

## Morocco

### Update on the context and situation of children

In 2023, Morocco experienced a powerful earthquake while continuing to implement reforms.

Economically, growth slightly increased from 1.4% in 2022 to 2.9% in 2023[1]. Inflation marginally improved from 6.6% in 2022 to 6.1% and the budget deficit was reduced from 5.2% in 2022 to 4.8% in 2023[2]. Morocco faced significant stresses with a persistent drought affecting food security and nutrition in addition to high inflation resulting in increased costs in food and energy. A study conducted by UNICEF and the National Office for Statistics (*HCP*) in 2023 concluded that 40% of households with five or more individuals felt the impact on their household purchasing power. Households with six or more members experienced the greatest impact in prices (9.6%). Further, education and health care related expenses increased notably with knock-on effects for households with children.[3]

In September, Morocco was hit by an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8. It affected 2.8 million people (of which 30% were estimated to be children) and particularly affected four regions: Souss-Massa, Marrakech-Safi, Drâa-Tafilalet, Béni Mellal-Khénifra (BMK). Over 60,000 houses were partially or completely destroyed. In response, the Government effected a robust response programme, including an emergency cash transfer scheme providing financial assistance to affected households (USD 250 per month) in addition to housing compensation (USD 8,000 or 14,000 depending on the damage). Children who lost both parents in the earthquake were subject of a special law conferring upon them a unique status to access social services through to adulthood. A five-year development plan of USD 12 billion is being put in place to guide recovery and reconstruction. Work remains to ensure effective feedback mechanisms for services being provided, effective child protection programmes, and cross-sectoral linkages across services for comprehensive support to the most vulnerable.

In social protection, Morocco launched the Direct Social Aid Programme (DSAP) in line with achieving SDG1. This programme is multi-pronged and aims to extend the existing cash programme to 7 million children from birth to the age of 21. It will provide monetary assistance for persons with disabilities and will guarantee a minimum monthly income of USD 50 for households below the poverty threshold established through a registry. A cash transfer lumpsum will also be provided for the birth of the first and second child of respectively USD 200 and USD 100. For children without family care or living in institutions, an allowance is being planned and aims to create a savings account for children placed in institutional care.

In the education sector, the action plan for education reform remains the strategic focus. Progress was noted in preschool enrollment which reached 76.2% in 2022-2023 (compared to 72.5% for 2021-2022) and in attaining universal coverage for primary education. Challenges persist in secondary school with drop-out rates stagnating at 335,000 children, underscoring the complexities of retaining this age cohort in school. A teacher's strike affected a third of teachers for a quarter of the year. The Government continues to invest in social protection programmes for education that reached 1.5 million households (*Tayssir programme*), 4.7 million students (*One Million School Bags initiative*), 130,205 widows and 220,000 children who are orphaned (*DAAM programme*)[4].

In 2023, the ongoing health reform made major strides with the passing of several bills for the creation of Territorial Health Groups, the Moroccan Agency for Medicines and Health Products, the Moroccan Blood Agency and the High Health Authority. For 2024, the domestic budget will be USD 3.7 billion, an increase of 9.1% when compared to 2023 and representing 7.7% of the total budget. This is

expected to reduce the share of direct household expenditures (an estimated 44.8% of total health expenditures in 2021), though this will remain challenging for the poorest quintiles. Regarding human resources, in 2022, the medical supervision ratio improved, with 1,313 inhabitants per doctor compared to 2021. Furthermore, the Government has signed a framework agreement to increase training capacities to double the number of graduates from medicine, pharmacy and dentistry and to triple the number of nurses to reach the WHO standard of health professionals per 10,000 inhabitants by 2030.[5]

Important policies were advanced in child protection. A tripartite agreement signed between the Ministry of Solidarity, Family and Social Insertion, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communications aims to strengthen coordination around children in contact with the law. Following orientation at the highest level, an amendment of the family code is underway with potential impact on child marriage and legal guardianship of children. Similarly, reforms to the penal code and the code of criminal procedure which will address alternatives to detention and the age of criminal responsibility are being finalized. Ongoing challenges in child protection include children engaged in labor, children in conflict with the law, as well as those in detention centers. Further progress is required to strengthen coordination between key actors, to increase the numbers of trained social workers, to improve access to integrated services, and provide recourse mechanisms while addressing social norms. Morocco expressed a strong commitment to the protection of migrants during its presidency of the Euro-African Process on Migration and Development.

Young people aged 15-24 represent 16% of the Moroccan population. The Government has developed targeted programmes including a "Youth Pass" providing discounts for certain services, the national volunteering programme, and the upgrading and digitizing of youth centers.[6] Collectively, these seek to address persistent geographic and gender disparities facing young people, particularly the 1.5 million who are neither in education, employment or training.

[1] National Office of Statistics (Haut Commissariat au Plan), 2024

[2] Bank Al-Maghrib, 2023

[3] UNICEF Morocco and National Office of Statistics, 2023

[4] Ministry of Economy and Finance, presentation note Finance Law, 2024

[5] Idem

[6] Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communications, 2023

## Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF together with partners, concluded the implementation of the first year of the 2023-2027 programme of cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco. The country programme is derived from the UN Cooperation Framework. With results spanning across health and nutrition, education, child protection, and social inclusion, UNICEF worked with partners to deploy cross-cutting strategies in advocacy, adolescent development and participation, and social behavior change to drive more efficient outcomes for children at central, regional and local levels.

In **health and nutrition**, the reporting year was marked by the end of the COVID-19 epidemic and its transition to endemicity and integration of its response into routine health services through a focus on primary health care strengthening. During the reporting year, the programme focused on institutional capacities at decentralized levels and improving access to, and quality of primary health care services for maternal, neonatal, child health and nutrition while fostering demand for services and promoting community participation and converging interventions to maximize outcomes for children.

At policy level, UNICEF Morocco supported the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) in

developing a national multi-sectoral nutrition strategy detailing specific and sensitive actions aimed at addressing the triple burden of malnutrition (persistent stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, and emerging overweight/obesity). Involvement of multiple ministries (such as the interior, agriculture, fisheries and rural development, trade and industry) is expected to bring several benefits including more robustly addressing determinants of malnutrition and integration of nutrition considerations into other sector strategies, thereby addressing the multiple causes of malnutrition. Furthermore, UNICEF Morocco contributed to the development of the national social behavior change and communications (SBCC) strategy for nutrition in the first 1000 days of life under the leadership of the National Initiative for Human Development with holistic early childhood development at its core. The SBCC strategy will be an important contribution to realizing the overall nutrition strategy developed by the MoHSP.

Key milestones were reached in the effective decentralization and empowerment of regional and provincial health authorities to improve efficiency and quality of services as well as the promotion of accountability and local governance. Regional health taskforces, that are governed by a Ministerial Circular, were strengthened in planning, monitoring and evaluation in two additional regions of Morocco. Child-centered regional health action plans were subsequently developed by multi-sector stakeholders to promote local decision-making based on the local landscape and priorities. Similarly, Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) related activities were implemented at decentralized level, particularly in two of three IDD endemic regions (BMK and Marrakech-Safi). The regional evidence-based roadmaps for IDD prevention and control were operationalized by concerned stakeholders under the leadership of each region, who is responsible for law enforcement and sanctions. Local salt producers/packers who were willing to upgrade their business received technical support in registration procedures, iodization techniques, and internal control of salt iodine content amongst others.

Additional actions focusing on improving availability and quality of primary health care were implemented in several regions including in-service training on essential neonatal care (ENC) comprising of theoretical training through the National Public School of Health digital platform and a week-long practical in the reference Neonatal Unit of Rabat Child Hospital, and establishment of pools of regional and provincial trainers for capacity building of health professionals on systematic neonatal screening and diagnosis of congenital hypothyroidy and congenital ear impairment and on the national nutrition package.

UNICEF Morocco mobilized important resources, particularly from GAVI/COVID-19 Deployment Support and Canada/CanVax, in the context of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and primary health care. UNICEF Morocco continued to support strengthening of vaccine cold chain and procured additional equipment to meet Performance, Quality, Safety (PQS) standards: 350 fridges for the points of service delivery and a walk-in cold room to upgrade a provincial storage that links the central warehouse and health facilities. This further contributed to replacement of non PQS fridges by another 14% adding to 15% from last year. In order to align with global standards for an immunization supply chain, Morocco conducted a landscape analysis by implementing an assessment on Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) using a sample of 53 sites at different health care levels. The assessment findings informed the development of an EVM continuous-improvement plan for the next five years with prioritization of immediate and medium to longer term actions. Furthermore, UNICEF procured a variety of vaccines (BCG, IPV, MR, bOPV, DTP, Hep B, Hib, Td, HPV) on behalf of the MoHSP for a total value of USD 8 million.

To increase community engagement and influence demand for primary health care services, UNICEF Morocco worked with the MoHSP and relevant partners to support a national digital strategy including public health emergency preparedness and two-way public communication among other priorities. Community outreach was conducted through Web-Radio-TV, *U-Report*, and mobile caravans targeting Online and offline *U-Report* activities invited more than 19,000 new reporters who remain ready to engage on issues around their well-being and development. Moreover, in partnership with civil society

organizations, an integrated community engagement field program around family health and vaccination promotion was undertaken rural areas in four regions identified by the ministry for their low vaccine uptake. Some 170 NGO and community Based organization were mobilized. These field activities engaged directly with around 30,000 persons. Local actors were accompanied in two regions (BMK and Marrakech-Safi) for establishment of local health committees and training of regional and provincial trainers in two regions (BMK and Sous Massa) to support positive parenting and early childhood practices.

Collectively, the health and nutrition results are linked to UN Cooperation Framework results that support the Government as it seeks to provide equitable and sustainable access to quality health services for all population groups. To further achieve this outcome, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA implemented a joint health and nutrition programme funded by JICA with on a variety of activities related to universal coverage.

The **education programme** collaborated with central and regional actors as well as civil society partners to address priorities in preschool education, quality education, and school governance in towards the national action plan for education reform.

Preschool education reached 76.2% of children up from 72.5% the previous year. Evidence shows that those who continue to miss out are young children residing in remote and rural settings. During the reporting year, UNICEF Morocco prioritized technical assistance to reach this remaining cohort of children. This included the conceptualization of models for preschool delivery in low population density areas as well as practical ways for strengthening positive parenting. The purpose of the programme is to better equip parents in their own role in preparing children for primary school. An evaluation is also underway of learners in the first year of primary school to review the impact of preschool education and to improve school readiness and strengthen the primary school curriculum.

UNICEF also worked to improve access of children, particularly girls in rural settings to quality education. Priority was given to a model developed in eight provinces of four regions with focus on improving the transition of girls between primary and lower secondary school. The model is multi-faceted, building the capacities of institutional partners to recognize the distinct challenges and needs of adolescent girls, engaging parents and the wider community including religious leaders, as well as providing the platform and space for adolescent girls (and boys) to champion their right to education and to articulate the barriers they face to access. As a result, 400 education personnel, *morchidates* (female Muslim spiritual guides), representatives of the justice sector, doctors, and CSO representatives were trained on gender positive masculinities with an additional 3,560 parents who were sensitized on the same topics. In addition, 85 teachers and educators of school clubs were trained on menstrual hygiene and 3,514 were trained and sensitized on taboos and stereotypes related to menstrual hygiene. Over 10 adolescent-led committees resulted in 42 meetings at local, regional, national and international level between young people and their wider community (including regional and global engagements) and with decision-makers, to claim their rights to education and denounce child marriage. The targeted locations have had dropout rates decrease by 4.6% on average.

To contribute to national efforts to improve school governance and environment, a landmark study was completed with the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research on violence in schools and presented during an international seminar that convened experts from UNICEF's Office of Research, Uganda, Indonesia, Finland, Canada and France to foster debate on global good practice, to build shared knowledge and draw possible recommendations for a national roadmap to promote a safe and protective environment in school. The ministry of education remains concerned with the provision of WASH services in low-resource settings. UNICEF gathered and shared models for services for areas with increased water scarcity, particularly using community-based approaches, and is cognizant this will be a growing area of programming within the sector.

In response to the September earthquake, UNICEF provided the ministry, foundations and civil society organizations with global tools and references on delivering education in emergencies and providing psychosocial support for children, as well as supplies and WASH solutions to schools and communities.

UNICEF continued its support to ensure children, including those on the move, have access to adequate **child protection** services by adapting interventions to changing contexts, including the earthquake, supporting relevant capacity-building programmes, and developing and implementing specialized tools, guidelines and protocols that establish procedures for diverse child protection services. Some 59 provincial child protection committees were established in response to the Head of Government's Circular n°11/2019 which specifies that the purpose of the localized child protection mechanisms is to ensure adequate care and rehabilitation through formalized packages of services and fully operational multi-sector coordination mechanisms at provincial level. UNICEF continues to accompany the Ministry of Solidarity, Family and Social Insertion (as lead institutional actor of the national child protection policy) as they undertake inclusive diagnostics, elaborate local action plans for prevention and response, and monitor their implementation. A training programme was developed for social workers supporting the provincial system for child protection (DTIPE) including modules on nurturing care, communication with children, case management, communication with children, child-family reintegration and adoption procedures, child and adolescent mental health, and care for migrant children.

UNICEF and partners committed to strengthen the linkages between social assistance and the judicial system. In June 2023, a partnership agreement was signed between the Public Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Solidarity, Family and Social Insertion and the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication (responsible for the management of protection centers for children in conflict with the law) to clarify care pathways, monitoring of case management processes, rehabilitation programmes for children in conflict with the law and support for the social work force. This coordination has resulted in the development of a comprehensive national protocol that is gender-sensitive, inclusive and in line with national legislation and international standards that will be adopted in 2024. Building on Government law 38.15 which makes provision for the institutionalization of social assistance in the courts through the creation of social assistance offices in courts of first instance and appeal courts, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Justice in the organization of an international conference on social assistance in the justice sector, attended by over 200 social workers affiliated with the justice system, along with several representatives of ministerial departments and NGOs. The conference produced a road map for the establishment of social assistance offices within courts and commitment to reinforce the capacities of those offering child protection services. Finally, 605 justice professionals as well as representatives from the Prosecutor's Office and academia, improved their capacities to provide efficient and child-friendly services. The trainings provided insights on how norms can be addressed when implementing legislation, child-friendly procedures, psycho-social support, care and access to justice for children and adolescent victims of crimes or in conflict with the law, and violence prevention. Some 25,936 children are in conflict with the law.

Support for the normative framework for child protection continues with the launch of the mid-term review of the Integrated Child Protection Policy and its national implementation as well as the ongoing development of the national family policy. The aim of these frameworks is to strengthen the protective environment for children to promote durable prevention systems.

During the reporting period 26,709 children in vulnerable situations received direct support from UNICEF, through access to social and justice services. An additional 1,297 children on the move benefited from a continuum of care and services.

Under the **social inclusion programme**, strategic outcomes were realized in evidence generation, social protection, local governance and public finance for children in collaboration with the National Statistics Office, Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF), Ministry of Health and Social Protection,

and regional authorities.

In terms of evidence generation, UNICEF and the National Statistics Office assessed the impact of inflation on households, food security and child poverty, given its year-on-year increase to 9.1% between 2022 and 2023. In reviewing various scenarios, the study looked at the key factors that had an outsized impact on families (including number of children, types of household expenditures, and others) and drew recommendations to mitigate conclusions. In addition, UNICEF contributed to the financing, preparation and launch of two strategic statistical initiatives, the general population and housing census where UNICEF worked to incorporate specific questions on children and the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). The MICS is being conducted for the first time in Morocco with over 50% government funding.

To accompany Morocco's political commitment to social protection, UNICEF invested in studies, advocacy and capacity building efforts together with a range of partners. A costing and analysis of the budgetary space for sustainable funding of the universalization of Family Allowances (FA) was conducted in partnership MoEF. It facilitated the budgeting for the extension of FA to all children in Morocco through the development of specific scenarios and a dynamic simulator allowing specialists to test various parameters and thus inform political decisions; an analysis of the budgetary space, examining potential budgetary leeway for financing the universalization of FA in Morocco; and the consolidation of international best practices in terms of social protection financing, including insights from Argentina, Chile, Brazil. Following the September earthquake and to complement the Emergency Cash Transfers (ECT) launched in October 2023, UNICEF mobilized substantial funding to work with regional partners with integrated social services for the most vulnerable children. These efforts were complemented by capacity building initiative of the MoEF on social protection, governance, targeting and financing that was delivered jointly in partnership with the International Labor Organization.

Morocco accords priority to decentralizing quality social services to reduce persistent inequalities. In contribution, UNICEF collaborated with sub-national partners to develop its first regional level integrated workplan in BMK, converging interventions and actions across UNICEF's programming areas, and promoting child rights holistically. Critical to this milestone was the approval and orientation of the executive leadership of the region.

Finally, UNICEF partnered with the MoEF to develop three budget briefs in sectors led by the Ministry of national Education, Preschool and Sports, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Solidarity, Family and Social inclusion. The budget briefs aim to influence budgetary allocations and decisions by departments and the MoEF and to advance public finances favorable to children. Collectively these system-oriented actions across the pillars facilitated UNICEF mobilizing over 10 million USD towards expected results in social policy and social protection.

Moving forward, as recommended during the annual review with partners, UNICEF Morocco will continue to strengthen its convergence in delivery both in terms of programmatic interventions and geographically to address the multiple stresses facing the most vulnerable children. The country office will also continue to embed emergency preparedness actions in its planning with partners, informed by experiences of the recent earthquake. Lastly, it will prioritize a south-south cooperation strategy for the next reporting period.

Finally, in accordance with its annual management plan, UNICEF Morocco conducted a peer review mission coordinated by the regional office to review its programming and operational approach as guided by organizational best practice. Implementation of key recommendations are being monitored by the country management team.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF in Morocco continues to work largely with institutional and national priorities to influence Government priorities on behalf of children, particularly those most marginalized. This collaboration has been carried out through evidence generation accompanied by strategic advocacy, modelling programming approaches for scale, and by offering technical support for policy developments.

During the reporting year, knowledge products on violence in children in schools conducted in collaboration with the Higher Council for Education, the fiscal space for social protection scenarios with the MoEF, the impact of inflation on children produced with the National Statistics Office, and assessment of vaccine management with the MoHSP offer recommendations for actions plans for each subject area. The education programme developed benchmarking tools based on global evidence to inform WASH-in-school services in low resource settings as well as preschool education programmes for low density communities. In the policy arena, the agreement signed between the Ministry of Solidarity, Family and Social Insertion, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communications aims to strengthen coordination around children in contact with the law. It follows steady progress amongst partners to build capacities of front-line services providers, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and to ensure a continuum of care in case management. Technical assistance was equally provided for policy milestones in nutrition and social behavior change working in partnership with the MoHSP, the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), and others.

UNICEF worked with its sister agencies through joint programmes, evidence generation and advocacy. Three large joint programmes around social policy are ongoing. The SDG Trust Fund Joint Programme (in support of the National Statistics Office and ministries of finance, agriculture and industry) was carried out jointly by UNICEF, FAO and UNIDO and resulted in a multifaceted assessment of the impact of rising international prices and sharing of information. Two other programmes involving multiple UN agencies, the National Observatory for Human Development, and the National Statistics Office support the evaluation of public policies and contribute to SDG monitoring and reporting. In health, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA implemented a joint health and nutrition programme funded by JICA focusing on equitable and sustainable access to quality primary health services in line with the national priority of achieving universal health coverage. This programme resulted in strengthening country capacities at various levels, national, regional, provincial and facility level in the area of MNCHN (mother, neonatal, child health and nutrition). Similarly, UNICEF has been collaborating with UNHCR, IOM and other agencies firstly on a Multi-Partner Trust Fund on access to services for migrants, including children, as well as other joint priorities such as common advocacy and planning. The UN System and the UN Communications Group worked collaboratively to implement a number of landmark campaigns such as the 2023 SDG campaign, the 16 Days of Activism against Violence against women, drawing attention to the particular situation of girls. UNICEF continues to partner with the World Bank to exchange information across all programme areas, with a particular focus on social protection.

In the response to the earthquake, the UN Resident Coordinator, with technical support from OCHA streamlined information, engagement with authorities, and response offers. Routine discussions at the level of heads of agencies and at technical level allowed for the UN system to prepare itself effectively in the immediate aftermath of the emergency.

Over the last year, to introduce its new country programme and accelerate its important shifts in decentralized actions, sharpened advocacy, and multi-sector convergence, UNICEF scaled up its advocacy efforts across the board. This included communication with ministers and key decision-makers on the situation of children, routine engagement with the country's leadership at regional levels and more effective partnerships with donors. Further, UNICEF worked with its base of donors primarily as partners, with field visits, advocacy events and programmatic exchanges undertaken with varied



public partners such as AGFUND, Belgium, Canada, COVAX/GAVI, EU, France, Finland, Japan, Monaco, South Korea, USAID and others. Around the earthquake response and beyond, the country office partnered with a number of UNICEF national committees. And, for the first time, UNICEF Morocco participated in the Global Women’s Forum, to share experiences in engaging with the private and public sector to advance results for adolescent girls.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

The issues raised below summarizes a number of key lessons and reflections from the first year of implementing the 2023-2027 programme of cooperation.

Firstly, the earthquake encouraged UNICEF to review and adapt its standard emergency **response to one more adapted to a middle income country context** and to draw key lessons:

- While Morocco does not routinely face emergencies, natural disasters can occur unpredictably. In terms of partnerships, the earthquake underscored the importance of embedding preparedness actions for a worst-case scenario within existing workplans and to cultivate and sustain relationships with new partners who often assume the initial role of coordination in a crisis (key foundations, civil security actors, and others). UNICEF in its engagement with various actors must continue to explore the most relevant partnership modalities, plan for supply scenarios based on the local environment, systematically update potential response activities, and advocate for coordination mechanisms, together with the UN system, that would help inform sector-wide actions.
- The earthquake also underscored the importance of maintaining presence, credibility, and relationships at central and regional level. UNICEF’s varied workplans across sectors allowed UNICEF to engage in high level advocacy when required and to provide technical assistance for acute needs (safe spaces for example). Existing workplans and dialogue with local authorities and civil society organizations allowed UNICEF to identify and advocate for the integrated needs of children and to complement government-led actions as required.
- The importance of a structured relationship with civil society organizations. Similar to conclusions drawn in the aftermath of COVID-19, continuously mapping and engaging with a wide range of civil society partners and NGOs is critical. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the UN and other bilateral partners were guided towards civil society to contribute to the response. UNICEF’s network and partnerships with civil society in education, child protection, and social behavior change was instrumental in the immediate aftermath.
- Given the capacities of Government to respond in emergencies, UNICEF will need to continue to reflect on its comparative advantage within nationally-led responses to crises. This requires taking an approach of “accompaniment” that leverages the organization’s mandate: promoting accountability to affected populations, supporting feedback mechanisms, developing linkages between service delivery pathways for the most vulnerable, and ensuring children and their unique concerns around psychosocial support and child protection are part of the national response.

Secondly, through the emergency response and routine programming, UNICEF Morocco has affirmed to strengthen its **regional presence and engagement**. Despite the important national reforms that Morocco has articulated and committed to rolling out, stakeholders at all levels recognize that these will only come to fruition once each region is accompanied as it contextualizes these policies and strategies. In the first year of implementation of its programme cycle, UNICEF has made important shifts in this regard:

- In each programming area, UNICEF has focused on a closer presence and support to a number



of resource-constrained regions. In one region, with these converging efforts, UNICEF developed an integrated workplan across all programming areas that was signed onto by the Governor and by elected officials. While this is an important milestone, UNICEF is progressively working to ensure that efforts in the region go beyond geographic convergence but focus on streamlining resources, funding, and programme themes to accelerate progress

- Lessons from that process and its outcomes, allowed UNICEF to be better prepared to support Government in its response to the earthquake by offering integrated interventions based on the organization's mandate and comparative advantage: child protection, learning continuity with focus on pre-school services, and targeted services to accompany the national cash transfer programme.
- In education, this approach of going beyond geographic convergence at a local level has yielded important results. In the five communities, local authorities across all sectors have come together, with UNICEF support, to find practical solutions to addressing high rates of school drop-out amongst young adolescent girls. Guided by the lived experiences of young girls in the region, the local communities have worked to make school more comfortable for girls (including support for menstruation), facilitated access to school for those at risk of drop out (safe transportation, for example), and worked with parents and religious leaders to reinforce and amplify the transformative effect of education on a girls' life. These deep and substantive partnerships for girls have been impactful with an average reduction of drop-out of 4.6% in the targeted provinces. UNICEF will work with partners to see how the model can be replicated in other regions moving forward.

Thirdly, UNICEF has supported an understanding of **accountability towards affected populations** both in routine programming and crisis contexts with institutional partners. While this was introduced in the context of UNICEF's work in social and behavior change, it is clear that there is a strong appetite specifically to strengthen both institutional and non-governmental platforms, mechanisms and structures that boost engagement and feedback to communities on a variety of policies and programmes. This commitment within a middle income country with strong institutions needs to be supported through dedicated resources and technical support.

Finally, for the first time UNICEF held its annual review following sectoral reviews jointly with the ministry of foreign affairs. The convening of partners provoked substantive discussions on **coordination**, joint monitoring of statistics related to children, and advancing a south-south cooperation agenda. As requested, UNICEF will have to reflect on how best to work with national partners to foster these periodic and strategic exchanges on key issues facing children, which is wholly in line with the country programme's strategic shift towards more cross-sectoral programming. country programme's strategic shift towards more cross-sectoral programming.