

## Papua New Guinea

### Update on the context and situation of children

Papua New Guinea (PNG) stands at a critical juncture where positive developments and persistent challenges intersect, shaping the nation's trajectory since 2018. The emerald rainforests, vibrant coral reefs, and rugged highlands are a backdrop to the struggles faced by a population exceeding 10 million, nearly 40 per cent children under 15, who bear the weight of the nation's future.

Despite its natural beauty, PNG finds itself entangled in the complex web of widespread poverty, presenting significant threats to the well-being of children. While progress has been made since 2018, over 35 per cent of the population (a staggering 3.5 million people), are below the national poverty line. This disparity is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where 40 per cent struggle to make ends meet, compared to 27 per cent in urban areas. The Gini coefficient, at 46.3 (2019), reflects a highly skewed distribution of wealth, amplifying challenges related to child well-being.

Health indicators convey a mix of improvements and persistent concerns for children. Despite a decrease in the under-5 mortality rate from 48 per 1,000 live births in 2017 to 43 per 1,000 in 2021, it remains high, especially in rural areas, where children face nearly double the risk compared to their urban peers. Gender disparities are evident, with boys experiencing a higher mortality rate than females. Maternal mortality, although declining from 336 per 100,000 live births in 2007 to 192 per 100,000 in 2020, significantly surpasses the regional average. Skilled birth attendance consistently remained low, reached to lowest level of 31% of live births in 2020 partly due to COVID-19 restrictions, with signs of recovery and reaching a level of 46% in 2023. Newborn mortality rates have stagnated in the last decade from 25 per 1,000 live births in 2015 to 21 per 1,000 live births in 2019.

While there have been strides in immunization coverage, substantial gaps persist compared to global targets. From 2018 to 2022, the 3rd dose of diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP3) coverage rose

from 34 per cent to 38 per cent, pneumonia's final dose from 33 per cent to 37 per cent, and the measles second dose from 23 per cent to 27 per cent.

Stunting remains a persistent challenge, affecting almost half of children under 5 (48 per cent), with rural children disproportionately burdened. PNG has the highest rates of all dimensions of child malnutrition in the region and is off-track on all the global nutrition targets.

Primary school completion rates are low and educational disparities are evident. Primary school completion is a mere 35 per cent, with rural rates plummeting to a dismal 27 per cent, and a further 25 per cent of children aged between 6 and 18 are out of school, with girls disproportionately affected. The 2022 net-school attendance rate declines significantly from elementary, primary, and secondary, dropping from 54 per cent to 52 per cent to 22 per cent, respectively. Only 68 per cent of persons with functional difficulties have ever been to school.

Access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene is a pressing concern in PNG. Half of households lack access to improved water sources, relying on potentially contaminated unimproved water sources (i.e., surface water, dug wells, springs). Over 80 per cent of the population lacks at least basic sanitation facilities. This can lead to open defecation and exposure to waterborne diseases like diarrhoea, contributing to an estimated 6,000 deaths annually. Inadequate sanitation facilities in many communities, like 72 per cent of schools, create a breeding ground for health risks.

Child protection is a paramount concern in PNG, with early marriage affecting nearly 10 per cent of girls aged between 15 and 19, compared to 1 per cent of boys. PNG has the highest rate of child marriage in the region. Physical violence is prevalent, with 75 per cent of children affected, and 85 per cent of fathers have reported beating their children (DHS 2016-2018). Further, 26 per cent of

partnered females aged 15 and older reported physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner. Underlying these challenges is the critically low birth registration rate: only 13 per cent of children under 5 are registered.

Disasters, conflict, and the impact of climate change further compound the challenges. Floods, landslides, and tribal clashes disrupt the education and basic services of countless children, translating to thousands thrown into uncertainty, unable to attend school or access vital care. Nearly 80 per cent of PNG's infrastructure is vulnerable to earthquakes.

The rising tide of climate change paints another concerning picture. Approximately 5 per cent of coastal villages have already succumbed to the rising seas, forcing relocations and disrupting the traditional livelihoods of generations.

Despite these multiple challenges, there is evidence of progress. The new Medium-Term Development Plan IV highlighted the need to prioritize child well-being and protection, outlining concrete strategies to improve access to education, health care, and safe environments. Further, key social sectors on which child well-being relies, have launched advanced national plans to address these challenges. For example, the National Health Plan focuses on reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, while the National Education Plan emphasizes increasing access to education and reducing dropout rates.

Further, key government-led initiatives have signalled potential improvements since 2018, like establishing the National Office for Child and Family Services. This dedicated agency strives to coordinate efforts and strengthen child protection systems nationwide. Additionally, the PNG Child Nutrition and Social Protection Project, a US\$90 million initiative launched in 2022, seeks to address

stunting through an approach that combines nutritional interventions with social protection programmes.

Economically, the gross domestic product (GDP) has rebounded since COVID-19, reaching 3.2 per cent per capita growth in 2022, above pre-pandemic levels. Notably, social sector funding has seen a welcome increase, with a 24 per cent allocation in 2022 dedicated to areas like education, health care, and child protection.

PNG stands at a crossroads, navigating the complexities of development while harnessing its immense potential. The challenges are daunting, but progress is evident.

## Major contributions and drivers of results

PNG is navigating a crucial phase in development. As the current country programme concludes, the inception of the new country programme document (CPD) unfolds. Simultaneously, the country office successfully contributed to the PNG Government's Medium-Term Development Plan IV, and to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). This exemplifies the dedication to the principles of One UN and a strong commitment to supporting government priorities.

In the years between 2018 and 2023, UNICEF PNG achieved impactful programmatic results and deepened its commitment to addressing interconnected issues affecting children. A notable accomplishment was the active participation in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC @30) celebrations, a significant milestone that saw UNICEF PNG amplifying children's voices and renewing the national commitment to their rights. This obligation translated into tangible actions beyond mere celebration, involving policy reviews, stakeholder empowerment, and prioritization of children's perspectives in decision-making.

## Development

Skilled birth attendance rebounded to 46% in 2023 from a low of 31% of live births in 2020. Integrated services for mothers and newborns reached 62 per cent of this group, significantly improving health-care access. Newborn care witnessed a remarkable boost, with over 366,741 mothers and newborns receiving Early Essential Newborn Care (EENC) across all provinces. To support the delivery of effective and efficient quality maternal, newborn and child health services, the National Department of Health was supported to implement integrated packages of interventions such as capacity building on emergency on obstetric and newborn care, provision of equipment to primary health facilities, and the implementation of the triple elimination of HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis strategy. More than 2,300 health-care workers, including nurses and doctors, honed their emergency obstetric and newborn care skills through UNICEF training. Community health engagement also expanded, with 977 Village Health Assistants trained in promotive and preventive services. This success was attributed to strengthened partnerships with health centers and community-based interventions, which empowered women in rural areas and adolescent pregnant mothers to prioritize prenatal care. Such efforts align with PNG's new National Health Plan, and contribute to healthier mothers and newborns, positively impacting child development and fast tracking the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) target for neonatal mortality rate of 12 per 1,000 live births by 2030.

The success in routine immunization coverage, climbing from 31 per cent to 38 per cent, demonstrated effective logistics, targeted outreach to remote areas, and addressing vaccine hesitancy. Notably, in 2023, 71 per cent of children under 5 received measles and rubella vaccinations, and vitamin A supplementation. These achievements hinged on efficient logistics, facilitated by the roll-out of the electronic logistics management system (mSupply) in health facilities across nine provinces. UNICEF supported the importation of more than 1,912,400 COVID-19 vaccine doses, 2.9 million injection devices, 172 pieces of cold chain equipment, 234 passive cold containers, 6 million PPE items, and 0.9 million inclusive early childhood development (IEC) materials to provinces in 2022. Furthermore, 412 national and provincial Expanded Programme on Immunization and vaccine focal persons have been upskilled on enhanced vaccine cold chain management, handling, and repair maintenance. These accomplishments enhance child protection against preventable diseases, positively impacting long-term health and school attendance.

With a view to create demand for immunization and address hesitancy, particularly among health workers, 8,193 health care workers trained on community engagement, interpersonal communication and infection prevention and control. Twenty national and international consultants deployed to support emergency response and vaccine demand generation. Around 300,000 community influencers in all 22 provinces engaged in awareness raising and social mobilization.

In the education sector, learning outcomes have improved by 7 per cent and 14 per cent in Grade 3 students meeting minimum proficiencies in reading and numeracy, respectively. UNICEF PNG's direct support enabled 20,000 young children (11,000 females) to participate in early childhood education in 1,061 model centers/preschools in 11 established provinces. Further, more than 50,000 students

(25,600 females) benefitted in 191 elementary and primary schools in seven provinces, and around 8,100 young children (4,400 females) enrolled in 102 integrated early childhood development centers responding to UNICEF's capacity building, community mobilization and awareness and advocacy activities. Underpinning these results is UNICEF's vigorous advocacy supporting the creation of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Unit within the National Department of Education (NDOE), which has contributed to provincial ECE planning and school clustering, building on the UNICEF-supported ECE cost and finance study, paving the way for sectoral reform to introduce ECE.

The introduction of the PNG Teen Entrepreneur programme engaged 629 Grade 6 students and 40 teachers, head teachers, school inspectors and NDOE officers in seven schools in Mount Hagen, further empowering children and enabling them to shape their futures by equipping them with life skills and an entrepreneurial spirit. By focusing on girls' education and life skills development, UNICEF PNG empowered children with early learning opportunities and entrepreneurial skills, thereby influencing future livelihoods and economic prosperity, and furthering the vision of the Medium-Term Development Plan IV.

Efforts to create safe learning environments were evident in implementing the Behavior Management Policy and Safe School Initiatives, benefiting 3,564 students (1,777 females) in 30 primary schools in the National Capital District, Western Highlands Province and Morobe. Addressing violence and promoting inclusive environments and focusing on equitable gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors among students (through strong community partnerships) led to this success. The improved safety in schools enhances child well-being and contributes to better learning outcomes and future potential, enabling children to exercise their rights, including the reproductive kind.

UNICEF PNG's interventions in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector resulted in an improved proportion of the population using better drinking water sources, reaching 53 per cent -- a 7 per cent increase since 2018. Further, UNICEF directly supported 61 health-care facilities to establish basic WASH services, a notable increase of 51 between 2016 and 2023. Additionally, by the end of 2023, 1,027 schools gained access to basic WASH services, while the community-led total sanitation approach led to 861 communities and one entire district being certified open-defecation free.

The OKY menstrual health and hygiene app in PNG is progressing in partnership with Save the Children. Consultations with girls are ongoing to contextualize the app for the country. The app will include interactive voice response, as well as radio messaging, which is in response to the low internet coverage across PNG. OKY is expected to be launched in July.

Community-led initiatives, hygiene education, and collaboration with WASH sector partners contributed to this success. In addition, UNICEF-supported policy work includes reviewing the Policy and Standards for WASH in schools, developing the WASH in schools guidelines, coordinating the WASH sector, and strengthening sector monitoring mechanisms. Additionally, UNICEF has generated evidence and advocated for expanding the WASH Public Service, increasing budget allocation for the sanitation subsector, and adopting resilient WASH and peacebuilding approaches. Beyond the statistical gain, improved access to clean water positively impacts child health, empowers children by reducing time spent on water collection, and reduces disease transmission, such as diarrheal conditions.

In the nutrition sector, the coverage of nourishment services has expanded, and the enabling environment for sustenance improved significantly between 2018 and 2023. The government has led the expansion of the nutrition programme to 12 provinces with UNICEF's technical support. The provinces with an active nutrition programme are Simbu, Western, East New Britain, Enga, Hela, Southern Highlands, Madang, Western Highlands, National Capital District, Morobe, Autonomous Region of Bougainville and Eastern Highlands. The programme's scope, service package and delivery platforms have been expanded to improve coverage. Nutrition services are now provided in over 200 health facilities, communities, and schools nationwide. Nutrition service coverage has improved over the last three years since the new platforms of community and schools were introduced.

Following strong advocacy from UNICEF, the government's commitment to nutrition has improved, as exemplified by its leadership of the FAST Track Initiative to address stunting. The government has also increased investment in nutrition with the rollout of the US\$90 million Child Nutrition and Social Protection Project. This prioritizes both stunting and other forms of malnutrition affecting children. By empowering mothers with nutritional knowledge and strengthening social protection systems, UNICEF PNG's efforts are expected to have a lasting impact on child health and development.

Child protection also saw significant governance and service delivery improvements between 2018 and 2023. Critically, the CRC Periodic State Party Report drafted in 2021 was endorsed in 2023, more than 19 years since the last CRC report was submitted by the Government of PNG on implementing its child rights obligations.

Concurrently, key policy developments have brought about transformative changes for child protection and promoting gender-equitable norms. Notably, five provinces successfully secured policy decisions from their provincial governments to implement the Local Level Governments' Participatory Action. The independence of the National Office of Child and Family Services from the Department of Community Development marked a milestone, resulting in increased staff capacity dedicated to child protection, with accompanying support services staff and financial autonomy. A historical moment was

reached with annual budget commitments of over PGK 3.5 million (US\$936,000) for decentralized Child and Family Services in five provinces, signifying a dedicated recurrent budget line for children in PNG, a landmark achievement not seen since 1997.

UNICEF was pivotal in these advancements, necessitating continued capacity-strengthening for service delivery. For example, over 247 child protection officers and case workers were trained in case management and PRIMERO; over 6,200 children and women victims of violence were assisted with comprehensive care; and 185 children in conflict with the law received case management services and non-custodial measures. Further, over 432 village court officials, Juvenile Justice Officers and police were trained in child protection. The Parenting for Childhood Development Programme (P4CD) expanded across six provinces, reaching over 14,158 parents and 45,300 children individuals. This work facilitated improved service provisions, with staff numbers reinforcing operational capabilities to benefit children and families nationwide.

In the area of social protection, beyond sector-specific achievements, UNICEF PNG's focus on strengthening Public Financial Management (PFM) reflects a strategic commitment to optimizing social policy outcomes. The budget analysis, sector-specific examinations, and the development of a Nutrition PFM Sector Brief indicate the organization's dedication to effectively directing resources for child well-being. This multifaceted approach aligns with UNICEF's goal of creating an environment where every child can thrive.

In its pursuit of impactful studies since 2018, UNICEF PNG has commissioned studies addressing critical aspects of child well-being. Initiatives such as the 'Strengthening Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Systems and Services for Children and Adolescents in East Asia Pacific Region (2022)' report shed light on the high burden of poor mental health among adolescents in PNG. This study, launched in collaboration with the National Department of Health, underscores UNICEF's commitment to holistic child development, and recognizing mental health as a pivotal component. In the WASH sector, UNICEF PNG's feasibility study on ceramic water filters further demonstrated UNICEF PNG's commitment to addressing water safety concerns, a critical component of ensuring the well-being of children.

Several initiatives across the sectors exemplified UNICEF PNG's commitment to gender mainstreaming, disability inclusion and adolescents. Principally, within UNICEF and designed in 2022, the programmatic review on Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion and Social Inclusion and the Adolescent Review ensured the critical evidence needed to prioritize the development of the new Country Programme Document and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. By recognizing and accommodating diverse needs, UNICEF PNG empowers children to reach their full potential, ensures accessible services, and advocates for inclusive policies.



Recognizing the threat that climate change poses to children's well-being, UNICEF PNG completed a climate rationale, which serves the crucial purpose of addressing children's unique and vulnerable position in the face of climate change. This rationale emphasizes the need to prioritize children's rights, well-being, and prospects in climate-related policies, initiatives, and strategies. It underscores the significance of safeguarding children from climate change's immediate and long-term impacts, ranging from extreme weather events to ecosystem disruptions.

These achievements directly contribute to national development priorities outlined in the Medium-Term Development Plan and the UNSDCF and ensure PNG's progress towards the SDGs.

## **Humanitarian Response**

The period from 2018 to 2023 marked a challenging time for PNG, facing humanitarian crises such as the 2018 earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic, and election-related violence. UNICEF's comprehensive efforts provided agile and effective humanitarian support across various sectors. For example, approximately 500,000 persons facing emergencies received WASH support. Over 3,000,000 people received key hygiene messages, and just over 11,000 gained access to functional latrines of agreed standards. In 2023, UNICEF continued WASH efforts, benefiting 129,182 students from 336 schools with improved water sources and handwashing facilities.

In the aftermath of the 2018 earthquake, UNICEF provided immediate assistance. Efforts included supporting 30,726 children (13,226 females) through safe temporary learning spaces, distributing teaching supplies, and offering psychosocial support. Additionally, establishing 32 child-friendly spaces provided psychosocial support to 4,818 children (2,170 girls and 2,648 boys). The #ENDviolence against Children campaign reached over 33,000 people (17,797 men and 15,402 women), identifying and supporting over 100 at-risk children (62 boys and 47 girls).

COVID-19 presented unprecedented challenges, and UNICEF responded with agility and effectiveness. The organization supported vaccinating 543,355 eligible individuals, ensuring vital supplies, logistics, and infection prevention measures. Nutrition responses directly addressed the needs of 17,402 individuals, while 1,767 children with moderate acute malnutrition were also treated. The organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Socio-Economic Impact Study underscores its commitment to understanding and addressing the multifaceted impacts on child well-

being.

The Enga/Highlands response addressed challenges related to tribal violence and displacement. UNICEF supported 301 households displaced by the upheaval in the Highlands region. These households received hygiene kits, including menstrual hygiene kits for women, and underwent hygiene messaging. Collaborative efforts with NGOs aimed to strengthen the child-protection system and build capacities in the Highlands area, particularly addressing election-related violence. Training initiatives reached 261 participants in child protection, gender-based violence, and mental health and psychosocial support. Strategic SMS blasts effectively communicated key messages to prevent violence against children and gender-based violence, reaching 200,000 individuals.

## **Conclusion**

The success of UNICEF PNG's initiatives can be attributed to effective collaborations with government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and communities, guided by evidence-based decision-making, a focus on sustainability, and gender-responsive programming.

Looking forward, UNICEF PNG is well-positioned to build upon its 2023 successes and lessons learned from the entire programme cycle to address the evolving needs of children in PNG, specifically climate and disaster resilience, gender equality, and reducing gender-based violence and systems strengthening of basic, quality services. With a continued central focus on climate action, the organization will leverage research findings to implement evidence-based strategies, enhancing climate and disaster resilience and ensuring a sustainable environment for the country's children. Gender equality will persist as a cornerstone, with sustained and expanded initiatives to bridge disparities and empower girls and women across various sectors.

Recognizing the significance of resource mobilization, UNICEF PNG will actively engage in advocacy and partnership-building activities to secure essential funding and support for its programmes. Strengthening collaborations with governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector will be emphasized to maximize the reach and effectiveness of interventions. A comprehensive sustainability approach will guide future endeavors, prioritizing building local capacity and fostering community engagement. This ensures that the benefits of programmes extend beyond immediate impact, contributing to long-term positive outcomes for children.

As UNICEF PNG moves forward, the organization remains steadfast in delivering impactful results for

children. The way involves a holistic and integrated approach that responds to immediate needs and addresses the root causes of challenges faced by children in PNG. Through sustained efforts in climate action, gender equality, resource mobilization, and community empowerment, UNICEF PNG aims to secure a brighter future for every child in the country.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF PNG navigated a dynamic landscape between 2018 and 2023, leveraging strategic partnerships and unwavering commitment to the UN development agenda, highlighting the critical role of collaboration in amplifying our impact on the youth across PNG.

### ***United Nations Collaboration***

UNICEF has been pivotal in coordinating the UNDAF review and revision process. Leading the People Priority Working and the Logistics Working Groups, contributing to the Common Country Analysis and the development of the UNSDCF, UNICEF ensured a child-centered approach and coherence within the UN's development strategy for PNG.

Additionally, the success of joint programmes underscores the collective strength of UN agencies in addressing complex challenges. Notable examples include the Spotlight Initiative, Papua New Guinea: Joint Programme (JP) Ending Preventable Maternal and Neonatal Deaths, and Papua New Guinea: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Phase 2. These joint efforts showcase the effectiveness of collaboration in tackling critical issues and achieving meaningful impact for children across various sectors.

Furthermore, UNICEF actively engages in advocacy and knowledge sharing through collaboration with UN colleagues. For example, with the WHO through the Joint Programme on Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being of Children and Adolescents aimed at strengthening multisectoral governance and coordination mechanisms for planning, implementation and monitoring of MHPSS interventions in the child protection, education and health sectors.

### ***Key Partnerships***

Partnerships with the public and private sectors play a crucial role in the ability of UNICEF to deliver results for children and young people, supporting the delivery of and advocacy for the child rights agenda.

UNICEF's collaboration with the Government of PNG is exemplified through close collaboration with national/provincial health and education departments, the Department of Justice and Attorney General, the National Office of Child and Family Services, and the District Development Authorities, to name a few. This collaborative approach ensures that UNICEF's programmes align closely with national priorities.

Collaborations with CSOs are vital in UNICEF's implementation of interventions, particularly in reaching hard-to-reach areas. Partnerships with organizations like Catholic Church Health Services have been instrumental in implementing and ensuring a broader impact and reaching marginalized communities. Another example is the partnership with the Somare Institute for Leadership and Governance, which aimed to enhance the capacity of the social service workforce and community facilitators. Furthermore, UNICEF supported 13 CSOs to strengthen their capacities on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), and as a key result, 92 per cent complied with PSEA policies and procedures.

The private sector is a key collaborator for UNICEF, with initiatives like digital tools training conducted in collaboration with Digicel. These collaborations enhance UNICEF's digital proficiency and ensure alignment with the latest technological advancements, reflecting a commitment to adaptive and future-ready interventions.

Partnerships with international organizations and research institutions, including the World Bank, the WHO, Burnet Institute, and the National Research Institute, contribute valuable insights and evidence for programme development. Collaborative initiatives such as the National Budget Analysis and the

Nutrition PFM Sector Brief are examples of the outcomes of these partnerships.

UNICEF's community-based partnerships, including engagement with the PNG Council of Churches, are focused on co-creating and delivering initiatives tailored to local needs. This approach enhances community engagement, promotes service uptake, and addresses critical issues, reflecting UNICEF's commitment to making a meaningful impact at the grassroots level.

The engagement with international development partners, including Japan, the WB, the European Union (EU), Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Korea, and USAID, is a cornerstone of UNICEF's strategy. CPD meetings with these partners facilitate unified responses to challenges, maximizing the impact of initiatives and fostering a coordinated approach to development. The EU's significant support as a major donor for the WASH sector extended services to schools, health-care facilities and surrounding communities, showcasing the impact of global partnerships on local communities.

UNICEF is the largest UN agency in the country. The donors to PNG include Antimicrobial Resistance MPTF, the Asian Development Bank, Australia, the EU, Germany, Gavi, the Global Environment Facility, Global Environment Facility Trust Fund, Global Fund for Coral Reefs, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Global Partnership for Education, Green Climate Fund, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, PNG, Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the World Bank. The country office (CO) has had a good mix of donors over the last five years, with public sector donors (i.e., governments and the UN Country Fund) accounting for 73 per cent of the total income (including RR/IB) and 15 per cent coming from multi-donor pools (like thematic funding and regular resources). Private sector funding, including NatComs and private sector fundraising COs funds, accounted for only 9 per cent of the income. The Australian NatCom has accounted for the majority of this private-sector funding. The CO was an implementing partner for the PNG Government on financing from the World Bank. The CO's top donor is Australia, whose funding is via the UN Country Fund for PNG, bilaterally and via UNICEF Australia.

Through the EU-UNICEF 2018-2022 co-funded programme, UNICEF has extended WASH services to 200 schools, 37 health-care facilities and 800 surrounding communities. Key national line departments and District Development Authorities were key partners facilitating that implementation. UNICEF has played a pivotal role in convening donors and orchestrating a rapid and effective response to the polio outbreak, showcasing the power of multi-sectoral collaboration. Collaborating with the WHO, World Bank, GAVI, and the governments of Australia and New Zealand, along with various organizations, UNICEF worked tirelessly to contain the outbreak and enhance immunization systems.

The Convergence Programme is an innovative programme that exemplifies multi-level partnership building. At the sub-national levels, UNICEF collaborates closely with district stakeholders and provincial authorities to deliver integrated services, empower communities, and maximize impact. In a concerted effort to secure funding and support, UNICEF PNG worked closely with UNICEF Australia and New Zealand, successfully garnering financial assistance from their respective governments. This approach emphasizes the importance of local partnerships and highlights the effectiveness of international cooperation in driving positive change at the community-level.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

In the dynamic realm of child well-being in PNG, UNICEF has forged transformative pathways and embraced innovative strategies, unveiling lessons learned and innovations that encapsulate UNICEF PNG's steadfast commitment to advancing children's rights and welfare:

- Through cross-departmental and sector partner dialogues, UNICEF successfully built consensus and mutual accountability, focusing on strengthening the capacity of government counterparts

and partners for enhanced sector coordination and knowledge management. Despite achievements, challenges persist, such as the unavailability of crucial data for decision-making and the need for improved collaboration and capacity within the government.

- Facing resource limitations, UNICEF PNG demonstrated innovative approaches, embedding support in national policies, engaging in impactful studies, and collaborating with the World Bank. Collaborative planning, strategic analyses, and adaptive management strategies showcased the organization's commitment to advancing child well-being.
- With user-friendly tools for effective programming and service delivery, UNICEF's Joint Monitoring and Supervision model showcases an innovative approach to enhance local partnerships and programme effectiveness. This structured model emphasizes continuous improvement and achievement of programme targets.
- Advocacy efforts by UNICEF resulted in key policy developments and educational programme implementations. The establishment of inclusive Early Childhood Development and Education (ECD/E) model centers contributed to quality and inclusive standards. The UNICEF Convergence cross-sectoral interventions, like the ECD Bilum Pak programme, successfully engaged parents and transformed their behavior, initiating home playtime programmes. The Safe School Initiative positively impacted students' attitudes, especially empowering female students.
- UNICEF PNG's adaptive management, innovative communication, and comprehensive programme coordination underscored resilience and commitment. Digital tools training, transparent reporting, and engagement with government stakeholders emphasized organizational proficiency and accountability. Adapting to unpredictable contexts reflected flexibility and dedication to improving child well-being.
- Implementing the electronic logistics management system (mSupply) in health facilities marked a transformative leap in routine immunization coverage -- this innovative use of technology streamlined supply chain processes, contributing significantly to the success.
- Recognizing the vulnerability of PNG's education system to crises, UNICEF adjusted emergency response strategies, providing educational resources for home learning. The organization initiated the PNG Teen Entrepreneur pilot programme, fostering entrepreneurship skills among students through experiential learning, crop farming, and market showcases.
- In Mount Hagen, the introduction of the PNG Teen Entrepreneur programme engaged Grade 6 students and teachers, fostering essential life skills and an entrepreneurial spirit -- an approach to preparing students for a rapidly evolving world.
- UNICEF's commitment to creating safe learning environments was evident through implementing the Behaviour Management Policy and Safe School Initiatives in 30 primary schools -- an innovative approach addressing violence and promoting inclusivity.
- In the health sector, UNICEF's emphasis on timely funding, data quality, human resources, community engagement, and sustainable service delivery underscored its commitment. The organization advocated for a robust NHIS, effective human resource management, and community partnerships to enhance vaccine literacy and demand.
- In the WASH sector, UNICEF's efforts to strengthen coordination, advocate for the National Water Sanitation and Hygiene Authority, and support the National mWater WASH MIS system highlighted its commitment.
- The Community-Led Total Sanitation approach achieved notable success, certifying 861 communities and an entire district as Open-Defecation Free. This innovative community-led

strategy in the WASH sector empowers communities to take charge of their sanitation practices.

- UNICEF PNG's climate rationale, addressing children's unique vulnerability to climate change, showcases an innovative approach to safeguarding children's rights and well-being amid environmental challenges.
- The development and scale-up of the National mWater WASH Management Information System represents an innovative solution to enhance the provision of WASH services. This system facilitates district-level data collection, supporting the development of Costed District WASH plans and improving overall understanding of capacity needs.
- The participative action research conducted in Goroka district exemplifies an innovative approach to conflict resolution in the WASH sector. By identifying and analyzing conflicts related to WASH services, this research informed targeted interventions to reduce tensions and build community trust.
- Commissioning studies, such as the 'Strengthening Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Systems and Services for Children and Adolescents in East Asia Pacific Region (2022),' underscores UNICEF's innovation in addressing mental health and psychosocial well-being as a crucial component of child safety.
- UNICEF's commitment to children was illustrated in supporting the Government's State Party Reporting of the Second Periodic State Report to the UNCRC for PNG, with voices of 170 children (93 girls) amplified in the UNCRC Children Annex Report.
- The P4CD programme uses a gender transformative approach and seeks to address the gender norms with respect to positive parenting. Positive results include an increase in male participation and a reduction in violence and abuse of children. The positive influence transcends individual households, making significant strides in education where over 200 schoolteachers are P4CD facilitators. This aligns seamlessly with the first evidenced-based National Social and Behavioral Change Strategy, launched in 2023 and aimed at preventing violence against children and women.
- The emphasis on transparent donor reporting and streamlined proposal tracking showcased UNICEF's commitment to effective resource management and communication. This innovative practice builds trust and accountability, ensuring efficient use of resources for programme goals.
- Implementing Structured Programme Coordination Meetings provided an effective platform for streamlined approaches, enhancing efficiency in programme management.
- The comprehensive training on digital tools showcased an innovative approach to equip staff with the necessary skills for effective programme implementation. This emphasis on organizational proficiency through technology reflects UNICEF's commitment to staying abreast of advancements in the field.
- Initiatives like the Children's Voices Challenge demonstrated innovative ways for children to express their concerns, emphasizing the importance of engaging children in decision-making processes. This creative approach reflects UNICEF's dedication to capturing diverse perspectives and promoting child participation.
- Results based management capacity development emerged as a crucial strategy for effective monitoring, reporting, and planning. This approach ensures a results-driven focus, contributing to the overall effectiveness of programme implementation.

UNICEF PNG's success in adaptive management underscores the importance of flexibility in programme management, especially in responding to emergencies.

