

APRIL 2021

SISONKHE

A Publication of the UNITED NATIONS in Eswatini

COVID-19 VACCINATION Roll-out begins

PROFILE
First UN female
driver

RETURN TO
SCHOOL
Pupils excited

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

UN celebrates International Women's
Day with partners



YOU ARE
CAPTAIN
KEEPER.

DO IT ALL
3Ws
WASH YOUR HANDS
WEAR YOUR MASK
WATCH YOUR DISTANCE

..ifike ka Ngci!



Acting Prime Minister. Eswatini has received a total of 32,000 doses of Oxford Astra-Zeneca. 20 000 doses were received from the Government of India on the 11th of March 2021 and 12 000 doses vaccines were received under the COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access) facility on the 13th of March 2021.

SISONKHE

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CONTENTS

- 5 FOREWORD
- 6 Message from the UNCG Chairperson
- 7 UNDP Director for Africa participates in Eswatini's new CPD launch
- 8 Eswatini begins COVID-19 vaccinations
- 10 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP
- 12 Child head households receive over E600,000 worth of farm inputs from the UN in Eswatini
- 14 UN Eswatini and partners bring smiles to children with disabilities in Lubombo
- 15 Solidarity and a shared responsibility as the greatest weapons in the battles against COVID-19 and HIV
- 16 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Organisation of Migration launch the Diaspora En-gagement Project
- 17 The UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) addresses the DIHAD Conference on "Africa: Impact of Con-flicts and Humanitarian Crises"
- 18 A health facility assessment shows that persons with disabilities face challenges as they access health services
- 19 UNICEF donates tablets to support Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
- 20 UNFPA Eswatini reaffirms support to Eswatini's fight towards preventing maternal mortality
- 22 UNDP Allocates USD600 000 to Eswatini for Business in Waste Management
- 23 UN staff commemorate World AIDS Day
- 34 Learners are excited about schools reopening in Eswatini
- 36 Eswatini commemorates World Day for Safety and Health
- 38 A diabetic woman is single-handedly saving rural communities from COVID-19

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“Where there is life, there is hope”



Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh UN Resident Coordinator

As we entered 2021, with the devastations of the COVID-19 pandemic ever-present, hope remained our greatest asset, for as the African proverb states: *“Where there is life, there is hope”*.

Commitment, courage and solidarity were our strongholds and brought us through; as individuals, the UN family and as a nation in what was an exceptionally tumultuous 2020 and beginning of 2021.

The United Nations in Eswatini remains committed, more than ever before, to the Government and the people of Eswatini through the newly signed United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021 – 2025, seeking to contribute to *“a just, prosperous and resilient Eswatini where no one is left behind”*.

The successful implementation of the UNSDCF is founded on strong partnerships between the United Nations, Government of Eswatini, development partners, civil society organisation, the private sector, the media and the academia. Thus, in efforts to see our beautiful Kingdom of Eswatini prospering; the United Nations joined efforts to mobilise

resources, enhance existing and develop new partnerships to respond and recover better from COVID-19, as well as effectively implement programmes, as One UN, across the country.

Guided by a series of briefs released by the UN Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, which served as extremely useful guiding principles for the global response to COVID-19, covering Strategic Preparedness, Humanitarian and Socio-Economic aspects of this response, the United Nations in Eswatini sought to respond to COVID-19 in an impactful and inclusive manner, prioritising those at greatest risk of being left behind. Thus, a renewed focus has been placed on vulnerable groups and communities such as persons living with HIV/AIDS, persons living with disabilities, women and children.

It has been encouraging and inspiring to see the great lengths that the Government of Eswatini, development partners and the UN family have gone to in order to protect and empower the lives of our most vulnerable people.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to commend His Majesty's Government for its leadership and determination, as well as our development partners and the UN Family, who continue to work exceptionally hard for the betterment of Eswatini.

It is with this same spirit of unity that we shall endeavour through 2021: focusing on resource mobilization, the effective implementation of the UNSDCF 2021-2025, reviewing the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and ensuring best efforts are made to track and achieve Agenda 2030.

We take courage in the national roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines which commenced in March 2021, and was launched by the Acting Prime Minister, H.E. Themba Masuku. Eswatini secured 108,000 doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine through the COVAX Facility, as well as 237,000 doses of Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and AstraZeneca vaccines, through the African Union Vaccine Acquisition Facility: a pivotal step in the nation's recovery from COVID-19.

2021 has already seen impactful and significant celebrations of annual milestones such as the International Women's Day and the World Book and Copyright Day with rural and business women, women with diabetes; and students, respectively. We have witnessed the power of togetherness, reflected in donations made by UN staff and personnel, led by the Staff Federation, of food, clothing, hygiene and other items for Eswatini impacted by the Tropical Storm Eloise in January 2021.

The UN family has worked to empower child-headed households with farm inputs worth E600,000, (approx 44,000 USD) and children living with disabilities, as has it made significant strides in efforts to combat climate change through efficient waste management.

It therefore gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the United Nations Development System in Eswatini, to invite you all to read the first 'Sisonkhe' newsletter of 2021. It is without a doubt that these efforts and achievements could not have been made without unity.

The United Nations continues to stand in solidarity with the people and the Government of Eswatini, as well as our valued partners, in efforts to achieve a “just, prosperous and resilient Eswatini where no one is left behind”.

Take care and happy reading to you all!

“A prosperous, just and resilient Eswatini where no one is behind.”



Dr. Cornelia Atsyor
WHO Resident Representative

I am delighted to share this message with you as the new chairperson of the UN Communications Group (UNCG).

The main purpose of the UNCG is to strengthen inter-agency cooperation in the field of communications and to increase the public profile of United Nations activities at the national level. I am therefore delighted to be leading a group of communications focal persons from all the UN agencies, funds and programmes at such a crucial time as we begin implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF 2021-2025).

In the UNSDCF 2021-2025, the UN and Government of Eswatini have committed to contributing to

“a prosperous, just and resilient Eswatini where no one is behind.”

It goes without saying that effective joint UN communications will play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of the new cooperation framework.

Since the beginning of 2021, I have been amazed by the sense of unity and desire to harmoniously Communicate as One UN. The experience we have while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that no challenge is insurmountable when we work together in solidarity.

This Newsletter – aptly named SISONKHE, meaning “we are together” – is another clear evidence of efforts to demonstrate our effectiveness in Delivering As One. I take this opportunity

to thank all contributors to this publication for sharing the excellent experiences we have achieved between January and April and making sure it is the quality that we can all be proud of.

The edition is the first of three that are planned for 2021. The others will be published in August and December, respectively. I therefore invite you again to start documenting all our work, including voices from our beneficiaries and partners so that we can publish within the agreed timelines.

I am particularly pleased that we have received support from the UNCT to develop a UNCG annual work plan which will be funded by equal contributions from all agencies, funds and programmes. One of the key activities for the UNCG in 2021 is the development of a Joint UN Communications & Advocacy Strategy 2021-2025 in line with the UNSDCF.

I look forward to the many initiatives planned by the UNCG which are all aimed at strengthening our relations with stakeholders as well as build a positive brand of the UN in Eswatini.

Enjoy your read.



UNDP Director for Africa participates in Eswatini's new CPD launch

The Director of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA), Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, launched the UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) 2021-2025 for the Kingdom of Eswatini, with the Minister of Economic Planning, Hon. Tambo Gina. The launch comes at the end of an official virtual mission by Ms. Eziakonwa to Eswatini, which started on the 22nd of March 2021.

The purpose of the mission was to engage the UN leadership in Eswatini, the Government and development partners on UNDP's development offer to the Kingdom of Eswatini; and identify further opportunities and partnerships that the Government could benefit from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) signed on 22 October 2020 and UNDP CPD. The CPD is a five-year programme that is aligned to UNSDCF and outlines areas of support and collaboration between UNDP and the Government in order to achieve a common goal: leaving no one behind and strengthening institutions to reach those furthest behind first. It focuses on two components: Sustainable Inclusive Economic Growth and Efficient and Participatory Governance.

“UNDP is a long-term partner of the Kingdom of Eswatini. What I have seen is a country rich in innovative solutions; a country on a remarkable path towards climate action and equitable growth,” highlighted Ms. Eziakonwa. She also emphasized that the *“new five-year development programme will build on these efforts with a focus on productivity, inclusion and resilience – deepening our collaboration with the government, key institutions and the private sector towards a green, better and more prosperous future for all.”*

Equitable growth remains a key priority for Eswatini and the UN Development System in Eswatini. Ms. Eziakonwa and the UNDP country team looked at practical

ways to stem the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic fallout across the country to ensure that no one is left behind in Eswatini. She noted the progress the country has made on its development agenda over the past four decades and was particularly impressed with Eswatini's achievement of the 95-95-95 target on HIV/AIDS ten years earlier than planned.

The five-year development plan marks the renewed commitment of UNDP to accompany the Kingdom of Eswatini, within the framework of UNSDCF and in collaboration with UN agencies and partners, in recovering from the shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change and to support the course towards a better and more sustainable future, while reducing youth unemployment, which currently stands at 47%, improving the quality and access to education, decreasing high poverty rates which have peaked since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ravages of Tropical Cyclone Eloise.

The new plan comes at a time when the Kingdom of Eswatini and its partners have the opportunity to build back better, through a swift and inclusive economic recovery programme that will be crucial for all emaSwati.

The launch event, held virtually, was attended by Government Officials, Development Partners, UN leadership, representatives of the business community

and civil society organisations.

In response, as Minister responsible for development assistance in the country, Hon. Gina acknowledged the strong partnership that exists between the Ministry and the UNDP country Office which, together with other UN agencies, has played a key role in the implementation of prioritised sustainable development actions as articulated in national frameworks.

“I particularly wish to acknowledge the UNDP for supporting us spearhead the agenda for reducing poverty and promoting inclusive growth in the country,” said Hon Gina. *“As we are gathered here today, I am proud to report that poverty levels in the country have reduced from 63% in 2010 to 58.9 % in 2017.”*

He also expressed his appreciation for the Ministry to be the interlocutor of UNDP Eswatini on issues pertaining, to the implementation of its Inclusive Growth portfolio.

“This new Country Programme presents us with the opportunity to achieve the country's development priorities including the Sustainable Development Goals, and to build on lessons learnt over the past years, notably from the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Hon. Gina.



UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa Director, Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa

The Kingdom of Eswatini

rolls-out COVID-19 vaccine



Acting Prime Minister of Eswatini Themba Nhlanguiso Masuku taking his first jab of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine during the launch of the roll-out



Acting Prime Minister of Eswatini Themba Nhlanguiso Masuku delivering a speech during the launch of the roll-out



Minister of Health Lizzie Nkosi takes her first dose of the AstraZeneca



JUDGE JACOBUS ANNANDALE takes his first dose of the AstraZeneca



First day of the elderly vaccination exercise at Ludzeludze Inkhundla.

On the 19th of March 2021, Eswatini Acting Prime Minister, Themba Masuku, launched a national rollout of COVID-19 vaccines while also getting his first jab of AstraZeneca vaccine at the Mbabane Male Wellness Clinic.

The launch, which was also used to allow the public to register and vaccinate on site, was attended by senior government officials, including Ministers, Members of Parliament, the diplomatic community, the United Nations, civil society as well as the media.

Masuku expressed hope that the vaccines will help the country to manage the COVID-19 response better by reducing new infections and deaths. "The vaccine will prevent us from falling seriously ill and in the

process lower death rates and relieve the emotional turmoil that has gripped the nation in the past year and it will allow people to live a life that was previously lived before the pandemic," he said. He dispelled rumours that AstraZeneca vaccine was not safe, saying the country has evaluated the vaccines with the help of WHO to ensure the safety of the recipients.

He noted that the success of this vaccination programme will rely on the cooperation of all Emaswati. "The rollout of the vaccines does not give us the licence to stop the health protocols that we have been so religiously adhering to over the past 12 months. We are still expected to use facemasks, wash our hands, avoid crowds and practise social distancing," said the Acting Prime Minister. Eswatini has received a total of 32,000

doses of Oxford Astra-Zeneca. 20 000 doses were received from the Government of India on the 11th of March 2021 and 12 000 doses vaccines were received under the COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access) facility on the 13th of March 2021.

"Vaccination against COVID -19 is but one of the prevention tools at our disposal and even after vaccination, we need to continue with the existing prevention measures, such as wearing masks, handwashing and social distancing, to mention a few," said Dr. Cornelia Atsyor, WHO Representative in Eswatini.

UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Nathalie Ndongso-Seh, thanked the Government for taking decisive steps in ensuring that stern measures are put in place to combat the epidemic and procuring the vaccines on time. "It is with much

relief that we see the deployment of the vaccines and we hope that the dark shadow that was clouding the bright future that we want for Eswatini has been removed," she said.

She expressed appreciation to the COVAX facility and paid tribute to the Minister of Health, Senator Lizzie Nkosi, and all frontline workers for the sustained response to COVID-19, where their lives were always put at risk. "We thank all the partners of the COVAX facility for joining Eswatini in ensuring that we build back a prosperous, just and resilient Eswatini that leaves no one behind," she said.

Ambassador of the United States of America to Eswatini, Ms. Jeanne Maloney, described the vaccines as a game changer. She noted that Eswatini has become a leader in

the enrollment of the vaccine and is exemplary to other countries. The initial consignment of vaccines will support the vaccination of health care workers, marking the first phase of the nationwide vaccination campaign. Vaccinating Eswatini's frontline workers first will ensure a healthy health workforce, who can continue providing life-saving services and maintaining a functional health care system.

The roll out of the vaccines will be carried out in two phases. Phase 1, stage A will cover all health workers and stage B will cover all the elderly and people with comorbidities. Phase 2 will cover other frontline workers such as the police force, teachers, transport industry and the media.

In efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19, all UN staff and personnel

were vaccinated against COVID-19, as of the 26th of March 2021.

The rollout of the vaccines took place at the UN isolation facility: a step taken by the United Nations to ensure the good health and well-being of their personnel who serve as frontline workers, and as reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.

The United Nations is at the forefront of the world's efforts to respond to and recover from the pandemic, as well as ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines within and amongst nations.

The vaccination of UN staff and personnel will enable the continuity of business operations, as well as assist the Government's efforts to recover better from the pandemic.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

UN celebrates International Women's Day with partners



CEO of Business Women Eswatini, Ms Tokky Hou

In March, the United Nations in Eswatini joined various partners in celebrating International Women's Day under the theme, "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world."

This year's theme recognised the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women stand at the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, as health care workers, caregivers, innovators, community organizers and as some of the most exemplary and effective national leaders in combating the pandemic. The crisis

has highlighted both the centrality of their contributions and the disproportionate burdens that women carry.

On the 8th of March, the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh participated in a regional celebration hosted virtually by the Regional Service Centre Entebbe (RSCE). On 26th of March, the UN Family joined celebrations hosted by Business Women Eswatini at Far East Textile Factory in Matsapha.

On the 27th of March, the UN joined a community-based celebration hosted by Diabetes Association in Mantambe area in the Shiselweni Region.

In the panel discussion hosted by RSCE, Ms. Ndongo-Seh noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has been detrimental

in the progress made towards a more equal future. She revealed that women in Africa, specifically rural women, bear the brunt of the pandemic with 60 percent of them working in the informal economy, which is an insecure labor market. *"Women are increasingly more vulnerable to poverty. It is estimated that 47 million more women are likely to fall into poverty due to the pandemic,"* she said.

The panel discussion featured prominent speakers from the UN, including Ms. Suzette Schultz, Chief of Service; Ms. Chhaya Kapilashrami, Director of the Human Resources Services Division; Ms. Linda Forsberg, Change Catalyst and Irene Zulu-Chabala from the Regional Service Centre Entebbe.

On the 26th of March, Business Eswatini, celebrated with rural women who are making an impact through the Vukani BoMake Project, an initiative that aims to empower rural women through vocational and business skills training. Through this project, village textile factories have been set up around the country producing facemasks and other PPE as well as shopping bags in support of the *"Phatsa Sakho"* campaign by the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs.

The UN supported the project by donating a container-factory in which rural women are manufacturing reusable grocery bags. *"It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the United Nations Development System in Eswatini, to hand-over a UN contribution towards Vukani BoMake's significant efforts in creating a better and more sustainable future for all and in achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world,"* said the UN Resident Coordinator during the handover. *"This container and the next ones to come will enable talented women to manufacture reusable grocery bags, a critical step towards achieving several SDGs and a true representation of the United Nations valued partnership with the Vukani BoMake Project and wonderful women of our Kingdom."*

She added: *"Women work not only to empower themselves, but their families, communities and future generations. The world needs to see more women in positions of leadership, as does this beautiful nation."*

The celebration was attended by high profile guests including the Minister of Tourism, Hon. Moses Vilakati, United States Ambassador, H.E. Jeanne M. Maloney and European Union Ambassador, H.E. Esmeralda Aragonés.

CEO of Business Eswatini, Mr Nathi Dlamini, stated that there's a female voice that has been getting louder and louder eager to make an impact in the societies and communities that they live in.

CEO of Business Women Eswatini, Ms Tokky Hou, stated that Business Eswatini continues to be passionate about the advancement of gender equality in the business sector, with a vision to empower women at the grassroots level. Ms. Hou noted that women entrepreneurs face a challenge of limited access to finance. She stated: *"Strong partnerships are essential in our efforts to create an equal future for all, as the great African proverb states: 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.'"*

Ms. Khanyisile Mabuza, Assistant Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), represented the UN Resident Coordinator at the community-based celebration held at Mantambe area in the Shiselweni. The event, hosted by Diabetes Eswatini, also showcased handicraft work done by women in the community. It was also used to raise awareness about diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. *"Women not only to work to empower themselves, but their families, communities and future generations of women,"* said Ms. Mabuza. *"People with diabetes must be protected and empowered, particularly women who show everyday strength and courage as individuals, mothers, daughters and community leaders."*

She added that the UN family looks forward to continuing to strengthen partnership with Diabetes Eswatini. Mrs Dumsile Mavuso, the founder of Diabetes Eswatini, highlighted the need for people with diabetes to ensure healthy eating, regular physical activity, medical periodic check-ups, including diabetes mellitus screening and counselling.





United Nations Resident Coordinator, Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh presented the UN contribution to the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Jabulani Mabuza,

Child head households receive over E600,000 worth of farm inputs from the UN in Eswatini

The UN contribution is in support of a project initiated by the Deputy Prime Minister, Sen. Themba Masuku, to address food insecurity and poverty among OVCs

On the 11th of March 2021, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh presented the UN contribution to the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Jabulani Mabuza, who received the items on behalf of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office at a warehouse of the National Disaster Management Agency in Matsapha.

The United Nations in Eswatini has contributed farm inputs worth E620,000 to orphans and vulnerable children living in child headed households across the country. The farm inputs included maize seeds, bean seeds, sweet potato cuttings, fertilizers, pesticides and also tractor hiring.

The UN contribution was made in support of a project initiated by the Acting Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Sen. Themba Masuku, to address food insecurity and poverty among orphaned and vulnerable children in 167 child headed households across the country. Food insecurity has indeed been exacerbated by COVID-19 and is affecting more vulnerable children who lost 1 or 2 parents to either HIV or the coronavirus pandemic.

The project is implemented by the DPMO in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Tinkhundla Administration.

The UN Resident Coordinator noted that orphans and vulnerable children face difficulties that no child should have to endure. *"Compounded by the devastation of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which has left over 1,800 children leading their households in Eswatini; the effects of climate-related disasters; and increasing hunger and poverty; our children continue to bear the burden of the Kingdom's vulnerabilities,"* she said. *"In order to achieve the Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), children must remain our focus. It is important that the people and the leaders of Eswatini gather in unity and solidarity to support them through this unprecedented time in history."*

The UN Resident Coordinator commended the Deputy Prime Minister's Office for their dedication to vulnerable children, including through education grants for orphans and vulnerable children as well as food distribution.

Minister Mabuza, who spoke on behalf of the Deputy Prime Minister, said *"the project was initiated with the understanding that issuing of food parcels creates a dependency syndrome and also degrades the pride of the recipients. The donation of farm inputs will empower the recipients with lifetime skills and also re-establish their dignity."*

The Minister also expressed gratitude as *"this donation will go a long way in ensuring that more child headed households are assisted above the 167, which are currently in the project."* He said the project will address food security targets under SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) as well as targets SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing).



UN Eswatini and partners bring smiles to children with disabilities in Lubombo

In partnership with the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Woman Farmer Foundation and ADRA, UN Eswatini bring smiles to 72 families of children with disabilities.



Families of children with disabilities receiving food, hygiene packs and personal protective equipment

On the 18th of December 2020, the United Nations in Eswatini, led by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, in partnership with the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Woman Farmer Foundation and ADRA donated food, hygiene packs and personal protective equipment to 72 families of children with disabilities in the Lubombo Region.

The donation, aimed at contributing to COVID-19 infection prevention and control efforts, was made to families in Mpolonjeni, one of the areas worst affected by poverty and drought.

The families received 10kg of rice & mealie meal, 5kg of beans, 2L cooking oil, 100mls toothpaste, toothbrushes, roll-ons, body lotions and special skin cream specifically designed for people with albinism. Speaking during the handover, Woman Farmer Foundation Executive Director, Ms. Sonia Paiva, expressed appreciation to the UN in Eswatini for bringing all the partners together to help the needy.

"Our greatest supporter and partner the UN in Eswatini has made this task a possibility because the Foundation has over the years been exposed to a wide range of ill-health and poverty faced by Emaswati especially the families that take care of people with disabilities," she said. "There are several

challenges that parents and guidance encounter while taking care of children with special needs and most of the time they find themselves confined in one place with restricted movements yet they are expected to cater for all the needs of the disabled family member. We are happy to be involved in this initiative of ensuring that no-one is left behind in development issues."

Lubombo Regional Secretary, Jane Mkhonta, also thanked the partners for their kind gesture and thoughts to needy people especially during the festive season. "On behalf of the office of the Regional Administrator in the Lubombo Region, we appreciate the kind gesture showed by our partners," she said. "The level of poverty and vulnerability is very high here therefore this intervention will definitely sustain a few lives as we pass through this season."

UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh was selected because it is among the least developed regions yet there were fewer programmes on the ground. *"Doing away with poverty and hunger remains our priority and is critical in this Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) by 2030,"* she stated.

"We have a responsibility as partners: Government, Development Partners, NGOs, private sector and others, to ensure that we achieve the targets set out in the SDGs for everyone, including children with disabilities."

Solidarity and a shared responsibility as the greatest weapons in the battles against COVID-19 and HIV



Acting Prime Minister Themba Masuku, UNAIDS Country Director Rose Craiguer, US Ambassador, Lisa Patterson and partners visit stalls as part of the World AIDS campaign

Nearly 40 years after its emergence, HIV, an easily preventable disease, still exists and AIDS continues to cause many deaths globally. For more than a year now, COVID-19 has additionally been threatening the health of people worldwide.

In the face of these health challenges, the UN bodies in Eswatini together with their HIV stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, commemorated the World AIDS day under the theme 'Global Solidarity, A Shared Responsibility' on 25th February 2021. The virtual event was organized by the UNAIDS and UN Cares team Eswatini and highlighted the importance of a world standing together in solidarity and responsibility to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

The UNAIDS Country Coordinator, Rose Craiguer, started by welcoming the participants and by giving an outline of the event. As Mrs. Craiguer is, together with the Secretary-General of the Eswatini National Commission for UNESCO, Phumzile Hlophe, one of the heads of the UN Cares programme in Eswatini,

she shortly presented the United Nations system-wide Workplace Programme on HIV, namely UN Cares. Its objective is to reduce the impact of HIV on the UN workplace by supporting 'universal access' to a comprehensive range of benefits for all UN personnel and their families, including confidential counselling and testing for HIV and COVID-19, free condoms and treatment covered by the UN staff insurance.

With regard to the HIV situation in Eswatini, the UN Resident Coordinator Nathalie Ndongo-Seh congratulated the Kingdom of Eswatini of having made tremendous progress in fighting against HIV and AIDS and being able to achieve the 95-95-95 target ten years ahead of all other nations. However, she also mentioned that Eswatini still has the highest HIV prevalence globally. 27.3% of the population, equaling 205,700 Emaswati, are infected with HIV with the majority of them being female. Of particular concern is, according to Ms. Ndongo-She, that new infections are estimated to be higher among young people aged 15 to 24, especially among girls and young women. She acknowledged that stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV are

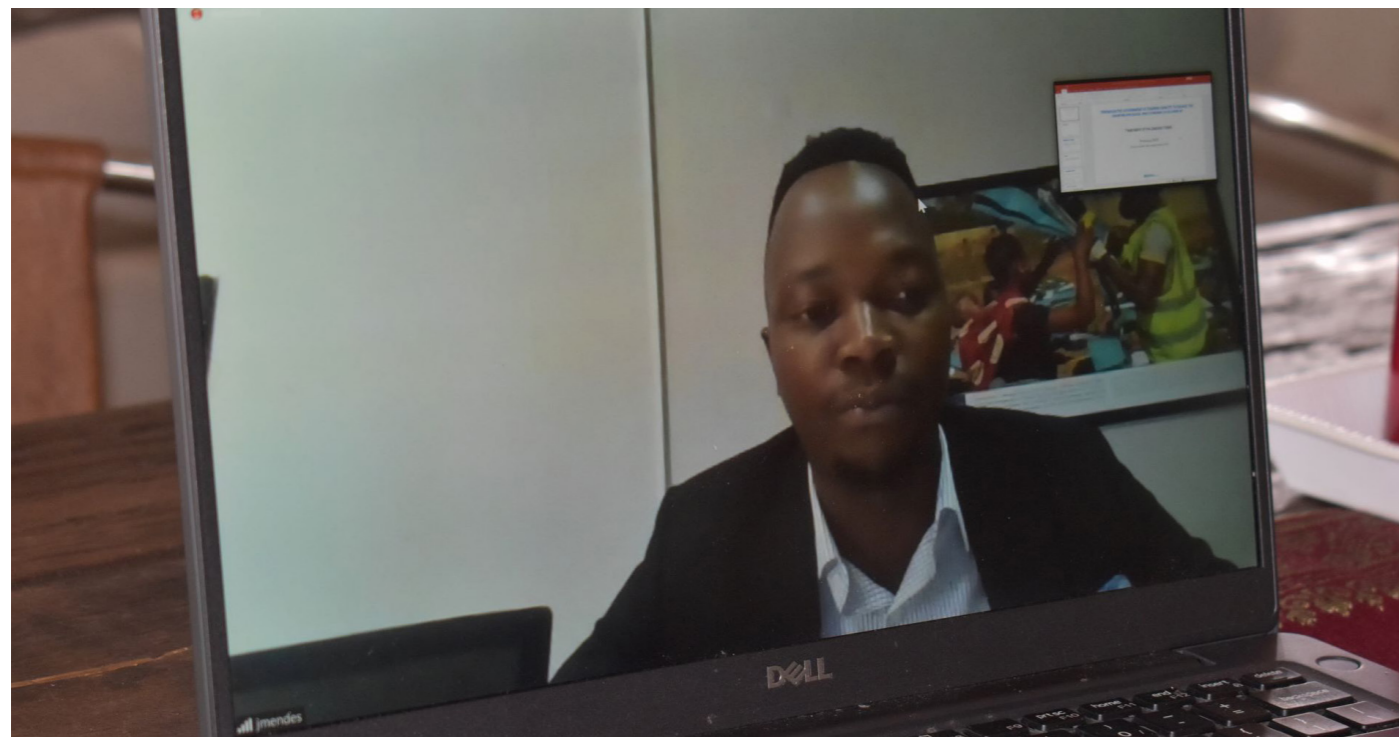
still widespread, disclosure remains difficult, access to adequate healthcare is limited. The COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated these challenges.

In order to end the colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19, action is required. The UN Resident Coordinator highlighted that stigma and discrimination need to be eliminated, people have to be put at the center of interventions, responses must be grounded in human rights and gender-responsive approaches, universal health coverage needs to be provided. As COVID-19 vaccinations have started, there is the need to guarantee that the COVID-19 vaccine is affordable and available to everyone everywhere and that HIV treatments and care are maintained.

In the face of the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, especially on people living with HIV and individuals being infected with TB, Dr. Advocate Dlamini of the Eswatini National AIDS Programme shared information around healthy living, HIV and TB during COVID-19, issues that also directly affect the UN community. He explained that in these difficult times of isolation and restrictions healthy living, including regular exercising, eating better, positive thinking and feeling good, is of paramount importance in order to deal with the mental health challenges the COVID-19 pandemic poses. Dr. Dlamini also detailedly elaborated on the connection between TB and COVID-19 and additionally presented the vaccination delivery strategies.

The UN Resident Coordinator Nathalie Ndongo-Seh concluded the session with the remark that solidarity and a shared responsibility allow to successfully fight the battles against COVID-19 and HIV and ensure that no one is left behind. She called for common action to beat COVID-19 and end the HIV/AIDS pandemic once and for all.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Organisation of Migration launch the Diaspora Engagement Project



Mr. Jeremias. Mendes participated in a virtual launch of the Diaspora Engagement Project

On Thursday, 11th February, the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Nathalie Ndongo-Seh, participated in the virtual launch of the Diaspora Engagement Project.

On Thursday, 11th February, the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Nathalie Ndongo-Seh, participated in the virtual launch of the Diaspora Engagement Project; spear-headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The launch was attended by Her Excellency, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Head of IOM, Ambassadors, leaders in business, the media and invited guests.

The Project aims to facilitate and encourage meaningful communication between the Emaswati diaspora and Government, for the economic and social development of the Kingdom of Eswatini. "It is time to take pride in the Diaspora made of Emaswati who are not only

changing or improving the lives of many others who reside in this nation but continue to fly the Eswatini flag high in different countries. This is the first time that a Diaspora Engagement is being initiated in Eswatini: as the UN, we are delighted to partner with the Government of Eswatini to implement this initiative that will contribute to the social and economic development of this nation," stated the UN Resident Coordinator.

The implementation of the Diaspora Engagement Project comes at an appropriate time, during the COVID-19 pandemic: "As we remain in this last Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the implementation of a Diaspora Engagement Project comes at a pertinent time to ensure that nobody is left behind," continued Ms Ndongo-Seh.

Effective engagement will require determined efforts, constant and innovative outreach, as well as collaborative strategies to encourage involvement of the diaspora in national socio-economic projects. Thus, the Project will commence with a 'Diaspora

Skills-Mapping' exercise, to identify gaps and opportunities with Emaswati abroad, as well as establish online diaspora engagement platforms, a Government database and Diaspora Forum.

The UN Resident Coordinator highlighted the significance of the Emaswati Diaspora, in saying: "In 2019, Emaswati received a total of E1.78 billion in personal remittances. This invaluable economic contribution by the diaspora to our nation cannot be underestimated."

"I would therefore like to commend Her Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for her visionary leadership in organizing this first diaspora engagement initiative, setting up a diaspora unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, recognising the invaluable potential of the Emaswati diaspora and the need for constant and innovative outreach with the community."

The UN Resident Coordinator addresses the DIHAD Conference on "Africa: Impact of Humanitarian Crises and Conflicts"



On the 17th of March 2021, the UNRC participated virtually in the annual DIHAD Conference, addressing the topic 'Africa: Impact of Humanitarian Crises and Conflicts.'

The Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development (DIHAD) Conference explores ways to mitigate the impact of conflicts on crises and provide adequate humanitarian aid to meet the needs of vulnerable people, and ultimately advance the development of principled and effective international development assistance.

The DIHAD Conference was attended by key decision-makers from NGOs, UN Agencies, Charity Organizations, the Private Sector and Governmental bodies to discuss issues that affect people and countries affected by disasters, crises and natural calamities.

The DIHAD International Scientific Advisory Board (DISAB) Director, Ambassador Gerhard Putman- Cramer, stated that: "Africa is a continent disposed to conflicts and disasters, and thus, there is a need for much humanitarian aid."

He continued by stating that: "Africa's conflicts have profound adverse effects on the development of the countries concerned and the region as a whole."

Due to the high rates of conflicts in Africa, aid provided is basic and given mostly to victims of war. Less resources are therefore spent on arising humanitarian needs and issues across the continent such as climate change, hunger and poverty.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Eswatini, Nathalie Ndongo-Seh, stated that: "conflicts on the continent are rooted in the complex historical and socio-economic factors, in the devastating legacies of authoritarian regimes including mismanagement of natural resources, in discriminatory policies, international pressures and in local obstacles." Hence, increasing issues of poverty, famine, mass displacement of persons, the destruction of livelihoods, weak institutions, and dysfunction of basic health, education and social services are ever-increasing."

The RC emphasized the need to focus on SDG 16; 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels by 2030,' noting that sustainable development is not achievable without peace.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), cited as an example of a country in Africa deeply affected by decades of conflict and human rights violations, continues to suffer. The country's land is rich in natural resources such as oils, diamonds and gold, however, the people are among the poorest in the world as 13 million lack adequate food and more than 1.3 million children under 5 are affected with severe acute malnutrition.

"Sustainable development and durable solutions to humanitarian relief are not possible without peace. It is critical to recognise the humanitarian/development/peace nexus, which focuses on the work needed to coherently address people's vulnerability before, during and after crises; emphasizes on a more coherent approach among actors for offers greater opportunities."

"Achieving the right mix of humanitarian, development and peace approaches, and how they are integrated, is critical. Truly delivering a humanitarian-development-peace ('triple') nexus approach involves rethinking finance mechanisms, ways of working, the expertise needed, and a more deliberate and consistent integration of conflict sensitivity and enhancing local capacities for peace," stated the UN Resident Coordinator.

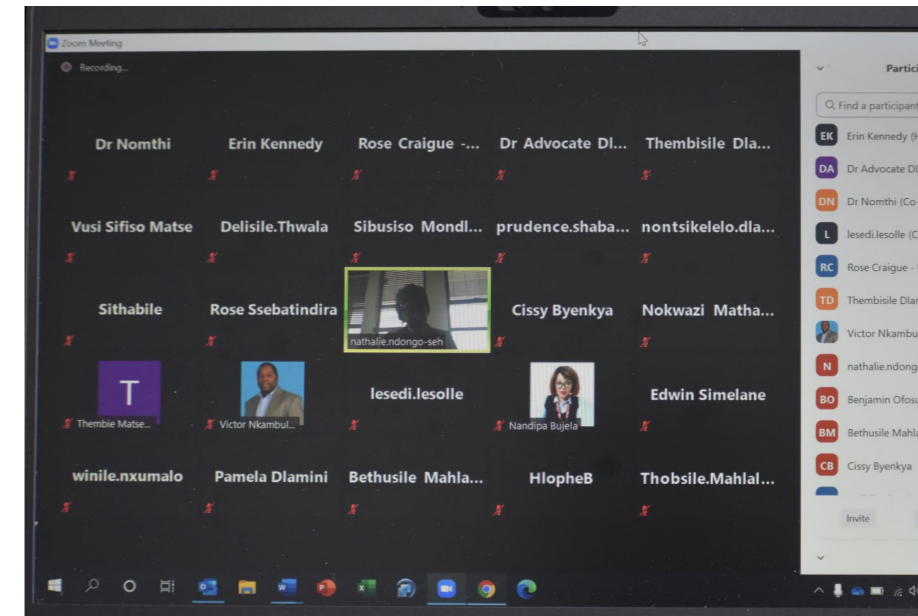
The UNRC continued by recommending that there should be programmes which are responsive to changes in context and enable capacity-sharing and collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors.

In 2020, in the face of devastations caused by COVID-19 around the world, the UN Secretary-General stated that 'it is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.'

"Together, we must silence the guns," concluded Ms Ndongo-Seh.

UN staff commemorate World AIDS Day

Solidarity and a shared responsibility as the greatest weapons in the battles against **COVID-19** and **HIV**



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Nearly 40 years after its emergence, HIV, an easily preventable disease, still exists and AIDS continues to cause many deaths globally. For more than a year now, COVID-19 has additionally been threatening the health of people worldwide.

In the face of these health challenges, the UN bodies in Eswatini together with their HIV stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, commemorated the World AIDS day under the theme 'Global Solidarity, A Shared Responsibility' on 25th February 2021. The virtual event was organized by the UNAIDS and UN Cares team Eswatini and highlighted the importance of a world standing together in solidarity and responsibility to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

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Programme on HIV, namely UN Cares. Its objective is to reduce the impact of HIV on the UN workplace by supporting 'universal access' to a comprehensive range of benefits for all UN personnel and their families, including confidential counselling and testing for HIV and COVID-19, free condoms and treatment covered by the UN staff insurance.

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UNDP Allocates USD600 000 to Eswatini for Business in Waste Management

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) allocated \$600 000 (E9 million) to the Kingdom of Eswatini for sustainable waste management. The support, extended through the UNDP COVID-19 Rapid Financing Facility, is for the implementation of the Waste Management for Improved Livelihoods and Resilience Initiative in Eswatini. This project will also create business opportunities for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

This support comes at a time when the country is currently witnessing the impact of Cyclone Eloise and the COVID-19 pandemic which is not only slowing development progress but also reversing gains made. Addressing a virtual press conference on Feb. 18, UNDP Eswatini Resident Representative, Rose Ssebatindira, said it is important to integrate entrepreneurship and climate change actions to better mitigate and adapt to multiple shocks as an important green recovery pathway from COVID-19. The press conference was held jointly with the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Hon. Moses Vilakati.

"One of the most pressing issues facing the country, as it responds to the pandemic, is the management of COVID-19 waste," Ssebatindira said, adding: *"The disposal of used masks, testing kits and reagents require a management system that will prevent littering and re-infections while generating income."*

She said this initiative is in line with The Kingdom of Eswatini's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan and is designed to address the impacts of COVID-19 through innovative low-carbon solutions to enhance green economic recovery. It is also in line with UNDP's inclusive

economic growth strategy as outlined in the Country Programme Document (CPD 2021-2025), underpinned by the principle of "leaving no one behind".

The Waste Management for Improved Livelihoods and Resilience Initiative takes advantage of lessons learnt from a UNDP-supported "Waste for Jobs" pilot project – at Matsapha Town Council – that benefited 114 households. It also draws inspiration from the no single-use plastic bag campaign, *"Phatsa Sakho Nawe"*, an initiative supported by UNDP and implemented by The Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs and the private sector, towards keeping Eswatini clean.

"There are indicative signs of positive behavioural change towards single-use plastic bags from this campaign as reported by Eswatini Observer, in its February 03 edition that 'Vukani Bomake women project generated over E80 000 from the sale of reusable shopping bags, as an alternative to single-use plastic bags, in less than three months'," said Ssebatindira.

In response, Vilakati acknowledge the challenge brought by COVID-19 to which the Ministry responded by setting up a committee to help mobilise climate finance

available globally. This initiative is a result of one of the six proposals that were successful.

"This project will develop an inclusive strategy to strengthen waste sector policy, legislation, institutional coordination and capacity building," said Vilakati.

He also said, among the outputs of the project, is a study that will form the basis for recyclable materials from household, commercial and industrial facilities to identify business opportunities in the waste management to attract more funding to the sector. The 18-month project has a strong bias towards women and the youth who form the largest group among MSMEs.



UN Eswatini's first female driver joins WFP

This International Women's Day, we celebrate the inspirational women that continue to join the WFP family in the aim to save and change lives. Thandiwe Shongwe joined WFP in December 2020 as the first female driver in the UN Eswatini.

Growing up in an environment where there was no stability, me and my five siblings moved around a lot. We lived from hand to mouth and could barely afford the rent says Thandiwe. My mother passed away when I was 18 years old, and my father was an absent parent. Being the eldest of my five siblings, I became a hawker, so that none of my siblings went to bed on an empty stomach, she said.

Thandiwe Shongwe is a 40 year old woman, who resides in Mbabane, Mpolonjeni area in Eswatini. Having lost her husband in 2009 due to unfortunate circumstances, she found herself being a bread winner of her 4 daughters. After I married my husband, I became a housewife. I had no previous working experience, nor had I completed my education, one of the major reasons that resulted to my unemployment. With four children looking up to her, Thandiwe learnt how to drive with the

car her late husband had left behind.

Further to obtaining her driver's licence, she ventured into the business of driving school children. "That is what sparked my passion for driving" she said with a beaming smile.

The series of lockdowns, which resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic left several emaSwati jobless including Thandiwe, whose source of income depended on the opening of schools. She was not about to let the same fate that befell her siblings befall her children. The vacancy couldn't have come at a better time for her family.

With more than 10 years driving experience, Thandiwe broke the cultural gender stereotypes in December 2020 when she joined not only the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), but the entire United Nations Eswatini as the first female driver. WFP Head of Office Cissy Byenkya says: "The World Food Programme is a forefront equal employment opportunity for both women and men to serve in of the largest humanitarian organisations, working towards zero hunger not

only in Eswatini, but across the world and we are happy to have our first female driver as a country office."

Thandiwe says working for the UN family and spending more time with the male drivers from the different agencies, has made her feel more empowered and equal to her counterparts. Not only has WFP accommodated her in all aspects but has also learnt a lot through the trainings they receive as drivers, and the support she has received has been amazing.

"I couldn't be happier joining any other organisation. Growing up and not knowing where our next meal will come from, working with WFP in ensuring that we obtain Zero Hunger by 2030 and knowing the significant role I play in ensuring the technical team arrive in a timely and safe manner." says Thandiwe.

Going forward, Thandiwe aspires to empower more women, especially young girls to seize every opportunity as a platform to learn, and knowing that women are too capable of making change.



Thandiwe Shongwe first female driver as a country office



The UN Eswatini Staff Federation donates items to Emaswati affected by tropical storm Eloise

In solidarity with persons impacted by Tropical Storm Eloise, the UN Eswatini's Staff Federation donated food, clothes and household items to the Acting PM.

Following the devastation left behind by Tropical Storm Eloise, which affected over 1000 Emaswati, and left close to SZL 180 million in damages, the UN Eswatini Federation of Staff Association organized a drive which enabled UN staff and personnel to make voluntary donations, in an act of solidarity with persons affected by the storm in Eswatini.

Tropical Storm Eloise impacted the Kingdom of Eswatini on the 24th of January 2021, after travelling through Madagascar, Mozambique and later Zimbabwe and South Africa; claiming lives, including four Emaswati, destroying homes, crops and infrastructure, and leaving thousands of people displaced across the various countries.

Donations included food and hygiene items, clothes, toiletries, masks and more, and were handed over by the UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh and Chairman of the Federation of Staff Association Mr.

Victor Nkambule, to the Acting Prime Minister/Deputy Prime Minister, Senator Themba Masuku on the 25th of February, in an act of solidarity with those affected by the Storm.

Speaking at the handover, the Acting Prime Minister/ Deputy Prime Minister expressed deep gratitude to UN Eswatini staff for "going above their call of duty" in donating items for those affected by the storm in such a generous manner. Senator Masuku noted that his office had identified families most impacted by the storm, and would gladly distribute the donated items to them, and further thanked the United Nations staff in Eswatini for changing the lives of Emaswati.

Mr. Victor Nkambule, Chairman of the Federation of Staff Association, in describing the items donated, highlighted the need for certain items such as diapers for children and adults alike, noting that both young families and the elderly had been severely affected by the storm. Mr. Nkambule expressed humility on behalf of the UN family, and gratitude for the partnership that the UN in Eswatini continues to enjoy with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.



Acting Prime Minister/Deputy Prime Minister, Senator Themba Masuku, UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Nathalie Ndongo-Seh



Acting Prime Minister/ Deputy Prime Minister expressed deep gratitude to UN Eswatini staff for "going above their call of duty" in donating items for those affected by the storm



The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Eswatini through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) conducting a training.



WFP and FAO support small-holder farmers to access structured markets through Home-Grown school feeding

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Eswatini through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has been, for the past two years implementing a pilot programme on Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF). The HGSF programme is a school feeding model that is designed to provide children in schools with safe, diverse and nutritious food, sourced locally from small holder farmers.

In Eswatini, 69 percent of the rural population live below the national poverty line and are relying on subsistence farming, a backbone for rural livelihoods.

Women constitute 60 out of 70 percent of people who rely on subsistence farming. WFP, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the MoA are empowering local smallholder farmers particularly women, by strengthening

their capacity in production and providing sustainable structured markets through the school feeding programme.

To date, WFP has trained 550 farmers on the production of maize and beans, marketing, post-harvest losses, commodity storage, warehouse management, climate smart agriculture practices, weed control, soil testing and food quality and Safety and Aflatoxins in maize and beans application, diet diversity, and gender amongst others.

WFP has provided market access supporting seventeen (17) registered smallholder farmer organizations, with a total of 663 individual farmers, 253 males and 410 being women across the country. The farmers have collectively produced and supplied 736.35 Mt of maize and 72.05 Mt of beans to the HGSF programme.

WFP has also distributed equipment to smallholder farmers which include 10,000 hermetic bags (distributions on-going), 16 weighing scales, 6 moisture meters

and 4 stitching machines. A total of Szl 3,987 905.00 has been used to pay local smallholder farmers, a significant amount to the country's economic revenue.

Minor Shongwe is a 41-year old woman from the Asikhuleni Madingizwe multi-purpose co-operative in Mpuluzi. This farmer organisation has 20 members (17 women and 3 Men). She is a mother of 5 children. Minor has been able to pay for school fees on a timely manner with the money she has been receiving from selling her maize through the HGSF programme.

"I have been farming for the past 10 years. I used to grow maize and sell to my neighbours at E80 for 25kg. Some customers would take the maize on debt and pay after 6 months. Life in farming was really hard before WFP came with this programme. We appreciate and are happy with the price they are buying from us". - Minor

She also noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the expenses have doubled and the money is assisting in a significant way.

The pilot for a HGSF programme is currently supporting 50 schools and 24,392 students. 50 headteachers, 50 focal teachers and 50 school cooks have been trained on HGSF protocols and management. The food basket has been improved with the addition of vegetables.

The Home-Grown School feeding basket consists of maize grain, rice, beans, vegetables (cabbage, spinach, tomatoes, and onions), vegetable oil and peanut butter with a proposal to also introduce eggs as a protein source.

School feeding is an education intervention that enables access to education through increased attendance and retention rates, while improving the nutrition and increasing the productive

potential of school children later in life.

"The introduction of the HGSF programme improved our concentration levels in classrooms. A majority of pupils come from under privileged backgrounds and child headed families and depend on schools meals. The closure of schools due to the COVID19 pandemic left a number of young emaSwati hungry". Zodwa Dlamini – Timphisini Highschool Student.

The national upscale of the HGSF programme is game changer in providing a sustainable local market to local smallholder farmers to supply schools. To End Hunger by 2030 there is a need to engage the youth and the private sector with its ability of access to finance for smallholder farmers.



The UN celebrates World Book and Copyright Day with Etjendlovu High School

On the 23rd of April 2021, the UN and Etjendlovu High School celebrated World Book Copyright Day at Etjendlovu's campus, in the Shiselweni Region.

In celebration of World Book and Copyright Day, the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Nathalie Ndongo-Seh, handed over donations of textbooks, exercise books, novels, pens and more, from UN staff, the Ministry of Education and World Vision, to Etjendlovu Primary and High School.

The day's celebrations, hosted by Etjendlovu school in Shiselweni and organised by UNESCO, included singing, dancing, speeches and more, performed by students and guest speakers. World Book and Copyright Day celebrates the importance of

reading and fostering children's growth as readers; as does it promote a lifelong love of literature for all people and the integration of literature into the world of work. This year's theme is 'Share a Story', which encourages people to share a story that will motivate others to enjoy and love reading.

World Book and Copyright Day, established by UNESCO, also celebrates history's and today's authors. During the celebration, the Head Teacher of Etjendlovu High School, Mr. Mike Hadebe, expressed his sincere gratitude for

the donations and highlighted the immense need for text books, a running water supply and housing for the teachers at the school. The school's parents' representative reiterated the concerns of the Head Teacher, whilst noting that poverty remains a devastating issue to overcome, for the students, their parents and the school alike.

However, despite the challenges faced by the pupils, Etjendlovu school continues to be one of the highest achieving schools in the country.

UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Nathalie Ndongo-Seh, receiving donations, from UN staff federation, the Ministry of Education and World Vision.

Ministry of Education and Training Representative, Ms Martha Shongwe, expressed her pride for the students at Etjendlovu, of whom, two students competed and won a SADC Essay Competition: a prestigious essay competition run across the entirety of the Southern African region. The UN Resident Coordinator continued to share how reading has had an incredible impact on her life and career, as both an Attorney at Law and elsewhere. She encouraged pupils to: "open and immerse themselves into every book that they have the opportunity to read," for:

"through reading, you are able to travel across the globe, connect with others and other cultures, improve your vocabulary and in turn, you will have more to share with others and you may be empowered to educate others."



Donations of textbooks, exercise books, novels, pens

UNFPA donates dignity packs to women and girls affected by Cyclone Eloise

"This is a very kind gesture. I will not worry about my child's nappies for a long time," stated a joyful 25-year-old Samukelisiwe Mamba after receiving her package from UNFPA at Game 5 community near Big Bend in the Lubombo region.



Mamba, who lost both parents at a young age, stays with the father of her 3 children in the community. Among other things, she described her failure to get her birth certificate on time as one of her worst struggles. This also rubbed off on her son, who was only able to enroll at school aged 8. Cyclone Eloise, which hit their community earlier this year, further escalated her challenges.

"The house got flooded. Our household items got soaked in water and other items were washed away. My family had no shelter and no belongings whatsoever for use whilst housed at Mahlabaneni Primary School," said Samukelisiwe reminiscing the rough times experienced due to the cyclone. Simiselwe Gamedze, a mother to a 3-weeks' old bouncing little boy, is another young woman who had to endure the horrific experience of the cyclone whilst in her advanced pregnancy.

"I was afraid I could get complications

and maybe lose the baby. I had to sleep on the floor in the school as the flood ruined our home and our house was damaged and those conditions were not favorable for a 7-months pregnant woman," Gamedze said.

"I thank God my baby boy came out well," Simiselwe expressed her relief. Simiselwe and Samukelise are among the 53 women, who received dignity packs from UNFPA on the 18th of March 2021 at Game 5 community.

UNFPA Maternal Health Program Officer Tamary Silindza-Mavuso, speaking during the handover, stated that the material support provided was part of UNFPA's humanitarian response initiative targeting women and adolescent girls.

"This support will ensure that women and their babies continue to practice good hygiene while they recover from the damage caused by the cyclone," she stated.

The packages comprised basic hygiene items; (bath soap, facecloth, body lotion, deodorant, tooth brush laundry soaps) menstrual hygiene items (sanitary pads)

and COVID_19 prevention items (Hand wipes, fabric masks and sanitizers). There were also add-ons of disposable nappies, petroleum jelly and big towels for pregnant and lactating mothers.

"Hygiene is crucial during pregnancy and lactation; however, it gets overlooked during disasters as food and shelter gets prioritized. We are hopeful that the packs we have brought here will be a significant contribution towards the protection of both the mother and the child," Mavuso continued. According to an assessment conducted by the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), about 34 families were affected by the cyclone in the community, resulting in the loss of their property, food and shelter. NDMA's Regional Officer Nobuhle Mbonane described the support as appropriate and fitting to the needs of women and adolescent girls in the area. She further stated that the dignity packs would be a huge relief to the affected families. Speaking on behalf of the community leadership, Sandziso Mamba the Indvuna Yenkhundla expressed his gratitude, stated that the hygiene packs are among the unending list of needs required for fast-tracking the recovery of the affected families.

"Recovering from a natural disaster is a long journey. It also requires a lot of money. With these commodities, the families will be able to save the little they have and use it to purchase other household needs," Mamba noted. For the next 5 years, UNFPA in Eswatini will thrive to reduce maternal mortality, currently at 452 women per 100,000 live births, by 50 per cent.

This donation therefore, adds to the long list of activities aimed at ensuring that women do not die while giving life, even during natural disasters.

Eswatini launches its National Awareness Campaign to combat Trafficking in Persons



Hon. Acting Prime Minister, a representative of H.E. Ambassador of the USA, the UN Resident Coordinator, Head of Office at IOM and invited guests.

On 28th April, the Government of Eswatini and International Organization for Migration (IOM), launched an awareness campaign to combat trafficking in persons.

The launch, held at Nkonyeni Lodge, was attended by the Hon. Acting Prime Minister, a representative of H.E. Ambassador of the USA, the UN Resident Coordinator, Head of Office at IOM and invited guests.

The Trafficking in Persons awareness campaign, an effort between the Government of Eswatini and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), aims to build the capacity of communities to identify and report Trafficking in Persons cases to the authorities.

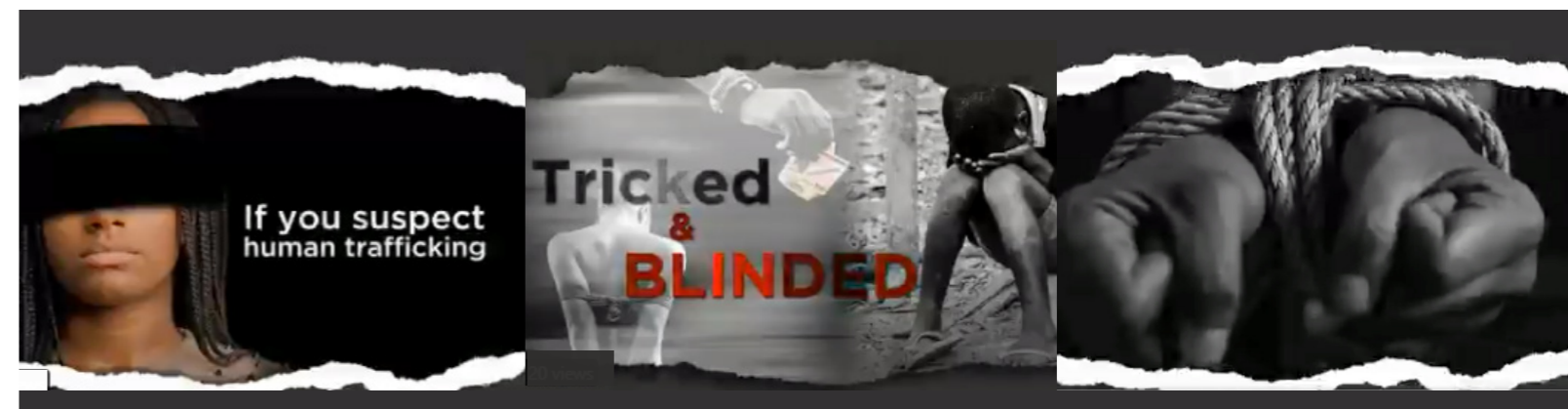
The Kingdom of Eswatini loses Emaswati to human trafficking each year. Between 2016 and 2018, 50 victims of trafficking were detected - most of whom were trafficked for labour and sexual exploitation to neighbouring countries South Africa and Mozambique.

Human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation is largely inflicted upon girls and women, fueled by promises of work or education opportunities in South Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has since exacerbated the vulnerability of already vulnerable populations, particularly children, youth, migrants and refugees.

Imposed lockdowns and resultant school closures affected 1.6 billion children and youth around the world, including 350,000 Emaswati learners. A further 5.2 million girls are at risk of never returning to education once schools eventually re-open, a devastating

consequence of teenage pregnancies. *"History tells us that, in times of crises, our girls are in particular danger of sexual violence and exploitation, having devastating consequences,"* stated the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Nathalie Ndongo-Seh.

"Despite efforts to address human trafficking in Eswatini, there is a desperate need to strengthen capacities to detect domestic trafficking, as instances of human trafficking continue to increase across the Southern African region," "The renewed efforts of the Government of Eswatini, in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and partners, reflected in today's launch of the awareness campaign to combat trafficking in persons in Eswatini, is therefore a pivotal step to preventing and responding to instances of human trafficking," Ms Ndongo-Seh continued: *"One liSwati lost to human trafficking is one too many."*



Community leader explains why investing in women and girls is critical to Eswatini's recovery from COVID-19

"As a mother, you can't give food to one child and leave the other, lest you want to be labelled a discriminating mother," stated Gugu Dlamini elaborating some of the challenges brought by the COVID_19 pandemic in the food provision on the children feeding scheme in her community.

Dlamini is a caregiver at Mtsambama Gogo Centre, in the Shiselweni region. Together with 5 other local women, Dlamini runs a child feeding scheme housed within the Mtsambama Chiefdom.

Their activity is among those hard done by the COVID_19 as it has increased the number of children they feed. As the children are not at school, they never miss a day at the centre and even more flock in. That demands services now go beyond just giving food.



WOMAN LEADER: Gugu Dlamini, a care giver from Mtsambama area believes increasing the number of women in leadership could fast-track development.

"The children are no longer at school now, so they all come here". At times they even arrive way before the food is ready. Others then continue preparing the food while others monitor the children play. The caregivers have also diversified their group purpose. Around 2016, the caregivers started a savings scheme which has helped women start gardening and market stall projects for support their families.

"A woman is someone with a great understanding of things around the home and the community. With many people like that in leadership, communities would realise development much faster." In the community of Mantambe, Nonhlanhla Vilakati, amazingly executes care giver duties too. She is a rural health motivator, who shares health information, and teaches community members on curbing the spread of the coronavirus. Her work also involves supporting diabetic people with information and preparing health diets.

Nonhlanhla and Gugu are among the women described by UNFPA's Margaret Thwala-Tembe when saying, *"Women move societies forward. Their passion is on safeguarding the health education and socio-economic aspect of the families and communities."*

Thwala-Tembe was making remarks during the virtual commemoration of the International Women's Day on the

8th of March 2021, where she further called for support of women with both skills and opportunities to lead. The event was organised by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office in collaboration with the Gender Consortium and UN's Gender Theme Group.

Honorable Thulisile Dladla, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, who was representing the Deputy Prime Minister, heaped praise on women for the tremendous work done by women and girls in their different communities.

"Women occupy a key role in the economic recovery strategy for their unending contribution in the economy. Let's support them, run together and make sure we continue resuscitating our economy as women of this beautiful country." "I am my mother's daughter. I am a woman, a mother, grandmother and an aunt," the Minister wittingly reminded the audience.

Ambassador of the European Union to Eswatini, Her Excellency Esmeralda Hernandez Aragonés noted that education can play a huge role in getting more women into leadership.

"Among other constraints, lack of access to education affects women in society. Without education, the women cannot

enter the labour market, therefore women and girls need to be educated to free and economically independent."

Eswatini is listed among countries with a high prevalence of gender based violence with 1 in 3 women expected to experience abuse before the age of 18. Making reference to a recent act of violence directed at a women vendor, Zanelle Thabede-Vilakati the Chairperson of the Gender Consortium, pleaded with Emaswati to be swift when dealing with matters of gender based violence to ensure the safety of women and girls.

UNFPA's goal of ending gender based violence and other harmful practices by 2030 remains unchanged and the COVID_19 and Cyclone Eloise situation demands that efforts towards this goal be doubled. It is for that reason Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem, in her International Women's Day message emphasised on the removal of hurdles that impede women's rights and choices.

"No woman should be denied choices. We have seen how crises can exacerbate existing barriers that hinder the ability of women to exercise bodily autonomy: sexual and reproductive health services were shuttered or scaled back across the globe, and gender-based violence skyrocketed," said the Director.



A call for ending stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS

BMW, "Li A", "ingculaza", "lifahlawane" or "phinduvuke" – discriminatory remarks like these are not uncommon for people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Eswatini, portraying them as being promiscuous, sick and unproductive.

Even though Eswatini has already made significant strides in dealing with HIV-related stigma and discrimination, prejudice and discriminatory attitudes directed against PLHIV and key populations persist and disclosure of HIV status remains difficult for PLHIV.

On 1st March 2021, Eswatini has joined the rest of the world to commemorate Zero Discrimination Day. The day was used to celebrate the right of everyone to live a full and productive life with dignity and without discrimination of any kind. Through the creation of a supportive stigma reduction framework that informs

the implementation of the HIV and AIDS policy, advocacy, and programming the Kingdom of Eswatini has united in the global action to reduce stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS.

For achieving the goal of ending AIDS by 2030 confronting inequalities and ending discrimination is of paramount importance as structural inequalities obstruct proven solutions in HIV prevention and treatment. Recent research shows that key populations are twice as likely to acquire HIV if they live in a country with punitive approaches to sexual orientation than if they live in a country with supportive legislation.

UNAIDS has been highlighting the urgent need to take action to end inequalities surrounding income, sex, age, health status, occupation, disability, sexual orientation, drug use, gender identity, race, class, ethnicity, and religion that continue to persist around the world.

Ending inequality requires transformative change. Greater efforts are required to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. There is a need to increase investments in health, education, social protection and decent jobs. In order to achieve dignity and equal rights for all political, economic and social policies have to protect the rights of everyone and pay attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

We can all play our part by calling out discrimination where we see it, by setting an example and by advocating for changes in law. We all have a role to play in ending discrimination and reducing inequalities. On this year's Zero Discrimination Day, Eswatini, NERCHA and UNAIDS in the Eswatini Observer and Times of Eswatini called for attention on persisting stigma and inequalities and promoted mutual action in order to address these issues and create a nation with zero discrimination.



Learners are excited about schools reopening in Eswatini

Learners across the Kingdom of Eswatini are excited about schools reopening after over a year since they were forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to stay at home and miss their 2020 academic year. Over 350 000 learners were affected by the indefinite closure of schools in March 2020 amid escalating cases of COVID-19 around the world.

UNICEF in collaboration with partners such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has been supporting the government to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on learners through numerous interventions including the introduction of radio and TV lessons.

Schools in Eswatini opened for the 2021 academic year on the 23rd March 2021. UNICEF visited the schools during the first week of opening to monitor how they were implementing innovative ways

of getting children back to school safely. Some of the precautionary measures that schools have implemented include setting up handwashing stations at strategic points like entrances and next to the kitchens.

Five-year-old Owethu Vilakati who is in 1st Grade at MDS Primary Schools was found washing hands in one of the handwashing stations in the school yard. Like many other learners in 1st Grade around the country, Owethu has had to contend with the plight of missing most of her very first days of school due to the pandemic. She might have to attend school only once a week. This is the reality for most learners in schools around the country.

Mrs. Dlamini, the Principal at Ezulwini Valley Primary School highlighted numerous challenges that the school is facing regarding the opening of schools under the new conditions. The small primary school facing the scenic Mdzimba Mountain has a total of 998 students enrolled for 2021. The school has introduced a shift system to try and

meet the academic needs of all learners while also adhering to COVID-19 precautionary measures. According to Mrs. Dlamini, Grades 6 and 7 now occupy 6 classes instead of 3 since they have had to split the classes in

However, this will result in most learners attending school only once a week. During the visit to Ezulwini Valley Primary School most learners were found outside the school gate. Mrs. Dlamini explained that the school had communicated the new learning arrangements to the learners, but after almost a year of missing school, accepting that they must continue missing more of their learning days seems to be a bitter pill to swallow.

Asked if the school had considered the prospect of online learning, Mrs. Dlamini was skeptical about its feasibility due to the disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds of most of her learners. “Most of our learners cannot afford the smartphones and data to enable them to learn online”, added Mrs. Dlamini.

As the monitoring of schools reopening continued, it became evident that the same issues are affecting countless other schools around the country. Ka-Schiele High School Deputy Principal Mrs. Aphane stated that they have had to introduce the shift system and reduce the number of learners to 20 per class. She also highlighted that most learners in the school cannot afford online learning tools and this is making it impossible for the school to introduce this intervention. She further stated that with adequate support, the school can explore other innovative ways of online learning like Google Classroom or Moodle.

Masundvuni High School is one of the schools that has attempted using online platforms to enable learners to continue learning on the days when they are not at school. According to Mr. Dlamini, the school’s Principal, they have around 650 students enrolled for 2021.

Mr. Dlamini stated that completing classes Form 3 & 5 will come to schools three times a week to try and accommodate all the students. He further stated that the schools introduced WhatsApp groups for learners to continue learning when they are at home, but this is proving to be a challenge since most students exit

the groups without any apparent reason.

However, for some learners in the school, learning online remains a luxury. Anele Madonsela, a 14-year old Form 1 learner in the school lost her mother to an unknown illness in March 2021. Anele, an aspiring medical doctor says she used to stay with her mother and elder sister in Matsapha. Her mother was a hawker who sold wares on the streets of Matsapha to earn a living.

“One day in early March, I found her lying flat on the floor. When I turned her around, she was unconscious with bleeding nostrils”, narrated Anele. She added that when she discovered that her mother was unconscious, she alerted her sister and they called a pastor to come and pray for her. After being prayed for, Anele stated that her mother showed signs of getting better and she went to sleep. But she never woke up.

“We thought she was asleep, but that was not the case. She was dead,” adds Anele narrating the sad ordeal.

She further stated that she missed being at school, but she will only have classes two days a week. Anele is one of the countless learners whose academic

future remains uncertain as UNICEF continues to work and collaborate with partners support the government to keep schools open in Eswatini.



Anele Madonsela is a Form 1 learner at Masundvuni High School

Eswatini commemorates World Day for Safety and Health

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security in Eswatini commemorated the World Day for Safety and Health at Esibayeni Lodge, Matsapha.

The event was attended by civil servants, The Ministry of Labour and Social Security Portfolio Committees in Senate and the House of Assembly, Principal Secretary, International Labour Organisation (ILO) OSH Specialist Pretoria Office, Employers and Workers' federations 'representatives, Representatives of the Mineworkers Associations, members of the Tripartite Advisory Technical Committee for Occupational Safety and Health and government officials. The event was officiated by the Honourable Acting Minister of Labour and Social Security Pholile Shakantu.

In her remarks, the Honourable Minister noted that fatal accidents at work places and non-fatal ones are increasing each reporting period. She said the Government of Eswatini main purpose of this celebration was to promote the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases in the world of work. "This is an awareness –raising campaign intended to focus international attention on the magnitude of the problem and on how promoting and creating a safety and health culture at work could help reduce the number of work –related deaths, diseases and injuries", she said.

The Minister noted that the ILO estimated that 160 million cases of non-fatal work related diseases occurred annually. These estimates implied that everyday approximately 6400 people died from occupational accidents of diseases and that 860 000 people were injured on the job. Addressing issues of occupational safety and health promptly and decisively does not only save lives but also has a significant bearing on economic performance in that it decreases insurance premiums on

pay-outs while also improving workers performances, morale and productivity as well as reducing absenteeism.

In her remarks the ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Specialist, Ms Penny Munkawa shared some findings; "This year's Theme *"Anticipate, prepare and respond to crises: Invest now in resilient OSH systems"* captures the global experiences and interpretation of the full year of successful and failed strategies to mitigate the impacts of COVID19.

The ILO findings reveal that up to 20-30 per cent of new COVID-19 infections in some surveyed countries may be attributed to workplace exposure. The Theme invites countries to examine the most critical elements on national

OSH systems, as articulated by Article 4 Convention 187, one of over 40 ILO's instruments on OSH. These include 1) national OSH regulatory frameworks, 2) national OSH institutional frameworks including competent authorities, 3) occupational health services, 4) information, advisory services and training on OSH, 5) data collection and research on OSH, and 6) strengthening OSH management systems at the enterprise level to prevent and respond to OSH risks."

For the first time ever in these celebrations, the Ministry was joined by the Eswatini Mineworkers Associations. These are current and ex-mine workers of South African Mining Companies. Two specialised occupational health clinics were set up in the country

to provide health support services to these workers on return back home.

A task team has been set up to make the OSH clinics in Manzini at the Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital and Hlathikhulu Hospital self-sustaining. Worker and Employer federations were encouraged to make use of these services.

Government will in collaboration with partners continue to explore possibilities of extending occupational health specialised services to other strategic parts of the country.

The celebrations of World Day for Safety and Health during the COVID-19 pandemic has led governments, employers and workers to face unprecedented challenges in relation to health hazards in the workplace caused by the virus. The global crisis has had profound impact and has touched every aspect of the world of work from the transmission of the virus to adverse OSH effects and risks. The Kingdom of Eswatini was not spared. Shifts to new forms of working arrangements have presented many opportunities for workers. We are reminded to anticipate, prepare, and respond to crises by investing in resilient OSH systems as per the OSH DAY 2021 theme.



Civil servants gather at the World Day for Safety and Health celebration.

A diabetic woman is single-handedly saving rural communities from COVID-19

In 2005 when Dumsile Mavuso (55) discovered she had diabetes, she was so stressed she almost gave up on life. She didn't know how to deal with her condition and there was no help available. "I was in a coma for 3 days and when I woke up I told myself that I was going to learn everything there was to learn about this disease," she says.

The purpose of the mission was to discuss UNDP's development offer to the Kingdom of Eswatini and identify further opportunities and partnerships that the Government could benefit from. The CPD is a five-year programme that outlines areas of support and collaboration between UNDP and the Government in order to achieve a common goal: leaving no one behind and strengthening institutions to reach those furthest behind first. It focuses on two components: Sustainable Inclusive Economic Growth and Efficient and Participatory Governance.

A few years later in 2010, she registered the first national association for people with diabetes, Diabetes Association of Eswatini, which continues to educate others about coping with the disease as well as how to prevent it. The organization works in all four regions of Eswatini to develop community driven interventions by establishing community educational engagements. It evolves mainly around the people infected by diabetes as well as those affected. "As part of the launch, I had mobilized a few people to do an awareness march around Manzini city but I was pleasantly surprised to see people coming in buses from all over the country to be part of the event despite that there was not even a snack provided as there were no sponsors," she says.

A former trade unionist whose love for home economics has made her venture into many community development projects in rural communities across

Eswatini, including her own home area in Mantambe in the Shiselweni Region, Dumsile is a beacon of hope for many. In 2020, Dumsile's efforts to raise awareness about diabetes and NCDs assisted many rural communities to survive the COVID-19 pandemic "Despite that the lockdown negatively affected our operations, we managed to visit health centres across the country, especially in Shiselweni, to make sure that they have enough stock of medication for NCDs," she says. "In our investigation we discovered that most rural clinics did not have relevant and adequate medication. We then pressed for the availability of these medications working closely with the Ministry of Health." In addition, she says, rural health motivators were trained in five rural communities in the Shiselweni Region.

A total of 48 rural health motivators in five chiefdoms received the training. The COVID-19 pandemic and the non-communicable diseases (NCD) epidemic have brought about a deadly interplay almost everywhere in the world. According to WHO, the COVID-19 pandemic had become an amplifier for health systems to better respond to NCDs as the momentum of progress in curbing the NCD epidemic has been going down since 2010. In Eswatini, the Minister of Health, Lizzie Nkosi has put emphasis on physical check-ups and adherence to treatment of NCDs after realizing that most deaths were a result of co-existing conditions, especially Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension, Cardiac Disease and Asthma. As of 25 February 2020, Eswatini, with a population of 1,093,238, had total 16,897 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and 649 deaths.



Dumsile Mavuso outside her home in Mantambe area in the Shiselweni Region.

According to WHO, a majority of these deaths were related to underlying co-existing conditions that the patients had. Dumsile says there were no deaths related to COVID-19 reported in Mantambe area. "We only had one case of person who had to be hospitalized," she says. "We believe that even though others may have contracted it; they were able to fight it by taking care of themselves through physical activity and eating a balanced diet." WHO has provided technical to Diabetes Eswatini, including financial assistance for the production of information and educational materials covering various aspects of the disease such as nutrition, coping mechanisms and prevention. WHO Health Promotion Officer, Dr. Kevin Makadzange says organisations such as Diabetes Eswatini are playing a critical role in educating people to detect and prevent the disease in communities. "We will continue to provide technical support towards the growth and coverage of this area as it is also critical in the COVID-19 response," he says.

Dumsile's work goes beyond Diabetes and COVID-19. In her community, she is known as a selfless woman who has sacrificed a lot for the benefit of others. She has converted her home in Mantambe area – about 150kms from Mbabane – into a mini textile and handicraft

factory, a conference centre and an office. "She has done a lot for us," says David Simelane, the chairperson of the Shiselweni Regional branch of Diabetes Eswatini. "We hold our meetings at her house; we receive training in her sitting room here and she feeds us as committee

Dumsile has mobilised a group of women in the community to start a textile and handicraft business producing facemasks, aprons, cushions as well as soaps and sanitisers. "I have been lucky to successfully appeal to textile companies in the Region to donate to us waste material that we recycle to produce a lot of useful products that we then sell to the community," says Dumsile without asking for anything in return.

The Shiselweni branch of Diabetes Eswatini has also embarked on a project to establish a vocational centre which will help young people – a majority of whom are unemployed – with skills with which they can earn a living. Eswatini is classified as a lower middle-income country with a Human Development Index of 0.608. Before COVID-19 struck, Eswatini's economic growth rate was already far below the 5% necessary to eradicate poverty and achieve Agenda 2030. 58.9% of Emaswati live in poverty.



Executive Committee Members of Diabetes Eswatini in the Shiselweni Region pose for a group photo with Dumsile Mavuso after a meeting

Out of her own volition, Dumsile has supported various community groups by linking them with technical assistance and donations. Some groups have benefitted from professional training in agricultural production as well as donations of seedlings. "As a farmers association, we are so grateful to what she did for us at the start of the pandemic," says Raymond Hlophe, chairperson of Mlotsemi Farmers Garden. "She came here with a lot of vegetable seedlings and told us to plant. We don't know where she got them from. She is naturally a kind person and I have not seen anyone like her." She also assisted to organise training and raise capital for a community owned nursery for the production of fruit trees and vegetables. "We have already received the professional training and have used our own little resources to kickstart the operations," Mandla Nxumalo, a former Member of Parliament in the area. "If it was not for her; this project would not have moved an inch. She is such a go-getter and dedicated person."



Chairperson of the Shiselweni Branch of Diabetes Eswatini examining one of the packed soaps which they sell to community schools and clinics.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE



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