Executive Summary

As a nation with the fastest progress on the Human Development Index over the past 40 years, Oman continued to accelerate progress for the well-being of children. Highlights of progress in 2013 include:

- Approval of the draft Child Law by the Shura and State Councils, awaiting the final Royal Decree
- Inclusion of priority issues on children in the social policy pillar of the forthcoming 9th National Development Plan, reflecting the commitment of the Government to strengthen investment in human development
- Preparation of Health Vision 2050, setting long-term strategies for the health sector
- Drafting of the Law on Education

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) scoping exercise was initiated in October 2013, subsequent to the transition in UNICEF leadership. Marked by a series of high-level consultations, the exercise was timely in light of the evolving development context requiring UNICEF to reposition itself for continued engagement in the high-income country context of Oman. UNICEF and the Government have mutually recognised the need for a strategic shift, and to focus on selected priority areas where UNICEF can maximise its added value.

Two key areas emerging from the MTR consultations are early childhood development (ECD) and protection and care of children. A sub-set of result areas include nutrition, education and social welfare. Evidence and knowledge management was identified as a cross-cutting issue, highlighting the pressing need for disaggregated data to inform decision-making and policy formulation. Strategies that support Country Programme implementation include: systematic approach to exchange of experiences with other countries, communication for behaviour change and facilitation of coordination across sectors and advocacy.

The Country Programme in the post-MTR phase therefore seeks to tighten its focus towards more systematic support for policy formulation/reform and capacity development, to sustain institutional change. The fourth quarter of 2013 set the stage for the shifts: UNICEF engaged in the social policy component of the 9th National Development Plan, Health Vision 2050 and National Action Plan on Social Work, with a view to raising the profile of children’s issues at the highest level of policy dialogue. New partnerships, for example with the Supreme Council for Planning (Department of Planning), Research Council and National Commission on Human Rights were also explored to strategically situate the dialogue.

In spite of the fragmentation of activities, major programmatic achievements in 2013 included:

- Drafting of the National Action Plan on Children
- Piloting of the child-friendly schools (CFS) model in nine schools in three Governorates, envisaged to be scaled up nationwide based on the vision and roadmap to be developed in 2014
- Drafting of the ECD Standards and initiation of an ECE Investment Study
- Drafting of the Code on Breast Milk Substitutes, awaiting approval
- Initiation of the first ever MICS in Oman with the National Centre for Statistics and Information, to inform the MDG report and 9th National Development Plan with fresh data.
- Initiation of the Situation Analysis on Children and Women (SitAn).

Country Situation as Affecting Children & Women

Recognised globally as a nation making rapid progress in human development over the past 40 years, the Government of Oman has translated the fruits of growth into realising the rights of children. Progress has been founded on an increasingly robust policy framework. Highlights of progress in 2013 include:

- Approval of the draft Child Law by the Shura and State Councils, awaiting a final Royal Decree
- Drafting of the National Action Plan on Children, which will serve as one of the key pillars of the forthcoming Strategy on Social Work
- Inclusion of priority issues on children in the social policy pillar of the forthcoming 9th National Development Plan, reflecting the trend toward strengthening investment in child and human development
- Organisation of the first national conference on childhood, opening up a forum for children and young people
to identify priority issues for children in Oman
- Preparation of Health Vision 2050, setting long-term strategies for the health sector
- Drafting of the Code on Breast Milk Substitutes, awaiting approval
- Drafting of the Law on Education

In spite of the remarkable pace of development, a complex set of persistent and emerging issues continue to affect the well-being of children in Oman.

In recent years, the Government has undertaken major institutional and policy reforms, affecting key partnerships in the management of the Country Programme. The Supreme Council of Planning was established in 2012, taking on many functions formerly performed by the Ministry of Economy. The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), under the umbrella of the Supreme Council for Planning, is mandated to be the official source of statistical data, and is responsible for the interpretation and harmonisation of statistics in Oman.

Care and protection of children feature prominently as an emerging issue. The reliance of many families on external caregivers, often from other countries, as well as changes in the family structure from extended to nuclear families are having an impact on child development. Road and traffic accidents and other injuries are an increasing cause of child deaths. Limited awareness and parental guidance regarding use of the Internet is making children and young people more vulnerable to various cyber threats. Meanwhile, persistent vulnerabilities related to issues of inclusiveness, such as children with disabilities, those in contact with the law and those affected by abuse, violence and exploitation call for continued investment in institutional reform processes.

In parts of Oman, children continue to be affected by persistent nutritional problems, particularly micronutrient deficiency. Stunting among children under five is as high as 21.5 per cent in Al Wusta, compared to the national average of 9.8 per cent[1]. Some of the underlying causes are declining levels of exclusive breastfeeding, inappropriate infant and young child feeding (IYCF), inadequate dietary intake, maternal anaemia and absence of a monitoring mechanism on salt iodisation. Meanwhile, childhood obesity is becoming a problem in other areas of the country.

In education, enrolment ratios and net attendance rates for primary school are high among both boys and girls (98.6 per cent / 97.5 per cent and 101.1 per cent /101.3 per cent respectively)[2]. However, opportunities for early childhood education still remain limited, with only 41.6 per cent of children (41.95 per cent male / 41.26 per cent female) attending pre-schools[3]. The drop-out rate increases as children progress along the educational ladder, with a rate of 7.6 per cent among boys in grades 10-12[4]. Repetition rates were 3 per cent in 2009/2010. While repetition is not observed between grades 1 and 4, it is higher among girls in grades 5 and 6 and among boys in grades 8 and 10. Some of the underlying causes include challenges in teaching methodologies and approaches, motivation among teachers, the learning environment and social and cultural conditions affecting children.

Such prevailing challenges emanate from the need to make concerted efforts to close critical gaps in institutional development and policy response across all sectors. More specifically, the Mid-Term Review scoping exercise identified the following systemic issues to be further addressed to realise the rights of children in Oman: policy and results-based planning; coordination mechanisms (for cross-cutting areas such as ECD, protection and care of children, disability and nutrition); capacity of the service providers; monitoring mechanisms to further improve the quality of services; and knowledge and behaviour of families and communities. In addition, evidence for decision-making and knowledge management was identified as a critical issue to be addressed across the sectors to enable equity analysis, an inclusive approach to policies and targeted investment.

Country Programme Analytical Overview

The programming context in Oman is unique and challenging: it is a high-income country facing a combination of emerging and chronic issues affecting the well-being of children and women. The Country Programme is fully funded by the Government, with a minimal support budget from UNICEF to finance operational costs. The Office is staffed by one international professional (Representative) and a minimum number of operations staff; the technical staff are seconded from relevant line ministries of the Government. The Country Office and its programmes draw on substantial technical support from the UNICEF Regional Office and consultants.

The MTR process was initiated with a scoping exercise in late October 2013, subsequent to the transition in UNICEF leadership, with the new Representative having arrived in July 2013. Marked by a series of high-level consultations, the scoping mission was timely in light of the rapidly evolving development context and to set direction for UNICEF’s continued engagement in Oman. UNICEF and the Government have mutually recognised the need for a strategic shift, and to focus on selected priority issues where UNICEF can maximise the added value. The discussions reviewed the first half of the Country Programme, which was comprised of fragmented, small-scale activities without an overarching strategy and clear linkages between the activities, resulting in limited impact.

Two key areas emerging from the consultations were: ECD and protection and care of children. A sub-set of result areas within the two overarching areas include nutrition, education and social welfare. Evidence and knowledge management cut across the sectors to address the need to generate disaggregated data for equity analysis to inform decision-making and policy formulation. Cross-cutting strategies that support Country Programme implementation include: long-term approach to exchange of experiences with other countries, communication for behaviour change, and facilitation of coordination across sectors, advocacy and participation. The annual review meetings – serving as a critical step in the MTR consultation process of reviewing the lessons learnt from the first half of the Country Programme – confirmed the strategic shifts that will be enshrined in the 2014 Annual Work Plans. The Country Programme in the post-MTR phase will therefore sharpen its focus, to provide more systematic support to policy formulation/reform and capacity development leading to institutional change. The fourth quarter of 2013 set the stage for the shifts; UNICEF responded to a request by the Government for technical support on overarching policies, such as: the social policy component of the 9th National Development Plan, Health Vision 2050 and National Action Plan on Social Work. New partnerships – for example with the Supreme Council for Planning (Department of Planning), Research Council and National Commission on Human Rights – were also explored, to bring the issues and dialogue to strategic entities and levels within the Government. Collaboration with the Planning Departments in each line Ministry was also strengthened, in line with the shift towards support to policies and strategies.

**Humanitarian Assistance**
- NA -

**Effective Advocacy**

*Partially met benchmarks*

**Capacity Development**
**UNICEF Annual Report 2013 – Oman**

**Partially met benchmarks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication for Development</td>
<td>Initiating action to meet benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Fully met benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Partnerships</td>
<td>Mostly met benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Management</td>
<td>Mostly met benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Based Approach to Cooperation</td>
<td>Partially met benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
<td>Partially met benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Sustainability</td>
<td>Initiating action to meet benchmarks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
South-South and Triangular Cooperation

Discussions during the MTR scoping exercise reflected Government interest in establishing a long-term exchange with other countries (including with non-programming countries) in selected areas, as well as to share its own experience as a high-income country that has made considerable social progress in the last 40 years. A visit to Chile on the Social Observatory was postponed due to elections in Chile, but discussions have resumed.
### Narrative Analysis by Programme Component Results and Intermediate Results

**Oman - 6350**

#### PC 1 - Early childhood development and health

**On-track**

**PCR 6350/AO/05/801 1.1** By 2015, 50 per cent of children between 3.5 to 5.5 years of age from families benefiting from social grant scheme are able to access quality early childhood education.

**Progress:**

Presently, just over 40 per cent of all children in Oman attend pre-school, regardless of participation in social benefit schemes. However, Oman has observed an expansion of the sector, with a sharp increase in the number of children (from 4,973 in 2005/2006 to 15,136 in 2010/2011); an almost an equal number of boys and girls attend these programmes[1]. This expansion provided the Ministry of Education with an incentive to match the increasing numbers with a quality curriculum characterised by its developmentally appropriate content. The Ministry of Education is now planning to integrate Early Childhood Education (ECE) into the national education system. Given that ECE is an emerging issue, there is limited evidence to support the development of a legislative and policy framework, standards and costing. Thus UNICEF was asked to support the key determinant analysis, including a thorough situation assessment of underlying and structural causes, policy analysis and options for new financing mechanisms, as well as cost-benefit analysis of ECE programmes and services that will all contribute towards strengthening institutional capacity to deliver ECE services and awareness among parents and communities.

During the annual review meetings it was agreed that a strategic target will be defined to strengthen coherence across ECE-related initiatives. Thus UNICEF’s 2014 Annual Work Plan seeks to improve the sequencing of the initiatives, leading to higher-level results. Furthermore, ECE-related initiatives are envisaged to serve as a major contribution towards the Early Childhood Development approach, based on multi-sectoral collaboration. The indicators for this outcome will be better defined through the Mid-Term Review consultation process, to reflect the strategic shifts.


**On-track**

**IR 6350/AO/05/801/001 1.1.1** By 2015 a policy on early childhood development with a monitorable plan of action is implemented;

**Progress:**

Data collection for the Early Childhood Education Investment Study was completed, and is serving as the basis for a desk review and ECE SitAn to support advocacy around the importance of investing in ECE.

The draft ECE Standards were developed based on a desk review of existing literature and policy documents. The objectives of the ECE Standards are to formulate national policies and guidelines, establish a legal framework that guides and validates the provisions of ECE programmes and to consolidate and systematise existing ECE-related laws, programmes and activities. The draft Standards were presented at a consultation workshop in 2013, to be followed by a validation workshop in 2014 to finalise the document.

Development of the national Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy was postponed to 2014, following completion of the ECD investment study and approval of the ECD Standards.

**On-track**

**IR 6350/AO/05/801/002 1.1.2** By 2015, CBOs and 40 per cent of first cycle schools in three remote Governorates promote Early childhood development & care

**Progress:**

The Early Childhood Education Communication Strategy was drafted, aiming to strengthen: awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Development, available services and parental capacities to care for their young children at home.

**On-track**

**PCR 6350/AO/05/804 1.2** By 2015 The Government of Oman is better able to provide quality child health and nutrition services in all regions of Oman.

**Progress:**

Health Vision 2050 was drafted to set the long-term strategic direction and plan for the health sector in Oman. Ten studies to document progress, lessons learnt and good practices in Oman’s health sector over the past decades were completed as background documents to construct the new vision. In addition, 22 strategic studies were undertaken to underpin the vision and actions for sub-sector priority issues. Towards late 2013. UNICEF was requested to provide technical support to the review of nine strategic studies and the Health
Vision 2050, in preparation for a major consultative meeting in March 2014, marking the strategic shift of the partnership towards a more policy-oriented arena.

Nutrition is among the priorities of the draft Health Vision 2050, as a response to the persistent pockets of micronutrient deficiencies affecting children. The National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan is being drafted with a view to strengthening a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition issues and set a strategic direction for the coming five years. The MoH has requested technical support from UNICEF to refine the Strategy and Action Plan, the monitoring and evaluation framework and costing as a key focus in the 2014 Annual Work Plan.

While acknowledging the remarkable progress of the health sector in delivering services to all parts of Oman, awareness-raising was identified in the MTR scoping exercise as critical to improving caring practices that lies at the heart of stagnating trends in nutrition. A strategy on communication for development (C4D) is urgently needed to address the demand-side issues and social determinants of health to further accelerate progress.

The strategic shifts via the Mid-Term Review are therefore a prerequisite for re-positioning UNICEF to respond to the pressing needs of the Ministry, and maximising UNICEF’s comparative advantage in high-impact interventions. The transition from the fragmented output-level results captured below was discussed extensively throughout the MTR process as well as at annual review meetings.

Constrained

IR 6350/A0/05/804/002 1.2.1 By 2015, 80 per cent of health centres in 2 Governorates have an integrated referral system on early screening and referral of childhood disability and morbidity;

**Progress:**

Preparatory steps (including the preparation of the work plan and identification of technical expertise) were taken to develop clinical guidelines for Down Syndrome.

The updating of the standard operating procedures (developed in 1995) on developmental assessment of children during the first five years of life and screening for and detecting developmental delays was postponed due to challenges in selecting appropriate technical expertise.

As identified in discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and annual review meetings, progress on this IR was constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to the overall results and strategies, and where UNICEF may have less of a comparative advantage.

On-track

IR 6350/A0/05/804/004 1.2.2 By 2015, health care providers in 6 governorates follow new neonatal guidelines (including Neonatal Resuscitation and the promotion of breastfeeding);

**Progress:**

A Code on Breast Milk Substitutes was drafted to strengthen the regulatory framework that supports exclusive breastfeeding. An advocacy workshop on the revised code and related technical training was postponed pending final approval of the code.

A knowledge/attitudes/behaviour/perception survey related to Oman’s food-based dietary guidelines was postponed. It is expected that the results of this survey will feed into a strategy to support demand-creation for appropriate services.

A planned survey of universal salt iodisation for the Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) elimination programme was also postponed, pending approval from the ethical committee.

No Progress

IR 6350/A0/05/804/005 1.2.3 By 2015, MoH decision makers integrate the social determinants of health into national plans related to child health and malnutrition in Oman

**Progress:**

The activity under this output (monitoring of stages 1 and 2 of the Plan of Action for IYCF) was cancelled based on mutual agreement between the Ministry of Health and UNICEF.

As identified in discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and annual review meetings, the lack of progress under this IR was due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to overall results and strategies.

PC 2 - Child protection

On-track

PCR 6350/A0/05/802 2.1 By 2015 the Government of Oman is better able to develop, implement, and enforce evidence based policies geared towards the protection of children and adolescents from violence, exploitation, and abuse
Progress:

During the Mid-Term Review consultations, care and protection of children was identified as a critical emerging issue affecting children in Oman today. The rapid socio-economic and cultural transition is associated with increased risks, such as physical security on roads, the Internet and changes in family structures – often emanating from life-style issues – that pose unprecedented challenges to the existing institutional capacity to protect children. Meanwhile, the Government continues to sustain focus on persistent issues such as disability. A notable challenge in Oman with respect to care and protection of children is the absence of data and indicators to formulate targeted policies on vulnerable communities, families and children, resulting in weak impact and development outcomes. There are also challenges related to a lack of expertise in communication strategies to raise the awareness of families and communities to reach unreached children. A major institutional challenge is the absence of mechanisms to coordinate the work of the relevant line ministries, resulting in duplication of efforts and lack of links between initiatives; for example, in responding to disabilities and notification and referral of children affected by violence and abuse.

Discussions during the MTR scoping exercise suggested that issues such as evidence-generation and monitoring and communication for awareness raising in relation to care and protection should be addressed in a multi-sectoral manner, drawing on existing coordination mechanisms. Discussions are also underway with Government entities, such as the Research Council and National Human Rights Commissions, to maximise their cross-sectoral mandates and achieve strategic results.

On-track

IR 6350/A0/05/802/001 2.1.1 By 2015, 80 per cent of professionals across sectors working in regional teams (task forces) manage cases of child abuse according to the national guidelines;

Progress:

The training-of-trainers (ToT) package on child abuse at health centres was developed and is awaiting finalisation prior to roll-out. A scoping mission on training in monitoring child abuse cases was undertaken to strengthen the capacity of Government to plan the next steps.

Constrained

IR 6350/A0/05/802/002 2.1.2 By 2014, the quality of community-based services for children with disabilities is improved

Progress:

Desk review of the teachers’ training was completed, and informed the content of the workshop and manuals. The first phase of teacher training was completed, strengthening the pedagogical skills of teachers from 11 Governorates to deliver quality, interactive teaching for young children. Discussions between the Ministry of Education and UNICEF confirmed the need to clarify the long-term goals and expected results from the teacher training. The possibility of building a national institution serving as a centre for excellence for Oman and the region to scale-up the training is under consideration.

Phase 1 training on the Portage Programme was completed to strengthen the capacity of national cadres at the Al Wafa Centres on issues related to parental involvement and home-based care for disabled children.

A regional TOT workshop to promote the Convention for Persons with Disability was re-scheduled to January 2014 due to the availability of technical expertise.

The adaptation of cognitive and career diagnostic tests for children with disabilities and the planned assessment of services for blind children were cancelled based on mutual agreement between the Ministry of Education and UNICEF due to the proposed budget, which went beyond the financial capacity of the Country Programme.

The production of home-based care manuals on disabled children was also cancelled based on the mutual agreement with the Ministry of Social Development and UNICEF, given the need to divert critical resources to strategic initiatives, namely the National Action Plan on Social Work.

While some activities took place, progress on this IR was constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to overall results and strategies, and for which UNICEF may have less of a comparative advantage.

On-track

IR 6350/A0/05/802/004 2.1.3 By End -2014, the Child Friendly School (CFS) model is piloted in 3 Governorates, documented and lessons identified for taking to scale

Progress:

The child-friendly school (CFS) model was piloted in nine schools in three governorates, resulting in a better-structured approach to teaching and implementation of child rights and monitoring the quality of education using indicators. Parents and communities now participate more actively in school management. Approved in 2012, thirteen standards for CFS are now being integrated into the national education system. A national working team has the capacity to deliver CFS approaches and provide feedback to the central level about challenges (e.g., abuse, teacher training, curriculum). The Ministry of Education now has the capacity to collect data for equity, quality and undertake bottleneck analysis, and to align education sector indicators with indicators for CFS standards.
Strong commitment of the Ministry of Education facilitated identification of the critical steps required to scale-up CFS to all schools in Oman, which will be formulated into a roadmap in 2014.

Technical guidelines for school nurses on school environment and occupational hazards was cancelled based on mutual agreement between the MoH and UNICEF, due to the need to divert critical resources towards strategic initiatives.

**On-track**

**IR 6350/A0/05/802/005 2.2.1** By 2015, 50 per cent of stakeholders and community leaders are able to effectively communicate on CRC in Oman including prevention of harmful practices;

**Progress:**
Regional trainings on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) resulted in strengthened awareness of regional teams on the Convention.

CRC has been mainstreamed into other activities. For example, the CFS initiative also provided an opportunity for teachers and students in three pilot governorates to strengthen their knowledge and awareness about children’s rights. The CRC is actively discussed in classroom settings and at parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings.

**Constrained**

**IR 6350/A0/05/802/006 2.2.2** By 2014, adolescents peer educators and counsellors in 4 Governorates are knowledgeable on life skills relevant to their lives including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention

**Progress:**
Youth counselling guidelines on risky behaviours were prepared and the capacity of selected health workers were developed to provide services to young people.

Information, education and communication materials about HIV were developed to promote societal awareness.

Development of the "Facts for Life" website was cancelled based on mutual agreement between the Ministry of Health and UNICEF.

As was identified during discussions at the MTR scoping exercise and annual review meetings, the progress of this IR was constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to overall results and strategies, and where UNICEF may have less comparative advantage.

**No Progress**

**IR 6350/A0/05/802/007 IR 2.2.3** Strengthened national capacity to develop comprehensive interventions on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention for adolescents between the ages of 15 to 24 - girls and boys - by 2015

**Progress:**
There are currently no activities under the IR; deactivation will be confirmed through the MTR

**No Progress**

**IR 6350/A0/05/802/008 I.R 2.1.4** By Mid-2014 The Omani Child law is in effect

**Progress:**
There are currently no activities under the IR; deactivation will be confirmed through the MTR

---

**PC 3 - Data and knowledge management**

**On-track**

**PCR 6350/A0/05/803 PCR 3.1** By 2015, the GoO is better able to collect, analyse, and disseminate gender- and age-disaggregated data on the situation of women and children

**Progress:**
Subsequent to the restructuring of the Supreme Council of Planning, which took over many functions of the former Ministry of National Economy, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), was mandated to be the official source of statistical data, and is responsible for the interpretation and harmonisation of statistics in Oman. The Chief Executive Officer of National Centre for Statistics and Information was formally appointed in early January 2014. serving under the Supreme Council of Planning.
Administrative data from routine systems are collected by line ministries, such as the ministries of Health and Education. Data is available down to the wilayat level (below Governorate), where disparities can be observed; however, the administrative boundaries are not consistent across ministries. Before the restructuring, the Department of Administrative Statistics under NCSI coordinated the regular compilation of administrative data from line ministries; however after NCSI’s institutional reform processes, it is not clear whether administrative data from the sectors are systematically shared with NCSI.

No national social surveys are conducted on a regular basis. Hence, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) would be an important source to make comprehensive data on children available for aggregation at the national level. A Memorandum of Understanding on the first-ever MICS in Oman was signed with the NCSI to initiate the Survey. MICS will generate data against key social indicators and will contribute towards Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reporting, as well as the formulation of Oman’s 9th National Development Plan.

Limited availability of sub-national data (below the Governorate level) is a major challenge to equity analysis and targeted investments, as well as to evidence-based planning. In a series of discussions, analytical capacity as well as dissemination, presentation and packaging of data to support advocacy with decision-makers were identified as areas in need of further technical support.

Evidence and knowledge management emerged as key priorities and strategies across the sectors during the Mid Term Review dialogue with line Ministries.

**On-track**

**IR 6350/A0/05/803/002 3.1.1** Government and CSOs have better capacity in management information systems, and monitoring and evaluation systems at national and sub-national levels on child-related issues

**Progress:**

The capacity of key staff at NCSI was developed to design, plan and manage Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. In 2013 a sampling frame, survey plan and survey methodology application were developed, a full-time survey coordinator was deployed to NCSI, the household listing was updated and training of enumerators and piloting was underway.

The preparatory steps for the Situation Analysis were agreed between NCSI and UNICEF. The SitAn will provide critical evidence to guide the priorities in the MTR process, as well as priorities for children in the 9th National Development Plan. It will be updated more thoroughly in late 2014, incorporating MICS data, followed by a data gap analysis that will support advocacy around the need for high-quality disaggregated data to facilitate equity analysis and policy formulation.

In 2013 a scoping exercise on the information observatory on children with disabilities was conducted, reviewing the existing data collection mechanisms. A key recommendation arising from the exercise was the need for a cross-sectoral approach, drawing on the mandates and work of the relevant line ministries (education, health and social development). The draft roadmap will be discussed to identify an appropriate ministry to lead the subsequent steps.

The analysis of the Observatory on Education and Vocational Training & Employment was finalised, resulting in approval for the establishment of an observatory that will provide strategic information to policy-makers, managers of education and training institutions, employers, guidance and counselling personnel and individuals seeking orientation in education, training and employment.

Activities around the Oman Child Well-Being Index were suspended based on mutual agreement between NCSI and UNICEF, due to challenges in technical feasibility, in particular the limited availability of data disaggregated at the sub-national level and lack of digitised boundaries.

A cognitive test on disability was completed and was awaiting translation at end-2013.

Based on the agreement between Ministry of Social Development and UNICEF, the activity on geographical information systems was incorporated into the M&E component of the National Action Plan on Social Work.

**No Progress**

**IR 6350/A0/05/803/003 IR 3.1.2** By 2015, more equity and vulnerability analysis to identify the causes of underlying trends and disparities – inclusive of gender-based analysis are disseminated.

**Progress:**

There are currently no activities under this IRs; deactivation will be confirmed through the MTR

**On-track**

**PCR 6350/A0/05/805 PCR 3.2** By 2015, an integrated Social policy addressing the rights of women and children is developed with adequate resources allocated

**Progress:** The Government of Oman embarked on two major initiatives that marked the prioritisation of social development issues in the national development agenda. Firstly, the Supreme Council of Planning identified social policy (focussing on human development) as one of the two pillars of the 9th National Development Plan, along with the diversification of economy. Secondly, the Ministry of Social Development initiated preparatory steps towards the development of the National Action Plan on Social Work – an organisational vision
and policy framework for the Ministry over the coming 10 years covering aspects related to social welfare and protection.

As a result of strategic advocacy with the Supreme Council of Planning and the Ministry of Social Development, UNICEF provided technical input to the process. A paper entitled “Strategic Agenda on Children in Social Policy” summarising the key priorities related to children prepared by UNICEF was well received at the national conference in late December to review the draft social policy report, and raised the profile of children’s issues.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Social Development to initiate the preparatory steps towards development of a national Action Plan on Social Work. With a view to empowering families, women, children and other groups to identify sustainable measures to realise their rights, the strategy would be founded on the four overarching components: social care, social development, human resource development and civil society development. National Action Plans on Women, Children and Disability will also form the core pillars. The engagement of UNICEF in the preparatory phases of the National Action Plan on Social Work marked its engagement with the Ministry of Social Development at a more strategic level, re-affirming the need to reduce fragmentation, as observed in the activities under AWP 2013 noted below.

**On-track**

**IR 6350/A0/05/805/003** 3.2.1 National Plan of Action for children/child strategy, with specific focus on child vulnerabilities at both national and sub-national levels is developed;

**Progress:**

In 2013 UNICEF supported strategic initiatives to strengthen the institutional framework for implementation of national policies and principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The Omani Child Law was drafted and approved by the Shura and State Council, and is now waiting the issuance of a Royal Decree.

The National Action Plan on Children was drafted to upgrade services, programmes and activities. The Action Plan is envisaged to be finalised in 2014, and will serve as one of the key pillars of the forthcoming strategy on social work. UNICEF also supported preparatory steps toward reviewing and refining the draft Action Plan on Disabilities for further action in 2014.

The first national conference on childhood was organised, opening up a forum for children and young people to identify priority issues for children in Oman.

Training was conducted to strengthen the capacity of the National Committee on CRC, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities to draft State Party reports on international human rights treaties.

**Constrained**

**IR 6350/A0/05/805/004** 3.2.2 Child budget allocations are better understood and analysed;

**Progress:**

The study on child budgeting in Oman was completed, but provided recommendations that were not compatible with the country’s public finance mechanism. However, the indicators developed for this project will be relevant to the forthcoming National Action Plan on Social Work and also inform the costing exercise across various sectors.

As was identified in discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and annual review meetings, progress on this IR was constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to overall results and strategies or in alignment with Government priorities and systems.

**Constrained**

**IR 6350/A0/05/805/005** 3.2.3 Enhanced capacity at national and sub-national level to plan, implement and monitor programmes to address child vulnerability.

**Progress:**

Upon consultation between the Ministry of Social Development and UNICEF, and reflecting the strategic shifts emerging from the MTR dialogue, the resources reserved for social policy training for MoSD officials were diverted to support the scoping exercise on the formulation of the National Action Plan on Social Work, to ensure a more strategic approach towards social work and, subsequently, the required capacity to deliver quality services and protection.

As identified in discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and annual review meetings, progress on IR was constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to overall results and strategies, or in alignment with Government priorities and systems. The IR was, however, revitalised and a new direction was set; i.e., to provide technical support for the preparation of the National Action Plan on Social Work.
The Annual Management Plan developed in consultation with staff and approved by the Country Management Team (CMT), sets the objectives and priorities. In 2013, the CMT met eight times to monitor implementation of programme and financial resources, operational matters and human resource development, in line with the indicators. Periodic programme management meetings took place throughout the year to monitor progress and address emerging issues. The terms of reference and membership for the Central Review Body, Contract Review Committee and Property Survey Board were reviewed. Work processes were also reviewed to further strengthen efficiency in processes and quality assurance linked to programme results. The Business Continuity Plan (BCP) was updated and followed by a simulation. Support budget under the IR was utilised to enable effective management and operational support to the Country Programme.

IR 6350/A0/05/800/002 Financial Resources and Stewardship

Progress:

Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION) role-mapping was developed to clarify responsibilities of staff members. While the Country Office does not receive Regular Resources (RR) given that Oman surpassed the threshold, the Government funds the Country Programme through Other Resources (OR) funding, as agreed in the Country Programme Document. Ninety-nine per cent of the funds were committed in 2013, and progress on resource utilisation and programme implementation was monitored during CMT meetings. The Country Office undertook a bank survey to identify an appropriate bank and improve efficiency. Cost-saving measures were implemented; for example, through shared premises and out-sourcing of support services. The resources under this IR were used to finance operating expenses and services to deliver the Country Programme results. These include, for example, on-site ICT support, communication services, ancillary services and office supplies.

IR 6350/A0/05/800/003 Human Capacity

Progress:

There is currently nothing to report under the IR, it will be reviewed during the MTR.

IR 6350/A0/05/800/888 HR

Progress:

There is currently nothing to report under the IR, it will be reviewed during the MTR.

IR 6350/A0/05/800/889 cross-sectoral

Progress:

Given that Oman surpassed UNICEF’s RR threshold, the Country Programme is supported by OR contributions from the Government of Oman, combined with a minimal support budget, as agreed in the Country Programme Document. As such, the funds under this IR supplement the support budget to finance operating expenses and services to deliver the Country Programme results. These include, for example, the services of drivers and a receptionist as well as the cost of office premises.

PCR 6350/A0/05/806 Effective and Efficient programme management and operations support.

Progress:

Cross-sectoral funds cover salaries of a programme assistant and support staff on institutional contracts and operating expenses,
security, office rent and communication.
Effective Governance Structure

a) The Office objectives and priorities were clearly defined in a comprehensive annual management plan adopted after the annual management review for 2012, in which all staff participated. The plan was finalised by the Country Management Team. It covers the Core Commitments on Children (CCCs) and includes detailed emergency response mechanisms; the selection of priorities was guided by the emergency risk management (ERM) policy and framework.
b) Oversight structures are in place and functioning. The CMT, which includes UNICEF staff and the four Government-seconded project officers, is the main oversight body. It met eight times during 2013. The annual management review will take place in January 2014. In addition, the Office established terms of reference and membership for the Central Review Body, Contract Review Committee and Property Survey Board.
c) The key performance indicators for the annual management plan, which include programmatic and operational priorities, were strengthened with the addition of indicators on gender equity. An Office Improvement Plan was developed based on the performance and experience of the Country Office this year. It covers staff learning and development, performance management and feedback, staff well-being and programme effectiveness.
d) CMT management indicators are used for monthly monitoring of (1) financial implementation/budget utilisation and resource/contribution management; (2) operations management (personnel advances recoverable and outstanding), (3) human resources management, including office learning activities; (4) information technology; and (5) major programme management/implementation issues to address any constraints and challenges.
e) The Country Office received a ‘satisfactory’ rating for governance at the 2009 internal audit.

Strategic Risk Management

a and b): The Office maintains and updates the Risk Control Library (last updated in September 2013). The matrix details the action plan and actions taken to mitigate identified risks.
c) There were no emergency situations in Oman in 2013. Emergency preparedness is ensured through the Early Warning /Early Action system for which information was updated in December 2013. In cooperation with the three other UN agencies in Oman (WHO, UNFPA, FAO), the Country Office maintains close relations with relevant Government agencies (such as the Disaster Management Committee and Oman Charitable Organisation) on readiness to provide humanitarian assistance in case of an emergency. The Core Commitments for Children were shared with counterparts, and strong partnerships are maintained with Civil Defence, Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
d) The Business Continuity Plan was updated on 30 Sept 2013, following testing and simulation on 26 September. Accountabilities of programme staff in business continuity issues were defined, for example in relation to identification of relevant partnerships and needs for supplies, programme communication/ advocacy and technical support at the onset of crisis. The Security Risk Assessment is updated periodically, and fully reflects mechanisms in the event of a sudden need for humanitarian intervention to ensure that potential risks are appropriately calculated.
e) The planned shift in the Country Programme’s emphasis, beginning in January 2014 and continuing through the Mid-Term Review, was designed to respond to the current internal and external operating environment.

Evaluation

a) Major surveys, studies and research undertaken by line ministries with UNICEF support – such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Situation Analyses – were compiled in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP). In the programmatic areas, desk reviews and analyses were conducted to inform the scope of work. Data, evidence and knowledge management were identified as critical cross-cutting priorities during the MTR scoping exercise. The Office will place greater emphasis on strengthening the IMEP and its monitoring in 2014.
b) The Office did not support any evaluations in 2013 given the timing of the programme cycle and national development plan, in addition to the limited programming capacity of the Office. The Office envisages at least
one major evaluation in 2015, after the programmatic shifts are endorsed by the Government through the MTR process, and prior to the development of the new CPD. The identification of a programmatic area to be evaluated will be selected in consultation with the Government and Regional Office.

b) Given the high-income programming context of Oman, priority is placed on national capacity development, including in the area of evaluation. In 2013 the Office benefited from the visit of the Regional Adviser on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) to strengthen the capacity of Government project officers in M&E.

c) The Office is supported by the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Hub in the Regional Office. Core business applications, mainly VISION and Lotus Notes, are accessed remotely using various IT tools such as Citrix, virtual private network (VPN) client and Win Term.

d) There are no Long-Term Agreements.

e) Members of the Property Survey Board discussed and agreed on various options to dispose of equipment, including: recycling of old files by the municipality, donation of publications to the ministries, donation of ICT equipment to various organisations (Oman Centre Association/Early Intervention for Special Needs, orphanages, Oman Charitable Organisation). Where no appropriate donees are identified, the items will be sent for destruction.

f) Information Technology (IT) support is provided by the Regional ICT Hub at the Regional Office; core business applications, VISION and Lotus Notes, are accessed remotely using Office IPSec connection, Citrix, and the VPN client. The regional ICT Hub is also managing overall ICT functions for the Country Office remotely, and the Regional Hub IT Officer conducted two visits in 2013 to provide on-site support for proper functioning and reliability of IT resources and infrastructure. On-site support is provided by a local service provider in Oman.

The Office has a standard ICT infrastructure consistent with the organisational IT policy. Connectivity is provided through 4MB leased lines from the only local Internet service provider in Oman (OmanTel), and Wireless Internet access is provided for guests and visitors using a dedicated 2MB ADSL link from the Omantel. HQ rollouts were applied on time. Computer hardware is in line with UNICEF’s configuration standards and meets current requirements/specifications.

Business Continuity BGAN Satellite terminals and Thuraya sets are available to be utilised for voice and data connectivity in case of emergency. Corporate e-mail access over BlackBerry and Smart phones were maintained for staff. The Office promoted the use of free tools such as VOIP, Skype, and Webex for daily work to achieve cost-savings.

Fund-raising and Donor Relations

The Government of Oman is the sole donor to the Country Programme and provides an annual contribution, as specified in the Country Programme Document, leaving no gaps in the Other Resources (OR) ceiling. In 2013, 99 per cent of the funds were committed; however, the implementation rate tended to accelerate in the last quarter, indicating the need to strengthen planning and monitoring of annual work plans, in close consultation with Government partners. At the annual review meeting, it was agreed that mid-year and
annual review meetings will be a requirement in 2014, to monitor implementation and make needed adjustments, as well as to strengthen oversight and quality control. The Country Office seeks to realise the initial recommendations arising from the MTR scoping exercise to focus on strategic areas of work to which UNICEF could best add value, and continue to enhance the programme planning function via a better-focused and structured annual work plan. The Country Office prepares an annual donor report for the Government. A mutual agreement has been reached to submit the donor report in the second quarter of 2014 to reflect the strategic shifts endorsed at the MTR. The four programme officers seconded by the Government also prepare and submit quarterly progress reports on programme implementation, financial status and results achieved to their respective Ministries.

**Management of Financial and Other Assets**

a) For the most recent internal audit (2009), the Country Office received a partially satisfactory rating for operations. All observations were closed as of 2011.

b) At the 2013 annual review meeting, the planned resources and results were critically reviewed, in preparation for the strategic shifts to be made at the Mid-Term Review. Based on the lessons learnt from a fragmented annual work plan, the Government and UNICEF mutually agreed that the 2014 AWP will be developed to reflect selected strategic initiatives where UNICEF can best add value to the well-being of children in Oman. Plans are underway to review and re-articulate the results framework and indicators as part of the MTR exercise, with a view to bringing more focus and coherence to the programme targets and results. Internal mechanisms to strengthen planning – for example through thorough review of the draft AWPs by senior management and Government project officers, formulating and refining AWP monitoring indicators and setting deadlines for submission of all TORs in the first quarter – have now been put in place, under the oversight of CMT.

c) The Country Management Team monitors budget utilisation on a monthly basis. Programme meetings took place throughout the year to monitor programme implementation and budget utilisation, as well as to address any need for follow up. Financial procedures are in order. Bank reconciliation is done in a timely manner and is in order. The Country Office undertook an in-country bank survey to identify a suitable bank for the UNICEF Office, and approval was received. The survey focused on the fees for services, credit for deposits, electronic banking options, requirements, controls and recommended stages, availability of branches and ATM machines, in-house tellers, quality/cordial service record of the bank and payroll services for staff. The Office completed a rating matrix sheet of all banks surveyed. A proposal for an e-banking platform to facilitate payments to partners and other payees within 48 hours was also approved. The Country Office will start to use the new bank in 2014.

d) While the Country Office does not receive Regular Resources (RR), given that Oman surpassed the threshold, the Government funds the Country Programme through Other Resources (OR) funding as agreed in the Country Programme Document. While 99 per cent of the funds were committed in 2013, a sharp increase in the utilisation rate was observed in the fourth quarter, indicating the need to strengthen planning and monitoring of the AWP, early finalisation of TORs and identification of qualified consultants.

e) See section on efficiency and cost-savings below.

**Supply Management**

Given the context of Oman, where the Government seeks a technical and advisory role from UNICEF, the supply component focuses almost exclusively on institutional and individual consultants that provide capacity development support to the line ministries. The total value of technical support (via institutional and individual contracts) was US$865,357.61. There was a small amount of related local procurement (supplies for workshops, trainings, etc.). In 2013 the Country Office undertook a small amount of offshore procurement of supplies to support implementation of the MICS, including salt test kits, height boards and weighing scales (total value: US$3,595) to ensure alignment with global standards. The MICS supplies were procured in close coordination with the Regional Office and based on lessons learnt from other countries that have conducted related surveys in the past.

In addition, based on an ongoing agreement with the Ministry of Health, the Country Office facilitated the reimbursable procurement of Vitamin A capsules and cold-chain equipment valued at $24,028.96.
The Office does not have long-term agreements for office supplies and other local procurement, but issues tenders for supplies as needed. The local market is well developed to procure, for example, office stationery and furniture and ICT equipment; however, it offers limited resources to support quality control of the programme, for example translation/interpretation and monitoring services.

Since the Country Programme does not have a service delivery component, the Country Office does not have a supply officer and there is no collaboration with other UN agencies on supply and logistics; there is no in-country warehousing, logistics or delivery to end-users; no requirement for innovative supply and technical solutions. The Country Office does not provide in-kind support.

**Human Resources**

a) The structure of the Country Office is unique. It has one International Professional (IP, the Representative), a few operations staff and four project officers seconded by the relevant line ministries. Management of secondment mechanisms will be further discussed with the Government during the MTR. A national communication for development (C4D) officer post remains vacant, although the post was advertised four times. The Office draws on support from the Regional Office and technical consultants to deliver quality results. In 2013, the Country Office benefited from the support of regional advisers and specialists in the area of programme planning, social policy, monitoring and evaluation, nutrition, information technology and communication, and C4D. With a view to filling critical gaps in programme coordination, planning and social policy, an IP was brought in as staff, on loan as programme coordinator; i.e, to support the Office to prepare for the MTR and accelerate programme implementation. Despite the short timeframe, the continued need for such a function has been acknowledged by the Government as critical to strengthen planning, quality control and coherence of the Country Programme.

b) A Human Resource Development plan was developed based on the continued priority placed on capacity development in the high-income context of Oman. An Office Improvement Plan was developed and was identified as a key area for staff learning, particularly in relation to business process efficiency. Programme Processes and Procedures training was undertaken. In 2014 the Country Office aims to focus on a few office-wide training initiatives linked to the Country Programme Document to enable the effective delivery of programme results.

An analysis of low implementation of individual learning initiatives highlighted the need to link learning initiatives to the priorities of the annual work plans and strategic shifts of the MTR, diversifying the approach to learning and reviewing the progress interactively via periodic Performance Evaluation Reports (PER) discussions.

The Office undertook a salary survey resulting in 5 per cent increase in salary for General Services staff and 7 per cent for National Officers. The net annual allowances, as well as first and second language allowance, were increased.


The housing survey took place in October 2013, to review the costs of housing and domestic services.

c) Emergency preparedness and response are part of the annual management plan. While the Office does not have a dedicated emergency specialist post, it draws on support from the Regional Office.

e) Staff are aware of locally available staff counselling resources. The office currently has no stress management committee but has a peer support volunteer and a focal point for sexual exploitation and abuse.

f) The Office implemented the 10 minimum standards on HIV in the workplace.
Efficiency Gains and Cost Savings

UNICEF and UNFPA continue to pursue joint premises for cost-efficiency purposes. US$ 12,000 was saved in the rental fee of office premises.

Cost-savings of US$ 3,500 were achieved when the Country Office introduced staggered working hours for drivers to cut back on overtime costs. Utilisation of office vehicles and drivers during weekends and holidays is kept to an absolute minimum. As a result, there has been an overall reduction in operating costs.

The cross-sectoral budget covers salaries and training of programme staff, and salaries of bilingual secretary, **security** guards and two drivers on institutional contract. An estimated US$ 12,000 was saved on office security compared to the previous 2012.

With respect to programmatic initiatives, the unique programming context of Oman enables engagement of highly qualified and committed technical experts while respecting the UNICEF rules and regulations. For example, a senior consultant offered to provide technical support to the Mid Term Review (MTR) scoping exercise on a pro-bono basis (i.e. the cost of only Daily Subsistence Allowance and travel was covered).

Changes in AMP & CPMP

The 2014 Annual Management Plan will be developed after the annual management review meeting scheduled to take place in January 2014. The AMP will be revised in mid-2014 to incorporate improvements regarding management mechanisms and processes that will support the follow-up of strategic shifts at mid-term review and timely implementation of programme priorities.

Summary Notes and Acronyms

AMP - Annual Management Plan
AWP - Annual Work Plan
BCP - Business Continuity Plan
CCC - Core Commitments on Children
CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CFS - Child-Friendly Schools
CMT - Country Management Team
CO - Country Office
CPD - Country Programme Document
CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DaO - Delivering as One
ECD - Early Childhood Development
ECE - Early Childhood Education
ERM - Enterprise Risk Management
HRD - Human Resource Development
ICT - Information & Communication Technology
IMEP - Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
LTA - Long Term Agreement
MDGs - Millennium Development Goals
MENARO - Middle East and North Africa Regional Office
MICS - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoH - Ministry of Health
MTR - Mid-Term Review
NCSI - National Centre for Statistics and Information
OR - Other Resources
PER - Performance Evaluation Reports
PPP - Programme Processes and Procedures
PSB - Property Survey Board
RR - Regular Resources
SRA - Security Risk Assessment
ToR - Terms of Reference
VISION - Virtual Integrated System of Information