

## Liberia

### Update on the context and situation of children

In 2023, Liberia persevered on its journey towards recovery and growth, a journey that began after the end of the devastating war in 2005. The nation, while still grappling with the aftermath of the Ebola epidemic in 2014 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination.

Despite the adversities, the nation's economic growth rebounded from a negative trajectory to a more optimistic one, with a forecast of accelerated growth in the forthcoming years. The real GDP growth, which was reported at -3.0% in 2020, surged to a high of 5% in 2021. Although the GDP growth slightly decreased to 3.7% in 2022, it is projected to rise to 4.2% in 2023 and further to 5.1% in 2024, according to the economic outlook reported in the Citizen's Guide to National Budget. This guide was released in June 2023 as part of the Liberian government's<sup>1</sup> fiscal transparency initiative.

The census data from 2008 to 2022 reveals a significant increase in Liberia's annual population growth rate, from 2.1 (1984-2008 tier) to 3.0, culminating in a population of 5.24 million people by 2022. This sudden surge in population growth is largely attributed to the return of the population following the end of the civil war.

Population trends also indicate a high rate of rural-urban migration, with 52% of the population now residing in urban areas. Remarkably, one-third of the population lives within an 80 km radius of Monrovia alone. The crude birth rate has seen a decrease from 43.61 in 2000 to an estimated 31.29 per 1000 people in 2021. Concurrently, the average life expectancy at birth has risen to 61 years<sup>3</sup>.

Liberia is currently experiencing a demographic dividend, characterized by a youthful population. The population distribution reveals that 48% are below 18 years, 47% are aged between 18-60, and a mere 5% are aged 60 and above. Notably, there is a demographic bulge in the adolescent age group (15-19).

Given this demographic structure, it is crucial for Liberia to prioritize enhancing child-based outcomes, particularly for children under five. The development of this youngest demographic is of utmost importance, as they play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's future. Ensuring their flourishing development is not just an investment in their individual futures, but in the future of the nation as a whole.

A significant 82.7% of the population is estimated to lack the financial resources necessary to afford a diet that meets nutritional requirements<sup>4</sup>. This presents a considerable challenge for caregivers, who struggle to ensure that children have access to adequate food. This struggle is particularly pronounced among families residing in rural areas, where employment opportunities are limited.

Alarmingly, more than one-third of the population suffers from undernourishment, with rural communities being disproportionately affected by food insecurity. This underscores the urgent need for interventions aimed at improving food access and nutrition in these communities.

In addition to these challenges, 52.3% of the population experiences multidimensional poverty<sup>5</sup>. This means that, beyond financial constraints, many families and children face deficiencies in various aspects of their lives, including health, education, and living conditions. Access to sanitation and hygiene facilities is also a significant concern. This highlights the complex and interrelated challenges that must be addressed to improve the overall well-being of the population.

Recent trends have shown a rise in COVID-19 cases in Liberia, causing some concern. However, the impact has been largely mitigated by improved response measures. From 3rd January 2020 to 6th December 2023, there were 7,930 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 294 deaths reported to the World Health Organization<sup>6</sup>. In response, a total of 4,460,668 vaccine doses have been administered as of 11th December 2022. Although COVID-19 remains an intermittent threat in Liberia, it is no longer considered a public health emergency, in line with the WHO declaration of 5th May 2023.

The year 2023 marked a period of political change in Liberia and its neighboring countries. The presidential elections, which respected the democratic rights of the voting population, were peacefully completed in November 2023, and the new government was installed in mid-January 2024. The United Nations and other international organizations closely kept a close watch on the process to ensure free and fair elections. However, the destabilization of several democratically elected governments in neighboring African countries has been a source of constant fear for many Liberian citizens, who are still recovering from the scars of war.

In terms of overall development, the Sustainable Development Report in 2023 ranked Liberia 157th out of 166 countries, with an overall achievement score of 49.8%. Only two out of seventeen goal areas (SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production, and SDG 13: Climate action) are on track<sup>7</sup>. The status of the SDG target for Liberia shows that 48.4% of indicators have made limited progress, while 31.3% of the indicators have shown worsening progress. Only 20.3% of the indicators are achieved or on track. This underscores the need for concerted efforts to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

1 Ministry of Finance and development Planning; Citizens guide to the National Budget FY 2023

2 Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Systems, GoL, Census 2022

3 United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision

4 World Bank, adapted from Herforth et al. (2022)

5 Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Liberia Country Briefing, OPHI, 2022

6 <https://www.who.int/countries/lbr> (Data reported to WHO in the last 24 hours. Latest update: 19 December 2023 at 05:43 pm GMT)

7 Sustainable Development Report Data accessed December 2023.

## Major contributions and drivers of results

### Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives:

In 2023, UNICEF remained steadfast in its commitment to champion Primary Health Care, striving to ensure quality health care for every child and woman. This was achieved by supporting the Government of Liberia with pragmatic reforms and good governance. UNICEF aided the Ministry of Health (MoH) in developing various policies and strategies for Universal Health Coverage (UHC). These included the National Community Health Policy (2023-2032), National Community Health Program Strategy (2023-2027), National Immunization Strategy (2023-2027), Effective Vaccine Management Improvement Plan, and Child Survival Strategy and Action Plan.

UNICEF actively participated in technical discussions across various health forums and platforms. Notably, UNICEF funded and facilitated the International Symposium on Community Health Workers, which culminated in the Monrovia Call to Action for a robust community health delivery platform.

UNICEF's support contributed to significant immunization coverage. As of November 2023, 96% of children aged 0-11 months received their first dose of the DTP vaccine, and 89% completed all three doses. Similarly, 83% of children in the same age group received their first dose of the Measles Vaccine. This marked a significant recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had disrupted basic health services since 2020. UNICEF also supported the procurement and clearance of 112,000 doses of the RTS,S malaria vaccine that arrived in Liberia, with the vaccination rollout planned to start in April 2024.

To identify and plan for reaching zero-dose children and missed communities, UNICEF supported the Coverage and Equity Analysis (CEA) thereby helping secure funding from GAVI and other sources. UNICEF also advocated for Public Health financing for Child Immunization and Community Health with the MoH and other supporters, leading to the World Bank granting US\$ 3 million for three years for childhood vaccines.

UNICEF provided funds and technical assistance for developing and validating the 2024 County-specific Operational Plan and the 2023 National Operational Plan. These plans were instrumental in resource mobilization and resulted in funding for maternal and child health, cold chain, and social & behavioral change combined with WASH and Nutrition. UNICEF also provided technical support for the external Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) and the Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP).

UNICEF played a pivotal role in the COVID-19 vaccination drive, overseeing the procurement, clearance, vaccine management, and in-country distribution of 5,036,370 doses since the start of the COVID-19 rollout. UNICEF also trained 108 supervisors and 1,800 vaccinators on the updated data collection tools for integrating COVID-19 vaccinations in all 15 counties. With 74% of its population vaccinated against COVID-19, Liberia became the first West African country to reach the 70% goal.

In the realm of digital health, UNICEF supported the Liberian Digital Health landscape with development of the Digital Health Policy and Strategy (2024-2027), which has been validated and is set to be launched in 2024. Support was also provided for the development of the Electronic Immunization Registry (eIR) and the Community Health Workers Master List and Registry into the DHIS2. This enables individual child tracking for immunization and for Community Health Workers.

## **Nutrition**

UNICEF collaborated with the Government of Liberia to address malnutrition in all 15 counties through a comprehensive approach including policy revisions, Social Behavior Change (SBC) strategies, and direct interventions to combat persistently high stunting levels in children under five, targeting a 22% reduction by 2025.

The efforts integrated nutrition interventions into national policies, with a strong emphasis on community health strategies and essential service packages. UNICEF played an active role in contributing to a robust SBC strategy, addressing critical behavioral issues related to malnutrition. By October 2023, significant outcomes were achieved: 192,232 adolescent girls were reached with Iron Folic Acid (IFA), 111,181 pregnant women received IFA, and 150,068 children benefited from micronutrient powder supplementation. The ongoing collaboration with the government involved direct interventions, including maternal, infant, and young child feeding counseling, deworming, and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) treatment.

In 2023, UNICEF conducted quality improvement training for nutrition data, thereby enhancing its collection and reporting. The organization facilitated participation in a global conference on the marketing of breast milk substitutes, thereby building staff capacities. Support was extended to decentralized coordination, strengthening multisectoral committees, which resulted in the inclusion of nutrition supplies in the essential drugs list. The emphasis on system strengthening and quality

supervision fostered a comprehensive approach to nutrition data and program implementation. Active engagement in community-level screening for SAM ensured prompt referrals and lifesaving interventions.

Despite challenges, UNICEF met or exceeded the SPHERE standards for SAM treatment, boasting an 82% cure rate and positive outcomes. The ongoing program reflects a commitment to improving nutrition services, fostering community engagement, and building resilience in emergencies. Future collaboration with the government aims to incorporate global best practices, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of nutrition interventions.

## **Goal Area 2: Every Child Learns**

In 2023, UNICEF Liberia, in collaboration with sector partners, continued to support the education sector to improve access to quality education. Notable progress was made, particularly in access, resulting in the Net Enrollment Rate (NER) for primary education improving from 43.4% to 46.3%, for Early Childhood Education (ECE) from 47% to 56.9%, and the Gender Index Ratio (GIR) in lower secondary education improved from 49% to 53%.

However, the quality of education remains a challenge, with the delayed launch of a national learning assessment system limiting the accuracy of data on the actual status of student learning. According to the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), the official proficiency in literacy and numeracy is 83.18% and 79.8% for Grade 3, and 75.56% and 75.39% at Grade 6, respectively. The Gender Parity Index (GPI), according to the Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2021/22, is 0.9. However, socio-cultural barriers continue to negatively impact the participation of vulnerable groups such as adolescent girls, who remain a priority focus.

In 2023, UNICEF collaborated with partners to strengthen the policy environment, especially the implementation arrangements for the new 2022-2027 Education Sector Plan (ESIP); to strengthen inclusive and gender-responsive school systems; to address the institutional capacity for the teachers; and to galvanize community action to address barriers.

Focusing on enabling the policy environment, sector planning, coordination, and monitoring, UNICEF advocated for the prioritization of foundational learning in the new Sector Partnership Compact, thus securing Global Partnership for Education (GPE) funding for systems capacity strengthening and sector transformation. In addition, UNICEF supported the training of three key sector planning staff and the implementation of two key related sub-sector policies: the national school quality standards and its rollout in selected model schools, and the teacher continuous professional development policy. UNICEF also continues to support the strengthening of the Education Information Management System (EMIS) to enhance evidence-based policy development.

To improve access, 73,849 students (36,223 boys and 37,626 girls) were reached through the implementation of a school package of inclusive and gender-responsive services in 200 model schools that promote national school quality standards. UNICEF, collaborating with partners, continued to enhance the institutional capacity of three Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) in the implementation of foundational literacy and numeracy (among other priority learning areas) and to roll out the Continuous Teacher Professional Development (CPD) policy and program.

Through this support, 3,006 teachers were trained, and a school cluster support system was established. Innovative digital/remote learning (radio and learning passport) was initiated for a more effective blended teaching and learning process, as well as to ensure future emergency preparedness and continuity of learning. Additionally, the education program implemented a non-formal Alternative Learning Program (ALP) that resulted in the promotion of functional literacy and employable skills for 5,828 (1,911 boys and 3,917 girls) out-of-school adolescents and youth.

The programme actively collaborated with partners, school and community leaders, and children to stimulate their involvement in addressing the low demand for education and to fortify resilience for future emergencies. This is of paramount importance considering that one-third of children remain out of school, resource allocation still suffers from inequities, and socio-cultural barriers persist, making girls particularly susceptible to gender-based violence.

To address these issues, a dedicated radio station was launched to support not only the continuity of learning but also to implement a social behavior change communication strategy. The education programme persistently worked with legislators and traditional leaders to tackle social barriers, enhance accountability in public financial management, and boost domestic resource allocation.

The programme consistently adopted several approaches that address effectiveness, the need for innovation, to build sustainability measures, and to integrate and build on lessons learned. UNICEF partnered with multiple sectors and ministries, including education and youth and sports, to address the multifaceted needs faced by adolescents.

In that regard, UNICEF provided grants to sustainably incentivize school-level improvement, promote employable skills development for adolescent girls and future advocacy for school-based financing. UNICEF built on the success of advocacy work with legislators and traditional leaders in addressing both social cultural barriers and inequities in resource allocation. Lastly, UNICEF engaged young people as effective change agents, peer supporters, and mentors. Going forward in 2024, these measures effectively position UNICEF to address current and emerging challenges and barriers to learning such as mental health and climate change.

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

UNICEF has persistently worked to fortify child protection systems in collaboration with the Government of Liberia and civil society partners. The aim is to deliver high-quality prevention and response services to address violence against children (VAC) and to improve birth registration services for children.

To bolster the child protection systems in Liberia, UNICEF supported the development of a 5-year strategic plan for strengthening the social service workforce. This plan was informed by the social services workforce mapping conducted by UNICEF. The organization also implemented the National Child Justice Strategy, focusing on enhancing diversion measures and building the case management capacity of 63 justice and social workers.

In addition, UNICEF, in conjunction with other UN agencies, strengthened the capacity of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights to monitor and report on child rights' violations. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the government's UNCRC state party reporting obligations, leading to the submission of the 5th, 6th, and 7th state party periodic reports.

To ensure a continuum of services, at least 89,776 individuals, including children and adolescents, have accessed multisectoral child protection, adolescents, and youth empowerment services. These services include case management, mental health and psychosocial support, diversion interventions for children in contact with the law, life skills, and vocational skills training.

These services were provided through various service delivery platforms, including adolescent safe spaces, resource centers, interim care centers, one-stop centers, birth registration centers, and other community-based service delivery platforms. The decentralization of child protection services, including birth registration, which now covers 98% of the 90 health districts in Liberia, has been a key contributing factor to these achievements.

As a means of reigniting the government's commitment to protecting children's rights, especially girls, from violence, exploitation, abuse, and harmful practices, UNICEF collaborated with the Government of Liberia, civil society organizations, and community structures to launch a Social and Behavioral Change (SBC) campaign. This campaign has mobilized about 28,000 individuals to take actions to eliminate all forms of violence against children and increase demand for child protection interventions.

To strengthen and improve knowledge management for the child protection sector and facilitate data-driven decisions for child protection, UNICEF supported the Government of Liberia and partners through line ministries. This support led to the development of an Interoperable Birth Registration Information Management System (IBRIMS), the signing of an MOU for the deployment of a child protection information management system, a mapping assessment of the at-risk youth population, and the development and piloting of a tool for social worker registration in Liberia.

#### **Goal Area 4: Every Child lives in a safe and clean environment.**

In 2023, UNICEF continued its efforts to reduce gaps in national water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) policies and strategies. This was done with the aim of achieving Sustainable Development Goal #6. UNICEF provided funding and technical guidance to support the Government in strengthening the WASH sector, developing policies and strategies, coordinating efforts, and building capacity.

UNICEF spearheaded the strengthening and improvement of functional WASH sector coordination at both national and sub-national levels. The WASH Joint Sector Review (JSR) was conducted with UNICEF's support, intended to inform the country's WASH Strategic Plan for 2023-2027.

UNICEF also supported the Sanitation Market Assessment of selected counties, demonstrating its commitment to evidence-based policy development. A new initiative, known as the "CHATWASH" Movement, was launched to accelerate the improved delivery of WASH services across the country. This movement has already begun to benefit communities, showing enhanced participation.

Efforts towards the attainment of Key Result for Children #8 resulted in a reduction of the proportion of people practicing open defecation from 37.7% in 2022 to 35% in 2023. However, this figure is still higher than the 2023 target. According to the 2022 Liberia population census report, the total number of people still practicing open defecation stands at 1.8 million out of a total population of 5.2 million.

The proportion of the population using an improved source of drinking water has increased to 76% (86% urban, 65% rural) in 2023, up from 72% in 2015, as per the JMP 2023 report.

A total of 144 communities, benefiting 15,000 individuals, have achieved Open Defecation Free (ODF) status in six targeted counties. Furthermore, 36,000 individuals were provided with knowledge on good hygiene through Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) and hygiene promotion activities in these six counties.

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

In 2023, UNICEF sustained its advocacy initiatives aimed at enhancing the allocation of social sector resources by various ministries. One such initiative involved facilitating the participation of senior health official and a capable Deputy Finance Minister at the Primary Health Care Financing Forum aimed to reduce out-of-pocket expenses on healthcare. This year also saw the launch of the Liberia Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Costed Strategic Plan, indicating a strategic shift in Liberia's approach to malnutrition.

UNICEF Liberia prioritized aligning its Public Finance for Children (PF4C) agenda with significant regional and global commitments. These include regional Key Results for Children (KRCs), the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025, and frameworks and guidelines such as the UNICEF PF4C Strategic Framework. To assist the LCO in organizing and executing its PF4C agenda, the country office adopted the PF4C Programme Strategy Note (PSN), PF4C-focused fundraising proposals, and internal PF4C capacity-building.

UNICEF developed a module to integrate child poverty estimation into the Household Income and Expenditure Survey and developed partners' capacities in the Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) approach to estimating child poverty. With support from government agencies, UNICEF continued to complete the estimation of child poverty in Liberia using 2019/2020 LDHS data. This collaboration involved the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, and other line ministries.

In February 2023, UNICEF conducted a PF4C Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment, indicating that approximately half of all children are simultaneously deprived of three or four dimensions of their well-being. UNICEF continued to work with government partners to build consensus on supporting the delivery of integrated social services to address multidimensional poverty and vulnerability. This was achieved by strengthening links between health, child protection, and social protection services.

### **Programme Effectiveness**

In 2023, UNICEF reinforced its adherence to the UN's Zero Tolerance Policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). Sixty-two staff members, including consultants and contractors, underwent mandatory Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) training, blending online and in-person sessions. Additionally, six new staff members, including two interns, received PSEA compliance orientation during their induction. The PSEA Cell was reactivated, ensuring that programs and operations integrate PSEA compliance into their work with partners and vendors. All Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) and Project Documents (PDs) were executed using the amended Civil Society Organization (CSO) Partner Declaration and Due Diligence Verification Form.

UNICEF co-chairs the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) PSEA Inter-country Network, offering technical support and enhancing capacity of network members on PSEA. This facilitated establishment of a victim-centered assistance initiative through state parties to respond to SEA victims. Contributions include harmonized PSEA trainings, mandatory staff training, introduction to the UN Common Assessment on PSEA for Implementing Partners (IPs), support for IPs to establish PSEA mechanisms, and the development and dissemination of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials on PSEA. Additionally, a Harmonized Code of Conduct for UN staff was introduced.

In 2023, UNICEF assisted 10 active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in conducting PSEA self-reassessments, reducing their risk rating from Moderate to Low. Although no SEA cases were reported, a multi-sectorial reporting tool was introduced in communities, schools, and adolescent resource centers. Key Government of Liberia partners were identified for comprehensive victim services, with collaborating CSOs offering psychosocial support in high-risk areas.

In collaboration with the Government of Liberia, UNICEF initiated community engagement strategies, involving local structures and appointing three individuals per community as SEA focal points. These focal points, acting as 'Gate Keepers' for women and children's rights, are announced during community meetings, encouraging residents to report SEA incidents to them. In educational settings, Buddy Club members and Peer Educators assume roles as PSEA focal points.

## Communication and Advocacy

In 2023, UNICEF enhanced its outreach strategies, leveraging online platforms to connect with supporters nationwide. A robust, evidence-based communication strategy reinforced UNICEF Liberia's authority on child-related matters. The existing media network prioritized child rights issues among stakeholders. Donor visibility was systematically enhanced in funding proposals, ensuring UNICEF Liberia's sustained impact in child welfare and development.

UNICEF Liberia expanded its communication efforts, utilizing social media for information dissemination, resulting in increased followership. Transparent communication was showcased through 426 updates, generating 240K post impressions and reaching 186K individuals. The 2023 Communication Unit strategically addressed funding gaps, securing resources for key interventions.

Various initiatives empowered 156,728 households and other focal points with knowledge and tools for informed decisions on immunization, nutrition, WASH, and SGBV prevention. Approximately 800,000 individuals were reached with tailored communication and behavior change strategies promoting preventive health practices.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2023, marking the midpoint of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) timeline (2016-2030), it was crucial to evaluate and present the achievements, challenges, and revised national priorities at the SDG summit. The Spotlight Initiative from Liberia, with UNICEF as a key partner among other UN agencies, was selected as one of the high-impact initiatives at the summit. UNICEF, along with other UN agencies and the Government of Liberia, committed to accelerating progress on the SDGs and announced its commitments at the September 2023 SDG summit.

The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Monitoring and Evaluation working group piloted the UN Joint Monitoring Mission. This mission brought together all UN agencies to monitor key initiatives alongside government counterparts at the county and district levels. The mission's results were presented to the working group, highlighting the significant contributions towards improving the UN's impact in Liberia.

UNICEF, in collaboration with other UN agencies, initiated a joint funding application for Enhancing Climate Resilience Integrated Multisectoral Strategies in Liberia under the African Development Fund CAW Adaptation Sub-window.

As part of a global effort to increase primary healthcare financing and reduce out-of-pocket expenses, currently at 53% of total health expenditure, UNICEF collaborated with other UN agencies and the Government of Liberia. This collaboration resulted in the development of a standalone Primary Health Care Financing Strategy aligned with the National Health Policy, Essential Package of Health Services II, and Health Financing strategy.

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Health Sector UN and other agencies, provided technical and financial support to develop and launch the National Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition (RMNCAH+N) policy 2024-2030. Additionally, UNICEF supported the development of the Liberia Child Survival strategy and Action Plan 2024-2028.

As the lead agency for communications under the UNCT, UNICEF actively participated in commemorating international days and spearheaded the Communicating as One to facilitate coherent



messaging and advocacy. These collaborative initiatives involved close coordination with government counterparts and partnerships with both national and international entities, strengthening relationships with key stakeholders and fostering a collaborative environment essential for achieving shared objectives.

UNICEF's work in Liberia thrives on collaboration across sectors, institutions, and communities. In 2023, UNICEF managed 13 partnerships with the Government and seven with civil society organizations, all instrumental in advancing child rights, achieving concrete outcomes, and laying the groundwork for future impact.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

### Innovation

As part of the four strategic axes for data and analytics work in the West and Central Africa (WCA) region, Liberia contributed to understanding the current situation and requirements before making data investments (Axis 1). The Government of Liberia (GOL) and the UNICEF Liberia Country Office (LCO), in collaboration with the UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO), led a diagnostic assessment of the data landscape for children. This assessment informed recommendations for an evidence-based strategic action plan tailored to the country's needs and assets related to data for children. One short-term recommendation from this initiative was the expansion of Birth and Death registration using the Health Management Information System (HMIS).

Under the same axis, to understand the national data ecosystem and define how best to strengthen it to lead a child-centered Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda, UNICEF collaborated with the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Service (LISGIS) and National Disability Commission. They conducted a disability analysis based on census data to identify entry points and support children with disabilities.

UNICEF supported nationwide training for staff of Ministries, Agencies, and Commissions (MACs) sub-offices and County Officials in Results-Based Management: Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting. This contributed to the implementation of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), and LISGIS. This was in line with Axis 3: making smart investments for data on children, bringing visible changes focused on interventions to mainstream the demand for and use of data across national and sub-national levels.

To strengthen its commitment to transparency, UNICEF Liberia initiated payments for social mobilization and community engagement via a mobile money application. This ensured that the correct amount was paid to the rightful individuals, motivating community volunteers and boosting their commitment to work.

### Lessons Learned

In 2023, the co-creation of gender integration projects with the Child Protection and Education programs accelerated gender-sensitive and responsive programming. Empowerment interventions targeted both adolescent girls and boys, addressing gender discriminatory norms and barriers impacting their development. This integration needs to be not only sustained but also expanded.

Stronger collaborations and coordination with local government enhanced partnerships and increased service coverage for underprivileged children in underserved communities.

Learning from the funding challenges of 2022, the Communication Unit strategically addressed funding gaps in 2023 through program and donor collaboration. Prioritizing impactful documentation, the country office secured resources for key interventions, forming part of the 2024 plan.

By leveraging local resources and empowering communities, UNICEF significantly strengthened immunization coverage and improved overall health outcomes in Liberia. Continued commitment and collaboration will be essential to ensure all children in Liberia have access to essential health services.

Technical support, when well-planned, can be as effective as funding. In 2023, the Country Office relied largely on technical support due to limited funding. Expanding partnerships to involve traditional structures and the legislature boosted mobilization and public finance management and accountability.

Modeling with 200 formal schools and involving three Teacher Training Institutes proved efficient in reaching the eleven counties covered by the Country Office and more out-of-school children. The increased attention and action for at-risk youth and adolescent development supported the Adolescent Programme and 16 new learning centers under Learning Unlimited Liberia to reach out-of-school children. The new Education Sector Plan and strategy is an opportunity encompassing all initiatives that will ensure sustainability and supplementary resources.

UNICEF initiated and ensured multisector collaborations with ministries outside Education whose mandates align with that of the Ministry of Education. These include the Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and Legislators' Joint Education Sector Committee.

Community-Led Total Sanitation is a proven tool to create demand to accelerate sanitation improvement in rural communities. Training sub-national leadership to enhance their monitoring skills and follow up on post-Open Defecation Free activities is crucial for the sustainability of Open Defecation Free and other Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene programs through the Community Health and Total Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene approach.

## **Way Forward**

Drawing upon the lessons of 2023 and preceding years, UNICEF Liberia is steadfast in its commitment to optimize resource utilization, thereby ensuring maximum value for money. This commitment is a testament to our accountability towards the children of Liberia.

In light of the formation of the new government, UNICEF is poised to strategically craft a new Country Programme Document (CPD). This document will be intricately woven into the government's new development agenda, while simultaneously ensuring that children's rights remain at the forefront of all initiatives.

Technical support will continue to be a pivotal strategy, as it has been proven that impactful results can be achieved not only through financial aid but also through technical assistance. Initiatives that have demonstrated desired outcomes and have potential for scalability will be prioritized for advocacy.

In alignment with the Public Spending on Needs for Public Finance for Children (PSN for PF4C), improving public finance for children in Liberia will also be a key focus area. Climate change considerations will significantly influence the selection of services and goods procured.

The JMP Progress report on household drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (2000–2022) reveals that over two-thirds (73%) of the Liberian population lacked handwashing facilities. This underscores

the urgent need for intensified social behavior change initiatives.

As we look forward to 2024, UNICEF Liberia is committed to leveraging innovative communication channels, strengthening partnerships, and adhering to international best practices. Through our unwavering commitment to excellence and adaptability, we aim to amplify our impact, making a significant contribution to the well-being and development of children in Liberia and beyond.