

Guinea Bissau

Update on the context and situation of children

Guinea-Bissau is among the poorest countries in the world and has a Human Development Index of 0.461, even below the average of 0.541 for sub-Saharan African countries, ranking it 178 out of 189 countries. Furthermore, Guinea-Bissau ranked fourth on the list of most fragile states in West Africa, after Guinea, Nigeria, and Niger on the 2019 Fragile State Index, (FFP, 2019). This high fragility continues to hinder efforts to ensure children's access to education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and impedes the development of health services as well as efforts to implement the National Development Plan entitled "Terra Ranka".

Guinea-Bissau continues to suffer from recurrent socio-political instability. Legislative and presidential elections were held in 2019. However, the legislative elections triggered a new political dispute between the two main political parties with respect to the formation of the parliament, delaying the nomination of the prime minister and his cabinet. The first and second rounds of the presidential elections took place as planned in November and December.

The International Monetary Fund estimated economic growth at 4.6 per cent for 2019, an increase compared to previous year's estimate of 3.8 per cent. The country's economy is largely dependent upon the agriculture sector, with rice and cashew nut production being the major contributors. The economic outlook remains uncertain due not only to the unstable political situation but also the volatility of cashew nut prices.

In October 2019, the Government retroactively approved the 2019 budget. This budget was adopted with an increase of 16 per cent compared to 2018, largely due to foreign-financed capital spending. However, despite a general increase in the budget, the social sectors of health, education, and social protection still face shortfalls and allocations remain below the expected target of 35 per cent as per the UNICEF Guinea-Bissau Country Office's Country Programme indicators. Furthermore, only a small percentage of social sector spending is dedicated to programme implementation, leaving the bulk of the budget for salaries and other personnel costs.

Like many countries in West Africa, Guinea-Bissau is experiencing rainfall variances, showing the country's vulnerability to climate change. Given the country's lack of adaptation capacity, climate change may exacerbate poverty due to its impact on agriculture, thereby worsening the already deteriorated living conditions of the population, in particular in rural areas.

Progress on child protection has been slow but steady. However, the child protection system remains fragile and there continues to be a lack of information and data on key child protection issues, despite some positive achievements on the birth registration routine data management system. There is no defined continuum of services for case management and referral, and no reliable and accessible information system on children experiencing violence, abuse and/or exploitation. The child protection system is still poorly coordinated and has a shortage of qualified and specialized human resources. While there have been advances in aligning national legislation with international human rights standards, the implementation of new laws and policies has been slow^[1].

Female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and gender-based violence remain common, especially in rural areas where such harmful social norms undermine progress in the realisation of women and girls' rights. Community-based programmes promoting dialogue around human rights and interventions targeting adolescent girls have been implemented in most regions where harmful practices are more prevalent, with some degree of success. However, to have a real impact on the situation of adolescent girls, there is a need to scale up these interventions and invest in life skills training and livelihood activities, including social protection and microfinance initiatives tailored to adolescent girls' needs.

The water and sanitation sector is still characterized by large inequities in terms of access to water. A secondary geographical information system (GIS) analysis of sector data shows that 34 per cent of villages have never had access to safe water within 1000 meters and an additional 30 per cent of villages have non-functioning pumps. With water rarely treated at the household level, one of the main risks to child health and child growth is the presence of faecal coliforms found inside 75 per cent of unprotected wells. Over 20 per cent of schools have no water point. Latrines, when they do exist, are rarely functional. Just 25 per cent of Guinea Bissau villages (1,476 out of 4,017 communities) have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) but, despite slow progress, Guinea Bissau is one of a few countries on track to meet SDG 6 on water and sanitation by 2030. However, the sector is severely underfunded and heavily dependent on external actors for WASH improvements.

UNICEF has actively supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) in strengthening the Community Health Information System. As part of this effort, community health indicators were defined and integrated into the District Health Information Software (DHIS2) platform with training conducted for 22 technicians. During the reporting period, community health workers (CHW) visited 81,981 out of 117,115 households with children under 5 years of age nationwide, identifying and referring diarrhoea and pneumonia cases, thus contributing to efforts to reduce child mortality.

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While notable improvements in the availability of nutrition data using SMART methodology have taken place, obstacles to improving the actual status of child nutrition are multiple. The absence of an implementation mechanism for nutrition interventions, combined with the lack of resources earmarked for nutrition remain by far the major challenges facing the sector.

Teachers' strikes continue to plague the education system. During the 2018/2019 school year, teachers' strikes were particularly intense and continued throughout the year, leading to public counter demonstrations led by students claiming their right to education. Strikes affected almost one third of the country's schools. In an effort to rescue the 2018-2019 school year and recover the school days lost during that school year, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed the Plan for Recovery of the School Year, which is being implemented successfully. The education sector also continues to suffer from insufficient funding and lack of capacity to address the many challenges faced by children, including out-of-school children. Overall, classrooms environments are not conducive to learning and there is a shortage of qualified teachers. Only one fourth of primary schools offer the full first six years of education. This situation is exacerbated in rural areas, where only a limited number of schools offer classes that continue until the end of primary level. This potentially results in children leaving the school system early, especially girls, before having acquired the necessary literacy and numeracy skills. Over the years, Guinea-Bissau has been increasing its gross enrolment rates in primary education (Grade 1-6). However, a closer look at the data shows that net enrolment rates are stagnant and that there is a large proportion of overage children that remain in primary schools. This latter phenomenon is partly due to the late enrolment of children, but also to high repetition and dropout rates.

The political context combined with strikes in the public sector have remained critical constraints for programme implementation throughout the year. However, despite these setbacks, UNICEF Guinea-Bissau was able to achieve important programmatic results. It is hoped that the new Government and Presidency established following the 2019 legislative and presidential elections will bring about an improvement of the overall situation of the country next year.

[1] FGM, human trafficking and domestic violence legislation, Child Protection Policy (2018-2030) and the new Civil Registration and Vital statistics (CRVS) Action Plan (2018-2028)

Major contributions and drivers of results

Every child survives and thrives

Thanks to UNICEF support, there are now 35 functional health facilities in Guinea-Bissau equipped with the necessary materials and with adequately trained human resources that now have the capacity to provide integrated essential newborn care. In 2019, 12,250 births were recorded in the health structures supported by the Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP) project, of which 509 newborns benefited from resuscitation, 588 were considered low birth weight and 148 underweight children were successfully treated with kangaroo mother care. Provisional data recorded through the project indicated that infants born in 5,337 live births received vitamin K within the first 48 hours and were breastfed within the first hour after birth, greatly increasing their chances of survival.

UNICEF is actively working with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to improve routine immunization coverage with an emphasis on reaching unvaccinated children. According to administrative data from January-September 2019, eight health regions out of 11 have Penta3 (protecting against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) coverage above 80 per cent (Bafatá, Biombo, Cacheu, Farim, Gabu, Oio, Tombali and Quinara) reaching the target set. Next year, priority will be given to the remaining three regions that have yet to reach 80 per cent coverage. National DPT3/Penta3 coverage is 82 per cent, below the country's target of 85 per cent. However, important disparities in coverage rates between regions persist (with 63 per cent in Bolama and 108 per cent in Farim). The proportion of fully vaccinated children (with 3 doses of DPT, 3 doses of Polio, BCG, and Measles) in 2019 was 68 per cent, less than the established annual target of 70 per cent.

In May 2019, the government, with the support of UNICEF and WHO, conducted a national measles vaccination campaign for children 9-59 months of age. A total of 237,364 (83 per cent) of 287,545 children were vaccinated. UNICEF also supported catch-up actions in low coverage areas that allowed to reach an additional 1,018 children missed during the campaign. The measles routine immunization coverage for the first quarters of 2019 was thus 79 per cent, just one point below the target value for 2019 (80 per cent).

UNICEF continued providing support to the National Nutrition Service through the training of nutrition and health technicians in different regions. Data from the integrated management of the severe acute malnutrition database indicates that 1,128 children under 5 years of age were admitted to the nutrition recovery centres. In general, the trends have

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showed that more boys (54 percent) than girls (46 percent) were admitted to the 62 nutrition recovery centres.

A total of 850 (35 per cent) of pregnant women in the country were enrolled in the Antiretroviral (ART) regime. The number of ART centres providing paediatric AIDS service delivery increased to 45 from 25 in 2018, and the number of children enrolled in ART regimen also doubled as a result, increasing to 706 compared to 347 in 2018.

Every child learns

UNICEF support to the basic education curriculum reform is an important contribution to quality in primary education that has continued. Building on efforts made in recent years for Grades 1 to 4, in 2019, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education (MoE) with the development of curricular materials for the second cycle of basic education (Grades 5 and 6). The most recent review of the curriculum dates to the 1990s, but now Bissau-Guinean children and teachers are expected to have access to a renewed and updated full cycle of primary education curriculum by 2020. In addition, within the Child Friendly Schools approach, UNICEF supported interventions aimed at increasing school retention in rural areas. A total of 14,375 children in primary education and 3,248 in preschool benefited from these interventions and received the necessary school supplies to ensure they remain in school.

UNICEF continued as the lead agency for the technical sub-group for preschool education. In collaboration with main partners of the sub-sector, a National Policy for Preschools was developed with financial support from the World Bank. Furthermore, the national communication strategy on Early Childhood Development and positive parenting was finalized. The strategy will be used as a basis for developing the preschool curriculum framework, which includes tools for educators with objectives and/or skills to improve the social, cognitive and psycho-motor development of the child.

UNICEF continued its efforts to support the consolidation and expansion of the National Network of Preschools (a national network for pre-school education professionals) accelerating progress towards addressing some of the challenges in the preschool subsector by: developing and supporting advocacy for a broad-based awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE); facilitating knowledge sharing, promoting good practices and innovation; supporting the development of key resources and tools to support practitioners and ECCE service providers, and increasing the availability of contextually relevant materials for use across Guinea-Bissau.

With financial support from the UN Peacebuilding Fund, UNICEF supported the development and implementation of a comprehensive model for adolescent leadership and empowerment. During 2019, 1,187 adolescents 12-16 years old (50 per cent girls) in 30 communities, in Cacheu and Gabu regions, benefited from a six-month training programme aiming at building their capacities in peacebuilding and life skills.

UNICEF has also supported the National Institute for the Development of Education with technical assistance to redefine an accelerated learning approach for out-of-school children. As part of this effort, the National Institute was able to: (i) identify essential skills required for each level of primary education to be maintained in the condensed version of the basic education curriculum; (ii) update the Teacher's Guide; (iii) train 30 teachers; and (iv) enrol about 880 children (48 per cent girls) from nine to 14 years of age in 34 schools of Gabú and Bafatá regions, in partnership with the INGO Plan International. The proposed accelerated learning program is expected to provide adolescents with the essential basic education skills to complete school in three years instead of six.

Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

Building on previous efforts, UNICEF continued to work closely with its partners to support the government to establish a solid child protection (CP) system. The new child protection policy was validated at the technical level; however, it was not approved by the council of ministers due to the unstable political context. Despite this setback, UNICEF and partners (the NGOs FEC and Plan international) assisted the government to widely disseminate the new policy document and to establish the proposed coordination mechanism.

Important progress was made with the elaboration of the Child Protection Code. UNICEF support was essential in mobilizing all the national child protection partners and ensuring their contribution to the revision of civil and penal legislation, including input for the new legal framework in the areas of child marriage, sexual violence, alternative care, children with disabilities, juvenile justice, and case management. During the period, the government approved the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) strategy and action plan thanks to UNICEF advocacy and mobilization of key partners (namely UNHCR, EU, Portuguese cooperation and the African Union).

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To establish the grounds for scalability and increase access of children to birth registration (BR) services, UNICEF has made interoperability between BR and the health sector a clear government priority. UNICEF advocacy and capacity-building support were crucial to the opening of nine new BR units in health centres during 2019, increasing the number of operational BR services to 24 in the country. In 2019, 18,423 children under seven years of age received their birth certificates through these services. In addition, the unprecedented integration of BR services into the national five-day measles immunization campaign proved to be an excellent strategy to accelerate progress on BR coverage rates.

Community and social mobilization for BR were strongly promoted as one of the key strategies of the National CRVS Strategy. To promote routine registration services, regional civil registration offices collaborated with community leaders to encourage families to register their children. BR initiatives were also integrated into other CP interventions, such as the FGM and the new adolescent girl empowerment programmes. As a result, over a two-week period 550 children were registered in 11 communities that declared abandonment of FGM and child marriage.

Increasing access of children and families to CP services continues to be a challenge in Guinea-Bissau, due to the weak capacity of service providers to guarantee key preventive and responsive CP services to child victims. UNICEF contributed to enhancing the capacity of CP service providers by improving the working conditions of civil servants from the justice, protection and health sectors, especially social assistants, prosecutors and the judiciary police. A total of 605 children victims of violence and abuse received appropriate assistance and care support from CP services. Support was provided to the newly established association of social assistants by facilitating partnerships with other Portuguese-speaking countries' associations for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Prevention and response services for child protection are only available in the capital and the government lacks the capacity to expand these services at the municipal level. To address this challenge, UNICEF has focused its efforts on strengthening community-based CP interventions as a key violence prevention strategy. Within the framework of the joint programmes on FGM and restorative justice, UNICEF, together with UNFPA and UNDP, has worked with NGOs and traditional leaders to implement violence-prevention activities, as well as promote alternative conflict-resolution mechanisms that respect children's and women's rights. UNICEF contributed to efforts to promote positive social norms, practices and behaviours to end gender-based violence through community open dialogues where commitments to reject practices and behaviours hampering children and women's rights were made by the community. More than 43,000 people actively participated in these dialogues, resulting in 52 communities publicly declaring their commitment to abandon FGM.

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

Guinea-Bissau faces many challenges in the water and sanitation sector. However, the country still has the potential to innovate and increase nationwide coverage for access to clean water and sanitation. At the technical level, the government, with UNICEF support, continues to lead the sector coordination mechanism and ensure the participation of the National Water and Sanitation Sector in international forums. The Water and Sanitation coordination group has proved to be an effective coordination mechanism that has contributed to significant improvement of the sector's overall situation.

As a result of UNICEF's continuous efforts to improve monitoring of the WASH sector, significant additions were made to the waterpoint functionality database, making it possible for key stakeholders and users to now have detailed information on the existing waterpoints and ultimately guide decision-making processes in the sector. The baseline for WASH services in schools and health centres was added to the database in 2019.

UNICEF has fostered the private sector's interest in WASH by promoting the establishment of water pump repair shops and mechanics operating on business principles. The introduction of sanitation marketing products, self-closing pans, water filters, and menstrual cups has improved affordable access to and quality of WASH services at the household level and for personal hygiene.

UNICEF worked with the government to undertake an assessment of areas suitable for low-cost drilling techniques and promote lower-cost water provision through cheaper pumps and private concessions for water provision as ways to increase the coverage of water services and improve efficiency in the management of water-supply systems.

The UNICEF-supported Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) programme – an innovative methodology for mobilising communities to completely eliminate open defecation – continues to progress at a steady pace and remains the primary approach for sanitation. The newly marketed self-closing slabs for pit latrines have been an excellent addition to the sector and assisted greatly in raising the hygiene standard for latrines. The slabs have also proven to be helpful in engaging with previously verified open defecation free (ODF) communities and further enhance perception and knowledge on improved sanitation. During the year, through a considerable effort from UNICEF, 324 villages were verified ODF, bringing the total number to 1,476 out of a total of 4,089 villages in the country. Even though progress has been slow, Guinea-Bissau continues to be one of few countries in the region on track to meet the 2030 water and sanitation SDGs.

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The year marked the end of the extensive health centre rehabilitation project initiated in 2016. The additional 13 health centres finalized during 2019 brought to 77 the total of rehabilitated health centres and maternity wards. There has been a significant improvement of access to piped water in health centres, from 38 per cent of Type C health centres nationally to 80 per cent. However, the sustainability of this progress remains a problem, especially given the inherent weakness in the maintenance of water systems. To address these problems, UNICEF has helped install a public standpipe for community use that will be functioning based on cost-recovery principles to allow the centres to use the income generated from the public standpipes to maintain the system. Although the system is functioning well, there is a need to clarify the accountability for the maintenance and repair of the structures between the relevant ministry and the health centres.

UNICEF Guinea-Bissau has sought to stimulate demand, and improve WASH infrastructures, including in schools and health facilities, and provide local governments with affordable models to scale up in these areas. As part of the WASH in Schools programme, 500 out of around 1,700 schools in the country have been assessed for WASH infrastructure during the year. The assessment reveals that 20 per cent of the schools have no water source at all and only 35 per cent have handwashing devices available. The UNICEF Guinea-Bissau Country Office has started addressing this problem, however, as UNICEF remains one of the main organizations supporting the improvement of WASH infrastructures, there is also a need to strengthen partnerships for WASH in schools. Likewise, UNICEF has helped improve the conditions of WASH in a few health care facilities. However, the capacity of the government to maintain basic WASH services in the health facilities and undertake the continuous and routine repair of the system is very weak.

Every child has an equitable chance in life

Children's issues were not considered a priority for the allocation of resources, as visible in the 2019 government budget. The allocations for health and education sectors represent 10 per cent and 7.4 per cent of the total budget respectively, far from the 15 per cent goal for health sector spending set by the Abuja Declaration. The Social Protection Ministry accounts for 1.5 per cent of the State budget which is very low for a country with such a high rate of multidimensional poverty (58 per cent).

Despite the political crisis affecting the country this year, the Guinea-Bissau Country Office managed to establish and maintain high-level policy dialogues with the government on social budgeting. UNICEF supported the government on social sector financing through capacity-building activities on social accountability, budget analysis and social mobilization for the Ministry of Finance and civil society. This engagement is expected to help pave the way for transparent and efficient budget allocation across social sectors. In 2019, UNICEF redoubled its efforts to consolidate engagement with other development partners on social protection, an area whose scope to date is fragmented and very limited. Several consultations between UNICEF, the World Bank, WFP, and UNDP facilitated information sharing about ongoing initiatives and helped catalyse joint actions.

UNICEF supported the elaboration of a social protection diagnosis. This diagnosis provided an overview of all the main social protection activities in the country and will facilitate further strategic activities. The diagnosis was disseminated in the different regions within the country, providing a path for collecting beneficiaries' feedback, not only on the document itself, but also on the social protection schemes currently being implemented in the country. The social protection diagnosis was also an opportunity to reinforce the capacity of the members of the Social Protection Steering Committee as well as the media on basic social protection concepts.

UNICEF supported the realization of the sixth round of the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS 6), a major survey which provides crucial statistical information on the situation of children and women in Guinea-Bissau. MICS 6 will help the country measure progress on the achievement of the SDGs. MICS 6 is also the main data source for monitoring the National Development Plan "Terra Ranka" (2015-2025), as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

To support the development of the new Country Programme 2021-2025, a situation analysis of children rights and well-being has been initiated in order to examine the progress, challenges and opportunities for achieving child rights and well-being, and the patterns of deprivations facing children in Guinea-Bissau.

Communication for development (C4D)

Progress in the area of C4D was made possible thanks to the close collaboration with traditional and religious leaders, village chiefs, traditional healers, women's association leaders, CBO leaders, community health workers (CHWs), community radio broadcasters and others and their commitment to support programme implementation at the community

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level. A total of 3,997 CHWs were trained in practical techniques to improve their interaction with families during home visits through counselling and community-based dialogue skills around the 16 agreed essential family practices. Furthermore, UNICEF seized the opportunity of the seven-day measles campaign to work with community radio to produce a total of 58 informative and educational programmes broadcasted and disseminated throughout the country, mobilizing 456 community leaders and volunteers as well as CHWs.

Communication and Advocacy

As part of the activities to mark the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Guinea-Bissau Country Office worked with young people, the Office of the First Lady, and its National Ambassador raising awareness on children's rights and gaining decision-makers' interest and support for the national child agenda developed by the Children's Parliament. This agenda, which sets the basis for decision-making and programme formulation in favour of children, is expected to be used as a platform for increasing children's participation in matters affecting them.

UNICEF Guinea-Bissau has engaged young people in the production and broadcast of programmes and debates on children's rights and gender equity throughout the year with the help of strategic partnerships with 29 community and national radios, national television and newspaper. As a result, 48 programmes have been produced and presented by children and adolescents in traditional media (TV, Radio, Newspaper) on issues of child participation and child rights in general, including on the 30th anniversary of the CRC.

Humanitarian situations

During the year, UNICEF Guinea-Bissau did not have to respond to any humanitarian situations. Nevertheless, the country office has continued to strengthen emergency preparedness, maintaining its emergency preparedness plan updated and actively participating in meetings of the UN System.

Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

In line with global priorities, UNICEF Guinea-Bissau adopted a Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Action Plan, which is also part of the country office's efforts to create a healthy and respectful working environment, promote adherence to ethics rules internally, as well as prevent risks of harm to children by implementing partners. The PSEA Action Plan, which was elaborated in a participatory manner, includes actions for all sectoral areas, setting clear timelines and accountability for actions. To support the implementation of its PSEA Action Plan, the country office developed a focal point system and has put in place adequate and innovative mechanisms to facilitate reporting and address non-adherence.

Office greening

In 2019, UNICEF, together with UNDP, funded the purchase and installation of a solar photovoltaic system composed of 210 solar panels in the parking lot of the UN building. The system produces clean energy for the building, protects and increases the lifetime of the UN vehicles in the parking area of the compound, improves drivers' and passengers' comfort at the beginning of a trip, and reduces fuel consumption. Solar energy is a renewable resource that does not contribute to CO2 emissions and thereby reduces global warming. With the 17 per cent fossil fuel reduction due to the solar panel system, the UN house will reduce its CO2 emissions by around 192 kg per day or 70,200 kg per year.

Gender

Following a Gender Programmatic Review of the UNICEF country programme conducted in 2018, the office has developed a Gender Action Plan covering all gender-responsive programmatic initiatives and integrating recommendations emerging from the review. One of the main recommendations was the development of a holistic support programme for adolescent girls, including WASH, child protection, education and HIV prevention actions in 34 selected communities of Gabu and Bafata.

The country office in-house gender-parity strategy was revised and updated during 2019 and renewed efforts were made

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during the year to increasingly recruit female candidates both for international and national posts. Some of the selected strategies include headhunting and internship programmes prioritizing female candidates.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Lessons learned from 2019 show the need for the country office to constantly review and adapt its programmes to respond to the many challenges facing Guinea-Bissau.

One of the main constraints faced by the country office in 2019 related to the stockout of crucial vaccines for children including polio (bOPV) and tetanus and diphtheria vaccines (Td), which are the vaccines traditionally funded by the government. Advocacy efforts with the new government, sworn-in in July 2019, shed light on the financial difficulties faced by the government to fund these vaccines on a regular basis. As an innovative approach, UNICEF has started searching for alternative funding sources (i.e. private sector) to avoid the recurrence of this situation. UNICEF has also embarked on a multisectoral effort, which will be rolled-out next year, aimed at strengthening the capacity of line ministries, in particular MoH and MoE to better plan and use their scarce resources.

In the area of child protection, the major lesson learned related to the successful partnership built with a number of actors to engage in upstream work and improve policy and legal frameworks in a very unstable political context. UNICEF partnered with other UN agencies (i.e. UNIOGBIS, UNFPA, UNDP, IOM, UN Women and UNODC), NGOs, and other civil society organizations and led the establishment of a strong sector coordination system that has helped advance the child protection agenda, in particular, the process of harmonization of the national legislation with the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the reform of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. UNICEF also used its joint programmes with UNDP and UNFPA, together with sister agencies, to voice concerns as “one UN” on human rights issues affecting women and girls and to ensure issues of relevance for women and girls are included in the legal reform process. UNICEF Guinea-Bissau is planning to adopt the same approach, consolidating partnerships to accelerate progress on the establishment of an effective child protection system and leverage resources to maximize results on birth registration.

With the aim of accelerating progress on the achievement of the key result of eliminating open defecation in the region, and successfully monitoring the Community-Led Total Sanitation programme (CLTS) the WASH sector has continued using and strengthening the cloud-based database that makes it possible to update WASH data from any smartphone or computer connected to the Internet. The system allows for the mapping of all Guinea-Bissau’s villages (official villages, based on 2009 census), as well as a selected number of schools, health centres, and waterpoints. Data visualization allows to strategically focus interventions for the WASH sector in areas that have not yet been targeted, and has helped to plan future interventions, follow-up visits and retention of ODF status in villages. The WASH monitoring system is now the official government system for waterpoint functionality and for ODF certification. In 2019, the monitoring of WASH in health facilities was added to the database. Internally, the system has allowed UNICEF Guinea-Bissau to properly manage and register interventions, take the opportunity for programme convergence and improve prioritization of interventions to accelerate progress on the agreed regional key results for children (KRC). It has created conditions conducive to addressing other issues affecting children at village level by facilitating the implementation of multi-sectoral interactions and a phased approach where interventions can easily be sequenced. The tool will be used by UNICEF Guinea-Bissau to expand the same monitoring platform to more programmes, thus increasing convergence between programmes to achieve the KRC.

Another lesson learned was that fostering sustainable and positive behaviour change at community level required sustained dialogue and meaningful participation of traditional and religious leaders and healers. While UNICEF Guinea-Bissau has relied on CHW and NGOs to help communities acquire knowledge on issues affecting children, engagement with traditional and religious leaders has proved to be very effective for prompting desired behaviours and practices at community level. A good example of this engagement is the Guinea-Bissau Country Office’s support to the “Vaccine Leaders’ Forum” and sectoral social mobilization committees for routine vaccination and birth registration promotion, where opinion leaders and leaders of different traditional and religious groups have taken an active role in disseminating educational content and messages, promoting changes in attitudes, practices and behaviours. This has proved to be a good approach to accelerate results towards reaching targets around the regional KRC on immunization and birth registration. Their influence has greatly contributed to triggering families’ willingness to adopt good practices, including the use of latrines, washing hands with soap or ash, and other good behavioural practices that improve living conditions of the families and the overall community.

Similarly, the partnership developed with civil society actors on social accountability and social budgeting has been key to making advances on data generation and the design of advocacy initiatives on social budgeting. However, the experience also highlighted the importance of engaging with national institutions to foster their interests on social budgeting in order to ensure the sustainability of interventions and the continued development of sound public policies and budget processes that take children into account.

