

Uganda

Update on the context and situation of children

In 2023 Uganda made important strides towards economic stability and growth, with the country registering a 5.2 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP), up from 4.7 per cent in 2022. While private consumption increased, tourism rebounded, and crude oil projects scaled rapidly, overall private sector investment retracted due to the governments deflationary monetary policy and a tightening of public investments (World Bank, 2023).

Despite inflation declining to 2.6 per cent by December 2023, the costs associated with education and health services rose, registering at 6.1 and 4.5 per cent respectively, directly impacting the well-being of women and children. Poverty reduction trends decelerated in 2023, with 41.7 per cent of the population living in poverty. Multi-dimensional child poverty is still high, at 44 per cent, and the monetary child poverty remained at 23 per cent. Reduced social sector financing continued slowing down the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Public budget allocations for health at 7.7 per cent and education at 8.4 per cent fall short of international benchmarks and early childhood education depends entirely on external or private financing.

The country experienced increased insecurity with several terrorist attacks, including against a school, killing 37 learners. Heightened regional instability in DR Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan, also resulted in more than 99,000 new refugee arrivals in 2023, of which 49,000 settled in urban areas (UNHCR, 2023). Due to funding shortfalls, the World Food Programme (WFP) reduced food assistance to the 1.5 million refugees in Uganda, and an estimated 24 per cent of acutely food insecure refugee households did not receive any assistance (WFP, 2023). The adoption in May 2023 of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) and the closure of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) significantly impacted the human rights environment in Uganda.

With only seven years remaining, development challenges continue to stall the progress towards SDGs in Uganda. New data from Uganda's Demographic and Health survey (UDHS) 2022 reveals progress on various child related indicators in the past decade, albeit with considerable regional and rural/urban inequities. Maternal and under-five mortality rates dropped from 336 to 189 deaths per 100,000 live births and 64 to 52 deaths per 1,000 live births respectively between 2016 and 2022; both however still far from the SDG targets of less than 70/100,000 and 25/1,000, respectively.

Uganda's universal health coverage stands at 49/100 in 2021, above the average of 44 for Africa. Stunting has reduced from 29 to 25 per cent between 2016 and 2021 and there is a 65 per cent decline in AIDS-related deaths among children 0 to 14 years since 2012. Neonatal mortality dropped from 27 to 22 per 1,000 live births between 2016 and 2021. However, still close to 40 per cent of children are not exclusively breastfed.

A slight decline in access to clean water from 70 to 69 per cent between 2020 and 2022 was registered, open defecation dropped from 24 to 23 percent, and access to improved toilets increased from 19 to 44 per cent between 2017 and 2022.

While Uganda's Universal Primary Education policy led to impressive enrolment rate of 93.5 per cent in 2021 as per Uganda's Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the country continues to register bleak results in the Education Sector.

UBOS recorded a 9% net enrolment rate for pre-primary education, a 32 per cent primary completion

rate last year (12 per cent in Karamoja) and 69 per cent rate transition to secondary education. There are also notable disparities in secondary enrollment with only eight percent from the poorest quintile enrolled versus 43 per cent from the richest quintile. Similarly, only 9 per cent of children with disabilities enroll in primary and 6 per cent complete it.

Additionally, only 51 and 53 per cent of children meet the literacy and numeracy requirements, respectively. Uganda curriculum does not provide relevant 21st century life skills and some 41 per cent of Uganda youth are not engaged in employment, education or training as they lack essential literacy and numeracy, employment and readiness for work skills.

Violence against children remains high with 85 per cent of children experiencing at least one violent disciplinary action (UDHS 2022). Teenage pregnancies remain high at 25 per cent depriving many adolescent girls from education and impacting their health. An estimated 6.2 million children aged 5–17 years are engaged in child labour (National Labour Force Survey 2021). Birth registration rates increased from 32 to 54 per cent between 2016 and 2021 and 76 per cent of children were diverted from the formal criminal justice system (Justice, Law and Order Sector 2022). The risk of online child sexual exploitation is high and gender inequality continues to impact disproportionately women and girls.

In 2023 UNICEF Uganda supported response and prevention actions to Marburg virus disease, cholera, measles and anthrax outbreaks, and to more than 47,000 people impacted from the El Nino-induced floods. Some 249,000 children under 5 years remain at risk of severe acute malnutrition due to food insecurity in the Karamoja sub-region. Beyond nutrition interventions, the country office (CO) continued to provide support to over 1.6 million refugees, half of which are women and children.

To accelerate action towards SDG implementation, the CO identified accelerated results to be implemented by the end of the current country programme with strong focus on social and behaviour change communication, public financing for children and evidence generation, especially on missing SDG indicators and data gaps such as on multidimensional child poverty, teenage pregnancies, violence against children.

Major contributions and drivers of results

The 2021 Universal Period Review (UPR) for Uganda provided key of recommendations relevant to child rights. The Government of Uganda (GoU) was prompted to strengthen its efforts to promote equal opportunities and protect the rights of vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities and refugees, and reinforce national legislation and institutional mechanisms in considering gender perspectives, while increasing the efficiency and accountability of public services.

In 2023, UNICEF Uganda continued to contribute towards the implementation of the national development priorities and with the generous support from both public and private sector donor partners who invested USD\$29 million in earmarked funding (from the EU, GAVI, Iceland, Ireland, UNICEF USA, UNICEF Canada, ILO, US CDC, UNICEF UK, UNICEF France, Italy, Norway, and UNICEF Luxembourg) and US\$17 million in core resources. These contributions enabled UNICEF to achieve the following results for children and adolescents in Uganda:

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

The UPR 2021 recommendations prompted the government to step up efforts to increasing access to health services, including through increased investment in health systems, measures to reduce maternal and infant mortality, efforts to eliminate HIV, availability of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and childcare services, increased coverage of drinking water supply, and include

women, children, persons with disabilities and local communities in developing and implementing climate change and disaster risk reduction frameworks.

UNICEF's Uganda public financing for children (PF4C) policy analysis and advocacy contributed to an increase in per capita health sector spending from US\$21.7 to US\$23. The CO provided direct support to more than 14 million children benefitting from quality maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health (MNCAH), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) elimination, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. Some 5 million caregivers were reached with appropriate capacity building and behaviour change efforts and 1.8 million people benefited from emergency interventions. The capacity to deliver quality health, HIV, nutrition and water and sanitation management services of 427 health facilities and more than 600 schools in the 29 UNICEF focus districts improved as well.

UNICEF Uganda supported the review of Child Survival and Health Strategy, the launch of the Community Health and the Digital Health Information Strategies, the development of the COVID-19 Immunization Integration Plan and National Oxygen Scale-up Strategy and supported the implementation of the 180-day post-Ebola recovery response plan. A social and behaviour change communication strategy was developed to combat the high rates of teenage pregnancy and new HIV infections among adolescents, along with a specialized service package to enhance services for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW).

The CO collaborated with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and health partners to enhance the MNCAH and immunization services, achieving a DPT 3 coverage of 89 per cent and 2.9 per cent dropout nationally. The Global Vaccine Alliance's (GAVI) IRMMA framework was introduced to identify, reach, measure, monitor, and advocate for under-immunized children. Some 80 districts showed remarkable progress in reaching under-immunized children (50 per cent reduction in the burden). New-born special care units were operationalized in 44 health care facilities. Peer-led ante and post-natal care model for AGYW and family support groups providing psychosocial support and linkages to integrated SRHR, HIV and gender-based violence (GBV) services were established in 72 high-volume facilities. The access to institutional deliveries for 257,239 pregnant mothers from remote locations was facilitated through community transport vouchers. In collaboration with the Global Fund, UNICEF Uganda continued to support the Integrated Community Case management (iCCM) programme in 68 districts, leading to the treatment of more than two million children diagnosed with malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea by village health teams (VHTs) within 24 hours. An electronic community health information system has been expanded in nine districts.

Through partnerships between UNICEF Uganda, UNAIDS, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), World Bank (WB), GAVI, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Makerere University and civil society, a national action plan to **strengthen the pediatric HIV response** was developed. This contributed to improved maternal retention on HIV treatment (89 per cent in 2023). Challenges continued to persist for institutional deliveries (64 per cent) and HIV case findings, due to lack of staff, supplies, and infrastructure, resulting in only 72 per cent of children aged 0 to 14 years receiving ART. The revised HIV prevention guidelines now include pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for AGYW.

The CO advocacy influenced a US\$1million allocation from the MoH towards **child nutrition**, including a 2 per cent (US\$440,000) Discretionary Development Equalization Grant (DDEG) earmarked for district nutrition coordination, thus extending critical treatment to 20,000 more children with severe wasting. The establishment of a national nutrition data repository with UBOS and capacity building strengthened data-driven governance. The support for maternal nutrition and dietary diversification, accelerated egg consumption initiatives and integration of wasting prevention in newborn care services contributed to reduction of stunting in the country. Vitamin A supplementation campaigns reached over 5 million children, with coverage rates peaking at 66.4 per cent in high-risk

areas such as Karamoja. Over five million caregivers were educated on infant and young child feeding, iron supplementation was provided to one million pregnant women and deworming to over 14 million children contributing to mitigation of nutritional deficiencies.

Despite population growth, low investment in WASH infrastructure continued to contribute to low use of basic safe drinking water. During the year UNICEF Uganda supported the development of a new National Sanitation Policy, the review of the WASH operation and maintenance framework and the strengthening of the WASH management information system. In partnership with the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), UNICEF Uganda supported the Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE) in developing a five-year costed action plan for climate-resilient WASH. A review of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) was also supported with Water and Sanitation being added as an adaptation sector, and Waste (including wastewater and sanitation) as a mitigation sector. These initiatives were showcased by MoWE and UNICEF Uganda at the COP28 summit in Dubai. MoWE was also supported with technical options for improved water demand management in small towns to reduce water losses. As part of climate resilience efforts, 10 remote sensing data loggers were installed in boreholes providing water to schools and communities, enhancing water system monitoring and supporting the access to water of more than 5,000 learners and 3,000 community members in the Karamoja region. WASH facilities were constructed in 50 schools and 21 health centres, including solar-powered water supply systems. Market-Based Sanitation initiatives reached 123,293 people, including approximately 65,300 children, providing basic sanitation services.

Every child and adolescent learns and acquires skills for the future.

UPR 2021 recommended a dramatic increase of national investment in early childhood development and national budget allocations to the education sector, continued efforts to facilitate access to education for all, including redoubling the efforts to provide free and quality education to all girls, increase enrolment, improve retention and completion rates in primary and secondary education, boost remedial education and address barriers contributing to school dropout.

UNICEF's Uganda advocacy contributed to an increase in per capita education sector spending from US\$48.7 to US\$50.5 and an earmarking of US\$25 million for disability inclusion as part of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) collaboration. More than US\$40 million in long-term investments were mobilized in support of quality education - US\$18.8 million by the European Union's (EU) Gender for Development Uganda (G4DU) programme focusing on transitioning girls to secondary education and the provision of alternative learning and skilling pathways to out-of-school (OOS) children; the extension of the Netherlands-funded US\$15 million PROSPECT programme for refugees with a focus on adolescent and youth learning and skills development and US\$1.6 million to Ireland's Quality for Inclusive Education programme in Karamoja. As chair of the Education Development Partners' group, UNICEF Uganda supported the finalization of the Compact for Education Transformation bringing US\$ 324,8 million to Uganda's Education sector through the GPE supported U-LEARN programme expanding equitable access to teaching and learning.

The CO supported the review of the National Integrated ECD Policy Action Plan to help inform the development of a new National Integrated ECD Costed Strategic Plan in 2024. UCO also advocated for the development of Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards specific to pre-primary and initial stages of planning have begun with implementation in 2024. Caring for the Caregiver, a package to support psychosocial wellbeing of primary caregivers of young children (with a focus on teen mothers), was developed and rolled out in 134 districts UNICEF and six donors partnered on the NAPE 2023 survey, which assessed students from 13 schools in each of 134 districts (1,742 schools), including special needs schools.

UNICEF Uganda strengthened the capacities of district local governments (DLGs) in 29 UNICEF priority districts to provide integrated ECD interventions in health, nutrition, WASH and early

learning through ECD centers. Some 52,235 children benefited from pre-primary education services, including in refugee settlements. ECD coordination at national level was strengthened.

The deployments of the global RAPID strategy supported the recovery of learning for 245,777 learners, and 241,888 public school teachers were supported and mentored to deliver the framework. Close to 4,000 CWD were included in education through the LEGO Braille Bricks initiative and provision of assistive digital textbooks, and some 100,293 adolescents, including 14,389 OOS children, benefited from digital life skills education. The UNICEF-ILO UPSHIFT program for social innovation and entrepreneurship skill building was recognized as an occupational training course, improving its accessibility by OOS youth through TVET and non-formal education centers.

Every child and adolescent is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.

The UPR 2021 recommendation appealed for allocation of adequate resources for child protection and continued efforts in human rights education across the government, including for police and military personnel. Recommendations included increased efforts on protection from all forms of violence and discrimination against women and children, strengthening systems assisting survivors of violence, including provisions of legal protection. The government was called to strengthen social safety nets to reduce the number of children living and working on the streets, strengthen the juvenile justice system, provide special attention on refugee children, redouble efforts to eliminate child labour and trafficking in persons, prioritize resources to support birth registration, and full implement national strategies to end child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation (FGM). There were also 19 recommendations on LGBTQI, including decriminalizing adult same-sex relations.

In 2023, UNICEF Uganda continued to support the dissemination of the National Child Policy reaching 80 percent national coverage (116 districts). USAID and UNICEF Uganda leadership in the Social Care and Support Technical Group leveraged multi-stakeholder support to the national Child Wellbeing Management Information System, finalization of the national alternative care framework, revising the national para-social workers' training manual, and coordinated support to strengthen justice for children. The CO supported the GoU develop quality assurance systems for social workers and included child protection education benchmarks across various social service training initiatives. The CO finalised the work on a national parenting manual empowering more than 50,000 caregiver with skills to identify risks and respond to violence against children (VAC).

Using the Parish Development Model as an entry point, 123,789 community members, including children, religious and cultural leaders and community influencers were reached with social and behavior change (SBC) interventions to address social norms and gender inequalities that drive VAC, child marriage and FGM. SBC efforts also ensured that 105,089 children, families and community members effectively use reporting channels for incidents of VAC and GBV.

Birth registration efforts contributed to 43 per cent of all 770,797 under 5 births and 60 per cent of the 162,446 under-one births being registered. The CO continued to advocate for decentralized birth registration through health facilities and simplification of the registration and service delivery processes. Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot was integrated into the SAUTI 116 helpline improving the counselling services to children and young adults.

Every child has an equitable chance in life.

The UPR 2021 recommendations urged the GoU to continue strengthen the social assistance for the most vulnerable, reduce the number of people living below the poverty line, and develop and implement a comprehensive national social protection strategy.

In 2023, UNICEF's advocacy was instrumental in increasing the public spending in health, education, and social protection to 7.7, 8.7, and 0.57 per cent respectively. The CO supported the MoH and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in tracking off-budget financing, and the Ministry of Finance in producing a citizen-friendly budget for 2022/23, including accessible Braille and audio-visual formats.

The CO made significant inroads with UBOS, to effectively measure child poverty, providing actionable data for the government. The CO supported the production of three comprehensive child poverty reports (raising awareness that approximately 44 per cent of children live in multidimensional poverty). Subnational child poverty data reports, generated with UBOS, informed the Parish Development Model interventions and district systems strengthening efforts. The measurement of multidimensional child poverty was embedded into two key national social protection programmes – the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) III and Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP), in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the University of Cardiff. Monetary child poverty estimates derived from small area estimation have informed the Ministry of Finance's budgetary allocations to districts in 2023. UNICEF's support (including through peer review) was instrumental for finalising Uganda's UDHS process following the withdrawal of the key quality assurance institution ICF-Macros.

UNICEF Uganda continued the support to the implementations of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS). The CO undertook a study to inform the NSPS targeting and provided equipment for the establishment of the national single registry. UNICEF successfully implemented a model child-focused social protection programmes, the Girls Empowering Girls (GEG) and EmpowerU Cash+ humanitarian cash transfer programme, benefitting 9,335 children and providing a 'proof of concept' for government social protection programs. In collaboration with ILO and HelpAge International, UNICEF Uganda build capacities of 23 government officials, including Members of Parliament, in social protection and public finance to support evidence-based advocacy for increased financing for social protection.

To support children in humanitarian need, the CO supported the EVD recovery plan, responded to Marburg virus and cholera outbreaks, and provided relief to refugees, flood-affected, and food insecure households. Consequently, 933,000 refugee women and children accessed quality health services, 64,900 people accessed improved for WASH services, and 702,479 people received critical WASH supplies.

In collaboration with the OPM, unconditional cash transfers benefitted 6,337 refugees and host communities in Lamwo district contributing to improved access to education and health services, and improved diets. The CO strengthened the preparedness and response capacity of 10 districts, including development of district contingency plans and conducting simulations. Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) measures were mainstreamed into program implementation and feedback from 68,450 U-report interactions were used for programme adjustments.

Humanitarian development nexus: Building on the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) initiative, the CO strengthened Uganda's cold chain capacity by procuring and installing 5 Ultra-Low Temperature Freezers and expanding the national capacity for safe storage. This ensures immunization commodities are available, contributing to equitable service delivery and prevention of stockouts. Public-private partnerships with Genome and Crown Health Care facilitated the installation of new oxygen plants in four regional referral hospitals with a potential to benefit 10 million children.

Through its EVD response, UNICEF strengthened eight regional referral hospitals through improvements in IPC infrastructure and hospitals' capacity to deliver quality emergency health services to an estimated 3.27 million at-risk children.

UNICEF's Uganda advocacy, communication and community engagement contributed to increased awareness on children rights. Media engagement saw 601 mentions reaching an audience of over 3.7 million people on radio and 983,874 on television. Digital outreach extended the visibility on children's issues to 120,949 users through the website and 281,022 users through social media platforms. Some 62 videos, 50 digital posters, 22 publications and 41 feature stories were produced, and 4,700 images shaped public perception and promoted donor recognition. UNICEF Uganda maintained a strong voice for children on critical issues, including the enactment of the AHA bill. Strategic opportunities, such as COP28 and the African Climate Summit, were used to amplifying the voices of youth. The CO advocacy with Ugandan Parliament was instrumental in passing the employment amendment bill, which will support breastfeeding and childcare provisions in the workplace. Partnerships with 21 private sector companies, including MTN and Airtel, advanced adolescent skilling initiatives and contributed to the expanded access to education, benefiting over 3,000 students and 200 teachers through digital resources, training and mentorship.

UNICEF Uganda continued to support multimedia campaigns through 300 radio stations and 100 community radios raising the awareness of more than six million people on prevention measures related to public health emergencies (Ebola, Marburg, polio, handwashing) and changing behaviours on negative social practices such as ending teenage pregnancy and child marriage. The public engagement promoted also the uptake of positive behaviors and demand for services, such as for immunization. Feedback mechanisms (community dialogue, house visits, counselling, and digital platforms/ U-Report) enabled 1,088,344 people to voice concerns and seek clarifications on access to services. Collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation and World Vision mobilized 650,067 key influencers for humanitarian risk communication and community engagement.

In 2023, the CO's evaluation coverage increased, commissioning four evaluations, and completing two, which contributed to program adjustments in humanitarian action and national system strengthening approaches. Investments were made to enhance National Evaluation Capacity Development by completing the national evaluation readiness assessment, development of the national evaluation plan for NDP III, and kickstarting the review of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.

During the year Uganda CO maintained agile and responsive business model with high-quality operational services sustaining optimal program performance and governance structures demonstrating robust functionality. Workplace culture was enhanced through dialogues and training. Streamlined SOPs governing travel and strategic field office relocation optimized programme delivery efficiency.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

During the year UNICEF Uganda was instrumental in fostering diverse partnerships with government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), development partners, private sector, academia and civil society organisations (CSOs). These partnerships were instrumental in promoting child focused policy adoption, such as the Community Health Strategy, the mainstreaming of child rights in the national climate-resilient WASH policies. Collaboration with DLGs and Core Primary Teacher Colleges strengthened education programme implementation at sub-national level. Partnerships with the University of Witwatersrand, Makerere University, faith groups, CSOs and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) underpinned success in early learning programmes.

UNICEF Uganda partnered with a variety of UN agencies and donors to respond to pressing child needs. A partnership with WFP and USAID strengthened the nutrition emergency responses in Karamoja. The partnership with UNAIDS was pivotal in galvanizing MoH leadership towards achieving the Global Alliance's objective to end pediatric AIDS by 2030. The GoU and UNICEF's Uganda stunting reduction advocacy campaign achieved a notable milestone in ensuring the Royal Pronouncement by the Rwenzururu king.

The EU supported Spotlight Initiative was extended in 2023 contributing to combating GBV and collaborating with USAID contributed to the development of the national child wellbeing MIS. The Global Programmes to end Child Marriage and eliminate FGM, implemented jointly with UNFPA and MoGLSD continued to combat harmful practices.

UNICEF Uganda partnership with UBOS helped generate vital child rights statistics and integrated key metrics into national surveys. Working jointly with UNFPA and WHO, UNICEF supported the successful completion of UDHS 2022. In partnership with MoGLSD, UNICEF influenced the development of a social protection study crucial for shaping the national social protection strategy and hosted, together with Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Social Protection (UPFSP), WFP, and OPM, a national dialogue to advocate for greater budgetary allocations to social protection. Partnering with KCCA and OPM, UNICEF carried out initiatives such as the GEG and EmpowerU Cash Plus social protection programmes.

In 2023, UNICEF Uganda contributed to the work of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) Development Partner Group and interagency coordination group thus ensuring a child-sensitive refugee response interventions. UNICEF and the OPM's Department of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Management implemented the EPR capacity initiative and helped to strengthen the resilience of 29 focus districts for disaster risk management.

The ongoing engagement with 21 private sector companies, business incubation centres and associations continued to advance the Learning to Earning skilling initiative. Broad partnerships across Ugandan ministries and organizations drove social change communication, outbreak prevention, and promoted health practices through expansive community mobilization and resource person networks.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF's Uganda pivotal support to several public health emergencies underscored the efficiency and impact of multi-partner collaboration and the role of risk communication outreach in preventing frequent public health outbreaks.

- Integrated approaches, such as combining the IRMMA (Identify, Reach, Monitor, Measure, Advocate) framework to identify zero-dose children and leveraging digital microplanning tools, exponentially increased outreach and delivery of services to vulnerable, urban children. UNICEF

Uganda demonstrated the benefits of a well-equipped (oxygen supply and IPC/WASH) health infrastructure bringing resilience and able to provide quality services to large population in both emergency and development context.

- The successful implementation of the maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response (MPDSR) digital application, an innovation promoted by UNICEF Uganda, demonstrated the potential of digital solutions to extend and strengthen primary health care services in urban settings and evidenced the need for an urban health strategy. UNICEF led an innovative campaign “No Time to Waste” to reduce stunting and improved children diet Uganda. Using the Prime Minister policy on national community and advocacy strategy, it quickly got the buy-in of other ministries and UN agencies.
- The piloted multifunctional water system in Kotido district of Karamoja region, effectively met diverse community needs (domestic and livelihoods including for livestock, irrigation, and home gardens) and is a viable model for scaling up climate adaptation and sustainability options in water scarce regions. Community-inclusive solar-powered water projects in schools and health facilities improved the quality of services and demonstrated sustainability of upkeep through user fees. Successful efforts in Market-Based Sanitation, data-driven services, and hygiene education have the potential to further boost sanitation coverage.

A number of initiatives demonstrated opportunities for faster integration of CWD in education process. An ECD kit for emergency response was re-design and tested allowing provision of support to CWD. LEGO Braille Bricks and assistive digital textbooks allowed 45 inclusive schools to enroll more CWD. Further innovations, such as the development and institutionalization of the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.2) created opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to the modern economy. Mobile ECD services boosted outreach to remote areas and strengthened the capacities of parents, caregivers and teachers.

Broad partnership collaboration of the Child Wellbeing Steering Committee demonstrated the ability of coordinated efforts to achieve a broad national outreach in disseminating the National Child Policy to multisectoral teams in 116 districts thus boosting capacities and skills to address VAC and harmful practices. Technological advances were embraced by incorporating AI-driven MHPSS counselling services in the SAUTI 116 helpline contributing to address data collection challenges. The strengthened partnership with the National Information and Registration Authority (NIRA) and MoH on birth registration demonstrated the strength on multi-agency collaboration efforts in driving change for children. The success in integrating birth registration through health facilities was evidenced by the high percentage of health facility births reported in the UDHS 2022.

Learning form evaluation of the urban social protection GEG program contributed to improved management systems and established clear baselines for the second phase of the program. Collaborative internal efforts within the EmpowerU Cash+ refugee interventions, enhanced health, education, and protection outcomes for refugee children.

The adoption of Power BI and other e-solutions reinforced accountability and facilitated information sharing between UNICEF Uganda central and zonal offices. The zonal results tracker and accountability framework proved effective in monitoring the delegation of authority and Power BI dashboards provided critical insights on the situation of children in districts. The CO saw a notable 12 per cent increase in young U-Reporters engagement providing feedback to UNICEF programing. Other SCB and Edcuation innovations saw the roll out of the “skilling chatbot” FunDoo on U-Report allowing 11,000 users to acquire nine critical 21st century and employability skills. The success of the skilling chatbot is a testimony to young people’s desire for easily accessible digital solutions. Peer-to-peer models for risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) were essential in boosting preparedness, especially for public health emergencies, and contributed to efforts addressing VAC and GBV through peer support.

The CO introduced in 2023 new direct cash payment methods which bolstered risk management in DCTs, mitigating fund misappropriation. Additional innovative digitization initiative targeted operational efficiency, cost-cutting, and environmental sustainability.

In building on the 2022 Mid Term Review of Uganda Country Programme Document (CPD), building on the UNICEF's review of the implementation of child related SDGs presented at the 2023 UN General Assembly's SDG Summit, and taking into consideration related recommendations calling for swift and accelerated actions, in 2023 UNICEF Uganda worked on identifying accelerated results for children. The MTR review confirmed that key child deprivations identified at the start of CPD need further attention and that the CPD Theory of Change and Result Framework remain relevant. However, the CPD required further focus, and as such, results that have potential to achieve sustainable, transformative change and positive impact on the largest possible number of children were identified for accelerated implementation until the end of the current CPD in 2025. Priority areas for action identified were in public financing, in particular strengthened advocacy and action for increased social sector financing from domestic sources, with focus on adequate social service workforce human resource financing, full national ownership and financing of critical supplies and commodities, social sector climate adaptation financing and boosting the financing of social protection schemes. Robust advocacy and investment in generating data for children, including multidimensional child poverty measurement and SDGs for children were prioritized as well. Targeted efforts of the CPD will seek accelerated action in gender equality and adolescent skilling, particularly actions related to learning to earning initiatives and girls' empowerment. And lastly, targeted investment in SBC efforts have the potential to bring change and address effectively VAC, GBV, negative social norms and uptake of services. A robust implementation of these focused results has the potential to improve the lives of children in Uganda and will lay robust foundation for sustainable change in the next CPD cycle.