2020 was an extremely challenging year for children in Sri Lanka. The year started with a newly elected president and a political transition to a strong, nationalistic government, running on a platform aimed at the Sinhalese majority. Further, Sri Lanka’s announcement in February of its withdrawal from co-sponsorship of UNHRC Resolution 30/1 and 40/1[1], will likely have an impact on social cohesion and justice for victims and missing persons.

In March, Sri Lanka initiated one of the most stringent lockdowns in the world[2] to contain the spread of the virus. Falling manufacturing export demands and a contracting tourism industry (sectors highly represented by women) led to widespread loss in families’ incomes, and the value of remittances falling. The pandemic led to a contraction of 6.7 per cent of GDP in 2020 and increased an already-high risk of debt distress.[3] Sri Lanka also slipped back to a lower-middle income country status in 2020.

Prior to the crisis, Sri Lanka and its children already faced challenges. Despite impressive progress in many areas of child wellbeing, low economic growth (largely due to the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks), low government revenues and high debt compounded an already difficult situation. Even though Sri Lanka has seen an impressive reduction of poverty (only 4.1 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line)[4], around three-quarters of Sri Lankans live on USS10 PPP per day or less. The economic impact is bound to lead to an increase in poverty and vulnerability, including amongst children.

From April, UNICEF conducted telephone surveys to assess the impact on families and children. Initial responses indicated 39 per cent of respondents had lost all income and a further 32 per cent lost some income. Subsequent rounds indicated around 70 per cent of respondent households were still reporting a loss in income. This forced most families to adopt potentially damaging coping strategies such as using savings, taking extra loans, pawning and selling assets. Food security was also threatened, with families reducing their food consumption, particularly of nutritious food. Surveys found that between a quarter to a third of families reduced food consumption and towards the end of the year, and households with a disabled person reducing consumption by 49 per cent.

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) quickly recognised the need to protect families. In April, it delivered almost 5.4 million cash transfers to households, repeated and expanded in May, to around 5.7 million transfers. The response was impressive in scale and scope, reaching an estimated 66 per cent of households with new recipients registered and payments made at a remarkable speed. Challenges emerged however with children and the elderly likely missing out on the cash response, a short duration of support and small amount provided.

As a result of the strict, extended lockdown, Sri Lanka was able to limit COVID-19 transmission and reopen businesses and schools in late Q2. However, reduced incomes and food insecurity had already aggravated already critical levels of malnutrition. A study conducted by the Medical Research Institute in urban Colombo shows a drastic increase (34 per cent) in child wasting, which will be compounded by the interruption of routine nutrition services. More than 50 per cent of eligible children are currently not receiving essential nutrition commodities.

The GoSL managed to quickly reorganize and prioritize essential maternal and child health services, ensuring continued access to life-saving interventions, such as child immunization (being the first country in the region to recover the high rates of coverage) and maternal care. Sri Lankan’s experience
in ensuring continuation of routine services was recognized in the region and globally, being praised for its robust response to the pandemic. 2020 saw about 43,000 cases, with only 215 deaths in the country. The crisis also provided an opportunity to improve WASH facilities in primary healthcare centers, early childhood centers, schools and in high-density, low-capacity urban settlements.

Nationwide school closure for most of the year disrupted learning for 4.2 million students[5]. Accessibility to and quality of alternative learning programmes varied significantly, widening learning gaps. In September, the telephone survey indicated that only 59 per cent of households have online learning equipment/resources.

School closures and restrictions on movements also had a major impact on child protection, mental health and children’s well-being. The restrictions disrupted children's routines and social support, while also placing new stressors on parents and caregivers who had to find new childcare options or forego work, making children more vulnerable to violence and psychosocial distress. Reports of domestic violence and harsh discipline increased, and anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in suicidal thoughts amongst adolescents and young people. The GoSL declared child protection/care services as essential services during the lockdown and the child helpline was also strengthened to support the higher volume of calls. There are also new demands from families to place children in care as they can no longer make ends meet.

The pandemic has also raised threats to social cohesion. The telephone surveys showed that males were significantly more likely to say they experienced discrimination in access to services, witnessed hate speech, and that the pandemic has led to communal disharmony or vilification of certain groups in relation to the spread of COVID 19. Further, of these respondents, most were Muslims.

As the year ended, and transmission rates grew quickly, schools closed again, and many families reported loss in income. Amidst these challenging times, the GoSL, with support from agencies such as UNICEF, is striving to effectively respond to the crisis, while strengthening available systems to ensure that essential services continue to reach all children, particularly those most vulnerable.


Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2020, the third year of the country programme, UNICEF Sri Lanka provided technical and financial support to the Government of Sri Lanka to achieve the following results across the child’s lifecycle.

Early childhood (0–5 years)

Improving the skills of parents/caregivers to better care for, protect and provide good nutrition for their young children remained a key priority for UNICEF Sri Lanka, even more so in the context of the
COVID-19 crisis. UNICEF used its BetterParenting.lk website for public-focused messaging on parenting, focusing on some of the stressors and challenges facing parents in the new-normal context.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated persistent issues of child undernutrition in the country and the urgent need for increased investments in this area. UNICEF continued its advocacy with the Sri Lankan Government, and in partnership with the World Bank, presented recommendations to the President, Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The recommendations speak to strengthening multi-sectoral coordination, increasing coverage and quality of nutrition interventions, investing more public funds for nutrition, and implementing the Multi-Sectoral Action Plan for Nutrition (2018-2025). In response, and to demonstrate their commitment, the Government allocated an additional Sri Lankan Rupees 1,500 million in 2021 to produce Thriposha - a supplementary food for children under five years and pregnant mothers. To further understand the drivers behind the concerning nutrition statistics, UNICEF is partnering with Penn State University to conduct formative research, which is yielding valuable information on what influences wasting in children. The results, in 2021, will inform a national infant and young child feeding strategy with a comprehensive behavioral change communication component.

In early learning, UNICEF commissioned a review of the draft national curriculum framework for preschools at the request of the Children’s Secretariat. The review, conducted by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, now serves as a core document informing the comprehensive curriculum review process of the National Institute of Education (NIE). UNICEF also provided extensive technical support in the drafting of a National Preschool Education Policy by the Ministry of Education in 2020, which has now been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

A milestone result for child protection was initiating the roll-out of the National Policy for Alternative Care of Children (adopted in late 2019). This has contributed to an 11 per cent reduction of children residing in childcare institutions, from 11,836 children in November 2019 to 10,632 in August 2020. New data from the assessment of the status of institutionalized children will support evidence-based advocacy and programming in this area in 2021 and beyond.

**Middle childhood (6–9 years)**

The prevailing COVID-19 pandemic meant prolonged school closure, with Grade 1-4 students receiving the lowest level of support for home-based learning, despite UNICEF’s advocacy efforts that they be prioritised. Extended periods of school closure also disrupted access to school-based services, such as school meals. As cluster co-leads for education and child protection, UNICEF took a cross-sectoral approach to holistically addressing children’s needs through the coordination of key stakeholders, demonstration of innovations, documentation of lessons learned, and generation of evidence.

To minimize learning losses, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the NIE, UNICEF provided study packs for 665,000 Grade 1 and 2 students (50 per cent girls) nation-wide to support their continued learning, particularly for those that lacked access to online learning. UNICEF also supported roll-out of an evidence-based learning recovery model for primary grades in two provinces through an adjusted curriculum, individualized teaching approaches and formative assessment. Based on its success, the Government is now introducing this model through the ongoing education reforms. Ongoing advocacy also helped secure a 2021 budget allocation for learning continuity and recovery.

In coordination with the Ministries of Education and Health, UNICEF played a key role in establishing and operationalizing systems and standards for safe school operations benefiting 4.2 million children nation-wide. This included the development of Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) guidelines and related orientations for teachers and school administrators; provision of handwashing stations and IPC supplies; conduct of a Back-to-School media campaign; and risk communication. In the longer term,
UNICEF is contributing towards efforts to sustain positive hygiene behaviours in schools, as well as better school-based health and nutrition services, through the drafting of a School Health and Nutrition Policy.

As part of UNICEF’s continued push to end violence against children, together with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and MoE, UNICEF is building an evidence-base, including what has worked in other countries and could be adapted to Sri Lanka, to inform strategies to address such violence. In 2020, a landmark study on bullying will help inform evidence-based policy action in this area in 2021. The study showed that, overall, boys were more commonly both victims and perpetrators, particularly of physical violence. Another initiative has been the adaptation of the Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social (PATHS) to adulthood programme (successfully implemented in Hong Kong) that was piloted in the Northern Province. The results and lessons learned will, when available, feed into policy reform and advocacy to scale up successful elements in home, school and institutional care settings, and a campaign to re-imagine a Sri Lanka without violence against children.

The Baseline Survey of the Community Managed Rural Water Supply Schemes, including climate resilience and governance aspects, was completed. The findings are informing the rural water supply sector on the development of climate-resilient water supply systems and models that promote water safety and security in different climatic zones. Key indicators are now included in the information management and monitoring system of the Department of National Community Water Supply. Steps were taken to conduct a National Water Quality Survey at household level to monitor progress towards SDG 6.2 on safely managed drinking water and inform future policies and programmes. UNICEF is also helping revise the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) primarily in the drinking water and urban, city planning and human settlement sectors.

Adolescents (10–19 years)

UNICEF’s engagement with and empowerment of adolescents became increasingly important given the impact of COVID-19 on this age group due to prolonged school closure, extreme isolation from friends and community and lack of consultation on decisions that affected their lives. In collaboration with the Department of Probation and Childcare Services, UNICEF is conducting an analysis of prevailing adolescent vulnerabilities to inform the development and roll out of a child and adolescent participation framework. The framework, once finalized in 2021, will guide more strategic engagement in the area of adolescent participation with a focus on skills development, strengthening adolescent networks/platforms and creating a more enabling environment for such engagement.

Another key concern affecting adolescent girls is Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), particularly in school settings. UNICEF supported the National Water Supply and Drainage Board in global high-level advocacy and the piloting and potential scale-up of different cost-effective and environmentally friendly MHM models. At the country level, UNICEF supported development of a MHM Country Snapshot to increase awareness on and advocate for MHM with government agencies, key stakeholders and the private sector.

A milestone achievement for adolescents was the drafting of amendments to the Children and Young Persons Ordinance. These amendments, once passed, will increase the age definition of a child in conflict with the law from 16 to 18 so that they are treated as minors under the law and no longer incarcerated with adults. Another amendment increased the minimum age of child labour from 14 to 16.

In the education sector, UNICEF has been positioned as a key technical partner of the Government of Sri Lanka in the ongoing curriculum reform process, which UNICEF is using as an entry point to help bring a stronger focus on skills, social cohesion, disaster risk reduction and climate change across the continuum of education. The NIE, with support from UNICEF, has already made progress in
incorporating transversal skills, including skills for social cohesion, into the Grade 6 Sinhala and Tamil language subjects. Further, two key studies have been competed: one on the determinants and drivers of bullying and other forms of inter-personal violence in schools; and another on the incidence, prevalence and conditions of ragging and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sri Lankan state universities. The studies highlighted critical concerns - for instance as high as 55 per cent of students reported being ragged in university - and the findings are now informing strategies to combat such violence in schools and universities.

Social policy and child rights monitoring

The COVID-19 pandemic made inclusive social protection, particularly Universal Child Benefits (UCB), a critical advocacy agenda, for which UNICEF generated evidence, built capacity and advocated at high levels. UNICEF also rapidly launched a nationally representative telephone survey to gauge the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on households and shared results with counterparts to inform their response, recommendations and advocacy. Further, the increase of domestic violence cases recorded by the national hotline of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs informed advocacy by UN agencies on the impact measures to control the spread of COVID-19 were having on women and children.

UNICEF’s strategic engagement with the Presidential Secretariat, Department of National Planning and the Presidential Task Force on Poverty Eradication contributed to a large cash transfer response benefiting approximately half of all households. UNICEF served as a convenor of IFIs, and bilaterals and UN agencies to coordinate efforts on social protection, which strengthened its partnerships and credibility in this area of work. UNICEF produced and disseminated to the Government of Sri Lanka in-depth analyses on features of the government response. The cash transfers were subsequently expanded to an estimated two-thirds of households and extended for another month. UNICEF also trained around 80 key stakeholders from government, as well as think tanks, trade unions and CSOs, on inclusive, shock-responsive social protection, and on pension policy. These efforts led to a more significant understanding of child-sensitive social protection by government officials, demand for improved systems by local academics and CSOs, and a stronger public discourse around inclusive social protection.

The first set of UNICEF Sri Lanka Budget Briefs, with support of the European Union, were finalized and published. UNICEF also produced high-quality analyses estimating the potential economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and different social protection responses. Further, given the fiscal challenges that Sri Lanka currently faces in implementing an effective socio-economic response, upon the request of the Prime Minister, UNICEF and UNDP produced a briefing note to explore pathways to reduce the debt burden. A Brief on the Budget Speech 2021, highlighting budget proposals that will impact the social sectors, was produced and disseminated to citizens on investments being made on children. The national government agreed to partner with UNICEF to produce its first Citizen’s Budget in 2021 to increase transparency of public funds.

UNICEF and the Batticaloa Municipality continue to work together to help Batticaloa become the country’s first Child Friendly City. Significant achievements in adolescent participation and child-friendly infrastructure improvements were made, such as virtual dialogues between the mayor and adolescents and a first-ever presentation of the budget to children. This initiative allows for collaboration between programme sections to achieve cross-sectoral results in a more contained and tangible context. Based on its success, efforts are underway to scale up this Child Friendly City initiative in other parts of the country.

Programme and Operational Effectiveness

Throughout 2020, UNICEF Sri Lanka remained responsive to a constantly evolving global and local
context. To ensure available capacity to support a timely, coordinated COVID-19 response, the programme team deferring non-essential programme work. In addition, the initiation of UNICEF’s Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) in April 2020, enabled UNICEF Sri Lanka to organise its programmatic interventions to align with the global approach and to mobilize resources.

Further, as the Sri Lanka Country Office (SLCO) is halfway through its five-year country programme, staff reviewed and updated key programme documents to reflect the evolving country context and realities, as well as better align the country programme to new national priorities and resources available for the remainder of the country programme. While half of all planned studies/evaluations were completed, providing the evidence base to inform UNICEF’s work going forward, the remainder are pending due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be carried into 2021.

UNICEF also provided key technical support to the Government of Sri Lanka’s communication strategies and priorities. UNICEF delivered targeted and mass COVID-19 communications to educate mass audiences and key at-risk groups on prevention, caregiving, stigma and the safe resumption of a ‘new normal’, in close collaboration with the Government and other partners. As the pandemic unfolded, UNICEF delivered multiple risk communication mass media campaigns, media engagement and digital and social media activities to raise awareness on COVID-19 prevention methods which reached a viewership of 12 million on mass media and gained over 44 million views and over 7.9 million engagements on social media.

UNICEF Sri Lanka continued to maintain a high preparedness level. The Office actively mobilized funds to strengthen sub-national level emergency preparedness capacities of authorities and children, focusing on Child-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction and engaged other UN agencies in mobilizing funds to mainstream climate change adaptation into development programming and build resilience among children. In late 2020, UNICEF prepared for cyclone season in the North Indian Ocean and reached out to government counterparts for forecasting and cyclone preparedness.

The Office designed a Communication for Development (C4D) strategy for 2021-2022 based on extensive consultations across programme sections and with regional experts. The strategy identifies UNICEF’s demand creation and behavior change priorities aligned to country programme priorities, mainly under the thematic areas of social cohesion, child nutrition, ending violence against children and hand hygiene.

Operations support to implement the country programme and achieve results for children was effectively provided. Sound financial and administrative management helped manage risks coherently, drive efficiencies and optimize the use of UNICEF’s resources, resulting in an over 95 per cent funds utilisation rate in 2020. SLCO also simplified business processes to promote greater efficiencies such as in low value procurement. Further, under the Business Operations Strategy (2018-2022), a strategic decision was taken for SLCO to relocate to the UN compound, which will result in significant cost savings. In terms of staff safety and security, SLCO ensured that all UNICEF offices fully complied with Security Risk Management measures with 99 per cent of staff reporting their satisfaction in this area. Performance management was also further strengthened, and SLCO had high compliance rates with global deadlines.

Considering the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, the Enterprise Risk Management tool was updated to include relevant mitigation strategies. Further, the Business Continuity Plan was activated, safety measures were introduced in the office premises and a ‘Back to Office’ plan was developed. SLCO facilitated a seamless transition to working from home during the crisis, ensuring a positive virtual work experience at home with necessary IT and tech support. The Supplies Unit was heavily engaged in responding to the COVID-19 emergency, supporting the Government with the procurement of medical supplies worth USD 23.9 million with funding from World Bank and ADB; by far the largest value of procurement done in recent history.
UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

As a small country office, partnerships are a core strategy for UNICEF to deliver ambitious results for children in Sri Lanka. In terms of government partnerships, UNICEF worked closely with sectoral partners to deliver results and entered into strategic new partnerships that positioned UNICEF to take forward key priorities. Notably, this included working with the Climate Change Secretariat and Ministry of Environment on the national climate change agenda; with the Urban Settlement Development Authority to provide WASH and waste management services in vulnerable high-density settlements; and with the Department of Probation and Childcare Services on developing an adolescent participation framework. CSOs also remained key partners, supporting the conduct of a rapid assessment of COVID-19 child protection issues and facilitating the launch of U-Report as a new way of engaging young people in Sri Lanka. To expand its partnership with the private sector, beyond mere financial support, SLCO conducted a Business for Results training for staff as a key step in developing a long-term strategic vision on engagement with the private sector.

Partnerships with International Financial Institutions (IFI) were strengthened in 2020. Partnering with both the World Bank and Asian Development Bank enabled UNICEF to deliver timely, high quality support to the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including using UNICEF Sri Lanka’s supply capacity to support USD 23.9 million worth of procurement on behalf of the Ministry of Health. In addition, UNICEF convened IFIs and bilaterals and UN agencies to coordinate efforts and strengthen partnerships in social protection. Engagement with academia, think tanks and CSOs was also valuable in building a dialogue around improved social protection systems. UNICEF also partnered with the World Bank to implement Menstrual Hygiene Management models in schools and public places and to conduct a Public Expenditure Review for nutrition, which was presented to the President in February 2020.

In 2020, joint planning and programming with other UN agencies has been a critically important strategy for UNICEF to deliver results in the context of COVID-19. This included resource mobilization, such as innovative financing offered by the SDG Fund (with UNDP/WFP), and securing resources to deliver joint results (with UNFPA/UNWomen on gender-based violence; and UNDP on hate speech). UNICEF also led discussions related to the UN Socio-economic Advisory Note identifying priorities for UN-government collaboration to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, UNICEF activated and co-led the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Cluster with WHO, jointly supporting the Ministry of Health to deliver high quality communications materials. UNICEF and UNDP partnered to conduct regular telephone surveys to assess the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on households across the island. The two agencies also developed a briefing note on debt management and fiscal constraints the COVID-19 economic downturn had triggered. Partnering with UNDP on this work amplified UNICEF’s voice and enabled the UN to provide coherent, credible messaging to government. UNICEF and WFP also jointly advocated for the resumption of Thriposha (nutrition supplement) production, with UNICEF convening key partners and WFP bringing resources to support additional procurement.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF can deliver results differently when the enabling environment is conducive. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed the Sri Lanka Country Office (SLCO) to rethink approaches and innovate in ways that previously were almost inconceivable. The extended, strict lockdown imposed in Sri Lanka transformed our operational context and demanded UNICEF and our implementing partners...
to rethink how to deliver timely results. UNICEF staff were required to work from home for 3-6
months, many of whom were also required to simultaneously balance family responsibilities. Although
working in a ‘virtual’ environment can be challenging, through supportive leadership, the flexibility
and commitment of staff and engagement by Staff Association, morale remained high and staff
navigated obstacles. With government, the extent to which our partners were able to move their work
online varied, with some embracing digital options and others persisting in requiring face-to-face
meetings. Regardless, 2020 provided opportunities to advance work that UNICEF has advocated for
years. For example, launching U-Report to engage Sri Lankan young people, reaching over 6,800
young people, including on issues such as COVID-19 awareness and preparedness to return to school.
In addition, through new partnerships, UNICEF was able to advance programming in urban areas for
some of the least visible communities in the country and leveraged private sector partnerships to
support the government response. These opportunities were partly as a result of resources being
available, but also the willingness and ability of UNICEF and government to take it forward.

**UNICEF often has a unique convening role and we should use it.** The impact of COVID-19 was felt
across South Asia by early March 2020. In Sri Lanka, as the economy slowed and schools closed, the
lives and livelihoods of communities across the island were affected, especially women and children.
With the rising caseload of COVID-19 globally, there was a related rise in demand for Personal
Protective Equipment (PPEs) to keep frontline workers safe and healthy; however in March/April the
demand for PPEs, much of which was being managed by Supply Division (+/- 65% of global PPE
procurement), far outweighed existing global supply chains.

Recognizing these challenges, in April 2020, UNICEF South Asia Region held regional discussions to
identify the industries and countries most effected and sought to propose solutions to the exponential
growth in demand for PPEs. UNICEF Sri Lanka was quick to follow up and identify opportunities to
connect garment industry partners with Supply Division. The garment industry in South Asia
generally, and Sri Lanka specifically, is one of the leading industries in the region with some of the
largest global players, many of which had been devastated by the termination of orders from European
and other markets. Majority of these garment manufacturers employ mainly female workers. In April/
May 2020, following confirmed interest by many garment companies, UNICEF Sri Lanka, its
Regional Office and Supply Division and the UN Resident Coordinator met with the Presidential Task
Force for Economic Revival and Poverty Eradication and other key stakeholders, including the Export
Development Board and relevant private sector entities, to take forward the concept of meeting the
global demand for PPE through local producers and resources. Mr Basil Rajapaksa, Chairman of the
Task Force, chaired the discussion, through which the entire value chain had been agreed upon, from
supply requirements; concerns regarding raw materials; switching production from various other types
of garments to COVID-19 PPE; identification and establishment of local and global standards for PPE;
and reopening of factories during the pandemic whilst adhering to health and safety standards. The
government was appreciative of the UN’s practical, constructive approach to addressing the economic
challenges facing Sri Lanka.

With all elements effectively in place, several leading garment manufacturers, including MAS Kreeda,
took up the challenge to reopen their factories, to diversify their production and switch to
manufacturing PPEs. Since the initial discussions and the creation of the environment and opportunity
for the local manufacturers, several garment manufacturers have smoothly transitioned from
production of general clothing to critical COVID-19 PPE in-line with WHO-approved local standards
and ISO certified global standards for Supply Division. Several contracts were agreed with UNICEF’s
Supply Division, including MAS Kreeda, to supply for UNICEF/UN global tender, while other
contracts were agreed locally for the supply of PPE for Ministry of Health and World Bank
procurements.

This timely, innovative strategy by UNICEF made a huge impact on the local garment industry, in
terms of new opportunities, remaining functional and retaining staff, and global reach, as locally
manufactured PPE reached even the most underserved parts of the world through the UN Supply Division. This also shows how even during a pandemic, with the right support, manufacturers can innovate to capture new markets and UNICEF can harness new partners to deliver results.

**Humanitarian-development nexus is a reality that UNICEF should have at the forefront of its agenda.** UNICEF’s approach to the humanitarian-development nexus places an emphasis on key initiatives, including strengthening systems, risk-informed programmes, community participation, planning and preparing for emergencies, and fostering partnerships and mobilising resources. In a middle-income country like Sri Lanka, which has emerged from conflict but also witnessed terrible natural disasters, UNICEF’s programming has operated where humanitarian work and development approaches converge but perhaps the extent to which this happens was revealed by COVID-19. Over the past years, UNICEF Sri Lanka has increasingly moved away from service delivery towards upstream system strengthening, all the while continuing to promote risk-informed programming given the regular threat of monsoons and droughts. COVID-19 also allowed UNICEF to advance other humanitarian/development priorities such as extensive advocacy efforts with the government to strengthen its social protection floor, including provision of a child grant, and building long-term capacity on Child Protection Business Continuity in response to any form of crisis.