Eritrea

Update on the context and situation of children

Eritrea has an estimated population of 3,748,901.[1] More than one in three of the population is below the age of 15.[2] Moreover, children under 18 constitute 47 per cent of Eritrea’s population. This demographic dividend provides a valuable opportunity to accelerate socio-economic development.

Eritrea’s economy is predominantly agrarian, with a large amount of farming being carried out on a subsistence basis. It is also dependent on mining and remittances from the diaspora, leading to accompanying volatility. The main headwinds for the economy include climate change, the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on supply chains and the lack of political and economic reforms. In 2024, real GDP growth is projected to increase to 3.1 per cent, from 2.6 per cent in 2023 and 2.3 per cent in 2022, due to higher international prices for metals, which account for 50 per cent of exports.[3]

Eritrea is vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. The Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI) identifies inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as the greatest vulnerability contributing to children’s climate risk in Eritrea.[4] At present, 95.6 per cent of children in Eritrea are exposed to high or extremely high water vulnerability.[5] Water scarcity has affected the country’s agricultural productivity, leading to crop failures and affecting the health and survival of livestock, while also causing a shortage of staple foods and a loss of income for farming families. In 2023, the risk of malnutrition was exacerbated by a drought and locust infestation.

Despite continuing security risks, including the ongoing civil conflicts in neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan, 2023 saw positive progress in the regional integration of Eritrea in the Horn of Africa. In June 2023, after 16 years, Eritrea rejoined the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, which is expected to boost its regional integration and trade. The president of the Africa Development Bank and the vice president of the World Bank visited Eritrea in September 2023. Eritrea’s foreign minister held talks with the United Nations Secretary-General to advance collaboration between Eritrea and the UN, as well as to improve peace and stability in the Horn of Africa.

In 2023, there was notable progress in social services provision. For example, according to the latest data available, for primary school, the school dropout rates rate went down from 15.85 per cent (2019/2021) to 15.43 per cent (2021/2022). For secondary school, the rate declined from 51.53 per cent to 45.62 per cent.[6] The decrease school dropout rates is in part due to limited dropouts following the reopening of schools after the school closures due to COVID-19, which lasted for a year. This development has had a positive impact on the survival rate to grade 5, with the increase from 76.2 per cent in 2019/2021 to 83.7 per cent (girls 86.3 per cent; boys 81.5 per cent) in 2021/2022, exceeding the 2023 target of 77 per cent.[7] Challenges remain in the quality of education, with the combined results of the minimum mastery level for literacy and numeracy at grade 5 standing at 37.6 per cent (the 2023 target: 39.5 per cent).[8]

Under-five mortality rates have experienced a substantial decrease, dropping from 85.5 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 38.1 per 1,000 live births in 2021. This estimate by the Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) has been validated and accepted by the government. The stunting rate remains high at 50.2 per cent in 2022 – the latest data available.[9] Eritrea’s stunting rate is also higher than the average rate of 25 per cent for low-income countries.[10] Stunting persists due to chronic malnutrition in Eritrea, caused by insufficient complementary feeding practices, a high disease
burden and limited access to nutritious foods.

The proportion of the Eritrean population using basic water services stands at 52 per cent.[11] In Eritrea, the demand for a safe and adequate sustainable water supply for domestic use, livestock and irrigation puts pressure on the available water resources and services. One clear need in water resource management and development in the country is to increase access to safe drinking water supplies.

For child protection, although recent data is lacking, the births of 60 percent of under-five children in urban areas have been registered[12] and 89 per cent of women and girls have undergone some form of female genital mutilation (FGM).[13]

The new Government and UN Joint Work Plans (JWP) for the period 2024–2026 are expected to be signed soon. These will align with the government’s ten priority sector plans, announced in early 2022.[14] The proposed JWP contains a notable shift in policy, towards requesting UN support for the tangible delivery of social services, rather than for policy or strategy development, which is now outlined as the government's responsibility. The expected results of contributions from UNICEF to the government will be adjusted to align with this JWP, with further refinement informed by the planned light Mid-Term Review (MTR) in the first quarter of 2024.


**Major contributions and drivers of results**

During 2023, UNICEF Eritrea’s programmatic and management priorities, which reflected the UNICEF Strategic Plan’s six Goal Areas, had the below results:

**Goal 1: Every child survives and thrives.**

**Health and immunization:** With UNICEF support, the primary healthcare outreach programme exceeded its target, benefiting 868,927 women and children – more than double the intended target of 400,000. The comprehensive approach of this programme encompassed various elements, such as health, the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), nutrition and WASH. The 868,927 women
and children reached in 2023 also marked a notable increase from the 2022 figure of 703,956 individuals receiving primary healthcare services.

The percentage of pregnant women receiving at least four antenatal visits decreased from 65.4 per cent to 62.7 per cent, but still surpassed the target of 60 per cent. 56,706 births (target: 50,000) were attended by skilled health personnel, which is an increase from 43,458 in 2022, demonstrating a 113 per cent achievement. This is partly due to UNICEF support to the Ministry of Health (MOH) in the awareness raising of 147,975 women to improve their knowledge on the importance of antenatal care, the identification of maternal risks and the importance of seeking delivery in health facilities for skilled care.

UNICEF’s contributions led to the achievement of a 97.5 per cent vaccination rate for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, surpassing the 87 per cent target. The EPI partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Health Organization (WHO), for which UNICEF played a key liaison role, allowed 153,135 children (69 per cent of the target of 220,388) to receive two doses of the measles and rubella vaccines to prevent outbreaks, a particular risk arising from cross border movement and population displacement. The low coverage compared to the target can be attributed to the high target population estimates of the 2020 EPI coverage baseline survey.

605,074 children (target: 400,000) benefitted from UNICEF-supported integrated management of childhood illnesses services (integrated community case management and/or integrated management of neonatal and childhood illness), which is an increase from 351,091, due to a high commitment from health providers. The overachievement this year in Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) can be attributed to our multifaceted approach, aligning with UNICEF’s commitment to excellence. This is exemplified through innovative Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) strategies, such as SMS feedback, which foster health-seeking behaviour in communities. Our investment in health worker capacity building ensures the delivery of high-quality care, complemented by the provision and distribution of essential materials and guidelines. Simultaneously, mass-media advertisements played a role in amplifying community awareness. UNICEF also supported the capacity building of 572 frontline providers across the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the health system in high impact, life-saving maternal newborn, child health and nutrition interventions, which contributed to this success.

In 2024, efforts will focus on enhancing the quality of newborn care services, by improving the collaborative practices of gynecologists and pediatricians. The focus will also be on reaching the approximately 2,036 children who have not received any vaccinations (i.e., zero doses) and the additional number of 5,472 under-immunized children, 80 per cent of whom are concentrated in just three zobas across the country (Gash Barka, Northern Red Sea and Southern Red Sea) and are mainly from nomadic, semi-nomadic and hard-to-reach populations.

Nutrition:

In Eritrea, where only one in five children is fed the minimum diet needed, the poor quality of children’s diets is the most important driver of all forms of child malnutrition. In 2023, a well-positioned advocacy effort by UNICEF has yielded the government’s enthusiastic leadership of a strategic and potentially transformative shift, from a treatment-focused nutrition programme to the promotion of a culturally accepted, locally available and nutrient-dense first food named DMK (DMK stands for Dura: cereals; Milk; and Kebkebe: legumes) for complementary feeding in children aged 6 to 23 months. Furthermore, with the aim of providing technical guidance to the implementation of this innovative approach, UNICEF supported the Nutrition Unit of MOH in the development of the National Homemade Complementary Feeding Guideline for children aged 6 to 23 months.

Widely promoted during the last two quarters of 2023, the First Foods initiative aims to tackle
malnutrition through a triple security approach: food security, nutrition security and social security. In 2024, the first foods initiative will be anchored to a country-wide nutrition systems approach (Health/Vitamin A using the EPI platform and Agriculture and Social Protection on food baskets for children under five).

UNICEF’s specialized procurement, authorized by the government, ensured an uninterrupted supply of nutrition supplies to 328 sites in all 58 districts for both malnutrition prevention and treatment, including ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), F-100, F-75, ReSoMal, vitamin A capsules and iron and folic acid (IFA) tablets. As a result, 50,516 children with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) or severe acute malnutrition (SAM) received quality treatment and 364,340 children under the age of five and 181,859 pregnant women were provided with micronutrient supplementation.

For quality nutrition service provision, UNICEF’s capacity building of 224 health workers and community volunteers in Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) contributed to the high cure rate of 91 per cent for SAM and MAM. However, the 8.3 per cent of defaulters – children not completing treatment – remain a major operational challenge.

Obstacles persisted in achieving the targeted vitamin A supplementation, reaching only 50 per cent coverage compared to the 90 per cent goal for children aged 6 to 59 months. While a vitamin A campaign should be conducted every year, because of lack of financial resources, this has not been the case for Eritrea. Therefore, integrating vitamin A supplementation into the measles-rubella follow-up vaccination campaign has been carried out. However, in 2023, the measles-rubella campaign was not implemented as planned, due to high measles-rubella first and second vaccine coverage, as well as low dropout rates and no reported measles outbreaks. This led to lower coverage of vitamin A in 2023. It has since been proposed that the country can conduct a selected measles-rubella campaign targeting 36 districts, which is now scheduled in 2024. The decision-making process for this strategy took time. However, there is now potential to bridge the gap in vitamin A supplementation through a scheduled measles-rubella campaign in April 2024.

**Goal 2: Every child learns.**

For service delivery for access to education, UNICEF Eritrea supported the enrolment of 6,970 out-of-school children (65 per cent girls; target: 3,200). UNICEF exceeded its 2022 achievement by 4,770 children. Cash incentives were offered to 2,225 girls transitioning to secondary school, influenced by UNICEF advocacy.

For improved learning, UNICEF has not yet provided learning materials for the targeted 100,000 children; 1,285,220 student textbooks for primary and middle school levels are to be printed. During the reporting period, the printing work is partially completed (229,418 books).

To enhance timely and robust data analysis of the fifth Measuring Learning Achievements Assessment (MLA V), UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education (MOE) with the ongoing digitization of the assessment system, aimed at ensuring timely data collection, entry, analysis and reporting, as well as the effective use of evidence-based responsive planning and resource allocation.

Over the course of the year, UNICEF has supported the procurement of ICT materials and solar power equipment to enhance the timeliness of the Educational Management Information System (EMIS) data collection and analysis. Given the recent procurement of advanced solar-driven technology and the collaborative engagement with the MOH DHIS-2 team, UNICEF will further invest in technical and financial resources in strengthening the EMIS analytical and reporting platform.

UNICEF's partnership played a pivotal role in designing the roadmap to realize Eritrea’s commitment at the Transforming Education Summit (TES) in 2022. UNICEF partnership secured approximately
US$20 million for sector reform under the third Global Partnership for Education (GPE 3) funding period (2024–2026). The GPE carry-over budget of over US$7.0 million is still to be utilized by December 2024. Without drastic improvements, this carry-over GPE budget will not be utilized.

In 2024, through the Resident Coordinator, UNICEF plans to continue exploring avenues and opportunities for optimizing Eritrea’s centralized in-country and offshore procurement of school construction and water system equipment and supplies.

**Goal 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation.**

Collaboration between UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) contributed to Eritrea’s strides in protecting 38,900 children and adolescent girls from FGM and underage marriage (UAM). Ongoing mapping activities are set to determine the FGM-free status of 16 focused sub-zobas. Within Zoba Anseba, 8 out of 9 sub-zobas will be free from FGM: 4 are already free from FGM and once collected data is analyzed, it is most likely that another 4 will be confirmed to be FGM free.

UNICEF supported the enhancement of knowledge of 411,217 parents and caretakers regarding effective parenting techniques, as well as engaging 150,000 (target: 100,000) in community sensitization initiatives aimed at eradicating harmful practices such as FGM, child marriage and violence against children. Girls under the age of eighteen residing in five sub-zones (Adi-Tekelezan, Habero, Halhal, Asmat, Mai-dima) were safeguarded against underage marriage through the implementation of local regulations. According to field reports derived from community-based seminars, there were no documented instances of actual or attempted child marriages taking place in communities residing in the five sub-zones. With increased funding of FGM intervention, technical support for intensifying programme implementation has been prioritized, which shall be enhanced through joint UN and government field monitoring visits.

Although the scheduled enhancements to the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system were not implemented in 2023, after UNICEF’s sustained advocacy efforts the government has underscored the critical nature of establishing a functional “national statistical system and capacity with regard to domestic data generation, processing and analysis and dissemination through the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS).” This is expected to commence in 2024. The CPIMS will enhance the timely tracking and monitoring of vulnerable children, families and individuals who are entitled to receive child and social protection services and will ultimately contribute to effective resource management in the child and social protection sectors.

Care, mental health, psychosocial well-being, income generating and justice services reached 380 households hosting 54,798 people, including 219 children with disabilities.

**Goal 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment.**

In 2023, UNICEF assisted the government in rehabilitating water systems, conducting planned national WASH assessments and integrating water supply solutions with renewable energy.

Out of a total of 54 planned construction projects, the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment (MOLWE), with UNICEF technical engagement and co-financing with the Water Resources Department (WRD), undertook community-led upgrading and construction of new climate-resilient, solar-powered water supply systems across 30 drought-affected areas, enabling 30,337 (15,454 men; 14,883 women; target: 60,000) people to gain access to a safe and sustainable water supply. Another 12 systems are nearing completion, which will benefit 22,293 more people. The remaining 12 construction projects are expected to benefit around 34,000 people. The progress in achieving the targeted output faced a delay due to the slow delivery of construction material by the Red Sea...
Corporation procurement agency. Whilst procurement of solar panels is almost fully covered through UNICEF financial support, with the WRD undertaking the installation, most of the labour requirements of construction and operation, as well as maintenance costs, are covered by the user communities, demonstrating the strength of the community service delivery model in Eritrea.

Eritrea achieved a 92 per cent Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. Notable high sanitation utilization rates across the regions (97 per cent in Northern Red Sea, 89 per cent in Debub region, 82 per cent in Anseba region and 45 per cent in Southern Red Sea region) provide evidence of applied sustainable social and behavioural change strategies.

Aligned with Eritrea’s goal of eliminating trachoma, UNICEF and the government collaborated on the production and dissemination of informative education and communication (IEC) materials for conducting community dialogues for the adoption of handwashing and face-washing in Zoba Debub, where trachoma has not been eliminated. 204,000 people in 204 communities, including 15,434 students in 22 schools in Zoba Debub were reached.

**Goal 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life.**

Financial support to vulnerable children reached 186,443 recipients, including 32 per cent with disabilities and 48 per cent females, expanding their opportunities to access basic social services. Over 180,000 vulnerable children in around 60,000 households benefited from the government-funded “martyr's cash transfer.”

An intensified implementation of a community-based capacity-building strategy, in accordance with the government’s social protection policy and strategy, resulted in a 17 per cent increase in the social protection workforce, now totaling 5,600 individuals, 42 per cent of whom are female. This empowered workforce rendered social protection services accessible and equitable, with a particular focus on beneficiary registration and targeting mechanisms, both of which were accessed by all 60,000 households, and case management.

Further to the mission on disability inclusion of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), this issue was prioritized in the 2024–2026 joint programme work plans between GoSE and the United Nations.

In 2024, the aforementioned CPIMS will be a key priority, together with advocacy for prioritization of first foods for children aged 6 to 24 months, as part of vulnerable families’ monthly food basket.

Two senior officials from the Ministry of Finance and National Development (MOFND) completed the global ExCEL evaluation course organized by UNICEF in October 2023. Their participation is pivotal in enhancing programmes and policies in Eritrea, as well as fostering a culture of evaluative thinking centered on achieving impactful results for children and their communities.

As of December 31, 2023, the budget utilization rate was 93 per cent, showcasing the country office’s commitment to efficient financial management. The office continues to work with key government partners in accelerating programme implementation, with particular emphasis on full utilization of the GPE grant. Throughout 2023, no losses were incurred from UNICEF-procured supplies, nor were there instances of long outstanding uncleared containers at the port, sustaining a four-year record of no incurred port demurrage charges, since 2020.

The UNICEF internal Staff Pulse Check Survey in Q4 revealed encouraging improvements from 2022.
Under the leadership of MOFND, the UNICEF-government Joint Work Plan (2022–2023) and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) have been successfully implemented. UNICEF, in collaboration with WHO, co-led the UNSDCF’s ‘People Pillar: Social Services Outcome’. The government, in collaboration with UN agencies, organized quarterly technical review meetings as well as regular sector-based tripartite meetings at the national level for the education, water and health sectors, enhancing alignment between the UN Cooperation Framework and Government Development Sector priorities. This effort resulted in increased joint sector field monitoring missions. UNICEF also advocated for 2022–2023 GoSE-UN End-Year Programme Sector reviews.

Through the H3 – Health Sector group of WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, Eritrea established nationwide teams of gynecologists and pediatricians. The teams worked on capacity building for healthcare service providers in maternal and newborn emergency care to reduce maternal and newborn death, which is a major cause of under-five mortality in Eritrea. The collaboration between government implementing ministries (MOH, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare [MOLSW]) and UN agencies (UNFPA, United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and WHO) resulted in an impressive 151 per cent achievement in providing integrated management childhood illnesses services to targeted children. Additionally, community engagement initiatives focused on eliminating discriminatory social and gender norms exceeded expectations, with almost twice the number of targeted participants involved. Similarly, community participation in the WASH community-led construction and Barefoot Doctors in the health sector showcased the critical role communities play as partners in UNICEF programmes in Eritrea.

Aligned with the National Multi-sectoral Strategy for Accelerated High Impact Nutrition Interventions, UNICEF collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNDP. This partnership, led by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) advanced food security and nutrition security through the DMK approach and strengthened food systems via public and private sector salt iodization.

Two other government-approved initiatives to which UNICEF significantly contributed were: the establishment of the Child Protection Information Management System and the climate change adaptation and resilience building carried out by the Water Resources Department at the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment.

The MOE Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) team was revived in 2023. Flexible and informal collaboration strengthened the partnership between UNICEF and MOE (the Program Management Unit and the ECCE team). This resulted in improvements in all indicators for quality and access of early childhood development (ECD) services, surpassing targets: A total of 3,324 pre-primary school aged children (1,577 girls) were enrolled in 78 revamped Early Childhood Care and Education classrooms (target: 40) in the three most disadvantaged zobas (target: 1200).

In the realm of quality and learning, a collaboration with MOE and GPE led to 6,970 out-of-school children and adolescents accessing education through UNICEF-supported programmes – twice the target. Furthermore, 4,412 teacher-educators received professional development training with support from UNICEF, exceeding the target and promising improvements in teaching quality, while also potentially contributing to enhanced results in MLA and completion rates.

Beyond the achieved results, three in-country visits by the GPE team facilitated high-level meetings, technical sessions and field visits, fostering a collaborative understanding of the education sector’s nuances. The successful disbursement of 60 per cent of the GPE Education Sector Programme
Implementation Grant (ESPIG) to MOE marked a significant achievement, setting the stage for positive outcomes in future GPE allocations. UNICEF’s support extended beyond borders, creating a robust south-south partnership between the ministries of education in Zambia and Eritrea, focusing on knowledge exchange and implementing foundational learning programmes using the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) model. A similar initiative with Rwanda on rapid classroom construction is underway, and it is anticipated to facilitate the ongoing commitment to strengthening educational ties between nations.

UNICEF demonstrated technical leadership and liaison support to key funding partnerships, resulting in the indicative country allocation of around US$20 million for the 3rd Global Partnership for Education (GPE-3) and the approval of US$11.8 million for the Gavi Full Portfolio Programme for health systems strengthening, equity acceleration, innovation and service delivery.

In 2023, the office received US$11 million, three quarters of which was in response to UNICEF humanitarian action for children. The key funding contributions were from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Fred Hollows Foundation, the Government of Japan, UNFPA/UNICEF headquarters and UNICEF Thematic Funding, among others. This partnership enabled UNICEF Eritrea to deliver results for children under the continuously challenging funding landscape.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Programme Shift in Nutrition for a Better Result
One key programme area with a major impact on children, nutrition, has undergone a transformative shift to strengthen results by placing greater emphasis on preventing maternal and child malnutrition. This involves embracing a systems approach, focusing on social protection and food beyond the health system and introducing nutrition-dense first foods for children, in line with the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) guidance.

Furthermore, while UNICEF reaches around half of the estimated caseload of SAM (which may be underestimated), it faces challenges in mobilizing resources for nutrition. The upcoming partnership on climate adaptive/resilient nutrition with MOA, supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB), provides an opportunity for UNICEF’s engagement. This collaboration aims to strengthen regional partnerships, supported by evidence produced by ESARO on nutrition and child food security with the AfDB.

To increase the supply of complementary feeding practices, the government has supported the production of DMK, made at home with locally available foods, and endorsed by UNICEF as a local solution. Challenges persist, however, and this effort will be complemented by intensified SBC to promote improved behaviours and recipes.

Successful Identification of Decentralized Initiatives
Increased joint UNICEF-line ministry field monitoring missions have supported assurance activities, enhancing programmatic assurances in line with the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) assurance plan. This provided evidence of progress in planned outputs/activities and introduced corrective actions. Government-UNICEF joint field monitoring missions in three remote zobas (Northern Red Sea, Southern Red Sea and Gash Barka) revealed successful local initiatives led by zoba-level authorities, focusing on marginalized children’s access to social services. These successes were documented to showcase zoba-level initiatives to external audiences.

Humanitarian and Development Nexus and Climate Agenda
In Eritrea, where the government encourages system strengthening, development funds can be well
received. Unfortunately, in 2023, apart from immunization and education, there has been more funding under humanitarian than development across all programme sectors.

The government’s acknowledgement of climate issues aligned with its principles of self-reliance, highlighted in the last Voluntary National Review of Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals that took place in 2022. This acknowledgement enabled UNICEF to effectively contribute in drought affected areas, to support the government in enhancing water access, focusing on climate-resilient and solar-powered systems.

UNICEF’s supportive role to the government at the time of the Horn of Africa drought response and its focus on service delivery at the community level position it well in the effort to improve climate resilience. In 2022 and 2023, UNICEF assisted in rehabilitating and constructing 67 climate-resilient and solar-powered water systems and improved the recharge capability of 20 water sources to sustain their yield. Additionally, in 2024 UNICEF is supporting the government in conducting a National WASH Assessment (NWA) to provide the latest information on the WASH sector.

The donor community recognizes UNICEF’s comparative advantage in meeting the needs of children throughout childhood and adolescence across all sectors. The institutionalization of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) at its early stage exemplifies the nexus approach. UNICEF Eritrea’s humanitarian response, which is embedded in development work, ensures the continuity and coherence of assistance to populations with both immediate and longer-term needs, as exemplified in the water or nutrition interventions. A few case examples and real-life stories on the UNICEF Eritrea YouTube channel effectively communicate the concept of “nexus” in Eritrea.

Looking forward, further to the baseline assessment of UNICEF’s environmental and social safeguards (ESS) implementation, forthcoming procedure and guidance on an integrated and comprehensive Complaints, Feedback and Redressal Mechanism (CFRM) with AAP and safeguarding will partly guide us to ensure the nexus is maintained. Additionally, identification of critical emerging issues in the country programme context through the upcoming MTR is crucial, against which our programme will be critically reviewed.

**Community-Based Strategies** continue to be pivotal in UNICEF Eritrea’s programming. In preventing FGM and UAM, engaging para-social/community workers for sensitization and mobilization proved effective, producing more outcomes than the previous year. Thus, the approach fostered community discourse, and averted FGM and UAM for 38,900 girls and women in 2023, establishing a resilient framework for long-term viability. A community-based strategy was also effectively optimized in the provision of a solar-based water pumping system that also included the construction of micro dams for groundwater recharging.

In conclusion, the emphasis is on the importance of continual innovation, adaptability and collaborative efforts in effectively addressing complex programming challenges and contributing to the achievement of SDGs.