

Gulf area sub-regional programme

Part 1: Situation update in the country

UNICEF's Gulf Area Office covers five countries: the Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Some four years after oil prices dropped drastically, a sub-region heavily reliant on oil- and gas-based revenue accelerated a series of reforms to diversify economies and review spending patterns. Together with targeted social development priorities, these sets of reforms were outlined in ambitious national development plans – the most notable of which is Saudi Arabia's VISION 2030. However, when oil prices rebounded at higher rates than expected in 2018 (US\$80 per barrel compared to US\$30 in January 2016), the sub-region faced the challenge of maintaining a sense of urgency around its plans for economic and social change.

Economy. Across the sub-region, the need to diversify away from an oil-based economy remains an urgent medium-term priority, despite World Bank estimates that all five countries will grow by more than 2 per cent (Bahrain, 2.59 per cent; Kuwait, 2.33 per cent; Qatar, 3.00 per cent; Saudi Arabia, 4.06 per cent; and United Arab Emirates by 3.66 per cent) in 2019. Even with this improved economic outlook, Gulf countries continue to face a declining global appetite for oil, especially as climate change response strategies are accelerated. To date, Gulf countries have largely been recognized for their commitment to reform efforts, such as: the introduction of a value-added tax (Saudi Arabia and the Emirates); review of subsidies, resulting in some adjustment of electricity and fuel prices; and the initiation of large-scale infrastructure projects. Inflated salaries for public sector jobs continue to distort economies in the region, but are also being gradually addressed in favour of encouraging private sector growth. Rising unemployment is being tackled through programmes such as "Saudization", which aim to replace expats with nationals in an increasing number of sectors.

The collective effort to re-imagine the skills children and young people must possess to participate more effectively in the future of their countries has strong implications for child development policies and programmes, and for UNICEF support. Overall, sub-regional trends toward expanding the private sector, rendering education more relevant for today's workforce demands, expanding opportunities for women in the work-place, and extending early learning and early childhood programmes resonate with UNICEF's recently endorsed programme of cooperation in the sub-region for 2019–2023.

Regional dynamics. Domestic reform agendas are being rolled out against a backdrop of conflict in the broader Middle East region. The ongoing war in Yemen continues to impact Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and that of its allies. Foreign assistance from the sub-region has been overwhelmingly directed to Yemen's humanitarian response and to Syria, resulting in a many-fold increase in the funds previously received by UNICEF's Gulf Area Office. The ongoing blockade of Qatar continues to affect the Gulf Cooperation Council alliance and at present shows no signs of abating. Overall, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and other countries in

the sub-region have played a more pronounced role on the international stage – examples are as varied as Kuwait's efforts to mediate the dispute between Qatar and Gulf countries, recognition of the Emirates by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for achieving the highest ODA/GNI in 2017 and preparations by Qatar to host international events such as the 2022 World Cup.

Future trends. Youth younger than 24 years – who form between 25 per cent and 46 per cent of the population (depending on the country, given variances in the demographic profile)– remain a powerful factor influencing national programmes and policy formation, from education and social protection to employment. Similarly, the latest United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (October 2018) reinforced the implications of declining fossil fuel consumption, both in terms of public demand and climate change response plans. The World Bank has noted that Gulf countries have among the highest water consumption in the world – a situation made possible by subsidized water prices and heavy investment in water production through desalinization and other processes, given the impetus to greening policies in coming years. Demographic trends and the impact of water security are key issues to be addressed through existing and additional policy reforms.

Country update

UNICEF's Gulf Area Office concluded its current sub-regional programme (2014–2018) and prepared for implementation of the next programme cycle, which calls for an expanded presence in three countries (Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar). During the reporting year, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates reported important policy changes that favour women and children.

A range of legislative and institutional measures were adopted in Saudi Arabia to promote child rights, such as the 2018 adoption of a Juvenile Act and establishment of an authority to oversee the welfare of persons with disabilities. In addition, an Act was promulgated on 'AIDS prevention and the rights and duties of sufferers'. A human rights e-learning portal was launched to promote awareness and understanding of human rights among students. A number of social and cultural reforms have also been instituted: lifting of the ban on women driving in June 2014, granting of licenses to operate cinemas after 35 years and hosting several international sporting and art events open to both women and men.

The 2018 universal periodic review summarized steps taken by the United Arab Emirates to progressively realize the rights of women and children, including a government commitment to work toward establishing a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles. The Emirates continued to prioritize gender equality, and now ranks favourably in the Arab world for its progress. In December 2018 the cabinet approved a package of policies and directives aimed at strengthening women's empowerment, including initiatives to: address violence against women, accelerate women's participation in decision-making and international representation and support the media in monitoring women's achievements in the public sphere.

Implications for UNICEF's work

This sub-regional snapshot allowed UNICEF's Gulf Area Office to draw some conclusions on the potential impact of socio-economic developments on children and the implications for UNICEF's engagement with its partners.

Strengthening partnerships: The Gulf's growing prominence on the world stage offers new opportunities for UNICEF partnerships in the sub-region. These partnerships could result in substantive collaboration with Gulf-based entities to engage in advocacy, promote the rights of children beyond the region and influence global humanitarian and development agendas. This opportunity was highlighted by the growing number of regional and global fora taking place in the Gulf. During the reporting year, this included: the annual meeting of the global future councils (World Economic Forum) and world government summit in the UAE, the Riyadh international humanitarian forum in Kuwait, the Doha forum and international parenting conference in Qatar, the Kuwait international conference for the reconstruction of Iraq and three pledging conferences held in Kuwait to support Syria (2013–2015). Operationally, to leverage such platforms to secure additional resources and commitments for children requires that UNICEF be well-positioned to offer credible information, solutions and potential programme and policy innovations.

Programmatic interventions responsive to national needs: The pace of national reforms offers potential risks and opportunities in relation to their impact on children. UNICEF has developed a sub-regional programme that is responsive to this evolving context. The ability to deliver and provide technical assistance to guide and inform policies on children, including public financing for children, requires new approaches to UNICEF's operational model. Most importantly, UNICEF's Gulf Area Office will need to rely on its multi-sector programming in early childhood, data and child protection to serve as a means of deepening engagement with public and private sector actors, with a view to providing entry points for Gulf countries to influence these same issues globally.

Strengthening UNICEF's normative role: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and commitment to improving the data landscape for children, as articulated in the new sub-regional programme, offer an improved environment for strengthening UNICEF's normative role. By convening partners to improve data systems and provide more timely and relevant information on the situation of all children – irrespective of gender, circumstance or location – UNICEF will gain significant opportunities to use evidence to promote the rights of girls and boys.

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

During the final year of the 2014–2018 sub-regional programme, UNICEF's Gulf Area Office concluded its contribution to three outcome areas: ensuring that Gulf-based partners demonstrate increased commitment to child rights in the region and globally, strengthening national capacities for the systematic generation and analysis of data and knowledge on the situation of child rights and supporting the use of relevant and timely data to inform national policies and reforms. UNICEF coordinated its delivery of results through three prongs: public partnerships and resource mobilization, private-sector partnerships and resource mobilization and programme delivery in the Gulf sub-region.

Public partnerships and resource mobilization

The reporting period was an important year for cultivating and strengthening partnerships with 13 public entities, most notably the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSRELIEF), the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MoFAIC), the Qatar Fund for Development and the Kuwait Fund for Arab

Economic Development. In addition, UNICEF worked closely with the Saudi Fund for Development, Islamic Development Bank and Arab Fund Secretariat.

During 2018 significant increases occurred in **quality** income from four governments against some of UNICEF's most critical humanitarian priorities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) primarily for Yemen. The overall funding target from UNICEF's public partnerships in 2018 was US\$100 million. Against this target, more than US\$325 million in agreements were signed. Ninety-eight percent of the funds were allocated to Yemen. This critical and generous assistance provided by the Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia was designated for the most urgent needs prioritized in the humanitarian response plan. The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); health; and nutrition sectors were well-funded; education and child protection received the least funding. Funds mobilized for Yemen contributed to goal areas 1 and 4 of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (SP).

In addition, the Government of Qatar signed an agreement to increase its contribution to UNICEF regular resources (RR) to US\$4 million per year in 2019 and 2020. UNICEF also received the agreed-upon RR from Gulf donors in 2018: Saudi Arabia, US\$1 million; United Arab Emirates, US\$200,000 and Kuwait, US\$100,000. The Gulf Area Office also received the agreed upon US\$500,000 from the Emirates for its local programmes in the country.

Factors that enabled these results include: regular and consistent consultation with partners and donors on potential areas for joint action; strategic engagement with partners that goes above and beyond requests for funding to include supporting public partners through capacity building and technical assistance. For example, UNICEF engaged with KSRELIEF on issues related to humanitarian priorities in the region, innovation, information-sharing, capacity building and a newly launched volunteer programme. UNICEF also facilitated a technical consultation workshop with KSRELIEF on child protection practices, standards and norms.

Emerging trends in public sector engagement include the introduction of donor pooled funding (as initiated by KSRELIEF and MOFAIC) to improve coordination. In addition, the reporting year saw a slight shift toward longer-term and more flexible funding that can be used to address resilience-focused activities in situations of protracted crisis, such as a three-year agreement with Qatar for WASH in Yemen for a total value of US\$70 million, of which US\$60 million is in matching funds. Finally, Gulf-based donors have been exploring new funding modalities, such as cash transfer programmes. UNICEF's Gulf Area Office will continue to engage strategically with its partners to provide information, technical assistance and capacity development support to inform these developments.

Private sector partnerships and resource mobilization

Private sector partnerships were sustained and expanded in 2018, resulting in the achievement of the expected annual target, US\$42.78 million in received and committed funds. However, this represents a decline in income when compared to the previous reporting year (US\$54 million generated in 2017). This shortfall can be attributed to pending contributions against signed agreements.

UNICEF acquired new partners such as Direct Aid of Kuwait and the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Foundation and attracted new funding and commitments from existing donors such as the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Dubai Cares, Al Ansari Exchange and the Al Abdulla family. A new three-year multi-country partnership with Majid Al Futtaim (MAF) was established with a target of US\$6 million (US\$2 million annually) to provide access to

quality education for every child in the six countries where MAF operates (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates).

For the first time UNICEF's Gulf Area Office launched a digital awareness campaign during the holy month of Ramadan, raising UNICEF's visibility and enabling an increase in individual giving. UNICEF GAO's partnership with key influencers was instrumental in driving the digital campaign via social media platforms. UNICEF also successfully established its first leadership circle in the Emirates, comprising donors, partners, supporters and key influencers. New strategic opportunities were identified and rolled out following *Vogue Arabia's* first annual ball in Dubai for UNICEF, yielding new prospects for partnership.

UNICEF also worked to deepen its engagement with the private sector, above and beyond fundraising requests. This included accompanying partners during field visits to UNICEF programmes, including a visit by Dubai Cares to Kiribati and Vanuatu islands to see progress in early childhood development (ECD) programmes and facilitating the participation of private-sector partners in global and regional events to profile their contribution and impact for children.

UNICEF Gulf Area Office worked through its public- and private-sector partners to advocate for organizational focus on providing opportunities for young people through the global Generation Unlimited (GenU) partnership launched during the UN General Assembly. The Emirates Minister of Youth, and the CEO of Dubai Cares, serve as GenU board members, and the Emirates Government has committed to hosting the GenU solutions summit in 2019. Private-sector partners from the country also played a lead role in the partnership with Dubai Cares, becoming the first to support the partnership with a firm pledge of US\$5 million.

UNICEF also recognized that partners in the Gulf continue to expect high-quality reports that clearly outline results achieved through their contributions. UNICEF fulfilled its role as the main interface with Gulf-based donors by ensuring quality and timely submission of all 19 reports due in 2018.

Programmes in the Gulf

UNICEF Gulf Area Office facilitated consultations with a wide range of partners across the five countries to define new programme priorities for the 2019–2023 sub-regional programme of cooperation. With UNICEF only present in the Emirates and Saudi Arabia, validating emerging issues and setting the stage for country implementation required an organization-wide effort.

In 2018 several rounds of consultations and meetings with UNICEF leadership were arranged in each country to ensure the relevance of and commitment to the programming framework. In addition, the UNICEF Gulf Area Office in the Emirates reaffirmed its partnership with its lead counterparts – the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood (SCMC) and the General Women's Union– under the leadership of MoFAIC. In Saudi Arabia UNICEF continued to work with its partner, the Family Affairs Council (FAC), to plan for implementation of the next sub-regional programme, under the direction of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During consultations related to development of the UN strategic partnership framework in Kuwait (to be finalized in 2019), UNICEF oriented a range of new partners on the government-agreed priorities of the sub-regional programme and explored mechanisms for implementation. In Kuwait, UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour to develop the first annual work-plan, which was submitted to the Government for a budget allocation. In Qatar, UNICEF conducted two training sessions (on the Convention on the Rights of the Child

(CRC) and results-based management) in advance of the development of the first annual work-plan. The sessions were attended by representatives of line ministries and civil society and hosted by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs. Finally, UNICEF continued to engage with the UN country team in Bahrain on the strategic partnership framework approved in 2017. Although UNICEF's activities under the framework remain unfunded, efforts continued to advocate for its presence and dedicated funding.

The sub-regional programme was endorsed in September 2018 by UNICEF's Executive Board, focusing on early child development (goal area 1 of UNICEF's SP), child protection (goal area 3 of UNICEF's SP), improving data for children (considered a 'change strategy' under the SP) and leveraging partnerships to secure commitments for children (also a 'change strategy').

This represents a departure from the previous cycle in important ways: it takes into consideration the ambition among countries in the region to be innovative and demonstrate global leadership; it focuses on multi-sector programme results that rely on UNICEF's comparative advantage for leveraging expertise across numerous sectors; and it reaffirms the need for substantive programmes for the children of the Gulf region that demonstrate UNICEF's credibility and capability as a knowledge leader for children. Finally, it identifies effective partnerships as central to the achievement of programmatic, advocacy and resource mobilization efforts.

During the reporting year UNICEF programmes in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates sought to finalize commitments to contributions against the results of the concluding sub-regional programme. Throughout the programme cycle, limited progress was recorded in either country for the outcome area on strengthening national capacities for improved data systems for children. However, the universality of the SDGs, and the drive to be more fully represented in international reports and processes provided a more conducive environment for partnership and programming.

In the Emirates UNICEF's main national partners led efforts to include data gathering and analysis on children in the next programme of cooperation. A data firm was recruited by UNICEF to map the country's information system and statistical outputs in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and SDGs and to develop a strategic plan to address gaps identified and strengthen the data ecosystem for children, thus providing a foundation for data system-strengthening in coming years. Inputs to the process are being provided by the technical committee on data, which consists of representatives of key line ministries and is led by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, in addition to UNICEF's partners. The results of this analysis will be available in 2019 for further discussion and planning with line ministries.

Initial findings of the mapping included a strong commitment to global best practice in information systems; an interest in using innovation to feature prominently in data collection and analysis; governance systems vary across the Emirates, thus requiring strong coordination efforts and information about the depth and breadth of sectoral data. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia UNICEF's new lead counterpart is committed to improving the data ecosystem for women and children under the new programme of cooperation. UNICEF Gulf Area Office is currently supporting the FAC to develop a publication offering a statistical bulletin on children, adolescents and young people while also highlighting emerging issues facing children and young people in the country.

UNICEF worked directly with the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates under the child-friendly cities initiative to gather and use data to promote and strengthen child rights. After much preparatory work in assisting wide-ranging stakeholders to collect data, assess the quality of services of children and develop an action plan (based on inputs from children, 40 girls, 20 boys), the Emirate of Sharjah was recognized as a child-friendly city, the first such city worldwide under the new UNICEF global guidelines. UNICEF's Gulf Area Office and the Emir of Sharjah signed a five-year memorandum of understanding on World Children's Day, outlining areas of collaboration for promoting inclusive social services, children's participation in urban planning and community life, availability of leisure activities and the promotion of child rights. Also in 2018, UNICEF worked with children, parents and municipal urban planners to develop a communication strategy to popularize child rights and principles of child-responsive urban planning. The child-friendly city initiative offers a platform for meaningful partnerships to use data and evidence to improve the lives of children in concrete ways, and Sharjah committed to sharing lessons globally on its experience to date.

Under the outcome area on supporting governments in the development of evidence-based programmes and policies, UNICEF concluded a number of on-going programmes during 2018. Previously, the UNICEF office in the Emirates provided technical assistance for the development of two overarching policies: the National Strategy for Motherhood and Childhood (2017–2021) and the Strategic plan for Children with Disabilities (2017–2021). A national country team consisting of both a high-level oversight body and a technical body of line ministry representatives was put in place at the time of endorsement. At year's end UNICEF's Gulf Area Office was providing technical support for development of an action plan for both policies that clearly delineates targets, roles and responsibilities for ease of reporting to the prime minister's office. The process presents an opportunity to strengthen accountability for national-level children's programming.

Guided by these strategies, in 2018 UNICEF collaborated with its partner SCMC on an advocacy initiative to promote a 'mother- and child-friendly UAE'. The participatory process involved a mapping of services currently available to mothers and children across the country (including remote geographical areas). UNICEF developed the mapping methodology and data collection tools, which focused on: comprehensive healthcare, quality education, child protection, child participation, equity and non-discrimination and evidence-based planning. Cross-sectoral consultations were subsequently conducted with key stakeholders from relevant authorities. Children's views, perspectives and recommendations were a key aspect of the mapping exercise, and were obtained through interactive focus group discussions with approximately 80 children and adolescents (48 girls, 32 boys) from various age groups, nationalities and ethnicities. In addition, 40 mothers were interviewed at schools, hospitals and public places to explore their views and experiences with available services and what needs improvement. These inputs will be used to develop an action plan led by the SCMC to improve the availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of services.

UNICEF's office in the UAE was a member of the national committee formed by the Ministry of Health and Prevention to develop a national strategic plan for the promotion of adolescent health, a process informed by the United Nations World Health Organization's global school student health survey conducted with 5,864 students in 2016. The resulting strategic plan prioritizes: mental health, substance abuse and self-harm, unintentional injuries, non-communicable diseases, violence and the provision of a supportive environment for the health and well-being of adolescents. Issues related to mental health and an enabling school environment will be prioritized during the next year of implementation, as agreed with partners.

The Emirates established an inter-ministerial committee to develop a national strategy on early childhood development. UNICEF was requested to provide technical support to review the content and drafts. UNICEF recruited a legal and child development expert to work with the Ministry of Education (lead entity within the inter-ministerial committee), to consolidate the Early Childhood Care and Learning Law. The law covers children aged 0–8 and outlines the services and support children are entitled to across sectors (health, education, protection), and the designated entity to oversee service delivery and quality assurance for each domain. It also clarifies governance of early childhood learning centres, which to date have been largely run by private operators. UNICEF's technical support also emphasized principles such as the best interest of the child and social inclusion, and contributed to the detailing of responsibilities for each lead entity. The law was finalized and reviewed by the Ministry of Justice in 2018 and is awaiting final approval.

In Saudi Arabia the UNICEF Gulf Area Office provided technical support for components related to early childhood development, child protection and skills development in the national childhood strategy. The strategy builds on the situation analysis on children previously prepared by UNICEF and its then-partner, the National Commission for Childhood.

Child protection interventions have gradually shifted from activity- or project-based efforts to the systems strengthening approach outlined in the upcoming sub-regional programme. In the United Arab Emirates, UNICEF's Gulf Area Office engaged in sustained advocacy with a national taskforce consisting of the SCMC, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Prevention, Ministry of Community Development and the Ministry of Interior to work towards becoming a 'Pathfinder Country' in the MENA region within the global partnership to end violence against children. The Emirates is the first country in MENA to join the global partnership. Under this framework, UNICEF will provide support for an assessment and related strategic plan to address violence against children. During the past two years, UNICEF has worked with its partner, the SCMC, to develop and roll out a bullying prevention programme in schools. The programme is now being mainstreamed in public and private schools across the country. In addition, a national committee (led by the Ministry of Education and including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Community Development and civil society, was set up to organize semi-annual bullying prevention campaigns. In 2018 campaigns were held on Emirates' Children's Day and World Children's Day.

In Saudi Arabia UNICEF completed its commitments under the joint programme on child safety' with the Arab Gulf Programme and the Ministry of Education to address topics in child psychology, child protection and safety and early childhood development more broadly in kindergartens. Initially, a basic training package (completed in 2016) was developed and mainstreamed into the Ministry's training programme, reaching 8,356 educators in 45 regions of the country. Additional topics identified by the Ministry and teachers were then tackled through an advanced manual, which was completed in 2018. UNICEF Gulf Area Office continued to collaborate with the Ministry of Education and the national family safety programme on a national bullying prevention programme that has reached 7,558 individuals in the school system (counsellors, principals, supervisors and teachers). The content features in the Ministry's routine training of teachers.

UNICEF also collaborated with partners on several advocacy-related events and processes for children. Forty schools (20 public, 20 private) in the Emirates implemented activities related to the global campaign to end violence in schools using material from the 'World Largest Lesson',

aimed at popularizing the SDGs among children. The Emirates also marked World Children's Day in several ways, including the presence of UNICEF MENA's regional director at the Sheikha Fatima Award, which commends global best practice in child development. The regional director also participated in discussions with children at the event and at the Zayed Academy for Boys to hear their understanding of children rights and their aspirations for their future. The Saudi Family Affairs Council also marked World Children's Day and its commitment to child rights by supporting all line ministries to mark the day with local events. In addition, several iconic buildings in Riyadh, such as the renowned Kingdom Centre Tower "went blue" in support of UNICEF's global campaign.

Gender

While the UNICEF Gulf Area Office did not carry out programmes or interventions solely dedicated to advancing gender equality, several were substantively informed by gender considerations. Ongoing data systems mapping in the Emirates prioritizes the collection of gender-disaggregated data; in addition, the strategic plan will clearly address how this can be achieved in line with SDG and national reporting. Work around the child-friendly cities and mother- and child-friendly Emirates initiatives has led to findings with implications for programming in support of girls. These include: how accessibility affects girls' participation in leisure activities or accessing services (noting that girls are more sharply affected by gender norms that require being accompanied by family members) and how community transportation could address this (through increasing the number of female-driven taxis, among other strategies). Two of four outcome areas in UNICEF's next programme include substantive gender-focused contributions: early childhood development, with its focus on the first 1,000 days and support for women through pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life and driving disaggregated data systems for children.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

UNICEF Gulf Area Office found the process for developing the new sub-regional programme to be a valuable opportunity to assess lessons learned that could guide its future practice.

The countries in this sub-region are highly developed. Therefore, UNICEF's primary challenge was to determine result areas that would have an impact on the lives of children in the Gulf by clarifying UNICEF's comparative advantage and determining strategic priorities responsive to the context. Despite limitations in its current staffing and resources, UNICEF was able to meet this challenge by: using national development plans as a key reference, exchanging ideas with sister UN agencies about their programming experiences in high-income countries, relying on technical expertise from UNICEF's Regional Office and Headquarters and by proposing innovative models for UNICEF's presence in the Gulf.

In the previous programme cycle, UNICEF GAO maintained dual, though largely distinct functions: engaging in resource mobilization with Gulf-based actors on behalf of the organization globally, and pursuing programmes for children in the Gulf. The success and limitations of this hybrid of global and sub-regional roles was also reviewed through staff consultations at all levels of the organization – headquarters, regional office, and UNICEF Gulf Area Office. Collectively this reflection concluded that for UNICEF to be relevant in the context of a changing landscape in the Gulf, it would need to be more engaged in all five countries and have a more integrated approach to all its functions (programmes, partnerships and advocacy) to coherently engage with public and private partners. UNICEF anticipates that this approach

will be more impactful in advancing the rights of children in the Gulf, in the region and around the world.

Lessons learned

Programming in the Gulf

UNICEF's Gulf Area Office supports programmes in the Gulf and has a presence in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which is completely reliant on funding from host countries. UNICEF has adjusted this scenario in its upcoming programme cycle in significant ways. Firstly, it has sharpened its programmatic focus to align more clearly with the national priorities of the region. By reviewing the situation of children in each country and engaging in country-level dialogue, even where UNICEF was not present, a more robust set of programme priorities have been identified and endorsed: to support early childhood programmes, especially for the first two years of life, to improve the data landscape for children such that relevant and quality data on children is gathered and utilized effectively and child protection systems are strengthened.

Second, the multi-sector and integrated nature of the programme priorities, which require engagement with multiple line ministries for each result area, leverages UNICEF's comparative advantage as a knowledge leader on children across sectors. The ability to tap into technical expertise across thematic domains and across the organization should position UNICEF to partner more substantively in providing timely and quality support to countries. For example, in the Emirates this approach, leveraging UNICEF's experience across the organization to become a "first point of call" on issues facing children, has been used successfully. UNICEF anticipates that the diverse consultations undertaken for developing the programme, strengthened by high-level advocacy across the organization, should yield greater commitment by all countries to the results that have been jointly agreed upon. The signing of a basic cooperation agreement for UNICEF to operate in Qatar is an expression of this strengthened partnership. UNICEF also concluded that its presence in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates has fostered strong partnerships with its lead partners, which facilitated linkages with a broader range of line ministries. These expanded networks will be critical for realizing the multi-sector priorities of the next cycle, such as early childhood development programmes. UNICEF expects that presence in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar will also enable greater progress in achieving results for children.

UNICEF's Gulf Area Office has also come to better understand the types of technical support requested by Gulf countries, which has implications for incoming staff. The countries of the Gulf are well-positioned to seek assistance from many of the most reputable and recognized institutions around the world. However, they look to UNICEF – and the UN-at-large -- to offer guidance on best practices and share programming standards and norms. In developing the sub-regional programme, UNICEF was successful in showcasing UNICEF's potential in each country context. However, to meet expectations and fulfil this role across the programmatic result areas, UNICEF is working on a recruitment plan that will identify senior staff able to partner effectively with leadership in each country context, with skills to identify and build technical networks that can be called upon to support sector-wide approaches. Given that UNICEF's presence will not be sizeable, staff will also need to be conversant in child rights, using strategic programming opportunities to fulfil UNICEF's normative mandate, raise awareness about child rights and strengthen the focus on gender equality. Finally, the growing number of agencies working to expand their presence and portfolio in the Gulf will need to be fully engaged in country-level processes responding to the UN reform agenda, including in

countries where UN strategic partnership frameworks are being implemented. Strengthened collaboration with UN sister agencies presents an important platform for providing coordinated support for implementation of the SDGs for all children.

Public and private partnerships

The approach to partnerships, with a view to leveraging commitments for children, will be informed by recent experience, including:

- **Integrated approaches to programming and partnerships:** UNICEF Gulf Area Office recognizes that more robust programmes within the Gulf have the potential to tangibly show how the realization of children’s rights can be advanced, which can assist in advocacy in support of children globally. In addition, partnerships with the public and private sectors present key opportunities to address the life-cycle of a child from birth through young adulthood. While early childhood programmes will focus on improving children’s quality of life during the first years, other partnerships (such as Generation Unlimited) offer a means to build on early investments in children through partnerships with the private sector that sustain those early gains through adolescence and beyond by ensuring that young people possess the skills they need to participate in the rapidly changing environments of the Gulf.
- **Paradigm shift - viewing donors as partners:** UNICEF also invested more substantially in engaging with government partners as more than donors. This shift has involved working strategically with partners to respond to their needs for technical assistance and information-gathering, and their ambition to engage in leadership roles within the region or globally. This approach is presenting new channels for promoting children’s rights.
- **Context-appropriate engagement:** UNICEF also recognized that face-to-face interaction and dialogue is of paramount importance in the Gulf. Therefore, ongoing support from UNICEF leadership, at all levels, has given greater impetus to recent priorities – whether working to establish UNICEF presence in new countries or signing key agreements – and provided much-needed funding during crises.
- **Promoting a shift to flexible funding.** Funds received to date from Gulf partners have been predominantly for emergencies. While this was due to escalating crises, particularly in MENA, the UNICEF Gulf Area Office needs to continue advocacy with partners to consider funding “forgotten” crises and/or more development and resilience-oriented programming.
- **Increasing UNICEF’s visibility and advocacy.** Considerable efforts were undertaken in 2018 to engage with corporate entities. From an advocacy standpoint, this was successful; key events and influencers reached far more individuals with UNICEF’s brand, messaging and programming priorities around the world. Translating this increased visibility into major new funding remains a challenge, which may be mitigated through sustained communication and discussion with partners.

Country operations

Development of the area programme management plan (APMP) that accompanies the sub-regional programme, defining key result areas and the resources and processes (funding, staffing, and governance mechanisms) required to achieve them, provided the entire office with an opportunity to reflect upon lessons learned in country operations.

A series of consultations with UNICEF Oman facilitated by the UNICEF MENA Regional Office

(MENARO) highlighted opportunities to share resources – particularly around human resources, finance and administrative functions. In reviewing the volume and complexity of transitions performed at both locations, a recommendation was made to create a joint operational hub to support these roles. The increased capacity afforded by the hub will also assist with the establishment and scale-up of operations in three new country locations.

The innovative approaches called for in the new sub-regional programme – including an increased focus on integrated functions across programme and partnership roles, the need for high-level advocacy and engagement with partners in each country and for talented staff able to lead programme operations –demands a strong recruitment plan in coming months, with the support of MENARO’s human resources team. UNICEF will use lessons learned in operating in multiple locations to orient incoming staff. Finally, the operations team will prioritize findings from staff consultations in recent months, including supporting a culture of effective communication across units to maintain shared understanding on programme implementation and to support the re-tooling or re-profiling of existing staff to fulfil new roles, as appropriate.

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