

2023 Annual Report

UNICEF
Information and
Communication
Technology
Division

Cover photo: On 25 May 2023, Ayesha, 13, and her classmates attended a computer class at Ramsundar Agragami Government Model High School in Bishwanath, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Engaged in discussion, they explored various computer tools, symbolizing a shared interest for learning and embracing technology.

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Part 1
Executive summary

In 2023, UNICEF's Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) continued to play a pivotal role in advancing the organization's mission to protect, support and secure a better future for children around the world. Against a complex global landscape increasingly impacted by armed conflicts, climate change, economic shocks and other challenges, ICTD reinforced its commitment to bridging the digital divide, fostering digital innovation and enhancing learning opportunities for children and young people.

The work of UNICEF, including ICTD, proved crucial in regions beset by humanitarian crises. In the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, and West and Central Africa, conflicts and natural disasters disproportionately affected children, necessitating urgent and sustained interventions. In just two such examples, a devastating earthquake in Morocco in September 2023 and severe flooding in Libya highlighted the need for resilient digital infrastructure to support emergency response and ongoing programmes.

Recognizing the growing impact of climate change, ICTD increased its focus on digital solutions to mitigate risks and enhance resilience. Nearly half of all children live in countries highly vulnerable to climate change, underscoring the urgency of developing robust digital infrastructures. In regions such as West and Central Africa, unreliable electricity and inadequate ICT infrastructure exacerbated the digital divide, further isolating vulnerable communities. At the same time, advances in digital technology and innovative approaches in areas like digital payments and mobile money showed promise in addressing these challenges.

ICTD continued to work to bridge the digital divide in multiple regions. In South Asia, the high cost of broadband internet and smartphones limited access for many children, with only 12 per cent of school-aged children having internet access at home. In response, UNICEF prioritized digital inclusion, ensuring every child could benefit from digital tools. Elsewhere, initiatives like the partnership with Airtel Africa, which connected over 1,066 schools and

1.7 million children in Eastern and Southern Africa to digital learning platforms, exemplified this commitment.

Artificial intelligence (AI) emerged as a significant focus in 2023. UNICEF recognized AI as a potentially powerful tool to advance child rights globally and worked to align its efforts with the United Nations' Global Digital Compact to harness the potential and mitigate the risks of AI. This also highlighted the need to equip all UNICEF stakeholders with the skills necessary to navigate and leverage digital tools effectively and safely, while ICTD's ongoing push for digital transformation underscored the need for a comprehensive, ecosystem-wide approach to enhance digital dexterity among UNICEF staff, partners and beneficiaries.

The year 2023 marked the midpoint of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025, with ICTD contributing significantly to progress in data analytics, digital education, e-health platforms and remote collaboration. The integration of digital technologies into operations and programming was critical in fulfilling UNICEF's mandate for children, evidenced by the growing number of requests incorporating digital components.

Looking ahead, UNICEF ICTD is poised to continue its work in supporting vulnerable children through innovative digital solutions. Bridging the digital divide will remain a priority to ensure equitable access to the benefits of digital technology. Collaboration and co-creation will be essential, and ICTD will work with governments, donors, private sector partners and local actors to drive cross-sectoral initiatives. Embracing evidence-based decision-making and advancing ethical AI applications will be key to delivering more effective programmes and improving outcomes for children.

UNICEF ICTD's commitment to digital innovation has already supported numerous successful projects. The focus for 2024 and beyond will be on scaling and sustaining these initiatives while exploring new digital frontiers. By addressing digital disparities and leveraging the potential of digital innovations and technologies, UNICEF ICTD aims to create a more inclusive and resilient future for all children.

Part 2 **Context and trends**



In 2023, UNICEF continued to work to protect children, adolescents and families worldwide, including in some of the most challenging environments. Perhaps more than ever before, technology played a crucial role in this work: helping to bridge the digital divide in some of the world's poorest communities, fostering digital innovation in health care and boosting children's educational opportunities by supporting the development of new e-learning platforms.

Around the world, child rights are at risk from the impacts of climate change, economic shocks, armed conflicts and regional instability, and the lingering after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This combination of threats, known as the polycrisis, jeopardizes children's future health and well-being and risks reversing some of the significant progress made in recent years.

Humanitarian crises are becoming increasingly more complex, protracted and unpredictable. The number of people in need has more than doubled in just the last five years. In 2023, crises in the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Republic, Yemen and elsewhere demanded urgent attention from UNICEF. In the State of Palestine, most of those affected by the conflict were women and children. West and Central Africa also faced serious challenges, including armed conflict in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin and high levels of poverty. The region's children face a disproportionate share of child rights deprivations related to education, health, nutrition and child protection.

The Middle East and North Africa region also experienced serious natural disasters. A magnitude 6.8 earthquake in Morocco in September 2023 led to the deaths of more than 2,600 people, with at least 100,000 children affected and numerous homes, schools and health centres destroyed. In the same month, severe flooding in Libya killed more than 4,300 people and displaced many more, including 16,000 children. While UNICEF's focus during conflict and after natural disasters was initially on emergency response – including protecting both beneficiaries and UNICEF staff – it was also able to support ongoing programmes through its digital transformation change strategy.

Nearly half of all children live in countries that are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The health and well-being of many of today's children, but particularly those who are already vulnerable to other risks, are threatened by the impacts of climate change. In 2023, several regions, including parts of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, experienced the devastating consequences of natural disasters and severe weather events linked to climate change. These crises highlight the urgent need for resilient digital infrastructures.

Unreliable electricity and inadequate ICT infrastructure in parts of West and Central Africa starkly illustrate the digital divide: the gap between communities with access to modern ICT services and those without. The digital divide can be compounded by the impacts of climate change and geographical constraints – as in the Pacific Islands, for example – heightening the risk that children and their families will be excluded from the benefits of the digital age. This is also an issue in Eastern and Southern Africa, which is home to some of the least connected communities in the world. However, adoption of modern technology in the region is growing at an unprecedented pace, with some areas experiencing a proliferation of innovation hubs, telecommunications companies and innovations in areas such as digital payments and mobile money.

The digital divide is a worldwide issue that is not restricted to any particular country or region. In South Asia, broadband internet and smartphones remain unaffordable for many of the region's poorest people; just 12 per cent of school-aged children in South Asia have access to the internet at home, declining to just 2 per cent for the poorest households. Lack of internet access is one reason for the low levels of digital literacy in the region, particularly among women. East Asia and the Pacific has experienced a surge in technological advancements, yet the digital divide appears to be expanding, exacerbated by challenges including economic inequalities and educational disparities.

Bridging the digital divide is crucial to ensuring that no child is left behind. In 2023, UNICEF continued to prioritize the different dimensions of digital inclusion from a child rights perspective in response to this challenge. There is also a growing demand for a child rights perspective in emerging areas of digital programming, such as climate.

ICTD worked to strengthen UNICEF's data analysis and visualization capacity, recognizing that this is crucial to leveraging the advantages that technologies offer for more effective programme delivery in new areas.

In 2023, UNICEF recognized the expanding role of artificial intelligence (AI) as a potentially powerful tool to advance child rights globally. This commitment aligns with the United Nations' Global Digital Compact, which aims to establish shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for everyone. At UNICEF, ICTD is already taking these principles into account in preparing for the inclusion of AI in emerging technologies to benefit child rights and well-being worldwide. At the same time, UNICEF is aware of the challenges and risks presented by emerging technologies – including, notably, risks to child rights and representation – and the possibility that advancements in digital technologies could actually contribute to widening the digital divide.

The push for digital transformation has shown that such a change strategy calls for a whole-of-operational-ecosystem approach, and has highlighted the need to enhance digital dexterity among UNICEF staff, partners and beneficiaries, and to equip them with the skills to navigate and leverage digital tools more effectively.

Digital technologies, in both operations and programming, play a pivotal and increasing role in allowing UNICEF to fulfil its mandate for children. A significant proportion of requests UNICEF receives from governments now incorporate a digital technology component, underscoring the growing importance of digital solutions in delivering for children. As this 2023 Annual Report marks the mid-point of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025, ICTD continues to demonstrate its strong commitment to digitally-enabled innovation and continuous improvement by contributing to significant progress in key areas such as data analytics, digital education, e-health platforms and remote collaboration.



Part 3 **Major results**

Bridging the digital divide

The 'digital divide' refers to the inequalities in access to the internet, to modern digital technologies and to the opportunities to acquire digital literacy and skills. The digital divide can significantly affect children's and families' abilities to benefit from online resources and opportunities and also carries implications that go beyond technology and access. Factors including poverty, gender, marginalization, location, disability and literacy can all impact a child's ability to benefit from technology. Bridging the digital divide requires a focus on digital inclusion. For UNICEF, this means ensuring that every child has the opportunity and ability to use digital tools beneficially in all aspects of life, while avoiding potential negative consequences, now and in the future.

In 2023, bridging the digital divide continued to be a priority for UNICEF in South Asia. The UNICEF ICT team in the region lead collaborative initiatives, such as creating visibility for the digital divide within the various UNICEF National Committees and developing digital community health interventions as one of the entry points to bridge the divide. The team successfully leveraged private sector partnerships to further digital transformation in the region, particularly in education. Education was also a focus in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, where UNICEF's participation in the seven-country (Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia) partnership with Airtel Africa helped to increase the number of schools with internet connectivity to use in their everyday classes. By the end of 2023, some 1,066 schools were connected, with over 1.7 million children able to access digital learning platforms.

Also in 2023, the UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific ICT and Digital Innovations team designed a framework for digital inclusion in the region, based on the UNICEF Child Centred Digital Equality Framework. In West and Central Africa, a recent survey indicated that ICT connectivity in the region has improved.

Technology for better health

In 2023, UNICEF ICTD collaborated with internal UNICEF partners to continue to build on the strong foundations of its work in digitally transforming health systems and introducing innovative technologies to support the health of children and young people worldwide.

In the Middle East and North Africa, governments are prioritizing advancing digital health in various ways. UNICEF offered technical support to projects including, in Egypt, the implementation of a system based on open-source software for the collection, reporting and analysis of health data; and a digital health planning course for government officials and academics in Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon.

Digitalizing health systems can directly enhance the accessibility, accuracy and efficiency of health services, while also facilitating better communication and coordination among health-care professionals. In Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF supported work to develop digital systems for immunization programmes and supply chain management in various countries.

In the East Asia and the Pacific region, UNICEF worked with key partners for digital health initiatives, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Government of Japan, to support governments to strengthen the capacity of their health workforce, develop standards-based technologies and encourage data-driven decision-making processes. For example, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Cold-Chain Equipment Optimization Platform project, supported by Gavi, helped to strengthen the country's immunization supply chain. UNICEF supported the project by recruiting national consultants to address human resource gaps in areas including cold chain logistics management, data management, and social and behavioural communication. UNICEF also developed and scaled up training on e-learning tools for vaccination staff.

In China, UNICEF produced self-paced online courses for health workers, community volunteers, teachers and rural social workers, on topics including early nutrition, early childhood development, responsive caregiving, and social and emotional learning. UNICEF also strengthened its signature Health Family App with more supported services on maternal, infant and young child nutrition. The app currently covers 2,941 health facilities and has over 960,000 registered users.



A digital lifeline

Using technology to close the immunization gap

Jonaila, a two-year-old from Bangsamoro region of the Philippines, and Manuel, a six-month-old from Papua New Guinea, symbolize the millions in East Asia and the Pacific who face daunting barriers to receiving routine vaccinations. Jonaila's mother, Jamila, battles long distances and societal stigma to access health care. In Papua New Guinea, Manuel's mother, Francisca, navigated the challenges of clinic closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF is tackling these obstacles with innovative digital health solutions like the Real-time Vaccination Monitoring and Analysis (RT-VaMA) system. In the Philippines, RT-VaMA played a crucial role in helping immunize 9 million children against measles, polio and rubella. In Papua New Guinea, the programme targeted 1.3 million children for measles and rubella vaccinations. By introducing RT-VaMA, UNICEF is equipping countries with the tools needed to implement and sustain such vital health initiatives. The valuable lessons learned from Jonaila and Manuel's communities offer insights to refine RT-VaMA further and tailor it to meet the unique challenges of different regions.

These efforts highlight UNICEF's commitment to using technology to close the immunization gap and safeguard the health of vulnerable children, to ultimately ensure that every child, no matter where they are, has equitable access to life-saving vaccines. This is in line with the United Nations promise to 'leave no one behind', as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.



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Innovative learning platforms

Alongside health, improving learning outcomes continues to be a fundamental part of UNICEF ICTD's work to support children worldwide. In 2023, key projects focused on the development and expansion of innovative learning platforms.

In Nigeria, flagship digital education innovations made significant progress in 2023. Nigeria's population is growing by 2.5 per cent every year and the child population is projected to reach 126 million by 2030. This rapid growth places the delivery of social services under significant pressure and the country's overall quality of education is low. However, if Nigeria can successfully invest in children's education, there is also potential to reap dividends from the impending youth bulge. The Nigeria Learning Passport (NLP), a collaboration between UNICEF Education, as well as Microsoft (via PG Education), Cambridge University Press and the Boston Consulting Group, aims to close the digital learning gap and provide continuous, high-quality education for students and teachers. The platform supports

learning in low-connectivity areas and offers technical and vocational education, equipping children with the skills needed for the twenty-first century. The NLP is an online e-learning platform with mobile and offline capabilities that provides free, continuous access to education from basic to tertiary levels. To date, the NLP has 740,351 registered users and 15,000 teaching materials aligned with the national curriculum and available in English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

For digital learning platforms to be effective, children, families and teachers must be able to access them. In Eastern and Southern Africa, UNICEF participated in a seven-country partnership (Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia) with Airtel Africa to connect schools and students to the internet. The second year of this five-year partnership enabled additional digital learning platforms to be made freely available to students and teachers and increased the number of schools with internet connectivity so that these platforms could be used in everyday classes. As of end 2023, thanks to 1,066 schools being connected, over 1.7 million children accessed digital learning platforms.



Nigeria Learning Passport

The digital tool boosting grades and bank accounts



Bolade Ayomide, a 14-year-old student at Government Senior College Agege in Lagos, is passionate about the arts and dreams of becoming a lawyer. However, her transition to senior secondary required mastering subjects like biology, which she initially found daunting. "I found biology tough and overwhelming and struggled to get average marks despite my best efforts," said Bolade.

When the Nigeria Learning Passport (NLP) was deployed at Bolade's school, Bolade quickly came to realize the platform's engaging, interactive and personalized approach to learning, through tools such as quizzes, videos and animations, made the future seem more hopeful. "I was impressed at the selection of courses available on the platform – everything from biology to mathematics to entrepreneurial and secretarial studies," said Bolade.

The interactive lessons made complex concepts easier to grasp, leading to a remarkable improvement in her grades: Bolade's biology score soared from below 50 per cent to above 70 per cent in one academic year, boosting her confidence and enthusiasm. Bolade also explored design using the Microsoft app on the NLP, earning extra income by creating posters. "I got paid four thousand naira the other day for designing a birthday poster for a friend," she said.



**Listen here to
Jutaro Sakamoto**

*Education Manager, UNICEF Nigeria
describing the critical role of the Nigeria Learning Passport
in children's education.*

**"I decided to dedicate my life to helping
children with the power of education."**

Supporting disaster preparedness and emergency response

Primero, an open-source web app primarily used by child protection and social services workers to deliver services, has tools to facilitate case management, incident monitoring, and family tracing and reunification. Primero has also proven to be a valuable tool in the aftermath of natural-hazard-related disasters and conflict, as it allows multiple partners to work on a common and secure platform. Through the app, users can refer cases confidentially to other partners and deliver integrated services to vulnerable populations. In 2022, for example, social workers in Romania used Primero to help children and families fleeing the war in Ukraine to access services including health care and education. In 2023, Primero proved to be an important component of UNICEF's emergency response to the severe earthquakes that hit Syria in February, affecting 8.8 million people, including 3.7 million children. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic agreed to adopt Primero, which helped it to reach a total of 28,934 children and women who experienced or were at a higher risk of abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect with individual case management and referral to support including health and education services, legal assistance and social protection schemes.

East Asia and the Pacific is one of the world's most exposed and vulnerable regions to natural disasters. The frequency and severity of extreme weather events in the region have been increasing as a result of climate change, exacerbating the disaster risks. To improve the availability, quality and use of data in emergency response actions, UNICEF developed the Automated Situation Reporting Tool, which uses data resources from UNICEF partners and machine learning to provide real-time information for

decision-making. The Tool can provide this information within the first 72 hours after a disaster – a huge improvement from the average 14-day lag for implementing traditional data solutions. The Tool has already proven successful in supporting the response to natural disasters in 2023, including in the Philippines (Mayon volcano eruption) and Vanuatu (Cyclone Lola).

In the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF responded to the emergencies in the Sudan and the State of Palestine, by installing ICT capabilities in a new office in Port Sudan and in several other satellite offices across the Sudan to allow UNICEF to reach those in need. In the State of Palestine, UNICEF relocated and partially restored its operations, including ICT functions, near the border with Egypt. Despite extremely challenging conditions, some UNICEF activities were able to continue thanks to strong support from across the organization.

ICT in disaster recovery and emergency preparedness was also a focus in other regions. For example, UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia team provided support in Ukraine and to those affected by the earthquake in Türkiye, and worked to strengthen emergency telecoms capabilities across the region.

In 2023, UNICEF's ICTD Humanitarian Business Relationship Management (BRM) team developed and launched the first ICT Emergency Preparedness Package. This comprehensive package includes six components and covers ICT infrastructure, Technology for Development (T4D), cybersecurity and data protection. The package is intended to support ICT staff in country offices in improving their disaster preparedness and ensure an effective and efficient emergency response. The package was developed through close collaboration between UNICEF regional offices, country offices and other departments, as well as within ICTD.



***Listen here to
Elshabi Mahmoud***

*ICT Manager for UNICEF Sudan, talking about the
challenging situations in which children require support.*

**“[T]he work we are doing in UNICEF is likely
helping and saving lives...”**

Technology in child protection, rights and welfare

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in UNICEF's child protection activities – for example, Primero is now used in more than 50 countries worldwide, primarily by child protection and social services workers. In 2023, following the adoption of Primero in 2022, the Government of Guatemala continued to expand the use of the software within the Ministry of Social Welfare to better reach vulnerable children and families with social services.

In an important new development for 2023, the BRM team created the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism (CMMM), a comprehensive website that houses child marriage data and its correlates. The CMMM partnership was formed to call attention to the issue of child marriage and galvanize action at global and national levels. The website will support this goal by making data on child marriage more accessible to researchers and increasing the use of quality data in programming and policy decisions to eliminate the practice.

How the Bebbio app is revolutionizing childcare



In Tajikistan, Daria and Komor, the firstborn twins of the Artykbaev family, arrived prematurely, leaving their parents anxious and lacking reliable information. When Zarnigor, their mother, heard about Bebbio, an interactive mobile app designed and developed for parents of children aged 0–6 years, she decided to give it a try for her youngest son, Doniyor.

After entering Doniyor's data into Bebbio and closely monitoring his development, Zarnigor noticed he was lagging in certain skills for his age. "At some point, I realized that I needed to consult a specialist because there was a significant gap between what he could do at the age of 4 and what he was doing," she said. The app prompted her to seek help from an early child development specialist, who quickly prescribed a stimulation programme.

"If the Bebbio mobile app had existed during my first pregnancy, it would have been much easier for me to navigate the health and condition of my children," said Zarnigor. The app also helped her keep track of her children's vaccinations. "Considering that my children were born prematurely, the Bebbio app helped us improve their developmental level, and we caught up with their peers quite well."

In Tajikistan, Bebbio also supports the National Communication Program, "1,000 Golden Days of a Child," enhancing awareness among parents and caregivers about the importance of the early years in a child's life. Through Bebbio, Zarnigor and many other parents in Tajikistan are finding the guidance they need to give their children the best possible start.



**Listen here to
Kouysinoy Maksoudova**

*Early Childhood Development Officer for UNICEF Tajikistan,
highlighting the usefulness of the Bebbio app.*

"[I]t is so rewarding ... your work brings changes into the lives of families and children..."

Promoting digital public goods, infrastructure and safety

In West and Central Africa, UNICEF worked to increase its engagement in digital innovation, recording 245 initiatives. The region's flagship projects include school connectivity in partnership with Airtel; YoMA (Youth Marketplace), a UNICEF-led, blockchain-based marketplace for youth to build and transform their futures by engaging in opportunities for earning, learning, and social and

environmental volunteering; Reach the Unreached (Zero-dose vaccine detection); and digital birth registration integration.

In Eastern and Central Africa, UNICEF improved cybersecurity awareness in the region by accelerating cybersecurity awareness training, increasing compliance from 30 per cent to 93 per cent. A cybersecurity assessment was conducted in 10 country offices and end-point vulnerability management tools were deployed.

Championing youth with Meri LiFE



Afsal Mohammed B, a social volunteer and entrepreneur from Kerala, India, has spent the past 17 years engaging over 100,000 youth across India and leading numerous initiatives aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Afsal is the founder and CEO of Captains Social Foundation, a youth-led non-profit with a vision for a world where young people are active community participants.

"Volunteering has changed my life," said Afsal. "I believe that volunteering is not just something that benefits the community; it also has benefits for the volunteer. It helps them up-skill and aids in personal development." Afsal emphasizes the importance of investing skills and knowledge into volunteering platforms like Meri LiFE, which he has used to organize and streamline activities. "I believe the Meri LiFE platform has a similar vision to engage people and connect them with opportunities. We can create a network of youth who can be changemakers. This platform allows them to put their ideas into action, providing support through training, mentorship, funding, collaboration, and tools to advance climate volunteering activities in India."

Meri LiFE is very successful, with over 110,000 downloads and 25.2 million participants across India. Afsal hopes to expand these opportunities to more volunteers, enabling them to replicate these initiatives in their own communities.



**Listen here to
Gibson Michael Ryungu**

*Chief of ICT, UNICEF India, as he talks of the
successes of Meri LiFE.*

**"I am always excited at the potential of
technology to drive social impact at scale."**



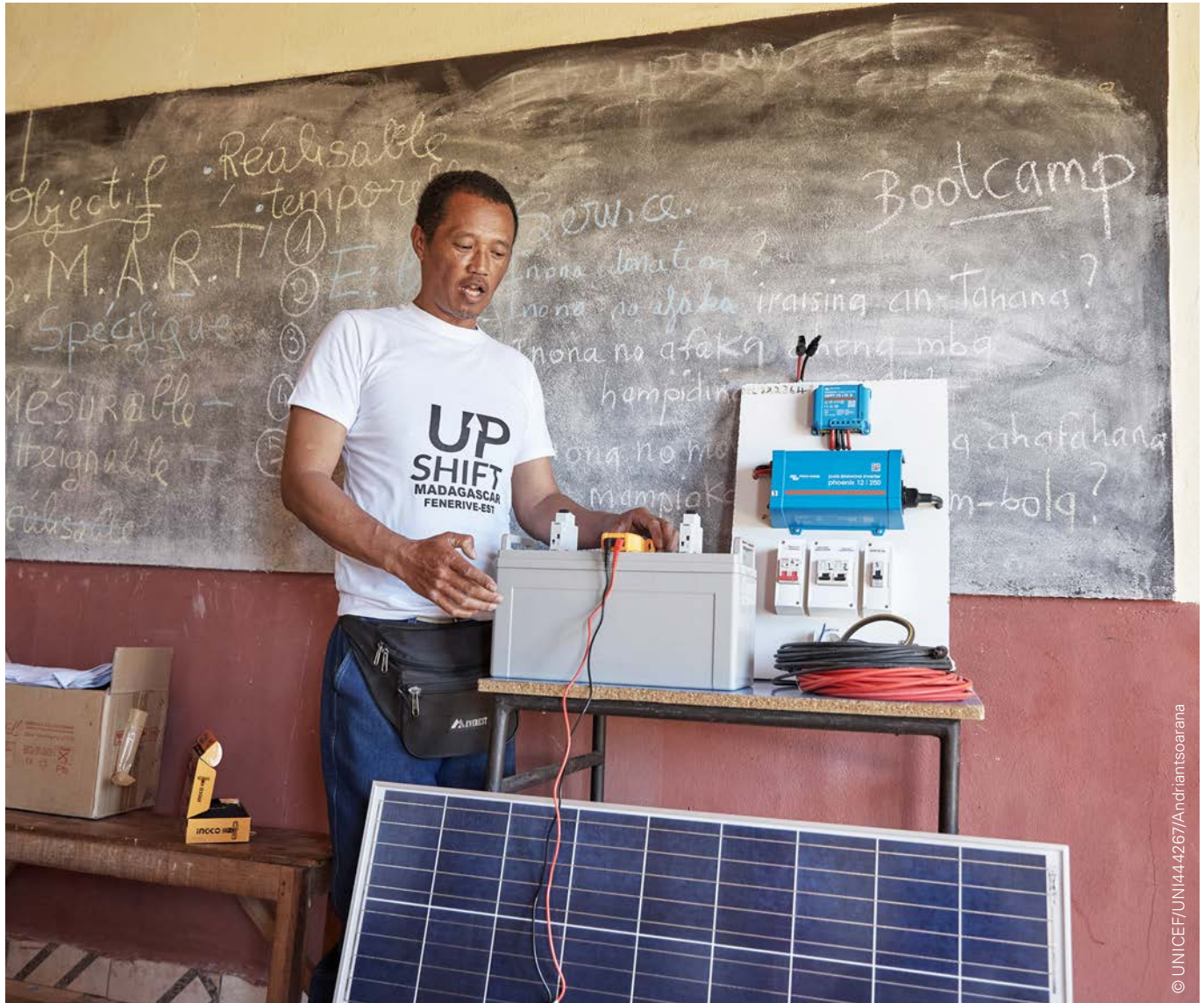
Systems strengthening and partnerships

Under our digital transformation agenda, the division has scaled up efforts to enhance digitally enabled programmes and operations, focusing on systems strengthening and partnerships in child protection, education, social protection and digital infrastructure. This includes bridging the digital divide for adolescent girls through initiatives like youth agency marketplaces. ICTD's involvement in sustainability and climate action has led to operationalizing early warning systems, transitioning to cloud technologies, and advancing health and nutrition outcomes through mobile health solutions and real-time data for emergency response. Strengthening cybersecurity and improving management efficiency through enterprise systems have been integral to enhancing service delivery, donor engagement, staff satisfaction and responsible AI use.

In 2023, ICTD provided user-centric business solutions to various stakeholders, delivering numerous products and refining governance and procedures for enterprise processes such as integration, data analytics, programme monitoring and systems optimization. Collaborating with internal and external partners, ICTD built impactful

solutions for children, delivering enterprise-level digital tools to internal business units, donors, supporters and programme partners. Investments in cloud technologies enhanced real-time data analysis and visualization capabilities, supporting strategic decision-making through intuitive data analytics solutions. The focus on scalability, innovation and continuous improvement was evident across all streams, including project, resource and vendor management, business processes, solution delivery and quality assurance. These efforts have set a foundation for future innovative solutions and sustainable digital transformations.

A key goal for 2022–2025 is to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness within ICTD, scaling up digital maturity and accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2022, a key step, aligned with UN's efficiency agenda, was the relocation to Valencia (supported by the Government of Spain) and Nairobi, as well as New York. The UNICEF WCA Regional Office in Dakar also improved efficiency through space sharing and the Common Services mechanism. These efforts align with a broader vision to enhance speed, agility and efficiency within UNICEF by streamlining operations and leveraging technology, while the use of Common Services



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ensures uniformity across UN agencies, optimizing resources and avoiding overlaps. With the UNICEF Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring division, ICTD provided UNICEF country offices with digital systems to collect and report on programmatic data more efficiently throughout the year, for field monitoring to measure impact of programmes and a new partnership management module to improve collaboration with civil society organizations. In 2023, regional ICT leadership and capacity were enhanced through technology primers and regional IT network meetings. The Headquarters Efficiencies Initiative in Istanbul expanded network infrastructure and high-availability appliances to support increased workloads.

ICTD made significant contributions to fundraising and partnerships, collaborating with the Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division to implement digital fundraising platforms in new markets. These efforts streamlined the integration of payment gateways, donation portals and reporting platforms, and strengthened technical integrations and core functionality. ICTD also expanded UNICEF's Strategic Engagement Strategy to five country offices, focusing on personalized communication through secure digital channels to ensure supporters feel confident with UNICEF handling their money and personal data.



Part 4 Looking ahead

In 2024 and beyond, UNICEF ICTD will continue its work to support the health, well-being and rights of some of the world's most vulnerable children with innovative digital solutions. It is clear that bridging the different dimensions of the digital divide will be key to achieving this goal. UNICEF strategies must prioritize addressing digital disparities from multiple perspectives to ensure all children have equitable access to the potential benefits of technology, especially in the most deprived or least connected areas. This will be crucial to improving children's digital literacy and supporting their access to the expanding opportunities offered by a digital world. It is important to remember that in those areas where fundamental digital infrastructure is enhanced, ICTD remains committed to advocacy and awareness of child rights in relation to the digital environment.

Multiple governments, donors and implementing partners are enhancing their own digital transformation agendas. ICTD recognises the necessity of aligning our efforts with national digital transformation strategies, ensuring synergy and maximizing impact on a broader scale.

For 2024 and beyond, it is clear that collaboration and co-creation will be key. ICTD will collaborate to drive the shift towards stronger cross-sectoral collaboration, driven by a holistic approach to child development. By integrating various sectors and stakeholders to address the diverse needs of children at different stages of life, UNICEF has been able to deliver more comprehensive and effective solutions. ICTD will seek to enhance its partnerships as part of a broader resource mobilization partnership drive in technology for children, with non-traditional partners, the private and public sectors, local actors and government agencies.

For a successful digital transformation, working with internal and external partners, UNICEF and ICTD senior leadership will have to embrace evidence-based decision-making, meaning that UNICEF will need to implement new data management approaches to pave the way for new analytics-focused data activation reliant on data being available, relevant and reliable.

UNICEF ICTD has consistently sought out digital innovations that can help it to deliver results for children around the world. This pursuit of innovation has contributed

to many successful projects, some of which are described in this report, which have helped to improve the lives of children around the world. Looking ahead to 2024 and beyond, ICTD must ensure that reusing, scaling and sustaining existing digital solutions is considered, where relevant, as a core part of its work, alongside exploring new solutions.

UNICEF offices across the world manage multiple digital projects, but limited resources mean that not all can be brought to scale, maintained and sustained, leading to wasted resources and duplication of effort. This shows that it is important to closely track the progress of UNICEF's global digital portfolio to ensure that established criteria to assess whether they are appropriate for piloting and scaling up are adhered to. This will allow resources to be allocated where they will make the largest impact. Sustainable funding models are also necessary for the long-term success of digital initiatives, to ensure continuity and scalability.

AI and the possibilities it offers are evolving rapidly. Along with other emerging technologies, ethical and responsible AI presents opportunities for improving service delivery and efficiency across UNICEF programmes. AI-powered solutions may help to deliver more effective and evidence-based programming, leading to improved results for children. ICTD is planning to foster innovation by dedicating resources to explore new digital frontiers and applications for emerging technologies. At the same time, ICTD must also work to build awareness of digital security, so that its staff, beneficiaries and partners are aware of the risks that accompany AI and other new technologies.

Climate-related digital programming will be an increasing area of focus for UNICEF in the coming years, as countries step up their efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts. Utilizing the newest technologies will



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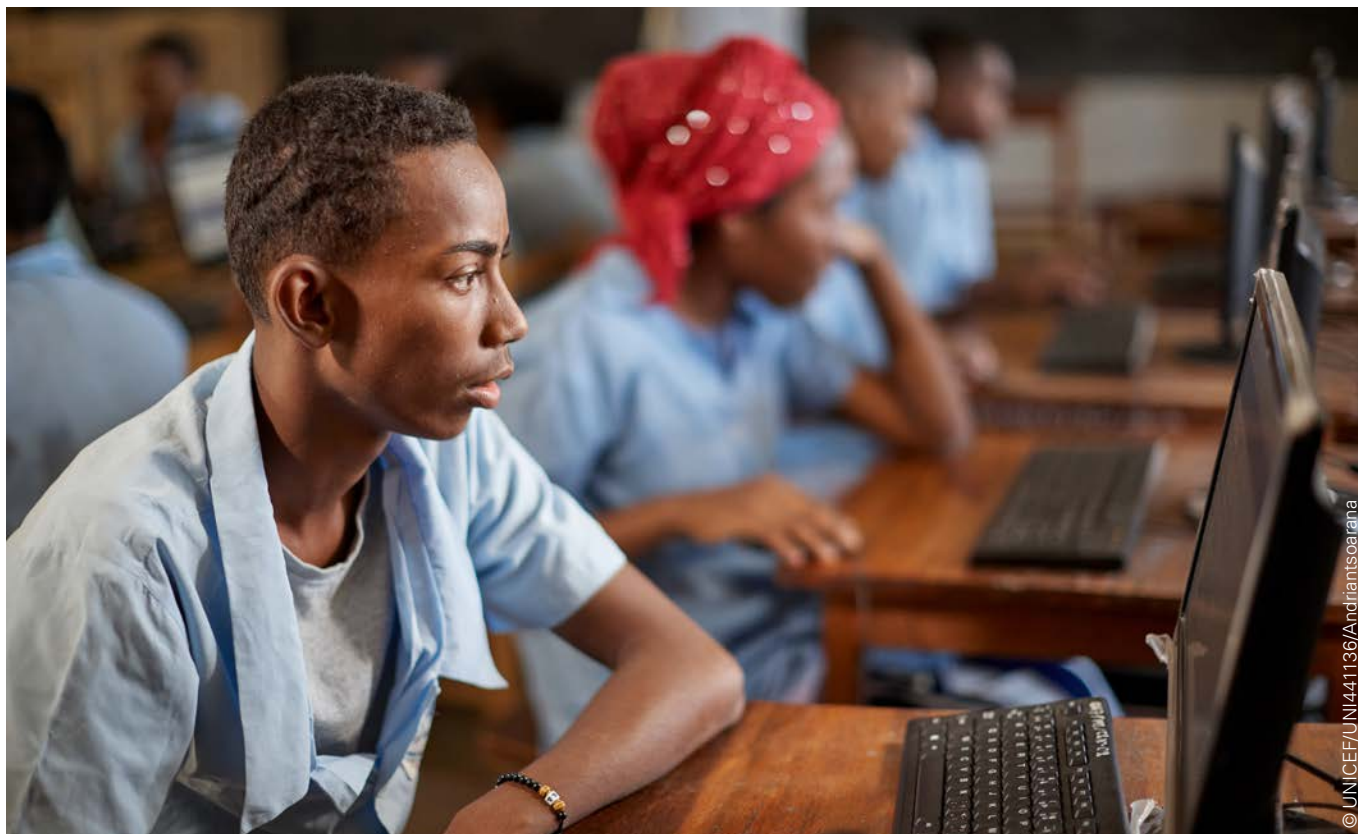
be vital to allow ICTD to take a leading role in this, as will localized approaches to allow UNICEF to meet the needs of different communities and regions.

Tailored approaches will also be crucial across other areas, as different locations face unique challenges and have unique capabilities. For example, the Middle East and North Africa region has a strong ICT infrastructure that can help to address specific regional needs and enhance programme effectiveness, while in West and Central Africa, where ICT infrastructure is often inadequate, supporting school connectivity should be prioritized.

ICTD continues to support digital transformation across UNICEF. Embedding digital transformation in country programme planning and institutional mechanisms will be key to leveraging digital technologies to support all goal areas. This includes, for example, initiatives like Yoma (youth agency marketplace). Collaborating across sectors and stakeholders in digital transformation will enable more comprehensive and effective solutions for children, as will aligning efforts with national digital transformation strategies.

UNICEF will continue to augment and enhance digital capacity and competence, allowing for digital dexterity for staff, beneficiaries and implementing partners. This could include, for instance, the integration of digital learning opportunities into existing workflows, additional investments in accessible technologies and the facilitation of opportunities for co-creation.

ICTD will continue to contribute to normative and policy initiatives including through the identification of emerging trends, risks and challenges. This will enable the department to stay 'ahead of the curve' by investigating and analysing emerging trends that could affect the people UNICEF serves. Working with others across the organization, ICTD will continue to incorporate normative child rights frameworks and policies that address future scenarios and promote positive change. ICTD will also continue to play an active role in advocacy, business engagement and partnerships, including by engaging in discussions and advocacy regarding regulations for new technologies.



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