

Sierra Leone

Update on the context and situation of children

The implementation of the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL)-UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation (CPC) 2020–2023, an integral part of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020–2023, continued in 2022. The UNSDCF outlines UN contributions to GoSL’s efforts to achieve its Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023 within the framework of African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with its principle of “Leaving No One Behind”. Key achievements within this framework in 2022 are in Section 2 below. on “Major Contributions and Drivers of Results”.

With no deterioration in the COVID-19 situation and in the absence of large-scale emergencies, schools remained open throughout 2022. The provision of institutional, community-based health and other social services for children and women continued uninterrupted. GoSL continued to demonstrate political commitment and strengthened the enabling environment for the advancement of child rights. The first ever health summit, organized with the support of UNICEF and development partners and chaired by the President, not only showed commitment but also produced an aide memoire charting the way towards achievement of Universal Health Coverage and SDG 3[1]. The Minister of Health and Sanitation used the opportunity of co-chairing the World Health Assembly side event on Child Survival Action to call for and initiate better donor coordination and strengthen the targeting of interventions to accelerate progress on child and maternal mortality reduction. While under-five mortality rate (U5MR) dropped from about 110 to 104.6 per 1,000 live births between 2013 and 2019[2], such an initiative is needed to accelerate progress towards the 45 per 1,000 live births target set in the CPC 2020–2023 and address inequities between urban and rural areas. This is also true for maternal mortality rates which improved from the 2013 baseline of 1,165 per 100,000 live births[3] to 717 in 2019[4] but needs accelerated progress to reach the 2023 target of 582.5 per 100,000 live births.

Preparation of the Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2022 -2026 was completed in 2022 with a strong focus on equity through the concept of radical inclusion[5] as part of the Government’s Human Capital Development programme. Launch of the ‘National Commitment to Foundational Learning’ by the President in June and his leadership in the UN Secretary General’s “Transforming Education Summit” in September, provided high visibility to education issues. This renewed the country’s commitment to achieve SDG 4 and good progress is witnessed in access to basic education although challenges remain with the quality and preparation of children for learning in the foundational years[6].

In a move with strong positive medium to long-term implications for gender equality (SDG5) and reduction of inequalities (SDG10), GoSL, in November 2022, enacted a Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment Act that makes mainstreaming of gender issues across all sectors in the country compulsory and mandates, among other measures, at least 30 per cent of female representation across all levels of the public sector (including Parliament) and private businesses with 25 or more employees.

Sierra Leone faced strong economic challenges in 2022. With a provisional end of year GDP growth rate of 2.8 per cent compared to 2.9 in 2021, the anticipated continuation of growth in GDP did not materialise in 2022[7],[8]. The global rise in food and fuel prices and its effects on domestic prices, combined with the depreciation of the Leone, resulted in higher inflation during the year. Inflation rose to 29.4 per cent from 17.9 per cent in 2021. Though a systematic analysis of impact is yet to be completed, there is concern that the economic situation could push more children and their families across the poverty line and jeopardize government’s capacity to finance implementation of a National

Social Protection Bill which was validated in 2022 with the support of UNICEF and expected to be enacted into law in 2023 to, among other things, fight poverty (SDG1).

While there were no large-scale emergencies in Sierra Leone in 2022, the country dealt with urban fire disasters, floods, and a measles outbreak that affected more than 2,000 families and called for humanitarian responses. UNICEF provided technical assistance to the Government's National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) to ensure that affected children and their families received timely assistance (including psychosocial counselling and support) to prevent disruptions in learning and development and in availability and access to basic services. The absence of a large-scale emergency in 2022 provided an opportunity to consolidate the humanitarian-development nexus with investments to fight COVID-19 also providing longer-term development benefits. For example, funding for COVID-19 response from the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) supported installation of three new oxygen plants in Makeni, Bo, and Kenema Hospitals for treatment of severe COVID-19 cases. The plants are providing better treatment outcomes for non-COVID-19 patients who require medical oxygen, including children with pneumonia, mothers with birth complications and sick newborns, with projected overall improvement in the lives of children and women.

[1] <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> - List of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

[2] Levels and Trends in Child Mortality, Report 2021, Estimates developed by the UN Inger-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation

[3] Sierra Leone Demographic Health and Survey, (SLDHS 2013)

[4] Sierra Leone Demographic Health and Survey, (SLDHS 2019)

[5] GoSL defines radical inclusion as the intentional inclusion of persons directly or indirectly excluded (from education) due to actions or inactions by individuals, society, or institutions. These include but not limited to the historically marginalized groups: pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children from rural and underserved areas, and children from low-income families (National Radical Inclusion Policy 2021)

[6] From 2017 to 2021: gross enrolment ratio (pre-primary) increased from 12.6 to 24 per cent, transition rate between primary and lower-secondary education improved from 75 to 97.6 percent, and completion rate of primary and lower secondary education went up from 64.2 to 92 per cent.

[7] Report On The 2021 and 2022 Real Gross Domestic Product (RGDP) Figures At 2006 Prices, Statistics Sierra Leone

[8] 2023 National Budget Speech, Ministry of Finance

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF is committed to four KRCs[1] as catalytic priorities to drive its contributions to achievement of the SDGs in Sierra Leone: (1) equitable and sustainable access to education for all children (KRC3), (2) improved learning outcomes (KRC4), (3) accelerating efforts to reduce, prevent, and respond to child marriage (KRC6), and (4) accelerate birth registration (KRC7)[2]. Starting in 2022, work on these priorities and other UNICEF-supported initiatives in the country were undertaken in line with the strategic direction provided by the UNICEF Strategic Plan (SP) 2022–2025, the successor to the SP 2018–2021. This section is organised around the five goal areas of the SP 2022-2025 and some notes on cross-cutting drivers of results, including management excellence within UNICEF.

SP Goal Area 1: Every Child Survives and Thrives

In 2022, a strategic shift from the traditional workshop-approach to competency-based practical mentoring and coaching, complemented by systems strengthening and enforcement of an accountability framework, continued to drive results, especially in the areas of community health,

digital health, neonatology and paediatrics, elimination of mother-to-child HIV transmission, and supply chain management. For Vitamin A supplementation, for instance, the approach was instrumental to an increase in 2022- Semester-1 coverage of 78 per cent (1,038,058 children aged 6-59 months) compared to 45 per cent in 2021 while Semester 2 performance improved to 64 per cent (or 742,963 children aged 12-59 months), up from 33 per cent in 2021 (KRC2). The same capacity building approach, combined with UNICEF's expertise and comparative advantage in supply chain management, maintained a high cure rate of 99 per cent or 39,814 out of 40,229 discharged (per SPHERE standards) in the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) programme performance for severe acute malnutrition (SAM) between January and September 2022, supporting the fight against stunting and its negative effects on child development and mortality.

In continuation of efforts to strengthen equity-oriented services as a driver of leaving no child behind, over 8,000 newly recruited Community Health Workers (CHWs) benefited from pre-service training oriented towards hard-to-reach communities, per the revised CHW policy. This contributed in 92 per cent of children 0-11 months being vaccinated with three doses of DTP-containing Penta vaccine in 2022 compared to 91 per cent in 2021, thereby maintaining the KRC1 target of 90 per cent. The HPV vaccine was successfully introduced in October 2022 and 177,537 girls aged 10 years (117 per cent of the target) were reached by piggybacking on the network and community-based social and behaviour approaches put in place for COVID-19 vaccine deployment. Co-delivery of HPV and COVID-19 vaccination further increased COVID-19 vaccine uptake among the target population of persons 12 years and older, resulting in Sierra Leone meeting the end-of-year target of 70 per cent.

SP Goal Area 2: Every child learns and acquires skills for the future

The Government's commitment to Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme, as noted in Section 1 above, was a strong driver of results in the education sector in 2022 (KRC3 and KRC4). This, combined with UNICEF's technical support and advisory capacity and government's progressive removal of financial barriers, led to an increase in gross enrolment rate of pre-primary education from 20.6 in 2021 to 24 per cent in 2022[3],[4], nearly doubling the 2017 figure of 12.6 per cent and surpassing the KRC target of 23 per cent.

This performance is being accompanied by the expansion of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres with funding from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to start the construction of 29 ECD centres that will bring the number constructed since 2020 to 101 and bring the total pre-primary school centres available in the country to 1,984. The Gross enrolment at the primary school level increased from 137 to 152 per cent between 2021 and 2022, indicating that a large number of under- and over-aged students enrolled at that level. The corresponding figures for the junior secondary level over the same period are 78 to 97 per cent respectively. The gross primary completion rate increased from 83.6 to 95 per cent between 2021 and 2022 though the number of out-of-school girls tends to increase as they move from lower to upper secondary school. Sierra Leone achieved an overall Gender Parity Index of 1:02 at all levels except at the senior secondary level. Building on the updated Out-of-School Children (OOSC) study noted in the 2021 edition of this report, UNICEF supported the development and launch of the National Strategy for OOSC in Sierra Leone as an important lever to implement the Government's radical inclusion policy and the 'leave-no-child-behind' agenda.

Regarding quality of education, the key drivers of results, include the availability of learning materials, training and capacity building of teachers, and access to safe learning spaces. UNICEF provided learning materials to 200 pre-primary schools to enhance early learning for 21,700 children. Furthermore, to ensure the full functionality of pre-primary schools, UNICEF supported the training of an additional 988 ECD teachers (82 per cent female) and the number of qualified teachers for pre-primary increased by 22 per cent to bring the teacher-pupil ratio from 1:44 in 2019 to 1:39 in 2022. Cumulatively, since the current CPC started in 2020, UNICEF support has helped train 68 per cent of all Early grade teachers in Sierra Leone (4,305 out of 6,287) in early learning pedagogies.

SP Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

In 2022, UNICEF in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), continued to support work to reduce, prevent, and respond to child marriage (KRC6). Implementation of the National Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage Strategy (2018–2022) was reviewed to distil lessons to guide the development of a new strategy for the protection of girls and women in Sierra Leone. Legal and policy reform support by UNICEF helped to complete a draft Child Rights Act. With support from UNICEF and in partnership with key stakeholders, the government made strides towards strengthening a national protection system in the areas of governance, multi sectoral coordination, legal and policy reform, child friendly and gender responsive services, case management and information management, and tackling of social and gender norms that perpetuate harmful practices. As a result, 98,405 children (55 per cent girls and 45 per cent boys) were reached through health, social work, justice, and law enforcement services, compared to 33,425 reached in 2021.

In 2022, UNICEF used child protection and Gender Based Violence (GBV) case management as an entry point for strategic advocacy and the strengthening of multisectoral coordination and response by facilitating the revival of technical working groups (TWG) on Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) and Child Protection Information Management System+ (CPIMS+) to provide a more robust and data-informed context for the fight against GBV.

UNICEF continued to strengthen birth registration within the civil registration and vital statistics system and contributed to an increase in the number of new persons developing improved knowledge and practice on birth registration services from 21,500 in 2021 to 33,310 in 2022, thereby exceeding the annual target of 32,250. However, only 27 per cent of children under five registered received certificates due to expensive fees parents/caregivers could not afford. Advocacy is ongoing for the elimination of fees for issuance of birth registration certificates.

SP Goal Area 4: Every child uses safe and equitable WASH services and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

UNICEF successfully leveraged resources from key donors towards delivering WASH services for children. Among significant milestones is the collaboration of UNICEF with the Government of Iceland on WASH programme activities, including innovative approaches to sustainable development in fishing communities. UNICEF is also collaborating with the Government of Iceland on the joint evaluation of the WASH programme activities in fishing communities to generate useful evidence for informed decision-making in the future. Results in the WASH sector are also being driven by improvements in policy in furtherance of which UNICEF supported evidence generation through two major surveys: the National Outcome Routine Mapping (NORMS) and Hygiene Behaviour Survey, and the Institutional WASH Mapping exercises. Additionally, UNICEF provided technical assistance for development of the WASH Information Management System to generate WASH data required for informed decision making. UNICEF supported the development and launching of two national documents on sanitation, the Sanitation Policy Implementation Guidelines and the National Sanitation and Hygiene Game Plan, both key to strategic steps the country is taking to accelerate the uptake of Safely Managed Sanitation services to reach universal access by 2030.

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS), with UNICEF's support, continued to progressively scale up the Chiefdom-Wide approach to sanitation and hygiene promotion in 2022. As a result, within the reporting year, 14 new chiefdoms in six districts were certified Open Defecation Free (ODF). Data from the communities that were collected through the online data (Kobo) platform indicates that an additional 343,851 people (171,650 males and 172,201 females) making for a cumulative total of 462,975 people (231,87 females and 231,117 males) over the course of the CP that are living in 1,039

open defecation-free communities. These results support the ambition of the GoSL to end open defecation by 2025 and contributes to the achievement of KRC8 i.e., reducing the proportion of the population practicing open defecation from 18.1 per cent to 11.7 per cent, in relation to which the country was at 14.6 per cent at the end of 2022.

UNICEF carried out a Climate Landscape Analysis for Children in 2022. The report, which was completed at the end of 2022 and will be released in 2023, provides a background for more systematic discussion on the effects of climate change on children and maps the way for climate-sensitive programming. In the meantime, UNICEF has leap-frogged to provide support for climate-sensitive WASH interventions, including the design and implementation of solar powered boreholes which contribute to reducing the carbon footprint and promote the use of green energy, and the construction and rehabilitation of 25 climate resilient piped water systems (7 Gravity Fed Systems and 18 Solar Powered Motorised Systems) in semi urban and rural areas. Similarly, WASH facilities are more gender sensitive, with separate blocks of toilets for males, females and persons with disability, and with toilets meeting the specific needs of girls and women in the contexts of menstrual hygiene management and security, through the provision of safe spaces and access. New toilet blocks, including in schools, now routinely make provision for people with disabilities.

SP Goal Area 5: Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free of poverty

Every child deserves to have access to inclusive social protection and live free of poverty. In this regard, the process of finalising the national social protection strategy provided a unique opportunity to reiterate the need for stronger social protection mechanisms for children in Sierra Leone to fight poverty and its effects. According to the 2022 World Bank poverty assessment for Sierra Leone, poverty reduction has likely stagnated or even reversed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic [5] This means that more children could be pushed below the poverty line. UNICEF in 2022 supported the government in developing new multidimensional child poverty estimates, which will expectedly be released in 2023, pending further trend calculations.

In 2022, the Persons with Disabilities Act was reviewed, with technical support from UNICEF and consultations are ongoing to develop a revised system for assessment and certification of disability, with emerging agreement on components to be piloted in 2023. As that work progresses, more attention will be paid to early identification and intervention for children with disabilities, given that there are still challenges with ensuring full inclusiveness for children with disabilities or delayed development, especially in rural and hard-to-reach communities.

Cross-cutting considerations

Results for children in Sierra Leone are also being driven by UNICEF-supported advocacy initiatives with Government, development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), and young people. Formal advocacy events in 2022 included the Day of the African Child, Menstrual Hygiene Day, International Day of the Girl Child, 16 Days of Activism, World Children's Day, and World Toilet Day. Cross-cutting interventions in the areas of emergency preparedness and response, innovation, Social and Behaviour Change (SBC), adolescent/youth empowerment and strengthening of gender responsive and transformative programming were important drivers of results in 2022. During the year, UNICEF initiated partnership with the business sector to expand the range of actors advocating for and helping to drive results for children in Sierra Leone. By end of the year, UNICEF and the Chamber of Commerce and Local Content Agency had started to build an operating framework for the partnership.

The role of UNICEF's expertise in supply management has been noted earlier in this report. As an enabler of results, this expertise and capacity building support by UNICEF ensured success in strategic planning (including the timely preparation of workplan plans), decentralization for more efficient

programme implementation to drive inclusiveness, evidence generation, and knowledge management initiatives that are indispensable to achievement of results. For knowledge management, the Country Office has started to systematise implementation of UNICEF's Global Knowledge Management Medium-Term Strategy 2021-2022 to ensure that experiences learned over the course of the Country Programme are effectively documented and disseminated to relevant stakeholders based on, among others, evaluations and studies. UNICEF implemented strategic evidence-generation activities that contribute to informed decision making and programming for children. In particular, the evaluation of the ECD Programme has yielded crucial evidence that will strengthen the positioning of UNICEF and national partners in addressing issues in early childhood development by enhancing the programme's performance.

The strengthening of the humanitarian-development nexus noted at the end of the first section of this report and the benefits outlined were an important driver of results for children in Sierra Leone in 2022. With the multiple vulnerabilities the children of Sierra Leone face, the importance of Social Behaviour Change and Community Engagement (SBC-CE) in programming in both humanitarian and development situations cannot be overemphasized.

Excellence in UNICEF's internal operations and staff support and morale-enhancement initiatives in the context of them being the organization's most important asset, and as pursued and achieved based on an Annual Management Plan UNICEF were crucial drivers of results in 2022, just like in previous years. Sound financial management and participatory management practices (including regular staff-management consultations) in accordance with UN and UNICEF rules promoted zero tolerance for fraud and misuse of resources to ensure that 100 per cent of UNICEF's financial resources are devoted to results for children.

[1] There all altogether eight KRCs: (1) Immunization, (2) Prevention of Stunting, (3) Equitable and Sustainable Access to Education, (4) Improved Learning Outcomes, (5) Protection of Children from Violence, including in Humanitarian Contexts, (6) Ending Child Marriage, (7) Increased Birth Registration, and (8) Ending Open Defecation.

[2] For example, it is known that girl child education is a positive correlate of child immunization given that mothers who complete basic education are more like to have their children immunized.

[3] Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education Annual School Census 2020 Report

[4] Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education Annual School Census 2021 Report

[5] <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sierra-Leone-Poverty-Assessment-FINAL.pdf>

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF's strong brand, comparative advantage, and track record of achieving social development results continued to position it to influence, leverage partnerships, and convene stakeholders and partners from within and outside the UN system in 2022. For example, Phase 2 of the *Saving Lives in Sierra Leone* programme funded by FCDO, continued for its fifth year. This joint programme between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and a consortium of NGOs continued, in 2022, to harness the respective strengths of each of these organizations to support government capacity to deliver reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health, and nutrition services, as well as procure essential commodities under the Free Health Care initiative.

In 2022, UNICEF continued to leverage its partnership with UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning to strengthen the financial simulation model drafted in 2021 and support the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, (MTHE) prepare a credible and country-owned costed the ESP) 2022-2026 through a capacity-building hands-on iterative process (see Section 1 above for the importance of the ESP). UNICEF also collaborated with the World Bank (WB) on the Education Public Expenditure Review (PER) covering pre-primary to tertiary education.

The UNICEF/UNFPA joint implementation of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (KRC6) has been noted in Section 2 of this report. An engagement with UNDP and IOM has contributed to coordinate and harmonize support to the National Civil Registration Authority to advance the legal identity agenda within the national Civil Registration and Vital Statistics system (KRC7). Similarly, the UN joint programme on disability inclusion funded by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) started in 2021 and is implemented by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF. UNICEF is taking the lead on strengthening disability assessment and certification, while other activities such as the revision of the Persons with Disability Act have complemented UNICEF's work and created platforms for engagement with organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs). Towards the end of year, a new partnership with UNDP that brings humanitarian and development approaches together, was established to implement a joint programme funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund to help create a protective environment to contribute to peaceful pre- and post-election periods (2022-2024), as well as peaceful elections in 2023.

UNICEF, in 2022, continued to play an active role in UN governance, coordination, and technical groups, including the UN Country Team, UN Youth Thematic Team, Programme Management Team, Gender Technical Group, the UN Communication Group (chaired by UNICEF), the UN Inter Agency Emergency Preparedness and Response Group (chaired by UNICEF in 2022). These roles extended the reach of UNICEF's advocacy for child rights and contributed to the achievement of results, directly and indirectly. In the areas of advocacy and visibility, UNICEF is the chair of UN Communications Group and has provided leadership on and contributed to the rollout of key joint UN visibility events and to the development of the Crisis Communication Plan.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Following three years of implementation, an evaluation of the current CPC is scheduled for 2023. Ahead of that evaluation, the CPC theories of change developed in 2019 remain relevant. In fact, much of the experience from 2020 to date appears to confirm key assumptions of the CPC and provide a better understanding of important elements of the assumptions. One of such assumptions is the importance of effective coordination of work by government, UNICEF, and other partners for the achievement of results. It has however emerged that UNICEF often needs to play a convening role in

support of such coordination to work effectively with all stakeholders. This was the case when UNICEF coordinated work between the two government ministries responsible for education (MBSSE and MTHE), the World Bank, and FCDO to prepare the Sierra Leone ESP 2022 - 2025. The shared commitment created engendered more timely and up-to-date information flow that was crucial for all parties to play their respective roles. UNICEF replicated this successful approach to promote inter-sectorial and inter-ministerial collaboration in the school-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) pilot project and OOSC study and strategy. Monthly coordination fora brought together MBSSE, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, donors, civil society partners, and research institutes to update progress and share information around SRGBV work. The key lesson is that investment in effective coordination, though time-consuming and challenging, continues to be indispensable for achievement of more impact.

Access to financial data is a major challenge in the public sector thereby limiting the type of analyses that can be carried out. The current budget structure, which is aggregated at a high level, makes it difficult to undertake detailed analysis on child-sensitive spending based on published data. UNICEF engagement with the Ministry of Finance (MOF), leading to a mention of child budgeting in the 2022 National Budget Call Circular, is an entry point for future data input and analysis. Training of government personnel at the MOF and other sector ministries is however needed to build capacity in data and financial management area to close the gaps in data and evidence generation for decision making.

Medical equipment/device management require reasonable inputs, systems and procedures, human and technology management, monitoring and supervision for them to produce desired effects and results. While this is the responsibility of all stakeholders, particularly the MoHS, there remains need for clear governance structure at the MoHS. While such a structure is yet to be solidified, strategic inventory taking of medical equipment and devices at PHUs was rapidly completed by leveraging the countrywide cold chain equipment assessment process.

Technology, especially digital solutions, if used strategically and efficiently with clear objectives, can have transformative effects, particularly in enhancing transparency and accountability to drive sustainable development. It is in this context that there is an ongoing UNICEF-supported Digital Public Goods (DPG) initiative in Sierra Leone to assist the Government in developing, adopting, and deploying DPG products for sustainable development. For example, UNICEF supported the MoHS to develop a digital health roadmap to help the country operationalize its 2018 National Digital Health Strategy and prioritize adoption of digital health solutions to address health system bottlenecks. One of the potential digital health use cases is the 'PReSTrack' (Pregnancy registration and tracking application developed by DSTI) which can be improved to promote 'continuum of care' (through digitalizing the "Maternal and Child Health (MCH) handbook"). UNICEF and MoHS are also conceptualizing the MCH emergency room, which will maximize the use of real-time data. Once operationalized, this will be a game changer in enhancing accountability and timely actions.

UNICEF continued to lead the UNCT Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) group in 2022, taking over from WFP, and co-chaired several of the Sector Pillars within the NDMA response system (also aligned with the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)) in WASH, Education, Communication, Nutrition, Child Protection /Psychosocial Support (PSS), and contributed to coordinating the humanitarian responses (floods, urban fires and civil unrest) and building local capacities. UNICEF is also a member of the inter-pillar coordination (MDAs, UN Agencies, NGOs/CSOs). Further joint UN efforts are needed to capacitate and support the GoSL (especially the NDMA and relevant MDAs) in the field of emergency preparedness and response.

That notwithstanding, there is a need to re-focus efforts towards SBC skills development and expand skills development and integration beyond health and WASH sectors to prevent SBC work from being implemented in silos and/or in a manner that duplicates efforts and does not promote efficient use of resources. There is also a need for contextualization of SBC strategies and approaches for urban

contexts, including in use of mass and social media instead of duplication of community engagement strategies applied in rural context where the bulk of UNICEF-supported initiatives may be found.

Looking forward

The year 2022 started as the penultimate year the current CPC 2020–2023. Mid-way through however, the Government and the UN system in Sierra Leone agreed to a one-year extension of the UNSDCF and the associated CPCs involving UN agencies, funds, and programmes. The extensions were agreed to accommodate the fact that general elections are scheduled for June 2023 and, in the build up to the elections, government partners and decision makers may not be available to participate in the process of developing a new UNSDCF and the associated CPC for a new programme cycle to start in 2024. At the time of reporting, documentation for the GoSL-UNICEF CPC extension was being put together for formal approval by the UNICEF Executive Board. Unless the evaluation of the country programmes scheduled for 2023 and other evaluations point otherwise, UNICEF-supported work in 2023 and during the CPC extension year (2024) will continue to be carried out within the framework of the current GoSL-UNICEF CPC. In doing so, efforts will draw strongly on lessons learned and the momentum that had been generated by the end of 2022. Thus far, based on current state of knowledge, 2023 and 2024 should be the beginning of the post-COVID-19 era for even more rapid achievement of results for children in Sierra Leone.