

## Sierra Leone

### Update on the context and situation of children

The political context was marked by the general elections in June which resulted in a second five-year term for the incumbent government. Due to the opposition contesting the election results, there was a temporary suspension of participation by the opposition in parliament and local government, and the freezing of key bilateral and multilateral partnerships. An *Agreement for National Unity* was signed in October, returning the opposition and restoring key partnerships. However, an attempted coup in November and the ensuing trial of the former President has increased tension in the country.

The World Bank Fall Economic Update[1] shows Sierra Leone addressing the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis and the impact of the Russian-Ukraine war, including high inflation at 54 per cent as of November 2023 compared to 35 in November 2022. This has resulted in rising food, fuel, transportation and production costs, reducing economic growth rate from 4 in 2021 to 3.5 per cent in 2022[2]. Coupled with an unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent in 2022, this has pushed children and their families further into poverty, with 70 per cent of children affected and 28 per cent of households experiencing severe food insecurity[3]. The shrinking fiscal space left limited resources for GoSL to provide quality social services for children and their families.

The disbursement of \$20.7 million USD by the International Monetary Fund to GoSL in November under the Extended Credit Facility Programme is expected to reduce inflation and to mobilize revenue for social expenditure and to respond to external shocks, including the adverse and poverty-related effects of climate change.

Although Sierra Leone's education and health expenditure constituted 22 and 10 per cent respectively of the total budget in 2022, budgetary disbursements remained uneven and not sufficiently focused on children.

Despite high investment in education, 64 per cent of grade 4 learners are not able to comprehend the text they read[4] and 28 per cent of teachers are unqualified.[5] There are significant inequalities in accessing education: children with disabilities have a 67 per cent chance of being in school compared to 73 for children without disabilities[6]. Children living in rural areas, and those from lower wealth households have fewer opportunities for enrolment, inclusion, and completion. Gross enrolment rates for pre-primary and primary increased from 24 and 152 per cent in 2022 to 25 and 157 per cent in 2023. Primary completion and transition rates to secondary have also risen from 95 and 119 per cent to 101 and 121 per cent, with more girls completing and transitioning than boys for the first time[7]. Health outcomes are improving with maternal mortality rate falling from 717 deaths per 100,000 births in 2019 to 443 in 2023. Infant, neo-natal and under-five mortality rates have also fallen from 104, 38.5 and 154 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019 to 78, 31 and 105 respectively in 2021[8]. Although these results are still far from the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 targets of 70 per 100,000 under-five and 12 per 1,000 neonatal mortalities, the launch of the first ever Child Survival Action Plan, National Child Health Programme, and National Community Scorecard underscore efforts to strengthen health policy and service delivery systems to achieve SDG 3.

In December 2023, Sierra Leone received 550,000 doses of the WHO-approved malaria vaccine, a gamechanger for improving child survival in the country. GoSL continued to co-finance nutrition by contributing USD 99,000 to the Nutrition Match Fund for ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF). With other contributions, this allowed for treatment of more than 25,000 children with severe acute

malnutrition (SAM) with a cure rate of 83 per cent.

There has been positive progress in the legal and policy framework for child protection and gender equality through efforts to align national laws to international child rights standards. Although the Child Rights Act of 2007 and Social Work Bill remain as drafts in Parliament, the review of the National Strategy for Teenage Pregnancy Reduction, and the roll out of the Gender Based Violence Information Management System (GBV IMS+) in three districts were two milestones in strengthening the protective environment for children. These investments, along with tailored training of 720 frontline personnel and enhanced institutional capacities extended child protection services reaching 56,000 children, surpassing the target of 16,000.

However, only 10 per cent of births notified by the Ministry of Health (MOH) were registered by the National Civil Registration Authority compared to 92 per cent in 2022. The drop is linked to the guideline to use mobile registration which is available only in 19 out of 1,282 health facilities. In terms of gender equality and empowerment, female lawmakers were voted into 41 of 135 parliamentary seats, more than doubling the number in the last Parliament, in line with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act of January.

The Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC) report<sup>[9]</sup> published in March describes how children in Sierra Leone face droughts, floods and poverty related to the negative effects of climate change. UNICEF supported GoSL to increase resilience, particularly of coastal communities and integration in the education curriculum, to respond and adapt to climate change.

[1] Sierra Leone Economic Update 2023: Macroeconomic Stability Key to Attainment of Food Security (worldbank.org)

[2] Ibid

[3] Food Security Monitoring System Report WFP Sierra Leone Country Office September 2023 | World Food Programme

[4] 2021 National Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Assessments (EGRA and EGMA)

[5] Annual School Census 2022 (ACS)

[6] MICS6

[7] ACS 2022

[8] Latest data is as of 2021

[9] Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC) | UNICEF Sierra Leone

## Major contributions and drivers of results

The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and UNICEF's Country Programme of Cooperation (CPC) 2020–2023 was extended to 2024 to align with the one-year extension of the United Nations Sustainable Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) whilst preparation of the new UNSDCF, CPC and Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2025-2030 continues in line with Agenda 2030.

The commitment of GoSL to harness and effectively coordinate domestic and international knowledge, expertise, financial resources, and partnerships, including with the United Nations, bilateral and multilateral partners, civil society organizations, private sector and others for the development of Sierra Leone is the most important contribution and driver of the results achieved in 2023.

The Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) and the Gender Programme Review (GPR) are expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2024. Lessons learned from the Evaluation of Early Child

Development and WASHNORM Survey completed in 2023, the CPE and the Gender Programme Review, will inform the finalization and the implementation of the new CPC 2025-2030.

UNICEF, in coordination with other UN agencies and partners, supported the strategic, programmatic and advocacy priorities of GoSL's Mid-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023 in line with UNSDCF and UNICEF's Strategic Plan (SP) 2022–2025, and UNICEF West and Central Africa Region's (WCAR) Key Results for Children (KRC)[1] with renewed focus on Leaving No One Behind, through strengthening the development-peace-humanitarian nexus to accelerate efforts towards the achievement of the SDGs as follows:

***SP Goal Area 1: Every Child Survives and Thrives (KRC 1,2)***

UNICEF's Health and Nutrition Programme is aligned with the Sierra Leone National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

Sierra Leone became a Pathfinder country for Child Survival in May 2022 based on past work and commitment of GoSL to achieve the Child Survival SDG by 2023 with the support of global health partners[2]. In April 2023, GoSL with the support of UNICEF and partners launched the Child Survival Action Plan (CSAP) 2023-25 to reduce under-five mortality and subsequently established a National Child Health Programme to coordinate and integrate quality health programme implementation across the continuum of care. Lessons learned from the 30-month implementation of the Community-based Primary Health Care approach were shared to accelerate the Maternal Newborn Child Adolescent Health (MNCAH) and nutrition programmes.

In May 2023 the government, WHO and health sector partners, including UNICEF, launched the report of the Universal, Health and Preparedness Review (UHPR). UNICEF and WHO at the national level supported the UHPR, which harnesses one health approach to health security engaging all-of-government and whole-of-society approach, ministries from across governments, development partners and civil society, to advance the process. The UHPR examines best practices, gaps, and challenges, along with priorities in three areas of the health response: governance, systems and financing for health emergencies, as part of the universal health coverage. This led to the creation of the National Public Health Agency in December 2023, a semi-autonomous body managing health emergencies across the country.

The KRC 1 target was **met** with **90** per cent of children 0-11 months being vaccinated with three doses of DTP-containing Penta vaccine in 2023. Ninety-three per cent of districts have at least 80 per cent of children vaccinated, signifying better herd immunity and polio transmission remains interrupted. The **hybrid approach** of integrating robust social and behavioral change interventions to enhance community leadership and participation in vaccination efforts, plus combining routine and outreach strategy for vaccine delivery, with periodic intensified routine immunization (PIRI) for bringing vaccines closer to communities resulted in increase of immunizations, including the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations from 61 in 2022 to 95 per cent of the target population (fully vaccinated). Using a similar model, the HPV vaccine surpassed its target (117 per cent) by reaching additional 25,535 girls. These models contribute to **evidence generation** preparing for the roll out of the malaria vaccines, which arrived in the country in December.

The leveraging of co-financing and support from Gavi, Global Fund and USAID, increased the availability of vaccines and strengthened the cold chain capacity from 80 to 91 per cent in 2023. Immunization access was also assured through the training of 32 cold chain technicians serving all 16 districts.

**Continued technical and financial support from UNICEF and partners** contributed to saving the lives of 7,979 (4,574 male, 3,405 female) newborns in 16 Special-Care Baby Units in 2023, a 12 per cent increase from 2022. UNICEF supported the development and rollout of 14 relevant policies,

strategies, guidelines, action and costed plans, investment cases and SOPs on MNCHA+ Nutrition, resulting in 1,622,337 children treated using IMNCI/iCCM protocol for malaria with ACT, pneumonia with antibiotics, diarrhea with ORS-Zinc; increased Vitamin A supplementation coverage for semester 1 from 78 to 79 per cent in 2023, and an 11 per cent increase in deworming service at 75 per cent. The cure rate for SAM increased from 84 per cent in 2022 to 98 per cent: at least 11,000 children affected by SAM and 19,041 MAM cases benefited of life saving treatment. The leveraging of the Nutrition Match Fund to increase the availability of RUTF since 2022 is a major driver of nutrition results and is expected to continue and increase in 2024 with advocacy from UNICEF and other partners. A total of 3,832 children and adolescents were tested for HIV through index case family voluntary testing in 7 high prevalence districts with a positivity rate of 4.4 per cent and linked to appropriate care.

### **SP Goal Area 2: Every child learns and acquires skills for the future (KRC 3,4)**

UNICEF was selected as Grant Agent by the Global Partnership for Education for the \$50 million investment for Sierra Leone 2023-2027. UNICEF supported GoSL in its Transforming Education Summit commitment to expand access to education (KRC3) and improve the quality of foundational learning outcomes (KRC4). The completion of 29 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers officially handed over by Government together with the training of 678 teachers and 4,836 cumulatively, has expanded access to education for more than 24,000 children aged 3-5, strengthening the foundation for primary education.

UNICEF supported GoSL to address challenges related to low learning outcomes through the training of 13,581 early grade teachers (3,810 females); implementing the National Curriculum Framework; establishing teachers' communities of practice in 11 of 16 districts; reviewing instructional core for early grade foundational numeracy and providing teaching and learning materials in line with the Education Sector Plan priority on "Delivering the Foundations of Learning for All." The increase in completion, transition and pass rates is attributable to sustained efforts in teacher training, curriculum and instructional development as a major contribution and driver of KRC 4.

GoSL with UNICEF support leveraged innovation and strategies in technology for development such as U-report/RapidPro through engaging 214,074 users, Learning Passport offered the complete MBSSE curriculum, benefited 16,700 people, while E-Upshift to prioritize adolescent and youth empowerment and education through the provision of digital, advocacy and life skills to over 21,500 young people (30 per cent girls) in the context of peacebuilding, active citizenship and improved socio-economic opportunities. Over 1,000 adolescents, youth and community members were reached with climate change education and awareness campaigns to foster the youth-led approach to transforming education and implement the recommendations in the Sierra Leone Climate Landscape Analysis for Children report.

### **SP Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices (KRC 5,6,7)**

The major contributions and drivers of results for KRC 5, 6 and 7 are the strengthened legal and policy framework to harmonize national laws and policies with international child rights standards; strengthened capacity and access to services for prevention from and response to violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children; and scale-up and strengthening of community engagement through joint programming with other UN agencies.

UNICEF supported the review of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018-2022) and development of the Child Rights Act, Social Work Bill, and the National Civil Registration Act., strengthened the protective environment for children. Government capacity on human rights treaty reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child was strengthened through training of 32 government stakeholders and representatives from Human and Child Rights Commissions on treaty reporting, particularly on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Building on the work of the child protection technical working group, standard operating procedures and data sharing protocols enabled piloting of the Information Management System for Gender Based Violence (GBV IMS+), with Sierra Leone becoming the first country in government led non-humanitarian context and contributing to a survivor-centered response to GBV. Tailored capacity development of over 720 personnel supported the expansion of child protection services reaching 56,061 children (36,777 girls, 19,284 boys), significantly exceeding the annual target of 16,000. This expansion of services was particularly important during the election period given the risk of socio-political tensions.

UNICEF leveraged the joint programme with the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), supported by the Peacebuilding Fund to create a peaceful and protective environment during the general elections nationwide, with a special focus on the six most conflict prone target districts scaling up life skills, community engagement and parenting programmes beyond four focus districts under the joint UNFPA/UNICEF End Child Marriage Programme. By scaling-up child protection services and community engagement from 4 districts in 2022 to 10 in 2023. The scale-up supported 59,184 community members, including 32,588 children (17,199 female and 15,389 male, 36 with disabilities) to gain practical life skills, practice positive parenting for parents and caregivers and engage in reflective dialogues.

#### **SP Goal Area 4: Every child uses safe and equitable WASH services and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment (KRC 8,9)**

In October 2023, UNICEF supported GoSL to launch the National Outcome Routine Mapping (NORM) Survey Report and the national WASH Information Management Systems (WASHIMS), two evidence generation, advocacy and knowledge management tools presenting disaggregated data on access to and quality of WASH services. Both confirmed inequitable access to basic water supply services with 53 rural compared to 78 per cent urban access, with people in rural areas five times more likely to defecate in the open than in urban areas. Access to basic water supply was maintained at around 65 per cent while sanitation services increased from 19 to 23 per cent.

The major contribution and driver of change in this sector has been the leveraging of innovative solar and climate resilient adaptations such as solar powered motorized systems to improve the capacity and sustainability of WASH services whilst addressing climate change.

#### **SP Goal Area 5: Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free of poverty**

UNICEF continued engagement with the Ministry of Finance in 2023, developing a handbook on child responsive budgeting to build capacity.

Following the validation and launch of the National Social Protection Strategy, UNICEF strengthening of adequate knowledge and national capacities both for GoSL counterparts and UNICEF staff in building efforts to develop a cash+ model for prevention of child marriage and teenage pregnancy and cash transfer in humanitarian actions. Efforts on developing a new system for assessment and certification of disability have continued to progress in 2023, however the revised Persons with Disabilities Act has not yet passed through Parliament. Once completed, these efforts will enhance social protection coverage for all children.

UNICEF continued to support GoSL and the World Bank to develop a comprehensive package of support for district development planning, including a template for district development plans which contains key child indicators being introduced in four districts. This will improve the monitoring of child indicators at district level to drive results in social protection.

Preparations started with Statistics Sierra Leone for a new round of MICS 7 in Q 3 of the year, with the hiring of a MICS consultant and preparations for questionnaire workshop.

## **Cross-cutting considerations**

UNICEF continued to build internal capacity, and that of government and implementing partners, to integrate and mainstream the cross-cutting integration of gender, Social and Behavior Change (SBC), adolescent participation, disability, innovation and technology for development. UNICEF has strengthened adolescent and youth engagement for climate change in generating sound evidence and a publication used for high level advocacy for SL's participation at Cop28 held in Dubai in December. UNICEF has maximized the use of humanitarian response platforms to identify opportunities for cross-collaboration and has improved the coordination of the implementation of multisectoral strategies through relevant coordination structures such as the Donor Coordination, Technical Working Groups and Steering Committees.

The Irish Aid-funded project to promote safe schools and empower out-of-school children, adolescent girls and children with disabilities to access quality and inclusive education, is an exemplary cross-collaboration on education using child protection referral protocols and pathways to implement the gender and inclusion recommendations from the National Out-of-School Strategy and Study, and the School-Related GBV (SRGBV) pilot of 2022. Youth-led initiatives in education, climate change, and civic participation (Youth Peace Ambassadors) are examples of how UNICEF amplified the voices and participation of adolescents and youth in decision-making across thematic areas, including through consultations, focus group discussions, U-Report and other digital innovation platforms.

Similarly, people-centric, including human-centered design and community-led approaches contributed to results across sectors ranging from vaccination uptake, adolescent participation in decision-making, positive parenting, and transformation of social norms. A strong strategic communication and advocacy interface across the programmes extended the reach of UNICEF's advocacy for child rights and provided visibility of the work of UNICEF and partners in Sierra Leone.

The implementation of the Supply Plan strengthened supply-based programme delivery to children. Sustainable supply solutions were developed through emergency preparedness, prepositioning, warehousing strategies, end-user monitoring and fostering of local market capacities to enhance supply chain systems. The provision of procurement services, technical support and guidance on procurement and supply chain management to partners and government counterparts provided timely delivery of supplies and programmes for the benefit of children. Sierra Leone did not experience any major emergency in 2023.

UNICEF experienced turnover of many staff in 2023 at all levels. There were several staff transitions in early 2023 with the retirement, rotation, and transfer of key staff, including two senior management staff and three Section Chiefs. A number of colleagues served as officers-in-charge, including staff on stretch assignments to ensure continuity in programme, operational and management effectiveness across sectors. Regular statutory meetings were held on a regular bases for programme, emergency preparedness and response, resource mobilization, operations, staff association, Joint Consultative Committee, country and senior management teams to ensure effective and efficient implementation of programmes, monitor key performance indicators, and to ensure duty of care in an ethical and compliant environment.

[1] Key Results for Children: Advocacy toolkits | UNICEF West and Central Africa

[2] Includes the Child Health Task Force, the Global Financing Facility, Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, **UNICEF**, **USAID**, etc

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF's strong brand, comparative advantage, and track record of achieving social development results continued to position it to influence on policy, mobilize resources, leverage partnerships, and convene stakeholders. Sierra Leone's admission into the Security Council 2024-2025 as a Non-Permanent Member presents an opportunity for UNICEF and UN agencies to support the GoSL to advocate for child rights, women's rights, disability rights, peace and security, and other related issues at the highest level.

UNICEF continued to play an active role in UN governance, coordination, and technical groups. In its role as chair of the UN Programme Management Team (PMT), M&E and Communications Group, and co-chair of Results Group 3 and Emergency Preparedness and Response Group, UNICEF provided leadership and contributed to the rollout of key joint UN priority and visibility events, including as part of the Steering Committee for the evaluation of the UNSDCF 2020-2023 and the development of the Common Country Assessment to guide the development of the UNSCDF 2025-2030.

UNICEF supported the Delivering as One approach, bringing development, peace and humanitarian approaches together, by collaborating with UNDP on the joint programme funded by Peacebuilding Fund to promote the creation of an enabling environment for the conduct of peaceful elections in June 2023. UNICEF continued the Global Programme to End Child Marriage with UNFPA and started implementing another joint programme with UNDP and UNFPA to advance disability inclusion in Sierra Leone.

UNICEF grew its public sector income by 7 per cent from \$25.8 million in 2022 to \$27.7 million in 2023 by maintaining and diversifying partnerships with GoSL, bilateral donors, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), Global Programme Partnerships (GPPs), and National Committees. UNICEF initiated new conversations with the African Development Bank and ECOWAS and leveraged these partnerships to increase its influence in advocacy, procurement, and supply chain management, and to position itself as the partner of choice in Sierra Leone. For example, Phase 3 of the Saving Lives programme is a bilateral agreement with UNICEF whereas the first two phases were joint programmes.

Strategic engagement with the private sector in Sierra Leone was not fully operationalized given the context of the general elections. However technical work with the private sector in innovation, technology for development, supply and procurement continued.

UNICEF partnered with credible worldwide consortia for the completion of independent evaluations and evidence generation using global long-term agreements and engaged individual consultants for research, studies and surveys. UNICEF facilitated participation from GoSL with UNICEF China on a technical study visit as part of South-South Cooperation and with Plan Eval on the evaluation of the CPC 2020-2024.

Multisectoral partnerships with government ministries, departments and agencies resulted in better integrated and coordinated programmes. For example, WASH results were achieved with the Ministries of Water Resources and Sanitation, Health, Planning and Economic Development, Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Fisheries and Marine Resources, and the National Disaster Management Agency for guidance and leadership in policy setting and planning, including the mainstreaming of humanitarian responses and management of results

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

The role of continued systems strengthening within and across sectors in the achievement of results

cannot be overemphasized. Strengthening human resource capacity, data collection and analysis, procurement, and supply chain management, and providing technical support remain innovative and catalytic approaches which UNICEF will continue.

One key lesson learned for UNICEF in 2022-2023 was related to the implementation of the GIGA project. It started in 2022 and is an exciting global project which aims at providing connectivity to all schools, providing internet access to all children and their teachers, as well as communities. While the plan was to roll it out in 2022 this only partly materialised, due to several setbacks including discontinuity of key staff. The overall planned roadmap by UNICEF and implementing partners was not possible to implement according to underestimation of the time and resources needed to negotiate, the impact of the election interference on key steps of the installation, training for the maintenance, capacities and dedication of the service provider. This led to major delays in 2022-2023, leading to the development of a new timeline. The new timeline was followed but with several challenges such as complications in terms of the construction standards of several schools, lack of connection to electricity, lack of community ownership and therefore not understanding the value of the infrastructure to be installed, leading to theft or vandalism and generally a lack of capacity of the schools and communities for maintenance and use of the internet connection, and lack of devices such as laptops and tablets to enable the use.

The GIGA project can be described as a partial success as 100 percentage of the trainings and installations were completed albeit late, but it was not possible to achieve 100 per cent of the connections due to the delays in the hardware installations. However, it has been a valuable steep learning curve for UNICEF and the partners, including GoSL for future similar projects. This phase of GIGA was deliberately restricted to 39 schools so that UNICEF and the government partner DSTI, were able to systematize lessons learned before GoSL received a much larger grant for GIGA expansion with nationwide coverage. The learnings from this initial phase have facilitated the government in developing more realistic workplans to ensure timely quality installation of the connectivity.

This experience demonstrates that some of the most remote schools should first be connected with offline devices which can be manually updated and will function similar to internet. This would allow for continuity of services and information flow, even when there is no electricity or other power sources or internet coverage. It is also a lesson learned that more emphasis needs to be given to training of the end users and on maintenance, as well as ensuring tablets and laptops are provided and at least one classroom adapted for the internet (offline and online) use. A parallel project providing solar power would ensure continued access to electrical power needed for the use of the internet connectivity (offline and online). The Innovation Section is now in discussions with the Office of Innovation in Sweden regarding a planned cross-sectorial solar initiative: Project Alpha.

UNICEF has made a deliberate effort to integrate and harmonize gender transformation, Social and Behavior Change (SBC), adolescent participation, disability, climate change and innovation and technology for development, into all programmes with synergised efforts towards integrated programming and results for children. For example, the collaboration between education and child protection teams to target the same communities for life skills and positive parenting programmes, and to use the national referral protocols for GBV, strengthened synergies facilitated the use of the referral protocols. A lesson learned is that this requires expertise for example on gender, SBC, adolescent participation and disabilities as well as dedicated efforts by the team, and continued coordination across sectors, which means stepping away from business as usual, through more coordination both of human and financial resources and their use.

In 2023 the office expanded its engagement with adolescents and youth from engaging them in lifeskills, UPSHIFT, GENU with focus on enhancing entrepreneurship to involving them in policy advocacy. The transformative power of community engagement, including the participation of



adolescents and youth has been mentioned under “cross-cutting considerations” but it is worth noting the innovative and best practice dimensions of this approach. The drafting of the Situation Analysis of Children and Women (SitAn) included focus group discussions with children and adolescents in all five regions of the country and contributed to the overall SitAn, as well as to an Adolescent Friendly SitAn, which will be launched in quarter 1 of 2024.

In October UNICEF invited UN and UNICEF Youth Ambassadors to participate in the Results Based Management training for UNICEF staff and partners, ahead of the SMR and development of the CPC. In December UNICEF included them in the Strategic Moment of Reflection (SMR) for the new CPC along with the government and other partners, where they had a session on what adolescents and youth can contribute with in policy, advocacy and dialogues with government. This was considered a best practice by GoSL and they requested UNICEF to facilitate a youth consultation on the draft MTNDP in early 2024, as part of the civil society consultations before the planned launch of the MTNDP by end January. To be able to expand the involvement of adolescents and youth in policy advocacy and decision-making UNICEF will integrate this across all programme sectors as well as work with GoSL, young people themselves and other stakeholders to create platforms for dialogues between young people and decision makers.

The strengthening of UNICEF field presence continued in 2023 and further enhanced programme delivery and partnerships at local level. Synergy and collaboration between UNICEF’s three office locations (Freetown, Makeni, Kenema) were reinforced with frequent field mission support of senior management. Section chiefs and results managers coordinated with the field offices, and field office staff participated in strategic programme planning and capacity building processes, especially for the RBM training, SMR and CPD processes.