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With regard to education, UNICEF is working closely with the government and donors on financing opportunities and approaches that will not only help with learning recovery, but also provide children with a meaningful chance to obtain an education that will prepare them for the world of tomorrow.

Munir Saifeldin, UNICEF Representative in Uganda
It is hard to believe how much the world has changed since the arrival of COVID-19. While 2021 contained some of the pandemic’s most difficult hardships, from grueling lockdowns to the reclosure of schools, we also experienced the wonders of science through the arrival of vaccines. UNICEF was privileged to help facilitate the procurement of more than 17 million COVID-19 doses for Uganda through the global COVAX facility – doses that were a light at the end of a grim two-year tunnel.

As we take stock of the pandemic, it is clear that some of the greatest victims of COVID-19 have been children. Thankfully, children managed to avoid the worst health outcomes from the virus. But children around the world will bear many of the long-term consequences of the pandemic. By the close of 2021, for instance, close to 6 million children in lower primary grades in Uganda had missed nearly two years of academic learning. Teenage pregnancies and violence against children were both up substantially, while 2 million more Ugandans were driven into poverty.

But we still have reasons for optimism.

At the end of the year, UNICEF had already begun the process of reimagining the future for children in Uganda and around the world. That has meant accelerating our work on strengthening systems to better respond to future crises, while reversing the rollback in child health and nutrition. With regard to education, UNICEF is working closely with the government and donors on financing opportunities and approaches that will not only help with learning recovery, but also provide children with a meaningful chance to obtain an education that will prepare them for the world of tomorrow.

UNICEF plans to continue along this road to recovery and resilience in 2022, ever determined to maintain our support for equal, inclusive and sustainable opportunities – for every child.

M. Munir A. Safiekin, PhD.
UNICEF Representative, Uganda
ANOTHER DEVASTATING YEAR OF COVID-19

IN 2021

CHILDREN MADE UP 13.6% of all COVID-confirmed cases in 2021. However, no child died or had severe symptoms, while an average of 350 children died each day from pneumonia, malaria and diarrhoea that resulted, in part, from a lack of access to primary health care.

Routine immunization coverage declined for certain childhood vaccines, such as the third dose of the diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine (DTP 3). Uganda also experienced the emergence of a vaccine-derived poliovirus after 10 years of being polio-free.

The COVID-19 lockdown triggered an increase in violence against children, particularly for girls. Sexual violence was the most reported form, making up 38.3 per cent of cases, with neglect being the second highest at 35.8 per cent.

The poverty rate rose from 18.7% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 21.9% after implementation of containment measures, driving 2 million more Ugandans into poverty.

152,571 COVID-19 cases were confirmed with 3,369 deaths.

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COVID-19 resurfaced in Uganda in March 2021, prompting the government to re-impose a 42-day nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus. Schools were closed again, and public and private transportation shut down, restricting education, livelihoods and business operations. From the loss of learning to rising violence and abuse, the second year of the pandemic had a severe impact on Ugandan children and adolescents.

Online child abuse became a concern, following the findings of the 2019 Disrupting Harm in Uganda study, which showed that of children and adolescents

15% HAD MET SOMEONE IN REAL LIFE after their first online encounter and

7% HAD SHARED NUDE IMAGES or videos of themselves.

Teenage pregnancies, especially in rural areas, rose sharply during lockdowns and school closures, which exposed adolescents to child marriage and sexual violence and exploitation.

DISTRICT HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM DATA REVEALED A 17% SPIKE IN TEENAGE PREGNANCIES BETWEEN MARCH 2020 AND JUNE 2021.

15.2 million including
8.2 million children

needed humanitarian assistance to cope with the loss of livelihoods, hunger and poor access to social services as a result of COVID-19 and other humanitarian crises in the country.

Close to
6 million

children in the lower primary grades (1–3) had missed nearly two academic years by the end of 2021.

I commend the significant work that Uganda has done to create a country fit for children. Given the new emerging challenges, more needs to be done and we need to move faster, especially in implementing already existing policies to improve the lives of boys and girls across the country.

Munir Safieldin, UNICEF Representative in Uganda
The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating short-, medium- and long-term consequences for children and their rights. In Uganda, UNICEF has been supporting policy actions throughout the pandemic to ensure that the rights of girls, boys and young people are upheld and supported despite the setbacks they experienced.

**KEY RESULTS IN 2021**

To strengthen the policy environment for child survival and development, UNICEF helped develop and disseminate normative guidance and plans for the health, nutrition and WASH sectors. This included the Community Health Strategy; the revised Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health Sharpened Plan; the Antenatal Care Communication Plan; the National Assessment for the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission Retention Strategy; the Adolescent Health Policy; the Adolescent Health Communication Plan and the implementation standards for adolescent-friendly services in health facilities; the WASH Open Defecation Free National Plan; investment cases for nutrition and integrated community case management; and the validation of the regulatory impact assessment for the draft National Nutrition Policy.

The recovery of the education sector was aided by UNICEF and partner support for policy development, which was instrumental in the Ministry of Education and Sports’ approval of the National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, the National Inclusive Education Policy, the Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings, and the Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan (2021–2025). These policies have helped create an enabling environment for the recovery and strengthening of the education sector.

As part of the process to strengthen one national protection system, UNICEF supported the dissemination of the National Child Policy in 51 of the 135 districts in Uganda. In addition, district child well-being committees were established to coordinate the implementation of the National Child Policy in each district. The National Child Policy demonstrates government’s commitment to the well-being of all children and to the delivery of child protection services to children. In addition, the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Strategic Plan was completed and approved by Uganda’s National Identification and Registration Authority Board to guide the implementation of birth and death registration in Uganda.
To increase the chances of quicker economic recovery from COVID-19, the government is requested to accelerate the national COVID-19 vaccination programme to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on productivity and provision of goods and services.

As quoted in the UNICEF Update on the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Children
The sharp increase in COVID-19 cases in March 2021 and the measures imposed to control its spread disrupted service delivery and children’s access to health care. In response, UNICEF and its partners facilitated an integrated push on continuity of essential health services while continuing regular programmes to support the sustainable and resilient recovery of the health system post-COVID-19.

**KEY RESULTS IN 2021**

As a key delivery partner for COVAX and an implementing partner for Uganda’s national vaccination drive, UNICEF helped procure more than 17 million COVID-19 doses for Uganda and supported the first and second doses of the vaccination of more than 1 million people in 2021, targeting priority populations such as teachers, health care workers and older Ugandans.

- As a key delivery partner for COVAX and an implementing partner for Uganda’s national vaccination drive, UNICEF helped procure more than 17 million COVID-19 doses for Uganda and supported the first and second doses of the vaccination of 1,076,923 people in 2021, targeting priority populations such as teachers, health care workers and older Ugandans.

- To help Uganda scale up its COVID-19 immunization and treatment programmes, UNICEF supported the procurement and installation of **ultra-cold chain equipment**; the distribution of oxygen cylinders, concentrators, personal protective equipment (PPE); and the maintenance of oxygen plans.

- UNICEF used an innovative approach to **decongest 11 regional referral hospitals**, which helped them continue offering quality primary health care services, including COVID-19 vaccinations. The hospitals were provided with decongestion items such as benches, conference tables, plastic chairs and emergency tents. All these items were procured by UNICEF.
OTHER PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

By strengthening the health system, UNICEF contributed to a 5 per cent **increase in women giving birth in health facilities.** The numbers rose from 62 per cent in 2020 to 67 per cent in 2021 (18 per cent of which were adolescent girls). This was achieved by decongesting health services, implementing quality care standards, improving WASH-related infection prevention and control (IPC) in maternities, and training 4,056 community resource persons in key family care practices, which helped encourage more women to deliver their babies safely in health facilities.

To improve adolescent health, UNICEF worked with strategic partners and districts to **expand the Young and Adolescent Peer Support (YAPS) model to 26 health facilities** and develop a national scale-up plan for the initiative. YAPS trained and mentored adolescents and young people to provide HIV prevention, care, treatment and support services to their peers. Through YAPS and other adolescent HIV interventions, close to 60,000 adolescent girls and boys living with HIV were able to access antiretroviral therapy in 2021.

To keep children protected from micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition, **Vitamin A supplements were given to nearly 2.2 million children aged between 6 months and 5 years**, while more than 1.4 million parents and caregivers with young children (under the age of 1) received counselling on how to feed their infants and young children. Around 37,850 children under 5 years of age were treated for severe acute malnutrition. These efforts contributed to a reduction in child mortality in UNICEF’s 29 supported districts and at the national level through improved nutrition, childcare, and infant and young child feeding practices.

UNICEF supported **innovative approaches to prevent malnutrition** including the national adaptation of family-led mid-upper-arm circumference (MUAC) screening and a community nutrition package for maternal and young child nutrition. Three hundred health workers were trained on family-led MUAC, a community approach that empowers mothers, caregivers and other family members to screen their own children for acute malnutrition.
COVID-19 TESTING AND MASS VACCINATION HAVE KEPT NUMBERS LOW IN KAMWENGE DISTRICT

In Kamwenge District in western Uganda, COVID-19 testing and mass vaccination campaigns have kept coronavirus cases down. Dr. William Mucunguzi, the district health officer, says the population is regularly sensitized on the importance of testing and vaccination, which are all provided free of charge.

“When the vaccines get to the district, we announce on radio and through different leadership structures, politicians, religious leaders and health workers to let the population know that the vaccines are here. We also tell them about the vaccination centres and the times the exercises will be conducted,” he says.

Mucunguzi reveals that the district, which started with 5 testing centres, now has 20 with the goal of bringing services closer to the people. “We have even gone to health centre IIs for as long as we have the required staff to support the vaccination. People now take vaccination against COVID-19 as something that is going to save them and help open up the entire economy,” he explains.

On rapid testing, the district health officer says that all health centre IIs and above are testing for COVID-19, which has contributed to the reduction of the virus in the communities because positive patients are initiated on treatment immediately. “We continue to conduct testing, and this has helped us break through,” the district health officer adds.

As of 24 November 2021, 33,100 people had been vaccinated while 347 tests had been conducted, confirming 30 positive cases and 2 deaths.

Kamwenge, a refugee-hosting district, has been supported by UNICEF to respond to and contain COVID-19 in the community, health facilities, schools, refugee settlements and district premises.

With funding from the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (US BPRM), UNICEF has supported Kamwenge with IPC supplies as well as PPE.

“UNICEF is our biggest partner, and we are very grateful. We get supplies from them in big numbers. This has stabilized the district. When we received PPE from UNICEF, our health workers gained confidence and they comfortably continued to deliver their work,” Mucunguzi reveals.

He notes that the items received included surgical and N95 masks; examination and surgical gloves; and infection-prevention supplies like disinfectant, chlorine, toilet soap, washing soap, handwashing stations, liquid soap, sanitizers and gumboots.

“If you move around the district premises, in schools, places of worship, markets and most public places, most of the handwashing stations and supplies used are from UNICEF. What we need to do is re-enforce utilization of all these supplies and encourage communities to adhere to the standard operating procedures,” Mucunguzi notes.

At Rwanda Health Centre III, UNICEF also provided filled oxygen cylinders, which was made possible by to US BPRM funding. The health centre serves nearly 90,000 refugees and nationals.
As in other parts of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the greatest education crisis in Uganda’s history, with 15 million learners affected by school closures and learning losses in 2021. Shutting the doors of educational facilities for long periods has worsened inequalities, affecting vulnerable children and adolescents who lack access to technology and other support for home learning. UNICEF helped to mitigate the impact by supporting continuity of learning. However, the recovery of learning losses will remain a challenge for the education sector in 2022 and beyond.

**KEY RESULTS IN 2021**

UNICEF advocacy, technical support and financial assistance helped to ensure that around 50 per cent of Uganda’s learners were able to continue learning, including those from refugee and marginalized communities.

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- 180,654 upper primary schoolchildren, including refugee children, benefited from printed home-learning material provided by UNICEF. This helped ensure continuity of learning when schools were shut due to COVID-19. Braille materials were also printed and distributed to 1,469 primary and secondary learners with disabilities.

- UNICEF helped maximize the potential of online and distant learning modalities when regular face-to-face learning could not take place. For example, to facilitate the transition from children learning in their mother tongues to learning in English, lessons for Primary 4 were broadcast to 9.8 million viewers on national television. A digital curriculum and life skills content were provided for 7,300 users via the Kolibri online platform, with 2,700 new users registered in 2021.

- In preparation for the reopening of schools and to support children’s psychosocial needs, some 1,250 recreation materials were distributed to 600 schools, reaching 363,052 learners in 20 districts.

- To support the continuity of early childhood development (ECD), UNICEF helped deliver home- and community-based ECD services in partnership with civil society organizations, resulting in 15,124 girls and boys being better prepared to transition to primary education. In addition, a parenting book was produced to assist parents with their youngest children’s home learning.
OTHER PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite the closure of early childhood development (ECD) centres, UNICEF’s implementing partners supported communities in providing families and their young children with integrated ECD services. The reporting of child abuse was strengthened through radio programmes and sermons, community awareness of key family care practices and engaging faith-based structures. Communities were also sensitized on accessing immunizations, antenatal care, nutrition, WASH and health services, which are key to meeting the multiple needs of young children.

A skilling programme gave 121,954 adolescent girls and boys, including refugee adolescents, who were not enrolled in schools the opportunity to enhance their life skills and resilience. The programme involved the rollout of the comprehensive life skills toolkit and UPSHIFT, a youth social innovation and social entrepreneurship programme designed to build skills and opportunities for disadvantaged young people.

UNICEF supported a school capacity-building intervention to prevent and respond to violence against children. A total of 1,051 teachers were trained to report, track, refer and respond to cases of violence against children, making communities and schools safer for children.

Amidst increased teenage pregnancies during school closures, the Ministry of Education and Sports launched the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy, which were developed with UNICEF support. The guidelines will pave the way for pregnant girls and teenage mothers to re-enroll in schools, giving them a second chance at education.

With UNICEF support, 22,550 adolescent girls and boys participated and led civic engagement initiatives in 17 districts through different district and community platforms that facilitate adolescents’ participation and advocacy on issues that matter to them.

UNICEF supported the government with strengthening the education systems at district level. Some 29 districts enhanced their data collection and management systems, evidence-based planning and cross-sectoral coordination, including coordination of integrated ECD services.

With technical support from UNICEF and in partnership with UNHCR, all 13 refugee-hosting districts developed education response plans.
SCHOOL CLOSURES KEPT SHARON IN THE SAME CLASS FOR TWO YEARS

Sharon Dipio (not real name) used to be withdrawn and shy. She only spoke when her parents asked her a question or sent her for something. Two years ago, Sharon was raped. Although the perpetrator was arrested and charged in court, it has taken a lot of psychosocial support in the form of counselling to address her trauma.

With UNICEF support, Trailblazers Mentorship Foundation (TMF) identified champion parents in rural communities to follow up on vulnerable girls such as Sharon, offering them mentorship and guidance to ensure they stay on course to achieve their dreams.

When UNICEF visited Sharon a year after her story was first published, she was vibrant and upbeat, especially among her peers in the local Girls Education Club. Sharon, still in Primary 6 at Pagirinya Integrated Primary School, admitted that interacting with her peers and discussing schoolwork was one of the things she missed about school.

“I only meet with my friends twice a month when our club meets, so I make sure to have all the fun I can. We discuss child marriage and menstrual hygiene, and compose songs and traditional dances about them,” she says.

When time allows, the club members, who are from the same class, discuss notes and reading material. Sharon’s daily routine revolves around house chores, gardening and then daily classes from 4–5 p.m. on Radio Salama.

Throughout the COVID-19 lockdowns, TMF ran educational programmes on local radio stations with UNICEF support.

Additionally, TMF formed 68 Girls Education Clubs in Adjumani District to give adolescent girls and boys an opportunity to meet, talk and engage in economic activities that can keep them busy and independent, and in turn prevent child marriage and pregnancy.

Godfrey Obulejo, the champion parent in Pagirinya Village who reported Sharon’s rape to the authorities, has been integral to her healing process. He has worked with her parents to give her a conducive environment to read, interact with her peers and stay on course to achieve her dream career of becoming a midwife.

The only obstacle to Sharon’s dream remained the COVID-related school closures that forced her to stay in the same class for two years in a row.

“If it wasn’t for the pandemic, I would be sitting my Primary Leaving Examinations this year [2021]. I want to be a midwife because it is the only way I can help sisters who got married when they were young. When they come to the hospital to give birth, I want to be there,” she says.

Sharon’s parents agree that she has made major strides to recover from past trauma and say her commitment towards attaining her midwifery dream is unfazed.

“Sometimes when she is at home, you might not easily find her. She has a hiding place in the house where she reads. We have agreed as a family to get a solar-powered lamp for her so she can also read at night,” her mother, Vicky Koma Edea, says.

Vicky is determined that her daughter will not marry early and says she will support Sharon with money from her maize and groundnut harvest to help her daughter finish her education. John Izama, Sharon’s father, shares his wife’s confidence in their daughter. If he has the means, he says, he will send her to boarding school.

TMF with UNICEF support has been able to empower more than 18,500 adolescents in Adjumani District with skills not only to resist child marriage, but also to speak out and report such acts.

Even during the lockdowns, members of the Girls Education Clubs across the district – boys included – were sensitizing their local communities through songs, dances and poems about the dangers of child marriages and the benefits of completing school.

Throughout 2021, the problem was the continued closure of schools that prevented vulnerable children such as Sharon from reaching greater heights, inadvertently contributing to school drop-outs and child marriages.
The COVID-19 crisis increased risks to children, women’s protection and mental health. Not only did the pandemic and related social and economic restrictions cause human suffering, they also triggered a major economic and social crisis that put women and children at further danger of violence, abuse and exploitation, including online abuse. At a time when protection needs to be increased, the government, UNICEF and other partners had to find ways to ensure the continuity of prevention and response services during Uganda’s multiple COVID-related lockdowns.

ONLINE CHILD ABUSE IN UGANDA

The 2019 Disrupting Harm study on online child sexual exploitation and abuse found that:

- **40%** of children in Uganda aged 12–17 are internet users
- **15%** of the children had met someone face-to-face after their first online encounter
- **7%** had shared naked images or videos of themselves

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UNICEF supported the government to reach consensus on the development of a comprehensive and inclusive parenting programme to prevent violence against children and other harmful practices.

- UNICEF supported the government to reach consensus on the development of a comprehensive and inclusive parenting programme to prevent violence against children and other harmful practices. The parenting programme includes parenting standards, a parenting manual, a facilitator’s guide and related tools to pave the way for a structured national parenting programme that will be rolled out in 2022.

- To strengthen the capacity of children, families and communities to identify risks and prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children, 69,348 women and men in 28 districts participated in community intergenerational dialogues and interpersonal communication sessions designed to change social norms that fuel harmful practices in Uganda.

- Additionally, 2,752 government and NGO staff members were trained in social and behavioural change communication, helping them to plan, implement and monitor integrated media campaigns on violence against children, which reached more than 2 million children and adults in 28 districts.

- To strengthen the government’s ability to deliver critical services to all children, UNICEF supported capacity-building on emergency child protection preparedness and response. Furthermore, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) was integrated into programme implementation, resulting in 153,490 individuals having access to mechanisms to report sexual exploitation and abuse. Meanwhile, community mobilization and awareness-raising activities on PSEA reached 262,711 girls and boys.

- UNICEF supported nine districts to demonstrate a sustainable and integrated child protection system. This was done by training 402 justice, health and social workers on case management, case referral and coordination, which contributed to providing multisectoral child protection services to 29,328 child victims of violence in humanitarian and development situations. Among them, almost 50 per cent out of 4,610 children in conflict with the law were diverted away from the criminal justice system.

- UNICEF support to Uganda’s National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) scaled up birth registration services to 170 health facilities in 27 districts. Using the upgraded Mobile Vital Records System, 338,762 girls and boys under 5 had their birth registered at decentralized NIRA district offices. In addition, 505 children in conflict with the law, who were either in remand homes or the National Rehabilitation Centre, received birth certificates.
UGANDA TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO PREVENT ONLINE CHILD ABUSE

Uganda will be one of the first countries to develop a National Child Protection Action Plan that will implement recommendations from a recent study that found disturbing evidence of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in the country.

The Commissioner for Children and Youth in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Fred Ngabirano, announced the plans during the launch of the Disrupting Harm in Uganda report at the Protea Hotel in Kampala on 16 November 2021.

“Next year (2022), the ministry will put aside five million shillings (US$1,500) to start work on this action plan. The team will be reporting to the ministry and our partners, like UNICEF, every quarter,” Ngabirano said.

Disrupting Harm in Uganda is a large-scale collaborative research study on online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) that targets internet-using children aged 12–17 across 13 countries in Asia and East and Southern Africa.

The study was conducted by ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF’s Office of Research-Innocenti with funding from the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, INTERPOL’s Ugandan Bureau and UNICEF Uganda, supported data collection.

Data from the household survey of children showed that 40 per cent of children aged 12–17 in Uganda are internet users – a higher proportion of whom are boys (45 per cent) compared to girls (35 per cent), mostly in urban areas. More than half of these children go online daily and 33 per cent only get online access at least once a week.

According to the study’s findings, 12 per cent of the female respondents said they were asked for a photo or video of their private parts and 19 per cent of these respondents had complied.

The research also found that offenders of online child sexual exploitation and abuse are people the child already knew and took place on social media platforms. The most used platforms for OCSEA were WhatsApp, Facebook and Facebook Messenger.

Additionally, most of the children did not tell anyone about their sexual abuse and exploitation.

The victims who opened up spoke to their close friends and siblings despite the finding that family members were more likely to commit sexual violence against children. Only one in five cases of OCSEA was committed by a stranger.

The study also found that law enforcement agencies, the justice system and social service structures lacked awareness, capacity and resources to respond to online sexual abuse and exploitation cases.

The study recommended that the government includes online child protection in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) guidelines so that the Ministry of Education can add OCSEA into the curriculum of computer classes, which will help students understand the risks of online use, and how to recognize and report it.

There is also an urgent need to support caregivers, teachers and medical staff with knowledge of digital platforms to monitor what and who children are communicating with online. While the study found that most children can operate smartphones better than their parents and caregivers, taking away gadgets from children or restricting their access was not recommended.

“Restriction of children is not the answer to disrupting harm and might have the opposite effect instead. When children are gagged, they start to withhold information and this can be more harmful,” said Dr. Jane Muita, UNICEF Uganda’s Deputy Representative.

Instead, the study recommended capacity-building and increased funding to law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, civil society and schools for a multi-sectoral approach.

As Rogers Kasiire, the Executive Director of Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL), noted, “We have disrupted many harms in Uganda before. If we start at our homes, then move to schools and give this information to children early enough, we shall disrupt OCSEA.”
Building back better

so that every child lives in a safe and clean environment

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance and preventive power of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to human health and well-being. Good hygiene, including handwashing with soap and clean water, is the first line of defence against many diseases including COVID-19. In Uganda, UNICEF and its partners refocused attention on WASH to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea and Ebola in health facilities, schools and community settings, while building resilient WASH systems that can withstand climate change and other shocks.

KEY RESULTS IN 2021

UNICEF provided WASH supplies to more than half a million people to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

• UNICEF provided WASH supplies to 621,723 people in 2021 to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The provision of PPE and IPC supplies for frontline and auxiliary/peer personnel also contributed to keeping service providers safe and working. The national guidelines and standards for WASH in health facilities, which UNICEF supported, will strengthen IPC in hospitals and health centres around the country.

UNICEF and its partners also ensured that refugees and host communities were protected against the risk of COVID-19 infection.

• 133,768 people were provided with enough clean water to prevent and control COVID-19 infection in health facilities, schools and communities.

• 43,400 people benefited from appropriate sanitation facilities, while 577,000 people were reached with critical WASH supplies related to the COVID-19 response.
OTHER PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

The rehabilitation of defunct boreholes and solar-powered water systems provided water to 68 schools, 40 health centres and 2 hybrid systems (in which communities share water systems with nearby schools or health facilities). Water and sanitation during maternity are lifesaving for mothers and babies, and essential to improve the quality of clinical care to prevent infection. Around 4,400 learners benefited from access to climate-resilient WASH facilities and 96 schools were supported with menstrual hygiene management activities.

With UNICEF support, 426 villages in central and western Uganda were declared open-defecation free (ODF) in 2021, helping to end one of the unhealthiest sanitary practices. A market-based sanitation approach was launched in two districts where a large proportion of villages achieved ODF status to enable them to move up the ladder for safely managed sanitation.

A major advocacy initiative to position WASH in the climate change agenda was launched in 2021. UNICEF partnered with the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) to refine the national climate rationale and incorporate WASH issues in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for climate change. This initiative is expected to strengthen WASH climate financing and make WASH interventions more climate-change sensitive. UNICEF started developing an alert system for water distress (ground water) or excess water (flooding), which will strengthen national capacity to respond in a timely manner.

With UNICEF support, 426 villages in central and western Uganda were declared open-defecation free.
When Universal Primary Education (UPE) was instituted in Uganda in 1997, it took another seven years for the whole country to realize what educationists and social workers knew all along: that enrolling children in school and keeping children in school were two different things.

While UPE initially quadrupled the enrolment in primary schools, at the end of the seven-year primary cycle, the number of children sitting for the national Primary Leaving Examinations had dwindled to almost half of those who had started out in Primary 1.

Several reasons for the high drop-out rates were advanced, but one was specific to the girls: menstruation. The onset of puberty simply made many girls stop going to school. This was especially pronounced in less developed remote areas like Karamoja in northeastern Uganda.

In Karamoja’s traditional communities, a girl simply couldn’t be permitted to remain among others when she was bleeding. The sad state of affairs continued until 2020, when the government announced that it would provide sanitary towels for vulnerable adolescent schoolgirls. However, the government’s pledge was hindered by budget shortfalls.

Fortunately, UNICEF and its partner, the Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF), were able to step in with school support for menstrual health.

Today, schoolgirls in Karamoja have clean, reusable menstrual pads thanks to a creative initiative that supported the manufacturing of pads at school by the children themselves. And no less than a cultural revolution is taking place in Karamoja with boys equally involved in the manufacturing process. In fact, in Karamoja-based Girls Education Clubs (which are also open to boys) teenage adolescents work in pairs – a boy and a girl – to measure, draw, cut, shape and sew the different layers and materials that make the reusable finished product. Five years ago, it would have been difficult to imagine the scene. But it is happening all over the region today.

In fact, the boys enrolled in the clubs are not only doing a good job supporting the girls, some of them are developing entrepreneurial plans to make pads for sale to women outside the education sector.

And the school ‘menstrual industry’ isn’t limited to only one product; the boys and girls also make nice underpants! But it is serious business – no giggles detected – as the young designers were fitting their pads to pants to ensure they held properly!

Today, girls in the Karamoja districts in which the programme is being implemented may drop out of school for other reasons, but menstrual-related drop-outs are thankfully becoming a thing of the past.
In 2021, the Ugandan economy began emerging from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased poverty and household vulnerabilities, widened inequalities, exposed the fragility of social service delivery and its financing, and threatened human capital development. Economic and social recovery is fragile and needs the continued support of UNICEF and its partners to protect children and the most vulnerable people from the ravages of the pandemic.

POVERTY IN UGANDA

- One in every five Ugandans is poor
- Poverty is almost three times higher in rural (29%) than urban (11%) areas
- Urban poverty is rising, from 9.5% in 2016/17 to 11.7% in 2019/20
KEY RESULTS IN 2021


- UNICEF partnered with the Kampala Capital City Authority and NGO partners to provide cash transfers and mentorship to 1,400 in- and out-of-school adolescent girls through the GirlsEmpoweringGirls Urban Social Protection Programme. The adolescent girls were equipped with life skills to reach their highest potential while the cash transfers helped the girls to acquire the materials needed to stay in school or support themselves.

- UNICEF, in partnership with the Office of the Prime Minister and the University of Cardiff, successfully embedded the measurement of multi-dimensional child poverty into the monitoring and evaluation tools of two national social protection programmes – the Third Northern Uganda Social Action Fund and the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project. Consequently, information on multidimensional deprivation will be measured routinely when assessing the effectiveness of these programmes.

- UNICEF positioned itself as a thought-leader on evidence-based responses to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children by publishing materials on the subject, including one called ‘The socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on children: Child well-being under threat’.

- For the first time in more than a decade, the Government of Uganda, with support from UNICEF, submitted the State Party Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Welfare and the Rights of the Child. UNICEF is helping to set up a multisectoral body of stakeholders who will follow up and monitor the implementation of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

- UNICEF leveraged its strong partnership with Uganda Bureau of Statistics and United Nations agencies, which resulted in adding a module on violence against children to the 2020/21 National Survey on Violence. The results of the survey exposed a grave situation, with Ugandan children experiencing high levels of violence and abuse.
I love skipping the rope with them, swinging them. We have become great friends. They no longer fear me or their father. We talk to them and they understand.

Cavine Abalo, a 20-year-old refugee from South Sudan, who participated in regular educational sessions on early childhood development as part of a community parenting group in Lamwo, northern Uganda
BRIDGING HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ACTION

Uganda faces several humanitarian crises every year, including refugee influxes, disease outbreaks, drought, floods and other natural disasters. These emergencies have been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result, an estimated 15.2 million people, including 8.2 million children, needed humanitarian assistance in 2021 to cope with food insecurity, malnutrition, displacement, poor access to basic services and multiple protection risks.

Disaster-affected people needed not only humanitarian help, but also support to reduce their vulnerability over the longer term and boost their resilience to future shocks. This is why UNICEF continues to complement its humanitarian interventions with a district system-strengthening approach that helps to provide vital nutrition, health, WASH, child protection, education and social protection services to Uganda’s most vulnerable, while also increasing the synergies between humanitarian action and development programmes.

Humanitarian results in 2021

- More than 140,000 children were vaccinated against polio.
- More than 37,000 children were treated for severe acute malnutrition.
- More than 65,000 children accessed psychosocial support services.
- More than 92,000 children received formal or non-formal education, including early childhood education.
- Some 133,770 people were provided with sufficient quantities of safe water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene.
- More than 621,000 people were reached with critical WASH supplies (including hygiene items) and services.
- Some 14,207,000 people were reached with risk communication messages on how to prevent COVID-19 and seek treatment if sick.
ADDRESSING SOCIAL NORMS, INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR

In Uganda, UNICEF applies social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) as a core strategy to meet the rights of children at scale. SBCC helps to increase demand for services, adoption of positive social and behavioural norms, and engagement of communities in both development and humanitarian contexts. In times of public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Communication for Development can save lives and inspire change.

Communication for Development results in 2021

- COVID-19 messaging reached more than 14 million people across Uganda.

- More than 1.9 million people were engaged in COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement activities, while over 84,000 people shared their concerns, asked questions and received feedback through online and offline mechanisms.

- Nearly 24,000 parents, caregivers, guardians and adolescents were reached with messages on key family care practices and ECD parenting tips.

- A multimedia campaign on 18 radio stations and 3 television stations reached more than 3.2 million people, raising awareness on the prevention of violence against women and children.

- More than 14,200 adolescents participated in life skills and empowerment sessions in 17 districts, including 3 refugee-hosting districts.


- UNICEF continued to co-chair the Risk Communication and Social Mobilization Sub-Committee of the National Task Force on Disease Outbreaks, which contributed to timely implementation of an integrated risk communication plan for COVID-19.

“More than 14,200 adolescents participated in life skills and empowerment sessions in 17 districts including 3 refugee-hosting districts.”
AN ADVOCATE AND COMMUNICATOR FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

In 2021, UNICEF continued to be a strong advocacy, campaigning and communications force for children in Uganda. UNICEF advocated for children’s rights by reinforcing the key messages that the COVID-19 crisis is a child rights crisis and that there is an opportunity to build back better post-COVID-19. Advocacy, visibility, resource mobilization and partnership efforts were intensified, especially on safe school reopening, continuity of learning despite the digital divide, and continued health and child protection service delivery. UNICEF also collaborated with local, national and international media to support the national COVID-19 vaccination drive and highlight other issues that continued to affect the health, education and protection of children in Uganda.

Communication, advocacy and partnership results in 2021

- **Communication and engagement of audiences in and outside Uganda** through the UNICEF Uganda website was heightened to mobilize support from partners and keep the public informed about key issues concerning women and children.

- **UNICEF produced over 170 multimedia assets**, including reports, posters and infographics, utilizing user-friendly and compelling designs to keep online audiences engaged.

- **UNICEF Uganda’s social media followers grew to 329,978** by the end of December 2021, up from 266,198 in January.

- **There were 50 short videos and 5 animations produced and uploaded on the country office YouTube channel**, attracting 284,700 views and over 300 new subscribers.

- **World Children’s Day was celebrated through a creativity contest** where children across the country, including refugees and those with disabilities, were provided with an opportunity to share their views on how COVID-19 has impacted their lives. Their concerns, dreams and aspirations were amplified in digital and traditional media reaching nearly 25.2 million people in and outside Uganda.

- **UNICEF partnered with key stakeholders**, including the media, government ministries, agencies and departments, donors, influencers, politicians, legislators, the private sector and youths to highlight the situation of Ugandan children and elicit their support to address the impacts of COVID-19 on children’s lives. Focus was placed on getting children back to school, teenage pregnancy, child marriage, positive parenting and nutrition.

- **The innovative Skilling Youth for Early Childhood Care and Education concept secured technical agreement from the Ministry of Education and Sports** to drive the initiative. Also, the stakeholder engagement with potential partners and funders advanced significantly – supported by the United Nations Capital Development Fund and UNICEF’s Innovative Finance Unit.

- **Through programmatic alignment with the youth and education programmes**, UNICEF Uganda **advanced discussions** with key stakeholders, including the private sector, on skilling adolescents and youth.

- **In 2021, UNICEF continued its support for operationalizing the Children’s Rights and Business Principles within Uganda’s extractives and mining sector.** This initiative addressed child labour and other child rights violations in the gold-rich areas in eastern Uganda, where artisanal small-scale mining activities are prevalent.

- **UNICEF leveraged support from private-sector partners** in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of funding, in-kind contributions, technical expertise and voice.
COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerabilities and challenges that children face in Uganda. It has given us a clear picture of existing inequalities and what steps we need to take to build a fairer and more protective society.

Laura Siegrist Fouché, Deputy Representative, Operations, UNICEF Uganda
Strengthen primary health care systems to reach every child everywhere, including newborns, and support resilient health systems to respond to disease outbreaks and malnutrition.

Reduce preventable maternal and child mortality through improved quality of care for small and sick newborns and their mothers.

Scale up the Ugandan National Nutrition Action Plan to improve the quality and frequency of children’s diets to reduce stunting and prevent and treat wasting.

Continue supporting multisectoral efforts to eliminate paediatric AIDS by 2030 and holistically respond to adolescent health issues including the increase in teenage pregnancy.

Complete innovative and climate-resilient WASH initiatives to ensure improved access to clean water and sanitation.

Advocate for the 46 per cent of health facilities without water and sanitation, and receive adequate provisions to improve the quality of care needed to save the lives of mothers and their babies.

Support recovery of learning by enhancing teacher capacity and training in the abridged curriculum by mobilizing stakeholders.

Provide centre, community and home-based early stimulation, along with responsive caregiving and early learning, including play-based learning opportunities.

Support the education and skilling of adolescent boys and girls, including teenage mothers, by bringing them to school and providing alternative skilling opportunities.

Finalize the Social Workforce Framework and develop job descriptions and supervision guidelines.

Scale up the existing urban social protection programme for adolescent girls in Kampala, including for adolescent mothers and their babies.

Build district local government capacity to better coordinate disaster management and emergency response.
If there was no blood pressure room at Moyo General Hospital, my twins would have been orphaned at birth.

Alice Aromorach, who is grateful to the UNICEF- and AVSI-Foundation-supported High Dependency Unit, which saved her life and was her home for three days.
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UNICEF continues to complement its humanitarian interventions with a district system strengthening approach that helps to provide vital nutrition, health, WASH, child protection, education and social protection services to Uganda’s most vulnerable.
## DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS 2021 (US$)

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