

UNDG 2008 Resident Coordinator Annual Report Lesotho

The year was characterised by traumatic global, regional and country-level developments - which created both opportunities and challenges - and influenced the way we planned and implemented our programmes. The severe drought of 2007, the global financial downturn, as well as high food prices, left many people food insecure and affected the country's overall economic performance.

The textile industry, the largest private sector employer in the country, instituted significant layoffs due to falling demand in the US. At the same time, the fall in commodity prices such as diamonds and platinum caused retrenchments in South African mines, affecting thousands of miners from Lesotho.

In 2008, the UN system carried out its development operations within a generally stable political environment, notwithstanding mild tension emanating primarily from the 2007 general elections, and, subsequently, from disputes within and across the country's main political parties. At the request of the Government, the Organisation provided financial support to the continuation of dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition. The dialogue was aimed at achieving full restoration of calm and normalcy, which are affected by almost all general elections in Lesotho. With our support, the SADC inter-party mediation delegation, led by the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire, resumed the efforts to settle the contested post-election grievances. While not all issues have been completely resolved, the UN's efforts in support of SADC, succeeded in averting an escalation of the issue.

Summary on progress towards UNDAF outcomes

No information in this section because the UNDAF was rolled out in 2008, and has, therefore, not yet been reviewed.

Summary on progress in UN Reform

UN Reform

In a bid to accelerate implementation of UN reform, in January 2008, the UNCT rolled out the UNDAF 2008-2012 in tandem with Country Programme Documents (CPDs), Country Programme Action Plans (CPAPs) and Projects. These elements signified the start of our five-year programme cycle. For the first time, the various UN agencies are synchronized, in terms of the starting and ending dates of our programming cycle. All agencies are now using the same Results-Based Management (RBM) programming tools, and the current UNDAF is fully MDG-based and consistent with the goals of the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Also our programming activities also commenced at the same time as the start of the programming cycles for most of Lesotho's other development partners, making it possible to reap synergies in collaborative programming for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Delivering as One

Taking this a step further, the UN Country Team (UNCT) took a new, bold move to embark on the "Delivering as One" (DaO) process as a "self-starter". This represents the first step towards transforming the way the UN does business, taking into account issues of coherence and efficiency, as well as relevance and impact at country level. The principle of doing more with less has never been more pertinent.

The UNCT dedicated its 2008 retreat to collective exploration of ways and means of working as a more unified and cohesive entity and ensuring its relevance to Lesotho's national priorities. Based on the experiences of the "One UN Pilots" and following repeated calls by the Government and donors for the UN to work more closely together, the UNCT outlined an action plan for strengthened UN coherence and effectiveness, and agreed to launch the Delivering As One (DaO) process in 2010. Taking into account our limited capacities and resources, our DaO process will be gradually phased, and will include a mix of joint programmes and joint programming activities.

MDG Reporting

In 2008, the UNCT played its role as scorekeeper of the MDGs by backing the country's endeavour to strengthen MDG monitoring and reporting. In a joint effort with the Government and development partners, the UN facilitated operationalisation of the Lesotho DevInfo and training on its usage. The database will form the backbone of the national Monitoring and Evaluation system and, ultimately, the performance management system of the Government. Its launch throughout the country also resulted in the production of the MDG Status Report for 2008. The report predicts that three of the eight goals (those related to universal primary education; gender equality; and a global partnership for development) will probably be met by 2015. But, HIV/AIDS, poverty and food insecurity will still require concerted efforts to scale up action. The Government and partners also need to urgently scale up multi-sector interventions for achieving a reduction in child mortality and an improvement in maternal health.

Response to HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has become the most serious challenge for the country in recent years. It is the number one cause of deaths in Lesotho, and a threat to the country's development. Lesotho has an adult HIV prevalence of 23.2 percent, which is the third highest in the world. In 2008, we continued to record up to 50 HIV-related deaths and some 60 new HIV infections per day. In light of this, the Government re-prioritised the MDGs to make HIV/AIDS the number one MDG and scaled up response. The flagship "Know Your [HIV] Status" campaign launched in 2006 to accelerate HIV testing resulted in an increase in the number of people who know their HIV status from 17.8% in 2007 to 29.3% in 2008. In keeping with the momentum, the UN supported review and integration of the campaign into the national HIV Testing and Counselling (HTC) programme. A framework for implementing the recommendations was developed, and quality assurance support for HTC was provided. The UN also backed the operationalisation of the National AIDS Policy (NAP) and Strategic Plan (NASP) (2006-2011). In close consultation with the key stakeholders, and with our technical assistance, the National AIDS Commission (NAC) coordinated: (1) development and finalisation of the 2008 Annual Work Plan, (2) development of plans and resource mobilisation for the review of the NASP in 2009, and: (3) review of the Monitoring and Evaluation framework.

These positive developments notwithstanding, I am concerned that Lesotho will not be able to achieve the 2010 target of universal access for prevention, treatment and care. To date, less than a third of people who need ARVs have access. Urgent efforts are required to strengthen governance systems and mobilize capacities required for improved coordination and service delivery. As a start, the UN assumed a new and more coherent approach in 2008. With financial assistance from the Irish Aid, and technical backstopping from the UNAIDS Regional Support Team, the Joint UN Team on AIDS (JUNTA) developed a Joint UN Programme of Support on AIDS (JUPSA). The Programme is a bona fide component of the envisaged DaO initiative. The level of interaction and time invested in the preparation of the programme should help the system make a greater impact on HIV.

Reduction of Maternal, Neo-Natal and Child Morbidity and Mortality

Maternal mortality in Lesotho is currently on the increase. According to the 2005 maternal mortality global estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and World Bank, Lesotho ranks 15th among countries with the highest maternal mortality. This is due to a continuing decline in human resources, limited access to skilled care due to the rugged terrain and harsh weather during winter months, as well as diversion of resources and efforts towards HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

In response, the UN stepped up the search for innovative options to operationalise the "Roadmap for Accelerating Reduction of Maternal and Newborn Morbidity and Mortality in Lesotho", launched in 2006. The roadmap aims to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services. Advocacy activities were carried out, targeting the most senior decision makers in the health sector. In addition, the country implemented a successful measles, de-worming and Vitamin A supplementation campaign in 2007, reaching more than 90% of the targeted children under the age of five. PMTCT and Paediatric HIV Care and Treatment services were also scaled up to reach close to 80% of the health facilities by the end of 2008. Initiatives intended to ensure a closer linkage between HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health programmes were also established to reduce the imbalance in resource allocation. These initiatives and strategies are articulated in the national Reproductive Health Policy, finalised with our support in 2008. Furthermore, the UN is supporting a Demographic Health Survey (DHS) scheduled for this year. This Survey will give a reflection of the impact of all the strategies used to address the high maternal and child mortality in the country.

Support to Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

While Lesotho has made progress in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, gender disparities still exist. Women are still subjected to various forms of discrimination and are directly affected by HIV, food insecurity and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). The UN embarked on several advocacy activities and events to popularise the "Legal Capacity of Married Persons' Equality" Act in 2008. The UN also facilitated the assessment of existing national capacity to mainstream gender and human rights into the planning and programming processes, and provided technical and financial support to enhance the capacity of local government and civil society to advocate for gender equality and gender programming. With our assistance, sensitisation campaigns on SGBV and available services for the survivors were intensified using various media channels. Technical and financial support was provided for development of the "National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence in Lesotho". A one-stop centre for survivors of SGBV was also established to provide integrated response and quality services to the survivors.

The entire UNCT recognises the fact that effective gender programming is key to reducing poverty, unemployment, maternal and child mortality, and to combating HIV. Lesotho has some significant institutional successes in the promotion of gender which can serve as examples. These include the establishment of the Ministry of Gender, development of Gender Policy, and Gender and Child Protection Unit and Affirmative Action approach to local governance representation. In 2009 the UN will intensify its effort to support these national initiatives.

UN Response to Food Insecurity -- the Drought and Global Food Crisis

Lesotho remains highly food insecure. During 2007 and 2008, the country suffered devastating consequences of a drought considered the worst in 30 years. Approximately 352,000 people were affected. The UNCT mobilised \$22.8 million to help the country respond to the crisis. However, the year 2008 did not guarantee a better start for many households, as a number of them had not fully recovered from the shocks of the crisis. Worse still, the late onset of summer rains made the harvest unpredictable, and the combination of low yields and high food and commodity prices kept many households vulnerable.

This prompted urgent re-activation of emergency interventions during the last quarter of the year. The UNCT jointly mobilised funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in the amount of \$1.7 million to meet the outstanding needs. Food assistance was provided to 87,000 beneficiaries, and over 16,000 vulnerable farming households received agricultural inputs for the 2008/2009 season. Emergency health kits were distributed to benefit 400,000 people. Training of health workers was also conducted. Garden tool kits and vegetable seeds were distributed to selected support and youth groups, and Emergency Obstetric Care equipment was provided to facilitate safe and clean delivery in 26 health facilities. The UN team also mobilised technical support and competencies for the development of the National Nutrition Policy, as well as the strengthening of the recently revived National Nutrition Surveillance System.

In response to the high food and commodity prices, the UN deployed an inter-agency mission and provided local technical assistance to help the Government formulate a national response plan. The Plan proposes provision of immediate assistance to people unable to meet their short-term food and essential non-food requirements, and development of sustainable strategies that would ensure long-term food security. The challenge now is for the Government, the UN and other development partners to embark on intensive resource mobilisation to implement the priority elements of the Plan.

I regret to say that dependence on food assistance by vulnerable communities will continue into the future, as there is not yet a clear, well resourced Government strategy/plan to tackle food insecurity in the long-term. The CERF will therefore remain an important facility for addressing the life-saving needs of the vulnerable, especially given the limited Donor presence and interest in Lesotho.

Support to Emergency Preparedness and Response

Let me also emphasise the fact that the UNCT played a significant role in strengthening the national coordination mechanisms for disaster risk reduction. With our support, the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) coordinated capacity building activities for the disaster management structures at all levels. As a result, integrated district disaster management plans were developed and a draft National Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Policy was formulated.

There are capacity constraints on disaster risk reduction within the Government and in the UN system. There is a need for DRR to be seen as a priority, as this will, in turn, help strengthen a culture of emergency preparedness and response in the country. In 2009, we will continue to provide capacity development support to the institutional machinery for DRR in DMA and the Office of the Resident Coordinator. Support will also be provided in several other areas, including: inter-agency contingency planning; information management; and, early warning.

Recognising the centrality of coordination and harmonisation of development assistance, the UN maintained the functionality of the Development Partners' Consultative Forum (DPCF), established in 2005 and chaired by the Resident Coordinator. During the year under review, and building on the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), the Forum was reinvigorated with greater emphasis on a more strategic content to its engagement, as well as more dynamic coordination with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. Accordingly, a technical arm of the Forum was established to help facilitate engagement with the Government. The Forum also agreed on the establishment of a joint secretariat, which will be operational in 2009. To date, the Forum has helped increase transparency between the Government and development partners, and among the development partners themselves. It has acted as a hub for information sharing and exchange among the development partners. It also facilitated strategic dialogue to strengthen the Government's institutional capacity for aid coordination and management.

The Country Team also took steps in 2008 to prepare the Organisation and Implementing Partners (IPs) for a full roll-out of the "Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT)" in 2009. During the course of the year, induction training and advocacy activities on HACT were conducted for key UN and Government staff to accelerate the move towards more simplified and harmonised cash transfers to the IPs.

Key aspects of the proposed 2009 workplan

In 2009 the UNCT will adopt more aggressive measures to make the MDGs the centrepiece of the country's development priorities. The Team will re-evaluate its contribution to the advocacy for the MDGs across all sectors, including how they affect the lives of ordinary citizens. The issue of human rights will receive more attention than we devoted to it in 2008, with a more serious effort on our advocacy for progress towards establishing a national Human Rights Commission.

To this end, the UNDAF and related country programmes will be reviewed, adjusted, and monitored in order to further align UN programmes with the national development frameworks. Meanwhile, HACT will be rolled out, and an effort will be made to ensure that UN staff and IPs become part of this new business culture. This will help facilitate ownership and utilisation of the new approach by the Government and other partners.

We will continue to engage all stakeholders in strategic dialogue to make Lesotho an active proponent of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. Through specific capacity development interventions, the UN will continue its collaboration with the Government and partners to strengthen the national system for aid coordination and management.

Our role in the response to HIV has assumed a different, reinvigorated stance. The JUPSA will be the single most important programme of our support on AIDS. The UNCT will continue to provide policy, financial, and technical support to the national efforts to reverse the impact of the pandemic on the country's small population, using existing national systems and strategies.

Under the DaO agenda, we will identify one or two more Joint Programmes that the Team will undertake in addition to HIV/AIDS, and mechanisms will be established to operationalise Joint Programming in relevant programmes including: Climate Change; Emergency Preparedness and Response; Food Security and Nutrition; Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; Governance and Human Rights; and, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Morbidity and Mortality.

The UNCT will develop new approaches to address the serious dearth of human resource capacity in this country. We will prioritise capacity development as a central theme, especially in critical sectors such as health. For the first time, a National Volunteer Corps will be established and UNV doctors will be mobilised as part of our efforts to boost human resource capacity.

Recommendations

Lesotho desperately needs a strong and effective UN. Its development challenges are immense but not insurmountable. Lesotho is one of two countries in the world and the only one in Africa, which shares boundaries with a single country. This unique position has had far reaching implications on its development, especially given the geographical size and economic strength of its one and only neighbor, South Africa.

Poverty is multifaceted and deeply entrenched. The country is among the poorest countries in the world with more than 75% of its population of 1.8 million living in the rural areas and nearly a quarter infected with HIV/AIDS. The current global economic downturn has provided an opportunity for the country to reflect on its development strategies. For the first time, the Government produced a growth strategy and embarked on tax reforms to improve investment climate.

In 2008, the country qualified for the US Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an important development. Our focus as the UN family in the coming year will be to continue to ensure sufficient attention to social protection while supporting the Government's initiatives towards achieving economic growth. Our collaboration with the Government remains strong, and I am confident that together, we stand a good chance of moving Lesotho's development agenda forward.