

## Comoros

---

### Executive Summary

In 2016, children in the Union of Comoros faced challenges in health, nutrition protection and education. Progress was made on routine immunization and malnutrition, although poor access to water, hygiene and sanitation remained major causes of child mortality. Children also faced violence, especially sexual violence, in a context of increased poverty and limited institutional capacities to address cases.

UNICEF Comoros implemented year two of its 2015–2019 programme cycle aligned with the National Development Plan and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, in the context of Delivering as One.

In nutrition, results focused on improving screening and treatment for severe acute malnutrition through routine work in the 17 district health centres set up to conduct screenings to measure mid-upper arm circumference and through campaigns. In 2016, some 766 children with severe acute malnutrition received treatment; 410 fully recovered, 105 are still under treatment and, sadly, 1 died.

Two hundred and fifty children abandoned the treatment and nearly half of the 263 children screened during the campaign did not integrate into the programme, due to indirect costs (transportation, accommodation and food) for accompanying adults. Routine screening remained weak because it was not well integrated into other health activities as well as a lack of motivation of community health workers.

In 2016, 64.7 per cent of districts in the country had Penta-3 vaccine coverage above 80 per cent, compared with 58 per cent in 2015. The Penta-3 coverage rate is 75.5 per cent, according to routine data. However, it was at 91 per cent, according to the measles post-campaign survey. Measles routine coverage was at 81.3 per cent, while the campaign data showed 76 per cent coverage and the post-campaign survey estimated it at 90 per cent. According to the Ministry of Health, there might be a problem in the child population estimates used to compute coverage. The upcoming population census might help resolve this issue. Knowledge of childcare practices – particularly around nutrition, hygiene and sanitation – increased among caregivers.

The number of schools providing preschool education reached 50.14 per cent in 2015–2016. Children will benefit from quality parental education, as preschool curricula were redesigned and learning materials revised to focus on the development of social, cognitive, motor and emotional skills, as opposed to previous curricula focusing only on cognitive skills and memorization.

The legal environment to protect children against violence and neglect was improved through the drafting of a National Child Protection Policy integrating the prevention of child marriage as one of its four main pillars. Service offerings were also increased through support to listening services – hence, a tripartite partnership between UNICEF, Telma Foundation (cell phone company) and the General Delegation for Human Rights. In 2016, 413 cases of child victims of violence, abuse, neglect and abandonment were reported to the

centres and assisted with UNICEF support. Some 190 children received follow-up medical assistance and 172 received legal assistance.

The visibility of the role of adolescents in the second decade of life increased at local and national levels, as did the acknowledgement of the role of community engagement in providing alternative pathways to youth. UNICEF Comoros partnered with community-based youth organizations to design and deliver awareness raising and sensitization activities in hygiene and sanitation and towards the abolition of child marriage.

The contribution of rights holders in advocacy debates also increased. UNICEF Comoros supported meetings between 150 boys and girls between the ages of 12 to 17 years old and the governors of all three islands (Mwali, Ndzuani and Ngazidja) and the Head of State of Comoros to discuss their expectations, ideas and dreams about their futures.

Government data generation capacity was strengthened. Government key staff benefited from the international best practice exchange forums on HIV and AIDS, nutrition and protection. Capacities of local communities were strengthened through communication for development activities to end harmful social practices and to stimulate demand for relevant services.

The Country Office operations continued to improve in 2016. The Country Office impact on the environment was minimized in compliance with the national Environment Law (no. 94-018/AF), by preventing the use of protected natural resources in UNICEF-supported construction works.

Quality assurance was strengthened by closely monitoring compliance to the 2016 local Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers Assurance Plan, including the undertaking of programmatic visits (all) and spot-checks (91.2 per cent). The scheduled audit of one implementing partner could not be carried out due to the difficulty in identifying a suitable local service provider. As part of Delivering as One, the Country Office is discussing with other United Nations agencies the possibility of establishing a joint audit contract with an international firm in 2017.

High-level advocacy for resources mobilization was strengthened through high-level exchanges with locally based diplomatic bodies.

## **Humanitarian assistance**

N/A

## **Strategic Plan 2018–2021**

The draft 2018–2021 Strategic Plan was shared with the Country Office staff and Country Management Team (CMT) members for reflection. No consensual structured response was provided by staff and CMT members. However, from individual discussions and reflection notes provided by a few professional staff members, it was felt overall that the first three and the last goal areas were considered very clear and concise, with a clear focus on what was to be pursued for children. Indeed, goals 1, 2, 3 and 5 have concrete substance elements, while goal 4 recouped cross-cutting elements that could be mainstreamed in the other four goals. From the discussions, it was determined that goals 1, 2, 3 and 5 seemed to be about the 'what', while goal 4 seemed to be more about the 'how', as equity, gender and social protection can all be addressed in the other goal areas.

The architecture of the Strategic Plan beyond goal 4 is in line with the Comoros National Development Plan strategic pillars and would fit well with programmes that are being

implemented in the country, and which need to be adjusted to the Sustainable Development Goals. After a period of hesitation on the National Development Plan, the Government – newly elected in 2016 – is embracing it and doing necessary adjustments to move forward with resource mobilization and quick implementation.

## Emerging Areas of Importance

In Comoros, three main issues were of concern to the Government and to programmes being implemented in 2016: climate change, early childhood development and the second decade of life.

**Climate change.** The first area of concern was climate change, including a worry about rainfall cycles and levels since rainfall seemed to have decreased in volume. Furthermore, drought periods seemed to be longer, affecting farm productivity for the most vulnerable families. This was felt by most partners to be one of many causes of child malnutrition. Another key issue communities were faced with during the reporting period was the erosion of the coastal line. Many communities solicited UNICEF's technical support to take decisions on school infrastructure affected by coastal erosion and needing to be reconstructed further inland. Beyond the infrastructural aspects of erosion, land availability for farming activities and other social-economic activities have become major concerns in communities.

**Integrated early childhood development (ECD).** School access indicators evolved positively over the years, reaching 81 per cent net enrolment rates in the primary cycle in 2014–2015. Transition between primary and lower secondary, which were both part of basic education, was at 92 per cent. One of the reasons for the positive access indicators in the primary cycle was the expansion of offering public preschool. The number of schools providing preschool education reached 34 per cent in 2014–2015, while preschool access was up to 22.4 per cent. To maximize the effects of integrated early learning programmes and their long-term impact on children's learning, UNICEF Comoros supported the consolidation of the preschool offering and the establishment of parental education. This included the design of preschool teaching and learning materials based on a revision of the preschool curricula.

In 2016, Comoros designed, with UNICEF support, an integrated parental education programme to reach children in the 0–3 age bracket. The aim of the initiative was threefold: parents would be better prepared to cater to the needs of their children (health, cognitive, social and psycho-emotional); children would be better equipped to learn effectively and enjoy their right to education once they reach school age; and the offer provided by the system would be tailored to the needs of preschool-age children and their different abilities.

However, access was limited beyond basic education, as transition to secondary education was as low as 45 per cent. Unemployment was a common among those youths who had dropped out before secondary education. Only very rare coordinated opportunities able to equip them with the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to live a healthy, safe, productive and self-fulfilling life were available to them through community-based non-formal programmes. Unfortunately, these alternative pathways were limited; they often lacked coordination and were generally under-resourced.

**The second decade.** To support the role of adolescents in the second decade of life and to acknowledge the role of community engagement in providing alternative pathways to youth, in 2016 UNICEF Comoros partnered with community-based youth organizations to design and deliver awareness raising and sensitization activities in hygiene and sanitation and the abolition of child marriage. These were the first steps to contribute to the strengthening of meaningful youth participation. The aim was to give value to the creative skills of youth,

among others, in the advancement of children and youth rights through support to community-level initiatives. UNICEF Comoros also initiated action to work with youth through social media to secure their engagement on issues that matter to them. The development of a Facebook web page was initiated in that regard. Furthermore, a partnership was initiated with cell phone company Telma for three green phone lines in the three listening centres for children and young people who were victims of violence.

### Summary notes and acronyms

CMT	Country Management Team
DCT	direct cash transfer
GSSC	Global Shared Services Centre
ICT	information and communication technology
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
OR	Other Resources
RR	Regular Resources
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

### Capacity Development

In 2016, capacity building of local communities relied on communication for development (C4D) to end harmful social practices and stimulate demand for relevant services. Sanitation marketing and immunization strategies, aimed at improving demand for better toilets and for increased vaccination coverage, were designed and validated in 2016. The national promotion campaign on improved toilets was launched in November during World Toilet Day, reaching about 20,000 households. The campaign used travelling theatre, concerts, and audio and video clips on local radio and television stations. Young people were actively involved as advocates for UNICEF-supported causes, reinforcing their creative capacities and giving value to their talents.

In education, UNICEF Comoros facilitated an exploratory visit from representatives of Burkina Faso on renovated Koranic education. This experience-sharing visit provided an opportunity for the Comorian Ministry of Education to learn about the parental education and preschool pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes implemented in Burkina Faso. Additionally, the Ministry of Education took the lead in increasing access to schooling through the completion of school construction and rehabilitation, benefiting more than 5,500 children. UNICEF also supported the procurement of 310,000 core textbooks for the benefit of 149,000 primary-school students.

Government capacities were strengthened on emergency water treatment, using pre-positioned portable water treatment units on the three islands. The aim was for civil security personnel to understand basic water treatment in emergencies. This practical training, conducted in October, reinforces civil security preparedness as the country approaches the cyclone season that spans from December to April.

### Evidence Generation, Policy Dialogue and Advocacy

In December 2016, the first round of monthly monitoring data collection and analysis on the growth of infants and children 0–23 months old was carried out by health workers in 69 villages. This process, supported by the National Health Information Directorate, aimed to

generate information on acute malnutrition leading to treatment and to strengthen evidence-based real-time decisions for improved advocacy at the national level. Due to a lack of funding, a Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition survey was not conducted.

UNICEF Comoros supported the development of an evidence-based national child protection policy and its action plan. This was informed by a mapping and formative evaluation of the child protection system in Comoros, led by the Government.

Local-level surveys on school access for the most vulnerable, a regional study on the schooling of children with disabilities and a communication campaign organized in 2016 by the Government of Comoros with UNICEF support UNICEF provided evidence to inform the first draft in December 2016 of a national strategy for the education of children living with disabilities.

To strengthen public awareness on the lifelong harmful impacts of violence against children, the third campaign to end violence against children was launched in 2016 by the Government of Comoros, with the support of UNICEF. This led to a common agreement among duty bearers on joint measures to prevent violence against children.

## Partnerships

A tripartite partnership between UNICEF Comoros, the Telma Foundation and the General Delegation for Human Rights was launched in November. The partnership aimed at fighting all forms of violence against women and children by supporting the listening services – established between 2004 and 2016 by the Government, UNICEF and three civil society organizations – to which abuses are reported and increasing the capacity to track and follow up on cases of abuse. In 2016, the services followed 413 cases of violence, abuse, neglect and abandonment, half of which received medical and legal assistance.

UNICEF partnered with the World Bank to support the Government of Comoros in reducing child acute and chronic malnutrition. Logistics and information technology equipment was procured for the Government for improved screening and management of malnutrition countrywide. The first round of monthly monitoring data collection on the growth infants and children 0–23 months old, supported by the National Health Information Directorate, took place in December 2016.

The partnership with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance continued. JICA provided immunization materials to the national immunization program, while Gavi supported the strengthening of the national health system and the cold chain.

UNICEF and the National Commission for Solidarity launched phase three of the Global Initiative to End Violence against Children. The objective was to end violence against children on the Internet. The campaign enhanced the finalization of the child protection policy adopted by the Government and its 2017–2021 action plan focusing on the fight against violence against children.

The Ministry of Tourism initiated a public-private Child-Friendly Hotels partnership supported by UNICEF. Three hotels carried out activities in favour of children in 2016, and at least three others were due to acquire the Child-Friendly Hotels label in 2017.

## External Communication and Public Advocacy

Several face-to-face advocacy activities were conducted in 2016. Meetings between children and the governors of the islands supported by UNICEF in partnership with the Human Rights Delegation gave children the opportunity to be directly involved in the debates around issues that affect their well-being.

To put children's rights on the political agenda and discuss UNICEF action and future strategies to prevent violence against children, the UNICEF Comoros representative met the Head of State and the Minister of Justice. A twice-yearly appointment was agreed with the President to follow up on the implementation of actions towards the promotion of children's rights.

The Day of the African Child, celebrated in Ngazdja in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, offered the opportunity to advocate for children's rights in the context of the current crises occurring across different parts of Africa. On this occasion, as on several others, the media were well represented and the events were broadcast on national television to reach a larger audience. To increase media capacity in engaging all duty holders on issues related to children's rights, a communication kit that included print materials, television and radio scripts and human interest stories were developed in close collaboration with the UNICEF Headquarters internal communication team to be used by national counterparts, non-governmental organizations and the international development community.

UNICEF Comoros was featured on international media on two occasions in 2016. Two Habari Za UNICEF Comoros bulletins were published electronically and on paper, and disseminated to partners nationally and internationally. UNICEF Comoros support to early childhood development was featured in 2016 IKEA international catalogue. The catalogue digital platform featured videos of pre-primary Renovated Koranic Education showing pupils' interaction with toys in the early childhood development kits procured with UNICEF support for all renovated Koranic education classes.

## South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

A mission from Burkina Faso composed of UNICEF staff and government partners was hosted in 2016. The aim was to share the experience of Comoros' renovated Koranic education. This allowed Burkina Faso authorities to become acquainted with the implementation of school-readiness programmes within the formal primary school system in Comoros. It also allowed Comoros authorities to hear about Burkina Faso's experience in parenting education and literacy programmes.

UNICEF Comoros supported the participation of its communication officer and a government delegation in the workshop organized by the African Union in Nairobi, as part of the 2063 African Union Agenda for Africa, on the role of media in ending early marriages of children. This workshop had two main objectives: to strengthen media capacity to better investigate child marriage in Africa by focusing on root causes and to explore the different aspects of the issues and challenges all stakeholders face to end the practice. Focus was on the media as the main conveyers of information to challenge the practice. The main output was the development of a country-level action plan for the media in Comoros, for which resource mobilization will need to be supported.

## Identification and Promotion of Innovation

In 2016, UNICEF Comoros focused on putting rights holders at the centre of mainstream advocacy. Three advocacy meetings with the governors of the three islands (Ngazidja,

Ndzuani and Mwali) and the Head of State were supported. In total, 150 boys and girls 12 to 17 years old – 50 from each island – participated in the meetings.

To prepare for the meetings, children met and discussed to develop questions on four main themes. These included education; health and nutrition, mainly of children younger than 5 years old; protection against all forms of violence, including cybercrime, mostly affecting children; and radicalization. Access to services for children with disability was embedded across the four themes, because of a lack of specific and appropriate solutions to improve the access of this specific group of children to education and health care.

At the end of the discussions, the children expressed their satisfaction for the opportunity to talk about their concerns with the country's primary decision makers. They were especially satisfied with the commitments made by these decision makers to focus on children in all future planning. Indeed, the Head of State as well as the three governors were sensitized to the importance of developing plans and strategies that are child-sensitive and that respond to the needs of children. The General Delegation for Human Rights coordinated the organization of the meetings in collaboration with the islands' local authorities in charge of child protection.

### **Support to Integration and Cross-Sectoral Linkages**

In preparation for the April 2016 presidential elections, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF Comoros jointly implemented a United Nations Peace Building Fund project called Conflict Prevention and Enhancement of Participation in the Peaceful Elections in the Union of the Comoros. This involved the UNICEF Representative meeting the candidates of the presidential election to raise awareness on issues related to the rights of children and women in the country. In addition, as discussed above, the General Delegation for Human Rights organized meetings between children and the elected Head of State and governors of the three islands to discuss issues affecting the well-being of children in the Comoros. These meetings also aimed at promoting education for the citizenship of children and awareness raising.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF worked closely on the Government of Comoros' measles vaccination campaign from 27 October to 29 October. The campaign's objective was to vaccinate at least 95 per cent of children 9–59 months old against measles. The campaign reached 97 per cent of targeted children in Ndzuani, 94 per cent in Mwali and 57 per cent in Ngazidja.

UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO funded the preparatory work for the fourth General Population and Housing Census to be carried out in 2017. UNICEF also provided technical assistance to the preparatory phase of the activity.

UNICEF also continued to be part of the United Nations Human Rights and Gender Thematic Group to ensure that the rights of children were well represented in all decisions taken by the United Nations system regarding equity.

The Country Office education, social protection, communication and child survival and development sections worked closely to support the drafting of a national strategy for the education of children with disabilities, led by the Government of Comoros. To improve household sanitation conditions in seven target communities, the social inclusion, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sections worked together on a sanitation marketing project.

## Service Delivery

In 2016, the Country Office continued to work towards improving its strategies and operations. This included focusing on evidence-based service delivery to better respond to identified needs and provide tailored solutions to issues.

Based on a detailed analysis of constraints and barriers on access to and use of basic services (immunization, nutrition, education, WASH, protection), UNICEF Comoros supported the Government in developing a National Strategy for Communication and Social Mobilization. Activities were redirected towards supporting governance and strengthening national capacities for the sustainability of achievements and the improvement of an information system for regular monitoring and informed decision-making. This strategy provided appropriate tools for social mobilization to reach vulnerable children in hard-to-reach areas, for the benefit of the most vulnerable. For example, a multi-year action plan to strengthen routine immunization was developed, supported by annual operational plans. Planning, organizing and coordination tools were also developed to improve the organization, integration, monitoring and evaluation of services. Furthermore, within the framework of service delivery, a vaccination campaign against measles was organized to avoid any epidemic outbreak. It reached 97 per cent of children 9–59 months old in Ndzuani, 94 per cent in Mwali and 57 per cent in Ngazidja, the main island.

In education, the 'Ecole primaire d'excellence' initiative, introduced in 36 primary schools in Ndzuani and focusing on quality teaching and learning, successfully contributed to improving students' performance in those schools. This led the education authorities to extend the initiative to 16 primary schools in Ngazidja and 3 primary schools of Mwali. This initiative's main objective is to make effective use of the resources allocated to the schools to improve learning outcomes for students, particularly the most vulnerable children.

## Human Rights-Based Approach to Cooperation

In September 2016, the complementary civil society report on the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was issued. The report, supported by funding from UNICEF and Plan International, was presented to the twenty-eighth session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on 29 October in the Gambia. The process benefited from the technical expertise of UNICEF Comoros, which was instrumental in ensuring that the Comorian delegation would include a 12-year-old child.

As part of the fight against human trafficking, a support mission from the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa was organized in April 2016. This was in response to a request for technical support made by the Government of Comoros. The mission's objective was to contribute to strengthening the action plan to combat human trafficking. Recommendations were made in the mission report to better fight against the scourge. The recommendations made have been incorporated into the Government's National Child Protection Policy.

To raise the awareness of authorities of children's rights, the General Delegation for Human Rights organized meetings between 150 children and the elected representatives (the Head of State and the governors of the islands) within the framework of a project funded by the Peace Building Fund. The group of children denounced the violence perpetrated against children, the decline in the rate of vaccination and the increase in malnutrition. They drew the attention of the authorities to the importance of combating poverty to prevent the recruitment of children by radical religious organizations.

## Gender Equality

The UNICEF Comoros 2015–2017 Gender Action Plan had two main priorities: to end child marriage and to mainstream gender in all programme components. To fulfil these commitments, UNICEF Comoros supported the process that led to a National Child Protection policy draft focusing on the prevention of child marriage and touching on education and health.

To start with, the Country Office contributed, with UNFPA, to the evaluation of the 2007 National Equity and Gender Equality Policy. Following that, a vulnerability mapping of Comoros was conducted. Child marriage was one of the aspects mapped, based on data from the 2012 Demographic and Health Survey/Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. Thus, child marriage was selected as one of the four pillars of the National Child Protection Policy, to be complemented by a costed national plan.

A national network for child marriage prevention, including several municipal authorities and civil society organizations, was also established.

The UNICEF Country Office participated in the 2016 African Union East Africa workshop on the role of media in ending child marriage. The aim of the workshop was to plan the capacity development of local national media in researching and treating child marriage issues and to support information sharing. This participation prompted the African Union's expression of interest to support the Government of Comoros in adhering to the African Union campaign to end child marriage.

In 2016, UNICEF Comoros continued to participate actively in the United Nations Human Rights and Gender Thematic Group upstream initiatives. In preparation for the presidential elections, it led awareness-raising debates on the participation of women in the political and electoral process and on the mainstreaming of gender issues in national policies.

Upstream and downstream advocacy and awareness-raising activities regarding violence against women and children were supported throughout the year. These culminated in the celebration of the international day for the elimination of violence against women in November.

## Environmental Sustainability

As a small island developing state, Comoros continued to be particularly vulnerable in 2016 to changes in its environment. Interdependence between people and the environment continued to be strong, with more than 90 per cent of the population depending on agriculture or fishery. This was a complex relationship, where people and nature also competed for space. As an example, one of the dangerous consequences was a consistent deforestation, which in turn is affecting natural water reserves, with some rivers drying up. This competing demand, exacerbated by population growth and aggravated by climate change, continued to pose a real threat to Comoros' population and its future generations.

In its actions, the Country Office strived to minimize its impact on the environment in compliance with the national Environment Law (no. 94-018/AF). It did that by ensuring, for instance, that construction work commissioned by the Country Office would not use protected natural resources, such as beach and river sand, which are essential to prevent erosion.

In addition, UNICEF Comoros reviewed and consolidated the mapping of communities' vulnerability to natural disasters. This work, in conjunction with climate change impact

scenarios, would facilitated the integration of climate change adaptation and mitigation in future actions.

The Country Office conducted an energy audit as a preliminary task to greening its working environment. In 2016, the Country Office relied heavily on a diesel generator to maintain power supply. This had a negative impact on the office's environmental footprint, increased its operational costs, and decreased staff productivity due to information and communication technology (ICT) power cuts during the shifts from general power to generator supply. To find a solution for these issues, plans were made to rewire the whole office in order to install solar power for, at the very least, all ICT services.

## Effective Leadership

The year 2016 was marked by the implementation of UNICEF human resource reform. Some new transformations came into effect, such as the establishment of:

- The talent management system (TMS) for effective talent acquisition and solid talent management, and quick deployment of staff;
- The ACHIEVE, a web-based performance management system that enables UNICEF staff holding permanent and full-time appointments to set up, monitor and complete their annual performance evaluation reports online; and
- The migration of finance activities and local human resource and payroll administration to the Global Shared Services Centre (GSSC).

With the support of the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, the Country Office worked to fully adhere to and implement the above initiatives at country level. Staff attended regional trainings and a high-performance scanner was procured to ensure smooth implementation of some of the GSSC requirements.

Two staff retired in 2016 – the chief of the child survival and development section and the senior driver, and the processing of documents for these two cases was given high priority. With technical support of the regional human resources team, they were handled properly and completed prior to the separation of the staff members. Moreover, as the Chief of the Child Survival and Development section was de facto the Deputy Representative, the Country Office strived to ensure timely completion of the recruitment process to minimize the gap between the retirement of the previous staff member and the arrival of his successor.

The commitment of the Country Office to closely monitor gender ratios and improve gender parity was achieved. Currently, UNICEF Comoros gender statistics show a 50/50 balance for senior staff

Most of the group trainings planed in the staff learning plan were completed (i.e., time management and results-based management). The annual staff retreat was held with the support of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office.

## Financial Resources Management

Throughout 2016, the Country Office kept its commitment to strengthening the monitoring of its management indicators. Progress on management indicators was tracked as a standing item on the agenda of each country management team meeting and remedial actions were taken when necessary.

Due attention was given to outstanding direct cash transfer (DCT) reports. The mechanism put in place in 2015 to monitor DCTs on a weekly basis, and to prevent reporting that took more than three months, was effective. It provided all programme and operation sections

with timely information to prompt appropriate action, whether internally or with implementing partners.

A key challenge faced by the Country Office was the difficulty to explain UNICEF procedures to government officers appointed in May 2016, after political and administrative reshuffles that followed the presidential elections. This caused some DCTs to go more than three months. However, the Country Office remained committed to improving the situation through close monitoring of DCT reporting cycles.

The Country Office improved performance included:

- No duty travel authorization more than 15 days after completion of travel was open on 31 December 2016;
- All bank reconciliations were submitted to headquarters and the GSSC before the deadline;
- No reconciling items were outstanding more than a month on 31 December 2016; and;
- The Country Office Table of Authorities was updated based on changes during the course of the year.

In 2016, 100 per cent of the funds available to the Country Office for the year had been utilized. That includes BMA, other resources – regular and regular resources.

Efficiency gains were also made because of improvements in the management of property and equipment. Many obsolete items were sold following the recommendation of the Property Survey Board (PSB) committee, raising US\$1,060.56.

## Fundraising and Donor Relations

Overall, UNICEF Comoros mobilized more resources than planned in 2016 (193 per cent). UNICEF ESARO announced US\$768,355 from thematic funds for all sectors to support regional priorities for health, WASH, protection and social inclusion. However, some intermediate results were underfunded or not funded: nutrition surveillance (4 per cent), parental education and the roll-out of renovated Koranic teaching (0 per cent), child protection helplines (28 per cent) and community-based protection approaches (23 per cent).

The Country Office raised US\$444,274 from the Global Partnership for Education for the preparation of the 2017–2020 Education Sector Transition Plan. The local education group also agreed to a round table in 2017 to mobilize resources to support the plan's implementation.

Budgeted concept notes for health, nutrition and education were shared with local ambassadors. A visit by the Comoros Ambassador to the United Nations provided the opportunity to raise awareness of the funding gap for the implementation of the country programme. Consultations also continued with visiting missions from JICA and the World Bank to mobilize additional resources for nutrition and universal health coverage.

Joint nutrition and maternal and neonatal health projects with UNFPA and WHO were submitted to the Resident Coordinator's office for follow-up. A joint project with the International Labour Organization, UNDP, UNFPA and WHO was submitted to donors to mobilize human security funds to reduce inequality, exclusion and discrimination in the country.

Weekly section meetings, monthly programme meetings, programmatic visits and spot

checks were used to monitor donor reporting compliance, grants monitoring and the optimization of funds. The four donor reports due in 2016 were submitted on schedule. A checklist to monitor the quality of donor reports was developed and relevant programme officers were trained on how to use it.

## Evaluation and Research

The Country Office updated its 2015–2016 biannual integrated monitoring and evaluation plan at the beginning of this year. More than 85 per cent of activities planned for the year were completed. The main achievements in terms of analysis, studies and evaluation included:

A mapping and formative evaluation of the child protection system in Comoros led by the Government with the technical support of Maestral International, an American firm specialized on such studies. These two studies were informed by the Mapping Toolbox developed by UNICEF for this purpose. They provided a descriptive profile of formal and informal child protection systems in place in Comoros. The findings informed the development of a National Child Protection Policy and its action plan. UNICEF Comoros has technically and financially supported the development of this mapping and formative evaluation of the child protection system.

An institutional analysis and a performance analysis of the education system in Comoros were conducted with the support of the Pôle de Dakar of the International Institute for Educational Planning. This analysis helped to identify weaknesses in the education system to propose suitable solutions through the development of 2017–2020 Education Sector Transition Plan.

A survey on Comoros household living conditions and particularly on sanitation facilities was conducted in nine municipalities in the country, including four in Ndzuani, three in Ngazidja and two in Mwali. The survey was part of the marketing of the sanitation project, which aimed to improve the hygiene conditions of the most vulnerable households by helping to build improved toilets. The survey was complemented by a campaign to raise awareness of the populations of these municipalities. Findings of the survey are not due to be published before February 2017 and will establish the baseline of the implementation of the marketing sanitation project.

## Efficiency Gains and Cost Savings

As part of Delivering as One, the Country Office maintained its contributions and overall commitment to the common premises and common services with other United Nations agencies. In 2016, the total contribution of UNICEF to common services amounted to US\$92,863.94 (27 per cent of total costs).

As in previous years, contributions from all agencies were used to cover the costs of shared services, such as security, running costs and salaries of the doctor and nurse of the United Nations dispensary, cleaning services and utilities. Fuel consumption and maintenance costs for generators increased sharply due to a chronic electricity shortage. For a lasting solution and for cost-savings improvement, most United Nations agencies in Comoros were in the process of installing solar energy. UNICEF Comoros submitted a request for Greening and Accessibility Funds to headquarters. Its approval would put UNICEF in a leading position and inspire other agencies. If implemented, the solar projects will save the Country Office US\$20,300 per year and will enable it to be autonomous in terms of electricity.

The implementation of the business operations strategy was at the conceptual phase in 2016. It was planned that the first implementation step would be the training of trainers.

Aside from common services, the Country Office also made some cost savings through one joint United Nations operation. Indeed, in 2016, the office contributed financially to the finalization of the National Development Plan, the report with UNDP. UNICEF contributed US\$3,021 (23 per cent) of a total of US\$13,120. This contribution was made through a DCT to the implementing partner responsible for the development and monitoring of the plan, the Commissariat Général au Plan.

## Supply Management

Health supplies	US\$523,762.14
Education supplies	US\$245,384.93
Protection inclusion supplies	US\$3,223.00
Operations	US\$104,358.71
<b>Total value of supplies received</b>	<b>US\$876,728.78</b>
Services	US\$550,388.12
Construction	US\$821,845.24
<b>Total value of Comoros Country Office procurement</b>	<b>US\$2,248,962.14</b>

As shown above, the actual total value for essential goods procured in 2016 was US\$876,728.78. The total supply spending by UNICEF Comoros, including construction and services, was US\$2,248,962.14.

In 2016, 43 institutional contracts were issued for US\$1,372,233.36. Out of this amount, US\$ 821,845.24, or 60 per cent, were for 18 construction and rehabilitation contracts. Of these, US\$750,045.24 were for Educate a Child-supported interventions in education and US\$71,800 for the GAVI-supported child survival and development programme.

UNICEF Comoros moved forward in the implementation of the supply strategy launched in 2015, to assess and source the international market to deliver cost savings for the best interests of children. For example, in 2016, a comparative assessment carried out on the local and international markets led to a management decision for international sourcing of textbooks procured through two purchase orders for the education programme. This enabled the securing of high-quality textbooks and compliance with delivery deadlines. Above all, the decision led to savings of limited financial resources, which amounted to US\$717,684.

UNICEF Comoros also saved by increasingly using regional and global long-term agreement suppliers for requests for quotations, invitations to bid and requests for proposals. This process resulted in saving quality-control resources and time, as the suppliers were previously technically evaluated and their companies were validated and referenced. It also helped in addressing the issues linked to the low capacity of the local market. The strategy was essentially used to meet the needs of purchasing requests from the WASH, nutrition and vaccination programmes related to procurement of goods such as utensils and kitchen implements, smartphones, dolls, ladles, spare parts, loudspeakers, protective gowns, etc. The Office also issued five local long-term agreements for mail management, spot checks, vehicle maintenance and hiring of vehicles.

Programme supplies were directly delivered to implementing partners, as UNICEF Comoros does not have a warehouse. UNICEF Comoros was recognized by local partners as a key player in the timely delivery of goods to end users on all islands. However, key logistic challenges persisted, such as poor infrastructures, low capacity of the local forwarding/transit agent and expensive airfares and sea freight between the islands.

## Security for Staff and Premises

In terms of security, 2016 was a challenging year for the Country Office.

The local air companies for travel between islands were banned by the International Civil Aviation Organization in February 2016 and, consequently, the whole United Nations system was unable to move smoothly from one island to another to follow up on programme implementation and for the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) assurance activities. The issue was discussed by the United Nations Country Team. It was agreed that each United Nations agency would rely on its headquarters for advice and guidance. While this is still pending, staff showed their commitment by travelling by boat where possible.

In view of 2016 presidential elections, with the support of the regional security adviser, staff were sensitized and trained on specific security measures necessary during election periods, and equipped with security equipment such as VHF radios. UNICEF played the lead in terms of staff safety and security during the election period, as the United Nations Department of Safety and Security at country level relied on the measures put in place by UNICEF.

Most of the issues related to staff safety and security were addressed or improved during the field mission of the regional security adviser in Comoros, who took the opportunity to build the capacity of the staff.

The Business Contingency Plan was updated with support from headquarters and the regional office, and was later tested successfully.

## Human Resources

The year 2016 was marked by the implementation of UNICEF human resource reform. Some new transformations came into effect, such as the establishment of:

- The talent management system (TMS) for effective talent acquisition and solid talent management, and quick deployment of staff;
- The ACHIEVE, a web-based performance management system that enables UNICEF staff holding permanent and full-time appointments to set up, monitor and complete their annual performance evaluation reports online; and
- The migration of finance activities and local human resource and payroll administration to the Global Shared Services Centre (GSSC).

With the support of the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, the Country Office worked to fully adhere to and implement the above initiatives at country level. Staff attended regional trainings and a high-performance scanner was procured to ensure smooth implementation of some of the GSSC requirements.

Two staff retired in 2016 – the chief of the child survival and development section and the senior driver, and the processing of documents for these two cases was given high priority. With technical support of the regional human resources team, they were handled properly and completed prior to the separation of the staff members. Moreover, as the Chief of the Child Survival and Development section was de facto the Deputy Representative, the Country Office strived to ensure timely completion of the recruitment process to minimize the gap between the retirement of the previous staff member and the arrival of his successor.

The commitment of the Country Office to closely monitor gender ratios and improve gender parity was achieved. Currently, UNICEF Comoros gender statistics for its section chiefs show a 50/50 balance.

Most of the group trainings planned in the staff learning plan were completed (i.e., time management and results-based management). The annual staff retreat was held with the support of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office.

## Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology

A functional team site for sharing and collaboration was set up in 2016 and all essential documents were uploaded online.

Internet connectivity improved since the connection was made to the fibre optic line with a local Internet service provider, which has a 10 Mbps/10 Mbps bandwidth. This line is the main connectivity line and the VSAT with EMC (1280/768 kbps) serves as backup.

Funding was secured from the regional contingency funds for Internet, telephone and electrical wiring. Measures were taken to secure funds in 2017 for universal Wi-Fi, as recommended by UNICEF ICT policies to enable the Country Office information technology and telecommunication system to fully meet UNICEF standards.

Staff continued to use OneNote and the advantages linked to it were appreciated by all staff.

In line with the Country Office policies, the main Business Contingency Plan site was provided with essential equipment and with a reliable Internet connection. The disaster recovery plan and business contingency plan were updated early in 2016 (before the elections) and were tested successfully on 16 December 2016.

An energy audit was carried out and funding through the greening and accessibility funds was expected for the extension of the solar power system to all offices in the UNICEF buildings.

A software application for inventory management of information technology equipment was developed and used for local management of assets outside VISION.

Another software application for the management of incoming and outgoing courier with partners was also developed and implemented. The software was very useful in reducing losses of couriers and delays in responding to incoming ones, while improving transparency in the process due to its accessibility by all staff.

## Document Centre

### Evaluation and research

Title	Sequence number	Type of report
Formative Evaluation of Child Protection System	2016/002	Evaluation
Child Protection System Mapping	2016/001	Study

### Other publications

Title
HABARI ZA UNICEF COMORES

