

Sri Lanka

Update on the context and situation of children

Recent political and economic developments have had major implications for the Sri Lankan economy, with current forecasts indicating that it will be 14 per cent smaller by 2024 than it was pre-Covid on a per-capita and inflation-adjusted basis.

In March 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) emphasised the urgent need to restore macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability.[1] The April debt moratorium led to Sri Lanka defaulting on its external obligations. Economic activity was further impeded by the very low levels of foreign reserves to import essential goods. A staff-level agreement between the IMF and the Sri Lankan authorities was reached on 1 September 2022 under the Extended Fund Facility of about US\$2.9 billion for four years, with the aim to stabilise the economy, protect the poorest and most vulnerable population groups, and lay the foundations for economic recovery. However, IMF Board approval requires that Sri Lanka advances debt negotiations and demonstrates specific financing assurances.

Deteriorating macro-fiscal conditions are disproportionately affecting poor and vulnerable households, with dire implications for children. The proportion of people living on USD 3.65 per day in 2017 Purchasing Power Parity or less – the poverty line typically used for lower-income countries – is expected to increase from 13.1 per cent in 2021 to 28.2 per cent in 2023. [2] Rampant inflation is putting intense pressure on households, with the country facing a serious food crisis that is likely to worsen. Headline inflation, measured by the year-on-year change in the Colombo Consumer Price Index, reached a record high of 69.8 per cent in September 2022, with food inflation soaring to 94.9 per cent, before starting to decline slightly from October onwards.[3] An estimated 6.3 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity, and two of three households reported having to resort to food-based coping strategies.[4] According to a nationally representative telephone survey conducted in October and November 2022, 77 per cent of households reported a negative impact on their household income since March 2022, and increasingly have to resort to one or more coping strategies, such as pawning belongings or borrowing money.

Children are likely to have been disproportionately affected by the unfolding crisis, with 2.9 million children in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.[5] Prior to the crisis, the prevalence of malnutrition for children under the age of 5 (wasting) was high, at 15.1 per cent.[6] For over 70 per cent of households, food comprises more than 40 per cent of their total expenditure[7] and evidence has found a significant increase in the cost of a nutritious diet.[8]

Essential health services have been severely impacted by critical shortages of medicine, lack of fuel and long power cuts.[9] Financial constraints forced the Government to scale back nutrition programmes, such as school meals and fortified food to mothers and undernourished children. The provision of Triposha, a nutritious supplement for children with moderate acute malnutrition and for pregnant and lactating women, was temporarily paused, and many schools have either stopped providing schools meals or reduced the quantity and quality. A 2021 survey indicated that wasting among children 6-59 months of age was 13.2 per cent, and a follow-up survey confirmed the worsening of child wasting levels.[10]

Education continues to be disrupted for children due to continued school closures, fuel shortages and families forced to prioritise other basic needs. It is estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in more than two years of learning loss, compounded by the current crisis, with reports indicating a growing number of school dropouts. The functionality of schools and education systems were also

weakened, limiting the capacity of schools to serve as a platform for essential services for children.

Additionally, front-line child welfare and protection services reported increasing numbers of requests from parents to place their children in institutions, driven by struggles to cater to their basic needs.[11] With increasing numbers of persons taking jobs overseas, migration of parents/primary caregivers raises concerns about the children left behind. Furthermore, there have been increased reports of cases of violence and abuse against children and women.[12] Whilst child welfare and protection staff have remained on the ground throughout the crisis, reduced budgets and lack of fuel impacted their ability to reach those most in need.

While Sri Lanka's flagship cash transfer programme, Samurdhi, covered nearly 1.8 million households in 2020, it excludes more than half of eligible households,[13] which, coupled with low benefit values, translates into limited poverty impact. Despite the temporary expansion of programmes, the crisis raises concerns of a cliff-fall scenario if this additional support ends prematurely, and benefit values continue to erode. The pregnancy voucher programme, covering women during six months of pregnancy and four months of lactation, was temporarily put on halt mid-2022, further increasing the vulnerability of children.

[1] IMF, Sri Lanka: 2021 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Sri Lanka.

[2] World Bank (2022), Sri Lanka Development Update: Protecting the poor and vulnerable in a time of crisis.

[3] Central Bank of Sri Lanka Press release, 30 November 2022, CCPI based headline inflation decreased for the second consecutive month in November 2022.

[4] FAO/WFP (2022), Special Report – FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, September 2022.

[5] UNICEF Sri Lanka (2022), Humanitarian Action for Children.

[6] UNICEF/WHO/WB (2022), Levels and trends in child malnutrition.

[7] Based on Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019.

[8] Rapid Qualitative Food Assessment by WFP and Department of National Planning.

[9] UN (2022), Revised Humanitarian and Needs, Multidimensional Crisis, Sri Lanka, October 2022.

[10] Medical Research Institute (2021), Nutrition status and gaps in the diet of Sri Lankans during the pre-economic crisis period (September-December 2021).

[11] The Morning, 27 September 2022, Northern families forced to give up children to foster care.

[12] Christopher, Chrishanthi, 9 January 2022, Sri Lanka shocked by raging child abuse; about 10,300 cases reported last year, The Sunday Times.

[13] Kidd et al. (2020), Investing in the future: A universal benefit for Sri Lanka's children, UNICEF Sri Lanka.

Major contributions and drivers of results

The crisis - if not addressed – can derail progress made across the health, nutrition, education, child protection and social policy sectors. In response, UNICEF supported emergency measures that safeguard children and mitigate a worsening situation, while sustaining the commitment and efforts of Government and other stakeholders to drive progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Early Childhood (0-5 years)

In response to the crisis, UNICEF strengthened maternal, new-born and immunization services in institutions across the country enabling improved access to health services and facilitated COVID-19

vaccination services contributing to 67 per cent of the population receiving both doses by end November. UNICEF also supplied essential medicines benefiting 1,143,000 people (approximately 58 per cent of those in need) and strengthened the functioning of maternal and neonatal units with safe use of oxygen and supply planning. In the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector, UNICEF supported healthcare waste management, drinking water quality improvement interventions through supplies for water treatment systems, water quality testing and rural water supply systems; provision of WASH facilities in Maternal and Child Health clinics and conduct of hygiene, menstrual hygiene and health programmes in poor urban settlements targeting adolescents. At community level, together with Sarvodaya (local NGO), UNICEF established/strengthened over 250 village level health promotion committees across the country to sustain good health and nutrition practices.

UNICEF continued its focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD), supporting the Family Health Bureau (FHB), Ministry of Health (MoH), in the development of a ECD manual for Primary Health Care Workers, which is being rolled out across the country. This was complimented by the FHB's efforts to update and simplify available content on ECD, building on the nurturing care framework, including a UNICEF module on supporting health care workers to provide nurturing care. The content is being adapted to the local context with WHO support and will be rolled out in 2023. UNICEF also continued to support the Government in providing targeted nutrition messaging and counselling on improving diets, services and practices, which were intensified during Nutrition Month in October. To strengthen these efforts, an Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) online training package was developed in both local languages for public health staff. UNICEF also directly supported nutrition interventions for pre-school aged children through the provision of meals to vulnerable pre-schools.

In early learning, UNICEF supported quality improvements of public preschool networks. Through a partnership with the Colombo Municipal Council – that oversees public preschools in Colombo mainly for children from low-income households in resource-poor urban settings – a qualitative research undertaken is now informing a costed multi-year action plan to improve public preschools. A preschool model will then be tested, and the process documented for future scale-up. UNICEF also supported early learning initiatives in the tea estate sector, which is home to some of the most vulnerable children. UNICEF mobilized relevant provincial government authorities, estate partners and other stakeholders to enhance Early Childhood Education (ECE) services and raise awareness among parents/caregivers to create demand for such services. These initiatives are being documented to serve as an evidence base for future advocacy and scale-up towards progressively universalizing ECE in the country.

To help better protect children, UNICEF streamlined the case management system, benefiting more than 7,000 children, and strengthened the Social Service Workforce that provide care and protection services in vulnerable villages. UNICEF also continued to support the implementation of the National Alternative Care Policy, which facilitates family-based care for the most vulnerable children, particularly those very young, and prevents them from being sent to an institution.

Progress was made in strengthening data collection systems on ECD. UNICEF partnered with the FHB to implement the ECD Index (ECDI) 2023, with data collection against SDG 4.2 completed, and preliminary findings presented to stakeholders. Further, with funding from the World Bank, UNICEF is supporting the integration of ECE data in the Education Management Information System, which is being piloted in the Western Province, with a plan to expand it nationwide.

UNICEF also promoted its parenting website, betterparenting.lk, with resources for parents/caregivers to ensure holistic care for young children.

Middle Childhood (6-9 years)

Sri Lanka lacks a national policy and strategic plan on school health and nutrition, which is required for a well-functioning governance framework for these programmes. To address this, UNICEF

supported the Ministries of Health and Education to develop a School Health Policy, which has now been submitted to the Secretary, Ministry of Education (MoE), and is awaiting submission to Cabinet.

As learning was disrupted with school closures, UNICEF supported the most vulnerable students in the Western, Uva, Central, Eastern and Northern provinces with learning material, and assisted the Provincial Departments of Education (PDEs) to strengthen learning continuity and recovery programmes reaching approximately 528,000 primary grade students (one third of all primary students). In partnership with the Sabaragamuwa PDE, a national symposium on learning loss was conducted leading to a strategy for improving the quality of foundational numeracy and literacy in primary. UNICEF also partnered with the MoE and the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka to strengthen teacher capacity on blended learning and pedagogy, including a national ICT capacity assessment and curriculum development. To promote an inclusive education system, UNICEF completed a comprehensive analysis of disability inclusion in education leading to commitment by the MoE, National Institute of Education (NIE) and other relevant stakeholders to develop the capacity of all teachers on inclusive education practices.

As the crisis escalated, media reports of violence against children and increasing mental health issues among children are of grave concern for UNICEF. The National Child Protection Authority, with strong advocacy support from UNICEF, established a multi-sectoral coordination mechanism on prevention of violence against children, which also provides recommendations on legal amendments related to corporal punishment. One important legal reform was the repeal of Section 29 of the Children and Young Persons Ordinance that sanctioned court administered corporal punishment (caning) of children. UNICEF also piloted the Positive Disciplining approach in 50 schools in Central and Uva provinces and the Positive Parenting manual in Mannar district that provide practical advice and alternate methods of disciplining children.

UNICEF is also helping prepare the country report on SDG 6.2 Sanitation and Hygiene by strengthening monitoring through the inclusion of questions on hand hygiene in the school census and collection of provincial baseline data (in the North) on WASH, Infection, Prevention and Control, Menstrual Health Hygiene and Climate Change. This is the first time data on climate change is being collected and will inform UNICEF's work going forward. UNICEF also worked at policy level, generated evidence, supported pilots and built capacities of government, local authorities and communities to implement climate resilient water supply plans/actions to strengthen the safety and security aspects of drinking water.

Adolescents (10-18 years)

Adolescents are facing a triple burden of malnutrition, with undernutrition and anaemia on one side and increasing levels of obesity on the other. UNICEF has now initiated a landscape analysis on adolescent overweight and obesity with support from the Regional Office, with findings expected by mid-2023. UNICEF also advocated for the continuation of school meal programmes, and this is now an important component of the Emergency Nutrition Plan developed by the MoH. To better understand the impact of the crises on and strengthen delivery of the Iron and Folic Acid supplementation programme for adolescents, UNICEF helped conduct a national micronutrient survey.

In the Education sector, UNICEF's continuous advocacy resulted in the MoE reviewing its National Action Plan on Education for Social Cohesion (2017). This provides a framework of action to inform the ongoing education reforms and the integration of skills, including those that promote social cohesion, into selected subjects of secondary education. UNICEF is technically supporting these much-needed reforms, which, over the long-term, will benefit all secondary students in the country. In higher education, UNICEF supported the launch of the study by the University Grants Commission (UGC) on ragging and sexual and gender-based violence in Sri Lanka state universities. This led to the development of a course to promote respect for diversity and prevention of harmful behaviour, which the UGC will introduce to all state universities.

A key legal reform impacting adolescents is the amendments made to the Children and Young Persons Ordinance that now treats those aged 16-17 years as children before the law. This enables UNICEF to support the separation of children from adults in the justice system. In addition, negotiations commenced with the Mediation Boards Commission on the use of existing legislation for diversion of children in contact with the law and the expansion of its scope to include all minor offences.

To promote adolescent participation, UNICEF used U-Report Sri Lanka – a messaging tool that empowers young people to engage with and speak on issues that matter to them – to connect with 3,588 adolescents through polls on climate change and disasters; experiences during the crisis; food availability and affordability; and corporal punishment. Further, UNICEF and the Department of Probation and Childcare Services reviewed existing policies and practices on adolescent participation to inform the development of meaningful engagement strategies going forward.

In response to mental health issues affecting adolescents, UNICEF expanded coverage of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) in schools and at the community level. In schools, the MoE, with UNICEF's support, launched psychosocial guidelines to help secondary teachers handle anxieties faced by students, benefitting all 1.9 million secondary students nationwide. UNICEF also provided community based MHPSS reaching over 7,000 adolescents through child protection agencies.

Climate change is a key emerging area of focus. UNICEF continued to empower adolescent girls and boys as agents of change for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation. This call to action and technical support resulted in – for the first time in Sri Lanka – the inclusion of children's views in DRR strategies, including child-centred risk assessments.

Social Policy

To monitor child rights, UNICEF strongly advocated for an independent institution which contributed to the establishment of a Child Rights Unit within the Human Rights Commission in October. UNICEF is also supporting the functioning of the National Monitoring Committee and improvements to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) monitoring matrix of the Government to facilitate data collection and reporting for the country UNCRC report in 2023.

The generation of high-quality evidence and use for policymaking was another core area of work. UNICEF supported the publication of the national Multidimensional Poverty (MPI) and child MPI for Sri Lanka in the Household Income and Expenditure Report 2019 (published early 2022) by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS), complemented by a joint report by DCS, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and UNICEF on the same topic, and the finalization of the Situation Analysis of Children and Women with the National Planning Department. The Government has demonstrated commitment to institutionalizing these measures and reporting them against SDG Target 1.2, which aims to reduce the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions.

Safeguarding social spending and ensuring the efficient, equitable and child-sensitive allocation of financial resources are more important than ever in this crisis. To this end, UNICEF produced a Public Expenditure Review for Social Protection and continued its work on social sector budget briefs. UNICEF also continues to support increasing transparency and citizen participation in budget processes; for example, through Citizen Budgets - a simplified version of a government budget. This is reinforced through training of civil society organizations on engaging citizens in budget processes.

The evidence generated by UNICEF also served to inform the crisis response, most notably through two rounds of telephone surveys that provided insights into the impact of the crisis on a household's social and economic well-being; as well as a study that estimates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and current economic crisis on children's well-being. UNICEF also generated evidence that

will be critical beyond the immediate crisis, assessing the rationale for and investments needed in building a social protection system that provides basic income security over the life cycle in a child-sensitive, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive manner. This informed UNICEF's advocacy work, as well as programmatic responses.

One critical response to the crisis was the provision of short-term nutrition-sensitive cash transfers of Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR) 5,000 (USD 14) per month for up to three months to 3,010 registered mothers with a total of 3,044 babies aged six months or below in Colombo. UNICEF has now put in place the system and tools needed to scale up this support to at least 110,000 families with young children aged 5-24 months (approximately one fourth of the total target group) for four months, commencing in 2023, prioritizing districts with the highest levels of severe child wasting.

Programme and Operational Effectiveness

The onset of a highly complex and evolving economic crisis meant that the design of the new Country Programme (CP) 2023-2027 had to be agile in providing timely humanitarian responses, while continuing to strengthen the systems across the sectors UNICEF works in. The CP, which is well-aligned with national priorities and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027, was endorsed by Government and approved by UNICEF's Executive Board in September.

In response to the crisis, UNICEF Sri Lanka launched a Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal for USD 25 million to support 2.8 million people, including 1.7 million children. Strong mobilization efforts with public and private sector donors resulted in the HAC being well funded. The Country Office (CO) also continues to maintain high preparedness capacity to be able to respond to any change in the situation.

UNICEF continued to play a key communications and advocacy role on issues affecting children. UNICEF partnered with the Health Promotion Bureau, MoH, and the World Bank, to disseminate clear and coherent messages for over 15 million people across the country on COVID-19 prevention, empowering individuals to adhere to measures to protect themselves and to improve vaccine uptake. Climate change was also a key advocacy topic for UNICEF. Young people were engaged in key events to learn, speak out and play a role in devising solutions to the climate crisis, including through U-Report. Overall, the various U-Report polls conducted engaged over 20,000 U-Reporters with the platform; surpassing the 50,000 U-Reporters milestone in Sri Lanka.

From an operational perspective, UNICEF enhanced its capability and governance through risk assessments, staff development, process simplification exercises and implementation of recommendations of internal/external reviews, audits and surveys. More efficient and effective financial and administrative services safeguarded UNICEF's financial resources through the proper management of financial assets, financial planning and cash management, as well as process improvements amidst a highly volatile economic crisis. Staff wellbeing remained a core priority, with support provided through sessions on managing change and career development, the regional staff counsellor, peer support volunteers and an all-staff retreat. UNICEF provided quality supply items in response to the crisis and for regular programmes and extended support to implementing partners on procurement services. Effective and timely implementation of Security Risk Management Measures ensured the safety and security of staff and premises, and business continuity in programme implementation.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

During a tough year for Sri Lanka given the economic crisis and its impact on children, UNICEF collaborated across sectors with different stakeholders to achieve optimum results for children.

UNICEF led the UN Results Group on Nutrition, facilitating development of the Joint UN workplan on Nutrition and timely reporting, coordination and evidence generation. UNICEF partnered with WFP on a micronutrient survey by the Medical Research Institute, an independent government research agency. Similarly, together with UNFPA and WHO, an assessment was conducted on Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, New-born Child Adolescent Health and Nutrition. In 2022, UNICEF received approximately USD 1.3 million through the Multi Partner Trust Fund to urgently provide lifesaving nutrition and child protection responses to the ongoing economic crisis in the country. At community level, UNICEF partnered with Sarvodaya (local NGO) on social behaviour change communication related to nutrition practices and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP).

Leading the UN Social Protection Results Group, UNICEF facilitated collaboration and consultation, including with government and key CSOs, on the National Social Protection Strategy to strengthen social protection in Sri Lanka. Following the onset of the economic crisis, the Group developed a note on the role the UN, as well as development partners, could play in supporting the Government to progressively build a rights-based, universal, inclusive, gender- and shock-responsive social protection system.

With funding from the UNICEF-UNDP Flagship Finance in Asia and Pacific initiative, UNICEF and UNDP are jointly working on a systematic assessment to address financing gaps for social protection. This is a strategic investment to explore the potential of an Integrated National Financial Framework for Sri Lanka. This partnership also leverages UNICEF and UNDP's respective lead roles in the UN Country Team Results Group on Social Protection and SDG Planning, Financing and Data Results.

Supported with a grant of USD 20 million from the European Union, UNICEF and UNDP launched a Justice Sector programme, with USD 7 million allocated to UNICEF to support much needed reforms in the Justice for Children Sector.

Jointly with the Resident Coordinator's office (RCO), UNESCO and UNICEF supported the Government to formulate and submit the Country Statement for the Transforming Education Summit to renew its vision and commitments in achieving education-related SDGs, particularly in response to the growing learning crisis caused by the crises.

As part of the Inter-Sector Working Group led by UN OCHA and the RCO and in-line with the UN joint Humanitarian Needs and Priorities appeal, UNICEF is leading four sectors and one Area of Responsibility (AoR) involving Government and key CSOs: Protection, including the Child Protection AoR, Nutrition, Education, and WASH. The Child Protection AoR and Education sector is co-led with Save the Children, WASH sector is co-led with the Ministry of Water Supply and Nutrition sector is co-led with WFP to ensure close collaboration with the food security sector. UNICEF also co-leads the Cash Working Group, together with WFP and Save the Children. UNICEF actively participates in the inter-agency Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force and the AAP Working Group.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Using short-term emergency responses to bring about system level changes

In response to the worsening economic crisis, UNICEF supported nutrition-sensitive short-term cash transfers for lactating women. In collaboration with the Colombo Municipal Council and Sarvodaya, a

local civil society organisation, UNICEF initiated a pilot in Colombo, providing Sri Lankan Rupees 5,000 (USD 14) per month for up to three months to 3,010 registered mothers with a total of 3,044 babies aged six months or below. With additional funding secured, the programme is being scaled up to around 110,000 families with young children (5 to 24 months) in the most vulnerable districts in terms of severe child wasting. Based on careful analysis of different response options, UNICEF opted to work with the Government to collect beneficiary data, while providing the cash transfer through UNICEF's own Financial Service Provider (FSP) and partnering with Sarvodaya on ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), including the establishment of effective complaint and feedback mechanisms.

A key feature of this programme is its aim to strengthen the overall national social protection system, through its programme design, delivery mechanisms and data collection systems. For instance, post-distribution monitoring was included in the pilot design, helping UNICEF collect valuable information on beneficiary preferences, such as for cash over vouchers as it increased their choices. This preference was further highlighted through a U-Report poll on an individual's choice to buy food and related food prices, indicating that the transfer value was inadequate. These insights used to advocate with Government for key social protection system changes and universal child benefits and to put in place mechanisms that strengthen response capacities, such as a long-term agreement with a Financial Service Provider (FSP) and a strengthened AAP approach. This initiative highlighted a key learning that even a short-term emergency response pilot can be designed to bring about longer-term system level changes with a much larger impact for children across the country.

Engaging private sector in digital transformations in education

The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing economic crisis have worsened disparities in learning and skills development. Prolonged school closures and the digital divide – in connectivity, access to devices, digital skills and contents – have deprived the most vulnerable groups from continuous learning. One key bottleneck is the lack of a sustainable strategy or financing for scaling up and mainstreaming distance and blended learning. Teachers and parents lack sufficient knowledge and capacities to support children with distance learning, which is further challenged by limited availability of hardware. Recognising this, UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Dhammika Perera Foundation to provide 100 schools with high quality digital content, including e-lessons on various core subjects in the national school curriculum, in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages. This private sector partnership marked the start of several digital transformation initiatives by UNICEF and is mobilizing critical private sector support to bridge the digital divide for the most marginalized students and schools. This will help fill existing critical shortages of subject teachers, such as English and Mathematics, while longer-term measures, such as teacher re-deployment plans, are under review. The early impacts from this timely and valuable partnership are a learning for the office that engaging the private sector is key for taking forward digital transformations in education, particularly in a fiscally constrained environment, and critical in building higher levels of resilience through technology.

Operational effectiveness for programme delivery

The economic crisis brought about 10 to 12-hour daily power cuts to preserve electricity and restrictions on fuel due to severe shortages. This had a huge impact on the CO as it relied on diesel for backup power for critical infrastructure, such as telecom and internet provision. This meant the CO would have to limit the number of hours it could run the generator, affecting staff who could also not work from home due to the power cuts and internet disruptions. Given that staff were heavily engaged in providing urgent humanitarian responses to the crisis and for reasons of security and business continuity, the office had to be innovative in finding solutions to the challenges it faced. The operations team immediately acted, providing power banks for all staff and a phone and SIM card to the Crisis Management team to ensure continuous connectivity and setting up a new business continuity site at the Representative's residence. The office mobilised additional resources from the Regional Office Contingency Fund to cover these expenses. While the Government made arrangements to provide diplomatic missions and international organizations with a continuous supply

of fuel, this was not working effectively and heavily impacted the emergency response and life-saving support provided by the UN agencies. This prompted the UN Operations Management Team to collectively request for increased fuel allocations for UN agencies to implement emergency related activities from the Ministry of Power and Energy; the request is currently under review. The demand for critically needed medicines during the crisis with accelerated lead times required surge support in the Supply section to manage the increased workload and multiple complex requests from the MoH. Despite concerted efforts by the CO to ensure timely delivery, global supply-chain challenges compounded by flight delays due to the fuel crisis affected the delivery timelines of offshore procurements. However, the ability of UNICEF's Operations Unit to be agile and innovative in addressing country context challenges has enabled the effective delivery of programmes, with minimal disruptions, in a time of crisis and chaos in the country.

The CO has taken into consideration these lessons learned in the design of its new country programme commencing in 2023. The new country programme highlights a stronger humanitarian-development nexus, integrating responses and services that safeguard children in the short-term and mitigate a worsening situation, while also supporting the State to recover and expand services in the medium term. UNICEF will also increase its engagement with the private sector in the delivery of services. Enhanced operational effectiveness will remain critical for both the crisis response and development programmes, particularly in addressing global supply chain related challenges during a period of ongoing crisis.