

Republic of Congo

Part 1: Situation update in the country

Children bear the brunt of the current economic crisis

A September 2018 World Bank report supported the fact that the Republic of the Congo continues to face a tough economic context due to a drastic drop of 64 per cent in public spending between 2013 and 2017, with investments falling by 82 per cent in the same period, coupled by a reduction in employment. An oil-dependent country, Congo suffers from the decline in its oil revenues, an undiversified economy, a lack of skilled workforce and a debt ratio that shifted Congo from being considered a moderately-indebted country to be classified as a country in distress. The resulting budget cuts will weaken health services, education, learning and social action if social expenditures are not protected, and may further increase inequality and vulnerability among households and individuals, especially children. An adjustment programme is being negotiated with the International Monetary Fund.

With many social demands and decreasing fiscal resources to address them, the challenge is to limit the impact of the economic and budgetary crisis on social investments. To do so, the Government is making the effort to protect and increase budget allocations to social sectors by reallocating budget expenditures to the most productive social sectors. For example, in 2018 the Ministry of Health's share of the national budget rose to 13 per cent of the national state budget from 4 per cent in 2017, while the Ministry of Defence's share remained at 14 per cent of the state budget in 2018.

To fulfil its commitment to inclusive and equitable growth that leaves no one behind, the Government of Congo, with the technical support of United Nations agencies, put in place an integrated strategic planning framework, the National Development Plan 2018-2022, informed by the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063. It is comprised of three priorities: a) strengthen governance; b) human capital development; and c) diversify the economy.

Although there has been progress in increasing access to quality services, the social situation of the Congolese population remains worrying, and children and the most vulnerable groups bear the brunt of the situation. According to the National Development Plan, almost two out of five Congolese (35 per cent) live below the poverty line. Evidence from Multiple and Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) shows that 61 per cent of children, or about 1.3 million children, in the Congo are in a situation of multidimensional poverty.

In Congo, many children under the age of five do not have access to quality health services. According to the 2014-2015 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), only 26 per cent of children are fully immunized, 67 per cent have received three doses of pentavalent vaccine and 67 per cent are vaccinated against measles before their first birthday. Seeking care in

institutions or from health providers remains low: 50 per cent of children with diarrhoea did not receive appropriate services, only 35 per cent benefited from treatment with oral rehydration salts and 8 per cent with the combination of oral rehydration salts and zinc. This low coverage is more accentuated for acute respiratory infections where only 28 per cent of children received care and 28 per cent antibiotic treatment. In this malaria endemic country, only 61 per cent of children under five years of age sleep under insecticide-treated nets, 49 per cent of children with febrile episodes of malaria have accessed health services and only 8 per cent have received treatment.

New evidence shows mixed progress in preventing HIV. According to Spectrum 2018 data, the dynamics of the HIV epidemic in Congo is characterized by an increase in new infections between 2010 (7,200) and 2017 (7,900) with 28 per cent of new infections occurring in children under 14 years old. The mother-to-child transmission rate increased from 15.9 per cent in 2013 to 18.8 per cent in 2017. The proportion of women who are HIV-positive and pregnant and on anti-retroviral therapy fell from 82 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2017. The percentage of infants born to mothers who are HIV-infected receiving antiretrovirals decreased from 25 per cent in 2014 to 12 per cent in 2017 due to a stock out of antiretroviral drugs and laboratory tests. Only 1,663 out of 8,507 children under 14 years old living with HIV received antiretroviral treatment (21 per cent).

The factors that prevent health and nutrition improvement for children under five years old include: a lack of qualified human resources; frequent stock-out of essential commodities; poor implementation of key interventions such as integrated management of childhood illness and infant and young child feeding; a persistence of social and financial barriers that limit access to quality health care; and a lack of access to water and sanitation services. Among the consequences, according to MISC 2015 only 32.9 per cent of children are exclusively breastfed, and 21 per cent of Congolese children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

School-age children and adolescents face many challenges to their rights to an inclusive and high-quality education and to protection. Although primary education is available for almost all children (97 per cent of children were enrolled in primary school and 92 per cent completed the cycle), the country still faces many problems linked to the quality of learning.

Congo grapples with a lack of evidence, including that on behaviour, knowledge and social norms. Several studies, including the Demographic Health Survey 2011, reveal that bottlenecks include limited community knowledge of maternal and child health, including HIV, and of essential family practices that improve children's health. There is also need for better awareness of the benefits and challenges of schooling for children in many families, especially among indigenous people. In some communities, risky behaviour in reproductive health continue, and there is limited knowledge about the consequences of violence on children, as well as a poor demand for services.

Progress toward the regional Key Results for Children

Key Result for Children 1: Immunization

The World Health Organisation epidemiological data show that immunization coverage increased between 2017 and 2018: from 69 per cent to 75 per cent for diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3); from 76 per cent to 83 per cent for Bacille de Calmette Guérin (BCG) for tuberculosis; from 70 per cent to 77 per cent for measles (VAR); and from 79 per cent to 86 per cent for tetanus (TT). The proportion of health districts with at least 80 per cent coverage

increased from 24 per cent to 44 per cent. There was no stock out of DTP, polio or TT vaccines in 2018.

In 2018, UNICEF Congo's contribution to the results above included improving vaccine management by raising the proportion of provider quality-specification standard equipment from 58 per cent to 90 per cent. This was achieved by building the capacity of 120 health workers on the maintenance of cold chain equipment through skills' transfer. UNICEF Congo mobilized alliances to prioritize resources from government and partners to ensure that stock outs were minimal by improving central cold chain monitoring, including a real-time monitoring system, and improving the supply of vaccines through the Vaccine Independence Initiative, a pre-financing mechanism in collaboration with UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen.

Key Result for Children 2: Reduce stunting

The rate of stunting declined from 24 per cent in 2011 to 21 per cent in 2015. There was a marked improvement in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding from 21 per cent to 33 per cent in 2015 (MICS 2014-2015).

In 2018, UNICEF Congo contributed to the development of a national infant and young child feeding strategy, enhanced by a series of advocacy sessions with members of Parliament to raise awareness on malnutrition in the country while raising political commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 2 by 2030.

With UNICEF Congo support, the number of health districts implementing high-impact interventions on nutrition increased from 20 (2017) to 29 (2018). At the national level, vitamin A supplementation and deworming contributed to the reduction in stunting. At least 80 per cent of children six to 11 months old were supplemented with vitamin A and dewormed.

The promotion and support of optimal infant and young child feeding among 366,639 pregnant and lactating mothers was a key driver of the achievements. The coverage of women who are pregnant who received iron folic acid at antenatal care consultations in the 29 targeted health districts increased from 48 per cent in 2017 to 56 per cent in 2018.

Key Result for Children 4: Improve learning outcomes

Evidence from the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems 2014 assessment showed that at the end of their primary education, only 27 per cent of pupils reached the sufficient threshold of competency in mathematics and 48 per cent in language. Repetition rates were among the highest in the region (23 per cent at primary level and 18 per cent at lower secondary level as per UNESCO Institute for Statistics data 2012).

Reasons for the situation include a shortage of qualified teachers, the lack of reading and mathematics books in schools, a lack of training curricula, the plethora of students in classrooms, a lack of materials and teaching tools for teachers, a weaknesses of the non-formal education system (re-schooling and literacy programmes), the persistence of strong geographical inequalities and the challenge of access to quality education for vulnerable children such as children with disabilities and indigenous children.

In 2018, as a result of UNICEF interventions, 2,758 girls and 2,870 boys in primary education acquired sufficient skills in mathematics and French, and 1,439 girls and 2,465 boys in lower secondary acquired the same skills. Currently, only 18 per cent of children at the end of primary school have skills in both French and mathematics.

Key Result for Children 5: Prevention and response to violence against children

According to MICS 2014-2015, 83 per cent of children from one to 14 years old are victims of disciplinary violence (psychological aggression and/or physical punishment).

UNICEF Congo addressed this issue with advocacy and awareness-raising activities, using the Day of the African Child to mobilize alliances, including adolescents and young people, to promote zero tolerance to violence against children in schools and communities. As well, 1,323 refugee and displaced children in the Bouenza, Likouala and Pool regions received psychosocial support in UNICEF-supported child-friendly spaces following violent disciplinary practices (corporal punishment).

Key Result for Children 8: Eliminate open defecation

WASH Joint Monitoring Programme 2017 data showed that 85 per cent of the population has access to basic water services while only 37 per cent uses safely-managed water services and 20 per cent uses basic sanitation services. There are significant geographical and rural/urban disparities, for example, 20 per cent of rural children practice open defecation compared to only 2 per cent in urban areas.

During 2018, Congo achieved Key Result for Children target 8.2 (number of schools with separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys as a result of UNICEF direct support) with 100 per cent of the targeted schools gaining access to separate sanitation facilities. However, the number of additional people living in newly certified, open-defecation free communities because of UNICEF's community led total sanitation programming was not achieved this year (target 8.1). UNICEF Congo strengthened the enabling environment with elaboration and validation of the national guidelines towards the "healthy village" implementation, while empowering 99 communities to gain and sustain sanitation access.

A stabilized humanitarian situation, with new threats in view

The humanitarian situation remained a priority in 2018. Following a cease fire signed on 23 December 2017 between the security forces and former Ninja rebels, the Pool Region (where over 80,000 people were displaced) benefitted from a favourable security context that facilitated the return of displaced people and the deployment of humanitarian actors in areas that had no assistance in the previous two years. However, recent needs assessment reports show that populations face financial and physical constraints in accessing basic social services, as well as reconstruction needs to repair destroyed or damaged infrastructure such as schools, health and water and sanitation facilities, markets, roads and housing.

In the Likouala Region, with a total of 34,200 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central Africa Republic, humanitarian needs remain high in a remote region where the scarcity of resources prevents the provision of access to basic social services of both refugees and host populations. In December 2018, over 16,000 refugees from DRC crossed the river Congo to the Plateaux Region fleeing ethnic tensions, of which approximately 50 per cent are children. A coordinated response was deployed to support host populations and refugees.

The political and security situation in DRC is a matter of high concern. A national contingency plan and a regional refugee response plan, involving all countries bordering the DRC, were developed. The Republic of Congo also activated a preparedness plan for Ebola Virus Disease

following World Health Organization advice, as there is an elevated risk of spread of the disease.

The action plan of the National Social Action Policy 2018 recognizes the lack of an emergency preparedness and response structure, and largely relies on international development partners including the United Nations.

The new UNICEF Congo Country Programme

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2020-2024 and the Government of Congo-UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2020-2024 were under development and will be aligned with the national priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2022. UNICEF Congo's focus is to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals one to six (the eradication of poverty; the fight against hunger; access to health; access to quality education; gender equality; access to safe water and sanitation, peace and security) and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and effective institutions).

In preparation of the new Country Programme Document 2020-2024, the country office engaged in a participatory process, under Government and UNICEF joint leadership, with counterparts and partners to formulate a programme strategy note and a draft document, guided by the Sustainable Development Goals, the UNDAF 2020-2024, UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and the National Development Plan 2018-2022.

In line with the Regional Director's recommendation to analyse the role of UNICEF in Congo, and the strategic choices and implementation modalities, the programme strategy note and draft Country Programme Document were informed by recommendations from the strategic moment of reflection of October 2018 in Brazzaville, that included line ministries, development partners, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations, children and young people, academia and the private sector.

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

The main goals of the 2014-2018 Programme of Cooperation with the Republic of Congo were to contribute to the acceleration of progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of the rights of all children, especially the most vulnerable, in the areas of maternal and child health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, water sanitation and hygiene, education and gender equality, child protection and inclusive social policies. The 2014-2018 Country Programme Document was extended for an additional year in line with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, until 31st December 2019.

Despite a persistence of major bottlenecks, which continue to be addressed, progress on all goal areas to achieve results for children was attained during 2018.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

In line with Country Programme Document objectives to step-up progress on health- and nutrition-related Sustainable Development Goals under 'A Promise Renewed' initiative, in 2018 maternal, new-born and child survival were improved by increasing coverage of high-impact interventions. UNICEF and other partners including the Global Fund, Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation, GAVI and the World Bank, supported the Government of Congo to strengthen the health system:

Maternal and child health

The maternal and child health component of the country programme document aims to ensure that by 2019 at least 90 per cent of pregnant women, mothers and children under five years old in five regions (Brazzaville, Cuvette-Ouest, Lékoumou, Likouala, Plateaux and Pointe Noire) have access to and are using a package of high-impact, quality interventions for survival during and after childbirth, and for the prevention and treatment of avoidable diseases in children under five.

At the policy level, UNICEF supported the Government to develop strategic documents such as the National Health Policy and the National Health Development Plan 2018-2022 both of which were validated.

UNICEF rehabilitated four birth rooms (out of a total of 33 targeted for rehabilitation by GAVI) and equipped eight health centres (out of a total of 40 targeted by UNICEF) in the Bouenza, Brazzaville, Kouilou and Plateaux regions (out of a total of 354 primary health centres in the country). Also, 200 midwives, medical doctors and paediatricians were trained on neonatal resuscitation and essential newborn care and provided with basic equipment for neonatal resuscitation. As a result, 59,573 live births occurred in UNICEF-supported health facilities.

Immunization

Despite the economic crisis and the end of Congo's post-GAVI transition period, routine immunization activities took place without interruption during 2018.

To advocate strengthening the supply chain, and following the UNICEF Regional Director's recommendation to identify new partnerships and funding mechanisms to support Congo in the post-GAVI transition, UNICEF supported a joint mission of the Ministry of Health and Finance to UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen. As a result, Congo made strides to prioritize resources to procure vaccines and joined the Vaccine Independence Initiative. Vaccine stocks were made available during 2018.

In a bid to strengthen maintenance of the cold chain, UNICEF advocated for the establishment of cold chain community maintenance cadres by identifying and training young people at district level. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Technical and Vocational Training to develop a concept note of a course-syllabus, to be analysed and tested in 2019.

The proportion of health facilities equipped with provider quality-specifications standard equipment increased from 58 to 90 per cent in 2018. The cold chain was strengthened by rehabilitating the central chain with the establishment of a real-time temperature monitoring system and by installing 120 solar equipment in health centres, both with UNICEF's support.

As part of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a local campaign was organized in 27 high-risk health districts out of 52 and 462,042 children under five years old were vaccinated against polio (87 per cent coverage).

To improve equitable access to high-impact interventions for indigenous populations, UNICEF Congo supported the implementation of mobile and advanced strategies for integrated immunisation in essential health care packages. A total of 1,449 people were reached including

590 children (39 per cent); 687 were male (47 per cent) and 762 female (53 per cent). Main interventions included: (1) immunization for 121 children and 238 pregnant women, (2) antenatal care for 113 pregnant women, (3) postnatal care for 27 mothers and new-borns, (4) treatment of acute malnutrition for 14 children under five years, (5) and deworming for all 1,449 beneficiaries.

HIV and AIDS

This component aims to ensure that by 2019 at least 90 per cent of eligible pregnant women, children and adolescents in the targeted areas, especially the most vulnerable among them, are using HIV prevention and treatment services. In 2018, UNICEF Congo supported the acquisition of antiretrovirals through the Vaccine Independence Initiative. With the support of World Health Organization, UNAIDS and UNICEF, normative documents were developed such as the prevention of mother-to-child transmission standards and procedures, a paediatric management guide and a task delegation guide. UNICEF Congo supported the establishment of two cohorts of 30 trainers on prevention of mother-to-child transmission, who will in turn provide training and coach teams in health districts and general hospitals starting 2019.

Nutrition

This component aims to ensure that by 2019, 90 per cent of children under five and of pregnant and breastfeeding women, especially the most vulnerable, will have improved nutritional status, and that girls and boys enjoy optimal growth.

UNICEF, World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization, supported the SUN movement to prepare and validate its roadmap for 2019-2020, and supported Government to strengthen a multisectoral coordination mechanism on nutrition.

During the 2018 World Breastfeeding Week, nearly 178,074 mothers of children aged 0-23 months in 60,927 households were reached with breastfeeding promotion sessions in the Brazzaville and Kouilou regions through awareness sessions in communities by young volunteers and through U-Report and SMS.

Vitamin A supplementation and deworming were delivered through routine and mass immunisation campaigns. In 2018, with UNICEF Congo contribution, 86,298 children aged six to 11 months were supplemented with vitamin A and dewormed which is 80 per cent of the total.

To address severe acute malnutrition from the national burden of 68,105 people, UNICEF Congo targeted 25,648 people in 55 health facilities (out of 357) in six regions whose management requires 25,648 boxes of ready-to-use therapeutic foods. With Food for Peace funding, 2,000 boxes were deployed in the 55 therapeutic feeding centres. Trained health providers screened 217,383 children aged six to 59 months for malnutrition of which 4,990 children aged six to 59 months (2,419 girls and 2,571 boys) were identified, and treated of which 4,507 (92 per cent) were discharged as cured.

Emergencies

In the Pool Region, UNICEF Congo and its partners improved children's access to primary health and nutrition preventive and curative services: 37,108 children (109 per cent of the target) aged six to 59 months were vaccinated against measles; 18,246 children (64 per cent of the target) were reached with emergency primary health services; 603 children (46 per cent of those targeted) aged six to 59 months with severe acute malnutrition were admitted for

treatment; and 1,689 children (52 per cent of the target) aged 0 to 23 months received micronutrients supplementation.

With the WASH sector, water treatment tablets and hygiene kits (soap) were distributed to mothers of severe malnourished children in the therapeutic feeding centres. However, the capacities of operational partners in humanitarian response remained limited.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

The education component of the country programme document is to ensure that by 2019, equity of access and quality of education are improved by increasing access to quality basic education for girls, adolescents and indigenous children by increasing the enrolment rate in non-formal education (community preschools, re-schooling centres, 'observe, reflect, act' schools) in six regions by 10 per cent; and by ensuring that all children in emergencies receive a package of essential services of education. In this context, in 2018, 35,142 children (20,121 girls and 15,021 boys) received multi-faceted UNICEF support.

These objectives are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals four and five, and outcome one of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework: the most vulnerable populations use basic quality social services including education, health, food security, water and sanitation, and adequate financial services. They also inform Key Results for Children 4: Improve learning outcomes.

To increase access and enrolment rates, UNICEF Congo support to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with World Food Program for nutritional supplement and other partners, allowed 7,768 indigenous children (3,715 girls; 4,053 boys) in the Likouala and Sangha regions to access primary education through 'observe, reflect, act' schools. A total of 5,840 students (2,638 girls and 3,202 boys) completed school and 4,210 students (1,873 girls; 2,337 boys) passed their exams.

The completion rate was 75 per cent (79 per cent for girls; 79 per cent for boys) and the success rate was 72 per cent (71 per cent for girls; 73 per cent for boys). Up from 5,886 indigenous children (2,714 girls and 3,172 boys) in 2017, the access rate increased by 24 per cent (27 per cent of girls; 22 per cent of boys), as did the school quality results, as the success rate especially in girls rose from 69 per cent in 2017 to 71 per cent in 2018, up from the initial target of 6,000 for 2018.

To increase retention, UNICEF Congo supported the Ministry to provide evidence of how awareness-raising activities in school clubs and listening spaces on school-related violence could improve school retention in 20 secondary schools in Brazzaville, Cuvette Ouest and Pointe-Noire regions, where school violence is a cause of dropout. Among the 7,282 registered and sensitized girls, 6,565 completed the school year. The retention rate for girls in these schools improved from 83 per cent in 2016 to 90 per cent in 2018.

To increase quality of education, curative pedagogy training was provided to 185 teachers (67 women and 118 men), including 77 teachers (35 women and 42 men) from primary education and 108 teachers (32 women and 76 men) from lower secondary education, to improve primary school certificate results and undergraduate study certificate results.

In turn, the teachers organized school support courses for 9,532 students (4,197 girls and

5,335 boys), including 5,628 primary school students (2,758 girls and 2,870 boys) and 3,904 lower secondary school students (1,439 girls and 2,465 boys). In total, 3,787 primary school students (1,876 girls and 1,911 boys) and 2,780 lower secondary school students (1,010 girls and 1,770 boys) passed their exams. The success rates were 67 per cent (68 per cent for girls and 66 per cent for boys) for primary school certificate, and 71 per cent (70 per cent girls and 71 per cent boys) for the undergraduate study certificate.

The school success rate improved in 2018 in targeted schools, particularly for girls, with an increase in primary school completion from 65 per cent in 2017 to 68 per cent in 2018, and in lower secondary schools from 61 per cent in 2017 to 70 per cent in 2018

Emergencies

To ensure access and quality education in emergencies (for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019), UNICEF Congo provided support to children in emergency situations in Pool, Bouenza and Likouala regions by equipping them with school kits, which enabled 9,237 children (4,927 girls and 4,710 boys) to be enrolled in primary school of which 9,701 students (4,542 girls and 5,159 boys) completed the school and 7,397 students (3,409 girls and 3,988 boys) passed their exams. Participation rate was 92 per cent (92 per cent girls and 92 per cent boys) and the success rate was 76 per cent (75 per cent girls and 77 per cent boys).

In the Pool region, 7,887 school-aged children (4,710 boys and 4,526 girls) benefitted from learning materials (including textbooks) and 700 children two to five years old were provided with safe access to child-friendly spaces for recreational and learning activities.

In Likouala, a total of 60 teachers from refugee-hosting schools were trained as part of the educational-support approach, to improve learning outcomes for children. A total of 1,350 primary school children improved their educational outcome as a result.

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

The protection component of the country programme document aims to ensure that by 2019, 50 per cent of girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable, are better protected against violence, exploitation and discrimination through: the development of a national child protection system in accordance with the national social policy; the provision of a package of essential services to at least 50 per cent of indigenous girls and boys in targeted areas, including birth registration; of schooling, health care and HIV/AIDS information to children in areas affected by emergency; and strengthening capacity to relevant actors to improve the child protection system and to respond more quickly and efficiently to identified cases.

The results support the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 16, Outcome 1, of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and contribute to the regional Key Result for Children 5 :the prevention and response to violence against children.

In 2018, the National Social Action Policy 2018-2022 and its costed operational plan was developed and validated, both with UNICEF support. To promote national ownership, UNICEF supported the dissemination and sensitization for 48 staff from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action, including 12 regional directors for social affairs and 12 regional directors for humanitarian action, who were trained to scale up the integrated approach of the child protection system in the Lékoumou region.

In line with the UNICEF Regional Director's indication to engage in a joint strategy on the needs of indigenous populations of the equatorial forest, the UNICEF regional office and Congo country office carried out an assessment on areas of convergence during a stretch assignment of a protection officer from UNICEF DRC to the Republic of Congo. The need to pursue this through stronger South-South collaboration was identified.

In the Lékoumou region, 1,514 children, including 766 girls and 748 boys obtained their birth certificate as a result of a collaboration with the Regional Directorate for Social Affairs that set up 19 child protection committees in Lékoumou region and trained 143 members of these committees as part of the integrated approach to child protection at the sub-national level.

To ensure better care for child survivors of violence, 90 actors including magistrates, lawyers, police officers and social workers were sensitized on child protection law, especially on (1) general principles of child protection, (2) extra-judicial and judicial procedures, (3) the basis of the special juvenile criminal law and (4) child labour. This resulted in greater awareness of, reporting on and response to cases of violence in 2018.

Emergencies

As reported in Humanitarian Action for Children 2018, the support for children in emergency situations in the Likouala and Pool regions allowed to provide a package of services including psychosocial support, birth certificates and raising awareness to 6,355 children, among whom 4,400 were children without birth certificates (2,640 girls and 1,760 boys). UNICEF Congo provided care and support to 41 child survivors of rape (one boy and 40 girls) and 96 child victims of violence. A total of 1,955 children (971 boys and 984 girls) were provided support through UNICEF-supported child-friendly spaces.

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

This WASH component of the country programme document aims at ensuring that 85 per cent of the rural, peri-urban and urban populations are using safe water and that sanitary facilities are available and used by 30 per cent of the population through (a) infrastructure surveys and support for infrastructure construction and renovation; (b) the promotion of community management committees to ensure investment sustainability; (c) the scaling-up of community-led total sanitation and WASH facilities in schools; (d) the modelling of low-cost, non-polluting latrines; and (e) the promotion of in-home water treatment.

Despite efforts to improve access to water and services, Congo is not on track to achieve this result in rural and peri-urban areas. To accelerate the achievement of results, in 2018 UNICEF Congo focused on strengthening the enabling environment and the response to the needs of the most vulnerable children in humanitarian situations, and the indigenous children of Likouala and Plateau regions.

In 2018, UNICEF Congo supported an analysis of the determinants of WASH ownership by key national stakeholders in the Lékoumou and Plateaux regions. The information was used to translate the national WASH policy into local development plans, being currently implemented.

With support from the regional office, UNICEF Congo was a catalyst for organizing a first high-level multisectoral dialogue on water and sanitation with the participation of various ministries (education, health, environment, finance and planning), civil society, technical and financial partners and the private sector. This led to the development of a roadmap to implement the

presidential initiative on “water for all” project, to strengthen cross-sector collaboration between the Ministry for Public Works and the Ministry for Water and Hydraulic, and to reach multisectoral support to Congo’s progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal 6.

To reduce the proportion of the population practicing open defecation and contribute to the regional Key Result for Children 8, UNICEF Congo supported interventions to end open defecation and improve the sanitation service ladder by increasing access to sanitation facilities that separate excreta from human contact, in the community and at schools, and to empower communities to gain and sustain sanitation access. In response to the results of the Government-led sustainability check of the community-led total sanitation approach, conducted in 2017, UNICEF supported the Government to validate The Guidelines for the Implementation of the Healthy Village Approach, and to carry out with the hydraulic agency a nation-wide mapping exercise of existing interventions and models on water-point management in rural areas.

With support from UNICEF Congo, a first cohort of 99 villages was triggered for community-led total sanitation, covering 45,346 persons including 23,126 women and girls and 7,210 children under five years. As of the 99 communities triggered, 56 have developed a water safety plan covering a population of 25,390, including 12,950 women and girls and 4,037 under five children, and 19 communities are ready to be declared open defecation free.

Emergencies

UNICEF Congo’s WASH response in the Pool region focused on increasing access to water and sanitation facilities. Eleven per cent of the target population were provided with safe water as per agreed standards and 682 people (16 per cent of target) benefitted from appropriate sanitation facilities.

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

The social inclusion component of the country programme document aims to provide all girls and boys in the most vulnerable areas with inclusive social policies by building the capacity of counterparts, putting in place child-sensitive social programmes, and supporting the national statistics system to produce disaggregated data. This is aligned with the UNDAF goal two and goal four.

With the aim to ensure that girls and boys in the most vulnerable areas benefit from inclusive social policies and increased resources, UNICEF Congo contributed in 2018 to the development of a child-sensitive National Development Plan. One of the three priorities is the development of human capital which includes child survival and development, education and social protection. UNICEF used data on child deprivation in health, nutrition, education, clean water or decent sanitation and made available disaggregated data from the 2014-2015 MICS. However, child poverty measurement is yet to be nationally owned, reported routinely by the Government and integrated into national action plans.

UNICEF Congo produced an equity-focused situation analysis of children and adolescents that argues for a holistic, integrated approach to implement measures that address child deprivations in Congo. It also informed the Country Programme Document 2020-2024 that is under development.

In response to the UNICEF Regional Director’s indication to engage in public finance

management, the country office produced its first budget brief which analyses and monitors budget allocations to health sector and makes recommendations on how to improve health spending performance. The evidence-based brief was shared with the Ministry of Health and parliamentarians to stimulate policy dialogue on the health sector budget and create fiscal space to increase social sectors budget allocations during a budgetary crisis.

Strategies for change

Programming for at-scale results for children

In support for Goal area 1, communication for development advocated for the availability of antiretroviral drugs and HIV screening tests; elaborated communication plans for immunisation campaigns (Key Result for Children 1); sensitized on breastfeeding and supported promoting good nutritional practices to displaced persons in the Bouenza and Likouala regions (Key Result for Children 2) and the formative supervision of 140 community health workers.

For Goal area 2, support was provided to build the capacity of 20 school clubs and 152 social agents. For Goal Area three, in the context of Key Result for Children 4, sensitization activities were facilitated on essential practices and use of social services in health, education and birth registration for beneficiary households of conditional cash transfers (Lisungi project in partnership with Ministry of Social Affairs). In support of Goal area 4, communication for development contributed with sensitization on hygiene measures and use of latrines and clean water sources as part of the healthy village approach (Key Result for Children 8) by training 59 non-government organization actors on community mobilization techniques.

UNICEF Congo supported the Ministry of Health to strengthen Ebola preparedness measures, coordinating the implementation of the joint communication plan at community level, targeting 350,000 people. UNICEF and its partners focused on community mobilisation, awareness raising activities and provision of hand-washing devices in school, health and community facilities. Capacity building was provided to 33 actors and trainers in the government, non-government organizations and the media who in turn strengthened the capacities of the actors at the decentralized level for a total of 270 trained people. A survey of 500 people provided evidence about the knowledge, practices and rumours about Ebola that informed the communication campaign.

In 2018, an adolescent's right to participation continued to occupy an important space in UNICEF Congo supported advocacy. During the celebration of the Day of the African Child on 16 June and World Children's Day on 20 November, over 600 children from diverse backgrounds participated and voiced their opinions by calling on the highest authorities in the country to advance children's rights. Children were active participants during the Strategic Moment of Reflection and consultations in preparation of the new Government of Congo-UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation 2020-2024.

Gender-responsive programming

UNICEF Congo contributed to advance girls' secondary education rates and to prevent gender-based violence, including in emergencies, by providing safe, girl-friendly sanitation facilities to 1,540 girls. UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Education and Forum for African Women Educationalists to promote girl's education in lower and upper secondary schools through 20 school clubs and listening spaces where girls and boys learn about and discuss gender and human rights and on how to prevent and address violence. During the reporting year, UNICEF supported the Forum with capacity strengthening and supervision. UNICEF supported 282 girls

who have learning difficulties, through the Ministry of Education.

UNICEF Congo contributed to addressing gender-based violence against girls, boys, and women through an ongoing study on gender-based violence at school, including online violence. The study was conducted in 15 councils covering the 12 regions of the country with a sample of 5,756 students and teachers in 193 learning institutions for lower and upper secondary. Results are expected in the first quarter of 2019 and will inform policy options that will contribute to improving school retention, especially for girls.

UNICEF Congo continued to generate disaggregated data by sex along key dimensions to ensure that gender issues are highlighted and considered in national planning processes, and advocated for the inclusion of children with disabilities in policy texts and statistics and supported the provision of school kits to facilities with children with hearing impairments.

Support for children from decision-makers and the public

UNICEF Congo focused its external communications around key advocacy moments including the Day of the African Child on 16 June which focused on fighting malnutrition (Key Result for Children 2); World Breastfeeding Week (Key Result for Children 2) in August; a high-level multisectoral dialogue on water and sanitation (Key Result for Children 8) in November; and World Children's Day (Key Result for Children 8). High-level advocacy with key financial and technical partners included advocacy meetings with accredited embassies in Brazzaville and Kinshasa (DRC), the mayor and the prefect of Brazzaville, parliamentarians and the President of the National Assembly.

UNICEF Congo social media channels have had steady but continuous growth since 2017. The number of followers rose from 14,111 to 16,427 on Facebook and reached 598 on Twitter and 233 on YouTube. There were 312 publications on social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Medium) with 20,012 views, 427 interactions, 15,660 likes on Facebook, 28,500 impressions, 683 profile visits and 29 new subscribers on Twitter. There is a need for better effort to document field actions, including emergency response. Bilingual posting (French/English) will mobilize greater engagement.

Develop and leverage resources and partnerships for children

In 2018, key donors included the Government of Japan, GAVI, the UNICEF French National Committee, the UNICEF UK National Committee, USAID and Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). These donors helped UNICEF Congo raise US\$ 3,591,106 in 2018. Total donor support for UNICEF Congo in 2018 was US\$ 7,474,249.00 including regular resources, other regular resources and emergency resources.

With the situation of decreased public spending, budget constraints and an economic and fiscal crisis, UNICEF Congo focused on influencing the agendas of financial and technical partners to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of investments and ensure that development and cooperation plans consider the specific needs of children. An example of this was in the education sector in which technical partners shared in advance their plans and budgets for 2019, providing an opportunity for cross-fertilization and strategic support for national plans.

Following the UNICEF Regional Director's indication to build strategic partnerships, UNICEF Congo engaged with the French oil company Total to support immunisation campaign in Pointe Noire. For 2019, in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator and other United Nations agencies, UNICEF will organize a meeting with the private sector in Pointe-Noire to identify

areas of collaboration.

Harnessing the power of business and markets for children

In partnership with the World Food Programme, 59 schools with a total of 8,850 students (4,377 girls and 4,513 boys) benefitted from the construction of latrines, handwashing and construction and/or rehabilitation of water facilities in Brazzaville (1), Lékoumou (30) and Likouala (28) regions, resulting in improved learning conditions for pupils

UNICEF Congo collaborated with UNESCO and the World Bank to produce strategic information (collection of education sector statistical data) which informed the flagship project for the reform of the basic education sector in Congo.

With GAVI funding, a project on strengthening health system, supported by UNICEF Congo, rehabilitated four health centres (clinics and hospitals) and constructed a new maternity. With McGovern and WASH funding, UNICEF is renovating and constructing boreholes in communities and schools as well as latrines in schools.

United Nations working together

UNICEF contributed actively to the development of the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2020-2024 which is aligned with the strategic priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2022.

Joint programme reviews conducted within the framework of UNDAF have not yet been conducted. However, the country office has the capacity to monitor Key Results for Children data within the UNDAF result groups where UNICEF is the lead agency, such as WASH and Education.

Fostering innovation for children

UNICEF Congo supported immunization campaigns through the implementation of text-messaging recall system, using an open-source application, Rapid Pro, in two regions (Brazzaville and Pointe Noire) to provide SMS vaccine recall to targeted communities with the objective of increasing coverage. During the 2018 national campaign against polio, 12 per cent of parents were informed by SMS which represents the third source for information.

Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children

MICS data generated evidence on progress made by the country towards national objectives and international commitments. In 2018, MICS data was used as baseline for the National Development Plan 2018-2022.

An advocacy booklet, What Parliamentarians Can Do to Fight Malnutrition in Congo, was developed and officially launched on 20 November 2018 in close collaboration with the Alliance Parlementaire Congolaise pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle (APCSAN). A budget brief on health financing highlighting critical data was developed and used for evidence-based advocacy to leverage resources and create fiscal space for children's rights to quality health services.

Enablers

Responsive, transparent and accountable internal governance

The country management team played a critical role in monitoring and addressing operations

and programme management issues through the systematic review of management indicators drawn mainly from Insight. Corrective actions were agreed upon and their implementation allowed the office to meet most management indicators' standards. As a result, UNICEF Congo met its key performance indicators in quality assurances and financial management with respectively 96 per cent and 100 per cent of the objectives achieved. At year-end closure, direct cash transfers outstanding over nine months were at 0 per cent. Regular resources and support budget were fully utilised and other resources were utilised at 98 per cent for other resources emergency and 99 per cent for Regular (OR).

As part of 2018 annual management plan, UNICEF Congo developed an Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan for 2018 which was validated by the country management team. Unfortunately, the Plan had a low completion rate due to unplanned activities and unpredicted staff movement (the United Nations volunteer responsible for research and evaluation was reassigned). Out of four studies planned, one is currently ongoing. As recommended by the regional office, the country office will endeavour to structure the activities around the Key Results for Children. A new regional strategy of evaluation, under development, will strengthen this component.

As in previous years, the country office continued to focus on HACT implementation with 32 of 38 programmatic checks conducted (84 per cent) and eight spot checks (100 per cent). No micro-evaluations were needed or conducted. Partner audits were programmed for 2019.

Result-oriented, efficient and effective management

To continue improving internal effectiveness and efficiency, UNICEF Congo enhanced the results-based management to plan, manage and improve results for children through capacity building and self-accountability. Emphasis was placed on improving performance of programmes and operations by establishing concrete and measurable results. One hundred per cent of the staff finalised their 2018 Performance Appraisal Form in Achieve.

An office retreat provided a space for discussion on innovative programmatic approaches, team-work, planning and promotion of a work place free of harassment and misconduct. The office emphasized the respect for UNICEF's code of conduct and the UNICEF Congo country office ground rules, as well as the duty of care. It inaugurated a child-friendly room and is improving the accessibility of premises for persons with disabilities.

Regarding efficiency gains, UNICEF Congo continued to reduce travel compared to the 2016 benchmark and achieved a reduction of 21 per cent, totalling 202 trips. A no-travel week was established the first week of each month. This decision improved the regularity and the quorum of statutory committees such the County Management Team.

The country office implemented measures to reduce the carbon footprint including the increase in the use of paper-scanners and the reduction in the use of paper. The office plan to reduce the number of printers and photocopy machines.

The total value of procurement performed 2018 totalled US\$ 1,558,644. The total value of supplies and services received was US \$ 10,777,624. Supply contributed to Goal Area 1, increasing immunization coverage by pre-financing vaccines to the Government through the VII initiatives; mobilisation of vaccines through procurement services; and procurement and deployment of cold chain equipment. As part of humanitarian response to internally displaced persons and refugees, UNICEF Congo supply team ordered health and nutrition commodities

from Copenhagen which reduced delivery time of supplies from three to two months. Supply supported provision of 25,200 boxes of RUTF increasing coverage for severe acute malnutrition. To Goal Area 2 and the increase in quality education through the provision of early childhood development kits and school kits, including in humanitarian situations, and to Goal Area 4 through the provision of WASH kits in emergencies.

People: versatile staff as agents of change

The country office aims to achieve staff gender parity by 2021. One fixed-term NOA female (administrative officer) and three temporary appointment females (P3 emergency specialist, P2 resources mobilization officer, and a GS6 supply associate) were recruited. The senior management team, which was female at 100 per cent, was balanced with the arrival of a male Deputy Representative.

In response to the results of the Global Staff Survey, the Congo country office implemented a plan of action to promote empowerment, career development and enable smooth performance review. The plan of action was closely monitored by the country management team for concrete activities and, as an example, Wednesday was declared “English Working Day.” As every year, the country office took part together with other United Nations agencies in the dissemination of the 10 standards norms on HIV to staff and their families. The support of a dynamic local staff association was key throughout the year.

A learning and training plan was implemented at 77 per cent with 72 per cent of individual training achieved and 81 per cent of group training. Among challenges were the language barrier and funding. Addressing the Ebola emergency was an opportunity to build the capacity of staff in Agora in resilience and management of health emergencies.

The security and well-being of staff was considered at many levels, including the quality of water, the improvement of toilets, an assessment of the electrical network system as well as the overall condition of the UNICEF building to inform future renovations.

Versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems

As part of the global strategy to reduce inefficiency using digital platforms, the country office prepared for the migration to the enterprise content management.

In support of programme results through an improved office and remote connectivity and security, information, communication and technology provides mobile phones to each staff, improved the standard of available computers, improved the wireless connectivity in the office and provided Thuraya sets for travelling to remote places. Support was provided to the communications team on digital and social media.

Despite connectivity issues, efforts are underway to maximise this project. A local survey conducted in 2018 showed that the local market improved in terms of cost and capacities to cater for the needs of organisations and the corporate world. The visit of the information, communication and technology regional adviser in 2018 helped identify areas for improvement in data communication and business continuity communications management. Recommendations, such as moving to the local internet connection and establishing a business continuity plan communications system in 2019, were underway.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

Lessons learned in 2018

Evidence-based advocacy is key to accelerate results for children

There is a need for systematic and consistent advocacy at various levels to influence duty bearers to take action for children's rights. Therefore, there is a need to continue to strengthen UNICEF's role as an advocate and convener for the rights of children. Some examples of advocacy related results are below:

Key Result for Children 1: Stride to accelerate immunization gains

In 2018, UNICEF supported a high-level joint mission of the Ministry of Health and Finance and GAVI senior officials to UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen, which raised the Government of Congo officials' appreciation of the potential and cost savings, quality assurance and efficiency gains when procuring vaccines and health commodities through UNICEF Copenhagen. This created a partnership between Government of Congo and UNICEF Supply Division to agree on pre-financing mechanisms to procure vaccines through the Vaccine Independence Initiative, thus enabling Congo to cope with its financial difficulties and avoid stock-outs.

In this regard, the lesson learned was the need to guarantee availability of vaccines' stock, and the Vaccine Independence Initiative proved a good mechanism to achieve this. In 2019, it is important to continue high-level advocacy to guarantee funding for the procurement of vaccines and related operational costs. Another lesson was that RSS GAVI support not only benefits immunization coverage but other high-impact interventions in the health system as well, such as maternal and newborn health. Going forward, UNICEF will continue to monitor the performance of routine immunisation and integrating high-impact interventions (EPI+).

Key Result for Children 2: Placing nutrition high on Congo's political and governmental agenda is key

A booklet entitled What Parliamentarians Can Do to Fight Malnutrition was launched and presented to a joint session of Parliament (the national assembly and senate) on World Children's Day in November. This resulted with the President's strong engagement of the National Assembly and the Parliamentary Association for nutrition and food security to rally behind children's rights by making malnutrition history in Congo. UNICEF, World Food Program and Food and Agricultural Organisation, supported the Scaling-Up Nutrition movement to prepare and validate its roadmap for 2019-2020.

Therefore, to accelerate stunting reduction, it is crucial to develop guidelines on key interventions. In the humanitarian settings, reinforcing the nexus humanitarian-development can better contribute in sustainable improvement of the nutritional status of children and women. It is important to reinforce the convergence of UNICEF, World Food Program, World Health Organization and Food and Agricultural Organisation actions in the targeted areas based on the 1,000-day approach. UNICEF will continue to support the Ministry of Health to scale up delivery of high impact nutrition interventions by developing national maternal nutrition guidelines, training manuals and communication materials and in scaling up of the baby-friendly hospital initiative.

Key Result for Children 4: improved learning outcomes require improved education management information systems

To evaluate quality of education in students, current assessments take place at the end of the cycle (end of primary and lower secondary education). However, this approach not been able to

obtain results by level of the cycle. For 2019, to judge the quality of learning in the cycle, fewer schools will be targeted and evaluated for all grades. To evaluate the quality of teachers, in 2018 the trainings on the practice of curative pedagogy were not evaluated making it difficult to make the connection between teacher training and students' academic achievement. For 2019, a test on the skill level of students and teachers will be done before the establishment of curative pedagogy in an institution to better monitor and evaluate school skills in key subjects.

Key Result for Children 8: Community mobilization is key to end open defecation

For 2019, the country office will continue to support community mobilisation to end open defecation and achieve “healthy village” status by strengthening monitoring, building a sustainable market for sanitation goods and services and through improving subnational coordination mechanisms.

Creating and earning fiscal space for children is critical to leave no child behind. The elaboration of the health budget brief is relatively a new technical area of work within PF4C for the country office. Challenges were faced in terms of data collection and analysis, for data related to budget execution. Advocacy will continue in 2019. At internal level, it contributed to increasing staff knowledge on budget issues that are linked to results of the health sector. In 2019, two budget briefs will be developed focusing on the health and education sectors. Based on lessons learned from 2018, the country office will partner with key stakeholders such as the ministerial counterparts, United Nations agencies, European Union, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and academia to enhance the quality of data and analyses with a view to institutionalize budget briefs. The country office will engage with Parliament by using budget briefs as evidence to inform policy dialogue towards protecting budget allocations for social sectors and making the budget more responsive to children's needs.

Programme coordination and integration

Coordination and integration efforts supported by UNICEF have resulted in alignment of funding towards integrated programmes such as child survival and development, learning outcomes and child protection which are implemented under more than three government ministries and civil society organisations, and attracting resources from various donors. During 2018, results were evidenced in minimal duplication of interventions and complementarity of activities by partners. Improved coordination contributed to improved programmatic results that require inter-sectoral coordination, including improved provision of high impact interventions.

The key lesson learned is that strong leadership and political will can be a catalyst for effective multisectoral coordination and integration. The complementary supportive policy framework including the national coordination framework, strategies and guidelines are critical for the coordination. Despite these efforts, intra-ministerial coordination and scaling up of integrated services should be further improved. It is anticipated that this will be further strengthened during 2019 and through the new Country Programme 2020-2024.

Emergency preparedness and response requires continued and coordinated support. In the response to the situation in the Pool region, challenges remain including WASH, education and child protection funding gaps and a limited return of displaced civil servants (including education and health staff) to their localities, negatively affecting delivery of social services. 118 schools remain closed (with several of them damaged during the armed conflict) and therefore a total of 15,428 children (three to 17 years old) have no access to education. As the lead agency for the WASH, nutrition, education sectors and the child protection sub-sector in the Pool crisis, UNICEF Congo leads the process to expand sectoral groups, from local

(Pool) to national level, to ensure humanitarian development nexus, synergies across sectors and strengthen government line Ministries capacities. Going forward, it will be important to strengthen local capacity to ensure sustainability of actions and services. UNICEF Congo will work closely with United Nations agencies and government entities to ensure that children and their families receive lifesaving commodities as well as to keep children in school.

END/