

## Sri Lanka

### Update on the context and situation of children

2021 was a challenging year for children in Sri Lanka due to COVID-19 and the related sharp downturn in the economy. The macroeconomic outlook is worrisome, with substantial external debt obligations in 2022 and 2023, depreciating foreign reserves, significant increase in inflation (especially food), limited revenue inflows, and downward pressure on the exchange rate (which depreciated eight per cent vis-a-vis the US dollar since 2020). The concerning nature of these indicators and the high potential for debt default resulted in credit rating downgrades in 2021.

Sri Lanka's COVID-19 caseload peaked in quarter three with the Delta variant and a higher proportion of patients needing treatment, including oxygen therapy. The public health resources and capacity were stretched to breaking point, but adjustments to treatment protocols supported home-based care and provided relief to overstretched health facilities and staff. By 31 December 2021, the caseload had risen to 587,935 with 15,0191 deaths, including 61 children. With the emergence of new variants, pregnant mothers and children became a high-risk group and, as of December 2021, 60 pregnant women have died due to COVID-19 and 10,500 pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers contracted the virus.

To reduce transmission, the Government imposed two extended lockdowns of about six weeks, which further compounded the socioeconomic vulnerabilities facing many households. To understand these issues, UNICEF conducted five nationally representative household surveys, four of which over the telephone (and three in collaboration with UNDP). The latest round (July 2021) confirmed that most households' income levels have not recovered to pre-COVID levels. In fact, in April 2020, 71 per cent of households reported losing all their income or having experienced a reduction in their income and that rate increased to 76 per cent in July 2021. Although the Government already put a cash transfer response in place to mitigate some of these challenges, the response has not evolved and became more limited in scope. In 2021, the number of households benefitting from emergency cash transfers was significantly reduced due to a narrowing of the eligibility criteria.

The telephone surveys also revealed that 43 per cent of families reported a decrease in their food consumption compared to pre-COVID. Since July, food security has further deteriorated with food shortages resulting from price controls followed by a significant increase in food and fuel prices, further eroding households' limited purchasing power. As a result, many have struggled to meet the nutritional needs of their children, and existing nutritional services to malnourished children under five and pregnant mothers have been severely reduced due to constrained budgets and a scarcity of supplies because of import restrictions. In July, the telephone survey confirmed that no family enrolled to receive ready-to-eat therapeutic food for severely malnourished children had received their benefit in June, and 78 per cent claimed that they had not received it for over two months. As the pandemic and its repercussions continue, families are being forced to cut expenditure on food and other basic items. Recognising these challenges, the Minister of Finance, in his 2022 Budget Speech, gave prominence to the issue of nutrition and expanded a nutrition voucher programme for pregnant and lactating mothers from 10 to 24 months. Considering the high rates of child malnutrition and rise in food prices, this programme will be critical to support the nutritional needs of children, particularly the most vulnerable, during their first 1,000 days.

All schools remained closed for most of 2021 with only sporadic and limited reopening in-between. Inequitable online learning opportunities, compounded by protracted teacher strikes, affected home-based learning and negatively impacted 4.8 million schoolchildren, especially the most disadvantaged. Data from a UNICEF survey in September 2020, indicated that 41 per cent of households with children

do not have access to online learning equipment. Despite the Government's efforts to provide online and offline learning options, learning losses increased in 2021 and school-based essential services were not available to children.

School closures and movement restrictions also disrupted children's routines and social support networks, impacting their protection, mental health and well-being. Financial and other stressors placed on parents contributed to making children more vulnerable to being institutionalized, violence and suffering psychosocial distress. Reports of physical punishment and abuse against children were highlighted in the press and administrative data from the police and social services confirmed an increase in domestic violence and child abuse during the lockdowns. Despite a landmark verdict by the Supreme Court in favour of a child who was beaten by a teacher, it is important to note that no progress on prohibiting corporal punishment has been made given considerable resistance in society.

In terms of implementing and monitoring the 126 UN CRC recommendations, the National Monitoring Committee has resumed regular meetings, with UNICEF participating as a committee member, and requested UNICEF's support to help restructure and reorganize their tasks and work. It is difficult to have an updated picture of how children are faring, since data from the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES 2019) is not yet released. However, it is positive that the Government measured, for the first time, data on child multidimensional poverty.

Despite these challenging times, there are reasons for some optimism in 2022. The Government has rapidly rolled out a comprehensive vaccination programme and, as of end December 2021, around 95 per cent of the population above 20 years (eligible population) have received both doses of the vaccine and all those eligible have received at least one dose. A booster dose (Pfizer-BioNTech) has also been provided to around 28 per cent of the eligible population. The Government also strives to balance health and economic priorities to ensure essential services continue to reach all children, particularly the most vulnerable. The COVID-19 crisis has presented opportunities to enhance systems, such as the health system through the procurement of equipment to strengthen the cold chain management system which will facilitate effective vaccine delivery for years to come, as well as build back better in the education system with improvements to online learning opportunities for all children, especially those most vulnerable.

## Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2021, UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the Government of Sri Lanka to achieve the following results across a child's lifecycle.

### **Early Childhood (0-5 years)**

UNICEF and the Ministry of Health (MoH) introduced an Early Childhood Development Index 2030 to establish a baseline which will capture, for the first time, key developmental milestones of children aged 24 to 59 months. This data will enable the Government to design policies and programmes that contribute towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 ensuring all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development and are ready for primary school; the survey will be rolled out in 2022. As part of its COVID-19 response, UNICEF printed and distributed home-based learning kits for almost 100,000 preschool children (70 per cent) in two of the nine provinces. UNICEF also provided expertise and funds to develop a 10-week competency enhancement programme for preschool children eligible for Grade 1 in 2022 with 6,500 teachers trained (80 per cent) to deliver this programme.

UNICEF commissioned research to produce a practice guide for teachers which will introduce the concept of a learning environment that bolsters children's ideas and interests using exploratory early childhood pedagogy and nurturing civic competencies. This guide will be presented to relevant

authorities to inform ongoing reform discussions. UNICEF continued to invest in strengthening the preschool Education Management Information System to address the lack of credible, up-to-date data, which hinders evidence-based planning and monitoring. A revised monitoring template is now available to enable preschool inspectors to document the quality of pedagogy in classrooms and monitor drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene against related SDG targets.

Malnutrition continues to be a critical issue affecting young children in Sri Lanka with evidence that the situation has further deteriorated due to COVID-19. Since UNICEF globally monitors three (of four) indicators under Target 2.2 (prevalence of stunting, wasting and overweight among children under five years), it was critical to understand the drivers and barriers to maternal and child feeding practices as direct determinants of malnutrition. As such, UNICEF commissioned a significant piece of formative research on maternal and Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices and the findings have been shared with the MoH. The research reveals the prevalent behaviours, motivators and barriers to desired practices which are preventing good feeding practices in the critical first 1,000 days of a child's life. This research will inform new behaviour change communication strategies by the MoH linked to improving IYCF with a focus on the first 1,000 days. UNICEF also technically supported the MoH to update and use health protocols to manage the over 150,000 children with severe and moderate acute malnutrition (SAM and MAM) and use quality assessment tools in maternal and newborn units to provide quality care for 40,000 mothers and their newborns.

To ensure better protection for children and vulnerable families, UNICEF conducted a functional assessment of the Social Service Workforce (initiated in 2019) and launched the report with the Minister of Samurdhi and National Institute of Social Development in 2021. The findings are expected to facilitate professionalization of social work in Sri Lanka, as well as accreditation and better supervision of the workforce. UNICEF also worked with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs to implement the National Alternative Care Policy to reduce the number of children in residential care. Throughout the year, UNICEF supported action plans in four provinces, resulting in the reunification of 283 children (11 per cent of those in institutions in these provinces; 54 boys and 229 girls) with their families and prevented the institutionalisation of 1,484 children (355 boys and 1,129 girls).

#### **Middle Childhood (6-9 years)**

The COVID-19 crisis resulted in schools being closed until October 2021, a situation further exacerbated by the protracted teachers' strike in quarter three. UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and provincial education authorities to develop and implement a strategy to ensure learning continuity and learning recovery for primary grades. This strategy, designed to target the most disadvantaged children, was scaled up nationwide reaching 50 per cent of primary students (834,733, half of them girls) with home-based printed learning materials. UNICEF also procured Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) supplies for 407 most-disadvantaged schools benefiting over 105,000 students. A child-friendly cartoon book with IPC messages was also developed in Sinhala and Tamil and distributed to all primary schools nation-wide, benefiting 1.67 million children.

UNICEF is a key technical partner in the Government's ongoing curricula reforms, and with the National Institute of Education (NIE), reviewed the national curriculum framework for general education providing key recommendations that are being taken forward by the State Ministry of Education Reforms. Further, UNICEF helped develop a National School Health Policy to provide school children with the knowledge and skills to promote their health and well-being and that of their families. Two key country studies were also finalised and presented at high-level and technical fora with government and sector stakeholders: i) *impact of COVID-19 on education* and ii) *national survey on learning continuity*. The research findings were well received and have contributed to informing the education reform process, as well as supporting advocacy on improving learning outcomes.

UNICEF acted as co-lead of the Protection, Education, WASH and Communication sectors, and as an engaged partner in the Health sector. Co-leading the education sector, UNICEF played a catalytic role, together with the World Health Organization (WHO), in using evidence-based advocacy to help

convince relevant line ministries to re-open schools nationwide, prioritising the early grades. In the water sector, UNICEF supported a Water Quality Survey to assess progress against SDG 6.2 on safely managed drinking water. Additionally, UNICEF supported a national assessment of community water supply schemes to monitor key indicators of rural water supply, which have now been included in the monitoring system and on the National Department of Rural Water Supply website.

Ending violence against children remains a core priority for UNICEF in Sri Lanka, in line with the SDG 16.2 and as a Pathfinder Country. UNICEF generated powerful evidence through two flagship studies to inform policy advocacy and social and behavioural change: i) *Estimating the Prevalence and Drivers of Bullying, including Cyberbullying*, commissioned by UNICEF Sri Lanka and UNICEF's Office of Research and ii) *Prevalence of Ragging and Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sri Lankan State Universities* led by the University Grants Commission with support from UNICEF. These studies addressed important data gaps on violence against children and facilitated engagement with relevant government institutions and stakeholders. This year, while no substantive advancement was made to legally ban corporal punishment, UNICEF continued to promote positive disciplining approaches in schools and homes. In schools, UNICEF developed related guidance material and mechanisms and is advocating for such approaches to be institutionalized in the ongoing education reform. With communities, UNICEF is promoting positive parenting using a newly developed manual (to be launched early 2022) and other innovative measures, such as the MoH's RapidPro-based messaging with parents and UNICEF's betterparenting.lk website.

To address growing concerns around children's mental health, UNICEF worked with the MoE and Provincial Education Departments in the North and East to develop a package of psychosocial support material for students and teachers, which, once rolled-out in 2022, will benefit all 1.9 million secondary students nation-wide. At community level, UNICEF strengthened the capacity of 156 government officers to provide basic psychosocial support and established mental health coordination networks in the Northern, Eastern, Uva and Central provinces, reaching more than 5,000 children and 1,600 parents/caregivers. This included officers working in childcare institutions, benefitting 336 children in 21 institutions in the Western and Eastern Provinces. This area of work has gained strong commitment from government partners for longer-term sustainability.

### **Adolescence (10-18 years)**

The meaningful participation and engagement of adolescents on issues that affect them remains a core UNICEF priority. UNICEF and the Department of Probation and Childcare Services (DPCCS) initiated a review of existing policies and practices on adolescent participation for those in contact with social services to recommend areas for improvement. UNICEF also worked with the DPCCS to elevate the voices of adolescents and youth through U-Report Sri Lanka, a mobile messaging platform, which engaged 13,000 U-Reporters in 2021 (total U-Reporters: 20,000) to solicit feedback using 'Polls with Purpose' on COVID-19 vaccines, poverty, priorities for children and back-to-school preparedness.

UNICEF also engaged and empowered adolescents as agents of change for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in-line with SDG target 13.1 which calls for strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters. This call to action resulted in - for the first time - the inclusion of children's views in divisional-level DRR strategies, including child-centred risk assessments conducted by children, with support from divisional level Child Rights Promotion Officers and District Disaster Management Centres. In addition, and as an input to the Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, UNICEF consulted with over 350 children to develop a Children's Declaration on DRR and CCA that captures the priorities Sri Lankan adolescents identified as necessary to combat climate change.

Adolescents continue to face challenges accessing quality justice services. UNICEF advocated with the National Child Protection Authority on the Children and Young Persons Ordinance to ensure children aged 16-17 years are treated as children, not adults, when in contact with the law. Sustained advocacy

also resulted in revisions to other laws, such as the Ministry of Justice increasing the age of admission to the School for Youthful Offenders (run by the Prisons Department) from 16 to 18 years and submitting a cabinet proposal to include boys in the definition of rape, and the Ministry of Labour increasing the minimum age for child labour from 14 to 16 years and agreeing to increase the age of domestic child labour (when a child works in a domestic setting but outside their own home/family) to 18 years of age. UNICEF also continued to push for the development of a diversion framework for children in conflict with the law and the release of children from prison due to COVID-19. Further, UNICEF advocated for the inclusion of a chapter on child rights in the new constitution.

In secondary education, UNICEF is working on integrating life skills, including for social cohesion, into the curriculum of selected subjects including: 1) sports for development concepts into the health and physical education curriculum; and 2) transversal skills into the Grade 6 Sinhala and Tamil language subjects. Further, to build resilient and safe school communities, the MoE and UNICEF disseminated the Comprehensive School Safety Guidelines to all schools.

### **Social Policy**

UNICEF has been working with the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) to improve the availability of data on children, particularly child poverty, inter alia as a requirement for SDG 1 monitoring. UNICEF successfully advocated for and designed a child module to be integrated into the Household Income and Expenditure Survey in 2019, to enable the measurement of child multidimensional poverty, and, in 2021 UNICEF worked with DCS to use the collected data to launch Sri Lanka's first National and Child Multidimensional Poverty Indices (MPIs). The Child MPI focuses on children 0 to 4 years and is the first official measure of child poverty, which links directly and precisely to the National MPI. These measures will enable policymakers to design better interventions to tackle deprivations faced by children.

UNICEF continued its efforts to help make social protection more child sensitive. UNICEF and the MoH advocated for an expansion of an existing nutrition voucher programme for pregnant and lactating mothers, presenting a costed proposal to the Minister of Finance. As a result, the Minister included the proposal in the 2022 Budget Speech, expanding the voucher programme from 10 to 24 months. UNICEF's advocacy efforts also contributed to an increase in the state budget for nutrition-sensitive social protection interventions in 2022. The expanded voucher programme will receive a new allocation of Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR) 1 billion and LKR 15 billion for nutrition support to poor, food insecure families. These are significant contributions and demonstrates the value of UNICEF investing in generating the evidence needed to support such advocacy, despite the extremely limited fiscal space.

UNICEF continued to conduct budget analyses and promote budget accessibility, producing the second edition of sectoral Budget Briefs on education, WASH and health, and the first editions of Briefs on social assistance and child protection (both being finalized). These will be widely disseminated and dialogue with policy makers is planned for early 2022. UNICEF also produced its third edition of the Budget Speech Brief, highlighting how relevant budget proposals will impact the social sectors and children. This brings more information to citizens on the investments being made for children and serves as an advocacy tool with Members of Parliament for budget debates.

UNICEF supported the development and launch of Citizens' Budgets with the Eastern (second edition) and Northern (first edition) Provincial Councils to enhance citizen participation and build demand for better investments in children. Under the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) in Batticaloa, Eastern Province, children and youth participated in local planning and budgeting, and in 2021, the Municipality also created a permanent CFCI expenditure category in the municipal budget and a dedicated allocation of LKR 2 billion (twice the amount allocated in 2020). Building on this success, this initiative was expanded to two other localities in the East.

### **Programme and Operational Effectiveness**

Despite challenges in coordinating and delivering programmes in a COVID-19 context, UNICEF has remained agile and strategic in its work, prioritizing the COVID-19 response, and implementing a road map to develop a new country programme from 2023. UNICEF also ensured close alignment with and helped develop the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

UNICEF disseminated clear, coherent messages on COVID-19 prevention, empowering individuals to adhere to measures to protect themselves. Through a mix of media channels, over 15 million people in Sri Lanka were reached with COVID-19 prevention messages, helping mitigate the spread of the virus and improve vaccine uptake. UNICEF also rolled out other key campaigns on COVID-19 risk communication, World Children's Day, Back to School, International Day for Poverty Eradication and Ending Violence Against Children. Millions of young people were engaged, online and offline, in the initiatives to express themselves on issues that affect them and demand action. All press statements, human-interest stories and reports published on the UNICEF webpage were amplified across social media platforms reaching over 71 million people.

From an operational perspective, UNICEF ensured risks were carefully managed and efficiencies were introduced where feasible, including a resource management tool to help ensure sound, responsive and strategic resource management. Operational support was also provided for effective programme delivery, including leveraging technology for results by promoting innovative and viable ICT solutions, particularly during the lockdown periods, and procurement of supplies worth USD 19.6 million, specifically to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

UNICEF continued to support staff on safety and wellbeing during the pandemic. The UN formed a COVID-19 Task Team on Duty of Care with UNICEF supporting key initiatives related to COVID-19 medical treatment, vaccination drives, and access to mental health/psychosocial providers.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Partnerships are key to delivering results at scale for children. In 2021, UNICEF invested in strengthening a range of partnerships including with the business sector, UN agencies and civil society.

With civil society, UNICEF invested in its partnership with U-Report Sri Lanka Steering Committee members - Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya, ChildFund Sri Lanka, World Vision Lanka, Sri Lanka Scout Association and the Department of Probation and Child Care Services - to ensure maximum outreach of the U-Report polls. UNICEF also partnered with Sarvodaya and the Ministry of Health to disseminate COVID-19 related messages to communities, and with Sarvodaya to increase public awareness on social protection reform.

During the year, UNICEF also partnered extensively with other UN agencies. UNICEF worked with WHO and the Ministries of Education, Health and Child Affairs to adapt the Nurturing Care Framework to fit Sri Lanka's Early Childhood Development policies and programmes. UNICEF and WHO also demonstrated the impact of joint evidence-based advocacy and collective action on the issue of reopening schools. In this regard, the two agencies jointly engaged the Ministries of Health and Education to provide coherent, complementary technical advice based on up-to-date evidence and lessons learned from previous school reopening exercises. This joint advocacy contributed to schools being re-opened, with priority given to preschools and primary grades.

UNICEF leads two UN Results Groups on Social Protection and Nutrition. In Social Protection, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP), organised a training for UN agencies to enhance understanding on how to achieve inclusive and child-sensitive social protection, leading to a clear workplan for 2021-22 for the Group. UNICEF also partnered with WFP to provide support (cash plus) to all families with children under five years in 11 divisions of Kalutara district, an area often affected by natural disasters. Beyond immediate support to families, this intervention will provide evidence to strengthen the case for an adequate beneficiary and transfer management system that can respond quickly and effectively to shocks. Linked to social protection, UNICEF also strengthened its collaboration with the International Monetary Fund, who sought UNICEF's expertise and support in advance of its Article IV consultation with Government.

New partnerships emerged with Government, specifically on climate change, with UNICEF partnering with the Urban, City Planning and Human Settlement sector and strengthening collaboration with the MoH and Urban Settlement and Development Authority, Climate Change Secretariat and Ministry of Environment to position UNICEF as a key agency in the national climate change agenda. Further, as technology for learning gained importance, UNICEF engaged relevant stakeholders on GIGA and Reimagine Education leading to a partnership with the apex ICT government agency and the State Ministry of Education Reforms to build capacity on blended learning and online pedagogy and assessment.

With business, UNICEF partnered with Atlas, a private company, and the Department of Probation and Child Care Services to distribute family recreational kits to over 3,782 children and families across the country, with most children (96 per cent) reporting the kits increased family interactions.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

***UNICEF needs to be agile and innovative in how it pursues advocacy priorities.*** Advocacy for the establishment of a Universal Child Benefit (UCB) is a core UNICEF priority and the Sri Lanka Country Office has been consistently advocating for a universal approach since 2019. UNICEF

developed a UCB Investment Case and invested time, resources and energy advocating with government partners for a progressive realization of this goal. While partners were positive about the merits of supporting all children, there was no indication that the Government of Sri Lanka planned to take this approach forward. UNICEF perceived that a combination of limited fiscal space and the political complexity of adjusting the existing system were acting as bottlenecks. Undeterred, the Country Office decided to change focus and advocate for expanding an *existing* universal programme rather than establishing a *new* universal programme. The rationale was to make it more feasible and to reaffirm the merits of universality. UNICEF proposed the expansion of an existing voucher programme for all pregnant and lactating women, from 10 to 30 months of support, i.e., from early pregnancy until the second birthday of a child. The rationale for changing the ask was to make it more appealing and seen as a quick and low-hanging fruit gain. UNICEF developed a short, costed concept note with a strong rationale based on solid evidence, complemented by a clear budget allocation request, and presented the proposal directly to the Minister of Finance. UNICEF also engaged the Ministry of Health in helping generate demand from within the Government for this expansion. Being able to adapt and innovate paid off and the Minister of Finance, in his 2022 Budget Speech, specifically allocated funds to expand the voucher programme to 24 months and referenced the criticality of the early years for a child's cognitive development. This is a critical step towards ensuring that all children have the right start in life – a concrete step towards a UCB. The Country Office will build on this progress to continue advocacy around a UCB and will remain agile in future advocacy approaches.

***A lifecycle result framework facilitates synergies but is challenging to operationalise.*** The Sri Lanka Country Office adopted a lifecycle approach for the 2018-2022 country programme with results focused on early childhood, middle childhood, adolescents and social policy. As children's needs cannot easily be divided up sectorially this approach has many merits and, theoretically, should foster better internal coordination and collaboration across teams. However, the Country Office found this approach extremely challenging to operationalise. Firstly, UNICEF's key partners in government remain sectorially focussed, and so UNICEF's external interactions remained sectoral. Secondly, UNICEF's programme design and guidance at global level are structured by sector (health, education, protection) thereby requiring the Country Office to constantly adapt lifecycle discussions, thinking and priorities to 'fit' UNICEF's global sectoral approaches. Thirdly, the lifecycle approach requires clear, practical accountabilities within an office and across teams so it is evident when staff are expected to function as lifecycle outcome groups or when work is better situated to sectoral teams, as both are required. These complexities consumed significant staff time to resolve, thereby outweighing any benefits generated by the lifecycle structure. The evaluation of the country programme reached similar conclusions and the Country Office will return to a sectoral approach in its next country programme.

***Staff wellbeing can be facilitated when staff are empowered and enabled to identify solutions.*** The Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) Academy in Sri Lanka – a staff learning platform established during the pandemic - contributed to staff feeling connected and supported their learning during the pandemic. The ROSA Academy in Sri Lanka commenced with the delivery of an initial set of sessions, exploring issues relevant to staff, by an external consultant and a voluntary team of Country Office co-facilitators. Recognizing the importance of staff connectedness, the ROSA Academy in Sri Lanka launched the *Kopi Kade* (or Plain Tea Café) in 2021, for colleagues to come together virtually in an informal setting to talk about anything except work. During these sessions, colleagues share challenges, insights, ideas and methods to help prevent burnout and promote mental well-being. The Café is frequently visited by senior management and the involvement of the Staff Association, Young UNICEF members and Peer Support Volunteers have both refreshed the Café and strengthened the support it offers all staff. The ROSA Academy in Sri Lanka remains fully functional, and the Country Office intends to safeguard the space for staff to shape and orient it, so it remains a useful platform to support staff wellbeing and mental health.

***Innovative thinking is required in the way UNICEF reaches the most vulnerable communities***

*during a pandemic.* UNICEF had to think more creatively in the way it accesses communities in hard-to-reach areas during a period of country lockdowns, curfew and restrictions, to ensure that critical services do not get disrupted and important gains are not lost. This was particularly important in the health and nutrition sector given increasing food costs and insecurity. Investments in developing an electronic manual on the national protocol on the management of SAM and MAM for healthcare workers, and its dissemination through WhatsApp groups and the Family Health Bureau website, helped scale up the response, resulting in the accurate diagnosis and management of more than 150,000 children throughout the country. The improved capacity of healthcare workers to use such online platforms also enabled the dissemination of other guidelines, such as on the delivery of Reproductive Maternal New-born Child and Adolescent Health services during the COVID-19 crisis. Other innovative tools were also used to reach parents, such as the ParentText initiative by UNICEF and the Health Promotion Bureau, which provided critical health and nutrition information and the betterparenting.lk website that disseminated information on parenting in the middle of a global pandemic.