Highlights

- A new wave of COVID-19 infection with the omicron variant hit the region in the early January. As of March 31, a cumulative total of 48,525,186 confirmed COVID-19 cases, of which 47,809,222 cases recovered, and 617,063 deaths were reported in the region of South Asia. Since mid-January 2021, over 441 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been delivered to the region through COVAX Facility.

- The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains dire with severe food insecurity caused by drought, and with critical public services that children and families rely on at risk of collapse.

- Sri Lanka is facing an acute economic and energy crisis sparked by a shortage of hard currency, and this is severely affecting the health sector with several major hospitals having suspended routine surgeries since March 2022 due to dangerously low lifesaving medicine and equipment stocks.

- In the region of South Asia, UNICEF funding needs for its humanitarian action in 2022 are a total of US$2.45 billion, of which 26 per cent has been thus far funded.

UNICEF HAC Appeal 2022
US$2.45 Billion
(Regional Total)
Regional Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

As of March 31, a cumulative total of 48,525,186 confirmed COVID-19 cases, of which 47,809,222 cases recovered, and 617,063 deaths were reported in the region of South Asia. The upward trend of confirmed cases has been observed since the early January 2022, which soon constituted a new wave with the omicron variant in the region. The increase in the number of cases was much sharper than in previous waves with other variants; however, most countries in the region has passed its peak by the mid-February, with an only exception of Bhutan, which continued demonstrating a sharp upward trend until the end of March.

Children across Afghanistan are increasingly vulnerable to disease and illness due to the combination of rising malnutrition, drought, displacement, and lack of access to safe water, sanitation and health services. The measles outbreak remains a significant concern with 62,185 cases of measles and 330 deaths reported across the country since January 2021. Across the country, 22.8 million people – half of the population – are projected to be acutely food insecure in 2022 (IPC 3 and 4). The nutrition situation in the country remains alarming with an estimated that 3.2 million children in Afghanistan expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2022, and a million severely malnourished children at risk of death, if immediate action is not taken.

Sri Lanka is facing an acute economic and energy crisis sparked by a shortage of hard currency, and this is severely affecting the health sector with several major hospitals having suspended routine surgeries since March 2022 due to dangerously low lifesaving medicine and equipment stocks. A sudden rise in the price of key commodities and fuel shortages have forced tens of thousands of people to queue for hours outside petrol and gas filling stations since March 2022. People also faced daily power cuts of up to 12-13 hours in March. Sri Lanka’s food costs were inflated by 25.7 percent and retail costs by 15.1 percent in February 2022, among the highest in Asia as well as the highest in Sri Lanka since 2008. Following the unpegging of the rupee from the US dollar, inflation rose to 30 percent for food in March. Commodities such as food and fuel are either unavailable or exorbitantly priced, and many staples are beyond the reach of many ordinary Sri Lankans.

Sri Lanka’s children are at the heart of this crisis, and it is likely that all six million of them will be affected. As families struggle to find enough food, public transportation has been cut and children are unable to go to school, cutting off their access to school meals. Due to a shortage of paper for printing, the Ministry of Education has postponed school examinations. These barriers to accessing schools, learning and the other services they provide is making children increasingly vulnerable to being pushed into child labour and other risks to child protection.

COVID-19 Vaccination

Over 2.4 billion doses have been administered across South Asian countries since January 16, 2021 with 58 per cent of the total population fully vaccinated and 69 per cent having received the first dose. Within this figure, more than 441 million doses have been received across all eight South Asian countries through the COVAX facility. Seven countries in the region have reached the December 2021 benchmark of 40 per cent of total population fully vaccinated. Afghanistan is the only country remaining with only 11 per cent fully vaccinated. Bhutan and the Maldives have already reached 70 per cent of their total populations fully vaccinated (the mid-2022 global target).

---

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

Afghanistan

Nutrition
- From January to March, UNICEF and partners provided lifesaving treatment for severe acute malnutrition to 105,715 children and young child feeding counselling to 243,015 primary caregivers through health facilities and mobile services across the country.
- UNICEF continued its engagement in scaling up the SAM treatment services; a total of 704 health sub centres have started delivering nutrition services in the reporting period. In addition, UNICEF continues to reach vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach and previously inaccessible areas through mobile health and nutrition teams (MHNT) with 137 MHNTs operating in 29 provinces in March. The scale up of nutrition services into private clinics and Family Health Houses is underway in the eight provinces of Badakhshan, Bamiyan, Ghor, Urozgan, Daykundi, Faryab, Badghis and Herat.

Health
- UNICEF continued to support the delivery of health services through NGO partners covering all 34 provinces as part of the Sehatmandi project, enabling 2,215 health facilities to provide a basic package of health services across the country with more than 4 million people reached with out-patient consultations (including 1.4 million children).
- Through the measles outbreak response intervention in 49 districts of 24 provinces, together with the routine immunization programme, more than 1.39 million children aged between 6 to 59 months have been vaccinated against measles during the first quarter of 2022.
- UNICEF continues to strengthen health service provision through the ongoing training of more than 11,000 community health workers and 108 family midwives on topics such as integrated community case management, community-based nutrition counselling, adolescent health, GBV prevention and mental health and psychosocial support. The training series is expected to be completed by May 2022.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- In the reporting period, UNICEF and partners continued to scale up lifesaving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), reaching 1,051,076 people with safe drinking water, 681,597 people with critical WASH supplies and 95,092 people with improved access to safe sanitation.
- To enhance preparedness for the heightened risk of a large AWD/Cholera outbreak, due to the high vulnerability of the Afghan population and lack of adequate service provision, UNICEF supported workshops with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) to develop Integrated Emergency Response Teams to quickly respond to new cases of AWD/Cholera. As part of the preparedness efforts, UNICEF and partners supported 228,437 people at risk of AWD with hygiene promotion and 164,639 with critical hygiene supplies. UNICEF continues to support drought affected IDPs reaching 29,232 people with water trucking in Kandahar and Herat and supporting 34,378 drought affected IDPs with hygiene supplies.

Child Protection, GBViE, and PSEA
- From January to March, UNICEF reached a total of 180,330 children and caregivers with mental health and psychosocial support through recreational activities, awareness-raising activities, case referrals, as well as on child well-being.
- UNICEF and partners scaled up gender-based violence prevention activities, reaching 42,661 people.
Adolescents/Youth
- A total of 33,500 Women and girls used UNICEF-supported safe spaces to access critical information and services in Kunduz, Ghazni, Zabul, Daikundi, Herat, Kandahar, Parwan, Balkh and Kabul provinces. They received awareness on integrated life-saving messages, including life-skills sessions and psychosocial support.
- In the first quarter, a total of 52,354 people has been trained on gender-based violence prevention and child marriage.

Bangladesh
Nutrition
- As of 31 March 2022, 2,768 children (1,265 girls) suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) were treated in UNICEF-supported facilities countrywide, including 1,738 children through UNICEF-supported 26 integrated nutrition facilities in Cox’s Bazar camps. Additionally, 123,718 caregivers of children aged 0-23 months received Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) counselling.

Health
- UNICEF and partners maintained the quality and accessibility of health services for 298,457 Rohingya refugees (16 per cent under five, 1 per cent Person with Disabilities (PwD) in ten camps through five 24/7 Primary Healthcare Centres and eight Health Posts.
- Under the COVID-19 response, UNICEF supported the costing of the “Oxypedia” National medical oxygen plan and an online oxygen data monitoring tool. Aside the installation of 30 Liquid medical oxygen across the country, plans are underway to install additional plant in Myrmensingh medical college. Installation of oxygen manifold system is underway in 80 Upazilas. About 1,000 oxygen concentrators were distributed to 100 Upazila health centres.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- In March 2022, Dhaka city has suffered an outbreak of diarrhoea cases as reported by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh. Diarrhoea cases increase every year in this period, but this year the rate was relatively high: 69,115 case in 2022 compared to 54,229 in 2019. UNICEF provided technical advices to Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority, including to increase chlorination dose and undertake water quality testing at the distribution point to end user level. UNICEF also supported message dissemination in media to promote boiling water before drinking, washing hands at critical times and cleaning household reservoirs every six months. Over 8 million people have been reached via social media with this critical lifesaving information.
- Through UNICEF direct support, a total of 242,500 Rohingya population (124,888 female, 127,313 children, 7,500 PwD) in eight camps have access to water supply, sanitation, and hygiene. 49,691 adolescent girls and women have been oriented on improved Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) practices.

Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA
- UNICEF has supported the Department of Social Services to upgrade the Child Helpline (CHL) with links to the case management system for better coordination with social workers and CHL service providers. From January to March 2022, the CHL received 31,350 calls of which 81.70 per cent were related to violence against children and women. 1,072 children (559 girls) have been supported by the referral mechanism.
- 5,274,456 (2,600,758 female, 29,537 PwD) children and caregivers have received Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) through the social workforce, child rights facilitators, adolescent clubs and strengthened Community-Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPC) nationwide. In Cox’s Bazar, 56,294 children and caregivers in the Rohingya community and 35,961 in the Bangladeshi host communities are accessing MHPSS since the beginning of the year.
- 62,494 individuals (35,474 female, 621 PwD) have been reached with Gender Based Violence prevention, risk mitigation and response services nationally. Among them 7,294 (3,258 girls) children are from the Rohingya refugee community in Cox’s Bazar.

Education
- At the national level, UNICEF supported 367,792 marginalised children (180,390 girls) to access formal or non-formal education, including early learning. The primary education institutions from grade 1 to 5 reopened in two shifts on March 2, 2022, the pre-primary on March 15, 2022 and the secondary schools on February 25 following safe school reopening guidelines, after six-weeks closure.
- UNICEF advocated for the national school reopening and roll-out of Myanmar Curriculum Piloting (MCP) in Rohingya refugee camps. In the Cox’s Bazar refugee camps 198,468 learners (94,264 girls) including 1,027 children with disabilities have attended 2,700 Learning Centres (LCs) in this quarter. 2,430 adolescents (553 girls) learning through MCP. With this, UNICEF has supported a total of 200,898 learners (94,817 girls) in the camps.

Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)
- A total of 214,318 people (48,433 girls, 87,550 female, and 1,064 PWD) were reached in camps for COVID-19 prevention and vaccination, Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD) and MCP. Interpersonal Communication (IPC) sessions have been an integral part of the Social Behaviour Change (SBC) community engagement packages. A 570-strong army of SBC volunteers facilitated the sessions with the tailor-made key behavioural matrix.
- Through 14 Information and Feedback Centres (IFCs) in the camps, UNICEF partners received and referred 5,670 feedback, 2,092 complaints and 7,375 queries, of which 793 were related to COVID-19. Other issues were related to health, non-food items, and WASH. About 60 per cent of the service seeker’s feedback loop was closed.
Bhutan

Nutrition
- Data collection process for the assessment of nutritional status among the monks and nuns in 30 monastic institutions completed in January 2022.

Health
- 270,000 doses of moderna vaccines received (donated by Denmark) and 90,090 doses of Pfizer vaccines were received through COVAX facility.
- Two rounds of paediatric vaccination campaigns (5-11 years) were completed, inoculating 83,226 children.
- 550,000 0.3ml syringes and 30,000 reconstituted syringes for paediatric vaccination were procured.
- 186 refrigerators were procured to support maintenance of Expanded Program on Immunisation (EPI) vaccines and transport vaccines to primary health services and hospitals.
- Training of health workers for the Effective Vaccine Management assessment completed in January 2022 and the data collection process (which was halted due to the lockdown in the country) is scheduled to start in May 2022.
- Fourth dose campaign launched from 18 April 2022 targeting high risk and vulnerable populations.
- Walk-in-Freezer installed at the National EPI Cold store.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- Contract awarded to vendor for the installation of handwashing stations outside with provision of safe water at entrance and provision of safe water within 34 additional Primary Health Centres (PHC) for hand hygiene, drinking and IPC. Once completed, 82 PHCs out of 185 PHCs will have access to safe water for hand hygiene, drinking and IPC.

Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA
- 17 case managers (15 female) from the head office including the shelter home had their skills reinforced on case management procedures for Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to handle cases using the guidelines on GBV case management. The training was led by the NGO RENEW with the support of UNICEF.

Education
- The opening of all schools and Early Childhood Care and Development centres was delayed over a month (schools were supposed to open in March) due to lockdown restrictions put in place in the country to ensure that eligible population including all children above 5 years were vaccinated against COVID-19. All regular schools have been reopened for face-to-face learning on 18 April 2022 in a phased manner.
- Established COVID-19 safety protocols (use of masks, hand washing with soap, maintaining social distance, reading children’s temperature in the morning) are being implemented across the nation.
- Candidates qualifying for placement (in country and ex-country professional/tertiary education programmes) will be placed on a priority basis following the announcement of Grade 12 high stake examination results.
- 64 Disaster Management focal teachers have been provided a virtual training by the Ministry of Education on Basic Disaster Risk Management and Planning. As a result, teachers will be able to strengthen School-based Disaster Management Planning (SDMP), mitigate risks, respond as frontline responders, and facilitate recovery.

C4D, Community Engagement and AAP.
- Plans to address COVID-19 shadow issues, specifically End Violence against Children and mental health promotion campaign, were endorsed by the government. A local firm to develop Information, Education and Communication materials to support the campaign is in the process of recruitment.
- Work is in progress to identify the priority districts for targeted community engagement interventions.
- Activities to engage and mobilize youth, local government officials and religious leaders finalized.
- Discussion is ongoing with National Broadcast media (BBS TV and radio) to establish a medium-term partnership.

Gaps/Challenges
- Due to surge in the COVID-19 cases and rampant community transmission, the uptake of essential health care services is being hampered.
- The Education Sector Disaster Management and Contingency Plan is outdated and needs revision, incorporating some of the lessons learned from COVID-19; however, there is a funding gap to implement.
- There is a huge turnover of teachers trained as disaster management focal points. There is no fund set aside to train the new teachers on School-Based Disaster Risk Management.
- Resources to purchase supplies for pre-positioning remains a challenge.

India

Nutrition
- 25.8 million (85.7 per cent of the targeted 30.2 million) pregnant women received 180+ Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplements during pregnancy from January to March of 2022 as reported in the health management information system data.
- With the schools reopening across the country, UNICEF advocated for the resumption of nutrition services to the targeted 49 million female students in the age group of 10-19 years. These efforts include advocacy for return to comprehensive service delivery, identifying alternate delivery systems and monitoring coverage in marginalized districts.
- By the end of March, about ten per cent of the female students from classes 6-12 and 14.9 per cent adolescent female students received 4-weekly IFA supplements through schools and anganwadi centers, respectively.
Health

- India has stepped up diagnostic capabilities by operationalizing more RT-PCR machines and procuring and installing new generation sequencing platforms to diagnose new variants. UNICEF contributed significantly to these efforts to strengthen health systems. UNICEF has been providing technical assistance to Oxygen Programme Management Unit in the Ministry of Health with placement of eight technical consultants and guiding National Oxygen Strategy.
- The programming will now shift to provision of essential health services focusing on Maternal, Neonatal Children Health care, as COVID-19 cases go down. Preparedness and response to other public health emergencies like acute encephalitis in Bihar, acute diarrhoeal and vector borne diseases in pre-monsoon time will be prioritized across the country. Integrated Diarrhea Control Fortnight will be led by the Ministry and prepositioning of Zinc, ORS, Antibiotics and IV Fluids will be prioritized using government resources in addition to creating awareness for prevention of diarrhea and other vector borne diseases.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

- Across 15 UNICEF supported states, 1,674,509 people were reached with critical WASH supplies and services during this reporting period. With a focus on vulnerable communities, SATO taps, masks and sanitizers were distributed to households in slums and informal settlements.
- Safe school protocols on COVID-19 prevention and control were implemented in 47,287 schools. These include retrofitting of WASH facilities, and handwashing stations including paddle-operated handwashing units, capacity building and Social and Behavior Change Communication campaigns on COVID-appropriate behaviour (CAB) including Handwashing with soap (HHWS).
- 105,042 community-level service providers (health workers, Anganwadi workers, members of the Gram Panchayat, Village Water and Sanitation Committee members) were trained in infection prevention and control, including CAB and HHWS. Anganwadi centres were equipped with WASH facilities, colour-coded dustbins, handwashing stations including paddle-operated handwashing units.
- 763,079 people were reached with handwashing behaviour change programmes in the UNICEF-supported states.

Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA

- Mental health and psychosocial support services and support for the prevention of gender-based violence were rolled out in the 20 districts of Bihar and Assam by a cadre of 120 master trainers with technical support from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) and the State National Health Mission.
- UNICEF India collaborated on an initiative supported by UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia with Columbia University to enhance adolescent engagement in humanitarian settings. Students from the university are extending technical support remotely through a desk review and stakeholder consultations to identify the needs and vulnerabilities of adolescents and youth during emergencies and their possible role in response and recovery.
- In Jammu and Kashmir affected by civil strife, UNICEF has expanded its adolescent programme to 108 adolescent and child friendly centres across four districts with a focus on life skills education. As an ongoing process UNICEF will ensure saturation in the existing districts and scale up simultaneously to other districts along with restructuring the curriculum and capacity scale up for these centres.

Education

- Schools and anganwadi centres (early childhood development centres) have reopened in almost all the states and Union Territories during the first quarter of 2022. UNICEF extended technical support to state governments to roll out back to school campaigns and remedial/catch up programmes to address and mitigate the learning loss due to prolonged school closures. In the state of Maharashtra, around 60,000 children from 1,200 elementary schools were provided access to quality children’s books to continue learning. In the state of Madhya Pradesh, 1,570 male and 483 female teachers were trained to facilitate learning recovery activities. In the state of Jharkhand, a total of 200,000 children (50 per cent girls) continued learning, through mobile learning vans and community learning camps with support from trained teachers, volunteers, and community mobilizers.

Social Protection

- UNICEF’s advocacy and technical assistance to the government contributed to extending Social Protection measures to three key national social protection programmes, namely NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), MukhyaMantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (in Bihar2) and PMMVY (a maternity benefit program run by the Government of India). The coverage has been expanded to an estimated 10 million girls, as against 9.7 million in December 2021.
- Advocacy efforts to expand the maternity benefits to second order child births led to a partial expansion to include the second order girl children, in addition to an increase in benefit from 5,000 to 6,000 rupees.
- UNICEF India signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of local governments (MOPR), Government of India to institutionalize child responsive local governance. The partnership is being rolled out in five states.

Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)

- Between January and March 2022, UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the relevant government departments to ensure communities receive timely and accurate information on COVID-19 and that they are receptive to the children’s vaccination that was introduced in the first quarter of the year. Interventions across 22 states are implemented through 65 partners in 460 districts and 297 social behaviour change consultants. Support to the government included the third wave response during February 2022 and the roll-out of vaccination for the 12-18 years age group.
- Vaccine perception offline social listening research was conducted in February 2022 in Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Nagaland, and Tamil Nadu. The qualitative study included interviews with 453 men and 505 women; 30 per cent of the respondents were from the urban population. 73 per cent of the respondents took the vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection/getting seriously sick. Of those unvaccinated, 17 percent did not consider ‘COVID-19 as a serious risk’. Fear of side effects was cited as reason for about 25 per cent of the respondents to delay the vaccination.

2 The scheme has different names in different states
• Five million people were engaged with appropriate face to face and web messages dispelling the confusion and myths around the vaccine, particularly in the States of Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh.

• In Odisha about 30,000 tribal youths were vaccinated through campaigns organized in partnership with Tribal Federation (TRIFED).

• Drawing lessons from the AAP intervention in Kerala (2018 floods response), a similar Community Feedback Mechanism is established in Bastar district, Chhattisgarh in partnership with the District Administration and youth network (Yuvodaya). The design uses a mobile phone application and an online dashboard to collect and analyse feedback from the communities and share the findings with the key stakeholders. The first survey was on access to services and vaccines, CAB compliance and risk perception. The findings were shared with the District Administration, which led to prompt action to enhance vaccination amongst the left-out population, and CAB messaging was intensified in the remote areas of the district.

Emergency Preparedness

• UNICEF extended technical support to the state of Assam to develop the Flood Preparedness Assessment Scorecard, which helped in the standardization of the flood preparedness review process in the state. The districts have commenced using the score card to report their status of preparedness using 11 Minimum Preparedness Standards. The reports will be reviewed by the state, and districts will be ranked according to their level of preparedness. UNICEF will support the districts to enhance their preparedness based on the ranking.

Adolescents/Youth

• Under the Young Warrior NXT initiative, 15 pilots were activated across India to help bridge the learning gap induced by the COVID-19 school closures. Around 75,000 young people participated in the baseline-ending assessments in these pilots to help decide scaling it up to impact 500,000 young people around India.

• To strengthen job-connect owing to high unemployment after the pandemic, a partnership with Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship was launched by YuWaah in four aspirational districts with a potential to scale up to 119 districts and 5,000 skills hubs.

• YuWaah facilitated a social dialogue between young people and the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to air youth voices. Teachers from 5,400 schools (across 33 districts) participated in a social Innovation challenge organized in Telangana in partnership with UPSHIFT, UNICEF’s Office of innovation.

Maldives

Nutrition

• A breastfeeding information booklet was developed and disseminated to new mothers, which will be a resource that encourages exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months.

• UNICEF supported Health Protection Agency to conduct nutrition activities at sub-national level, and to monitor essential nutrition services in health facilities in three islands. Refresher sessions were also conducted to health care providers delivering nutrition services from the three sites on the updated recommended IYCF practices, that included feeding during illness such as COVID-19. The sessions reached a total of 33 health professionals while separate sessions for the public were held to equip and improve parents and caregiver’s knowledge on complementary feeding and breast-feeding, reaching a total of 31 beneficiaries.

• During the reporting period, a total of 7,540 children received growth-monitoring services and 331 parents and caregivers received IYCF counselling from the 12 reporting sites where the strategy is being piloted.

• UNICEF supported the Health Protection Agency to build capacity of staff on antenatal care (ANC) nutrition in the main tertiary hospital of the country, where 40 cent per cent of deliveries take place. A total of 45 participants attended the session, including doctors, nurses and nursing students. The training focused on addressing the nutritional needs of pregnant women who were high risk, or have illnesses including COVID-19.

Health

• During the reporting period, UNICEF supported the government to finalize the Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) report, dissemination and development of Comprehensive Improvement Plan of EVM. The gaps in cold chain and supply line are already being addressed by UNICEF and donor support.

• UNICEF supported the government to conduct a two-day national workshop in collaboration with WHO, on Vaccine and Cold-Chain Management for immunization focal persons from Atolls and Greater Male’ Area, as part of strengthening the national vaccine program and in preparation for paediatric COVID-19 vaccination.

• During the reporting period, a total of 1,659 pregnant women were registered and 2004 women received ANC counselling from 17 reporting sites.

• UNICEF supported to conduct pre-testing of the ANC/PNC package in four sites within the periphery, reaching a total sample size of 42 participants. As part of the process, focus group discussions were conducted at selected regional, atoll and island level sites. The pretesting will support to inform and evaluate the reliability and validity of the package.

Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA

• UNICEF, with the delivery of the training and orientation, is supporting the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services for the roll out of IBAMA (or Community Social Groups) at the island level, comprising one representative from social service, health, education, police, local councils and local women's development committees to work together in prevention and facilitation of interventions for vulnerable groups. IBAMA groups have now been established in 32 islands with an additional 13 islands receiving the initial orientation.

• UNICEF is supporting the Local Government Authority (LGA) in conducting Social Behavior Change (SBC) trainings for Women’s Development Committees (WDCs), to equip WDCs with the necessary skills to engage in addressing harmful social and gender norms at the island-level. The training has now been conducted for 207 participants in 60 islands of 7 different Atolls.
• UNICEF continued its support to the Maldives Police Service to conduct the Sensitization Programme on Child Rights and Child Protection, to streamline and to improve service provision in for cases of violence against children. As of now a total of 441 Police Officers from 13 different atolls have been reached.

Education
• All schools around the country resumed in-person learning and extracurricular activities since January 2022.
• Strategy on Remediation for addressing learning Loss due to COVID-19 was approved and launched in March 2022. This strategy was developed by the National Institute of Education/Ministry of Education with support from UNICEF.

Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)
• The Government of Maldives has drafted a plan to establish a COVID-19 response programme under the Health Protection Agency and close the Health Emergency Operations Centre (HEOC). Thus, Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) is now a strategy under the new plan, and with UNICEF’s support it has finalized key interventions: continuation of the public engagement on upkeep of life saving behaviours (with focus on people with special needs), scale-up of vaccine demand generation/addressing misinformation (as boosters being administered at the moment), provision of timely updates on COVID-19 variants to the public and changing epidemiological situations.

Nepal
Nutrition
• A total of 2,183 children aged 6-59 months with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) have been treated in approximately 863 outpatient therapeutic centres (OTCs) across the country, with UNICEF support.
• Caregivers of 80,351 children aged below 23 months received infant and young child feeding (IYCF) counselling. In addition, UNICEF continued ongoing support for IYCF information dissemination and counselling services via telephone, radio, SMS, TV and other social media communication channels.
• 21,679 children (6-23 months old) received multiple micronutrient powders with UNICEF assistance.
• UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) to implement family mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) pilot program in 4 out of 77 districts for the treatment of moderate and severe acute malnutrition.

Health
• Over 40 million doses3 of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered by the Government of Nepal (GoN) as of 31 March, to 94 per cent of the targeted population (aged above 12 years) with the first dose and 82 per cent with full doses. UNICEF continued to provide technical support in effective vaccine management, vaccination campaign including supply management of vaccine and devices. UNICEF supported the government in delivering over 5.6 million doses of Moderna and Pfizer BioNTech vaccines. 91 per cent of children aged 12-17 years received the first dose and 73 per cent received full doses of vaccine during the reporting period.
• UNICEF distributed 36 in-line refrigerators from the COVAX facility, 38 solar direct-drive refrigerators, 1,109 freeze-preventive vaccine carriers and 19 walk-in refrigerators, as support to the GoN. Further, UNICEF supported the government with COVID-19-related supplies, including 13,459 home isolation health kits, 10,050 face shields, 225,000 surgical gloves, 778,050 surgical masks and 7,957 hand sanitizers.
• UNICEF handed over 200 units of oxygen concentrators and 1,288 units of oxygen cylinders and also supported in transportation of these equipment to the Provincial Health Logistics Centres.
• UNICEF and Biomedical Engineering Foundation Nepal continued partnership and provided technical support to 26 COVID-19 designated hospitals for repair and maintenance of oxygen-related biomedical equipment (ventilators, high-flow nasal-canula, continuous positive airway pressure, oxygen cylinders and oxygen concentrators).

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
• UNICEF supported 16 schools through improvement of WASH facilities benefiting 6,400 students. 186 ultra-poor households were supported with toilet repairs for reuse, while another 50 ultra-poor households were supported with Bio-sand filter for safe water.
• Over 3,000 people benefitted from essential WASH supplies including 1,900 soaps and 195 hygiene kit that were distributed in poor communities, to support in hygienic practice for prevention from water borne diseases and COVID -19 infection.
• 16 water supply system were upgraded for service improvement and continuation as part of the longer-term support including inclusion of water safety planning benefitting more than 2,400 people. Over 1,000 people benefitted from the installation of four handwashing stations in community and district health offices.
• Over 56,286 people were reached through door-to-door visits in poor communities, as part of continuation of WASH education, promotion and linkage with nutrition status improvement.
• As part of the local level support to COVID-19 recovery, UNICEF provided formal WASH skill development training program to 85 people (including 10 female) focusing on plumbing, electrical and masonry works.

Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA
• UNICEF and its partners supported 4,218 people (1,725 males and 2,493 females) from the communities including those in holding centres at points of entry with psychosocial support through deployment of community based psychosocial workers and counsellors.
• 39 people (22 males and 17 females), including representatives from local governments and frontline service providers in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts of Sudurpaschim province, were sensitized on importance of psychosocial issues, referral pathways and effective and timely psychosocial support to vulnerable people.

---

• 3,264 people (640 males and 2,624 females) were reached with gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services. Additionally, a three-days training on GBV was provided to two partner organizations of Lumbini and Sudurpaschim provinces focusing on wide range of issues.
• UNICEF-supported protection helplines and emergency intervention services including appropriate care arrangements and emergency assistance, reached 714 children (285 boys, 429 girls), out of which 118 cases (45 boys, 73 girls) were referred to different services such as health, security and justice.
• UNICEF continued to support the documentation of real time protection situations in the communities through protection monitoring and incident reporting (PMIR) system. 18 volunteers were oriented on PMIR system.

Education
• UNICEF and partners trained 1,900 teachers (58 per cent females) from 650 schools of Lumbini and Sudurpaschim provinces to facilitate ‘tole-sikshya’ program (community learning circles) and safe reopening of schools.
• Total of 6,053 children (50 per cent girls) have been reached through 206 ‘tole-sikshya’ classes and equipped with supplementary learning support to recover their learning loss from school closures.
• 207 local level executives and other educational stakeholders from 17 targeted local governments/municipalities of Lumbini and Karnali provinces were oriented for effective implementation of ‘tole-sikshya’ program.
• UNICEF and partners oriented 1,028 teachers (42 per cent females) on psychosocial support and safe re-opening of schools in Madhesh province.
• UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to improve Education in Emergency (EiE) component of education management information system (EMIS) and is providing continuous technical support to provincial and local governments to collect and obtain EiE information through systematic mechanisms. Till date, 71 per cent of schools have reported EiE information through the EMIS system.

Social Protection
• UNICEF initiated the ‘cash plus’ response through a shock responsive approach and supported, approximately 9,000 households (HHs), including 1,200 persons with disability in 12 municipalities across Nepal, targeting the most vulnerable people and children, including Dalit families. Of those supported majority HHs included people from the Dalit community with children under five. Field monitoring and third-party monitoring of the intervention has established that the targeted HHs received the planned cash support amount of NPR 10,000 (approximately US$ 85) in their bank accounts or manually through the local government staffs/representatives. The cash support was complemented by nutritional counselling and behaviour change communication delivered through phone, while WASH services were also implemented in the targeted municipalities.

Cross-sectoral – (HCT, C4D, Risk Communication and Community Engagement, AAP)
• A total of 1,750 community feedback were collected in January-February through online and offline platforms on COVID-19, including from 576 community members from different parts of the country through focus group discussions. More than 85 per cent of the concerns were related to access to vaccination, its availability and efficacy, 30 per cent about COVID-19 spread, testing and treatment, and remaining on secondary impact of COVID-19.
• A rapid survey on vaccination was conducted with more than 174,000 people (above 12 years old) from 21 municipalities of Madhesh province. As per survey findings, 84 per cent reported to be fully vaccinated, while for others, certain issues such as insufficient vaccine, less information about the vaccination time and venue, were mentioned as reasons for not getting vaccinated. Findings were shared with provincial and local government and issues were addressed accordingly.
• UNICEF reached more than 7 million people through COVID-19 vaccination information through radio and television.
• UNICEF was able to reach 10.6 million people through social media channels (gathering 179.2 million impressions and 29.6 million engagements) through content promoting safety measures related to Omicron and various other related issues including routine immunization, especially targeting children.
• During the reporting period, UNICEF-supported Crisis Media Hub at MoHP developed and released over 200 multimedia products on COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related health messages. The Hub engaged influencers (actors/mayors/singers/social activists) on videos to motivate people to get vaccinated and follow public health safety measures, and videos were broadcast across the country through the national Nepal TV and 19 private TV stations.

Pakistan

Nutrition
• A total of 33,586 children suffering from SAM (16,826 girls and 16,760 boys) have been admitted for SAM treatment during the first quarter.
• UNICEF ensured a total 58,490 children aged 6-59 months (28,365 boys and 30,125 girls) received multi-micronutrient supplementation during the first quarter of 2022.
• With UNICEF’s support, counselling on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices in the COVID-19 context through health facilities, Lady Health Workers and other community-based networks reached 158,543 pregnant and lactating women during this period through community engagement efforts.

Health
• UNICEF is supporting provincial and regional health departments to ensure continuity of essential primary healthcare services including immunization, ante-natal care, post-natal care, delivery services, childcare and curative care for adults in 136 targeted health facilities reaching 1,322,385 people during the first quarter of 2022.
• Measles immunization reached a total of 95,562 children (46,699 females and 48,863 males) vaccinated against measles in the 136 UNICEF supported health facilities during this reporting period
• UNICEF-supported IPC training reached 245 frontline health workers during the first quarter of 2022.
• Clinical Management of Children with COVID-19 training was provided to a total of 5 paediatricians trained during 2022.
**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene**
- UNICEF rehabilitated and installed WASH facilities which included ultraviolet water filters, toilets and handwashing stations in 10 healthcare facilities (HCFs).
- In the first quarter of 2022, 422,681 people have gained access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities in these HCFs contributing towards reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection among the healthcare workers and the general public especially care givers and children seeking essential health services.
- UNICEF supported an overall fabrication and installation of 21 handwashing stations placed at strategic points in cities and communities enabling over 50,000 people thus far to wash hands properly.
- Almost 180,666 people have been so far supported with hygiene promotion services including COVID-19 prevention and control information.
- UNICEF has supported the training of 1,568 frontline sanitary and health workers on WASH/IPC in HCFs and high-risk communities on WASH/IPC.
- UNICEF reached an overall of 31,920 children (16,279 girls and 15,641 boys) in 60 schools with WASH/IPC services.

**Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA**
- UNICEF and its partners have trained a total of 1734 social workforce professionals (894 women and 840 men) in psychosocial support and stigma prevention in all provinces through a package developed by UNICEF.
- A total of 13,742 parents, caregivers, children and individuals (2,608 girls, 2,323 boys, 4,493 women and 4,318 men) received psychosocial support by trained social workforce professionals. This includes 621 individuals (102 girls, 60 boys, 199 women and 261 men) who received specialized counselling sessions in all the provinces.
- Messages on stigma and violence against children have reached a total of 121,890 individuals.
- The total number of children who received child protection services supported by UNICEF in Sindh and Balochistan has reached 323 children (49 girls and 274 boys).
- During the reporting period, implementing partners continued to deploy multiple channels to enable the affected men, women, boys and girls to access platforms for safe reporting of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The mechanisms include complaints boxes, trained Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) focal persons, hotlines, special email addresses, and reporting through face-to-face interaction with CSO staff. 331,200 people (125,000 men, 140,400 women, 31,700 boys and 34,100 girls) had access to safe reporting mechanisms that can handle Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

**Education**
- UNICEF continued to support national and provincial education authorities with school readiness and safety. During the first quarter 19,077 children (13,022 girls) continued to have access to safe formal and non-formal education through UNICEF support.
- UNICEF contributed to support safe operation of school’s teachers and education officers by training them on safe reopening and operations of schools, taking total teachers and education officers reached to 694 teachers and education officials (451 women).
- 247 teachers and education officials (131 women) and education officers have been trained on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).
- The seventeen-week distance learning training for 100 students (39 girls) from Punjab and Sindh has been completed, the virtual training is focused on functional English, building soft skills and communication skills to improve student/learner employability.

**C4D, Community Engagement and AAP**
- During the reporting period 414,690 people were engaged in risk communication and community engagement actions across the country.
- Through national and private media channels with messages on COVID-19 prevention and vaccination reached 22,500,000 people.
- Through social media 375,356 people were reached with messages on COVID-19 vaccination reached. On Facebook UNICEF Pakistan received 835,844 impressions and 239,929 engagements. On Twitter, the two tweets received, 34,756 impressions and 3,676 engagements. On Instagram, the three posts received 18,054 impressions 408 engagements.

**Emergency Preparedness, Response and Disaster Risk Reduction**
- Prepositioning plans updated, and emergency stocks increased to serve for 150,000 people and 29 standby partnership agreements pre-signed to facilitate timely response in case of an emergency.
- UNICEF signed Disaster Risk Management related workplan with National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan with cross sectoral commitments by WASH, Education, Child Protections and gender programmes apart from the overarching DRM support needs.

**Gaps/Challenges**
- Given the lack of available resources, hindering UNICEF’s capacity to address needs in the high-risk areas, focus has been maintained on ensuring functionality of regular programmes.
- For WASH due to limited resources, UNICEF focused mainly on handwashing in public places, schools and HCFs. However, providing handwashing stations and soap to vulnerable households could have had a significant positive impact.
- Healthcare waste management remains an area requiring urgent attention from government authorities. UNICEF is therefore engaging with the Ministry of Health to coordinate waste management efforts and to mobilize all concerned stakeholders and donors to support the proposed initiatives. Due to lack of dedicated COVID-19 response funding regular resources were re-programmed to meet the planned targets.
- Non-Compliance with Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) continue and lifting of general restriction on markets and opening of schools may put the country at risk of resurgence of new cases with new variants, which can be avoided with appropriate RCCE measures for PHSM compliance.
Sri Lanka

Nutrition
- Findings of the formative research to contextualize maternal, infant and young child feeding which includes a chapter on impact of COVID-19 on food security and seeking maternal care was presented to the key stakeholders at a round table discussion at the Ministry of Health (MoH) in 2022. MoH is currently preparing and planning to implement the key recommendations of this research.
- Continuing on the support to the Family Health Bureau (FHB) in converting the standard capacity building programme for Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) and growth monitoring to an online module from 2021, work on the Tamil IYCF online training package was initiated. It would benefit about 1,500 health care workers in maternal and child health who use Tamil as the first language.
- UNICEF and WFP are jointly supporting the Medical Research Institute of the MoH to conduct a national nutrition and a micronutrient survey to study the prevalence of key micronutrient deficiencies, to assess the coverage of key nutrition interventions and household food insecurity. The research proposal was finalized with the national steering committee.

Health
- Procured essential personnel protective equipment worth of USD 78,500 (Rs 24,764,864.40) to be used by 10,000 health care workers in the care of COVID-19 confirmed or suspected patients and during the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns.
- UNICEF commenced supporting the Epidemiology Unit of MoH to upgrade their existing website which hosts key information regarding mass vaccination programmes, vaccination centres, real-time data on vaccine coverage, essential target groups in districts and updated resources, as the current website designed many years back is unable to meet the requirements of the rapid vaccine roll out programme. Such upgraded website will be a source of real-time information to 125,000 local health care workers, the general public and to international community.
- Effective Vaccine Management Assessment 2.0 was successfully completed in the country and the continuous improvement plan for the country which provides recommendations to improve the national immunization programme including COVID-19 immunization was submitted to the Epidemiology Unit.
- UNICEF and MoH are preparing and planning to establish three oxygen plants (plant-in-a-box) to strengthen the oxygen production system in the country. The Government of Sri Lanka has plans to establish 10 new oxygen plants at 10 dispersed locations in the country and this support would benefit the population in Western and Southern Province which cater to a population of 7.6 million people.
- UNICEF technically supported the MoH in assessing the maintenance of validation of Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission (eMTCT) of HIV and syphilis programme in the country. Sri Lanka achieved WHO elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV and syphilis in 2018 and following assessment WHO confirmed that Sri Lanka has maintained eMTCT of HIV and Syphilis in 2019-2020.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- UNICEF provide improved hygiene facilities and essential WASH supplies to 1,500 schools in all nine provinces in the county, enabling over 450,000 school children (229,500 girls and 220,500 boys) to resume their education in the new year. Primary schools from the most vulnerable areas were selected for this support in maintaining and operating WASH facilities (cleaning, disinfection etc.), improve hygiene and reinforce hygiene messages among students.
- Targeting urban communities, UNICEF conducted national level training of trainers (ToT) programmes on adapting COVID-19 precautionary measures during the waste collection and trained 108 officers. After the ToTs, these officers trained 2,835 urban local authority health staff and waste collectors. Developed a new normal calendar to promote COVID-19 protective practices and adaptation to the new normal, 2500 copies were disseminated among the MoH clinics, urban local authorities, and high-risk health staff.
- Wider array of consultations was conducted with stakeholders (UNICEF, Ministry of Environment, Bioengineering Unit and Central Environment Authority) for awareness creation, deciding locations and specifications and developing the sustainability plan for the long-term management regarding the installation of incinerators in two hospitals. The technical evaluation committee was formed, and the feasibility assessment was conducted.
- Several trainings were conducted for healthcare workers (medical health staff and hospital waste management staff) from the different types of health care facilities (MoH Clinics, Base Hospitals, primary hospitals) on the safe management of covid and vaccination-related waste.
- Two national level consultation workshops were conducted by UNICEF and MoH to design WASH assessments in health care facilities and health staff was trained on using WASH FIT (Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool) developed by WHO/UNICEF to conduct WASH assessments in health care facilities.
- National level 3 consultation workshops were conducted to finalize the methodology and assessment tools of the COVID-19 vaccination-related waste assessment. The assessments aim to estimate the quantity of healthcare waste generated, describe the methods practiced, to collect, store, transport and dispose of healthcare waste generated due to the COVID-19 vaccination programme and thereby identify the barriers for implementing the practices recommended by the MoH for proper management of healthcare waste generated due to COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Child Protection, GBVIE, and PSEA
- Around 326 community members including children were reached with psychosocial and referral supports through already established divisional Mental Health and Psychosocial forums and community support networks in Northern, Eastern, Uva and Central provinces.
- As part of UNICEF continuous advocacy and technical support, around 86 children were reunified with their families from institutions and social service workforce system was strengthened at community level to regularly monitor the progress of already reunified children.
- 152 children in Childcare institutions were trained on skill development training programs which helped to build their resilient skills and coping capacity in response to COVID-19.
Education

- The implementation of the UNICEF-supported learning continuity and learning recovery strategy for primary grades is currently being led by the provincial education authorities. This intervention particularly targets marginalized children, reaching 834,733 primary children (50 per cent girls). Building on UNICEF’s experience in applying a blended approach (online/offline) in three provinces, this support includes learning assessments, an adjusted curriculum, formative assessments, and individualized teaching with the engagement of parents. Further, this also includes supporting teachers through quality circles.

- UNICEF engaged with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and ICT Agency to develop and roll-out a nation-wide teacher capacity development programme on online teaching-learning, which includes awareness raising and promotion of online safety for teachers and parents for more sustainable capacity building on distance learning. The needs assessment among teachers has been completed and currently UNICEF is supporting the MoE to review the teacher training curriculum and develop modules on the integration of technology into teaching and learning.

- The psychosocial package jointly developed by the MoE, Education Departments in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and UNICEF is currently being printed for distribution. This material would help teachers to address the needs of children, as well as their own. Meanwhile, UNICEF continued to support the MoE to develop the roll-out strategy for the psychosocial package including the ToT and budget. Considering the ongoing security and fuel crises, the ministry has planned to start the ToTs from June 2022 onwards. As reported earlier, the intervention will benefit 113,250 secondary teachers and over 1.9 million students nation-wide.

- In 2021, UNICEF supported the MoE in the development of the School Safety Guidelines, which includes preparedness against health-related pandemics and school-level preparedness for COVID-19. The material is currently being rolled out through ToTs targeting the nine provinces, benefitting all students (4.2 million) in the 10,155 public schools.

- UNICEF continued to support the provincial education authorities in monitoring student attendance following the school reopening. With the evolving nature of the current crises, UNICEF continues to monitor the realities on the ground to help timely advocacy, prioritization, and response.

Social Protection

- UNICEF through WFP and the Department of Samurdh supported 637 families with children under 5 in Kalutara district through cash transfers for two months in 2022, to ensure food security amidst COVID-19 and economic crisis.

- Finalised the questionnaire and began data collection for a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on households. Considering the lack of data on the effect of COVID-19 and the economic crisis on households in Sri Lanka, the responses from this survey will be critical in understanding the needs of households.

- Finalised a public expenditure review on social protection and a documentation of the GoSL’s COVID-19 response. Both these papers are critical pieces of evidence that will support the development of new responses to the economic crisis and stronger social protection programmes.

- Conducted consultations with leaders from five districts to 1. increase public awareness and demand for better social protection systems, and 2. better understand the vulnerabilities people are currently facing and what support they need.

Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)

- A Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey was conducted focusing on booster vaccine to gain insights into eagerness and hesitancy. Based on the results, a mass communication campaign to promote the uptake of the COVID-19 booster vaccine was carried out through TV, Radio and print media reaching a nation-wide audience of over 15 million people.

- UNICEF is supporting Social Listening Tool installed at and managed by the Health Promotion Bureau of MoH for real time monitoring of COVID-19 sentiments to facilitate a quick response by experts.

- Strengthened the IT infrastructure facilities of the Estate and Urban Health Unit of MoH to facilitate their COVID-19 interventions targeting estate (plantation) and urban communities.

- Targeting the estate (plantation) communities, trained 110 Officers in plantation sector to promote COVID-19 protective practices and to monitor the adherence to the IPC measures. Increased the awareness of 40 Estate Managers on COVID-19 prevention and response measures and strengthened the coordination between Estate Management and area Medical Officer of Health (MOH). Reached 500,000 most vulnerable individuals in estates (plantations) through the Risk Communication messages disseminated through public address systems to promote protective practices, increase booster dose uptake and update on the new variants of COVID-19.

- Finalized the inception report and survey tools of the Formative Assessment on handwashing behaviour among households in urban and estate sectors and currently in the process of obtaining the ethical clearance.

Gaps/Challenges

- Mounting public frustration over the economic crisis exploded with multitude of anti-government protests around the country. Largest of such protest continues for over 2 weeks starting on 3 April 2022 in front of the President’s office in Colombo, demanding the President and the Prime Minister to set down. The Cabinet of Ministers except for the Prime Minister resigned en masse on 3 April 2022. With such instability in addition to fuel and power crisis, the whole governance structure is halted and vital services for children are either limited or lacking.

Human Interest Story

How an adolescent girl helped her community fight COVID-19

Studyng at non-formal basic education centers established by UNICEF with funding from Government of Japan and support from Sindh’s authorities empowers girls to become agents of change in their communities

“People tend to fear new things and to resist change,” says 15-year-old Firdous Bhutto, who lives in Bhutta Mohalla, a densely populated community in Qadirpur village in the Ghotki District of Pakistan’s south-eastern Sindh province.
"Initially, people in my community refused to adhere to key preventive behaviours against COVID-19. Later, they refused to be vaccinated against the virus," the student tells.

About 150 families live in Bhutta Mohalla, with most men working in agriculture or construction. Firdous is one of only 30 students aged 12 to 16 who study at a Non-Formal Basic Education (NFBE) Centre established by UNICEF with support from Sindh’s Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education and funding from the Government of Japan in collaboration with Japan’s International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Pakistan.

Located in the midst of a maze of narrow muddy roads and open drains, the one-room center is a beacon of hope and the only learning facility in this impoverished community.

The adolescent girls and boys studying at the NFBE Centre, whose teacher Habibullah happens to be Firdous’ paternal uncle, have always taken a keen interest in the health and hygiene sessions which are included in the curriculum. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly across the world early 2020, the social organizers leading these sessions started to mention COVID-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs).

As the eldest of her six siblings, three of whom study with her, Firdous taught her family what she had learnt as soon as she came back home. Soon, she decided to spread the information further.

"No one is safe until everyone is safe. Extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary actions. After my school shut down because of the lockdowns, I went door to door and told other families about COVID-19," the student explains.

Convincing the villagers of adhering to COVID-19 key preventive behaviours was an uphill task. Initially, people dismissed the information she shared, but Firdous was not discouraged.

After word spread that people living in villages around had become severely ill due to the virus, people started to pay heed to what she said.

After several months of closures, schools in Pakistan started reopening sporadically. Firdous’ uncle and teacher Habibullah attended a UNICEF-supported training on safe reopening of schools, where he learnt how to resume teaching while keeping the students safe at school. When the NFBE center reopened, Firdous assisted him to ensure that all the students adhered to COVID-19 SOPs.

Firdous first heard about the COVID-19 vaccine in March 2021 from an elderly maternal uncle who lives in Kashmore, a city in Northern Sindh. As he visited her family, he told her that he had just been vaccinated.

"COVID-19 was overwhelming for all of us. I was incredibly relieved to hear about the vaccine. It gave me hope that the pandemic may soon come to an end," Firdous explains.

Pakistan’s national COVID-19 vaccination drive, led by the federal Government and provincial authorities with support from UNICEF, initially targeted only seniors. Once more, Firdous went door to door, this time to try and convince older members in her community to get the jab. She visited several families every day, only to be turned back as she faced stiff resistance from everyone.

Misinformation regarding the COVID-19 vaccine was rampant on social media. Both community elders and younger people were very skeptical. Fake rumours of COVID-19 vaccines causing death and other weird conspiracy theories were doing the rounds in the village. Some people even began scolding Firdous, trying to deter her from promoting vaccination.

“My community’s response to the vaccine was very disheartening. I tried to explain that just like the polio vaccine, the COVID-19 vaccine was beneficial and harmless, but to no avail,” she tells.

Firdous decided to focus instead on her immediate family. As her paternal aunt Zebunniya was eligible for vaccination, Firdous tried to convince her to get vaccinated. To alleviate her fears, she arranged a call with her fully vaccinated uncle in Kashmore. The effort paid off and Zebunnisa got vaccinated against COVID-19 the very next day. This prompted other members of the community to gradually follow in her footsteps.

Over the months, the Government lowered the age of people who were eligible to vaccination.

“I was so excited when it was finally announced that everyone aged 12 and above can get vaccinated!” Firdous tells. “I was the first adolescent to get vaccinated in my community, I got the jab as soon as a vaccination team visited our neighbourhood. I gathered my friends and got them vaccinated too!”

Thanks to Firdous’ efforts, all the students at the NFBE centre have now received at least their first shot of COVID-19 vaccine.

Firdous’s father Nasrullah Bhutto, a farmer who only studied until eighth grade himself, often jokes that it is impossible to say no to his daughter because she never gives up.

“The education which Firdous has received at the centre has empowered her to speak up and advocate for what is right. She has become a role model despite her young age,” he tells.

Nasrullah says that he realized the value of education when he was hired at a factory owned by a foreign company in Karachi.
“I was the only one among 50 coworkers who had not graduated from high school. When my contract expired, it was not renewed, while some of my coworkers got better contracts,” he tells. “When I went back home, I told my wife that our children would study and should never have to face the embarrassment I face in society.”

Nasrullah immediately enrolled Firdous and her siblings in a school located in the community at the time, but which taught only up to grade 3. As traveling out of the neighbourhood to study was not considered safe, Firdous and her siblings had to drop out after third grade. They resumed studying only after UNICEF opened an NFBE Centre in Bhutta Mohalla with funding from Government of Japan and support from Sindh’s Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education.

“The NFBE Centre model thrives on community support. The teachers belong to the communities where they teach, which helps convince parents to enroll children, especially girls. We try to foster a sense of ownership within the community so we can achieve sustainable and long-lasting results,” says Rehana Batool, UNICEF Education Officer in Sindh.

So far, 150 NFBE Centres have been established by UNICEF under the “Enhancement of Non-Formal Education” project funded by the Government of Japan in collaboration with JICA and with support from Sindh’s Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education across the province.

Regional Funding Overview & Partnerships

In the region of South Asia, UNICEF funding needs in 2022 are a total of US$2.45 billion to sustain provision of life-saving health and nutrition services, promotion of safe behaviours through mass communication and community engagement including hygiene promotion, promotion of safe return to school and continued learning as well as provision of child protection services to tackle both direct and secondary impacts of COVID-19. It also aims to minimize the impacts of extreme weather events through emergency preparedness measures as well as immediate response. The Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) Appeals further covers manmade and natural disaster responses in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Regional HAC that covers cross broader need in South Asia as well as Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. UNICEF expresses its sincere gratitude to all public and private donors for the contributions received and continues to rely on their generous support to cover the overall funding gap of 26 per cent, amounting to more than US$630 million at the end of March.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAC Appeal</th>
<th>Requirements ($)</th>
<th>Funds available</th>
<th>Funding gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humanitarian funds received in 2021 ($)</td>
<td>Carry-over ($)</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>2,047,724,710</td>
<td>301,033,791</td>
<td>206,407,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>216,527,920</td>
<td>16,060,082</td>
<td>78,284,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>76,591,711</td>
<td>2,267,449</td>
<td>15,043,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>27,274,014</td>
<td>513,000</td>
<td>4,093,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>69,496,410</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>1,776,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia Region (incl. Bhutan, Maldives&amp;Sri Lanka)</td>
<td>16,114,354</td>
<td>368,236</td>
<td>1,743,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,453,729,119</td>
<td>320,592,558</td>
<td>307,349,007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who to contact for further information:

George Laryea-Adjei
Regional Director
Regional Office for South Asia
Tel: +977 985 1020913
Email: glaryeaadjei@unicef.org

Carmen van Heese
Regional Adviser Emergency
Regional Office for South Asia
Tel: +977 980 1030064
Email: cvanheese@unicef.org

Rene Ehounou Ekpini
Regional Adviser Health
Regional Office for South Asia
Tel: +977 980 1096877
Email: rekpini@unicef.org