Country Office Annual Report 2018

Costa Rica

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Costa Rica is an upper middle-income country with impressive social and economic gains, particularly for children and adolescents, who represent 31 per cent of the total population of approximately five million. Three out of every 10 children are under the age of five, while four out of 10 are between the ages of 13 and 17. The country is now reaching the end of its demographic bonus, with an increasingly ageing population and a reversal in dependency ratios, which presents implications for the care and upbringing of young children and the elderly. Compared to three decades ago, Costa Rican children enjoy more opportunities for survival, development and protection as a result of universal and focused social protection programmes that have been sustained over time.

The country improved its human development index from 69 to 63 between 2010 and 2017 and possesses a robust system of laws, policies and programmes for the protection of children's rights, including the National Policy for Children and Adolescents. In 2017, the Government guaranteed high levels of investment in the social sector, amounting to nearly 24 per cent of total investment. Of this, 27 per cent was for the health sector, 32 per cent for education, 30 per cent for social protection, 10 per cent for housing and 1 per cent for recreational, cultural and religious activities. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the country ranks fifth in the region in social investment per capita behind Chile, Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina (*ECLAC, Social Panorama, 2018*). However, the increase in fiscal constraints - 2017 public sector debt totalled 49 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product - and inefficiencies in sector spending could impact the country's capacity to sustain social investment levels (*Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy, System of Sustainable Development Indicators and United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report, 2018*).

Despite significant progress in the social sector and the existence of several programmes to reduce poverty, in 2018 20 per cent of the population remained poor, using income-based poverty. Poverty levels are higher in rural areas (26 per cent) than in urban areas (19 per cent). It was estimated that if monetary transfers to the poorest were eliminated, extreme poverty would increase by 4.2 percentage points and total poverty by 2.8 per cent in 2018 (State of the Nation Report, 2018. National Council of University Rectors). Thirty-four percent of all children live in monetary poverty, of whom 12 per cent are in extreme poverty, whilst 34.4 per cent suffer poverty-related multidimensional deprivation (*National Household Survey, National Institute of Statistics and Census/INEC, 2018*). These high levels compound the challenge that no child will be left behind, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is particularly the case for vulnerable children living in rural areas, coastal and border communities, and/or who are primarily from indigenous, Afro-descendent and migrant and refugee populations, as well as children with disabilities (*Child and Adolescence Wellbeing Index, IBINA, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy*).

From a gender viewpoint, data suggests that higher educational levels improve opportunities for women. According to the 2017 National Household Survey, job opportunities for professional women double those with a high school education, and more than quadruple

those who only completed elementary school. Maternity also affects the participation of women in the job market, which in 2017 was 42.7 per cent, 30 percentage points lower than those of men (72.6 per cent). The means that a woman without children has 1.2 times more opportunities for employment, compared to a woman with one child and 1.6 times more than a mother with three children. These results underscore the importance of offering child care services as a strategy to achieve gender equity in the labour market. Guaranteeing the right of every child to quality universal child care becomes imperative to ensure that having children does not limit the possibilities for women to participate in the job market.

Early childhood development is marked by socio-economic and cultural variables. Although on a national scale, 81 per cent of children aged 3 - 4 years show adequate physical, emotional and intellectual development, this percentage increases to 93 per cent in wealthier households and decreases to 68 per cent in poorer households. As a result of an established national priority, the rate of preschool enrolment increased from 27.7 per cent in 2002 to 84.5 per cent in 2018. Despite the country´s solid performance in primary education, the quality of learning processes continued to be a challenge.

Concerning secondary education, in 2017, 43.3 per cent of adolescents did not complete high school due to high exclusion and repetition rates, despite improvements in physical infrastructure, teaching methods and study plans. Educational performance by the most vulnerable children and adolescents reveals the challenges that exist in attaining full inclusion in education and of amplifying dual education (vocational) opportunities. According to a 2016 study, migrant and indigenous children had twice the probability of not receiving an education – 24 per cent and 20 per cent respectively – than non-migrant or non-indigenous children - 12 per cent for both. The percentage of adolescents in rural zones who attend high school (83 per cent) is less than their urban school counterparts (91 per cent) (*Report on the State of Children´s Rights/EDNA, University of Costa Rica, 2016*).

Nationally, 46 per cent of children aged 2-14 years (52 per cent of boys and 39 per cent of girls) have experienced a least one form of physical or psychological abuse by their parents or caregivers; this practice is more prevalent among heads of families without education (8 per cent) than among those with an education (3 per cent) (*Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2011*). Although administrative data differs and is even sometimes obsolete, it confirmed that a growing number of children and adolescents are victims of multiple forms of abuse in the family, community, school and institutional environments. In 2017, approximately 53,358 cases of child abuse were reported to the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI), 10,152 cases more than those reported in 2015. Of the 2017 cases, 21 per cent were due to family conflicts, 17.5 per cent to physical aggression, 5.1 per cent to sexual abuse and 0.30 per cent to commercial sexual exploitation.

The levels of gender-related violence in the country are alarming. In 2017, the Ministry of Health reported approximately 13,000 cases of domestic violence, of which 68 per cent affected women and 21 per cent girls. Among homicides, special attention should be given to femicides, which reached 26 in 2017: 14 of them perpetrated by male partners (3 cases more than in 2016) and 12 by ex-husbands, ex-partners, boyfriends, stalkers or sexual offenders(four less than in 2016). Even though there is a sound political and institutional agenda on gender issues, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private environments is still a significant challenge for Costa Rica.

In recent years, the country has been working on alternatives to the institutionalization of

children, given that 2017 PANI data estimates there are 5,367 children in some type of foster care under the National Protection System because of the loss of parental care.

Twenty-first century children and adolescents in Costa Rica tend to be more digital natives than those of previous generations. Some 97 per cent live in households with access to a mobile phone and 52 per cent with internet. These elevated access rates increasingly expose children and adolescents, particularly girls, to cyberstalking and online sexual trafficking. From January to September 2018, the Crimes Against Human Integrity, Smuggling and Trafficking Unit of the Organism of Judicial Investigation received 53 complaints for the seduction of minors by electronic means and 30 for dissemination of pornography. In 2017, 103 cases of corruption of minors were reported, 290 complaints received for dissemination of pornography and 22 for the production and reproduction of pornography. The number of complaints for the crime of grooming increased from 96 in 2016 to 186 in 2017 (*ECLAC and UNICEF, 2014 and Judicial Power Complaints for Crimes Presented to the Organism of Judicial Investigation*).

The country registered a decrease in the percentage of adolescent mothers aged 15-19 years, from 19.4 per cent in 2012 to 14.7 per cent in 2017. Nevertheless, Costa Rica still has high numbers of Afro-descendent and indigenous adolescent mothers, 22 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, which illustrates the difficulty of universal public health programmes reaching highly vulnerable groups in the country. Suicide is the third highest cause of death in adolescents aged 15-19 years, and among indigenous communities the rate is four times the national rate (*Psycho-Social Analysis of Suicides Among Indigenous Youth, University of Costa Rica, 2017*). Other barriers that hinder adolescents are inadequate educational and professional alternatives for those without schooling, high unemployment rates and the abuse of alcohol and other substances (50 per cent in schools).

The population of 15-24 years old who neither studied nor worked decreased from 20.3 per cent in 2000 to 15.5 per cent in 2017, although this was 1.8 percentage points higher than in 2016. Employment among young people is at precarious levels nationwide. Among this population, male unemployment is 17.5 per cent, while for females it is 31.8 per cent, a significant gender gap.

Recent findings indicate that the use of psychoactive substances among adolescents is starting at an older age and there is a noticeable decrease in cigarette smoking, although it is important to monitor a potential increase in vaping. In addition, there is an increase in the use of marijuana, arising from a decreased perception of risk and legalization in other countries. The levels of drinking of alcohol, the primary substance used by adolescents, has been sustained over time (*IV National Survey on Drug Use Among the High School Population, Institute on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, 2015*).

These changing trends in the situation of children and adolescents in Costa Rica took place against the backdrop of significant social, political and economic events in 2018 that to some extent presented direct or indirect implications on the Country Programme. The 2018 Presidential and Legislative Elections were characterized by a strong polarization on issues associated with social coexistence and human rights, reflecting a larger trend towards conservative values and attitudes in the region. As noted by the State of the Nation report, "issues related to family, same sex marriage, abortion, sexual education guidelines and religion polarized the electoral process and demonstrated the existence of ´two Costa Ricas´". After a second electoral round, the previous party in power, Citizen´s Action Party, won the Presidential elections, but with a weakened legislative presence, thus making it much more

difficult for the current administration to ensure the passing of its key legal reform proposals. Despite the continuity of the political administration, there have been significant changes in all ministries closely related to the UNICEF Country Programme thereby setting in motion an intense agenda of presentations of key priorities and strategies in order to secure commitments to sustain ongoing initiatives for children.

In his acceptance speech, the new President indicated that nothing is as urgent for the country as reforming the negative fiscal situation characterized by high public sector debt and deficit. For this reason, at the core of the legislative agenda was the approval of the Law to Strengthen Public Finance, which eventually passed in early December 2018 after an intense period of lobbying and negotiation. Although the new Law addresses the high fiscal deficit and debt, it will be important for UNICEF to monitor the impact that its implementation may have on the sustainability of previous gains for children and the impact of universal and targeted social protection programmes which have been the mainstay of the country´s public policy in recent decades.

The contentious debates around the fiscal reform package pitted the public sector unions against the Government. This eventually led to a national strike that lasted 80 days and caused the absence of approximately 32,000 employees. It has its deepest impact on the education sector, with the suspension of classes in 52 per cent of public schools significantly compromising children´s right to their education, as well as thousands of children from poor families not benefiting from school feeding programmes. Consequently, several of the Country Programme´s planned activities with the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) were delayed and, in some cases, postponed to 2019, such as the emergency preparedness "Safe Schools" workshops in highly vulnerable coastal schools.

As a net importer of migrants from the region, Costa Rica once again found itself vulnerable to the worsening political and economic climate in Nicaragua since early 2018. This led to an increase in formal and informal migratory flows of Nicaraguans, as well as new asylum requests (tripling from 2017 to 2018). According to the General Immigration and Foreigners Department, more than 20 per cent of these claims were recent, while the remaining 80 per cent were from persons who have been in Costa Rica for a long time, but whose decision to formalize their irregular situation stemmed from heightened preoccupation with the situation in Nicaragua. New arrivals were largely young people, university students, human rights defenders, journalists and their families, including many children. Exacerbating the Nicaraguan migrant situation, albeit to a lesser degree, was the increase in migrants and refugees from Venezuela, also resulting from its highly unstable political and economic situation. In the face of this increase in the number of children and adolescents from these countries, UNICEF partnered with national authorities and other United Nations (UN) agencies to strengthen the national response to safeguard the implementation of the best interests of children, especially at border crossing areas.

With 12 of the 22 thematic areas approved as part of the Costa Rica´s examination for accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the pending challenge is to move forward with the remaining areas as quickly as possible before the deadline. The outstanding areas are difficult, requiring legislative approval and structural changes to many bureaucratic bottlenecks that hinder a more effective public sector administration.

In December 2018, the Government presented its 2019-2022 National Development and Public

Investment Plan (PNDIP). For the first time, the Plan linked macro-level results with core public programmes and strategies, the required resource allocation, the compliance with concrete goals, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the evaluation of results. The pillars prioritized in the PNDIP are innovation and competitiveness; infrastructure, land management and mobility; human safety; health and social security; education for sustainable development and coexistence; macroeconomic stability; and territorial development. Following a detailed internal analysis, it emerged that there is a very strong convergence between the proposed national goals and the 2018-2022 UNICEF Country Programme.

For the 2018-2022 Country Programme, UNICEF proposed a paradigm shift to adequately address the rights of the most disadvantaged children and adolescents in Costa Rica. Guided by UNICEF's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, the general theory of change is that thousands of children and adolescents, principally from migrant, indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, poor households and those living with disabilities, have been excluded from the social and economic gains that have benefited a large majority of the population, leading to missed opportunities for their development. In response to this situation, three outcomes drive the theory of change: inclusive early childhood development and education; child protection; and social inclusion, public advocacy and communication. Implemented in an integrated manner, interventions aim to eliminate five bottlenecks that hinder the full realization of children´s rights: design of public policies that limit greater incidence on the situation of children; institutional capacity constraints and insufficient multi-sectoral coordination; inadequate societal awareness of the plight of children; spending inefficiencies; and specific social norms that violate children´s rights.

The priorities in 2018 revolved around six strategic intents:
1) Ensure the continuity of successful models initiated in previous years;
2) Solidify relationships with the new government administration to position these models as part of its priorities for children;
3) Develop statistical baselines for improved measurement of outcome and output indicators;
4) Fine tune the broad theory of change into annual theories of change to improve the contents of annual work plans with key counterparts (with support from the UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office/LACRO);
5) Progressively strengthen the quantity and quality of partnerships with civil society, academia and the private sector and involve them in the design and implementation of models, and;
6) Mainstream adolescent participation in all outcomes complemented by new partnerships in this area.

Inclusive early childhood development and education

Based on the Strategic Plan´s Goal Area 2 (Every Child Learns), the purpose of this outcome is for the Ministry of Public Education and other institutions responsible for the education of children and adolescents, to offer structured and relevant options to reduce educational exclusion, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. The National Development and

Public Investment Plan´s priorities are congruent with the country programme: increase the coverage of preschool and child care alternatives; reduce secondary education exclusion rates; and improve the academic results of all children and adolescents through higher quality education programmes. This outcome is also aligned with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Strategic Priority 2 to strengthen institutional capacities for more effective, efficient and innovative public services, with a gender and human rights focus. This outcome is implemented through two outputs – Inclusive Quality Education and Early Childhood Development.

In overall terms, the outcome saw important efforts in the construction of partnerships and strengthening of institutional capacities so that children and adolescents may access, remain and complete their integral development in the phases of early childhood, preschool and secondary education. This outcome represented 19 per cent of the total programmatic implementation in 2018.

Inclusive quality education

To support MEP in dealing with these challenges, in the last few years UNICEF has provided technical assistance for developing and implementing its educational inclusion strategy. This has resulted in the MEP decision to institutionalize and improve sustainability for the process by creating an Educational Permanence, Reincorporation and Success Unit (UPRE) as a standing department within its organizational structure.

Because violence also triggers educational exclusion, UNICEF promoted strengthening safety and coexistence in schools by preparing a protocol for dealing with issues of racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and is currently supporting its implementation nationwide. This protocol is part of a wider series supported by UNICEF to strengthen the education sector response to violence in schools.

To assist adolescents at risk of exclusion, UNICEF had agreed to support the continuity of the innovative pilot programme Community Teachers. However, it was suspended due to the educational sector strike that impeded working in the prioritized high schools.

Preschool education was declared mandatory and universal during the year, and in response, UNICEF and MEP developed a social media campaign addressing the factors for not sending children to preschool and promoted change in social norms to encourage mothers, fathers and caregivers to enrol their children. This campaign contributed to a significant increase in preschool enrolment, from 66.2 per cent in 2017 to 84.5 per cent in 2018. Support will continue with a second campaign in 2019, focusing on the importance of early childhood development, particularly for the most vulnerable young children.

UNICEF also concentrated its work on the issue of quality education by supporting the systematization of MEP´s Early Childhood Development Policy, which provided important recommendations for its strengthening. In coordination with UNICEF LACRO and its alliance with the Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination of the Central American Integration System (CECC-SICA), the Ministry´s capacities for evaluating education programmes were strengthened through the evaluation of the "Yo Me Apunto" (I´m All In) strategy. Another capacity building process was an induction on results-based management and theory of change with MEP´s Planning Department.

Given the high vulnerability of many Costa Rican schools to emergencies, UNICEF made progress with MEP on the proposal to implement the Safe Schools initiative in five vulnerable coastal schools. Although postponed in 2018 due to the education sector strike, these schools will eventually receive training on how to handle different risk scenarios, with a particular innovation that one of the training modules is designed for young children.

Another process that commenced was the technical support for the National Children's Hospital Centre for Support in Hospital Pedagogy. This aims to ensure and improve the comprehensive and continuous educational process for hospitalized, convalescent children and those with recurring medical treatment. A first assessment and systematization of the experience will be done in 2019 to escalate this model to the rest of the hospitals in the country.

UNICEF, together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was a key partner in the implementation of the World's Largest Lesson and provided technical assistance to MEP to begin a process of adolescent participation to generate safe educational spaces, enhanced leadership and empowerment towards 2019. The World's Largest Lesson was celebrated in an elementary school with the participation of 893 boys and girls, at which UNICEF delivered key messages on prevention of bullying as well as how to address specific cases.

Early childhood development

There is a lack of coordination amongst the institutions that deliver early childhood development services, which is reflected by the fact that only 10 per cent of the population of children in conditions of vulnerability receive this attention. In view of this, UNICEF seeks to finalize the current cooperation cycle with institutions for comprehensive child development and preschool education offering excellent care for children and their family, with robust coordination mechanisms and high-quality standards. During 2018, work focused on promoting the articulation of institutions for the care and comprehensive development of children and on the analysis and definition of uniform care criteria for these services.

The Technical Secretariat of the National Child Care and Development Network (STCUDI/REDCUDI) was identified as a key counterpart. It brings together key public institutions, such as MEP, PANI and the Ministry of Health, that provide comprehensive care and development services for children under the age of 12 living under conditions of poverty and vulnerability. The first 2018-2020 Annual Work Plan was signed with STCUDI to strengthen capacities for inter- institutional coordination of REDCUDI and the use of the theory of change to identify institutional priorities. Specific activities that started in 2018 included a costing study to identify the scope for family and government co-payments and its eventual implementation strategy, as well as REDCUDI´s Strategic Plan monitoring system. Support was also provided to develop a training module for the implementation of MEP´s 2017 Pedagogical Guide for Children aged 0-4 years, the purpose of which is to strengthen capacities of personnel from the different care alternatives to standardize child development criteria. Processes to be accelerated in 2019 and 2020 are the generation of a specialized capacity strengthening programme for the staff of the Technical Secretariat and other REDCUDI partners; the development of a communication for development (C4D) strategy to change social norms in child-rearing and care patterns; the definition of uniform profiles for personnel responsible for care alternatives; and the review and improvement of laws to strengthen the quality and control of care services.

One of the primary milestones for the year was the consolidation and up-scaling of the Music for Children Program. UNICEF has supported this programme for several years in conjunction with the National Music Teaching System (SINEM) and the Centres for Child Nutrition and Education (CEN-CINAI) as a model that introduces children to music and enhances their hearing system, expression of feelings and ideas, memory development, motor skills strengthening, artistic-creative skills and socio-cultural and linguistic integration. Music for Children provides children in conditions of vulnerability with access to diverse musical experiences that contribute to their comprehensive development, by enjoying the quality of education, recreation and games, equal opportunities, equity and progressive autonomy.

In light of the programme´s impact on the improvement of cognitive and socio-affective capacities in participating children, as well as their integration and overall happiness, UNICEF will support the programme´s up-scaling through the training of CEN-CINAI facilitators for implementing its methodology. This strategy was applied in 2018 in the East-Central and South-Central regions with the participation of facilitators from 30 per cent of establishments, reaching 18 per cent of the children who attend this service across the country (approximately 4,578). In addition, UNICEF provided technical assistance for the systematization of experiences from the programme and the formulation of its national upscaling strategy.

In an innovative sub-regional fundraising partnership with BAC Credomatic, outreach to its clientele resulted in approximately US$$30,000 in 2018 which will be used to support initiatives by MEP and REDCUDI promoting universal preschool education and quality day care services.

Child protection

Within the framework of the Strategic Plan's Goal Area 3 (Every Child is Protected from Violence and Exploitation), UNICEF Costa Rica promoted the strengthening of child protection actions and prevention of violence through the up-scaling of innovative models and successful initiatives. This programmatic area is consistent with SDG 16 and UNDAF´s Strategic Priority 3, as it promotes the achievement of peace, justice and solid institutions to end all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence against children and adolescents, through robust national agreements and social participation. The PNDIP also prioritizes improving the country´s human security through violence prevention and adolescent empowerment models, congruent with UNICEF´s approach. This outcome is implemented through two outputs – Violence prevention models and Changing social norms.

In 2018, this outcome´s major results were the strengthening of models for the prevention of violence against children and of the National and Local Integral Protection Systems which, supported by the generation of policies, plans and institutional directives, enabled the creation of better and more protective environments for children and adolescents. This outcome represented 20 per cent of the total programmatic implementation in 2018.

Violence prevention models

UNICEF supported the elaboration of the Violence Prevention Policy for School Age Children (6-11 years) and the Violence Prevention Policy for Adolescents (12-17 years). These complement the National Policy for Children and Adolescents, developed with UNICEF assistance in 2009. The policies contribute to more efficient actions by the National Council of Childhood and Adolescence (CNNA), better defining its interventions and understanding that the needs and issues of children under the age of 12 are different from those of adolescents,

based on the principle of life cycle programming and implementation.

Support was also given to the CNNA to analyse the functioning and performance of the Commission Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CONACOES), during its internal process of redefining activities and increasing its effectiveness. In this framework, one of the scenarios recommended by the analysis was the merger of CONACOES with the National Coalition Against Illegal Trafficking of Migrants and Human Trafficking (CONATT), which was subsequently endorsed by the substitute text for the CONATT Law.

Communities have an enormous potential for strengthening local polices for the prevention of child violence. UNICEF initiated a programme, in conjunction with the National Confederation of Community Development Associations (CONADECO), to improve the capacities of approximately 200 community leaders on child-centred violence prevention strategies and the development of community action plans, which will continue throughout 2019.

As part of actions related to the de-institutionalization of children and adolescents, UNICEF, in partnership with PANI and Community Development Associations from the municipality of Desamparados, promoted the innovative violence prevention model, Forging Community Alliances (HALCOM). This model encourages life skills acquisition among adolescents who are institutionalized or at risk. It supports adolescents by providing them with technical training, the construction of their life projects and the development of employment skills.

With regards to the model for the protection and care of migrant indigenous children, Houses of Happiness (Casas de la Alegria), which UNICEF helped to design and implement in 2014, the systematization of the model was completed and the Presidential Decree that enables its nationwide application was approved. The installation, with support from UNICEF, of the first Casa de la Alegria in the municipality of Tarrazú following the Presidential Decree was an important milestone, given that all prior units (17 in total) were located in the municipality of Coto Brus.

Continued strengthening of local child rights policies was pursued through the consolidation of the Child Friendly Municipalities programme (Cantones Amigos de la Infancia). This included the development of an online platform and training module that in 2019 will be instrumental in further promoting the development of comprehensive municipal child and adolescent policies, hopefully in all municipalities.

UNICEF also supported the amplification of the Civic Centres Without Walls model (Centros Cívicos sin Paredes, CCSP). This complements the Civic Centres for Peace by expanding their reach to offer cultural, sports, psycho-social and learning activities as a means for violence prevention and social cohesion. The CCSP developed a methodology for the multiplication of Centres' activities in the neediest and most distant regions. In 2018, UNICEF's support enabled CCSP activities to reach approximately 2,000 children and adolescents. The educational topics offered included gender-equal parental responsibilities, positive masculinities and education on sexual and reproductive health rights.

The systematization of the CCSP model was concluded in 2018, as well as the protocol for situations of violence in the civic centres and a teaching guide. This was prepared in conjunction with MEP to teach the contents of the bullying protocol, both at schools and civic centres. These and other documents being prepared, contribute to standardizing the norms and procedures that in 2019 will assist to empower the capacities, reach and impact of the

seven existing CCSPs.

UNICEF and MEP, with the support of Mente Sana Foundation, promoted the model Listening Classrooms (Aulas de Escucha). This model promotes the prevention of bullying and educational exclusion by empowering adolescents and providing psycho-social support and recreation alternatives. It focuses on students with the highest vulnerability to education exclusion aged 13 to 14 years, which is a critical stage in adolescence. In 2018, 100 per cent of students (1,020) from the 20 participating high schools continued their education and were not excluded by the system. Some of the topics developed during the training included conflict resolution, affective relationships and sexuality for gender equality.

The CCSP and Listening Classrooms models underscored the importance of ensuring the participation of the education sector in the design and execution of violence prevention interventions.

Changing social norms

The promotion of violence-free and protective environments, particularly for the most excluded and vulnerable children and adolescents, entails changes in social norms of violent or negligent behaviour, starting with a change in the knowledge and perception of the problem. For 2018, strategies in this area focused on changing knowledge and perceptions concerning the exclusion of indigenous women, children and adolescents from health services, the prevention of child burns, and the elimination of physical punishment as a child-rearing practice.

The 2017 study by UNICEF and the NGO Tree of Justice on the situation of the Cabécar indigenous population, revealed the important challenges that women, girls and adolescents face to fully enjoy the fulfilment of their rights. In response to this study, together the NGO Hands for Health, and the Ministry of Health, a methodology was developed for the promotion of health services, with the participation of close to 800 families from the Bribri, Ngäbe and Cabécar indigenous groups. The aim was to empower indigenous women to change behaviours, attitudes and practices that promote healthy lifestyles and safe environments following a C4D approach. Based on the very positive results obtained in 2018, expectations are that the model will be escalated to more indigenous communities.

In Costa Rica, child burns are the second cause of traumatic injuries seen at the National Children's Hospital. This led UNICEF, the Surviving Burns Association (ASOQUEM) and the Burns Unit at the National Children's Hospital to undertake a consultation process with 50 leaders from two communities who contributed to a training programme for families.

Since 2016, UNICEF has supported PANI in implementing the Families in Action Programme (FAMA), a model that promotes changes in social norms regarding positive and violence-free child-rearing among families. Given the strong growth in the implementation of the model (5,178 participants in 2017), during 2018 UNICEF contributed to the creation of a computerized system for PANI to improve its monitoring capacities and geo-referencing of the initiative.

Social inclusion, public advocacy and communication

The Social Inclusion, Public Advocacy and Social Communication outcome seeks to strengthen the national framework of child inclusive policies, programmes and social services. It promotes the generation of institutional capacities for situational analysis, monitoring and evaluation of

policies, the improvement of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms and knowledge management, and effective social participation, particularly of children and adolescents. This component directly supports the Goal Area 5 (Every Child has an Equitable Chance in Life) and the Change Strategies of the UNICEF Strategic Plan. It is aligned with the Strategic Priority 2 of the UNDAF to strengthen the technical capacity of the public administration to generate data and produce knowledge to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies. It also directly addresses the National Goals on Equality contained in the PNDIP. Three outputs comprise this outcome: policy monitoring and evaluation; knowledge management; and advocacy, communication and participation.

In 2018, UNICEF´s work in this outcome was instrumental to update child-focused data, through surveys and studies and to strengthen the country programme´s strategy on adolescent empowerment and participation, especially through the initial rolling out and adaptation of Generation Unlimited. In combination with other important results, UNICEF contributed to the construction of inter-institutional partnerships and knowledge generation platforms to support the development of public policies and programmes aimed at prioritising highly vulnerable groups of children and adolescents. This outcome represented 61 per cent of the total programmatic implementation in 2018 (the higher than usual percentage in this outcome is due to the MICS).

Policy monitoring and evaluation / knowledge management

During 2018, UNICEF carried out a robust advocacy, inter-institutional coordination and capacity generating process to strengthen the measurement and in-depth analysis of the situation of children in the country, with the greatest efforts focused on the National Survey on Women, Children and Adolescents (MICS/EMNA), the second time after the 2011 round.

The MICS/EMNA survey was conducted by the Inter-Institutional Technical Committee, composed of the National Institute of Statistics and Census, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, and implemented between March 2017 and May 2018. The remainder of 2018 was devoted to reviewing the database and producing statistical tables, leading to the official presentation planned for April 2019. MICS/EMNA's implementation process required wide-ranging inter-institutional coordination, for which the technical assistance of the LACRO and UNICEF headquarters MICS teams was instrumental. Given the recognition of the survey´s relevance, MICS/EMNA was included in the Bill of Law that defines the National Strategic Plan for the Production of Information, which once approved will ensure continuous rounds.

The MICS/EMNA survey will update about 48 per cent of the SDG indicators, thereby establishing a critical baseline for measuring the SDGs. The INEC and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy are responsible to ensure the use of survey data by public, private, academic and civil society institutions. MICS/EMNA will also produce a gender-focused baseline that will facilitate gender-sensitive institutional programming and, in 2019, a specialized study will be conducted between the National Institute for Women (INAMU), UN-Women and UNICEF.

UNICEF Costa Rica played an important role in developing and strengthening systems to monitor and evaluate child-related programmes and policies. This included the Monitoring System for the National Agenda on Children and Adolescents (ANNA), which UNICEF also supported in 2015. Key products were monitoring reports on ANNA compliance, to be followed in 2019 by an evaluation of the outcomes of the Agenda which is expected to contribute to

improved decision-making processes, accountability and effective use of public resources for children. Likewise, UNICEF led the development of baselines and monitoring systems for key UNICEF-supported models and innovations such as FAMA, Civic Centres without Walls, Music for Children and Comprehensive Health for Indigenous Women, Children and Adolescents.

MIDEPLAN and UNICEF developed the 2018 workplan which contained important actions to strengthen the Ministry´s institutional capacities in the areas of evaluation and evidence generation. Support will be provided for the evaluation of programmes and projects focusing on child and adolescent rights and for the implementation of the National Evaluation Policy Action Plan, which is a pioneering initiative in Latin America.

Other activities were undertaken to strengthen management, coordination and knowledge use capacities of counterparts. Within the framework of the University of Costa Rica´s Report on the State of Rights of Children and Adolescents (known as EDNA), UNICEF supported the conceptualization and analysis of the data for the 9th EDNA Report (2019). This responds to the recommendations on methodological guidelines, editorial governance and structure of contents emanating from the assessment of the 8th EDNA Report in 2017.

In response to General Comment 19 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF led an awareness and advocacy process that led to a partnership between PANI, MIDEPLAN, the Ministry of Finance, the University of Costa Rica to build a methodology that measures public spending and investment in children and adolescents. The first report is due in 2019. This follows on previous initiatives to measure public spending on children´s issues.

Overweight and obesity among children and adolescents is an emerging concern for public health in Costa Rica. The 2016 First Weight and Height School Census supported by UNICEF revealed that three out of 10 school aged children were overweight or obese, up 43 per cent from 2009. To elicit more information, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health, MEP and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund to design and implement the National Survey on Nutritional Oversight and Physical Activity in High Schools which will guide strategies to improve lifestyles of children and adolescents. Furthermore, as part of the MICS/EMNA Survey and with the support of CEN-CINAI, an anthropometric model was applied for children aged under 5 years. This information will provide a better panorama of this issue and factors associated with childhood obesity and support the development of models, interventions and prevention strategies. These models and initiatives are coordinated within the framework of the UN Scaling up Nutrition movement (SUN), led in Costa Rica by the Ministry of Health.

Other relevant actions under the knowledge management output to improve institutional capacities to facilitate monitoring, evaluation and decision-making related to child-focused public financing, programmes and policies included the development of the National Child and Adolescent Information System and the conceptualization of the Child Rights Observatory.

Advocacy, communication and participation

An important strategy pursued by UNICEF in 2018 was the promotion of communication and public advocacy processes that informed initiatives among the Costa Rican society in favour of the rights of children and adolescents, particularly those in situations of greater social vulnerability.

Although the country has made progress in compliance with child and adolescent rights, the

knowledge amongst decision makers and the population in general regarding the situation of children and adolescents is still low. For example, a UNICEF study in 2017 showed that 51 per cent of the sampled population had, on average, inadequate knowledge of child and adolescent rights. Among the main problems identified by the study were drugs, family disintegration and abandonment, difficulties with respect to educational access and permanence, intra-family violence and poverty. These issues underscore the communication and advocacy challenges that need to be addressed to have a greater impact on public policies and to drive changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices by the population to produce positive results on the lives of children and adolescents. Consequently, in 2018 UNICEF strengthened its advocacy efforts, partnerships and C4D initiatives, complemented by the development of messages with practical advice for duty bearers (principally parents, caregivers, teachers, and others) on how to better protect children and adolescents, which were widely disseminated in various communication channels and social media.

In mid-2018, the presentation of the 2017 Annual Report was an opportunity to advocate for children and adolescents. It positioned the actions that UNICEF and partners are taking to generate sustainable results and positive outcomes based on a strong rights agenda. The report was presented to national authorities, public institutions and civil society, and was disseminated amongst 25 communication and media platforms. It highlighted the challenges that the country must address to decrease childhood poverty, educational exclusion, violence against children and achieve universal preschool education, amongst other areas. The report was also presented to the Legislative Assembly's Commission on Children and to several civil society organizations. Social media messages on the report reached 90,000 persons.

In Costa Rica the digital gap is low, holding a position of 2.1 on the Digital Access Index. This represents an opportunity for the country to address more sophisticated challenges such as digital citizenship, the digital economy and artificial intelligence. UNICEF supported the International Connected to the South Symposium: Costa Rica 2018 "Digital Transformation and New Challenges for the Inclusion of Youth", within the framework of South-South cooperation in conjunction with the University of Costa Rica, the Institute for Communication and Image of the University of Chile and the Argentinian organization Faro Digital. Nearly 100 persons from 17 countries in the region attended the Symposium, with discussions on the inclusion of young people with respect to digital technologies. As an input to this event, 40 students and faculty from the University of Costa Rica´s School of Communication Sciences strengthened their research capacities by designing a participation, human rights and digital citizenship model applied to 228 students from 10 secondary schools in vulnerable areas of the country, which enabled them to acquire critical knowledge and life skills.

UNICEF Costa Rica's social media and digital platforms became an essential resource for positioning child and adolescent rights in the public agenda, with a 300 per cent increase in child-centred information published in the press (74 notes) and social media followers increased by 16 per cent.

The celebration of World Children's Day provided a major opportunity for advocacy and visibility. Amongst the strategies used around the celebration were:
1)   Mobilisation of support amongst decision makers, leaders and influencers from all sectors of society for the UNICEF global petition;
2)   A takeover of the office of the President of the Legislative Assembly;
3)   The National Children's Dance Festival with the participation of 225 children and adolescents;

4)	Promotion of an encounter of We Women Connecting: Entrepreneurs, with the participation of 275 adolescents and women, and;
5)	Production of a video to promote UNICEF messages through dance.

The combination of these efforts reached more than 140,000 persons with UNICEF messages through social media, and also positioned the voice of adolescents regarding their rights in the communication media.

A community diagnosis was undertaken to set the basis for C4D strategies targeting fathers, mothers and caregivers on the importance of preschool education, which produced an increase in pre-enrolment for 2018-2019. UNICEF also partnered with the National Children's Hospital on changing capacities, attitudes and practices concerning negligence as a form of violence and on myths regarding the prevention and care of burns. The campaign reached close to one million persons, with more than 30 publications in social media. National Children's Hospital data indicated that during the period of the campaign, burns in children decreased by 80 per cent. In addition, the Desampa Inclusivo campaign prepared a communication strategy to fight stereotypes and prevent discrimination against adults and young people with disabilities, to be implemented in 2019.

UNICEF Costa Rica is rolling out Generation Unlimited and adapting it to local realities, through the six strategies:
1	Mainstreaming of youth-related issues in key programmes;
2	Formulation and implementation of a five-year youth programme in partnership with public institutions and civil society;
3	Evidence generation on required capacities, life skills and employability;
4	Positioning of adolescent and youth issues in the public agenda and in public policy;
5	Empowering girls, adolescents and women to achieve gender equality and physical, financial and political autonomy, and;
6	Application of innovative teaching models that contribute to the empowerment and political participation of adolescents with emphasis on the most vulnerable groups.

As part of this initiative, agreements were signed with the Vice Ministry for Youth, the National Young Persons Council and two civil society organizations (Fundación Parque La Libertad and Fábrica de Historias), establishing a working platform for the entire cooperation cycle. A first component focused on the preparation of a series of strategic studies that will inform UNICEF´s work in Generation Unlimited during the forthcoming years. These are a participatory analysis on needed capacities, life skills and employability for young people; a proposal of innovative models to promote the empowerment of youth; the design of a Youth Ombudsperson; and the development of a methodology to support the empowerment and employability of young persons with disabilities.

The second component centred on strengthening the participation of young people with encouraging results. Nearly 100 young people from indigenous territories participated in the first consultation of indigenous groups; this process will continue in 2019 with 400 youth from all indigenous territories and will be a key input for the 2020-2024 National Public Policy on Youth. Support was provided for 78 young people to participate in the National Youth Meeting, where they acquired knowledge on dual education and empowerment. In addition, the afore-mentioned National Children's Dance Festival was instrumental to promote capacity strengthening and life skills.

In line with SDG 5, UNICEF supported Fábrica de Historia for the 2nd National Meeting of We Women Connecting, during which close to 1,500 women and adolescents heard testimonies and learned lessons from women leaders and entrepreneurs. In addition, 809 adolescent females aged 12-19 years from vulnerable communities experienced a new perspective on the gender and equity focus through storytelling and leadership workshops. This activity was particularly relevant in a context of the number of single women and female heads of household who live in poverty and the situation where 60 per cent of young persons who do not go to school or work are women.

Gender

UNICEF Costa Rica is implementing a holistic gender equality strategy which is in line with the organizational Gender Action Plan, and important progress was made in 2018. The generation of data to illustrate disparities affecting boys and girls, principally through the implementation of the MICS/EMNA and its specific module for women aged 15-49 years, as well as other surveys on nutrition, will enable the development of evidence-based policies that can directly address gender issues at their root causes.

Another achievement in 2018 was the support to several awareness-building activities concerning different manifestations of gender inequalities and the need to change social norms as a bottleneck for gender equality. UNICEF and its partners, including the UN Gender Interagency Group, developed, implemented and successfully participated in numerous campaigns and outreach activities such as the International Day of the Girl Child, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, Forbes' Powerful Women Congress, the National March Against Violence Against Women and the National Children's Dance Festival (highlighting the importance of equality among male and female dancers).

Much progress was attained in strengthening model programmes with a focus on eradicating gender inequalities. These benefited from the systematic application of a C4D approach to promote changes towards more gender-inclusive knowledge, attitudes and practices among highly vulnerable groups, and as a central component to encourage gender sensitive and positive child-rearing in families. The Families in Action Programme/FAMA was one good example of this.

The promotion of cultural and sports activities at the community level (as in Civic Centres Without Walls) and the delivery of psycho-social support (Listening Classrooms and HALCOM) enabled vulnerable children and adolescents to realize their right to leisure, peaceful coexistence and quality education, whilst simultaneously providing a safe space to reflect and learn on the importance of positive and equal gender relations. Gender transformative impacts are also at the base of the ECD agenda addressing the need to ensure that all women can access affordable and quality child day care. They are also a cornerstone of the Generation Unlimited Strategy, which is centred in the empowerment and employability of young adolescent women (We Women Connecting).

Capacity strengthening to incorporate gender dimensions in planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation was prioritized through the participation of all UNICEF staff in the UN Gender Discrimination Workshop.

Humanitarian assistance

UNICEF Costa Rica prioritized the finalization of the Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP), which was a very challenging and complex exercise for a small office with limited specialized human resources in emergencies. Nevertheless, it provided the opportunity to undertake a thorough child-focused analysis of the country´s main risks. For each of these risks, different scenarios and preparedness actions were defined at the sector level (such as education, protection, and health). The resultant EPP provided the required analysis and information for further mainstreaming risk-informed programming in all humanitarian initiatives and development programmes.

In the face of the increase in migratory flows and in the number of persons requesting asylum and supplementary protection during 2018, UNICEF provided technical assistance to national counterparts in their obligation to implement international human rights standards and strengthening their institutional response capacity. This focused on guaranteeing all childrens' rights to international protection and regular, safe and organized migration.

During the final quarter of 2018, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) joined efforts to support PANI in the training of four local offices located in border regions of the country. The objective was to ensure the application of the different protocols for the protection of children and adolescents who migrate on an unaccompanied basis or with their families under highly vulnerable conditions. Eleven training workshops were imparted, involving around 100 public employees from PANI, the Ministry of Public Security and the General Immigration and Foreigner Department in key municipalities from the northern and southern regions of the country. The technical assistance provided by UNICEF strengthened PANI´s implementation of the six national child protection protocols concerning migration and asylum, analysed and improved the required inter-institutional articulation needs and supported the improvement of organizational and administrative processes.

Regarding the generation of emergency management capacities, since 2014 UNICEF Costa Rica has participated in the sub-regional project Participation and Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Emergencies in Central America, funded by Office of United States Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). The second phase of the project covers September 2017 to March 2019, and achievements have included:
1   Approval of an Executive Decree that mandates compliance with the regional standards for inclusion, protection and care of persons with disabilities in emergencies;
2   Design of a communication campaign, a theatre play and a training kit to promote changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices among public employees and the population and their relationship with persons with disabilities;
3   Incorporation of inclusive risk management standards in the Return to Happiness (Retorno de la Alegria)child-centred strategy;
4   Design of a training methodology for adolescents and young adults with disabilities and their caretakers on Inclusive Risk Management Standards and human rights, and;
5   The inclusion of the Functional Capacity Module in the MICS/EMNA survey.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

As evidenced throughout this report, UNICEF´s actions in 2018 are firmly ensconced in key work areas germane to programming in an upper middle-income country context:

- Advocacy to promote child-and gender-friendly policies, laws and budgets;
- Strengthening of national and local capacities so that institutions can approximate themselves more to the needs of children and adolescents;
- Strategies deliberately designed to address inequalities, exclusion and discrimination against children and adolescents;
- Rigorous monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the situation of children;
- Promoting social dialogue through the construction of national and local partnerships, and;
- South-south/triangular cooperation placing Costa Rica simultaneously as exporter and importer of good practices.

The aim is to effectively identify, respond and eliminate the key barriers and bottlenecks that have impeded the opportunity for all children and adolescents to benefit from social and economic development. As the first year of the country programme, the priority in 2018 was to deliberately establish the necessary platforms in planning, baseline development, partnerships and institutional engagement so that key and promising models of innovation can generate the results and evidence for the eventual national ownership and appropriation to take them to scale.

The country programme´s theory of change is the vehicle to convert these strategies into tangible results and improvements in the well-being of children and adolescents. However, whereas the theory of change articulated in the Country Programme Document is very clear in terms of a five-year horizon, it quickly became evident that this had to be translated into annual theories of change with specific benchmarks and results, an exercise which greatly benefited from LACRO´s support. In addition, this is a process that UNICEF should not undertake in isolation. It required active counterpart involvement to fully understand the logic of the theory of change as it relates to results-based planning through capacity building. This process eventually resulted in annual work plans where UNICEF´s financial and technical inputs address those areas identified through a more microscopic theory of change. The successful experiments in developing theory of change-informed work plans with the Ministries of Education and National Planning were essential to identify the medium and long-term transformations that need to be undertaken on behalf of children and constitute the basis to apply the same approach with remaining key counterparts in 2019.

UNICEF invested a significant amount of time and resources in producing data, baselines and monitoring systems which will be instrumental to inform programmatic interventions based on evidence and results. Whilst the second round of MICS was the most visible data generation process, there were a number of other processes that contributed to this goal, including surveys and studies on obesity and overweight in children and adolescents and the implementation of the Social Maps developed in 2017. These have been complemented by the creation of baselines and monitoring systems to measure progress in the innovative models such as Families in Action, Child Friendly Municipalities, Civic Centres Without Walls, Music for Children, Listening Classrooms and the Judicial Mentors. In this process, the key lesson was the need to gravitate from a data generation strategy to a more integrated knowledge management methodology. Within this strategy, monitoring and evaluation will be fully integrated into planning, technical counterpart capacities strengthened in knowledge management, data proactively mined and used to inform executive level decisions on child-focused policies and programme, and advocacy, communication and social mobilization are inserted into knowledge management methodologies. This transition, which will be a priority in 2019, should guarantee better and greater advances in the design and impact of policies.

Investing in a limited number of innovative models within each of the three programme outcomes not only is warranted in a low-resource setting but is instrumental in projecting UNICEF´s greater value-added to its wide range of counterparts. In this regard, the fact that some of these models, such as Casas de la Alegría, Civic Centres Without Walls, Music for Children, Listening Classrooms have either already been officially appropriated by Government or are close to this milestone, confirms that this method of working has been a wise choice. Nevertheless, this does not mean that UNICEF had a clearly specified theory of change to inform the evolution of these models. In other words, it is only at this point that UNICEF has more clearly identified the macro-steps, or the course of events, to take into account in developing models, and that sufficient time needs to be invested at the beginning before embarking on this process. Consequently, this logical work path entails:

1   A very clear definition of the problem and whether it represents a situation where important deprivations of child rights are occurring and whose solution would have a direct and positive bearing on the country´s vision for children and its own development goals and aspirations;

2   The need to count on government acknowledgment of the problem and an indication that it will actively participate in all stages of the development, implementation and evaluation of the model;

3   The commitment to an early systematization to identify preliminary results, lessons learned, pitfalls and the overall potential of the model;

4   The importance of investing sufficient resources into national, local and community capacity building on the paradigm shift (use theory of change and results-based management approaches) behind the models, and;

5   The need to prioritize the elaboration of guides, protocols, toolkits and monitoring systems to facilitate follow-up on progress, identification of unintended results, development of logical pathways and the consolidation of recommendations regarding different scenarios and options once the model has been confirmed as apt for national scale-up.

The lack of inter-institutional coordination has long been identified as a structural barrier in Costa Rica in many sectors, including those areas affecting children and adolescents. Although there is wide recognition of this problem, even at the highest level, it does not necessarily nor automatically lead to the will to work together over the setting aside of organizational mandates and responsibilities, many of which are constitutionally enshrined. Notwithstanding this bottleneck, UNICEF has found that as long as a priority has been codified in national and local priorities, for example, in the National Development Plan, the National Agenda and Policy for Children and Adolescents, or in sectoral or thematic policies, the appetite to work together is significantly higher and more conducive to allocation of resources. This has been the case in bringing together MEP, PANI and the CEN-CINAI around the priority to universalize early childhood care for all working mothers irrespective of their economic standing, in the rolling out of Generation Unlimited and in the integrated health model for indigenous women, children and adolescents. In the end, the core lesson is that deep-seated, structural problems affecting children require broader multilateral efforts wherein UNICEF can be an important convener. In the process, a lesson is that bringing institutions out of their comfort zones is a requirement towards breaking artificial silos and barriers. Interestingly, this has challenged UNICEF's internal responses to guarantee a more unified team wherein annual work plans and the elaboration of direct cash transfers are now negotiated, developed and monitored with the involvement of several programme staff.

2018 was an important year to achieve greater maturity in positioning participation and social

mobilization in the country programme both as process and as strategy. UNICEF has undertaken important efforts to position the situation of children´s rights in the public discourse - particularly through the use of social media - mobilize different sectors of society and promote substantive participation of children and adolescents through the combined strategies of advocacy and communication and focused partnerships with private sector, academia and civil society entities that are also fit for purpose. The key lesson is that this process can be enhanced by guaranteeing three elements. Firstly, there needs to be an effective articulation between knowledge management, social communication, citizenship mobilization and systematic strengthening of the capacities and leadership skills of children and adolescents. Secondly, social mobilization strategies need to be developed through innovative partnerships with civil society, academia, media, the private sector and key influencers, wherein children and adolescents need to be part and equal. Finally, the design, evaluation and scaling up of innovative models of child and adolescent participation should prioritize both mass communication as well as face-to-face strategies.

Costa Rica exhibits the paradox that a sophisticated normative and legal framework does not necessarily imply fewer violations of children´s rights, and that the positive national indicators are automatically the same at sub-national level, which in many cases are worse. Hence, whilst the normative framework has in overall terms generated a positive quality of life index and improved opportunities for children, UNICEF´s work must be fine-tuned to guarantee that its programmes intelligently combine ¨a head in the boardroom and a foot in the field¨ approach. This requires a number of shifts. Investing in improving and strengthening the normative and legal framework is essential but must be accompanied by focusing on design shortcomings that are at the heart of the inability of existing policies to reach all children and adolescents.

Equally important is the need to ensure that lessons learned from work at community level reach policy makers, and the converse, that UNICEF use its convening and mobilizing capacities to approximate national level decision-making to local level bodies. Using the example of the successful Integrated Health for Indigenous Women, Children and Adolescents initiative, UNICEF will need to be more present at the local and community level in planning and implementation processes, combined with the delivery of capacity strengthening initiatives. This last point also underscores that the majority of local civil society organizations have great potential as programme implementers but require a high level of capacity building in financial and administrative processes, for which the harmonized approach to cash transfers methodology can be very relevant.

Even though the UNICEF programme focus in Costa Rica necessitates hard choices in terms of which priority areas will be addressed (a typical challenge working with limited resources in upper middle-income countries where universal social protection schemes have made great strides) this does not exclude contributing in other areas. A case in point is how UNICEF has managed to provide added value in health and nutrition without specialized expertise. This has been achieved by utilising the strong capacities in data generation and knowledge management. This is manifested in the large number of indicators that will be updated in health and nutrition, the support to national surveys and plans of action on childhood obesity and overweight and participating in different governmental working bodies and councils on health and nutrition.

The number and impact of emergencies in 2018 were not as high as in previous years. However, the migratory crisis in the northern frontier with Nicaragua, generated by the political and economic instability in that country, obligated UNICEF to work outside of its traditional

areas and collaborate more closely and in an integrated manner with other UN agencies and in coordination with national authorities. In the process of completing the Emergency Preparedness Platform, an important lesson was the need to establish a minimum threshold of knowledge and capacity across the entire country programme in order to progressively build a team much more fit to respond to emergency situations. This led the country management team to identify as mandatory a number of general and specific online courses to be undertaken by all staff.

2018 was not without challenges. Although the current Administration is making an effort to lend continuity to the previous one, especially in priority sectors to UNICEF, this has demanded a tremendous amount of time reaching out to new ministers in order to brief them on the country programme and more importantly to secure their commitment to ongoing initiatives. In the process, it has been necessary to negotiate the incorporation of new priorities of the Government which fortunately has not detracted significantly from UNICEF's programmatic focus and expected results.

The general education sector strike, which was the longest in the country´s history, not only had an impact on the continuity of classes for thousands of children and adolescents, but led to the necessary rescheduling of activities to 2019 and, in some instances, their outright cancellation.

UNICEF Costa Rica operates in a resource mobilization environment with very few traditional donors that could help to sustain the programme. In this regard, a reliance on regional thematic funds will continue to be a priority, whilst working with Government counterparts to successfully navigate the ¨funding to financing¨ paradigm shift whereby UNICEF can bring to bear successful experiences in the identification of resource mobilization strategies, especially in education, early childhood development and child protection.

An important effort has been made to respond to LACRO´s recommendation to reduce risks inherent in issuing a high number of individual and institutional contracts to the detriment of other disbursement mechanisms, principally direct cash transfers (DCTs). This is constraint imposed by the impossibility in Costa Rica of issuing DCTs to government partners. Between 2017 and 2018, the volume of contracts was reduced from 34 per cent to 5 per cent, whereas DCTs increased from 22 per cent to 46 per cent, thus significantly reversing the high percentage of contracts historically issued.

UNICEF Costa Rica enters 2019 with a very optimistic perspective based on what has largely been a very successful year in achieving important results for children. Baselines have been developed, successful models have been appropriated by Government, annual work plans informed by the theory of change are in place and a new cohort of partners has been incorporated into the country programme. In addition, UNICEF´s digital imprint has never been stronger, thereby guaranteeing that instrumental C4D campaigns will reach a large segment of the population, complemented by an increasing and evolving maturity in the area of child and adolescent development and participation. Likewise, the gender strategy witnessed positive outcomes which will be expanded and solidified in 2019. The lessons learned will be instrumental in the process of fine tuning many processes and improving UNICEF's ability to take promising models and innovations to scale.
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