

Mali

Update on the context and situation of children

In 2023, important institutional reforms occurred in Mali, including the adoption of a new constitution via a referendum, the launch of the general population census report, the adoption of territorial integrity laws, and the launch of the country's 2063 vision.

The "Assises nationales de la refondation de l'Etat" held in December 2021, yielded three principles which guided all reforms in 2023: respect for Mali's sovereignty, respect for its strategic choices, and defence of Mali's people vital interests in all decisions taken.

On 30th June, the Security Council reiterated strong support for the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by 31st December 2023, and the transfer of security responsibilities to Mali's transitional Government, in power since 2021.

Despite the Government's and partners' efforts, challenges remain in terms of insecurity, human rights violation, effective decentralization, and participation of local communities in decision-making; this situation is likely to hinder the implementation of child-focused policies. Progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remained stalled on many fronts, highlighting the urgent need for improvements in policy implementation.

With a population of approximately 22.4 million, 55 percent of whom are under 18, Mali ranks 186th of 191 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI adjusted for inequalities stands at 0.29, the Gender index is 0.89, and the Gender Inequality Index is 0.61. Out of an estimated 3,343,223 children aged 0 to 17, at least 41.3 percent of them suffer from multiple concurrent deprivations - worse in rural areas, high-density peri-urban informal settlements, and for those with disabilities. About 8.8 million people (34 percent of the population), including 391,961 internally displaced persons (56 percent children), needed humanitarian assistance, compared to 7.5 million in 2022.

Conflict-related violence led to a protection crisis; 1.6 million children needed protection (compared to 1.5 million in 2022).

Mali continued to experience a challenging economy that hampered its efforts to make progress for children and adolescents. Despite the residual effects of the COVID-19 and of the Economic Community of West African States sanctions, the economy has shown signs of resilience and restoration to its pre-2020 level, with GDP growth estimated at 5.1 percent in 2023 and projected to grow 5.3 percent in 2024.

Despite this growth, the gains have not been evenly distributed, leading to persistent poverty and inequality, which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Investments in children remained inadequate with only 3 percent of the total budget spent on social protection in 2022-2023.

According to the national progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals, between 2010 and 2022, maternal mortality rate has fallen from 660 to 317 per 100,000 live births, and neonatal mortality from 39 to 33.4 per 1,000 live births. However, infant mortality has remained unchanged at 60 per 1,000 live births) and under-five mortality from 130 to 94 per 1,000 live births, due mostly to malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea, and malnutrition. Health service coverage, particularly in remote and urban poverty-stricken areas, remains low due to weak and underfunded health systems, insufficient human resources, and weak governance.

Approximately 1.26 million Malians were food insecure, a 30 percent decline over 2022. Stunting rates among children under five is still high (21.9 percent over the last two years), but lower than the African average of 30 percent in 2022 (KRC2). According to the 2022 *Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions* survey, the severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate increased from 10 percent in 2021 to 10.8 percent in 2022. Also, 49.8 percent of children under six months are being exclusively breastfed (compared to 47.6 percent in 2021) and 21.3 percent of children 6-59 months benefitted from dietary diversity (20.5 percent in 2021). The malnutrition rate among women and adolescent girls remains high (Anaemia: 59 percent). Almost a third of low-income adolescents' girls aged 10 to 19 years were malnourished.

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects a considerable number of women and girls, and many families adopt negative coping mechanisms to deal with shocks. About 72.7 percent of girls have undergone a form of female genital mutilation, 66 percent of girls living in poorer areas are married before the age of 18. The social welfare workforce is depleted, and there is still an insufficient national budget for child justice, social welfare, and limited implementation of legislation.

Among the 7.8 million school-age children in Mali, more than 3.3 million are out-of-school. As of December 2023, over 1,500 schools remain non-functional because of insecurity (266 less than in 2022), affecting more than 465,000 students and 9,300 teachers. The situation remains volatile and characterized by important disparities between regions. Dropout rates and learning losses are extremely high, especially for girls and children from poorer households. About 80 percent of secondary schools do not have adequate and separate latrines while 80.1 percent of girls do not complete general secondary education due to pregnancy, early marriage, and school related GBV. Barriers to education include poverty, inadequate or lack of school infrastructure, and sociocultural norms. Further, poor teacher preparation and shortage jeopardize the quality and continuity of learning.

In 2021, 83 percent of the population was using basic water services. Data are still unavailable for 2022 and 2023. Challenges include weak institutional coordination and capacity, especially for maintaining WASH infrastructure, and insufficiency of water supplies. Increasingly, extreme climate induced events impact WASH services and lower community resilience. Over 96 percent of IDPs are living without reliable access to water. Nationwide, only 20 percent of households had access to safely managed sanitation in 2022.

Environmental degradation and climate change remained a priority. UNICEF launched its first Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC), which showed that 8 million children in the country were exposed to more than one climate or environmental risk. Mali remains among the top 10 countries in the region with an extremely high Children's Climate Risk Index score (CCRI: 7.3), the impacts of which disproportionately affect children and the poor. Achieving net zero emissions and building a climate resilient economy will require investment of approximately 5.8 percent of its GDP every year.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2023, UNICEF continued working with the Government to protect the rights of all children and adolescents. To implement its 2020-2024 Country Programme of Cooperation, UNICEF, has adopted the life-cycle approach, which consists in delivering an integrated package of interventions that leave no child behind, especially the most vulnerable and those in humanitarian situations. Consequently, UNICEF has built a continuum of support to a child's full development.

Pillar 1: The early years (0–5 years):

Remarkable results were achieved in maternal, newborn and child health care thanks to UNICEF's support in building the capacity of health workers, providing equipment, and deploying tools and guidelines, using an integrated community approach that offers a comprehensive package of interventions. A total of 1,251,240 under-five children (compared to 1,078,655 in 2022) were reached by an integrated package in UNICEF supported regions.

The percentage of health facilities providing the seven Basic Emergency Obstetric and New-born Care interventions increased from 37.7 in 2022 to 60 percent in 2023. Similarly, new-born postnatal care rates increased from 58 to 76 percent between 2021 and 2023, against a target of 59 percent. In the meantime, skilled-birth attendance increased from 71 to 75.2 percent respectively in 2022 and 2023, providing maternity units with lifesaving equipment in 1,702 health care facilities. Over 3,817 health workers were trained in quality of maternal and neonatal care, and in integrated community case management. Community health workers (CHWs) reached 2.3 million people with preventive, promotive and curative health, and nutrition services. Additionally, through continuous reinforcement of interoperability between health and civil registration services, 533,769 out of 624,515 living births were declared in 2023 (KRC7).

Integrated approach to boost immunization resulted in a total of 696,339 children aged 0-11 months (92.9 percent) receiving DPT-Hep-Hib-3 vaccination (KRC1), surpassing the target of 90 percent. Community mobilization strategies, as well as strengthening the cold chain, highly contributed to achieving this result. Support for the response against polio has enabled 7,260,865 children 0-5 years old to be vaccinated nationwide and the response against measles has enabled 322,265 children aged 9 months to 5 years to be vaccinated.

UNICEF endeavoured to ensure that Health Facilities (HFs) meet the minimum standards, including the provision of clean water, gender segregated latrines and hand washing stations. As of end of 2023, a total of 242 HFs (161 percent of 2023 target) have met the minimum WASH in HF standards, benefitting 529,00 people, including 300,000 children.

To stimulate the demand of health and nutrition services, 506 new nutrition support groups (GSAN) at community level were set up, trained, and equipped, increasing the number to 8,460 GSAN across the country, an increase of 37 percent compared to 2022. Through these platforms, 1,011,144 caregivers (including 754,311 pregnant and lactating women) benefitted from counselling on essential family practices, including recommended IYCF practices and early stimulation of children.

To prevent malnutrition, UNICEF supported two rounds of Vitamin A supplementation and deworming. Consequently, 4,798,066 children aged 6-59 months received Vitamin A (KRC2) and 4,302,029 children aged 12-59 months were dewormed in the first round. About 4,967,114 children under five were screened for acute malnutrition at the community level. Furthermore, 75 percent of CHW's sites supported by UNICEF, provided treatment for uncomplicated SAM cases, against a target of 70 percent. The micronutrients powder distribution program reached 135,563 children aged 6 to 23 months to support home food fortification to improve children's diets.

UNICEF provided emergency nutrition response in 32 affected districts, reaching over 206,700 children with a package of life-saving foods and materials to support early identification and treatment of children with wasting. With UNICEF's support, 98 percent of health facilities now offer wasting treatment services according to global standards, against a target of 90 percent.

Thanks to the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach, 181 new communities (70 percent of the annual target) eliminated open defecation practice (KRC8), adopting good sanitation practices: 3,803 self-sponsored household latrines constructed, 5,583 existing latrines rehabilitated and acquisition of pots for children. In addition, 121,936 people in humanitarian situation have gained access to safe and sustainable drinking water facilities (75,982 children under five and 17,071 people living with disabilities).

A total of 18,270 children aged 3-5 (54 percent girls) had access to early childhood education (ECD), through distribution of locally manufactured kits, capacity building for 235 facilitators and inspectors and 1,475 School Management Committees' (SMC) members in 225 ECD centres. Community members in 55 villages were supported with income generation activities, which contributed to supporting the operational costs of ECD centres. Further, UNICEF supported the provision of safe water supply, latrines, and handwashing services suitable for young children in 21 centres. Similarly, members of ECD management committees received training to ensure the routine management and operation of their respective centres and their WASH infrastructure.

Pillar 2: The formative years (6–12 years)

UNICEF contributed to improve the quality, and access to gender-responsive and comprehensive quality basic social services for children aged 6 to 12, in a protective, safe, and clean environment, even in the most complex humanitarian situations in Mali.

The year 2023 registered some progress on education indicators; the Primary Gross Enrolment increased from 79.60 percent (77.4 percent for girls) in 2022 to 81.7 percent (79.6 percent for girls) in 2023 (KRC3). The Lower Secondary Gross Enrolment rate was at 51.4 percent (50.5 for girls) in 2023 which showed a marginal progress of 0.6 percentage point compared to 50.8 percent (49.8 for girls) in 2022. Community engagement, and social and behaviour change awareness-raising campaigns about school enrolment were central to this increase.

About 161,282 children (47 percent girls) had access to primary formal and non-formal education including in humanitarian situations (230 percent of annual target). This result was achieved through

direct insertion or reinsertion of Out of School Children, construction, and rehabilitation of classrooms, reopening of non-functional schools, implementation of alternative education opportunities such as accelerated education and Community learning centres. Advocacy efforts led to the reopening of 174 schools giving 39,152 children (19,500 girls) access to education.

In terms of learning outcomes, statistics showed that the primary completion rate increased to 55.7 percent (55.1 percent for girls) in 2023 compared to 54 percent in 2022 (target of 55 percent). Girls' primary completion rate has improved to 55,7 percent in 2023 from 53,2 percent in 2022. Despite this progress, the gender gap persists with Gender Parity Index for the completion rate at 0.98 in 2023.

UNICEF contributed to this result by providing school materials to 388,086 (47 percent girls) students and 12,188 teachers.

UNICEF strengthened the capacity of the education system in evidence generation and better use of data to inform planning, and decision-making. The focus included strengthening teacher and School Management Committee (SMC) capacity in learning assessment, as well as monitoring student and teacher attendance. Additionally, UNICEF continued its support to improve the Education Management Information System (EMIS) for the collection and production of comprehensive data to track progress made in the education sector. In this perspective, WASH indicators were integrated into the EMIS questionnaire along with a series of institutional capacity building activities.

In its efforts to promote innovative approaches drawing on digitalization to support distance learning, 550,000 primary school aged children (51 percent of girls) benefited from digital learning through the broadcasting of two validated radio programs through 78 community radios across the country.

To address the gender issues in education sector, the Ministry of Education, with UNICEF's support, organized a series of capacity building activities on gender-sensitive education, conducted a gender audit as well as a Women in Learning Leadership research, efforts which highlighted the Government's commitment to gender-sensitive policies and strategies towards mainstreaming gender in education.

The challenge remains the insufficient funding. The country still has challenges to comply with the Dakar Framework for Action to ensure the sustainability of the education financing.

Pillar 3: The second decade (13–18 years)

Progress was achieved in ensuring multi-sectoral programming to respond to the needs of adolescent girls and boys. Thanks to UNICEF support, 187,429 adolescent girls (target of 132,922), reached through community clubs and mentors, are adopting positive parenting behaviours, and are supporting norms that are protective of children, including preventing child marriages (KRC 6). Communication for social behaviour change supported interventions designed for gender and social norms transformation. About 165,609 people (49,683 girls, 48,027 women) participated in interactive discussions on gender equality, and action to end violence against children.

In collaboration with other partners, UNICEF helped implement the National Case Management System to respond to violence against children. Capacity building and deployment of case management officers and mentoring of community case workers resulted in 5,940 adolescent survivors of violence (3,730 girls) benefitting from comprehensive protection services (KRC 5).

As lead of the Child Protection Working Group, UNICEF supported capacity building initiatives for 630 community case workers in management of GBV in Emergency. A total of 45,856 people (17,756 girls and 9519 women) benefited from GBV prevention and response interventions whereas 29,453 adolescents, (13,877 girls) benefited from psychosocial care.

UNICEF helped strengthen the capacity of child protection actors to improve services provided to children in need of protection. Consequently, 2,041 unaccompanied and/or separated adolescents, including 730 girls, received family care or appropriate alternative services; 548 children (77 girls) who have left armed groups, benefitted from social reintegration assistance. As a results of monitoring and advocacy efforts by UNICEF and its partners, a total of 56 children (7 girls) benefited from alternative measures of detention. In partnership with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, a national strategy for child justice was developed (pending amendment and validation).

UNICEF supported government's efforts to provide access to quality education to more out-of-school adolescent boys and girls. Consequently, 14,118 out-of-school children, (6,070 girls), were enrolled in

secondary education and vocational training activities. Adolescents who participated in vocational training activities received assistance to set up their own revenue generating business upon completion of their training. This strategy helped these adolescents become socio-economically independent while reducing their level of vulnerability and the likelihood of their recruitment by armed groups.

UNICEF continued to support the Ministry of Education to operationalize the National Strategic Plan for WASH in schools, politically validated in 2022. Consequently, national, and sub-national actors participated in trainings related to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). A study on financial flow for WASH in School was also conducted to identify the funding gaps. Subsequently, a round table was organized to inform the partners and encourage resource mobilization in the sector.

There have been improvements in providing holistic and nurturing care for young children and communities are more aware of its importance. The challenge that remains is to establish a UN joint action plan for promoting social norm change, and social action to address violence against children and women with strong engagement of many key opinion leaders.

Pillar 4: An enabling environment for community resilience

Mali has implemented various policies and programs to address child poverty, including National Social Protection policy, National Education and Health sector plans. However, child poverty remains a significant challenge due to limited resources, regional disparities, and ongoing conflicts. UNICEF and partners have worked to institutionalize child poverty measurements, ensuring the availability of the latest data.

The government produced budget briefs on social sectors and the public expenditure review of the social protection section is ongoing. UNICEF worked closely with UNDP and the government to address bottlenecks in evidence usage, timeliness, decision chain, while monitoring shifts in priorities. The Government made efforts to strengthen its public fiscal management system and the recent assessment of the fiscal transparency report confirmed that the government has produced its executive budget proposal, enacted budget, and the end-of-year report, with information on debt obligations. UNICEF has also engaged with International Financial Institutions and development banks to leverage resources for children's rights and explore innovative financing mechanisms for local development plans.

UNICEF supported existing social protection mechanisms, such as intervention mapping, dialogue on practice harmonisation, standards and procedures, and risk management mechanisms. Through the programme, 57,000 households (170,000 children) were reached with cash transfer programme including productive cash transfer targeting women to further empower them.

UNICEF has strengthened the approach of "accountability to affected population" and prioritized youth engagement through talk shows and U-report. The extension of the Social Registry was pursued to reach 1.5 million households (40 percent of the total population). This achievement will serve as an entry point for policy advocacy towards discretionary fiscal policy measures to design and implement social protection services to contain or mitigate socio economic effects of ongoing multifaceted crises. Progress is also being made in linking social assistance to information and services, including social behaviour change communication.

UNICEF continued its efforts to strengthen the national emergency preparedness and response system, providing technical and financial support. Consequently, the National Directorate for Social Development (DNDS) has elaborated a national plan for preparedness and response to floodings, which is the main instrument catalysing all flood preparedness and response interventions in the country, with specific plans for each of the country's most at-risk regions. In addition, UNICEF supported the DNDS in developing an advocacy, communication, and resource mobilization strategy for emergencies with an objective to mobilize innovative resources for humanitarian action.

Pillar 5. Programme effectiveness

Communication and Advocacy

UNICEF continued to increase its reach and prominence of voice to strategically position itself as the leader on child rights, with a focus on adolescent girls, and in support to advocacy and fundraising

efforts in both humanitarian and development contexts.

In 2023, the Office conducted an analysis of immunization advocacy needs, culminating in an immunization advocacy strategy, in line with UNICEF's global advocacy priorities.

UNICEF new media strategy enhanced engagement with national and international media, particularly on the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel. UNICEF's priority advocacy themes (Education, Nutrition, Climate Change) and humanitarian issues were mentioned more than 1,000 times in online news. In Mali, UNICEF stands out greatly and occupies the first place in terms of digital presence on subjects related to children's rights.

Resource Mobilisation and Partnerships

UNICEF Mali mobilized US\$ 124.1 million, including US\$ 26.8 million from Regular Resources, US\$ 59.2 million from Other Resources - Regular, and US\$ 38.6 million from Other Resources - Emergency. Ten per cent of Other Resources was flexible, multi-year, or thematic contributions, which are particularly effective in achieving results for children. However, the funding portfolio is increasingly threatened by internal and external geopolitical risks, including the possible closure of some embassies and the end of some bilateral development programmes. Funding for the HAC appeal decreased from 54 percent in 2022 to 36 percent in 2023, due to global funding cuts and competing global emergencies, among others. UNICEF organised several high-level round table meetings with ambassadors and heads of multilateral missions, focusing on the humanitarian needs and tailoring UNICEF's response to the departure of MINUSMA.

Enablers

Programme delivery was supported with US\$83.3 million in supply and procurement, from Gavi and procurement services, compared to US\$57 million in 2022. Nine Audits and 55 micro-evaluations on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) risk mitigation were completed through the CSO partner-risk assessment. Audit recommendations led to a series of strategic programme shifts and risk mitigation measures.

To increase awareness on UNICEF's policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), UNICEF adopted a PSEA code of conduct. All newly hired staff are required to systematically sign the Code of Conduct, undertake a mandatory online course, and attend face to face induction. Around 22,105 people received information on acts that constitute SEA and how to report them.

Staff recruitment was completed at an average of 76 days during 2023 against the target of 60 days.

The office did not achieve the target of 50:50 of a balanced staff representation. The ratio of female to male is at 29:71. The ten workplace culture indicators were monitored. Duty of care was prioritized, and mechanisms for attending to staff well-being in the context of an L2 emergency coupled with MINUSMA withdrawal were further strengthened.

Adolescents and youth Participation

A total of 66,300 adolescents and youth (26,046 in 2022) engaged in key child rights and adolescents' initiatives, with a focus on peace and learning crisis. Continued advocacy with the government resulted in increased adolescent's and youth's participation in child rights awareness activities aligned to peace building. Social media, peer education, and partnership with informal groups of adolescents are potential strategies to promote adolescents' access to information and give visibility to issues related to adolescent health, education, child protection, and gender.

Programme Monitoring

UNICEF continued investing in national Statistics systems to report progress towards the programme outputs and outcomes through initiatives such as the UN Data and Statistics Strategy. UNICEF contributed to the SDG Monitoring initiative, which led to the High-Level Political Forum – SDG report submission. In its continuous effort to generate evidence and knowledge, UNICEF provided technical support to the government to implement the seventh Demographic and Health Survey (DHS).

Electronic Field Monitoring, applying programmatic risk framework, was strengthened leading to an

effective coverage of programmatic visits. UNICEF began real-time monitoring using insights platforms. Through PREMISE, UNICEF was able to effectively capture on the ground data in crucial areas including WASH, education, nutrition, health, and child protection. Routine data quality assessment was experimented successfully to improve reporting on programme indicators. Third Party Monitoring was deployed in hard-to-reach areas including collecting feedback from beneficiaries. Despite positive results, daily challenges persist for UNICEF and its partners in reaching those in greatest need. The ongoing interconnected crisis in North-East Mali poses obstacles to safe movement and access to vulnerable children and families due to restricted humanitarian access and the departure of MINUSMA. Humanitarian workers also encounter similar challenges. UNICEF is actively working on strengthening its localization agenda to ensure service continuity in hard-to-reach areas. Moreover, crucial materials for development programs and humanitarian response are scarce in the local market. Massive infrastructure damage and hazardous road conditions further complicate partner travel, leading to delays in program delivery. To address this, UNICEF is establishing local infrastructure in field offices for the storage and transportation of essential supplies.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF continued to ensure that its programme and priorities are consistent with national priorities related to children as defined in some key documents, including the National Development Plan (CREDD 2019-2023), UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2024, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union 2063 Agenda. The programme is also aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan, and regional priorities on Key Results for Children (KRCs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 & 8).

From 2020-2023, key success stories were particularly related to long-term joint programming with other UN agencies (based on the notion of complementarity), the Government of Mali, and a focus on systems strengthening through capacity building.

UNICEF supported the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in developing the UNSDCF 2025-2029 by leading the UNSDCF 2020-2024 evaluation process and providing insights on the Common Country Analysis (CCA). Additionally, as the Operations Management Team chair, UNICEF played a role in enabling the system to adapt to changes in the operations context, and in leading the coordinated approach for working under the Business Operations Strategy.

UNICEF and UNDP provided support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who presented the SDGs Rescue Plan to the HLPF. The SDGs progress review is a key example of successful joint/multi-stakeholder support. The Country SDGs rescue plan has shed light on the successes achieved while highlighting the need for continued investment by the Government in the social sectors to accelerate the SDG agenda and ensure sustainability of ongoing investments. In addition, UNICEF also completed two joint Programmes under the SDG Fund to accelerate Mali's transition towards inclusive and integrated social protection in collaboration with the World Bank and UNDP to support Mali towards the 2030 integrated Finance Strategy.

In partnership with the World Bank, through the Project for the Promotion of Access to Financing, Entrepreneurship and Employment in Mali (PAFEEM), UNICEF supported the implementation of Income-Generating Activities and Labor-Intensive Public Works. This component aimed to stimulate the economic and social development in the localities of intervention by creating employment opportunities and strengthening the resilience capacities of local communities.

Strong collaboration between UNICEF and other UN agencies continued in 2023. UNICEF enhanced its partnership with UNFPA and UN Women to end violence against children and women, through the Spotlight initiative. A stronger prevention strategy and multisectoral responses were implemented in conjunction with several ministries, which contributed to the reduction of GBV in 2023. In addition, several consultations were held between the three agencies to establish a collaboration mechanism on advancing adolescents' agenda with focus on girls and the secondary data analysis of the Population and Housing Census.

Together with UNDP and UNFPA, UNICEF implemented a Harmonized approach to cash transfers

(HACT) sharing cost strategy, sharing information on partnership risks evaluation and management, including PSEA evaluation.

Partnerships with the media, key online influencers, and with the National Committees along with key high-level visits, including the visit UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director related to L2 humanitarian in Sahel and the withdrawal of MINUSMA were instrumental in enhancing UNICEF's brand and visibility as a key partner of Mali's Government on issues impacting children, including in emergencies.

UNICEF chaired and co-chaired several sectoral and humanitarian clusters, including WASH, Nutrition and Education. Through these groups, UNICEF has strengthened its partnerships with other UN agencies, national and international NGOs, and several local communities. In its capacity as the lead for Nutrition and the convenor for the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement UN network, UNICEF has strengthened partnerships, coherence and harmonization with FAO and WFP. In fact, UNICEF continued to work with WFP on joint projects in different areas, including addressing socio economic impact of COVID19 and building resilience of national systems as well as of communities. Collaboration continued with development partners, such as WHO, on epidemics response and on maternal, newborn and child health. UNICEF continued its strong partnership with several bilateral and multilateral partners including Germany, the United States of America, Canada, the World Bank, the European Union, Sweden, and was able to leverage further funding support.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF's experience in Mali in 2023, and throughout the 2020-2024 cycle, produced numerous lessons learned that offer immense potential to accelerate results, at scale, going forward.

Understanding the dynamic of the context

To be effective in advocating and influencing government policy reform processes, UNICEF must analyse and understand the complex and rapidly evolving socioeconomic and political context of Mali. This requires timely analysis of the context, as well as agility and adaptive programming approaches to address the changes in the context. Leveraging partnerships to deliver consistent, evidence-based, and timely key messages increases the chances of government uptake of proposed reforms.

Flexible Emergency Response

Given the humanitarian situation in Mali, with public health emergencies and the impact of MINUSMA withdrawal in United Nations Operations, including humanitarian access and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), it is important for programmes to be flexible and to span the development, humanitarian, and peace triple nexus, to scale up and down depending on the needs. According to the L2 Humanitarian Evaluation commissioned by the Regional Office, UNICEF's programme has demonstrated flexibility to enable the achievement of results as humanitarian crises have arisen. UNICEF has integrated 'humanitarian response' within workplans through existing outputs in each programme; and integrating crisis modifiers that enable repurposing of regular interventions to flexibly respond to emergencies. Flexibility on the part of donors and other partners was also critical in facilitating this effort. Moving forward, UNICEF will build on its resource mobilization strategy to develop innovative strategies to enhance resource mobilization for emergency response, with a target to cover at least 50 percent of the HAC funding requirements. Flexibility for 'emergency response' is necessary to ensure swift reprogramming based on the evolving context, ensuring adequate epidemic response (polio and measles campaigns), and adapting strategies to maintain continuity of essential services in all regions with limited humanitarian access. UNICEF's ability to provide such a flexible emergency response led to the extension of the L2 Humanitarian response until the end of June 2024.

Joint Programming

In partnership with WFP and BMZ, UNICEF supported the implementation of a Building Resilience in

the Sahel Programme (2019-2023) to strengthen the resilience capacities of systems, communities and individuals affected by protracted, complex and recurrent crises. This Resilience programme invested successfully in the line Ministries, thus achieving efficiency, and enabling the Government (with improved capacities) to sustain the interventions. An evaluation of this joint programming approach revealed that it is suited to all large-scale public-sector-led programmes; however, the way to measure the Community Resilience Index is yet to be determined.

Innovation - Digitalization and Technology for development

The introduction of e-tools and the development of new forms of T4D partnership with technology companies (i.e., PREMISE, Reach Unreached etc.) demonstrated excellent potential and revealed some challenges to UNICEF systems. Firstly, stronger engagement with technology companies and research institutions is important to promote innovation in programming. Secondly, increasing engagement and collaboration with for profit E-Tech solution providers requires further thinking around UNICEF's position on open-source products to ensure sustainability of interventions at no cost to the end-user. Finally, UNICEF's internal procurement processes for digital solutions would benefit from greater agility and clearer guidance on data design and handover, and on open-source licensing requirements. As UNICEF moves rapidly towards expanding such partnerships, operational solutions will be essential.

Lifecycle approach

UNICEF has adopted the life cycle approach for its 2020-2024. The theories behind the approach are that all stages of a child's life relate not only to one another, and the lives of other people, but they are also influenced by the broader social-ecological environment in which the child lives.

The summative evaluation of the Mali-UNICEF Country Programme 2020-2024 notes that the lifecycle approach has strengthened intersectoral programming around health, nutrition, education, WASH, child protection, and social policy, and made it possible to reach more children particularly in remote parts of communities, with a comprehensive age-related package of services.

Overall, the evaluation found the lifecycle approach relevant and effective. However, it is exceedingly difficult to measure its efficiency in terms of the cost-benefit ratio and to estimate its long-term sustainability. Further, despite the suitability of the life cycle approach to cover the needs of children in a holistic and multi-sectoral manner, it is not necessarily suitable for emergency contexts, especially in an environment where more than 75 percent of the funds received by UNICEF are directly allocated to programmes, as opposed to Pillars (Outcomes) and where the coordination mechanisms of the lifecycle approach inside or outside of UNICEF is not aligned with staffing and governance structures, neither are they with Government ways of conducting business as line ministries are organized in sectors.

Innovative financing

Donors supported UNICEF with over US\$124.1 million for programming in 2023. While support from traditional donors, development partners and UN joint programmes continue, increasing pressure on available resources and the global economic impact of global economic crisis remain a concern.

Therefore, new opportunities in private sector partnership, engagement of non-traditional partners and joint programming with UN agencies are critical to sustain results for children.

Looking Ahead

As UNICEF is approaching the last year of the implementation of the Country Programme (2020–2024), it is critical to reflect on the successes and challenges so far and make the necessary adjustments to meet all program's objectives. UNICEF has started developing its new Country Programme (2025-2029), which will contribute to Mali's Vision 2063 toward a sustainable socioeconomic development pathway that provides all its children with opportunities to fulfil their full potentials in society and lead a healthy life, with access to quality education and protection services. Consequently, UNICEF will continue working to strengthen health systems for equitable and quality primary healthcare for all; ensure optimal nutrition, growth and development; support HIV prevention and care with strong adolescent empowerment and participation; bolster resilient and inclusive WASH

services; ensure quality learning and skills-building opportunities for all girls, boys and adolescents; provide comprehensive child protection, including for the most vulnerable and marginalized; and strengthen social inclusion, including through social protection.