

Oman

Executive summary

The year 2015 was an important year of development planning for the Government of Oman, with key work undertaken not only on development of the long-term Oman Vision 2040 but also on the Ninth National Development Plan (NDP) 2016–2020. This has led all ministries to prepare forward-looking strategic inputs to these vital plans, a process providing a critical opportunity for effective United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) engagement to advance child rights.

Overall, 2015 also witnessed several important developments for children: Oman was declared free of iodine deficiency disorder, a highly important step in a context where child and maternal nutrition outcomes remain sub-optimal despite the high-income environment. The country also has nearly eliminated cases of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, leading the Middle East and North Africa region in this regard. This is being achieved, for example, through the broadening of eligibility criteria for antiretroviral treatment in line with global United Nations recommendations, as well as the issuance of guidelines for the treatment and management of HIV in December 2015.

UNICEF Oman pursued a threefold focus to achieve equity and social inclusion for all children: 1) support for the development of these important national strategies and plans, particularly playing an increasingly important convening and coordinating role among stakeholders; 2) building national-level child protection monitoring and reporting mechanisms; and 3) situating child maltreatment at the centre of development plans and advocating for it to be addressed as a priority. All of this has strongly positioned UNICEF Oman in regard to social policy while supporting its flagship outcome on policy engagement. This also complements UNICEF Oman’s continuing role as a respected voice, particularly for the most disadvantaged children, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) vision to leave no one behind. In turn, notable achievements resulting from UNICEF Oman support have included:

- Finalization of the National Strategy for Children to drive overall child policies
- Development of ground-breaking, multi-sectoral national strategies with implications for children, including the National Social Work Strategy 2016–2025, which broadens the scope of social development in the country, and the Strategy for Prevention and Mitigation of Child Maltreatment
- Adoption of a comprehensive set of Oman’s first child well-being indicators
- Establishment and effective functioning of the first national-level mechanism for child protection in the form of child protection committees in all governorates
- Development of an action plan to improve the quality and coverage of long-term education services for children with autism as a foundation for further work on inclusive education overall
- Significant strengthening of the evidence base on children as a foundation for enhanced results-based management and for reporting on tangible progress. This has been achieved through the finalization of two critical priority research initiatives: the first

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in two decades, which has resulted in a wide range of up-to-date child-related data, and the Situation Analysis of Children.

- Finalization of the first national early childhood development (ECD) standards, covering children from birth to age 6 years, bolstered by the embedding of ECD in the National Strategy for Children, the National Social Work Strategy, an education strategy, and health and nutrition components of the national Health Vision 2050
- Expansion of the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) initiative from 9 to 24 schools and from three to five governorates. An overall evaluation of CFS is underway to further inform national-level scale up.

UNICEF Oman facilitation of cross-sectoral linkages among child rights issues has resulted in important synergies that represent a paradigm shift for the Government toward a more holistic approach to achieving child rights, such as under the National Social Work Strategy. In its efforts, UNICEF Oman relied strongly on evidence generation and capacity development as primary programme strategies, which in turn were closely linked with effective results in policy dialogue.

While programmatic resources have been secured, funding gaps exist and resulted in constraints. Work on the National Nutrition Survey, a major UNICEF Oman focus, was delayed due to lack of funding; efforts to generate resources from the private sector are underway. Similarly, formulation of a Communication for Development (C4D) strategy has been pushed back due to resource issues. The timing of the start of the revitalization of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, which will extend the baby-friendly concept to all primary health care institutions to strengthen national outcomes on infant and young child feeding, has been delayed to 2016 due to scheduling requirements for technical assistance.

The Government has agreed to extend the UNICEF Oman Country Programme to 2016, and a new country programme document will be formulated in 2016 for 2017–2020.

Humanitarian assistance

Oman is a secure and resilient country, such that no humanitarian interventions were undertaken during the year. However, when the potential for deaths and damage from natural disaster was raised in November 2015 with two rare cyclones (Cyclone Chapala and Cyclone Megh) within two weeks, UNICEF Oman had followed up with relevant ministries, particularly the Ministry of Health (MoH), on disaster preparedness levels.

Visits to emergency preparedness centres in Muscat revealed extensive preparations taken in case Oman was struck by the powerful storms, which eventually devastated the Arabian Sea island of Socotra, which is part of Yemen. For example, the Government had a full strategy for pre-positioning emergency supplies, including food, and had already acted on this, as well as on preliminary evacuation plans. A new high-speed, multi-hazard early warning system, launched in March 2015, was in place to support monitoring and data processing, while crisis communications plans were also ready. Critically, all stakeholders (civil defence, health, et al.) were connected 24 hours per day, seven days per week, including via a centre for timely coordination. These impressive levels of disaster preparedness underscore the relevance of the Omani experience as an international best practice for disaster risk management, which may be documented in a case study for other countries.

Mid-term review of the Strategic Plan

The first two years of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014–2017 have provided strong momentum for a number of areas important to child rights globally, including equity, strengthened monitoring and enhanced data for analysing the context for children. At the country level, this has translated into a clear understanding of organizational direction and leadership on the child rights agenda. Moreover, the Strategic Plan's seven outcomes generally remain relevant to all development contexts, including those of high-income countries; for example, six of the seven outcomes are relevant for Oman. In particular, in Oman, issues of social policy and child protection have gained impetus and have allowed UNICEF to show its value-added in the high-income context; nonetheless, social policy remains a new UNICEF intervention area and requires further focus and building of organizational capacities in this regard.

Likewise, the six outputs articulated in the Strategic Plan generally remain highly relevant. However, UNICEF Headquarters may wish to consider more strongly featuring an additional element with regard to increasing national capacities, given that the current focus is on ensuring availability of and access to services to strengthen systems. For increasing numbers of countries, including high-income countries, the issue is more one of quality rather than access, particularly when development outcomes are sub-optimal. In terms of creating an enabling environment, further strengthening of communication regarding components of the Strategic Plan is required, so that governments become more aware of global- and regional-level UNICEF initiatives. On the normative side, the principle of gender equality can likewise benefit from being framed more specifically in terms that are practically relevant at the country level. For example, in Oman, gender considerations need to be further expanded into sensitive child protection issues.

In terms of organizational efficiency and effectiveness as addressed in the Strategic Plan, it should be pointed out that it can be difficult at the country level to decide which, of a plethora of innovations, to engage, especially in terms of identifying the 'right' innovation. Broadening the definition of innovation beyond initiatives employing new technology to 'smaller', non-technological initiatives, may prove equally useful. Additional guidance at the country level on supporting integration and cross-sectoral linkages, including sharing best practices, would also be welcome given that efficiency is vitally important to achieving results in a high-income context.

The Strategic Plan approach to management efficiency and effectiveness also remains highly relevant, but could be strengthened with regard to investments in human resources. Because UNICEF offices in high-income countries are intended to be lightly structured, a careful examination of the mix of expertise should be undertaken to ensure that UNICEF Oman can meet government expectations, especially where the Government is the sole funding source.

Critically, the Strategic Plan at mid-term will need to be reviewed in terms of three key challenges now posed in the era of the SDGs: 1) because of the breadth and universality of the SDGs, UNICEF is likely to have to work even more strongly in the coming years to put children at the forefront of the development agenda and requires clear guidelines in this regard; 2) linked to this, UNICEF will need to consider in depth how it is going to be 'universal' as well, a revision that will need to be taken into consideration in a particularly sophisticated way in high-income countries; and 3) even as that broader agenda comes into play, UNICEF will need to identify and clearly articulate its specific niche and refine its focus, potentially 'letting go' of some issues. Although none of this will be easy, the process promises rich and stimulating discussions leading to a crucial re-shaping of the organization's mandate.

Summary notes and acronyms

C4D	Communication for Development
CFS	child-friendly schools
CMT	Country Management Team
ECD	early childhood development
ECE	early childhood education
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ICT	information and communication technology
MENARO	Middle East and North Africa Regional Office
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
NCSI	National Centre for Statistics and Information
NDP	National Development Plan
OIP	Office Improvement Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDSS	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VISION	Virtual Integrated System of Information
WHO	World Health Organization

Capacity development

Capacity development has been central to the development of ground-breaking initiatives such as the National Social Work Strategy, under which a group of highly qualified technical advisors sourced by UNICEF Oman supported the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). A significant contribution of support has been to open up the use of data, evidence and their analyses, strengthening MoSD capacities. Institutionalizing such capacities will bolster the Strategy's transformative philosophy and are expected to contribute to a change in decision making so that demanding the use of evidence in programme reviews/progress reporting becomes normal practice.

A system for monitoring child rights violations was introduced through the establishment/capacity building of multi-disciplinary child protection committees in all provinces, including support for the development of terms of reference and training manuals for the committees and trainings of trainers. The training of 22 master child protection trainers representing all provinces, along with a three-day workshop for 40 physicians to strengthen the response to child maltreatment, has further paved the way for the institutionalization of child protection capacities at the national level. In Dhofar, a high-level field visit by UNICEF Oman found the Child Protection Committee to be functioning effectively, including reporting a case involving a non-Omani child. UNICEF Oman assistance has been sought for the coordination of further cross-country cases. Finally, technical support to the nation's first hotline for reporting child abuse (telephone number 1100) has poised the hotline for launch in early 2016.

With regard to CFS, the training of principals from 15 new schools allowed them to develop school plans for the first year of the CFS programme, selecting activities most relevant to their institution. Following the training, each principal presented the CFS approach to teachers, parents, students and others at their school, thereby building a wider base of stakeholder capacities for CFS scale up.

Evidence generation, policy dialogue and advocacy

UNICEF Oman policy dialogue and advocacy built on a multi-level approach and quiet diplomacy that involved building relationships, bolstering champions, relying on solid evidence, and employing a realistic timeline. With UNICEF Oman support, the new National Strategy for Children is serving as an overarching platform for ensuring that child protection is part of an effective social protection system.

Evidence on the status of children's rights was significantly bolstered with finalization of MICS5 in collaboration with the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Lessons include: 1) MICS is applicable to the high-income country context, generating a wealth of information on child rights; 2) MICS can be implemented while addressing national requirements for data sharing. UNICEF Oman ensured that a qualified consultant worked within NCSI, in line with the national partner's requirement that data not leave its premises; 3) systematic interaction at the highest levels effectively addresses bottlenecks in a timely fashion.

UNICEF Oman technical support to the MICS helped ensure robust results that highlighted Oman's development advances. However, MICS findings also showed that room for further progress exists in the areas of child protection, ECD and child nutrition. These findings have informed planning for the NDP as well as background documentation for the National Social Work Strategy. Like the MICS, the UNICEF Oman-supported Situation Analysis of Children underscored considerable achievements and highlighted shortfalls. The Situation Analysis has proven an important background document for the National Strategy for Children and the NDP.

Finalization of national ECD standards helped ECD stay at the forefront of the national agenda, while support for the development of a costed Early Childhood Education (ECE) National Plan of Action represented a crucial output following the recommendations of a national investment study. The plan aims to position ECE, which rose from 15,136 enrolled (2010–2011) to 58,552 enrolled (2013–2014), as a priority, given that two of every three children remain outside of ECE.

Partnerships

Deepened and expanded partnerships were featured in almost all of UNICEF Oman's 2015 work. First, a partnership forged with the Research Council of Oman resulted in UNICEF Oman effectively using its convening role for multi-sectoral partners and supporting the development of 138 child well-being indicators within the new, user-friendly Social Indicators Database of the Social Observatory Research Programme. For the first time, this has allowed instant access to social, economic and demographic data from a variety of government and non-government sources to facilitate policy decisions/programme interventions in three key domains of social change: family cohesion, youth values and standard of living. The child indicators will be linked as a self-contained group that researchers can easily identify by a flag in the database.

Second, in the area of ECD, UNICEF Oman served as a catalyst, bringing high-level officials of Sultan Qaboos University together with globally renowned ECD researchers from Columbia University and maximizing knowledge sharing between the two institutions on innovative ways forward related to ECD. UNICEF Oman also facilitated a visit by Sultan Qaboos University officials to New York to learn from best practices at Columbia's Early Childhood Centre, which can then be replicated in the Sultanate.

During the formulation of the National Social Work Strategy, analysis of the impact of cash transfer programmes on levels of poverty served as an entry point for the establishment of a key

partnership with the World Bank. This demonstrated what could be done by way of analysis using data already available and with easily accessible software. In turn, the World Bank committed to engaging under the strategy to better target cash transfers, which will be critical to building capacities and tracking performance as major triggers for programme development across the future work of the MoSD.

External communication and public advocacy

A significant achievement facilitated by UNICEF Oman advocacy during the formulation of the National Social Work Strategy was the Government's acceptance of the use of fundamental development concepts. These included references to 'vulnerability' and 'poverty' as well as to social class differentials and the occurrence of violence against women and children. By the end of the planning exercise, national counterparts were actively using these ideas. In turn, this has ensured ownership by the Government and political support for the ideas developed and thus is a key measure of success. Vulnerability in particular has taken a central place in the strategy, introducing a new social model across the life course of all families through, for example, the establishment of a national social protection floor (Social protection floors are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees). Being able to draw on these key concepts will mean that Omani policymakers can now fully take advantage of recent global advances in the measurement and monitoring of progress.

At the same time, another key advance was the introduction of vulnerability as a major social domain for child well-being indicators at a two-day UNICEF Oman-supported workshop in November 2015 for 50 key officials from multiple sectors. The child vulnerability indicators, now being finalized, include both individual indicators and contextual indicators in terms of family and community.

National media are strongly interested in child rights issues, reporting almost daily on general developments related to children. Thus, UNICEF Oman's engagement in 2015 received good coverage. In particular, interviews with UNICEF Oman with regard to the National Social Work Strategy, the selection of child well-being indicators, child maltreatment, child protection committees and CFS all brought important child-related issues to a wider audience.

South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

Working with UNICEF Viet Nam, UNICEF Oman facilitated a week-long mission by the MoSD, which has helped to share Oman's experience on evolving engagement with social protection reform in middle- and high-income countries. In a high-level meeting chaired by the Viet Nam Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, a presentation on Oman's reforms resulted in the highlighting of common areas between the two countries, including the universalization of social assistance, aspirations to facilitate the empowerment of beneficiaries and the establishment of a national database to monitor service provision/cash assistance. The Government of Viet Nam further highlighted areas in which Viet Nam would like to learn from Oman through additional exchanges, for example, long-term vision (Oman Vision 2040), comprehensiveness/coherence of social protection policies within the framework of the National Social Work Strategy and thresholds for sustaining minimum standards of living.

The input from a senior government official into UNICEF's internal strategic 'moment of reflection' proved to be critical for the UNICEF Viet Nam programme team, inspiring them to consider opportunities to re-position UNICEF's role in an emerging middle-income country, especially with respect to enhancing the normative framework, the delivery of technical assistance, evidence-based advocacy and resource mobilization partnerships. Participation of

the government official in this exercise was noted as a good practice by the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

A senior government official also met the United Nations Country Team in Viet Nam to share Oman's experience with its dynamic engagement with the United Nations, particularly UNICEF. The insights shared led United Nations representatives to express interest in further exchanges.

In another example of South-South cooperation, the MoSD is considering key recommendations from five ministry participants of a study tour to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to learn from that country's child helpline experience, which was facilitated by UNICEF Oman and the UNICEF Gulf Area Office.

Support to integration and cross-sectoral linkages

Multi-sectoral approaches have been clearly embedded in numerous UNICEF Oman-supported results throughout 2015, including new national ECD standards, national strategies for children, as well as on national strategies on social work and child maltreatment, selection of child well-being indicators, and the establishment of child protection committees.

All of this is bringing a paradigm shift towards a holistic vision for child rights in Oman and is introducing a culture of stronger collaboration and coordination among sectors. For example, a breakthrough occurred with the MoH on the development of the nation's first multi-sectoral strategy on child maltreatment and a 20-point action plan involving short-, medium- and long-term objectives. UNICEF Oman leadership and advocacy against violence and abuse has thus received significant traction despite an overall lack of data on this culturally sensitive issue, which nonetheless appears to be growing in Oman (e.g., trends in reported neglect/physical maltreatment cases, high levels of reported bullying in school).

The strategy involves not only the health sector but also education, social development, transport/communication, justice, foreign affairs, religious affairs and consumer protection, all under the high-level political will of the National Committee for Family Affairs. Embedding a rights-based approach, the strategy highlights outcomes of improved quality/quantity of reporting and documentation of child maltreatment and decreased prevalence of culturally accepted practices that are damaging to children (e.g. physical punishment as discipline) as well as multi-sectoral strategic approaches for prevention. An additional result of the heightened attention to the issue was the publication of the Clinical Guidelines on Child Maltreatment by the MoH in 2015, underscoring equity principles in clinical practice intended to improve the quality of care.

Human rights-based approach to cooperation

Disability emerged strongly as a rights-based priority issue in numerous UNICEF Oman-supported initiatives in 2015. This represents a critical development for a country where nearly half of marriages are consanguineous, as highlighted in the situation analysis. Approximately 1.1 per cent of Oman's children aged 0 to 14 years are believed to have disabilities.

As a result of successful internal advocacy by the disability group in the planning process for the National Social Work Strategy, disabilities became a full pillar of the new Strategy. This will allow the issue to be given greater space and attention, as well as a larger claim on MoSD resources. Disability was also highlighted in the new child maltreatment strategy, which stated that children with disabilities are believed to be more than 3.5 times more vulnerable.

A ground-breaking, multi-sectoral assessment on overcoming barriers to the social integration of children with autism, which is nearing finalization, is expected to shed new light on equitable access to/opportunities for quality services, including diagnosis/assessment and inclusive education, as well as for relevant national legislation. The numbers of these children, although still estimates, are believed to be increasing in Oman, with a lack of specialized centres/institutions. The assessments, conducted by UNICEF consultants (University of Northampton), outline a new strategy and action plan with regard to autism education, highlighting the steps and milestones that the Government is advised to achieve to make services more coherent and comprehensive. In turn, these are expected to pave the way for a comprehensive national effort on inclusive education for all children with disabilities in the context of development of the NDP and Vision 2040.

Initial results of the study indicate key barriers include a lack of provision of services to children with autism, particularly in rural areas, pressure on relevant resources (lack of qualified, trained teachers), a lack of clarity among stakeholders with regard to responsibilities, deeply rooted public attitudes of stigma and parental factors such as denial and lack of knowledge. Stakeholders involved in data collection in five governorates included all entities and organizations working directly with autistic children from the Government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Gender mainstreaming and equality

UNICEF Oman was entrusted with the lead technical role in the formulation of the National Social Work Strategy, the importance of which (to the Government) was illustrated by full-time stakeholder engagement, even during the Eid holidays. The rights-based strategy, which for the first time brings all Omani families to the centre of multi-sectoral social policy, highlights equity, social inclusion and empowerment as guiding principles. This family focus offers an important model that could go well beyond Oman to other parts of the Middle East region. Critically, the strategy has a specific vertical pillar on women and gives particular attention to gender as a cross-cutting horizontal issue. Notably, it embeds social protection in macroeconomic policy and expands the protective role of the MoSD to encompass promotive and transformative elements.

Building on strong UNICEF advocacy and technical support, this key strategy also seeks to enhance human capital through critical investments in children and drawing more effectively on the full capabilities of persons with disabilities, while encouraging women's active participation in the labour market. Gender was given a very thoughtful hearing by the MoSD senior management team in the final stage of strategy preparations. The National Social Work Strategy has been facilitated to serve as a strong vehicle for taking these ideas forward into action.

As implementation of the new strategy gets underway, UNICEF Oman is positioning itself as a high-level convener to ensure the clarification of roles and effective coordination and synergies. All of this will serve as necessary groundwork for a positive enabling environment for women and vulnerable persons as well as the achievement of measurable results.

Environmental sustainability

UNICEF Oman benefited from capitalizing on the focus on environmental sustainability in the SDGs, submitting its first environmental footprint assessment to provide an important baseline for its support to the United Nations Climate Neutral Strategy. The data showed, for example, that use of electricity comprised 51 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions to which UNICEF Oman contributed. Air travel contributed another 39 per cent, while office vehicles were

responsible for 6 per cent. Use of these data will serve as the basis for monitoring UNICEF Oman performance and progress in the coming years.

Effective leadership

A 2015 internal audit of UNICEF Oman found governance and programme management controls functioning well in a number of areas. The audit stated that the Annual Management Plan presented management priorities with their expected results/targets and performance indicators and assigned staff responsibility accordingly. The audit also found that the office had established terms of reference for the Country Management Team (CMT) to ensure that there was appropriate membership. Throughout the year, key actions that emerged from CMT meetings were taken on audit preparation, the recruitment of a programme manager and the formulation of the Business Continuity Plan.

However, the audit noted that UNICEF Oman could strengthen the segregation of some roles, while also observing that roles did not always align with staff's functional responsibilities. At the same time, the audit noted that having only six professional staff made it difficult to ensure adequate segregation of duties. Among other actions, UNICEF Oman is reviewing the delegation of authority and mapping of functional roles in the Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION). Certain roles have also been delegated to the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO)/UNICEF Gulf Area Office to mitigate potential conflicts of interest. UNICEF Oman is reviewing risk management areas with all staff and assigning mitigation actions by reflecting them in staff performance plans. UNICEF Oman has also agreed to increase oversight of the programme planning process, including assigning timeframes for the implementation of planned outputs.

To address priorities that emerged from the UNICEF Global Staff Survey, the Staff Association presented results at the annual staff retreat. The global results showed marked improvements in job satisfaction, personal empowerment, work/life balance, office leadership and standards of conduct, though a noticeable decline was observed in perceptions of career/professional development. Prioritizing issues most relevant to the UNICEF Oman context, the team developed an Office Improvement Plan (OIP) focused on professional development, staff learning and streamlined feedback systems. Notably, OIP implementation status has become a standing agenda item at CMT meetings.

Financial resources management

In terms of the internal UNICEF Oman audit, the period covered was January 2014 to July 2015, with expenditures of US\$3.5 million. A total of 10 actions were agreed on at the completion of the audit to address auditors' recommendations. Two of these were high priority and are discussed further elsewhere in the report in terms of human resources management and procurement; the other eight actions were rated as medium priority.

UNICEF Oman received its full annual programme budget from the Government as other resources and utilized 100 per cent by 31 December 2015. A total of 100 per cent of institutional budget funds was also utilized. Funds utilization was periodically monitored in CMT and Programme Management Group meetings, which provided greater oversight and resulted in improved management of contributions and budget control. UNICEF Oman does not have direct cash transfers, nor does it participate in the United Nations harmonized approach to cash transfers.

As an interim measure, UNICEF Oman received global thematic funds from MENARO to

support the implementation of school-based activities to scale up the CFS initiative in 2015, following the CFS pilot in nine schools in 2014, as well as to reinforce programme management. These were 100 per cent utilized by the end of 2015.

Bank reconciliation was prepared on a timely basis. UNICEF Headquarters approved Standard Chartered Bank Oman as a suitable bank that can expedite payment processes via an e-banking platform. UNICEF Oman is finalizing a Bank Communication Management System training. In response to audit recommendations, UNICEF Oman has agreed to strengthen oversight over processing of financial transactions, including training of staff on the use of general ledger codes.

Fundraising and donor relations

The internal UNICEF audit recommended that UNICEF Oman develop a resource mobilization/fundraising strategy in consultation with MENARO. Further, it recommended that UNICEF Oman consider fundraising with the private sector in Oman and establish an action plan to monitor implementation of any strategy. In response, UNICEF Oman has developed such an action plan. Nonetheless, in 2015, UNICEF Oman was overfunded, with its funding ceiling raised by US\$368,110, from US\$932,000 to US\$1,300,110.

Donor reporting is being strengthened in response to recommendations from the audit. This includes timely submission of reports, specificity of results reporting, inclusion of the quality assessment of these reports in key performance indicators, and use of a checklist for review and clearance of reports as a tool during finalization of the documents. UNICEF Oman annually submits one donor report to the Government as the sole donor.

Evaluation

An overall CFS evaluation, which is nearly finalized, will confirm what type of policy decisions need to be made with regard to further informing the scale up of CFS at the national level. The evaluation will identify what aspects of the initiative have been successful and where further development is necessary. Data that are still being analysed were collected through interviews/focus groups and surveys with some 475 CFS key stakeholders (teachers, students, principals, parents and directorates) as well as field visits, observations and a desk review of documentation, including from UNICEF Oman and the Ministry of Education.

Efficiency gains and cost savings

As part of its efficiency gains in resource use and related cost savings, UNICEF Oman was able to negotiate an important agreement with Security and Safety Services for the reduction of the number of security guards from three to one. A total of US\$16,987 was saved through this move.

Meanwhile, the Microsoft Lync unified communication tool strengthened collaboration, offering free, self-managed online meetings, chat services and audio/video calls. This has led to significant communications cost savings, particularly because other Voice over Internet Protocol services, such as Skype, are blocked in Oman.

No joint United Nations operations exist in Oman.

Supply management

UNICEF Oman did not procure supplies for programme-related initiatives. No collaboration with other United Nations agencies on supply and logistics aspects occurred in 2015. Likewise, there was no role for the Government or UNICEF Oman on in-country warehousing, no in-country logistics and delivery to end-users, no monitoring of supplies and no usage of innovative supply and technical solutions. In 2015, UNICEF Oman estimated a total of US\$30,000 through regional and local procurement, mainly to purchase office supplies.

Based on an ongoing agreement with the MoH, UNICEF Oman facilitated the procurement of vitamin A capsules and cold chain equipment. The amount of US\$49,404 was subsequently reimbursed by the MoH.

Security for staff and premises

In 2015, Oman experienced no humanitarian emergencies affecting children or UNICEF programme activity implementation or deliverables. The overall security situation in Oman continues to be peaceful, and there have been no perceived risks/specific threats to the United Nations presence in Oman; the country remains at United Nations security level 1. The Security Management Team, through which UNICEF maintains close collaboration with the three other United Nations agencies in Oman (the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)), has agreed to conduct a risk analysis in 2016 with the support of the Security Advisor.

UNICEF Oman facilitated a mission of the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) to update the security risk assessment, security plan, Minimum Operating Security Standards, and Minimum Operating Residential Security Standards. The office guard was also given a brief and training on the safety and security of the premises and office access control. Throughout 2015, UNICEF Oman also maintained close communication with government agencies such as the Disaster Management Committee, the Oman Charitable Organization, civil defence authorities, the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Effective 1 January 2016, UNICEF Oman will move to new office premises, which have been approved by security personnel. Major Minimum Operating Security Standards at the new location are being finalized.

Human resources

As a small office, UNICEF Oman was extensively supported by MENARO, which effectively extended country office capacity. UNICEF Oman recruited a professional level 4 programme manager on a fixed-term appointment; the post will be funded by MENARO regular resources for two years. In collaboration with the Staff Association, UNICEF Oman also took the opportunity of visits by regional advisors/international consultants to organize learning sessions for general staff on social policy, MICS, ECE and monitoring and evaluation as part of the implementation of the OIP.

The UNICEF Oman audit recommended that high priority be given to several actions related to the secondment of government staff as project officers, noting concerns related to selection, reporting and performance management. As a result, UNICEF Oman has agreed to define its role in the process of identifying potential secondees. Likewise, with support from the UNICEF Division of Human Resources, UNICEF Oman has agreed to clearly define mechanisms for assessing secondees' performance and to agree on these with the Government.

As another high priority, the audit recommended strengthened oversight with regard to the application of procurement controls, including the implementation of a procurement plan, selection of contractors and recording in VISION. In response, UNICEF Oman is establishing timelines for services and reviewing the efficiency of the contracting process, among other measures. In addition, UNICEF Oman is providing guidance to ensure the proper maintenance of procurement information and the timely closure of completed purchase orders and contracts. Also in response to audit recommendations, UNICEF Oman agreed to periodically review vendor master records to ascertain the validity of vendors with multiple records, ensuring that new vendors are correctly grouped.

In the absence of a formal United Nations coordination system in Oman, UNICEF Oman facilitated a cost-of-living survey for international United Nations staff in the country and an important United Nations salary survey to contribute to the revision of local United Nations salary scales.

Effective use of information and communication technology

UNICEF Oman had a major change in its information and communication technology (ICT) systems with the migration to Lightweight and Agile Information Technology programme (Light). The migration introduces a new architectural model for field offices that aims to significantly reduce complexity and minimize operational risk by reducing the ICT infrastructure footprint. It also increases the overall ability to adapt to changes such as the implementation of new technologies or the mobility of the workforce. This was complimented by utilizing Microsoft Office 365 cloud-based services, enhancing mobility and access to corporate application, cost savings in information technology hardware/software, as well as improved business continuity. Office data has been moved to the MENARO Light service centre, where it is hosted and maintained.

ICT support is provided by the Regional ICT Support Hub, which also remotely manages overall office ICT functions. On-site information technology support is provided by a local service provider; this was supplemented by one visit by a regional information technology officer in 2015. One ICT customers' satisfaction survey was conducted, which showed very good ratings for ICT services and hub support, and good ratings for the local service provider.

UNICEF free corporate Voice over Internet Protocol and Skype for Business unified communication tool were largely used to strengthen collaboration between internal staff and external partners, offering free, self-managed online meetings, chat services and audio/video calls, as well as cost savings.

At the end of 2015, UNICEF Oman moved to a new building. The move of ICT services was smooth, and all ICT services were operational from the new building according to the agreed plan. Office connectivity was enhanced by upgrading the main link to 4 megabits per second according to the new policy. Asymmetrical digital subscriber lines backup and guest Wi-Fi asymmetric digital subscriber line links were also upgraded to increase connectivity performance and strengthen office availability. A new wireless system was installed, covering the entire new office with two wireless networks, for the office and guests, respectively.

ANALYSIS BY OUTCOME AND OUTPUT RESULTS

OUTCOME 1 Programme support

Analytical statement of progress:

Oman is one of the few countries that has not only joined the high-income category but has also experienced rapid human development with a strong degree of equity. This has resulted in steep reductions in child mortality (by 82 per cent to 9 per 1,000 live births), universal child immunization, universal primary education and significant action to address the rights of women, who comprise 22 per cent of the labour force.

During the comprehensive mid-term review of the Country Programme 2012–2015 held in 2014, the Government, as UNICEF Oman's sole donor, and UNICEF Oman jointly identified a new focus on two strategic areas: 1) early childhood learning, care and development; and 2) child-centred, inclusive strategies and plans. Initiatives under both focus on removing bottlenecks in the enabling environment and strengthening capacities in planning, coordination and evidence-based decision making.

Although implementation of an upstream focus takes time, the Government has highlighted its satisfaction with the level of UNICEF Oman engagement at the policy level thus far. In addition, it has specifically commended the seniority of advisors/consultants provided on key initiatives, reflecting UNICEF Oman's vigorous response to a government request to ensure the highest quality of technical expertise.

Important internal systems were also introduced to improve UNICEF Oman planning/monitoring. In a key example, a strengthened set of results and indicators for management effectiveness was identified to achieve the shift from transactional to higher-level performance monitoring, reaffirming alignment with the global UNICEF Strategic Plan and Oman's high-income context.

OUTPUT 1 Governance and systems

Analytical statement of progress:

A 2015 internal audit of UNICEF Oman found governance and programme management controls functioning well in a number of areas. The audit stated that the Annual Management Plan presented management priorities with their expected results/targets and performance indicators and assigned staff responsibility accordingly. It found that the office had established terms of reference for the CMT, with appropriate membership. Throughout the year, key actions from CMT meetings were taken on audit preparation, recruitment of a programme manager and formulation of the Business Continuity Plan.

However, the audit noted that UNICEF Oman could strengthen the segregation of some roles, while also observing that roles did not always align with staff's functional responsibilities. At the same time, the audit noted that having only six professional staff made it difficult to ensure adequate segregation of duties. Among other actions, UNICEF Oman is reviewing the delegation of authority and mapping of functional roles in VISION. Certain roles also have been delegated to MENARO/the UNICEF Gulf Area Office to mitigate potential conflicts of interest. UNICEF Oman is reviewing risk management areas with all staff and assigning mitigation

actions by reflecting them in staff performance plans. It has also agreed to increase oversight of the programme planning process, including assigning timeframes for the implementation of planned outputs.

To address priorities from the UNICEF Global Staff Survey, the Staff Association presented results at the annual staff retreat. The global results showed marked improvements in job satisfaction, personal empowerment, work/life balance, office leadership and standards of conduct, although a noticeable decline was perceived in career/professional development. Prioritizing issues most relevant to the UNICEF Oman context, the team developed an OIP focused on professional development, staff learning and streamlined feedback systems. Notably, OIP implementation status has become a standing agenda item at CMT meetings.

OUTPUT 2 Financial resources and stewardship

Analytical statement of progress:

In terms of the internal UNICEF Oman audit, the period covered was January 2014 to July 2015, with expenditures of US\$3.5 million. A total of 10 actions were agreed on at the completion of the audit to address auditors' recommendations. Two of these were high priority and are discussed further under other sections in terms of human resource management and procurement; the other eight actions were rated as medium priority.

UNICEF Oman received its full annual programme budget from the Government as other resources and utilized 100 per cent by 31 December 2015. A total of 100 per cent of institutional budget funds was also utilized. Funds utilization, including the performance of key performance indicators, was periodically monitored in CMT and Programme Management Group meetings, which has provided greater oversight and resulted in improved management of contributions and budget control. UNICEF Oman does not have direct cash transfers, nor does it participate in the United Nations harmonized approach to cash transfers.

As an interim measure, UNICEF Oman received global thematic funds from MENARO to support the implementation of school-based activities to scale up the CFS initiative in 2015, following the CFS pilot in nine schools in 2014, as well as to reinforce programme management. These were 100 per cent utilized by the end of 2015.

Bank reconciliation was prepared on a timely basis. UNICEF Headquarters approved Standard Chartered Bank Oman as a suitable bank that can expedite payment processes via an e-banking platform. UNICEF Oman is finalizing a Bank Communication Management System training. In response to audit recommendations, UNICEF Oman has agreed to strengthen oversight over processing of financial transactions, including training of staff on the use of general ledger codes.

OUTPUT 3 Human resources

Analytical statement of progress:

As a small office, UNICEF Oman was extensively supported by MENARO, which effectively extended country office capacity. UNICEF Oman recruited a professional level 4 programme manager on a fixed-term appointment; the post will be funded by MENARO regular resources for two years. In collaboration with the Staff Association, UNICEF Oman also took the opportunity of visits by regional advisors/international consultants to organize learning sessions for general staff on social policy, MICS, ECE and monitoring and evaluation as part of the implementation of the OIP.

The UNICEF Oman audit recommended that high priority be given to several actions related to the secondment of government staff as project officers, noting concerns related to selection, reporting and performance management. As a result, UNICEF Oman has agreed to define its role in the process of identifying potential secondees. Likewise, with support from the UNICEF Division of Human Resources, UNICEF Oman has agreed to clearly define mechanisms for assessing secondees' performance and to agree to these with the Government.

As another high priority, the audit recommended strengthening oversight with regard to the application of procurement controls, including the implementation of a procurement plan, the selection of contractors and recording in VISION. In response, UNICEF Oman is establishing timelines for services and reviewing the efficiency of the contracting process, among other measures. In addition, UNICEF Oman is providing guidance to ensure the proper maintenance of procurement information and timely closure of completed purchase orders and contracts. Also in response to audit recommendations, UNICEF Oman agreed to periodically review vendor master records to ascertain the validity of vendors with multiple records, ensuring that new vendors are correctly grouped.

In the absence of a formal United Nations coordination system in Oman, UNICEF facilitated a cost-of-living survey for international United Nations staff in the country and an important United Nations salary survey to contribute to the revision of local United Nations salary scales.

OUTPUT 4: Cross-sectoral

Analytical statement of progress:

Given that Oman surpassed the UNICEF regular resources threshold, the Country Programme is supported by the other resource contributions from the Government of Oman, combined with minimal support budget, as agreed in the Country Programme Document. As such, the funds under the intermediate result supplement the support budget to finance operating expenses and services to deliver Country Programme results. These include, for example, the services of drivers and a receptionist, as well as the cost of office premises and security.

OUTCOME 2: the Government of Oman establishes strategies and standards for inclusive early childhood learning and development and strategies for enhanced care at the community and family level to benefit children

Analytical statement of progress:

In Oman, the concept of integrated ECD services is gaining clear momentum for children under 6 years, a period when children develop at the most rapid pace of their lives physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. Finalization of the first National ECD Standards represented a key component of implementation in 2015 of a new ECE National Plan of Action, while enhanced child care and infant and young child feeding, like ECD, have been incorporated into a number of ground-breaking national policies (see below). All of this has been enhanced by UNICEF technical support/capacity development, including assistance to policy-makers in identifying ECE challenges and gaps, and strong advocacy.

OUTPUT 1: Capacities of key stakeholders are enhanced to establish a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism for ECD in Oman

Analytical statement of progress:

This output addresses work to ensure that multi-sectoral coordination occurs within the embedding of ECD at the forefront of the national development agenda, with a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism identified as a priority in the new National Strategy for Children, the ECE Action Plan follow-up and the National Social Work Strategy 2016–2025.

Overall, UNICEF Oman has served as an important convener of partners, with consultations throughout the ECD process involving stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, MoH, MoSD, the private sector, civil society organizations and academics. For example, in its support to the development of the National Social Work Strategy in 2015, UNICEF Oman facilitation helped to ensure that the MoSD committed to providing an organizational framework for ECD that brings different ministries, the private sector and civil society together at the decentralized level. In turn, all of this has shown the overall way forward on coordination, which has now been raised by the Ministry of Education with the National Committee for Family Affairs; a Cabinet decision is pending.

OUTCOME 3: The Government of Oman has adopted adequate strategies and costed plans to implement child rights policies and framework.

Analytical statement of progress:

The year 2015 was an important year of development planning for the Government of Oman, with key work undertaken not only on the development of the long-term Oman Vision 2040 but also on the NDP 2016–2020, the National Strategy for Children, the National Social Work Strategy, the Strategy for Prevention and Mitigation of Child Maltreatment, and others. This has led all ministries to prepare forward-looking strategic inputs to these vital plans, a process providing a critical opportunity for effective UNICEF engagement to advance child rights.

In its efforts, UNICEF Oman relied strongly on the facilitation of cross-sectoral linkages among key child rights issues, evidence generation and capacity development as primary programme strategies, which in turn were closely linked with effective results in policy dialogue. Results of these important initiatives, such as the finalized MICS and the Situation Analysis of Children, have fed into strategy development and are beginning to bolster understanding of the status of barriers and bottlenecks for the most disadvantaged children, along with their families and communities. For example, building on the MICS results, a critical gap analysis on overall data for children is underway.

OUTPUT 1: A costed scale-up plan/roadmap for the CFS initiative is developed and informed by an evaluation of CFS.

Analytical statement of progress:

This output is centred on scaling up plans and evaluation of the CFS initiative in Oman. Scaling up plans and a road map for the human rights-based approach of the CFS initiative were completed, with expansion from 9 to 24 schools and from three to five governorates in 2015. An overall CFS evaluation, nearly finalized, will confirm what type of policy decisions need to be made with regard to further informing the scale up at national level. This will identify what aspects of the initiative have been successful and where further development is necessary. Data that are still being analysed were collected through interviews, focus groups and surveys with some 475 CFS key stakeholders (teachers, students, principals, parents and directorates), as well as through field visits, observations and a desk review of documentation.