

Update on the context and situation of children

1. High level political and economic developments affecting children

Following the May 2018 general election and the first victory by opposition parties in Malaysia's post-independence history, 2019 witnessed continued resolve by the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government to follow through on their election promises of good governance, poverty reduction and human rights. Key positive developments include a reorientation of the national development agenda towards addressing socio-economic disparities and demonstrable political commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Leaving no one behind (LNOB) agenda. The Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 policy replaces the National Economic Policy and associated Vision 2020 as Malaysia's national blueprint for reducing inequalities and achieving High Income Country (HIC) status.

Much of the year focused on strategic preparations for the development of the 12th Malaysia Plan, which will chart the way to achieving *Shared Prosperity VISION 2030* (SPV2030). UNICEF contributed policy briefs on urban child poverty and children with disability submitted to the Ministry of Economic Affairs as part of the LNOB compendium of papers developed by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) for the 12th Malaysia Plan. In partnership with the World Bank, UNICEF presented a paper on child-sensitive social protection reforms at the 12th Malaysia Plan kick-off conference in July 2019. Meanwhile, the UNCT developed the Common Country Assessment and begun work on the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), which will be the first ever cooperation framework to be signed by the Government of Malaysia and UNCT Malaysia.

Despite notable progress, challenges remain as these developments have been accompanied by increased racial and religious divide. Ethnic tensions have also been exacerbated by widespread public dissatisfaction with the rising cost of living, high youth and graduate unemployment (10.9 per cent and 9.6 per cent respectively), slow wage growth, and contentious economic policy reforms aimed at fiscal consolidation. As the government has prioritised re-engaging the public to allay fears and guard against risks to social cohesion, the pace to make change has fallen and anticipated progress on sensitive issues affecting children (such as child marriage and the rights of stateless, undocumented and refugees) has been slow.

2. Implications of social policy reforms for children and families

In line with the government's commitments to address child poverty, 2019 witnessed an increase in the value of benefits paid to low income families with children under the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BSH) programme (an additional MYR 120 (approx. US\$ 30) per child per year), new tax incentives credits for women returning to the labour market (MYR 500 (approx. US\$ 122) per month for up to two years), and additional funding of RM 30m (approx. US\$ 7.3m) for child care in government's 2020 budget. In education, the government announced a Zero Reject policy in January 2019 which grants access to mainstream public education for all children, including children with disabilities and undocumented children with at least one Malaysian parent.

3. Child health and well-being

Although Malaysia is an upper-middle income country with a high level of human development, certain indicators of child well-being lag behind others. Stunting among children aged 0-5 years stands at 20.5 per cent, wasting at 11.9 per cent (IPH, 2017) and overweight among children aged 5-19 years at 12.7 per cent (WHO, 2018) – the second highest in Asia. Nutritional anaemia affects almost a quarter (22.8 percent) of women of reproductive age and represents a significant public health problem. 2019 also witnessed the continued emergence of adolescent mental health as a major public health and policy concern.

Meanwhile 2019 also witnessed several incidents of hazardous levels of air pollution and illegal chemical waste dumping. Exposure to such high levels of environmental pollutants can be expected to have long-term implications for the health and

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well-being of a great number of children in Malaysia.

4. Exposure to violence, exploitation, abuse and other harmful practices

Availability of reliable data on child rights infringements is extremely limited in Malaysia. Nonetheless, existing data suggests children's widespread exposure to various forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and other harmful practices. In particular, Malaysia is one of the few countries in the region where corporal punishment is continued to be practiced in schools. Data from UNICEF's global databases found that in Malaysia: 3 in 10 young people have experienced online bullying (2019 U-report poll), 71 per cent of children aged 1-14 experienced violent discipline, and 25.3 per cent of adolescents were physically attacked (UNICEF, 2017). Online exploitation remains a concern with over 20,000 IP addresses downloading and uploading images of child pornography reported by the Royal Malaysia Police.

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCDD) has drafted a National Strategy and Action Plan to End Child Marriage in 2019, however state-level resistance to an outright ban persists. Although Malaysia has introduced a number of initiatives to support comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), the effectiveness of these programmes has been limited by inadequate teacher training, and the limited hours committed to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) within the school curriculum.

5. Rights of indigenous children and children affected by migration (undocumented, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, stateless, and trafficked children)

Access to education, learning outcomes and educational attainment for Orang Asli children remain low despite their right to education being explicitly protected in law, as is the duty to make Indigenous languages available in government schools if parents of at least 15 pupils in the school so request. Significant rates of dropouts after primary school is key issue, seriously limiting human resource development and economic opportunity amongst the Orang Asli communities.

The government has been working towards a policy position on the right to work for refugees and asylum seekers and a major announcement is expected imminently. This would constitute a major step forward in reducing the vulnerability of the 177,800 refugees and asylum seekers registered with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia of which 26 per cent (46,340) are children. In July 2019, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs confirmed plans to implement an alternative to immigration detention (ATD) pilot for children from depots.

Sabah state is home to a large number of migrants and undocumented population who are at further risk of statelessness. Although there are no official figures on the prevalence of statelessness and undocumented people in Malaysia, estimated data from 2018 shows that 3 in 10 were non-citizens in Sabah compared to 1 in 10 at national level. The United Nations Country Team is conducting a mapping of undocumented persons in Sabah to propose policy solutions. This provides an important opportunity for UNICEF to position itself alongside UNHCR, as a partner of choice in support of the government commitment to resolve issues relating to childhood statelessness in Sabah and elsewhere.

Malaysia remained on the Tier 2 Watch List in the 2019 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report produced by the US State Department. The report mentioned that the Malaysian government did not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but was making significant efforts to do so. The government explained the continued decrease in the number of victims identified as a result of a reduction in the use of large-scale police raids of suspected commercial sex establishments and instead focused on investigations against forced labor, the larger trafficking problem in Malaysia.

6. Space for child and adolescent engagement and participation

Government has announced to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 to enable and drive young people's participation in decision-making processes. It will add at least 3.5 million new voters to the electoral roll by the next general election in 2023. In addition to lowering the voting age, the constitutional amendment also includes provisions to automatically add 18-year-olds onto the electoral roll and to lower the minimum age for individuals to stand as candidates for parliament to 18 years old.

7. Gender and LGBTIQI rights

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Women's empowerment remained a dominant theme in 2019 with gender inequality increasingly positioned as a major impediment to the achievement of Malaysia's national economic development ambitions. The Government's 2020 budget introduced a number of measures to promote women's economic opportunities including new tax incentives for mothers returning to employment and additional funding for child care. On the other hand, growing conservatism in society at large was apparent not only in the high-profile deaths of two members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) community, but also in the rejection of the *Convention Concerning Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work* by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) due to the Convention's provisions on LGBT rights.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In its capacity as Chair of the UNCT Inclusivity and Wellbeing Results group, UNICEF coordinated significant contributions by the UNCT to the policy debate on Leave-no-one-Behind. UNICEF's specific contributions focused on multi-dimensional poverty, the inclusion of children with disability and improved social protection systems. All of which are highly anticipated in the 12th Malaysia Plan 2021-2025.

Interventions have been in line with UNICEF's results framework focused on two outcome areas notably to ensure that 1) by 2020 children in Malaysia benefit from strengthened national policies, quality social services and capacities that enhance their lives and well-being; and 2) strengthening commitment and environment promoting child-centred social inclusion, disparity reduction and resilience. Within these two focus areas, the progress has been made through cross-cutting integrations, strengthened partnerships and capacity building efforts.

1: Goal area 1 Every Child Survives and Thrives

Landscape analysis on malnutrition of children

In efforts to promote healthy living for all children in Malaysia, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health (MoH) to conduct a landscape analysis of malnutrition amongst children in Malaysia, providing insightful evidence on the overall nutrition status of children including trends and predictors of malnutrition among children under 5. The prevalence of stunting and underweight among children under 5 remain a moderate public health concern while wasting is classified as a serious public health concern using WHO cut-offs. In 2019, the government has allocated a special allocation to the Ministry of Health to conduct health and nutrition interventions to address the problem of stunting in children in Malaysia.

Sugar tax imposed

UNICEF (in coordination with WHO, WB and UNDP) commissioned simulations on the consumption and revenue effects of various tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) policy options that were presented in April 2019 at a high-level inter-ministerial meeting chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. The meeting also discussed the design of a new Healthy School Breakfast programme to be funded from the proceeds of the tax. The SSB tax subsequently came into force in July 2019. Although the tax was set at a lower rate than advocated by UNICEF (and immediate consumption effects are therefore expected to be limited) it is anticipated that the rate will be increased over time and expanded to a wider range of unhealthy foods and beverages.

2: Goal area 2: Every Child Learns

SDG4 leadership enhanced

UNICEF provided SDG 4 leadership and high-level technical support to the Ministry of Education (MoE) during the National

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Education Policy Review, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Strategic Dialogue for Education Ministers, and the Education World Forum. UNICEF's enhanced partnership with MoE also enabled the initiative of embedding global goals in curriculums through mapping and piloting of Global Citizenship Education for lower secondary level. The initiative will progress to pre-primary and primary levels as well. In addition, UNICEF has initiated discussions with MoE on improving existing child protection systems in education, so that it successfully prevents and responds to all forms of violence against children in schools.

Early warning system prevents children dropping out of school

UNICEF Malaysia continued its high-level engagements on education for out-of-school children (OOSC) and non-citizens. As a result of the findings of the study on OOSC conducted by UNICEF, MoE developed an early warning data system/repository to address issues related to OOSC. The data repository facilitates data consolidation across numerous databases and applications that exist in government agencies and other organisations and can show detailed lists of individual students at specific schools identified as at risk of dropping out, based on seven indicators. This resulted in the inclusion of education for non-citizens in the Government's inter-ministerial taskforce and invitation to provide technical input on OOSC in the National Action Plan on Child Marriage. The pilot in one state has succeeded in reintroducing 262 secondary school students who had dropped out back into schools.

The introduction of the zero-reject policy by MOE which among other aims at granting undocumented and stateless children admission to Government schools represented another key success. As of May, 2,635 undocumented children have gained access to education in mainstream schools under the policy. UNICEF also recorded significant progress on inclusive education through the introduction of the zero-reject policy for children with disabilities with 10,948 students gaining access to education in mainstream schools. UNICEF has also been invited to provide technical input on the National Blueprint for Inclusive Education. However, more needs to be done in supporting the government with this policy especially with education for non-citizens.

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

Ending child marriage prioritized by government

A National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage, developed this year, will be launched in January 2020. UNICEF was instrumental in supporting the process of a national dialogue and was the only UN or non-governmental agency invited to provide technical support to the Roadmaps development at the inter-ministerial workshop convened for this purpose by the MWFC on 25th July. The step taken to develop this action plan reflects the commitment made by the government in its election manifesto of 2018, and reiterated by the Deputy Prime Minister in her [video message](#) on World Children's Day. Progress in this regard is also attributable to the concerted advocacy by UNICEF and UNFPA, together with national child and women rights organizations and the diplomatic corps, notably the Nordic embassies, Canada and Australia. The Government reaffirmed its commitment to end child marriage and to address teen pregnancies by introducing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in future policies at the ICPD25 conference in Nairobi in November 2019.

Similarly, in the State of Sabah, where the issue is further compounded by customary laws, UNICEF supported the development of a state action plan to end child marriage, focusing on legislation and social norms.

To address social norms driving this practice, UNICEF supported the development of an advocacy brief on child marriage for greater awareness raising and communications efforts, agreed with the MWFC, and included in the National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage.

Progress was also made towards the introduction of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). A Technical Working Group

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(TWG) on Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) led by Malaysian Council for Child Welfare (MKKM) in collaboration with UNICEF, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was established. The TWG ensures coordination of efforts, sharing of tools, resources and research, towards strengthening CSE initiatives and empowering adolescents to make informed decisions. This includes adaptation and implementation of UNESCO Guidelines on CSE, and supporting Malaysia's inclusion in a regional research on teenage pregnancy. Malaysia's National Action Plan on Ending Child marriage advocates to strengthen CSE to effectively end child marriage in the country, as a deterrent for teen pregnancies which is one of the drivers. UNFPA has also contributed through facilitating inter-faith dialogue in support of the introduction of CSE. The commitment to CSE achieved supports progress towards sustainable development goal 4 on education, as well as the 25-year review of the ICPD programme of action at which Malaysia pledged its commitment to its introduction.

Child online safety recognized and acted upon

Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) reported that Malaysia has close to 20,000 IP addresses downloading and uploading images of child pornography in South East Asia (MCMC, 2019).

Recognizing the importance of private sector involvement as well as that of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to addressing gaps in regulatory and policy approaches on CSEA, UNICEF provided technical support within the framework of its partnership with MCMC for a conference towards "*Enhancing national multi-sectoral responses to prevent and tackle online child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSEA)*" held in April 2019. Key partners included ITU, Interpol, International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, Australian High Commission, The Western Union Company, R.AGE (the Star), and Digi.

Bullying in school and online countered through national campaign

Endorsed by the Ministry of Education, corporate partners (SP Setia, Digi, The Star/R.AGE, International Medical University) with the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Study Hub, Childline, etc.) and UNICEF launched the second, and expanded scale of a nationwide #StandTogether campaign to counter bullying and violence in schools with kindness. UNICEF's feedback from the 2018 campaign led to improvements in the form and the quality of engagement for 2019 with 750 schools reached, 750 teachers and 2,250 students trained and educated through 15 resilience and restorative practice workshops conducted nationwide, with 15 celebrity ambassadors including UNICEF's Goodwill Ambassador, Lisa Surihani and 25 members of parliament publicly supporting the campaign via videos and social media. In addition, UNICEF led the pilot expansion of the campaign from schools to children with disabilities, indigenous children and children affected by migration ahead of the 2020 campaign. The campaign has been recognized as a good practice in neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines who plan to emulate it and won the **Best Branded Content Project** at the World Digital Media Awards in the UK this year. Later in the year, the WhatsApp chatbot developed by UNICEF and R.AGE for the campaign received gold award at the 2019 Asian Digital Media Awards in Hong Kong.

Parenting support interventions recognized and expanded

Parenting support intervention materials were revised and strengthened in partnership with the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) and Universiti Putra Malaysia, including support for additional modules focusing on child online protection, parenting children with disabilities, comprehensive sexuality education, and child marriage. A forum on Parenting and Child Online Protection held in June 2019, commemorated Parenting Month. Trainings and events held in Sabah have further expanded work on parenting in the state.

Cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial network formed to protect children affected by migration

Through the European Union co-funded 'Protection of children affected by migration' programme, UNICEF has been instrumental in convening relevant stakeholders to address the protection and rights of children affected by migration. As a collective response to protect children affected by migration an inter-ministerial Project Advisory Committee was established within the remit of programme consisting of the MWFC, MOHA, Department of Social Welfare, Immigration, National Strategic Office of the Council for anti-trafficking in persons and anti-smuggling of migrants (NSO MAPO) together

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with the European Union (EU), Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM-National Human Rights Institutions), UN agencies and NGO. This committee and resulting partnerships under this programme represent an opportunity to address issues faced by this group of children through an inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral approach. The Programme supported the first National Conference on Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP), with one of the focus, being child trafficking.

UNICEF in partnership with International Detention Coalition, promoted alternatives to immigration detention (ATD), and is conducting mapping of shelter needs, to support the anticipated adoption of the ATD pilot by the government, and stop the detention of children affected by migration.

4: Goal area 5: Every Child has an equitable chance in life

UNICEF has undertaken extensive social policy dialogue engagements throughout 2019, these have contributed to a number of important social policy reforms were witnessed as follows:

Increased funding for child-sensitive social policies

UNICEF's presentation on child poverty and child-sensitive social protection at the kick-off conference in July 2019 for the 12th Malaysia Plan, continued its advocacy in support of social protection system reform. The presentation articulated the rationale for expanding provision of child benefits and presented a range of costed policy options for consideration. In parallel, a strategy paper on urban child poverty was submitted to the Ministry of Economic Affairs as part of the Leave no-one behind compendium of papers developed by UNCT in support of the 12th Malaysia Plan. These engagements added to wider calls for social policy reforms that resulted in increased value of benefits paid to low income families with children under the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BSP) programme (an additional MYR 120 (approx. US\$ 30) per child per year), new tax incentives credits for women returning to the labour market (MYR 500 (US\$ 122) per month for up to two years) and MYR 30m (US\$ 7.3m) of increased funding for child care.

Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI)

UNICEF is engaging with Sabah state government and Petaling Jaya City Council to implement the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) with a view to leveraging local budgets to promote the realization of the rights of children. Petaling Jaya City was the first city in Malaysia to sign the MoU on CFCI with UNICEF. As part of this endeavour, the city has established a municipal Children's Council that called on the Mayor to use the CFCI to address six priority issues namely: vandalism; bullying; child friendly spaces; cleanliness; public amenities and child participation. Over time, UNICEF anticipates that further State and municipal authorities will join the initiative and that CFCI could develop into a powerful strategy for mobilizing public and private sector resources for children in support of the SDGs and child wellbeing.

5. Enablers and cross cutting areas:

5.1 Adolescent participation and engagement opportunities enhanced

Strengthening adolescent participation in development and child rights monitoring, is a key component of UNICEF's Country Programme, in this regard UNICEF supported several initiatives to facilitate young people's participation in respect of the SDGs and in relation to issues that directly affect their generation.

Children present recommendations for antibullying school policy to government during Kids Takeover at Parliament Malaysia

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UNICEF supported forty children across Malaysia, aged between 13 and 16 years old, who staged a “Kita Peduli (We Care)” Kids Takeover at Parliament Malaysia on World’s Children’s Day to demonstrate their concerns on bullying in schools. They presented recommendations for an Antibullying School Policy to the Deputy Minister of Education, in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, UNICEF Representative to Malaysia, Parliament Speaker of the House and others. The Deputy Minister of Education committed to reviewing the recommendations made with a view to adopting them into policy in-line with the MoE’s commitment to promote safer learning environments and tackle bullying in schools.

Children present their Vision for 2030 and actions to achieve it at Malaysia’s first SDG Forum.

Fifty-two children aged between 13-18, planned and facilitated a ‘Welcome to Our 2030’ Children’s Forum on 7 November 2019 at Malaysia’s first national SDG Summit organized jointly by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT). Eighteen children from marginalized groups and thirty-four children from the Children’s Representative Council of Malaysia participated. In the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and conference participants, the children presented key issues and solutions they had identified concerning some of the SDG goals and their call to action for adults and children to achieve their Vision for 2030, which will be used to inform high-level policy on a whole nation approach to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

World’s Largest Lesson Young Changemakers School Workshops enable 3000 children to learn about child rights and the SDGs.

The World’s Largest Lesson Young Changemakers School Workshops provided the opportunity for close to 3,000 children from 64 schools to learn about child rights and SDGs. Organized with the MoE and local NGO, WOMEN:girls, children were prompted to develop ideas and solutions to problems through participatory interactive group sessions. Among the participants, 2,639 children aged 11 and 13 years old participated in the Children4Change Survey. The survey revealed children’s concerns about issues; feelings about the world they live in; perceptions about being heard and the kind of actions they are prepared to take to create a better world.

5.2 Using the power of evidence to drive change for children.

In response to the challenges of limited data availability and evidence on key equity issues, UNICEF continued to focus on generating robust evidence for effective policy dialogue, and to help develop national policies and programmes. Two strategic evaluations were also undertaken and finished in 2019. These were formative, learning oriented and with an equity focus and included an evaluation on UNICEF Malaysia work in innovation as well as an evaluation on the #ThisAbility Flagship initiative. The evaluations were designed to allow for findings and recommendations to greatly influence how disability and innovation work are designed in the new Country Programme.

Situation Analysis of Children study

The UNICEF Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Malaysia revealed key issues faced by children in Malaysia: 1) Child poverty (1.8 million children living in relative poverty); 2) Growing number of children who are failing to access essential social protection, health and education services including marginalized children (indigenous, poor, children with disability, LGBTIQ, refugee, migrant and undocumented children); 3) Increasing rate of child malnutrition, particularly stunting and overweight, and high rate of under-nutrition among Orang Asli (indigenous) children (three times the national average); 4) Concerning levels of violence, exploitation and harmful practices affecting children with relatively weak system and capacities to prevent and respond to these child protection challenges; 5) High and rising rates of depression, anxiety and stress being experienced by adolescents with relative under-development of services and supports to address mental well-being and suicide prevention. These findings will support to strengthen advocacy interventions for UNICEF and key partners in support of child well-being agenda in Malaysia.

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5.3 Research-based social and behavioural change communication strengthened

UNICEF's effort to strengthen institutional capacity building in Communication for Development (C4D) as articulated in its Country Programme results framework, has materialized into a strategic partnership with Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) which established the first C4D centre in Malaysia named "UMS-UNICEF C4D Unit" for social and behavioural research, C4D-related curriculum development, training and consulting. The centre is strategically placed to further strengthen local capacity through a localized C4D curriculum and training and to generate relevant evidence, and to provide evidence-based local solutions and is the first of its kind in Malaysia. In addition, UNICEF had planned to strengthen the capacity of at least 3 units of social sector ministries by 2020, and surpassed this target during the training on social and behaviour change communication held in December 2019, at which 41 participated from seven ministries, academia, and non-government organizations.

5.4 Developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children

UNICEF Private Sector Fundraising and Partnership raised almost USD 20 Million from Malaysian donors recruited and maintained 150,000 monthly pledge donors contributing significant income and resource for children in the country and globally, funded 100% of the UNICEF Malaysia Country Program, contributed over USD 8 Million to Global Regular Resources and USD 800,000 to Regional Thematic work for children. Developing and leveraging sustainable financial support for children.

Throughout the year, UNICEF was able to count on the renewed support of national ambassador, Lisa Surihani, starting with the launch of the CRC@30 campaign. This was followed by Lisa Surihani's field visit to the Cox's Bazar refugee camp which drew media attention to the plight of refugees, and support fundraising initiatives over Ramadhan. The national #StandTogether campaign which is a multi-sectoral partnership, saw the participation of local celebrity influencers. The school visit by actor Siwon Choi, special representative from UNICEF South Korea (and subsequently regional ambassador), bolstered the campaign and broadened its reach. Additionally, the participation of Lisa Surihani in Borneo Marathon brought about an increase of media attention. November saw the first public outing of UNICEF Malaysia's new Youth Advocate, singer Ismail Izzani, who also recorded a "Raindrops" video on child rights. On World Children's Day, 20th November, the landmark KL Tower, and the building of the MWFC turned blue to mark the occasion.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

There have been a number of key lessons learnt this year across UNICEF Programme. These have been mainly around strengthening integrated approach to policy advocacy through evidence generation and research. Under Social Protection, a system-wide approach is important in balancing child-focused advocacy. Beyond advocating for change from a child rights perspective, UNICEF advocacy required greater awareness of wider demographic, social, economic, institutional and fiscal factors to maximize relevance and effectiveness. It is particularly true in terms of social protection reform but is also relevant to UNICEF's engagement on social workforce strengthening. Additionally, UNICEF policy engagements in support of reduced disparities among Malaysia's children needed to be more informed by public finance and institutional analysis. Particular attention needed to be paid to developing a cogent, evidence-based case for increased public investment in programmes and services for children, and the implications of Malaysia's fragmented and highly centralized institutional framework for the capacity building agenda. This cannot be achieved without the availability of quality disaggregated data and other requisite researches that provide a basis for sound policy analysis. This will be an advocacy agenda for the next few years especially as part of the next country programme planning.

In terms of building effective partnerships to influence policy change, it is important that a strategic and coherent vision; systematic and sustained advocacy strategies are built through technical, contextual and diplomacy capacities/skills. These skills were particularly crucial during the Out-of-School-Children (OOSCI) study whereby the partnership between UNICEF and Government complimented the approach on strategic collaboration particularly with MoE. This also created a shared ownership and sense of concern and understanding on equity issues in education. UNICEF strategically positioned the two OOSC studies for greater buy-in from the government. Inviting all stakeholders and government agencies together for every technical meeting led to a smooth endorsement for both studies when the two studies were combined as one report. A complementary partnership and ability to view challenges as opportunities by acknowledging the challenges was key in building trust and a solid working relationship especially with Government. The strength of UNICEF's strategic collaboration with MoE has also resulted in nationwide school children participation in the Country Programme Document processes,

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Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Summit, CRC@30 and #StandTogether campaigns.

To sustain stronger partnerships, developing a partnership strategy prior to initiating a new programme could have helped broaden UNICEF's partnership network for programming, and can help more effectively achieve programme results across programme sectors. This will be planned under the formulation of new country programme, especially since the new United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDCF) also warrants joint programmes and stronger partnerships. Under UNSDCF, closer collaboration with other United Nations agencies is imperative. It has been learned that the engagement to strengthen the child-sensitivity of Malaysia's social protection system cannot be done in isolation from a wider work on social protection reform. Collaborated efforts with the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and World Bank will contribute in reaching the goal and advocating for intended change.

To overcome the lack of understanding on Communication for Development (C4D) and social and behaviour change communication among stakeholders, UNICEF has partnered academic institutions to further cascade C4D capacity in country. From the experience of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)-UNICEF C4D unit, UNICEF learned that establishing a C4D centre is the first step and requires an ongoing technical support and network building for sustainability.

Results on innovation were planned in the current country programme not only as a separate result but also as a cross-cutting area to strengthen change for children. Experience and achievements so far indicate that there is value add through innovations that need to be strategically embedded within the core programming. UNICEF also recognizes the opportunity for innovation to serve as a convening force across the United Nations (UN) system in Malaysia as part of the wider UN reform. There is the opportunity for UNICEF to join forces with the UNDP Accelerator Lab initiative – as part of the global partnership – to ensure that relevant UN innovations take children into account children and young people, and to co-create and implement solutions for serving children and young people. Furthermore, promising solutions and initiatives can benefit from the global UNICEF Innovation Fund where needed.

Disability-Inclusive programming has begun to be mainstreamed across the whole country office. This is based on the preliminary recommendations from a formative evaluation of the #ThisAbility Flagship initiative and a theory of change exercise on disability, both conducted during the year. The evaluation preliminary recommendations indicate that UNICEF needs to: fully embed disability into key planning documents and ensure that children with disabilities are included and monitored across all areas of programming.

Joint efforts with government and civil-society partners further strengthened disability-inclusive programming. A partnership between UNICEF and Special Olympics Asia Pacific (SOAP) was established to pilot and seek feasible modalities on inclusive health, education and sports services for children and families with and without intellectual disabilities in Sabah. In addition, commitment has been made with the Sabah Welfare Department to develop a 2-year workplan to strengthen their disability-inclusive service provision and knowledge.

Lastly, UNICEF Malaysia has begun the preparations for a Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability programme that will be included in the 2021-2025 programme cycle. The programme was borne out of the UNICEF global commitment to addressing the global climate emergency, and at the same time to address climate and environmental issues such as air and water pollution affecting children's health and wellbeing in Malaysia. Several consultations have been held with key stakeholders including the Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Health, UNDP and youth organisations to inform the programme, with a partnership being established with the national university UKM to conduct a study in 2020.