

South Africa

Update on the context and situation of children

The first ‘full post pandemic year’ started with an upbeat tone. “COVID 19 did not browbeat us into submission or disillusionment. Working together, we overcame that crisis, and we have started to recover,” the President remarked in his early February ‘State of the Nation Address’. This positivity was matched by a quarter 1 real gross domestic product (GDP) that expanded by an estimated 0,4%, with manufacturing and finance industries driving the growth.

But despite some resilience, the country continued to struggle to balance its books due to a severe reduction of national income in the form of government revenues, an energy crisis that does not appear solvable in the short-term, and stubborn unemployment levels that are too high for an upper middle-income country. By quarter 3, GDP contracted 0.2% with households reducing their spending on items such as transport, recreation, and housing utilities.

Child poverty remained high, with 33%^[1] of children living below the extreme (food) poverty line and nearly half of all children below the ‘Lower Bound Poverty Line’. The country’s infamous inequality levels hit a record Gini per capita income index high of 0.67, a rise of three points since 2015 estimates^[2]. This inequality varies widely among provinces and population groups, meaning the burden of poverty and inequality is unfairly distributed. Larger-sized households, female, and younger-headed homes, as well as households with low levels of education are much poorer in comparison to others. These are also the homes with the largest percentage of children. South Africa also has an estimate number of 642,000 migrant or displaced children – making it the country with the largest child migrant population on the continent^[3].

The latest Census (2022) results, released in November this year, revealed a population increase over the last 12 years from nearly 52 million to 62 million. Of this population, two cohorts of children, particularly those living in ‘at-risk’ areas and homes, continued to be of particular concern. This includes children starting out on their first 1,000 days of life, and adolescents, aged 10-19 years, who represent a significant proportion of the population at 17.4%.

Malnutrition rates remain shockingly high, with child stunting still affecting nearly 1 in 3 children under five years, while adolescent obesity is equally concerning, with data showing more than 31% of females, aged 15-19, are overweight or obese. Exclusive breastfeeding is still only practiced by around 50% of new mothers and more than 100,000 children under five years make up the so-called ‘zero dose children’ who are at increased risk of deadly but vaccine preventable diseases. The measles outbreak earlier in the year reiterated the urgency of reaching 90% community-level immunization coverage but on a positive note resulted in a strong and coordinated response by Government and relevant partners to avert a more severe national level outbreak.

Around 300 children are murdered on average every three months, with another 2,000 suffering the horrific impact of attempted murder and assault. Research shows that children aged 0-5 years suffer the impact of ‘household’ violence such as shaking and related traumas, adolescents are more exposed

to gang violence, escalations related to provocations and robbery.

The Presidential National Strategic Plan against GBV continued to provide a platform for convening action among civil society partners. Adolescents are also exposed to other challenges, such as mental health issues, alcohol and tobacco use, and early and unprotected sex with multiple partners, which carries a high risk of HIV infection, other sexually transmitted infections, as well as teenage pregnancy.

Girls are still three times more likely to contract HIV than boys, and adolescent mothers are less likely to know their status at their first antenatal visit and are less likely to adhere to treatment, so do not virally suppress, and are less likely to disclose their status. Only 82% of children living with HIV know their status and a mere 68% of those eligible are receiving treatment.

The education recovery from the COVID-19 learning loss continued and positively the Matric 2022 pass rate hit 80%, a rise from 76% in 2021, importantly all provinces reported improved results. At the other end of the basic education journey, more than 3 million children (60%), aged birth to 4 years, are attending early childhood learning (ECD) programmes, half of whom are supported by a pro-poor government subsidy. Overall and more worryingly, the latest Census findings showed only a 3% increase since 1996 in the number of people (73,4%), aged 5-24 years, attending an educational institution.

The bounce of the Springboks victory at the Rugby World Cup in late October was matched by a slight decrease in the quarter 3 youth unemployment rate to 43,4%. But the lack of opportunities in the learning to earning transition space, including youth who are not in employment, education, or training, continues to burden an energetic, creative, and innovative youth cohort. The ‘Just Transition’ away from fossil fuels and emerging green economy could provide the jobs of the future but the relevant skills must be developed today to maximize the youth potential.

Climate change and environmental degradation, in particular water, soil and air pollution, as well as drought, threaten the wellbeing of children. The ‘Climate, Energy and Environment Landscape for Children’ released in November noted, that more visibility and deliberate references to children are needed in relevant policies. The cholera outbreak also highlighted the critical need for increased investment in climate resilient water and sanitation systems. Latest data shows that 82% of households have access to piped water, either within their residence or on their premises, but the quality of water and operations of sanitation systems continues to be a concern.

A decade since the death of Nelson Mandela, the first President of a democratic South Africa, improving the wellbeing of every child must again be prioritized today, as he stated, “*History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children.*”

[1] StatsSA 2023 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0441/P04413rdQuarter2023.pdf>

[2] StatsSA 2023 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-06/Report-03-10-062015.pdf>

[3] UNICEF and The South African Red Cross partner to assist migrant children

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2023, results for children in South Africa continued to be anchored in the child rights agenda and were achieved through strong partnerships with Government, civil society, academia, and the private sector, including engagement with children and young people.

Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives in a safe and clean environment.

UNICEF and partners supported the Department of Health (DOH) to develop the package of service benefits under the national health insurance bill (NHI). The 'Policy Framework and Strategy for the Implementation of the Ward Based Primary Health Care Outreach Teams' was also reviewed to inform work moving forward.

The national immunization system was enhanced through UNICEF's technical and financial support, with the aim of reducing the number of zero dose children. A vaccine stock out analysis was conducted. The 'reach every district' (RED) strategy was adapted, including the national cold chain manual and effective vaccine management training materials. Training, coaching, and mentoring of frontline health workers helped to strengthen capacity and additional cold chain equipment was installed. The emergency response to the measles outbreak reached more than 9.6 million children and stopped the spread of the disease and polio outbreak preparedness training was conducted that benefited 200 trainers, covering 2,000 health facilities and 30 vaccine depots.

UNICEF is leading the UN's support to Government on the 'Global Alliance to end AIDS in Children' country plan. The adolescent girl and young women (AGYW) peer mentor programme has scaled-up its reach and engagement from one district in 2017 to seven in 2023, with Government now recruiting and providing stipends for peer mentors in KwaZulu Natal, reaching more than 41,000 adolescents and young women. UNICEF is also providing technical support to assess gaps in the delivery of programmes that work to prevent the vertical transmission of HIV, as well as pediatric and adolescent AIDS programmes in related to the Global Fund related work.

A bottleneck analysis was conducted on child wasting and maternal nutrition, resulting in nutrition improvement plans being developed in four provinces. UNICEF facilitated a series of policy dialogues on transforming food systems to better work for children and this opened the space for comments from stakeholders on the 'Draft Labelling and Advertising of Foodstuffs Regulations in South Africa'. These are being compiled and will inform updates to the regulation in 2024. The modelling of the 'Blueprint for improving the South African school food environment' was conducted in 6 schools (urban and rural) in KwaZulu-Natal province and benefited 8,335 learners aged 6 to 16 years. This modelling will inform the scale-up of the programme at national level.

The 'Climate Energy and Environment Landscape Analysis for Children' (CEELAC) was finalized, including a set of key recommendations to ensure a more child-responsive approach to climate action. In response to the cholera outbreak, UNICEF provided hygiene kits, WASH supplies and handwashing facilities, supporting more than 166,100 people at home, in schools, early learning centers and health facilities. The outbreak was contained thanks to a strong cross-sectoral and coordinated approach among Government, UN and civil society partners, and community leaders.

Every child, including adolescents, learns.

UNICEF continued to strengthen and improve the quality of early childhood development (ECD) and education systems through a focus on equity, scale, and learning-to-earning pathways. More than 50,600 ECD practitioners and educators (grades R to 3) received training to improve their capacity to implement play-based pedagogical approaches for early learning. This included the development of learning and teaching support materials to enable the effective roll-out and implementation of the National Curriculum Framework (birth to 4 years). The review, identification and alignment of laws and policies to accommodate the ECD-function-shift supported the integration of ECD into the basic education system. The DBE is also enhancing the relevance of the education system, by focusing more on competencies, including transferrable skills. UNICEF played a lead role in supporting the finalization of the 'National Core Competency Framework' that was approved by the Council of Ministers.

As part of the COVID-19 learning recovery, the Siyavula math and science online platform for Grades 8 to 12 learners was accessed by more than 3.5 million learners (61% girls), with over 1 million additional questions added in 2023. The UNICEF supported 'Early Grade Reading Programme' trained and coached 695 teachers and set-up an additional 1,200 reading corners, including 63,000 books, to more than 200 schools.

To tackle the continued gender disparity in the transition to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related careers, 460 adolescent girls were trained in aviation and space technology and 3,219 young people (57% girls) exposed to various STEM-related career opportunities. In addition, 400 educators (60% females) were trained on coding and robotics with 594 learners (56% females) trained on and exposed to 4IR technologies.

The Mamelodi Business Hub was rehabilitated and opened. It was set-up within the township, to increase access to training and resources to improve employability and employment opportunities for vulnerable youth. Nearly 2,900 youth entrepreneurs received training to develop their business ideas, including financial literacy and business management, while a further 12,429 young people benefited from job shadowing.

The YoMobi platform has now registered around 170 organizations and provides resources and support for their services focused on young people. This unique service is tailored to provide organizations with institutional capacity building and information to improve their youth skills development work.

Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence and exploitation.

Child protection systems were strengthened, with UNICEF support, by improving inter-departmental coordination to prevent and respond to child protection risks. More than 222,372 vulnerable children were provided with protection and other essential services. South Africa is one of the ‘pathfinding countries to end violence against children’ and in 2019 the Department of Basic Education (DBE) took the pledge one step further by endorsing the ‘Safe to Learn’ call for action that aims to keep children safe and secure in school. To support DBE’s efforts, UNICEF commenced a review and update of the ‘National School Safety Framework’ (2016) to include online safety related issues identified in the ‘Disrupting Harm South Africa’ report (2022).

UNICEF is also empowering young women and girls to realize their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). This work, supported by the Canadian Government, has improved the capacity of 105 social service professionals in three targeted districts with high rates of violence. UNICEF addressed the inter-section between violence against children (VAC) and violence against women (VAW) through high-level advocacy and programming models, such as investing in dialogue with boys to address toxic masculinity. With the National Department of Social Development (DSD), UNICEF supported children’s consultations, including over 500 children across all nine provinces, to inform a potential 7th Pillar of the ‘National Strategic Plan for Gender Based Violence and Femicide’ that would more specifically focus on VAC.

Over 25,000 parents and caregivers were reached with face-to-face or hybrid parenting programmes. Over 1.2 million people were exposed to social behaviour change messages to tackle gender norms and reduce violence against children. While media-based messages have wider reach, including TV and community radio, the effective methods to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes has not yet been established. Face-to-face interactions have the highest impact in increasing knowledge but are costly and the reach is minimal.

During 2023, the ‘Zimbabwean Exemption Permit’ (ZEP) for Zimbabwean nationals in South Africa was due to expire first in June and then December, leading to heightened tensions among migrants and host communities. UNICEF responded through an EU-funded children on the move programme, reaching more than 12,300 ‘children on the move’ with essential social services, legal, psychosocial, education and health support. UNICEF supported DSD as well as partner CSOs to strengthen the case management for children on the move, ensuring they are well integrated in the existing case. Later in the year, the expiration of the ZEP was deemed to be unconstitutional and has been extended to 2025.

Every child, including adolescents, access inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty.

SACO, working with Statistics South Africa, and other partners, has been advocating for improved data collection and analysis to further inform social protection and broader work to improve the wellbeing of children. This included an agreement that a second Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) will take place in 2024. The analysis will enable the Government to establish progress or regression against the 2020 baseline and will allow for the promotion of the tool to sector

Departments. A similar agreement was made with a partner to test the veracity of the ‘Decent Standard of Living’ tool on the much-anticipated Income and Expenditure Survey.

In 2023, results from the General Household Survey (GHS-2022) showed improved coverage of the child support grant (CSG) meaning that fewer children (in absolute numbers) lived in poverty in 2022. This was an unexpected but welcome outcome, given the negative impact of COVID-19 on economic growth. In 2023, social protection coverage for children was further consolidated via increases in the number of children who received social grants. Despite these gains, challenges were experienced, around sustaining an inflation-adjusted level of expenditure on children’s programmes and services. Thus, the complementarity that is sought between strengthening the nexus between recipients of child grants and ensuring that these beneficiaries receive improved services in other programmes, has been disrupted.

The CSG remains Government’s premier tool to counter income poverty and the fact that progressively more children are covered under this social assistance arrangement, bodes well for the future of this intervention. It is important that momentum is sustained. Furthermore, given that additional resources for a 100% coverage rate for the CSG are already incorporated in present CSG budgets, focused work is needed to ensure that all qualifying children receive the grant. This is especially important for very young children, who have the lowest uptake rates. Given the evidence about the importance of the first 1,000 days of life on immediate and long-term child development, reaching these children will be a major focus in 2024 and beyond.

Cross Cutting Result Enablers

Communications and Advocacy

UNICEF is a lead voice and advocate for the rights of children across South Africa through driving public narratives, articulating response and advocating for action on issues affecting children. This includes through media engagement, powerful character-led digital content, including the voices of children and partners, as well as child and youth engagement.

UNICEF again used its convening power and voice to drive public debate informed by the opinions and ideas of children and young people, such as through U-Report polls and information sharing, volunteer club action and online engagements.

UNICEF South Africa has a close, important and balanced communications narrative that includes social, and behaviour change messaging and engagement. For example, eight volunteer clubs worked on the ‘My Body, My Health, My Wealth’ nutrition campaign to promote healthier lifestyles. This included behaviour change and advocacy elements to call for better food marketing regulations and

environment. The draft regulations now in place by the Government are a positive stride forward.

Mental health related media work, polling and two-way information sharing continues to break down stigma, open debate and provide access to vital resources for young people, whilst driving partnerships.

The UNICEF ‘multimedia truck’ has again incorporated powerful storytelling content, alongside community health activations to convince parents to get their children vaccinated, alongside broader child and family health services. The UNICEF South Africa website analytics also show the importance of information for parents and children, such as the best performing webpages consistently including content that speaks to the routine immunization schedule and related information.

Fundraising and Partnerships

In 2023, SACO’s total income is expected to reach just over \$8.6 million, compared to \$13.8 million in 2022. This is in-line with fundraising targets for regular programming and reflects the final disbursement and utilization of large COVID-19 grants and those received in response to the 2021 civil unrest and 2022 floods. The dominant share of emergency grants in the past 2.5 years came from public donors and the ratio of ORR to ORE has now adjusted from 2:1 in 2022 to 4:1 in 2023; with public donor funding coming down from 62% of total income last year, to 18% of total income in 2023. Just over a third of total income for 2023 has been drawn from Nat Coms (showing an 18% increase year on year), while just shy of a fifth of 2023 income has been contributed by public donors. The remaining balance of SACO’s 2023 income is from other sources of funding -i.e., thematic funds, and end violence pooled fund.

Total income from local fundraising in 2023 has resulted in around \$250,000 raised from two corporate grant contributions, with a third set to be closed out in early 2024. These grants have all been directed to work related to child protection. Two additional grants of a cumulative value of circa \$838,000 are currently in advanced contract and negotiation stage and will also form the basis of the local fundraising pipeline for the first quarter of 2024. In addition to corporate giving, income from individuals has amounted to roughly \$145,000. This stream of local income has been consistently declining due to donor attrition but has shown resilience in the absence of active acquisition work.

The total value of advisory and technical support services that SACO received pro bono from business this year were focused on Generation Unlimited related engagements and exceeded \$1.3 million, while \$115,000 was leveraged for an implementing partner.

Operations

The Operations team, consisting of ICT, Supply, Admin, Quality Assurance and Human Resources, was a key enabler and support function for programme sections to achieve results for children this year. Balancing efforts to improve diversity in procurement with quality and timely programme

delivery continued in 2023. A market survey was contracted to be completed in 2024 to support these efforts, which will be supported by greater data-led geographic convergence of interventions in 2024.

SACO expenditure increased from USD 14.4m in 2021, to USD 17.5m in 2022 and a further increase to USD 21m in 2023. One of the key drivers for the increase in expenditure in 2023 compared to 2022 was the increase in emergency funding for the Health Section, focusing on cold chain equipment.

With the Operations staff remaining constant despite the higher throughput in the last two years, this has resulted in certain functions being stretched at times, however key performance indicators as per the HQ Office dashboard were maintained. Restructuring the receptionist post to take on the internal travel portfolio has allowed the recruitment of a new post (in Dec 23) to strengthen quality assurance and compliance.

Regarding the categorization of expenditure in 2023, contracts/supplies accounted for USD 12.8m and transfers to CSO Partners accounted for USD 3.8m. There has been a slight decrease in the number of new CSO Partnership documents (PDs) in 2023 (44) compared to 2022 and 2021 (51 and 52), however additional focus is required to pursue higher value strategic partnerships given that 25% of new PD's were for less than USD 50k and 70% were less than USD 100k. For institutional contracts signed during 2023, there was a slight decrease from 228 to 211 compared to 2022, with individual consultancies remaining constant at 35 across 2022 and 2023.

Per the above new PDs signed in 2023, support was provided to 12 Partners to undertake the PSEA Assessment and 100% of Partners were assessed for PSEA of which 2 Partners received a Moderate risk rating and will be further supported to achieve a low-risk rating.

Innovations

Innovation supported key government initiatives, encompassing technology to support with real-time feedback, child and adolescent participation and using data for advocacy on key issues impacting the child, adolescent and youth agenda and addressing improved learning outcomes. Innovative partnerships through initiatives such as Generation Unlimited have engaged the private sector, government, and academia, particularly in the realm of digital learning and earning pathways through the Youth Agency Marketplace (YOMA). Pathways to the green economy was also a focus with citizen science for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring, which saw significant co-investment from government and support from academia. "Gaming4Girls", as a concept to understand how the digital and creative industries could benefit and complement STEM education for girls was also piloted in South Africa. School connectivity through a partnership with GIGA was also taken forward and other digital initiatives included tackling issues related to sexual reproductive health, broader health outcomes and child projection.

Monitoring, Data and Evidence

This year saw the strengthening of the office's monitoring and data agenda. A monitoring strategy was finalized and a programme monitoring visit assessment completed. Mentorship was provided to 12 CSO partners focused on strengthening means of verification for partnership results and two results-based workshops – one on RBM fundamentals and the second on the use of technology for monitoring / reporting – were held virtually, with over 190 participants each from across the region.

The disparate data sets for children were pulled together in eight thematic and 1 situation overview fact sheets and a data for children dashboard was finalized. Plans in 2024 and beyond include institutionalizing the data dashboard into StatsSA. Citizen science research in water quality monitoring to help close SDG data gaps was ongoing with an inception report and stakeholder workshop completed. Development of a monitoring and reporting tool for the Department of Women, Youth and People with Disability (DWYPD) is in the design phase with completion planned for Q1 2024.

With respect to emergency response, data collection using drones to support disaster preparedness in Alexandra township was completed and shared with stakeholders. A business case to guide the SACO strategy on the use of Drones in data readiness in disaster management commissioned with a new partner in collaboration with innovations (completion Q2 2024).

UNICEF contributed to treaty body reporting obligations for South Africa including submission of a confidential alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in August 2023 in response to the State Party submission made in 2022. UNICEF also participated in the CRC 96th Pre-Sessional Working Group Meeting 25-29 September 2023 alongside civil society organizations and children.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF continued to play an important and leading role in UN coordination structures. These included the UN results and theme groups, where UNICEF co-led the Human Capital and Social Transformation pillar and related sub-groups for Education and Violence, as well as leading the M&E theme group. In addition, UNICEF played a key role in the UN Communications Group, UN Operations Management Team, Protection Group, Social Protection, as well as Gender and Youth Theme Groups. UNICEF engagement in these UN coordination structures was critical for positioning children's issues in the overall UN agenda. UNICEF is also recognized as a leading organization in the UN Emergency Response Coordination Group, led by the Resident Coordinator's Office

UNICEF is an active member of the Gender Task Team (GTT), addressing the intersection between violence against girls and boys and violence against women. GTT focused its activity on contributing to the sub-regional GBV Spotlight Initiative submission from six countries in Southern Africa (Zambia, Eswatini, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa). The proposal was well received by the spotlight secretariat, and a donor roundtable in October 2023 was hosted by six Resident

Coordinators, supported by the Gender Task Team. UNICEF's active engagement in GTT helped the spotlight initiative to include children as critical target group for both prevention and response pillars.

Since 2019, the Generation Unlimited initiative in South Africa, led by UNICEF together with partners, has encompassed projects that address youth skills for employability, entrepreneurship, and social impact creating opportunities for young people. In 2023, it was decided to better position this initiative by developing a value proposition to clarify the operational model and ways to initiate a movement that complements existing initiatives in the country. This was done in consultation with UN Women, UNFPA, ILO, UNDP, World Bank and the African Development Bank. There is strong commitment to further collaborate and coordinate youth interventions under the GenU South Africa framework.

UNICEF worked with UN colleagues to strengthen our collective voice for child rights. This included working as vice-chair of the UNCG, supporting events and other engagements. UNICEF joined the 'Living Ubuntu' campaign to promote social cohesion with IOM and UNHCR through multimedia and other content. Working with OHCHR, a joint climate op-ed on the release of 'Comment 26' and the launch of a new photo project highlighted the importance of child participation in climate action. UNICEF led and supported the joint communication response to the cholera outbreak and the Johannesburg fire. This included content from 'the ground' and related media engagement related to the two emergencies.

UNICEF continued to convene leading business minds through the UNICEF SA CEO Network, with three gatherings on priority areas of work (Gen U, climate and violence). Two local corporates provided funding to violence prevention and early intervention work (Momentum / AECI), while a third (Capitec) has also recently committed to supporting. UNICEF also collaborated with partners, such as the International Cricket Council, through which USD\$115,000 was leveraged for programmes assisting girls in STEM. The partnership with PwC not only strengthened Generation Unlimited related work but also provided in-kind support for training and technical assistance to the value of more than USD\$1 million.

Strong inter-agency collaboration with UNDP and UNEP ensured that online challenges and hackathons linked to climate change and the environment targeted the participation of children and young people. For example, some 300 young people took part in a challenge on the circular economy and just transition putting them at the centre of solutions for sustainable development. The youngest team of 13 /14-year-old boys won the challenge with a can crusher prototype, which will be supported through seed funding. As part of a separate challenge another youth team incubated an innovative solution that recycles waste products called 'ReCha'. They won seed funding of \$10,000 from the 'ImaGen' ventures fund linked to the Global GenU Initiative.

The partnership with the Water Research Commission (WRC) was strengthened in 2023. A Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2022 brings together the education, WASH, innovations and PMRE teams and has pushed the office conversation on our WASH / Climate change agenda. Areas of collaboration included South-South cooperation led by the Health and Nutrition /WASH

team with China on climate resilient WASH technology, citizen science and water quality monitoring – with a focus on young people (i.e. YOMA project) – and expanding the toolkit to include water quality monitoring in institutions, as well as strengthening hygiene in schools and operations and maintenance consideration in WASH in schools.

Partnerships were strengthened with the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Associate (SAMEA), WFP and CLEAR-AA within the emerging evaluators (EE) programme. SAMEA is the main voluntary professional evaluation association in the country and is a strategic partner in the coordination of national evaluation capacity development initiatives. SAMEA also brings the broader M&E ecosystem partners together such as the DPME. The EE programme offerings were expanded to include the work immersion stream with WFP / CLEAR AA as well as shorter work placements, technical interest group webinars, and EE group trainings. Work has also been done to improve the EE website and expand the eco-system of partners and funders for 2024. A total of 65 EEs benefitted from the programme in 2023.

A relationship has been established with National School of Government (NSG) which has hosted the UNICEF Evaluation Office's sub-regional executive course for evaluation leaders. It was the first course held on the continent and first course which has been hosted by a government partner globally. The NSG has been instrumental in not only providing logistical support to hosting the course but also providing content and field trips to participants to programme sites. There are plans to host a second run of the evaluation course in South Africa in 2024.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

In South Africa's 'higher middle income' context, UNICEF's strategic partnerships approach is particularly important, from a programming, advocacy, convening and fundraising perspective.

UNICEF continues to play a convening and leveraging role bringing together organizations and stakeholders with the goal of protecting and realizing child rights at its core. This includes leading minds from the business sector through the UNICEF SA CEO Network, with three gatherings in 2023 on priority areas of work (Gen U, climate and violence). Working with UNICEF HQ and Nat Coms, UNICEF has built local partnerships with corporates, such as BMW SA and SAP, to not only deliver on programming but to strengthen child rights related advocacy and engagements in-country. UNICEF also leveraged USD 115,000 for a partner working in supporting girls in science, technology, engineering and math subjects, and in-kind technical and training support to the value of USD 1 million was received from PwC.

From a fundraising perspective, UNICEF is working to **better match programme needs and funding modalities**, which in South Africa includes technical upstream work, as well as programming 'on the ground'. Experience has shown that corporate partners prefer to invest in projects that have a direct tangible benefit for a smaller number of children and young people. This doesn't always match

programming funding gaps, particularly those related to upstream technical support for scalable national programmes. Though the local private sector remains a key channel for fundraising efforts, onerous reporting requirements have also led to more thinking around how corporate grants can be more tactically allocated to downstream and emergency related work. In essence, this would allow for quicker disbursements and greater agility in the area, which is what most corporate partners appreciate. Over 60% of local corporate grants to UNICEF in the last five years have been committed towards emergency response work, while the remaining 40% has been allocated to downstream programming.

Major donors and foundations are earmarked as the most suitable partners for upstream work as their mandates and reporting culture are more aligned to the pace and nature of UNICEF's upstream work. Grant patterns over the past five years also reveal that grants from foundations are larger and more flexible, which better aligns them to system strengthening, capacity building and policy development and enhancement. Moving forward, as part of the fundraising strategy the office will also identify specific funding gaps that lend themselves to corporate partnerships to avoid potential mismatches. In addition, UNICEF has already set a minimum threshold of USD\$50,000 for funding towards programming to cut down on administrative processes and to consolidate the number of implementing partners for monitoring and oversight.

In 2023, UNICEF collaborated with Government, academia, and civil society to strengthen youth skilling for the jobs of today and tomorrow, including the green economy. UNICEF has been playing a more prominent role through the Generation Unlimited private-public-youth initiative to improve the holistic skills and attributes needed for employability and to nurture the entrepreneurial passion and mindsets of unemployed youth, women and girls within township economies. Within the school environment, work with the Department of Basic Education and many other partners has been improving the quality of and scaling-up education in science, technology and math subjects, such as through robotics and coding. The GenU related work has also included the development of green learning-to-earning pathways for adolescents and young people, particularly those not in any form of education, employment or training – the so-called NEET youth. Through the Youth Agency Marketplace (YOMA) more than 1,000 youth volunteers engaged in water quality monitoring, using citizen science learning tools, accessing certified learning-to-earning courses and receiving incentives through blockchain technology. By deploying innovative financing mechanisms, citizen science empowered adolescents and young people to monitor local water quality and report on SDG6 in South Africa, piloting a cross sectoral programmatic approach that is a model for good governance and accountability. This work is further supported through operational research conducted by Rhodes and Wits University to build assets, skills and resources for marginalised groups, increase employment and strengthen visibility, voice and representation.

UNICEF's support in rolling-out national programmes at a provincial level or modelling a promising programme practice at district or provincial level is critical. As a result, moving forward it is worth exploring provincial level work plan agreements in priority provinces to strengthen impact for children at a local level. It would also be important to have a strategic review of where UNICEF should invest in capacity building for sustained impact. For example, experience in 2023 shows that the frequent rotation of Government hired social workers means maximizing investment in capacity building can be limited. Scaling existing models and ensuring sustainability to strengthen national systems requires careful preparatory processes and time. Programme design should incorporate a realistic timeline to ensure arrangements with Government mechanisms are in place. Civil society

partnership selection also requires careful review to ensure that they are fit for purpose. For example, while some organizations have strong technical expertise at national level it doesn't necessarily mean that they have good local presence to model a programme at district level. Exploring competitive bidding for more diverse and strategic civil society partnerships will be further explored in 2024.

From a positioning perspective, external communication focused on routine immunization, violence against children, mental well-being and climate action. **A more deliberate strategy and narrative needs to emerge on core advocacy priorities** in 2024. This includes 'packaging' content, partnerships and child / youth engagement at relevant times. The HQ - CO child protection and health collaboration on parenting advocacy and strategy development can strengthen mental health and violence prevention advocacy, while the 'Climate Landscape Analysis' and the new climate coordinator will further enable this work. UNICEF South Africa's support to emergency preparedness and response will also be more focused and anchored in an assessment of capacity gaps of Government systems and coordinated with the UN system in country. This will support the identification of a clear value addition and demonstration of broader impact beyond small-short term interventions with limited numbers of beneficiaries.