

# UN BHUTAN COVID-19 SITREP # 7

## 24 JUNE 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 Bhutan Forward Better’*

*- Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator, Bhutan*

## 1. Highlight of key achievements and advocacy messages

### SITUATION IN NUMBERS (23 June 2021)

**1970** COVID-19 confirmed cases  
**267** Active cases  
**1702** Recovered  
**1** Death

- **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**- supported the digital development of the Bhutan Vaccine System (BVS), building on similar systems called Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN) in India and SMILE in Indonesia, procured and distributed IT equipment to health workers across the country required for the BVS, helping successful inoculation of more than 93% of adult eligible population.
- **UNDP**- supported a pilot e-health system using mobile cardiocography devices (iCTGs) for the initiative “*Reaching every pregnant woman with quality gynecological and obstetric services through iCTG*”, in partnership with JICA. It allows remote monitoring of fetal heart rate and uterine contraction of pregnant women and will help detect high-risk pregnancies for timely referral and care. The technology will enhance health and wellbeing of pregnant women in remote parts of Bhutan where access to gynecological and obstetric services remain a challenge. The support includes procurement and distribution of 46 mobile iCTG devices to some of the most rural parts of the country.
- **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 a deep, widespread and crosscutting impact on the lives of people working in the sector.
- **UNDP** – supported 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.
- **UNESCAP** – provided 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 the Royal Security Exchange of Bhutan (RSEB), UNESCAP held a virtual workshop on digital finance transformation on 9 December 2020, highlighting 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 engaged in disability inclusion activities.
- **UNFPA** - Continued advocacy both at home and globally, “move beyond counting, quantification, and assessment” into “bold and courageous initiatives to inspire innovative actions to promote women’s rights” and to create a world in which “women’s equality is guaranteed, not granted” – Quoted from Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador at the 54th Commission on Population and Development. During the pandemic, Her Majesty Gyalyum addressed SRHR and GBV issues during lockdown through televised statements, observation of virtual global days and the launch

of the State of World Population Report 2021 'My Body is My Own- Claiming the Right to Autonomy and Self-determination'.

- **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.
- **UNFPA**- supported the participation of 27 EmoNC (Emergency Obstetric And Newborn Care) focal from hospitals from 14 districts to share experiences and improve implementation of RMNCH operation guidelines during the COVID pandemic specifically during the lockdown. No major challenges were reported in the provision of MCH services during lockdown. All the EmoNC focals were further trained through LDHF on the management of pregnancy complications which not only contributed to their continuing medical education but also facilitated facility based competency training implementation plan that can be implemented even during lockdown, and also standardizing the emergency MCH kits. mobilized additional resources to support the MoH to procure additional 5000 PPE for the front line and MCH service providers in the high risk districts.
- **UNICEF** – procured and handed over critical medical supplies to the MoH including 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 supplied 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** - in collaboration with the Department of Law and Order, UNODC distributed 2,500 face masks to high school and college students. The masks contained messages promoting the Blue Heart Campaign aimed at preventing Trafficking in Persons.
- **WFP** – organized a workshop to institutionalize and validate the 72-hour rapid assessment approach and digital vulnerability database with government partners, equipping RGoB with a spatial vulnerability database which includes household and social vulnerability data, to immediately produce impact assessments and recommendations for emergency response. The vulnerability database can also be leveraged to identify vulnerable groups, design and monitor shock-responsive social protection programmes for the RGoB at the Chiwog, Gewog, or Dzongkhag level. WFP trained Government staff in the approach, data processing, analysis, and report generation, while also defining standard operating procedures, roles and responsibilities.
- **WFP** - conducted a "Training on the application of GIS and open-source data collection tools" together with the Department of Disaster Management to district officials in Western Bhutan. The objectives of the training were to provide hands-on experience on the use of GIS and open-source data collection systems in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) while advocating for the importance of geospatial data in an emergency decision-making process.

- **WFP** - 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.
- **WFP** - assisted the RGoB in ensuring safe reopening of schools through the refurbishment of kitchen and stores and provision of infrastructures such as pallets, baskets and exhaust fans 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 collaboration with the Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA), developed 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.
- **WHO** - shipped 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.

## 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 Royal Government of Bhutan took swift and decisive measures to contain the outbreak and quickly formed unconventional alliances with the Civil Society Organizations, local innovators and the private sector to ensure continuation of essential services to the most vulnerable. This includes several key measures to help prevent the spread of the virus and formulate socioeconomic responses and recovery programmes.

- **Nationwide mass vaccination campaign.** The Bhutan Vaccine System (BVS) was launched, and population was prompted to register. In addition, the nationwide mass vaccination campaign was launched on 27 March 2021, reaching 93% of the adult population (63% of its total 800,000 citizens) with a first injection. It was preceded by advocacy engagement conducted virtually with local government leaders and young people across the country.
- **National Preparedness and Response Plan (NPRP).** To mount an effective and efficient response to COVID-19, the RGoB prepared the NPRP. This aimed 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 COVID-19 Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

- **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 and granted approximately USD 16.3 million to over 33,000 beneficiaries in six months. It has been extended for an additional 15 months from April 2021 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 the prevention of 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** – 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** – 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** - supported 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** - enhanced the RGoB’s capacity to safely and 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. Additionally, UNDP is procuring two electric trucks for biomedical waste management to help support the initiative.

- **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** – operationalized guidelines on SRMNCH (the Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health) services during lockdown periods. 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.
- **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) during COVID-19.
- **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** – 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** – provided 1,000 PPE to Red Cross/Taxi Association members who serve as frontline responders. Hand sanitizers and PPEs worth USD 239,000 were also handed over to MoH.
- **UNFPA** - Towards raising awareness on the crucial roles of midwives in provision of essential PHC during the pandemic, the State of World Midwifery Report 2021 which included the midwifery status of Bhutan for the first time was virtually launched and discussed among the midwifery faculty from both Government and Private institutes towards investing in midwifery in the areas of education and training, workforce management, service delivery and leadership and governance.
- **UNFPA** - supported to draft training manuals for Adolescent Friendly Health Services, midwifery standards and family planning standards so as to standardize the training manual and facilitate the capacity development of service providers using the online platform so as to enable the access by high-risk zones as well.
- **UNFPA** - mobilized additional resources to support the MoH to procure additional PPE for the front line and MCH service providers in the high risk districts.
- **UNFPA** - raised awareness on the crucial roles of midwives in provision of essential PHC during the pandemic. The State of World Midwifery Report 2021 which included the midwifery status of Bhutan for the first time was virtually launched and discussed among the midwifery faculty from both Government and Private institutes towards investing in midwifery in the areas of education and training, workforce management, service delivery and leadership and governance.
- **UNICEF** - supported the roll-out of the mass COVID-19 vaccination (which started from 27th March) through training of health workers, development of the COVID-19 vaccine deployment plan and development of the RCCE strategy for the vaccine.
- **UNICEF** - supported the procurement of 50,000 doses of DTP, 164,000 doses of Td, 80,000 doses of bOPV and 14,500 doses of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine. Further, two refrigerated vans for vaccine transportation, eight cold rooms, one freezer along with 15KVA stabilizers and ICU equipment were



handed over to the Ministry of Health. The shipment of two ultralow temperature cold chain units are enroute and will arrive soon. In terms of continuity of services, within the period of January – March 2021, 1,799 children have been immunised, and 1,412 pregnant women have availed of ANC4 visits.

- **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 were given handwashing communication packages and 7,015 children (6,571 monks and 444 nuns) received soap 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 was 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 were 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 were procured to monitor the vaccination quality.
- **UNICEF** - 205 portable megaphones were supplied 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** - provided briefings 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** - used 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** – worked 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” to be used for targeted assistance during the 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** – 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** - procured 4,520 reusable face masks and 1,130 face shields on behalf of the MoE to be distributed to schools under the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme.
- **WHO** - continued 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 provided 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, were the central coordinating body for all media-related materials and to validate all information related to COVID-19 at the national level to debunk myths and fight misinformation.
- **WHO** - handed over two sets of NCD Kits to MoH to support the provision of essential health services.
- **WHO** - provided technical expertise in drafting a Risk Communication Plan, assisted in developing frequently asked questions and answers to meet the growing demand for information and to clarify any confusion regarding the virus among the general population. WHO published the Q&A in the national newspaper – Kuensel.
- **WHO** - supplied MCK tents that have been utilized for the establishment of temporary flu clinics across the country.
- **WHO** – created awareness on preventive measures, assisted the MoH in developing posters in two languages and disseminated them on election notice boards in all districts.
- **WHO** - supported a review on health preparedness and response towards COVID-19. The three day review was attended by all the health officials who were at forefront responding to this pandemic
- **WHO**- in collaboration with MoH is in the process of carrying out a rapid study to assess the impact of COVID-19 on essential health care services.
- **WHO**- supported training of 180 doctors and 250 nurses on ICU management of COVID-19 positive cases.
- **WHO**- handed over Nu 31,361,500 to procure PPE.
- **WHO**- supported the remuneration of 121 frontline workers, the hiring of 21 vehicles to provide essential health services and the recruitment of 23 hotline managers for a COVID-19 toll free station.
- **WHO**- handed over 1.3 million surgical face masks to protect health care workers from infection and over Nu 13,842,840 to MoH. In addition, WHO handed over 15 trauma bags to strengthen trauma care in the country.
- **WHO**- supported MoH in developing costed action plan for COVID-19. Officials from MoH, UNICEF and WCO participated in a 3 day workshop to develop this action plan. In addition, WHO deputed three of its technical officers as full-time members of the Technical Advisory Team to support MoH in preparedness and response to COVID-19 in the initial phase of the pandemic. WHO supported MoH in providing hand washing and drinking water stations to all hospitals and selected institutions for people with disabilities in the country.
- **UNFPA and 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** - 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** – 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 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**- provided referral services for 35 survivors of GBV to avail shelter, psychosocial and medical services during lockdown.
- **UNFPA** – supported volunteers in several districts to manage 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** – developed a GBV prevention package that 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.
- **UNFPA** - Two days virtual engagement with more than 50 Community Based Scout Leaders and Volunteers on prevention of GBV and SRH during pandemic expanded their knowledge and helped them to provide necessary support and interventions as community volunteers during the pandemic particularly in preventing Gender Based Violence and other forms of violence in the country.
- **UNICEF** - 63 health workers (30 male and 33 female) were 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 were delivered 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** - 1,270 children (555 girls) and 437 (176 female) adults were 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 2020, and class IX and XI from 21 September 2020, 18,271 children (9,089 girls) participated in counselling classes.
- **UNICEF** - 117 schools started bi-monthly Psycho Social Support sessions. The sessions are being conducted online and face-to-face (where allowed) and will run until end of December. Till date, this service has reached 2465 children (1,399 girls).
- **UNICEF** – provided technical support 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 were developed and disseminated to about 2,900 Desuungs who are currently undergoing training. Prevention and response to GBV were incorporated into their training manual.
- **UNICEF** - 500 trained scout leaders (290 female) wer 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** - supported home-based learning and promoted COVID-19 prevention practices, through development of an ECCD parenting booklet. 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, a Policy Brief on ‘Child-sensitive cash transfers in Bhutan’ was 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**- 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).
- **UNICEF** – worked with the Ministry Education to support the teachers ahead of reopening schools in February. 140 (63 F) school counselors were oriented online on the Welcome Back Check-in Session with children of all grades using the guidance developed by the MHPSS Collaborative and Save the Children. They were oriented on how to conduct activities to understand how children are feeling about returning to school and what they need to feel safe and supported as they enter back into regular social contact with peers and routine classes or activities. Since the reopening of the schools, the counselors are rolling out the orientation for 446 class teachers (237 F) of all grades who in turn delivered sessions with their students on the first day of school or within the first week of school reopening reaching 9310 children (4326 F) .
- **UNODC** - In collaboration with the Bhutan National Legal Institute, 45 judges from western and eastern Bhutan have been trained on the identification, prosecution and protection of TIP victims during and after trail.
- **UNODC** - 47 gups and RENEW volunteers from Gasa, Punakha and Zhemgang were trained on the SOP to prevent and combat TIP in Bhutan to identify vulnerable people their local communities and refer them for services with relevant agencies.
- **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** - 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** - 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** – 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** - 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** – 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 covered 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** - provided 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** – provided 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 were 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** - supported ten young entrepreneurs, through the Loden-UNDP COVID-19 Response Fund, to 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** - supported 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** – supported 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 and certified 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** – 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.
- **UNDP** – supported 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 supported 17 farmers groups and 18 groups of workers who were laid off, mainly by focusing on vegetable production in more than 3400 acres of land. In addition, UNDP through the Rapid Financing Facility (RFF) is supporting promotion of green jobs in the agriculture sector through climate smart agricultural production and catalyzing on the digitization of farm operation whilst also addressing critical supply chain barriers through integration of post-harvest market access. The project has revived 45 acres of agricultural land, supplied 90 protected cultivation equipment, and has distributed 150 sets of micro-irrigation systems such as drips and sprinklers. A total of 19 youth were also employed through the initiative.
- **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), supported 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 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 helped a short-term COVID-19 response and supported 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** – 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** - in partnership with the MoE, MoAF and MoH, developed 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 Drukgyul, which aims to help Bhutanese inculcate the habit of healthy eating, and substitute food import with Bhutanese food during and beyond COVID-19.
- **WFP** - in collaboration with Tarayana Foundation initiated a community outreach project targeting 1,000 households in 8 gewogs of Lhuentse, Trongsa, Tsirang and Zhemgang districts. This project will educate parents, community leaders & influencers as well as adolescents and youth in the target age

group to ensure nutrition & health advocacy to help rural and vulnerable population groups eat & stay healthy during the COVID-19 Pandemic & beyond. WFP trained Tarayana field workers on the Food and Nutrition Security Survey which is ongoing in these 8 gewogs.

### 3-4. Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration

- **ADB, UNDP and RCO** - supported 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** - 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** – provided policy advice 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** - together with local CSOs, empowered 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

From a total of 90 participants, two were successful in securing competitive interest -free funding support for setting up a start-up business.

- **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** - 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** - supported piloting e-litigation in 14 courts to ensure continued access to justice services even during the COVID-19 pandemic including for vulnerable groups such as women, and people living with disabilities through an online platform. 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 supported the procurement of additional equipment for courts in the high-risk areas in the South. The E- litigation platform was launched on 21 April 2021.
- **UNDP** - supported development of a Comprehensive Communication plan for Parliamentary functionality to ensure delivery of core governance functions in times of emergencies.

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

- **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 'Rainbow Dialogues' was hosted in June to mark Pride Month and give a voice to the LGBTQI community of Bhutan. A video recording of previous sessions is available on the Bhutan Dialogues YouTube channel and 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 equality 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** – 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** – 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% 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** - 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** – in partnership with the National Statistics Bureau, explored 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).

- **UNICEF** - supported the Ministry of Health in implementing community engagement interventions (RCCE) to support the national vaccine roll out plan. As part of the plan, 30 chairpersons of the local government participated in a virtual Q&A session with experts from the Ministry of Health. As a result, local government leaders-initiated community engagement activities in their respective communities to get vaccinated. More than 60 district scout secretaries and leadership scouts participated in a virtual Q&A session with experts from the Health Ministry. As a result, scouts provided support to the districts health officials in mobilizing communities to come for the vaccination.
- **UNODC** – Given the increasing vulnerability of people being trafficked due to the economic situation, UNODC continued 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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,541,742</b>	<b>21,059,587</b>	<b>5,385,869</b>	<b>96%</b>

## 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

### For further information, please reach out to

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