

### Update on the context and situation of children

The situation of children and women in Afghanistan became increasingly precarious in 2019 amidst growing insecurity, economic challenges and socioeconomic disparities. High poverty rates (55.6 per cent) and population growth (1.8 per cent) against low economic growth (1 per cent) indicated that per capita incomes are declining while poverty is increasing. A high number of security attacks including suicide bombings and aerial strikes took place in the year. Between July and September, over 4,000 civilian casualties (31 per cent children) were reported - the highest for a single quarter since 2009. The Afghanistan Presidential Elections took place despite a series of delays resulting from organizational and security challenges. The threat of major attacks and scattered incidents leading up to the elections resulted in low voter turnout. Three months after the elections, only provisional results have been declared.

Violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including attacks on health and education facilities, targeted killings and the forced recruitment of children continue to be reported. However, the Government has shown immense political will to protect Afghan children with the passage, through Presidential Decree, of the country's first ever Child Protection law, which is aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Parliamentary approval is still awaited. About 281,914 people fled their homes and have become internally displaced - 58 per cent of whom are children and 21 per cent of whom are adult women. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) living in temporary settlements are facing difficult conditions and lack basic services. This situation has been aggravated with the influx of cross-border returnees. Since January, 496,526 undocumented and 5,000 documented Afghans returned from neighbouring countries adding pressure to already constrained resources.

A series of natural disasters, including drought, floods, landslides and earthquakes, have increased the humanitarian needs of children. In 2019, it was estimated that 3.8 million children needed humanitarian assistance. Drought and conflict caused over 3.6 million people to plummet into emergency levels of food security while increasing the number of children affected by Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM). In 2019, an estimated two million children under the age of five and 485,000 pregnant and lactating women were affected by acute malnutrition of which 600,000 children were affected by SAM. Overall, about 37 per cent of children under five years are stunted and over 30 per cent of adolescent girls are anaemic. Although the maternal mortality rate (638 mothers per 100,000 live births) and newborn mortality rates (37.1 newborns per 1000 live births) were high in Afghanistan, access to maternal, newborn and child health services more than doubled in 2019. However, challenges remain with only 36.8 per cent of women receiving postnatal care and 56.3 per cent giving birth in a health facility. While progress has been made in increasing access to routine immunizations, about half of all children remain unvaccinated. Factors obstructing the uptake of immunization services include national bans on vaccinations, geographical distance of communities from health facilities, inadequate facilities to store and distribute vaccines, and the absence of female vaccinators. Polio cases increased from 21 in 2018 to 28 in 2019, however, the portion of missed children in high-risk districts reduced to 2.54 per cent from 3.82 per cent in 2018. The increase in cases is attributed to bans on house-to-house campaigns by Anti-Government Elements and mistrust by communities towards vaccinations, particularly in areas where communities are deprived of other essential services. To address this, UNICEF and partners are developing an integrated package of basic services including water, sanitation, education and nutrition.

About 3.7 million, or one third, of school-aged children are out-of-school, with two million in conflict or disaster-affected areas. The fear of violence has forced parents to take pre-emptive measures to protect their children from harm by keeping them from going to school. There was a 45 per cent increase in attacks against schools and personnel between 2018 and 2019. Due to fear of attacks, 1,012 schools were closed depriving 499,552 children (329,133 boys and 170,419 girls) from learning opportunities. Girls - who are already less likely to go to school - have been particularly impacted in this regard with 2.2 million school-aged girls out of school. About 64 per cent of Afghans have access to clean drinking water - a marked improvement from 20 per cent a decade ago. However, 60 per cent of the rural population still lacks access to improved and safe sanitation. Millions of children are being impacted by unsafe WASH environments, with evidence from a 2015 survey that 50 per cent of schools don't have clean drinking water and 33 per cent lack sanitation facilities. Limited knowledge and harmful cultural norms around menstruation, combined with inadequate WASH facilities in schools, are hampering the attendance of adolescent girls. Conflict and violence have further exposed women and girls to abuse, including gender-based violence. Meanwhile harmful cultural practices often entail the imposition of strict gender segregation rules and restricted mobility, thereby compromising access to healthcare, nutrition, education and protection services. A 2018 study on child marriage revealed that the practice remains prevalent in the country with 46 per cent of surveyed women being married before the age of 18.

The security environment, weak infrastructure and extreme geographical terrains coupled with widely scattered communities resulted in obstacles reaching beneficiaries, collecting data and monitoring results. Of 398 districts, 119 are out of the Government's control while 103 districts have been assessed as hardest to reach. In response, UNICEF and partners pushed for innovative approaches to ensure that no child is left behind. A fully functional service delivery system that combines facility-based and mobile services along with widespread social and mass media presence has not only

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allowed access but expanded outreach. The office is now adding two outposts to the existing five field offices and six outposts to reach the most remote and deprived communities. Therefore, given that the situation is unlikely to stabilize in the near future, partners are continuing to plan and implement with a combination of dedication and creativity to serve all Afghan children.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

#### Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

In 2019, 7.4 million individuals (1.4 million infants with routine primary vaccinations, and 6 million women of child-bearing age) were reached with timely vaccinations. UNICEF continued to procure all childhood vaccines for Afghanistan with no stock outs throughout the year. Despite challenges related to power supply, vaccine storage facility temperatures remained in the recommended range for 97 per cent of the time. Environmentally-friendly and cost-effective solar-powered cold chain equipment is being installed with 471 refrigerators installed and more planned for 2020, ensuring long-term sustainability. EPI messages were disseminated via mass media, while a network of over 3,000 religious leaders and 8,000 immunization communicators were trained to disseminate messages on the importance of vaccinations. A National EPI Communication Strategy was finalized and supported with a capacity building plan to create in-country capacity and sustainability in the future. In coordination with Health Cluster partners and Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) over 1.4 million women and children under five were reached in remote areas through 75 mobile outreaches providing antenatal care, postnatal care, immunisation and medical treatments including Integrated Management of New-born and Childhood Illnesses (IMNCI) e.g. pneumonia, diarrhoea and new-born complications. Capacity development initiatives ensured that 227 health facilities across the country can effectively provide IMNCI services. Eight previously-established newborn care units in provincial and district hospitals continued to provide care to newborns. More than one million children under five years of age with diarrhoea were provided with ORS/Zinc co-pack at the community level through Community Health Workers, increasing the use of Zinc among diarrhoea cases from 9.6 per cent to 36.6 per cent. Over 1.02 million individuals in humanitarian crisis and those living in hard-to-reach areas benefitted from UNICEF supported Primary Health Care services through various service delivery models. This includes 233,032 pregnant women and newborns who were supported with maternal and newborn care services. Polio cases increased to 28 from 21 in 2018, with cases emerging from the underserved and access-constrained areas of Southern and Eastern Regions. The increase was partly due to a nation-wide ban on vaccinations by Anti-Government Elements (AGEs). Although the ban was lifted in August, house-to-house campaigns are still prohibited. UNICEF adapted by implementing a site-to-site and facility-to-facility strategy, while engaging with AGEs locally to facilitate access. Nevertheless, about 10 million doses of polio vaccine were provided to children under five in high-risk polio provinces. To address misinformation and engage cultural and religious influencers to build a cadre of well-informed vaccine advocates, a national communication strategy was developed. The Immunization Communication Network (ICN) of over 7,000 outreach workers and influencers worked to reduce refusals. Resultantly, 53 per cent of children missed due to absences and 26 per cent missed due to refusals in Very High-Risk Districts were vaccinated, reducing the portion of missed children in high-risk districts to 2.54 per cent from 3.82 in 2018. The ICN also referred 324,380 children for basic services including routine immunization and birth registration. The 2018 drought that had lasting consequences into mid-2019. About 8.6 million children and adolescents were reached with nutritional support, including the treatment of 302,638 children under five (166,203 girls, 136,435 boys) for Severe-Acute Malnutrition (SAM) with an 83 per cent cured rate. Responding to the shortfall in Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF), UNICEF is testing a new protocol which revises the dosage of RUTF, aiming to reduce the amount needed for a child to recover by one-third. Preliminary analysis of data generated in locations piloting the protocol indicate that lower amounts of RUTF used for treatment may have similar outcomes as standard protocols. The growth of over 565,000 children was monitored to identify nutritional deficits through the Community-Based Nutrition Package. This also empowered caregivers, with counselling on infant feeding practices delivered by women, to ensure availability of these support services to mothers and caregivers. Two evaluations of the nutrition programme, including on community-based nutrition, were undertaken and will help identify pathways to improve service delivery in 2020. For micronutrient supplementation, 7,691,591 children aged 6-59 months received Vitamin A supplements during polio National Immunization Days, which was less than the target (79 per cent reached) largely due to persistent bans on immunization campaigns. Alternative distribution channels are now being explored. Over one million adolescent girls were provided Weekly Iron Folic Acid Supplementation (WIFS). The programme was expanded to Accelerated Learning Centres (ALCs) to reach marginalized adolescent girls. UNICEF and the Ministry of Education are now on the cusp of launching a consolidated database on WIFS to enhance forecasting, distribution and monitoring, and will help ensure that stock is maintained whilst also collecting other routine education data. The National Public Nutrition Strategy (2019-2023) was launched and is fully aligned with the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A). Together, the two strategies form a comprehensive platform for multisectoral programming and will ensure long-term sustainability and cost-effectiveness of services and interventions to address the poor nutritional situation in Afghanistan. UNICEF supported a dedicated event for the Global Nutrition Cluster, in which humanitarian-development nexus achievements and opportunities for returns in investing in nutrition were presented to members and donors in Brussels. Advocating on global platforms is expected to be instrumental to help attract much-needed investment.

### Goal 2: Every child learns

Children's access to learning opportunities, even in insecure environments, was improved through Community-Based Education (CBE): a proven means to reach children who are unable to attend formal schools due to insecurity, distance or other constraints. In 2019, 131,591 children (51 per cent girls) were attending 4,965 Community-Based Schools, ALCs, and Early Childhood Development classes. UNICEF directly supports 80 per cent of the CBE classes in Afghanistan. An evaluation recommended scale-up, citing that due to the success of CBE, demand is exceeding supply. With girls representing 60 per cent of out-of-school children in Afghanistan, UNICEF supported the launch of the first-ever Girls' Education Policy, while facilitating sector coordination for enhanced coherence and synergies among partners to ensure girls stay in school. Through the Girls' Access to Teacher Education (GATE) Scholarship Programme, 887 female students received scholarships to be trained and serve as teachers in some of the most marginalized provinces with higher gender disparities. Field monitoring and anecdotal reports indicate increased enrolment and retention rates of girls in schools with female teachers, hence contributing to efforts to reduce gender disparities in education. The foundation for improved learning quality was laid through the development of a National Assessment Framework with roll-out planned in 2020. Under this framework, 4,291 teachers, technical extenders and academic supervisors (24 per cent women) were equipped with the skills to conduct classroom assessments to improve learning outcomes. The procurement and distribution of teaching and learning materials reached 1,325,296 (51 per cent girls) first grade students in formal schools and 24,262 children in 1,013 pre-school classes. The environment in 92 ALCs was improved with the installation of WASH facilities and the training of 100 teachers, and 92 School Management Shura (SMS) members on hygiene promotion. The growing attacks on education resulted in strengthened collaborations between partners to bolster the Education in Emergency (EiE) response. An EiE response package was developed along with a comprehensive School Safety Framework. A total of 209,326 children (55 per cent girls) were accommodated at temporary learning centres. Furthermore, 148,210 children (58 per cent girls) were able to continue learning through 4,542 temporary learning spaces.

### Goal 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

A presidential decree was issued on the country's first law protecting child rights, which is aligned with the CRC. A National Child Protection Strategy was also devised in the year. The law and strategy have not just put child protection in the legal ambit for the first time, they signal a sustained, costed effort to protect every child from violence and exploitation. The Council of Ministers has mandated Free Legal Aid for all children in conflict with the law, with compulsory psychosocial support and psychological counselling for children in detention. More than 1,700 children detained on non-terrorist related offences benefited from this package of services. UNICEF and Ministry of Interior also partnered to introduce mandatory courses on "Child Friendly Policing" to ensure that police officers are aware of the rights of children in police custody. Continued advocacy and partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) strengthened country ownership and commitment to child protection, demonstrated by a 47 per cent increase in the child protection budget for 2019–2020. Under a new regulative framework, which made the registration of newborns receiving routine immunization in health facilities compulsory, about 500 health professionals were trained on birth registration procedures resulting in a 30 per cent increase in birth registrations (553,191 children, including 264,475 girls) over last year. UNICEF directly supported 92 social workers while advocating with the Government to double its self-funded social worker positions to 245 to meet the increasing demand. Child Protection Action Networks (CPANS) in 34 provinces identified over 50,000 cases of children in dire circumstances and referred 18,878 (15,268 boys and 3,610 girls) of them to case managers and social workers for support. With the success of this community-based network, MoLSA standardized performance evaluation criteria and standards of service provision for social workers and case managers. Leveraging mass and social media platforms, over 2 million people were reached with messages on child protection violations stemming from harmful social practices and structural inequalities. Over 247,900 people listened to sermons delivered by 700 Religious leaders on child marriage, gender-based violence, child recruitment and violence. Over 3,035 grave violations against children were documented with over 86 per cent verified, with support provided to children and families who experienced these violations. For instance, 700 children maimed by remnants of war received prosthetic limbs; 266 child combatants released or captured from armed opposition groups received reintegration services, and 55,000 children received explosive weapons risk education. About 140 out of 211 children detained on security charges were released after the Juvenile Court hearing cases of children detained on "terrorism charges" was transferred from an adult prison to a Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre, creating a more supportive environment for detained children. Under UNICEF's humanitarian work, 3,300 unaccompanied minors who were deported from Turkey, Iran, Gulf States, Pakistan and Europe, to Afghanistan were reunited with their families; 400 children were prevented from being recruited in the Afghanistan National Police; and around 65,000 children received psychosocial support in 245 Child Friendly Spaces. In addition, 100,000 primary caregivers in displaced communities received community-based mental health and psychosocial support.

### Goal 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

With a focus on increasing sustainable access of communities to drinking water and sanitation, 393,366 people (including 198,178 women) in 870 communities declared free of open defecation began living in safe and hygienic environments. To aid this achievement, 9,981 latrines were built and 29,926 were upgraded by communities without financial subsidy,

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suggesting the effectiveness of the Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach. CLTS and hygiene training packages were revised in accordance with global CLTS principles and the Government's commitment to make Afghanistan Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2025. About 150 of the newly-ODF communities are in urban slums of Kandahar province, where environmental samples of poliovirus were positive. Increasing 140 per cent over last year, a total of 282,286 people (including 142,223 women) in 137 communities gained access to improved drinking water through sustainable, low emission water supply systems, including gravity-fed and solar-powered piped systems. This accounted for 94 per cent of all completed water supply systems in 2019. These solutions will increase resilience to climate change and reduce the carbon footprint. In schools, 84,466 students (including 34,998 girls) from 43 high-schools in 11 provinces and 92 ALCs acquired access to safe drinking water, segregated sanitary toilets and hand-washing facilities, protecting them against diseases related to hygiene and sanitation. Improved WASH infrastructure was provided to 11 healthcare facilities. For the sustainability of these interventions, UNICEF and partners designed standards for WASH in Schools, which will be rolled out in 2020. About 91,122 girls and 2,025 teachers in 64 schools in provinces with low female enrolment were trained on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) guidelines developed by UNICEF, reducing risk of dropout amongst adolescent girls by challenging taboos and educating them on good MHM practices. About 21,130 girls utilized MHM facilities in 43 schools. Meanwhile, Global Handwashing Day and Girls' Hygiene Day were celebrated under the slogan – 'It is time for action' to raise national awareness of the importance of girls' hygiene and the urgency of this public health issue. Handwashing Day was celebrated across 22 provinces, reaching 195,000 students (111,098 girls), while Girl's Hygiene Day reached 91,122 girls with MHM information. UNICEF and other cluster partners provided access to safe drinking water to 290,680 people (including 141,852 women) through emergency and resilience services, including through 14 durable water supply projects. A total of 79,360 people accessed gender-sensitive sanitation facilities and 342,315 people (of 200,000 targeted) benefitted from hygiene awareness in conflict and drought-affected areas.

### Goal 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life

In 2019 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report was completed and its findings on child poverty were instrumental to reviving the dormant social protection programme in Afghanistan. Current discussions between UNICEF and partners are focusing on how MPI can be linked with a wider set of Public Finance for Children activities. Trend analysis is ongoing, with potential to inform national policy formulation. This along with the progress made towards developing an integrated social protection policy represent movement towards social protection system strengthening. Afghanistan was also selected by EMOPS as one of the pilot countries for the UN Common Cash Initiative in early 2019. Consequently, UNICEF is building its capacity on cash-based interventions to increasingly integrate cash-based modalities in humanitarian response as a means of reducing the impact of the multiple shocks to which vulnerable population groups, especially children, are subject to.

### Programme Effectiveness

With the re-structuring of the Social Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (SPPME) section to Social Policy, Evaluation, Analytics and Research (SPEAR), Planning and Monitoring (PM) and Resource Mobilization (RM) sections, the office embarked on a review of roles, guidance, SOPs and frameworks to ensure that there was clarity of roles across the board, and to strengthen programme delivery and raise quality and standards of planning, monitoring and reporting. The preparations for the internal audit provided an opportunity for reviewing these processes and streamlining them for more efficient programming. The quality and timeliness of reporting has improved, and several donor proposals were submitted, many of which garnered resources despite human resource challenges in the RM unit. A new RM strategy and action plan were developed to focus on mobilizing resources for the duration of the extension of the country programme.

Gender focused programming was strengthened with the ACO's Gender Action Plan (GAP) which contextualizes the priorities in the global GAP 2.0 and is aligned with individual programme priorities. To ensure that ACO is on track to deliver on this, capacity building of staff was also undertaken.

Communication for Development has focused on some system strengthening work which has been specifically targeted to certain priority results such as girls' education and child marriage, laying the foundation for the development of a strategy in 2020 that is more inclusive and addresses the entire country programme.

In 2019, the office stepped up the advocacy and communication through social media and at various platforms internationally, to restore attention to Afghanistan's children. The global campaigns on End Violence, Children Uprooted and CRC@30 provided opportunities to focus the attention to Afghanistan's children. The Child Alert launched in December generated 200 stories and reached over 162,718,123 people. Through the use compelling and emotional visuals that tell the stories of children; shareable assets with links to influencers; use of local language as well as riding the waves of regional and global campaigns, more than 35 million people have been reached through social media platforms.

ACO continued to respond to the drought affected from 2018 and the flood affected in 2019. As the year progressed, strategies were developed and actioned in WASH and Nutrition to translate the emergency response to sustainable durable solutions for the affected communities. The Field Offices continued to be the frontline implementers of the programme and

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the revised accountability framework clarified their increased accountabilities in implementation and monitoring. ACO continued to be a strong voice at the Humanitarian Country Team, not just through our leadership of Education, Nutrition and WASH clusters and Child Protection sub-cluster, but also through membership at the HCT and a seat at the table of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) Board.

In addition to the reviews and revisions of processes, the country office also undertook a review of the Flagships which concluded that the priorities outlined in the CPD still held true and therefore prioritization should be on all of these and not on a select few. Building on the lessons learned from the flagship approach, which contributed to greater inter-sectoral planning and collaboration, multi-sectoral proposals have been increasing, paving the way for more integrated programming in 2020.

### Management Effectiveness

A new budgetary control system was introduced to improve the efficient management of 171 operations staff and the \$15 million non-staff budget, to better forecast future fixed and variable costs to aid resource planning. A new central warehouse compound was constructed to better coordinate logistics, improve stock security, and provide additional contingency capacity for the land-locked country. A rolling three-year field office capital infrastructure plan was introduced to facilitate and support programme planning and implementation, including the upgrading of two outposts to allow international staff residence and the development of two new secure outposts in the difficult Southern Region. A gender recruitment strategy was implemented to address short and long-term staff gender imbalances with 10 female, national UNVs recruited. In addition, the roll out of practical country specific ethics training courses was started, and a new on-site staff medical unit was contracted and implemented to aid staff well-being, augment business continuity planning, and fulfil the offices hardship duty station duty of care to its staff.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

Upon careful review of the results achieved over the year, theories of change in the strategy notes were seen to be credible and remain valid. However, readjustments to programme implementation were made based on foreseen and unforeseen events in Afghanistan.

#### Innovative Approaches

**Creative programming in unpredictable settings:** In the unpredictable operating environment of Afghanistan, UNICEF followed a 'risk-informed programming' approach to adapt programmes to rapidly meet the needs of populations affected by conflict and disasters. In response to the ban on house-to-house visits for polio vaccinations, the programme found a way to adapt by implementing the innovative site-to-site and facility-to-facility campaign strategy. National bans are also impacting Vitamin A supplementation, and an alternative approach whereby supplements are integrated in routine services is now being explored.

The shortage of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food is being addressed by new protocols that revise its dosage and thereby make it possible to reach maximum children with the nutrients they need to recover. The education programme is moving from facility-based to flexible modalities such as the Community Based Education to bring education to out-of-school children in remote areas. In this way, a key lesson learned in the year was the need for re-prioritization, where necessary, of UNICEF funds, staff and supplies to ensure no child is left behind.

**Innovative use of available resources:** The Afghanistan Country Office continues to face constraints in generating enough funds to address the huge needs. There is a need to make more strategic investments into high-yielding, cost-effective and sustainable interventions. A long-term investment in drought resistant water supply facilities had multiple benefits; it removed short-term fixes like water trucking, provided access to safe water supply to adjoining communities, reduced the number of IDPs in search of safe water services and allowed humanitarian resources to be utilized for other durable solutions. Meanwhile, investing in solar-powered water supply systems is another cost-effective strategy in addition to being climate friendly and sustainable.

**Streamline Service Provision:** An important innovation that improved service provision and management of diarrhoea, a disease that is a major contributor of child mortality in Afghanistan, was the introduction of co-packaged ORS and Zinc. Both items are critical to diarrhoea management, and both have traditionally been provided separately. This simple act of co-packaging supplemented with awareness raising campaigns increased the utilization of Zinc and ORS by four folds in a span of three years (9.6 per cent in 2015 to 36.6 per cent in 2018). A formal evaluation of this programme is planned for 2020, for eventual commercialization, thereby fostering potential UNICEF-private partnerships.

**Community Empowerment:** Community engagement and participation is fundamental to UNICEF Afghanistan's

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implementation strategy. The success of the Community Led Total Sanitation in leading to the declaration of five districts as open defecation free in 2019 is evidence for this. One novel idea that helped to limit the burden on both UNICEF and government personnel was in the capacity building of mothers to recognize early signs of malnutrition in children through measurement of the child's Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC). Over 15,000 mothers and caregivers were trained in three districts in Herat and equipped with MUAC tapes, measurement and referral skills, resulting in an increase of 220 per cent in admissions for treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition.

### **Lessons Learned**

There are lessons to be learned from a more strategic use of limited personnel. For instance, it is often more efficient to build on synergies and strengths of a workforce from other programmes, especially in the same geographic areas. In one instance, modules on best parenting practices were added to the training courses for community-based mobile health teams, Child Friendly Space facilitators, and teachers in IDP communities, who have the potential to reach over 300,000 people with parenting messages. In another instance, non-emergency personnel from existing government structures, including social workers, were redirected to serve displaced populations during the emergency response to drought. Similarly, social workers, police officers, CPAN members were all reassigned for emergency response on need basis. However, this approach put a strain on government personnel; a challenge that was mitigated when the process was revised so government workers assessed and referred people and then contracted NGOs for specialized services.

**Increased integration:** There is a strong case for increased integration between programmes, not just because it reduces the burden on resources, but also because it yields high returns. For instance, the provision of WASH services in polio high-risk areas will help to stop the transmission of the virus from contaminated water sources. The C4D unit designed a programme whereby kindergartens were used as platforms to disseminate messages on health, nutrition and WASH behaviours, as well as forming a stepping stone for Early Childhood Development programming. After the March 2019 floods, it was found that a series of siloed response activities were taking place with no coordination between humanitarian partners. To mitigate this in the future, an Emergency Preparedness and Response training on integrated services for emergency preparedness and response was organized, after which, Emergency Preparedness Plans underpinned by integrated response measures were prepared.

**Strategic communication:** Having famous personalities, local influencers and community leaders take on the advocacy messages for children's rights significantly aided awareness raising, demand generation and resource mobilization. The First Lady's involvement not only helped to break cultural taboos around menstruation, but also brought five line ministries together to deliberate the national rollout of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) guidelines. After this, the first ever MHM guideline and promotion packages were translated to local languages and disseminated across 22 provinces. To carry awareness raising interventions forward, there is an opportunity here to hold trainings for teachers and female members of religious organizations to act as MHM champions and disseminate MHM and hygiene messages. A key lesson learned during the year is that stakeholders, community members and donors alike, must be engaged through the entire cycle of programming, and not just at key events and at certain points in time to not lose momentum at any point.