The Sultanate of Oman

Executive Summary

Oman is one of a very few countries that has both joined the high-income category and also experienced rapid human development with a strong degree of equity. This progress has resulted in steep reductions in child mortality (by 82 per cent, to 9 per 1,000 live births), as well as universal child immunization, universal primary education and significant action to address the rights of women, who comprise 22 per cent of the labour force.

In 2014, Oman ranked 56 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index, while also facing important vulnerabilities. Finding the right development niche in response to this unique development context – and thereby bringing equity and maximum benefit to children – has not been easy. Approximately half of children under 5 have mild anaemia. One in 10 infants has low birth weight. In addition, 11 per cent of boys and 6 per cent of girls under 6 months suffer from stunting, with wide regional variations, and less than one third of children under 6 months are exclusively breastfed.

However, 2014 proved to be a rich and transformational year for UNICEF Oman, with the successful culmination of longstanding programmatic and advocacy efforts. This not only considerably expanded the UNICEF Oman dialogue/decision-making with the Government on resources, but also made an important contribution to the ‘how’ of UNICEF programming in a high-income country context, with important implications for similar countries.

The comprehensive Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Country Programme 2012-2015 offered space to elevate the Government-UNICEF Oman partnership to a new strategic level. Consequently, UNICEF undertook ground breaking engagement in a reshaped programme environment. During the review, held in April 2014, the Government, as the sole donor to UNICEF Oman, and UNICEF 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 areas focus on removing bottlenecks from the enabling environment and strengthening capacities in planning, coordination and evidence-based decision making. In turn, this contributes to three result areas in the global UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017:

- Nutrition, with a particular focus on reducing wasting/stunting, improving rates of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) and enhancing maternal nutrition;
- Education, supporting efforts to provide access to quality education for both girls and boys through improved learning outcomes and inclusive education, including in early learning and child-friendly schools;
- Social inclusion, through strengthening policy environments and systems for vulnerable children.

The new focus was buttressed by the implementation of key programme strategies aligned with the high-income context, including an explicit strategy to support cross-sectorial linkages. Other programme strategies relate to:
Institutional capacity development, particularly in knowledge management and monitoring for equity, through the systematic exchange of experiences with other countries and enhanced communication for behaviour change so that progress against key indicators is accelerated.

Evidence generation, policy dialogue and advocacy, to address significant gaps in disaggregated data, promote equity analysis, and underscore policy targeting so that services benefit vulnerable families and children. In particular, key data for children have been highlighted through major UNICEF-supported analyses and studies such as the draft Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Oman 2014 and the first Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Oman.

In turn, these efforts contributed to overcoming constraints related to programme activities, while also addressing emerging issues for the Ninth Development Plan 2016-2020 and situating children’s issues in the long-term government vision. To further broaden the policy dialogue, new partnerships were explored with numerous public and private sector entities, including oversight institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission.

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 the vigorous UNICEF Oman response to a government request to ensure the highest quality of technical expertise. Finally, the shift in the emphasis of programme strategies is already paying off. For example, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), which benefited from high-level, UNICEF-sponsored capacity development during the first MICS, reported that it feels ready to undertake future such surveys on its own.

Important internal systems were also introduced to improve UNICEF Oman planning/monitoring following MTR recommendations. 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.

Humanitarian Assistance

Not applicable

Equity Case Study

Development of the Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Oman 2014, under the leadership of the NCSI and in collaboration with line ministries, provided important evidence for informing targeted policymaking in line with the recommendations of the MTR. Through its synthesis of a large amount of officially approved secondary data on a range of key indicators, the Situation Analysis, which awaits final Government approval, has helped to underscore a new and explicit implementation strategy for UNICEF Oman that supports cross-sectorial linkages.

Critically, the Situation Analysis has become a unique one-stop document on children’s issues in the country, from policy to community levels, using the latest official data available as well as the UNICEF key determinants framework. Most importantly, it:
• Highlighted the key progress that Oman has made, which has been virtually unique in achieving rapid human development with progressive equity trends, demonstrating the Sultanate as a model for other countries.
• Shed light on key equity-related issues, including vulnerabilities by geographical location and population group, such as children with disabilities. It further identified remaining areas for improvement, including in areas such as nutrition, early childhood development (ECD), quality of education and protection.
• Identified priority areas for research, such as childcare practices and data gap analysis, to address a lack of sub-national data.

Strategic use of the evidence from the Situation Analysis was clearly defined from the start, which has guided the presentation and use of the document. The Situation Analysis was intended to be a concise document to be used to support policy advocacy, addressing not only programmatic shifts arising from the MTR, but also children’s issues during the development of the national Ninth Development Plan and other medium- and long-term government plans. Some of the emerging long-term issues highlighted by the Situation Analysis included:
• Quality of health services to address demand-side issues, including premarital counselling, screening in consanguineous unions, and unmet needs for family planning
• Knowledge and awareness of women, especially on maternal nutrition and IYCF
• Increase in educational retention above Grade 6
• Reduction of retention rates in lower secondary school and improvement in learning outcomes for secondary education
• Review of child protection standards against international standards, including the age of criminal responsibility
• Reporting and referral systems for violence and abuse

Finally, development of the Situation Analysis contributed to partnership leveraging, as UNICEF considerably strengthened its partnership with the NCSI as a result of the quality of the work and technical expertise. The Situation Analysis also provided a forum for discussion and agreement among line ministries on key equity-related issues related to children.

Based on the successful formulation and use of this Situation Analysis, the MTR recommended conducting situation analyses on a rolling basis, with robust causality analysis and updated with new data.

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Building on MTR recommendations, the UNICEF Oman capacity development strategy was shaped by the new priority given to upstream approaches and cross-sectorial linkages, thereby better promoting equity for children. By focusing on strengthening government institutions, it offered a multiplier effect so that child-centred policies/plans were systematically refined and progress was sustained, underpinning a newly prioritised outcome area. This complemented the Government’s full responsibility for service delivery in a high-income country.

At the policy level, UNICEF Oman focused on capacity development in areas including planning, coordination and results-based management, all of which strengthened components of the ‘how’ of effective development programming. For example, a comprehensive package was provided to bolster the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Social Development in formulating the National Strategy on Social Work, which defined a major component of the Government’s vision to address vulnerabilities among children and women. The package encompassed: a) policy advisory services to guide coordination of the strategy steering committee; b) conceptualisation of the planning process; c) applying the UNICEF key determinants framework in situation analyses informing development of the strategy; and d) technical expertise on quality assurance, including on social inclusion concepts.

Sectorial-based capacity development proved integral to the development of the National Action Plan on Early Childhood Education (ECE), furthering achievement in the second newly prioritised outcome area. This helped sustain government funding in the sector, where enrolment has quadrupled but requires further strengthening. It also supported better targeting of underserved areas, as well as adequate service quality. UNICEF Oman likewise strengthened sub-national child protection committees, a mechanism endorsed by the Child Law to monitor child rights violations, through development and training on the use of a new child protection manual. Lastly, a training of trainers, in conjunction with Down Syndrome International, aimed to improve the quality of health services for children with down syndrome.

To strengthen the overall enabling environment, especially for the most vulnerable children, experiences were systematically exchanged with other countries on issues such as institutional frameworks for social equity monitoring, so that Oman could share good practices while learning from others. These will be taken forward further in 2015.
Evidence Generation, Policy Dialogue and Advocacy

The Government continued to perceive UNICEF Oman as the authoritative voice on children, especially those who are vulnerable, in part given the UNICEF comparative advantage in transferring capacity on the strategic analysis/use of data to ensure equity.

As part of the UNICEF Oman re-positioning, more focus was given to areas of support that are still required in the high-income context. These include assessing data gaps, as well as sharing new methodologies and tools for data collection/analysis, ranging from the MICS to a key ECE investment study and an equity analysis of child-friendly schools (CFS). Fostering national ownership ensured holistic analysis of the situation of children and women, while effective advocacy positioned such evidence with multiple stakeholders, especially at the decision-making level.

The UNICEF key determinant framework was applied with regard to numerous inputs (the Situation Analysis, the CFS equity analysis, a functional analysis for nutrition and diagnostic studies for the National Strategy on Social Work). The Situation Analysis, led by the NCSI, proved a landmark document that provided important evidence for informed policymaking, including in the forthcoming Ninth Development Plan. The analysis, which awaits final approval, also identified the further need to analyse data gaps with respect to children, as well as potential areas for strategic research. All of this guided advocacy to deepen knowledge on such gaps and emerging issues. Vulnerability mapping and studies, including on community behaviour and knowledge, are expected to help demonstrate Oman as a global model for high-income countries.

At the same time, extensive policy dialogue and advocacy were woven into different phases of key studies, including the ECE investment study and the ECE Action Plan. As a result, this highly consultative process has helped place ECE as a major component of ECD, at the forefront of the Government agenda. Effective UNICEF Oman advocacy with the Ministry of Health on the need to update nutrition data resulted in the Ministry requesting UNICEF support to prepare protocols for the upcoming National Nutrition Survey. Lastly, strong UNICEF advocacy helped the Government to focus on a multi-sectorial public nutrition approach to tackle persistent nutrition challenges.

Partnerships

Strengthened partnerships are fundamental to achieving development goals in a high-income country context. The ability of UNICEF Oman to facilitate such partnerships was identified as a particular strength during the 2014 MTR. The objectives of evolving partnerships, along with the underscoring of existing partnerships, included:

- Reinforcing strategic attention to equity
- Sustaining and reinforcing national mechanisms to monitor child rights and equity
- Facilitating policy dialogue, especially in areas requiring cross-sectorial collaboration
- Positioning policy advocacy at the highest levels of Government

All of this broadened the policy dialogue and situated it more strategically (for example, through the initiation of multi-sectorial approaches to ECD and to nutrition) while raising the overall partnership with the Government to a new level. Thus, the fostering of strategic partnerships proved especially vital to the UNICEF re-positioning in regards to generating opportunities in the national policy environment, programme collaboration, and beyond.
An evolving partnership with the National Human Rights Commission led to UNICEF Oman participation in a dialogue, led by the Commission, in which the National Bank of Oman expressed interest in financing collaborative initiatives on child rights. UNICEF Oman provided technical expertise to help develop a proposal capturing the priority areas identified in the consultation; this key step helped to further this important process, which was particularly critical given that the MTR also highlighted the need to broaden overall financial contributions beyond those of the Government.

New and deepened partnerships are also being explored with the Supreme Council for Planning, as well as line ministry departments of planning; academic institutions such as the Research Council and Sultan Qaboos University; State and Shura Councils; the media; private sector and civil society organisations; and other United Nations agencies. Various modalities of partnership mechanisms, beyond contributions through funds, also are being explored.

Forging global and regional partnerships is also expected to open the way for sharing Oman’s good practices and success stories with regard to child rights and well-being, and gaining from other experiences in high- and middle-income country contexts.

**External Communication and Public Advocacy**

National media interest in development issues related to children is strong, and UNICEF Oman garnered and generated extensive media coverage in 2014. The high-level visit of the Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, which resulted in agreement with senior Omani officials on strategic programmatic shifts during the MTR, served as an important catalyst for numerous strategic meetings with the Government that fostered additional news stories and considerable advocacy for children. In addition, wide coverage of the adoption of the Child Law 2014 raised awareness of this important milestone for child rights in the country, which further guarantees the protection of children.

Other media coverage highlights included:
- A three-part print interview with the Representative on progress and challenges related to child rights in Oman, which was also carried on social media and in video format.
- In turn, the Representative’s highlighting of particular challenges related to low rates of exclusive breastfeeding spurred one of Oman’s leading English-language publications to print a series of three investigative reports on this key nutrition issue in the country.
- Coverage of meetings between the UNICEF Oman Representative and senior Government officials on an array of child-centred issues as well as of the Representative’s strategic meetings in governorates.
- Extensive reporting in local newspapers on events involving UNICEF Oman, including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding to conduct the country’s first MICS.
- Exploration of significantly widened access to social media through an important partnership with the Consumer Protection Authority.

Finally, national media also offered major coverage on regional and global issues involving children, focused on the situation of children in areas of conflict in both the Syrian Arab Republic and Gaza.

**South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation**

Not applicable
Human Rights-Based Approach to Cooperation

UNICEF Oman vigorously responded to the Government’s invitation at the MTR to maximise UNICEF added value as an independent and authoritative voice for children through the promotion of the normative framework founded on international human rights principles and standards. In particular, UNICEF Oman efforts in 2014 to more strategically use available data and to generate additional disaggregated data and evidence on key indicators for children reflected this new direction.

For example, the Situation Analysis of Children and Women 2014 was used as a human rights-based approach, equity analysis and determinant analysis to creatively examine development trends, policy and legal frameworks, and institutional and budgetary setups in the country. This ground breaking Situation Analysis became a key evidence base and reference work, and was expected to be influential in highlighting key emerging issues during the forthcoming national Ninth Development Plan. In addition, application of the Situation Analysis’ human rights based approach was critical to the restructuring of the Country Programme Results and Resources Framework following the MTR, thereby clarifying programmatic hierarchies.

At the Government’s request, UNICEF Oman likewise provided top-quality technical support and brokered its global experience to refine the national legal and policy framework and enhance the alignment with principles enshrined in international human rights treaties. In so doing, it took important steps to further strengthen the realisation of child rights in a high-income country context, particularly through the provision of high-level expertise to the National Human Rights Commission to underpin an institutional assessment in this regard.

Gender Mainstreaming and Equality

Oman has a strong commitment and an equally strong record with regard to gender equality, including under the National Strategy for the Advancement of Omani Women. As reaffirmed in the Situation Analysis on Children and Women 2014, access to education is equitable, and female enrolment has achieved parity in a context of near-universal primary education and very high secondary enrolment. Almost all young people (aged 15-24) are literate. Overall, Oman had a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.348 in 2013, ranking it 64 out of 149 countries.

Nevertheless, gender equality and mainstreaming are part of all UNICEF Oman interventions. Key examples in 2014 include the provision technical expertise for the development of ECD standards, which serve as a developmental framework across multiple domains for all Omani children, regardless of gender, so that every child from birth to age 6 has expanded opportunities to achieve expected levels of age-specific knowledge and skills. With the scaling up of CFS throughout the year, UNICEF Oman likewise has been instrumental in helping to ensure that schools provide learning environments that are gender-responsive as a key dimension of CFS; in addition, it promoted the principle of equity among male and female children and fostered community efforts to achieve gender equity. At the same time, capacity development for teachers has had a significant gender dimension, particularly in ECE and CFS, given that virtually all teachers are women.

The UNICEF Oman provision of technical support to help embed gender equality in other child-centred, inclusive plans is advancing gender-related rights even further: through its disaggregation of data by gender and other dimensions, the first national MICS is expected to help inform more targeted policymaking. Development of the 10-year National Strategy on Social Work benefited from the inclusion of a key pillar focused explicitly on women. Finally, the
roadmap for initiating a cross-sectorial approach to nutrition proved critical to highlighting issues of maternal nutrition as a key determinant of persistent development challenges in the country.

**Environmental Sustainability**

In the high-income country context, the UNICEF Oman programme focused primarily on education, nutrition and social inclusion. As such, issues of environmental sustainability were not addressed comprehensively, but rather, in individual initiatives such as the study on the interaction of human health and environmental sustainability as part of a quality education.

**Effective Leadership**

The Annual Management Plan and Office Improvement Plan, developed in early 2014, guided the process, expected results and areas for review during the MTR and Mid-Term Management Review (MTMR), while also setting benchmarks for official routine management practices. Key actions emanating from Country Management Team meetings were taken with regard to reinforcing management mechanisms, including:

- Drafting a revised and strengthened set of results and indicators for development and management effectiveness, to achieve the shift from transactional monitoring to higher-level performance monitoring in line with the global UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan.
- Assessing the previous audit report, with support from the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO), re-confirming that UNICEF Oman continues to make progress.
- Reviewing and updating the risk profile and risk control library, which resulted in nearly all risk ratings being reduced. Of 12 risk areas, only one increased from 2012.
- Reviewing workflow to ensure quality terms of reference outlining strategic objectives, policy implications, methodology and timeframe, in close consultation with UNICEF regional advisors for technical soundness.

With respect to programme management, the following mechanisms were introduced:

- Four detailed annual work plans with concerned line ministries, with prioritised outputs and activities at policy level, in line with MTR recommendations. This has reduced programme fragmentation. Strategic and policy-level initiatives were selected and reflected in the annual work plans to respond to key determinants identified in the Situation Analysis of Children and Women 2014. A two-year joint National Human Rights Commission-UNICEF Action Plan was drafted.
- A Country Programme table, which captured programme results, indicators, funding level and gaps. The table was updated regularly.
- A revitalised system of monthly Programme Management Group meetings, with a structured agenda and minutes capturing key action points to plan and monitor progress of sectorial and cross-sectorial work, studies/research and funding utilization, among others.
- A strategic annual Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which has begun to prioritise key studies/surveys, support the planning of evaluations and link to effective advocacy work.
- In addition, a local Joint Consultative Committee was convened to offer orientation on progress on efficiency and effectiveness procedures led by UNICEF Headquarters, discussing potential implications for UNICEF Oman.
Financial Resources Management

Fund utilisation was periodically monitored in Country Management Team and Programme Management Group meetings as a standard agenda item, which provided greater oversight and resulted in improved management of contributions and budget control. In recognition of the need to strengthen follow up and monitoring of programme implementation, progress reports on programme implementation, financial status and results achieved continue to be prepared by project officers.

As a result, funds were received and utilised in a steady and timely manner. In line with the Country Programme Document, UNICEF Oman received its full annual programme budget from the Government and utilised 99 per cent by 31 December 2014. While UNICEF Oman does not receive regular resources due to Oman having reached the graduation threshold, 99 per cent of institutional budget funds were also utilised.

Segregation of duties remained a challenge due to the size of the UNICEF Oman office. As a result, certain roles were delegated to MENARO to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest.

Bank reconciliation was prepared on a timely basis. UNICEF Headquarters approved Standard Chartered Bank Oman as a suitable bank for expediting payment processes via an e-banking platform. UNICEF Oman will begin using this service beginning in February 2015.

Given that the Government is the sole funder of the Country Programme, UNICEF Oman does not have direct cash transfer transactions, nor does it participate in the United Nations harmonized approach to cash transfers.

Fundraising and Donor Relations

Donor reporting, in particular, was strengthened, including the timely submission of reports, 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 the finalisation of the documents. UNICEF Oman annually submits one donor report to the Government as the sole donor. In 2014, a strategic report was again prepared and submitted, highlighting key programmatic shifts identified through the MTR process, as well as tangible results achieved in implementing shifts in the post-MTR period.

Resource mobilisation efforts continue to be a priority for UNICEF Oman, to ensure that additional financial resources address the government expectations expressed at the MTR, especially in the areas of programme coordination, planning and evaluation. As a result of the Government’s request to engage highly qualified international technical expertise in these areas, the need to increase the Country Programme Document budget ceiling and overall financial contributions was highlighted by the review and was being addressed.

As an interim measure, for example, UNICEF Oman received global thematic funds from MENARO to support the strategic planning process for scaling up CFS and reinforcing programme management; these were 100 per cent utilised by 31 December 2014. A more sustainable option to finance the potential increase in programme funding and support the overall strategic shift is being sought through advocacy with key decision makers.

Building on an evolving partnership with the National Human Rights Commission, UNICEF participated in a dialogue led by the Commission where the National Bank of Oman expressed interest in financing collaborative initiatives on child rights by the Commission, concerned line
ministries and UNICEF. UNICEF Oman provided technical expertise to support the development of a proposal capturing the priority areas identified in the consultation.

**Evaluation**

The 2014 MTR identified the need for strengthened evaluation as an important issue for overall programme effectiveness. During the review, the Government and UNICEF Oman identified the CFS initiative as a potential area for evaluation and a prerequisite for effective preparation of the Country Programme 2016-2020.

Strengthening evaluation capacities within the Government represented another tangible way in which UNICEF demonstrated its value. This has been initiated with regard to the five seconded government staff who serve as UNICEF technical project officers. UNICEF evaluation policies stipulate that each programme component be evaluated at least once during the Country Programme cycle, in partnership with national authorities and adhering to United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards, and that 3 to 5 per cent of total programme budgets be allocated for evaluation.

Nonetheless, good evaluation is expensive. An evaluation of the CFS initiative is planned for early 2015. In addition, UNICEF Oman has started the process of strengthening related institutional capacities in the areas of knowledge management, evidence-based policymaking and monitoring for equity. The Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, included in this report, and linked to annual work plans, also indicates a range of surveys and studies undertaken in 2014. These included the MICS, as well as support to partners’ other data collection activities in all areas of the current Country Programme.

**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 the owner of the office premises not to institute an annual raise in rent until the end of 2015, when it is expected to increase by 10 per cent. Meanwhile, the Microsoft Lync unified communications tool strengthened collaboration, offering free, self-managed online meetings, chat services and audio/video calls, and has led to significant communications cost savings, particularly because other Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) services, such as Skype, are blocked in Oman.

UNICEF Oman also introduced staggered working hours for drivers in order to cut back on overtime costs. Utilisation of office vehicles and drivers during weekends and holidays is kept to a minimum. As a result, these operating costs were reduced by nearly 40 per cent.

**Supply Management**

Because the MTR identified that UNICEF will best add value at the policy level, UNICEF Oman did not procure supplies for programme-related initiatives. No collaboration with other United Nations agencies on supply and logistics aspects occurred in 2014. Likewise, there was no role for the Government or UNICEF 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. A notable achievement following the recommendations of the MTMR was the significant increase in the Contract Review Committee ceiling, to US$ 50,000. Given that technical support is the most important input in the high-income context, the value of most consultancies is above the old ceiling of US$ 20,000. At the same time, a long-term agreement with several translation firms was also established to ensure fixed prices for high-quality
translation into Arabic of policy-related documents, thereby meeting the standards of the Government of Oman.

In 2014, UNICEF Oman spent a total of US$ 2,600 on offshore, regional and local procurement, mainly to purchase office supplies. Given that local vendors have solid and reliable marketing and procurement policies, no difficulties were encountered in local procurement. UNICEF Oman has not used in-kind supply assistance.

Based on an on-going agreement with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF Oman facilitated the procurement of vitamin A capsules and cold chain equipment. The Ministry subsequently reimbursed the amount of US$ 41,580.

Security for Staff and Premises

In 2014, Oman experienced no humanitarian emergencies affecting children or UNICEF programme implementation.


Throughout 2014, UNICEF maintained close communication partnerships with government agencies such as the Disaster Management Committee (DMC) and Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), as well as with the Civil Defence, Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Human Resources

Although UNICEF has a small office in Oman, the office was extensively supported by MENARO in 2014, effectively extending UNICEF Oman capacity and providing a global backbone that helped to ensure quality services. At the same time, engagement of highly qualified consultants was a priority to support strategic shifts and a policy-oriented approach, as well as to add value in the high-income context. UNICEF Oman engaged several new institutions/individuals with global reputations to support flagship work, such as the Situation Analysis, National Strategy on Social Work and National Nutrition Strategy, and explored potential future collaboration with others. A list of key areas requiring technical support was developed to ensure advanced planning and engagement of internationally recognised experts/institutions.

While other UNICEF offices in the Middle East and North Africa were requested to contribute part of their institutional budgets toward the establishment of the Global Shared Service Centre, UNICEF Oman was exempted from current contributions, allowing the office to maintain its structure. At the same time, the MTMR recommended the establishment of a new programme specialist post and the abolishment of a vacant national Communication for Development (C4D) post, along with the recruitment of a volunteer to support C4D work. The recommendations await final endorsement from the Government and therefore have not been submitted for programme and budget review.
As a transitional measure, UNICEF Oman recruited a professional level 4 programme specialist on a temporary basis to reinforce programme coordination functions and sustain progress in programme planning, monitoring and social policy. This allowed the Representative to focus primarily on high-level policy advocacy, partnership leveraging and resource mobilisation.

In particular, the unique system of project officers seconded from line ministries benefited from initial efforts at revision. The Framework Agreement for the Secondment of Government Staff was reviewed/revised during the MTMR, resulting in the formulation of a discussion note that presented various options for consideration and government approval. Meanwhile, the agreement of three project officers was extended based on mutual agreement between concerned line ministries and UNICEF, while the NCSI did not renew its agreement due to an internal restructuring process. Further discussions are planned during the development of the new Country Programme Document 2016-2020.

Capacity building of project officers also continued to be a top priority. In 2014, UNICEF Oman took the opportunity to visit regional advisors and consultants to organise learning sessions in programme meetings, for example, on the Country Programme cycle, the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017, social policy, the MICS, and ECE. In conjunction, the Performance Appraisal System (PAS) of project officers seconded by line ministries was streamlined to reflect accountabilities of project management functions in line with MTMR recommendations.

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

Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology

MENARO supports UNICEF Oman in regards to information and communications technology (ICT). Core business applications, primarily VISION and Microsoft Office 365, are accessed remotely from MENARO. The regional ICT hub also remotely manages overall ICT functions for UNICEF Oman. A local service provider in Oman provides on-site information technology (IT) support. In 2014, this was supplemented by two visits from a UNICEF regional hub IT officer.

Migration from Lotus Notes to the Microsoft Office 365 cloud-based platform represented a major change in ICT for UNICEF Oman. The move simplified both configuration and access, given that it works using basic Internet lines and has a comprehensive, robust web portal, along with much higher storage capacity. This provided critical resilience for business continuity planning, so that UNICEF Oman staff can fully access the platform using UNICEF laptops, office smartphones and personal mobile devices from any location.

The Microsoft Lync unified communication tool strengthened collaboration between internal staff and external partners, offering free, self-managed online meetings, chat services, and audio/video calls. Use of the OneDrive file-sharing tool helped staff upload important documents with no cost, share them, and access them virtually from anywhere. This has facilitated additional information sharing and become an essential business continuity planning tool.

Office connectivity was enhanced at the end of 2014 with the addition of a new 4-megabyte asymmetrical digital subscriber line backup connection to offload internet browsing from the
main link. This has increased connectivity performance and strengthened office availability through an automatic fall-over between both links.

**Programme Components from RAM**

**ANALYSIS BY OUTCOME AND OUTPUT RESULTS**

**OUTCOME 1 Programme support**

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
Oman is one of a very few countries that has both joined the high-income category and also experienced rapid human development with a strong degree of equity. This progress has resulted in steep reductions in child mortality (by 82 per cent, to 9 per 1,000 live births), as well as universal child immunization, universal primary education and significant action to address the rights of women, who comprise 22 per cent of the labour force.

Finding the right development niche in response to this unique development context – and thereby bringing equity and maximum benefit to children – has not been easy. 2014 proved to be a rich and transformational year for UNICEF Oman, representing the successful culmination of longstanding programmatic and advocacy efforts. This not only considerably expanded the UNICEF Oman dialogue/decision-making with the Government on resources, but also made an important contribution to the ‘how’ of UNICEF programming in a high-income country context, with important implications for similar countries.

The comprehensive MTR of the Country Programme 2012-2015 offered space to elevate the Government-UNICEF Oman partnership to a new strategic level. Consequently, UNICEF undertook ground breaking engagement in a reshaped programme environment. During the review, held in April 2014, the Government, as the sole donor to UNICEF Oman, and UNICEF 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 areas focus on removing bottlenecks from 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 the UNICEF Oman vigorous response to the Government request to ensure the highest quality of technical expertise.

Important internal systems were also introduced to improve UNICEF Oman planning/monitoring following MTR recommendations. 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:**
The Annual Management Plan and Office Improvement Plan, developed in early 2014, guided the process, expected results and areas for review during the MTR and MTMR, while also
setting benchmarks for official routine management practices. Key actions emanating from Country Management Team meetings were taken with regard to reinforcing management mechanisms, including:

- Drafting a revised and strengthened set of results and indicators for development and management effectiveness, to achieve the shift from transactional monitoring to higher-level performance monitoring in line with the global UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan.
- Assessing the previous audit report, with support from MENARO, re-confirming that UNICEF Oman continues to make progress.
- Reviewing and updating the risk profile and risk control library, which resulted in nearly all risk ratings being reduced. Of 12 risk areas, only one increased from 2012.
- Reviewing workflow to ensure quality terms of reference outlining strategic objectives, policy implications, methodology and timeframe, in close consultation with UNICEF regional advisors for technical soundness.

With respect to programme management, the following mechanisms were introduced:

- Four detailed annual work plans with concerned line ministries, with prioritised outputs and activities at policy level, in line with MTR recommendations. This has reduced programme fragmentation. Strategic and policy-level initiatives were selected and reflected in the annual work plans to respond to key determinants identified in the Situation Analysis of Children and Women 2014. A two-year joint National Human Rights Commission-UNICEF Action Plan was drafted.
- A Country Programme table, which captured programme results, indicators, funding level and gaps. The table was updated regularly.
- A revitalised system of monthly Programme Management Group meetings, with a structured agenda and minutes capturing key action points to plan and monitor progress of sectorial and cross-sectorial work, studies/research and funding utilization, among others.
- A strategic annual Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which has begun to prioritise key studies/surveys, support the planning of evaluations and link to effective advocacy work.
- In addition, a local Joint Consultative Committee was convened to offer orientation on progress on efficiency and effectiveness procedures led by UNICEF Headquarters, discussing potential implications for UNICEF Oman.

OUTPUT 2 Financial Resources and Stewardship

Analytical Statement of Progress:
Fund utilisation was periodically monitored in Country Management Team and Programme Management Group meetings as a standard agenda item, which provided greater oversight and resulted in improved management of contributions and budget control. In recognition of the need to strengthen follow up and monitoring of programme implementation, progress reports on programme implementation, financial status and results achieved continue to be prepared by project officers.

As a result, funds were received and utilised in a steady and timely manner. In line with the Country Programme Document, UNICEF Oman received its full annual programme budget from the Government and utilised 99 per cent by 31 December 2014. While UNICEF Oman does not receive regular resources (RR) due to Oman having reached the graduation threshold, 99 per cent of institutional budget funds were also utilised.
Resource mobilisation efforts continue to be a priority for UNICEF Oman, to ensure that additional financial resources address the government expectations expressed at the MTR, especially in the areas of programme coordination, planning and evaluation. As a result of the Government’s request to engage highly qualified international technical expertise in these areas, the need to increase the CPD budget ceiling and overall financial contributions was highlighted by the review and was being addressed.

As an interim measure, for example, UNICEF Oman received global thematic funds from MENARO to support the strategic planning process for scaling up CFS and reinforcing programme management; these were 100 per cent utilised by 31 December 2014. A more sustainable option to finance the potential increase in programme funding and support the overall strategic shift is being sought through advocacy with key decision makers.

Donor reporting, in particular, was strengthened, including the timely submission of reports, 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 the finalisation of the documents. UNICEF Oman annually submits one donor report to the Government as the sole donor. In 2014, a strategic report was again prepared and submitted, highlighting key programmatic shifts identified through the MTR process, as well as tangible results achieved in implementing shifts in the post-MTR period.

OUTPUT 3 Human capacity

Analytical Statement of Progress:

Progress is reported under the human resources section.

OUTPUT 4 Human resources

Analytical Statement of Progress:

Although UNICEF has a small office in Oman, the office was extensively supported by MENARO in 2014, effectively extending UNICEF Oman capacity and providing a global backbone that helped to ensure quality services. At the same time, engagement of highly qualified consultants was a priority to support strategic shifts and a policy-oriented approach, as well as to add value in the high-income context. UNICEF Oman engaged several new institutions/individuals with global reputations to support flagship work, such as the Situation Analysis, National Strategy on Social Work and National Nutrition Strategy, and explored potential future collaboration with others. A list of key areas requiring technical support was developed to ensure advanced planning and engagement of internationally recognised experts/institutions.

While other UNICEF offices in the Middle East and North Africa were requested to contribute part of their institutional budgets toward the establishment of the Global Shared Service Centre, UNICEF Oman was exempted from current contributions, allowing the office to maintain its structure. At the same time, the MTMR recommended the establishment of a new programme specialist post and the abolishment of a vacant national Communication for Development (C4D) post, along with the recruitment of a volunteer to support C4D work. The recommendations await final endorsement from the Government and therefore have not been submitted for programme and budget review.
As a transitional measure, UNICEF Oman recruited a professional level 4 programme specialist on a temporary basis to reinforce programme coordination functions and sustain progress in programme planning, monitoring and social policy. This allowed the Representative to focus primarily on high-level policy advocacy, partnership leveraging and resource mobilisation.

Capacity building of project officers seconded from line ministries also continued to be a top priority. In 2014, UNICEF Oman took the opportunity to visit regional advisors and consultants to organise learning sessions in programme meetings, for example, on the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017 and on the MICS. In conjunction, the PAS of seconded project officers was streamlined to reflect accountabilities of project management functions in line with MTMR recommendations. The framework agreement to on secondment was reviewed/revised during the MTMR, resulting in the formulation of a discussion note that presented various options for consideration and government approval.

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

OUTPUT 5 Cross-sectorial

Analytical Statement of Progress:
Given that Oman surpassed the UNICEF RR threshold, the Country Programme is supported by the other resources (OR) contributions from the Government of Oman, combined with minimal support budget, as agreed in the Country Programme Document. As such, the funds under the output 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.

OUTCOME 2 By 2015, Government of Oman establishes strategies and standards for inclusive early childhood learning and development and strategies for enhanced care at community and family level to benefit children

Analytical Statement of Progress:
Oman’s important achievements in 2014 in the newly prioritised area of ECD have focused on strengthening the cross-sectorial enabling environment, particularly the policy and legal framework. This included conducting an education sector evaluation and strengthening the education sector framework, as well as implementing Health Vision 2050 during the Vision’s first full year. Both the education evaluation, which represented the culmination of a yearlong effort that began in 2013, and Health Vision 2050, proposed key sectorial reforms to strengthen systemic change. These included, for example, enhanced coordination, decentralisation of policy development and sex disaggregation of indicators.

With ECD standards put in place in 2014, Oman is now able to promote a multi-faceted approach to early childhood, integrating nutrition/health and social protection with ECE, which has been the traditional focus with regard to young children. Once implemented, the ECD standards are expected to benefit the most vulnerable young children, especially rural and lower-income children, who particularly require enhanced access to services. This is critical given not only the fast-growing nature of ECE in particular, where enrolment quadrupled between 2010/2011 and 2013/2014, but also because important development challenges remain in regards to young children’s nutritional status and social well-being in Oman.
Initially, the new standards are expected to help raise the rate of Early Childhood Education access, which stands at 55 per cent, and, in particular, to boost enrolment in nurseries, covering 5,713 children across the country. For example, an ECE Action Plan, developed in December 2014 with UNICEF technical assistance, aimed to expand the number of private kindergartens and nurseries sharply, and to increase the number of children enrolled in private ECE, from 18.4 per cent in 2014 to 40 per cent by 2020. It also intended to extensively include ECE within Oman's long-term Vision 2040, as well as to place early learning among the top priorities for the forthcoming Ninth Development Plan, with sustained funding.

The Action Plan, for which costing was not yet complete, was complemented by the development of a national ECE rollout plan, with specific targets for improvement in vulnerable areas. The Plan underscores the strong emphasis accorded by the Government and UNICEF alike to broader ECD. Critically, this presages an expected expansion of integrated ECD centres as overall ECD investment rises and the enabling environment strengthens further.

UNICEF Oman was the Government’s partner of choice in ECD, given its comparative advantage in employing a holistic approach to the provision of comprehensive, inclusive services for young children’s survival, development, growth and support during a period when the child’s brain development and function are being formed. In all, UNICEF Oman offered key advisory services and advocacy from policy to working levels. The Representative personally engaged in high-level advocacy with senior officials to bring ECD to the forefront of the Government agenda.

Oman likewise benefited from extensive support from MENARO with regard to ECD. This included exposure to best practices in the region, as well as specific advisory services and technical support. For example, the Ministry of Education is now incorporating suggested revisions to CFS standards and indicators, supported by MENARO expertise.

Overall, building a coalition of like-minded and increasingly coordinated partners and stakeholders has provided a major boost for the ECD programme. For example, development of the ECE Action Plan encompassed numerous consultative meetings with stakeholders from multiple sectors, including representatives of: the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, State Council, Royal Oman Police, private schools, private early childhood institutions, Sultan Qaboos University, seven governorates (Muscat, Al Wusta, Dhofar, Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Dhakhipiyah, Al Sharqiya South), and parents. In addition, steps were taken to enhance and expand the Child Care Centre in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University to serve as a centre for excellence in the Middle East and North Africa region on integrated ECD research, knowledge and planning. UNICEF Oman has facilitated new partnerships between Sultan Qaboos University and Columbia and Yale Universities to enhance this initiative.

**OUTPUT 1** Inclusive, costed, quality ECE strategies, standards and plans are developed using current data, in consultation with State and Shura Councils, and Line Ministries

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
Strengthened investment in ECE remains central to achieving a holistic approach to the newly prioritised area of ECD. In 2014, development of a national ECE Action Plan represented a first step towards strengthening access to quality ECE services for all children in Oman, especially rural and low-income children, thereby enhancing equity. UNICEF Oman was instrumental in facilitating extensive consultations with partners to strengthen the process, while also positioning itself strategically to provide high-quality technical expertise and strong advocacy for
expanded ECE investment. In addition to declaring ECE a long-term development priority of the country, the Plan, which awaits finalisation, aims to increase Government investment in ECE services to a target of 0.4 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI), and to align it in the long term with international standards.

As a result of the process, the Government also developed plans to sharply increase the number of public pre-school classes from a 2014 baseline of 98 to 834 by 2020. Incentives to increase private investment in ECE across governorates – including substantial reductions in the time required for licensing procedures and renewal to address key bottlenecks – are expected to double the number of private kindergartens and nurseries, from 223 in 2014 to 455 in 2020.

**OUTPUT 2: Capacities of key stakeholders is enhanced to establish a cross-sectorial coordination mechanism for ECD in Oman**

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**

Development of Oman’s first ECD standards in 2014 contributed substantially to furthering integrated ECD strategies and plans, including with regard to the preliminaries for the development of a specific cross-sectorial coordination mechanism. In turn, this laid the foundation to strengthen progress with regard to ECD policy development and knowledge generation, both areas identified in the MTR as requiring further support. The Ministry of Education formulated the standards in collaboration with UNICEF Oman and partners, including the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Royal Oman Police and non-government organisations (NGOs).

In addition, MENARO provided a high-level group of ECD experts to train a national team in the development and validation of the standards, using advanced and well-structured methodologies. The standards encompass five multi-sectorial developmental domains: social and emotional development, language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, physical development and health, and approaches to learning. All of this was underpinned by an explicit focus in the re-positioned UNICEF Oman Country Programme on cross-sectorial linkages, as well as on institutional capacity development.

**OUTCOME 3** By 2015, Government of Oman has adopted adequate strategies and costed plans to implement child rights policies and framework.

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**

Over the years, Oman has put a number of policies and programmes into place to help raise well-being indicators on children and women. Now, the country is ready to improve policymaking and implementation by enhancing its capacity to further narrow the gap by reaching the most vulnerable children, such as girls and boys with disabilities, and to promote more social inclusion.

Throughout 2014, the Government, with UNICEF policy advice and technical inputs, focused on refining policies and mechanisms. This was a key determinant also acknowledged in the Situation Analysis, to promote a coordinated approach to responding to a range of social and economic vulnerabilities and to improve the well-being of people. Enactment of the Child Law 2014 offered a framework for defining child rights in the national context and in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
The Law considerably enhanced the enabling environment for children, covering a wide range of issues from child survival, health and education to protection and recreation. It further accommodates a number of Oman's obligations, such as the formation of a national committee for monitoring the implementation of the CRC; a national committee for family affairs; a national human rights committee; a family counselling help line; and a law for people with disabilities. These regulations and services are all aimed at supporting children both directly and indirectly to ensure the sustainability of good practices of care and protection.

Meanwhile, formulation of the Education Law 2014, which has been submitted to the Cabinet for finalisation, underscores the heightened attention to quality of education, including making ECE compulsory. Likewise, an evaluation of the education system in 2014 reviewed areas such as policy development, project management, curriculum, teacher professional development and the examination system, and recommended key reforms to continue to enhance overall quality.

In further strengthening of the enabling environment, the Ministry of Social Development embarked on the development of the 10-year National Strategy on Social Work that is envisaged to guide the institutional goals and structure of the Ministry. UNICEF Oman advocacy and technical expertise has been vital in furthering this process, given that UNICEF was identified by the Government as a partner of choice. This marked a major shift toward policy-level cooperation in line with MTR recommendations. With a view to empowering vulnerable groups, including children, the strategy will cover components of social care and social development, as well as pillars on children, women and disability. Leveraging partnership with all concerned ministries and stakeholders, the Ministry of Social Development, with UNICEF technical expertise, organised a national conference to review selected thematic areas and ensure a coordinated process in the development of the overall strategy.

At the same time, the overall coherence and inclusiveness of policies is being further strengthened. The Government sought UNICEF Oman inputs on critical discussions that were initiated to devise a plan to strengthen the institutional mechanisms to monitor equity and promote child rights. With a view to operationalizing the Social Observatory, the Research Council embarked on a plan to develop indicators, including on children, with UNICEF technical expertise.

Welcoming the enactment of the Child Law, a new partner of UNICEF Oman, the National Commission on Human Rights, began a review of its institutional capacity and identified possible ways to engage partners in promoting children's rights effectively. Mirroring the strong commitment of the Government on the issue of disability, the Directorate General for Persons with Disability Affairs was established within the Ministry of Social Development to streamline policy and services for people with disabilities, at national and governorate levels.

Generating quality data and evidence on vulnerabilities has also been critical to facilitating the process of national planning in 2014. Findings of the draft Situation Analysis of Children and Women made it a landmark document that will be used to inform critical advocacy initiatives, while the MICS, also being finalised, made substantive progress in generating new evidence to address critical data gaps for children.

Lastly, the CFS initiative made a key contribution to the reform of Oman's education sector through its adoption as the singular framework for quality education in the country. With CFS based on the principles embodied in the CRC, child rights became more strongly integrated into the national education system. In particular, the generation of new data through UNICEF-
sponsored activities strengthened the equity component and supported the overall quality of education.

OUTPUT 1 Draft National Plans of Action for child care and protection are prepared and costed

Analytical Statement of Progress:
To support the Ministry of Social Development in the development of the National Strategy on Social Work, UNICEF assisted in the identification of a group of highly qualified technical experts serving as advisors to the Ministry's Steering Committee, as well as in technical quality assurance of the overall process and output documents. UNICEF also assisted in the identification of specialised experts to support thematic diagnostic studies and the development of National Action Plans in the area of children and disability.

Key results achieved include:
- Identification of vision and definition of key concepts to guide the national strategy, in alignment with international principles and standards
- Strategic work plan outlining a coordinated process leading to the development of the National Strategy and National Action Plan, including on thematic areas serving as pillars of the overall strategy
- Draft diagnostic studies on children and on disability, which effectively applied the UNICEF key determinant framework

Two carryover activities from the pre-MTR period were also implemented with technical expertise from UNICEF. The capacities of national cadres at social services and at one NGO were strengthened through a series of three trainings to promote and engage parents in providing home-based care for children with disabilities. The capacities of child protection committees in four regions, comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Public Prosecutor's Office and Royal Oman Police, were also developed to protect children (particularly children with disabilities) and adolescents from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. All this reflected key provisions of the new Child Law.

OUTPUT 3 A costed scale-up plan/roadmap for the CFS initiative is developed and informed by an evaluation of CFS.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
The Government's scale up and institutionalisation of the CFS initiative is underpinned by strong UNICEF Oman support to the entire initiative, from concept to implementation. For example, throughout 2014, a team of high-level experts provided by UNICEF advised national CFS Working Team members. This is enhancing the singular framework for quality education and learning in the country and creating a generation with knowledge of child rights. This highlights the positive impact that UNICEF Oman has had on the strategic directions of policy reform, as well as on the quality and continuing relevance of activities.

Some 600 stakeholders in 13 schools of five governorates provided inputs to the draft CFS Vision Statement, expanding awareness of the CFS approach and the CRC. This critical feedback has been taken to the Cabinet to further support scaling up the programme. In 2014, the CFS approach was informally introduced to six new schools in two new governorates, with formal scaling up planned for 2015.

A formative evaluation further exploring the initial reception at nine pilot schools, and the development of a road map for the scale-up were also critical in 2014. The evaluation covered
246 students, 82 parents/guardians, 181 teachers, and 18 school administrators. Data collected with regard to all six CFS dimensions revealed broad positive support for CFS principles (health, safety, protection, inclusiveness, child rights promotion, gender responsiveness, effective learning and community participation).

Pilot school stakeholders also reported that they perceived their schools as generally improving by CFS measurements. In one primary school in the southern district of Dhofar, for example, data showed that the level of CFS implementation was excellent. Gender responsiveness and effective learning received especially high student ratings. A similar school in Muscat provided a particularly strong example of effective CFS implementation, with data indicating that all constituent groups (parents/guardians, administrators and students) were satisfied with the implementation of all dimensions.

Finally, Oman was one of the first countries in the region to pilot an equity analysis initiated by MENARO. The analysis, also incorporating a bottleneck analysis, reaffirmed that national learning outcomes require further strengthening. UNICEF-provided capacity development, technical expertise and evidence generation for the Ministry of Education and the schools themselves.

All of this bodes well for eventually positioning Oman as a regional leader in education. Key CFS partnerships are also being explored with the Teacher Centre for Specialisation and Sultan Qaboos University.

**OUTPUT 4** By 2015, 50 per cent of stakeholders and community leaders are able to effectively communicate on CRC in Oman including prevention of harmful practices;

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
Regional trainings on the CRC resulted in strengthened awareness of the Convention among regional teams.

The CRC has been mainstreamed into other activities. For example, the CFS initiative also provided opportunities for teachers and students in three pilot governorates to strengthen their knowledge and awareness of the CRC. The CRC is actively discussed in classroom settings and at the parent teacher association meetings.

**OUTPUT 5** By 2014, adolescents peer educators and counsellors in four governorates are knowledgeable on life skills relevant to their lives including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
Youth counselling guidelines on risky behaviours were prepared and capacities 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 a mutual agreement between the Ministry of Health and UNICEF.

As was noted in the discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and the annual review meetings, progress towards the output has been constrained due to the fragmentation of
activities that are not clearly linked to the overall results and strategies, and where UNICEF may have less comparative advantage.

**OUTPUT 6** 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

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
There are currently no activities under the output, and deactivation will be confirmed through the MTR.

**OUTPUT 7** By mid-2014 The Omani Child law is in effect

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
There are currently no activities under the output, and deactivation will be confirmed through the MTR.

**OUTCOME 4** By 2015, Government of Oman has adopted adequate strategies and costed plans to implement child rights policies and framework.

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
The progress update is reflected under Outcome 2: Child Centred Inclusive Strategies, above.

**OUTPUT 1** Institutional capacities in Oman are enhanced to better monitor child rights and results for children using disaggregated quality data, participatory methods and equity analysis

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
Innovative consultative processes and inputs for the Situation Analysis of Children and Women and for a set of protocols for the upcoming National Nutrition Survey enabled these key analyses to be owned by multiple sectors. As a result, for example, the preliminary findings of the Situation Analysis began to inform critical advocacy initiatives, including for the development of the national Ninth Development Plan, medium- and long-term sectorial plans, and the 2014 MTR. UNICEF Oman provided high-quality technical support on the methodology, analysis and consultations alike.

The nation’s first MICS also made substantive progress. Upon field work training provided with the support of UNICEF Oman, the NCSI capably managed the field work, data analysis and tabulations. NCSI also hosted a quality assurance mission by the UNICEF Headquarters MICS team that reviewed the data sets. Draft MICS findings and tables are now in the final review stages and are expected to address the critical data gaps on children while confirming progress in many areas.

Enactment of the Child Law 2014 and a series of high-level meetings with the National Human Rights Commission during the MTR resulted in a draft two-year joint National Human Rights Commission-UNICEF Action Plan, marking the start of a strategic partnership with the Commission. UNICEF identified highly qualified technical expertise with a specialisation in child rights and the CRC to facilitate a consultative process led by the Commission, which identified priority areas for institutional development. These included development of: 1) a strategic plan to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Commission’s oversight role in the implementation of child rights; 2) strategies and plans to promote and strengthen public awareness on child rights; and 3) mechanisms and tools to monitor child rights. The joint action plan served as a
vital input to the Commission’s funding proposal on the promotion and protection of child rights to the National Bank of Oman, drafted with UNICEF support.

OUTPUT 2  By 2015, more equity and vulnerability analysis to identify the causes of underlying trends and disparities - inclusive of gender-based analysis are disseminated.

Analytical Statement of Progress: There are currently no activities under the output, and deactivation will be confirmed through the MTR.

OUTCOME 5  By 2015, Government of Oman establishes strategies and standards for inclusive early childhood learning and development and strategies for enhanced care at community and family level to benefit children.

Analytical Statement of Progress: The progress update is reflected under Outcome 1: Early Childhood Learning Development and Care, above.

OUTPUT 1  Government has strategies and evidence to support community-based initiatives to promote early childhood learning, child care and nutrition (IYCF)

Analytical Statement of Progress: An important emerging partnership with the influential Public Authority for Consumer Protection is beginning to promote the nutrition aspects of ECD, facilitated by UNICEF Oman through capacity development to shape key C4D messages. This is expected to stimulate greater community awareness of major child and maternal nutrition challenges and the need to consider the multi-sectorial dimensions of nutrition as a development issue, increasing programme impact to address the needs of vulnerable populations. MENARO provided guidance by offering high-quality technical expertise that concluded that the Authority, with an estimated 50,000 followers on social media, had the potential to be a highly successful media gateway on issues of both IYCF and child care. In collaboration with the Authority and the Ministry of Health, UNICEF Oman conducted a workshop for 20 strategic participants that facilitated a focus on the more complex messages needed to successfully advocate for equitable development on key digital and social media sites.

Meanwhile, a new vision for a communication strategy to promote ECE was being developed now that ECD standards and other key initiatives are in place.

OUTPUT 2  High quality, cross-sectorial strategies and action plans are developed to improve services for maternal and child nutrition and infant and young child feeding (IYCF)

Analytical Statement of Progress: Challenges related to child and maternal nutrition are gaining new prominence in Oman in approaches both within and outside of the Ministry of Health, through increased attention to the convergence of nutrition-specific health interventions with nutrition-sensitive interventions in other sectors. This is further reflected in the new Health Vision 2050, which incorporated IYCF in its strategy following strong UNICEF advocacy.

The Ministry of Health developed protocols for a multi-sectorial National Nutrition Strategy and an accompanying analysis and road map, with high-level technical expertise from UNICEF Oman. The analysis and road map defined the Ministry’s roles and responsibilities in this
regard, thus providing a clearer framework for integration with other partners for ECD and ensuring that the plan has sufficient financial and human resources. The road map also emphasises two general clusters of activities, including: 1) interventions to strengthen the system (data, capacities and awareness); and 2) nutrition-specific interventions in need of strengthening, such as a focus on exclusive breastfeeding, as well as reaching women before they become pregnant.

This represented a vital initiative reflecting a shift toward a more policy-oriented UNICEF approach, as recommended by the 2014 MTR. UNICEF Oman not only provided highly qualified technical expertise for drafting of the strategy, which triggered major milestones in decision making, but also offered technical expertise for a complementary functional analysis and facilitation of cross-sectorial discussions, in line with the MTR recommendation on strengthening coordination. Initial discussions contributed to the Ministry of Health’s decision to take an approach focused on combining policy- and community-based interventions to nutrition, as encompassed in the strategy. Potential multi-sectorial partnerships began to be explored with the Public Authority for Consumer Protection, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, Supreme Council for Planning and academia.

In a carryover activity from previous years, UNICEF Oman assisted in a training of trainers on Down Syndrome management to specifically improve the quality of health services for these children in response to the high proportion of children with down syndrome in the population (2.4 in 1,000 live births). The training, conducted in collaboration with Down Syndrome International, was crucial, given that these children are at risk for a number of associated medical conditions that necessitate increased awareness among health care providers.

OUTPUT 3  By 2015, Ministry of Health decision makers integrate the social determinants of health into national plans related to child health and malnutrition in Oman

Analytical Statement of Progress: 
The activity under this output (on 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 was noted in the discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and the annual review meetings, no progress has been observed under this output due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to the overall results and strategies.

OUTCOME 6  By 2015, Government of Oman has adopted adequate strategies and costed plans to implement child rights policies and framework.

Analytical Statement of Progress: 
The Government of Oman embarked on two major initiatives that marked the prioritization of social development issues on the national development agenda. First, the Supreme Council of Planning identified social policy (focussing on human development) as one of the two pillars of the Ninth National Development Plan, along with the diversification of the economy. Second, the Ministry of Social Development initiated preparatory steps towards the development of the National Action Plan on Social Work, an organizational 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 UNICEF-prepared
paper entitled ‘Strategic Agenda on Children in Social Policy,’ which summarizes the key priorities related to children, was well received at the national conference in late December, where the draft social policy report was reviewed, and raised the profile of children’s issues.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Social Development to initiate preparatory steps towards the development of the National Action Plan on Social Work. With a view to empowering families, women, children and other groups to find sustainable measures to realize their rights, the strategy would be founded around the four overarching components of social care, social development, human resource development and civil society development. The National Action Plans on Women, Children and Disability will also form the core pillars. UNICEF engagement 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 Annual Work Plan 2013, noted below.

OUTPUT 2  Child budget allocations are better understood and analysed

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

As was noted in the discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and the annual review meetings, the progress towards the output has been constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to the overall results and strategies, and in alignment with the priorities and systems of the Government.

OUTPUT 3 Enhanced capacity at national and sub-national level to plan, implement and monitor programmes to address child vulnerability.

Analytical Statement of 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 to Ministry of Social Development 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 the required capacity to deliver quality services and protection.

As was noted in the discussions during the MTR scoping exercise and the annual review meetings, the progress towards the output has been constrained due to the fragmentation of activities that are not clearly linked to the overall results and strategies, and in alignment with the priorities and systems of the Government. The output has, however, been revitalized with the new direction set to provide technical support to the preparation of the National Action Plan on Social Work.

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