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A Strategy for UNICEF's Contribution to Africa's Development Agendas

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Cover image: This graphic representation of the map of Africa does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Summary

This strategy on the UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas aims to enhance how UNICEF will support the achievement of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and its Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024–2033; Africa's Agenda for Children 2040; and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The strategy aims to emphasize partnering with continental institutions, Governments, civil society, the private sector, young people and children themselves in driving country-level actions that accelerate scalable and sustainable impact for children across Africa. It was drafted following extensive internal and external consultations, particularly with African stakeholders.

The strategy was adopted during the Second Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board on September 5, 2024.



SECTION 1

Overview

Africa[1] has made notable gains in child survival and development in recent decades, and has created important opportunities for further progress, but the continent also faces key headwinds for the future of its children and young people. The African continent represents 20 per cent of the world's land area, has a population of about 1.5 billion,[2] and has a gross domestic product (GDP) of around $3 trillion.[3] Despite having low levels of average per capita income, Africa's recent economic expansion, significant endowments of natural resources and a sizeable, young and growing population make the continent an important partner in the broader global context. For UNICEF, the presence of 689 million children, a number that is projected to increase to 754 million by 2030 and 930 million by 2050 based on current demographic trends,[4] means that a stronger partnership with Africa is imperative to help to create further opportunities for children and young people even as they confront the challenges of the present and the future.

The high ambitions set by Africa in its development agendas present another opportunity for UNICEF to enter enhanced partnerships that accelerate scalable and sustainable solutions for children.

The continent's Agenda 2063 prioritizes "an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children".[5] The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Africa's Agenda 2063 puts forward catalytic interventions (Moonshots) to be achieved by 2033. Moonshot 6 on making "African citizens more empowered and more productive"', has strong implications for children.[6]

Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 (Agenda 2040), the children's development agenda that has its own goals and targets to be achieved between 2016 and 2040, complements Agenda 2063. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,[7] the continent's child rights treaty (and the only continental treaty for child rights in the world), sets out a rigorous agenda for the development and protection of children. Aligned to and reaffirming adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter also covers a wide range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for children. Africa's ambitious targets for children are clear in these development agendas (see the annex for key targets for children).

1 In this document, "Africa" refers to all of Africa, including Eastern and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa and North Africa.
2 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision*, New York, 2022.
3 International Monetary Fund, IMF DataMapper, 2024, accessed on 8 May 2024.
4 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision*, accessed on 16 February 2024.
5 African Union, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, Addis Ababa, 2013, Aspiration
6 African Union, *Agenda 2063: Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024–2033 – Decade of Accelerated Implementation*, Addis Ababa, 2024, Moonshot 6.
7 African Union, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 29 November 1999.

The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Africa's Agenda 2063 puts forward catalytic interventions (Moonshots) to be achieved by 2033. Moonshot 6 on making "African citizens more empowered and more productive'", has strong implications for children.

Today, Africa stands at a crossroads on how to accelerate progress towards these ambitious yet necessary targets, without which the continent's aspirations for its children, the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's own development agendas will be undermined. Investing in the continent's greatest assets, its children and young people, is vital to overcoming the multiple challenges that the continent faces: slowing social, economic and environmental progress; the vestiges of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; high and persistent debt and debt-servicing burdens; increasing disasters due to climate change; conflicts; and barriers to international finance and technology. It is critical to capitalize on the continent's demographic trajectory by narrowing the gaps in child survival and development.

UNICEF is enhancing its contribution to Africa's development agendas to support the African Union, its member States and African institutions and partners in accelerating progress for children on the continent. This strategy not only focuses on supporting Africa in meeting the child-related targets of its development agendas as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, but it also re-examines the next generation of partnerships needed and the way in which UNICEF will programme, operate, advocate and leverage in, with and for Africa in the coming decade and beyond.

SECTION 2

Introduction

This strategy on the UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas highlights areas of child survival and development where progress is being made, as well as those where progress has stalled or is being reversed. It further highlights the areas where the African Union and its member States have requested greater support to accelerate progress – in education; employable skills for young people; community health and nutrition; access to safely managed water and sanitation; and protection against violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect, among other issues. The strategy is timely, in part due to the demographic transition that Africa is undergoing, with its child population (aged 0–17 years) set to rise by 10 per cent from 689 million in 2024 to 755 million by 2033, and further to 850 million by 2040 and 930 million by mid-century, while child populations are projected to diminish on every other continent apart from Oceania for the remainder of the century.[8]

8 UNICEF estimations based on the latest available data from UNICEF global databases.

The strategy is timely due to Africa's ongoing demographic transition, with the child population projected to increase from 689 million in 2024 to 930 million children by 2050.

UNICEF is seeking to fully utilize the resources allocated to Africa, including country and regional offices and headquarters divisions and offices, National Committees for UNICEF, and partnerships to support countries in accelerating progress for children on the continent. This strategy on the UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas will influence the organization's strategic plans and will be important component of the organization's work with its partners, particularly those on the continent, and in its analysis of data and policies. The strategy builds on the invaluable work of UNICEF through its country programmes of cooperation and humanitarian response in Africa. It recognizes that any changes agreed on at the African Union level are enacted at the regional and national levels and will seek to reinforce continent-wide strategies with support for national and local implementation.

SECTION 3

Development context

The current strategy is situated in the development context of an Africa facing dynamic opportunities, challenges, shocks and stressors. This section briefly summarizes several key trends that form the backdrop of this strategy.

The analysis paints a picture of gains as well as persistent deprivations. Together with the African Union and its member States, UNICEF has seen important advances in child survival and development in Africa over the past 25 years. Since 2000, child mortality has fallen by 53 per cent; access to safely managed water services has doubled from 226 million to 575 million people; annual new vertical HIV infections among children under age 15 years have dropped by more than 70 per cent; and birth registration has risen from 47 per cent to 59 per cent.[9]

Children (aged 0–17 years) currently represent around 46 per cent of Africa's population, although they account for more than half (52 per cent) of the population in Central Africa.[10] However, with the child population predicted to decline sharply on almost every other continent, including Asia, the Africa share of the global population will increasingly rise, reaching almost one third by 2030, two fifths by mid-century, and almost half by the end of the century, based on current trends.[11]

While several indicators demonstrate significant progress on child survival and development on the continent during this century, other numbers show the depth and breadth of the remaining challenges for children. Although net primary and secondary school enrolment and attendance have both increased, tens of millions of primary and secondary school-aged children in Africa remain out of school. Among those who are in school, learning poverty (which combines measures of school attendance with learning outcomes) was 86 per cent among 10-year-olds in sub-Saharan Africa.[12] The prevalence of child marriage has failed to improve over the past decade across the continent, and over the past 25 years in West Africa, despite determined efforts. Ninety-one million children under 5 years of age were not registered at birth and more than 30 million young people are not in education, training or employment.[13] And even though most countries in Africa have laws to prevent harmful practices against children and young people, over the last decade progress on several of these areas has stalled, and in some countries even reversed.

Part of the reason for these deprivations is that progress simply has been unable to keep up with population growth. In addition, advances have failed to keep pace with demographic changes. This explains why millions of children remain out of school or are not learning even when in education; more children are stunted than a decade ago even though stunting prevalence has fallen; and more people lack access to basic hygiene facilities than 10 years ago.

9 UNICEF estimations based on the latest available data from UNICEF global databases.

10 UNICEF calculations based on data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision*, accessed on 16 February 2024.

11 Ibid.

12 UNICEF, *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 update*, New York, June 2022.

13 UNICEF estimations based on the latest available data from UNICEF global databases.



The growth of wealth among Africa's private sector has been strong in recent years; a stronger focus is now needed on how private sector stakeholders can play greater roles in enhancing the well-being of the continent's children.

These factors are important drivers behind the UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas. It is perhaps more true than ever before that "business as usual" will not suffice. UNICEF and its partners in Africa are challenged to do things differently to accelerate progress, narrow the gaps, overcome humanitarian, peace and security challenges on the continent, and move towards a demographic dividend for Africa.

A. Opportunities

Despite these challenges, exciting opportunities are emerging for Africa's children and young people. New possibilities are being brought by integration, population dynamics, resource wealth, the promise of digitalization and the continued maturation of African institutions. With the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, Africa will have the world's largest free trade area that can increase trade by 50 per cent and intra-African trade by more than 80 per cent, and generate revenues of $450 billion, helping to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.[14] Africa's population dynamics, combined with adequate investment in human capital development, empowerment of girls and women and fostering entrepreneurship, could lead to a massive boost in GDP per capita in this century.[15] Africa has 60 per cent of the globe's unutilized arable land,[16] and the most sun hours in the world,[17] but it has yet to exploit their full potential. With a burgeoning population of dynamic and entrepreneurial youth but with only 37 per cent of the continent using the Internet in 2023,[18] there is considerable potential for financial intermediation, business and job creation and economic growth, as well as accelerating the provision of social and economic services.

In recent years, Africa's institutions have performed an enhanced global role. The African Union has been a member of the Group of 20 since September 2023 and holds regular summits with the European Union, China, Japan, the United States of America and other countries. The emergence of African Union specialized agencies such as Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the African Medicines Agency, the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Development and the forthcoming African Humanitarian Agency, together with the African Development Bank and planned pan-African financial institutions, represents a major step towards the development of infrastructure that can pool technical and strategic resources at the continental level to accelerate country action. The growth of wealth among Africa's private sector has been strong in recent years; a stronger focus is now needed on how private sector stakeholders can play greater roles in enhancing the well-being of the continent's children.

14 Echandi, Roberto, Maryla Maliszewska and Victor Steenbergen, *Making the most of the African Continental Free Trade Area: Leveraging Trade and Foreign Direct Investment to Boost Growth and Reduce Poverty*, World Bank and AfCTFA Secretariat, Washington, D.C., 2022.

15 UNICEF, Generation 2030 Africa 2.0: *Prioritizing investments in children to reap the demographic dividend*, New York, October 2017, p. 40.

16 Ayodimeji, Zainab, 'What are the most-produced cash crops in Africa, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Family Farming Knowledge Platform, 2022, accessed on 12 April 2024.

17 World Bank, Global Solar Atlas, accessed on 12 April 2024.

18 International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2023*, Geneva, 2023, p. 2.



Expanding investments in children and young people will need to consider ways of releasing these fiscal constraints and overcoming Africa's human capital constraints and skills deficit, which contributes to the huge challenge of the lack of jobs for young people.

B. Challenges

Africa is facing challenging trends and constraints. Climate change is already taxing food and water security, heightening vector-borne diseases and leading to health stress, aridity, floods and droughts.[19] Instability and conflicts in some countries are undermining their efforts to move towards the fulfilment of Africa's development agendas and the Sustainable Development Goals. Programming needs to take greater account of the impact of climate change and foster climate action to increase the resilience of social services for children and young people. Financing for children remains a major constraint, even with improving fiscal management, as the combined debt of the African Union tops $1 trillion[20] and the continent is set to pay more than $70 billion in debt service in 2024 alone.[21] Debt servicing is contributing to the crowding out of social spending, including the expansion of vital social protection programmes to support development and ward against shocks and stressors.

Expanding investments in children and young people will need to consider ways of releasing these fiscal constraints and overcoming Africa's human capital constraints and skills deficit, which contributes to the huge challenge of the lack of jobs for young people.

UNICEF contributions to Africa are delivered through its country offices and country programmes, supported by its regional offices. Over several decades, this has allowed the organization to adapt its programming to specific contexts, develop bespoke solutions with Governments and other stakeholders and rely upon a strong body of regional and international support.

19 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability - Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Pörtner, H-O et al. (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, 2022, chapter 9, pp. 1285–1456.

20 African Development Bank, 'Keynote speech by Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina President, African Development Bank Group, delivered at the Paris Club, Paris, 20 June 2023.

21 Morsy, Hanan, 'Reforming the Global Debt Architecture,' United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 4 July 2023, available at: www.uneca.org/stories/reforming-the-global-debt-architecture.

SECTION 4

UNICEF contributions

UNICEF will enhance the current model of engagement by sharpening the focus of its country programmes, doubling down on strengthening systems and institutions, and promoting approaches to building climate-resilience. The organization will support existing and emerging child-focused initiatives of the African Union institutions.

The UNICEF contribution focuses on three key areas for action: accelerating human capital development for children and young people; enhancing resilience, humanitarian action and climate action for children; and renewing commitments to child rights, as enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These key areas for action form the basis for strategic impact areas. UNICEF will pay special attention to the most vulnerable children, including more than 70 million children with disabilities living in Africa who continue to face significantly worse outcomes across all facets of child rights.

The contribution also emphasizes the key strategies that can enable empowered youth engagement and community mobilization; continent-wide support for supply chain management and local manufacturing, procurement, warehousing and distribution of essential commodities for children and women; data and analytical support and partnerships; support for African partners to leverage domestic and international financing for child survival and development, including from the private sector; digital access and connectivity, literacy, online safety and protection, and digital public services for children and young people; and public-private partnerships for child-related social services.

FIGURE 1 **Overview of UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas**

Africa's development agendas



Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want • Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 • African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child • Sustainable Development Goals • Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF goals and mission in Africa



Convention on the Rights of the Child • Sustainable Development Goals • Africa's development agendas • UNICEF Strategic Plans • Regional priorities

Opportunities

Historic gains for child survival and development; economic growth; African Continental Free Trade Area; population dynamics; dynamic youth; digitalization; African institutions; private sector involvement and financing.

Challenges

Slower progress in some areas of child development; coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic impact; child protection issues, including harmful practices; discrimination against girls and young women; poor learning outcomes; social safety nets and financing; debt burden; instability, fragility and conflict; challenging megatrends; shocks and stressors.

Three impact areas



Human capital development: community-based health systems; learning to jobs; nutritious first foods; targeted support to adolescent girls.



Resilience, humanitarian action and climate action: water, sanitation and hygiene; adaptive social protection; renewable energy; early warning and preparedness; humanitarian response and sustaining systems.



Intensify implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Strategies

- **Youth engagement** and community mobilization for children;
- **Continent-wide support** for supply chain management and local manufacturing;
- **Partner with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**, the African Union and statistical institutions on data, analytical support and capacity development;
- **Leverage domestic and international financing for children**, including from the private sector;
- **Digital access and literacy**, digital safety and protection and digital public services for children
- **Private sector involvement** for social services.

Ways of working

- Strengthen the UNICEF Office to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa for greater Africa-wide thought **leadership and strategic influence**;
- **Realign the next generation** of country programme documents with the priorities of this strategy;
- **Strengthen coordination** between UNICEF regional offices in Africa, the UNICEF Office to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and UNICEF headquarters divisions.

SECTION 5

Impact areas

IMPACT AREA 1

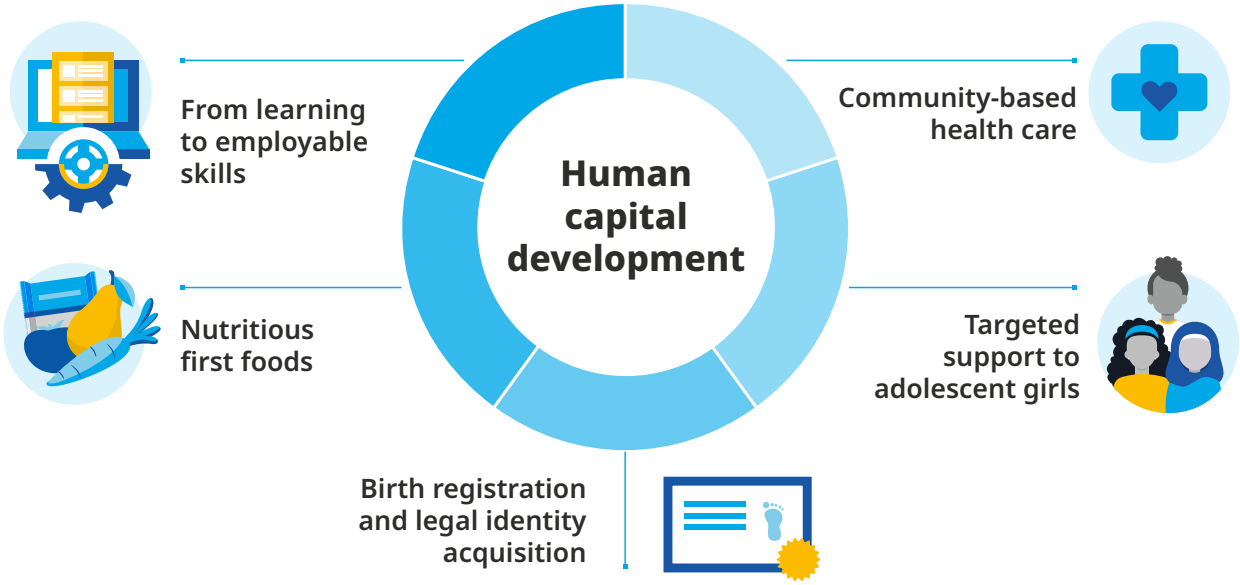
Intensifying the development of human capital in Africa

In accordance with the African Union strategic priorities for children, UNICEF is committed to supporting the African Union and its member States in the urgent pursuit of a robust human capital agenda that is ambitious in scope and impact. The UNICEF offer will focus on five interconnected areas of human capital development: from learning to employable skills; community-based health systems; nutritious first foods; birth registration and legal identity; and targeted support to adolescent girls (see figure 2 below).

A. Learning to employable skills

The African Union has agreed on key targets for education, science, technology and innovation for the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024– 2033 in Strategic Objectives 6.1 and 6.2. Achieving these goals will require a new effort, building on – but going beyond far beyond – the current path, to first tackle the learning crisis, starting from the foundational stages of the early years through to primary and secondary education. This is one of the organization's foremost commitments to Africa and UNICEF will work with the African Union, Governments and regional and international organizations towards this endeavour.

FIGURE 2 **Key elements of human capital development**





Specific actions will include to tackle the learning crisis starting from the foundational stages of the early years through to primary and secondary education.

Specific actions will include working with Governments to enrol every child in primary school and retain them in school until completion of at least a secondary education; make foundational learning, second-chance education and employable and transferrable skills pre-eminent priorities in programming and advocacy; establish a continent-wide learning assessment initiative; and expand gender-responsive education approaches – from an early age and through the learning journey – to tackle the root causes of inequality and uneven economic prosperity. Furthermore, UNICEF will partner with the African Union to launch Giga Africa, an initiative that will digitize education systems, connecting schools to the Internet and harnessing solar power to bridge the digital divide, as well as to scale up Generation Unlimited Africa, another initiative to nurture Africa's youthful human capital to build and sustain a prosperous and green continent.

UNICEF will support the development of multiple pathways for employable skills acquisition for adolescents and young people; enhance technical support to the African Union Commission in education, science, technology and innovation; and strengthen its collaboration with the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to support school meal programmes that help to retain children in school, especially vulnerable children. As a first step, UNICEF will work with ministries of education to host a conference on transforming education in Africa in November 2024, and will help to craft clear recommendations to improve learning and skills, what countries should do more of and how partners can lend their support. The recommendations are expected to inform the deliberations of the Heads of State and Government at the next African Union summit in 2025.

B. Child survival through support to community-based health systems

In addition to the need to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being, and the Agenda 2063 target on under-5 mortality, Africa continues to require more robust front-line support to readily address multiple public health emergencies. UNICEF has long been a pioneer of community health systems and is already stepping up its work in this area in Africa through its commitment to increase community health-care workers. The UNICEF-Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention expanded partnership provides a solid framework to increase the continent's front-line workforce and supply chain capacity, and to produce, procure and distribute vital health-care commodities on the continent.

Specific contributions under the UNICEF and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention expanded partnership will include working with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, African Union member States and other partners to train, equip and deploy an additional 500,000 community health workers across the continent over the next four years; joining hands with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention to reignite continental-level political commitments to immunization to achieve a 25 per cent

reduction in the number of zero-dose (unvaccinated) children or reach 2 million zero-dose children each year; and supporting the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in providing a timely multisectoral response to public health emergencies within four weeks of declaration as part of the UNICEF contribution to the continental Joint Emergency Preparedness and Response Action Plan. These actions will support the achievement of key indicators of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan's Strategic Objective 6.2. UNICEF will also continue to strengthen its collaboration with the African Union Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Services.

C. Fostering nutrition through support to first foods in Africa

Eliminating all forms of malnutrition, focusing on severe acute malnutrition, is a core goal of Moonshot 6, Strategic Objective 6.2 of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan. Child food poverty is the main driver of the persistently high rates of undernutrition among children in sub-Saharan Africa – including stunting and wasting in early childhood – which affects more than one third of children 5 years of age, a total of 59 million children.[22] Improving nutrition will require an array of strategies, including multisectoral approaches, improving exclusive breastfeeding, providing multiple micronutrient supplementation and enhancing the food system, particularly the foods that young children eat – the "first foods".

22 UNICEF Nutrition and Child Development Section, Programme Group, *First Foods Africa: Addressing Child Food Poverty and Malnutrition*, New York, 2024, p. 2.

Innovative large-scale approaches are needed to improve children's first foods, food environments and food practices. The First Foods Initiative in Africa initiative will support the local production and consumption of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods and food supplements for young children in Africa. It aims to incentivize local production of nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable first foods through partnerships between public and private leaders and stakeholders; to shape policy environments through market-based and social protection approaches, and improved food standards, guidelines and policies, including fiscal policies; and stimulate consumption of first foods and food supplements through large-scale social market and social and behaviour change programmes, with direct public procurement and delivery in fragile contexts and humanitarian action.

UNICEF will work in coalition with other United Nations agencies, including the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the World Bank Group, to roll out the First Foods Initiative over the coming years, fostering Africa-owned public-private partnerships. The organization will work with African Union member States, local governments and a selected number of medium-to-large African food companies with national and regional reach that are committed to joining forces to end child food poverty and malnutrition in Africa. The Child Nutrition Fund will be a key financial instrument underpinning the First Foods Initiative in Africa, in support of the objectives of the Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy, 2015–2025.

D. Birth registration and legal identity acquisition

As UNICEF refines its contribution, it has become clear that acquiring a legal identity, particularly through birth registration, is crucial for Africa's children and young people. The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan underscores the importance of robust civil registration systems, which facilitate access to formal economic, social and political systems and are also critical for e-government initiatives. UNICEF contribution in this area includes deepening its contribution to the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, a continental initiative designed and owned by African Union member States that provides a structured approach to ensuring a legal identity for all, harmonizes efforts across the continent and bolsters civil registration systems.

E. Targeted support to adolescent girls

Girls and young women in Africa are key to the continent's future. In recent decades, gains have been achieved in girls' access to primary, secondary and higher education, civic and political participation, formal employment and access to social protection. But Africa has yet to realize the vast potential of its girls and young women, especially adolescent girls. Unleashing this power is not only their right; it is also necessary for the continent's future, as no country or region has achieved a demographic dividend without the education and empowerment of girls.

In Africa, adolescent girls remain heavily disadvantaged as compared to adolescent boys. Adolescent birth rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa, which also has the highest rate of out-of-school children at the secondary level. As in other regions and continents, adolescent girls in Africa are more likely than adolescent boys to not be in education, employment or training, less likely to have access to digital devices than their male peers and are at the greatest risk of contracting HIV. Further, adolescent girls overwhelmingly undertake more care work than boys. All of these factors compromise adolescent girls' access to schooling, play and learning.

In addition to supporting government-led mainstreaming of gender-responsive programming across the three impact areas, the UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas for adolescent girls will focus on key solutions. These include supporting the expansion of adolescent girl-centred health and nutrition, including to prevent anaemia and malnutrition; supporting learning, skills and agency; promoting safety and freedom from gender-based violence and harmful practices; and fostering social protection, including access to economic assets and care, thereby supporting girls' power over their futures.

Key targets for impact area 1, including on child mortality, learning poverty, etc. are specified in the annex.

IMPACT AREA 2

Resilience, humanitarian action and climate action

Africa has vast resources and a diverse environment. But the continent is being hard hit by climate change, including a wide variety of climate and environmental hazards, shocks and stressors, such as water scarcity, riverine floods, costal floods, vector-borne diseases, heatwaves, drought and air, soil, and water pollution.[23] In addition, conflicts persist on the continent and have intensified in some areas.

Building resilience and reducing exposure to climate and environmental risks through investments that are sensitive to children's vulnerabilities will be critical to helping to prevent climate threats from turning into disasters. UNICEF will partner with relevant arms of the African Union Commission to roll out the recently released UNICEF Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan, 2023–2030 and engage in key activities to promote adaptive social protection systems; expand decentralized energy solutions for health and education facilities across the continent; and support the African Union and its member States in providing early warning and preparedness action on a range of risks and stressors.

23 UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, *Time to Act: African children in the climate change spotlight*, Advocacy Brief, Nairobi, September 2023.

UNICEF will work more closely with the African Union and the African Development Bank water and sanitation institutions to expand access to safe water and safe sanitation facilities and to improve water management on the continent. This strengthened engagement will include support to the African Ministers' Council on Water and greater use of public-private partnerships to enhance water security.

UNICEF will continue to strengthen its support to humanitarian crises, including children in armed conflict and those affected by natural disasters, and will provide advice and assistance to establish the African Union-approved African Humanitarian Agency in the coming years. UNICEF remains committed to humanitarian response and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, and will intensify engagement with the African Union and international humanitarian agencies in anticipating and responding to national and cross-border crises.

Key targets for impact area 2 are specified in the annex.

FIGURE 3 **Key areas for resilience, humanitarian action and climate action**



IMPACT AREA 3

Intensify implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and support to the African Committee of Experts

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is the African Union's child rights charter. It is the only continental or regional child rights charter in the world and is aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is the African Union mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Charter and promote child rights in Africa. The Committee's main functions are to collect information; interpret provisions of the Charter and monitor its implementation; provide recommendations to Governments on working with child rights organizations; consider individual complaints about violations of children's rights; and investigate measures adopted by African Union member States to implement the Charter.

Like its global counterpart, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the African Committee of Experts is confronted by poor and erratic member reporting, inadequate resources, weak follow-up on recommendations, inadequate responses to incidents of grave child rights violations and insufficient attention to its general comments.

UNICEF commits to supporting the African Committee of Experts with child rights monitoring and to advocate with African Union member States to meet their obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Supporting the African Committee of Experts will also be important for several areas of child protection in some African regions and countries where scant progress has been seen over the past decades, including harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and violence against children.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is the only continental or regional child rights charter in the world and is aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF will also more strongly encourage African Governments to meet their obligations to children under the African Charter through regular reporting, action on recommendations and policy direction – including adjustments to legislation, regulation and policies, and enforcement of existing statutes – influenced by the recommendations and general comments of the African Committee of Experts.

Key targets for impact area 3 are specified in the annex.

SECTION 6

Strategies

To implement the impact areas, UNICEF will employ six strategies: youth engagement and community mobilization for children; digital access, literacy, safety and protection; continent-wide support for supply chain management and local manufacturing; data and analytical support and capacity development on Africa's indicators for children to the African Union and its statistical institutions; support and analysis for leveraging financing for children, both internationally and domestically, including from the private sector; and public-private partnerships for the expansion of social services. UNICEF will continue to contextualize the strategies to the different country contexts across Africa.

A. Youth engagement and community mobilization for children

Africa is replete with dynamic youth organizations across the continent. The African Union Commission works with many of them through its Women, Gender and Youth Directorate. UNICEF also partners with many youth organizations in African countries and at the regional level. Using local and contextual social and behavioural data, UNICEF will leverage its strong working relationships with Governments and local organizations to address attitudes, norms and practices. UNICEF and the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate will work to strengthen the existing strong network of youth-led initiatives as they partner with Governments to advance child rights on the continent.

B. Continent-wide support for supply chain management and local manufacturing

UNICEF will contribute to strengthening Africa's institutions through sharing technical knowledge on service delivery, notably in supply chain management. Several initiatives are already in progress under the UNICEF-Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention extended partnership dedicated to strengthening community-based primary health care, supply chain management, pooled procurement and local manufacturing and emergency response. Through the expanded partnership, UNICEF will contribute to Africa's development agendas in the following ways:

a. Support to African manufacturing for health and nutrition commodities. The outcomes of the expanded partnership between the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF aim to have the former organization develop a well-established supply-chain management division, a robust five-year strategic plan, at least one state-of-the-art warehouse on the continent, and capacities to support pooled procurement mechanisms and local manufacturing.

b. On pooled procurement, UNICEF will draw on its deep expertise in health and nutrition commodities to help build capacity in the development of procurement strategies and market shaping, tender design and execution, shipment planning and procurement operations, forecasting and supply planning, and quality assurances.

Through training and joint visits, it will facilitate the opening of local markets and will also allow local African manufacturers that meet the minimum requirements to access global markets through UNICEF and other global procurement institutions. As the African Medicines Agency becomes operational, UNICEF and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention will develop a workplan with them.

C. Partnering with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union and statistical institutions on data, analytical support and capacity development

UNICEF has a unique data offer that draws heavily on the household Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and other international databases. The organization also provides key indicators for monitoring the child-related Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF will contribute to Africa's development agendas in this area in the following ways:

a. Work with the African Union Commission to strengthen data analysis capacity on child indicators. This will improve the capacity of the African Union statistical institutions to generate continental data for children, in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and other United Nations and African Union entities.
b. Collaborate with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and other partners on thought pieces that will inform the prioritization of children's issues, including reports on the state of Africa's Children and on financing for human capital, resilience, climate action and other critical issues affecting children.

D. Support and analysis for leveraging domestic and international financing for children, including from the private sector

In most countries in Africa, domestic resources are mobilized by taxation policies and these resources make up the bulk of the funding of the national budgets. Increased government expenditures are funded through domestic resources. Today, more than ever before, budgets have the potential to drive development and improve children's lives – provided that more resources can be raised and they are effectively managed.

Over the past two decades, considerable work has been undertaken by UNICEF and others, including the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Child Policy Forum, on setting goals and priorities in public finance for children in Africa. Within UNICEF, innovative or alternative finance for children refers to financing approaches, tools and mechanisms that leverage additional resources for children through new financial instruments, or apply existing instruments in a new way.

UNICEF will contribute to Africa's development agendas on financing for children in the following ways:

a. Co-lead thought pieces on financing for Africa's children, including country benchmarks against African and internationally agreed standards.
b. Pursue advocacy on financing for children linked to policy reforms for child poverty reduction and equitable allocation of national budgets.
c. Advocate for debt restructuring and relief in order to scale up programmes for children in Africa.



Digitalization holds great promise for Africa to accelerate development, build human capital and reduce poverty.

E. Digital access and literacy, digital safety and protection and digital public services for children

Digitalization holds great promise for Africa to accelerate development, build human capital and reduce poverty. Equally important is its ability to reduce the digital gap between Africa and the rest of the world. Currently, Africa is unable to take full advantage of its digital potential as less than 40 per cent of citizens have access to the Internet and an intermittent supply of electricity makes access difficult. Dismantling the barriers to access will be important in helping to enhance skills for young people and prepare them for the fourth industrial revolution. It will be imperative to also expand the teaching of digital literacy to children and young people, put in place tools to keep them safe online and digitalize public services for children and families.

UNICEF will bring together its multiple assets and capacity in this area in the following ways:

a. Support countries to expand digital access to schools and health-care centres through the Giga Africa initiative, which will also begin to include sustainable energy solutions in connectivity for education and health-care centres.
b. Support Governments to strengthen their online safety for children, building on the work of national Governments and the UNICEF digital child protection work and the UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight Disrupting Harm project.

F. Private sector involvement for social services

The public-private partnership approach to expanding services is in operation on the continent in many variations, including public non-governmental organization, public-private-provision and public-private-community models. UNICEF will contribute to Africa's development agendas in the following ways:

a. Expand models for partnership in delivering social services for children, including with private sector actors. This shift will be essential to the organization's role as a convener and catalyst aiming to explore different models of public-private partnership. These partnerships should seek to collectively stimulate demand, shape policies and a normative environment, facilitate and leverage financing and incentivize the local provision of services and products for children.
b. Strengthen service-delivery systems, including workforce development, especially at the decentralized levels.
c. Like in other regions, establish a private sector fundraising programme for Africa, building on the agency of the middle class and businesses to spur solidarity for investment in children and on leadership skills, which will allow UNICEF staff to work more closely with private sector leaders on child rights issues.

SECTION 7

Ways of working

Currently, UNICEF engagement in Africa is primarily through its country programmes of cooperation, which are jointly developed by its country offices with the respective Governments. The three UNICEF regional offices covering Africa – Eastern and Southern Africa; Middle East and North Africa; and West and Central Africa – support their respective country offices and engage with regional and continental institutions and processes. The UNICEF Office to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa maintains relations with the African Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and other strategic African institutions, as well as other countries and regional bodies that engage with the African Union.

Given the need to support and appreciate the growing strength of African institutions, their increasing ability to catalyse the continental agenda and their expanding requests for technical support and thought leadership at the macro level, UNICEF will consider the following ways of working internally and with external partners, including donors.

UNICEF will strengthen its whole-of-organization support for Africa. It will realign the next generation of country programme documents with the priorities of this strategy. The organization will also strengthen the capacity of the UNICEF Office to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa as well as coordination between this office, the UNICEF regional offices and headquarters divisions, including through coordinated workplans, scheduling joint regional management team meetings for Africa once every two years and thought leadership activities. Furthermore, the organization will establish a steering group chaired by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, to oversee the roll-out of the UNICEF contribution to Africa's development agendas and will establish a unit in its Programme Group to leverage global initiatives in support of the implementation of this strategy.

Partnerships, both among United Nations entities and with external organizations, will be enhanced for the implementation of this strategy and for programming, advocacy and financing for Africa's children. Upon approval of this strategy, a road map will be developed to drive its implementation, with a focus on achieving the impact areas, influencing the development agendas for Africa's children, and identifying dynamic partnerships models that reinforce the narrative of opportunities for greater impact on the continent. UNICEF will also undertake joint review meetings with relevant African Union entities on progress towards the implementation of this strategy.

SECTION 8

Conclusions

Reviewing and investing in its contribution to Africa's development agendas is an imperative for UNICEF. Africa's development agendas and continental child rights agreement are ambitious in scope and scale. When these are combined with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is a clear vision for progress for children on the continent. Africa can reap substantial dividends in child rights, economic growth and social cohesion if it invests in its greatest asset: its children and young people.

This document puts forward impact areas which, if pursued diligently, will help to accelerate progress for children significantly. Scaling up impact in human capital, resilience and climate action, and implementing the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, are pressing, indispensable and hugely rewarding investment areas for the achievement of the goals of Agenda 2063 as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. UNICEF will employ a whole-of-organization approach to ensure that the commitments outlined in this strategy are implemented. Upon endorsement of the strategy, a process will be instituted for UNICEF to work with the African Union and its institutions and partners to further develop and raise funding for the key initiatives proposed.

Africa's future depends on ***investing in its children and young people.*** *Doing so requires strong* ***political will****, sound* ***strategies****, adequate* ***financing*** *and robust* ***implementation.***

By adopting a whole-of-organization approach and sharpening its offer at the country, continental and regional levels, and clearly spelling out impact areas, change strategies and enabling actions, UNICEF will be supporting the African Union and its member States in tackling child deprivations at scale and in addressing the multiple emerging issues that are primarily transboundary and transregional. By collaborating further with other partners who are also adopting similar strategies, including other United Nations agencies and international financial institutions, UNICEF will be able to leverage additional political support and financing for children. Advocacy and partnerships, including with Governments, will be critical for the effective implementation of this strategy.

The future of Africa will be brightest if it invests in its children and young people. Africa will continue to need a blend of strong political will, sound strategies and adequate investment in implementation capacity. Achieving the continent's development agendas will go a long way towards attaining a demographic dividend that will lift hundreds of millions out of poverty and deprivation towards the realization of the fundamental rights of all children. With this strategy, UNICEF stands ready to make an enhanced contribution to achieving Africa's development agendas.

Annex

Collated targets for children in Africa's development agendas[a]

Key child-related targets of Africa's development agendas		Current rate	Sustainable Development Goals 2030	Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024–2033[b] Moonshot 6	Africa's Agenda for Children 2040[c] Target 6
		2022		2033	2040
Impact area 1	Child mortality rate (under-5 deaths per 1,000 live births)	66	25 in all countries	25	10
	Maternal mortality rate (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)	463	70	175	Significantly reduced
	Undernutrition prevalence (% of children under 5 years of age)	33.8	Elimination	Elimination	Elimination
	Birth registration (% of children under 5 years of age whose births are registered)	59	100	100	100
	Learning poverty (% of children aged 10 years who cannot understand a simple text)	87	Elimination	20	Elimination
	HIV treatment, children (% of children aged 0–14 years living with HIV who receive antiretroviral therapy, sub-Saharan Africa)	55	End the AIDS epidemic	95	100
	HIV treatment, pregnant women (% of HIV-positive women who received antiretroviral therapy during pregnancy and/or labour and delivery, sub-Saharan Africa)	–	-	95	100
	Youth unemployment rate (as a % of youth labour force)	–	Full and productive employment	14	–
Impact area 2	Use of safely managed drinking water services (% of total population)	40	100	95	100
	Use of safely managed sanitation services (% of total population)	31	100	80	100
	Social protection coverage (% of child population, sub-Saharan Africa)	14	Substantial coverage	18.2	23.7
Impact area 3	Child marriage (% of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 years)	31	Elimination	Elimination	Elimination
	Female genital mutilation (% of girls and women aged 15–49 years)	35	Elimination	Elimination	Elimination

[a] Derived from the African Union targets set out in Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 and the Moonshots of the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024–2033 for Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.
[b] Targets derived from the African Union, Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2024–2033 for Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, accessed on 24 March 2024.
[c] Targets derived from the African Union, Africa's Agenda for Children 2040, accessed on 24 March 2024.

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