UNICEF Social Policy has been supporting the Government of Lesotho in addressing multidimensional aspects of child poverty and disparities, establishing social protection systems, strengthening decentralized service delivery, enhancing public finance for children, building resilience to external shocks, and enhancing humanitarian responses. The key strategies of the supports include, evidence generation and innovation through research and M&E, advocacy and partnership to improve policy environment and systems; and technical support to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of programme implementation. European Union is the strong partner of UNICEF Lesotho to strengthen the Social Protection System.
KEY STATISTICS

- Population of 2 million people (49% male and 51% female)
- 57% of population living under poverty line
- 34% living under Food poverty line
- 74% of population in rural areas living in poverty
- 40% of children are poor
- 500,000 children live in poverty of those 125,000 children are under the age of five
- 52% of children experience deprivation; and 33% experience severe deprivation;
- 22% unemployment rate since economic downturn
- High inequality with a Gini index of 0.53
- High Public spending in social sectors:
  - Education 19%
  - Health 13%
  - Social Protection 9%

PAST ACHIEVEMENTS

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection is the biggest programme of social policy in UNICEF Lesotho. It accounts for about 95% of the social policy section's financial and human resources.

UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Social Development to build a comprehensive social protection system. The key achievements are listed below:

1. Formulation of the Social Protection Strategy that was approved in 2014;
2. Establishment of a new Ministry (Ministry of Social Development, MOSD) and its structure which has been approved by the Government. The structure establishes Department of Social Assistance to implement and coordinate social protection initiatives;
3. Establishment of the National Information System for Social Assistance (NISASA). NISASA is a registry which stores socio-economic data for targeting, planning, managing and monitoring social protection programmes. NISASA is currently hosting information for 120,000 households (about 600,000 people). Currently all cash transfer programmes are using NISASA;
4. UNICEF also supported the Ministry (MOSD) with the development of new Management Information System (MIS) meant to support integration and management of cash transfer programmes;
5. Integration of Social Assistance/cash transfer programmes: Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) with the support of UNICEF has initiated integration of 3 main social safety nets – Child Grants Programme (CGP), Public Assistance programme, and Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVS’s) bursary – to develop an integrated social safety nets to increase economy of scale and better target the poorer of the poor;
6. Linking social assistance with livelihoods and resilience: although the CGP has positively improved education and health outcome, the impact evaluation also proved that the grant on its own cannot resolve major developmental challenges faced by the beneficiary households. UNICEF in partnership with the Catholic Relief Services has started a livelihood initiative targeting social assistance beneficiaries. With the financial support of the EU the project will run for two and a half years;
7. Linking social protection with emergency support: during the 2012/13 emergency, UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development supported 26,681 households with cash. The existing NISSA system was used to target and pay the beneficiary households;
8. Taking over of the CGP programme by Government of Lesotho in 2013. The CGP started as a donor funded programme in 2009. Continued advocacy and demonstration of results influenced the Government of Lesotho to take over the responsibility (benefit cost) in 2013;
9. Expansion of the CGP: the CGP started in 1000 households in 2009 in 6 community councils. Currently the CGP has expanded to 36 councils, covering about 80,000 vulnerable children.
10. Secured high level commitment to expand NISSA to all 365,000 HHs by 2018. On 17 Feb 2017, Right Honourable Prime Minister of Lesotho launched the NISSA expansion to new 60,000 HHs.

DECENTRALISATION AND IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES:

Citizen Service Centres (CSC) or One Stop Shop (OSS): In an effort to improve service delivery especially for vulnerable children and their families including those who are living in remote villages, UNICEF with the finance of the EU has been supporting the ministry of Local Government since 2014 to implement the CSCs. The CSC is a single office where multiple services are consolidated, offering citizens the convenience of having multiple needs met in one location.

Since the beginning, the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) completed the design and roll out of CSCs in seven community councils in six districts covering about 8 per cent of Lesotho’s total population. In 2016, an estimated 20,000 disadvantaged people in 16 urban and rural community councils were provided with 60-70 services, organized through 24 service days.
UNICEF'S CONTRIBUTION

• Generated evidence to inform strategic and operational decisions;
• Provide technical assistance in designing and implementation of social protection system and initiatives;
• Strengthened capacity of implementing partners at national and sub-national levels to provide vulnerable children and their families with effective service delivery through an integrated social protection system;
• Established a strategic partnership with EU to mobilize key financial resources to implement social protection. EU has already contributed 22 Million Euros since 2008 to social protection;
• Advocacy with the Government to create an enabling environment and systems by allocating adequate resources for social protection. Government took the overall responsibility of providing 20 000 HH with benefit cost and 50% of operational costs in 2013.

PUBLIC FINANCE FOR CHILDREN

UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Finance to enhance participation, transparency, quality and size of investment in children.

Use of CGP evidence to leverage public resources: UNICEF jointly with European Union have succeeded to bring Government of Lesotho to take over all benefit cost of the programme and half of operational cost in September 2013 for an amount of M 37 Million (US$ 3.7 Million) by providing evidence through an impact evaluation.

Evidence drafted to initiate advocacy to enhance transparency in budget allocation; and to increase size of budget for children: UNICEF has conducted open budget survey and drafted four budget briefs in 2016 to share with parliamentarians.

CHILD POVERTY AND EVIDENCE GENERATION

Child Poverty Study: UNICEF Lesotho conducted the child poverty study in 2012 and the results were used to engage policy makers and influence decisions for children.

SUMMARY OF TRENDS IN THE PROGRAMMING ENVIRONMENT

• Public spending on the social sectors has been increasing but there are still inefficiencies. Participation, transparency, and equity and quality of spending are issues need to be addressed.
• The CGP contributing to improvement in education and health. The grant has:
  • Led to an increase in the proportion of children who are currently enrolled in school.
  • The CGP contributed to retaining children ages 13-17 in primary school, particularly boys who would have otherwise dropped out, with enrolment rates six percentage points higher for this group.
  • Contributed to meet a large increase in expenditures on schooling, school uniforms, clothing and footwear for children.
  • Contributed to a 15% reduction (from a baseline of 39 percent) in child morbidity.
  • Led to an increase in birth registration by 37% amongst children ages 0-6. (source: CGP impact evaluation)

CHALLENGES

• Expanding the coverage and amount of child grant. Currently, the programme covers about 27,000 households out of estimated 80,000 households which need social assistance. The amount of grant given per households per month is also lower (average US$ 14) comparing to other countries of similar contexts. To cover all households in need of support, the Government needs create fiscal space for social protection;
• Providing public services to children and their families including community people, particularly those who are living in remote villages. The Government of Lesotho has a Decentralisation Policy. Community council structures have been established, but ministries have not devolved functions that can support delivery of services for children, their families and rest of the community. Secondly lack of fiscal decentralisation has also impacted on limited services that can be offered by the community councils;
• Inadequate human resources in the Ministry of Social Development and Local Government Division to implement planned programmes related to basic social service delivery;
• Weak accountability relationship between actors also compromises timely and quality service delivery. Implementation and expansion of one stop shop to provide services to the most disadvantaged population living in remote areas slowed down and distribution of timely cash to community people during El Nino was delayed owing to weak accountability relationship between public actors;
• Strengthening public finance for children to enhance participation, transparency, accountability, equity, quality and size of investment in children due to poor economic growth for the last few years.

UNICEF’S CONTRIBUTION

• Generated evidence to inform strategic and operational decisions;
• Provide technical assistance in designing and implementation of social protection system and initiatives;
• Strengthened capacity of implementing partners at national and sub-national levels to provide vulnerable children and their families with effective service delivery through an integrated social protection system;
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• Advocacy with the Government to create an enabling environment and systems by allocating adequate resources for social protection. Government took the overall responsibility of providing 20 000 HH with benefit cost and 50% of operational costs in 2013.
KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2017

SOCIAL PROTECTION
1. Support the functioning of the social protection coordination mechanism;
2. Expansion of the integrated social safety nets;
3. Expansion of NISSL to 120,000 new households;
4. Develop a community development plan that will guide linkages with livelihood initiatives;
5. Develop an implementation plan of the national social protection strategy; and
6. Continue advocacy to increase the coverage of the CGP.

DECENTRALISATION
1. Expand the CSCs to 5 new community councils.

PUBLIC FINANCE FOR CHILDREN
• Political economy and fiscal space study;
• Open budget survey to understand the transparency of budget making process;
• Analysis of social sector budgets – education, health, social protection, etc.
1. Orient UNICEF staff members and parliamentarians on public finance for children and child poverty; and
2. Engage parliament to influence budget decisions for children.

CHILD POVERTY ANALYSIS
• Conduct child poverty and disparities study/prepare child equity Atlas.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION
1. Support the MOSD in finalizing social protection M&E framework;
2. Conduct Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

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