

the Republic of Uzbekistan

Part 1: Situation update in the country

Uzbekistan, with a child population of more than 10 million, became a lower-middle-income country in 2010. There was a reported decrease in national income poverty rates between 2004 and 2016, from 26.1 per cent to 12.3 per cent, but disparities remained high, particularly in rural areas and in Karakalpakstan, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions. Social assistance provided to children and their families has steadily decreased in recent years.

Uzbekistan's economic development has been stable, with an average growth in gross domestic product of 5.1 per cent in 2018. Concerns persisted regarding disparities across different regions and populations, and health indicators varied across socio-economic status, urban-rural residency and geographic location.

There has been a reduction in under-five mortality in Uzbekistan, but 57 per cent of under-five deaths occurred in the neonatal period (first 28 days). Uzbekistan faced health system challenges. Although the Government provided citizens a basic benefit package, out-of-pocket expenditure as a percentage of health expenditure was estimated to be 43 per cent. The quality of maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health was identified as one of the main challenges within district health systems and was exacerbated by inconsistencies in water, electricity and heating supplies. Other challenges included availability of essential commodities and the need to enhance the Health Management Information System in terms of indicators collected, definition of indicators, data collection, analysis and reporting. Although a good primary health system existed, it was difficult to show the efficiency, quality and equity of the provision of primary health services. The health services delivery system infrastructure was outdated and in need of upgrading or replacement. The capacity of health managers to analyse data for decision-making, to identify bottlenecks, develop, implement and monitor quality improvement plans, and to improve skills to carry out an equity-focused approach need to be developed.

In 2018 UNICEF supported the Government of Uzbekistan and contributed considerably to achievements in policy development, health system strengthening and improving service delivery. Bottlenecks remained that need to be addressed. According to MICS 2006, exclusive breastfeeding was inadequately practised. UNICEF studies highlighted low levels of knowledge among home visiting patronage nurses on how to counsel mothers and families on the importance of breastfeeding, identifying danger signs, early stimulation and other behaviours critical for child survival. According to DHS data, poor dietary practices for women who were pregnant and for children lead to micronutrient deficiencies, including anaemia. According to official statistics, the routine immunization coverage rate during the last ten years has been as high as 98 to 99 per cent. However, many children miss being immunized, and there are communities that are hesitant about vaccinating their children.

According to national statistics, Uzbekistan achieved near-universal access to general secondary education. On the other hand, according to administrative data, only 29 per cent of children aged between three to six years were attending any preschool education programme. The quality of education services provided was a major concern in both pre-primary and basic

education sub-sectors. The enrolment rate in preschool education in Uzbekistan was very low compared to other Central Asian countries and countries with lower middle-income status. The enrolment rate in preschool education was also characterized by huge regional variations. For example, while nearly 80 per cent of children aged three to six years in Tashkent attended a preschool, only 12 per cent of children in Surkhandarya and 20 per cent in Kashkardarya regions had such an opportunity. Only 23 per cent of preschool age children attended any form of early childhood education in rural areas, whereas, in urban areas, approximately 46 per cent of children in the same age group attended some form of preschool education.

Preschool education was neither free nor compulsory in Uzbekistan, but, following the strong advocacy efforts of UNICEF and development partners such as the World Bank, the Government is contemplating provision of one year of free, compulsory preschool education for all children. There is a need to create demand among families to enrol their children in preschools. There also is a need to understand why community participation in school management is not valued by families and to address that behaviour accordingly.

General secondary education in Uzbekistan was free (no tuition fees), and compulsory, resulting in an overall gross enrolment rate (GER) of approximately 97 per cent in 2016-17, with a 100 per cent rate in primary grades (grades 1-4) and approximately 94 per cent in secondary education levels (grades 5-9). A 2018 study by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Education demonstrated that on average, learning levels among children were insufficient to be commensurate with the lower-middle income status of the country and there were enormous differences in children's performance. Substantial variations in learning levels were attributed to children's socio-economic backgrounds and school-level variations, especially those related to teacher effectiveness. The study also noted that given the low coverage, the participation in and quality of preschool services, school readiness is not a strong predictor of learning among children. The overall education quality also was affected by the inadequate quality of the curricula, a lack of qualified teachers, the low quality of education management processes, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, shortcomings in evidence-based policy and decision making, fragmented policy and rigid service delivery.

In 2018, Uzbekistan adapted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the country, and accordingly, aimed to improve SDG 4.2.2, 'Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex' and SDG 4.2.1, 'Proportion of children and young people in grades 1-4; secondary school grades 5-9 who achieved at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics, by sex.'

Based on the latest figures from the State Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 24,672 children were living in residential care institutions. Although that number is below the regional average in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it exceeds the global average of 120 per 100,000. Reviews of available data showed that the flow of children into alternative care, including those children placed in institutional care, most often originated from families, with only 10 to 15 per cent being orphans. More than half were placed in residential care due to their family's socio-economic difficulties. An ineffective gatekeeping system and the lack of a comprehensive mix of services to meet the needs of children from vulnerable families were among the major bottlenecks that contributed to institutionalization. Labour migration also was identified as a factor that contributed to the placement of children in institutions; however, that requires further analysis. Most of the research available focuses on remittances and the consumption patterns of families and pays little attention to the social consequences of labour migration.

Although some legislative safeguards existed concerning child-friendly approaches and treatment in the justice system, Uzbekistan does not yet have a separate juvenile justice system. The 2016 analysis of the compliance of national legislation with international justice for children standards showed that changes should be made in legislation to introduce diversion to prevent the interaction of children in conflict with the law with the formal justice system. Existing criminal legislation did not protect the rights of victims and witnesses of crimes in justice processes. There was no requirement for specialisation of professionals, and child-sensitive court procedures were not in place. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations of 2013, expressed grave concerns about 'continued reports of torture and ill-treatment being routinely used in investigations, including of persons under the age of 18 years.' Attempts have been made in recent years to introduce a child-friendly approach to the system, but progress has been limited. The placement of boys and girls in closed educational-correctional institutions due to minor offences remained the practice when dealing with children in conflict with the law.

Due to inadequate investment in water supply and waste water management, Uzbekistan faced the problem of an aging and deteriorating infrastructure and improper disposal and treatment of wastewater, resulting in poor hygiene and a high health risk for people in some areas of the country.

According to the Republican Centre for Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance of Uzbekistan, approximately 15 per cent of schools did not have acceptable water and sanitation infrastructure. A centralized water supply was available in 62 per cent of schools, but 13 per cent of rural schools did not have any water supply system. A knowledge, attitudes and practices survey conducted by UNICEF in 2017 showed that despite knowledge about hand washing, students did not practice correct behaviours due to the unavailability of water and sanitation facilities. Ensuring universal access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030 (SDG 6), especially children, requires investments in adequate infrastructure, providing sanitation facilities, and encouraging hygiene at every level.

The majority of children in low-income families of Uzbekistan were not adequately covered by social protection. The results of the recently-conducted 'Listening to the citizens of Uzbekistan' survey revealed that 75 per cent of eligible low-income families with children and adolescents were not receiving social allowances. Those results came on the heels of sharp budget cuts and a tightening of the targeting criteria over the last 10 years. This concern about coverage also was raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (Observation 13.1), which recommended the Government increase financial resources for the social protection of children and adolescents. Similarly, children often lacked access to necessary social services and support. In particular, there was no well-established social work function to provide continuous and comprehensive support to families experiencing difficult life situations.

The realization of the full potential of young people was a key government priority, given that 60 per cent of the population were under 30 years of age. The fact that 42 per cent of young people were not in education, employment or training led to disenfranchisement and a loss of potential. While Uzbekistan achieved a near universal enrolment rate in primary and secondary education, the enrolment rate at higher education level was only approximately 12 per cent, according to administrative data. There was a disconnect between the knowledge and skills children and youth get in the formal education system and the requirements of the labour market. The economy was not generating sufficient employment opportunities to absorb the

growing number of young people entering the labour force each year (more than 500,000 people). Youth had limited opportunities to participate in social, economic and political life. This resulted in a youth unemployment rate of 19 per cent, three times higher than overall unemployment in Uzbekistan, according to the International Labour Organization. Young people with disabilities, those living in residential and closed institutions and those from low-income families were among the most disadvantaged in realizing their full potential. For example, of young people with disabilities, only 27 per cent completed general basic education, 18 per cent had upper secondary and vocational education and only 5 per cent completed a higher education programme.

Young people did not have meaningful ways of participating in governance and decision making at local or national levels. New approaches are required to address that challenge.

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

In 2018, UNICEF continued working across health system areas to ensure mothers and children, especially the most vulnerable, had access to quality individual and population-based healthcare services. UNICEF contributed to enhancing the quality of maternal, newborn and child healthcare in two regions by 30 per cent through the implementation of local health care improvement plans. The percentage of children aged 2-59 months who received medical care by general practitioners according to approved protocols and standards increased from 47 per cent in 2017 to 58 per cent in 2018. UNICEF contributed to those achievements through technical assistance, advocacy, capacity development and evidence generation, working closely with the Government.

In 2018, UNICEF worked with the central government to improve the health sector plan for the next 10 years. UNICEF provided policy advice on the development of the maternal, newborn and child health package, as well as its costing and financing. During a national consultation exercise with multiple government and non-government participants, UNICEF advocated for increased emphasis on newborn health. UNICEF made practical recommendations based on the global 'Every Newborn Action Plan' with a focus on quality of care.

A comprehensive review of the immunization program identified areas for further improvement. Health system strengthening for the immunization program, implemented jointly by Ministry of Health, UNICEF and the World Health Organization, with financial support from the GAVI Alliance, increased the capacity of the immunization system. The programme specifically improved the cold chain infrastructure, cold chain capacity, and cold chain facilities' security and fire protection systems through the construction of cold chain facilities at regional and district levels and the upgrading of cold chain equipment. Support from UNICEF to the Ministry of Health in vaccine budget planning and forecasting was scaled up to include cold chain maintenance and operational costs. Further agreements between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance were made to introduce a unified methodology for the planning of immunization budgets. The technical requirements for the development of the software for a vaccine management information system were met. The assessment of the supply chain human resources gap was conducted and recommendations were shared with the Ministry of Health for submission to the Presidential Administration as part of the health sector plan. The

findings of a study on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of parents regarding immunization helped develop an action plan to address barriers to immunization nationwide and in selected regions.

UNICEF provided support to implement a district health system strengthening project through the training of health managers on supportive supervision and by supporting the implementation of health care improvement plans. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of that work showed significant improvements in quality of maternal, newborn and child care in project sites.

UNICEF supported the first-ever national nutrition survey on children and women at reproductive age in Uzbekistan. The survey's preliminary results provided the evidence to develop a Law on Breastmilk Substitutes and a Policy on Maternal and Child Nutrition. Once the data analysis phase of the survey is finalized, the findings will be used to develop a comprehensive nutrition programme for the country.

UNICEF supported the Government to analyse how mother-to-child transmission of HIV/syphilis was being prevented and supported the development of a national strategy and action plan to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of those diseases. Jointly working with the US Center for Disease Control, UNICEF supported awareness raising and capacity building on the prevention and control of health care associated infections (including HIV) to reduce the instances of such infections. Technical guidelines on providing psychosocial support to HIV-infected children, adolescents and their families were issued by the Government, with support from UNICEF.

A communications strategy was developed to influence the behaviours of parents and families and to promote caregivers' positive practices for child health and development at national and subnational levels. The strategy was based on evidence and included the perspectives of key stakeholders at national and regional levels. The communication strategy will be rolled out in two regions to improve practices critical to children's health and families' understanding of actions that need to be taken, and to build the capacities of patronage nurses to counsel good practices.

Communications campaigns were implemented to increase public awareness about the benefits of immunization and build the commitment of decision makers to focus on uptake of immunization. The 'Every Child Alive' campaign was implemented to support advocacy efforts focusing on reducing newborn mortality rates. The Government included interpersonal communication skills in the training module of patronage nurses, based on the successes of UNICEF's implementation of the participatory and learning action approach to behaviour change. This led to the institutionalization of the critical component of interpersonal communication in the nursing curriculum.

As part of South-South cooperation efforts, Uzbekistan learned from Kazakhstan's experience on home visiting and to Turkey's best practices on immunization systems. Uzbekistan also shared its experience with day care centres with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

In 2018, UNICEF worked in partnership with the Ministry of Public Education and its allied institutions, the Ministry of Preschool Education and the State Inspection for the Supervision of

Education Quality under the Cabinet of Ministers.

UNICEF supported the Government of Uzbekistan to develop the second Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 by bringing together an entire spectrum of education stakeholders. The plan defines long term goals and objectives for different sub-sectors in education and provides a strategic vision for developing the education sector. The plan also is expected to help the Government access global opportunities in terms of funding and engagement with the international community, as evidenced by the prospect of a US\$10 million grant from the Global Partnership for Education to implement activities for improving access and quality of the preschool education sector.

As part of developing the Education Sector Plan, UNICEF also prepared a detailed analysis of the situation of the education sector, examining access, equity, quality, governance and financing issues in each sub-sector of education. Given the paucity of data and analysis in the country, the analysis provided critical information for the Government of Uzbekistan to make evidence-based planning and policy decisions.

In 2018, UNICEF provided technical expertise to the Government to revise the Law on Education. The 1997 Law on Education reflected a more welfare-oriented approach to education, whereas the revised Law focuses on a child-rights based approach. Once adopted, the new Law on Education will redirect the focus to educational quality issues. It includes 30 additional articles, focusing on, inter alia, a more rights-based approach. More attention is directed to realizing inclusive education. New areas (spheres) of lifelong education and health education are included and there is a greater role for the private sector.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Preschool Education in developing a new Law on Preschool Education to reflect sub-sectoral priorities.

In 2018, UNICEF prepared detailed policy reviews on inclusive education and on the teaching workforce. UNICEF also developed two policy notes drawing from international best practices in education—one on the methods for raising additional resources for preschool education financing, and the other on engaging private sector in education through various public-private partnership models. Those reviews involved a mapping of existing legal documents and legislative frameworks and comparing them vis-a-vis international best practices as well as identifying gaps and bottlenecks that hinder the creation of an enabling environment for ensuring rights-based education for children. Several of the findings and recommendations of those policy reviews and notes were incorporated by the Government into its policy documents. For example, the Ministry of Preschool Education developed a series of public-private partnership models to engage the private sector in increasing equitable access to quality preschool education in the country. The Ministry of Public Education issued a series of decrees and other policy documents to support teachers' working conditions, incorporating several recommendations from the Teacher Workforce Policy review. The findings and recommendations from the Inclusive Education Policy Review contributed to the development of a Draft Law on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities.

In 2018 UNICEF supported a study on the profile of children with low learning levels. This study was the first effort in the country to conduct a nation-wide assessment of children in primary grades using tools and methods modelled on international assessment programmes. The process of conducting the study triggered an interest in upgrading existing national assessment systems. It also contributed to capacity building of relevant Ministry of Public Education staff as

the country gears up for participation in international assessments in 2021. The study highlighted poor learning levels among children from vulnerable backgrounds attending poorly resourced educational institutions. The study will guide the development of specific, targeted efforts to improve education quality in the country.

In 2018, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Preschool Education to begin the process of revising the curriculum to go beyond a content-driven approach to adopt a more competency-based learning approach. That process was underway in general secondary education. In the preschool education sector, the Early Learning Development Standards were revised and a new curriculum was developed using a competency-based approach. The Ministry of Public Education was equipped with resources to introduce and integrate disaster risk reduction and safe behaviour into the regular school curriculum in a more holistic manner.

To ensure access to equitable and affordable quality preschool education for the most vulnerable children, especially those living in rural areas, UNICEF supported the development of alternative and innovative forms of preschool education. A Conceptual Framework for Alternative Forms of Preschool Education and initial workplan for modelling alternative forms of preschool education was drafted. The alternative forms of education will be modelled in the three most deprived regions with low enrolment rates.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Preschool Education in developing and piloting a preschool Education Management Information System, which is expected to facilitate systematic, robust data collection for monitoring and evidence-based planning. During 2018, UNICEF provided technical expertise to establish the system and develop the institutional capacity of the Ministry to manage it. Based on a needs assessment, steps were taken to address the main gaps identified, including finalization of the monitoring framework. The framework includes key monitoring indicators, definition of key indicators and reporting types, data required for estimating key indicators, articulation of formula for estimating the indicators and details of the required disaggregation of indicators. Based on the indicator framework, data collection tools were developed. The system was piloted on the platform of the OpenEMIS system. As an initial step, basic data were collected nationwide. The guidelines and user manuals for data collection, compilation using paper-based tools and the OpenEMIS platform were being finalized in order to conduct capacity development activities with key personal in charge of data collection and analysis.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Preschool Education to organize national conferences on 'Innovative Approaches to Improving Access to Quality Preschool Education in Uzbekistan', held on 24 March, and on 'The Role of the Innovative Learning Environment in Enabling the Child's Holistic Development', held on 19 November (together with the World Bank).

To support the efforts of the Government to make preschool education available to families, UNICEF designed communication strategies to create demand for those services. UNICEF designed a study to help understand the current practices and the bottlenecks for communities to access such services.

To support advocacy efforts, UNICEF rolled out the campaign 'Early Moments Matter' to promote early childhood development, with a focus on fathers' roles in parenting and preschool education. UNICEF developed TV and radio shows to promote messages on early childhood development and the benefits of preschool education in a child's school readiness.

As part of the rollout of the 'End Violence against Children' campaign, UNICEF convened 'Youth Talks', a platform for young people to share their experiences of bullying in educational institutions. This created significant public discussion on social media platforms on the need to create child-friendly environments in schools, and the need to train teachers on how to address bullying in school. A roundtable discussion was convened with media managers on how to create a public dialogue on this issue in mainstream media, which led to significant media coverage. UNICEF developed public service announcements for television to sensitize audiences about the negative impact of bullying that were broadcast repeatedly on the most popular TV channels in Uzbekistan.

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

The programme of cooperation between the Government of Uzbekistan and UNICEF reached some important milestones in 2018, as shown by the high-level pronouncements and directives issued to line ministries and state bodies to include child protection system strengthening at national and district levels. For instance, the Presidential Resolution of June 2018 on family support system strengthening ensured the following priorities for the Government's policy agenda over the next five years: development of the social work profession; amendments to the law on social services for vulnerable people in compliance with international standards; development of family-based alternative care for children without parental care; and prevention of offenses by children through community support programmes.

Efforts were made to develop the capacity of front line education and health workers to establish a rapid response system for cases of violence against children at national and regional levels. With UNICEF support, a training programme for statutory referral bodies' staff and service providers was developed. Case management tools and mechanisms also were developed for identifying cases of child abuse in family and residential care settings. A standard operational procedure was drafted to apply case management when providing support to families and children in difficult life circumstances. Once finalized, the procedure will contribute to a platform for better coordination of prevention, referral and response measures at all levels.

In 2018, increased attention was paid to child care in the country's development agenda. UNICEF introduced several initiatives for programmes to support vulnerable families and children. For instance, a Concept Note on Child Care System Reform (de-institutionalization), linked to the broader social sector policy agenda, was presented to the Government. It emphasized enhancing existing family services with social work functions, and introduced mechanisms to minimize the placement of children in residential care institutions. In 2018, an Inter-Agency Coordination Council on the Committee on the Rights of the Child implementation started bringing together all stakeholders in the area of child protection to better monitor the situation of children and propose improvements to programmes. The establishment of the Council partially responds to one of the observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the lack of a unified mechanism for overall coordination of child protection in the country. The Council also developed the National Plan of Action for implementation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations and monitors its implementation.

Since Uzbekistan's independence more than 25 years ago, domestic violence has been a very sensitive topic. UNICEF, together with other concerned UN agencies, actively engaged with the Government in the development of the draft Presidential Resolution #3827 on the Prevention of

Domestic Violence, issued in October 2018. The major focus of UNICEF's recommendation was on the protection of child victims and witnesses of crimes. UNICEF contributed to the draft Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence. UNICEF also supported three workshops on the definition of different forms of violence against children and introduced child protection mechanisms for prevention of and response to cases of violence to the Expert Group in charge of drafting the Law. The Expert Group adopted the definitions advocated by UNICEF in the Law. The roles and responsibilities of child protection bodies also are included in the Law.

UNICEF advocated with the Cabinet of Ministers for the establishment of social work services in the social protection system to address the needs of vulnerable families and children. As a result, the social protection agency, to be established in 2019 will be in charge of social work service provision. With UNICEF support, the National University of Uzbekistan completed an assessment of the functions of the existing social service workforce across social sector ministries and agencies. The assessment showed that although social work does not exist as a specialized profession, many statutory bodies and service providers perform social work functions in their duties, without necessarily possessing the competencies and knowledge of social work or officially having such duties in their job descriptions. The assessment recommended the establishment of a specialized social work service provision system and the addition of social work functions to the duties of some paraprofessionals, such as patronage nurses and school psychologists, and providing them with development opportunities to acquire social work competencies. The 2018 Government-led Child Protection Forum validated the findings of the assessment and recommended taking them forward as a critical factor in implementing Uzbekistan's policy agenda for human rights and achievement of the SDGs.

Working with the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, UNICEF provided a platform to young women and girls to speak about gender-based violence. UNICEF Uzbekistan rolled out the global campaign '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' to raise public awareness through discourse in the media about the challenges faced by women and girls in the country. UNICEF developed content for special television shows to focus on how gender-based violence affects society.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of the Interior to establish and promote a child-friendly specialized approach to investigating the cases of victims and witnesses of crimes. Three child-friendly investigation rooms were established and police investigators were trained by UNICEF. The training was later taken up by Government throughout the country in 12 pre-trial facilities. Twenty six investigators from the justice sector were trained in forensic interviewing, with a particular focus on dealing with child victims and witnesses of crimes.

In 2018, UNICEF advocated with the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Public Education to take measures to stop the referral of children to closed educational-correctional institutions and facilitate the reintegration of children in such institutions into families and communities. With UNICEF support, an action plan was developed for this purpose and was adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers (Action Plan #426). UNICEF also supported the training of Women's Committee staff and social workers on case management and developed their capacity to implement the plan. At year end, the cases of 167 out of 254 girls in those institutions were assessed, and reintegration of 41 girls into families and communities was ongoing. Working closely with the Prosecutor General's Office, communication materials were developed to influence the behaviour of young people and to prevent them from re-offending. This work represents a step toward fulfilling one of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendations to Uzbekistan in 2013 on children

deprived of liberty.

UNICEF also developed special television shows to highlight the issue of children in conflict with the law for public broadcast. The shows included interaction between young people and Ministry of Interior officials to ensure that young peoples' voices were heard. The discussions led to increased public discourse on subjects that were previously considered too sensitive.

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

Because low investment is the major bottleneck in access to safe drinking water and hygiene in educational settings, UNICEF focused on showing how increased investment can result in considerable progress. UNICEF provided support to ensure sustainable access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and to promote hand washing and good hygiene practices in the four most deprived schools in two regions of Uzbekistan. Water pipelines were constructed in four schools, ensuring that approximately 2,000 children (980 boys and 1,020 girls) and community members had access to safe water. Sanitation facilities were built in two target schools, improving the sanitation and hygiene conditions of approximately 1,120 children (549 boys and 571 girls), including conditions so girls can practice good menstrual hygiene.

To promote behaviours related to sanitation and hygiene, UNICEF developed six public service announcements (short videos) for broadcast over popular channels. The messages focused on positive hygiene behaviours, including menstrual hygiene, and emphasized hand washing with soap. Television channels broadcast the public service announcements pro-bono and they were repeated several times to ensure that the messages were delivered to a large audience nationwide.

UNICEF rolled out a social media campaign on 15 October to commemorate Global Handwashing Day. Stories were published on the UNICEF Uzbekistan website (www.unicef.uz) to communicate positive stories of handwashing with soap. On the same day, in collaboration with Ucell, a telecom operator in Uzbekistan, SMS messages were sent to approximately 4.2 million subscribers with a reminder about the importance of hand washing.

At the end of the project, a concluding conference was conducted in the 5 target regions, to present results and discuss actions to be taken for future scale up. In addition, a national conference to present the project results was conducted. Representatives from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Public Education, management of regional health and education departments and principals of pilot schools discussed results and developed recommendations for future scale-up of best practices.

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

UNICEF engaged with the Government in improving social protection for children and young people. In the context of ambitious socio-economic reforms, Uzbekistan's fragmented social protection system was a source of major vulnerability for the success of the reforms, as well as for the well-being of the population, especially the most vulnerable children and families. At the request of the Government, UNICEF, together with the World Bank and the International Labour Organization, conducted a comprehensive assessment to identify key strengths and weaknesses of the social protection system.

UNICEF continued to advocate for institutional reform of the social protection system. UNICEF

initiated a policy debate by putting forward a discussion paper on the consolidation and better coordination of social protection functions across the government. The policy debate took place in roundtables organized jointly with the Development Strategy Centre within the UN Development Assistance Fund Results Group on Social Protection, during bilateral discussions with key policy makers and in the media. UNICEF developed concrete reform proposals, as a result of which, in 2019, a new government entity, either as a ministry or an agency, will be established to bring together all social protection activities under one roof.

In 2018, UNICEF partnered with the World Bank to conduct a representative household survey, 'Listening to the Citizens of Uzbekistan,' which focused on population well-being. Based on the survey data, UNICEF Uzbekistan, for the first time in almost a decade, was able to conduct a quantitative assessment of child-focused social protection programmes. The survey data also was used to create a micro-simulation model to develop evidence-based proposals for reforming targeting approaches for social allowances for children. The main purpose of the reform proposals was to make allowances more inclusive and effective in addressing child poverty. The results of the assessment and the micro-simulation model were the basis for a range of government capacity building activities, including workshops to jointly develop and enhance proposals.

To improve the efficiency and transparency of social protection programmes, UNICEF developed the concept of the single registry for social protection. Based on the concept, the Government requested UNICEF's support in piloting the registry in one region in 2019. This represents the first step in building an integrated social protection data management system.

As a first step in a dialogue about making the social protection system shock-responsive, UNICEF conducted a feasibility study on introducing humanitarian cash transfers through the existing cash transfer mechanisms.

UNICEF Uzbekistan, jointly with the UNICEF Division of Data, Research and Policy, produced 'Generation 2030 Uzbekistan: investing in children and young people to reap the demographic dividend.' The publication provided the basis for an SDG policy dialogue with decision makers on how to leverage the demographic dividend in Uzbekistan by investing in human capital and opportunities for the next generation.

UNICEF partnered with the Youth Union of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Senate and the Ministry of Public Education to launch a digital youth engagement platform, U-report. The initiative brings youth and the Government closer together, enabling two-way communication and engagement of young people in decision making. From its official launch in October 2018 until year end, there were more than 4,285 U-reporters from around the country, and that number was growing on a daily basis.

UNICEF co-led the UN Task Team on Youth and the development of the UN Joint Programme on Youth. The joint programme focuses on empowering and expanding opportunities for young people not in education, employment or training. UNICEF coordinated the initial situation analysis and theory of change for the joint programme and led the process of consultations with young people on the root causes, consequences and solutions to inform the design of the joint programme.

Given the lack of comprehensive situation analysis of young people in Uzbekistan, UNICEF, jointly with the Youth Union of the Republic of Uzbekistan, prepared to conduct a survey,

'Youth of Uzbekistan: Aspirations, needs and risks'. In 2018, a comprehensive survey methodology was developed jointly with a leading think tank, Youth Policy Lab, and was awaiting clearance from the Government for the survey to be conducted in early 2019. The study is intended to evaluate the situation of young people from their own perspective and inform youth policy.

UNICEF also contributed to building the capacity of the Youth Union of the Republic of Uzbekistan to equip young people with life skills. UNICEF conducted two training-of-trainers workshops for Youth Union staff and the Institute for Studying Youth Issues and Training prospective personnel, under the President's Academy of Public Administration, with a view to mainstream the life skills curriculum into youth programmes delivered by the Union.

UNICEF worked closely with the media and young people to promote the participation of children and young people in the public domain. UNICEF facilitated the participation of children, including children living with disabilities and children living with HIV, to express their views in the media. TV and radio shows were developed to provide those children with a platform to reach out to the general public and decision makers.

World Children's Day was an opportunity for children and young people, including innovators, children with disabilities and children living with HIV, to interact with ambassadors and senior officials from several embassies in Uzbekistan. This interaction focused on how different governments address the needs of vulnerable children around the globe. The children also engaged with Ucell, a telecom operator, to discuss the employability of persons with disabilities.

UNICEF also facilitated dialogues with experts on social protection and why vulnerable families and children need cash assistance.

From the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December until the end of the year, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme curated an exhibition that provided insight into the lives of children with disabilities. UNICEF organized events for children with disabilities, their parents and subject experts, to share their experiences and issues with decision makers, international organisations and media. Decision makers expressed their commitment to addressing the issues of children with disabilities.

To demonstrate the importance of giving voice to vulnerable groups, and to address the stigmatization of children with disabilities, UNICEF partnered with the independent theatre group, Ilkhom, to produce a performance featuring children and young people with disabilities. The performance debuted on 27 December 2018 and was preceded by an event in which high-level government officials participated. The theatre production and the event were so effective in their advocacy that a special meeting was held in the Cabinet of Ministers, and additional measures were adopted by Government, to improve the situation of persons with disabilities.

Gender dimension

UNICEF Uzbekistan focused on ensuring that gender disaggregated data was generated. For example, in the health sector, the provisions included in the 'Law on Nutrition of Infants and Young Children' were influenced by the preliminary gender-disaggregated data generated by the UNICEF-supported National Nutrition Survey. Other dimensions of gender-based interventions included promoting involvement of fathers in childcare and positive parenting

through patronage nurses.

UNICEF facilitated access to dignified menstrual hygiene in two pilot regions, to address the cause of school absenteeism among girls. Adolescent girls in the four most deprived schools gained access to safe and adequate hygiene facilities to manage their monthly menstrual cycle in privacy and with dignity.

To advance gender equality in access, retention, and learning in education for girls and boys, Education Management Information System (EMIS) data collection tools and mechanisms were introduced for the pre-school subsector to produce disaggregated data for improved policy analysis. An Education Sector Plan was developed with UNICEF support, defining long term goals and objectives for different sub-sectors in education, with a strong focus on addressing gender equity issues.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Justice and Women's Committee of Uzbekistan in drafting the 'Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence', and ensured the inclusion of elements of gender-responsive prevention and response measures. Gender-based violence and negative gender attitudes, behaviours and norms were identified as reasons for the institutionalisation of girls. Rehabilitation and re-integration plans were prepared in partnership with the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan following the assessment of the situation of 167 girls in specialized educational-correctional institutions. As a result, 41 girls were successfully re-integrated into their families and communities.

Humanitarian preparedness

UNICEF Uzbekistan was not required to respond to any emergencies in 2018. However, considering the very high probability of exposure to natural hazards, especially earthquakes, UNICEF took measures to improve preparedness and support disaster risk reduction efforts in the country.

UNICEF agreed on a cooperation framework with the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan by concluding a memorandum of understanding. The first practical step in this agreement was reinforcing the response capacity of the Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan by providing emergency stockpiles in areas of nutrition, WASH, education and child protection. The emergency stockpile can address the basic needs of an affected population of approximately 10,000 people, including 4,000 children.

In the education sector, UNICEF continued to focus on developing school materials that promote disaster risk reduction among children and their families. A monitoring framework for emergency preparedness at school level was developed and added to the current Education Management Information System of the Ministry of Public Education. Cold chain facilities were designed and constructed with the risk of earthquakes in mind to ensure immunisation is not disrupted by natural disasters.

UNICEF Uzbekistan also maintained its preparedness for emergency response by ensuring it met 100 per cent of the corporate standards for preparedness.

Access to reliable data remained a major bottleneck for evidence-based programming and policy advocacy. UNICEF focused on improving systems for administrative data management in health, education and social protection. UNICEF introduced management information systems on electronic platforms to make reliable data available. UNICEF also supported a number of initiatives such as the National Nutrition Survey, the Youth Survey and the study on profiles of children with low learning achievement. A study on the situation of children affected by migration was ongoing at year end. In some other areas a different strategy is taken up for overcoming the challenge. In communication for development a shorter-term interim solution is adopted: In developing communication strategies a general framework of the strategies is developed based on the available data, and then plans are further streamlined and fine-tuned through validation exercises.

Access to communities was another constraint that made it difficult to validate relevance of programmes, to implement programmes that promote demand for services or to conduct data collection exercises such as surveys. Introducing and promoting platforms such as Ureport or 'Youth Talks' jointly with government partners partially addressed that constraint. In other cases, such as large-scale surveys or studies, partnering with other development agencies such as UN agencies or the World Bank was helpful to remove bottlenecks to implementation.

To increase equity in UNICEF programming, access to the most marginalized groups is needed. That can best be achieved by NGOs and CSOs, which are either non-existent or lack operational capacity. UNICEF tried to overcome this challenge by increasing its interaction with community-based organizations at local level in a CRM programme that focused on developing capacity for monitoring children's rights and creating local development plans.

Lower levels of capacity in local government and highly centralized systems of decision-making posed challenges for the implementation of initiatives such as the District Health System Strengthening programme and others that had a very strong local-level implementation component. UNICEF incorporated a strong capacity development component into this programme and engaged in high-level advocacy with national authorities to ensure steady implementation.

The pace of development programmes increased considerably in the last two years. Supporting the reforms planned by the Government requires UNICEF's constant engagement as well as flexibility and readiness to address needs immediately. UNICEF Uzbekistan addressed this challenge by maintaining a cadre of highly qualified professionals who provide high-level technical advice to partners.

In some areas, specifically child protection and social protection, the absence of a lead agency to implement programmes or coordinate efforts of different stakeholders resulted in delays in programme implementation. To address this, UNICEF promoted the establishment of coordination mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Coordination Council on Child Rights. UNICEF also actively engaged with partners to promote the concept of a single agency in charge of all aspects of social protection. Child protection and social protection receive little attention from the donor community. To increase funding in the long term for those programmes, UNICEF increased its engagement with partners such as the World Bank and the European Union.

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