

UNICEF
WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA REGIONAL
OFFICE



Regional Office Annual Report 2018

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Executive Summary

Children in West and Central Africa bear a disproportionate share of deprivations of their rights. Whereas the region is home to only 11% of the world's children, it accounts for 31% of under-five deaths and one third of children not attending primary or lower secondary school, as well as 20% of all stunted children.

New humanitarian emergencies struck the region in 2018, while others endured and increased in scope and complexity, significantly increasing the number, vulnerability and suffering of children affected by emergencies. Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria experienced major cholera outbreaks, while DRC experienced two distinct outbreaks Ebola, the second of which became the second most widespread outbreak of this disease in history. In Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Niger and Nigeria conflict caused death and displacement, and in some countries led to the recruitment of children into armed groups. Drought in the Sahel, exacerbated by climate change and growing insecurity, resulted in widespread severe acute malnutrition (SAM) among children.

Faced with this situation, during 2018, UNICEF offices in West and Central Africa, led by the West and Central Africa Regional Office, accelerated efforts towards a set of Key Results for Children (KRC) as the region's focused response to the manifold deprivations and challenges facing children, and as its strategic contribution to the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and therefore the child focused Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The KRCs include:

- **Immunization** to protect children against vaccine-preventable diseases
- **Prevention of stunting** to protect the full physical and cognitive development of children
- **Equitable and sustainable access to education** focused on reducing out-of-school children
- **Improved learning outcomes** in primary and lower secondary school to prepare young people as responsible and productive citizens
- **Protection of children from violence** through provision of protective services for prevention and response
- **Ending child marriage** to enable girls to realize their potential
- **Birth registration** to secure the right of children to a legal identity
- **Ending open defecation** to allow children to grow up in a safe and clean environment

The KRCs contribute to the following SDGs:

- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (target 2.2)
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (target 3.1, 3.2, 3.8)
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (targets 4.1, 4.5, 4.6)
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (targets 5.2, 5.3)
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (targets 6.2)
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (targets 16.2, 16.9)

The KRCs also promote the realization of aspirations set forth in the African Union's Agenda 2063 'The Africa We Want':

- Aspiration 1: A Prosperous Africa, based on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development (goals 2, 3)
- Aspiration 6: An Africa Whose Development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by African People, especially its Women and Youth, and caring for Children (goals 17, 18)

Regional Office support to the 24 Country Offices in the region was articulated around providing multi-sectoral technical assistance, quality assurance and oversight, enabling them to deliver on their commitments against the KRCs, as planned in Country Programmes in support of the respective UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF).

On immunization, the Regional Office collaborated with WHO, GAVI, CDC and World Bank to secure renewed political commitment to strengthening routine immunization, through organization of high-level events, leading notably to the inclusion of immunization in the national budget of Chad. The Office supported 11 countries to build investment cases for routine immunization, as a result of which Cote d'Ivoire and Central African Republic attracted US\$325 million and US\$55 million from the Global Financing Facility, respectively. The Regional Office supported the installation and mapping of remote temperature monitoring systems for vaccine management in 8 countries, to address the bottleneck posed by inadequate energy systems. These efforts helped the region to stay on track towards KRC targets on effective and equitable immunization coverage, with 2 additional countries reaching 90% coverage of DTP3 (8 countries total), and 2 countries having 80% coverage in every district.

On nutrition, the Regional Office collaborated with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to convene parliamentarians from WCA to critically reexamine the determinants of malnutrition, leading to 2 additional countries developing costed plans for infant and young child feeding, bringing the total number of countries having developed such plans to 8. The Office supported 8 countries to perform bottleneck analysis of management of SAM services, following which these same countries identified corrective actions and included these in national action plans. These contributions stimulated the continued expansion of services to prevent stunting, such that vitamin A supplementation rose by 4 million to 56 million (54%) children under five years.

On education access, the Regional Office supported 5 countries to conduct studies of out of school children, to better understand and address the determinants of exclusion from education and the bottlenecks impeding the return of children to school. The Office conducted a regional analysis of Koranic education, which can attract up to one third of primary school age out-of-school children in some countries, with a view to defining a strategy for its inclusion into the formal education system. Faced with an increasing number of children in need of education services in humanitarian settings, the Regional Office produced guidance on radio education programming, assisted with production and pretesting of modules, and supported feasibility studies in 6 countries to expand the reach of this innovative approach. Although new data on the out-of-school rate in the region was not available in 2018 due to weaknesses in routine data systems in the education sector, these efforts are expected to contribute to reducing the proportion of children out of primary and lower secondary school in the region from 34% to 20% by 2021.

On learning outcomes, the Regional Office supported 11 countries engaged in an Africa-wide research undertaking on understanding the factors that explain teacher absenteeism – a major factor in the region affecting quality of service delivery and learning outcomes. The Office also completed a study on

opportunities and challenges of technologies to improve learning outcomes. Assessments of early learning were undertaken in 3 countries with Regional Office assistance, for the purpose of informing national dialogue around preschool development and reform. Through this work, Country Offices were better positioned to deliver targeted, relevant education/early learning materials to over 2.9 million children – nearly 9 million more than the previous year.

On violence, following sustained policy dialogue, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted an operational plan for the enforcement of its Child Protection System Strategic framework, which will enable it to optimize technical assistance to its Member States. The Office supported 11 countries to integrate guidance on approaches to violence prevention and response into their programming, and to prepare and deliver training and advocacy directed towards Governments. This enabled Country Offices to train of over 1,300 social workers, leading to countries identifying and reaching nearly 95,000 child victims of violence with at least one type of protective service. With the International Organization for Migration, the Office signed and implemented a memorandum of understanding in 3 countries to improve coordination for the return and reintegration of migrant children. This contributed to raising the number of children reached with services to care for children having experienced violence to nearly 115,000, nearly 20,000 more than those reached in the previous year.

On child marriage, the Regional Office, in line with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, supported the development of costed action plans to end child marriage in 6 countries. Through advocacy, the Office positioned girls' education as a key strategy to prevent child marriage through regional institutions including ECOWAS and the African Union (AU). Through such advocacy, during the AU Second African Girls' Summit, the duration of the African Union Campaign to Eliminate Child Marriage was extended by two years until 2023, and the effect of girls education upon child marriage was recognized. This contributed to expanding the reach of targeted interventions to address child marriage, which involved the participation of nearly 185,000 adolescent girls in 2018, which is over 80,000 more than the previous year.

On birth registration, the Regional Office strengthened political engagement through high-level missions to Chad, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, conducted jointly with the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank, and through engagement in the AU civil registration and vital statistics initiative. As support towards strengthening national data collection continued, real-time monitoring systems were set up in 4 countries, with technical assistance from the Regional Office, as pioneers for scaling up. Strategic guidance was disseminated by the Office for joined-up approaches, to accelerate birth notification and declaration through health service delivery platforms which enjoy more complete coverage, notably immunization. This led to the registration of 3.9 million children under one year, exceeding the number registered in the previous year by nearly 900,000.

On ending open defecation, the Regional Office engaged in strategic partnerships and advocacy, convening of Ministers and Directors of sanitation for the AfricaSan movement, and the India sanitation convention, all contributing to increasing political prioritization for sanitation. With Regional Office support, 6 countries developed national roadmaps to end open defecation, 8 countries developed costed action plans, 9 countries established online WASH data collection systems, 12 countries performed regular sustainability checks on water, sanitation and hygiene programming and 7 countries developed preliminary concept notes to access potential climate funding. The Office convened gatherings of industry for the purpose of shaping the growth of expertise and capacity in the region for the manufacture of household latrines, as a sustainable approach to expanding access to quality sanitation services. These contributions enabled an additional 5.8 million people to gain access to an 'open defecation free' certified

community, while nearly 2000 additional schools were recognized as having separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys that meet quality standards.

In order to deliver these results, the Regional Office strengthened a multi-sectoral approach that connected the different KRCs, leveraging sectoral assets in a coordinated manner focused on vulnerable children. This involved, for example, harnessing the immunization platform to extend the reach of birth registration services; promoting the delivery a minimum water, sanitation and hygiene package along with nutrition interventions; promoting retention of adolescent girls through secondary school as a strategy to end child marriage; supporting development of referral mechanisms in schools to prevent and address violence; promoting installation of quality sanitation facilities in schools, separated and differentiated for girls and boys, as a strategy for retention of girls in school.

Key achievements cross-cutting approaches involved the development of a regional Investment Case on Adolescent Girls, which facilitated the securing of funds for integrated programmes on adolescent girls in Benin and at the regional level. Support to evidence-based advocacy for increased public finance for children contributed to initiation of new social protection programmes in three countries, using cash transfers targeted to the most vulnerable populations.

The office sought to foster a holistic approach of social services to children in their second decade of life, by providing technical assistance to the design, implementation and stock taking on a multi-platform approach (involving schools, communities and health facilities) to delivering an integrated package of services for adolescents. This approach was subject to modelling in Benin with a view to its uptake by the country and across the region.

The key change strategies used in 2018, drawing from the comparative advantages and expertise of UNICEF, were convening and engaging in partnerships, influencing behaviour change, advocacy, private sector engagement, innovations and evidence generation. The Regional Office rolled out a new module for emergency preparedness in the 24 countries of the region and in the Office itself; and its contributions to humanitarian response were designed in such a manner as to lay a foundation for recovery and the return to development pathways in crisis-affected countries.

Major shifts in 2018 relate to Regional Office action evolving towards shared-value partnerships, influencing policy discourse and standard setting through targeted engagement with regional institutions, shaping the regional research agenda and strengthening the UNICEF sub-national presence across the region, with a focus on disadvantaged regions. Building on this experience, in 2019 the Regional Office will continue to support the 24 Country Offices in West and Central Africa, working closely with HQs and partners from the UN and beyond, to accelerate towards the achievement of our collective commitments towards the Key Results for Children.

Part 1: Situation Update: Regional Trends that Affect Children and Women

West and Central Africa (WCA) bears a disproportionate share of the global burden of child rights deprivations. Only 11% of the world's children live in the WCA, yet the region accounts for 31 % of under-five deaths, over 42% of maternal deaths, one third of out-of-school children (primary and lower secondary) and 20% of stunted children globally. WCA is also the only region in the world in which the number of people practicing open defecation has increased during the past decades.

In 2018, growth of gross domestic product (GDP) was 3.2% for West Africa and 2.2% for Central Africa¹. In spite of growth however economic disparities are increasing. Recent drops in raw commodity prices coupled with a lack of economic diversity has negatively impacted resource dependent countries since the fall of oil prices, in 2017 further limiting domestic fiscal space for financing of social sectors. Consequently, debt to GDP ratios have increased from 23% in 2012 to 59% in 2017.

WCA has made some progress towards reducing the burden and prevalence of deprivations in recent decades. Between 1990 and 2015, under-five mortality in the region declined by 50%. During the same period, the maternal death rate was reduced from 1,070 to 679 deaths per 100,000 live births. However overall progress has been limited and in certain cases reversed due persistent challenges including protracted and new emergencies, insecurity, violent extremism, population growth, urbanization, gender inequality (17 countries in the region are among the top 20 most gender-inequitable in the world), migration, trafficking and climate change.

Demographic growth is increasing rapidly, such that the population of the region is expected to rise from 480 million in 2015 to 711 million in 2030, with an ever greater proportion concentrated in urban centers². The region has the highest fertility rates in the world (7 countries with fertility rate above 5 children per woman) which translates into the world's youngest population.

The young population is an immense resource, while at the same time presenting a risk. The region's ultimate success in reaping the demographic dividend will depend on how well countries in the region engage, employ and harness the energy and drive of young people. Moving the needle on stagnant development outcomes for the region hinges on the successful activation of this group.

Public spending in key social sectors remains low. On average, education expenditure stands at around 17% of total Government spending and health around 9%, which remains well below international commitments to allocate 25% and 15% to these sectors, respectively. According to a recent study commissioned by the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO), were countries in the region to attain the health expenditure efficiency level of the best performers in sub-Saharan Africa, the region could halve its under-five mortality rate without any increase of resources.

Migration involving children is widespread and is expected to intensify due to rapid population growth, compounded by the region's unequal economic development, weak governance systems and protracted conflicts forcing young people to seek aspirations in neighbouring countries and beyond. It is estimated that at least 43% of migrants within the region are children. About 12 million people from West and

¹ World Economic Situation and Prospects 2019, World Bank. This source classifies DRC as part of East Africa, and Mauritania as part of North Africa.

² World Population Prospects, 2017

Central Africa are involved in migration flows per year, 75% of them moving within sub-Saharan Africa out of which 54% within WCA.

According to the latest child deprivation analyses done at the regional level, more than 80% of children experience at least one deprivation of their basic rights. Sanitation is the area in which the greatest proportion of children are deprived at 74%, followed by health and violence against children. Monetary poverty affects 55% of children in the region, above the poverty rate of the general population (50%). This is explained in part by the fact that the poorest households tend to have the highest number of children and generally have limited access to quality social protection programmes.

Despite substantial progress, child deaths remain a major public health concern in West and Central Africa. Under five mortality ranges from 17 per 1000 live births in Cabo Verde to 123 per 1000 live births in Chad – among the highest rates in the world. In 2017, 1.72 million children below the age of five died in WCAR, translating into one third of child deaths worldwide. Most of these deaths were caused by vaccine-preventable diseases, malaria, respiratory infections and diarrhea.

Maternal mortality rates in WCA are also amongst highest in the world. Despite a 43% decrease between 1990 and 2015, maternal mortality in the region remains almost three times greater than the global average. Maternal mortality rates as high as 500 to 1000 per 100,000 live births are still witnessed in certain countries.

Though progress has been made in reducing stunting from 41.1% to 33.5% of children under five, between 2000 and 2017, this remains significantly above than the global prevalence of 23%. Nevertheless, due to population growth, the number of stunted children has risen from 23 million in 2000 to nearly 29 million in 2017. This accounts for 18% of the 155 million stunted children in the world. One of the major determinants of stunting is poor infant and young child feeding practices, especially exclusive breastfeeding for infants below six months and minimum dietary diversity of children aged 6 to 23 months.

While prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) remained stable, the number of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) continued to increase, rising from 3.7 million in 2017 to 6.3 million in 2018. The region treats the greatest number of children affected by SAM in the world, with 1.8 million children below five years admitted for treatment in 2018 (90% cure rate), including 1.6 million in the nine food insecure countries of the Sahel. Key bottlenecks to continued effective coverage include lack of ownership and integration of treatment into health systems, sustainable financing and access to services.

WCA has one of the world's highest HIV burdens among children and adolescents, second only to that of Eastern and Southern Africa. Six countries alone account for 80% of people living with HIV in the region (Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad and Ghana). Only 26% of the 490,000 children aged 0 to 14 years living with HIV, received anti-retroviral treatment (ART) in 2017. This is the lowest pediatric ART coverage rate of any region in the world. Though services for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) expanded between 2010 and 2017 and a few countries have sustained high coverage of PMTCT interventions, including Cabo Verde and Benin, only 47% of the 485,000 pregnant women living with HIV in the region were reached with ART in 2017. Weak health systems and insufficient integration of HIV at primary health care level are major constraints to further expanding PMTCT interventions.

New HIV infections among adolescents aged 15-19, who are susceptible to infection, have remained stagnant at 62,000 despite the steady population growth in the region since 2009. The current pace of

reduction is sufficient to keep up with the increasing population of this age group. This progress is fragile, as the demographic growth in the region will determine the future of the HIV epidemic for adolescents. Limited access to HIV prevention information and services, the gender norms and practices that increase girls' vulnerability to HIV and high-risk behaviors among adolescents in key populations remain key challenges to further reducing new infection rates.

Despite progress achieved over recent years, with the proportion of children out-of-school in WCA decreasing from 36% in 2007 to 34% in 2017, important challenges remain to achieve effective coverage of education services. Indeed, due to population growth, the number of out-of-school children actually increased during the same period, rising from 32 million to 41 million. Almost half of these children are in Nigeria (16.3 million) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, 3.1million), yet smaller countries also experience high rates of out-of-school children, such as Liberia, Niger and Burkina Faso where more than half of all school aged children are out of school. The gross enrolment ratio of pre-primary education is 33% on average in the region, and the completion rates at primary and lower secondary education are respectively 68% and 42% with marked disparities. There is a substantial gender equity gap in access to education, such that 55% of the poorest adolescent girls have never attended school. The retention rate is estimated to be 65% over the primary cycle and 78% over the lower secondary cycle meaning that many students having accessed education are at substantial risk of dropping out before completing the cycle.

Quality of education is a serious concern. A recent assessment in Francophone countries demonstrated that less than half of children in school acquire the basic competencies in mathematics and literacy by the end of primary school. Barriers to education include lack of access to schools, availability of teachers, and cultural/religious factors leading parents to keep their children at home. With the rise of fundamentalist extremism in the region, schools are increasingly becoming a target for attacks. A total of 238 schools were attacked in 2018 and a further 3,800 closed due to insecurity. An estimated 9 million children were in need of emergency education assistance in 2018.

Access to clean water in WCA is uneven and subject to disparities across the region. Access to basic water services has steadily increased, rising from an estimated 155 million people (37%) in 2010 to nearly 191 million in 2015 (39.7%). Access is disproportionately lower in rural areas (46%) compared with urban areas (82%). Prevalence of the practice of open defecation is high, extending to 122 million people (25.5%). Although prevalence has slightly decreased, dropping from 26.3% in 2010, the number of people practicing open defecation has risen significantly from 110 million. Prevalence in rural areas is high at 38.4% and has remained so since 2000.

Violence against children is prevalent across the region. The proportion of children who experience violence (including violent discipline, sexual violence, and physical violence) within the home and in communities is alarming. While data is largely under reported, findings from national surveys indicate that at least 1 out of 10 of girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced sexual violence across the region. Household survey data indicates that an average of nearly 9 out of 10 children (86%) aged 1 to 14 across the region experience violent discipline, and this prevalence would not appear to have evolved significantly over the past decade.

Securing the rights of children to a legal identity remains a challenge in the region where less than half (45%) of children have their births registered by the age of five, and only 43% of infants have their births registered within their first year of life. Millions of births go unregistered every year and the number of unregistered children is expected to reach 78 million by 2030 if the current trends continue.

The rights of young and adolescent girls continue to be hindered by negative social and gender norms around practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). In 2018, the proportion of women aged 20 to 24 married before the ages of 15 and 18 remained among the highest in the world, at 14% and 41% respectively, though prevalence has decreased from approximately 52% in 1990. Niger is characterized by the highest proportion of child marriage in the world, with over three out of four girls married before they turn 18 (76%). One in three girls in Chad, Central African Republic and Niger are married before the age of 15. In addition, over one in five (22%) girls aged 15 to 19 have undergone FGM, with large variations between countries such as Guinea (95%) and Niger (1%).

Humanitarian situations

In 2018, the region continued to face multiple emergencies, affected by underlying structural drivers, including climate change, growing insecurity, political and socio-economic transitions and demographic change underlying the need to further develop emergency preparedness platforms and integrate emergency responses into national development plans and systems.

Nigeria faced a major cholera outbreak that spread into neighbouring Niger and Cameroon, with 29,000 cases registered in Nigeria alone. A factor mitigating further spread of the disease in Niger was the availability of free treatment, demonstrating the importance of coherent regional public health approaches to manage cross-border health emergencies. UNICEF worked closely with national authorities and partners to mobilize a response, with the support a Regional Cholera Platform.

The DRC experienced multiple complex emergencies, including two unrelated outbreaks of Ebola in the northern and eastern parts of the country. By the end of 2018, the Bikiro outbreak in the north had led to 88 cases, and the North Kivu outbreak in the east had seen nearly 600 cases, making it the second largest Ebola outbreak in history – with no immediate end in sight. A large-scale rapid response was mobilized to contain the Ebola outbreaks in collaboration with the Government and UN agencies including UNICEF and WHO and with NGOs. Though the first outbreak in northern DRC was contained relatively quickly, the response to the second outbreak was slower and more complicated given ongoing inter-community conflicts as well as population movements and restrictions associated with the election preparations. The availability of vaccines proved instrumental in containing the virus, such that no new cases have been detected outside the initially affected areas. Outside of the media spotlight, humanitarian crises stemming from conflict continued with an escalation of violence and displacement affecting more than 500,000 people in Ituri province, as well as the return of 300,000 people from Angola, mainly to the Kasai region. In North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, and in the Kasai region, violence forced more than 2.1 million people to leave their homes. At the same time, 28,000 cases of cholera were reported across the country.

In the region straddling Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali the humanitarian situation deteriorated sharply with armed groups targeting emanations of the state, including schools and health centers, causing many to close and others dramatically curtailing their activities. In Burkina Faso alone, over 150,000 children were out of school, with over 1,000 schools closed. Children were twice the victims of this violence, losing on the one hand access to services due to insecurity and on the other facing limited resources for health and social services as public spending was re-directed towards a security for increased military and security responses.

The humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) remained critical in 2018, with several attacks on the civilian population leading to further casualties and displacement. Almost one quarter of

the population remained either internally or externally displaced. Though there was some timid hope of positive political developments with the negotiation of a peace agreement towards the end of the year, it will take time for population to regain trust in the political processes and access to basic social services.

In the Lake Chad basin, the humanitarian situation remained challenging, though security improved slightly, allowing humanitarian actors to look beyond rapid response mechanisms towards focusing on more extensive resilience and system building efforts and continued efforts towards polio eradication. The situation in northern Cameroon and north-eastern Nigeria remains extremely precarious. Displacement increased in 2018, with 1.8 million people displaced due to conflict. Between January and November 2018, an average of 4,000 individuals – mainly women and children – were displaced every week, up from an average of 1,400 in 2017. There has not been any large-scale return and attacks on civilian populations continue, leading to new waves of displacement.

The situation in north-west and south-west Cameroon continued to worsen in 2018, while the humanitarian response increased. Civilians continued to bear the brunt of the conflict with an estimated 350,000 internally displaced and 86,000 fleeing into neighbouring regions. Access to essential services has been severely curtailed. Most of the displaced were in hard to reach areas. Access essential services for children has been severely curtailed. Critically, schools have remained closed, depriving over 600,000 children of education. UNICEF responded through humanitarian cluster coordination, leading the response in WASH, nutrition, education and child protection and calling for close monitoring of possible human rights violations.

Part 2: Key Results Achieved against the Regional Office Management Plan

Taking Forward the Key Results for Children in West and Central Africa

During 2018, the first year of the Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP) 2018-2021, the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) supported the UNICEF Regional Management Team to take forward its vision for contributing to the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and therefore to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), by focusing on reaching Key Results for Children (KRC) – the region’s priority results. This involved positioning the KRCs, through advocacy and policy dialogue at the regional and global levels, as a key transformative strategy for the region to respond to the manifold deprivations and challenges facing children. This would constitute its strategic contribution towards the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021, and therefore to the aspirations of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 ‘The Africa We Want’ and to the SDGs. It also involved development of an operational framework for implementation, coordination and learning, as well as measurable commitments and systems to hold Country Offices to account for their contributions towards country and regional targets. The Regional Office support to the 24 Country Offices in the region was articulated around providing multi sectoral technical assistance, quality assurance and oversight, enabling them to deliver on their commitments against the KRCs as planned in the Country Programmes in support of the respective UNDAFs. The KRCs were put forward as a common agenda for children in West and Central Africa, in an effort to federate partners and allies around a focused set of results to catalyze concrete change in the realization of child rights across the region.

The Key Results for Children in West and Central Africa include:

- **Immunization** to protect children against vaccine-preventable diseases
- **Prevention of stunting** to protect the full physical and cognitive development of children
- **Equitable and sustainable access to education** focused on reducing out-of-school children
- **Improved learning outcomes** in primary and lower secondary school to prepare young people as responsible and productive citizens
- **Protection of children from violence** through provision of protective services for prevention and response
- **Ending child marriage** to enable girls to realize their potential
- **Birth registration** to secure the right of children to a legal identity
- **Ending open defecation** to allow children to grow up in a safe and clean environment

Country Offices’ assessment of support received from the Regional Office in 2018 remained highly positive, with over 90% of Country Offices expressing agreement or strong agreement, through the annual Client Satisfaction Survey, with the assertion that the Regional Office delivered quality, consistent and coherent support during the reporting year.

Goal Area 1: Every Child Survives and Thrives

In 2018, the Regional Office promoted the holistic survival and development of children in West and Central Africa, with a focus on the Key Results for Children involving the acceleration of routine immunization and the prevention of stunting.

KRC 1 seeks, by 2021, for 80% (15.4 million) of children 0-11 months in WCA to be protected against vaccine preventable diseases annually. According to data released in 2018, a promising trend towards KRC

1 is visible, with 2 additional countries achieving the Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) target of 90% national DTP3 (increase from 6 in 2016 to 8 in 2017). However, Nigeria's low DTP3 national coverage in 2017 held back the overall regional performance. The number of children under one year, who were vaccinated with the third dose of DTP containing vaccine, rose from 11.45 million (64%) in 2016 to 11.81 million (65%) in 2017³. Yet since 2010 the regional DTP3 coverage has been stagnating around 65%. Additional efforts to increase coverage are required in Nigeria, DRC, Chad, Guinea, and Mali if the region is to achieve the regional target by 2021. The number of countries having surpassed the threshold of 80% DTP3 coverage in every district – a key indication of equitable service coverage – stood at 2 in 2017⁴ (Gambia; Sao Tome and Principe).

KRC 2 seeks, by 2021, for 93% (86 million) girls and boys under 5 years in WCA, especially those marginalized and living in humanitarian situations, to receive high impact nutrition services to prevent stunting. According to data released in 2018, the number of children reached through biannual vitamin A supplementation campaigns – a key intervention to prevent stunting – reached 56 million (54%) in 2017 (up from 52 million (56%) in 2016), which represented progress towards the 2018 target of 69 million children.

The following strategies and approaches were pursued, as the Regional Office contribution towards KRCs 1 and 2.

The Regional Office contributed to securing the political commitment of senior government leadership to scale up high impact child survival and development interventions. In Benin and Chad, the Regional Office – in its role as leader of the Regional Immunization Working Group (with WHO, GAVI, CDC, World Bank and others) – supported the organization of high-level national forums on the revitalization of immunization, through the recruitment of external experts who accompanied the entire process associated with the organization of each forum. These forums generated encouraging results: for instance, the President of Chad reinserted immunization in the national budget and on the agenda of the Presidential Task Team on Health. On the sidelines of the 68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, the Regional Office co-organized, with WHO and the Gavi secretariat, a high-level event on the acceleration of routine immunization which attracted 20 Ministers of Health from across the region. This event served to reinforce national leadership, ownership and accountability, to secure leaders' recommitment to immunization as a public good and right for each child.

Regarding nutrition, Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS and ECCAS) and parliamentarians were mobilized to reposition nutrition at the center of national development agendas. To this end, the Regional Office collaborated with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to convene parliamentarians from WCA to a workshop, funded by the Office, which focused on highlighting the situation of malnutrition in the region, and recalling its main determinants and challenges. As a result in part of this contribution, 14 countries developed parliamentary commitment plans and 13 developed national multisectoral nutrition plans, of which 8 (2 additional in 2018, Cameroon and Nigeria) have costed plans for infant and young child feeding. To strengthen of routine data collection and information management in the nutrition sector, the Regional Office contributed to the inclusion of innovative nutrition indicators in national information systems of three countries. Regarding HIV, the Regional Office laid the ground for the co-convening jointly with UNAIDS and WHO, of a high-level meeting with Ministers of Health and high-level representatives

³ Sources: WUENIC 2017rev web update (July 2018); United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, DVD Edition.

⁴ Sources: Country-specific Joint Reporting Format (JRF) 2017

from all countries in the region, to take stock of the implementation of 2015-2020 roadmap for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission (eMTCT) of HIV and universal coverage for pediatric HIV testing and treatment. The ministers and high-level representatives in attendance at the meeting – postponed to early 2019 – issued a declaration recommitting Governments and partners to accelerate progress towards eMTCT and pediatric HIV care and treatment by 2020 through scaling up point of care diagnostic technologies, family HIV testing and task shifting (i.e. transfer of certain HIV treatment and care tasks to non-physician health care workers, as a strategy for addressing shortages of human resources). By intensifying delivery of such actions at the country level, while leveraging investments in the health sector, it is expected that progress will accelerate towards the 90-90-90⁵ UNAIDS targets for 2020. These efforts, building on those made in previous years, contributed to halting the rise in number of cases of new HIV infections among adolescents aged 15-19, who are susceptible to infection, with the trend remaining steady at 62,000 over the past decade – in spite of continuous population growth during the same period. Stated otherwise, the current pace of reduction is sufficient to keep up with the increasing population of this age group.

The Regional Office supported 15 countries to undertake in-depth equity and bottleneck analyses of health and nutrition programmes, to track progress with quality data and to effect timely course corrective action. Thus, the Regional Office deployed expertise to provide on-site support to targeted countries, to strengthen their capacity to conduct equity and bottleneck analyses using standardized tools. These analyses guided the development of UNICEF country programmes, national strategic plans and investment cases in the countries receiving support. In particular, eight countries, characterized by particularly low SAM service coverage (between 40% and 68% according to surveys), received support to perform bottleneck analysis of management of SAM services. Analyses revealed bottlenecks related to lack of skilled human resources due to high turnover; unavailability of essential supplies due to poor supply management; financial challenges due to donor conditionality and low domestic funding; and inadequate continuity of treatment due to poor quality of services and limited capacities of community systems and actors. Corrective actions to address these bottlenecks were identified and translated into national action plans in all eight countries.

To leverage domestic resources for scale up and sustainable financing of the regional priorities, the Regional Office developed and disseminated a system that connects analytical tools (EQUIST, OneHealth), which enabled the identification of barriers preventing optimal utilization of health services, the selection of appropriate strategies to reduce these barriers, and the estimation of additional cost and impact of the selected strategies. Eleven countries were supported by the Regional Office to utilize this system to develop investment cases for immunization, which seek to fill funding gaps by leveraging domestic resources and attracting external resources, while at the same time improving prioritization and allocative efficiency. The investment cases produced through this support have already assisted two countries to secure funding from the Global Financing Facility (GFF): Côte d'Ivoire (US\$ 325 million) and Central African Republic (US\$ 55 million).

The Regional Office developed a training package on guiding national budget allocation to nutrition, and supported budget tracking exercises in five countries, to advocate for increased investment in advancing nutrition with emphasis on domestic financing.

⁵ The 90-90-90 UNAIDS targets call for a scale-up of HIV testing so that 90% of people with HIV are aware of their infection, 90% of people diagnosed with HIV are linked to antiretroviral treatment (ART) and 90% of those on ART adhere and have undetectable levels of HIV in their blood.

The Regional Office engaged in organization-wide efforts to deepen the UNICEF strategic partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), such that it now emphasizes collaboration at the country and regional level and focuses on health systems strengthening through Primary Health Care. The partnership supports the region's effort to accelerate progress towards results for children through multisectoral approaches that contribute to at least 4 key results (immunization, reduction of stunting, birth registration and ending open defecation). Regarding nutrition in particular, the Regional Initiative for Sustained Improvements in Nutrition and Growth (RISING), with BMGF, seeks to strengthen the organizational and technical leadership of regional platforms to support the scale up of key evidence-based interventions to improve nutrition. Key initial steps taken through this initiative include supporting the implementation of the Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Thus, the Regional Office organized trainings and workshops in 9 countries, at which new evidence and guidance on baby-friendly hospitals was disseminated.

The Regional Office promoted programmatic innovations by supporting the introduction of the family testing of HIV using the index case on antiretroviral treatment as an entry points (9 countries), point of care technology for HIV early infant diagnosis (3 countries) and community registers in the context of the Child Friendly Communities (CFC) approach (5 countries). This involved the Regional Office convening a regional experts' consultation to take stock of the field experience in the area of family testing, which led to defining key considerations for the roll-out of family testing in WCA. These innovations are underpinned by a strong learning agenda to build knowledge of what works, of the determinants of success and of the cost of scale up.

The Regional Office supported the installation (5 countries) and mapping (3 countries) of remote temperature monitoring systems for vaccine management, through tailored technical assistance. This innovative approach is intended to address the bottleneck to immunization coverage posed by inadequate energy systems to maintain vaccines at the required temperature.

The Regional Office supported the roll-out of the Child Friendly Communities (CFC) and Real Time Monitoring approach (5 countries), with financial support from BMGF (DRC, Guinea and Liberia), the French Muskoka Fund (Togo), and Germany (Chad). Through an integrated community-based model, the approach seeks to empower communities to access and utilize accurate and timely information on the situation of children and women, in order to accelerate improved access to quality child survival and development interventions. The package of interventions delivered through this approach includes immunization, vitamin A supplementation, SAM treatment, screening of acute malnutrition, deworming, birth registration and the promotion of optimal infant and young child feeding practices. The RO developed and provided technical support for the implementation of (i) standard tools (paper-based and electronic) for community registers for pregnant women, newborn and under five children, (ii) a protocol for a planned impact evaluation, and (iii) the monitoring and evaluation plan.

Regarding early childhood development, the Regional Office provided technical assistance for the finalization of a revamped Care for Child Development module for health workers, the aim of which is to promote nurturing care of babies while improving counselling and support to caregivers, especially the most vulnerable such as adolescent mothers.

As part of its responses to outbreaks of Ebola in DRC, vaccine-derived polio in DRC, Niger and Nigeria and measles in 18 countries, the Regional Office advocated for countries to integrate a system strengthening component into humanitarian action focusing on key components of health and community systems and multisector approaches. As a result, the Ebola response in DRC included building boreholes in

communities to overcome water shortages which is helping to build community acceptance of the response. The polio response in Chad involved strengthening the cold chain with solar fridges and intensified routine immunization activities, targeting low coverage and vulnerable populations such as nomads, internally displaced, refugees and those in the islands.

The Regional Office supported three Country Offices in the Sahel space to strengthen national capacities in preparedness and response to nutrition-related emergencies. Support was delivered through workshops at national and sub-national levels and led to participants formulating timebound commitments for follow-up in 2019. This was done in close cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP).

Goal Area 2: Every Child Learns

The Regional Office strengthened partnerships, conducted high-level policy advocacy and provided technical assistance to countries related to knowledge generation and capacity development, with a focus on accelerating progress towards the Key Results for Children on equitable and sustainable access to education and improved learning outcomes. Efforts in the areas of girls' education, education in emergencies, early learning and systems strengthening, connected to and supported these regional priorities.

KRC 3 seeks, by 2021, for the proportion of Out of School children of primary and lower secondary school age in WCA to be reduced from 34% (41 million) to 20% (29 million). New data on out of school children, which would provide an indication of progress towards KRC 3, are not available on a yearly basis. This reveals weaknesses in the area of data production and explains why this area has been prioritized as a key change strategy to accelerate progress towards improving access to education.

KRC 4 seeks, by 2021, for 100% (76 million) of pupils from pre-primary to lower secondary education in WCA, both boys and girls, to be reached with interventions targeting improvement of learning outcomes and skills. As a contribution towards this goal, UNICEF provided 2.9 million children with individual education/early learning materials across the region, up from 2.1 million in 2017, surpassing its target of 1.7 million.

The following strategies and approaches were pursued, as the Regional Office contribution towards KRCs 3 and 4.

The Regional Office produced and disseminated across 24 Country Offices guidance on implementation of key change strategies for reduction out of school children, and for improvement of learning outcomes of children, which emphasize investment in effective teacher management as a central pillar.

Evidence generation – a key strategy – was pursued as a matter of priority, to support a holistic vision of education – beyond formal education, and across the humanitarian-development continuum – and provide alternative learning opportunities for out of school children and adolescents. Thus, studies on out of school children were completed by 5 countries, with the support of the Regional Office in the form of technical advice, quality assurance and oversight. The Regional Office completed a regional analysis of Koranic education, based on a country mapping exercise, to inform strategic reflection on approaches to programming in this area. In addition, radio listening studies were conducted in 6 countries, to explore the effectiveness of this approach to learning and uncover good practices. Knowledge generated through the work of the Regional Office demonstrates that investments in resilient education can increase the perception of safety for children and teachers. Indeed, a resilient approach to education is recognized as

essential to mitigate the effects of conflict and other hazards on the education systems and to prevent a rise in OOSC.

As a key strategy to accelerate education access in the region, Cote d'Ivoire was among the countries that took forward efforts to integrate Koranic education into the formal education system, by leveraging studies completed in 2017 to engage in national policy discussion. While the number of children in Koranic education is not precisely known, some estimates show that the proportion of primary school age out-of-school children involved in this form of education can reach up to one third in some countries, whereas such children are classified as being out of school. In support of these efforts, the Regional Office completed a regional analysis, in order to further refine the UNICEF regional strategy and define the key interventions related to Koranic education.

DRC Country Office produced an analytical review of the 'Back to School' campaign which it has supported for the past years, with a view of improving its effectiveness, with support from the Regional Office through quality assurance of the design, conduct and reporting on the review.

Faced with an increasing number of children in need of education services in humanitarian settings (9.5 million, up from 8.6 million in 2017 and 6.5 million in 2016), the Regional Office supported emergency response at the country level by producing a field guide on radio education programming – a promising approach to reach out of school children in emergency situations – and methodological guidance for conducting 'Protective Learning Environment' studies. This contributed towards ensuring that children faced with emergencies are not deprived of their right to enjoy access to quality education.

Feasibility studies on radio learning were conducted in 6 countries, with a view to informing production and broadcasting strategies for this learning modality, involving questions related to choices of languages, broadcasting time, shaping mobilization and ensuring access for girls. Studies to measure the perception of safety in schools operating in conflict were also conducted, to gauge the extent to which such perceptions constitute a bottleneck to school attendance, which can be addressed by investments in school-based risk mitigation measures. The Regional Office contributed to these studies by providing guidance and technical expertise in the form of researchers and radio experts. Equipped with such evidence and knowledge, the Regional Office partnered with the G5 Sahel secretariat to contribute together towards reducing the number of out of school children in 5 Sahelian countries (Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Burkina and Chad). A project in this regard was presented during the G5 Sahel donor round table held in 2018, and financial support from major donors is expected to be forthcoming. The aim is to extend the scale of the radio learning approach, initially through UNICEF programming and ultimately through uptake by Governments and partners.

11 countries engaged in undertaking an Africa-wide research on understanding the factors that explain teacher absenteeism – a major factor in the region affecting quality of service delivery and learning outcomes. In collaboration with its counterpart Regional Office for East and Southern Africa (ESARO) and the UNICEF Office of Research, the Regional Office supported the launch of the 'Time to Teach' initiative, aimed at assessing and uncovering the causes of teacher absenteeism in 8 countries.

Also with ESARO, the Regional Office completed a study on opportunities and challenges of technologies to improve learning outcomes. In 2019, this will be followed by development of a practical toolkit and resources for Country Offices to engage with Governments on using information and communications technologies to enhance learning acquisition of children in school in a sustainable manner.

Assessments of early learning were undertaken in 3 additional countries (DRC, Congo, Guinea; 9 countries having already completed this assessment in previous years) with Regional Office technical assistance, to inform national dialogue around preschool development and reform. In addition, Guinea developed a simulation model for costing the expansion of preschool. This early learning assessment tool, developed by the Regional Office, has now become public good, having been fully integrated into the portfolio of the Education Systems Analysis Programme of the Conference of Ministers of Education (PASEC) – the lead on learning assessments in francophone countries in Africa. With support from the Regional Office, Ghana and Sao Tome and Principe became part of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) supported initiative Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) for the period 2019 to 2020.

The Regional Office continued to place special emphasis on addressing barriers to education that are specific to girls. With engagement and contributions of the Regional Office, the SDG 4 Regional Working Group on Gender Equality and Inclusive Education produced advocacy products on girls' education and delivered key messages during the GPE replenishment conference and the Pan African Conference on Education (PACE). Capacity of five country offices was strengthened with support from the Regional Office through training on gender-responsive education sector planning, in collaboration with United National Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) Pole de Dakar. Knowledge generation and sharing of good practices on girls' education was pursued by the Regional Office through its organization of a regional capitalization workshop on school related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and studies. The latter involved a mapping of child marriage and early pregnancy in 13 countries in WCA, and the production of case studies on good practices to eliminate SRGBV. Through collaboration of the Regional Office with UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa and the Forum for African Women Educationalists, a standard gender-responsive pedagogy manual for Sub-Saharan Africa was revised.

Goal Area 3: Every Child is Protected from Violence and Exploitation

The Regional Office progressed towards meet its targets related to supporting countries to strengthen child protection systems to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and harmful practices, and to ensure that all children in the region secure their right to a legal identity.

KRC 5 seeks, by 2021, for at least 50% more children affected by violence in WCA to be provided with protective services to prevent and respond to violence in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings (at least 182,000 children annually). During 2018, nearly 115,000 children having experienced violence were reached by UNICEF-supported health, social work/social services or justice/law enforcement services, surpassing the annual target of nearly 95,500. With substantial investments underway, three countries had in place an information management system that supports and tracks case management, incident monitoring and programme monitoring, on par with the number targeted.

KRC 6 seeks, by 2021, for the percentage of girls in WCA aged 20-24, married before the age of 18, to be reduced from 41% to 37% (additional 3 million girls not married before 18). Although measurement of the prevalence of this phenomenon remains infrequent due to its dependency on household surveys, it is expected that extension of coverage of services addressing child marriage will have an effect on prevalence. Thus, during 2018, nearly 185,000 adolescent girls actively participated in at least one targeted intervention to address child marriage, up from 111,500 in 2017. The number of countries implementing a costed national action plan or strategy to end child marriage – key tool to catalyze efforts across sectors at national level – increased from one to two (Burkina Faso, Togo), but did not meet the target of three countries.

KRC 7 seeks, by 2021, for the number of children under one year whose births are registered, to be raised by 30% from the coverage level of 2017. During 2018, according to country administrative data, the number of children under one year whose births were registered increased to 3.9 million up from 3 million in 2017. Forthcoming national household surveys across the region will confirm whether a more significant proportion of the target population is being reached, as might be expected according to the positive trend suggested by administrative data.

The following strategies and approaches were pursued, as the Regional Office contribution towards KRCs 5, 6 and 7.

The Regional Office sought to strengthen informal and formal child protection systems to prevent and respond to violence and exploitation, to increase country capacity to prepare for and provide child protection services in emergencies, to improve capacity to implement multi-sectoral scalable and evidence-based interventions aimed at preventing and responding to harmful practices, and to devise and scale up innovative approaches to secure the first right of the child to birth registration through interoperable civil registration systems with health, education and social protection sectors.

Investments during the previous programme cycle of the UNICEF Strategic Plan which were continued into 2018, on strengthening services and the social welfare workforce at the decentralized level, reaped dividends during the reporting period with close to 120,000 children affected by violence reached with services in 2018. Still, this falls far short of the total number of children in the region affected by violence, as suggested by prevalence estimates in household surveys.

Following an established baseline of child protection interventions in West Africa prepared by the Regional Office, and following sustained policy dialogue, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted an operational plan for the enforcement of its Child Protection System Strategic (CPSS) framework. The Plan is a reference tool for the Regional Child Protection Working Group (RCPWG) to provide technical assistance to Member States. Through concentrated efforts to strengthen the social service workforce (SSW) across the region, 1,300 professionals and paraprofessionals in 11 countries were trained. They were also able to identify and reach 94,400 child victims of violence with at least one type of protective service. Innovative interventions have been initiated in Cote d'Ivoire, where social workers now benefit from cash transfers through their mobile phones and provide direct support to children victims of VAC; and in Senegal, where community-based actors are supported with Rapid Protection, a free SMS based system which allows them to refer a detected case of violence against children to relevant services. In addition, it should be noted that Ghana, Mauritania, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon have all harmonized their case management systems with international standards.

A project for protecting children on the move in six countries was negotiated and signed by the Regional Office with the Department for International Development (DfID) of the United Kingdom. UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), another partner to the DFID initiative, developed a memorandum of understanding in three of the six targeted countries to improve coordination for the return and reintegration of migrant children.

The Regional Office provided dedicated and sustained support to the four countries implementing the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger and Sierra Leone). Central to this support was an analysis of the impact of the interventions implemented previously that led to a focus on selected activities with a greater impact. As a result in part of these efforts, more than 182,000 adolescent girls have been reached by at least one targeted intervention

aimed at reducing child marriage across the region. Specific support was provided to six countries that have selected child marriage as a key result, leading to the development of costed national plans to address child marriage in all six countries. Another important highlight has been the region-wide mobilization of Country Offices to promote investment in quality girls' education as a key strategy to prevent child marriage in the region. Through advocacy, the Regional Office positioned girls' education as a key strategy to prevent child marriage in WCA among regional institutions including ECOWAS and the African Union, as illustrated during the AU Second African Girls' Summit held in Ghana in which the office played a key role.

As part of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation, progress toward elimination of FGM was made through successful advocacy with national governments and strategic partners such as the African Union and ECOWAS, led by the Regional Office. During the course of the year, the Regional Office continued to support ECOWAS to convene its Member States around an operational framework to deliver on the Strategic Framework for Child Protection Systems Strengthening, approved by Heads of Member States in 2017. Significantly, following Regional Office advocacy, policy dialogue and technical engagement, the AU launch its campaign to end FGM.

The Regional Office supported national capacities across the region for emergency preparedness and the quality of ongoing humanitarian response, and thereby contributed to the humanitarian-development nexus. Representatives from national NGOs and from the Governments of 17 countries were trained on coordination of child protection response in emergency situations (CPIE) and developed national response plans. Emphasis was placed on strengthening evidence-based programming and coordination mechanisms by providing bi-monthly regional analyses of grave violations of children's rights to key protection stakeholders and through the re-launch of the Regional CPIE Working Group Coordination Group. Technical guidance was provided to Country Offices to improve their child protection information management systems, and the quality of their humanitarian planning, performance monitoring and reporting. The Regional Office continued to liaise with a wide range of actors including UNODC, CTDED, IOM, UNHCR and government counterparts to secure an appropriate response and care for children associated with armed groups, especially with Boko Haram. The protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) remained a central concern in the region and 6 country offices were supported by the Regional Office in the development and the rolling out of specific action plans and service provision to victims.

Strategies pursued by the Regional Office in 2018 to improve coverage of birth registration included: (i) strengthening political engagement (enabling environment), (ii) transforming civil registration services (supply), and (iii) mobilizing communities for the use of services (demand). Birth registration was raised on the political agenda in Chad, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal through high-level missions led by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Regional Office. The Regional Office continued to lead in building the evidence and partnerships around civil registration in emergencies for universal registration of births in support of the AU civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) initiative. Effective real-time monitoring systems were set up in four countries, with technical assistance from the Regional Office, as pioneers for scaling up. Innovations were launched for social accountability mechanisms to mobilize communities for increased use of services. While administrative data remains largely incomplete across the region, available data shows clear progress in routine registration rates in countries where joined-up service models have been put in place, such as Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. Challenges remain in the establishment of standardized and professional civil registration systems and services, largely related to lack of prioritization in national plans and budgets.

The Regional Office continued to play a convening role in the CRVS Core Group of partners, led by UNECA, the AU Commission and AfDB, to mobilize technical and political support for the region. New partners were mobilized, such as the Francophonie International Organization (OIF), the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the CRVS Centre of Excellence, hosted by the Canadian government. This partnership supported a workshop organized by the Regional Office, which produced a framework to strengthen systems for civil registration in fragile states. Contacts were made both at the regional and global level with the World Bank Group ID4D programme, which aims at providing countries with digital identity solutions, for increased coordination of the two initiatives.

Strategic guidance was disseminated by the Regional Office for joined-up approaches, in particular for countries to accelerate birth notification and declaration through health service delivery platforms which enjoy more complete coverage and reach, notably immunization. Real-time data collection systems using simple mobile phone technology were encouraged to allow basic data transmission for measurement of overall system performance and UNICEF-specific results.

Goal Area 4: Every Child Lives in a Safe and Clean Environment

The Regional Office strove to expand water and sanitation coverage, in pursuit of ending open defecation as one of the Key Results for Children in the region, including through strengthened emergency WASH response.

KRC 8 seeks, by 2021, for the proportion of the WCA population practicing open defecation, to be reduced from 25.4% (122 million) to 15.5% (88 million). As a contribution towards this result, UNICEF supported the community approaches to total sanitation (CATS) approach, resulting in an additional 5.8 million people living in 'open defecation free' certified communities, surpassing both 2017 performance (4.6 million people) and the annual target of 4.3 million. Further, nearly 2,000 schools were recognized as having separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys that meet quality standards, once again surpassing the 2017 result (1,650) and the 2018 target (1,550). This is expected to address a gender-specific bottleneck that discourages girls and women from using sanitation facilities and impels them to seek relief outside, impacting negatively on their school attendance and educational attainment, in addition to repercussions on public health.

The following strategies and approaches were pursued, as the Regional Office contribution towards KRC 8.

The Regional Office continued its support to adapt the SDG WASH targets to national contexts. The Regional Office supported the generation of baseline data for the UNICEF Global Game Plan to end Open Defecation, the Pan-African N'gor commitments on sanitation and hygiene, and for KRC 8. The Regional Office engaged in strategic partnerships and advocacy, convening of Ministers and Directors of sanitation for the AfricaSan movement, and the India sanitation convention, all contributing to increasing political prioritization for sanitation and ending open defecation. The Office provided technical assistance and quality assurance to six countries to develop national roadmaps to end open defecation, and to develop strategies towards universal sanitation access. Eight countries developed costed action plans, to enable monitoring for equity and universal WASH access. Also, with this support, nine countries established online WASH data collection systems to enable evidence-based decision making.

With continuing support from the Regional Office, twelve countries perform regular sustainability checks on WASH programming, representing a step change in the approach to sustainability. Based on Regional

Office technical guidance, checks provide a measure of the sustainability of WASH infrastructure and behaviour change and incorporate feedback mechanisms for course correction where necessary.

Humanitarian WASH response capacity was strengthened in eight countries through improvement of cluster coordination mechanisms. A new cluster was established with Regional Office support in Cameroon. Regional Office support on cholera control in the region culminated in the Abuja Commitments for cross-border collaboration in the Lake Chad Basin. Through the Regional Cholera Platform, the Office supported Country Offices and actors at country-level through dissemination of tools, issuance of alerts, training and advocacy, and influenced integration of the regional platform into global cholera elimination efforts. These efforts contributed to reducing the overall number of cases of cholera recorded in the region, from 65,537 in 2017 to 62,516 in 2018, though the case fatality rate remained unchanged at 2.1%.

The Regional Office supported generation of baseline data on WASH in schools. On the integration of WASH in nutrition, it developed an e-learning tool for WASH and nutrition personnel and produced a study of the effect of WASH on nutrition outcomes in Chad. The Office developed three country case studies showcasing the manner in which WASH can contribute to the nexus connecting humanitarian action and development.

To facilitate resilient WASH services in fragile contexts, the Regional Office supported seven countries to develop preliminary concept notes for potential climate funding. An urban WASH landscaping study was conducted to inform future urban WASH programming. Harnessing its convening power, the Office facilitated countries' emerging engagement with the Green Climate Fund on WASH.

The Regional Office facilitated evidence generation and knowledge exchange. The AfricaSan sub-regional meetings provided a platform for peer learning and exchange on sanitation with UNICEF co-leading its sub-committee on monitoring and learning. Evidence was generated and consolidated on cholera control and prevention via the regional platform. Dissemination of the latest WASH evidence and knowledge was conducted through monthly webinars directed towards Country Offices.

Goal Area 5: Every Child has an Equitable Chance in Life

The Regional Office invested in cross-cutting programming approaches, to better equip countries to move towards the Key Results for Children across the board. Key achievements in this regard include the roll-out of the Investment Case for Adolescent Girls in 8 countries, technical support to Country Offices on public finance analysis, and support to the planning, implementation and monitoring of adolescent programming.

Regarding public finance for children (PF4C), support was provided by the Regional Office for the preparation of the budget briefs in Mali, Cameroon and Benin, and for public expenditure reviews of social sectors in Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, involving health, education and social protection sectors. In Sierra Leone, the costing of the social protection programme has supported the Government to demonstrate strong commitment to social protection, through increased 2019 budget allocation to the social safety net programme. The Regional Office provided technical support to the design and implementation of national social safety nets and cash transfer programmes in 14 countries. As a result in part of these efforts, new cash transfer programmes were initiated in Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, where Country Offices played a key role in the targeting and beneficiary selection process.

Regarding adolescent programming, the dissemination of the new UNICEF Adolescent Programming Guidance and the launch of the Generation Unlimited (GenU) alliance, to which UNICEF is a contributor,

are key milestones that influenced UNICEF work in WCA. Through substantial Regional Office support, four Country Offices (Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon) established a functional coordination mechanism to support cross-sectoral programming on adolescents and the adoption of gender transformative national policies for adolescents. Key focus included adolescent health and well-being, linked to the regional key results related to child marriage and education. This work builds on and strengthens the synergy with the Investment Case on Adolescent Girls. For example, in Benin, the Regional Office provided technical assistance to the Government to design and implement a multi-platform (School/Community/Health Facility/Virtual) approach to deliver an integrated package of services for adolescents (SRH/HIV/GBV, Nutrition and Hygiene). This modeling involved a close collaboration between multiple areas of expertise (health, HIV, nutrition, gender, WASH, education) both within UNICEF and within the Government of Benin. This initiative will be fully implemented in 2019 and the lessons learned will inform the national planning and scale-up of adolescent health and wellbeing in Benin, and will contribute to the regional learning agenda in WCA.

The Regional Office provided technical support to generate evidence on key issues and learning to support adolescent programming. For example, the Office made progress in developing (i) a regional report on factors affecting the wellbeing of adolescent girls, (ii) a secondary analysis on the determinants of HIV risk and vulnerability among adolescents, and (iii) a review of evidence on menstrual health and hygiene in the region. These will inform the learning agenda on adolescents in 2019 and accelerate implementation in support of relevant regional priorities.

The Regional Office supported Country Offices to contribute to the GenU global alliance, following its launch at a side event of the UN General Assembly in September 2018. WCA Country Offices were engaged in the global contest for GenU solutions and the solution proposed by Cote d'Ivoire Country Office that addressed adolescent and youth participation and empowerment (i.e. the Youth Media Programme) was selected among the top 20 global GenU solutions for the year 2018.

Normative Principles including the Gender Dimension

2018 witnessed the sustained engagement and commitment of key global and regional actors to reducing gender inequality, including the African Union and major donors. The Regional Office prioritized gender results across the strategies to reach the Key Results for Children and developed an Investment Case on Adolescent Girls laying out a vision for integrated investments to increase girls' life opportunities and address the demographic dividend. Major milestones achieved on advocacy around adolescent girls included: hearings with the French Senate and Parliamentary Commission on Women's Rights to influence the upcoming French G7 presidency as well as support to eight countries to develop impact content for increased programme advocacy and partnerships on adolescent girls. The Regional Office also secured a solid positioning within the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative to prevent harmful practices, end violence against women and girls and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. A regional programme was developed, anchored in the African Union vision, and technical assistance provided to four recipient countries in the region: Liberia, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Additionally, the adolescent girls' investment case also allowed for collaborative programming on adolescent health and well-being. Hence, funds were secured for the first integrated adolescent health proposal in Benin as well as for a regional proposal on using human-centered design to develop adolescent health education solutions. Work is also ongoing on evidence generation on gender inequalities and the empowerment of women and girls through three major initiatives: development of a regional data report analyzing key interlinked dimensions critical to the wellbeing of adolescent girls; launch of a partnership with a regional research network to analyze

gender dynamics in community health systems in 3 countries; a draft evidence review on menstrual health and hygiene in the region. Support was provided to Country Offices to strengthen gender capacities and to priorities gender results and strategies in country programming. Thus, four countries were supported to undertake a Gender Review, and three countries were assisted to articulate gender results in planning of new country programmes. Country Office capacity on gender was strengthened through support to recruitments in 5 countries and credentialing of gender focal points.

However, the space for political and social dialogue on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls was increasingly challenged in 2018, in certain areas of the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin due to the rise of political and religious conservatism.

Humanitarian Situations

The Regional Office contributions to humanitarian results fell into two categories: (i) strengthening preparedness through the roll out of the Emergency Preparedness Platform in 24 countries, and (ii) coordination and support of humanitarian response across ten countries facing humanitarian crises (including Cameroon, Central African Republic, DRC, Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Mali), notably involving the Sahel nutrition crisis, to epidemics, including Ebola and cholera, and to population displacement due to conflicts and natural disasters.

Onboarding of 24 Country Offices on the new Emergency Preparedness Platform was coordinated through onsite and remote training. All Offices successfully completed the preparedness planning process and have implemented preparedness actions in line with the UNICEF Preparedness Procedure.

The Regional Office spearheaded joint advocacy with WFP and FAO to sound the alarm early about increasing malnutrition trends in the Sahel. A position paper *Sahel: Early action and scale-up of the humanitarian response* was launched by the three UN agencies' Regional Directors, and the Regional Office published press and advocacy materials on the Sahel nutrition crisis. The Regional Office supported Country Offices with analysis to target SAM hot spots. The Regional Office launched an end of year Sub-Saharan Malnutrition Appeal supporting eight countries in WCA, well-coordinated with WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

In response to two Ebola outbreaks in DRC and a regional cholera outbreak centered in Nigeria, The Regional Office supported cross-border coordination and information sharing to stop the spreading of epidemics to neighbouring countries, as well as multi-sectoral technical support. The Office also started early coordination between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to respond to the armed conflict in the border areas where education and health services are increasingly targeted.

Humanitarian monitoring and reporting systems in Country Offices were strengthened with on-site support to 10 countries included in the UNICEF Humanitarian Appeal for Children (HAC). With Regional Office support, Niger established an SMS-based monitoring system using RapidPro, while Cameroon established third party monitoring for the North-West South-West emergency, to monitor results without UNICEF staff. Webinars were conducted to improve humanitarian reporting through periodic Situation Reports and data management.

The Regional Office supported Country Offices to implement cash-based programming, using the EPP Minimum Preparedness Standard on cash-based programming (Chad, Niger, Mali and DRC) and by conducting feasibility assessments.

The Regional Office supported the tightening of linkages between humanitarian and development, including by connecting Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) responses to other multisector responses; through linking emergency cash and social protection; and by supporting advocacy on mainstreaming emergency nutrition and linking this to preventive measures.

Influencing Global/Regional Discourse and Policy

As part of its efforts to develop and leverage resources and partnerships for children, the Regional Office used the Key Results for Children as the focus of UNICEF's agenda in West and Central Africa, to convene and federate partners and allies – representing both public and private sectors – around a common agenda for children.

The Regional Office sought to transform cooperation with key partners into shared-value partnerships, wherein each partner contributes its own expertise towards the furtherance of common priorities – i.e. a common agenda for children – thereby shifting away from a donor-recipient relationship. In this regard, the office engaged in the development of the UNICEF-BMGF Partnership Strategy, and the Strategic Dialogue Meeting of UNICEF with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). As a result, the focus of cooperation with BMGF has been sharpened to support health systems strengthening through primary health care (PHC), involving multisector approaches that touch on at least four priority results (i.e. those related to immunization, stunting, birth registration and ending open defecation). Cooperation with BMZ is now more clearly focused on addressing the connected themes of nutrition, education and mobility of children in the Sahel space, in line with both the regional priorities and the BMZ aspiration for a 'Marshall Plan for Africa'.

The Regional Office co-organized with WHO-AFRO and Gavi secretariat a high-level ministerial breakfast on the acceleration of routine immunization during the sixty-eight session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa to reinforce national leadership, ownership and accountability to recommit to immunization as a public good and right for each child.

At the regional level, the Regional Office selected entry points for engagement with regional institutions in line with the regional priorities, to elevate the priority and give impetus to the regional priorities through inter-state cooperation. The Regional Office thus contributed to UNICEF engagement with the AU, supported drafting of key child sensitive policy documents for the ECOWAS and a resource mobilization strategy for the water management plan of the Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCAS). The office played a leadership role in advancing the AU Ending Child Marriage Campaign, engaging in the organization of the Second African Girls Summit in Ghana, and supported the AU CRVS Programme. The Regional Office continued to provide support to the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) to develop the Implementation Frameworks of the AU Continental Education Strategy 2016-2025.

The Regional Office worked with the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) for a harmonized framework to monitor progress towards the Africa Water Vision 2025 and the Dakar/Ngor Declarations 2030. The Office provided technical assistance to ECOWAS to prepare two important policy documents involving a regional Child Policy Framework including its plan of action and a social protection policy framework. These documents, finalized in 2018, are expected to be adopted at the conference of Heads of States in 2019. With ECCAS, the Regional Office lobbied and advocated for the speedy recruitment of key officials for the Health and Social Affairs Sectors, who are expected to bring new impetus to cooperation in 2019. Building on past collaboration, UNICEF and ECCAS have co-created a strategic agenda

for the future, involving the publication of an annual report on the State of the Central African Child, securing increased humanitarian access and advocacy for acceleration on immunization and birth registration.

As part of its efforts to harness the power of business and markets for children, the Regional Office convened industry meetings of private and public sector actors, to foster the growth of regional expertise and capacity for the manufacture of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF) and household latrines, both of which are essential products linked to priority results 2 and 8. It is expected that these region-based industries will be in a position to satisfy demand and needs within the region, as a critical contribution to accelerating coverage of essential services to prevent stunting and to end open defecation, by bringing the right commodities, at the right price, closer to the community.

To assist countries to engage more effectively with the private sector in support of the regional priority results the Regional Office supported Togo and Equatorial Guinea Country Offices to establish non-financial engagement with private enterprises.

Other Change Strategies

During 2018, the Regional Office continued to equip programmes, at the regional and country level, with cross-cutting expertise to implement key change strategies of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021, in view of accelerating progress towards the regional priority results for children.

Influencing behavior change and social norms for at-scale results for children

The Regional Office significantly widened C4D support to programmes and has made significant progress in developing cross-cutting assets, including community engagement and social and behavior change quality standards, tools, platforms and capacities. In response to 6 polio outbreaks, as well as Ebola outbreaks in DRC, C4D technical assistance was provided through a variety of means. Tailored strategies for addressing the causes of reluctance and resistance to polio vaccination in DRC, supported by deployment of 37 experts to the Haut Lomami and Tanganyika provinces in 2018, contributed to a marked reduction of missed children during polio vaccination campaigns: i.e. decrease from 10% in 2017 to 2% in 2018 in Haut Lomami and from 8% in 2017 to 2.7% in 2018 in Tanganyika. To enhance cross-cutting focus on strengthening of community engagement, stakeholder consultations organized on quality standards and measurement of community engagement and support provided to strengthen community engagement in the education 'Data Must Speak' initiative and the Child Friendly Communities approach.

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

The Regional Office reshaped its communication focus to align with an advocacy agenda centered on the priority results for children, with the region's demographic transition as the underlying theme, making the case for accelerated investments in child-sensitive policies. These included multi-country initiatives around: (i) newborn/child health linking to immunization, stunting and WASH-related regional priorities; (ii) the Sahel with focus on nutrition and links to education and WASH-related regional priorities; (iii) migration with a focus on the regional priorities related to violence, exploitation and abuse; (iv) youth leadership, cutting across regional priorities. Striking a balance between calling attention to challenges and highlighting progress was at the core of the office's communications strategy.

Within this agenda, communications intervened along the following three lines:

Media outreach and partnerships: The Regional Office worked closely with Country Offices to ensure coherent messaging on regional issues, leading or co-leading proactive media outreach, and facilitating interviews and visits to position UNICEF as a credible voice throughout the year and at key high-profile advocacy moments, such as the GPE Conference and Africa Girls' Summit. This led to coverage of 6,300 articles referring to UNICEF's work in regional and global top tier media, surpassing the target of 6,050, and positioned UNICEF second with respect to share of voice, surpassing the target of reaching the top 3.

The Regional Office accorded special attention to countries in crisis, both to highlight major humanitarian issues and to protect UNICEF from reputational risks arising from such operating environments. Major communication packages were rolled out, such as Child Alert on the Kasai crisis and sustained communication on Ebola outbreaks (DRC); Child Alert on the CAR humanitarian situation; and a communications package on the nutrition situation in the Sahel involving six countries.

Storytelling through initiatives and products: A key achievement was the launch of the regional website (www.unicef.org/wca), providing a window to UNICEF's work in WCA articulated around the regional priorities. UNICEF Africa social media platforms continued to grow, amplifying country content through weekly updates.

Engagement with children, youth and influencers: The Regional Office rolled out initiatives to amplify the voices of children and youth, and to afford them opportunities to take action in line with the youth engagement pillar of the Gen-U initiative, such as The Africa We Want youth talks involving six country offices, the Africa Changemakers series with ten Country Offices, and the Voice of Youth (*Voix des Jeunes*) media programme with five country offices.

UN working together

The Regional Office engaged substantively in efforts to translate the ambitions associated with the reform of the UN development system (UNDS), underway during the reporting year, into practice in the region.

Thus, the Office systematically kept Country Offices informed of the evolution of the UN reform initiatives during gatherings of the Regional Management Team, meetings of Deputy Representatives of Operations Managers and network meetings and through regular updates. This enabled Country Offices to position themselves appropriately in dialogue within their respective UN country teams on operationalizing UN reform at country level.

Conversely, WCARO took stock of suggestions and opportunities, from the field perspective, which were fed up to the UN Transition Team through UNICEF headquarters, with the aim of shaping a UN reform that optimizes the effectiveness of UN coordination in-country. Key areas of opportunity related to the role of the UN Resident Coordinator, the appropriate parameters for connecting the peace and security pillar of the UN system with those pertaining to development and humanitarian response, the implementation of a levy on earmarked contributions to finance UNDS coordination and integration of agency-specific country programming into UNDAFs. In addition, the Regional Office engaged heavily in dialogue on determining the manner in which UN reform would be applied in the specific case of Cabo Verde, which hosts a fully integrated Joint Office of UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA, in order that the UNDS preserve and continue to learn from the unique and inspiring model of integration that has been developed in this country over more than a decade. Discussions are ongoing to develop a new model for Cabo Verde following the delinking of the Resident Coordinator function from that of agency Representative. These efforts helped the UN Transition Team to remain attuned to the reality in the field

when considering the mechanisms for implementation of UN reform and their implications for UN country teams.

The Regional Office sought to position two initiatives as ‘accelerators’ to deliver on the commitments of the Common Chapter of the Strategic Plans 2018-2021 of UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women. The UN Support Plan for the Sahel, and the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, were thus put forward as opportunities for deepened collective engagement of these sister agencies – at the scale of the region.

Further, the Regional Office was instrumental in developing a practical model for application of the concept of humanitarian-development nexus – a component of UN reform – in the case of the cross-border Liptako Gourma region, which spans across Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. Thus, the Regional Office convened key stakeholders to perform a multidimensional analysis of vulnerabilities and capacities of the population and local systems to weather the effects of the potential shocks and stresses that characterize the region. This will inform a joint prioritization framework of a variety of partners, to deliver a holistic response bridging humanitarian assistance, recovery and resilience.

Harnessing the power of business and markets for children

The Regional Office provided continuous technical assistance to Country Offices and partners to promote adequate management of their supply chains and the identification of risks and shortcomings for procurement, inventory management and overall data analysis. The Regional Office launched the first regional forecasting exercise for regular goods and services and for specific global commodities. Building on this exercise, the Office performed an analysis of existing long-term procurement agreements and identified gaps where the conclusion of supplementary long-term agreements would support timely and quality acquisition of goods and services for programmes across the region. Continuous improvement and management of the regional hubs in Accra and Douala allowed for timely release of emergency items, effective replenishment and tracking of the stockpile movements. The Regional Office placed particular emphasis on strengthening health supply chains of partners, with a focus on the procurement and management of essential supplies by the Ministries of Health in the region. RUTF pipeline monitoring and coordination was also prioritized by the Office.

Fostering innovations in programming and advocacy processes and practices

The Regional Office provided quality and coherent technical support to Country Offices to harness innovation and digital solutions that better contribute to the regional priorities and Country Office key results with greater focus on scaling up proven technologies. This involved support to implementation of more than 60 different technology-enabled innovations across the region, through training, network meetings, webinars, remote support, field missions, and evidence generation on effectiveness of innovations. In addition, the Regional Office, in collaboration with four countries, designed, developed and piloted a digital community information system for scheduling, delivering, recording and monitoring integrated community-based package of preventive, promotion and curative services. The initiative will be scaled up in these four countries in 2019.

The Regional Office developed and implemented an online platform to capture and share all ‘technology for development’ and innovation initiatives across the region.

The Regional Office, in partnership with ESARO, completed a study on opportunities and challenges associated with the use of technologies to improve learning outcomes. The study synthesized available

literature, as well as learnings from Country Offices and EdTech providers, academics and influencers in order to understand the role of information communication technology to enhance learning and provide guidance on how to systematically and sustainably incorporate new technologies within education systems. In 2019, the Regional Office and ESARO plan to further build on this study by developing a practical toolkit and accompanying resources.

Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children

Regional Office support towards the generation and dissemination of up-to-date, quality data and knowledge on office performance and the situation of children, as well as evidence related to programme approaches and strategies, informed programming choices and advocacy across the region in support of the region's priority results for children.

Of 9 countries in the MICS6 programme through which they received continuous support from the Regional Office, 1 completed its final report (Sierra Leone), 3 were at reporting stage, 1 at tabulation stage, 2 at data collection stage and 2 at design phase. A draft regional research strategy was produced by the Office to enhance the culture of research in the region, and a data landscape analysis was initiated by the Office to gain an overview of data gaps versus needs in the region.

With support from the Regional Office, 20 Country Offices launched 28 evaluations and the Office launched 4 evaluations, of which 20 were completed as at 31 January 2019. To enhance quality and build country capacity, each Office commissioning an evaluation received close and timely support from the Regional Office throughout the evaluation process: from the development of the evaluation terms of reference and the provision of quality assurance during the recruitment of evaluation teams and consultants, to the review of inception reports, draft reports and final reports.

Timely, credible data guided Regional Office support to the improvement country programming documentation and reporting including through integration of the regional priority results, which in turn helped to establish a solid foundation from which Country Offices are better positioned to deliver effective, relevant and sustainable results for children. In the furtherance of the aim, 15 Country Offices at various stages of the exercise of developing a new Country Programme received support from the Regional Office to improve the quality of their country programme documentation (including Situation Analyses, Strategic Moment of Reflection documentation, Programme Strategy Notes, Country Programme Documents, annual reports, mid-term review documentation), including through fostering stronger alignment with the region's priority results and their related change strategies, in support of the UNICEF Strategic Plan. The Office supported the Regional Management Team to translate its vision for the priority results into concrete commitments and an operational framework, involving a results framework, guidance on integrating regional priorities into Country Programmes, and technical guidance notes for implementation of each regional priority.

Internal Management as Enablers of Results for Children

Living and working conditions in hardship duty stations

UNICEF's distinctive, extensive field presence across the WCA region, including 56 zone offices located away from national capitals, endows the organization with comparative advantages stemming from its proximity to local populations, both physical, cultural and linguistic and in terms of sensitivity to the reality on the ground. Field presence is underpinned by a strong, versatile and enabled workforce on assignment at zone offices. Thus during 2018, under the impetus of the Regional Management Team, the Regional

Office spearheaded region-wide efforts to improve living and working conditions in these sub-national locations. Emphasis was placed on UNICEF personnel, women and men, on assignment at duty stations designated as D and E hardship classification by the International Civil Service Commission. This initiative was pursued in coordination with the Regional and Country Staff Associations and has impelled involved Country Offices to take measures to improve conditions of premises and guest houses, access to medical care and counselling, among others. For example, Country Offices reported refurbishing of premises including with greening initiatives and accessibility features, setting up joint guesthouses with UN agencies, strengthening briefings for staff and dependents on security as well as PeP kits, developing innovative solutions to connectivity issues in field locations including harnessing mobile phones and updating repertories of medical practitioners at sub-national locations, These efforts will be pursued and widened in scope, in 2019.

Responsive, transparent and accountable internal governance

The Regional Office sought to strengthen governance across Country Offices in the region, through support towards preparation for and follow-up to audits as well as fraud prevention.

The Regional Office supported Country Offices in preparing for internal audit, managing the audit process and following-up audit findings and recommendations. This support contributed towards a positive outcome in that none of the audits except two (Nigeria and CAR) received qualified adverse ratings. Support was also provided to the Cameroon Country Office, and the overall audit conclusion for this office was 'qualified moderate'.

Country Offices subject to external audits in 2018 (Burkina Faso, Ghana) also received support from the Regional Office. The conclusions reported in the management letter issued by the UN Board of Auditors were overall positive.

The Regional Office performed an analysis of recurring issues identified through audit, in view of assisting Country Offices to build action plans to mitigate such issues proactively.

In light of the high risk environment in which country offices operated in WCA, the Office elevated fraud prevention as a priority. An Anti-Fraud and Fraud Risk Mitigation Training of Trainers was organized at the Regional Office, jointly with headquarters, at which all Country Offices in the region were represented.

The Regional Office supported Country Offices to improve quality of implementation partner management, including support: (i) to improve quality assurance and follow up of high-risk findings, as well as follow up to refunds due and impairments and write-off; (ii) to implement the newly issued HACT Procedure; (iii) to adopt the eTools Partnership Management module and the UN Partner Portal, which are expected to attract potential CSO partners and to allow for more transparent and competitive selection processes for CSO collaboration; (iv) to train implementing partners on improving financial management, anti-fraud and ethics, and CSO partnerships in emergencies; and (v) in relation to the rollout of initiatives on prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation, insofar as they pertain to implementing partners.

Results oriented, efficient and effective management

As part of continuous efforts to achieve greater efficiency and economy in office management, progress was made towards the implementation of opportunities for simplification identified at the corporate level. As a result in part of Regional Office technical support and oversight, Country Offices reduced the number of committees they host, and thresholds for the Contracts Review Committee and Partnership Review

Committees were adjusted to the recommended levels. The introduction of procurement cards, the purpose of which is to provide purchasing and processing efficiency, has encountered challenges due to limited presence of the financial institutions identified at global level and constraints in dealing with other service providers. The Regional Office is working with headquarters to overcome these challenges.

As a step towards streamlining administrative processes, an administration workshop was organized with participants from Country Offices, zone offices, the Regional Office and headquarters, during which major administrative processes were reviewed and key recommendations were agreed to streamline these processes, including expanding eco-efficiency and accessibility projects across offices, deployment of an electronic fleet management system, decentralizing low value procurement for simplification and systematically setting up long-term agreements for such low value procurements. Implementation of agreed recommendations will commence in 2019 and these are expected to contribute towards improving efficiency and value for money in across the region.

The quality of Country Programme Management Plans has improved following increased support to Country Offices on this foundational component of country programme documentation, through webinars and bilateral support provided to offices in the process of developing a new country programme.

The Regional Office participated in the testing phase of the new Budget Formulation Tool, and the pilot country (Togo) successfully completed the pilot phase satisfactorily. This tool is expected to enable managers to focus on efficiency and value for money during country programme planning and will strengthen results-based management and results-based budgeting.

In 2018, the Regional Office reviewed the Annual Management Plans of Country Offices and provided feedback for improvement, and in so doing emphasized the necessity of linking office management priorities with the priority results for children, and of identifying and managing risks, which may compromise the implementation of management and programme priorities.

People as versatile staff as agents of change

As a building block of its efforts to support the regional priorities, the Regional Office sought to attract and retain a highly qualified, diverse, mobile and motivated workforce, throughout the region with over 2800 regular and temporary staff in service. Thus, regarding workforce planning, the office supported Country Offices through the staffing dimensions of country programme development and created diverse functional talent groups and emergency rosters. Regarding diversity, the Regional Office conceptualized a strategy to achieve gender parity by 2021, supported offices to develop and implement context-specific gender strategies, and interns and short-term assignments were encouraged to facilitate the entry of young people into the organization's workforce. As a result in part of these efforts: of 40% of posts filled in the region during the year were women candidates, of the international professional posts filled during the year in the region, over half were from programme countries. On mobility, the office managed the annual rotation exercise involving placement of 62 staff members, and supported managers in approving stretch assignment and mission deployments. The office took measures to allow staff members to align their annual work plan deliverables to the regional priorities.

Versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems

The Regional Office emphasized the improvement of office efficiency, through data telecommunications capacity, ICT infrastructure resilience and remote presence capabilities.

Data connectivity continued to improve as a result of the entry to market of ever more Internet Services Providers, offering better services at a lower cost. This trend has allowed the Regional Office and several Country Offices to improve greatly their internet data links at a lesser cost. The Regional Office and Country Offices have implemented proper remote presence systems and have reduced the cost and use of paper by implementing group multifunction printers and reducing greatly the use of personal printers.

Special attention was accorded to security and emergency communications, as a critical enabler of humanitarian response in remote and insecure locations, through seven peer review missions. Offices located in hardship duty stations (D and E classification) benefited from reviews of their security telecommunications infrastructure and Business Continuity Plans. Support was also reserved for offices in the process of relocating to new premises.

Part 3: Lessons Learned and Constraints

Constraints

During 2018, insecurity persisted and worsened in a number of countries in the region. This necessitated additional capacity at the Regional Office to provide support to Country Offices in the field of security, in light of increased demand. Delays associated with recruitment of the additional security staff at the Regional Office posed a challenge in this respect.

Indeed, attracting and retaining qualified, diverse human capacity to lead and guide Country Offices across the region remained challenging due to the requirement of French for most personnel, given the fact that the vast majority of countries in the region are French speaking. This rendered the pool of qualified, available and willing candidates for key specialized positions very small, leading to such positions remaining vacant for significant periods of time.

Lesson 1: Shifting from Transactional Partnerships to Shared-Value Partnerships

Given their alignment to the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and therefore the SDGs, the Key Results for Children are ambitious in nature, seeking at-scale results for children, tending towards universality in the realization of rights. This necessarily requires transformative shifts to effect a step-change in favour of children, and such change in turn requires that massive means be placed at the disposal of the child-sensitive social sectors in a well-coordinated manner.

Cognizant of this necessity of unlocking new resources for children in the region, during 2018 the Regional Office took a new approach to partnerships. Thus, instead of conceiving of partnerships in the traditional donor-to-receiver model, involving a transaction of cash or supplies in return for results, the Regional Office positioned the regional priorities to advance towards the SDGs – the Key Results for Children (KRC) – as a common agenda for children, around which all manner of actors could convene, each locating its contribution to children within this larger agenda. In this model, each partner brings its respective value addition to the KRCs based on its specific area of expertise and comparative advantage, hence the notion of ‘shared value’ whereby partners mutually reinforce one another’s action by mutualizing their assets, financial, know-how, skills and more. Such partnerships may involve cash or supply transactions between partners, however such transactions now fit within a wider framework. By putting forward the KRCs as a common agenda for children, partners would be more attracted to investing in the region, by seeing how their contribution would form part of a wider effort. This is in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, in that the approach seeks to unlock resources for investment in the child-social sectors from all manner of domestic and external, public and private sources.

For example, the Regional Office engaged with headquarters in the development of the UNICEF-BMGF Partnership Strategy, and the Strategic Dialogue Meeting of UNICEF with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). As a result, the focus of cooperation with BMGF has been sharpened to support health systems strengthening through primary health care (PHC), involving multisector approaches that touch on at least four KRCs (i.e. those related to immunization, stunting, birth registration and open defecation). Cooperation with BMZ is now more clearly focused on addressing the connected themes of nutrition, education and mobility of children in the Sahel space, in line with both the KRCs and the BMZ aspiration for a ‘Marshall Plan for Africa’.

In addition, the Regional Office laid the groundwork for maturing partnerships with Gavi and promising new private sector sources in 2019, by institutionalizing the shared value approach across the office.

This approach to partnerships appears both promising and essential to accelerate change at the scale required to achieve the KRCs, and will be pursued with ever greater drive in 2019 with the arrival of a senior partnership manager.

Lesson 2: Targeted Engagement with Regional Institutions to Influence Policy Discourse and Standard Setting

The Regional Office is well positioned to engage with regional organizations, notably the Africa Union (AU), ECOWAS and ECCAS, to contribute to and influence the adoption of norms and policies, which, through these institutions, is expected to lead to their adoption by the organizations' Member States. Yet engagement with these organizations presented its own specific challenges, which called for a targeted, as opposed to wide-ranging, approach, to effect tangible, incremental change at implementation level.

The Regional Office played a key role in fostering partnerships with regional institutions and other core partners around the development of a strategic vision towards stunting reduction. Using existing coordination bodies, such as the Regional Nutrition Working Group, parliamentarian and civil society networks, the office has raised awareness on nutrition challenges among decision makers and advocated for the adoption of policies favourable to the promotion of nutrition through a multi-sectoral approach coordinated at high level of government.

Though the Regional Office had strengthened its partnerships with ECOWAS in recent years, the partnership relied too heavily on the commitment and capacity of the rotating Regional Child Protection Working Group Secretariat. For example, shifts from one organization to another slowed implementation of ECOWAS' child protection strategic framework. In addition, regional organizations appear to lack strong accountability mechanisms, and their mechanisms and capacity for donor and partner coordination remain weak.

Such challenges call for a targeted approach to engagement with regional organizations, as was taken in the area of gender and child protection. The office maintained sustained engagement with the AU and its Member State governments on gender equality, including playing a leadership role in the AU Ending Child Marriage Campaign and the Second African Girls Summit. On child protection, the office supported the development of the ECOWAS child protection framework and the AU civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) Programme.

A key lesson learned moving forward is for the Regional Office to continue to support Member States of regional organizations at country level, to translate political engagement among the membership into resource allocation and improved results. The generation and use of evidence on the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of specific high-impact interventions, and the strengthening of exchanges and cross fertilization across countries, will be strengthened.

Lesson 3: Value Addition of the Regional Office in supporting Multi-Country Programmes

During 2018, the value of Regional Office coordination of multi-country programmes such as those related to children on the move, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and resilience was apparent. These programmes provided a framework for increased comparability between countries on common thematic areas and allowed for greater cross fertilization and learning, and expanded the reach to the

most vulnerable children in the region. This will be pursued with increased collaboration with UN agencies to increase synergies and impact.

The regional dimension to this type of intervention has served to elevate these issues – positioned within the KRCs – on the political agenda across the region.

Lesson 4: Necessity of cross-sector integration to accelerate the KRCs

During 2018, the Regional Office explored opportunities for connecting the service delivery platforms underpinning each KRC, so as to mutually reinforce one another. These opportunities were captured in guidance and disseminated to Country Offices for implementation, through the regional KRC Working Groups.

For example, the office refined an approach, whereby the relatively well-performing immunization platform is harnessed to facilitate registration of births at maternity clinics and health centres as a strategy to bring civil registration services closer to rights holders and increase coverage.

The office also framed child marriage as an issue leading to drop out of adolescent girls from school. By linking this issue with education, this approach seeks to mitigate the sensitivity aroused by condemning child marriage as a cultural practice, while at the same time creating synergies with the capacity and resources of the education system.

At the community level, the office supported the roll-out of the Child Friendly Communities approach, which empowers communities, through real-time monitoring of services, to claim and promote the rights of their children across sectors, including health, nutrition, WASH and birth registration.

Inspired by these promising multi-sector approaches, the Regional Office will in 2019 guide Country Offices to use Annual Management Planning as a key opportunity for harnessing the full scope of UNICEF presence in-country to support the achievement of each KRC. This will involve Country Offices systematically fostering synergies across social services underpinning each KRC and building cross-cutting areas of expertise into each KRC (e.g. gender, C4D, communication, emergency preparedness, social protection, partnerships, evidence), as well as exploring ways in which support functions can be utilized in support of each KRC (e.g. operations, HR).

Lesson 5: Shaping the Research Agenda in support of KRCs

A key contribution of the Regional Office in 2018 was the development and dissemination of a set of technical guidance notes for each KRC, as the basis for guidance and support to Country Offices. The core of this guidance is the change strategies, which are expected to be effective in removing bottlenecks standing in the way of reaching the planned results. Yet evidence on the causes explaining the persistence of certain bottlenecks and the optimal strategies to address these causes, remains incomplete.

Hence, the Regional Office recognizes the necessity of shaping a research agenda for the region – including Country Offices – focused on shedding light on the causes and potential solutions to key bottlenecks holding back progress towards the selected results for children. Dissemination of knowledge and evidence so generated including with partners, would allow for refinement of change strategies and consequently more effective programming. Further, this approach would position UNICEF as a credible ally, thereby attracting greater interest of partners in contributing to the child agenda and child focused SDGs.

Lesson 6: Position UNICEF as a Leader in the Prevention and Response to Cases of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in the Region

UNICEF as a whole in 2018 has taken a robust response to the prevention and response to cases of sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA), especially those involving children.

The Regional Office has engaged fully in devising the organizational response to this nefarious phenomenon, at the policy and procedures level. In the WCA region, the Regional Office has developed guidance for Country Offices on building office-specific action plans on PSEA and elevated the priority of such plans through their integration into Annual Management Plans.

In 2019, the Regional Office will vigorously pursue this initiative, assisting Country Offices to prepare and implement their PSEA action plans, including through development of tools, advisory support to management, counselling support to staff, among others. The initiative will be expanded to encompass sexual harassment and abuse of authority within the organization. This will enable the organization to fulfil a core responsibility towards the children we serve, while positioning UNICEF as credible and principled, fit to convene others around an agenda for children towards the SDGs.

Lesson 7: Empowering Zone Offices

One of the key comparative advantages of UNICEF is its presence in the field and its knowledge and attunement to communities, and this is particularly the case in WCA. This proximity is underpinned by UNICEF's extensive field presence in the form of zone offices, of which there were 56 in 2018.

However, zone offices are by their very nature located in less accessible, less accommodating locations, resulting in more difficult conditions for personnel on assignment at such locations. Thus, in 2018 the Regional Office performed a survey of all personnel assigned to zone offices in duty stations of the highest 'hardship' classifications of the ICSC, with a view to better understanding their living and working conditions. The survey revealed a number of basic issues related to health, information and communication technology, administration of human resources, as well as hygiene and WASH. These issues affected the health, morale and ultimately the performance of the personnel on assignment to zone offices, including women in particular. In response to the results of this survey, the Regional Office mobilized Country Office management to undertake a systematic review of and response to the key clusters of issues raised through the survey. Office Staff Associations were enlisted as partners. This fruitful initiative will be repeated in 2019 among personnel on assignment at a wider array of hardship duty stations, with a view to systematizing this Duty of Care with respect to the living and working conditions of personnel assigned to the field.

Beyond tending to the basic needs of personnel in the field, the Regional Office sought to promote the empowerment of zone offices while strengthening their accountability for results. Thus, the Regional Office recommended the systematic participation of zone office managers at annual meetings of Deputy Representatives and Operations Managers, to bring their unique perspective to the table. Following office support to the development of Country Office accountability frameworks – including provisions detailing the accountability mechanisms for zone offices, the Regional Management Team decided that with support from the Regional Office, all Country Offices would develop such accountability frameworks in 2019. It was also decided by the Team that as of 2019, the zone office contribution to the region's deliverables against the Strategic Plan would be detailed in annual work planning of Country Offices, also with support from the Regional Office, so as to better recognize the contribution of such offices to

national-level results linked to the selected key results, while holding them accountable for the achievement of such results.

Looking forward to 2019

In 2019, the Regional Office for West and Central Africa will continue to support the 24 Country Offices to accelerate towards the achievement of their collective commitments, aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and the SDGs. It will do so through a mixture of technical assistance, quality assurance, knowledge generation and oversight of Country Offices, combined with high-level leadership and representation to convene and leverage a wide range of partners around key results for children in regional and global forums. The 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2019 provides a unique opportunity to do this. 2019 will also present the opportunity to start preparing the mid-term review of the Regional Office Management Plan 2018-2021. In so doing, the Regional Office, with its partners, will refine its strategies and accelerate its contributions towards reducing the disproportionate share of rights deprivations borne by the children of the region, emphasizing first and foremost those that are furthest behind.