

Nigeria

Update on the context and situation of children

Nigeria boasts the largest economy and population in Africa, with nearly 224 million people – 110 million of which are children[1]– and is projected to become the third most populous nation in the world by 2050.[2] The burden of rapid growth is evident: Nigeria has a 37 per cent poverty rate and 84 million people living below the poverty line.[3] Although the Multidimensional Poverty Index dropped from 0.25 in 2022 to 0.17 in 2023, 18 per cent of the population still live in severe poverty, and 33 per cent are considered multidimensionally poor.[4] Notably, 63 per cent of the population is under 25 years old, with females representing almost 50 per cent.[5] Women of childbearing age comprise almost 25 per cent of the population, and young people aged 10–24 comprise 32 per cent.

These challenges and other persistent shortfalls prevent the full realization of child rights in Nigeria. Despite a 20 per cent increase since 2022 in access to improved water and sanitation, there are many pending issues to address. Open defecation is still practiced by over 38 million people, or 17 per cent of the population.[6] Similarly, while primary education out-of-school rates have slightly decreased to almost 26 per cent, significant disparities between states and higher rates among children from the poorest households continue. While most children (84 per cent) transition to lower secondary school, completion rates for girls and boys remain below 70 per cent.[7]

Birth registration for children under-five stands at 57 per cent, with significant disparities between and within the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The under-five mortality rate remains high at 102 per 1,000 live births, with one-third of these deaths occurring in the first 28 days after birth. Skilled attendance at delivery has increased to 51 per cent, but access remains limited.[8] These challenges are compounded by entrenched social norms that influence the health-seeking behaviours of women and girls. According to the Global Gender Gap, the country's ranking slipped to 130 out of 146 in 2023 from 123 out of 146 in 2022, emphasizing the ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality.

Nigeria records the second-highest number of unvaccinated children worldwide, with 2.2 million zero-dose children.[9] This resulted in the country's largest outbreak of diphtheria in 2023, a vaccine-preventable disease, with over 12,500 cases confirmed.[10] Despite the lack of recent data, the prevalence of stunting is considered to remain high at 33 per cent among children under-five, with rates being much higher in Nigeria's North West and North East.[11] Country-wide, the number of severely wasted children doubled in 2023, from 1.4 million to an estimated 2.6 million.[12]

Climate change, recurring disasters, public health emergencies and complex humanitarian challenges affected millions of Nigerian children in 2023. Protracted armed conflict in the North East, banditry in the North West and farmer-herder violence in the North Central zones affected over 4.5 million children. After 14 years of armed conflict between government forces and non-state armed groups in the North East, the garrison towns have become safer. Areas beyond, however, remain insecure, including the farmland of displaced people. Consequently, 2 million people remain internally displaced, including some of the 160,000 people relocated after camps for internally displaced persons closed in Maiduguri, Borno State. In addition, farmer-herder violence in Benue State in the Middle Belt continued, leaving another 1 million people displaced. In 2023, flooding caused significant infrastructure damage and displaced 8,504 households and 51,043 people. These complex challenges have impacted the lives of vulnerable children, adolescents and women, contributing to disease and loss of livelihood and education opportunities.[13]

Addressing women's and children's challenges requires policy reforms, legislation and targeted programming as a continuum of efforts within UNICEF's country programme strategies. With technical support from UNICEF, Bauchi State adopted the Child Rights Act, becoming the final state to adopt legislation to safeguard the rights of girls and boys. The First 1,000 Days Formative Study Report[14] and the updated Birth and Death Compulsory Registration Bill highlighted the importance of investing in children's first 1,000 days of life.[15] The digital Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

system[16] became operational in 23 states and aims to integrate birth registration with health services seamlessly. Collectively, these initiatives all aim to provide a sustainable response to Nigeria's development and achieve better results for children.

The newly elected Government of Nigeria has initiated critical policy reforms under the Renewed Hope Agenda.[17] These reforms include significant economic measures such as overhauling gasoline subsidies and exchange rate unification. While aimed at restoring economic fundamentals for inclusive growth, these changes require difficult economic adjustments for the population.[18] As a result, around 26.5 million Nigerians will likely suffer from food insecurity in the upcoming lean season (March-July).[19]

[1]UNICEF, 'UNICEF Data', accessed January 2024.

[2]Nigeria population is 223,804,632; UNICEF, 'Data: Nigeria', accessed January 2024.

[3]World Bank, 'The World Bank in Nigeria,' accessed January 2024.

[4]United Nations Development Programme, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023*, UNDP, New York, 2023.

[5]United Nations Population Fund, *UNFPA Nigeria Country Programme Document, 2023–2027*, Abuja, February 2023.

[6]World Health Organization and UNICEF, *2022 Annual Report: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP)*, July 2023.

[7]National Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, *2021 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) & National Immunization Coverage Survey (NICS): Survey Findings Report*, NBS and UNICEF, Abuja, August 2022.

[8]MICS 2021

[9]UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2023: For Every Child, Vaccination*, UNICEF, Florence, April 2023.

[10]UNICEF, *Nigeria Diphtheria Outbreak Situation Report*, UNICEF, Abuja, 30 November 2023.

[11]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey 2021*, Abuja, September 2022.

[12]OCHA population for Borno, Adamawa, Yobe; SMART survey for Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, 2023; National Population Commission Nigeria and ICF International, *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018*, NPC and ICF, Abuja, and Rockville, Maryland, 2019.

[13]UNICEF, *The Economic Cost of Conflict in North East Nigeria*, UNICEF, Abuja, August 2023.

[14]UNICEF, *First 1,000 Days Formative Study Report*, UNICEF, Abuja, April 2023.

[15]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Act 69 of 1992: Birth, Death, Etc (Compulsory)* (revised bill awaiting enactment).

[16]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *eCRVS Regulations of 2022*.

[17]The State House, President Tinubu's Speech', 17 October 2023.

[18]The World Bank, *Nigeria Development*, World Bank Group, Washington, D.C., 2023.

[19]Cadre Harmonisé, *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification*, Cadre Harmonisé December 2023.

Major contributions and drivers of results

During this first year of the 2023–2027 Country Programme, UNICEF-implemented programmes were aligned with the Government of Nigeria's priorities, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023–2027 and the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives

In 2023, UNICEF reinforced strategic cooperation with Nigeria's federal and state governments, supporting reforms and implementing good practices in the nation's primary health care systems. The primary health care memorandum of understanding (MOU) in eight states showed significant

improvements in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and routine immunization outcomes compared to the national average. Notable achievements include a 25 per cent increase in skilled birth attendance, a 17 per cent improvement in pentavalent-1 vaccines, and a 25 per cent rise in pentavalent-3 vaccines across MOU-participating states. In addition, UNICEF fostered high-level leadership engagement with the governors and deputy governors. As a result of these efforts, almost 3,900 professionals, including midwives and nurses, have demonstrated improved capacity for life-saving skills and over 70,000 vulnerable persons were enrolled in health insurance to reduce out-of-pocket health expenditures in five states.

UNICEF supported the government in broadening health care coverage and enhancing workforce capacity, targeting maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health interventions. This led to almost 1,500 health workers with enhanced capacity for pneumonia treatment and hypoxemia management in 14 states. In addition, more than 8,500 individuals have strengthened their capacity for community service delivery across 10 states, reaching over 1.6 million women with skilled birth attendants during deliveries, treating diarrhoea for almost 1.2 million children under five and treating pneumonia in almost 300,000 children under five.

UNICEF supported states in reaching 1.8 million adolescents and young people with online and offline health information and services. Adolescents and young people actively participated in various programming, including participating in the 3rd Nigeria Conference on Adolescent and Youth Health. They also supported the yellow fever vaccination campaign in Jigawa and Kaduna states, leading to almost 15,900 campus students and community members vaccinated.

With thanks to key donors, UNICEF supported setting up vital health care infrastructure, including nine pressure swing adsorption oxygen plants and six level-two newborn units in six states. The nine oxygen plants are projected to benefit 264,600 children under-five, and the newborn level-two units will benefit around 5,000 newborns annually. UNICEF influenced policy improvements and finalized key guidelines, including the Nigerian Every Newborn Action Plan, the Age-Appropriate Disclosure Guidelines for HIV, and the National Chlorhexidine Scale Up, which will improve the treatment of bacterial infections and prevention of infections during surgeries and other procedures.

Almost 72 per cent of Nigerians over 18 years of age were fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in 2023. Leveraging the diphtheria outbreak response as a catch-up for routine immunization, Nigeria achieved a four per cent increase in pentavalent-1 coverage to 90 per cent (from 86 per cent in 2022) and a seven per cent increase in pentavalent-3 coverage to almost 87 per cent (from 80 per cent in 2022). The inequity gap in immunization coverage among states also was reduced: 25 states have reached 80 per cent pentavalent-3 coverage compared to 21 states in 2022. Overall, 7.8 million children were vaccinated against diphtheria.[1] Significantly, there was a 23 per cent reduction in circulating variant of poliovirus cases compared to 2022, while the novel oral polio vaccine and fractional inactivated polio vaccine vaccination campaign reached 26.2 million children under-five in the three states known as Areas of Intractable Transmission.

UNICEF was key in influencing efforts to integrate gender into immunization services and advance adolescent girls' health. One notable achievement was the UNICEF-led analysis of social and gender-related drivers for immunization. Support for introducing the human papillomavirus vaccines (HPV) to adolescent girls (ages 9-14 years) in October 2023 benefited 4.6 million girls as of December 2023, against a 5.8 million target.

UNICEF advocated for increased public investment in nutrition, which resulted in the release of US\$1.2 million (against a target of US\$2 million) of state government funds for preventing and treating malnutrition. Over 95 per cent of ready-to-use therapeutic food procured by UNICEF was from three local factories, reducing reliance on international manufacturing and promoting private-sector engagement.

UNICEF continued to support the government at the federal and state levels by advocating for the adoption of positive practices and policies and implementing gender-sensitive nutrition programmes. The Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition Guideline was updated considering the specific needs of adolescent mothers.[2] The National Social and Behaviour Change Strategy for Nutrition and the Maternal and Child Health Handbook were finalized.[3] During Maternal Newborn and Child Health Week campaigns, UNICEF expedited preventative interventions by helping to reach over 31 million

children aged 6–59 months with two doses of vitamin A supplement; 8.8 million children aged 12–59 months with deworming medicines; and about 4.8 million pregnant women with iron-folic acid/multiple micronutrient supplementations. Additionally, over 1.3 million pregnant and breastfeeding women (against a target of 1 million) received a package of tailored nutrition counselling services to improve their diets.

In the North East and North West, UNICEF worked closely with partners to pilot humanitarian cash transfers to the caretakers of 6,609 severely malnourished children admitted for treatment. The objective was to pre-empt relapse and offset the opportunity costs related to treatment. An estimated 850,000 severely wasted children aged 6–59 months received life-saving treatment – the highest number reached over the past five years and likely one of the highest globally, which implied securing the largest pipeline worldwide.

Goal Area 2: Every child learns

Nigeria continues to help expand access to quality education, especially for marginalized children. Through high-level, multi-modal policy advocacy, the government’s new roadmap on education includes the core components of the out-of-school model developed by UNICEF. The government has also set up a new commission to focus on out-of-school children and *Almajiri* – people who migrate from their homes searching for Islamic knowledge. UNICEF’s advocacy and support have resulted in all states developing action plans to scale-up the out-of-school model.

Nigeria achieved favourable progress on key results for children by improving access to education and learning outcomes.[4] Out-of-school children account for 25.3 per cent (23 per cent target) of primary and lower secondary school-age children. Meanwhile, the gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education is 37.8 per cent (30 per cent target) and the gross intake ratio to the last grade of lower secondary school is 68.8 per cent (50 per cent target).

A national strategy on retention, transition and completion for secondary education students was developed to build a new model for girls’ secondary school completion, with technical support from UNICEF. The National Council of Education, Nigeria’s highest decision-making body on education, has adopted a policy on the re-entry of pregnant and married adolescent girls into school to mitigate school drop-out. Building on the recognition that multiple pathways are needed for learning, the Nigeria Learning Passport has grown tremendously, registering almost 780,000 users, the second highest in the world. This has been enabled by strong public-private partnerships to address infrastructure barriers. Through UNICEF support, 2,011,337 children (873,765 females; 631,896 children with humanitarian needs; and 1,670 children with disabilities) accessed formal and non-formal basic education in Nigeria.

UNICEF also played a leading role in improving the learning and skills development of Nigerian children and youth. To expand access to quality pre-primary education, UNICEF supported the government to revise the National Early Childhood Care Development and Education Policy and minimum standards. UNICEF convened a national conference with the government and all partners to address the national learning crisis, during which a Framework of Action for scaling foundational literacy and numeracy was developed. To better define the breadth of skills needed to succeed in education, work and life, UNICEF supported the government to develop a national skills framework. As a result, almost 305,028 children (175,487 girls; 224,791 children in humanitarian situations and 1,209 children with disabilities) developed the breadth of skills to improve learning outcomes. In a global first, climate change education curricula standards were developed, highlighting this cross-cutting priority and emerging benchmark for education curriculum. UNICEF also supported the Youth Manifesto: Action on Climate Change and Education in Nigeria, which builds on insights gathered from over 47,000 adolescents and young people in the country.

Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

UNICEF successfully supported the government in accelerating the registration of 11 million births of children under-five in 23 states and the Federal Capital Territory, surpassing the 2023 target of 10 million. This achievement significantly enhances the legal identity of children, laying a foundation for their rights and protection. Almost 1,300 community-based child protection structures were established

and strengthened across 15 states. These structures are pivotal in delivering a defined package of child protection services at the household level.

UNICEF reached almost 120,000 children (47,836 girls) who had experienced violence in all settings with integrated health, social welfare and justice services. This multifaceted approach ensures a holistic response to the diverse needs of children affected by violence. In six states, 718 girls and boys in conflict with the law were successfully diverted from detention to safeguard their well-being and offer an alternative path toward rehabilitation and support. Additionally, five states instituted specialized justice systems with child-friendly procedures across police, justice, judiciary and social welfare services.

UNICEF validated the Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children in Humanitarian Action in the North East,[5] harmonized case management tools nationwide, and supported the establishment of the Council for Social Work in Nigeria. These initiatives will contribute to a more robust and standardized child welfare framework. Notably, almost 3,900 girls and boys formerly associated with armed groups received reintegration assistance in three states, supporting their transition back into society. Of these, 141 children were released from administrative custody by the military and were provided access to reintegration services in 2023, in line with the Handover Protocol signed in 2022 by the Government of Nigeria. UNICEF also provided inputs in preparing the Nigeria Universal Periodic Review 2023,[6] highlighting key policy considerations related to child rights.

UNICEF, in collaboration with the government at the federal and state levels, conceptualized and advocated for the establishment of a community-led initiative to end female genital mutilation. A remarkable 6.2 million individuals, including young people, were mobilized to join the Movement for Good[7] and actively work to end female genital mutilation in five states. Ten youth civil society organizations worked with partners and focused on gender-sensitive policy advocacy, the empowerment of girls, and survivor networks to spread social and behavioural change messages. Furthermore, almost 17,000 adolescent girls received life-skills training, including comprehensive sexuality education, equipping them to advocate for change and challenge the root causes and drivers of harmful practices and gender inequality.

Almost 250,000 children were provided with safe avenues to report sexual exploitation and abuse. These children received appropriate and timely support, underscoring UNICEF's commitment to safeguarding the rights and well-being of every child. These results collectively demonstrate the high-impact efforts to promote child protection and empowerment within the complex contexts of humanitarian response, gender considerations, adaptation to climate change, and diverse challenges that affect children in Nigeria.

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

UNICEF continued supporting the government to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goals 6.1 and 6.2 by strengthening water and sanitation systems and processes. UNICEF provided technical support in developing three strategic documents: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Sector Finance and Advocacy Strategy; WASH Sector Wide Sustainability Check; and Nigerian Guidelines for Rural Drinking Water Quality Monitoring and Surveillance. These documents present a framework for increasing public investment in the sector, addressing water quality, engaging the private sector, and improving the sustainability of climate-resilient WASH services.

UNICEF provided technical support to promote a sustainable model of WASH facilities through public-private-community partnerships. As a result, 936 water facilities were repaired, rehabilitated, upgraded or constructed, and over 3,000 sustainable operation and maintenance models were developed for water facilities management. These interventions benefited about 4 million people with improved water access, including about 790,000 who received humanitarian WASH services. In Adamawa, Bayelsa and Yobe states in the North East, about 600,000 people have access to safe water supply services through UNICEF support. An additional 99,326 internally displaced persons were reached with WASH supplies, such as basic hygiene kits and menstrual health and hygiene kits.

As a strategy to improve WASH access and behaviours in institutions, a 5-STAR approach for WASH in schools was introduced in Kano, Katsina and Jigawa states in 2023. A total of 104 schools and 71 primary health care centres were provided with sex-segregated, climate-resilient, equitable and safe

WASH services. This benefited 9,000 patients and caregivers and 25,000 children in schools, including 58,000 adolescent and post-menarche girls in 486 schools who received menstrual health and hygiene messages. To ensure sustainability and proper use in these facilities, UNICEF facilitated the establishment and training of school-based management committees and environmental health clubs in schools.

UNICEF continued to support the implementation of the Clean Nigeria Campaign, resulting in 4 million people with access to basic sanitation services. Similar progress was recorded in the campaign to stop open defecation, with 2.6 million people in 4,000 communities and 117 Local Government Areas certified as open-defecation-free. UNICEF supported Nigeria's first-ever Toilet Business Owners Conference to accelerate household toilet construction through the more than 2,500 active toilet business owners. Over 33,000 toilets were constructed, and approximately US\$300,000 was mobilized from sanitation revolving loans and household contributions for toilet construction. Similarly, about 3.7 million people were reached with key hygiene messages for sustained behavioural change, and about 400,000 women and girls received menstrual health and hygiene messages and support for making and using reusable sanitary pads.

The Climate Landscape Analysis for Children in Nigeria[8] was launched on World Children's Day on 20 November 2023. The research highlights the adverse impacts of climate hazards on Nigerian children and calls for multi-sectoral action to safeguard their rights.

In support of government efforts and as an early recovery intervention following the 2022 floods – the most devastating climate-induced event in a decade – UNICEF provided health, WASH, gender-based and violence-related assistance to 185,000 flood-affected people.[9] Support also included a humanitarian cash transfer to 3,381 flood-affected households in Bayelsa State in southern Nigeria. At a smaller scale, UNICEF supported the government-led 2023 flood response in Adamawa State within one month of the flooding, reaching 22,000 people with safe water by delivering aqua tabs and chlorine.

Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life

A pivotal achievement in strengthening the social policy landscape for Nigeria's children was doubling the National Social Registry's coverage from 15 per cent in 2022 to 30 per cent in 2023. This expansion ensures a more comprehensive reach of social protection initiatives, particularly benefiting the most vulnerable children.

UNICEF supported two crucial social protection bills that seek to realize the right to social protection for all children in Sokoto and Kebbi states. UNICEF spearheaded the comprehensive review of state-level policies, embedding context-specific policy measures for children.

UNICEF collaborated with the National Bureau of Statistics to strengthen the routine measurement and reporting of child poverty. This resulted in the development of child poverty estimates and a cutting-edge report that provides insights into child deprivation and guidance for policies and strategic planning. It has also been used in drafting development plans and policies, ensuring a holistic approach to child well-being.

Advancements in public finance for children represent a key milestone in 2023. Sustained engagement and innovative technical assistance led to prioritizing human capital development in Nigeria's 2024–2026 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework. The share of public spending exceeded 2023 targets by 0.9 per cent in education, 0.8 per cent in health and 0.17 per cent in social protection, reflecting an increased commitment to investing in the critical sectors shaping children's futures. Building on these lessons, UNICEF is shaping strategic innovations, including developing a concept for a digital policy analysis tool that can be used for scenario analysis and for improving the impact of fiscal policy reforms on child deprivation.

UNICEF's work for children is funded entirely through individual donations and the voluntary support of our partners in government, civil society and the private sector. Voluntary contributions enable UNICEF to deliver on its mandate to protect the rights of children in Nigeria, help meet their basic needs, and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF sincerely thanks all resource partners whose contributions supported our work and humanitarian action in Nigeria in 2023. The achievements described in this report resulted from these new and continued partnerships. On

behalf of Nigeria’s children, their families and communities in urgent need, UNICEF is especially grateful for humanitarian thematic contributions, which provide the most flexible resources for emergency response.[10]

[1]UNICEF, *Nigeria Diphtheria Outbreak Situation Report*, UNICEF, Abuja, November2023.

[2]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Cash and Voucher Assistance Operational Guidance*, Federal Ministry of Health, Abuja, Jul 2023.

[3]MCH handbook, *Nigeria’s Maternal and Child Health Handbook*, forthcoming in2024.

[4]UNICEF, *Advocacy Toolkit*, UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office, Senegal, April 2021.

[5]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Guidelines: Alternative Care of Children in Humanitarian Action in the North East*, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abuja, 2022.

[6]United Nations Human Rights Council, ‘Universal Periodic Review – Nigeria: Fourth Cycle,’ 15 December 2023.

[7]The Movement for Good to End FGM gained over 6 million members. This community actively raises awareness about the adverse effects of female genital mutilation and serves as vigilant reporters for girls at risk of female genital mutilation.

[8]UNICEF, *Climate Landscape Analysis for Children in Nigeria*, UNICEF, Abuja, 2023.

[9]UNICEF, *Nigeria 2022 Flood Response Brief, August 2022 to June 2023*, UNICEF, Abuja, 2023.

[10]Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance; Canada; Education Cannot Wait Fund; European Commission/EC/ECHO; GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance; Global Fund; Global Partnership for Education; Government of Nigeria; KfW–Germany; Norway; Nutrition International; SIDA–Sweden; UNICEF National Committees; United Kingdom; USA; USAID; and other United Nations agencies.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF’s work in Nigeria with other United Nations agencies and a network of partners reflects a transformative journey and is aligned with the Government’s Renewed Hope Agenda.

For the first time, children are part of the President’s agenda due in part to UNICEF’s child rights evidence-based advocacy and engagement. A partnership between UNICEF and the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) has begun, resulting in a National Child Well-being Dialogue and bringing ministries and the private sector together for a ministerial roundtable and meaningful policy debate. UNICEF was also a key partner for the second annual NESG Gender and Inclusion Summit and supported the inclusion of adolescents and young people. In addition, UNICEF partnered with Gombe State to pioneer the localization of Nigeria’s National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.[1] UNICEF worked closely with other United Nations agencies to realize the 11 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework outcomes for 2023–2027. UNICEF co-chaired five outcome groups. UNICEF is actively represented in other outcome groups and the Interagency Data Management Working Group.

UNICEF’s leadership in sector-wide initiatives resulted in transformational shifts to achieve results for children in Nigeria. With key leadership roles in the education sector, including co-chairing the Nigeria Education Group, the Emergency in Education Working Group and the United Nations Transformative Initiative for Education, UNICEF has advocated for what works to get children into school and ensure they are learning. UNICEF proactively partnered with the National Council on Climate Change and the Ministry of Environment to promote the participation of children, youth and civil society in shaping the country’s climate policy. Also crucial was a collaboration between UNICEF and other United Nations agencies on a paper for Nigeria’s Participation in the United Nations Climate Ambition Summit, convened by the United Nations Secretary-General at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 20 September 2023.

UNICEF co-drafted the first inter-agency North West appeal, including a chapter on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and has become a key interlocutor for donors and development partners in the North West. This is in part due to co-chairing the inter-agency North West Coordination Forum,

jointly with the INGO Forum. In partnership with Rapid Response Mechanism members, composed of United Nations agencies and NGOs, a total of 280,645 conflict-affected people were reached with life-saving assistance, including nutrition, WASH and non-food items in Borno and Yobe states, and 75,000 people received integrated assistance across two sectors. UNICEF continued to enable the humanitarian-development-peace nexus by strengthening government capacity and serving as sector coordination lead and provider of last resort in the North East for child protection, education, nutrition and WASH.

Joint Programmes remained a critical vehicle for collaborative engagement, leveraging and resource mobilization towards achieving results for children. UNICEF was actively part of 22 active joint programmes, including government-funded joint programmes, United Nations-to-United Nations programmes, and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund mechanism. For example, the Spotlight Initiative focuses on providing services to the most vulnerable women and girls and those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination[2] while the Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation is building a global movement of allies, working towards eliminating the practice by 2030.[3] Notable first-time achievements in 2023 included the distribution of the maiden awards for the Primary Health Care Leadership Challenge[4] in recognition of states transforming the lives of women, girls and children through exceptional leadership and significant investments in primary health care. This flagship programme is a joint partnership of the Nigeria Governors Forum, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Dangote Foundation, the National Primary Health Care Development Agency and UNICEF.

Generation Unlimited Nigeria – a public-private-youth partnership platform that embodies the Business for Results approach – connects on shared values with nearly 30 partners that support UNICEF’s programmes to deliver results at scale. The platform supports school and community connectivity, digital learning, workplace readiness and youth engagement. In 2023, partners aligned their business models to connect 79 communities and 800 schools to the internet and provided data (whitelisting) for Nigeria Learning Passport and Yoma.[5] These actions helped over 300,000 children and 500,000 young people gain access to digital learning.

[1]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy of Nigeria*, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abuja, August 2022.

[2] Spotlight Initiative – Nigeria.

[3] UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, *Delivering the Global Promise: End FGM by 2030*, UNFPA and UNICEF, 2022.

[4] The Primary Health Care Leadership Challenge seeks to revamp the ‘Primary Health Care Under One Roof’ policy.

[5] Yoma is a global digital platform, launched in Nigeria and Burundi in 2020, where young people can develop their skills, find opportunities and achieve social and environmental impact.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Innovations

By empowering adolescent girls, improving digital learning outcomes, and addressing the lack of supplemental oxygen in health care facilities, UNICEF is working to create a brighter future for the next generation.

Alongside the Federal Ministry of Education and other partners, UNICEF is using cutting-edge innovations for better outcomes with and for adolescent girls to address the dual learning crisis in Nigeria. The deployment of the Nigeria Learning Passport has improved learning outcomes for 80 per cent of registered learners in school, at home and in non-formal education structures. Largely due to digital literacy efforts, teacher training and evidence generation, registration with Nigeria Learning Passport increased from 117,585 in 2022 to over 785,000 in 2023.

Pioneering technologies have increased access to affordable, reliable oxygen to reduce preventable newborn and child deaths. In Nigeria, pneumonia is one of the leading killers of children under the age

of five.[1] To address the lack of oxygen and reduce preventable newborn and child deaths from pneumonia, UNICEF and its partners introduced an oxygen system planning app[2] to calculate how much oxygen is needed and inform investment plans to make oxygen available in 14 states. Oxygen-Plant-in-a-Box has been deployed in nine hospitals to produce large volumes of medical oxygen, including nine pressure swing adsorption oxygen plants and six level-two newborn units in six states. UNICEF's commitment to developing sustainable energy solutions and climate-responsive communities yielded a first-in-the-world engineering feat: designing a clean, reliable, affordable solar microgrid system with battery storage for uninterrupted oxygen production. Two hospitals have installed and tested this innovative solar power system, and UNICEF has shared the tested designs to be considered in more hospitals in Nigeria and beyond.

Lessons learned

Emerging opportunities to reach the furthest children

A partnership-signed, state-focused MOU comprised of the Federal Ministry of Health, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, UNICEF, and eight state governments has significantly bolstered routine immunization and primary health care systems. Progress is evident in operationalizing functional primary health care centres in zero-dose communities, with high-quality data, above-average HPV coverage and strategic health worker deployment. Future efforts will sustain integrated services, enhance state investment oversight, and target vulnerable populations.

UNICEF contributed to a 34 per cent increase in birth registrations by reaching over 11 million under-five children in 23 states and the Federal Capital Territory (compared to 7.3 million in 2022). A comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach integrated the child protection and health sectors, incorporating a digital Civil Registration and Vital Statistics system and birth registration into health services. Strategic partnerships with federal and state government agencies, coordination with local leaders, community engagement and advocacy, capacity development for health workers and birth registrars, and reviewing legal frameworks contributed to the success of the programme. The national scale-up emphasized meticulous analysis, real-time digitized process reviews, alignment of strategies through joint micro-planning, and the importance of addressing performance gaps. To better localize humanitarian response, UNICEF, in partnership with a local NGO, provided nutrition and WASH assistance to 25,000 conflict-affected people in Marte Local Government Area in Borno, an area not accessed in seven years.

Systems strengthening on monitoring and evaluation

A key lesson in strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system is the leadership support required to drive the change management process towards results-driven, risk-informed programming. To this end, UNICEF has strengthened its system through harmonized programme monitoring. Per the knowledge management plan, UNICEF used monitoring tools, mid and end-year reviews, monthly programme forums and evaluations as reflection platforms to steer insights and actions toward effective planning and achieve results for children. UNICEF also strengthened risk management and fraud compliance capacity, aiming toward programme resilience. Efforts were made to strengthen staff performance management by aligning individual performance plans to the programme and management priorities set forth by the Rolling Management Plan and Rolling Work Plan. Aiming to enhance Accountability to Affected Populations, UNICEF gathered and analysed quantitative data from the NGO-implemented and UNICEF-supported complaint and feedback mechanisms used by 7,452 people.

The way forward

In 2024, UNICEF Nigeria plans to conduct a programme review that will focus on adapting programming to the changing context and staying fit-for-purpose to achieve results for children in Nigeria. UNICEF will continue to drive forward its commitment to climate action for children and the First 1,000 Days approach to foster multi-sectoral collaboration, integration and convergence to reach the furthest behind and most vulnerable children.

Drawing on the demonstrated proficiency in executing MOUs at the state level, UNICEF will strategically position itself as the premier partner at the federal level within the health sector's

innovative Sector-Wide Approach agenda in 2024.

Several effective educational models developed in 2023 will be scaled up or replicated to achieve country programme targets and ensure every child can learn. To facilitate learning and increase academic access and success, UNICEF will train government officials on digital learning, planning and budgeting; engage parents and grow the Nigeria Learning Passport user base; and increase employability skills, especially for adolescent girls.

The WASH sector will build on sustainability and climate change action plans to promote public-private partnerships to deliver on climate-resilient country programme WASH results targets.

Mobilizing public finance for the WASH programme through improved sector coordination and advocacy at the state level will be a key focus.

As part of UNICEF commitments in the current country programme, UNICEF will intensify efforts to advocate with the Government of Nigeria and expedite the issuance of birth certificates, concurrently enhancing the institutional capacity of the National Population Commission and related entities.

UNICEF will also intensify efforts to strengthen the social protection systems at the federal and state levels while intensifying advocacy for increased public finance investments for children.

[1]UNICEF, 'Nigeria contributes highest number to global pneumonia child deaths,' UNICEF, 12 November 2019.

[2]UNICEF, 'Oxygen System Planning Tool. See also: World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, *WHO-UNICEF technical specifications and guidance for oxygen therapy devices*, World Health Organization, 2019