UNICEF Regional Office South Asia

Annual Report 2019

Contents

Abbreviations

ADAP	Adolescent Development and Participation
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
C4D	Communication for Development
CEC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CO	Country Office
ECD	Early Childhood Development
E-RMT	Expanded Regional Office Management Team
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GenU	Generation Unlimited
HACT	Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers
ILO	International Labour Organization
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
ODF	Open Defecation Free
OOSC	Out-Of-School-Children
PHC	Primary Health Care
RBM	Results Based Management
RBM-ISD	RBM for Inclusive Social Development
RHL&CR	Regional Headline and Complementary Results
ROMP	Regional Office Management Plan
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SAR	South Asia Region
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
T4D	Technology for Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Executive Summary

The eight countries of the South Asia Region (SAR) have a total population of about 1.856 billion[1] (approximately a quarter of the world's population), and are home to 616 million children below 18 years of age (26% of children worldwide) and 348 million adolescents (28% of adolescents worldwide). Of the 23 million under-immunized children worldwide, eight million (35%) live in South Asia.[2] In 2018, UNICEF estimated that of the 650 million men and women globally who were married as children, 285 million (44%) are in South Asia.[3] About 36% of all neonatal deaths occur in this region (900,000 of 2.5 million globally).[4] SAR is the only region in the world with polio-endemic countries – Afghanistan and Pakistan – and 2019 saw the number of cases increase.

The Regional Headline and Complementary Results (RHL&CR) of the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF-ROSA) under its Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP) 2018–2021 contribute significantly to UNICEF's global Strategic Plan goals and targets. SAR contributes 10% of the Strategic Plan goal to reduce the number of children with stunted growth by 100 million and 17% of the goal to reduce out-of-school children (OOSC). This reflects the significance of this region: if SAR targets are not achieved, UNICEF will not achieve its global targets. Similarly, progress in SAR is vital to the achievement of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recent years have seen significant progress in SAR, with an additional 100,000 newborn lives saved; however, the newborn mortality rate is still 26 per 1,000 live births and must be accelerated by 3% annually to meet SDG targets. Aggregated data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics from September 2019 suggests that SAR has registered only mixed success in reducing the total number of OOSC in recent years. OOSC at lower secondary level have declined from 18.2 million in 2016 to 16.5 million in 2018, with more boys (9.2 million) than girls (7.3 million), but those at primary level have increased from 10.3 million to 12.4 million, with more girls (6.8 million) than

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Summary of Progress on Headline Results

1. ***Save newborns***
- Percentage of women aged 15–49 attended by skilled health personnel at least once during pregnancy is increasing significantly in all countries.
- WHO/IGME estimates show that under-5 child mortality is dropping significantly across all countries, and the proportion of live births attended by skilled health personnel is increasing.

2. ***Fully immunized and eliminate polio***
- National data show signs of regional progress, with 80+% children fully immunized in some countries, but the rate of progress remains below target. Polio remains endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3. ***Reducing stunting***
- Household surveys and Joint Malnutrition Estimates (UNICEF/WHO/World Bank) show prevalence of stunting is decreasing in all countries except Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

4. ***Every child learns***
- The number of out-school children of primary school age has decreased in seven countries (India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Bhutan) but progress varies by country and education level. In Afghanistan, enrolment rates are stagnating or decreasing due to conflict, droughts and floods.

5. ***Preventing child marriage***
- Recently available household data show that the percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in union before age 18 is declining in all countries. With UNFPA, UNICEF is a key force supporting SAR governments in this area.

6. ***Eliminating open defecation***
- The number of people living in communities certified free of open defecation in 2019 show that, with UNICEF support and government leadership, SAR is making substantial progress which is driven in particular by India.

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[1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev.1

[2] UNICEF South Asia (2019). Improving Children's Lives, Transforming the Future: 25 Years of Child Rights in South Asia.

[3] UNICEF (2018). Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects.

[4] United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (2019).

boys (5.6 million). In 2019 alone, over 96 million additional people were living in 181,454 communities newly certified as free of open defecation (ODF) and were reached through direct and indirect support from UNICEF. UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) partnered with the South Asia Coordination Group to End Violence Against Children to generate key evidence to support efforts to end child marriage in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, while birth registration increased to 70 per cent in 2019 from 60 per cent in 2016.

In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA prioritized primary health care (PHC), and adopted a multi-sectorial approach bringing together health, nutrition, early childhood development (ECD) and communication for development (C4D), and supported country offices (COs) to mobilize programmatic action towards the provision of PHC at community level. The office also collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to convene a landmark regional conference on "Stop Stunting: Power of Maternal Nutrition". This led to an impactful Call to Action that is contributing to strengthening the SAARC policy environment and programme delivery at scale to improve the diet of millions of young children, thereby accelerating progress towards SDG-2 (zero hunger).

Protracted crises and recurrent natural hazards in the region require UNICEF programming to be agile, adaptive and relevant to any context. To help COs develop such programmes, UNICEF-ROSA prioritized the bridging of humanitarian-development nexus and improved the capacity of UNICEF teams on risk-informed programming. An assessment of the humanitarian-development nexus was also initiated to capture experiences in specific countries. The findings will inform future programmes.

In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA actively shaped public discourse on policies benefiting children in the social sector. For example, the office supported a ministerial meeting on child rights in Sri Lanka and strategic south-south collaboration through SAARC in the areas of education and nutrition. UNICEF-ROSA and the United Development Cooperation Office actively contributed to UN-Reform, and UNICEF-ROSA became convening agency for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) in Bangladesh and Maldives. To sustain the momentum of the Youth Skills Solution Forum and support all countries in following up on its outcomes, the office established a Generation Unlimited (GenU) Secretariat which is convening and facilitating a regional network to link a community of advocates and practitioners. UNICEF-ROSA reached nearly half a billion (425 million) people through social media channels with messages on issues affecting children, including at least 40 million adolescents.

To engage the private sector in the achievement of results for children and ensure sustainable, cost-effective sanitation supplies, UNICEF-ROSA led an innovative market-shaping exercise for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). This included sanitation market assessments in three countries and industry consultations with the private sector.

In 2019, data gaps continued to hamper adequate monitoring and reporting. To address this, the two years remaining of the current ROMP period will be dedicated to filling data gaps to feed into the next cycle, and developing systems and methodologies for real-time data collection, monitoring and reporting. This will contribute to establishing a strong baseline for the next ROMP.

2. Context

About 1.856 billion people, one-fourth of the world's population, live in SAR countries,[5] making this both the most populous and the most densely populated geographical region in the world.[6] These eight countries alone account for about 39.49% of Asia's population.[7] The region is host to 616 million children below 18 years of age (26% of children worldwide) and 348 million adolescents aged 10–19 years (28% of adolescents worldwide).

UNICEF's RHL&CRs for SAR contribute significantly to the goals and targets of its global Strategic Plan (2018–2021). Of the 23 million under-immunized children worldwide, eight million (35%) are in South Asia.[8] South Asia is the only region in the world with polio-endemic countries (Afghanistan and Pakistan), and 2019 saw the number of cases rise. Currently, 36% of all neonatal deaths around the world occur in South Asia (approximately 900,000 of 2.5 million globally),[9] the majority of these in India.

SAR contributes to 10% of the Strategic Plan goal to reduce the number of children with stunted growth by 100 million. Of the 149 million children with stunted growth worldwide, 59 million (40%) live in South Asia.[10] Globally 258 million children are out of school at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels and 93 million live in South Asia.[11] UNICEF-ROSA aims to reduce this number by 10 million by 2021, almost 17% of the global Strategic Plan target of 60 million.

In 2017, 67% of all people who practice open defecation lived in the region (600 million of 892 million globally).[12] During 2018 and 2019, with direct and indirect UNICEF support, more than 164 million people came to live in ODF communities. In 2018 UNICEF estimated that of the 650 million men and women globally who were married as children, 285 million (44%) were in South Asia[13]. For UNICEF, SAR is of vital importance: if targets are not met in this region, global targets may not be achieved.

Economic trends: During 2019 as in previous years, SAR saw the fastest and strongest rates of economic growth worldwide. Growth was mostly fuelled by India, the largest country in the region, which generated 80% of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Maldives and Bangladesh also registered rapid economic growth while other countries grew at a much slower rate. Most SAR countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Bhutan, are considered lower-middle-income economies assessed by GDP per capita. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are both upper-middle-income countries.

Political trends: Despite the region's economic growth it remained burdened by political instability, social unrest, natural disasters and protracted crises. In India, the political situation caused social unrest, which occupied global media attention throughout the year and affected political stability domestically and externally, and with its immediate neighbours. Decisions made on the Kashmir issue and a new citizenship law created major rifts between communities and widespread social unrest. Elections in Afghanistan and the violent terrorist

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[5] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev.1

[6] "South Asia Regional Overview". South Asian Regional Development Gateway. Archived from the original on 21 November 2008.

[7] *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2009

[8] UNICEF South Asia (2019). Improving Children's Lives, Transforming the Future: 25 Years of Child Rights in South Asia.

[9] United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (2019).

[10] UNICEF, WHO, International Bank for Reconstruction, The World Bank Group (2019). Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition: Key Findings of the 2019 Edition of the Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates.

[11] UNESCO, UIS Statistics at: http://data.uis.unesco.org/

[12] WHO, UNICEF (2017). Progress On Drinking Water, Sanitation And Hygiene: 2017 Update And SDG Baselines.

[13] UNICEF (2018). Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects. Based on 2010–2016 data.

acts in Sri Lanka during Easter added further complexity. Natural disasters such as floods caused internal displacement and affected livelihoods in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Social trends: Economic growth also contrasted with some of the world's lowest rates of progress towards the SDGs. The region remains young and poor, with over 300 million children in multidimensional poverty.

Pervasive norms and attitudes on the value of girls and women, including on gender-based violence, child marriage and discrimination, remain bottlenecks to the achievement of results for children in SAR. Additionally, there are several emerging issues, such as urbanization, climate change, disability, labour-induced migration and refugee movement (including the unprecedented influx of Rohingya into Bangladesh) and demographic changes (aging and the youth bulge). These require attention if UNICEF is to continue to achieve progress in the region.

Social spending in SAR: A 2018 report by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) found that none of the countries assessed in SAR spent even 75% of the global average on social protection, health care and education.[14] In particular, the report estimated the average global public expenditure on social protection to be 11.2% of GDP and found that in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region this figure falls to 3.7%, ranging from 6.5% in Sri Lanka to below 2% in Bangladesh.[15] Much improvement is needed to ensure that social sectors are well-resourced to deliver results for children.

Technology and private sector trends: Emerging opportunities for UNICEF to leverage and harness the power of business to accelerate results for children are to be found in the region's vibrant private sector, which is stronger than ever. Use of technology and access to internet and web devices is widespread: Afghanistan is the only SAR country where less than 90% of surveyed households owned a mobile phone (87.3%, according to the Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015). Increasing use of smartphones is an opportunity for UNICEF to interact directly with young people and households with young children. The use of internet and social media is also high and UNICEF COs across the region have millions of followers, often young people. However, in common with other regions, SAR faces issues around "fake news".

UN-Reform: UNICEF-ROSA is closely engaged in the ongoing UN-Reform process and ensures issues related to children and young people are fully integrated in regional forums, guidelines, tools and issue-based coalitions.

Humanitarian situation: SAR is highly prone to both natural and manmade disasters, with rising frequency and intensity due to climate change, environmental degradation and conflict. In 2019, an estimated 19.5 million SAR children were affected by floods, drought, conflicts and displacement. These included 5.7 million in Afghanistan and 4.1 million in Pakistan affected by drought and internal displacement. Floods affected 9.8 million in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal. Collectively, in 2019 over 25 million people (36% of them children) were affected by floods across SAR: over 20 million people in India, four million in Bangladesh, half a million in Nepal, and 300,000 in Afghanistan and Pakistan. While the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh stabilized at 855,000 people in 2019; there was no concrete progress on their voluntary and sustainable return to Myanmar. This left 1.3 million refugees and members of host communities, including 700,000 children, at risk of disease outbreaks, flooding, abuse and exploitation.

Conflicts continued to negatively impact on humanitarian access, notably including direct attacks on vaccination and health workers in Pakistan. In Afghanistan, access remains challenging, though a breakthrough was achieved in late 2019 when the Taliban rolled back previous bans on operations.

Despite the challenges within the region, UNICEF country programmes continued to deliver the best for children with support from UNICEF-ROSA through its role in providing oversight and technical assistance to achieve programme excellence.

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[14] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2018) Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected.

[15] Data on social protection expenditure vary significantly between sources. The data used in the UN-ESCAP report were taken from the ILO across various years, excluding health care.

3. Key Results Achieved against ROMP

This section presents key results of the UNICEF-ROSA ROMP (2018–2021) aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018–2021). Cross-cutting elements are discussed under the relevant goal areas or change strategies. Detailed results achieved against ROMP indicators are provided in Annex 1.

GOAL AREAS

Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

Work to improve maternal, newborn and child health in SAR is framed along three RHL&CRs: Saving Newborns, Fully Immunized Child and Eliminate Polio, and Reducing Stunting.

Saving newborns (500,000 additional newborn lives saved by 2021): Significant progress was demonstrated by the latest data, which showed an additional 100,000 newborn lives were saved in SAR. However, the regional newborn mortality rate remained 26 per 1,000 live births and must be accelerated by 3% annually to meet SDG targets.

Fully immunized child (3.3 million additional children fully immunized by 2021): The number of fully immunized children increased only marginally and progress on the headline result to eradicate polio remained off-track as polio cases increased in 2019, reaching 147 in Pakistan and 29 in Afghanistan.

In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA successfully established PHC advocacy and programming as a country-level priority in the region. Following the 2018 Astana Declaration on PHC, the office's health, nutrition, ECD and C4D sections collaboratively supported COs to develop plans to mobilize political commitment to operationalizing community-level PHC, and leveraged the April 2019 Expanded Regional Office Management Team (E-RMT) meeting to advance this agenda. Following the meeting, senior leadership and programme teams of COs presented country-specific two-year action plans. Thereafter, the office provided support and guidance to realize these plans. To support COs in achieving this progress, UNICEF-ROSA collaborated with WHO regional offices and the United Nations H6.[16]

To broker knowledge on child and maternal health, UNICEF-ROSA produced technical products and organized training events. These included: (i) an evaluation of community health workers in all countries, to generate evidence for PHC reform and community health systems strengthening; (ii) developing, with WHO, a regional guide to generating demand for immunization; (iii) training on Perinatal Death Review; (iv) training of Expanded Programme on Immunization managers at national, provincial and district levels on applying the latest methodologies to find and reach unimmunized children; and (v) case studies on health systems strengthening.

Reducing stunting: (10 million fewer children with stunted growth and development by 2021): The region is off-track in achieving this result, and targeted measures are required to catch up. In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA directed attention to the role of children's diets as a driver of child growth and development in early life by: (i) conducting a landscape review on complementary feeding in SAR and policy and programme action, through partnerships with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Alive & Thrive; (ii) galvanizing country-level action through a flagship SAARC and UNICEF Regional Conference on Improving Young Children's Diets; (iii) developing a draft SAARC framework on multi-system action to improve the diets of young children; (iv) documenting stories of change on complementary feeding by partnering with the Emergency Nutrition Network; and (v) initiating the Network for Improved Nutrition in South Asia to enhance communication, coordination and collaboration amongst 15 regional development partners (UN agencies, Asian Development Bank, World Bank and civil society) to accelerate progress towards nutrition targets in South Asia.

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[16] The UN H6 partners are UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO, UNAIDS and the World Bank Group.

Goal Area 2: Every child learns

In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA and all COs continued to support governments and partners in achieving the RHL&CR of ensuring Every Child Learns; addressing poor learning achievements by strengthening education systems; working across sectors on ECD, adolescents and skills; leveraging strong partnerships to work collaboratively on the SDGs; and producing evidence and advocacy to drive change for children.

Every child learns (10 million OOSC enrolled and learning by 2021): New data showed mixed success in reducing OOSC numbers in recent years (UNESCO Institute of Statistics data from September 2019), While lower-secondary-age OOSC declined between 2016 and 2018 from 18.2 to 16.5 million, comprising more boys (9.2 million) than girls (7.3 million), primary-age OOSC increased from 10.3 to 12.4 million, comprising more girls (6.8 million) than boys (5.6 million). Despite the increase in primary-level OOSC, encouraging progress was reported in Pakistan (nearly five million fewer OOSC of primary and secondary age in the last five years) and Nepal (nearly 500,000 fewer OOSC in the last three years). UNICEF-ROSA will continue to support all COs in accelerating programming at scale, and increasing focus on ECD and marginalized adolescents, in line with the newly developed global Education Strategy.

Based on evidence from SAR, UNICEF-ROSA prioritized education exclusion due to gender disparities as a strategic issue in 2019: girls comprise 49% of the region's 93 million OOSC and 38% never attend school at all, compared to 18% of boys. Those who do continue their education tend to be economically inactive, while boys experience disadvantage in lower secondary education in some countries. UNICEF-ROSA supported COs to implement gender-responsive education and measures to support girls' transition from primary to lower secondary schooling. A specific example is the support provided to the first-ever Girls' Education Policy in Afghanistan where girls represent 60% of OOSC.

The Youth Skills Forum in India created momentum to regionalize GenU. In Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Bhutan, this led to the establishment of new or strengthened national bodies to conceptualize unified and evidence-based strategies, plans and targets at country level. In Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, and Bhutan, the forum catalysed new partnerships with the private sector, UN agencies including the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and government counterparts to expand skills development opportunities for youth, such as apprenticeships, training and improvements in secondary education. To sustain momentum and support all countries, the office established a Secretariat to follow up on the key outcomes of the forum by convening and facilitating a regional network linking advocates and practitioners.

Through a fruitful partnership with SAARC and UNESCO, UNICEF-ROSA organized a ministerial meeting in the Maldives in October, during which a SAARC Framework for Action was endorsed by all member states. This will facilitate cooperation between countries on monitoring and reporting on SDG-4 (quality education) targets.

In Bangladesh and Afghanistan, UNICEF-ROSA provided support for emergency response in education, focusing on, respectively, the Rohingya education response and developing a School Safety Framework.

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

In 2019, an analysis of evidence showed substantial progress towards the RHL&CR on Preventing Child Marriage, and on achieving universal birth registration.

Preventing child marriage (500,000 child marriages averted): In 2019 a review of evidence supported by UNICEF-ROSA and UNFPA found a declining trend in child marriage. However, while there are fewer child brides, a potential increase was found in child grooms taking part in self-initiated marriages, as well as continuing challenges around structural violence due to existing gender norms and societal expectations about marriage. The study provided a basis for planning for the next four years of action, including the design of new regional and country theories of change to end the practice.

Birth registration of children under five increased to 70% in 2019 from 60% in 2016. UNICEF-ROSA, with UN-ESCAP, supported a meeting of the South Asia Civil Registration Professionals network and published papers on civil identity, coordination and cross-border collaboration. The meeting provided strategic direction on marriage and divorce registration, confirmed civil registry as the foundation for a legal identity, and affirmed that each country would have different civil registration structures reflected in legislation and ICT requirements.

However, violence against children remained prevalent and no SAR country has a legal framework that is fully compliant with international standards. A legislative review conducted by UNICEF-ROSA found only Nepal has legally abandoned corporal punishment, and only Maldives has set the minimum age of criminal responsibility at 15 in line with international guidance. A regional meeting, organized in partnership with the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, reviewed how the workforce can be strengthened to better protect children, including against violence.

Knowledge management remained an important strategy for programme excellence, providing the foundation for evidence-based programmes. In 2019, this included two web-based platforms on child protection and child marriage with a SAR focus, accessible to UNFPA and UNICEF. UNICEF-ROSA disseminated briefs on evidence on child marriage and a monthly bulletin on child protection programmes, as well as webinar series on child protection in humanitarian situations and on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and child safeguarding.

With UNICEF-ROSA assistance, the Governments of Nepal, Sri Lanka and India engaged private entities and media to support studies in state universities on violence, with steps taken to improve the capacity of call centre agents to establish mechanisms for reporting violence.

Goal Area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment
UNICEF achieved substantial progress in improving access to safe and clean environments for children in SAR under the RHL&CR of Eliminating Open Defecation.

Eliminating open defecation (148 million fewer people in open-defecation-free communities by 2021): During 2019 alone, over 96 million additional people living in 181,454 newly certified ODF communities were reached with direct and indirect UNICEF support. This success was made possible as SAR governments continued to prioritize reducing open defecation throughout 2019. Progress was substantial in India (through the Swachh Barat Mission) and in Nepal, and both countries declared themselves ODF. Marked gains were also achieved in Pakistan. Afghanistan and Bhutan. As a result, many more children now have access to better sanitation and hygiene and are protected from potentially deadly diseases. Having already reached its planned targets for this headline result, UNICEF-ROSA revised its ROMP targets for the next two years.

Millions of children also benefitted from complementary results, including safely managed water, WASH in Schools, menstrual hygiene management and hygiene promotion.

In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA supported over 15 knowledge products and conducted six major capacity development events. These included training on WASH in Emergencies for 60 participants, and on climate change and WASH (including financing) attended by almost 40 UNICEF WASH teams and government agencies. As part of the Women in WASH initiative, the office supported five female colleagues to participate in these and other training events.

UNICEF-ROSA enhanced private sector engagement by applying market-shaping strategies to promote safe sanitation. This included direct support for three sanitation market assessments, in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, and a collaboration with UNICEF's Supply Division to coordinate industry consultations. These will enhance the engagement of private sector concerns, chambers of commerce, business associations and ministries of industry/commerce in the achievement of the SDGs, with a combined market value of over US$ 3 billion. The office also coordinated with COs on innovative and blended financing opportunities, specifically those linked to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Climate change and the environment, including water scarcity, remained key areas of concern and action throughout 2019. Many countries focused on enhanced climate-resilience in interventions. UNICEF-ROSA invested in efforts to access climate financing through proposal development and implementation and stepped up strategic activities on climate change programming with the arrival of a Regional Climate Change Advisor. These included activities related to mapping, capacity development, planning and policy.

Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life

UNICEF-ROSA combined action in social policy and protection, gender and adolescent programming, with the aim of removing barriers related to geographic location, gender, age, religion, caste or ability that prevent children from reaching their full potential. In 2019, four strategic milestones were achieved:

- The adoption and use of the multidimensional poverty index (MPI). With strong support from UNICEF-ROSA, all eight SAR countries have now performed child-sensitive MPI analyses and the findings are used to influence budgetary processes to make the case for financing the SDGs and financing for children. A regional child poverty report was completed and will be published in 2020. To consolidate and build on these achievements, 56 staff were across the region were trained on Public Financing for Children.

- Knowledge creation on the availability of financial resources and their effective use for building human capital, driven and linked to achievement of SDGs. A major achievement in this area was the finalization and disbursement of over US$ 1 million under the first European Union technical facility for four countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal) in 2019, with total support amounting to almost US$ 3 million to date.

- Building strong social protection systems as a key state-building intervention. With COs, UNICEF-ROSA raised nearly US$ 1 million in support to provide high-level technical assistance to move social protection systems forward. Missions were conducted to provide research and policy support to India, Afghanistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka, and a report on the gender responsiveness of social policies in South Asia was published.

- Providing comprehensive guidance on engaging with local development and governance without getting entangled in political issues related to decentralization. The guidance was developed in collaboration with the Bangladesh and Bhutan COs and the resulting report will be published in 2020.

Adolescent development and participation (ADAP) is a strategic area of work for UNICEF-ROSA. The office supported adolescent empowerment through three strategic approaches: (i) promoting convergent programming for adolescent participation; (ii) evidence and data generation; and (iii) advocacy for adolescents. To strengthen adolescent programming across the region, UNICEF-ROSA reviewed its ADAP strategy to mainstream adolescent development, participation and empowerment strategies across sectors.

With IKEA Foundation funding, UNICEF-ROSA coordinated the implementation of the Improving Adolescent Lives initiative which strengthened adolescent groups, increased community engagement around adolescent rights, and enhanced relationships between adolescents, communities and service providers. With the conclusion of this project in 2019, UNICEF-ROSA consolidated documentation, lessons learned and knowledge management from Afghanistan and Pakistan and will complete the India component in 2020.

Humanitarian response

In 2019, as protracted crises and/or humanitarian situations continued to affect the poorest SAR communities, UNICEF-ROSA made additional efforts and investments to develop a framework linking humanitarian and development programming. This framework is critical to sustain support and find solutions to the core challenges posed by deep-rooted poverty, as manifested in several protracted humanitarian situations. Milestones included the provision of support to the development of UNSDCF in Bangladesh with an assessment of the humanitarian-development nexus; and to be rolled out to Nepal, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The World Bank expressed strong

interest in the process, and it subsequently became the UNICEF-World Bank joint effort in Bangladesh. Strengthening the linkages between humanitarian and development support, UNICEF-ROSA continued to promote risk-informed programming across the region, and completed training in Nepal, India and Sri Lanka.

With financial and technical support from UNICEF-ROSA, COs reached over 1 million people, 40% of whom were children, with humanitarian assistance. Continued efforts at regional and country levels strengthened capacity for emergency preparedness and response. With the completion of training for Rapid Response Mechanisms roster members (30 in 2019), SAR now has a pool of 65 ready-to-deploy roster members. In addition, over 120 staff members in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal were trained on Emergency Preparedness and Response, and some played key roles in UNICEF response to regional floods in 2019. With a high level of staff changes, UNICEF-ROSA continued to support COs in implementing the new procedure on emergency preparedness using the preparedness platform. Investment in risk reduction and preparedness to mitigate the impact of disasters remains at the heart of UNICEF programming, and aims to contribute to a safer environment, combat the impacts of climate change and promote disaster risk reduction.

CHANGE STRATEGIES

Programming excellence for at-scale results for children

During 2019, UNICEF-ROSA employed a range of strategies to reach results at scale through programming excellence. Multisectoral discussions conducted throughout the year resulted in a monitoring framework for tracking results. Programme review and effective knowledge management fostered further collaboration, particularly on social policy, youth, skills and employment among others.

An important feature of the regional headlines monitoring framework is its link with complementary results: these are intermediate results (e.g. reduced maternal anaemia) that ultimately lead to the achievement of headline results (e.g. improved maternal nutrition).

Using strategic partnerships at regional level with other UN agencies, academic institutions, governments, regional bodies, development partners and religious leaders, UNICEF-ROSA leverage the strengths of others to achieve at-scale results. Other strategies included generating and disseminating evidence and knowledge to improve programmes and expanding community engagement into and across sectors.

Gender-responsive programming

In 2019, promoting gender equality, the rights of women and girls, particularly adolescent girls, remained a priority area for UNICEF-ROSA. In preparation for the Beijing Platform for Action Review, the office supported the regional *Gender Counts* study which identified areas where progress for girls is most needed (see the infographic about SAR women and girls in the past 25 years in Annex 2). The UNICEF-ROSA gender team supported the completion of gender programmatic review synthesis reports which identified regional areas of progress as well as priority programming and institutional effectiveness measures. A gender toolkit corresponding to the RHL&CRs, and guidance on immunization incorporating Gender Action Plan strategies and the regional strategy around six core change pathways, was rolled out. These products support COs in achieving gender-responsive results. To overcome restrictive social norms and the low value of girls, UNICEF-ROSA invested in shifting gender socialization in regional and strategic CO programming.

Winning support for the cause of children from decision-makers and the wider public

UNICEF-ROSA continued efforts to reach and engage key stakeholders and strategic external audiences with information on the situation of children and young people in South Asia. Key outputs concentrated on child rights and a new GenU focus on building youth skills and ensuring young people had opportunities for careers and work. In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA contributed to celebrations of the 30-year anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by leading a regional effort to advocate for child rights with as many people as possible, including children. The campaign included the development of a storybook and videos with child rights champions that were shared widely in South Asia. UNICEF-ROSA reached about 425 million people through its social media channels. A joint effort between the office's communication and programmatic sections (health,

education, nutrition, WASH) led to the development and dissemination of content for #WeTheFuture, reaching 40 million people, including adolescents, through social media.

Developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children
As part of the CRC@30 celebrations and to strengthen the political space and commitments for children, UNICEF convened two high-level events: a Parliamentarian Forum and a Religious Leaders Conference, with representatives from all SAR countries. To build issue-specific multi-stakeholder coalitions, the office organized the South Asia Youth Skills and Solutions Forum, thereby regionalizing GenU in SAR; initiated the Network for Improved Nutrition in South Asia; and convened the South Asia Civil Registration Professionals network. Working with its sister agencies, UNFPA and UN-ESCAP, UNICEF-ROSA consolidated regional partnerships to end child marriage and increase birth registration respectively. Continuing to advocate in intergovernmental spaces with SAARC, UNICEF organized an education ministerial meeting with UNESCO and held a Regional Conference on Improving Young Children's Diets in South Asia, galvanizing the development of frameworks for country-level action. In sanitation, innovative and blended financing opportunities were explored with AIIB.

Leveraging the power of business and markets for children
In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA stepped up efforts to engage the private sector to improve children's lives. The E-RMT meeting in November included a full-day session on Business for Results (B4R). This was attended by the Private Fundraising and Partnerships, Supply and Programmes Divisions from UNICEF-HQ, as well as chief executives from private sector companies who shared their experiences to help foster effective private sector partnerships. Bolstered by the Programme Guidance Note on Business Engagement and its relevance to headline results, the management of the eight SAR COs expressed strong support for B4R roll-out and confirmed plans for deep dive strategic reflections on which private sector stakeholders to engage with and how. Putting B4R into action in South Asia, 186 business entities, associations and foundations worked with COs to provide investment, dissemination support and non-financial resources in 2019. Ninety businesses provided core assets, innovative solutions and expertise to explore solutions to the problems children face and 138 integrated Child Rights and Business into their activities and relationships, benefitting 1.5 million children. At the end of 2019, the office added a new post focusing on Child Rights and Business and non-financial private sector engagement.

United Nations working together
Since the launch of UN-Reform, UNICEF-ROSA has engaged regionally and within countries in support of improved programming processes and milestones. In 2019, the office contributed to and influenced the Issues Based Coalition. UNICEF acted as convening agency supporting the UNSDCF for Maldives and Bangladesh, and as part of the Regional UN Peer Support Group, contributed to quality assurance of UNSDCF initiatives across Asia-Pacific. UNICEF-ROSA also actively contributed to internal and inter-agency discussions on the ongoing UN development system reform process through the Regional UN Development Group. Joint work with sister UN agencies and contributions to the reform process led to joint regional products and results. These included a ministerial conference and several knowledge products emerging from a UNICEF-ESCAP[17] partnership on civil registration and birth registration; evidence review and common knowledge management platform on End Child Marriage with UNFPA;[18] and a major regional overview of food security and nutrition with FAO, WHO and WFP.[19]

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[17] The partnership is framed around the Asia-Pacific Framework for Action to improve Civil Registration and Vital Statistics. As part of the government regional steering group guiding this framework, UNICEF-ROSA supports UN-ESCAP and governments in responding to the midterm review of the action framework. Jointly, both agencies supported the formation of a network of civil registration professionals in South Asia and co-produced publications on issues facing civil registration in the region.

[18] The partnership with UNFPA was initiated under the Global Programme to End Child Marriage. The regional offices of both agencies jointly provided technical guidance to COs, researched the impacts of humanitarian crises on the practice, and completed a review of recent evidence from South Asia to better inform programming. Joint workshops with COs of both agencies on "what works" resulted in an evidence-based theory of change for the region adapted to specific countries.

[19] FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. (2019). Placing Nutrition at the Centre of Social Protection. Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2019

Fostering innovation in programming and advocacy for children
UNICEF-ROSA's ICT team rolled out innovation/Technology for Development (T4D) governance in the region and supported COs in RapidPro scale-up and U-Report deployment. U-Report funding was secured for Bangladesh and India. T4D training was piloted in collaboration with UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific regional office. UNICEF-ROSA also provided inputs on WhatsApp and RapidPro integration and the development of an Effective Vaccine Management portal and completed an EdTech project to identify best practices and solutions. The office conducted surveys for a Voices of Youth initiative using Facebook and U-Report to seek input from young people in all eight SAR countries on their aspirations, skills gaps and how they perceive their families, communities and governments to contribute to meeting their aspirations and addressing gaps. The findings fed into a study titled *Developing Skills in Youth to Succeed in the Evolving South Asian Economy*, which examined young people's understanding of labour markets across the region, and how their suitability for the labour market could be improved. UNICEF-ROSA also supported a workshop on youth, technology and skills for future work at the South Asia Youth Skills and Solution Forum. The forum was attended by over 250 delegates from civil society, the private sector, government, international agencies and youth and resulted in a call to action to address the regional secondary education crisis, scale up digital literacy, prioritize the school-to-work transition and decent jobs for young people, and to promote youth entrepreneurship.

Using the power of evidence to drive change for children
SAR more than doubled the number of completed evaluations to 20 in 2019, from nine in 2018. Over a dozen studies and research pieces were also completed. UNICEF-ROSA contributed four evaluations to that total, including a first-in-UNICEF synthesis of gender programme reviews which yielded global, regional, and CO-level recommendations. Regional engagement with parliamentarians was supported with a regional study of CRC@30 and the new region-wide initiative on Youth and Skills/ GenU was supported with studies and case studies identifying ways forward in the region. Multi-country evaluations continued (including one on child marriage) or were initiated (including on community health workers) and will be finalized in 2020. A Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) findings report was completed in Bangladesh and progress was made towards completing the nationally-coordinated MICS in Pakistan. In Nepal, MICS data analysis was being completed. A knowledge management strategy was developed and began to be operationalized across SAR.

ENABLERS

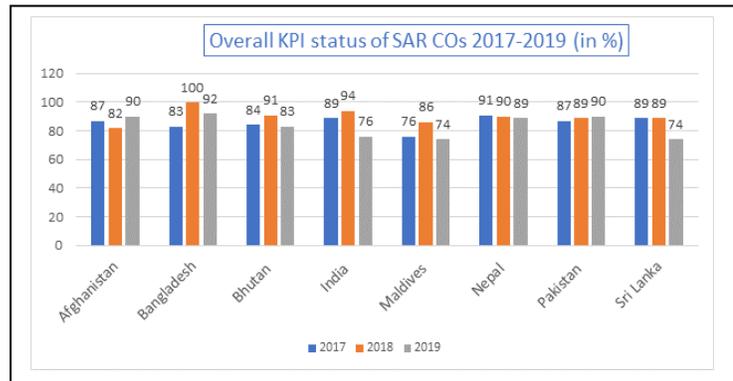*Responsive, transparent and accountable internal governance*
In collaboration with Global Shared Service Centre (GSSC), Division of Financial and Administrative Management Treasury, Supply Division, UNICEF-ROSA achieve important results around business and transaction simplification. To reduce processing time and volume of low-value transactions, the office achieved the following key results: (i) procurement cards were introduced; (ii) the low-value procurement threshold was raised; and (iii) direct payment modalities to GSSC were instituted. The office stepped up efforts to strengthen knowledge and capacities on risk management through the systemic introduction in all COs of Enterprise Governance Risk and Compliance (eGRC), an integrated collection of capabilities for organizations to reliably achieve their objectives (governance), address uncertainty (risk management) and act with integrity (compliance). In coordination with the ICT team, the contract alert system was automated; mAsset, an asset management application which consolidates the asset records below US$ 2,500 in VISION, was successfully piloted; and global best practices were modelled. Throughout 2019, UNICEF-ROSA ensured effective, efficient and risk-responsive use of resources, meeting UNICEF accountabilities for new and ongoing implementing partnerships. This included reaching completion targets for all assurance activities under the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT).

Results-oriented, efficient and effective management
Throughout 2019, UNICEF-ROSA fostered a results-oriented culture within the office and across the region. The office held weekly meetings for all heads of sections, quarterly Regional Office Management Team reflective meetings and programmatic reviews at mid-year and end-year attended by all staff members. These meetings were opportunities to track progress in strategic activities and key performance indicators and to propose strategic actions to accelerate results and support the COs in achieving results for children. Two E-RMT

brought together programme and management staff, with participation by external guest speakers and specialized divisions from UNICEF-HQ.

The Results Based Management (RBM) approach remained central to UNICEF-ROSA's work to accelerate progress towards results. A major achievement was the finalization of the RBM for Inclusive Social Development (RBM-ISD) approach and learning package. This was pilot-tested in Sri Lanka and 300 government officials were trained to integrate RBM into government institutions, development plans and processes.

Overall KPI status of SAR COs 2017-2019 (in %)

Country	2017	2018	2019
Afghanistan	87	82	90
Bangladesh	83	100	92
Bhutan	84	91	83
India	89	94	76
Maldives	76	86	74
Nepal	91	90	89
Pakistan	87	89	90
Sri Lanka	89	89	74

This proof of concept provided a foundation for the development of global guidance on RBM-ISD, which is now being rolled out across the organization. As UNICEF-ROSA had led on the knowledge on RBM-ISD, its team shared expertise on concepts and lessons learned with other offices through Deputy Representative and Operations meetings in UNICEF's Middle East and North Africa and the West and Central Africa regions. A dedicated session at the Regional Management Team in spring 2019 leveraged support from SAR Representatives. About 110 UNICEF staff in Bangladesh, Nepal and the regional office enhanced RBM skills with UNICEF-ROSA support.

The office continued to support COs in designing new country programmes in line with the new UNSDCF in the context of UN-Reform, and also provided quality assurance to key milestones including, but not limited to, programme strategy notes and situation analyses. As part of its oversight mechanism, the office provided feedback letters and strategic feedback to each CO as they prepared and submitted their annual reports.

An independent review of the accountability framework provided ways forward to strengthen accountability at the regional level. Its recommendations will be operationalized in 2020.

Staff capacity to drive change for children
UNICEF-ROSA had the highest investment globally in UNICEF's leadership excellence programmes, ensuring that COs apply contemporary management skills for staff engagement and motivation and thus directly improve the lives of children. The first-ever regional learning needs assessment provided data points for the next five years' learning strategies. In Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan, the office's comprehensive gender workforce parity study led to the development of action plans to tackle diversity challenges based on evidence. UNICEF-ROSA rolled out peer support volunteers and staff wellbeing initiatives across the region. While some 300 recruitments were completed in 2019, significant challenges remained in attracting talent to challenging duty stations. However, despite its small quality assurance Human Resource unit, the office met its key performance indicator targets at high quality.

Versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems
UNICEF-ROSA made steady progress during the year in supporting programmes and regional headline result implementation, knowledge management platforms and business improvement solutions. A regional training calendar, Contract Alert SharePoint application, mobile Data Pocketbook application and enhancements to the Human Resource Training Database and UNICEF-ROSA Travel Planning and Approval were implemented. Building on its previous experience with barcode-based asset management, the office successfully pilot-tested mAsset for time-saving asset management. Enterprise Content Management migration progressed in the region with new sites established. Multi-factor authentication, Windows 10, Server 2016, Service Gateway and backup software were rolled out. The office supported COs with Cisco Meraki deployment which enabled cloud-based management of office network infrastructure and more granular network bandwidth management. With

UNICEF-ROSA support, Bhutan CO was the first in the region to migrate to the CloudOne ICT infrastructure model, enabling it to operate fully in a cloud environment, without reliance on servers located in the office.

4. Lessons Learned and Constraints

Despite the substantial achievements in 2019, challenges occurred which inhibited progress in certain ROMP result areas: eradicating polio, reducing stunting and reducing OOSC. At the ROMP mid-term review, UNICEF-ROSA reflected on both successes and challenges, and identified the latter as including both ambitious target-setting whilst formulating results, and dynamic programming contexts which impede success such as low community acceptance and trust in polio programme areas.

Lessons learned

Partnerships are important elements of success in any UNICEF programme, and 2019 yielded important learning on partnerships with other UN agencies. Such partnerships are most effective when there is: (i) mutual recognition of the other's comparative advantage; (ii) a clear activity that both agencies can work towards; (iii) a selective partnership measured by results, recognizing that partnerships take time to mature. Modelling ways of working jointly at the regional level positively affects how joint work occurs between country teams.

Convergent programming is central to delivering the ambitious results set out in the new UNICEF Strategic Plan and the organization's contribution to the integrated SDGs. It provides a sound global vision which can be adapted to the range of contexts in which UNICEF engages in South Asia. Thus, the RHL&CRs represent an opportunity to move forward cross-sectoral views and work from the regional office to the COs. In 2019, E-RMTs that brought together cross-sectoral groups for joint sessions with the Country Representatives galvanized cross-sectoral work. For example, following the E-RMT on Goal Area 1, UNICEF-ROSA and the COs progressed PHC as the keystone of cross-sectoral work. This led to the convergence of ECD, health, nutrition and C4D. Based on these lessons learned, UNICEF-ROSA will continue to organize cross-sectoral E-RMTs.

Evidence-based programming: The opportunity for reflection during the ROMP MTR was used to improve programme strategies, collect evidence to generate knowledge on what worked or failed, and take corrective actions to improve programming. For example, learning from nutrition evidence showed that a child's diet is a driver for growth at an early age. The team collected further evidence on complementary feeding, established new partnerships and advocated with more strategic partners at the regional level (through SAARC) and continued to document change stories and learn from experience.

Challenges and ways forward

Bridging the **gender gap** in access to primary education will require stronger targeted action for girls in Afghanistan and Pakistan. UNICEF-ROSA will therefore support scale up of community-based education programmes in Afghanistan, and gender-targeted programmes in Pakistan, by working collaboratively with provincial governments, the Global Partnership for Education and the European Union, as appropriate.

Data gaps continued to hamper adequate monitoring and reporting of RHL&CRs. The two years remaining in the current ROMP will be dedicated to filling data gaps and developing systems and methodologies for real-time data collection, monitoring and reporting. This will feed into the next programming cycle and contribute to a strong baseline for the next ROMP.

Achieving results require having **the right workforce** in place. In 2019, UNICEF-ROSA continued to face challenges to workforce diversity and inclusion. Despite action plans launched in critical SAR countries, success was not secured, and these plans will need to be monitored closely in the coming years. Staff burn-out is an increasing area of concern which must be better considered and managed by local leadership.

These core insights will guide UNICEF-ROSA in 2020, as it completes the second half of its ROMP and accelerates its actions to ensure every child in South Asia reaches her or his full potential.

5. Annexes

Annex 1: Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP) Result Matrix Status 2019

ROSA ROMP Result
matrix status 2019.xls

Annex 2: Gender Counts

Unicef - A new era
for girls SA.pdf

Annex 3: Illustrative List of Knowledge Products produced by UNICEF-ROSA in 2019

S/N	Title	Sector/Thematic Area	Type of product (Evaluations, Research, Assessment, Case Study or others)
1	Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in South Asia Countries	Child Protection/CRVS	Study
2	Civil Registration in South Asia: Coordination, Connections and Collaboration	Child Protection/CRVS	Background paper
3	South Asia Cross Border Migration Mechanisms: A Scoping Study	Child Protection/Migration	Scoping study
4	Ending Child Marriage in South Asia: An Evidence Review	Child Protection/Child Marriage	Evidence review
5	The Legal Framework for Child Protection in South Asia	Child Protection/Justice for Children, Violence against Children	Study
6	Linking Development and Humanitarian Programming (including case study for UNSDCF/ CCA Bangladesh)	Emergency/DRR section	Framework paper/ Case study