



UNFPA Eswatini Newsletter

Jan-Sep 2024 Highlights

Foreword

This bulletin highlights the country programme achievements of the first nine months of 2024. It also provides notable milestones leading to the achievement of UNFPA Eswatini's vision of a 50% reduction in preventable institutional maternal deaths. These achievements have been enabled through collaboration, innovation, and commitment to addressing the most pressing needs in sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and maternal health.

As we look ahead to the remaining quarter of the year, our commitment to advancing the health, rights, and well-being of the people of Eswatini remains strong. I extend my deepest gratitude to our partners, the government, and the UNFPA team for their dedication in achieving the intended results for the first 3 quarters of 2024. Together, we will continue to make strides toward a future where no woman should die while giving birth.

UNFPA Eswatini
Head of Office

Mrs. Margaret Thwala-Tembe





UNFPA Eswatini Welcomes Swedish Ambassador on Monitoring Visit of the 2gether4SRHR Programme

UNFPA Eswatini, alongside other UN agencies hosted a courtesy visit from the Swedish Ambassador to Eswatini and Mozambique, as part of the monitoring of the 2gether4SRHR programme. The visit aimed to assess the progress and successes of the programme, a joint initiative by four United Nations agencies: UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO.

Swedish Ambassador to Eswatini and Mozambique, Hon. Mette Sunnergren alongside Minister of Health, Hon. Mduduzi Matsebula, MOH Directorate and Officials, Country Director, Mr Yu, Head of Office, Ms. Thwala-Tembe and UN Agencies' officials.

To date, over SZL 30 million has been invested in enhancing integrated sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services for adolescent girls and young women of reproductive age in Eswatini. During the visit, Sobhuza II Clinic was highlighted as a best practice in the provision of integrated of SRHR and HIV services.

The clinic's model offers a holistic approach to addressing the needs of women, promoting accessibility to essential services. Ambassador, Hon. Mette Sunnergren lauded the clinic's commitment to providing integrated health services, noting this as key in promoting the quality of life, the supermarket approach in service provision for women and girls is also core in preventing missed opportunities.

In addition to the clinic visit, the Ambassador and the delegation had a courtesy with the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) in Eswatini to discuss areas of improvement and further collaborations within the 2gether4SRHR programme.

Key discussion points included strengthening service delivery for young people, improving health outcomes for women, and expanding access to family planning and HIV services across all regions of Eswatini. Speaking on behalf of UNFPA, the Head of Office emphasized the importance of continued investment in SRH and HIV integration, expressing gratitude for the Swedish government's support.

"The success of Sobhuza II Clinic exemplifies what can be achieved through collaborative partnerships. We are committed to scaling these interventions to ensure that women and girls across Eswatini have access to comprehensive healthcare services."

The 2gether4SRHR programme has played a pivotal role in improving the SRH and HIV outcomes for women and young people in Eswatini, contributing to the global agenda of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moving forward, the programme partners aim to address existing challenges and build on the successes to ensure the long-term sustainability of these vital health services.



Swedish Ambassador, Hon. Mette Sunnergren alongside Heads of Agencies of UNAIDSS, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO.

International Condom day: Reaffirming Commitment towards a healthy youth in Eswatini

On 13 February 2024, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) joined forces with the Ministry Of Health(Eswatini National AIDS and SRH programmes), UNAIDS, and other CSO partners to commemorate International Condom Day. This annual event serves as a reminder of Emaswati about the triple protection of condoms (prevention of HIV, other STIs and unintended pregnancies).

The event took place at the UN House, where participants gathered to discuss strategies for promoting condom use, avoiding risky sexual behaviors, and fostering safer, healthier communities. The Condom Day event is relevant in Eswatini because of the challenges of high adolescent pregnancies and resurgence of new HIV infections.

Data from the Eswatini National HIV/AIDS Programme (ENAP) highlights the severity of the STI burden, particularly in the Manzini region, where over 51% of the population is affected.



Gciniwe Sibandze shows off a female condom during the commemoration.

Against this background, UNFPA collaborates with Government Ministries (MoH, MoET and MoSCYA), and other partners to enhance access to integrated sexual and reproductive health information and services for young people at all levels.

Despite reaching over 200 people at the event and distributing approximately 250 male condoms, the campaign continues to face challenges, particularly the stigma surrounding condom initiation, especially for young girls. To address this, UNFPA, in collaboration with the Family Life Association of Eswatini, continues to support the #CONDOMIZE! campaign to raise awareness about safer sex practices.

Towards a digitilised GBV case management information system in Eswatini

In an effort to enhance GBV information management, UNFPA supported the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO) with 20 desktop computers valued at **SZL 596,300.17**. This aims to strengthen GBV information management. Digitilisation of GBV data is critical as it will prevent double reporting of GBV cases and ensure availability of real-time data for evidence-based decision making and programming. Currently, GBV data is captured using a paper based system, the arrival of these computers will hept the country move to the Gender Based Violence Management Information System (GBVIMS). The official handover ceremony took place at DPMO,



Ms. Margaret Thwala-Tembe hands over computers to the Prinicipal Secretary of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Ambasador Melusi Masuku.

where Principal Secretary (Ambassador) Melusi Masuku accepted the computers and other related accessories from UNFPA Head of Office, Ms. Margaret Thwala-Tembe. Ambassador Masuku emphasized the crucial role that these computers will play in improving the management of GBV cases by providing a reliable system for data collection and case management. “The provision of computers will contribute to ensuring that our partners, especially frontline responders like the police (DSC Unit) can promptly capture reported cases and transmit them for analysis and evidence generation,” he added.



Principal Secretary in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Amb. Melusi Masuku making his remarks during the handover.

Deputy National Commissioner Mr Shadrack Simelane, said that the police service had a shortage of computers and needed to address the challenge and service delivery mechanisms of the police service.

“The computers will be installed in police stations nationwide to ensure accurate and efficient capture of GBV cases,” he said. He added that “this technology will greatly enhance our ability to manage cases effectively.

Thwala-Tembe emphasized the importance of reliable data in addressing the GBV crisis. By safeguarding the confidentiality of survivors and ensuring data integrity, the new system will empower service providers to deliver more targeted and effective interventions.

The enhanced data collection capabilities will enable the government and partners to understand the magnitude of GBV in the country, thereby facilitating evidence based policy and programming decisions. Innovation, digitilisation and data are critical accelerators for Eswatini to make major strides towards ending GBV and other harmful practices.

Government launches Hlonipheka - Thriving for Dignity Programme for GBV survivors and persons with disabilities



UNFPA ESARO Regional Director, Ms. Lydia Zigomo and the EU Ambassador to Eswatini Dessislava Choumelova after signing the partnership.

About 400 survivors of gender-based violence in Eswatini, along with approximately 1500 persons with disabilities, are set to benefit from the Hlonipheka – Thriving for Dignity programme, valued at nearly E11 million. The partnership between the European Union and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

aims to address the pressing issue of gender-based violence and empower vulnerable communities in Eswatini, including persons with disabilities. Hlonipheka, meaning dignity in Siswati, was officially launched by the Deputy Prime Minister, Sen. Thulisile Dladla, represented by Principal Secretary of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Ambassador. Melusi Masuku, at the UN House in Mbabane on 21 February 2024. Highlighting the urgency of the project, the Deputy Prime Minister emphasized its timeliness in light of the recent surge in cases of gender-based violence across the country. Over the course of three years, the project will implement various interventions, including the empowerment of 200 caregivers and family members of children with disabilities, as well as training of 80 service providers and counselors in safe spaces. Additionally, 700 policymakers, including Members of Parliament, Tindvuna Tetinkhundla, service providers (healthcare workers, teachers, and community members), will undergo training and sensitization on their roles in supporting the programme's objectives.

Promoting social justice

The overarching goal of Hlonipheka is to foster safe communities that actively promote social justice and protect the rights of women, girls, and persons with disabilities. The programme will lead to significant improvements in the human rights and overall well-being of survivors of gender-based violence and persons with disabilities in Eswatini.

EU Ambassador Ms. Dessislava Choumelova echoed His Majesty King Mswati III's call for increased resources to combat gender-based violence, emphasizing the EU's commitment to investing in human capital and social cohesion. The EU's contribution of EUR 500,000 (SZL 10,260,000) towards the project demonstrates its dedication to supporting initiatives that address pressing social issues.



UNFPA Eswatini Head of Office, Ms. Margaret Thwala-Tembe hands over computers to Principal secretary of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Ambassador Melusi Masuku.

Ms. Lydia Zigomo, UNFPA Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, highlighted the widespread prevalence of violence against women and girls in the region, emphasizing the need for collective action to combat this human rights abuse. “In Eswatini, data reveals significant disparities in decision-making power, with 51% of women lacking autonomy in crucial areas such as sexual consent, contraception use, and healthcare decision-making,” she said

Mr. George Wachira, the Resident Coordinator, stressed the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to achieve the project's objectives effectively.



ESARO Regional Director, Ms. Lydia Zigomo with the Un Eswatini Resident Coordinator Mr George Wachira.

He expressed gratitude to the Deputy Prime Minister for her strong leadership on GBV in line with the directives of His Majesty the king, and thanked civil society, the media, the private sector and international partners for speaking up strongly on violence.

Mr. Wachira thanked the EU for its continued partnership with the UN, locally and globally, in delivering sustainable development programmes, recognizing the vital role of financial support in driving positive change.

Hlonipheka–Thriving for Dignity project represents a significant step forward in addressing gender-based violence and promoting the rights of vulnerable communities in Eswatini. Through collaboration and concerted efforts, it is poised to make a meaningful impact on the lives of survivors and persons with disabilities, fostering a more equitable and just society for all.

Investing in Women: Eswatini's Commitment to Inclusion and Empowerment



Mary Mbhamali, from Ntontozi with a physical disability.

On March 8, 2024, UNFPA joined the global community in celebrating International Women's Day under the theme "Invest in Women: Inspire Inclusion." This year's commemoration in Eswatini was marked by a series of discussions and reflections on the challenges women face and the urgent need for investment in their empowerment.

The Eswatini Gender Consortium Chairperson, Mr Sonic Dlamini, emphasized the importance of fostering inclusion and meaningful engagement in all programs aimed at empowering women. He highlighted that, for many women and girls, particularly those in child-headed families, academic success remains a distant dream due to the numerous obstacles they face. Addressing these barriers, he stressed, is crucial to ensuring that women can fully participate in and contribute to all sectors of the economy, including the ongoing fight against gender-based violence.

Mary Mbhamali, a resident of Ntontozi with a physical disability, shared her personal experiences, shedding light on the additional challenges faced by women with disabilities. She explained that inadequate infrastructure often acts as a significant barrier, making it nearly impossible for women with disabilities to access public transport or navigate urban spaces. Parents of children with disabilities are often at a disadvantage, as they require to stay home to care for their children, thus limiting their empowerment opportunities.

"Women and girls represent half of the world's population, yet gender inequality continues to persist, stagnating social and economic progress."

The Deputy Prime Minister Senator Dladla, underscored the need for action, stating, "Women and girls represent half of the world's population, yet gender inequality continues to persist, stagnating social and economic progress." She called for robust action plans to invest in women as many young women are in Eswatini drop out of school due to financial constraints or early pregnancy. She also highlighted the impact of climate change and conflict, which push millions of girls into poverty, yet these are the very women who ensure that families are fed.

In her remarks, she acknowledged the strides made by the Eswatini government, including efforts to address gender inequalities through initiatives such as the Women in STEM program and the Election of Women into the Assembly Act of 2018. These efforts, she noted, are crucial investments in gender equality, with women's representation in Parliament currently standing at 29%, which is a notable improvement.



Deputy Prime Minister, Senator Thulisile Dladla following the proceedings during the womens' Day event.

UN's contribution to women's empowerment,

Margaret Thwala-Tembe, Chair of the UN Gender Theme Group, highlighted the UN's contribution to women's empowerment, emphasizing that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls are integral to realizing the 2030 Agenda and all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

She reiterated the need for meaningful participation from both men and women in driving this agenda forward. The event concluded with a collective resolve to continue investing in women, recognizing that such investments are not just a moral imperative but a necessary step towards building a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous Eswatini.



Midwives at the Forefront of Mainstreaming Climate Resilience in Maternal Health



Midwives from different regions of Eswatini pose for a photo during the commemoration.

On the 5th of May 2024, Eswatini joined the global community in celebrating International Day of the Midwife under the theme, "Midwives, a Vital Climate Solution."

The event, hosted by the MOH in collaboration with UNFPA, was attended by high profile people, (Minister of Health, the Director of Health Services, Chief Nursing Officer, EGPAP representatives, the UNFPA Head of Office and other development partners). The day highlighted the role midwives play in maternal and neonatal health and their critical importance in the face of the growing climate crisis.

In her remarks, the UNFPA Head of Office highlighted the challenges midwives face in today's world. "When a crisis strikes, midwives are often the first on the scene, especially in remote communities. Every two minutes a woman dies somewhere in the world due to pregnancy, childbirth, or its aftermath, which some of these deaths occurring in Eswatini. Climate change worsens this situation, hence midwives are more than just health-care providers. They save lives of women in the most challenging conditons, such as



A panel discussion on the role of midwives in climate crises in Eswatini.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, midwives were at the forefront, ensuring safe childbirth and providing essential care.

harsh temperature conditions, floods, and extreme weather. If unattended, these conditions can result in premature births, miscarriages, and limited access to maternal health facilities. Therefore, Midwives are instrumental in navigating these challenges.

A panel discussion at the event delved into the intersectionality of health epidemics, climate change, and maternal health. The discussion illuminated how midwives are uniquely positioned to raise awareness in communities about these critical issues.

The Minister of Health, Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula, reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting midwives and maternity units.

He emphasized the collaborative efforts between the government and partners, especially the UNFPA supported pilot of a Safe Delivery Application, which aims to improve quality of care during pregnancy, delivery and post partum. Furthermore, UNFPA and MOHs collaboration through the Third Party Procurement agreement has significantly promoted reproductive health commodity security, (FP and life-saving maternal health medicines and supplies).

The Chairperson of the Swaziland Midwives Association (SWAMIDA), Mr. Zwakele Ngwenya, spoke passionately about the vital role midwives play in the context of climate change. "Women and girls continue to get pregnant and will need essential support during their pregnancy, regardless of the environmental challenges they face," he said.

He also said the importance of preparing aspiring midwives for the real-world challenges of the profession, ensuring they are well-equipped to provide care in increasingly difficult circumstances.

The stories shared during the event brought to light the human faces behind the statistics and highlighted the extraordinary resilience of midwives in Eswatini. These women and men are not just health-care workers, they save lives of women by navigating a world where the impact of climate change is felt especially by the most vulnerable.

DPMO and UNFPA's GBV Prevention Efforts for Community Engagement Through Hiking at Mahamba Gorge



To ensure a continued fight against GBV, the DPMO supported by partners developed a 365 days against GBV campaign plan.

As part of the 365 days plan, advocacy and outreach activities for prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) were undertaken. One of these is an annual tourist event termed Mahamba Gorge. UNFPA Eswatini collaborated with DPMO and CSO partners at the tenth Mahamba Gorge hiking to deliver GBV awareness and prevention messages.

The hiking expedition spanned three days, from 27th, to 29th April 2024. Its theme was **NKWEEEE!! Let's invest to prevent gender-based violence.** This highlighted the shared dedication to combatting GBV and Violence Against Children (VAC) which had been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hiking event activities included a Family Fun Day where the public was educated about GBV prevention reaching approximately 300 people.

Information on specific topics such as sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), entrepreneurship, and the roles of men and churches in GBV prevention was disseminated.

The Mahamba Gorge Hiking's main event attracted over 5000 attendees who came together in a show of solidarity against gender-based violence (GBV). High-profile attendees included the Deputy Prime Minister Honorable Thulisile Dladla, the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs Honorable, Jane Mkhonta-Simelane, and the Ministers of Sports, Culture, and Youth Affairs Honorable Bongani Nzima as well as former Deputy Prime Minister Senator Themba Masuku who is also a patron for the Mahamba Gorge Hiking. The presence of these policy makers underscored the national importance of GBV prevention efforts both at policy level and community level as they also toured partner stalls acknowledged the diverse contributions towards combating GBV.



Members of the local community attending the Family Fun Day, engaging in a discussion on the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill with UNFPA staff.

UNFPA and EU Partner to Empower Children with Disabilities in the Lubombo Region through the Hlonipheka programme

Hlonipheka is a transformative programme co-funded by the European Union Delegation in the Lubombo region and UNFPA, designed to improve the lives of survivors of gender-based violence and children with disabilities in Eswatini. The programme works in collaboration with seven key implementing partners, including Libumba Medical Mission Eswatini, a dedicated entity committed to supporting children with disabilities in the Lubombo region. Currently, Libumba is supporting and making a significant impact in the lives of 95 children with disabilities, primarily those with cerebral palsy, a condition that often requires specialized care and support.

Libumba is based in Siteki, a region impacted by high poverty and unemployment resulting in socio-economic challenges in providing essential care for children with disabilities

and their families, let alone afford the costly, life-changing surgical procedures that could greatly improve the children's mobility and quality of life. In this context, Hlonipheka has emerged as a beacon of hope focusing on restoring dignity and providing the much-needed support. The programme has arrived at a critical time when Eswatini is facing health sector related challenges with limited access to essential health services by most vulnerable populations.

In an effort to further expand its reach and access to services by communities, Libumba is in the process of introducing a helicopter service designed to provide medical care to extremely remote areas that are nearly impossible to access by vehicle. This innovative approach will allow Libumba to serve over 100 people in need of essential medical care across multiple communities in a single day.



The helicopter that will be used to reach patients in the most remote areas in the Lubombo region.

Joanne Chesson, shared her excitement about this development, "The helicopter service will be a game-changer for us, allowing us to reach communities that have been underserved for far too long. It's about bringing care directly to those who need it most, no matter how remote they are."

Joanne Chesson, the Director of the Libumba Inclusion Initiative, highlighted the profound impact Hlonipheka has had on their organization. She emphasized that the programme has not only provided crucial financial support but has also amplified advocacy efforts, raising awareness and attracting additional funding from other development partners. "Through the programme, Libumba received support from the Office of the British High Commissioner, which led to funding surgical procedures for 15 children and support for their recovery," Chesson said. "These are children who have never walked before, but thanks to Hlonipheka, they will now have the chance to walk, and their families' lives will be transformed in ways they never thought possible."

"Through the programme, Libumba received support from two remarkable women who work tirelessly to care for the children and their parents. Despite enduring long hours in challenging conditions such as extreme heat and rain, their commitment to providing ongoing support and care remains unwavering," Joanne added.

Hlonipheka has also been instrumental in enabling the Libumba Inclusion Initiative to offer further training for caregivers, ensuring that the children receive the best possible care, even in challenging conditions. Joanne Chesson, Director of the Libumba and a passionate advocate for children's rights, expressed her deep gratitude for the Hlonipheka programme. She noted that the initiative has not only expanded and strengthened the activities of Libumba but has also laid the groundwork for sustainable, long-term impact on the lives of children with disabilities (CWDs) and their caregivers. "This programme has given us the resources and the visibility to make a real difference," she said.

The Hlonipheka Initiative exemplifies the transformative power of international partnerships, local organizations, and passionate individuals working together to promote dignity, empowerment, and hope for children with disabilities in Eswatini. Through this collaboration, the lives of children with disabilities are being transformed, offering them not only the chance to walk but also the opportunity to lead fuller and more dignified lives.

"These are children who have never walked before, but thanks to Hlonipheka, they will now have the chance to walk, and their families' lives will be transformed in ways they never thought possible."



Joanne Chesson of the Libumba Initiative.

"It's about more than just immediate relief, it's about creating lasting change and ensuring that these children and their families have the support they need for a better future."

DPMO and UNFPA's Collaborated Effort for a Strengthened Prosecutors' Response to GBV



From 11 to 13 September 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and UNFPA held a training workshop for prosecutors and desk officers involved in the handling of sexual and domestic violence cases. Participants, selected from all four regions of Eswatini ranged from police officers, advocates and prosecutors and the Director Public Prosecutions (DPP), engaged in a capacity building sessions aimed at improving the prosecution of gender-based violence cases as guided by the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence (SODV) Act of 2018.

Other pieces of legislation that were used during the workshop were the National Constitution (2005) and the Marriage Act. Reports of violence in Eswatini are increasing, and the training came at a time where prosecutions of GBV cases have become a priority in the justice system. Data shows that in Eswatini 15% of adolescent girls and young women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence during childhood, compared to 21% of boys, according to Phumzile Dlamini, UNICEF's Child Protection Specialist.

One in four adolescent girls and young women in Eswatini have experienced sexual violence before the age of 13. These incidents are frequently perpetrated by individuals known to the victims, often within familiar environments. "The prevalence of violence against women affects all sectors of society, regardless of social or economic status," said a workshop facilitator.

"The most common forms of GBV in Eswatini include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as sexual harassment. These forms of violence occur in homes, workplaces, and public spaces."

During the workshop, DPP, Ms. Lomvula Hlophe, highlighted the challenges prosecutors face, particularly the withdrawal of statements by victims. "Violence is a dangerous cycle," Hlophe explained. "Many victims report abuse but later withdraw their statements, often after reconciling with their partners. Unfortunately, this cycle repeats itself, and we end up losing many women to violence." Hlophe urged police officers to take all cases seriously, warning that seemingly minor incidents can escalate into deadly violence. "These cases are often underestimated, but the unseen trauma and the potential for further violence must not be overlooked."

In rural areas, the situation is more complex. Many women in these communities have become so accustomed to violence that it is seen as a norm, making them resistant to efforts to report abuse.

“Many victims report abuse but later withdraw their statements, often after reconciling with their partners. Unfortunately, this cycle repeats itself, and we end up losing many women to violence.”

A Royal Eswatini Police Service desk officer noted, “In some rural areas, women defend the very practices that harm them. They view domestic violence as a normal part of life, and they resist attempts to change that.” This deeply ingrained mindset, combined with the perception of bias in gender rights, complicates efforts to encourage men to report abuse and women to break free from cycles of violence. The workshop emphasized the need for a balanced approach that takes into account both legal and cultural contexts.

As Eswatini continues its fight against GBV, initiatives like this workshop, supported by UNFPA, represent a critical step in strengthening the legal response and ensuring that justice is served for all survivors of violence. This will be further enhanced through the ongoing efforts on transitioning from paper based GBV data collection to digital information management system for ease of tracking and management of GBV cases nationwide. UNFPA’s technical and financial support through the provision of 20 desktop computers in support of GBV data collection is applauded by the Government of Eswatini.



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