

## Sierra Leone

### Update on the context and situation of children

In February 2019 President Julius Maada Bio launched the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023. The plan, with inputs from development partners including UNICEF and consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals and African Union Roadmap, focuses on critical national priorities ranging from social, macroeconomic and human capital development, to empowering women and children. For the first time the plan includes a section dedicated to children's rights, signifying an elevated level of priority for children by the Government.

In July the International Monetary Fund Executive Board declared that the Government of Sierra Leone's (GoSL) reform agenda had progressed satisfactorily and approved the disbursement of US\$21.62m under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF). This was despite a challenging economic environment: inflation increased from 16.8 per cent in 2018 to 17.2 per cent in the first half of 2019, while the Leone depreciated by 4.8 per cent at the official market rate. The ECF-supported programme plans to expand the social safety net, creating an opportunity for UNICEF to work with the Government to ensure that Child Rights continue to be protected in Sierra Leone.

UNICEF mobilised approximately US\$16.4 million in 2019, a 59 per cent increase from 2018. Funds were raised through traditional and non-traditional donors to Sierra Leone including the Governments of Canada, Ireland, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom; Global Programme Partnerships (GPP), GAVI Alliance and Global Fund (GFATM); UN Girls Education Initiative; and UNICEF National Committees for Korea, Japan, US and Finland. Regular Resources (RR) versus Other Resources Regular (ORR) accounted for 22 and 78 per cent, respectively. The wide range of donors and high proportion of donor funds compared to core funding demonstrates partners' confidence in the ability of UNICEF to deliver high impact programmes for children going into the new Country Programme.

Statistics Sierra Leone finalised three key reports in 2019: the Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey (2019 SLDHS), conducted every five years; the 2019 Multidimensional Child Poverty Report; and the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) 2018. The SLIHS estimates that Sierra Leone has a population of 7,534,981, with an estimated 1,248,180 households, with the average household containing 6 people. Increased data availability for the new Country Programme provides opportunities for UNICEF to work with the Government to more effectively plan, monitor and implement its interventions

The Multidimensional Child Poverty Report showed that the proportion of children that are poor dropped from 77 per cent in 2010 to 66 per cent in 2017. The proportion of children deprived in one dimension declined in all districts with exception of one (Kailahun), in which there was no significant change. A key emerging finding is the identification of a poverty belt in Sierra Leone, ranging from the North East to South West. Boys are more deprived in more than one dimension of poverty than girls, at 67 per cent and 64.9 per cent respectively. These findings highlight significant geographic disparities and inequalities that must be addressed through an integrated, pro-poor multi-sectoral approach to ensure that no child is left behind.

Fertility is low among adolescents, at 102 births per 1,000 women. Among 20-24-year olds there are 196 births per 1,000 women. This represents an overall decline in fertility in Sierra Leone from 5.1 births per woman in 2008 to 4.2 births in 2019. However, by the time a woman reaches 19 years old it is likely she already has two children. Approximately 21 per cent of women aged 15-29 have begun childbearing, and 18 per cent had a live birth. Rural teenagers are more likely to start child bearing earlier than urban teenagers, at 29 per cent vs 4 per cent (DHS 2019). A number of key steps were taken in 2019 to understand drivers of teenage pregnancy and the rural-urban disparities so that girls can be more equitably supported in 2020.

Sierra Leone's maternal mortality ratio was the third highest in the world with 1,120 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2017 compared with 1,180 in 2015 (Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000-2017). According to the Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation 2019, under-five mortality rate in Sierra Leone continued to decline from 234 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 110 in 2017 and down to 105 in 2018. Though a remarkable achievement, this rate remains four times higher than the SDG 2030 target of 25/1,000. Malaria, acute respiratory illnesses, and diarrheal diseases, which are easily preventable or treatable through cost-effective Primary Health Care (PHC) interventions, are responsible for nearly half of all deaths of children under-five. Progress in neonatal mortality reduction is slower with the current rate at 33 per 1,000 live births compared with 51 in 2000 and 34 in 2017. However, the planned increase in number of Special Baby Care Units (SBCUs) in 2020 aims to accelerate this reduction.

Fifty-six per cent of children received all basic vaccinations, and 50 per cent have received all age appropriate vaccinations, with significant geographical disparities (DHS 2019). Government increases of central cold storage in 2019, alongside increased community-based awareness raising regarding vaccinations, will contribute to increasing this coverage in 2020.

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Thirty per cent of children are stunted and 11 per cent are severely stunted. Stunting in Sierra Leone is inversely related to wealth: 24 per cent of children in the highest quintile are stunted, compared to 33 per cent in the lowest quintile (DHS 2019). Only 54 per cent of children under 6 months are exclusively breast fed. While this is low, it does mark an increase from 32 per cent in 2013. Anaemia remains high, with 68 per cent of children experiencing some form of anaemia, and 47 per cent of women aged 15-49 are anaemic. Anaemia prevalence is high in rural area than urban areas (DHS 2019). Further behavioural change is required to increase the equitable adoption of essential family practices, and to address nutritional disparities across demographics.

Data published in 2010 showed that between 2013 and 2018 primary level enrolment increased by 57 per cent. Enrolment in Junior Secondary represents 77 per cent of all eligible children, 22 per cent up from 2018 (Draft Annual School Census 2019). Despite the Free Quality School Education Initiative, and the 2004 Education Act making basic education compulsory, 61.6 per cent of Sierra Leoneans do not send their children to school because they do not value education (SLIHS 2018). However, 700,000 more students enrolled in 2019: pre-primary enrolment saw a 41.1 per cent increase of 40,000 students; primary a 29.4 per cent increase of 403,000; junior secondary a 43.2 per cent increase of 136,000; and senior secondary a 47.9 per cent increase of 99,000. While the Government has made significant progress in enrolment, quality learning outcomes must continue to be prioritised. Strategies designed to sustainably improve learning outcomes in 2019 include a focus on early childhood education and improving the quality of teacher training.

There are large inequities in the WASH sector, with approximately 2.4 million people (30.2 per cent of the population) are still using unsafe water and 1.4 million people (17.6 per cent of the population) practice open defecation. Safe hygiene practices stand only at 46.8 per cent. Access to WASH facilities in rural areas are much lower than in urban areas with 44.3 per cent using water from unsafe sources in rural areas compared to 10.5 per cent in urban areas. In sanitation and hygiene, 26 per cent of people in rural areas practice open defecation compared to 5.9 per cent in urban areas (Joint Monitoring Programme 2019). Continued efforts to improve water quality testing and increase sustainable community-based maintenance aims to reduce these inequities.

In 2019, 61 per cent of children under one had their births registered by the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA). While low, 2019 saw increased integration and coordination between the NCRA and Ministry of Health and Sanitation, which will likely increase the number of registered births.

Family Support Units (FSU), Legal Aid Board (LAB) and the Judiciary provided legal services to 24,352 children (10,849 boys, 13,503 girls) in 2019. Of the 4,211 child victims of sexual assault reported to FSU-Sierra Leone Police in 2019, 3,537 were girls. UNICEF has commissioned significant studies on social norms in 2019 that will enable programming to challenge around violence and sexual assault in 2020.

Sierra Leone is a country at risk of man-made and natural disasters. While there was no declared emergency in 2019, the country experienced sporadic disease outbreaks including a Lassa Fever outbreak, and small-scale urban fires in Freetown, and small-scale flooding in August 2019. While the fires were mostly a result of dense, low income urban housing with limited regulations, the floods are a regular seasonal occurrence. Sierra Leone is at risk of greater flood damage as climate change alters rainfall patterns and urbanisation and deforestation continue to increase. UNICEF continued to work with the GoSL in 2019 to strengthen response mechanisms in anticipation of future emergencies.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

#### Goal Area 1: Every Child Survives and Thrives

In 2019 the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) committed to global goals on Primary Health Care (PHC) toward achieving universal health coverage, influenced by UNICEF advocacy and technical assistance. The joint community health worker (CHW) mission of UNAIDS, UNICEF, WHO, World Bank and Global Fund, convened by the President of Sierra Leone, resulted in high level political support for the CHW programme, and national consensus to institutionalise it as a permanent part of Sierra Leone's health care delivery mechanism.

In 2019 CHWs conducted 58,453 postnatal home visits; treated 271,454 children for malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea; screened 418,014 children for malnutrition; and referred 45,465 acutely malnourished children to health facilities for treatment in 2019, all with technical and financial support from UNICEF. Now institutionalised, the CHW programme will reach more children and families from 2020 onwards, increasing equitable access to healthcare.

The integrated measles and rubella (MR) campaign achieved 99 per cent coverage, reaching over 3 million children aged 9 months to under 15 years followed by its successful introduction into routine services; and the Oral Polio Vaccines reached over 1 million children (0-59 months). UNICEF Communication for Development's support to social mobilisation and communication for MR introduction contributed to an 88.3 per cent awareness level among caregivers prior to the arrival of

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the vaccination, contributing to the successes in reach.

With funds from Gavi, UNICEF supported the installation of a central cold store and 220 solar refrigerators nationwide, the latter expanding coverage in Periphery Health Units from 45 per cent in 2017 to 60 per cent in 2019. Sierra Leone maintained a high DTP3 coverage at 90 per cent, and UNICEF supported an immunisation coverage and equity assessment to identify gaps in full immunization coverage of all age-appropriate vaccines to enable the Government to reach more children in 2020.

UNICEF support to routine Vitamin A Supplementation (VAS) and deworming services in three districts contributed to increasing coverage from 25 per cent to 32 per cent, and from 14 per cent to 22 per cent respectively between semester 1 and 2. In the seven districts that have not yet transitioned from campaign approach, UNICEF assisted with organising two biannual campaigns, achieving 88 per cent and 86 per cent coverage respectively in the first round.

Over 3,530 sick new born lives were saved at four Special Baby Care Units (SBCUs), established with UNICEF support, with a high survival rate at 79.5 per cent. Encouraged by this success the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) prioritised a national scale-up of SBCUs to reach and save more sick new born lives, which is currently underway with further UNICEF support.

The HIV-positive rate of children aged 0-14 exposed to HIV decreased from 15.3 per cent in 2018 to 10 per cent in 2019. These results were supported by supervision and mentoring tools developed by UNICEF and partners on the prevention of mother to child transmission service delivery, Early Infant Diagnosis (EID) services and paediatric Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART), used to mentor 370 health workers in 207 facilities nationwide.

Sierra Leone is on-track to achieving the global SDG targets for wasting at 5 per cent, but child stunting remains high at 30 per cent. The costed National Nutrition Multi-Sector Strategic Plan launched in 2019 by the Vice President represents a high-level political commitment to harmonise and coordinate multi-sectoral efforts toward reducing stunting. Over 95 per cent of children under five admitted for severe acute malnutrition were discharged as cured, meeting global SPHERE standards, and the integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) programme reached 66 per cent admission coverage. UNICEF supported procurement of nutrition therapeutic supplies nationwide, while seven districts targeted by UNICEF reported higher admission rates of 84 per cent. UNICEF, with Irish Aid and partners, assisted in a knowledge, attitude, practice and barriers study on maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) to design a national social behaviour change communication strategy for MIYCN practices to improve nutrition outcomes in 2020.

These health, nutrition and HIV results contributed to achieving national priorities under Clusters 1 and 2 of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP); SDGs 2 and 3; UNICEF Western and Central Africa Regions Key Results for Children (KRC) 1 and 2; UNDAF Pillars 1 and 3; and Annual Management Plan (AMP) Priority 1 (integrated with Early Childhood Development (ECD)).

### Goal Area 2: Every Child Learns

The President launched the four-year \$17.2M Global Partnership for Education (GPE) programme with commitment from UNICEF to support three main outputs that address the key 2023 targets: increase access to quality pre-primary education; improve early grade learning outcomes; and strengthen education systems. The President's support of the GPE provides political space for UNICEF to continue support and influence the Government's flagship education policies in line with KRC's 3 and 4.

Under the Government's Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme over two million children were enrolled in school, an approximate 30 per cent increase since 2018; and 98,905 vulnerable children (36,656 girls) in marginalised areas were enrolled and retained with financial and technical assistance from UNICEF.

To further improve equitable access to education UNICEF worked with community structures to assist vulnerable children who were out of school, or at risk of dropping out of school, with basic school materials, mentorship and psychosocial support. Improving equitable access to education is a Government priority in Cluster 1 of the MTNDP, to develop human capital, and supports achieving SDG 4.2, KRC3, and UNDAF Pillar 3.

A landmark breakthrough to improving learning outcomes, in line with SDG 4.1 and 4.2, Cluster 1 of the MTNDP, and KRC4, was the policy shift by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to include pre-primary education as a key priority in the FQSE programme, based on UNICEF advocacy and institutional support. UNICEF supported the MBSSE to develop the National ECD Policy, ECD Minimum Standards and a National ECD Curriculum to further improve the quality of, and access to, ECD opportunities for children.

Over 3,600 children (1,839 girls) participated in UNICEF-supported ECD programmes (165 per cent increase over 2019

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target); 1,560 ECD teachers and caregivers (1,249 female) were trained on early stimulation, positive parenting, and learning through play; and ECD kits were provided to over 88,855 children (47,764 girls) in 1,225 ECD centres nationwide.

To improve quality of instruction, UNICEF provided learning materials to approximately 23 per cent of students (172,334 boys, 169,678 girls) and teaching materials to over 3,000 teachers. To address systemic challenges in quality, the country office worked closely with the five Teacher Training Institutes and the Teacher Service Commission to improve teachers' skills, specifically focusing on pedagogy, child centred approaches, and participatory methodologies, in line with UNDAF Pillar 3; and AMP Priority 1: Early Childhood Development.

Innovation was a sector priority. The recently established Directorate of Science and Technology (DSTI) and MBSSE collaborated to create a data visualisation dashboard, with support and technical assistance from UNICEF. The dashboard provides comprehensive school-level information, facilitating better planning and decision making by all education stakeholders, improving equitable access to quality education for children across Sierra Leone.

In collaboration with UNESCO Pole de Dakar, a comprehensive Education Sector Diagnostic Analysis was initiated to provide basic education data for input into the development of the next Education Sector Plan, scheduled for 2020. With technical assistance and financial support from UNICEF HQ and West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO), the MBSSE conducted a MICS-Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity (MICS-EAGLE) workshop to analyse MICS education data to enhance decision making, policy development and planning. These results contribute to Government priorities of evidence-based decision making and innovation articulated in MTNDP Cluster 4 and UNDAF Pillar 7, and AMP Priority 4: Innovation and Technology for Development.

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

In 2019, UNICEF continued to develop and broaden its partnerships with the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy (NSRTP), the Ministry of Justice, the Sierra Leone Police, and the NCRA – in addition to core work with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) – to strengthen political support for child protection systems; build capacity of social work and justice personnel, and implement actions to prevent and respond to harmful practices.

A Human Resource Strategic Plan (2019-2023) was developed by the MSWGCA, enabling it to implement human resource capacity building and recruitment measures that will contribute to long term strengthening of the child protection system. For the first time, a tertiary-level social work curriculum was instituted, along with the costing of the Child Welfare Policy and its implementation plan. The new curriculum enables MSWGCA to recruit appropriately educated social workers who will be instrumental to strengthening the social protection workforce, resulting in long term dividends to children in Sierra Leone.

Through investment in the child protection case and information management system Primero, 11,895 at risk children (6,771 girls) were provided with child protection services in 2019, up from 9,687 (5,150 girls) in 2018. For ongoing case management capacity development UNICEF trained 80 MSWGCA staff and 400 additional personnel from related ministries and Civil Society Organisations in all 16 districts, up from 44 organisations in 2018, directly contributing to achieving the Government's MTNDP Cluster 5; SDG 16; KRC 5; and UNDAF Pillar 7.

To further African Union (AU) commitments to Civil Registration, the NCRA registered and issued birth certificates to 104,378 children (53,900 girls) between January to September 2019, with 61 per cent of children under 1 having births registered. UNICEF supported the Comprehensive Country Assessment of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems; the CRVS Costed Strategic Plan 2020-2023; secured printing of new birth and death certificates; and provided technical assistance to 550 NCRA staff on birth registration and notification procedures. An Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is in place between the MoHS and NCRA to facilitate cooperation on the development of an interoperable registration system in line with the objectives of KRC 7, with plans to build a system of e-birth notifications, aiming to increase birth registration in 2020 and beyond.

In addressing the underlying causes of gender-based discrimination and inequalities UNICEF assisted the NSRTP in the development of its 3-year implementation framework and monitoring and evaluation plan. The framework supports Government's National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018-2022), launched in December 2018,

Two studies – an ethnographic study on female genital mutilation (FGM) and a survey on social and behavioral drivers of child marriage through the Cross-regional Social Norms Programming and Monitoring Initiative – to inform evidence-based interventions in 2020 and improve UNICEF's ability to monitor progress. The partnership with UNFPA through the Global Programme to End Child Marriage demonstrates the commitment to the Common Chapter objective to address SDG 5.3, and the results contributed to achieving UNDAF Pillar 4, Cluster 6 of the MTNDP, KRC6, SDGs 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and AMP

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Priority 2.

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

In 2019 GoSL strengthened the WASH policy framework, while UNICEF provided technical input to the Urban WASH Policy, the National Water Resource Management Agency (NWRMA) strategy and the WASH policy review. The development of a National Sanitation and Hygiene Strategy and Water Safety Plan facilitated by UNICEF will form the foundation of the new WASH policy implementation plan that will improve coordination and equitable delivery of WASH services.

The establishment of a national WASH database and piloting by UNICEF of an innovative WASH digital monitoring system using real-time data through mobile phones has improved quality data collection and reduced erroneous data entry. This has enabled the WASH sector to institute programmatic corrective adjustments, contributing to evidence-based decision making and innovation priorities, articulated in the Governments MTNDP Cluster 4 and UNDAF Pillar 7, and AMP Priority 4: Innovation and Technology for Development.

To address deteriorating water quality at household-level UNICEF supported water quality testing in 3,300 households and 600 water points using digital platform. The results showed 93.8 per cent of drinking water at point-of-use contaminated with *E. coli*. UNICEF worked with MoHS to scale up community-based hygiene education on safe water chain and to develop a strategy to improve water safety to be implemented in 2020.

To improve access to drinking water, UNICEF invested in the development of 55 improved water points supporting 69.8 per cent of the population to use improved sources of drinking water; and 102,406 (52,227 female) more people across 13 districts to access to basic level of drinking water. While contributing to SDG 6.1 and 6.2, UNDAF Pillar 2, and MTNDP Cluster 3 targets, the results fell short of targets largely due to funding constraints.

Access to basic sanitation remains a challenge. The National Strategy on Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion with a costed action plan is under development, which will scale up sanitation efforts, to be finalised in the first quarter of 2020. UNICEF directly supported Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) in 536 communities resulting in 199,899 additional people (52 per cent women) living in open defecation free (ODF) environments. WASH programming in schools reached 94,530 children (48,211 girls) in 354 schools (of a targeted 392) with hygiene and group handwashing education, directly supporting MTNDP Cluster 1, and UNDAF Pillar 3, and KRC3.

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

In 2019 the Office of the Vice President took on leadership for social protection activities to further the commitment of the Government towards pro-poor fiscal policies and human capital development. This transition increased high-level political commitment to social protection issues, resulting in the first Inter-Agency Forum on Social Protection, chaired by the Vice President. This step has opened and formalized operational space for the pursuit of increased social protection for children and families, providing an opportunity for UNICEF to ensure that child rights remain a priority.

The Forum endorsed key social protection initiatives supported by UNICEF and World Bank, including expansion of the Social Safety Net (SSN) programme to all districts, covering a total of 65,000 households (45 per cent of extremely poor) with 70,000 children (51 per cent girls); the Social Transfer Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (STEMPRP) with provision for an Emergency Trust Fund; and the development of a costed gender-equitable National Social Protection Strategy and Basic Minimum Income Guarantee.

In advance of an international conference on social protection financing in January 2020 to be hosted by GoSL, UNICEF supported a fiscal space analysis and the development of a business case for increased investment in social protection, identified as a priority area in the AMP. This analysis will support the Government to identify priority investment areas in social protection.

With the World Bank, UNICEF supported the automation of the grievance redressal mechanism and recruitment of 16 district officials by the Anti-Corruption Commission, expected to ensure smooth, equitable and accountable implementation of SSN programme and real-time complaint resolution, contributing to MTNDP Clusters 1,2,3,5,6; UNDAF Pillar 1; and SDG 1.3.

As part of policy engagement and data for decision making, the Sierra Leone Multidimensional Child Poverty Report 2019 was launched by the Minister of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) with a commitment to track the MTNDP indicator on reducing child poverty. In support of decentralised planning and budgeting and to serve as baselines, district vulnerability and equity profiles were developed for all 16 districts. The data enables GoSL and UNICEF to better target multisectoral pro-poor initiatives, particularly focused on addressing geographic disparities in poverty distribution.

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In meeting the global reporting commitments on SDGs, FAO, UNDP and UNICEF provided technical and financial support for the preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) report of the Government. UNICEF trained representatives from Statistics-Sierra Leone, academia, civil society and UN Organisations on the use of evidence to measure country progress towards the SDGs, contributing to UNDAF Pillar 7 and MTNDP Cluster 4 that aims to improve the Government's accountability to its citizens.

### Gender Dimension

UNICEF contributed to three major gender results in line with the Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2.0.

First, 15,853 (of a targeted 16,000) adolescent girls were provided with reusable sanitary pads and training to produce their own. Tailors were trained to produce them to ensure sustainability of the intervention.

Second, UNICEF strengthened partnerships with the MBSSE Gender Unit and Girls Child Network to train 146 male and 256 female school and community stakeholders to support girls during their menstrual periods, and distributed menstrual hygiene kits to 15,000 girls in 82 schools. These cross-cutting results address the GAP programme priorities to ensure gender equality in access, retention and learning; and gender equality in teaching and education systems, while strengthening institutional capacity of MBSSE to promote gender equality sustainably and at scale.

Third, addressing child marriage, UNICEF's Child Protection and Education programme worked with civil society partners to operate safe spaces and deliver life skills training to girls and boys, reaching 35,912 girls aged 10-19 across eight districts, surpassing the 2019 KRC target of 12,000. Gender responsive CHW programming led to 590 at-risk adolescent girls being referred to health facilities and safe spaces. These initiatives contributed to achieving the GAP programme priority of preventing and responding to gender-based violence against girls and boys.

### Humanitarian

Sierra Leone experienced sporadic disease outbreaks including a Lassa fever outbreak, small-scale flooding, and fires in 2019. UNICEF played a role in inter-agency coordination, supported rapid WASH, Health and Nutritional needs assessments during fire and flood incidents; supported immunisation of 320,692 children aged between 6 months to 15 years during measles outbreak in two districts; and responded with life-saving WASH items to 42,000 flood-affected persons.

The Country Office undertook annual Emergency Preparedness Planning through Emergency Preparedness Planning platform. Four high-risk scenarios were identified – floods, epidemics, Ebola and fires. UNICEF worked with the Government to strengthen its ability to respond to future emergencies.

### Innovation

In 2019, UNICEF Sierra Leone became the first Country Office globally to sign a workplan with a partner Government's innovation agency on a plan to scale up innovation and use of technology in social sector. UNICEF provides support to DSTI in three thematic areas: Data for Decision Making, Innovation and Technology Ecosystem Strengthening, and Community Engagement. This partnership places UNICEF at the forefront of developing innovative initiatives with the Government to improve the rights of children.

DSTI established a dedicated corridor for the use of drones for humanitarian purposes. The corridor, the first of its kind in the West Africa, was launched by the President in November, with support from UNICEF. UNICEF partnered with N'jala University, selected as host site for the corridor given its important role as an Institute for Technology and Engineering. The corridor will explore innovation opportunities in existing supply-delivery systems; emergency preparedness and response programs; data and imagery analysis.

U-Report Sierra Leone grew to 154,000 registered participants, a 12.4 per cent increase from 2018. The cohort of U-Reporters currently covers approximately 5 per cent of the population aged between 15-34, and 2 per cent of all Sierra Leoneans. Ministry of Youth Affairs is using U-Report platform to solicit feedback to support the participatory development of a National Youth Strategy to improve opportunities for adolescents. UNICEF has partnered with private telecom operators Orange Sierra Leone and Africell to waive charges for U-Report engagement for FQSE and the development of the National Youth Strategy.

### Other Cross Cutting Work

In 2019 the Country Office finalised the Country Programme Document 2020-2023. UNICEF drew on lessons from the current Country Programme to develop a more effective results-based management (RBM) approach to budgeting, manifested in the Country Programme Management Plan (CPMP), and developed with participation from all staff, in line

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with AMP Priority 7. The RBM approach ensures every budget line links to achieving results. Learning from challenges of directly implementation during the current Country Programme, the CPMP focussed on resourcing for systems strengthening, with a view to providing greater value for money and impact. The new Country Programme will also adopt a thorough child-centred, risk informed programming approach that strengthens resilience to shocks, designing programmes in a way that enables them to be adaptable to emerging risks.

Leading up to the celebration on CRC@30, the country witnessed enhanced levels of engagement on child rights issues with the presence of high-profile UNICEF global goodwill ambassadors, a theme song broadcasted nationwide, and a pledge for support by the President and critical child-focussed ministries. This nationwide movement culminated in a national children's conference, the first in Sierra Leone, supported by UNICEF.

The Communication for Development team demonstrated the success of using radio as a medium for behaviour change and broadcast 150,000 minutes of content in 2019. As of October 2019, 65 per cent of listeners of UNICEF-supported programmes adopted health seeking behaviours, and 63 per cent reported discussing with friends and family.

The Operations team enabled a wide range of efficiency improvements in 2019, notably reducing the average time between containers discharged and cleared from the port from 56 days in 2018 to 17 days in 2019, far below the 30 days threshold for demurrage free period, resulting in savings and more efficient delivery of supplies for children.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

#### Constraints

Coordinating health and nutrition supply chains continued to be complex in 2019. Unpredictable funding and a fragmented supply chain system led to delays of Free Health Care (FHC) commodity distribution, and stock outs of nutrition therapeutic supplies at facility levels. Similarly, while UNICEF has been supporting the integration of routine distribution of the Global Fund funded HIV, TB and malaria commodities, due to different procurement processes across partner organisations, coupled with storage, transportation and human resource constraints, difficulty was faced in managing distribution timelines across the three programme supply chains. As a result, the HIV programme missed several of the integrated distribution rounds and stockouts were reported at district and facility levels.

#### Lessons in Supply and Distribution

The supply constraints provided UNICEF with two important lessons: first, all four elements of supply chain management (integration, operations, purchasing and distribution) are interdependent, thus planning cannot be done in isolation. Second, a harmonized approach facilitated by real time communication and data visibility to coordinate parties across the supply network is critical.

Given the wide range of products required for the FHC initiative, procurement planning to ensure timely arrival of medicines was central. Procurement requests from Government were rounded off to full container loads, procurement lead times per product category were determined and procurement deadlines were communicated with partners and donors. This approach allowed UNICEF to plan for arrival of FHC items up to March 2021.

Previous end-user monitoring showed an accumulation of education supplies at district level since no formal supply chain mechanism existed. Long term storage in temporary facilities increased the risk of loss and damage. In 2019 the supply strategy was adjusted for direct delivery to schools in the form of kits. Collaborative picking and packing with authorities in districts with appropriate space for distribution monitoring, increased both the understanding of what was supplied, speed of distribution, and ownership of products.

UNICEF implemented the innovative mWIMS application to address warehouse and inventory management challenges. Through the application, combined with re-aligning warehouse management processes, the end of year stock count had a \$0.45 USD discrepancy compared to a 2018 discrepancy of \$94,511 USD. The time spent on physical inventory counts was reduced from 2-4 days to less than half a day, a significant saving of resources. The lessons in how these processes were made more efficient through innovative application of technology will continue to be applied during the next Country Programme.

#### Necessity of cross sector integration to accelerate KRCs

A constraint in addressing KRC6 has been parallel Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) developed with education and child protection civil society partners. A key strategic shift in 2019 was to align the results of the PCAs towards common objectives of preventing child marriage by getting girls back to school. By working in a more integrated and

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collaborative manner in addressing child protection issues through schools, as well as life skills building in non-formal spaces, UNICEF was able to track results more clearly, exceed targets, and deliver programmes for children more efficiently.

Prior to 2019 KRC3 was addressed primarily through re-enrolment of children who had dropped out. In 2019 the education programme focused on addressing the systemic causes of KRC3, through linking the KRC4 objectives of enhanced quality ECD programming and increasing pre-school and right age enrolment. Ensuring that children are school-ready and have had access to quality pre-primary education addresses both the symptoms and the causes of dropping out. It does so through increasing quality to reduce attrition rates, increasing retention through school readiness, and re-enrolling children who have dropped out. The MBSSE will continue to apply this lesson in 2020, having included pre-primary education as a key priority in the FQSE programme.

A major achievement in Sierra Leone's KRC7 target to develop an interoperable birth registration process with the health sector is the development of effective working arrangements between institutions. Following a 14-month transition period, the NCRA is now functional and operational at the national and district level. A Memorandum of Understanding is in place between the MoHS and NCRA to facilitate cooperation on the development of an interoperable registration system, with plans to build e-birth notification system. This cross sectoral integration to increase the number of children who have their births registered in Sierra Leone will be further strengthened going into the next Country Programme.

### Scaling up evidence-informed programming

The lack of high quality, disaggregated data has been a challenge for the Country Office during this programme cycle. The Country Office has been addressing gaps and shortcomings identified during the development of the new Country Programme. While developing the new theories of change for the 2020-2023 Country Programme there was a need for fiscal and budgetary analyses in the social sectors, as well as limited use of systematic operational research methodologies for pilots/models to support the scaling up of programmes.

Use of quality evidence to design and monitor programmes is critical to the new Country Programme, and in preparation the Child Protection programme is undertaking surveys on social and behavioural drivers for child marriage, the results of which will then guide the development of social norms programmes to reduce child marriage. Formative research on violence against children in homes has been conducted and will inform the development of a parenting education programme in Sierra Leone; and an ethnographic study on FGM is also underway which will inform UNICEF's interventions on this topic, which will include working with the Government to finalize a National Strategy for the Reduction of FGM.

Further opportunities to achieve results through innovative evidence-based programming became apparent after the successful advocacy for heightened political commitment toward strengthening PHC and institutionalizing community health. With application of technology UNICEF supported geospatial data analysis and visualisations of health facility and CHW distribution, identifying gaps with respect to deprivations and access to services. The results were both presented in a World Bank workshop and used in a briefing note shared with the high level joint UN-donor CHW mission convened by the President. The mission synthesized all available evidence and brought stakeholders together to co-create the common vision toward consolidation, integration and institutionalization of the CHW programme for improved quality, efficiency and financial sustainability.

### Resource mobilisation

In 2019 the Country Office galvanized fundraising with non-traditional donors to expand its avenue of resource mobilisation through its core donors only. This laid the groundwork for new funding partnerships to develop in 2020. Sierra Leone was featured in prominent appeal ceremonies by the UK Natcom, raising £7.9 million for immunization programmes for children globally, including in Sierra Leone. Following a visit by the Foreign Minister of Iceland hosted by the country office, WASH and Livelihoods commitments from the Government of Iceland nearly doubled. Further, based on targeted outreach, Finland presented a commitment to fund ECD and Child Protection specific to reduction of harmful cultural practices. Lessons from a successful approach to diversifying the country office donor base will be carried into 2020 and applied to integrated programming.

The Sierra Leone Country Office will take these lessons forward going into 2020, and ensure that through the application of results based management approaches, effective fundraising, and the use of evidence, the office delivers high quality, scalable and accountable programming to sustainably improve the position of children in Sierra Leone.