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Update on the context and situation of children

Children account for nearly half (47 per cent) of the approximately 800,000 people living in the Union of the Comoros. The population grows at a rate of 2 per cent annually and 69 per cent of people live in rural areas. The under-five mortality rate is 67.5 deaths per 1,000 live births. This overwhelmingly Muslim country is made up of three main islands: Ngazidja, Ndzuwani, and Mwali. Comorian society is marked by a powerful sense of local identity, with **pronounced social hierarchies and strong divisions between individuals from different backgrounds.**

Presidential elections held in 2019 led to the re-election of President Azali Assoumani. The election campaign contributed to some **socio-political tension**. UNICEF and other United Nations agencies continued to engage stakeholders to pave the way for constructive dialogue, conducive to sustainable development work in a peaceful and stable environment.

A 2018 analysis indicated that domestic revenues account for 11 per cent of GDP, well below the country's fiscal potential of 19 per cent. One of the areas of priority investment for the Government is **public infrastructure** to help increase productivity in strategic sectors and boost growth. At the same time, **the quality and quantity of public investment remains low.**

Government expenditure is chiefly directed to payroll and administrative institutions, which **makes creating more fiscal space for spending on children difficult.** In 2019, strategic partnerships between UNICEF and development partners including France, the World Bank, and the European Union have focused on joint advocacy for greater budget transparency, better monitoring of public spending, and increased allocations to the social sectors for children.

The economy continues to be affected by the global financial crisis – this is evident in lower remittances from the Comorian diaspora (which represent nearly a quarter of GDP), depressed export earnings, low rates of foreign investment, and excessive debt. The main source of income is small-scale agriculture, which employs almost half of the poor and remains dominated by rain-fed subsistence crops, thus exposing Comoros to climatic and economic shocks. A limited resource base, small internal market, and unfavourable business conditions make it difficult to diversify or expand the Comorian economy. This is further compounded by sizeable gaps in infrastructure – particularly in terms of access to electricity – and poor international connectivity.

Despite the economic crisis and population growth resulting in an overall impoverishment of the population, Comoros was **reclassified by the World Bank as a lower middle-income country (LMIC)** in 2019 based on its gross national income (GNI) per capita of US \$1,320. This reclassification may adversely impact the country's ability to raise funds.

While many children are subject to both monetary and multidimensional poverty, multidimensional poverty has declined considerably with the improvement of living conditions in recent years. At the same time, progress is uneven and inequalities between rural and urban households stark. The 2018 UNICEF Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) considered six dimensions: health, nutrition, water, sanitation, housing, and protection against violence for children aged 0–4 and water, sanitation, housing, protection against violence, education, and access to information for those aged 5–17. Deprivation of access to hygiene affects the largest number of children aged 0–4 (62 per cent). More than half of children in this age group (59 per cent) are subject to more than one deprivation, with 9 per cent of children subject to deprivation of health, nutrition, and hygiene at the same time. For 5–17-year-olds, the deprivation of access to information was most prevalent, affecting 63 per cent of children; while 45 per cent were subject to multiple deprivations, most commonly in the areas of access to information, education, and hygiene.

While the country has adopted policies to improve the **nutrition of children and women**, the situation remains **alarming**, mostly due to food practices rather than food availability. Access to a healthy environment remains a major challenge. **Very few households have improved toilets or hygienic storage and disposal systems.**

Sustained Government efforts have improved the level of access to drinking water, especially in urban areas. At the same time, the situation in health and education facilities is particularly worrying. A large portion of health centres do not have water (61 per cent), hand-washing facilities (75 per cent), or sanitation services (49 per cent). Medical waste is not managed at all in 39 per cent of facilities, while 15 per cent sort it correctly, and only 4 per cent safely dispose of it. Similarly, many schools have no water (56 per cent), hand-washing facilities (83 per cent), or sanitation (45 per cent). This means 43 per cent of pupils had no access to water, 81 per cent had no access to hand-washing facilities, and 43 per cent had no access to toilets in school. The importance of access to potable water, sanitation, and hand-washing facilities in schools, where children spend most of their day, cannot be overemphasized.

Dedicated public investment has had a positive impact on children's school attendance. At the same time, **the quality of education remains a concern, especially given the small number of trained teachers, limited supply of teaching**

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materials, and an expanding student body. Many children who enrol do not complete the school year.

Despite an improved institutional framework, children and women in the Comoros are frequently subject to deprivation, exclusion, abuse, and violence. Social conventions help foster a culture of violence and abuse toward children and women and impunity for perpetrators where victims rarely speak up and disputes are frequently settled between families outside the formal justice system. There are **no institutions in place to identify, support, and/or shelter survivors of violence in the country.** The Government is working with civil society and partners to reinforce laws protecting children's and women's rights.

The situation of women remains quite complex. On the one hand, matriarchal traditions give women economic power in the family structure. On the other, there are significant imbalances in favour of males in terms of political, cultural, social, and economic rights. Some traditional social norms lead to child marriage and expose girls and women to multiple forms of abuse. The 2018 Gender Development Index placed Comoros in the fifth group of countries – those deviating the most from absolute parity.

Children are not expected to play an active part in social life and very little data is available about child participation. The only available suggests that household access to the means of communication has increased in recent years.

Intense tropical cyclone Kenneth made landfall on the Comoros on 24 April 2019. The cyclone affected 345,000 people, mostly on the islands of Ngazidja and Mwali; 185,900 needed urgent multisectoral assistance. UNICEF worked with the Government and humanitarian partners to provide immediate support to those affected. The passage of the cyclone left 7 people dead, 182 injured, and 19,372 displaced; 4,482 houses were destroyed and 7,013 damaged, 213 classrooms were demolished, and a further 252 damaged; and 96 water tanks were levelled. As a result, approximately 44,800 pupils were left without schools. In addition, the cyclone destroyed four-fifths of agricultural farms – the economic backbone of the country. The six-month UNICEF response was made possible thanks to US\$983,500 from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), US\$650,000 from Education Cannot Wait, US\$112,000 from the Global Humanitarian Thematic Fund, and US\$200,000 from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

Major contributions and drivers of results

2.1 Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF supported the development of a **newborn care guide** that will serve as a standard protocol for maternity and newborn care services. A total of **73 health workers** (61 women and 12 men) **were trained in essential newborn care.** The **Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) Unit at the El Maarouf Hospital was refurbished and received information and communications technology (ICT) equipment** in September 2019 and provided care for 154 premature babies before the end of the year. In addition, **UNICEF equipped 10 maternity and neonatal services** to deal with neonatal emergencies. Of the 21,600 deliveries in the country in 2019, 85 per cent took place in the presence of an attendant at healthcare facilities.

In line with the community-based approach, each of the country's **17 health districts now has in place a management committee made up of community health workers, medical staff, and representatives of local authorities.** The committees **meet quarterly to monitor results,** discuss obstacles, and decide on necessary course adjustments. They also review all maternal and newborn deaths in their communities.

A **Training of Trainers on the eight key family practices** was held in the aftermath of Cyclone Kenneth. The 21 health staff who benefited went on to **train 830 community health workers (CHWs)** who organized awareness-raising sessions reaching more than 42,000 people. The workers also distributed 17,000 insecticide-treated bed nets to affected families and 25,000 sachets of oral rehydration salts (ORS) to health facilities, which helped manage two-thirds of diarrhoea cases in children under five.

UNICEF advocacy resulted in the Government purchasing half of the necessary traditional vaccines for the first time, with UNICEF sponsoring the other half. Coverage of the pentavalent vaccine reached 78 per cent, with 18,753 children aged 0–11 months (9,080 girls and 9,673 boys) receiving the three required doses. **No stockouts have been reported.** The Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) self-assessment conducted in 2019 showed good progress, with a national composite score of 85 per cent.

Following a **measles** outbreak on Ngazidja in May 2019, the Comoros Country Office, with help from the Regional Office, supported the Ministry of Health to draft a response plan and funding request. **Rapid mobilization of US\$285,000 made it possible to organize a vaccination drive which effectively interrupted the outbreak.**

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UNICEF continued to strengthen the **package of community-level infant and young child feeding (IYCF) interventions** to prevent chronic malnutrition in all 17 health districts. The training manual for Community Health Workers was expanded to include nutrition, and culinary demonstrations covering appropriate feeding practices, food preparation techniques, and food storage and hygiene were held in 69 villages to boost knowledge among mothers and carers. UNICEF documentation and **advocacy helped leverage World Bank funding to expand this community nutrition intervention nationwide.**

Two vitamin A supplementation and mass deworming campaigns coupled with active screening for malnutrition among children aged 6–59 months were organized in 2019. The campaigns aimed to reach 12,167 children aged 6–11 months and 109,502 children aged 12–59 months. The first round took place in areas affected by Cyclone Kenneth and reached 78 per cent of the targeted girls and boys (98 per cent in Mwali, 89 per cent in Ndzuwani, and 65 per cent in Ngazidja). The second round carried out in December reached the 90 per cent target for coverage. The deworming campaign for children aged 12–59 months reached 74 per cent of the target (94 per cent in Mwali, 89 per cent in Ndzuwani, and 60 per cent in Ngazidja).

In addition, UNICEF supported the expansion of the current network of therapeutic feeding centres (CRENAs) for children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM), from 7 to 16, in addition to the 17 centres located at district level (CRENIs). Provisional data suggest that of the 1,850 children (817 boys and 1033 girls) with SAM who were admitted to the care centres 67 per cent were discharged after successfully completing treatment, 28 per cent did not complete treatment, and the death rate was 1 per cent.

A US\$100,000 grant from Netherlands as part of the Global Thematic Fund enabled UNICEF to support the Ministry of Health to **strengthen the focus on maternal nutrition in healthcare facilities.** This includes expanded access to micronutrients during pregnancy, communication sessions for behaviour change to support improved maternal nutrition, formative supervision, and data collection and analysis. In 2019, 12,444 pregnant women (32 per cent of the total) received iron and folic acid supplementation as part of their antenatal care.

2.2 Every child learns

UNICEF continued to play **a key role in coordination of the education sector** to ensure alignment of partners' interventions with the 2018–2020 Education Sector Transition Plan (PTSE) and supported the first joint sectoral review – an opportunity for stakeholders to assess results and make course corrections for the next phase.

The preschool enrolment rate for children aged 4–5 years increased from 21 per cent in 2017 to 32 per cent in 2019. In absolute terms, the number rose from 13,900 to 15,175, with parity between boys and girls. This includes 127 children with disabilities, of whom 57 per cent were girls.

In 2019, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education with tools to manage and expand preschool provision, with a focus on quality and monitoring. As part of this, UNICEF helped develop a **budgeted plan for the nationwide expansion of preschool classes in public schools**, which includes a monitoring tool to track access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Activities included distributing preschool textbooks to all public and private schools, as well as supplying 218 attendance registers, 300 tables, and 150 benches.

As part of a **new capacity building programme for school councils**, UNICEF distributed 615 trainers' guides and 17,774 parenting guides, took part in consultations with education stakeholders at the national and decentralized levels, and contributed to strengthening school management in 50 schools. The programme also includes a focus on **inclusive education**, with management committees in 6 pilot schools adapting the school space, including toilets, to the needs of children with disabilities.

UNICEF supported the provision of teacher guides and **textbooks for 113,225 children** (55,480 girls and 57,745 boys) – reaching 79 per cent of all primary and preprimary students. Further textbooks are needed for older pupils, mainly in Grades 5 and 6. Textbook distribution helped improve teaching and learning conditions and boost student retention, though it had little effect on the repetition rate, which remained at 16 per cent.

A partnership with the South African Embassy resulted in the complete modernization of a primary school in Ngazidja, including refurbishment and equipment for three classrooms, the headmaster's office, and toilets, and the inauguration of a preschool programme at the school.

UNICEF also played an active role in a **nationwide assessment of school infrastructure in the aftermath of Cyclone Kenneth** and successfully mobilized US\$1.1 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Education Cannot Wait to help rebuild damaged infrastructure. Two schools have benefited from a WASH-in-schools recovery programme which helped provide toilets and water facilities for 329 students, including 158 girls.

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A total of 744 staff working in the **education sector benefitted from training on disaster risk reduction (DRR)**. This included 683 teachers and directors (280 women), 40 managers and Ministry of Education staff at central and island level (15 women), and 21 supervisors (5 women). Participants reported that they were able to use the training to sensitize nearly 27,000 other people, both directly within schools and through other platforms.

The national budget allocations for the education sector remained stable at 22.8 per cent of public expenditure, according to the 2019 report of the Education Sector Transition Plan. At the same time, the share of the primary subsector increased from 35 per cent to 36.5 per cent. **An education budget brief helped UNICEF advocate for a dedicated budget line and dedicated 5 per cent of the state budget allocation for preprimary education** to enable the implementation of the development strategy for the preschool subsector.

2.3 Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

In January 2019, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) exercise assessing the human rights situation in the country was completed on time with UNICEF support. UPR recommendations included abolition of the death penalty; strengthening of institutions promoting and protecting human rights; mobilization of resources to improve the prison system and conditions of detention; adoption of neutral policies on access to education, health and social services; and intensified efforts to combat all forms of violence against women and girls.

The 2019 United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report has, for the fifth year, classified Comoros as part of the Tier 3 group of countries – countries whose governments do not meet the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. UNICEF advocacy efforts contributed to the **National Assembly adopting a bill authorizing the Head of State to ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in June 2019.**

UNICEF leadership also led to the **establishment of a platform of state and non-state actors in charge of child protection** officially launched in February 2019. The platform is expected to contribute to a multisectoral child protection system and to support actions to strengthen child protection in the country.

UNICEF supports a network of 5 centres of an **integrated listening and protection service for children and women who have been victims of violence**. In 2019, **the centres supported 410 children** (369 girls, 41 boys, of whom 11 were children with disabilities). Around 56 per cent of the children received medical care following experiences of sexual abuse, and 41 per cent received legal assistance. In 2019, UNICEF paid special attention to the two new integrated listening and protection services set up in 2018: in Foumbouni (Ngazidja) and Bandrani Mtsangani (Ndzuwani). In addition, in June 2019, the office carried out an evaluation of the integrated listening and protection service in Ngazidja. The evaluation suggests the service provides a comprehensive response that meets the needs of children and women as it seeks to expand its range of activities to include psychosocial care and community sensitization. Evaluation findings are being used to attract further funding for expanding the programme; discussions are underway with France and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

UNICEF supported the **development of internal procedures within the police and gendarmerie child protection services** to improve the quality of care for victims. Twenty staff (30 per cent women) as well as the 3 judges for children (all females) took part in a Training of Trainers on these new procedures. In 2019, the Moroni and Mutsamudu brigades have recorded 290 cases of violence against children, of which 40 per cent were sexual assaults. In addition, a central database has been launched to harmonize data collection and all of the integrated listening and protection centres have been equipped with new computers to make data management more efficient.

About **25,000 adolescents (60 per cent girls) were reached through activities to raise awareness of the issues of violence against children and women and child marriage**. The activities were organized in schools, villages, public spaces, and disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In addition, recognizing the importance of South–South cooperation, UNICEF facilitated a **partnership** between the Continuing Education Service of the University of the Comoros (SUFOP) and the Higher Institute of Social Work (ISTS) of Madagascar, to provide **training and upskilling for social workers in the Comoros**. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the SUFOP and UNICEF for this purpose.

2.4 Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

As in previous years, UNICEF was the only actor **working with communities to broaden access to improved sanitation**. The sanitation marketing project continued to show results as knowledge spread across communities, resulting in increased demand for improved sanitation solutions. Recognizing that interpersonal communication remains the most

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effective means of disseminating knowledge, UNICEF supported training on improved sanitation for 98 community health workers. Portable demonstration units were used during community meetings to bring the information to life. UNICEF used a three-pronged strategy: working to increase demand by promoting improved toilets in collaboration with community health workers, and installing improved toilets in schools and health centres; working to stimulate production by training artisans and facilitating coaching by experienced artisans; and continuous advocacy to ensure that sanitation marketing principles are included in the final version of the new water law.

In addition, **UNICEF conditional cash assistance** enabled 647 of the most vulnerable households, including 485 households headed by women and 91 households headed by a person with a disability, to acquire an **improved toilet**. This represents 67 per cent of the poorest households identified by local authorities based on family structure (number of children, presence of both parents, households headed by children, the elderly, or people with disabilities), house characteristics, and lack of land ownership.

As co-lead of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster and principal humanitarian actor in the area of WASH, UNICEF worked with the Government, water utility company, and civil society organizations to provide emergency water supply to 74,078 people for 3 months following the impact of Cyclone Kenneth. UNICEF also partnered with the Comorian Red Crescent on the distribution of essential non-food items (NFIs) to 1,523 households in the most affected localities. In addition, 1,700 women received menstrual hygiene kits with reusable menstrual pads. In a follow-up satisfaction survey, 96 per cent of the 796 respondents were in favour of reusable menstrual pads and agreed they should be made more widely available in the country.

In addition, the UNICEF Comoros Country Office supported the **scale-up of the water services information system**, with the ongoing mapping of water services and the introduction of water service quality monitoring, to the remaining two islands of Mwali and Ndzuwani. All water abstraction points – 20 wells, 7 boreholes, 294 springs, and 113 river catchment points – on the two islands were mapped. This is the first comprehensive mapping exercise of water resources on Comoros – a prerequisite to establishing a sound strategy for climate-resilient water supply.

2.5 Every child has a fair chance in life

To complement the 2017 analysis of the situation of children and women in the Comoros, UNICEF carried out a **child poverty analysis**, covering both monetary and multidimensional aspects. The analysis showed that 42 per cent of Comorian children live in households classified as poor and 60 per cent face multidimensional poverty.

The findings also revealed that close to a quarter of children living in poor households are not subject to multidimensional poverty. In contrast, 48 per cent of children who experience multidimensional poverty live in non-poor households. The child poverty analysis provided an opportunity to **train 20 technical experts from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEED) in Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA)**.

Due to a shortage of funds, this was the **last year for the programme of unconditional cash transfers to the most vulnerable households** which has been in place since 2014. There was a single disbursement of funds to the 559 beneficiary households, which cover 1,980 children. The cash transfer programme has enabled some beneficiaries to develop productive activities to support their livelihoods.

In addition, 3,100 disaster-stricken families with a total of 12,853 children benefited from an **unconditional WASH cash transfer** coupled with sensitization to help reduce the risk of waterborne diseases in the wake of Cyclone Kenneth.

UNICEF continued producing and disseminating evidence to support **advocacy for improving the public financial management framework for children in the Comoros**. A recent analysis revealed that the share of the state budget allocated to the health sector has more than tripled, from 5.3 per cent in 2017 to 16.3 per cent in 2019. This brings it above the 15 per cent threshold recommended by the World Health Organization.

Over 90 per cent of the studies and analyses scheduled for 2019 in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) have been carried out. Project documents for the Multiple-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) planned for 2020 have been developed and validated. In addition, a training on Results-Based Management (RBM) was organized for 23 UNICEF and partner staff (14 men and 9 women).

The UNICEF Comoros Country Office received US\$97,000 from the Global Evaluation Fund to supplement funding for the evaluation of the integrated listening and protection service; carry out the formative evaluation of the country programme; and develop national capacity in evaluation. **Evaluations** of the infant and young child feeding programme and the listening and protection service were carried out in 2019 and will be used for advocacy and scaling up. The Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office Evaluation section will manage the evaluation of the country programme in 2020 as part of its ongoing support to the Country Office.

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The President of the Union of the Comoros took part in the **celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child** and recorded a video message renewing his commitment to protect the rights of Comorian children. The ceremony received wide coverage across radio, television, newspaper, and social media channels. More than 1,700 children across the country participated in a march to claim their rights. The number of followers of the UNICEF Comoros Facebook page has grown from 3,500 to more than 6,000 during the year. Estimates suggest more than 200,000 people have been reached with video and other communication content on UNICEF work.

UNICEF supported a **knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey** on children's health, development, education and protection in Comoros. The findings of the KAP study provide behavioural and social data that will inform the national Communication for Development (C4D) strategy. For example, the survey revealed that nearly 26 per cent of children aged 15–17 are involved in a multiple-partner sexual relationship, which may lead to a greater focus on programming for adolescents.

In addition, the Country Office has contributed to **national preparation and response capacity in humanitarian situations** by organizing and delivering training on water, sanitation and hygiene in emergencies to 60 officers of the General Directorate of Civil Security (DGSC).

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Two factors have delayed programme implementation in Comoros in 2019: the electoral process in a difficult political climate, which ended with the confirmation of the president at the end of March 2019; and tropical cyclone Kenneth which made landfall on 24 April 2019 affecting 345,000 people – 46 per cent of the population.

The year tested the country and UNICEF capacity to respond to an emergency on a national scale. Lessons and recommendations on future preparedness were documented during a Cyclone Kenneth Lessons Learned Workshop, as well as during an evaluation carried out by the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI). The emergency underscored the need for a comprehensive preparedness, response and resilience strategy – both in terms of emergency response and risk communication. One specific challenge identified was the absence of an emergency-situation communication for development (C4D) plan, and no coordination structure. This challenge had been addressed in time for the expected landfall of Cyclone Belna, which narrowly deviated from the Comoros in December 2019. In terms of emergency preparedness, an operational communication plan was developed, and a multisectoral emergency communication group was set up under UNICEF leadership.

For the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, emergency lessons included: (a) the importance of prepositioned contingency stock, especially in a situation where air shipment is prohibitively expensive and would take too long by sea; (b) that the emergency cash transfer, organized with the social protection sector, has demonstrated its efficiency in responding to the immediate needs of the affected population – and this modality should be formalized within the national contingency plan and the sector response plan; (c) that there are capacity gaps: WASH actors other than the National Civil Security Directorate and the Comorian Red Crescent were not familiar with humanitarian assessment tools, which resulted in slow, inefficient data analysis in an emergency context; and (d) that the current water supply system is not resilient, with most pumping stations in Ngazidja relying on a fragile source of energy.

UNICEF has also embraced innovation and integration of new technologies. The use of smartphones and online platforms such as KoBoToolbox continues to prove its efficiency for quickly deploying surveys and collecting data. Building on the previous years' work, the Comoros Water Information System (SIEC) developed by UNICEF in collaboration with the National Directorate of Water and Sanitation became operational on all three islands. SIEC uses mobile phone technology to collect data and store it online. This technology has proven its relevance and agility in the aftermath of the cyclone, as a new water infrastructure inspection module was developed and distributed to public servants in a matter of days, allowing for a prompt and reliable assessment of damage to water infrastructure following Cyclone Kenneth. This experience has fuelled interest in extending mobile-technology-based data collection to the immunization and education sectors.

UNICEF is also looking for further ways to accelerate community access to improved sanitation. An innovative project makes use of the popular community saving scheme to help overcome cash flow obstacles to investing in improved toilets. Early indicators suggest this approach has considerable potential; as with sanitation marketing, it will likely take a number of years to reach scale.

UNICEF continues to advocate for a better enabling environment for water, sanitation and hygiene in the country. The absence of a dedicated budget allocation, stagnant policy and institutional reform, and annual changes of line ministries

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point to low prioritization of this sector. At the same time, public servants remain committed to improving the situation within their role. The need for continuous high-level advocacy remains critical, alongside capacity strengthening at the operational level to make progress for the well-being of children.

In the education sector, UNICEF has worked together with the Ministry of Education to launch mobile-phone-based platforms to improve official communication and reporting between the school, district, and ministry levels. The initiative is being implemented in the 50 public primary schools chosen as pilots for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Transitional Education Project for the Union of the Comoros (PTEUC), and staff have been trained on reporting relevant information using a smartphone. Early signs are promising and may lead to a further scale-up.

Similarly, UNICEF has worked in coordination with the Ministry of Health to develop a concept for an electronic immunization registry to record and track child immunization records at the local level using an online platform and tablets and/or smartphones. This concept, which is under review, is expected to address weaknesses in routine immunization in the country.

Coordination bottlenecks were encountered in the parenting programme supporting early childhood development. The current programme focuses on strengthening the capacities of parents in their role as educators and caregivers to enable young children to develop to their full potential and prepare for school. The programme is implemented chiefly by the network of community health workers employed by the Ministry of Health. Poor collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education has prevented the implementation of activities such as awareness-raising sessions on hygiene, nutrition and preschool education, despite the provision of parental education guides and trainers' guides to the island authorities. The guides were developed under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, which is now looking to work with school councils and mayors, with whom they have already started parental education activities, rather than community health workers.

As part of its work on post-cyclone reconstruction, UNICEF has specified the use of energy-saving lamps (LEDs) in all new and refurbished health facilities. With support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the office has also introduced solar-powered water pumps as a climate-resilient option in order to avoid the use of fossil fuels.

Following the release of the Independent Task Force Report on Workplace Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority, the Comoros Country Office developed and adopted an action plan addressing the key recommendations. The plan is being implemented and monitored by the Country Office Joint Consultative Committee and the Local Staff Association.