

## Belize

### Part 1: Situation update in the country

UNICEF Belize's Country Programme was implemented in the context of the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework 2017-2021 (UNMSDF), the joint regional effort to tackle priorities affecting 17 English and Dutch speaking countries of the Caribbean. The framework aims to enhance development results and impact by combining the comparative advantages of the UN System within a single strategic framework.

Belize has a young population. In 2018, the total population was estimated at 398,050, of which an estimated 184,450 (46 per cent) were 0 to 19 years old. Slightly less than half the child population were girls, and 55 per cent of the total population lived in rural settings.

In 2019, the Government, led by the United Democratic Party, will initiate its penultimate year of a third five-year mandate. On 10 April, 2019, Belizeans will hold a referendum to vote on whether to take the question of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize to the International Court of Justice for resolution.

Belize is classified as an upper middle income country, but more than 40 per cent of Belizeans and half of all children below the age of 15 years live in absolute poverty. Like many other small island and developing states, Belize is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and to the effects of climate change. The country incurs an estimated average loss of 4 per cent of GDP per year due to natural disasters. Limited economic data exists, but available data suggests that poverty levels are above the average for Latin America and the Caribbean and that poverty levels in rural areas are twice the level of urban areas. Since Hurricane Earl hit Belize in 2016, UNICEF and the UN system have continued to work actively with national and local government and civil society partners to strengthen disaster preparedness and response mechanisms and capacities.

The comprehensive review of the country's social protection programmes undertaken in 2016 indicated that there were 48 such financial support, social assistance, social insurance and social service programmes in Belize. The Ministry of Education has provided secondary school subsidies to all schools in Toledo and Stan Creek districts since 2009. In 2018, the subsidies were extended to Corozal district. Public social protection expenditure is still low (0.7 per cent of GDP, excluding health) and the BOOST national cash transfer programme only covers approximately 25 per cent of the people living in extreme poverty.

Belize's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is monitored and evaluated by the National Committee for Families and Children, which is the major advisory body to the Government on family and children's issues. The limited availability of official, updated data remains an important challenge to the effective monitoring of progress related to children's rights in Belize. The last Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 5) was undertaken in 2015 and released in 2017. UNICEF will support the piloting of a new MICS Plus module in 2019, and will support a National Census exercise in 2020.

In 2018, UNICEF supported Belize in key data and evidence-based initiatives. The initiatives offer a wealth of strategic information to strengthen national policy and programme response to

the SDG call to leave no child behind. UNICEF launched findings from a study on out-of-school children and a menstrual hygiene management study; finalized a situation analysis on adolescent health; supported a community gang assessment study; conducted a review of national early childhood development data systems; and launched a U-Report platform.

UNICEF continued to provide support to implement and monitor the National Early Childhood Development Strategic Plan (2017-2021), which was finalized in Belize in 2016 with support from UNICEF. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 5 Early Childhood Development Index indicated that 82.5 per cent of children aged 36 – 59 months were developmentally on track. Between 2011 and 2015, important progress was made in early childhood development. In 2011, only 32 per cent of children between 36 and 59 months of age attended an early childhood education (ECE) programme; by 2015 that number increased to 55 per cent. Disparities still exist, as only one in five of the poorest children currently attend such programmes. The Cayo District has the lowest ECE attendance rate, at 36 per cent.

Violence, neglect and parenting remained key areas of focus for early childhood programming. According to MICS 5, one in four children under the age of 5 is left alone or in the care of another child under the age of 10 for more than one hour during the week. Those children are at greatest risk for unresponsive care, neglect, severe injury and death from abuse. There is much to gain from empowering parents as well as other actors across multiple sectors who provide services targeting young children and their families.

According to MICS 5 data, approximately 22 per cent of Belizeans are adolescents (ages 10 – 19 years). The same data show significant gaps in multiple indicators of well-being affecting adolescents, with disparities between geographic regions, age groups, and sexes. For example, the adolescent birth rate for ages 15-19 is 55 births per 1,000 in urban areas, but almost double that in rural areas. One in five adolescent girls age 15 – 19 is married or in a union compared with only one in 10 boys. Eighty seven per cent of schools do not have toilets accessible to students with physical disabilities. To address these gaps, Belize has increased its focus on secondary education. The 2017 secondary school dropout rate was 6 per cent, a slight decrease from 8 per cent in 2013. Dropout disproportionately affected boys (6.6 per cent versus 4.8 per cent for girls). The Ministry of Education's estimates for completion rates show modest increases from 2013 to 2017 for both primary school (from 76.4 per cent to 81.1 per cent) and secondary school (from 63.3 per cent to 66.7 per cent), with girls having higher completion rates than boys.

Violence in and around schools remained a challenge. Previous gains made to ensure schools are child-friendly and provide quality education need to be reinforced further through equity-focused interventions such as those recommended in UNICEF's Out of School Study, which was launched in 2018. The research was supported by a steering committee comprised of government stakeholders, UNICEF, and associations. The main barriers to school completion identified in the study included household poverty, disability, living in rural areas, late entry and inadequate preparation for primary school. Major recommendations included strengthening of social assistance or subsidies for access to education, extending the age range for compulsory education (from mandatory age of 14), increasing quality and service delivery through teacher training, improving tracking of students, interventions to enhance support for literacy, and improving school spaces including water and sanitation facilities. The Ministry of Education will develop an action plan to implement the study's recommendations.

Interpersonal violence and crime continued to be major challenges. Belize consistently ranks

among the top 10 countries in the world for per capita homicides, with an average of approximately 40 homicides per 100,000 residents. The age at which one becomes legally responsible for criminal activity is 12 years (the Latin American and Caribbean regional median, but higher than some Caribbean countries). Statistics indicate that the majority of major crimes do not involve youth. For example, in 2018, 29.5 per cent of homicides, firearms offences, and gang activity involved youth under 18 years of age. Incidents involving youth offenders are often sensationalized in the media, resulting in a public perception that youth are responsible for the high crime rate in Belize. UNICEF and partners continued to advocate for the implementation of a National Diversion programme, which will be piloted in three districts, with key indicators to be tracked in each.

Free legal representation is not provided to youth even when they are being prosecuted for offences that involve jail time or significant fines, or when charged with adults. The only offence for which free legal aid is available is murder. In 2018 UNICEF Belize supported implementation of free legal clinics for children nationally. This also prompted the development of a feasibility study on Legal Aid for Children, which was being finalized at year end. The Government hopes to pilot free legal aid for children in the same districts in which the National Diversion programme will be piloted.

A 2018 Community Gang Assessment supported by the Inter-American Development Bank and UNICEF found that the intersection between gangs and guns has created an epidemic of violence in Belize City (particularly southside), including the exposure of children and youth to trauma, injuries and murders, as well as the exposure of a significant percentage of children and youth to risk factors for gang involvement. The assessment also found that the inability of many adolescents and youth in Belize City southside to access secondary, higher and vocational education, as well as the lack of employment opportunities and multiple social services, make them more vulnerable to joining a gang and contributes to perpetuating the cycle of poverty and violence. The report also points out the lack of a consistent, comprehensive and sustained response to the gang problem. To face the escalating violence in Belize City, in March 2018, the Government established joint military and police security measures in the southern part of the city. In September a state of emergency was declared. To respond to this evolving situation, UNICEF developed new partnerships with the newly-created Ministry of National Security to support capacity development of military and police forces in terms of norms and standards for the handling and care of children in their custody and expanded partnerships with civil society organizations working in child protection and violence prevention in various districts. UNICEF Belize also continued its partnerships with the Supreme Court, Restore Belize and the Ministry of Human Development.

According to the MICS 2015, 3.9 per cent of girls and 5.1 per cent of boys aged 15 - 19 first married or entered a marital union before the age of 15. Some 20.8 per cent of girls and 10.7 per cent of boys aged 15 to 19 were married or in a union. The 2010 Population Census data, showed that 38,486 young people were married or in a union before the age of 18, with twice the number of females engaging in relationships before the age of 18 years than males. Child marriage and early union was highest among Mestizo females, and Mestizo males under the age of 18 represented the highest number of males in union when compared to males in other ethnic groups. The age-specific fertility rate for adolescent females aged 15 - 19 in Belize was 74 per 1,000. The rate has decreased slowly country-wide, but the Corozal, Stann Creek and Toledo districts still show higher rates compared to the country-wide average.

The infant and under-five mortality rates in Belize dropped significantly between 2006 and 2015,

from 22 to 9 per 1,000 live births, and 27 to 12 per 1,000 live births, respectively. Some 7.3 per cent of children under age five were overweight, slightly above the average for the Latin American and Caribbean region. The country still had significant stunting prevalence in children under 5 years, despite a moderate decrease from 19.3 per cent in 2011 to 15 per cent in 2015. The geographic and ethnic disparities in stunting verify the correlation between stunting and poverty and inequity: in the Toledo district, one in every three children under 5 years is stunted.

The prevalence of diabetes, primarily type II diabetes, is very high in Belize and is directly related to obesity, which is in turn related to diet and physical activity patterns. An estimated 50.5 per cent of Belizeans are overweight, and 20.6 per cent are obese. These rates are substantially higher for women, with significant consequences for related diseases and childbirth complications. From 2013-2017, adolescent females aged 15 to 19 had a higher rate of morbidity due to diabetes.

Mental health, particularly among older adolescents (ages 15 – 19) is a growing concern in Belize. Between 2014 and 2016, the attempted suicide rate among older adolescents increased by 39 per cent each year. Between 2008 and 2017, the number of adolescents aged 10 to 19 who attempted suicide represented 36 per cent of attempted suicides among all age groups. Psychiatric nurse practitioners indicated that the three leading causes for admission of adolescents to mental health clinics were: disorders due to psychoactive substances use, attempted suicide and mental health disorders due to anxiety and stress-related disorders.

The health of adolescents is an important determinant of national health, stability and potential and is dependent on many factors that reach far beyond the health sector. Improving adolescent health therefore requires an understanding of the underlying determinants or drivers and threats to adolescent health as well as strong multisectoral collaboration and broad adolescent engagement and community support for social and behavioural change.

In 2018 UNICEF Belize added a specific area of work on adolescent health and wellbeing. With UNICEF Regional Office support and guidance, a new output was included under the lifelong learning outcome. UNICEF Belize supported the development of a National Adolescent Health Strategy to enhance programme response to the health of adolescents. Long term consultants were added to the UNICEF Belize team for adolescent health and for U-Report to support programming, adolescent engagement and implementation.

Located within the Caribbean's hurricane corridor Belize is vulnerable to seasonal flooding and storms. In 2018, UNICEF Belize expanded its partnerships to include the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO).

UNICEF Belize established a number of partnerships in 2018, including with the Ministry of National Security; civil society organizations for community action to prevent violence; Realize Belize for programming for persons with disabilities; and private sector companies Digi (formerly Belize Telemedia) and SMART to support innovative child-focused use of technology for development. UNICEF also established a new memorandum of understanding with the UK High Commission in Belize to support modernization of the birth registration system and extended its partnership with the Probitas Foundation to support strengthening of laboratory capacity and access to primary health care for rural communities.

UNICEF Belize remains constrained in its funding and human resources and this poses challenges to the adequacy, flexibility, predictability, timeliness and sustainability of technical

and programme support in all areas as well as to UNICEF's ability to facilitate innovation in responding to current programme challenges affecting children.

## Part 2: Major results, including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

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

#### Early childhood development and parenting

In 2018, UNICEF Belize continued to prioritize its support to strengthen national early childhood development (ECD) policies, providing important contributions to UNMSDF and Belize Country Programme Document outputs to increase access to holistic ECD, learning and care environments. UNICEF Belize consolidated its support to the inter-ministerial mechanism established by the Ministries of Health, Education and Human Development, which have the lead mandates for service delivery and monitoring of outcomes in early childhood through implementation of a national ECD strategy. UNICEF Belize's focus in 2018 was on strengthening ECD data systems for monitoring and evaluation of ECD outcomes, with technical support from education specialists in UNICEF Headquarters and the Regional Office.

An ECD Technical Working Group was established in 2018 to advance the operationalization of the ECD Programme and Strategic Plan with linkages to the National Children's Agenda 2017-2030. Key international technical experts collaborated with the ECD Technical Working Group (Ministries of Education, Health, Human Development and UNICEF) to organize three workshops designed to: propose changes to the ECD Theory of Change and M&E Framework; increase understanding on data sharing among government entities; design mechanisms and strategies for reporting on ECD indicators through existing data management systems; and determine the support required to produce an implementation plan and strategy for the monitoring and evaluation of ECD in Belize. The Government and UNICEF partners from Chile, Colombia and Honduras presented on experiences on intersectoral data sharing. The data system review in Belize included an analysis of policies and an overview of each major information source informing the monitoring of ECD. A theoretical framework was introduced to the Technical Working Group with an aim to strengthen the national ECD monitoring and evaluation plan. Existing indicators were strengthened to further support the tracking of the child throughout the life cycle.

UNICEF Belize continued to implement programmes and service delivery for strengthening its commitments to three core ECD policy goals: children are born and remain healthy during their early years; young children's environments are nurturing, responsive, safe, inclusive and culturally appropriate; and young children have the skills and opportunities for success in early learning. One major achievement to ensure the implementation of these commitments was the continued UNICEF-supported capacity building of ECD providers and frontline workers in Care for Child Development, with a focus on violence prevention.

UNICEF Belize strengthened national implementation of the framework on ECD and violence prevention by increasing the number of qualified persons in Care for Child Development. In 2018, intersectoral training events facilitated by trained senior officers from the health, education and human development ministries resulted in more than 125 additional trained ECD providers, including rural public health nurses, social workers, teen mothers from the Youth Enhancement Services, roving caregivers and preschool teachers. The broad rollout of the Care for Child

Development capacity development initiative greatly helped to establish a solid network of providers offering multiple points of contact and opportunities to support parents to enhance ECD outcomes, preparedness for lifelong learning and prevention of violence in early childhood

In January 2019, Belize will have the opportunity to showcase Care for Child Development best practices and to support Eastern Caribbean countries in rolling out and implementing such practices. Through this south-south collaboration, in partnership with UNICEF's Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area, CARICOM and the Organization for Eastern Caribbean States, more than 20 people will have the opportunity to share and learn from the Belize experience.

An evaluation of the Roving Caregivers Programme implemented by the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation (MHD) and supported by UNICEF was begun in 2018. The evaluation is utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to adequately assess the impact of the programme on three components of ECD: cognitive and socio-emotional development, physical well-being and growth.

In 2018, UNICEF provided technical assistance to the development and launching of a National Parenting Guide. Parenting advocates were contracted by the Government and advocacy continued for positive parenting practices through the work of the National Parenting Task Force, with UNICEF's support.

### **Stunting and overweight/obesity**

In 2018, UNICEF Belize secured global thematic funds to increase its support to tackle the rise in overweight and obesity in vulnerable children and adolescents and to contribute to closing the gap as it relates to stunting. With technical support from UNICEF and the Pan American Health Organization, a strategy was developed by the National Sustainable School Feeding Technical Committee, including the Ministries of Health, Education, Agriculture and Human Development, to ensure nutrition-specific coordination at the national level, including a specific objective of reducing obesity in children and adolescents.

UNICEF Belize also supported the Government in the collection of more than 400 urine samples for a urinary iodine and sodium study in 6-12 year old children in primary schools to provide the country's first national data on population iodine status and sodium intake. The data will provide an objective basis for further guidance on child health and nutrition programmes.

### **Adolescent Health National Strategy**

In 2018, together with UNFPA and the Pan American Health Organization, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health in developing an adolescent health national strategy and roadmap. The roadmap contributes to Belize's development priorities as delineated in the 2016-2019 Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy, in Horizon 2030, and in the UNMSDF 'Healthy Caribbean' pillar. It provides for a systematic collaborative effort to strengthen service delivery on adolescent health. UNICEF coordinated with district-level partners to ensure participation of adolescents in district and national level consultations to gather adolescent input toward the development of an Adolescent Health National Strategic Plan. This strategic planning process built on the Accelerating Action for Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!) Global Guidance. The process led to the development of a needs assessment that identified conditions that have the greatest impact on adolescent health and development, based on a comprehensive analysis of available data. The comprehensive assessment of available data and disaggregated data for adolescents aged 10-14 and 15-19 resulted in a situational analysis (SitAn) of adolescents' health that highlighted specific adolescent health priorities for each district, based on the

disaggregated data by geographic locations. Multiple priorities were identified, including mental health, obesity, violence and injury prevention, sexual reproductive health and positive development. The strategic planning process also led to a landscape analysis of existing adolescent health programmes, policies, legislation, capacity and resources that resulted in a report on mapping of services and programmes for adolescents in Belize. It also included a priority setting exercise that proposed evidence-informed prioritization of interventions for strategic programme response, based on review of the proven interventions documented in the AA-HA! Guidance.

Two national and four sub-national consultations with 233 adolescents validated key issues, strategies and interventions and identified priority programmes. The consultations ensured that inputs from adolescents and service providers at both national and sub-national levels were taken into consideration for the national strategic plan development process.

With technical support from UNICEF and in collaboration with UNFPA and the Pan American Health Organization, the Ministry of Health initiated adaptation of global guidance on norms and standards for quality adolescent health care. On the basis of this work, the Ministry of Health in Belize drafted a detailed job aid for health care workers to guide training and quality assurance in adolescent health care.

UNICEF Belize supported adolescent engagement in the pre-conference dialogue as well as participation in the global Primary Health Care Conference in 2018. Using digital tools (surveys via U-Report and WhatsApp), face-to-face focus group discussions and consultations, UNICEF Belize gathered information on adolescents' knowledge, views and experiences in accessing primary health care services. The findings from adolescents were presented by Belize's adolescent delegate to the global Primary Health Care Conference in Kazakhstan. The data also contributed to a global report on adolescents and primary health care that was used to inform the advocacy and outcome document from the global conference. UNICEF also collaborated with the Pan American Health Organization and the Ministry of Health to host an Open House on adolescent health to raise awareness and understanding of the adolescent health issues in Belize and highlight specifically, previously unseen data on mental health.

### **Adolescent health and maternal and newborn care: Medical Laboratory Initiative**

In 2018, UNICEF Belize continued to support the improvement of the country's capacities for early detection and accurate diagnosis, as well as for ensuring the proper medical management of diseases, through the implementation in Belize of the Global Laboratory Initiative. The objective of this partnership is to reduce the time between initial health seeking and access to health care and thus, to improve child health and development outcomes. UNICEF Belize, in close partnership with the Ministry of Health, Probitas Foundation and UNICEF Spanish Committee, successfully supported the expansion of the Southern Regional Hospital medical laboratory in Dangriga and construction of a laboratory in Santa Theresa health clinic, as well as the provision of medical equipment for both laboratories and the San Antonio polyclinic. This contributed to the provision of enhanced health services to Toledo and Stann Creek, two of the most underserved districts in the country, and especially to the most vulnerable communities, including to Maya and Garifuna children and families. The Southern Regional Hospital medical laboratory provides services to more than 75,000 people in Stann Creek District as well as the southern district of Toledo and its 55 rural and remote communities. UNICEF contributed to an increase in laboratory tests of up to the double, between 2016 and 2018. In environments that provide favourable conditions for the breeding of mosquitos and other pathogens, hence are at increased risk of vector borne and infectious diseases, this initiative contributes to provide

essential health services to the most vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women, mothers, children and persons residing in remote villages.

Fifty-four medical laboratory staff nationwide improved their capacities in infection control, parasitology, molecular biology, standard practices in blood bank, HIV/AIDS, biosafety and waste management.

With technical assistance from UNICEF, auditing of medical laboratories was strengthened in 2018 through an in-depth analysis of existing data. Key issues within the laboratories were identified and follow-up actions were pursued based on the analysis, including the development of a more comprehensive medical laboratory assessment tool. As a result, higher quality specialized medical tests are now being provided to the patients.

As a result of these positive developments, additional funds were leveraged from the Probitas Foundation, and the Global Laboratory Initiative will expand its partnership in 2019 to two new polyclinics in the northern Corozal district, aimed at providing key medical laboratory services to 12 of Belize's poorest communities. Belize's experience has been selected as a best practice to be showcased in the Probitas Foundation's tenth anniversary video.

### **Gender results**

Strengthening Belize's medical laboratory capacities at the selected sites enabled the Government to improve the quantity and quality of medical tests and diagnoses, including increasing the quality of antenatal care for pregnant women in remote rural areas, migrant populations, and Garifuna and Mayan communities.

### **Goal area 2: Every child learns**

#### **Equitable access to quality education: Out-of-School Children Initiative**

The Government of Belize's Education Sector Strategy for 2011-2016 aimed to reduce barriers to school completion by increasing equitable access through a number of schools and spaces in school, improving accountability and improving education quality and relevance. In 2018, in accordance with the Country Programme Document's objective to enhance the capacities of national entities in terms of education planning, equity data collection and use, and with the Government's commitment to 'Children achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development,' the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MoEYSC) and UNICEF launched the Out of School Children Initiative study, which detailed a quantitative and qualitative analysis on the profiles and barriers for out of school children and those at risk of dropping out. The national report included recommendations for addressing the problem of dropout and the use of data to inform policies and interventions.

The study results indicated several factors are associated with lack of school completion, including poverty, disability, late entry and inadequate preparation for primary and living in rural areas. Repetition rates stood at 8.4 per cent for boys and 6 per cent for girls taking two years longer to complete primary school. The transition rate from primary school to secondary school was reported at 89 per cent, but the difference in secondary level enrolment between first and fourth year was 43 per cent, indicating a major challenge with secondary school dropout, retention and/or transfer. An action plan will be developed in 2019 by Ministry of Education, with UNICEF technical assistance, to implement the study's major recommendations.

#### **Learning outcomes: Professional development training for teachers of young children in**

### **literacy and literacy based interventions**

A key aim of the Belize Ministry of Education National Literacy Strategy is that all Standard I students (grade 2) are either reading at grade level or receiving relevant, targeted intervention. One of the obstacles to achieving that goal is the limited knowledge base of pre- and primary school teachers. With UNICEF support, the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture retrained more than 50 teachers on the impact of early childhood experiences; using classroom libraries to support literacy development; and identifying and responding to students struggling to learn to read.

In 2018, six district education centres in Belize organized literacy awareness raising activities in celebration of International Literacy Day. More than 60 primary schools and approximately 1,200 students participated in the literacy awareness activities. As a result, several schools embarked on literacy programmes/interventions in their schools.

### **Skills development: Life skills education strengthening in secondary schools**

In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MoEYSC) engaged in a rationalization and diversification of the national curriculum for secondary schools. Life skills will be one of eight subjects in a new universal core curriculum that all students from first to fourth form will be required to take. Many schools use an existing Positive Youth Development Curriculum for their life skills classes, but it was not originally designed as a four-year programme. It also needs strengthening in some areas, including in its approach to comprehensive sex education. As part of the development of a new life skills curriculum, with UNICEF support, MoEYSC provided specialized training and engaged a wide variety of stakeholders in consultations. As a result, teachers have increased their capacities to adequately implement life skills as part of the curriculum. More than 100 government, civil society and religious organization delegates, with expertise in life skills education participated in the Life Skills Curriculum Development consultations.

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

In March 2018, following several murders in the South Side of Belize City, the Government of Belize declared a State of Emergency there, resulting in an intense increase in police presence, implementation of curfews and introduction of Belize Defense Forces on the streets. UNICEF engaged various ambassadors and government partners to discuss potential solutions to address violence against children. To strengthen the capacity of right-holders and duty bearers to foster positive practices and norms to protect children from violence, an innovative call for proposals was developed to provide catalytic funds and technical assistance to community initiatives for violence prevention and to accelerate learning between community actors, government and civil society. The effort was financed by Armed Violence Prevention funds and was supported through a broad partnership with the Government (including the Ministries of Human Development, Education, Local Government, National Security, and the National Committee for Families and Children). Civil society organizations, including indigenous peoples' organizations, participated. UNICEF supported five community-based groups in addressing violence in early childhood, addressing violence using art and culture and developing tools to target those most at risk for gun violence and exposure to gangs. The five groups' work was documented in a video that will be complete in February 2019.

In partnership with the Ministry of Human Development Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, a number of capacity building events were conducted. Topics covered included basic and intermediate suicide prevention, trauma-informed care, building relationships with

teenagers (both facilitated by the Center for Adolescent Studies) and a week long, intensive 'Leading from the Middle' course for the Ministry's middle management team. Participants included social workers who provide services to children who are victims of abuse and children who come in conflict with the law.

Courses also were provided locally by the University of the West Indies in Belize, covering Family Law, Trial Preparation and Advocacy, Introduction to Counselling Teenagers and Young Adults, Time Management, How to Communicate with Diplomacy, Tact and Credibility, and an Introduction to Mediation Studies. Eighty-seven staff attended those courses. Steps were taken to launch an online training platform for the social workers that work in the Ministry of Human Development, including an online version of the Basic Suicide Prevention course, and the development of standard operating procedures for each unit, with a focus on the first 48 hours response to emergency cases. To date, pre- and post-tests have been developed for each of the courses to determine each participant's knowledge. In 2019, a concrete theory of change will be developed to strengthen the social work force.

### **Access to justice: Capacity building for family court and legal clinics**

To increase the country's capacity to promote and ensure justice and systems that enable the prevention and treatment of violence, UNICEF Belize supported the Government-led comprehensive reform process in the area of justice for children. A vital component of this reform also includes systems strengthening and capacity building of Family Court staff. With support from the Government of Switzerland, UNICEF Belize and the Child Friendly Court Committee initiated a capacity building exercise for the Family Court staff and for other child justice professionals who interact with the Family Courts in Belize. A needs assessment of all professionals working with the court and professionals interacting with the Family Court was completed. The needs assessment recommended moving the child justice sector to a more systems orientation and moving it from a punitive to a more intentionally rehabilitative system, and one that avoids criminalization of developmentally appropriate adolescent behaviour. It also recommended increasing knowledge and consideration of the trauma of both family separation (in care cases) and use of institutional settings (in both juvenile and 'uncontrollable child' cases), as well as court policies and support for magistrates and others, which can help move court practice in the right direction. Additional recommendations included ensuring access to counsel for children in conflict with the law, children in 'uncontrollable child' cases, and parents facing care orders with the risk of termination of parental rights; increasing attention and resources on data collection and analysis to enable policymakers to make data-informed decisions and track progress; and improving case flow management to better understand what is driving the vast number of adjournments and lengthy court cases in Family Court. Following the assessment, UNICEF developed a Comprehensive Training manual that will be piloted with 75 professionals in 2019.

With support from the European Union, UNICEF and the Belize Legal Advice and Services Centre (Legal Aid) conducted a series of mobile legal clinics for the benefit of children and their families, as well as for communities and people of limited resources in underserved areas across Belize. In 2018, a total of 18 sessions were conducted in both urban and rural communities of all six administrative districts nationally. These sessions were spearheaded by an average of three pro bono attorneys each, from the private and public sectors, who were specialized in different fields of law. A total of 348 people were able to access legal support services, with cases requiring further follow-up or legal representation being referred to the Legal Aid Office in Belize City. Specific sessions were conducted at the Princess Royal Belize Youth Hostel and at Wagner's Youth Facility aimed at facilitating access to justice by children in

conflict with the law. Those sessions provided clients the opportunity for follow through and further support at no cost. Thirty eight children were supported with legal advice, of which 12 were also able to receive further support through free legal representation. Using the methodology and data from the legal clinics, the Inter-American Development Bank was preparing a feasibility study on free legal aid for children in Belize.

### **Harmful practices: Roadmap on child marriage and gender results**

Responding to global, regional and national commitments to accelerate actions to end child marriage and early unions, under SDG 5 and in connection with the Country Programme Document priority to support policies that address violence against children, UNICEF, UNFPA and the Central America and Mexico Youth Fund responded to a request by the National Committee for Families and Children to support the development of a Road Map to End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Belize. That goal is included in Belize's National Children's Agenda, which falls under the purview of the National Committee for Families and Children. A two-day workshop was organized with the objectives of strengthening the understanding of the problem of child marriage and early unions in Belize, and developing a Road Map with key strategies for preventing and addressing it. Belize is the first English-speaking country in the region to initiate actions to end child marriage and early unions. A country profile was developed to systematically document the policy, legislative and data challenges impacting child marriage and early unions. The Road Map is expected to be completed in 2019. This work is closely linked to the gender action plan and is also supported by the UN Gender Theme Group.

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

#### **Urban settings: Sustainable and Child Friendly Initiative**

Over the past four years, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development (MLLRD), the Mayor's Association, United Nations Development Programme, and the National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC), UNICEF has provided support to municipal authorities in their efforts to ensure that their cities and towns were child friendly. In parallel, UNICEF supported the development of the National Children's Agenda 2017-2030. This agenda reaffirms the Government's commitment to make Belize the best place to grow up as a child and to raise families.

In 2018, UNICEF worked together with the NCFC and the municipal authorities to validate the alignment of their respective Child Friendly Municipality Strategic Plans 2017-2021 with the National Children's Agenda. The municipalities' support for Belize's National Children's Agenda 2017 - 2030 reflects their firm commitment to the fact that there is no better alternative for sustainable development than the investment in an enabling environment which promotes, protects, respects and fulfils children's rights.

In 2018, the Hopkins Municipal Declaration was signed by the mayors of all nine of Belize's municipalities, the Chair of NCFC, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Local Government and UNICEF. The declaration establishes a re-commitment for the progressive realization of children's rights across all nine municipalities and underscores the critical importance of the collaborative partnership among and between the Ministry, the Belize Mayors' Association, the Municipalities, NCFC, and UNICEF.

#### **Disasters**

Mainstreaming risk informed programming and humanitarian preparedness

In 2018, UNICEF Belize contributed to strengthening the country's preparedness measures and

supporting risk informed programming, in line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) and the SAMOA Pathway agreement. Three major humanitarian and simulation capacity building sessions engaged the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO), the United Nations Emergency Technical Team (UNETT) and the Belize City Emergency Management Team, among others.

Drawing from UNETT's experience in international disaster risk management, participants were engaged in various discussions focusing on introductory concepts to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, gender equality in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian settings, approaches to reduce risk (institutional and community level), impact of climate change on vulnerability and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss standards and best practices in the context of case studies from various regions as well as identify lesson learned from local experience.

The simulation exercise, supported by the emergency specialists from throughout the region and from the UNICEF Regional Office, successfully strengthened UNICEF Belize's capacity to respond to disasters and increased the understanding of key stakeholders about their roles, in conjunction with UNICEF, in responding to disasters, with a primary focus on children.

UNICEF Belize completed onboarding the Emergency Preparedness Platform in 2018. UNICEF staff were familiarized with the new preparedness framework and developed an understanding of how it fit into the country programme cycle and allowed for the identification of priority risks, scenarios and preparedness actions to address those risks.

### **Sanitation and hygiene**

Gender responsive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools and menstrual hygiene management

UNICEF provided technical assistance to the WASH multi-sectoral body to disseminate communication materials to improve knowledge, attitudes and practices of all stakeholders, creating safe, healthy and clean environments where children grow, learn and thrive. The communications work is part of an action plan developed with the multi-sectoral body, which is chaired by the Ministry of Health and made up of government partners and NGOs, including the Belize Red Cross. Re-modeling of bathrooms (the "hard side" of the initiative) will commence in three additional primary schools in 2019. The WASH multi-sectoral body began work on a set of standard operating procedures for the work of WASH in Belize schools and communities. Terms of Reference were developed in 2018 to guide the work of the multi-sectoral body.

UNICEF and the WASH multi-sectoral Technical Working Group developed an integrative approach to menstrual hygiene management to incorporate it as a component of existing opportunities such as WASH, Sexual Reproductive Health, and the HFLE Curriculum. A Menstrual Hygiene Management Study was launched, and the results were disseminated nationally to all primary (309), secondary (60) and vocational (6) schools. The information shared will impact more than 120,000 students aged 5-19, nationally. The study provides key policy recommendations on the need for improved design and provision of supplies in latrine facilities for women and girls to accommodate menstrual hygiene needs and ensure privacy; adequate water supply in bathrooms facilities; hygiene awareness and sensitivity training in schools for both girls and boys to enhance understanding and prevent bullying; and, increased accessibility and affordability of hygiene products. UNICEF supported the WASH Technical Working Group for the planning and development of effective country-specific menstrual hygiene management interventions.

## **Gender results**

UNICEF, the National Emergency Management Organization and the Ministries of Human Development, Labour and Local Government collaborated on an initiative through which 80 shelter managers from Belize District were trained on preventing Gender Based Violence against boys and girls during emergencies. This was the first-ever capacity building initiative of this nature in Belize. It addressed the mitigating factors and protocols that should be established to guarantee the protection of boys and girls during a disaster.

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

### **Child poverty and social protection**

UNICEF worked with the Government of Belize, Municipal Authorities, NGOs, communities and the private sector to promote investment in children through truly universal, comprehensive, consistent and effective policies, as well as inclusive social protection programmes to ensure that every child in Belize has an equitable chance in life.

UNICEF, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank jointly supported the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation in organizing an ongoing series of four social protection conferences that are contributing to the strengthening of the national social protection system, specifically in terms of social protection floor, comprehensive labour market integration, multidimensional poverty measurement, and social protection response in emergencies. Based on the policy recommendations advocated for in the UNICEF-UNDP supported Comprehensive Review of Belize's Social Protection System (2017), and as a key result of the first Social Protection Conference in December 2018, the CEO Ministries' Caucus agreed to develop a national social protection floor, which will include an emphasis on social protection for children. Additional results of this high-level technical expertise and policy advocacy work included Belize's participation in the first regional dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean, 'On the road to equality: 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.'

Belize also was invited to showcase its national social protection experience at the upcoming UNICEF-ILO Universal Child Grants Conference. In parallel, UNICEF contributed to strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Human Development by providing long-term Social Protection technical assistance to its Policy and Planning Unit.

UNICEF continued to provide technical support to Belize's national cash transfer BOOST programme, which provides monthly cash to 3,200 impoverished households (8,600 people). During 2017 and 2018, UNICEF technically and financially supported the BOOST Plus initiative (led by the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, aWrap Around Service approach that complements BOOST programme), in providing 167 families and children of Belize City Southside with intensive, holistic social work support to individuals with complex needs. Evidence from the UNICEF-supported BOOST impact evaluation (2016) showed that the programme succeeded in helping children and families gain access to social services and supported children and families by providing educational assistance in the form of paying for tuition, fees, school bags and school supplies. BOOST Plus psychosocial support and social work facilitated changes such as increased access to social benefits and services, including in terms of identification, health and education. In 2019, costing exercises will be supported by UNICEF to advocate for higher coverages.

In close coordination with the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation (MHD) and the Statistical Institute of Belize, UNICEF Belize strategically supported data dissemination and data system strengthening, enabling the country to meaningfully monitor the National Children's Agenda 2017-2030. UNICEF Belize supported capacity building in transitioning to develop the generation of a new data system, Belize Data for All, by converting the former BelizeInfo, and developing a data dashboard for the monitoring and evaluation of the National Children's Agenda and social protection indicators. There is no other online database in Belize that brings together multiple data sources capable of generating information on the situation of children and women. As Belize rolls out the National Children's Agenda, this online data dissemination platform will integrate the monitoring, readjustment of interventions, and reporting on the progress of the indicators on children.

UNICEF supported the Ministry in preparing the government report to the Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This report will be the first to be submitted in more than 15 years and thus will provide an important update to significant changes in measures put in place to fulfil obligations for protection, respect and provision of the rights of all children, as well as the current gaps. There were challenges in 2018 in ensuring a swifter state reporting process and new efforts will be made to promote the finalization and submission of the Belize state report in 2019.

### **Adolescent empowerment Sustainable and Child Friendly Initiative**

Over the past four years, with support from the Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development (MLLRD), the Mayor's Association, UNDP, and the NCFC, child and adolescent participation in local governance was strengthened. Children's advisory bodies (CABs) were established in every municipality in Belize, and children worked together with local government officials to identify key issues that would impact the delivery of results for children. As the central feature of Belize's Sustainable and Child Friendly Municipalities Initiative (SCFMI), the children's advisory bodies ensured systematic participation of and consultation with children on all matters concerning them. Local governments across Belize reflected results related to children in their strategic plans. The Belize Children's Agenda 2017-2030 also reflects multisectoral results.

In September 2018, UNICEF Belize launched the U-Report Belize platform ([belize.ureport.in](http://belize.ureport.in)) together with the National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC), Department of Youth Services (DYS), Ministry of Labour, Local Government (MLLG), Belize Telemedia Limited (BTL), and SMART Belize. More than 2,250 U-Reporters have been registered in Belize, (47 per cent male and 53 per cent female), with adolescents and youth representing more than 75 per cent of them and 20 per cent of them being out of school.

This free, confidential and innovative tool facilitates creative engagement with children, adolescents, young people and service providers by providing them with accurate information through regular, free text messages. In 2018, U-Reporters received useful updates on preventing diseases transmitted from mosquitoes during the rainy season, practicing healthy lifestyles and proper hand-washing techniques. The U-Report platform also played a critical role in promoting dialogue, obtaining feedback and providing key messages to assess critical gaps in information on child marriage, violence in school, and health care of young people in Belize. Information was translated to data and provided key inputs to develop national strategies and roadmaps that better address adolescents' needs.

### **Disability**

UNICEF increased its investment in children with disabilities in 2018 by partnering with REALIZE Belize, a user-led NGO that is driven by the needs and aspirations of individuals with disabilities. UNICEF and REALIZE Belize supported the National Emergency Management Organization with training on protecting children with disabilities during an emergency. The engagement with REALIZE Belize resulted in disability awareness and inclusion capacity building processes for health professionals, teachers, emergency staff, parents and caregivers and inclusion of emergency plans with a special focus on protecting children with diverse abilities.

### Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

The Theories of Change and corresponding results logic in the Country Programme Document's outcome results framework remain relevant.

To better include the priority needs of Belize's second decade, in accordance with the findings of the situation analysis, and in line with the Government's request and UNICEF's new strategic plan and organizational priorities (including Generation Unlimited), UNICEF Belize supported the main partners in the formulation of a more specific theory of change (ToC) on adolescent health, with a focus on mental health to address a significant and neglected threat to the wellbeing and development of adolescents in Belize. The ToC development for mental health, the country's first, was being finalized by the Ministry of Health. Because mental health is affected by multiple health, social and environmental determinants and has a wide range of individual, social and economic effects, the ToC will guide multisectoral response to adolescent mental health issues in Belize.

Adolescent mental health is an area of learning for UNICEF Belize as well as for the Government and partners. UNICEF Belize worked closely with health teams in the UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office and at UNICEF Headquarters for guidance and additional capacity. A major lesson learned is the important added value provided by systematically ensuring that in-country trainings provided to UNICEF staff (particularly on learning agendas), and supported by UNICEF Regional Office and Headquarters, are jointly delivered to key government, civil society and UN agency partners. In 2018, this was the case for results-based management, communication for development (C4D) and intensive emergency-preparedness trainings. This joint delivery strengthened national capacities and enabled more rapid consensus-building on strategies to better deliver for children. As a result of the results-based management training, in addition to the theory of change on mental health, specific theories of change also were developed jointly on early childhood development and juvenile justice.

#### **Programming at-scale results**

UNICEF continued to promote and strengthen intersectoral approaches across all programme areas. This was especially effective in ensuring that children's needs in Belize are addressed in a holistic and more sustainable manner. For example, quality assurance for early childhood development is managed entirely through an intersectoral technical working group (TWG), which enabled accelerated support toward strengthening of cross-sectoral early childhood development data systems and expansion of capacity building for the rollout of care for childhood development. The successes resulting from this collaboration enabled Belize to consolidate national gains and lessons learned which the Government will share as examples of best practice with other Caribbean countries in a South-South exchange in 2019. Another

example of an intersectoral approach that accelerated results for children was the multisectoral WASH Technical Working Group, which oversaw and released findings from Belize's first study on menstrual hygiene management.

To address the increasing violence against children, UNICEF Belize engaged with a wider range of partners, including civil society organizations and the security forces. This provided excellent opportunities to scale up programme efforts and reach vulnerable children in time and with relevant support. communication for development (C4D) training was delivered to UNICEF staff, government and civil society partners, with the support of the UNICEF Regional Office, to enhance the use of this effective strategy to support social and behaviour change. As a result of the training, multiple C4D strategies and roadmaps were developed to support priority areas for children, including violence prevention.

In 2018 UNICEF placed an emphasis on support to strengthen national and local capacities in emergency preparedness and recovery. A major lesson learned from those initiatives was the importance of investing in strengthening capacity at decentralized levels for responsive programming with all relevant partners. To this end, UNICEF Belize worked with the Ministry of Local Government, municipalities, the National Emergency Management Organization and Belize City Emergency Management Organization to support effective emergency preparedness. As an additional result of the capacity building processes supported by UNICEF, UNFPA and UNETT, Belize now has 80 trainers in Return to Happiness nationwide, and 80 shelter managers have been trained on protection of children, women and other vulnerable populations. To harmonize approaches and ensure quality at all levels of response, UNICEF Belize is working with humanitarian partners to develop protocols for response to children in emergencies, jointly with the UNICEF Regional Office and CDEMA.

### **Gender-responsive programming**

UNICEF worked closely with the UN interagency team to promote better integration of gender in programming across agencies and to leverage internal capacity more effectively for greater impact. Major lessons learned included the added value of interagency coordination on gender to achieve greater efficiency; the benefits of generation and dissemination of key data, and impact from more strategic joint support toward specific gender-responsive priorities in the country. UNICEF is the Co-Chair of the UN Gender Team Group (UNGTG), which supported several initiatives that brought the gender dimension to the forefront in 2018. These included mainly the Menstrual Hygiene Management Study, Child Marriage and Early Union road map, National Parenting Manual (including actions for greater male involvement), and celebrations on the Day of the Girl Child. As a member of the National Gender Focal Point/Gender Integration Committee (GFP/GIC), UNICEF supported increased national awareness on gender and gender mainstreaming.

UNICEF Belize participated in the panel discussion, 'The Importance of Data for High Level Advocacy' at the opening of the Caribbean Women and Sexual Diversity Conference. UNICEF plans to provide technical support to the GFP/GIC for the drafting of its annual work plan with focus on institutional and individual capacity building and gender empowerment.

Internally, UNICEF Belize plans to incorporate a gender analysis of all its programmes as a part of the office midterm review process, highlighting ongoing efforts to strengthen gender programming and gender mainstreaming.

### **Winning support for the cause of children**

In 2018, UNICEF made a strategic decision to widen its ability to deliver results for children by expanding support for its cause. The rapidly growing U-Report (more than 2,250 people registered in less than a year) has proven to be a powerful opportunity to connect directly with young people and community actors across the country, tap into their direct knowledge of the challenges they face and engage them in a meaningful dialogue to find and implement solutions for children, including during emergencies. UNICEF solidified major partnerships with the only two mobile service providers in Belize (SMART & Digi), who committed to providing 600,000 free SMS to U-Reporters annually. That service is expected to significantly increase mobilization and participation in communities with connectivity challenges by enabling free SMS registration and messaging across all mobile networks.

The importance of continuing to strengthen the Sustainable and Child Friendly Municipalities Initiative was another lesson learned in 2018. The initiative places children's rights and needs at the centre of all the country's nine municipalities. Periodic interaction among the mayors, who are the main decision makers at local level, helped reinforce their commitment to ensuring better delivery of results for children. Through its communication tools and partnership events, UNICEF shared best practices to address children's rights among the municipalities and observed that cities and towns with less child-friendly programmes and planning approaches were learning and encouraged to change. To further motivate municipalities to make progress toward safe and child-friendly communities, UNICEF, partners and the mayors agreed to adopt a child-friendly certification process for all the municipalities in Belize. By the end of 2018, partners in government and civil society strongly supported expansion of this partnership model and framework to all local government areas, including rural areas in Belize, which are still facing high levels of inequalities and child poverty.

**Leveraging resources and partnerships, and the power of business and markets**  
UNICEF Belize has mobilized resources from the Government of Belize for the 2017-2021 Country Programme Document totaling US\$497,624. Mobilizing financial resources from the private sector or other donors remains a challenge. The partnership with Digi and SMART is a promising start to such support, and does already include important in-kind contributions, such as the free SMS. UNICEF's two private sector partners in Belize have confirmed their continued interest in supporting entrepreneurial skills development in children and adolescents. In 2018, they collaborated with UNICEF to facilitate a series of sessions on creative communication in special camps organized by UNICEF for children involved as advocates in the Sustainable and Child Friendly Municipalities Initiative. UNICEF's partnership with the private sector on U-Report offers a good opportunity for further collaboration with these specialist technology and communications partners to enhance support toward mentorship and employment readiness skills for adolescents, a promising contribution to the Generation Unlimited initiative.

### **UN working together**

To support SDG 1.3 (Social Protection) and building on the UNMSDF, UNICEF Belize promoted and developed a key partnership with the Ministry of Human Development, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank to support poverty eradication and the strengthening of Belize's national Social Protection system. Under the leadership of the UN Regional Coordinator, the Ministries' CEO Caucus agreed to develop a national Social Protection Floor. A major lesson learned from this process so far is the importance of the combination of change strategies to meaningfully influence the theory of change, namely by using the power of evidence through the policy recommendations included in the UNICEF-UNDP supported Review of Belize's Social Protection System; winning the support from decision-makers to the cause of

children, through the high-level advocacy with the CEO Caucus and UNMSDF framework to build shared accountability.

UNICEF, along with UNFPA and PAHO, actively contributed to ensuring the Ministry of Health's ownership for the development of the first adolescent health national strategic plan. This led to the development process moving forward smoothly because it was led and owned by the Ministry. Formal outreach by the Ministry of Health to other ministries and other stakeholders ensured the multi-sectoral nature of the extended working group and that the contents and priorities of the strategy will be multisectoral. Internal communication and collaboration on adolescent health between UN agencies was increased.

UNICEF, along with UNFPA, supported the development of a Roadmap to Accelerate Actions to End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Belize. A key lesson learned was the importance of promoting effective coordination with regional partners and the UNICEF Regional Office, in the framework of the existing global and regional joint programmes, which facilitated seamless partnerships between both agencies at country level, who have provided technical and financial support to the process and are expected to continue supporting the finalization of the roadmap and its implementation by national authorities.

Migration is a growing challenge. The UN has initiated joint work to develop a comprehensive protocol to address unaccompanied minors as migration flows continue to bring them to Belize. Jointly identifying a holistic solution remains difficult and the coordination among the relevant agencies - mainly IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF - will have to be further strengthened for that purpose.

### **Fostering innovation in programming and advocacy for children**

The Belize U-Report platform uses existing social networks such as WhatsApp, SMS and Facebook, taking advantage of the growing internet-connected community at the least cost. In 2018, UNICEF Belize actively promoted multi-stakeholder engagements with adolescents through numerous outreach activities and advocacy campaigns in all the districts, to rapidly increase the number of participants, both from in school and out of school adolescents as well as interested community actors. In 2019, the U-Partner platform is expected to be rolled out as a dedicated free hotline service that enables delivery of scheduled, confidential and quality-assured one-on-one social support via mobile phone to young people by their peers. To further build on this new technology, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, mental health counselling will be progressively made available countrywide, to help bridge the gap in access resulting from the limited number of specialized mental health professionals available to offer basic information and counselling.

Another important innovation has been to systematically ensure adolescent participation in the entire process of developing the adolescent health national strategic plan. This was accomplished both by using new technologies and through local consultations with adolescents. Adolescent representatives were included in the adolescent health technical working group and were involved in each step of the design process. Trained by UNICEF and the Department of Youth Services, adolescents facilitated the national consultation. The use of U-Report also enabled wider consultations with adolescents throughout the country. In this way adolescents did more than provide input – they truly influenced decisions about the development of the adolescent health national strategic plan process.

### **Using the power of evidence to drive change**

It is important that Belize clearly identifies the children at greatest risk and in greatest need. There is currently very limited production of systematic and updated data on social and child indicators in the country. For this reason, UNICEF will support Belize in piloting MICS Plus in 2019. A new situation analysis, which included consultations with children and adolescents, was developed in 2018 and will be finalized in 2019. In parallel, major studies such as the Out-of-School and Menstrual Hygiene Management reports provided key data to shape relevant policy and programme interventions aimed at the SDG promise to leave no child behind. Most importantly, ensuring the effective participation of all relevant stakeholders, including children and adolescents themselves, is proving to be key to ensuring relevance of priorities, innovation in solution creation, and greater effectiveness in planning, particularly around neglected issues affecting children and adolescents (such as adolescent health and mental health, or issues such as adolescent pregnancy and violence prevention, in which little progress has been registered).

UNICEF supported the introduction and initiation of multiple promising change strategies and must continue to leverage support from across the organization to optimize them. Taking into consideration the lessons learned and the existing challenges, in 2019 and beyond, UNICEF Belize will need to strengthen its own resources for programme support, including internal capacity, to ensure the continuity of impact and sustainability of the results achieved to date. The midterm review of the country programme in 2019 offers a crucial opportunity for this reflection and action to strengthen the UNICEF Belize Country Programme.

END/