

Country Office Annual Report 2019

Gulf Area Subregional Programme



Update on the context and situation of children

1. Overview

UNICEF Gulf Area Office (UNICEF GAO) covers five countries: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the State of Kuwait. The reporting year marked the first of the 2019-2023 subregional programme of cooperation between UNICEF and these five countries. The sub-region continues to undergo rapid economic, political and social changes that inform UNICEF's engagement.

Economy. Future trajectories around the economy and the need to diversify away from oil revenue continue to drive economic policy and national development plans. As the World Bank's Gulf Economic Update for December 2019 summarizes, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) overall was expected to fall to .8% with a decline in oil-based growth and acceleration in other sectors underpinning massive public investment programmes in the region. The World Bank also notes that KSA has made the greatest advances of any country in the 2020 Doing Business Report, with Bahrain and Kuwait amongst the top 10; yet another signal of the range of policies enacted to support private sector development. Sustaining this rapid pace of development has necessitated additional investments by Governments in social sectors. National development plans, such as in KSA and UAE place a distinct focus in strengthening primary health care, improving education systems, and strengthening citizen accountability in public service provision. Required changes in education and skills development that will assist young people to more effectively shape and lead the knowledge, creativity and services industries of the future are at the heart of national discourse across the Gulf subregion.

Regional Dynamics. While the Riyadh Agreement between Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the recognized Government of Yemen was a positive step in November 2019, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen continues unabated, with children disproportionately affected. The blockade between UAE, KSA and Bahrain with Qatar remains in place though there have been signs of thawing relations with symbolic gestures such as the participation of the Saudi and Emirati teams in the 2019 Arab Gulf Cop in Qatar. These, at times, unpredictable regional dynamics play out against some significant national level milestones for the Gulf countries. In December 2019, KSA took over the presidency of the G-20 Summit and related processes, a first for the Kingdom. In UAE, preparations are well underway for Expo2020 which is expected to be the largest yet, featuring innovation and solutions to sustainable development challenges by the UN family. The World Government Summit, an annual forum to discuss the future of public policy, will also be held within Expo2020 next year. During the 2019 World Government Summit, UNICEF and Dubai Cares in coordination with the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC) issued the "Dubai Declaration on Early Childhood Development". The Declaration builds upon the 2017 launching of the series by the medical journal The Lancet, "Advancing Early Childhood Development: From Science to Scale," by the same partners. In Qatar, the annual Doha Forum in December brought together world leaders and experts around the theme: "Reimagining Governance in a Multipolar World".

2. Country Level Updates on the Situation of Women and Children

Historically, UNICEF GAO has had an established presence in KSA and in the UAE. In recognition of the tremendous potential for UNICEF to partner more substantively with the Gulf, the organization committed to expanding its physical presence to Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar and to placing additional staff in all five country contexts. In 2019, UNICEF GAO established its presence in Qatar. During the reporting year, KSA, the UAE and Qatar registered important policy advances for women and children.

In **KSA**, social reforms continue to be introduced – with an ever-growing number of cultural and entertainment activities being made available to women and families. There has been an "opening" of the Kingdom with tourist visas issued for the first time and currently accessible to citizens of 49 countries. In addition, guardianship laws were eased, with women no longer needing to seek male approval for travel. Changes were made to laws pertaining to travel documents, personal status, labor and social insurance with an aim to improve gender equality. Both mothers and fathers can now be considered legal guardians of children. Also, with respect to children, measures were passed to prevent child marriage under the age of 18. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its concluding observations of 2019, recommended the development of a national human rights strategy that adopts a human-rights based approach to programming with an emphasis on inclusion and shifts away from a charity-oriented perspective, including for children.

In **UAE**, the Government announced a draft law for the establishment of a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles. The UAE Cabinet approved the Family Protection Policy which focuses on the centrality of the family for social cohesion. From this overarching policy, numerous actions will follow, such as new disciplines in academia to support family protection, initiatives to prevent domestic violence, formulation of strategies and other efforts to harmonize prevention and response to violence at the federal level. Also, during the reporting year, the Emirates Schools Establishment board was set up as a separate body under the leadership of the Minister of State for Public Education to

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oversee policies and standards in public schools with participation from various line ministries and industries as part of the on-going shift to separate service provision from regulation – a trend occurring across the sub-region. At the Emirate level, Abu Dhabi established the Early Childhood Authority, further cementing political commitment on early childhood development.

Qatar continues to exercise global leadership in the field of education. During the reporting year, Qatar held its biennial WISE conference, which includes the largest gathering of knowledge leaders in education and innovation. The visit by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education in 2019, recognized and applauded Qatar's role in expanding opportunities to education for the most vulnerable children around the world through foundations such as the Qatar Foundation and Education Above All. The Special Rapporteur also noted Qatar's commitment to a progressive view of education including through VISION 2030 which highlights the importance of values, cohesion, and critical thinking. The Rapporteur outlined recommendations calling for the greater inclusion of migrant and non-Qatari children by addressing barriers such as varying fee structures. Also, of significance, the Council of Ministers referred legislation that would end the sponsorship system limiting the movement of workers between employers as well as out of the country to the advisory *Shura Council*. Approval of this legislation is expected in early 2020.

3. Implications for UNICEF's Scope of Work

Collectively, these trends have substantive implications for UNICEF's work in the Gulf and around the world. Firstly, as Governments in the sub-region continue to review the public sector – striving towards efficiencies, aligning social development policies and service delivery with international best practice, UNICEF can play a substantive role in **sharing evidence or brokering exchange of technical expertise from across the organization** on "what works" in child development. Secondly, as countries engage more robustly on the human rights agenda including addressing recommendations from treaty bodies, passing new legislation, or drafting new policies around gender equality and the rights of children, **UNICEF can leverage its normative function** with timely technical support for programme guidance to address gaps or to assist in the implementation of these laws and policies. Lastly, as countries in the sub-region play an increasingly visible role on the world stage by leading global partnerships, conferences and processes, UNICEF can find further opportunities for partnership as the key **"reference" for children**.

Major contributions and drivers of results

1. Early childhood development

Initial efforts to scale-up national programmes for early childhood development were undertaken in four of the five countries with a mix of technical support to counterparts to develop service packages, develop tools targeting caregivers, and engage in advocacy for ECD through global partnerships.

In **UAE**, the content for a mobile application prepared in Arabic and English incorporating culturally suitable, evidence-based information, related to nurturing care, stimulation, health and nutrition, protection, responsiveness during the first 1000 days, when development is most pivotal in a child's life, was submitted to Ministry of Health and Prevention for approval. Also, in UAE, UNICEF GAO curated content to increase the awareness of parents and caregivers to prevent childhood unintentional injuries such as: burns, drowning, falling, poisoning, road traffic accidents, suffocation and choking, and heat stroke. The content was translated into more than 150 drawings with brief messaging to be disseminated. With respect to partnerships around ECD, UNICEF HQ represented the organization at a High-Level Meeting on Early Childhood Development and Early Childhood Learning in Humanitarian and Fragile Settings organized by the SCMC in coordination with Dubai Cares, the Emirates Red Crescent and moderated by HRH Princess Sarah Zeid of Jordan.

In **KSA**, UNICEF GAO, with its partner the Family Affairs Council, agreed on the terms to conduct a rapid assessment on caregiving practices across the Kingdom to help inform programmatic next steps. UNICEF GAO also facilitated the organization's technical inputs and advocacy efforts for continued attention to early childhood development in the education-focused priorities tabled by the Saudi Arabia presidency of the G-20 including a framing presentation at the start of the first Education Working Group.

In **Qatar**, with technical support from MENARO, UNICEF GAO continued to strengthen its partnership with the Doha International Family Institute, (part of the Qatar Foundation), to gather evidence on "what works" in positive parenting in the region, with a view to developing an evidence-based advocacy case that could inform further programme interventions, research and resource mobilization in MENA and globally. This advocacy case is expected to be completed and disseminated in 2020.

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In **Bahrain**, where UNICEF GAO is non-resident, UNICEF GAO partnered with UNDP to conduct a technical mission to determine entry points for programming in early childhood development and early learning, including trainings with the Care for Child Development training package, and a review of standards and guidelines for nurseries. Also during the reporting year, UNICEF GAO in partnership with UNICEF MENARO participated in a stakeholder forum celebrating "100 Years of Formal Education" in Bahrain, coordinated by Shaikha Noura bint Khalifa Al Khalifa and highlighted the importance of key moments for investment such as the early years. In **Kuwait** progress was limited, though UNICEF GAO through MENARO provided technical inputs to the draft Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition National Strategy which will be launched in first quarter of 2020.

2. Child protection and violence against children

The **UAE** has made substantial investments in child protection during the reporting year. In 2018, the UAE became the first country in the region to join the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children as a pathfinder country and committed to hosting the next Solutions Summit in 2020. UNICEF GAO provided technical support to an interministerial taskforce (convening the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Prevention, Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of Community Development) working to prepare a strategy for ending violence against children, an expected deliverable under the Global Partnership. UNICEF GAO produced an assessment report on violence against children after conducting field visits, interviews with stakeholders and focus group discussions with children. The UAE also continues to contribute to other international efforts around child protection including chairing The Virtual Global Taskforce and having a permanent seat on the WeProtect Global Alliance. Child Protection bylaws of the Child Rights Law (Wadeema Law) were passed. The Ministry of Education established a Child Protection Unit and received technical support from UNICEF to conduct trainings on child protection, violence against children, case management and other topics for some 51 child protection specialists (CPS) each responsible for clusters of schools (an estimated 8000 students each). Recruitment of the second cohort is underway. UNICEF is technically supporting the development of Procedural Guidelines for Child Protection Specialists. Finally, the UAE agreed to participate in the global "Safe to Learn" Campaign and has developed with UNICEF GAO technical support for an action plan with relevant stakeholders.

UNICEF GAO and the Family Affairs Council (FAC) in **KSA** conducted consultations with representatives from all relevant entities carrying out prevention and response services for child protection. Current strengths and areas for improvement were outlined jointly and will be used during a roundtable discussion to agree on an action plan on the way forward. In addition, partners in KSA have expressed interest at all levels of society in the protection of children online. At the request of the Government, UNICEF worked with FAC on an assessment to determine how children's engagement with digital media is understood as well as the ways in which Government entities are responding to the interplay between mental health, time spent online, child participation and child safety. The process, informed by inputs from children, parents, and a wide variety of Government entities resulted in a framework for action, proposing next steps in evidence generation, social mobilization, and monitoring. The outcomes of this process were presented at the 2019 Saudi Family Forum and the Human Right Commission's high-level event discussing human rights in a rapidly changing world.

In **Qatar**, where UNICEF is now present, a focus was given to cultivating partnerships under the leadership of Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs and a network of child protection NGOs, including the Qatar Social Work Foundation and SIDRA Hospital's department of pediatrics, to define priorities in the next several years. This includes the development of national child well-being indicators, a National Strategy on Children and Families and a comprehensive review of all the laws and policies relating to children. During the reporting year, the Government established a national inter-ministerial committee on children, women, the elderly and persons with disabilities to provide guidance and coordination.

3. Data and evidence for children

In supporting efforts to generate data and evidence on children, UNICEF GAO registered progress in UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain under the first output of supporting national data collection and utilization. Results against the second output to work with academia and ministries to generate evidence on children were constrained.

In the **UAE**, UNICEF GAO facilitated a diagnostic report surveying the data landscape in the UAE and setting out key issues, challenges and opportunities for the UAE's evolving federal statistics institutions. This included mapping the country's data landscape. A strategic action plan was developed that outlined recommendations to enhance data governance, improve collaboration and foster openness and is awaiting next steps. This will help to facilitate global reporting of UAE's considerable data on children, and decision-making in national programmes and policies. At sector level, the diagnostic report highlights the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention's data dictionary developed across departments and with clear methodologies as an example for other Ministries to consider. At the request of Government, UNICEF will support Ministry of Education with improving its Education Information Management System (EMIS).

In **Qatar**, UNICEF GAO, strengthened its partnership with the Planning and Statistics Authority (PSA). With technical

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support from UNICEF MENARO and HQ, UNICEF commitment was secured to undertake a new MICS, which will complement existing initiatives (such as the upcoming Health Survey) to provide a comprehensive up-to-date data set on children to inform policy and practice in Qatar. UNICEF and the PSA also agreed to collaborate on the production of its first national report focused on children in 2020. UNICEF MENARO and HQ provided technical contributions to the regional workshop on the modernization of and use of official statistics, organized by the Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority.

While not present in **Bahrain**, UNICEF GAO with technical support from UNICEF MENA, benefited from the coordination of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office to engage with the Information and eGovernment Authority by providing remote technical assistance on child-specific indicators under the SDGs where UNICEF serves as custodian.

4. Partnerships for Children

UNICEF GAO used lessons learned in previous reporting years to deepen and expand its network with public and private partners who continue to commit resources and advocate for children's rights in the region and around the world. UNICEF GAO further strengthened its engagement with **public partners** such as King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSRELIEF), the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC), the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), the Islamic Development Bank, the UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future, the Arab Coordination Group and the Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Agreements for close to US\$ 252 million were signed with the Governments of KSA, UAE, Qatar and Kuwait in contribution to UNICEF's most critical humanitarian priorities in Yemen, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. Funds mobilized against the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan contribute to Goal Areas 1, 2 and 4 of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Thanks to continued advocacy with the partners to diversify funding interests, funds were also raised for Cuba, Jamaica and Haiti. The amount raised in 2019 constitutes close to double the funding target for the year (US\$ 127.5 million). UNICEF also received a generous in-kind donation of 2,520 cartons of Ready-to-use-Therapeutic-Food (RUTF) from the UAE MOFAIC in support of children with severe acute malnutrition in Northeast Nigeria.

In addition to the US\$ 4 million allocation to UNICEF Regular Resources (RR) from the Government of Qatar signed in 2018, UNICEF received the agreed upon RR from the Governments of KSA (US\$ 1 million), Kuwait (US\$ 200,000) and UAE (US\$ 100,000). UNICEF GAO also received the agreed upon US\$ 500,000 from the KSA for its local programmes in the country.

UNICEF GAO continued its strategic engagement with public partners around areas of potential joint action. Several high-level meetings and consultations were held this year between UNICEF senior management and key Gulf public partners, including participation in important regional and international events such as the World Government Summit in the UAE and the Doha Forum. The Doha International Conference on Disability and Development was held on 7-8 December 2019, under the guidance and patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Founder of Qatar Foundation for Social Work and its affiliated civil society centers. The conference's landmark outcome - the Doha Declaration - forms a core reference point internationally for policy development about human rights and sustainable development in the context of disability.

During her visit to the UAE, UNICEF Executive Director met with Government partners including HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai; HH Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, and HE Mohammad Al Gargawi, Minister of Cabinet Affairs and the Future. The Executive Director engaged in country visits to KSA and Kuwait; during her visit to KSA, the ED met with HE Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, Supervisor General of KSRELIEF, and a number of senior Saudi officials and business leaders. In Kuwait, the ED met with HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait, Mr. AbdelWahab Al Bader, Director General of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and other key figures from the private and public sectors.

Sustained engagement during the reporting year facilitated the signing of MoUs of collaboration with key Gulf partners, which provide broad frameworks around which to impact children in a range of sectors. The MoU with KSRELIEF focused on humanitarian action capacity building, research, data sharing, innovation and support to the volunteering programme. The MoU with KFAED focused on collaboration around common interests and agendas, and the Basic Cooperation Agreement with the State of Qatar allowed UNICEF to establish a presence in Doha and formed the basis of our collaboration on a variety of programmes.

UNICEF GAO also initiated new forms of engagement with Gulf and Gulf-based partners around new aid modalities such as the Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund for Children (GMPF), launched in September 2019. The GMPF is joint initiative between the Islamic Development Bank and UNICEF, which aims to build an effective Shariah-compliant platform for Muslim donors to support the SDGs. UNICEF GAO also initiated projects focusing on the rights of children and youth with disabilities. UNICEF GAO will continue to engage strategically with its partners in innovative areas and to provide partners with information, technical assistance and capacity development.

UNICEF GAO staff continued to actively participate in UN Country Team meetings and processes in KSA, UAE, Bahrain, and

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Kuwait. In Qatar, despite the lack of a formal UNCT, UNICEF GAO regularly coordinates with resident agencies. In UAE, UN coordination has been revitalized through the establishment of Interagency Working Groups (IAWGs); UNICEF serves as chair of the Partnerships IAWG and the co-chair of the National Engagement IAWG. UNICEF has also been an active member of the Gender and Youth and Advocacy IAWGs. UNICEF GAO recognizes that the UNCT and RC system can allow UN agencies to jointly engage with authorities on an even wider remit than is prescribed in country programme documents – allowing UN agencies to remain responsive during a time of rapid change in the sub-region.

With respect to **private sector engagement**, UNICEF developed its Gulf Private Sector Plan (2019-2023). It describes the Gulf context, objectives, maps key audiences, and indicates enablers or allies. In 2019, private sector partners contributed close to US\$14 million for UNICEF programmes worldwide in addition to commitments of a US\$84 million, to be signed in 2020 as new business opportunities. UNICEF through the consulting agency, GlobeSight, completed a study to assess the private sector market in the Gulf countries. Engagement with private sector actors yielded new income from existing and new partners to address issues ranging from polio eradication, ECD, youth refugee education, to maternal and neo-natal health. During November's Reaching the Last Mile conference in the UAE, in addition to the US\$ 160 million commitment made by the Crown Prince's Court (CPC) to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), two private sector partners made commitments of US\$ 1 million each for polio eradication (Mohammed Al Ansari and the Al Abdulla family).

In the KSA, UNICEF GAO forged connections with the corporate sector, foundations and high net worth individuals (HNWIs) such as SABIC, Almarai, MISK Foundation H.H. Princess Nouf bint Muhammad Al Saud. The Executive Director also met with Lubna Olayan, Prince Al Waleed and Princess Lamia during her visit in February 2019. The partnership with Al Waleed Philanthropies remains UNICEF's longest standing private sector partner, though expected installments against the US\$ 50 million partnership fell short at US\$1.24 million in 2018 and US\$ 2.45 million in 2019.

In Kuwait, the partnership with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) resulted in US\$ 8.5 million raised. A further US\$ 400,000 was received from Direct Aid. The recruitment of a new fundraiser in Kuwait will help develop new businesses and partnerships, including partnerships with HNWIs and the corporate sector.

UNICEF GAO uses unique approaches to strengthen its brand and to cultivate partnerships with private actors and entities. The UAE Leadership Circle is composed of a group of leaders who lend their influence to advocate for children's rights by amplifying UNICEF's work in the Gulf and around the world. Leadership Circle members included individuals from royal families, corporate executives, social media influencers and senior persons of the Dubai government. The Circle took field visits to UNICEF programmes in Jordan and Bhutan. Based on this positive experience, a similar Leadership Circle of women is being created in the KSA with participation from Saudi royals. UNICEF also held an inaugural fundraising event called the Abu Dhabi Dream Ball 2019, a high-profile event jointly organized with Harper's Bazaar Arabia and under the patronage of the UAE's Minister of Culture and Knowledge, H.E. Noura Al Kaabi with local partners Sawtouna and the Emirates Red Crescent in support of UNICEF. The event raised almost US\$700,000 and further strengthened our brand as the knowledge leader on child rights.

In individual giving, UNICEF GAO in the UAE used lessons learned from last year's Ramadan campaign to expand this year's effort with communal meals such as *suhoors*, *iftars*, *ghabgas* and advocacy aligned with a field visit to UNICEF programmes with social media influencers. This culminated in increased commitments from new pledge donors and an estimated US\$ 600,000 in income compared to US\$ 287,000 raised in 2018.

In 2019, **partnerships to advance child rights** led to key milestones in the Child Friendly Cities Initiative led by the Emirate of Sharjah and the 30th commemoration of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF GAO, in collaboration with Sharjah Child Friendly Office (SFÇO), Sharjah Education Council and Sharjah Private Education Authority, launched the child friendly schools and nurseries initiative to ensure that educational environments in Sharjah are safe, healthy and protective, staffed with trained teachers, equipped with adequate resources and offer conditions appropriate for learning. UNICEF GAO developed the standards for child friendly schools and nurseries which incorporate three major components: Child Rights Education, Child Participation and Child Protection. These standards were guided by the experience of UNICEF worldwide, in implementing rights-based approaches to education and evidence pertaining to child development and growth. UNICEF GAO conducted training workshops to strengthen the capacity of individuals working with children and adolescents in promoting meaningful child participation and actively involving children. UNICEF GAO collaborated with UN-Habitat, SCFO and Sharjah Urban Planning Council to engage children in the design of a public space in Sharjah by conducting a Block by Block workshop. A total of 48 children (20 girls and 28 boys) participated in the workshop in which they initially conducted a field visit to the public space of interest to obtain their perspectives about it. The children then utilized Minecraft to illustrate their views, needs and wants related to the public space visited. Most notably, many of the children recognized the need to design across the spectrum of ability and disability, by incorporating sign language and helpful signage in proposed park designs. UNICEF and UN-Habitat developed guidelines for involving children in urban planning which will be presented in WUF 10 in Abu Dhabi 9-13 Feb. 2020. Finally, Sharjah participated in the first UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Summit, which brought together more than 600 participants.

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SCFO presented Sharjah's accomplishments and participated -including 1 boy and 1 girl from Sharjah- in 3 side events. Sharjah won one of the 2019 Child Friendly Cities Inspire Awards for the "Child-Friendly Social Services" category, celebrating an inspiring project that promotes one of the most effective and earliest ways to ensure child health and survival; breastfeeding.

Partners across the Gulf took part in activities and processes to celebrate and take stock of child rights in the sub-region on World Children's Day and to mark CRC@30. In the UAE, 79,872 students from 168 public and private schools participated in the World Largest Lesson with focus on CRC awareness. The Emirate of Sharjah organized a two-day event open to children, families and the media with activities aimed to raise awareness on children's rights such as graffiti, games and competitions. Al Majaz Amphitheatre Island in Sharjah was also re-named *Children's Rights Island* and turned blue for the celebrations. UAE mobile operators rebranded their networks to mention CRC@30 and billboards on public highways displayed the logo. UNICEF GAO also marked the day with the International Humanitarian City (IHC) and SOS Children's Villages, through introducing the CRC to more than 700 children from the GEMS Modern Academy in Dubai. In KSA, UNICEF GAO and FAC convened a diverse group of children as the child-led advisory group to the FAC. UNICEF GAO and FAC also organized a refresher training for advocates of children from across the Kingdom. In Kuwait, a workshop organized by the Kuwait Fund invited children to express their thoughts and opinions on child rights through drawings. In Qatar, the Qatar Fund for Development released video messages from children talking about their vision of the future and what the CRC means to them. As global landmarks turned blue on World Children's Day, so did notable buildings and sites in the Gulf including the Bahrain Financial Tower, Kuwait Fund Offices, Dubai Frame, Al Amajaz Amphitheater in Sharjah, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Qatar Fund for Development offices tower.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

In developing the 2019-2023 programme cooperation between UNICEF and the Gulf, UNICEF GAO reflected substantively on the ways it could strengthen its contributions to, and partnership with, the countries of the sub-region. The resulting programme addressed this reflection in several important ways. Firstly, it outlined a strategic set of programme priorities that are relevant across the sub-region, responsive to the national development aspirations of the various countries, and leverages UNICEF's comparative advantage of multi-sector expertise. Secondly, UNICEF GAO recognized that it could partner more effectively with the countries of the region to also share their achievements and lessons learned in contribution to global "public goods" in child development. Lastly, the programme of cooperation called for a deeper presence by UNICEF in each of the countries – one that seamlessly integrates technical expertise in programmes, advocacy, partnerships and fundraising. Lessons learned here take stock of the assumptions and priorities underpinning this revised operational model.

- The **programme priorities of early childhood development, child protection and data continue to resonate with partners and remain relevant** against national development priorities, primarily for their multi-sector nature (given strong state capacities to deliver basic social services). In addition, this engagement has sharpened the need to focus on programmatic enablers and strategies – such as promotion of a human rights-based approach to programming as well as utilizing communication for development to reach families, communities and the public for advocacy, creating demand for existing services, creating awareness around referral to services and most importantly, to inform national programmes and policies. In a period of substantial change, UNICEF should increasingly work with partners to ensure the most vulnerable in society are not left behind. Finally, as the sub-regional priorities are substantively linked with development plans, it is important to quickly bring on board the senior technical expertise planned for in the programme. Incoming staff will need to develop and trigger national and international networks to advance these priority result areas rapidly.
- **Establishing an office in Qatar** has helped to validate the operational model of the sub-regional programme which calls for a substantive investment in the national priorities of the Gulf countries, while supporting Gulf-based actors as they deepen and expand their commitments and advocacy for children in the region and around the world. The new presence in Qatar has yielded real-time information on opportunities for engagement, allowed UNICEF to be more responsive of emerging priorities, and demonstrated areas in which UNICEF can partner in Qatar across the breadth of the organization.
- **Facilitating exchange between UNICEF GAO countries.** As incoming staff join UNICEF GAO, it will become important to identify strategic moments to facilitate knowledge exchange between the Gulf countries, noting that while there are differences between countries, there are substantive areas of convergence – around early childhood and positive parenting, on scaling up responses and systems to address violence against children, and in meeting data needs in the context of the SDGs.
- **UNICEF's engagement in high income country contexts.** The reporting year has also yielded important lessons about the nature of technical support required from countries in the Gulf – that it be best-in-field and delivered in a timely fashion. UNICEF will need to think through new approaches of delivering this support leveraging UNICEF's presence and expertise around the world. In addition, as a knowledge leader on children, UNICEF GAO, needs to

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more nimbly respond to “one-off” requests by referring partners to technical support wherever it resides – within the organization or through the organization’s expanded networks.

- **Maintaining dialogue with key partners.** Engagement with UNICEF’s traditional public partners this year underlined the importance of maintaining an active dialogue to exchange information and vision regarding humanitarian and development cooperation; advocacy for child rights, and innovation. The diversification of interest by partners, both programmatic and geographic, as well as their support to longer-term predictable income requires sustained investment (both staff time and resources by UNICEF GAO). This includes the preparation of capacity building activities such as high-level dialogue, partnership deep dives and skill-share workshops.
- **Maintaining engagement at the highest level.** Interactions between UNICEF and its key partners at the leadership level continues to be of critical importance in pushing our joint agenda and in expediting decisions regarding the allocation of humanitarian and development funding.
- **The legal framework regulating private sector engagement.** There is a range of modalities across the Gulf for engaging with the private sector, particularly around fundraising through the general public, HNWI’s and foundations. UNICEF GAO continues to engage with authorities to better understand towards a more comprehensive partnership with the private sector.
- **Advancing emerging priorities for UNICEF and children.** UNICEF GAO appreciates that while Gulf countries are looking to accelerate results around pending social development goals, especially around human capital development (primary health care, quality in education, child protection systems strengthening), they are also deeply interested in partnering with UNICEF around topics around which they can lead or contribute substantively. During the reporting year, this included expressed interest in children and digital media, children and urban planning (including child friendly cities), and mental health and well-being. UNICEF will need to think through how it can use these strategic opportunities to advance learning and programming in emerging fields.
- While the sub-regional programme does not have an explicit focus on **adolescent and young people**, it does recognize that investments in early childhood, child protection and data are important contributions to their development. In addition, UNICEF GAO’s efforts to expand its partnership base will provide numerous platforms to address the growing interest by Government in young people and skills development for future economics. The, Generation Unlimited, is equally as relevant in the Gulf as in other parts of the world – with its focus on quality and relevant secondary education. Other opportunities are also emerging through UN Country Teams in the UAE and in KSA.