Since the turn of the century with the pursuit of the MDGs and the subsequent adoption of the SDGs, West and Central Africa region (WCAR) has achieved significant progress for children. Thus, the rate of under-5 mortality in WCAR fell from 168 per thousand live births in 2000, to 106 in 2015 and 95 in 2019. The proportion of children aged 0-11 months vaccinated with the third dose of DTP3 rose from 43% in 2000, to 61% in 2015 to 66% in 2019. The maternal mortality ratio dropped from 962 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000, to 699 in 2015 and to 674 in 2017.

In spite of this progress, before the COVID-19 pandemic, children in WCAR already bore a disproportionate share of the global burden of child rights deprivations. Whereas the region is home to only 11% of the world’s children, it accounts for over one-third of under-five deaths, one-third of unvaccinated children DTP3, one-third of out-of-school children (primary and lower secondary school-age) and one-fifth of stunted children. Of the ten countries characterized by the highest prevalence of child marriage, seven are found in WCAR, including the top four.

COVID-19 triggered a socioeconomic crisis of unprecedented proportions with severe implications for children first and foremost, threatening to reverse the hard-earned development gains of the past decades. The dramatic scale of the disruption to child-centered social services was illustrated by the quadrupling of the number of children out-of-school, with 128 million children temporarily out-of-school (pre-primary to upper secondary) joining the 41 million children (primary to lower secondary) already deprived from their right to education. By severely disrupting economies, livelihoods and child-centred social services, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis risked multiplying existing high levels of child poverty and vulnerability.

1) Economic trends

- **Economic growth experienced a sharp reversal** with drops in national output resulting from the effects of the pandemic and 15 countries in the region were forecast to experience negative growth. The GDP growth forecast for 2020 was -2.2% (-0.5% West Africa, -4.0% Central Africa), down from 3.5% in 2019, according to IMF.

- **Public expenditure on child-centered social services** came under tremendous pressure as governments mounted massive programmes to address the public health and economic effects of the pandemic, while at the same time facing diminished revenue.

- Real-time socioeconomic impact assessments and projections revealed eroded household incomes as a result of the economic slowdown and COVID-19 preventive measures. Combined with higher prices for services and commodities, this led households to opt for harmful coping strategies, related to children’s school attendance, health care, child labour, or early marriage.

- **Debt servicing in many countries was unsustainably high and expected to further increase**, with the effect of crowding out government expenditure on other sectors, notably the social sectors. National debt represented over 80% of GDP in several countries, which, combined with high interest payments, prevented countries from securing further external debt financing.

2) Humanitarian trends

- **Before the onset of COVID-19, over 25 million children were already in need of humanitarian assistance in the region**, to which UNICEF responded alongside humanitarian partners through 11 Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeals in 2020.

- **With the onset of COVID-19, the number of children in need of humanitarian assistance**
doubled to nearly 65 million in August 2020. In response, UNICEF launched its global COVID-19 HAC appeal calling for US$ 1.9 billion, over one-fifth of which was planned for WCAR.

- The situation of children in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, with over 7 million children in need) witnessed a significant and rapid deterioration due to armed conflict and insecurity, increasing the risk of spill-over to neighbouring coastal countries.

- In DRC (15 million children in need), the second largest Ebola outbreak on record, which took place in an active conflict zone, was declared over in June 2020. The same month, the country announced its eleventh Ebola outbreak, which was declared over in November 2020.

3) **Demographic trends**

- The expansion of service coverage and the adoption of behaviours and social norms favourable to children have been outpaced by population growth. Thus, the proportion of stunted children under-5 decreased from 40% in 2000 to 32.7% in 2019, whereas the absolute number of stunted children rose by over 6 million to 29 million during the same period.

- By the final year of the African Union Agenda 2063 “The Africa We Want”, the number of children under 18 years of age in WCAR is set to double compared to 2015, reaching over 500 million, such that WCAR will be home to 1 in 5 of the world’s children.

- The urbanization rate in WCAR continued to rise, creating risks and opportunities for children. Whereas approximately 41% Africa’s population lived in cities in 2017, it was expected that by 2050 this proportion would rise to nearly 60%.

- Gender discrimination, restricting women’s and girls’ social, economic and political participation in private and public spheres, infringed on the rights of women and girls and constituted a major barrier to development across the region. According to the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, women and girls in 11 out of 16 countries with data experienced ‘very high’ (2) or ‘high’ (9) levels of gender discrimination in 2019, representing modest gains on previous years which are expected to have been eroded during the pandemic.

4) **Environmental trends**

- WCAR is one of the most environmentally degraded regions and one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change, with temperature increases in the Sahel in particular projected to be 1.5 times higher than in the rest of the world.

- Climate change compounded existing vulnerabilities, particularly in the Sahel. This was due to high dependence on rainfed agriculture to support food security and livelihoods, combined with rapid population growth and chronic humanitarian crises related to recurrent drought, flooding, epidemics and conflict. Water scarcity, longer dry seasons and the effects of higher temperatures were projected to become potential sources of new conflict and forced migration.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

During 2020, the third year of the ROMP 2018-2021, WCARO supported the RMT to pursue its focus on the Key Results for Children (KRC) as the region’s strategic contribution to the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and therefore to the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063 ‘The Africa We Want’, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The KRCs are embedded in CPDs in support of UNSDCF and national development priorities.
The overall status of progress towards the KRCs according to available data, some of which predates the onset of COVID-19, is summarized as follows:

- **Six of the eight KRCs are on a positive trajectory (KRCs 3-8), though four of these require acceleration to meet 2021 targets with only KRCs 4 and 5 on-track.**
  - Immunization coverage (KRC 1) has stagnated in WCAR over the past decade, while the reach of vitamin A supplementation for the prevention of stunting (KRC 2) experienced a sharp drop in 2020.
  - Although new data is expected to reveal a deceleration of progress towards KRC outcome targets due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is encouraging to observe that the reach of services and practices, to which UNICEF directly contributed, met 2020 targets of output indicators and exceeded 2019 performance for KRCs 3, 4 and 8.

In spite of unprecedented obstacles, UNICEF stayed and delivered at the front lines, framing COVID-19 as a crisis for children first and foremost and supporting governments and communities to respond accordingly.

**Goal Area 1: Every Child Survives and Thrives (KRCs 1 and 2)**

**KRC 1** seeks, by 2021, for 80% (15.4 million) of children 0-11 months in WCAR to be protected against vaccine preventable diseases annually. The number of children under one year, who were vaccinated with DTP3, rose from 11.9 million in 2017 to 12.4 million in 2019. However, the regional rate of coverage remained unchanged at 66% and the number of unvaccinated children increased from 6.1 million to 6.2 million due to the effect of population growth. The extent to which service disruptions and depressed demand affected DTP3 coverage will be revealed with the next release of WUENIC data. Existing data indicated that nine countries experienced a decrease in immunization coverage of 10% to 25%, with two countries experiencing a 50 to 75% drop. KRC 1 progress towards 2021 targets was constrained.

**KRC 2** seeks, by 2021, for 93% (86 million) girls and boys under 5 years in WCAR to receive high impact nutrition services to prevent stunting. The number of children aged 6-59 months reached with two doses annual of vitamin A supplements – a key service for the prevention of stunting – experienced a sharp drop with the effects of COVID-19, falling to 43 million (48% target population) in 2020 from 66 million in 2019 (75%), which fell short of the annual target of 80 million. KRC 2 progress towards 2021 targets was constrained.

WCARO supported COs to contribute to the continuity of routine immunization and its resumption in cases of service interruption, notably through the adaptation of vaccination strategies and protocols to ensure the safety of health workers, mothers and children, with partners such as WHO. The RO supported four COs to engage in catch-up activities aimed at avoiding a missed cohort of unvaccinated children. WCARO worked closely with COs to avert potential stockouts of vaccines at district-level through redistribution of vaccine supplies through support to subnational monitoring and organization of charter flights for supplies. As a result, few countries reported stock-outs at lower distribution levels (four BCG, three Penta, three IPV) and the duration of stock-outs did not exceed one month with the exception of BCG.

Faced with depressed demand for immunization services following the outbreak of COVID-19, WCARO provided technical support on risk communication and community engagement in 10 countries, addressing rumors and misinformation around vaccination, including as part of preparation for the advent of COVID-19 immunization campaigns in 2021.

In 2020, the region celebrated the eradication of wild poliovirus with the certification of Nigeria as polio-free. However, the region witnessed outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus disease
(cVDPV2) in 15 countries. Through its engagement in a series of remote meetings with Ministers of Health of nine countries, the WCAR Regional Director forcefully advocated for the resumption of immunization interventions to halt outbreaks of cVDPV2 as well as broader routine immunization – a call that was heeded by most of these countries.

In countries transitioning from vaccine financing support from Gavi, WCARO provided COs with technical support towards improved national financial planning and advocacy for increased allocation of domestic resources for routine immunization. By strengthening the institutional, financial, and technical capacities of Gavi-transitioning countries, this support contributed towards enabling them to sustain their immunization programmes following the withdrawal of Gavi support.

WCARO enhanced advocacy to sustain momentum on major regional initiatives related to stunting prevention, notably Stronger with Breast Milk Only (SWBO) and the 1st Foods and wasting agendas. The SWBO initiative – innovative public advocacy and social and behavior change initiative in collaboration with A&T and WHO – rolled out in six countries in 2020 with the organization of high-level advocacy events, bringing the total of countries engaged in the initiative to 17.

To strengthen knowledge of bottlenecks and solutions related to complementary feeding in the region, WCARO commissioned assessments involving a regional landscape analysis on trends and predictors of young children’s diets and an analysis of the local production of complementary foods in six Sahel countries.

As part of advocacy and policy support, WCARO supported the ECOWAS to evaluate the 2019 Adolescent Nutrition Forum and to prepare a management response, and engaged in the preparation and conduct of the African Union’s Africa Day on Food and Nutrition Security as part of efforts to elevate nutrition on the regional policy agenda.

WCARO supported six countries in the Sahel to implement end-user monitoring of nutrition supplies, partially meeting its annual target. This enabled UNICEF offices to verify that nutrition supplies such as ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) reached the beneficiaries for whom they were intended. Two Sahel countries (one additional) procured over 15% of national requirements of RUTF in 2020 – a key strategy for sustainability of nutrition interventions in favor of prevention of stunting.

**Goal Area 2: Every Child Learns (KRCs 3 and 4)**

KRC 3 seeks, by 2021, for the proportion of out-of-school children (OOSC) of primary and lower secondary school age in WCAR to be reduced from 34% (41 million) to 20% (29 million). The most recent household surveys suggest a steady reduction in the regional OOSC rate, reaching 28% in 2020, falling short of the annual target of 22%. However, school closures in response to COVID-19 led to an additional 128 million temporary OOSC. In spite of the COVID-19 context, UNICEF-supported programmes contributed directly to the participation of 2.3 million out-of-school children in early learning, primary or secondary education services, three times the annual target and over half a million more children than in 2019. KRC 3 progress towards 2021 targets was constrained.

KRC 4 seeks, by 2021, for 100% (76 million) of pupils from pre-primary to lower secondary education in WCAR, to be reached with interventions aimed at improvement of learning outcomes and skills. According to PASEC, all of the 12 countries subject to analysis in 2019 exhibited a greater proportion of students meeting the minimum proficiency threshold in reading and mathematics in grades 2-3 and/or grade 6 (both in most countries), compared to 2014. However, over two-thirds of children still do not achieve the minimum proficiency threshold in 10 of 12 PASEC countries. As a contribution towards this result, in spite of the COVID-19 context, UNICEF-supported programmes provided 4 million children with individual education/early learning materials in 2020, more than double the annual target of 1.8 million and double number reached in 2019. KRC 4 progress towards 2021 targets was constrained.
WCARO successfully engaged and influenced the AU, Africa CDC and partners in the RCP/Africa Regional Coordination Group on SDG4-Education 2030, to assure the continuity of learning and the safe re-opening of schools in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic through innovative strategies in distance learning (digital learning, TV, radio), strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy and measures to address the data crisis in the education sector. As a result, 52% of the 128 million children affected by the closure of schools were reached through distance learning, of which 38 million in humanitarian settings.

WCARO provided continuous close-proximity guidance to all 24 COs on remote/distance learning solutions including through the development of a WCAR Digital Learning Strategy and toolkit tailored to the regional context. Thus, 19 COs engaged with governments on strengthening digital learning programmes, building on e-learning pilots and the GIGA Digital Infrastructure programme which supports 60 countries globally. Three countries were fully operationalizing digital learning content at primary level, 14 countries were developing the strategy and two countries already had such a strategy.

Through strengthened engagement of WCARO with COs and HQ, Education Cannot Wait and donors, the number of COs serving as grant agent of the Global Partnership for Education increased from two to seven during 2020, thereby strategically positioning UNICEF as a leader in the sector enabling it to influence the regional agenda for children with an equity focus.

WCARO provided guidance to all 24 COs on education and skills development focused on adolescents in and out of school, involving multisectoral programming approaches to address adolescents’ needs in a coherent and holistic manner. This approach is aimed at the prevention of school drop-out, especially for adolescent girls, and the provision of skills-based alternative learning pathways for adolescents out of school.

WCARO developed a regional concept note on the focused agenda of foundational literacy and numeracy and organized a kick-off workshop convening all 24 COs and leading to the production of a roadmap for roll-out of the initiative in 2021. The RO equally supported the development of national pre-primary strategies in six countries, of which two were finalized and adopted by governments and two expected to be finalized and adopted in early 2021.

WCARO brokered collaboration of seven COs with UNICEF’s Office of Research to review their Time to Teach reports to refine strategies for the improvement of teaching practices for learning outcomes. A synthesis of national 19 OOSC studies was conducted by the RO, providing a regional overview of barriers of non-enrolment and drop out to inform national policies.

**Goal Area 3: Every Child is Protected from Violence and Exploitation (KRCs 5, 6 and 7)**

KRC 5 seeks, by 2021, for the percentage of women aged 18 to 29 who have experienced sexual violence by age 18 to be reduced from 6.2% in 2017 to 4% by 2021. The most recent household surveys indicate that the prevalence of sexual violence rose to 6.6% in 2020, before the spread of COVID-19. At the same time, the number of children having experienced violence that were reached by UNICEF-supported social services rose to 660,532 in 2020, exceeding the 2021 target of 629,801. KRC 5 progress towards 2021 targets appeared to be on-track, though the effect of these results on the prevalence of sexual violence is yet to be ascertained.

KRC 6 seeks, by 2021, for the percentage of girls in WCAR aged 20 to 24, married before the age of 18, to be reduced from 41% to 37%. The most recent household surveys indicate that the prevalence of child marriage continued to steadily decrease, standing at 39% in 2020, before the spread of
COVID-19. In the COVID-19 context, 608,379 adolescent girls were reached with prevention and care services addressing child marriage, falling short of the annual target of 709,096 and regressing compared to 2019. KRC 6 progress towards 2021 targets was constrained.

KRC 7 seeks, by 2021, for the percentage of children under one year of age, whose birth is registered at the civil registry, to be raised from 44% in 2017 to 68%. The most recent household surveys suggest a steady, gradual increase in coverage of birth registration services, reaching 48% in 2020 before COVID-19, though well below the annual target of 63%. KRC 7 progress towards 2021 targets was constrained.

The socio-economic effects of COVID-19 combined with movement restrictions and school closures instituted across the region heightened the risks of exposure of children to sexual violence, particularly girls, while at the same time hampering the detection of cases of violence due to the isolation of children at home. In response, UNICEF spearheaded efforts across the region to establish toll-free ‘Child Help Lines’ for the reporting of cases of violence against children by victims and witnesses, for referral to the relevant social services.

WCARO sustained its engagement with ECOWAS on the implementation of the ECOWAS Strategic Framework on Strengthening Child Protection Systems, and in the context of COVID-19 supported calls for urgent action to address sexual gender-based violence and to protect the rights of women and girls. WCARO advocacy and technical support led in part to the launch of a platform of Member States which aims at mainstreaming GBV in national development plans and a regional working group on sexual and gender-based violence was established under the auspices of ECOWAS.

In situations of conflict, principally the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and DRC, WCARO supported COs to provide community reintegration support to more than 14,000 children released from armed forces or groups and to enable 17,000 unaccompanied and separated children to access family-based care or appropriate alternative services.

WCARO pursued the strategy of delaying child marriage through investing in education of girls and their retention in school, thereby expanding the scope and sustainability of child marriage interventions in the region. RO advocacy, in part, led to the adoption by 15 ECOWAS Member States of a Roadmap and Plan of Action on Child Marriage, including an accountability mechanism.

A multi-country evaluation of community engagement initiatives to reduce child marriage and FGM was conducted in five countries and is expected to yield important context-sensitive findings and recommendations regarding how communities can most effectively be engaged to reduce child marriage and FGM.

Birth registration services appear to have been widely disrupted across WCAR countries with the effects of COVID-19 – according to UNICEF data, 10 of 15 surveyed countries experienced drops in service coverage of which three witnessed decreases exceeding 25%.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, WCARO leveraged strategic partnerships to give political support to the achievement of universal birth registration, linked to the wider UN Legal Identity Agenda with UNDP, UNDESA and the World Bank. As a result in part of strong advocacy from WCARO, the “No Name Campaign”, under the leadership of the African Union, mobilized support for accelerated efforts towards universal birth registration and the importance of continued service delivery in the midst of the pandemic.

Through RO strategic orientation and support, 16 countries were working towards the interoperability of health and civil registration services, through connecting civil registration with hospital maternity wards and community-based services. WCARO supported seven countries to explore linkages of the
birth registration process with the immunization calendar in order to boost coverage. Digitization and other digital solutions, including real-time data collection, were tested across five countries, and the development of investment cases for the development of a public good on digital CRVS was initiated in two countries.

Goal Area 4: Every Child Lives in a Safe and Clean Environment (KRC 8)

KRC 8 seeks, by 2021, for the proportion of the WCAR population practicing open defecation, to be reduced from 25.4% (122 million) to 15.5% (88 million). As a contribution towards this result, UNICEF supported community approaches to total sanitation in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in an additional 7.6 million people living in open defecation-free certified communities, exceeding the annual target of 3.6 million and surpassing the 2019 result by nearly 1.5 million people. Data released in 2019 showed that the number of people practicing open defecation in the region dropped by 6 million to 116 million in 2017, though this fell short of the regional target even for 2018 (113 million). KRC 8 progress towards 2021 targets appeared constrained.

The RO led a rapid mapping of the needs for WASH response in all 24 countries and developed and disseminated guidance on COVID-19 response through WASH services, centered on the installation of WASH facilities and infection prevention control in health facilities and schools for their safe re-opening. As a result, UNICEF contributed to the provision of WASH services and implementation of safety protocols in 103,000 schools and the delivery of IPC training to 225,000 healthcare facility staff and community health workers in the region, while UNICEF-supported IPC awareness raising campaigns reached over 261 million people during the reporting year.

With WHO, the RO launched the Hand Hygiene for All initiative on Global Handwashing Day, seeking to capitalize on the renewed attention to the transformative potential of handwashing with soap brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, involving the African Minister's Council on Water (AMCOW), the African Development Bank, Africa CDC and Lixil. The RO launched the #NoPoopChallenge on World Toilet Day as a campaign that aimed to engage youth as agents of change to take action towards ending open defecation.

Through RO capacity strengthening support and technical guidance, two additional countries completed open defecation free roadmaps in 2020 (11 total). WCARO partnered with AMCOW to build capacity of governments to monitor the 2nd round of Ngor commitments, which define clear, achievable commitments intended to deliver dignity and equity in sanitation and hygiene in Africa by 2030.

In partnership with UNFPA, WHO, UNESCO and UN Women, WCARO organized a virtual event on menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) – building on efforts towards improved access to quality sanitation and linked to the retention of girls in school – on the International Day of the Girl. The event highlighted the MHH-related barriers faced by adolescent girls and women in the region, facilitated cross-fertilization of programming experiences and marked the kick-off of a digital communication campaign to galvanize support for the removal of MHH-related barriers.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Reaffirming the KRC Agenda

The KRC agenda has galvanized the full weight of the UNICEF presence in WCAR, combined with partners, and focused the WCARO contribution through a strategic common agenda, contributing to tangible progress towards the progressive realization of child rights at-scale with equity while
enhancing accountability for results.

Accordingly, through the mid-term review of the KRCs and the ROMP that took place in 2020, WCARO, in line with the strategic direction of the RMT, reaffirmed its commitment to the KRCs as the region’s strategic contribution to the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, as part of the Decade of Action towards the SDGs. It is essential to sustain and heighten the multi-sectoral and multi-country efforts, investments and approaches pursued by the region since 2018, acting on evidence and knowledge to refine approaches and strategies in favor of acceleration.

**Shoring-up State and Household Resources in Favor of Children**

Public finance took on heightened significance as an acceleration strategy as governments faced the competing imperatives of addressing the economic fallout of the pandemic, preparing to finance COVID-19 vaccines and assuring the continuity of routine social services with diminished revenue. WCARO is well positioned to advocate forcefully for protecting domestic public financing for social services and to support countries to secure and unlock additional external financing, while improving efficiency, transparency and focus of public spending, building on its efforts in 2020 supporting COs to update budget briefs and engage with IFIs.

Social protection came to occupy a prominent place in the context of COVID-19 response, as a means of shoring-up household finances in a timely manner, thereby assisting households to avoid coping strategies that are harmful for children, such as withdrawal from school, child labor, child marriage and inadequate nutritional practices. Drawing from its experience in coordinating the COVID-19 social protection response and expansion measures in WCAR countries in 2020, WCARO is well positioned to advocate for investments in social protection systems and to provide policy advice on the design and targeting of cash transfers so that they reach the most vulnerable households.

**Bridging the Digital Divide and Connectivity Gap to Leapfrog to Scale**

During the COVID-19 crisis, technology and digital solutions were embraced by WCAR countries with the promise of sustaining essential services in the face of restrictions on movements and gatherings. Though these offer an opportunity to leapfrog towards reimagined social services of the future with significantly wider reach, governments ought to attend to bridging the digital divide and connectivity gap so that the most deprived children are not left even further behind through such transformation. WCARO, through its strategic guidance to COs, can build on experience so far to highlight this issue in line with UNICEF’s equity focus.

**Necessity of Emergency Standby Capacity**

The experience of 2020 shows that standby emergency capacity is crucial to ensuring that UNICEF acts as a first responder in the face of growing conflicts, increasingly complex and concurrent epidemic outbreaks and other disasters. This is particularly the case in WCAR which hosts the greatest number of protracted emergency situations of all UNICEF regions (8 countries with interagency HRP). Preparedness merits increased attention in the next ROMP, alongside measures in favor of risk- and gender-informed programmes towards heightened resilience.

**Maturing the Region’s Approach to the Continuum of Innovation, Evidence and Knowledge**

The WCAR experience since 2018 reveals the potentially transformative nature of a systematic approach to innovations, evidence and knowledge as part of a continuum.

In contrast with a scattered, isolated approach, the WCAR model – matured with the convening power and technical expertise of WCARO – involves the careful selection of pilot initiatives with scalability
and sustainability in favor of the KRCs. Selected innovations are systematically scrutinized through evaluations, research and studies. In cases in which evidence substantiates the effectiveness of innovations, the WCAR model envisages that the region will systematically propel them towards scale-up, through fostering their uptake by governments and communities, as well as replication across countries. In the context of COVID-19, this approach enables the identification of acceleration strategies that have proven to be the most effective, or ‘COVID-proof’, in the midst of the pandemic.

**Duty of Care and Organization Culture as an Essential Enabler to Stay and Deliver for Children**

The region’s longstanding commitment to discharging its duty of care and promoting a positive organizational culture as a key enabler of results for children – steered by WCARO – came to the fore in 2020 with the untold effects of COVID-19 on UNICEF personnel, particularly the most vulnerable and those in the most insecure and remote locations. As a testament to these efforts, the Global Staff Survey 2020 revealed that satisfaction of WCAR staff in terms of personal empowerment increased by 19% compared to the 2017, and WCAR earned the highest score among regions in the areas of security, measures taken in response to COVID-19 and knowledge and information sharing. As a result of WCARO’s efforts towards the resilience and wellbeing of the UNICEF workforce in WCAR, UNICEF was in a position to stay and deliver for children in the midst of the pandemic.

**Looking Forward**

In 2021, WCARO will take forward the lessons set out in this report as it completes the final year of the ROMP 2018-2021 and shapes the ROMP 2022-2025. Elements of the strategic focus of the next ROMP having emerged through the WCARO experience include: emphasizing acceleration strategies focused on achieving scale and sustainability of results with equity; fostering increasingly customized and context-responsive technical assistance; anchoring multi-sector ways of working for the delivery of coherent and holistic support to COs; and instituting a more adaptive, agile and fit-for-purpose business model.

The key guiding principle underpinning these efforts will be the optimization of the WCARO contribution to accelerating progress towards the KRCs, including through humanitarian response – cognizant of the enduring effects of COVID-19 and seizing the opportunities having emerged in the midst of the pandemic – as the region’s strategic contribution to the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and therefore the SDGs and African Union Agenda 2063.