

South Africa

Update on the context and situation of children

South Africa has approximately 59.6 million people, with roughly 19.7 million children under the age of 18 years. With a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of US\$ 7,133 in 2019, South Africa is ranked as a high (upper) middle-income country, and its economy is the second largest on the African continent. The country has made remarkable progress in several social indicators since the end of Apartheid in 1994. Access to education is near-universal (99.0% for compulsory years to Grade 9). The child mortality Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target has already been achieved with the rate being reduced for under-five mortality from a high of 79 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 35 deaths per 1,000 in 2019, driven primarily by the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Yet, South Africa's under-five mortality rate remains about three times higher than other high middle-income countries.

Access to basic services, such as drinking water and sanitation, remains high, and nine million children receive school meals. The child support grant presently reaches approximately 13 million children. Moreover, child rights are enshrined in the Constitution and a progressive Children's Act; a Constitutional Court ruling confirmed that corporal punishment even in the home is unconstitutional. However, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world with a Gini Coefficient of 0.67, and, compared to other countries with a similar Human Development Index (HDI), South Africa demonstrates poorer performance on key child indicators.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the nutritional status of the South African child was far from optimal, characterized by high stunting (27% or 1.5 million children under-five years) and severe wasting rates (2.5% or 151 000 children under five years). Wasting remains a significant underlying cause of child mortality, being associated with one-third of all child in-hospital deaths. Meanwhile, childhood obesity is reported at 13 per cent, which is more than two times the global average and the highest in the Eastern and Southern African region. Despite South Africa's progress in reducing child mortality over the past few years, some of the key child survival interventions such as exclusive breastfeeding, remain low at 32 per cent. A quarter of babies are not breastfed at all which increases their mortality risk by 14-fold. This nutritional situation worsened during the year as access to food, income and basic services were reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Africa also has the largest HIV epidemic in the world, with 7.7 million people living with HIV of which 4.4 per cent are children under the age of 15 years. Over the last decade, there has been significant progress in the reduction of mother to child transmission (MTCT) of HIV in South Africa. According to recent HIV estimates released by UNAIDS in July 2020, the annual number of new HIV infections in children aged 0-14 years declined from an estimated 78,272 in 2000 to 12,260 in 2019; the coverage of antiretroviral treatment for HIV positive pregnant women as well as early infant diagnosis of HIV infection services were estimated to be over 95 per cent.

In the education sector, COVID 19 amplified existing inequalities, with children from poorer schools in quintiles one to three that are disproportionately affected by school closures. Up to 75 per cent of Grade four learners could not read for meaning in any of the 11 official languages in 2016. Poor learning outcomes are the primary driver of grade repetition (15% for secondary education) and adolescent dropout, with nearly half of the cohort dropping out between Grades 10 and 12. During the emergency which included school closures, limited infrastructure, connectivity, and devices hampered access to alternative learning platforms and services. The latest 2019 household survey figures released in 2020 showed that 36.8 per cent of children birth to four-years old were attending an early learning and development programme in an ECD center or pre-school, while 3.9 per cent are with child

minders, which are day mothers that provide a mix of early learning opportunities and care to mostly the younger children in this age cohort. This trend remains consistent with only marginal changes since 2010.

According to the Optimus Survey from 2015, one third of all children experience some form of abuse before the age of 18, not once but multiple times. 2020 was a particularly challenging year as children's deprivations augmented as a result of lockdown and the fall out therefrom. Socio economic rights of children worsened as inequalities deepened for children and youth. Child hunger, increased cases of child abuse, online exploitation and neglect, fear, anxiety, and distress were reported to Childline on a monthly basis with up to 25,000 callers. The President called Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Violence against Children (VAC) the 'second pandemic' in COVID related speeches throughout 2020.

Statistics South Africa and UNICEF completed the first multidimensional poverty study for children and established that 62 per cent of children can be regarded as multidimensionally poor. Severe levels of deprivations were found for children living in rural provinces, where families have a female household head, and where the average family size is above three children per household. In 2020, children were able to benefit from increases in the value of grants through top-ups of R300 in May and an additional R500 per month during the following period of June to October. Similar top-ups for all other grants amounted to R250 during the period and included those for the old age pension, disability, foster child and care dependency grants. While limited in duration, these top-ups have made a difference to the overall level of hunger and poverty among children. The National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) estimated that child hunger levels ranged from 11 percent to 15 per cent for the first half of 2020, and that the reduction could be attributed, in-part, to the top-ups to the social grants. The country's public finances deteriorated prior to COVID-19 and the health pandemic has put more pressure on the ability of government to finance social commitments

Major contributions and drivers of results

At the beginning of 2020, UNICEF South Africa set out the following annual priorities: (1) Strengthening of national and sub-national health systems capacities for evidence-based planning and monitoring of a comprehensive package of EMTCT, maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition services with focus on identifying and covering the unreached; (2) Capacity strengthening of national and sub-national education systems for the delivery of quality and inclusive education; (3) Reaching child populations most at risk of poverty, discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect or displacement through prevention and early intervention programmes; and (4) Developing a Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) tool to direct and prioritize the allocation of resources for children which is used by at least four national and provincial social sector departments.

(1) Strengthening of national and sub-national health systems capacities for evidence-based planning and monitoring of a comprehensive package of EMTCT, maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition services with focus on identifying and covering the unreached

UNICEF South Africa Country Office (SACO) provided technical assistance to government in the coordination, planning and implementation of the multi-sectoral interventions prioritized in the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan (2018-2023), and through the development of the communication strategy for the plan. The programme partnered with government and other stakeholders to create awareness among adolescents and youth about obesity and the importance of healthy eating as a modifiable risk factor for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) during the National Nutrition and National Obesity Week (NNOWs) campaign. In support of government to continue with child nutrition services during COVID-19 lockdown, UNICEF South Africa communicated key messages on infant and young child feeding using existing virtual platforms during and after the world

breastfeeding week. UNICEF developed the Blueprint for Improving the South African School Food Environment which provides guidance about healthy eating, drinking clean, safe water and physical activity to learners and other stakeholders; supporting the National School Nutrition Programme and other existing guidelines and strategies that look to improve the school food environment for prevention of triple burden of malnutrition among school children and adolescents.

Since 2017, mothers2mothers (m2m) in collaboration with UNICEF South Africa has been implementing the Peer Mentor Project in South Africa. Through the Project, m2m and UNICEF have been providing technical assistance to the National Department of Health to support the scale-up of interventions for pregnant and post-natal adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces. In 2020, the Project saw the integration of an e-service delivery platform into the routine face-to-face service delivery platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This adaptation to the Project aimed at providing targeted COVID-19 interventions to AGYW and their infants. Peer Mentors reached pregnant and breastfeeding AGYWs through e-Services from July-September 2020. In addition to peer-via-phone interactions, the Peer Mentors also established WhatsApp support groups which provided a virtual platform for clients to engage with each other. These virtual support groups provided an innovative support mechanism where clients can interact with each other. Furthermore, the peer mentor project increased significantly from an enrolment of 5,395 in 2019 to 14,870 pregnant or breastfeeding adolescent girls and young women in 2020, ensuring that they receive psychosocial support and education.

UNICEF also played a crucial role in the monitoring of performance of MNCH which showed a downward trend of vaccination coverage rates particularly in the urban areas where COVID-19 pandemic had hit the most. The World Health Organization, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) together with UNICEF, supported the National Department of Health in developing and implemented an integrated child health catch-up drive in all districts for children under five years of age. The catch-up drive aimed at intensifying the routine immunization services and providing catch-up doses to children who have missed vaccinations. The drive, which will run until the end of March 2021, is also being used as a platform for providing other child health services, including Vitamin A supplementation, de-worming, growth monitoring and HIV services. In addition, UNICEF South Africa has been working with the National PMTCT team to monitor the implementation of the new PMTCT guidelines with particular focus on viral loads done during pregnancy, labour and delivery and postnatally to ensure women remain virally suppressed and adherent; and monitoring early infant diagnosis using new data sources to manage and monitor the programme.

(2) Capacity strengthening of national and sub-national education systems for the delivery of quality and inclusive education

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the education sector with the temporary closure of ECD-programmes. The UNICEF-supported P.L.A.Y online in-service training for ECD practitioners and Grades R to 3 educators commenced with its second phase and 74,198 enrolled during the year with 34,470 completions, which exceeded the initial target of 17,000 significantly which was due to beneficial marketing that helped in the number of practitioners enrolled. Up to 43 district and provincial officials received the first part of the Phase II training of trainers. UNICEF continued to provide technical support with regards to the function shift of ECD from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the DBE, which included the consolidation of the conceptual understanding of the function shift and participation in the technical workstreams to provide technical input.

In continuing efforts to address teacher accountability to improve curriculum Implementation and performance, UNICEF provided support for the finalization of the Framework for Curriculum Implementation. Harmonizing this plan with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) resumed in 2020 and plans are to conclude the process in 2021. Implementation of early grade reading programme focusing on Setswana was launched in 2020, as well as finalization of language

benchmarks in basic education through UNICEF support. The financial review draft report, a project that seeks to analyze the financial implications of scaling up the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) programme across all nine provinces as part of the Improvement Plan activities project has been completed. The provincial departments have been engaged on the model.

Progress on increasing the number of schools that practice daily group handwashing as a result of UNICEF direct support in national programmes was enhanced, with a total of 408 out of 500 schools practicing handwashing. This includes 386 schools that have a handwashing station construction completed (84 in 2020 – completed by Education and Health team).

In 2020, 740 new girls and 1,217 existing girls from 27 districts in 112 schools benefited from virtual job shadowing. Additionally, 31 new mentors/job shadowing host organization coordinators were trained on the TechnoGirl Programme. The programme also supported 285 Grade 12 learners who have completed their three-year job shadowing programme to review and confirm their development plans. The University of Pretoria collaboration under the 'Future Africa Campus' enrolled 2,000 young people in the five-faculty initiative implemented under the GenU initiative.

Under the emergency response, a total of 7.3 million persons (6.68 mil children and 618,000 parents) directly benefitted from remote learning resources, including through online platforms, broadcast (radio and TV) and social media. The 'ActiveLearning@Home' series supported children from Grade R to 9. For the early childhood sub-sector, UNICEF in partnership with the partnership of the Department of Social Development, Department of Basic Education and the LEGO Foundation developed the Tshwaragano Ka Bana (working together for children): Let's play, learn and grow together series, as easy to understand learning support materials for parents of young children (birth to 5 years) and reached more than 958,812 young children through 634,576 parents.

(3) Reaching child populations most at risk of poverty, discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect or displacement through prevention and early intervention programmes

Responding to intensified children's deprivations, anxiety, fear and distress as a result of COVID-19, UNICEF child protection managed to nurture, consolidate and expand investments in strategic partners. These partners included the Presidency, DSD (Department of Social Development), Parliament, SA Human Rights Commission, Council of Social Service Professionals, corporate, media and civil society. The partnerships formed allowed for greater awareness raising and capacity building on the plight of children during the pandemic. Moreover, this allowed for UNICEF to leverage these partnerships to deliver results for children on the ground ensuring that their mental health, needs for information, protection and direct relief were met.

To respond to the emergency, Child Protection received additional resources from UNICEF ESAR (Eastern and Southern Africa Region), governments and corporate and therewith the team could deepen partnerships with South African Council of Social Service Professionals, ACT, Childline, JellyBeans and Scalabrini. Toolkits were developed to train Social Service Professionals on the Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), child protection and mental health and 352 social service professionals (SSPs) were trained; 160 religious' leaders from 6 out of 9 provinces trained in child protection and up to 332,000 families with children received counselling and direct relief support.

Innovative tools were developed for parenting and counselling to most at risk children such as through WhatsApp platforms, call centers and a parenting App. Early in the pandemic Heartlines developed four podcasts and five public service announcements (PSAs) on COVID protection, child protection, child rights, mental health, and parenting. All compounded by national awareness and advocacy through 15 live TV and radio interviews on related topics including on online protection. Together with the UN (United Nations), technical assistance continued to be provided to the Presidency for the

implementation of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Femicide. A Global Trauma Conference was held and attended by the Special Rapporteur on VAC (Violence Against Children) to the Secretary General with representation from African Union (AU), UN, civil society, and government up to ministerial level, and resulted in an Emergency Action Plan for Children. VIACOM organized a Global Benefit Concert to support food and health needs for children and families affected by the COVID-19 which attracted up to 60 million viewers through MTV, YouTube and other channels resulting in further funding raised for UNICEF and WFP in these areas. Lastly, the year ended with a high-level launch of the EU (European Union) funded programme for children on the move as to strengthen systems to enhance CoM's rights to services and legal identity. A real time monitoring tool on children's wellbeing was developed as part of a national assessment to monitor children's wellbeing whereby child and youth care workers in the 9 provinces will collect real time data. The preliminary data which came out at the end of 2020 have already led to emergency management meetings with DSD and partners in the beginning of 2021 as to ensure children's needs are met in response to findings from hunger, to deprivation and child abuse.

(4) Developing a Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) tool to direct and prioritize the allocation of resources for children which is used by at least four national and provincial social sector departments

Major results were achieved across four areas, namely participating in a society-wide coalition to advocate for the introduction of top-ups to social grants for children; with its government partner, Statistics South Africa, established the country's baseline for the measurement of multidimensional poverty among children; strategically using the national Parliament as a vehicle to promote the well-being and interests of children's programmes and services in the budget and further nurturing and consolidating many strategic partnerships in the area of children's rights. The successful establishment of the country's first ever multidimensional poverty tool for children (MODA) has raised the overall profile of multidimensional poverty and placed this approach at the center of possible transversal (using the data to inform national financing formulae) and sector-specific interventions (using the data to inform strategic planning and resources allocation). UNICEF SACO has continued to be effective at using public platforms by getting the Appropriation Committee to endorse one of the team's recommendations in the annual Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) submissions. The recommendation addresses the strategic planning and implementation phase of national and provincial budgets and requires the government to limit the impact that accumulating expenditure arrears have on planning and delivery of programmes for children.

UNICEF SACO is supporting the development of a multidimensional poverty tool for children that is centered on what children themselves consider as "socially perceived necessities." This is a significant contribution to a human rights approach to programming and for prioritizing the voices and preferences of children. UNICEF also continues to support the Department of Social Development in its bid to develop a policy that integrates beneficiaries of cash transfers with a range of complementary services. The strategic positioning is intended to support the Department of Social Development in its drive to increase the overall impact of social grants for children.

Two new budget briefs were introduced in 2020, namely on social protection and prevention and early intervention. With regards to the latter, the government took a decision to mandate the establishment of a new budgetary programme on prevention and early intervention. UNICEF SACO contributed directly to this result, which will allow better tracking of provinces' commitment to this intervention. It also contributes directly to the CO's Annual Management Priority (AMP) via an expanded focus on prevention and early intervention and backed-up by resource commitments at the provincial level.

In 2020 for the first time in history, the province of Western Cape appointed a Children's Commissioner, with whom the office has worked closely ever since such as the production of a podcast on children's rights to encourage parents to take care of their children during lockdown.

UNICEF South Africa signed a MoU with the SA Human Rights Commission to strengthen collaboration in real time monitoring of children's rights, build further evidence and publish research papers and advocate for the Office of the Rights of the Child to be reinstated in the Presidency where it was positioned during the Mandela years. For the latter a position paper was produced with input from all the Offices of the Premier's in the provinces, by DSD, UNICEF and letters in support were shared with the President from the SAHRC, UNICEF and national Coalition on Children's Rights. The SAHRC contributed to a global publication on Realizing Children's Rights, Changing Lives, launched by ED Fore at a session with ED OHCHR and with SA HARC's CEO by year end. During 2020 the Commission established a Think Tank on children's rights to which UNICEF presented twice on real time monitoring of children's rights. The partnership with the Commission was widely published on national TV.

In respect of the existing MoU with Parliament, UNICEF worked with a consultant to produce the first ever of its kind child rights training toolkit, which was developed in close consultation with Parliament and be the tool for training of MPs in 2021. It will also form the basis to train government and municipal staff on children's rights through the School of Governance in collaboration with DSD. The latter will be an institutionalized child rights training course online. A training guideline has also been produced as to accompany the training toolkit for trainers. The Office also developed a list of issues for government to respond to in its second report to the CRC Committee first quarter of 2021.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

As part of contribution to UN reform and coherence, UNICEF SACO contributed to UN wide strategic planning, partnership building and joint advocacy. This included UNICEF SACO active role and co-lead role in the finalization of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework as well as COVID 19 response. Our work with other UN agencies through the Joint Programme on Social Protection has helped UNICEF to strengthen its relationships to the DSD, National Treasury and National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Through this approach, social protection does not only become an issue for children or women, but an integrated approach that has enhanced our platform and joint approach to the government to address social protection gaps.

In partnership with DSD and DIRCO, OCHCR and Save the Children as to discuss the 2021 reporting obligations for the CRC but also to develop and produce a training toolkit on children and their rights for government officials through the School of Governance. The partnership with the SA Human Rights Commission was focused on addressing real time monitoring of the situation of children and the national civil society coalition on creating a nurturing care framework for children.

UNICEF participated with the WFP and FAO in the bi-monthly National Food and Nutrition Security Steering Committee meetings coordinated by the Presidency to discuss progress regarding the implementation of the NFNS Plan (2018-2023). Key technical areas that the UN agencies supported government on were the finalization of the communication strategy, mobilizing resources for implementation and conducting a cost of malnutrition study to support the advocacy efforts of the plan.

Partnerships in Education included UNDP through “YoMobi” intervention that leveraged technology, young people’s resourcefulness and high unemployment to address food security, information gaps among young people and stimulate rural economy within the GenU while that with the University of Pretoria scaled up various skill-building and capacities to respond to COVID-19 with a focus on youth. A partnership with Harambee reached 6 million young people with reliable information on COVID-19, as well as tips on effective work-seeking and staying engaged through a national pandemic campaign.

In Sports4Development, following the Violence Prevention Forum (VPF) meeting of May 2020, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in partnership with UNICEF, the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), Agape Youth Movement (AYM) and the South African Police Service (SAPS) formed an Action Group on violence prevention and child protection. The Action Group was formed to provide a coordinated approach to respond to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the safety of learners from violence and GBV and uphold the work done in the field of youth engagement.

UNICEF South Africa’s communication and partnerships team leverages the support of other organizations, influencers and businesses within everything it does. This year, a partnership with TikTok helped reach more than 30 million people with vital education and anti-bullying messaging. UNICEF South Africa also played a lead role within the UN Communications Group, supporting on COVID-19 messaging, including internal communication on the UN’s return to office approach.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF needs to further build on the useful lessons that were learned or re-confirmed: the importance of (1) being flexible in adapting to emergency contexts, (2) securing the highest political commitment; (3) aligning behind the government priorities and (4) considering government’s capacity and timelines for policy making, emergency preparedness and response.

During the emergency response for child nutrition services, a gap has emerged on the sub-optimal

coordination mechanisms within state and non-state actors and the absence of clear guidance on child nutrition. As such, UNICEF South Africa will advocate for better preparedness and response on child nutrition during emergencies when engaging with state and non-state actors in 2021. Additionally, it was also identified that there exists a gap regarding the identification of active COVID-19 child cases who are at risk of malnutrition. UNICEF has since advocated for the phased-in implementation of Family MUAC to empower caregivers and mothers to screen their own children at home to ensure that malnourished children receive care and treatment timeously.

The education programme learned that, a close relationship with Government yields dividends: during the emergency, most regular programme successes were as a result of negotiation with government which, because of strong alignment and trust in UNICEF, resonated with the sector response priorities. Additionally, Covid-19 was the first national emergency in South Africa that affected all provinces and schools at the same time and there is much learning regarding emergency response particularly on the necessity and urgency of mainstreaming emergency in sector plans, with sound national coordinating mechanisms which will be emphasized in the coming year.

Although partners were quick to adjust to working through virtual platforms and worked more efficiently together, all community programmes were halted and care and referral systems for vulnerable children were compromised. However, the crisis taught the Child Protection sector to be working better together as to respond to children's needs. The situation also led to the need to know how children are affected by the situation and as such the commitment towards using the Real Time Monitoring Tool to be used as the instrument for a real time assessment on children's well-being came through and survey began. The first field findings from this survey which came out at the end of December 2020 and presented in the beginning of 2021 have provided statistics on child abuse, hunger and suicide intentions; this has regenerated the interest to accelerate the implementation of the cash, care and protection model with integrated social welfare workforce and digitized case and information management services which will be further prioritized in 2021.

The ability to re-orient to an emergency mode of operation versus operating in a development context requires considerable skills and reflection. Examples include using computer-assisted telephonic interviews instead of live focus group discussions and re-orienting the content and approach of the annual budget brief series to address how each of the main social sectors responded to the pandemic. A pertinent lesson from 2020 was the need to build contingency planning into delivery modalities which will be a focus area as we progress to the following year. It can no longer be assumed that in-person presence is required to deliver on workplan commitments. What worked well was the country office's consistency in highlighting the negative impact of accumulating spending arrears on children's programmes, which led to the adoption of this recommendation by Parliament for a second time in three years. The sharing of information and coalition building amongst all actors in society worked well as recognizing that the situation of children was deteriorating and realizing concerted action is needed across the board and the lifecycle of children, to be managed and facilitated by an institutional child rights governance structure. UNICEF is well positioned in society in the years ahead to keep a convening role and bring all these various actors together.

The role of online and digital communication came to the fore in a year when South Africa locked down for periods of time. However, access to individuals and locations to produce engaging multimedia content was extremely challenging as the hard lockdown restricted travel. This highlighted a gap in communications relationships with organizations, families and individuals on the ground, through whom information could have been gathered even from a virtual position. Being innovative in using quotes and information sourced from a distance is an important lesson learned and to be enacted on from an emergency preparedness perspective. The communication section will seek to improve its human interest angled content in the coming months.

With a young and digitally engaged volunteer population, UNICEF was able to work with its

University Clubs to quickly shift their engagement online. Having a cadre of young volunteers with the resources to be able to access digital platforms was in this instance an advantage as they spread vital COVID-19 prevention messaging quickly. Improved research and access to data during the early outbreak would have been beneficial to help tailor and inform the response. Research and data collection now form a pillar of UNICEF's RCCE work moving forward and this will become even more critical as the COVID-19 vaccine is rolled out. The importance of nurturing relationships over time was also highlighted, as corporates stepped up to support children through UNICEF at a time of national crisis.

In 2021, UNICEF South Africa will continue to chart a path of working at national-, provincial- and local-level to address these challenges and advance the child rights and well-being in South Africa. Particularly, the year 2021 will mark the first full year of the new country programme which will continue until 2025, and will focus on (1) child health and well-being; (2) early childhood, primary and secondary age education; (3) adolescent development and participation; (4) social and child protection; and (5) social policy and child rights. Moreover, UNICEF South Africa will continue to adapt to the impacts of COVID-19 on the well-being of children and women within the country.