, psychosocial support for children, signs and symptoms, dos and don'ts during COVID-19 pandemic).

- **WFP** - WFP supported the development of safe reopening protocols and checklists with the Ministry of Education in partnership with UNICEF and other development partners. The document aimed to guide and support teachers and students to stay healthy and safe while following health, safety and psychosocial protocols for COVID-19 prevention and control measures.
- **WFP** - To address issues related to food safety and quality during COVID-19 and to ensure food imported in large quantities due to the pandemic situation are safely stored, WFP in collaboration with the Department of Trade, Ministry of Economic Affairs (MoEA), developed a customized training module on food safety and quality management during warehousing, transportation, distribution and retail. The training also covered the science behind safe storage of food commodities, storage structures and the basics of inventory management. As a result, 43 private traders were trained. For this training, WFP also partnered with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Food and Agriculture Centre of Excellence (FACE) for an online session on industry best practices from large organized retailers in India.
- **WFP** - Against the backdrop of COVID-19 and the resulting import and storage of large quantities of food enough for the entire population for six months, WFP supported various RGoB partners on food safety and quality management aspects of food commodities procured under the National Food Security Reserve (NFSR). This included the development of national guidance for food safety and quality management at the warehouse level; publication and distribution of food safety brochures (transportation and retailers) and social media awareness campaigns among others.
- **UNESCO, UNICEF, and WFP** – UNESCO participated in the Framework for reopening schools in Bhutan. The Framework, jointly developed by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the World Bank provides guidance to help national and local authorities make their decisions on why, when and how to reopen learning establishments.
- **WFP and UNICEF** - UNICEF and WFP drafted a brochure with simple illustrations on food groups and advocacy, explaining how to eat a variety of foods in each meal, as demonstrated by the ideal food plate. The document also includes encouragement to eat a "rainbow" of vegetables to make vegetable consumption attractive to children as well as handwashing steps.
- **UNFPA, WFP and UNICEF** - 5,000 copies of the COVID-19 FAQ booklet and 600 copies of 'A Balanced Diet' brochures were disseminated to Scouts and other volunteers with support of UNFPA and WFP.

3-3. Economic recovery: Protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the most vulnerable productive actors

- **FAO** – FAO received a request for intensive vegetable production in selected urban/peri-urban areas for employing displaced employees from the private sector and youth. The project focuses on technology-induced vegetable production. The support covers over 77 acres giving employment to over 300 laid-off employees. FAO in collaboration with the National Organic Program, supports agricultural research centers, and other relevant districts.

- **FAO** - FAO is providing greenhouse facilities and capacity building to a monastic school in Yurung chiwog, to help them produce their own vegetables and food items (USD 10,000).
- **ITC** – ITC (International Trade Centre) is providing capacity building and market linkages opportunities to MSMEs through distance coaching, e-learning and online B2B in light of COVID-19.
- **ITC** - E-platforms, including the Bhutan Trade Information Portal and Agriculture Market Information System have been launched for Bhutanese businesses to remain up-to-date with the latest regulations and market access requirements. ITC has provided advisory support on trade policy, investment promotion and business advocacy, integrating critical aspects for business growth after COVID-19.
- **UNDP** - Through the Loden-UNDP COVID-19 Response Fund, UNDP supported ten young entrepreneurs execute green business ideas to help their communities navigate the COVID-19 , directly creating employment opportunities for 57 individuals (21 Female and 36 Male) comprising of single mothers, youth and those whose jobs were impacted by COVID-19 and overall contributing to Bhutan’s initiative towards building back better, including climate action. The second round of the Fund was opened to participants of vocational training programmes organized by RENEW and YDF, with five businesses selected including coffee shops, recycled products, gift baskets and farming.
- **UNDP** - UNDP is supporting energy diversification in support of enhanced energy security, with the implementation of a pilot project to install 180 kW Solar Photovoltaic (PV) systems. The project will not only offset the fossil fuel-based energy imports from India during lean hydropower months in the winter but will demonstrate the potential of solar PV as the new source of energy and future areas of skilling, upskilling and employment opportunities under the ‘new normal’.
- **UNDP** – Taking the lead from the recommendations provided by the Rapid Socio-economic Impact Assessment, and in line with the RGoB’s Economic Contingency Plans, UNDP is supporting programmes in food self-sufficiency, nutrition security and tourism resilience, geared towards generation of livelihood opportunities for people impacted by COVID-19 through cash for work and reskilling and upskilling opportunities. So far, 100 young laid off national cultural tour guides (National certificate 2) completed upskilling program and are now trained as Trekking Guides (National certificate 3). One popular trekking route in Bhutan is under rehabilitation (80 % complete) with one tourism facility complete in partnership Guides Association of Bhutan engaging 30 laid off people from the tourism sector
- **UNDP** – UNDP supported the RGoB to carry out a value chain analysis of three priority products (potato-processed products, cooking oil and noodles) in order to strengthen the Cottage and Small Industries sector and achieve economic diversification. The analyses will be finalized by Q1 2021.
- **UNDP** – UNDP is supporting the Government’s Agriculture Contingency Plan in Paro Dzongkhag to enhance the overall food self-sufficiency and nutrition security while directly providing livelihood opportunities to the laid-off workforce. The proposal will specifically support 17 farmers groups and 18 groups of workers who were laid off, mainly by focusing on vegetable production from more than 3400 acres of land.
- **UNESCAP** - Bhutan’s experts participated in ESCAP’s Capacity Building Webinars on *Smart Road and Rail Solutions for transport connectivity in the COVID-19 context* (30 November – 1 December 2020) and on *Road and rail transport agreements in the context of the COVID-19 crisis response* (27-28 January 2021), organized under the Framework of the United Nations Development Account project on “Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics: Contactless, seamless and collaborative UN solutions”.

- **WFP** - In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MoAF), WFP is supporting the smallholder farmers in Trongsa, Zhemgang, Lhuntse & Samtse in production, postharvest management, and marketing to strengthen their livelihood, enhance household income and increase employment opportunities from the agriculture sector. At least 1190 smallholder farmers, 70% of them being women, were benefitted from WFP's support. As of end of December, about 144 MT of fresh local vegetables produced by the smallholder farmers were sold, earning a gross income of BTN 7.89 million. This will help address the short-term COVID-19 response and support the agriculture sector's long-term efforts for increased production, market linkages, income, and job creation in line with Bhutan's Economic Contingency Plan.
- **WFP** – WFP has started implementing a two-year project on strengthening the agriculture sector statistical and M&R system, in partnership with the RNR statistical division and relevant agencies. The near real-time integrated agriculture statistical, monitoring and reporting system is designed to improve agricultural statistics, market-related data, and data on rural livelihoods including farmer income. This will help to provide sector-wide agriculture data for better production planning, targeting of agriculture services and for stronger feedback and learning across the sector.
- **WFP** - WFP in partnership with the MoE, MoAF and MoH is developing a national Social Behaviour Change Communication(SBCC) Strategy to improve dietary and physical habits for Bhutan's school children. The strategy will support the implementation of the Prime Ministers plan for Healthy Drukylu, which aims to help Bhutanese inculcate the habit of healthy eating, and substitute food import with Bhutanese food during and beyond COVID-19.
- **WFP** - To promote healthy eating during COVID-19 and beyond, WFP in collaboration with Tarayana Foundation has initiated a community outreach project targeting 1,000 households in 8 gewogs of Lhuntse, Trongsa, Samtse and Zhemgang districts.

3-4. Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration

- **ADB, UNDP and RCO** - UNDP together with UNRCO-ADB is supporting the Ministry of Finance to strengthen macroeconomic forecasting and modeling that will enable the Government to:
 - Simulate the relationships and interactions between different sectors of the economy;
 - Estimate economy-wide impacts of shocks, including scenarios related to the impact of COVID-19;
 - Model the multi-dimensional effects of different policy actions; and
 - Adapt simulations to changes in assumptions and circumstances.

Work has started on mapping the necessary data and constructing the main dataset that will support the new approach. This exercise will also be used to help estimate the economy-wide impacts of shocks, including COVID-19.

- **UNESCAP** - UNESCAP organized a high-level policy dialogue on COVID-19 and South Asia with planning/economic ministers of all South Asian countries including the Minister of Economic Affairs of RGoB and the heads of SAARC and BIMSTEC Secretariats to share experiences and lessons in mitigating the pandemic in the subregion and discuss regional cooperation.
- **UNESCAP** – UNESCAP has provided policy advisory to Bhutan for sustainable graduation in view of the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on its economy. UNESCAP contributed to the DTIS of Bhutan and took the lead for Chapter Review of Trade Performance, LDC Graduation and WTO Accession and provided technical assistance to the National Task Force which is preparing the 21st Century Economic Roadmap of Bhutan.

3-5. Social cohesion and community resilience

- **UNDP** - UNDP together with local CSOs are empowering survivors of GBV and women working in the entertainment vocation, the LGBTQ community, youth with substance abuse disorders (including recovering), people living with HIV, youth with mental illnesses and other marginalized groups in the country through following skills development programmes:
 - **Vocational training:** weaving, tailoring, food production, professional traditional and cultural performance etc.
 - **Essential rights and awareness building** on Sexual Reproductive Health, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence
 - **Cross-cutting skills development** including leadership skills, basic financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills

Some of the participants of the programme have submitted business proposals to a joint fund set up by UNDP and Loden Foundation, with five business ideas selected for funding.

- **UNDP** - UNDP supported NCWC to develop a COVID-19 Contingency Plan geared towards preventing domestic violence and strengthening care services for vulnerable women and girls.
- **UNDP** - UNDP supported inclusive advocacy to ensure no one is left behind by making regular COVID-19 press briefs from MoH accessible to the deaf community. UNDP is also working with CSOs in the disability space on four COVID-19 advocacy videos, highlighting challenges faced by Persons Living with Disabilities (PWDs) during COVID-19.
- **UNDP** - UNDP is supporting piloting of e-litigation in 10 courts to ensure continued access to justice services even during the COVID-19 pandemic including for vulnerable groups such as women and children. This will enhance the efficiency of justice services, as well as contribute to access to justice for rural populations. As of February 2021, the first batch of equipment has been handed over to the regional courts.
- **UNDP** - UNDP supported development of a comprehensive Parliamentary functionality plan to ensure delivery of core governance functions in times of emergencies.

3-6. Communications and Data, M&E, Learning 4 COVID

- **One UN** - In adapting to the new normal, UN Bhutan is hosting a series of virtual 'Change-Maker' roadshows with the theme 'The Future We Want'. Designed to keep students who are out of school engaged during the pandemic, the roadshow raises awareness on several environmental issues by engaging students from all over the country, through art in different forms, such as theatre, painting, photography and writing while visualizing the future they want. The roadshows also inform and educate young people on climate change and the action they can take in their own communities. The next roadshow will take place in March at the Royal Thimphu College.
- **One UN** – UN Bhutan launched its communications initiative We Care, We Share: Resilience tools for COVID-19. It provides useful information on personal resilience, physical health, mental health, lifelong learning and student entertainment to the general public and UN Staff during COVID-19. The initiative has a dedicated page on the UNCT website, which serves as a one-stop-shop for COVID-19 resilience tools and information. Since UN Bhutan started its initiative, the number of visitors to the website has soared by approximately 500%.

- **One UN** - Bhutan Dialogues is a flagship programme in 'thought-leadership in development' where the UN partners with a leading Bhutanese NGO/CSO (Loden Foundation). Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, Bhutan Dialogues is now being hosted virtually. It opened a space to discuss COVID-19 and its implications in the country, while also providing opportunities for "recovery better" and "transformative changes" discussions for the future. A special edition 'Youth Dialogues' was hosted in November to give a voice to the youth of Bhutan. The session was attended by over 300 students from the Royal Thimphu College and was also livestreamed to ensure people have access to the session, in line with COVID-19 protocols. The video recording of previous sessions is available on the Bhutan Dialogues YouTube channel and on the UNCT website.
- **UNDP** - Together with NCWC, UNDP worked on advocacy videos and social media posters and illustrations to: 1) raise awareness on the heightened risks of domestic violence during COVID-19, 2) call for action to prevent gender-based violence and 3) advocate gender quality by drawing attention to the increased burden of unpaid care work on women and girls during COVID. The videos launched on the national TV. The illustrations have reached over 52,000 users on UNDP Facebook.
- **UNDP** - Together with the MoH, UNDP produced an advocacy video to debunk misinformation about COVID-19. The video continues to be aired on national TV regularly. It was also shared on the social media channels of both UNDP and MoH. With 157,000 views, 44 comments and 3,400 likes on the MoH Facebook page, it remains the most viewed COVID-19 advocacy video. The video has also gone viral on WeChat, a messaging and social media app popular among the elderly and rural population.
- **UNDP** - In partnership with the Disabled Persons' Association of Bhutan, Ability Bhutan Society and Wangsel Institute for the Deaf, UNDP developed a series of advocacy videos highlighting the challenges facing persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the context of COVID-19. It was aimed at raising awareness on the need to ensure disability inclusion in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts to leave no one behind.
- **UNESCAP** – COVID-19 has highlighted the need for more timely and more granular data. ESCAP worked with NSB to enable cost-effective and COVID-19 resilient economic statistics production using administrative data. The collaboration modality is COVID-19 resistant with weekly virtual status meetings and regular stakeholder seminars with national experts participating physically and ESCAP experts on Teams.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA trained 30 tourist guides and 34 community volunteers comprising of local leaders, advocates, teachers, shelter home counselors, home makers, mental health counselors on GBV prevention and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights issues.
- **UNFPA** – UNFPA developed and disseminated IEC materials (posters and animated films) to address GBV and SRHR issues during the COVID-19 lockdown through national television and social media platforms
- **UNICEF** - To date, over 700,000 people have been reached with lifesaving messages on COVID-19 prevention and access to services through digital media (268,970) such as Facebook and UNICEF website and through community engagement (488,000). About 18,200 influential persons and volunteers were mobilized for community engagement at various levels.
- **UNICEF** - To date, over 70 percent of the population (500,000 people) have been reached with lifesaving messages on COVID-19 prevention and access to services through digital media (418,490 people) such as Facebook and UNICEF's website. About 54,000 children in schools and institutes were reached with

lifesaving messages and access to services including mental health, GBV and child protection through engagement of more than 500 COVID-19 focal persons. Over 25,000 influential persons and volunteers were mobilized for community engagement at various levels. 12 focal persons from different faith-based organizations were engaged to support community engagement in prevention of COVID-19 and prompt access to services. 7,617 families and children (4,276 female) in 20 districts were reached with lifesaving messages and access to services including support to younger children in their school lessons and learning through engagement of 3,811 Scout volunteers as community communicators on COVID-19. 5,000 copies of the COVID-19 FAQ booklet and 600 copies of balanced diet brochures were disseminated to Scouts and other volunteers with additional support provided by UNFPA and WFP.

- **UNICEF** – A social media campaign on “Life of an ECCD facilitator during COVID-19” was launched and 63 stories were shared on social media from facilitators across all 20 districts. All stories with best practices were published as a booklet and launched by the Minister of Education and UNICEF Representative. 540 #COVID19Stories from children, young people and parents/caregivers on their experience of coping with the pandemic were published (<https://www.unicef.org/bhutan/stories>). The digital mobilization of children and young people through online campaigns such as the #COVID19STORIES presented an opportunity for UNICEF and partners to understand and tap into the emerging trends in digital engagement for social change.
- **UNICEF** - To understand the effectiveness of the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) messaging and interventions around the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF partnered with the MoH to conduct a Rapid Pulse Survey targeting the most remote population groups. The findings, which mainly pointed to the need to further strengthen and improve the approach for RCCE including deployment of community mobilizers and influencers and better use of social media channels, have been embedded into the second wave of RCCE interventions which were implemented. **UNICEF** - UNICEF and the National Statistics Bureau are currently exploring the possibility of a microsimulation on the effects of COVID-19 on Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) for Bhutan in collaboration with OPHI (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative).
- **UNODC** – Given the increasing vulnerability of people being trafficked due to the economic situation, UNODC continues to air messages on Trafficking in Persons through the National TV. The messages include cybersecurity/online scams, sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and child exploitation, and access to service providers.

4. Delivery of UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF) in 2020

Under the UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework 2019-2023, the 2020 Annual Joint Work plan of the UN and Royal Government of Bhutan budgeted for USD 27,541,742. This budget figure is inclusive of COVID-19 Response and Recovery support.

UNSDPF Outcome	Planned Budget (USD)	Utilized (USD)	Transferred (USD)	Delivery Rate based on funds Utilized + Transferred (%) against planned budget
1. Data and Policy	719,432	152,882	26,870	25%
2. Essential Social Services	12,388,293	10,291,164	1,109,203	92%
3. Governance	648,347	504,792	30,411	83%
4. Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management	13,785,669	10,110,748	4,219,384	104%
Total	27,541,742	21,059,587	5,385,869	96%

5. Partners of United Nations Bhutan

The Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gross National Happiness Commission, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Information and Communications, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, Parliamentarians, Dratshang Lhentshog, Royal Civil Service Commission, National Commission for Women and Children, National Statistics Bureau, Anti-Corruption Commission, National Environment Commission, National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology, Dzongkhags, Royal University of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law, Nazhoen Lamtoen, Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC), RENEW, Tarayana, Bhutan Foundation, Bhutan Youth Development Fund, Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for Special Children and Youth, Loden Foundation

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