

# Country Office Annual Report 2018

## Sao Tome and Principe

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### Part 1: Situation update in the country

After four years of political rule by the same party in the island state of Sao Tome and Principe, 2018 was marked by a legislative campaign that culminated in October elections and a change in power. Following publication of the results, opposition parties formed a coalition, obtained an absolute majority in Parliament and were asked to form a government by the president. The new Government was officially installed in December 2018, following two months of negotiations. Following inclusive dialogue and diplomatic negotiations, a long-term political impasse was avoided. This peaceful transfer of power confirms Sao Tome and Principe as one of the strongest multi-party democracies in Africa.

During the development of UNICEF's country programme document (CPD) for 2017–2021, data showed continuous progress made by the country in terms of access to basic services, confirming the positive trend which started in mid-2000. Further, Sao Tome and Principe succeeded in meeting the Millennium Development Goals for education, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Important efforts have been made to increase the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in past years. The oil industry and construction sectors are expected to grow –but not before 2020– while the agricultural sector has been declining for the past four decades. Despite extensive promotion of the country's natural and cultural assets, Sao Tome and Principe cannot yet rely on a strong tourist sector to provide sustainable economic returns.

In general, economic conditions continue to be characterized by heavy dependence on external financial aid: GDP data from 2016 show that only 14.9 per cent of GDP comes from domestic resources. This situation greatly hampers domestic expenditure on social sectors.

It is expected that a newly signed project between the Government and the World Bank to scale-up social protection services for 2,500 families through cash transfers will improve the conditions of the most vulnerable households, which are often female-headed. In this framework, UNICEF provided solid technical support to the Ministry of Social Affairs to identify the most vulnerable families, ensuring the connection between this programme and UNICEF-supported income-generating activities and parental education programmes.

Overall, the political environment was conducive throughout 2018 for the design, validation and

adoption of several key policies and laws aimed at improving the lives of children and youth. There is a strong partnership with the Government, UN agencies, bilateral partners and civil society, that allowed UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe to achieve important results for children in this second year of country programme 2017–2021 implementation, especially at the strategic and policy development levels.

UNICEF interventions and strategies contribute to the achievement of United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) outcomes, especially in the area of social cohesion, and are aligned with UNICEF's Strategic Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With regard to access to health services and promotion of child well-being, recent data and evidence from the field show positive trends, specifically in the areas of maternal mortality, immunization, HIV/AIDS and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). According to the United Nations inter-agency group for child mortality estimation, maternal mortality declined from 189.3 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 76 per 100,000 live births in 2014.

The adoption of a national health plan and implementation of a new national health strategy are expected to accelerate the improvement of access to and quality of health services.

Furthermore, following UNICEF advocacy, the Government (through the Ministry of Health/MoH) adhered to the vaccine independence initiative, which will lead to gradual national ownership of the immunization programme and related expenses. According to MoH administrative data, vaccine coverage of children under one year for all antigens remained high in 2018, as demonstrated by the DPT/Hib/HepB3 average of 96 per cent. Coverage of the first dose of vitamin A supplementation increased considerably, from 93 per cent in 2017 to 97.8 per cent in 2018, while the number of children under five years of age affected by pneumonia decreased from 2,274 in 2017 to 1,559 in 2018 (Government data, 2018).

The health platform continued to be ideal for integrated services in Sao Tome and Principe. In 2018, in line with the First 1,000 days agenda, UNICEF supported a national early childhood development (ECD) campaign to raise awareness among caregivers about the importance of the first years of life to children's cognitive, social and emotional development, using communication for development (C4D) strategies. Birth registration services are currently integrated with health services, provided through maternity centres, ensuring coverage of over 90 per cent.

Access to drinking water has improved continuously, increasing from 110,000 people in 2000 to more than 180,000 in 2015, according to data from the joint WHO/UNICEF monitoring programme (JMP). However the JMP also found that open defecation (OD) rates remain very high; North East region accounted for more than 65 per cent of the population practising open defecation. Following a country exchange with Guinea Bissau in 2017, and with support from UNICEF's West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO), UNICEF supported the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to introduce the community-led total sanitation (CLTS) approach.

For the first time, community-led total sanitation interventions got underway in 2018, starting with three communities in two districts, with a plan to expand to 10 communities in 2019. Piloting this approach was supported by the country's recently validated sanitation policy, developed with UNICEF support in 2017.

In the area of HIV/AIDS, Sao Tome and Principe made important efforts to expand access to anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment, which increased from 48 per cent in 2011 to 78 per cent in 2018 (administrative data), thanks to UNICEF and Global Fund support. Based on these results the country is considered to be on-track for eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV. While progress is encouraging, a 2017 UNICEF/UNAIDS regional report consolidating data from 2010–2016 confirmed that that only about 40 per cent of adolescent girls and boys in Sao Tome and Principe have complete knowledge about HIV and AIDS. The country programme document prioritizes the work of all sectors on adolescents and young people, and for the first time a comprehensive life-skills curriculum was developed and rolled out in the country, with UNICEF support, benefitting almost 600 boys and girls.

Sensitization and dialogue on life-skills is a key strategy in Sao Tome and Principe, which is characterized by high fertility rate (4.5 children per woman), including among adolescents (MICS 2014), and where the abuse of alcohol and other drugs is increasing, especially among young people. In 2018 UNICEF provided support for the validation of both the first national action plan for the prevention and response to early pregnancy and the first national youth strategy. Renewed energy and action by youth associations linked to the National Youth Council required a repositioning by UNICEF, which resulted in greater collaboration with civil society on the youth agenda, to ensure tangible results for the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys.

Sao Tome and Principe's population of around 205,000 is extremely young; 52 per cent are under 20 years of age (2012 National Census). While this represents an extraordinary opportunity for growth and transformation, it also requires investment in the social sectors, especially in education, to provide equitable access to and retention in quality education, learning (including non-formal) and professional training opportunities.

The 2018 education sector analysis report showed that while Sao Tome and Principe remains among the top spenders in education (28 per cent of GDP), that percentage has decreased steadily since 2010, when it was almost 38 per cent. Strong investment and support for education by the international community has resulted in an improved quality and increased enrolment across all levels. In particular, access to preschool education jumped from 21.4 per cent in 2006 to 71.4 per cent in 2017. This is a positive trend, resulting from continuous UNICEF advocacy and technical support in the area. Nevertheless, despite a slight improvement, secondary school dropout rates for both girls and boys remain high and UNICEF and partners need to address the causes identified through a study on out-of-school children. To allow access to education by the most vulnerable, important efforts have been made to help adapt infrastructure to ensure access and inclusive education, learning from ongoing service delivery, supported by UNICEF, for children who are blind or deaf.

With UNICEF advocacy and technical support, and following Government approval in 2017, the country's National Assembly approved a package of laws for the protection of children in June 2018. The package includes laws on: protection of at-risk children and youth, foster care, children's institutions, civil juvenile justice and key legislation relating to family law. This process began in 2013 and required long and constant support and advocacy by UNICEF and its partners to reach final approval. Expectations for implementation of these laws are high, as violence against children, sexual abuse and domestic violence rates remain worrisome.

The child protection system continued to suffer from lack of adequate financial resources and a weak monitoring system, which prevent the collection of data on violence and the planning of

adequate response in terms of service delivery. UNICEF, in collaboration with Portuguese experts, is providing technical support to build capacity within the Social Protection Directorate, and the new Government is committed to sustain ongoing efforts. In its application of the principle of leaving no one behind, UNICEF continued to support national campaigns in the areas of birth registration, parental education and immunization. Increased urbanization required a new approach to poverty reduction that takes into account different social dynamics, compared to rural areas.

In July 2018 Sao Tome and Principe finalized and validated its 5th and 6th reports on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking stock of important progress in the area of policy development over the past five years. The report will be presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva in May 2019. UNICEF supported the elaboration of a situation analysis and dedicated studies on out-of-school children and adolescents, but the reports revealed a critical lack of updated data and heavy dependence on large-scale household surveys for updating the situation of children and young people.

Above-average performance in several sectors, including access to water and electricity, were key factors contributing to the recent graduation of Sao Tome and Principe to the status of lower-middle-income country. However, this new status presents important risks, particularly for a future decline in external support to the country. It also fails to reflect the situation of vulnerability experienced by most of the population.

According to recent World Bank estimates, about one third of the population continue to live on less than \$1.90 per day, and two thirds of the population is considered to be poor, using a poverty line of \$3.20 per day. The latest MICS was released in 2014 and since then no large-scale survey has been undertaken, leaving decision-makers and the aid community with little updated data on the situation of children and women. Preparatory work for the MICS6 began in 2018, and the survey is expected to start in the first half of 2019.

The everyday reality for children, youth and women in Sao Tome and Principe, remains challenging. The quality of living conditions for a majority of the population contrasts with the encouraging forecast of the International Monetary Fund released in 2017 and often cited by the local media.

The country was not affected by any emergency in 2018. Nevertheless, the changing political environment and continuous electricity cuts, especially towards the end of the year, affected administrative, private and public services and led to civil unrest and discontent in most parts of the country. The situation slowly improved towards the end of December 2018. Heavy rains during the month of November affected access to most remote areas and caused some damage to schools and houses. As an island state, the country's vulnerability to climate change is perceived to have increased and emergency preparedness in this area will need to be at the core of UNICEF and United Nations work in the coming months and years.

Throughout the year, UNICEF collaborated very effectively with the other UN agencies through implementation of the UNDAF and joint plans. UNICEF played a lead role in the implementation of the joint plan on social cohesion, as a contribution to the Common Chapter and as lead of the UN communication group. Joint initiatives included advocacy for increased investment on adolescents and the MICS6, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); response to school exclusion with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) for HIV/AIDS-affected children; and joint technical support to the Ministry of Health with

the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO). Additionally, UNICEF joined with UNFPA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the development of an integrated information system on criminality, including gender-based violence related crimes and crimes against children. UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA also worked together to support national counterparts in the selection of country-relevant SDG indicators, which will greatly assist in monitoring of progress through 2030.

Ongoing UN reform is expected to consolidate the existing dynamic and to offer new opportunities for joint work for children's rights in the country.

## Part 2: Major results, including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

### Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe's work on child survival contributed to SDG goals 2, 3 and 5, and to the UNDAF's social cohesion outcome. During the past year UNICEF reached the CPD 2017-2021 target related to immunization coverage, while more work remains to be done to reach targets for anaemia reduction, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and coverage of sanitation facilities.

In 2018 UNICEF strengthened its support to the MoH through a mix of advocacy, technical support and knowledge generation. Following extensive consultations with national counterparts and partners, the Ministry adopted the national health development plan and national health policy. UNICEF, WHO and GAVI jointly provided financial and technical support for the development and finalization of both documents. UNICEF technical support was critical to ensuring that the equity dimension, gender and children's needs were taken into account in these policies. The main innovation included a strategy on strengthened decentralization of health services to reach the most vulnerable living in remote areas of the country. The national health policy also foresees strengthening of the health data collection and management systems. With this new policy, all health-related data will be available at central level across all different health areas starting in 2019. The policy also provides orientation, in line with the Abuja Commitments, on public financing of the health sector. In 2018, an estimated 8 per cent of GDP was allocated to the health system; the new policy foresees an increase of up to 15 per cent of GDP.

Another important 2018 result was the Government's commitment to the vaccine independence initiative, achieved in collaboration with UNICEF Supply Division and UNICEF WCARO. The initiative was signed and US\$500,000 was approved by UNICEF. The next step will be signature of a memorandum of understanding between the Government and UNICEF and a letter of guarantee, expected for early next year.

UNICEF organized national training to strengthen capacities at central and district levels in the area of vaccine supply estimates and budgeting, building on its many years of collaboration with the authorities and key partners in this area. As a result, the MoH is now autonomous in its planning and monitoring of vaccine supply. In 2018 UNICEF procured 22,000 doses of BCG vaccine, 8,879 doses of measles and rubella vaccine, 22,589 doses of polio (VPO2), 10,240 doses of diphtheria and tetanus and 6,309 doses of Hepatitis B vaccines, corresponding to

US\$15,580, to contribute to the prevention of potential stock-outs. As in 2017, vaccination coverage in 2018 remained fairly high: BCG, 96 per cent; DPT-Hib-HepB3, 96 per cent, Polio3, 95.7 per cent; anti-pneumococcal, 95.7 per cent; rotavirus3, 96 per cent; yellow fever and rubella3, 89 per cent.

UNICEF supported the installation of 38 solar panels for health centres, representing 100 per cent coverage by solar panels. The new technology allowed health centres to guarantee functioning of the cold chain, including during long power cuts that affected the whole country in late 2018. The impact of this intervention on immunization coverage will be evaluated with 2019 immunization data.

In collaboration with WHO and GAVI, UNICEF consolidated the introduction of the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine in the country to scale up preventive measures among adolescent girls. UNICEF and partners carried out two additional phases of HPV vaccine demonstration, reaching approximately 2,600 girls aged 10 years (99 per cent rate). Following the piloting in 2018, HPV will become part of routine immunization starting in 2019.

In the area of nutrition, an important result achieved by UNICEF was the approval of the first Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes by the national parliament. The code is expected to improve market regulation and contribute to increased awareness about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. Additionally, a national campaign to promote exclusive breastfeeding without water was launched in 2018, including a C4D component, with the participation of the reproductive health staff and midwives from maternities. More than 90 per cent of women who were pregnant and new mothers were sensitized during this campaign. UNICEF continued to be the only partner supporting the national nutrition programme, procuring and distributing vitamin A. UNICEF support, through routine supplementation, has been instrumental in increasing vitamin A coverage by more than 4 per cent compared to 2017, contributing to child survival. According to Government data, routine vitamin A supplementation in both target groups (6-11 months and 12-59 months) was above 90 per cent. In 2018 a slight increase occurred due to its introduction during the African Vaccination Week campaign. As a follow up to 2017 piloting by UNICEF of micronutrient supplementation on Principe Island as a strategy to reduce anaemia, and in response to requests by partners and decision-makers, in late 2018 UNICEF was supporting an evaluation of the intervention, which is expected to inform the MoH on the feasibility of national scale-up.

HIV/AIDS treatment guidelines were updated with UNICEF and WHO technical support, and 75 new health professionals were trained in their use. Additionally, UNICEF procured and distributed a total of 265 bottles of ARV (paediatric formula), 100,000 boxes of HIV/AIDS test, and 100 dry blood sample collection kits, which were used to test 100 per cent of pregnant women through 2018. These actions contributed to increased decentralization of services to prevent HIV transmission and increased adherence by women who were pregnant to the PMTCT strategy. Consequently this work contributed to an increased ARV coverage rate, from 48 per cent in 2011 to 78 per cent in 2018. Based on these results, the country is considered to be on track for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

UNICEF collaborated with WHO and UNFPA to update the integrated plan of reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health, including nutrition. For the first time, the new plan includes nutrition services, with a special emphasis on adolescents. According to government data covering January to November, 5,010 live births took place at a central maternity, corresponding to 92 per cent of all live births in UNICEF-supported areas. This

represents an important increase compared to 2017, when deliveries in health facilities totalled just 4,000.

## **Goal area 2: Every child learns**

UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe's work in goal area 2 contributes to SDG goals 4 and 5 and to the UNDAF social cohesion outcome. During 2018 UNICEF reached the CPD 2017–2021 target related to gross enrolment in pre-primary education, although further efforts are required to reduce the number of children not in school. New data on the percentage of children developmentally on track will be available with the finalization of the MICS6 in late 2019.

During the past year, the Ministry of Education (MoE) began an education sector review, which resulted in a draft updated education policy. The full process was supported by UNICEF, the World Bank and the GPE, and allowed national counterparts and partners to evaluate progress and propose adjustment to the education strategy for 2012–2021. UNICEF continued to lead the local education group (LEG) supporting submission of proposals for the sector review and the dissemination of various drafts to the members for comments. Most importantly, following UNICEF advocacy, the education reform now includes two years of mandatory pre-school for all children and a dedicated decree was approved by the Council of Ministries to guarantee the functioning of the new pre-school modality.

To support the policy provision, UNICEF continued to invest in early learning and parental education. The important increase in preschool enrolment documented by the CSR can be explained by the introduction of a two-shift modality, so that across the country, children have can attend preschool in the morning or in the afternoon, contributing to an increase in equitable access to this level of education. The solution was introduced in 2018, following UNICEF advocacy and piloting in 2016/2017.

In 2018 UNICEF continued to roll out the parental education programme; 155 families from 19 communities belonging to the poorest 10 per cent of the population were sensitized on the importance of early childhood development (ECD), stimulation and early learning through group sessions, indirectly benefiting more than 671 children. Also, communication materials, multimedia assets and debates with key messages were elaborated and disseminated in line with UNICEF's global ECD campaign, #EarlyMomentsMatter. UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe will need to accelerate efforts in this area by strengthening its C4D approaches. Cultural and gender barriers related to child care as well as harmful practices such as violence and alcohol abuse among caregivers demand a stronger C4D support to the parental education programme across sectors.

The new education policy features a special emphasis on inclusive education, as a result of UNICEF advocacy. In particular, UNICEF advocated for the inclusion of measures to routinely identification children with special needs who are not in school and the provision of targeted support. In addition to incorporating inclusion into the national policy, UNICEF supported the development of a legal framework to regulate inclusive education provision within the MoE. In partnership with Portuguese Academia, inclusive education specialists are supporting the MoE to better define roles and responsibilities and to define a protocol and norms for inclusive education classes. Throughout 2018, UNICEF, in collaboration with the NGO's Valle Flor and the Association of the Blind - Cabo Verde- ADEVIC, organized the training of teachers to improve their capacity to teach children who are blind or deaf. The training targeted a group of 29 teachers representing all districts, and aimed at promoting a culture of inclusivity across

schools and classrooms in the country.

Additionally, UNICEF supported the establishment of resource centres to support teachers dealing with children with special needs. These centres are equipped with special education material to promote attendance of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. With UNICEF support, implementing partners are also organizing sensitization and mobilization activities for community members and families in these intervention areas.

While collaborating with the MoE on education reform, UNICEF also continued to invest in the areas of knowledge generation, technical support and institutional strengthening. In 2018 UNICEF provided financial and technical support for the realization of the first out-of-school study, which identified potential intervention strategies to prevent school dropout and non-formal learning opportunities for children who never entered school. Some of the strategies highlighted in the study will be included in the final revised education strategy. Unfortunately, non-formal strategies for out-of-school children are not yet part of the national education system. UNICEF will need to maintain dialogue with the new Government and partners to identify sustainable and cost-effective solutions for children not in school, especially adolescents. The introduction of effective C4D strategies will be required to keep young people committed to education while improving communication and pedagogical approaches by teachers, especially for secondary education.

To improve the quality of education, UNICEF supported piloting of self-evaluation mechanisms through the establishment of quality indicators tested in 14 institutions. UNICEF trained 261 teachers on the use of the self-evaluation tools, which are meant to define the basic quality benchmarks to be met by each school across areas such as curriculum and educational practices, teachers, learning, infrastructures, organization and school management. The initiative seeks to raise the level of quality of education services and the satisfaction of the educational community. UNICEF continued to advocate for increased engagement of education system actors and communities' in monitoring education quality and finding solutions, in a participatory way, for improving learning outcomes.

Finally, in response to the critical condition of the country's learning environment, UNICEF supported the rehabilitation of preschools in the most remote areas of the country in three extremely poor districts, benefitting roughly 200 children. UNICEF also supported the training of 720 preschool education and auxiliaries on utilization of the new preschool curriculum developed in collaboration with Brazil's Pontifical Catholic University in 2014–2016 and adopted by the Government in 2016. In 2018, to support teaching practices at preschools, UNICEF provided financial support for the procurement of curriculum materials for 100 per cent of preschool classes and teachers.

Since 2017 and in line with the CPD, UNICEF accelerated support to the adolescent development agenda through the establishment of a dedicated programme for mainstreaming life-skills for young people and strengthening institutional capacities and policy development for adolescents. The year under review was critical for the roll-out of the first life-skills curriculum, which includes basic information and sensitization around 24 skills, spanning from self-esteem, gender balance, autonomy, leadership, pro-activity, resilience and stress management, to alcohol and drug abuse and others. UNICEF supported three trainings of trainers, strengthening the capacities of 63 trainers (33 boys, 30 girls), who were then able to reach 600 adolescents and young people across the country through a mix of group work in communities, schools and youth centres.

Following these sessions, trainers used the tools to assess the general knowledge of young people attending the sessions. Preliminary anecdotal information showed that much of the information and skills shared were unknown to the public before this intervention, and that the roll-out of the programme is boosting volunteerism for adolescent and young people's well-being in the country.

For 2019, while continuing to scale up the programme and advocate for the mainstreaming of life-skills education into the education system and non-formal learning opportunities, UNICEF will also invest in collecting data on the impact of the programme in terms of knowledge acquisition.

The main partners for implementation of the life-skills programme were the Institute of Youth (the technical arm of the Ministry of Youth) and the National Council of Youth. During 2018 UNICEF supported the equipping of 10 youth interaction centres with furniture and ICT equipment. These centres function as platforms and safe spaces for young people across the country.

Finally, to address excessive consumption of alcohol among young people, UNICEF supported the Institute of Drug and Addiction to place 1,600 notices on the 2012 law prohibiting the sale of alcohol to adolescents under 16. The notices were posted in night clubs, shops and other public or private spaces selling alcohol. In 2019 UNICEF will strengthen its support to the Institute with the development of a C4D strategy for reduced alcohol and drug consumption, through support for law enforcement, in collaboration with national police and other services. Some of the barriers to behaviour change in this area include lack of parental support, general acceptance of alcohol abuse, lack of expectations and low self-esteem.

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

The work of UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe in goal area 3 contributed to SDG goals 5 and 16. The new MICS6 will allow UNICEF to report on progress toward the two outcome targets related to violence against children and children benefiting from legal aid. UNICEF's efforts to establish child protection laws and build the capacity of national counterparts also contributed to CPD results.

Thanks to UNICEF advocacy and technical support, and following Government approval in 2017, the National Assembly of Sao Tome e Principe voted for an essential package of laws for the protection of children in June 2018. The package includes laws on: protecting at-risk children and youth, foster care, children's institutions, civil juvenile justice and a new family law. The process of elaborating these laws began in 2013 and required persistent support and advocacy by UNICEF and its partners to reach final approval.

To support implementation of the child protection policy, which includes enforcement of the child protection legal framework, UNICEF advocated for the approval of a national decree creating a national committee to coordinate implementation.

The decree was published and will officially enter into force in May 2018. Establishment of the national committee to coordinate implementation of the child protection policy is an historical achievement. This multi-sectoral committee is expected to enhance coordination among all stakeholders' and make a concrete difference for vulnerable children and families in the

country. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs and with UNICEF support, the committee will define the strategic axes and priorities for implementation of the policy.

The new Family Law establishes 18 as the minimum age for marriage and strengthens the obligations of parents, especially fathers, toward their children. The law represents an important step forward for gender equity, as previously girls could be married at 14, and boys only at 16. Additionally, the stronger focus on fathers seeks to improving shared responsibilities among caregivers with regard to child care and support. The law on civil juvenile justice includes new procedures and foresees the establishment of services for children in conflict with the law. To achieve the relevant CPD indicator, UNICEF will closely monitor and support the laws' implementation in 2019.

Throughout 2018 UNICEF also accelerated efforts to prevent and respond to violence, particularly domestic violence. Technical and financial support was provided to the National Counselling Centre against Violence (NCCV) to promote new social norms and protective individual practices against such violence. The Centre is dedicated to addressing domestic violence and provides service delivery to victims, including counselling and health system referrals.

Following up on the first phase of capacity building in 2017, UNICEF supported the training of NGO staff acting as community facilitators to organize and run activities for raising awareness about domestic violence using adapted C4D tools and an interactive methodology, boosting dialogue around sensitive issues such as violence. The districts of Me-Zochi and Lemba, targeted for these interventions, are among those with the highest rates of domestic violence according to the national police. Me-Zochi also includes some of the most populated rural communities in the country.

In 2018 UNICEF also financed a study on the impact of interventions against domestic violence. Preliminary results show that communities in the most remote areas of the country, such as those in Me-Zochi and Lemba districts, are now aware of what constitutes domestic violence and that it is a crime. This widespread knowledge is a result of ongoing support for community dialogue and sensitization supported by UNICEF and other organizations. Nevertheless, existing gender dynamics affect the translation of this knowledge into new behaviours.

The upcoming MICS6 (to be conducted in 2019) will provide updated information on women's perception of violence and show whether sensitization activities have contributed to an improvement of the situation. Historically, and considering the critical situation of women in the country, UNICEF supported the NCCV to carry out its mandate against domestic violence. Unfortunately, some of the most critical barriers to eliminating violence against children and women include strong gender stereotypes and discrimination as well as multiple-partner dynamics out of the wedlock, leading to lack of social and economic responsibility by males, and the use of violent discipline by caregivers.

In 2018 UNICEF began to support the strengthening of case management (attendance and follow-up) by the directorate of social services (DPSS). Child protection was recently added to the DPSS mandate, thus it is critical to develop the agency's technical skills and organizational competence. To this end, UNICEF continued to support the rehabilitation of DPSS centres, covering 50 per cent of districts on the Island of Sao Tome through improved infrastructure, furniture and ICT equipment and training of 100 per cent of DPSS social workers. Also,

UNICEF provided technical support for the development and testing of case management technical orientation guidelines and tools. Following the testing, it is expected that the Ministry of Social Affairs will validate the guidelines and tools and begin using them regularly in 2019.

Use of these tools (questionnaires and other data collection tools) is expected to reduce the challenge of data collection and monitoring of cases of violence and abuse against children. Nevertheless, the child protection system remains weak due to lack of consistent data and UNICEF and partners rely on large-scale household surveys, which do not allow for immediate case management. The strategies adopted by UNICEF are expected to contribute to the achievement of CPD indicators on reducing violent discipline. The new MICS6 is expected to provide additional evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions.

Additionally, UNICEF collaborated with UNDP and UNFPA to strengthen the national integrated data collection system on crime statistics. Dedicated software was developed, ICT equipment procured and an initial group of technicians trained.

The system is weakened by lack of internet connections, power cuts and a scarcity of skilled human resources. UNICEF plans to continue its support, in the framework of the governance thematic group of the UNDAF joint workplan, and is committed to help find solutions to these shortfalls.

#### **Goal area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe's work under goal area 4 contributed to SDG goal 6 and to the UNDAF's social cohesion outcome. As noted, important efforts will be required to reduce the rate of open defecation in the country, which is included in CPD results for 2017–2021. While the coverage of latrines rose from 6,000 in 2000 to 46,000 in 2015 according to JMP data, non-regulated urbanization, population increases and lack of responsiveness to sensitization all affect the open defecation rate, which remains very high across the country.

Thanks to country exchanges on sanitation with Guinea Bissau in 2017, and with the support of UNICEF WCARO, UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe supported the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment by introducing the community-led total sanitation approach in 2018.

Following development of the country's first sanitation policy, initiated in 2017, UNICEF played an instrumental role in accompanying the policy's finalization and validation in August 2018. The main innovation is related to increased community participation and monitoring of improved access to clean water and reduced open defecation. The policy also includes provision of gender-separate WASH facilities in all schools. Policy implementation is expected to accelerate in 2019, supporting achievement of related SDG indicators by Sao Tome and Principe.

Three pilot communities in Lemba and Lobata districts were selected on the basis of their high OD rates. Community dialogue was initiated with the support of Oquimamb, a local NGO specialized in sanitation, with financial and technical support from UNICEF. Of the three communities, one showed strong commitment to the fight to eliminate open defecation. The majority of community members build their own latrines and acquired knowledge of the risks to health and wellbeing posed by open defecation. As a result of the piloting phase, 18 new latrines were built, allowing access to basic sanitation services to an additional 95 community

members.

However, weak community ties and lack of leadership in the other two communities, combined with extreme economic conditions and disrupted social dynamics, led to lack of engagement. At year's end, UNICEF and its partners were taking stock of the lessons learnt during this first pilot before attempting to scale up the approach. In particular, UNICEF is exploring how best to strengthen the C4D component linked to CLTS to respond to the unique needs of the local population. Barriers to behaviour change included poor socio-economic conditions and understanding of the impact of open defecation on health and well-being. Despite these challenges, the CLTS piloting led to strong engagement by the national ad hoc committee and local authorities. Buy-in by national actors is a prerequisite for adjusting the approach in the coming months and years, in line with the new sanitation policy.

Finally, UNICEF continued to support WASH in schools; during 2018 five new schools (four preschools and one primary school) gained access to basic WASH facilities, reaching about 1,568 students.

### **Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

Throughout 2018 UNICEF continued to address key dimensions of inequity affecting children by supporting the national agenda of poverty reduction, addressing discrimination and promoting young people's participation. In line with SDGs 1, 5 and 10 and the UNDAF outcome on strengthening social cohesion, UNICEF intervened in the areas of public finance for children, social protection, adolescent development and childhood disabilities. With regard to relevant CPD targets, it is expected that by 2019, the population covered by government cash transfers will increase, as a result of UNICEF advocacy and World Bank interventions.

In 2018 UNICEF organized training sessions and boosted dialogue on public finance for children, supporting the country in the areas of budget management and equitable redistribution, with special attention to children. A five-day training session was organized with support from UNICEF WCARO, during which 35 participants from the national administration, civil society and development partners (including the United Nations International Labour Organization/ILO) were introduced to the basics of public finance for children. Participants were selected on the basis of their engagement in shaping the national budget and their potential future role as advocates for children.

To strengthen national ownership and engagement on the development of a national strategy on public finance for children, UNICEF provided financial support for the participation of Sao Tome and Principe's budget director in an international workshop for Lusophone countries on transparency in national budget definition and monitoring.

As a result of this participation, the International Budget Partnership and UNICEF developed a series of recommendation for the Sao Tome and Principe Government, which will need to be acted upon before May 2019. These include the need to further engage civil society during the process of budget definition and the institutionalization of a dialogue group, including development partners, to make contributions to the process of defining the state budget. However, the national budget allocation for social protection services did not increase in 2018, but UNICEF's support in the area of public finance, as well as responsiveness by the new Government, is expected to have an impact in coming years.

Due to the political transition that characterized the second half of 2018, a national position on public finance for children is not yet available. Nevertheless, UNICEF will advocate with the new Government to follow up on the above-mentioned recommendations and develop a strategy for public finance for children.

The process of institutionalizing the first children's parliament was completed, with UNICEF support, in June 2018. The process included the election of 55 child parliamentarians, aged 11 to 17 (equally represented by boys and girls) and a president and vice-president. UNICEF will support the parliament to become a strong advocate for children's rights, in particular for increased financing of child-friendly services for the most vulnerable. With support from UNICEF, a delegation of the children's parliament attended the first Lusophone meeting of child parliaments in Portugal in November 2018, resulting in increased knowledge, exposure and networking opportunities.

In the area of social protection, UNICEF supported institutional strengthening of the national social protection system. Emphasis was placed on coordination and capacity building. In collaboration with the child protection programme, 34 social workers were trained on case management for social protection and monitoring tools were revised and updated. Following UNICEF advocacy, the Government promulgated a document regulating non-contributory social protection, to increase state protection of most vulnerable groups and reduce social exclusion. UNICEF, the World Bank and the ILO collaborated to support the coordination of social protection activities through the establishment of the first National Social Protection Council.

To strengthen the impact of the parental education programme, UNICEF also supported 58 vulnerable families with training and equipment to develop income generating activities, with a special focus on women. In collaboration with WFP, UNICEF also supported 80 children affected by HIV/AIDS with access to school and psychosocial support. UNICEF ensured the sustainability of these interventions by ensuring that families and children supported will be included in the database of the national cash transfer programme supported by the World Bank.

In 2018, through its adolescent development programme, UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the Ministry of Youth for finalization of the first national youth policy. Additionally, UNICEF supported finalization of the first action plan for prevention of early pregnancies. Due to the political transition and the installation of a new Government in December 2018, implementation of the plan will start in 2019, with support from UNICEF and UNFPA.

In addition, awareness-raising campaigns for behaviour change were undertaken across all the districts and through digital and non-digital platforms with the aim of enhancing young people's knowledge about the consequences of early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and school dropout. New data on the impact of the life-skills programme and awareness campaign on adolescent awareness of HIV/AIDS will be available at the end of 2019, following completion of the MICS6.

### **Contributions to key results for children**

UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe selected KRC1 and KRC3, but also supported KRC5 and KRC8 as described in the previous sections. With regard to the selected KRCs, efforts by

UNICEF and others ensured that immunization coverage in the country reached more than 90 per cent for the majority of life-saving vaccines, thus achieving KRC 1. The initiatives and interventions described under goal areas 2, education, continued to contribute to achievement of KRC 3 on out-of-school children.

While average access rates in Sao Tome and Principe explain the need to further pursue KRC 4 on quality education, it is also important to continue eliminate inequities affecting access to education, in accordance with 'no one left behind' principle. Although new data from MICS are not yet available, the most recent administrative data on out-of-school children show an increase in the rate of secondary school-aged children not in school: from 5.8 per cent in 2013 to 8.5 per cent in 2017.

### **Cross-cutting work**

Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children was one of UNICEF's key strategies throughout 2018.

UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe supported the development and validation of the Government's 5th and 6th reports on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the country. The reports include information on how the Government addressed recommendations from 2013 by the child rights committee. It also analyses trends and progress in major areas related to child rights. To obtain validation of the report, UNICEF supported the establishment of a multi-sectoral committee, which included other UN agencies such as UNFPA and WFP. The report will be presented and defended in May 2019 in Geneva.

UNICEF supported the National Institute of Statistics to implement its national strategy for statistical development on communication and dissemination of data through national studies and surveys. In 2018 and with support from UNICEF WCARO, UNICEF completed the main preparatory survey phases including: research plan, sampling, budget, household mapping and enumeration and validation of the MICS6 questionnaire

UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe's contribution to the UNDAF was critical, especially with regards to social cohesion and governance outcomes. UNICEF led implementation of joint plans by the social cohesion thematic group and the UN communication group. In its role as lead for social cohesion, UNICEF supported the introduction of innovative tools for the analysis of progress and results against the UNDAF that were adopted by other thematic groups. Additionally, UNICEF led the UN communication group's coordination of organized advocacy activities and the organization of events related to the main international and national commemorations relevant to the UN mandate. As a contribution to the common chapter, UNICEF worked closely with WHO, UNFPA, WFP and UNDP in areas related to social protection, data and statistics, health and adolescents.

UNICEF was also very active in developing and leveraging resources for children. Set-aside funds totalling US\$300,000 were provided to the office to support the realization of MICS6. Additionally, with UNICEF's advocacy, UNFPA and the European Union joined forces to fill the remaining funding gap for MICS6 implementation, facilitating a smooth start for the preparatory phases. UNICEF established initial contacts with the Portuguese Committee for UNICEF, which resulted in the development of a proposal currently under consideration as well as the first collaboration with the Portuguese carrier TAP Airlines. Through increased networking and visibility of UNICEF results in the country, Sao Tome and Principe is now one of four countries

taking part in the global GPE/UNICEF-supported initiative on 'Better early learning and development at scale (BELDS). This will result in both financial and technical support for the Sao Tome and Principe CP throughout 2019. UNICEF is part of the group of eight country offices developing an investment case on adolescent girls, with support from UNICEF WCARO. For 2019 UNICEF aims to expand its relationship with the local private sector, including communications companies, cocoa producers and the tourism sector.

UNICEF's work in the area of external communication and advocacy was characterized by strong investment in digital communications and social media. The first Instagram and Twitter accounts for UNICEF Sao Tome were launched, alongside the existing Facebook page and YouTube channel. At the end of the 2018, the Facebook page was among the top 10 most-dynamic UNICEF Facebook pages in all of Africa.

With regard to operations-related enablers, the office streamlined work processes by adding six new standard operating procedures and the accountability framework between Sao Tome and Principe and Gabon was reviewed. A business operations strategy was developed and signed in September 2018 with other UN agencies present in the country. Migration to Windows 10 was implemented in 2018. On the SharePoint platform, the office developed staff-friendly applications for e-mail tracking and management of the vehicles fleet. A team site was also developed on the SharePoint platform as a transition to the document management system from the ECM project. VISION access was granted to all staff. The VISION system on SAP HANA was successfully deployed on users' workstations. The switch from APPROVA to IRC was completed, IBCS v15.0 was installed. Finally, a business continuity site was setup, with a radio link to the office and satellite devices (BGAN and Thuraya) were installed.

### Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

As important achievements were registered in the areas of policy development and legislation, moving forward UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe will next focus on achieving greater balance between its work at the policy level and at the community level, through service delivery. Programmatic visits and interactions with partners show the need for UNICEF to invest in modelling evidence-based solutions to support policy implementation at a larger scale.

Despite intensive capacity building at the institutional level, insufficient national ownership and structural financial/logistical constraints sometimes affect UNICEF's ability to regularly monitor the situation of children and women in the country. In the coming year, it will be important for the office to accelerate its support for improved monitoring systems and reconnect decision making levels with vulnerable communities, ensuring that key legislative and policy improvements achieved by the country in 2018 are translated into improvements in the lives of the most vulnerable children.

The 2017 and 2018 experiences with South-South collaboration showed the importance of widening the scope of horizontal collaboration to non-Portuguese speaking countries to respond to programmatic needs, especially in the areas of early pregnancy and out-of-school children. In order to address the need for Portuguese-speaking experts, UNICEF continued to advocate within the UN system for the development of a roster of specialists across areas relevant to the UNDAF.

In past years, UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe used traditional C4D strategies (such as campaigns, sensitization activities, mobilization through the media) to encourage behaviour change across programmes and specifically in the areas of preventing violence against children and promoting life skills, parental education and nutrition. One of the most important challenges relates to the capacity to evaluate the impact of these activities in the longer term, and to shift from assessing knowledge to confirming actual behaviour change. The barriers to behaviour change are common across programmes and include gender discrimination, socio-economic conditions and limited access to services.

Additionally, the pace at which the organization transitions to a digital workplace and the use of technology-based innovation to support programmes represents an opportunity – but also a challenge for a small office like UNICEF Sao Tome e Principe. Linguistic and technical constraints require an approach capable of strengthening internal and external capacities to creatively use innovation and support evidence-based practices. To tackle these challenges in 2019, UNICEF will count on organizational assets and skills to build capacities on C4D, both internally and externally. UNICEF WCARO support will be needed to identify strategies to boost community engagement across sectors. Additionally, the office will strengthen its innovation for social change portfolio through the recruitment of a dedicated technology for development staff.

In 2018 the country office successfully achieved KRC 1 related to immunization. The changing environment characterized by the gradual exit of GAVI and adherence to the vaccine independence initiative may hamper the results achieved to date. In close collaboration with UNICEF's Supply Division and UNICEF WCARO, UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe will need to continue anticipating shortfalls and leveraging additional support to national counterparts for a smooth transition to vaccine independence. In 2019, the country will no longer be eligible for vitamin A supply in-kind donations, but UNICEF is confident the Government is ready and willing to take on the responsibility for procurement, to ensure sustainability. Additionally, lack of financial support for the collection of biometric data will prevent UNICEF from measuring impact on anaemia reduction in the framework of MICS6. While UNICEF already contributes to the procurement of iron and folic acid for pregnant women, in 2019 it will work closely with UNICEF WCARO to identify strategies for addressing iron-deficiency anaemia in women of reproductive age, with a focus on adolescent girls.

While the Sao Tome and Principe office is not among the champions for regional KRCs related to violence and open defecation, it benefits from exchanges and learning within the region as these remains important priority areas where UNICEF needs to make a difference. Conversely, the excellent achievements of the country in the area of birth registration could inspire other countries to achieve the relevant KRC.

Progress and results achieved throughout 2018 confirmed UNICEF as the leading organization for the promotion of children's rights in Sao Tome and Principe. Nevertheless, the office sometimes experienced a lack of solid partnerships with civil society and faced the challenge that there were only a few partner organizations advocating and delivering services for children's rights locally. In 2019 strategic partnership development will need to span from community organizations to private sector to academia and beyond. UNICEF has a strong reputation in the country and a demonstrated capacity to leverage resources and engagement. In 2019 it will accelerate efforts to engage additional local partners in major advocacy activities.

External communication activities allowed UNICEF to voice important messages on children's rights. The people of Sao Tome e Principe are traditionally responsive and mobilize for

children's rights, both during the national month of children in June and on the 20th of November. Activities organized by UNICEF for World Children's Day in 2018 confirmed the great leveraging power of these special events. Schools, private sector entities and national institutions responded to UNICEF's appeal to engage, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child anniversary did not pass unseen. The coming year will mark 30 years since the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, offering UNICEF an opportunity to make children's voices heard at the national level throughout the 12 months and to engage in sustainable partnerships with local actors.

UNICEF's programme structure is conducive to cross-sectoral work, especially in the areas of adolescents and parenting education. A challenge is posed by segmented structures and accountabilities among national partners. The new UNICEF strategic plan and the SDG framework are important instruments for advocacy and planning for increased cross-sectoral collaboration across the life cycle, with a special focus on the first 1,000 days and the young people's agenda.

To measure the impact of its actions and those of the Government on the lives of children, UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe must work around one major obstacle: the lack of timely and comprehensive data. It is believed that this will be remedied with the launch of the MICS in 2019, which will help show what the country has achieved for children in the last decade and where extra effort is required.

Finally, in the framework of UN coherence, the first year of implementation of joint plans was rich in lessons learned. Above all, the need for more frequent dialogue among agencies on progress and perspectives, beyond the mid-year and end of the year reviews. Increased frequency will allow for improved analysis of cooperation opportunities and a stronger appreciation of results against the UNDAF. UNICEF has a key role to play as leader of the social cohesion group, which accounts for the greatest number of programme components and partners, and as leader of the communication group. Going forward, UNICEF Sao Tome and Principe considers UN Reform as an opportunity to further strengthen children's rights in the United Nations narrative and action.

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