Update on the context and situation of children

In 2020 Jamaica directed most of its energies at responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The island ended 2020 with relative low incidence with 12,915 cumulative cases and a fatality rate of 2.4 per cent. Mitigation measures such as border, school and workplace closures however had a devastating impact on the economy. The economic downturn threatens to erode recent economic and social gains, and challenges advances towards the SDGs.

In July, UNICEF conducted a COVID-19 socio-economic impact survey to measure its impact on children. This was the first structured COVID-19 related survey in Jamaica. The results showed that approximately 80 per cent of households suffered income reduction, with significantly greater loss (49 per cent) for households in the lower socioeconomic bracket. Nearly 45 per cent of households experienced food shortages. This was felt more acutely in female-headed households (56 per cent) and households with two or more children (57 per cent). School closures and restrictions of movement and social gatherings have had a tremendous impact on children’s mental health and their ability to access necessary services. The study confirmed dramatic increases in children’s levels of boredom (63 per cent), overeating (57 per cent), frustration (41 per cent) clinginess (49 per cent) anxiety (23 per cent) and fear (21 per cent).

With school closure in March, learning was interrupted for many children. The study indicated that lack of availability of, and reliable access to, distance learning technologies is exacerbating learning disparities. The challenges in providing continued quality education emphasizes the stark inequities in Jamaica’s education system, the important role of educators and the need for further capacity building. COVID-19 containment measures have also led to children spending more time online – an increase from 3.1 hours to 6.8 hours daily.

Even before COVID-19, Jamaica’s education sector faced considerable performance challenges. Progression through the education system remains low and unevenly distributed. Only 23 per cent of Jamaican children transition to tertiary education, with the richest quintile accessing at a rate seven times higher than the poorest. Students in urban areas are twice as likely to access tertiary studies compared to rural locations. Approximately 50,000 secondary school aged adolescents are out of school. Of this number, 60 per cent are boys.

As schools reopen, Jamaica faces competing demands for resources to ensure: the return to, and retention in school of the most vulnerable children; alternative learning programmes; safe school operations; and technological innovations for building system resilience. As the system recovers, improved efficiency is required with better allocation of educational inputs and increased attention to quality.

Despite the successful launch of the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV) in 2019, violence against children (VAC) continued to be of great concern. The COVID-19 study revealed an increased likelihood that children experience violence at home due to heightened tensions in households, added stressors on caregivers and social isolation. The situation is made worse by children’s limited access to supportive relationships and social services usually available to them at school and community levels. 40 per cent of respondents admitted that adults in the household shout, yell, scream or call their child names more frequently than prior to the COVID-19 restrictions. Approximately 15 per cent said children were spanked, hit, or slapped more frequently.

Adolescent girls and young women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence and abuse. In 2019, 83 per cent of reported rapes to the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) were of females 24 years
old or younger. Boys are more likely to become victims of physical abuse or be involved in crime. In response to this gender-based violence (GBV) epidemic in Jamaica, the United Nations in partnership with the Government of Jamaica launched the European Union (EU)-supported Spotlight Initiative (SI) in 2020.

As of June 2020, 1,742 children (approximately 52 per cent of whom are boys) resided in children’s homes and places of safety. A recent UNICEF-supported study investigated the quality of institutional care, highlighting VAC which is being perpetrated by children themselves as well as staff. In keeping with child rights standards endorsed by Jamaica, the government is committed to accelerate efforts that will focus on preventing family separation, reuniting families, and providing family-based alternative care.

Jamaica has a widely recognized solid social protection system, however some of the most disadvantaged children are still not fully captured by social safety nets. This includes children in rural communities, children vulnerable to social, environmental and economic shocks; and children with disabilities. Approximately 77 per cent of benefits under the national conditional cash transfer target children. Challenges of exclusion exist in regard to children with disabilities and those within state care. Most recent data (2017) shows that the proportion of children and adolescents in poverty (24.1 per cent and 26.1 per cent), is consistently higher than working age adults (15.4 per cent) and the elderly (14.5 per cent) in poverty.

In 2020, an additional 18 public health facilities began implementing adolescent-friendly services, bringing the total number of adolescent-friendly sites to 44 – with at least three adolescent-friendly facilities in e parish. Nevertheless, a UNICEF-supported 2020 situational analysis on adolescents living with HIV in Jamaica, found consistently poor adherence to anti-retroviral treatment which led to sub-optimal viral suppression.

Jamaica experienced higher than normal levels of rainfall in 2020 which resulted in major landslides and extensive road damage. A recent Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC) indicated that Jamaica must strengthen integration of children’s issues into its environmental and climate instruments, increase children’s sensitization and involvement and strengthen their resilience against environment-related illnesses.

Jamaica is only able to report less than 50 per cent of the SDG indicators. Social SDG indicators affecting children and adolescent’s availability has been challenged by the long delay to conduct two of the main sources of socio-demographic indicators – the Reproductive Health Survey (RHS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). There were solid plans to fill those gaps in 2020, but COVID-19 delayed the fieldwork to at least 2021.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

**SAFETY AND JUSTICE PROGRAMME**

Interventions under the Safety and Justice programme aimed to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal Target 16.2: “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”. In 2020, UNICEF used its convening power to forge partnerships to rapidly respond to the heightened risks of violence against children caused by COVID-19. UNICEF rapidly responded with establishment of Parenting Support Helplines reaching 872 families with psychosocial support and referrals, and with the provision of emergency supplies, including sanitation and hygiene equipment that benefited 400 adolescent mothers and more than 2,000 children living in state care. UNICEF also initiated a public-private partnership with the Office
of the Children’s Advocate (OCA) and the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ) to establish a National Child Helpline. The 24/7 toll free helpline will be launched in 2021 and will provide a safe space for children to confidentially express themselves and receive counselling and referral services by trained personnel.

The EU-funded Spotlight Initiative (SI) was launched at the highest level, co-led by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport (MSGES) in March. The SI provides a unique opportunity for the UN system to support the GoJ and civil society to address high levels of family and gender-based violence. As the lead of the SI Pillar 3, that focuses on changing social norms and harmful practices that perpetuate family and gender-based violence, UNICEF activities rely heavily on community interventions. Given the challenges in reaching communities during the first months of the pandemic, UNICEF used a blend of Communications for Development (C4D) approaches aimed at systematically raising awareness and providing opportunities for public debate and dialogue around non-violent social norms. A multimedia campaign on both traditional and social media was conducted to respond to the rising cases of child abuse and gender-based violence. The content encouraged the public to report violence against children and women, and duty bearers to fulfil their obligations to protect them. Two public service announcements were aired on television and radio and social media, and UNICEF staff participated in media interviews. Across radio and TV the campaign created a total of 74,454,000 impressions. For social media the campaign reached 1,527,477 persons on Facebook and Instagram, generating 4,657,879 impressions, 1,848,262 video views and 11,426 engagements.

In 2020, UNICEF continued to assist the Government of Jamaica to advance with the implementation of the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV), the first step to fulfill the Government of Jamaica’s commitments as a Pathfinder Country. Work began on to develop a framework to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NPACV and raise public awareness. UNICEF continued to provide high level technical assistance to support system strengthening around parenting, justice for children and de-institutionalization of children in state care.

a) Parenting models with violence prevention and gender responsive content were developed to be delivered face-to-face as well as through innovative technology-based approaches. UNICEF conducted formative research on parenting to inform the development and roll-out of interventions under the SI. Through a partnership with Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH), an evidence-based parenting mobile messaging system is currently being adapted to fit the Jamaican context. This system uses UNICEF’s RapidPro technology to offer to parents on-demand practical and personalized parenting information and tips.

b) UNICEF’s technical and financial support helped the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) build a strong stakeholder network for child diversion that facilitated coordination and integration and strengthened the administrative and programmatic framework of the National Child Diversion Programme (NCDP). These efforts benefited 149 children in 2020. Additionally, 17 mental health professionals were hired by the government to provide/support social interventions for children who were diverted.

c) UNICEF continued to advocate for alternatives to allow more children to live in a protective family environment and to support the government’s goal to have 75 per cent of children currently in state care, living in family-based alternative care by 2023. As a follow-up to the UNICEF-funded 2019 study on Children in State Care in Jamaica, UNICEF initiated a consultative process with key stakeholders, led by the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA), to develop a strategic framework for de-institutionalization in Jamaica.

**LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME**

All UNICEF-supported interventions in education were aligned with SDG 4 and Goal 1 of Jamaica’s
Vision 2030 National Development Plan that aims for “world class education and training”. Emergency interventions were aligned with the government response and the UNCT Jamaica COVID-19 Socioeconomic Response Plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the inequities in Jamaica’s education system. Learning was interrupted for many students. The COVID-19 impact assessment indicated that a lack of availability of, and reliable access to, distance learning technologies exacerbated existing disparities. The challenges in providing continued quality education through remote learning have also emphasized the pivotal roles of school leaders and teachers and the need for ongoing capacity building.

Part of UNICEF education interventions were postponed or re-programmed to prioritize COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery. In this vein, UNICEF rapidly responded to the requests for support made by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) and became the lead UN agency within the Education pillar under the UN Jamaica Socioeconomic Response Plan. UNICEF interventions were based on a combination of strategies: 1) strengthening MOEYI capacities on distance learning 2) advocacy and public engagement to ensure a safe return to school 3) developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children with government, CSOs and private sector organizations 4) Fostering innovation and use of technology to promote a more inclusive education.

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded support to re-imagining education and equipping school administrators to lead online communities. UNICEF helped to train more than 1,000 school leaders on virtual instructional modalities in collaboration with the National College on Educational Leadership (NCEL) with the launch of an online, free to access, Virtual Instructional Leadership (VIL) course. To date the VIL has logged just under 2,000 participants representing more than 1,000 schools and has positively impacted 300,000 students from Early Childhood to secondary levels.

UNICEF also supported the MOEYI Special Education Unit and Special Olympics Jamaica (SOJ) to guarantee continued education for 550 children with disabilities by providing adapted tablets with specific approved content and one-year data plans for educational purposes. In collaboration with the Early Childhood Commission (ECC), UNICEF supported the distribution of 1,100 Play and Learn kits to children under-age 6 in quarantined zones. In preparation for a safer Return to School, UNICEF partnered with the civil society organization (CSO) Food for the Poor to improve access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and handwashing facilities for 20,000 children in 19 schools in high risk COVID-19 areas. These service delivery emergency response interventions were reinforced by the establishment of new public-private sector partnerships with local companies such as Digicel, Scotia Bank and UNICOMER, that increased the reach of the interventions with in-kind and financial contributions.

Since the beginning of the current country programme, the Jamaica Country Office (JCO) has been implementing strategic pilot interventions to help ensure a more child-friendly school environment for children through the School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) framework, the EduSport programme and Road Safety initiatives. Scale up plans for these interventions were completed in 2020 and they will be rolled out in 2021. The evaluation of SWPBIS pilot conducted in 2020 was the foundation of the scale up plan for SWPBIS project.

UNICEF also continued to partner with the MOEYI to improve system-wide, data-driven decision making. The JCO supported the completion of a review of the national Age 4 Jamaica School Readiness Assessment (JSRA) program to ensure more streamlined administration and data collection, to better enable usage of the results to drive action. A Public Expenditure Review (PER) of the Education sector is ongoing in partnership with the World Bank and Ministry of Finance and the Public Service (MOFPS). The draft report has already been presented to the country’s national Education Transformation Commission which is scheduled to report to the Prime Minister with specific recommendations on education policy, in March 2021.

2020 has been marked by the tremendous challenges which COVID-19 posed for the Health Sector. The response to the pandemic has taken the full attention of the public health services, with thousands of health care workers redeployed from their substantive work in key areas including maternal and child health, nutrition and adolescent health. This demanded that UNICEF remained flexible and nimble to support relevant aspects of the response. It is important to note, however, that the period was also marked by opportunities to innovate and do things differently. Emergency interventions in response to COVID-19 were fully aligned with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)-led Country Response Plan and the UNCT Jamaica COVID-19 Socio-economic Response Plan 2020-21.

COVID-19 prevention measures in the island led to curfews, school closures, quarantine in communities and restrictions on gatherings. UNICEF’s communications expertise was immediately sought by the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) to develop several communication products linked to COVID-19. Those PSAs specifically targeted families caring for children and provided messages on prevention, reduction of stigma against people infected by COVID-19, as well as information on COVID-19 and breastfeeding. These products were widely shared on social and traditional media generating more than 16.9 million views. With UNICEF support, more than 6,000 adolescents were engaged through online and other media-based outreach activities for mental health interventions, and 100 girls who were victims of gender-based violence accessed friendly support services.

In December 2020, the Parliament approved the National Infant and Young Child Feeding Policy. UNICEF’s technical and financial support and advocacy has contributed to this approval that lays a firm foundation for the implementation of the international code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

Beyond COVID-19, adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and sexual violence continued to be the main problems affecting progress and empowerment of young women and girls in Jamaica. UNICEF’s continued technical assistance to the MOHW contributed to increasing, by 25 per cent, the number of facilities implementing adolescent-friendly service standards in 2020, reaching 33 out of the 44. UNICEF also successfully negotiated with the MOHW, the opening of two new Teen Hubs in rural parishes for 2021 as part of the European Union (EU)-funded Spotlight Initiative (SI). As UNICEF Jamaica continues to prioritize adolescent mental health, a historic partnership was forged with the MOHW and the University of the West Indies (UWI) Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC) to design and operationalize a mental health chatline for adolescents and youth. This collaboration is the product of years of persistent advocacy and negotiation. It will ensure that young people have 24-hour access to counseling services using mobile messaging. The MOHW is leading the effort and has committed to absorbing the cost of operation of the chatline within 2 years.

**CHILD RIGHTS MONITORING AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY PROGRAMME**

UNICEF continued its efforts to propose decisive responses to socioeconomic needs, within the context of a diminishing fiscal space to address many of the historical and emerging needs, against the backdrop of a global pandemic which threatened to erode domestic gains made during the previous years.

As part of the COVID-19 response, UNICEF developed new partnerships with the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) and the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service (MOFPS) to provide
financial and technical support to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 among the most disadvantaged families through the establishment of child-sensitive, shock responsive mechanisms. Emergency cash transfers were provided to over 2,700 families with children with disability or with pregnant and lactating women, already targeted through Jamaica’s primary social safety-net programme, the Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH). In partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), social assistance was provided to 1,000 families of children with disabilities. Additional arrangements between UNICEF and the MLSS were solidified, paving the way for future enhancements to the social protection system that will facilitate the support to develop a more child-sensitive, shock responsive social protection system.

In 2020, UNICEF Jamaica continued to harness the power of evidence to drive changes for children in the island through advocacy and evidence-based programming. An ambitious research and data collection agenda was rolled out in 2020 to inform development of the next Country Programme and UNICEF advocacy on key issues affecting children rights.

UNICEF in collaboration with CAPRI conducted *The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Jamaican Children*, which was the first survey in Jamaica measuring the impacts of COVID-19. The survey highlighted that COVID-19 impacted families at multiple levels (access to food, education protection, health) and that these impacts were disproportionately felt by lower-income families and female-headed households. A Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Belief (KAPB) baseline survey on family and gender-based violence was initiated to support the planning and monitoring of community interventions under the European Union-funded Spotlight Initiative (SI). The finalization of the Climate Landscape Analysis (CLAC) for Children and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) identified those climate, energy and environment-related issues affecting children and persons with disabilities and provided recommendations for making Jamaica’s climate resilience frameworks more child inclusive. To complement existing evidence gaps in the area of child protection, two major initiatives were launched in collaboration with national partners: 1) a system-wide Evaluation of the Child Protection System in Jamaica and 2) research on the opportunities and risks of children’s internet use.

In partnership with the World Bank and the Government of Jamaica, a preliminary draft of the Public Expenditure Review (PER) of the Education Sector was presented to the PER Steering Committee and the Education Transformation Commission, mandated by the Prime Minister to provide recommendations on Education Reform. The PER is expected to support the Government of Jamaica to monitor and report on the expenditure on education over the last 5 years, link outcomes and results to spending, and plan and respond to the needs of the sector. The PER revealed some of the gaps and opportunities for timely interventions to strengthen public finance management capacity of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) and its independent agencies.

UNICEF Jamaica built on these findings and, in collaboration with PAHO/WHO and UNDP, developed a successful Joint Proposal to the SDG Trust Fund, Financing for Development. This new project, led by UNICEF, will support the MOFPS to roll out the Results Based Budgeting (RBB). It will also strengthen the public finance management capacity of two of the largest Ministries (Education and Health) to facilitate a more efficient, effective and equitable resource allocation towards achieving the SDGs. This Joint Project will invest US$1.2 million to strengthen RBB capacity, together with diagnostic budget analyses. It will develop financial simulation models and budget tracking systems that will enable reprioritization of funds to services which affect the most deprived and vulnerable populations.
UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In responding to the crisis triggered by COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF Jamaica intensified collaboration with the government, private sector and development partners and UN agencies. UNICEF Jamaica worked to ensure a rapid response to requests from the Government of Jamaica (GoJ) and contributed to development and implementation of the UNCT Socioeconomic Response plan to COVID-19, by leading two inter-agency working groups (Education and Social Protection). UNICEF led a successful submission to the COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust Fund for a Joint Project supporting the GoJ to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the most marginalized families, through shock-responsive cash transfers (CT). UNICEF’s collaboration with FAO, ensured that nutritional support to families with children with disabilities was complemented with fresh produce, purchased from female farmers whose livelihoods were negatively impacted by the pandemic.

UNICEF’s prompt response to the crisis encouraged private sector organizations to join its efforts. UNICEF partnered with Digicel and Unicomer, to help provide tablets to children with disabilities; and with Scotiabank to support a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme in schools. Other partnerships with the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ) and the Victoria Mutual Foundation facilitated psychosocial support to parents and children.

Outside of COVID-19, UNICEF continues to expand existing partnerships to achieve high-level, high-impact results for children through engagement in financing for development and innovative financing areas. UNICEF led a successful UN Joint Proposal for the SDG Fund for Financing for Development for the strengthening of Result Based Budgeting (RBB) and efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure in Health and Education. This project builds upon existing UNICEF partnerships with the World Bank and the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service (MOFPS), and expands its collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, (IDB), the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Implementation of the joint Spotlight Initiative (SI) began in 2020. Thanks to the flexibility of the European Union (EU), UNICEF was able to reprogram some funding allocated for 2020 to respond to emerging needs during the pandemic. UNICEF forged new partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) to conduct community-level interventions as a part of the implementation of SI.

The Common Country Assessment (CCA) was a strategic opportunity for UNICEF Jamaica to highlight the situation of the children in the preparation of the next UN Cooperation Framework (2022-2026). UNICEF led the CCA development phase as the chair of Programme Coordination Team (PCT), in close collaboration with the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO). In 2020, UNICEF also led the Operations Management Team (OMT), Measurement and Evaluation (M&E) Working Group, and co-led the Human Rights Working Group and United Nations Emergency Task Team (UNETT). The UNICEF Representative continued to act as the RC during the first semester of the year until mid-June 2020.

UNICEF has signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and finalized the contract to prepare our move to the UN House in 2021. This will further enhance our ongoing UN collaboration.

Lessons Learned and Innovations
1) Better office climate for better results.

Since 2018, UNICEF Jamaica has implemented multiple training and team building activities to strengthen team spirit, raise staff morale and promote gender diversity and inclusivity among the staff, in line with UNICEF’s Care, Respect, Integrity, Trust and Accountability (CRITA) values. These deliberate efforts to create and maintain an inclusive and harmonious office climate are yielding excellent results, as shown by the 2020 Global Staff Survey. The JCO was ranked among the top three offices globally in staff satisfaction and engagement, a significant improvement over previous survey results. Efforts to strengthen staff engagement continued in 2020 with more sessions geared at improving communication and promoting UNICEF’s ‘speak up culture.’ Duty of care and flexibility also played a big role in ensuring the team was engaged and morale was kept high, especially amid prolonged working from home because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleagues’ mental health, amid the COVID-19 crisis, was another area on which the staff association, HR and Management joined efforts to address. Throughout the year, the JCO maintained active remote interactions with innovative ice breakers, virtual checkups and social sessions as well as brownbag lunch sessions to bolster team engagement.

The internal reflection on the results of the Global Staff survey conducted in collaboration with the Global Principal Adviser of Organizational Culture, Regional Office (RO) HR team, the Staff Association JCO confirmed that this high level of engagement and staff satisfaction achieved by Jamaica country office was accompanied by greater programmatic results. The programme is increasingly shifting to more high-level policy dialogue and high impact results, confirming that a good office environment and a highly motivated team deliver significantly better results for children.

2) Leveraging support for children in the context of the UN Reform.

As part of the UN reform, UNICEF Jamaica has made a deliberate effort to join forces and work together with the rest of the UN system to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the response to emergencies in Jamaica. In this vein, in 2020 UNICEF became one of the main UN Recipient Agencies for the European Union (EU)-funded Spotlight initiative that is supporting the Government of Jamaica’s efforts to reduce family violence. Beyond Spotlight, new joint programme opportunities provided UNICEF with a platform to broaden areas of engagement; better coordinate efforts with other UN agencies to achieve transformative and sustainable results for children; and access the new pool of funding sources made available as part of the UN Reform and SDG acceleration efforts.

As part of the COVID-19 response, UNICEF successfully led a joint proposal for the COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), that mobilized US$600,000 to support UNICEF and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID on the most disadvantaged. UNICEF also led a successful joint proposal, in partnership with UNDP and PAHO, to the Joint SDG Trust Fund that mobilized US$1.2 million to support improving efficiency, effectiveness and equity in Public Expenditure in Jamaica for SDG acceleration. In partnership with UNDP a Joint Programme proposal that is currently at the final review stage, was developed to establish an Innovative Impact Investment Fund in Jamaica in partnership with the private sector.

3) Innovative new platforms for providing mental health services to adolescents and young people

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on the mental health of adolescents and young people, exacerbating pre-existing challenges. The limited availability of mental health services even before the pandemic made virtual engagement a priority to expand access to these services. In line with this focus, several interventions were set in motion to provide adequate psychosocial and mental health support or referrals to adolescents and young people during the pandemic and beyond.
As part of the emergency response, UNICEF supported CSO Eve for Life to provide safer and more consistent access to victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG) through survivor mentors, by providing cellular phones and data plans. This project provided emotional support to 100 victims of VAWG. In the education sector, UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health’s Child Guidance Clinics to establish a teletherapy system for children, identified through schools, who were struggling with mental health issues such as depression, suicidal thoughts and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Finally, through UNICEF’s financial support and advocacy the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) and the University of the West Indies’ (UWI) Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC) are collaborating to establish a mental health chatline for adolescents and youth. Powered by UNICEF’s RapidPro software and its U-Partners chatline management dashboard, the service will provide 24-hour access to messaging-based counselling and referral services. These new platforms will facilitate the access to critical services and support to adolescents and families beyond COVID-19.

4) Accelerating implementation of Spotlight Initiative programme during COVID 19

The launch of the Spotlight Initiative (SI) in Jamaica took place in early March. However, programme implementation was severely affected by the COVID-19 restrictions, as most of the UNICEF-supported interventions are at community level. Thanks to the EU’s flexibility, UNICEF promptly reprogramed part of the 2020 funding to respond to the increase levels of family violence as a result of COVID-19, within the framework and objectives of the programme.

To accelerate implementation a call for expressions of interest was issued to identify civil society partners offering the best comparative advantage. This led to the partnership agreements with 6 CSOs, which are currently supporting the SI implementation to address family violence at community level, including positive parenting, C4D theatre for development, GBV prevention activities in schools and through sports.

Thanks to the UNICEF team’s swift response in reprogramming and identifying new partners, the JCO was able to fill key gaps to prevent and respond to the increase in family violence seen as a result of the pandemic and its impacts, while accelerating the programme delivery. Implementation of the programme reached 90 per cent by the end of the year, despite the challenging circumstances of COVID-19.