Update on the context and situation of children

This year saw Viet Nam’s economy recovering relatively well, although socio-economic disparities by geographic region and ethnicity remained persistent. Viet Nam’s second Voluntary National Review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda revealed that Viet Nam is making progress in select areas, including poverty, health and well-being, clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy, with at least half of indicators showing some progress. However, in most other areas, Viet Nam is lagging behind the regional pace, especially on quality education, gender equality and life below water.

This highlights the urgent need for improvements in policy implementation and public investment, particularly in terms of inclusive and quality education, gender equality, the environment and social protection. A major challenge continues to be data availability and quality. At present, Viet Nam has sufficient data on only 62 per cent of SDG indicators. The largest data gaps are seen in gender equality, sustainable cities and communities, climate action and peace, justice and strong institutions. A further and urgent investment in SDG data generation is needed to adequately report on the Agenda 2030.

Viet Nam’s political leadership in 2023 maintained its focus on the high-level anti-corruption campaign, which resulted in significant changes in senior positions. Government counterparts continued to be cautious and risk averse in response to the campaign, leading to slow decision making and implementation of national budgets and bottlenecks in procurement. Impact could be felt across all sectors and was particularly severe in the health sector which suffered from unprecedented vaccine supply stock-outs and interruptions in routine immunization services. This situation has resulted in significant immunity gaps, putting many children’s lives at risk.

Economic growth was estimated at 4.7 per cent[1], weakened by low domestic and external demands and slow internal public investment. Positive macro-economic indicators such as ample fiscal space and low inflation offer opportunities to accelerate implementation of the public programmes required for Viet Nam to achieve upper middle-income status by 2030.

The multidimensional poverty rate is expected to decrease to 2.9 per cent in 2023[2]. However, the proportion of poor households in the poorest districts of Viet Nam remains high at 33 per cent. The multi-dimensional child poverty (MdCP) rate remains notably high among ethnic minority children, standing at 33.1 per cent (2020). Also, the Southeast region suffered an increase in the MdCP incidence from 6.6 per cent in 2018 to 10.1 per cent in 2020.

The impacts of the pandemic highlight the absence of a modern social protection system capable of providing adequate unemployment insurance, cash transfers and other forms of social assistance and security to workers and the near-poor. At the same time, the effectiveness of social protection programmes for children is hindered by limited coverage and accessibility, including children in remote or minority areas and children with disabilities. Lack of coordination between different programmes and agencies leads to service delivery gaps and inefficiencies. There is a large SDG financing gap in social protection which, together with job creation, would require additional annual spending of 3.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

New data on adolescent mental health revealed that nearly 22 per cent of adolescents reported having a mental health problem, with the highest portion reporting anxiety. The national survey found that adolescents experienced problems primarily in the domains of family, peer relationships, and school
or work but only 8 per cent used support services. Worryingly, only 5 per cent of parents recognized that their adolescent needed help for emotional and behavioral challenges.

Health indicators have stalled and, in some cases, reversed. While Viet Nam has consistently maintained over 80 per cent coverage for routine immunization of children under one year of age, complex government procurement procedures have caused a marked drop in routine immunization coverage to 66.4 per cent, as of October 2023. Nutrition continues to be a challenge, with almost one in five children under five years old being stunted. Especially concerning are stunting rates among ethnic minority children, where up to one in three children are underweight.

Despite government commitment to sustainable development, there has been limited progress towards meeting its ambitious net-zero targets. During the COP28 World Leaders Summit, Viet Nam launched a Resource Mobilization Plan to implement its Just Energy Transition Partnership. Partners committed to mobilise an initial US$15.5 billion in the next five years to support Viet Nam to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and transition to clean energy. Fortunately, 2023 did not see any catastrophic natural disasters, however repeated storms caused significant flooding in some coastal regions. National systems were well-prepared to respond to these emergencies, and very few deaths were recorded. Air pollution continued to be a serious health threat for children in major cities. According to IQAir, PM2.5 air pollution levels in Hanoi were frequently among the worst in the world during 2023.

2023 saw continued challenges caused by the Government’s official development assistance (ODA) policies. Most development agencies, including UN, are experiencing extended delays in programme implementation due to lengthy processes for appraisal, approval and implementation. The UN Country Team – with UNICEF support and in cooperation with other development partners – is leading a high-level dialogue with Government on medium-term options for the ODA regulatory framework and short-term measures to accelerate ODA project implementation. Despite these challenges, UNICEF achieved significant results in 2023 through a necessary shift to direct implementation, expanded partnerships, with careful attention to effective teamwork between programme and operations. Throughout the year, the office monitored and addressed the impact of these measures, established mechanisms that ensure information sharing, trouble shooting and the finding of solutions. The impact on staff wellbeing remains an ongoing concern – as the constantly changing requirements, the lack of traction and the need for staff to carry an ever-heavier burden is a risk to morale and motivation of staff. Given the likelihood that delays and excessive procedures will continue for the foreseeable future – ongoing attention to staff welfare, to timely communication with partners and donors will be essential.

[1] The WB 2023
[2] GSO, 2023

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF support further built Ministry of Health (MOH) capacity to effectively develop and implement regulations and technical guidelines related to maternal, new-born and child health. This included support to routine immunization services, as well as the National Action Plan on deployment of COVID-19 vaccines. As a result, as of March 2023 8,181,709 children aged 5-17 years vaccinated with either two doses or one booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine, 964,000 children under-one were fully vaccinated through routine immunization and 690,800 new-borns and their mothers received early essential and new-born care and Kangaroo Mother Care services. While the country faced an acute shortage of vaccines due to procurement challenges, the coverage for routine
immunization was partly compensated by an increase in uptake of immunization provided by the private sector and by 676,300 doses of DTP-HepB-Hib vaccines procured by UNICEF.

UNICEF technical advice and advocacy contributed to the development of Viet Nam’s first National Scheme on Mental Healthcare System Strengthening. This holistic, multi-sectoral scheme seeks to ensure that mental health services are available and easily accessible where they are most needed, including specialized services for children and adolescents. It lays out a framework for multi-sectoral collaboration, and a continuum of care approach to mental health, including the strengthening of promotion, prevention, and responsive care interventions.

Vietnamese children suffered from low coverage of nutrition interventions including for severe acute wasting. As an interim solution for nutrition financing (while long-term solutions such as health insurance were being discussed), UNICEF supported accelerated implementation of the nutrition components of the National Targeted Programmes (NTPs) through a series of planning and advocacy workshops, leading to increased spending on nutrition packages for the most disadvantaged populations. UNICEF provided technical assistance to two provincial governments to develop comprehensive plans on sustaining and scaling up high-impact nutrition interventions for 2023–2026, resulting in increased financial allocations for nutrition from provincial resources.

To address the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), with UNICEF support, promulgated a circular on building a safe school environment. This includes a regulation banning, with immediate effect, the sale, advertisement, and marketing of unhealthy foods (such as sugary drinks) in schools. This effort was complemented by UNICEF support to pilot and roll out a school nutrition environment assessment tool that guides schools and local authorities to understand the unhealthy nutrition environment in and around schools, and to take corrective measures including enforcement and education. Child obesity was also part of the communication and advocacy efforts in 2023, including the engagement of influencers and youth advocates in the Fix My Food campaign, which reached 6.7 million people and reported 4.5 million impressions.

On water and sanitation, UNICEF technical support and advocacy resulted in the development of two important circulars – on private-sector engagement and socialization for rural water supply, operation and maintenance – which are awaiting approval by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). These circulars are child-focused and when implemented should result in vulnerable children in rural areas having increased and sustainable access to water.

UNICEF also supported the development of two National Action Plans on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for women and children, adopted and disseminated by the Viet Nam Women’s Union and MOET countrywide. Given the extensive reach of both organizations, these child-sensitive and gender-responsive plans will reach most vulnerable women and children in schools and communities, increasing their access to and improving the quality of WASH services. With UNICEF technical advice, three provincial action plans on sanitation were approved by Dien Bien, Soc Trang and Thai Nguyen provincial authorities, with the objective of accelerating sanitation access for hard-to-reach populations. Direct support provided by UNICEF benefited more than 102,000 individuals, including over 64,000 children, with increased access to WASH services using climate-resilient technologies such as net zero toilets and solar pumping. Through a unique cooperation between UNICEF, MARD, and international and local private sector partners, the first solar powered net-zero toilet in Viet Nam was installed in a primary school of the water-constrained Mekong Delta region. This is the first step towards an expanded public-private partnership to roll out this green energy sanitation solution in schools around the country.

Viet Nam’s high vulnerability to climate change and disasters drove UNICEF to support the Viet Nam Disaster and Dyke Management Authority (VDDMA) in developing guidance for monitoring
and evaluating the National Plan on Disaster Risk Management, national guidelines for child-centred disaster drills (focusing on the preparedness of children and communities), and guidelines on assessing the implementation of the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction in Viet Nam. The drafts were shared with all 63 provinces for their input and will be instrumental in further enhancing national disaster mitigation and preparedness. The roll out of training on child-sensitive and gender-responsive emergency response for provincial VDMA branches and other local actors continued, with workshops organized in 2 regions. Given the high risk of outdoor and indoor air pollution in Viet Nam, UNICEF provided technical assistance to finalize guidelines for maternal and child health stakeholders on appropriate interventions to inform and prevent exposure of mothers and children to air pollution.

Building on key milestones achieved in the first two years of the country programme, UNICEF influenced the development of the Education Sector Analysis and Education Strategic Development Plan for 2021–2030, with vision to 2045, including more focus on equity. UNICEF continued supporting MOET to finalize and implement competency-based education and learning for all children which will benefit more than 21 million children with improved social-emotional learning, transferable skills, green skills, digital literacy and gender equality. UNICEF provided technical assistance to MOET to develop a new curriculum for early childhood education that is gender responsive, oriented to social-emotional learning and includes digital literacy for more than 4 million children. Hundreds of experts at all levels contributed to the process.

In alignment with MOET’s digital transformation strategy, UNICEF supported implementation of the digital skills and competency framework. The programme prioritized strengthening teachers’ capacity in digital skills and pedagogy; training school administrators in planning for ongoing maintenance of information technology networks and assets; and educating students in digital skills and online safety. Technical assistance to the MOET Information Communications and Technology Department (related to strengthening the education data management system) was put in place.

Through its Skills4Girls programming, UNICEF worked with girls in rural remote settings and poor urban areas to increase their participation in skilled work, especially in fields where they are underrepresented. UNICEF support equipped girls with science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) and digital technology skills and provided them with opportunities to develop self-confidence, problem-solving and decision-making skills. Enhanced STEAM learning benefited all school-aged children, starting with those in pre-school, through teacher training nationwide.

Inclusive education was further strengthened through support to policies that improve the quality of inclusive education for ethnic minority students and children with disabilities. Materials for the implementation of mother-tongue-based bilingual education were developed and tailored to Hmong, ‘rai and Khmer children. These materials not only address language barriers but also enhance teachers’ capacity in teaching methodologies for ethnic students.

To further advance gender equality and inclusion, a digital platform, including gender-responsive teaching and learning materials, chatbots with adolescents on gender, comprehensive sexuality education and mental health was made available to adolescents nationwide https://weshare.vnies.edu.vn/. An LGBTQI+ school assessment tool was implemented with nearly 3,000 students and more than 200 teachers trained on gender equality, gender-responsive pedagogy to improve school friendliness and inclusion of sexual diversity and gender identity.

UNICEF also supported MOET in rolling out the national climate-smart schools framework. The focus was to enhance the knowledge and skills of education managers and teachers in seven provinces to undertake participatory disaster-risk reduction and climate-change education, including how to integrate and implement school-based initiatives related to solar energy, WASH and air pollution.
The recommendations from the 2022 mental health in education study formed the basis for UNICEF support to MOET in this area. Mental health education and promotion activities were run by MOET departments, institutes and provincial education departments. Furthermore, the Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) package was introduced to primary- and secondary-school teachers and is currently being adapted for roll-out in 2024. UNICEF’s evidence-based advocacy for strengthened school-based services to support students’ mental health and well-being contributed to the adoption of a MOET Circular which stipulates that all primary and secondary schools will have, for the first time, a school counsellor.

**Work continued to further enhance the child protection system.** Strong advocacy and technical support from UNICEF yielded critical improvements in legislation to address violence against children and child labour. UNICEF provided extensive advocacy and technical support to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) in the development of an inter-sectoral protocol on providing support and interventions in cases of violence and sexual abuse of children, based on international standards and best practice. The protocol, approved by relevant government agencies, provides clearer roles and responsibilities for the social welfare, health, education, and police sectors when responding to cases of child abuse and violence. UNICEF’s support also contributed to the adoption by MOLISA of case-management guidelines on child labour.

UNICEF worked closely with the MOH and MOET to integrate child protection and social work into their systems. In 2023 UNICEF provided technical support and shared international best practice to inform the development of polices, guidelines and training programmes. UNICEF made substantial contributions to MOET and MOH circulars on social work job positions, and staff structures for child protection and social work services in schools and public health facilities. These are critical to strengthen the social-service workforce to improve child protection, mental health care and psychosocial support and counselling for children. Assistance was also provided to MOH to develop guidelines on the establishment and operationalization of child protection units/multi-disciplinary child-protection teams in hospitals with pilots underway at the National Paediatric Hospital and Bach Mai General Hospital.

UNICEF provided capacity building on child labour prevention and life skills education for MOET through development of handbooks and training materials, with subjects including the prevention of abuse, violence, exploitation and trafficking, child online protection, social work and counselling skills. Blended offline and online training, reached over 21,000 teachers and education staff.

In the justice sector, UNICEF’s ongoing partnership with the Committee for the Advancement of Women of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) shed light on the fact that almost none of the male-only forensic specialists within the health sector had received specialized training on skills and techniques in working with child victims, mostly females. Based on this critical insight, UNICEF supported MOH to develop and deliver a training programme for 100 medical forensic examination officers on child-friendly, gender-sensitive forensic examination, protection and counselling for child victims of abuse and violence.

A significant milestone was achieved toward a comprehensive legal framework for child justice with the inclusion of the Law on Justice for Minors in the 2024 Legislative Agenda of the National Assembly. Some 1,969 frontline and incoming justice and legal professionals (745 of them women) had enhanced capacity to handle cases involving children. The national roll-out of Family and Juvenile Courts progressed to district level, reaching nine district courts: 7,020 child offenders and victims had improved access to child-and gender-sensitive justice. The child-justice knowledge base was strengthened with the publication of the Report on the Situation of Under-18 Alleged Offenders and Victims.

UNICEF continued its public advocacy and behaviour change communication efforts to end violence
issues covered included non-violent discipline, mental health and psychosocial support for children. With assistance from UNICEF, the Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Holistic Parenting Programme was expanded to 13 provinces. This programme, led by MOLISA and implemented in cooperation with the Viet Nam Women's Union aims to build parents' skills (promoting gender roles and participation of not only mothers but also fathers in childcare) and competencies to provide holistic nurturing care and safe living environments for their young children. UNICEF supported 24 workshops to train 501 IECD parenting facilitators who subsequently conducted hundreds of parenting sessions for over 11,600 parents.

UNICEF continued to generate evidence and advocate for investment in child-related social policies as crucial drivers of Viet Nam's inclusive and sustainable development. UNICEF advocacy focused on spending efficiency and reprioritization, specifically directing more resources toward early childhood education, vocational training, preventive medicine, primary healthcare, childcare, child protection and universal child benefits, with priority given to children aged 0–3 years and pregnant women. UNICEF conducted a comprehensive political economy and policy analysis on the barriers to addressing multi-dimensional child poverty, using updated data and perspectives from key stakeholders such as the government, Party, academia, and development partners. These efforts had positive impact on key national decrees, directives and resolutions on childcare and social sector policies (notably the Party Resolution 42 on continued reform and improvement of social policies) and led to the prioritization of investments in community-based services for children in provincial socio-economic development plans and budgets.

UNICEF supported the National Assembly in its oversight role, including by supporting a National Conference on IECD. Recommendations from this event called for sufficient, equitable allocation of public resources for children, especially for nutrition and pre-school education. UNICEF also urged the Government to continue roll-out of the holistic parenting programme and to implement a roadmap for providing universal child cash-transfer benefits, beginning with children aged 0–3 years and pregnant women.

At sub-national level, UNICEF sustained its public finance advocacy, resulting in milestone decisions by the Provincial People's Committees of Gia Lai and Dien Bien to increase the allocation of public resources to sustain and scale up impactful ECD interventions in nutrition, maternal and child health, education and child protection.

UNICEF enabled meaningful participation of children and adolescents through support to various platforms and mechanisms. UNICEF provided capacity building for facilitators at the seventh National Children's Forum, focusing on teamwork and inclusive participation, especially for children with disabilities who joined for the first time. UNICEF technical inputs were instrumental to the first ever national mock plenary session of Children's National Assembly where 263 child delegates representing all 63 provinces debated a range of relevant issues, including violence, child abuse, injury prevention, and online safety. As part of the progress in rolling out the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) with Da Nang City, creative platforms such as Hackathon, U-Invent, and Children's Councils were advanced to facilitate meaningful participation as part of the child friendly city action plan. Capacity building for young advocates on mental health and participation have laid the ground for establishing a UNICEF young people's advisory board in 2024.

Through its partnerships with the business sector and the Viet Nam Chambers of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), UNICEF raised awareness and advocated for child-focused Environment Social and Governance (ESG) approaches by business. UNICEF completed the Business and Community Resilience Landscape Analysis, which assesses the exposure and vulnerability of selected business to climate hazards and will enable businesses to promote climate resilience, disaster preparedness and community responses.
UNICEF contributed substantially to Viet Nam’s second Voluntary National Review, ensuring robust data and analysis on child rights, especially of vulnerable groups including ethnic minorities and children with disabilities.

UNICEF successfully developed and began implementing robust technology for development (T4D) policies and procedures to ensure effective, efficient cross-section technology collaboration, compliance and resource utilization within the country office. Technology support was provided at all stages of a T4D initiative’s lifecycle, for instance technical assessment and scoping for the NOKIA partnership project and setting up e-learning platforms on parenting and child justice.

Communication-related key performance indicators (KPIs) underline the increasing influence of UNICEF among target audiences. There was a 50 per cent increase in top-tier media articles that mentioned UNICEF and a 17.5 per cent increase in registered U-reporters in 2023. The Brand Barometer saw a 15-point increase in survey participants believing UNICEF to be influential. High-level visits boosted these results, with Queen Mathilde of Belgium’s visit enabling UNICEF to directly engage with the Vietnamese President and other stakeholders.

Capitalizing on the Women’s Football World Cup, UNICEF co-organized an event with the Embassy of Australia featuring the Prime Ministers of Viet Nam and Australia to promote girls’ skills and sport. Communication, public advocacy and behaviour-change campaigns reached more than 68 million people. To mark World Children’s Day, 1,200 young people including U-Reporters took part in UNICEF activities and supported the campaign Open Up & Connect to promote mental well-being. World Children’s Day featured a policy advocacy event, and other campaigns spotlighted girls’ skills and empowerment, child obesity, climate change and ending violence against children. While some digital reach indicators decreased, social media engagement was 405 per cent over target.

Viet Nam Country Office successfully maintained its partnership and resource mobilization strategy with the private sector, resulting in attainment of projected revenue for 2023. UNICEF Vietnam was the winner of the UNICEF Inspire Award 2023 for its contribution to the Global Philanthropy efforts.

UNICEF invested heavily in staff professional development and well-being. This delivered positive results from the Q4 2023 Pulse Survey, with impressively high overall scores (including on workplace culture) that place the Viet Nam Country Office among the top three in UNICEF globally.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF continued its close cooperation with other United Nations agencies to deliver results for children and women. This included joint programmes with other UN agencies, for example, on child justice, children with disabilities and on violence against women and children. UNICEF chaired the UN Joint Results Group on Inclusive Development. In 2023, it successfully brought UN and other development partners together to focus on data, particularly SDG data gaps by establishing and co-convening a development partners working group on data.

Advocacy partnership with civil society, UN agencies and research institutes were pursued throughout the year. For example UNICEF worked with the NGO Health Bridge on obesity prevention and with government agencies to influence policies, including advocacy for tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. Partnerships with local research institutions such as Hanoi Medical University and Hanoi University of Public Health were strengthened to boost the evidence base around nutrition interventions. Adolescent mental health advocacy and promotion was significantly advanced through partnership with the
Institute for Sociology (IOS), which conducted the 2022 Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey. In collaboration with UNICEF Headquarters, IOS conducted a series of deep dive consultations with stakeholders on the survey’s key findings to inform further advocacy and policy recommendations.

The office continued to play a leadership role in convening key sector groups for coordination of both development and humanitarian responses. UNICEF co-convened the WASH in emergency working group, the Nutrition Partnership Group, and the Education Sector Working Group. As coordinating agency for the Global Partnership for Education in Viet Nam, UNICEF supported the development and submission of Viet Nam’s successful application for the multiplier grant, which mobilized USD 4.7 million to support early childhood education.

In an exciting new partnership, UNICEF and the Viet Nam Development Bank (VDB) actively collaborated to develop an initial proposal to the Green Climate Fund for a “Net Zero Climate Resiliency for Children” programme. If approved, this programme has the potential to mobilize a 100 million USD investment in child-sensitive climate mitigation and adaption programming at national and sub-national levels.

Under a joint programme on ending violence against women and children, UNICEF continued strengthening its partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women to tackle violence against children and women. The three agencies worked closely together to provide synergistic and complementary support at national and sub-national level. In this context, UNICEF spearheaded collaboration with the MOLISA Department of Children’s Affairs to develop a national social behaviour-change strategy on ending violence against children and women. UNICEF will work with UN Women, UNFPA and their respective government partners, including the Department of Gender Equality in MOLISA and the Family Department in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to develop this much needed strategy.

Several new programme partnerships were launched in 2023. For example, UNICEF embarked on formal partnership with the Viet Nam Association for the Protection of Children’s Rights, the only social organization mandated under the Law on Children to promote the implementation of children’s rights. A new partnership was forged with the Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour focused on rolling out the IECD Holistic Parenting Programme to reach employees of small and medium enterprises.

UNICEF was an active membership of the operations management working groups (finance, human resources and procurement) and substantively contributed to the drafting of the United Nations Business Operations Strategy (BOS) workplan 2022–2026, and implementation of the BOS 2023 workplan. Viet Nam was also one of the first countries to roll out the Local Shared Services Centre globally prioritized by the United Nations.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

*Lessons learned*

The year was marked by the continuing challenges to implementation posed by the more complex and stringent Government ODA procedures for project approval and implementation. This delayed the planning and implementation of the 2023 workplan, and in some cases required a shift to direct implementation and other modalities in order to deliver on UNICEF’s mandate and meet obligations to donors. An agile and solution- oriented approach to these challenges proved critical to ensuring programme continuity, as did effective collaboration and open communication between programme and operations teams. In order to ensure continuous learning and a strategic and proactive response, issues were discussed on a weekly basis in Section Chief meetings, and solutions co-created and communicated across sections. At the same time, UNICEF leveraged its strong partnerships at both
national and provincial levels to enable rapid implementation once approvals had been granted.

VCO’s 2023 Light Gender Programme Review found that while the office has numerous gender-responsive and transformative initiatives ongoing, these have not always been effectively communicated or shared. It concluded that more investment in the documentation and reporting of gender results is required. The Review recommended that this divide be bridged through enhanced documentation, reporting, and knowledge sharing, particularly spotlighting VCO’s substantial work in gender-transformative and girl-centred programming. This will entail capturing the valuable work more effectively and investing in reporting and documentation. VCO has been actively engaged in substantial efforts in these areas, and there is a significant opportunity to highlight and spotlight these initiatives more prominently for wider recognition, partnerships and advocacy.

The country office conducted a thorough review of its T4D processes and results. Through a series of T4D workflow review and problem-solving sessions, challenges in the current T4D implementation were identified, including lack of counterpart ownership, weak quality assurance, loose technology project management and insufficient T4D knowledge. As a result, the office introduced the T4D SOP, based on UNICEF T4D Technology Playbook and the Viet Nam context, to guide the management of T4D initiatives from opportunity discovery, concept development, implementation to evaluation, completion phases.

The digital transformation of the education sector offered an opportunity to accelerate the advancement of quality inclusive education for all children. The office found that tech-based innovations, when planned appropriately, can include adaptations for children with disabilities and ethnic minority children. Retrofitting digital solutions to diverse needs is both more costly and less effective than incorporating specific digital accessibility requirements into the terms of reference and detailed acceptance criteria (such as the design having been tested with users with disabilities and being usable offline) for digital materials and platforms during planning phases. It is also necessary to develop the capacity of partners and their subcontractors in the application of Universal Design for Learning and digital accessibility standards when creating digital resources for teaching and learning.

Experience in 2023 reinforced the effectiveness of combined high-level policy advocacy and hands-on learning from direct implementation to promote, advocate and inform the scaling-up of tested models and evidence-based policies to eliminate violence against children. Drawing on UNICEF-supported research and reviews, including the 2022 Comprehensive Study on School-related Factors Impacting Mental Health and Well-Being of Adolescent Boys and Girls in Viet Nam, and pilot interventions at school-level, MOET was able to present strong evidence drawn from national and sub-national levels to convince the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Government of the need for a strengthened child protection workforce and enhanced psychosocial support for students. This resulted in the landmark approval of the circular to establish and fund a counsellor position in all schools.

Innovations

UNICEF cooperated with the Viet Nam Development Bank and the Government to conceptualize an innovative Net Zero Climate Resiliency for Children (NZCRC) initiative and to seek opportunities for financing net-zero and climate-resilient social infrastructure and services as a new asset class. The initiative aims to build resilience by placing children at the centre of adaptation and mitigation policies and actions. The NZCRC will demonstrate the Children Climate Risk Index (CCRI) developed by UNICEF as a composite indicator of child vulnerability to climate and environment shocks. Focal areas for NZCRC include climate-smart community planning; child-centred climate action; disaster risk reduction; solarization; basic social services; climate-smart education; renewable energy generation and access; energy saving; climate-smart health and nutrition; net-zero and climate-resilient urban planning and climate-resilient WASH to vulnerable groups, including adolescents and youth, girls, women, persons with disabilities and their associated communities.
UNICEF is piloting the Aquonic zero-emission toilet at Long Phu C Primary School (Soc Trang province) as part of the “Innovation for Children” project. “Net Zero Aquonic” is a greenhouse gas-free wastewater treatment model comprised of compact treatment tanks with numerous components that can convert septic tank wastewater into clean, germ-free water that can be reused for irrigation or toilet flushing. The treatment system is entirely powered by clean energy generated by solar cells. This initiative is planned to scale up among schools in remote areas nationwide through innovative partnerships with the local private sector. The “Innovation for Children,” as the name implies, aims to create a safe, healthy, and sustainable living environment for Vietnamese children through innovative technology, energy, and clean water initiatives.

To promote a learning culture in the office, the UNICEF HR Unit worked closely with all programme sections to organize monthly learning and sharing sessions. Colleagues used these sessions to share and learn from experts and from each other.

To advance its commitment to sustainable procurement, UNICEF focused this year on understanding the current capabilities of the local market, particularly regarding the persistent demand for printing services. The office conducted a mini market survey and administered interviews and questionnaires to suppliers who have previously provided services. Through active engagement with these suppliers, UNICEF will extract insights to improve its procurement processes.