

India

Update on the context and situation of children

India's post-pandemic economic outlook is showing positive signs. While the pandemic caused a severe economic shock and exacerbated income disparities, post-pandemic economic growth – albeit uncertain – is expected to recover to 6-9 per cent per year.[1] India is projected to become the world's most populous nation by 2023[2] and is currently home to nearly 1.4 billion people, including 460 million children.

India made impressive gains across several dimensions of human development. The under-5 mortality rate in India has decreased from 45 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015 to 32 in 2020.[3] Neonatal mortality has reduced from 26 per 1,000 live births in 2014 to 20 per 1,000 live births in 2020.[4] About 76 per cent of children (12–23 months) are fully vaccinated compared to 62 per cent in 2015-2016. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) has decreased from 97 per 100,000 live births in 2014–2016 to 103 in 2019, with remarkable progress in states with high MMR. There has also been a decline in stunting among children (0-5 years), from 48 per cent in 2005-2006 to 35.5 per cent in 2019-2020.

Nevertheless, important gaps remain in the full realisation of child rights as gender and inequities continue to affect outcomes. India spends 3.8 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on education and 1 per cent on health, resulting in high out-of-pocket health expenditures.[5] India accounts for sixteen per cent of global under-5 deaths, and it is the only country with higher death rates for girls. [6] Leading causes of children's deaths include complications in the neonatal period, pneumonia, and diarrheal diseases.[7] Additionally, 38 per cent of maternal deaths occur among young females.[8][9] Sixty-four per cent of children (0–6 months) are exclusively breastfed, while only 11.3 per cent of children (6–23 months) are fed an adequate diet. [10]

Gains in access to education were adversely affected by extended school closures during COVID19 pandemic leading to rising in deteriorating learning levels. The pandemic led to one of the world's longest school closures, which has created a significant learning loss, affecting 286 million children (3–18 years). Most children (3–10 years) are enrolled in early childhood and primary education.[11] Net enrolment rates drop to 52.5 per cent at the secondary level and 34.7 per cent at the higher secondary level, with higher retention rates among girls.[12] Approximately 32.2 million children aged 6-17 years are out of school, of which a higher percentage are children between the ages 14 and 17 years (26.2 per cent) and from disadvantaged groups.[13] In 2021, 34 per cent of students in grades 3, 5 and 8 achieved targeted performance levels (45 per cent in 2017). Girls and boys had similar performance, while children from scheduled castes and tribes and minority communities had the lowest performance levels.[14]

Social and child protection legal and policy frameworks have been progressively strengthened. India expanded social protection programmes, including the Maternity Benefit Programme, a robust child protection legal and policy framework, and strengthened statutory structures up to the district level. The year saw a significant policy change on child protection with the launch of Mission Vatsalya and Mission Shakti.

Issues related to child protection, including psychosocial well-being, are rising - Violence against children, particularly gender-based violence, is highly prevalent yet invisible. Gender-based violence is exacerbated by deeply rooted social norms that undervalue the girl child, worsened by its intersection with pre-existing social, economic, and cultural stratification. Eighteen per cent of women (18–19 years) have ever experienced physical or sexual violence as per the National Family Health Survey-5

(NFHS-5) [15] 2019-21.[16] Of the 77,732 children in conflict with the law in 2021, only 48 per cent received a final verdict.[17] These point towards the need for investment in diversion and restorative processes. India's gender ranking has improved from 140th to 134th between 2021 and 2022[18], according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, with gender-biased sex selection, higher under-5 mortality rates for girls, child marriage, gender-based violence and poor economic opportunities for women as priority issues to tackle.

Over the years, the number, scale, duration, and complexity of humanitarian crises have increased dramatically in India, challenging the systemic capacity of social sectors to prepare and respond to emergencies. Around 80 percent of India's population lives in districts exposed to extreme hydro-met hazards, such as floods, drought, heatwaves, and cyclones[19]

[1] World Bank, Global Economic Prospects, January 2022

[2] United Nations Population Division, 2022 Revision of World Population Prospects, <https://population.un.org/wpp/>, accessed on 14 December 2022.

[3] Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/node/294> accessed January 16, 2023

[4] Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/node/294> accessed January 16, 2023

[5] Government of India, Summary of Union Budget 2022-2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1794167>, accessed on 14 December 2022.

[6] Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, Levels, and Trends in Child Mortality, 2021, <<https://data.unicef.org/resources/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality-2021/>>, accessed on 15 January 2023

[7] Dandona, Rakhi, G Anil Kumar, Nathaniel J Henry, Vasna Joshua, Siddarth Ramji, Subodh S Gupta, Deepti Agrawal, et al. "Subnational Mapping of under-5 and Neonatal Mortality Trends in India: The Global Burden of Disease Study 2000–17." *The Lancet* 395, no. 10237, 2020, pp 1640–58.

[8] Office of the Registrar General India, Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2015–17 and 2017–19.

[9] UNICEF India, Situation Analysis of Children in India, 2021, <<https://www.unicef.org/appeals/india/situation-reports>>, accessed 15 January 2023

[10] NFHS-3 and http://rchiips.org/nfhs/factsheet_NFHS-5.shtml/NFHS-5.

[11] Ministry of Education (MoE), Unified District Information System for Education Plus 2020-21, <<https://www.education.gov.in/en/udise-report-2020-21>>, accessed on 15 January 2023

[12] Ministry of Education (MoE), Unified District Information System for Education Plus 2022-23.

[13] NFHS-5, 2019-21.

[14] MoE, National Achievement Survey 2017 and 2021.

[15] NFHS-5 is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. See: http://rchiips.org/nfhs/factsheet_NFHS-5.shtml.

[16] NFHS-5.

[17] Ministry of Home Affairs, Crime in India 2020.

[18] World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>.

[19] CEEW (Council on Energy, Environment and Water), 2021. Climate Change Vulnerability Index for India: <https://www.ceew.in/sites/default/files/ceew-study-on-climate-change-vulnerability-index-and-district-level-risk-assessment.pdf>

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2022, UNICEF India worked closely with the Government at the national and state levels and its network of partners to catalyse critical results for children in the process of recovery from the global pandemic and building resilience of a generation of 460 million children to socio-economic shocks,

The Country Programme, aligned with the Government of India's priorities, the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDf) 2018-2022, and the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025, provided critical support for national efforts to protect and fulfil the rights of children in India, and promote their full potential through equity-focused and gender-responsive programming in an inclusive and protective society.

Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF supported implementing intensified immunisation campaigns across 460 districts, reaching more than 4 million children who had missed getting timely vaccination during the pandemic. Technical support for the Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) process for standardisation and quality enhancement of the supply chain led to an increase in National EVM scores from 68 per cent in 2018 to 82 per cent in 2022. UNICEF also contributed to a larger effort of advocacy and program design to reduce the number of zero dose children in selected States, in partnership with MoHFW, GAVI and its partners UNICEF continued to be a lead partner of the Government in strengthening adolescents' health and wellness by supporting the scale-up of the School Health and Wellness programme nationally, covering 3.46 million students. UNICEF also supported efforts to improve institutional delivery in over 90 per cent of its programming states through consolidating partnerships with professional associations and institutionalising Quality of Care (QoC). This resulted in more than 50 per cent quality certification for health facilities in supported underperforming districts[1] and less than 8 per cent mortality rate in Special Newborn Care Units throughout the year. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, empowered by UNICEF's advocacy and technical support, reviewed the implementation of the India Newborn Action Plan and recommended steps to accelerate progress towards achieving the Single-Digit Neonatal Mortality Rate and Stillbirth Rate goals by 2030 in coordination with relevant partners.

In 2022, UNICEF supported the Government of India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF-led communication campaigns and social and behavioural change initiatives supported the continued rollout of the National Vaccine Communication Strategy, reaching over 358 million people with vaccination and COVID-sensitive behaviour messages. Additionally, UNICEF engaged with 70 million people in person through a network of 1,300 social mobilisers and multi-sectoral partnerships.

A gradual improvement in coverage of critical nutrition services was observed in 2022, signalling positive progress towards reducing malnutrition in children, adolescents and women in India. UNICEF's efforts to restore at-scale quality essential nutrition services in supported states were effective in addressing this issue post-pandemic.

Progress was accelerated by the launch of POSHAN 2.0[2], the updated flagship nutrition strategy of the Government of India, in 2022. For the first time, the scheme to eliminate anaemia was revised to include the 11-18 age group in underperforming districts. POSHAN 2.0 also included new guidelines for decentralising wasting management to the community level, which enabled UNICEF to support the development of state guidelines and the expansion of community-based services from 88 districts (20 per cent) in 2017 to 238 (54 per cent) in 2021 and 314 (71 per cent) in 2022. The number of children with severe wasting enrolled in facility-based and community-based programmes increased from 251,741 in 2017 to 447,739 in 2021 and 581,032 as of September 2022.

In 2022, UNICEF also focused on reducing anaemia in India by supporting the Anaemia Mukht Bharat programme[3] of the Government. As a result, coverage of Iron-Folic Acid supplementation among adolescent girls improved from 23 per cent in 2017 (11.2 million out of 49.5 million) to 53 per cent (26.1 million out of 49.7 million) in December 2022 and from 77 per cent in 2017 to 96 per cent in December 2022 (21 million out of 21.9 million) among pregnant women.

Supporting the Government to systematically apply the health system strengthening approach helped enhance delivery at scale of quality essential nutrition services, and substantial funds were leveraged on the Government's part. However, gains were constrained by the combined effects of increased frequency and severity of climate-induced emergencies, the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and exacerbated global cost of living induced by the Ukraine war. Continuing pressure on family incomes and food security is anticipated in the coming years. Recognising how this threefold crisis could affect children, girls, and women, there is an urgent need to generate data and evidence on trends and likely scenarios and strengthen gender-transformative and nutrition-sensitive social protection systems to enable vulnerable groups to enjoy their right to food and nutrition.

Every child learns

By mid-2022, schools and early childhood development (ECD) centres fully reopened after one of the longest closures globally, impacting children's learning, as evidenced by the Foundational Learning Survey (FLS) 2022[4], conducted and disseminated with UNICEF support. The FLS set the baseline for the national Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) mission and established the benchmark for literacy in 20 languages and numeracy and reporting of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1.1.

Based on the evidence, UNICEF focused on building institutional capacity to plan equitably and deliver quality education, including students' safe return to school. With partners, 6.5 million children (48 per cent of girls) benefited from early recovery and school readiness programmes in grade 1. More than five million parents, children, and adolescents were reached with the 'back to school' communication campaign.

UNICEF continued to support implementing a comprehensive school safety programme in ten states. The focus on out-of-school children continued and 754,593 children (51 per cent girls), including 2,447 children with disabilities, were identified and transitioned to formal education. To strengthen Early Childhood Education (ECE) under National Education Policy, UNICEF and its partners supported the capacity development of ECD workers based within school premises through improved academic support from specifically trained 50,000 primary school teachers and the development of an online ECE course in multiple languages, reaching more than 400,000 ECD workers and benefiting 7.2 million children enrolled in ECD centres. Additionally, caregivers of more than 10 million preschoolers (50 per cent girls) were supported in promoting children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development at home. UNICEF also worked with the Government and other partners to support adolescents' transition from school to future opportunities through developing and expanding school-based 21st-century skills programmes, including coding, financial literacy, and self-esteem empowering 1.1 million adolescents. Support for career guidance expanded across 15 states, with 39.8 million students (50 per cent girls) registered to access career information to inform their career pathways.

Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

Nearly 2 million women and children received enhanced gender-sensitive protective services in 2022 with technical support from UNICEF, including over 130,000 children rescued from or at risk of labour and trafficking. Almost 900,000 children were provided with family-based care. UNICEF also continued supporting aftercare programs and Care Leavers Associations in eight States. A blueprint for the inclusion of child protection in the urban governance system and enhancement of services for children in street situations was supported in 5 states. More than 617,000 (51 per cent women) child protection and allied functionaries were trained through the support of UNICEF to build capacity towards institutionalisation.

UNICEF advocacy, evidence generation, and support in 181 districts (increased from 175 districts in

2021) enhanced the visibility of the child marriage agenda in 14 States. UNICEF's scale-up of strategic partnerships enabled 12.9 million adolescents (68 per cent girls) to access comprehensive child protection information, life skills and other programmes and 10 million community members (50 per cent women) to engage in child marriage and violence prevention. Increased attention to empowerment and meaningful participation enabled 3 million adolescents (57 per cent of girls) to engage in civic issues and raise their voices against harmful social norms. UNICEF also supported training 15,000 (68 per cent women) non-specialised service providers on early detection, primary care and linkage to referral services, directly providing services to 918,978 (38 per cent female) children and caregivers. UNICEF also expanded interventions and built capacities in areas affected by civic strife and natural disasters, enhancing protection monitoring mechanisms, system referrals, family tracing and community-based MHPSS interventions

UNICEF continued to be a strategic partner supporting the Government of India's flagship programmes. UNICEF's strategic support to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) rollout of Mission Vatsalya enabled a greater focus on prevention, family-based care, workforce strengthening, case management, and information management system integration. UNICEF also worked to integrate the perspectives of children and adolescents in the Mission Shakti program for women's empowerment and safety, as well as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme.

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

In 2022, the Government of India sanitation programme for rural areas (Swachh Bharat Mission-SBM 2) was implemented with support from UNICEF on planning, implementation capacity building, and monitoring. The effort reached an estimated 4.4 million people with access to household toilets, almost 140,000 villages were declared open defecation-free plus (ODF+), and more than 6,100 master trainers were trained. UNICEF supported urban sanitation focusing on faecal sludge management. UNICEF advocacy resulted in the scale-up of the upgradation of non-functioning toilets and urban solid waste management.

UNICEF supported the rural water supply programme (Jal Jeevan Mission- JJM), which provided access to safely managed water services to 20 million people in 16 states. UNICEF provided more institutionalised capacity building through key resource centres, focusing on community water management, strengthening resilience to climate changes, gender-responsive and equity.

Technical support was provided for integrating social and behavioural change (SBC) contents in WASH programming in communities, health centres, schools and childcare centres. The capacity of almost 173,000 key stakeholders was enhanced, and significant contributions were made to amplify key messages at national and state levels. The best practices of women champions in the water programme were documented and showcased at the global climate conference (COP27.)

Given the declining COVID-19 cases, UNICEF advocated with the Ministry of Education to relaunch the "Clean School Award" after a 3-year hiatus. Under the national water supply programme, 860,000 schools 889,000 childcare centres and 35,000 public institutions gained access to tap water connections. An estimated 960,000 stakeholders were trained on WASH in Schools using the National School WASH training toolkit. During Global Menstrual Hygiene Day, nearly 1.2 million people were reached with menstrual hygiene (MH) messages.

With its local partners, UNICEF supported 90,000 flood-affected people from Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Telangana with safe drinking water, hygiene kits and 100 school continuity kits, reaching 18,297 children. One thousand two hundred boys and girls were provided psychosocial support through District Child Protection Units.

Every child has an equitable chance in life

Over one million households benefitted from government social protection schemes, catalysed by UNICEF advocacy and technical support. Sustained evidence generation and advocacy, supported by UNICEF, led to a) horizontal expansion of food security and job guarantee programmes to cover newly vulnerable families; and b) vertical expansion to include second-order girl childbirths within national maternity benefit programmes and grants for children losing parental care during COVID-19. UNICEF's technical assistance resulted in new or improved conditional cash transfer (CCT) schemes to promote girls' transition to secondary school and delay age at marriage. Technical assistance towards improving birth registration services, including linking with national identity systems, helped improve coverage dramatically.

Technical assistance and continued advocacy led to the institutionalisation of child budgeting in nine states. UNICEF's advocacy with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj helped mainstream children's issues in the localisation of the SDGs through the Child-Friendly Gram Panchayat model. Grassroots capacity building of Gram Panchayat (GP) functionaries and a participatory approach to developing village plans with a focus on women and children included advocating for making Mahila Sabhas (women's village meetings) and Bal Sabhas (children's assemblies) mandatory before the Gram Sabhas (GP general body). In 2022, all targeted sixteen state governments integrated child and gender-responsive governance in the Panchayat Raj Institution training curriculum and GP development plans (GPDPs).

Change strategies and enablers

The year 2022 marked a studied transition from focusing on the fallouts of the pandemic on child rights to astute strategic child rights advocacy centred on key deprivations and opportunities.

UNICEF's creative content and campaigns outdid the previous year's performance in advocacy, along with 88 per cent positive media coverage compared to 86 per cent in 2021. UNICEF had 6.8 billion impressions compared to 8.5 billion in 2021 and 1.27 billion video views compared to 600 million in 2021. Thirty-eight parliamentarians and seven celebrity advocates supported World Children's Day with children across India, creating a crescendo of inclusion and equity in child rights discourse and the UNICEF Brand.

An intensive flood preparedness campaign in Bihar reached 3 million people, significantly improving the preparedness of line departments and communities. Five states established real-time monitoring mechanisms to track child-centred disaster risk reduction actions in priority settings. UNICEF linked 2600 families with differently-abled children to the Government's public distribution system and student scholarship scheme. Approximately 315,000 trained adolescents and youth are actively engaging at the community level as change agents in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience across eight states supported by UNICEF.

In 2022, Country Office Operations built partnerships with stakeholders using innovative, technology-enabled solutions for better results for children and ensured access, availability & affordability of supplies and services. The Office strives to continuously improve grant management, ensuring compliance of all donor agreements signed by UNICEF with UNICEF policies and managing the contributions effectively and efficiently, including donor reporting and compliance with donor agreements. The 2022 independent donor report quality review^[5] revealed a significant increase in the quality of donor reports submitted by the India Country Office from 63 per cent in 2020 to 80 per cent in 2022. Despite the significant increase in the volume of reports from 148 reports in 2021 to 263 in 2022, the Office recorded the timely submission of all reports. In addition, preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) remains a corporate priority of the highest order for UNICEF. The Digital Transformation Strategy and Framework were developed to drive the change management processes for leveraging Technology for Development and Digital Innovation. The Evidence Strategy

was operationalised in 2022 with the creation of the Evidence for Children Section.

[1] Underperforming districts are priority districts of the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP), which aims to quickly and effectively transform 112 most underdeveloped districts across the country. Niti Aayog 2022. <<https://www.niti.gov.in/aspirational-districts-programme>>, accessed on 03 January 2023.

[2] Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Women and Child Development issues Guidelines of 'Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0' - an Integrated Nutrition Support Programme , Press Release, New Delhi, 2 Aug 2022, <<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1847548>> accessed on 03 January 2023.

[3] Ministry of Women and Child Development, "ANAEMIA UKT BHARAT", Press Release, 04 February 2022 . < <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1795421>>, accessed on 03 January 2023

[4] Department of School Education and Literacy, <https://dse.education.gov.in/fls_2022>, accessed 15 January 2023

[5] 2022 Independent Donor Report Quality Review led by the Regional Office in South Asia

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027 for the UN in India was developed with core strategic engagement and contribution from UNICEF. During the development process, UNICEF led the Education working group and co-led the nutrition, health, participation & empowerment working groups. The UNICEF Country Programme Document 2023-2027 was derived from the Cooperation Framework. It was elaborated in a participatory and consultative process jointly with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the nodal government agency for UNICEF in India.

India assumes the Presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20)[1] from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2023. To support the efforts of the Government of India to host the event, UNICEF is providing technical support on several Sherpa tracks, including as a knowledge partner for the Education Working Group and the Youth20.

UNICEF has been at the forefront of deepening the impact of joint programming.

In 2022, the Social Protection for Nutrition (SP4N) Community of Practice (CoP) in India was set up, comprising over 20 partner organisations representing research and academia, civil society, United Nations, Foundations and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including BMGF and World Bank. The CoP aims to further strengthen strategic collaborations with partners in SP4N through joint knowledge sharing, evidence generation, capacity building and policy advocacy initiatives in India.

UNICEF and UNFPA continued to lead the implementation of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (GPCEM) in India in 14 States.

YuWaah[2], a public-private-youth partnership, has reached 46 million+ (15 per cent) young people through its partners. More than 20 million youth were connected in 2022 to support them with career guidance, employment support, volunteering and leadership opportunities, and 21st-Century skills.

UNICEF led the implementation of the **Multi-Partner Trust Fund inter-agency programme** on protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) in collaboration with UN Women, UNHCR and WHO, benefiting nearly 1,858,034 children and women in five states through GBV risk mitigation, prevention and response interventions.

In alignment with the repositioning of the UN Development System envisioned by the UN Secretary-General, the UN Operations Management Team (OMT) in India is involved at the strategic level to bring more efficiency to UN agencies at the country level. Several initiatives were undertaken in 2022, including creating Joint Long-Term Agreements (LTAs) for various operation requirements on behalf of all UN agencies and helping them avail services with more efficiency and cost avoidance. In addition, achieving a Green Building rating for Common premises in India is a top priority that complies with internationally accepted building operations and management norms regarding energy efficiency, water, and waste management.

[1] The Group of Twenty (G20) is the premier forum for international economic cooperation. It plays an important role in shaping and strengthening global architecture and governance on all major international economic issues. <https://www.g20.org/en/about-g20/#overview>

[2] YuWaah devised scalable, new financing models within the UNICEF structure to create more space for partnership-oriented resource mobilisation through facilitation, collaboration, and co-creation with diverse stakeholders, ensuring maximisation of resources and impact.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Lessons Learned

The implementation of the Country Programme 2018-2022 and the unprecedented experience of responding to a global pandemic have highlighted some key lessons, including the need for gender transformative programming, a strong equity lens to reach those farthest behind, and strengthening the participation of children and young people.

To sustain and build on gains made in tackling gender inequities in India, UNICEF will continue championing **gender transformative** priorities in India. It is critical to continue promoting the agency, voice and leadership of women and girls, challenge and change harmful gender norms and address the gaps in access to knowledge and services.

UNICEF implemented its programme with an **equity lens**, addressing inequalities to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised children. Improved evidence and understanding of inequities and their drivers combined with a strong field presence and decentralised support at the state level positions UNICEF well to promote the equity agenda and to reach the hardest-to-reach/most vulnerable children. A lesson learned is that when supporting Government led approaches via flagship programmes, efforts should be further strengthened to reach the most vulnerable children, including through systems strengthening at the state and district levels.[1] In addition, there is a need for decentralization of resources and powers coupled with flexibility in spending norms at local Government level enabling timely actions on disaster preparedness to address the changing patterns of emergencies due to climate change.

UNICEF has advocated for institutionalising **adolescent and youth participation** through formal decision-making platforms at the block, district, state, and national levels. The rise of youth volunteerism during the pandemic illustrated the powerful role young people can play and the need to engage them as active change-makers. Through UNICEF and YuWaah (Generation Unlimited in India), more than 4 million young people have been engaged in youth engagement/volunteering networks. A lesson learned is, therefore, the need to further focus on meaningful engagement of adolescents and youth as an enabler of empowerment for children and young people and an accelerator of development goals for children.[2]

UNICEF India successfully expanded its engagement with the private sector in the current country programme, including partnerships with private sector platforms, networks, and aggregators at the central and state level committed to protecting and promoting child rights, including strengthened partnerships related to the primary healthcare system in the context of the global pandemic. Moving forward, there is potential to reflect on and **refine UNICEF's approach to partnership**, including responding to evolving partnerships. Furthermore, UNICEF's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery process offer a unique opportunity to create synergies and convergence with all relevant development sectors to support children's survival and development rights.

Innovation

The post-pandemic world requires strategic innovation and digital transformation to address the intensified deprivations in its wake.

UNICEF has scaled up the deployment of Information, Communication Technology and innovations for supporting quality primary health care service delivery and system strengthening across the UNICEF-supported states; as an example, UNICEF supported the development and deployment of an online labour room management system - MaNTrA (Maa Navjaat Tracking App) - in Uttar Pradesh, covering 25,835 health facilities across 75 districts, which has registered 2 million pregnant women already. UNICEF has also supported MoHFW in redeveloping the RCH 2.0 Portal, a national MIS for maternal and child health services. UNICEF engaged 30 million caregivers and influencers with maternal and newborn health messages and leveraged 16 million USD from public budgeting for RMNCAH demand generation activities. In addition, the Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) of women and children was designed and rolled out in partnership with a Civil Society Network of 21

Organisations, including 374 community volunteers to inform shock-responsive social protection and social services.

UNICEF learned, leveraged and supported the *scale-up of high-impact programmes towards achieving results for children in India*.

Through co-financing from the Government, UNICEF and Power of Nutrition have been a catalyst for the successful scale-up of Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions in all districts of Maharashtra. "Aarambh" started as a WHO-supported pilot project in 2017 in 44 villages/ 10 blocks. The objective was to test the ECD Nurturing Care Framework (WHO-UNICEF) delivery to the most vulnerable population through existing government platforms. Evidence from the modelling demonstrated improved children's nutrition outcomes, infant and young child practices and psychosocial development scores. In addition, technical and financial support to a national and state-level network of Centers of Excellence (nearly 32 academic partnerships) helped accelerate the rollout of key nutrition interventions, including early sensory and psychosocial stimulation as part of Early Childhood Development.

Building on the learning from the pilot, UNICEF supported the state government to contextualise and consolidate the initial work. The evidence generated from these two districts enabled the translation of the science of ECD from a pilot at the village level into two districts and, in 2022, towards a state-wide scale-up reaching 2.5 million children under five years of age. Fully recognising the gains in the process of human capital development, the state government endorsed the Aarambh approach and backed it up with a resource commitment of USD 1.7 million.

The **launch of Mission Vatsalya and Shakti** has created the space for building an inclusive and resilient system to protect and empower children with a focus on prevention. This offers opportunities for nationwide childcare reform. Furthermore, in 2022, the Young Warrior NXT brought together 30+ partners to build evidence on the types of scalable, impactful life skills delivery models. These interventions collectively reached approximately 88,000 young people across 12 states of India, and 15,742 impacted students took the baseline. End-line assessments, wherein 51 per cent of these respondents saw an improvement in their skill scores. The learnings from these pilots highlighted the importance of offline teaching, training teachers to impart life skills, and self-paced learning requiring in-person nudges to bring about high impact. The most impactful pilots are being supported for scale-up.

[1] Medium-term Strategic Reflection, p 22 and Country Programme Evaluation p 183

[2] Country Programme Evaluation, pp 66, 183, and Medium-term Strategic Reflection, pp 1, 11-12, 15