

Sri Lanka

Part 1: Situation update in the country

To reduce the country's budget deficit and debt burden, the Government of Sri Lanka continued its revenue-based fiscal consolidation strategy with an emphasis on revenue-enhancing tax reforms. However, despite increased tax revenue from 12.3 per cent in 2016 to 12.6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2017, total revenue as a percentage of GDP declined from 14.2 per cent to 13.8 per cent during the same period. Further, total expenditure and net lending also reduced from 19.6 per cent in 2016 to 19.4 per cent of GDP in 2017, indicating a reduction in recurrent expenditure. An increase in interest payments as a percentage of GDP and disaster relief measures, together with the shortfall in non-tax revenue, resulted in a budget deficit of 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2017. Political instability and uncertainty in the country further compounded the economic situation and impacted on investments and international trade. This uncertainty stemmed from the move by the Honourable President of Sri Lanka, who appointed the ex-president as Prime Minister without the prior removal or impeachment of the incumbent. Furthermore, diminishing foreign exchange reserves depreciated the local currency, which compromised the purchasing power of households, impacting on the health, nutrition and social status of children living in households close to the poverty line.

In early 2018, the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee) published its Concluding Observations on Sri Lanka's combined fifth and sixth period State Party report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The document created a new momentum for policy dialogue and advocacy on addressing obstacles to child rights promotion in the country and enabled UNICEF and its partners to highlight key violations. This resulted in the Government engaging in positive dialogue with the UN Committee during its review. The policy environment in Sri Lanka remained largely positive throughout most of the year, with the Government maintaining its commitments to good governance, democratic institutions, rule of law and national reconciliation. The Government remained committed to implementing the UN Human Rights Council resolutions on Sri Lanka, establishing the Office of Missing Persons in 2018 and adopting an act on the establishment of the reparation mechanism for individuals impacted by the conflict. This contributed to an improved environment for cooperation with international development partners, UN treaty bodies and civil society.

In the child protection sector, the Ministries of Women and Child Affairs (MoWCA), and Justice (MoJ) were proactive in addressing the UN Committee recommendations. The MoJ successfully advocated for and increased the minimum age for criminal responsibility from eight to 12 years, giving the judges enough discretion to decide on alternatives to the deprivation of liberty of children. It has also taken steps to tackle the case backlog involving sexual abuse and rape crimes against children, resulting in 13 per cent of cases cleared in 2018. The MoWCA developed several policy documents and action plans, which define a new government vision in the areas of ending violence against children, alternative care and support to day care for working women. UNICEF also worked with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to advocate for the creation of an independent child rights mechanism in the country.

Despite strong policy work on preventing violence against children, ensuring a protective and

violence-free environment for children and adolescents remains a key challenge in Sri Lanka. Corporal punishment, while illegal, continues to be practised in schools as a disciplinary measure and is accepted by most parents and students. A recent study commissioned by the National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka revealed that 80 per cent of school children experienced at least one form of corporal punishment in the last quarter. The 2017 Global Report estimates showed that 38 per cent of children (aged 13-15) reported being bullied in the last two months, and 47 per cent of the same children reported being in at least one physical fight in the last 12 months. Physical punishment as a disciplinary method is equally widely used at home, with the most recent estimates indicating that 73 per cent of children (aged 1-14) faced violent discipline in the home environment.

In 2018, the Government finalized the National Policy on Alternative Care of Children. This outlines key changes in regulations, services and monitoring of programmes to prevent separation of children from their parents and improve family care alternatives. During the year, about 230 children were re-unified with their families, while 177 family separation cases were prevented. However, as per the Government report, more than 14,500 children and adolescents remain in Government and privately-run residential institutions, away from their families and communities.

In child survival and development, progress in the past two decades in Sri Lanka has been significant. However, while the mortality rate of children under five has steadily declined, progress in reducing the neonatal (first 28 days after birth) mortality rate stagnated. There are also wide disparities in under-five and neonatal mortality rates, with higher rates recorded in the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern provinces and the Central province, which has the largest poverty-stricken tea estate population of the country. Approximately 2,000 newborns die annually in Sri Lanka, many from preventable and avoidable deaths. The Government considers this an urgent priority as reflected in the recently launched Every Newborn Action Plan. Child development beyond 'survival' is another challenge, and the decreasing trend of child mortality in Sri Lanka does not mean that all children who survive are able to thrive and reach their full potential. Children with special needs are particularly vulnerable, with systematized early identification services not yet available. Further, 21 per cent of children in the earliest years of life are still deprived of proper nutrition along with the nurturing and responsive relationships which lay the foundation for a child's future development. Malnutrition continued to be a major challenge across the life cycle, inhibiting optimal physical and mental development. The 2016 Demographic and Health Survey indicated that 15 per cent of children under five were wasted, a level that the World Health Organization (WHO) defines as 'critical', and 17 per cent were stunted, with much higher prevalence levels among poorer population groups.

Poor nutrition continues into later childhood, with one-third of primary school-aged children having a low body mass index-for-age, 11.5 per cent stunted and 11 per cent anaemic. Overweight is a growing concern: increasing rapidly with age, from 1 per cent of children under five to 9.6 per cent of school children aged 6-12 years. The double burden of malnutrition—underweight and overweight - is also a challenge among adolescents. Preliminary analysis of a comprehensive nutrition survey among adolescents of 10-19 years conducted in 2017 by the Medical Research Institute showed that 8.1 per cent were anaemic, 26.7 per cent thin and 13.7 per cent stunted; while 7.4 per cent were overweight and 2.4 per cent were obese. To address these concerns, the Government developed a new Multi-Sectoral Action Plan for Nutrition 2018-2025, based on a life cycle approach, which awaits Cabinet approval.

Regarding female adolescent health, the Ministry of Education (MoE) maintained its commitment to menstrual hygiene management in the education sector under the school health promotion framework. In 2018, the MoE initiated the development of menstrual hygiene management-specific school criteria and a monitoring system, which needs to be taken forward as a priority in 2019.

Significant attention was given by the Government to drinking water quality during 2018, with the Presidential Secretariat coming forward to verify the status in all schools in Sri Lanka. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector stakeholders fully endorsed the need to comply with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 by adding 'quality' and 'availability' parameters to national indicators, in addition to the existing 'accessibility' parameter. The technical working group appointed by the Ministry of City Planning and Water Supply (MoCPWS) delivered substantial results in this regard by articulating the rationale for Sri Lanka in defining the milestones in the progressive ladder towards 'safely managed' water and sanitation. UNICEF Sri Lanka's advocacy and technical guidance led to the inclusion of SDG 6 indicators in the upcoming Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) in 2019. This will be the first time that quality and available data will be collected by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS).

Increasing attention was given by the Government to the water management and environmental sectors, particularly on managing water sheds and river basins through multi-stakeholder approaches. UNICEF advocated for influential representation of drinking water stakeholders in these platforms, while also liaising with and technically supporting the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in a related project under the Green Climate Fund.

In sanitation, consensus was reached among key Government stakeholders at national level that in addition to solid waste management, the management of human excreta must be mainstreamed by local authorities. UNICEF played a convening role, bringing the Ministry of Local Governments into the national WASH coordination platforms as a key stakeholder. In contrast, WASH-related hygiene and knowledge promotion received little focus during the year, given other priorities.

Regarding children's rights to education, the policy and programmatic environment of early childhood education (ECE) continued to suffer from ambiguity in role delineation, policy uncertainty, and conflicting data. This was despite increased public investment in improving access to preschool education, primarily through a five-year (2015–2021) US\$50 million project financed by a loan from the World Bank. The re-worked National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development of 2004, presented by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MoWCA) in 2018 is yet to receive approval from the Cabinet of Ministers. A complementary national preschool education policy is under development by the National Education Commission. Moreover, the administrative decentralization of the ECE sub-sector, where provincial councils at the sub-national level are constitutionally empowered to supervise and manage preschools, has led to a patchwork of quality frameworks, standards and progress across provinces. In some cases, this approach has created islands of excellence in an otherwise poorly performing system.

Based on data from the first-ever National Census of Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka (2016), published by the MoWCA in 2018, only 55.6 per cent of 3 to 5-year-old children attended preschool. Further age disaggregation showed that only 22.6 per cent of 3-year-olds and 63.4 per cent of 4-year-olds (one year before official school entry) attended

preschool. However, in contrast, the Gross Enrolment Rate for pre-primary education in Sri Lanka as reported in UNESCO's Institute for Statistics and sourced by the MoE is 94.2 per cent. Worryingly, the statistical portrait of the ECE subsector derived from these multiple and incompatible data sources may ultimately lead to misinformed policies that shortchange children from realizing their full potential through accessible and high quality early learning.

In primary and secondary education, Sri Lanka continued to face many challenges in ensuring the quality of education and reducing school drop outs due to a lack of investment both in terms of human resources and finances. Despite the close-to-universal access to primary education (94.7 per cent), poor quality of education service provision and the consequential low learning outcomes remain issues across all levels, with significant disparities across regions and population groups. Children with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable, with 23.5 per cent (aged 5-14 years) excluded from mainstream education. Critical bottlenecks exist that undermine the focus on developing life, citizenship and employability skills in schools exist. Towards overcoming these, in 2018, UNICEF initiated dialogue with the MoE and National Institute of Education (NIE) on the integration of such skills in secondary education with the aim of informing curricula reforms in 2019.

The Government continued to recognize the important role the education sector plays in promoting peace and reconciliation. This was reflected in the Peacebuilding Priority Plan signed between the Government and the UN. The most recent review report of the National Policy and Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace highlighted two key pre-conditions: curriculum revisions and school-to-university level models aimed at strengthening the competencies of children, adolescents and youth in analysing, resolving and preventing conflict, as well as promoting peace within their communities. To facilitate changes in the education sector, with support from the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, the MoE established a dedicated Peace Education and Reconciliation Unit (PERU) within its institutional structure; developed a national action plan; and established different technical committees to provide guidance. However, operationalization of this action plan was delayed due to frequent technical staff changes in PERU and a continued focus on one-off programmes which have not demonstrated an impact on changing beliefs or attitudes.

In higher education, a fundamental problem affecting peaceful and cohesive learning environments is violence, including ragging, which is a form of systemic abuse and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). So far, strategies towards redressing ragging and sexual gender-based violence in Sri Lankan universities have been mainly based on research done on an individual basis among a few, selected universities. To institutionalize such strategies at a system level, evidence needs to be generated on a larger scale to inform policies and strategies that apply to all universities in the country.

Sri Lanka is classified as a medium risk country (rated a score of 4.2 by the Index for Risk Management), with 96 per cent of its disasters related to climate, such as flooding, extreme winds and drought. It was ranked the fourth most affected country in 2016 according to the Global Climate Risk Index. In May 2018, the southwest monsoon brought heavy rainfall once again to the Southern, Southwestern, Western and North-Central regions. Over 188,000 people were affected with 26 deaths and 85,197 people displaced for more than a week. Unfortunately, gender and age disaggregated data on the disaster-impact are not available to humanitarian agencies. The total damage and losses calculated by the Government was around US\$1.9 million for emergency response and relief, as well as compensation for damage and losses in the housing, education, irrigation, transportation and drainage sectors.

Simultaneously, drought continued to affect over 970,000 people in 2018 in the North, North-Central, East and Northwest Provinces, with around 211,000 people lacking access to drinking water since 2016.

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

The SDGs, Every Newborn Action Plan, and Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality programme continue to measure global progress in reducing the maternal mortality and neonatal mortality rates in the post-Millennium Development Goal era. Inline with global targets, the Government has committed to achieving ambitious targets of reducing maternal mortality to less than 10 per 100,000 live births and newborn mortality to less than 2.2 per 1,000 live births by 2030. This requires concerted efforts by key stakeholders at all levels, including UNICEF, if the country is to achieve these targets. Sri Lanka's national health priorities, such as those articulated in the National Maternal and Newborn Health Strategic Plan (2017-2025 and Every Newborn Action Plan 2017-2020 are aligned with the SDG goals and prioritize actions which reduce maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity by improving the quality of care.

In 2018, the first year of the new country programme in Sri Lanka, UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine (MoHNIM) to implement several important initiatives that contributed to system-level changes in the health sector. This involved capacity building of 480 clinical health staff to improve the quality of services and putting in place an effective system for quality control and organisation of services in the health sector. These system-level changes aim to improve the quality of maternal and newborn care for mothers and children under five years of age and bridge the gap between policy and practice. The actions supported included: 1) generating evidence on the causes of perinatal deaths to reduce still births; 2) scaling up the Point of Care Quality Improvement (POCQI) model in 14 hospitals to improve the quality of maternal and neonatal health care; and 3) providing kangaroo mother care techniques to improve the quality of care for extremely pre-term/low birth weight babies in 25 targeted hospitals. This resulted in increased compliance with standards/protocols on maternal and neonatal care and timeliness of services in targeted hospitals.

UNICEF also assisted the National STD/AIDS Control Programme to prepare for the validation process of eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis – a public health priority in Sri Lanka. The recommendations for improvements in this area were presented at a high-level symposium for consideration and action going forward. One significant achievement in 2018 was that no babies were infected through mother-to-child transmission.

However, despite sound achievements in maternal and child health care, progress in nutrition is slow. In 2018, UNICEF engaged the Family Health Bureau in regional initiatives to review the status of policies and programmes relating to maternal nutrition in South Asia. The landscape analysis helped the Government to critically examine the extent to which the country's policies and programme guidance are in-line with WHO recommendations, and ensure relevant coverage of maternal nutrition interventions. This resulted in a new policy dialogue focused on

Triplosa supplementation programmes for pregnant and lactating women, which resulted in the modification of Triplosa supplementation from blanket to targeted. With regard to school-based health and nutrition, UNICEF continued to work with the MoHNIM and the Ministry of Education.

UNICEF Sri Lanka also continued its work with other partners, including the MoHNIM, MoE, World Bank, World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the WHO, under the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) movement to address chronically high rates of stunting and acute malnutrition. Upon request from the SUN National Focal Point, UNICEF, in partnership with WFP and FAO, technically supported a consultative process with relevant stakeholders to develop the Multi-Sectoral Action Plan for Nutrition 2018-2025. The Plan was finalized but its approval was delayed due to the political situation.

UNICEF also played a catalytic role in enhancing coordination among development partners active in nutrition. Together with the World Bank, UNICEF officially launched the SUN Development Partners Network, a platform that is critical for advocating for nutrition to be elevated in the national development agenda and for improving coordination among development partners to ensure better alignment around the Multi-Sectoral Action Plan for Nutrition.

Another milestone achievement in 2018 was positioning early childhood development (ECD) as a priority in policymaking, programming, and public spending in Sri Lanka. This involved the development of budget proposals for priority actions required to deliver high quality ECD in the country. For this, UNICEF in partnership with the National Planning Department and MoHNIM, MoE and MoWCA, conducted sector analysis workshops to identify the priority actions and discuss where new or additional investments were most needed. Following these workshops, a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder technical meeting was organized to validate the proposed interventions and agree and/or improve the quality and quantity of financing sought from the 2019 National Budget. The process culminated with the 'Building Brains, Building Futures: Sri Lanka Early Childhood High-Level Meeting' hosted by the Department of National Planning and UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Mass Media, Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs, MoHNIM, MoE, MoWCA, the Parliamentary Caucus for Children and the World Bank. The meeting concluded with a presentation of budget proposals on ECD to the Minister of Finance and the media by the Secretaries of the MoHNIM, MoE and MoWCA to be included in the National Budget of 2019, as new or additional investments. The meeting brought together key stakeholders from Government and development agencies to highlight the roles that each partner can play towards ensuring a situation where all girls and boys have their rights to good health, nutrition and early learning realized and are able to reach their full potential.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

In 2018, the primary narrative for Sri Lanka's education policy was around improving learning outcomes and environments for children at all levels of education.

In early childhood education, which is for children under five years of age, at the national and sub-national levels, public, private and non-governmental institutions continued to make needed improvements and investments in both policy and programming. Operating in a policy vacuum, where the revised national policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2004) had not yet been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, UNICEF Sri Lanka's technical and

financial support focused on building on the strengths of different partners and driving change at a system level.

In June 2018, UNICEF Sri Lanka, with support from UNICEF Headquarters and Regional Office, facilitated a workshop for policy makers and practitioners to introduce and trial a new 'Conceptual Framework for Building a Strong Pre-Primary Sub-Sector' and its accompanying sub-sector diagnostic and planning tool. This helped participants reflect on the strengths and gaps in this sub-sector with the aim of targeting priority areas for planning and action and identifying early childhood education (ECE) investments to be financed through the national budget of 2019. Moreover, comprehensive and integrated programming and, consistent messaging and advocacy based on this Framework, allowed UNICEF and partners to shift from creating stand-alone products and tools towards addressing systemic challenges for a more effective sub-sector.

Guided by the Conceptual Framework, which identifies the essential elements within the pre-primary sub-sector, UNICEF Sri Lanka prioritized several areas of action in 2018, including: 1) creating an enabling environment by working on national and sub-national policies; 2) improvements in monitoring adherence to early childhood development standards in preschools, and; 3) increasing access to preschools in recently resettled areas in former conflict-affected districts of the country.

UNICEF Sri Lanka maintained its active engagement in national ECE policy dialogue by providing inputs into the draft 'National Preschool Education Policy', championed by the MoE and the National Education Commission. This policy defines a unified common vision and courses of action to make preschool education in Sri Lanka accessible, affordable and of high quality. At the provincial level, in the Eastern province, UNICEF supported the review of and amendments to the statute on preschool education with a focus on governing roles and responsibility of duty bearers; preschool registration; monitoring; quality assurance; and inclusive education. These amendments brought this provincial legislation up-to-date and grant greater autonomy to the provincial Preschool Education Bureau in guiding and regulating the ECE sector.

To help public officers monitor adherence to standards in preschools as an integral part of their work in improving learning outcomes, UNICEF worked with the ECD units and authorities of Central and Uva provinces to develop a comprehensive assessment toolkit and trained 120 people on its use. This assessment toolkit is now an institutional norm in both provinces and monthly assessments took place in all 4,354 preschools, reaching almost 100,000 students.

In the post-conflict resettlement areas of the Eastern and Northern provinces, UNICEF Sri Lanka provided more direct support to pre-schools through the construction and rehabilitation of 33 classrooms in preschools and strengthening of preschool management committees. This provided approximately 1,000 preschool children with access to safe and more conducive learning environments.

To support teachers in primary education improve their methods and practices of teaching, UNICEF Sri Lanka provided support to scale up a promising approach to inclusive education, known as the 'multilevel', child-centred pedagogical approach. This teaching approach is tailored to individual student needs, learning paces and strengths of students. It allows teachers to identify diverse types of learners through formative assessments and to provide individual attention through remedial and enrichment activities, which is not possible in a

traditional format of teaching. Anecdotal evidence and observation suggest that this pedagogical approach has resulted in improved learning outcomes of students, increased student engagement and more regular school attendance. These findings have led to the Eastern provincial authorities committing to expand the application of this pedagogical approach to all its 1,180 schools in 2019, reaching about 95,800 students.

During the reporting period, Sri Lanka's educators continued to undertake reforms to embed elements of socio-emotional competencies and life skills within the curriculum for primary school. UNICEF Sri Lanka supported the NIE's on-going curricula revision and teaching aide development process to strengthen the integration of peace education, social cohesion and disaster risk reduction (DRR) concepts into the environment and related areas subject in primary education. Additionally, UNICEF worked with the NIE to improve Second National Language (2NL) competencies in primary education teachers, specifically focusing on oral competencies. For this purpose, a teacher training module was developed with simple techniques for teaching 2NL in Grades 3 and 4.

With the aim of ending corporal punishment in primary and secondary schools, UNICEF had conducted a pilot programme in 100 schools in the North in 2017 promoting alternate positive approaches to disciplining. In 2018, UNICEF and the Department of Education of the Northern province, appraised this programme and identified positive indications of increased awareness of school communities on the consequences of bullying and corporal punishment of students, and improved school capacity to promote violence-free learning environments. Using the lessons learned, the programme was introduced in all four targeted provinces, involving: 1) a mapping of current disciplinary practices administered in schools; 2) identifying positive discipline techniques; 3) establishing provincial resource teams, and; 4) developing materials and training modules for teachers on positive disciplining. In addition, UNICEF, together with the MoE and the MoWCA commissioned a survey on the knowledge, attitudes and practices on bullying in schools to generate evidence which will inform a national strategy and action plan to end bullying in schools.

Guided by its framework of rights-based, child-friendly schools, UNICEF Sri Lanka implemented an integrated package for school rehabilitation and development in resettlement areas of districts in the Eastern and Northern provinces. A total of 19 schools that were poorly resourced with inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure and learning facilities were rehabilitated or reconstructed with new classrooms and improved water and sanitation facilities and re-equipped with new school furniture. In addition to physical enhancements, UNICEF also invested in strengthening school development committees and introducing child-centred teaching and learning approaches.

UNICEF Sri Lanka continued to play a lead role in coordinating the implementation of the 'reconciliation pillar' under the three-year Peacebuilding Priority Plan signed between the Government and the UN in 2016, in which education has a key role. In conformity with the recommendations from the review of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and the related action plan, UNICEF focused on music and sports as conveners for increasing interactions and promoting social cohesion skills among junior secondary children. Informed by the success of a pilot project implemented in the Eastern Province from 2016 to 2017, which used music as a medium to bring together 108 students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, UNICEF worked with the NIE to integrate elements of this approach into the 2018 national music curriculum reform. Additionally, the NIE with UNICEF support, developed a strategy to promote social cohesion and civic values through language, math, science and

social sciences subjects. The expectation of this strategy is to incorporate practical activity-based teaching and learning methods into the national curricula framework of these subjects.

To promote social cohesion through sport, UNICEF integrated 'mini-games' into civic education teaching and learning practices for Grades 6, 7 and 8 in Central and Uva provinces. These 'mini-games' are fun and simple, but importantly teach children of all ethnic and religious groups vital life skills while fostering positive peer relationships and social cohesion. To support rollout, an instruction manual for teachers was developed covering 16 sports activities. Around 1,200 civic education teachers from 200 schools were trained on the use of the manual to promote civic education competencies among students. Material kits were provided to targeted schools. Provincial resource teams with in-service advisors were formed to provide continuous technical and mentoring support to the teachers. At national level, UNICEF worked with the NIE to integrate social cohesion skills into the physical education curriculum. At the time of reporting, a supplementary guide book for teachers was developed and this will be further rolled out through NIE-led trainings for provincial resource teams in 2019.

UNICEF, working with the MoE and the provincial Departments of Education in the Northern, Eastern, Uva and Central provinces, are trialling a new idea, under a private-public partnership model, to transform the delivery of the civic education subject in schools. The model aims to connect students and teachers using information technology to improve inter-cultural communication and create platforms of exchange and learning between them.

In higher education, UNICEF partnered with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to provide technical and financial assistance to the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka which is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and regulation of the administration of universities., to conduct the first-ever university system-wide study on the issue of ragging (hazing) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the 15 national universities. The study, to be completed in 2019, aims to identify incidences, prevalence and existing policies and systems to report and address ragging and sexual gender-based violence in the Sri Lankan university system. The findings will be used to develop a macro framework of actions to promote a violence-free university system, design and pilot university-led interventions, and document lessons learnt to inform policy responses.

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

During the reporting year, the Government remained largely committed to providing better protection for children from violence and abuse. In response to the situation of children in need of protection, in line with the SDGs and UN Sustainable Development Framework for Sri Lanka, UNICEF and the Government developed a set of strategies to support national efforts for better protection of girls and boys from violence and abuse. These strategies were translated into a specific development assistance work plan for 2018-2019.

UNICEF provided technical assistance and advice to the MoWCA which chaired the Sri Lankan delegation that attended the State Party Dialogue with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva in January 2018. The delegation had cordial interactions with the UN Committee and accepted all 126 recommendations in the Concluding Observations, published in February 2018.

In response to the recommendations and with advice from UNICEF Sri Lanka and partners, the

MoWCA took a leadership role in streamlining and coordinating efforts of the Government to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A key achievement by the MoWCA was the re-organization of the National Monitoring Committee and familiarization of new members to the Committee with the CRC recommendations. The Committee tasked the MoWCA with creating a matrix of indicators in-line with the recommendations and asked various ministries to act upon those recommendations. This matrix was drafted with support from UNICEF and Save the Children.

Progress on protecting Sri Lankan children from violence and abuse was observed in five broad areas: policy development, system strengthening, service provision, advocacy and fundraising, and evidence generation. A major policy achievement in 2018 was raising the minimum age for criminal responsibility. In response to recommendations of the UN Committee, the MoJ revised the law and increased the minimum age from 8 to 12. The Penal Code was amended in May 2018 to reflect this change, which also gave new discretionary powers to judges to consider the minimum age based on the evolving capacity of a child, up to age 14 on a case-by-case basis. Another milestone was the initial adoption of the National Policy on Alternative Care of Children by the Cabinet of Ministers. This new policy is expected to bring about much-needed changes to the existing child protection system to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families and improve services for children in residential care. In line with this policy, the Government allocated around US\$28,000 for a comprehensive analysis of the situation of children in residential care in 2019.

The MoWCA also finalized the National Plan of Action to End Violence against Children 2019-2022, an important milestone for Sri Lanka as a Pathfinding Country of the Global Partnership to End Violence. The Plan of Action builds on the Government policy on Gender-based Violence against Girls and Women, adopted in 2016. These results were possible because of the enabling policy environment in the country promoted by the Government, which promised rule of law, good governance and citizen-centred policies in its vision documents. UNICEF was a key partner to the Government contributing to the above-mentioned results by providing long-term technical advice and engaging in targeted advocacy. It is expected that these changes will reduce the number of children in residential care (currently over 14,000); improve children's experiences in accessing justice services (more than 1,000 children per year); prevent detention of children in conflict with the law; and improve data collection and evidence-generation.

Almost 600 deprived children benefitted from social services that helped prevent violence and abuse against them through improved social service workforce capacity in target districts. In response to the UN Committee recommendations, the MoWCA took steps to address key systemic challenges: weak coordination and referral of child protection cases among mandated government actors and need for stronger social service workforce. Sri Lanka has a wide network of government organizations at the divisional level, however their roles are often vague or overlap, with unclear pathways in terms of case in-take, referral and management. In addition, capacity of the social service workforce is often inadequate to meet the demanding pressures of preventing and responding to violence and abuse against children. In 2018, several ministries with the mandate of child welfare (education, health, women and child affairs, law and order) came together to design a new project to address this gap. The project is being implemented in five divisional secretariat divisions to empower social services providers through better cooperation, case conferencing, referral and case management. This project contributed to strengthening the social services workforce in Sri Lanka, which plays a vital role in reducing violence against children. The project will continue in 2019, based on the results of

the initial phase.

Improving the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of service provision remained a government priority during 2018 which was supported by UNICEF. This included the efforts of the Attorney General's Department to address the backlog of cases of child sexual abuse and rape to increase access to justice and improve public trust in justice services. During the reporting period, more than 2,000 such cases were processed, benefitting more than 1,800 girl victims of abuse and rape.

The generation of new data and evidence remained another priority area for UNICEF in Sri Lanka. In 2018, UNICEF collaborated with the MoE to initiate a study on peer-to-peer bullying among school children. The study findings will be available in 2019, and will inform new policy development, teacher training and skills-building programmes. Another achievement for Sri Lanka was the collection, for the first time, of administrative data on children in contact with the justice system for the UN Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.

Demonstrating strong leadership, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with targeted technical advice and assistance from UNICEF, coordinated with 17 relevant line ministries and departments as well as other UN agencies to collect data on children in contact with the justice and administrative systems, and submitted its report to the Global Study.

As part of the commitments under the Human Rights Council Resolution of September 2015, the Sri Lankan Government established the Office of Missing Persons in 2018 – one of the four transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms. UNICEF worked with UN sister agencies and relevant Government partners to provide technical support in light of the hundreds of cases of missing children resulting from Sri Lanka's armed conflict. A study was commissioned to document the experience of the Family Tracing and Reunification Unit, established with UNICEF's support in 2010, in its follow-up of 874 missing children registered with the Unit.

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

In 2018, Sri Lanka continued to move forward key policy and programmes in the WASH and environment sectors with a focus on issues related to drinking water safety; water scarcity; human excreta disposal; solid waste management; chemical pollution of the environment; hygiene of vulnerable groups; preservation of flora and fauna; and disaster resilience. UNICEF worked at multiple levels including strengthening the enabling environment, testing models for potential scale up and supported direct service delivery, either targeting a specific age group of children or the community as a whole.

Another key strategy employed was strengthening and building on partnerships. UNICEF's long-standing partnership with the MoCPWS and its new partnership with the DCS were instrumental in improving SDG 6 monitoring. Furthermore, the Regional Centre for Sanitation in collaboration with UNICEF Sri Lanka, continued capacity building on menstrual hygiene management, which helped profile this approach outside the school environment through engagement with public health and water service providers. UNICEF's partnership with the MoCPWS was the foundation for national level advocacy on menstrual hygiene management outside of the school domain and the SDGs, based on which, UNICEF Sri Lanka entered into a new partnership with the DCS to improve SDG 6 monitoring. UNICEF also continued to maintain its long-term partnership with the School Health and Nutrition Branch of the MoE, with a focus on menstrual hygiene management and monitoring in schools, including service

functionality and behaviour change. To address challenges in monitoring, UNICEF reached out to the Data Management Branch of the MoE to secure their commitment to pilot the monitoring of key WASH indicators related to behaviour, quality and functionality. At the sub-national level, in the Northern Province, UNICEF involved both the Irrigation Department and academia in groundwater recharging initiatives, adding greater momentum and credibility for the implementation of this concept. In addition, UNICEF's partnership with UNDP supported the construction of agro-wells, combining water supply and livelihoods. In the North and East, UNICEF's partnerships included the Provincial Departments of Education and Medical Officers of Health, as well as local civil society organizations for programme implementation and technical support. These partnerships helped leverage existing resources in the WASH sector towards the achievement of common objectives.

To ensure compliance with SDG targets for safe water and sanitation, UNICEF worked with key service providers to assess data gaps, including WASH status in pre-schools. In 2018, consultations with key stakeholders resulted in commitment to conduct a targeted gap analysis next year, which will assess both the quality of WASH infrastructure in pre-schools, schools and health centres, as well as the knowledge, skills and practices of preschool and primary teachers and frontline healthcare workers related to WASH, including menstrual hygiene management. Regarding WASH in schools, the MoE expressed willingness to upgrade the annual school census WASH indicators by bringing in qualitative and behavioural aspects. The MoCPWS also committed to assessing compliance of the water safety levels of community-managed water schemes against SDG 6 and developing ground water as a sub sector.

UNICEF Sri Lanka played a key facilitation role in mainstreaming SDG 6 monitoring by providing technical support and sharing global knowledge and experiences. This resulted in the design by key stakeholders of a comprehensive questionnaire for monitoring SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2 on safely managed water and sanitation respectively, which included 'availability' and 'quality' parameters, in addition to existing 'accessibility' parameters. Continued advocacy resulted in the DCS agreeing to include the upgraded questionnaire in the next HIES in 2019 and the Demographic and Health Survey. These will enable the establishment of a baseline against the new indicators and, ultimately, monitoring of SDG 6. The next national population and household census questionnaire will also be revised accordingly so that the three surveys are consistent in its monitoring and reporting.

The Regional Centre for Sanitation continued to strengthen its human resources, with support from UNICEF regionally and in-country, and maintain a key profile in the region among stakeholders from the WASH and public health sub-sectors, particularly in the areas of excreta management and menstrual hygiene management. This resulted in increased stakeholder awareness of their role in menstrual hygiene management outside of the school environment, such as community and public health. UNICEF also continued to provide technical and facilitation support to the MoE to follow up and report on menstrual hygiene management as a commitment made during the WASH in Schools International Learning Exchange in 2017.

At sub-national level, in the post-conflict areas of the Northern and Eastern provinces, UNICEF provided WASH facilities in three preschools and 35 primary and secondary schools inline with nationally-promoted designs. Additionally, UNICEF linked private sector companies with 30 resource-constrained schools to cover recurrent WASH-related costs, including supplies. Safe water and sanitation facilities were also provided in three health centres with a population coverage of 50,000. At the community level, in the Eastern Province, UNICEF facilitated access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation for 108 households. In the North,

UNICEF advocated for and introduced the Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) concept to the local authorities, in collaboration with the Department of Irrigation, to improve water safety and reduce salinity. This resulted in a substantial proportion (80 per cent) of the targeted stakeholders being trained on the MAR concept and increased demand from local government officials to sustain it.

UNICEF supported key initiatives which resulted in greater awareness on menstrual hygiene management and its impact on adolescent girls, as well as the role played by education officials, teachers and the students. These initiatives reached more than 2,000 girls in 14 targeted schools in the Northern and Eastern provinces through providing access to dedicated WASH services, particularly facilities for sanitary pad disposal. To monitor improvements in schools, UNICEF supported the design and integration of 10 menstrual hygiene management-specific indicators into the school monitoring system of 13 pilot schools. These schools reported a substantial improvement in menstrual hygiene management from an overall rating of 30 to 87 per cent. This strengthened UNICEF Sri Lanka's ongoing advocacy for the use of these indicators across all schools as a means of measuring progress. Building on this, more customised menstrual hygiene management approaches and messages were also used in targeted communities, such as those newly resettled, based on the specific needs of adolescent girls and issues identified, for instance teenage pregnancies.

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

UNICEF's Global Strategic Plan 2018-2021 prioritizes the situation of children who live in extreme poverty, and of the many more who experience deprivations in multiple dimensions that impact their rights and development. In Sri Lanka, impressive and steady progress in reducing poverty has been achieved over the past decades, and only approximately four per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line, which is based on a monetary measure. However, pockets of much higher poverty rates exist: more than 400,000 Sri Lankans are living just above the poverty line and are vulnerable to falling easily into poverty.

Questions have been raised as to whether the poverty line used is too low (the incidence of poverty based on the World Bank's Global Poverty Line of US\$3.20 a day for lower middle-income countries is more than twice the estimated national incidence of poverty). More importantly, the Government does not calculate and publish child poverty estimates, neither monetary nor multidimensional, making, in practical terms, the issue of child poverty invisible. It also makes it much harder to properly tackle the issue or set useful targets in the context of the SDGs, and thus contribute to the achievements of the goals set forth in UNICEF's Strategic Plan.

Against that backdrop, UNICEF Sri Lanka worked in 2018 to help highlight child poverty, starting from understanding who and where poor children are, and what deprivations they face. UNICEF partnered with Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative to generate greater interest and capacity of the DCS, the body mandated to estimate poverty in the country, on measuring multidimensional poverty. Key statisticians from the DCS were trained on and calculated the National Multidimensional Poverty Index, and initial discussions were held on how to specifically measure child poverty. The DCS agreed to include a child module in the upcoming HIES Survey of 2019 with sex-disaggregated data that will also capture any discriminatory household practices. This will be the first time the HIES has a child-specific module, which will allow for important cross-tabulations amongst a variety of child and poverty indicators. The DCS also agreed to calculate and publish child poverty rates, both monetary

and multidimensional, based on data from the upcoming HIES. To help DCS with this commitment, UNICEF partnered with Centre for Poverty Analysis, a national think tank, to facilitate a consultative process with national and international stakeholders that will culminate with the adoption of a context-relevant methodology for measuring multidimensional child poverty in Sri Lanka. This allows for monitoring of SDG 1, and more importantly, the design of evidence-based policies to eliminate child poverty. In addition, gender-focused dimensions will be included in the measurement of multidimensional child poverty.

In terms of addressing child poverty and vulnerability, the UNICEF Strategic Plan recognizes the important role of social protection systems. While UNICEF Sri Lanka has made some efforts and progress in the area of social protection over the past few years, 2018 was the first year of stand-alone work, under a new social policy Outcome. During the year, the focus was on establishing UNICEF as a credible partner, building on initial work around shock-responsive social protection. An assessment of the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system is being finalized, examining the potential of Sri Lanka's existing social protection schemes to respond to disasters. Preliminary findings were presented at a World Bank Conference on Adaptive Social Protection to key stakeholders in Sri Lanka. The final assessment will provide recommendations on how to improve the capacity of the system to respond to shocks, particularly for those most vulnerable such as female-headed households and widows.

UNICEF Sri Lanka also contributed to social protection system strengthening focussing on targeting of response interventions. As part of a reform envisioned for the social protection system, the Government is developing a Social Registry Information System to enhance the transparency and accountability of social protection programmes and improve their efficiency and impact. UNICEF partnered with Oxfam to identify vulnerabilities to weather-related shocks, in order to help the Government improve their mechanisms for identifying households in need of assistance. The ongoing project is collecting and analysing data from one of the most disaster-prone locations, Kalutara district, where within the past three years, the average household was affected four times and twice relocated to safe locations. Particular attention is being paid to female-headed households and other gender dimensions that influence vulnerability. Both initiatives will result in concrete recommendations that, if taken forward by the Government, can significantly reduce levels of vulnerability and improve effectiveness of its response to shocks.

UNICEF convened UN agencies to discuss the UN's role and engagement in social protection, including issues on policy development, system strengthening, evidence building, advocacy, and implementation. UNICEF also liaised with the World Bank and the National Planning Department to create a stronger role for itself in the drafting of the National Strategy on Social Protection. This aimed to ensure that the different vulnerabilities children face along the life cycle will be addressed by a more inclusive, rights-based social protection system.

UNICEF commenced engagement on public finance for children, to review how domestic resources are promoting or hindering results for children. This was against a backdrop of deteriorating transparency of budget information to the public, and limited opportunities for the public to engage in the budget preparation process (measured through the Open Budget Survey), as well as low levels of priority given to social sectors in Government spending. As a result of UNICEF's advocacy, the Eastern Provincial government agreed to produce a consultative Citizen's Budget for 2019, with UNICEF's support. Preparatory meetings were held with Chief Secretaries at provincial level, as well as with planning and budgeting officials to launch the initiative and discuss the modality and timeframe of this work. The publication of this

Citizen's Budget, which will be the first in the country, will be a significant step for children: more transparent and accessible information to budgets are crucial for accountability and meaningful advocacy engagement on investing for children. This will also help address a key UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendation related to the allocation of resources for children. Further, to assess the level of investment in the social sectors that most directly impact children, UNICEF established a partnership with a well-recognized local think tank, Verite Research, to generate evidence for advocacy. The ongoing partnership will lead to the production and wide dissemination of five budget briefs in the first quarter of 2019.

Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints

To foster convergence in addressing the multidimensional deprivations that affect children, the new UNICEF-Government country programme outcomes were formulated following a child-centred approach. This requires UNICEF to take an integrated approach to programming that combines actions across sectors and involves all relevant stakeholders. With 2018 the first year of the country programme, opportunities were taken to test the cross-sectoral approach in programming. As part of its internal coordination structure, to facilitate the delivery of priorities of the country programme, UNICEF established three outcome groups: one for each of the child-centred outcomes (early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence). The outcome groups function as a programmatic platform to promote convergence between sectors and targeted actions to achieve the integrated results.

In this context, UNICEF prioritized early childhood development (ECD) to model and demonstrate the integrated, child-centred programming. Playing a convener role and strengthening institutional structures at the national and sub-national levels were key comparative advantages for UNICEF in moving this forward. UNICEF engaged with not only with its regular government partners (MoWCA, MoHNM and MoE), but also with less traditional ones such as Ministry of Finance and the National Planning Department to create a more conducive environment through improving horizontal and vertical coordination and committing to key investments to scale up high-quality ECD services for every child in the country. UNICEF contributed substantially to developing new and/or reviewing existing multi-sectoral national policies on ECD and child care, and facilitated sectoral meetings in education, health and child protection and cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholders (government and non-government partners).

These efforts aimed to enhance capacity for budgetary analysis and to prioritize ECD investment that the Government could make through its 2019 National Budget. In addition, to improve teaching quality, UNICEF in partnership with the ECD Authority of the Uva Province identified and tested a technology-based solution to disseminate the detailed weekly lesson plan for a total of 40 weeks and its accompanying teacher instruction manual based on the Early Childhood Development Standards. Almost every teacher in the registered preschools – more than 90 per cent of preschools are registered in the province – received weekly text messages with the lesson plans and learning activities for each following week. They reported that they appreciated the guidance under the new system. The SMS-based system was enhanced with additional messages on nutrition and/or child protection and there is potential for two-way communication between preschool teachers and ECD authorities in the future.

However, adopting an integrated approach at a national level through a comprehensive, thoughtful and planned approach that blends multiple services across systems/ministries

proved to be difficult. Intricate vertical structures within ministries and between national and sub-national levels, and poor collaboration among programmes in different sectors continued to pose challenges for implementing and monitoring integrated approaches, such as that adopted in ECD. For example, a multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation framework and a clearly-defined coordination mechanism for ECD are still yet to be defined and put in place. This was intensified by the political turmoil that took place during October-December 2018. The fragile Sri Lankan economy was badly affected during the political upheaval with the steep loss in value in its currency, downgrading of its economy and loss in tourist revenue. In the wake of the political crisis and doubts about the future of democracy in the nation, several Governments and donors (such as Germany, Japan, the United States, and the European Union) froze their funding for development aid. From UNICEF Sri Lanka's perspective, there were short-term set-backs, particularly the high-level advocacy events planned for November to December 2018, and the delays in programme implementation at national and local levels impacted on achievement of planned results. Although the risks to UNICEF programmes and advocacy were minimal during the crisis since it was short lived, in the absence of an appropriation bill, a risk remains that the efforts to increase the ECD budget allocation may not be successful.

In 2018, UNICEF continued to demonstrate different approaches to address systemic constraints that impede the realization of children's rights, including piloting and experimentation, more intense upfront analysis, and working on an 'at scale' solution from the outset.

One example relates to the potential of making an impact at provincial level. To facilitate the provision of safe drinking water to resettled communities in Jaffna district, UNICEF facilitated the promotion of three types of MAR options: open wells and shafts, aquifer storage and recovery, and rooftop rainwater harvesting. This was because water was scarce in the region and the district lacked major surface water sources, as well as depleted groundwater due to salinity. During the field testing of these options with multiple stakeholders, UNICEF primarily provided technical inputs and resource persons from the same sub-national region, including for the development of training materials. The field-tested MAR options were well received at local government and provincial level, resulting in a recommendation to mainstream the MAR concept across the Northern Province. The Northern Provincial Department of Education integrated the MAR concept into their system, including the training of 12 education zonal teams and development of a video documentary (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhdECItblnQ). The success of the tested options means that in future scale-up no additional field testing will be required and the MAR concept can be implemented directly. This demonstrated that the ability to adapt and respond to a local context, by creating local partnerships, leveraging local resources and knowledge and generating recognition, are important strategies for an eventual scale up of a model, and that expansion alone is not enough.

A second example is the child-centred approach to disaster risk reduction (CC-DRR). UNICEF partnered with the MoWCA to implement this innovative approach for an 'at scale' platform, using children's clubs and child rights promotion officer (CRPO) networks. At the same time, opportunities were provided for learning and adjustments for further reach, through other players (e.g. international and national civil society organizations). While a pilot phase was considered, the project launch was very successful and eliminated the need for testing. A National Action Plan to rollout CC-DRR in Sri Lanka was finalized and will guide and coordinate all related activities by partners. In 2018, with UNICEF's advocacy and technical and financial support on CC-DRR, the MoWCA included CC-DRR as a mandatory capacity building component for CRPOs in their annual development plan. It also allocated resources from its

own budget as the first step to implementing CC-DRR in the country. In addition, through the promotion of CC-DRR in Sri Lanka, UNICEF was able to link key government entities at the grassroots level who had previously worked in isolation. The Disaster Management Centre and the CRPOs under the Department of Probation and Child Care Services commenced working together in identifying risks faced by children from natural disasters and planning for risk mitigation at district level through CC-DRR programmes supported by UNICEF.

With significant progress made at policy and legislative level as a result of UNICEF's evidence-based advocacy, commitments to greater accountability for implementation and follow-up is needed. There are many examples of policies being developed and adopted by the Cabinet, but not costed (and hence remain unfunded), nor evaluated to assess impact. Examples, include the National Evaluation Policy and the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Plan. As such, UNICEF Sri Lanka will continue to strengthen national and local mechanisms, institutions and processes to monitor and report on the implementation of policies, and link these with international systems, including UN human rights mechanisms.

Using child rights champions as an advocacy strategy was found to be particularly valuable for complex interventions that require sustained support. For example, the former Secretary of the MoWCA was a champion in Committee on the Rights of Children reporting. With her passion and leadership, consensus was built among stakeholders with diverse interests on collecting the much-needed data for the Committee report. Moreover, the former Secretary garnered organizational support for policy change for taking forward some of the recommendations.

Similarly, a group of evaluation champions among Members of Parliament led to the momentum for passing of the National Evaluation Policy by the Cabinet of Ministers. However, voluntarily or politically-driven turnover of these champions resulted in losing commitment and a specific set of skills which can be detrimental to sustainability of a particular initiative. Therefore, going forward, UNICEF Sri Lanka will adopt a more institutionalized/systemic approach and focus efforts on building capacities and competencies at an institutional level.

Child participation is one of the Convention on the Rights of the Child guiding principles. Creating an environment in which child participation is fully and effectively realized has been challenging for the Government in Sri Lanka. Although successful initiatives and interventions have been put in place to ensure meaningful participation of children (such as child-centred disaster risk reduction, social cohesion and reconciliation), traditionally, the Sri Lankan society views children as the property of their parents or under the authority of elders within their community, with little recognition of any entitlement to their emerging autonomy.

As such, child participation remains elusive for most children in Sri Lanka. The Government and, to a certain extent, the civil society have the tendency to address participation in rather limited ways – primarily through specific projects or one-off consultative events. Too often these initiatives, while achieving benefits for the individual children and local services involved, have made very limited progress in transforming the social, political and cultural environment towards greater opportunities for sustained engagement. UNICEF Sri Lanka remains committed to promoting meaningful participation of children within families, schools and the larger community. For example, children will be consulted on the choice of competing priorities for the allocation and use of resources and for the design of plans and policies affecting them.

As funding streams are decreasing and the fiscal space is constrained, strengthening public-private partnerships and identifying innovative financing modalities are critical to ensure that

the rights of children in Sri Lanka are protected. In 2018, UNICEF partnered with International Finance Corporation and 10 private sector companies from the garment industry, banks and others, to make the business case for employer-supported child care. UNICEF and the International Finance Corporation will continue to engage with other industries such as tourism and hospitality to expand this programme and ensure the provision of quality ECD services to children and other with childcare-related benefits to their employees, which can yield business benefits and be a win-win-win for employees, children and communities.

Learning from its experience in 2018, UNICEF Sri Lanka will continue to implement the child-centred approach and test the theories of change as outlined in the country programme and Programme Strategy Notes. A stronger emphasis will be placed on middle childhood and adolescence outcomes, as well as on mainstreaming gender and disability in all outcomes. As change strategies, UNICEF will continue to use evidence for high-level advocacy and maintain high-impact partnerships. At the same time, UNICEF Sri Lanka will strengthen its communication for development and innovation.

END/