Update on the context and situation of children

India has made impressive gains along several dimensions of human development. The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) 2019-21[1] records further improvements in sex ratio at birth, infant and child mortality rates, in the percentage of children exclusively breastfed, children under one year fully vaccinated, maternal care indicators, consumption of iron-folic acid, and in receiving postnatal care from health professionals.

Nevertheless, there are persistent shortfalls to the realization of child rights. High levels of malnutrition[2] and poor learning outcomes are persistent and vary widely across states, low-income urban families, and slum dwellers. Disadvantaged communities continue to suffer from poverty and multidimensional deprivations, lack of access to quality services in health, poor school attendance, shortage of sanitation and safe water supply, housing conditions, continued practice of child marriage and child labour. NFHS-5 2019-21 reported[3] an increase in child malnutrition across many states, increasing anaemia in some states. The stark disparity in data indicate that children’s survival continues to be reliant upon where the child is born and the wealth, caste and social status of families, the educational level of the mother, and specifically to families belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe castes.

The pandemic has deepened poverty and exacerbated the inequalities that children face, especially in nutrition, education, protection and mental health. The pandemic disproportionately affected the development of children due to the loss of jobs and livelihoods of parents, with more families being pushed into poverty. Average household income in July 2021 was still 4.7 per cent lower than its pre COVID-19 level in nominal terms[4]. Reduced access to health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, and protection services exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Extension of school closures impacted 286 million children, who could not attend school for more than a year[5] causing a huge learning loss. This resulted in a reversal of gains made in access and enrolment rates, learning levels and acquisition of skills, and widened the gap in digital literacy.

Concerns around climate change and environmental sustainability, along with varied and recurring disasters, affected many Indian children and became even more urgent in 2021. India is the fifth most vulnerable country to climate change[6]. It is estimated to have incurred a loss of around US$87 billion in 2020 due to extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, floods and droughts[7]. Furthermore, close to 90 per cent of the burden of disease attributable to climate change is borne by children under the age of five[8]. Natural calamities, including cyclones in West Bengal, Gujarat, Odisha and Tamil Nadu, and flooding in Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra, Kerala and Telangana, caused devastation in 2021. This resulted in further compromising child rights, with the heaviest impact on the most vulnerable.

India’s economic growth started picking up in the 3rd quarter of 2021, and GDP is expected to return to pre COVID-19 levels by the end of 2021-22 financial year. However, sustaining a higher growth will depend on the ability to meet the timelines of infrastructure investments and disinvestment plans by the Government of India (GoI). Uncertainty about economic recovery post COVID-19 remains real. Some sectors are struggling more than others, the number of unemployed remains high, and private consumption is low. COVID-19 has reduced fiscal space for children, with social investments being the hardest hit by the economic slowdown. The share of the Union Budget for children has also fallen over the past few years[9], reducing from 3.16 per cent in 2020-21 to 2.46 per cent in 2021-22[10]. The Union Budget 2021-22 allocated 9 billion Indian rupees (INR) for “Mission Vatsalya”, including the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and Child Welfare Services -- 40
per cent less than the INR 15 billion for ICPS alone in the Union Budget 2020-21[11].

**There are affirmative actions initiated to shift in public expenditure for children.** As the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic began to subside, the Union Cabinet approved INR 6,289.93 billion for economic relief from the pandemic[12]. State governments also announced additional schemes to benefit those worst affected by the pandemic. In fact, during the past year, 13 of 14 studied states registered a rise in spending on children (comparing pre vs post COVID-19 levels), and four states an increase in per-capita spending on children[13]. Consequently, states have increased expenditure on the social sector, including for children, due to New Delhi’s fiscal stimulus, including higher devolution to states for priority sector spending, subject to various reforms and prudent debt management.

**Between 2020 and 2021, the GoI introduced new flagship initiatives and reforms to respond to emerging challenges and protect children's rights.** These include “Jal Jeevan Mission” (JJM), “Swachh Bharat Mission Phase II” (SBM), “Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat Abhiyaan”, “National Education Policy 2020” (NEP), “POSHAN Abhiyaan” (nutrition), “Mission Vatsalya” (Child Protection Services and Child Welfare Scheme), “Mission Shakti” (Protection and Empowerment for Women), and “The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021”. While the announcement of these initiatives is positive, several have not yet been operationalized, and implementation seems delayed.

[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

---

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

Guided by government priorities, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) 2018-2022, UNICEF continued contributing towards national efforts to protect, promote and progressively realize the rights of all children, especially the most disadvantaged.
UNICEF’s creative content and campaigns outdid previous year’s performance in advocacy along with 86 per cent positive media coverage. UNICEF had 8.5 billion impressions, 200 million video views, and a growing 62 million engagements on social media channels.

The pandemic constrained several results, particularly disruptions in nutrition and education. Addressing equity also remains a challenge. UNICEF works with partners and adapts programming to reach the most marginalized.

**Every child survives and thrives**

UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other stakeholders contributed to support the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to develop the India Newborn Action Plan 2021-2030 road map to achieve the national goals of a single-digit neo-natal mortality and stillbirth rate. UNICEF continued to support the COVID-19 response and supplied personal protective equipment for health-care workers, equipped hospitals with high-flow nasal cannulas, oxygen concentrators, and oxygen generation plants. Laboratories were supplied with RT-PCR machines, RNA extraction machines, and laboratory deep freezers. The ports of entry were strengthened by supplying and installing mass thermal scanners. UNICEF supported scale-up of COVID-19 vaccination coverage by supplying more than 600,000 cold-chain syringes and equipment, 100,000 mentoring and supportive-supervisory visits to COVID-19 vaccination centres, and risk communication interventions across 22 states. As of December 2021, India crossed 1.34 billion COVID-19 vaccinations, with around 51 per cent full vaccination coverage of the eligible population. Partnerships were leveraged to ensure the continuity of quality maternal, newborn and child-health services, improving the Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative from 14 per cent (2020) to 35 per cent (2021).

UNICEF, with UN agencies and development partners, supported the government on nutrition services. UNICEF worked with MoHFW to develop and implement COVID-19-sensitive restoration of nutrition services for adolescent girls and pregnant women. Through its national and state-level centres of excellence, UNICEF supported state governments to implement a package of services for children with severe acute malnutrition. This initiative resulted in doubling the number of children treated compared to 2020. Iron and folic acid supplementation tripled for adolescent girls in one year (from 8 per cent to 24 per cent by September 2021), and returned to pre COVID-19 levels in pregnant women (90 per cent in September 2021).

The IMPAct4Nutrition public/private partnership doubled to 212 partners pledging to contribute resources to nutrition. For the first time, a COVID-19 and nutrition situation and response monitoring report was published with over 20 development and academic partners. An important milestone is the first national policy dialogue on overweight and obese children, hosted by NITI Aayog and supported by UNICEF and UN agencies. This resulted in policy papers addressing unhealthy and processed foods marketing.

**Every child learns**

As mentioned above, the ongoing pandemic caused schools and early childhood development centres being closed for most of the year. To ensure continuity of learning, UNICEF and its partners continued to support the government and communities to reach 21.5 million children (47 per cent girls) accessing remote learning opportunities. The development of digital and non-digital content facilitated enhanced access to learning materials by the most marginalized children, including those with disabilities. The Ministry of Education (MoE) disseminated national guidelines, developed with UNICEF support, promoting parental participation for home-based learning. More than 10 million parents supported the learning environment at home, enabled by self-help groups, community volunteers, adolescent collectives, online platforms, television networks, and community radio.
While advocating for reopening schools in 17 states, the review, development, and implementation of safe reopening protocols for schools and early childhood development centres were supported. About 280,000 teachers or school focal points across more than 218,000 schools were trained in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and infection prevention and control protocols. While schools have begun to reopen in a phased approach with “back to school” campaigns, there are concerns that not all children will return. With UNICEF technical support, states customized an application that facilitated identification and referral of 193,010 out-of-school children (44 per cent girls) into special training programmes and formal schools in nine states/union territories. In collaboration with partners, innovative initiatives such as activating 332 mobile learning units targeting Musahar children in Bihar, reached the most marginalized. A model devised to expand access for out-of-school children with disabilities to learning brought them back on the Uttar Pradesh (UP) government’s agenda priority.

The National Achievement Survey 2021 was conducted with technical support from UNICEF, providing evidence of the pandemic’s impact on children’s learning and skills. To combat these losses, state governments rolled out a learning recovery programme to reach 15.8 million children in eight states. Working in strategic partnerships, UNICEF supported states to plan and implement literacy and numeracy skills programmes. A campaign promoting “reading for joy” has reached more than 2.5 million children (48 per cent girls) in Maharashtra. Career guidance portals were expanded to 15 states, with 26 million adolescent students (50 per cent girls) registered. In response to increasing natural disasters due to climate change, UNICEF has expanded its comprehensive school safety programme to 10 states, covering 145,000 schools to build resilience against humanitarian and climatic shocks. In Chhattisgarh, state education plans integrated school safety elements and capacitated 14,000 teachers (45 per cent females) on its implementation.

**Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

UNICEF supported government and stakeholders to enhance child protection systems with a special focus on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strengthening social workforce regulatory frameworks and capacities was prioritized, with 234,253 (45 per cent female) child protection functionaries and allied workers trained on case management in identifying vulnerable children, working towards strengthening families, preventing separation, promoting family-based care for children, and providing psychosocial support to children and their families/caregivers. With a 40 per cent increase in the number of functionaries trained compared to 2020, 1,138,551 women, girls, and boys accessed gender-based violence prevention and response services and other child protection services in 17 states. Mental health and psychosocial support services reached more than 630,000 children (46 per cent girls), an 83 per cent increase from 2020.

UNICEF, with government and civil society organization (CSO) partners, reached 12 million adolescents (70 per cent girls) with essential services (health, child protection). Awareness of 13 million parents and community members was raised on child protection issues, and 3.2 million adolescents were engaged in initiatives to solve community-level challenges (child marriage, labour, violence, and climate change). Support to district action plans in 175 districts led to the allocation of US$60 million in government resources, and the facilitation of access to cash transfer and social protection schemes benefiting 3.8 million girls.

Services towards preventing family separation and providing alternative care arrangements were scaled up in 12 states, benefiting nearly 228,000 children across 274 districts.

A multi-pronged strategy for preventing and responding to child labour and trafficking was developed and implemented in 10 states. This included the government mobilizing sixteen million at-risk families to enable linkages with social protection schemes, and messages on preventing child labour reaching 2.5 million community members.
Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

UNICEF leveraged an estimated US$407 million for WASH interventions, leading to the prevention of COVID-19 and other transmissible diseases affecting children. Under UNICEF-supported initiatives, 132 million people were reached through the media with hand-hygiene messages: half a million staff were trained and engaged in infection prevention and control and WASH in schools initiatives, one million for COVID-19 emergency response, and 3,800 practitioners for WASH in health-care facilities. Close to 7.5 million people received emergency WASH supplies (e.g., soap and hand wash stations), and 8 million people were sensitized on menstrual hygiene. Furthermore, use of hygienic menstrual absorbents increased to 77.3 per cent in 2021, from 57.8 per cent in 2016.

Critical advisories, standard operating procedures (SOP) and training content were developed/issued and implemented for COVID-19-specific interventions at a significant scale (e.g., advisories from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj [MoPR] on the Fifteenth Finance Commission grants; 280,000 staff trained online and engaged for school WASH).

Strategic partnerships with corporates were operationalized, e.g. with Unilever and Lixil mobilizing multi-million US dollar in-kind donations; with over 100 non-governmental organizations (NGO) for field interventions; with WHO, IRC and WaterAid for policy engagement on hand hygiene; with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for sanitation/faecal sludge management; with Johnson and Johnson on menstrual hygiene; with UN and youth groups for climate action and green jobs initiatives; with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for WASH projects in several states; with academia for evidence generation and advocacy.

UNICEF contributed to prioritize COVID-19-sensitive interventions through the national flagships - notably the Jal Jeevan Mission and the SBM -- across 15 states and 109 districts. This resulted in 10 million people gaining access to basic sanitation, while 28 million people and 1.7 million schools and Anganwadi centres gaining access to onsite water supplies.

The WASH programme expanded its scope supporting (i) climate-resilient WASH, strengthening resilience to shocks in communities and coordinating climate action across all UNICEF programmes; and (ii) WASH for the urban poor, leading capacity development and communication components of the SBM-Urban.

Every child has an equitable chance in life

UNICEF supported the National Policy Commission on microsimulation evaluation of 13 national social protection programmes to inform the development of a national integrated social protection policy framework, and advocate for prioritized public investments in social protection for children, underpinning inclusive COVID-19 recovery.

UNICEF’s advocacy and technical assistance contributed to the launch and rollout of tailored cash transfers by governments to extend social protection for children without parental care during the pandemic in seven states, reaching more than 30,000 children. UNICEF worked with state and local governments in implementing social protection programmes on food security, maternity benefits, rural works programmes, and humanitarian cash transfers. Overall, nearly half a million households were reached, including vulnerable children, through capacity building of more than 63,000 local governments and 5,000 community-based organizations. The initiative was accompanied by evidence generation and advocacy were done for effective portable social protection for internal migrant women, and children-supported registries to deliver emergency cash transfers for migrant families nationally across six states. Working with the Office of the Registrar General of India and six state governments, UNICEF technical assistance strengthened inclusive, resilient, and digital Civil
Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems by developing training e-modules in 11 languages and an adapted legal framework. Furthermore, a south-south dialogue between Madhya Pradesh and Kerala's state governments and China on building social registries was organized.

UNICEF advocated with state governments to safeguard public funds critical for social sectors during the pandemic; the public expenditure analysis of 14 states showed an increase in per-capita expenditure on children in 13 states. Institutionalizing child budgets in nine states and sustainable development goals (SDG) and nutrition budgets in one state was supported. A new evaluation framework for Child-Friendly Gram Panchayats in the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was also established to measure its effectiveness, institutionalizing the Child-Friendly Gram Panchayat Awards.

**Change strategies and enablers**

UNICEF strengthened systemic capacity for risk-informed programming across various social sectors in states covered by the 17 field offices. Early childhood development response focused on engagement with parents and caregivers on nurturing care and psychosocial wellbeing of children and their caregivers. Eleven states rolled out a social and behavioural change package on responsive caregiving during early childhood, with messaging around good health, adequate nutrition, safety, security, early stimulation, and early learning. Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) was also strengthened, with more than 76 million people being reached and engaged on COVID-19-appropriate behaviours. UNICEF leveraged government funds for targeted campaigns in 426 districts with 1,300 social mobilizers and nearly 300 consultants. More than 500,000 frontline workers, CSOs and youths have been trained to engage with communities on COVID-19-appropriate behaviours with key messages to address vaccine hesitancy.

**UNICEF responded to nine humanitarian emergencies in 2021**, including three cyclones (impacting West Bengal, Odisha and Gujarat) and six floods. For instance, response to Cyclone Yaas in West Bengal reached 8,000 families with emergency supplies, engaged 300,000 people on risk awareness, and provided 35,000 women, men, girls and boys with safe drinking water.

With climate change and environmental degradation, UNICEF focuses on mainstreaming and scaling-up interventions to strengthen community resilience by adapting social and health services and facilities. In parallel, opportunities to expand the green economy sustainably and equitably by working with line ministries and key flagship initiatives across sectors are being explored. Advocacy for greater investment, in preparedness to enable faster response to and recovery from disasters, is also prioritized.

Aligned to the Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan 2022-2025, UNICEF conducted the Gender Programmatic Review (GPR) to strengthen the 2022 Workplan and the next Country Programme development. In response to the Government of Bihar’s request, a gender-transformative approach paper on adolescent empowerment was developed and shared with the department following a series of stakeholder consultations. The paper is also complemented by a detailed action plan, including monitoring indicators for participating nodal departments for maximizing efforts.

**Data and evidence** were used to strengthen UNICEF and government programming, particularly the response to COVID-19, such as producing targeted RCCE content, guidelines and policies, improved capacity building, adaptations in social protection schemes, remote learning models, and alternative care for children. Key achievements include the development of UNICEF’s Evidence for Children Strategy and the strengthened collaboration with NITI Aayog’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) unit to build national and state-level M&E capacities. The culture of rights and results-based management across the office was also reinforced.

With COVID-19, the main goal for operations management was to ensure that all personnel and their
family members were safe and able to deliver their functions effectively. Consequently, the office updated COVID-19 operational guidelines, adapted its business continuity plan, and supported programme implementation at national and state levels. Vaccination of office housekeeping and security personnel was also supported. An internal audit of the India Country Office was conducted by the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations, which concluded that controls and processes over the office were in place and functioning, and offered recommendations for further improvement.

An initiative on prevention from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) was rolled out in the India Country Office. The assessment of 390 CSOs, with three were marked as high risk, 294 at moderate, and 93 at low-risk categories. Training for staff and PSEA focal points of over 200 CSO partners was completed for 574 participants. This was complemented with 44 office hour slots for post-training queries with partners. As a joint UN contribution, support was provided to train 130 participants from over 70 CSOs working with UN agencies. UNICEF also supported printing posters and pocketbooks for the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office. A victim-assistance protocol was drafted and finalized with comments from the PSEA steering committee.

**UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships**

UNICEF facilitated UN collaboration, by leading results groups on education, nutrition and food security and actively participating in all other results groups. UNICEF expanded these collaborative mechanisms by leading “Protecting People: Social Protection and Basic Services” under the UN COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Framework.

Several initiatives were undertaken jointly with UN agencies. A government-led dialogue on child weight and obesity was held, which resulted in NITI Aayog, UNICEF, WHO and the World Food Programme supporting drafting policy briefs on the prevention of obesity. UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Jhpiego also supported the MoHFW in rolling out and scaling up school health programmes. In 2021, 111,047 Health and Wellness Ambassadors were trained virtually, covering 93,597 schools, and almost 62,000 school principals were also oriented into the programme. UNICEF also worked with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the UN Resident Coordinator to organize climate change campaigns, and workshops engaging youth on climate action.

UNICEF also continued to make strides in existing joint programmes. Under YuWaah, UNICEF with UN agencies, government and more than 1,350 private and funding partners launched “Young Warrior”, a campaign mobilizing 6.6 million actions from over 5 million young people to champion COVID-19 appropriate behaviours. This campaign's learnings and partnerships are leveraged to support the Ministry of Youth Affairs (MoYAS) and Sports in the National Youth Festival, and convene partners on initiatives, including 21st-century skills and life skills called Young Warrior NXT. YuWaah and UNICEF also spearheaded a partnership with the World Economic Forum to bring together 60 partners on informing gaps and key priorities on digital infrastructure for learning. YuWaah is currently the only UN representation on the committee working on digital infrastructure in higher education at MoE, and is on the National Youth Index working group hosted by MoYAS as the only non-GoI member.

UNICEF and UNFPA work closely on ending child marriage under the Global Programme to End Child Marriage through joint planning, review, advocacy and evidence-generation collaboration and coordination for implementation at the state level. UNICEF continues to lead the implementation of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund inter-agency programme on protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) during COVID-19, in collaboration with UN Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and WHO, benefiting nearly 900,000 children and women in five states through GBV risk mitigation, prevention and response interventions.
In 2021, private sector partnership's revenue and contributions-in-kind value was approximately US$25 million, against US$7 million in 2020. Income from UNICEF National Committees increased from US$11 million in 2020 to US$55 million. Individual giving grew by over 30 per cent, despite many being challenged by the second wave of the pandemic slowing down income growth. Furthermore, the office was able to mobilize US$96 million in 2021 for the Humanitarian Action for Children, including 21.3 million from the government donors.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

**Innovations**

**Innovative data collection and use of digital platforms:** COVID-19 propelled implementers to utilize digital platforms for larger outreach and innovations in 2021. UNICEF utilized telecommunication such as telephone for assessments and for data collection, monitoring and gap analysis across most states. These remote systems for monitoring and supportive supervision helped programmes to support continuity of services. Tools like Kobo and RapidPro were used to collect responses from communities, which helped assess the pandemic’s effect at a macro and micro level on a real-time basis. Applications like Safe Delivery App, HIV-AIDS App, and the digitalization of programme modules were also done. Low-tech innovation was piloted to engage parents on responsive parenting using interactive voice response (IVR) and feature phones in UP and Jharkhand.

**Integrating and scaling climate-resilient and urban solutions:** Climate change has emerged as one of the biggest threats to human health and access to services in India. UNICEF supported programmatic and technological solutions to strengthen water source sustainability. These include hydrological mapping and water use analysis at the community level (in addition to improving the efficient use of water through Jal Jeevan Mission), improving adaptation and mitigation practices adopted by schools and health-care facilities such as installing renewable energy generators for cold chains, and greywater recycling and improving waste management practices that mitigate environmental degradation through strengthening local-level governance and planning processes under the SBM Phase II. These investments contribute to building a green economy by skilling and professionalizing the relevant workforce. These initiatives are also adapting communities to become more resilient in facing and coping with post climactic shocks in urban and rural areas. There is great potential to skill-up youth to promote climate action in their communities and peer groups.

**Mental health:** To support the emotional wellbeing of children and help them overcome exam stress, 1.1 million children (46 per cent girls) in the 14-16 year age group utilized an emotional learning programme. Students were reached through a toll-free IVR number, while teachers were reached through WhatsApp using innovative methods like 30 stories for students and ten stories for teachers. These were created and contextualized for students to better relate to the scenarios pertaining to their social and emotional wellbeing along with feedback platforms for students. This was done in collaboration with the Governments of Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, and Jharkhand.

**Lessons learned**

The reviews conducted in 2021 revealed that the strategic priorities of the 2018-2022 Country Programme remain highly relevant to achieving results for children. The following lessons were gathered in 2021:

There is a need to refine strategies further and innovate to reach the most vulnerable children, and respond to the new realities presented by COVID-19, including tackling the child deprivations that have intensified in its wake. For instance, the COVID-19 emergency in 2021 has highlighted the need
for UNICEF India to make greater use of adaptive and risk management approaches. The health sector’s shock responsiveness was improved by UNICEF mobilizing and engaging various communities of practice to address the primary and secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, UNICEF India successfully expanded its engagement with the private sector. It enhanced the utilization of partners’ assets in support of national priorities such as supplies, vaccine uptake and joint advocacy for COVID-19 prevention. A wide network of partnerships was also fostered with private sector platforms, networks, and aggregators committed to protecting and promoting child rights at the national and state level, allowing us to start new activities in support of family-friendly policies in the textile industry, and challenging harmful gender stereotypes in the marketing sector. The year also saw new innovative engagements, creating funding through partnering with CryptoRelief, a community-run fund delivering respite via the procurement of critical supply syringes, and raising awareness on mental health through a non-fungible token auction, and a partnership with the ICC T20 World Cup. Moving forward, there is potential to reflect on and refine UNICEF’s approach to partnerships, including building on existing partnerships and stronger private sector involvement.

A positive lesson learnt from the pandemic response has reinforced the “regular” evidence-based data for adapting and implementing risk communications in response to the rapidly evolving environment. More than 80 million people were reached and engaged through RCCE, with half a million frontline workers, CSOs and youths trained to engage communities. The pandemic demonstrated the value of evidence generation and behavioural insights as key to positioning social and behaviour change vis-a-vis sectoral, government and non-government partners. There is potential to expand community feedback and accountability mechanisms to affected populations to strengthen engagement with communities. The evidence strategy developed covering essential data, research, and evaluation of critical knowledge gaps, identifying policy solutions and strengthening UNICEF’s value-add as the thought-leader on children in India.

UNICEF was well-positioned to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in India in 2021 basing on its strong expertise in disaster preparedness and response to children, and its ability to convene and rapidly mobilize partners to respond to the evolving situation on the ground. The office mobilized almost US$96 million to respond to the priority concerns affecting children as a fallout of the pandemic. Learnings from 2021 highlighted the importance of coordination, including timely data and streamlined processes for effective management. There is also a need for strengthened capacity of UNICEF technical staff on risk-informed programming and emergency response.