

Nigeria

Update on the context and situation of children

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has a population of 206 million, 107 million of which are children. The situation of children in the country in 2020 was profoundly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting impacts on economy and society.

UNICEF supported the federal and state governments of Nigeria both in COVID-19 response but also very importantly in “COVID-proofing” existing programmes in health, education, nutrition, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene and other areas of UNICEF and government collaboration, to safeguard progress toward the sustainable development goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable children.

Within the SDG framework, Nigeria, along with other countries in UNICEF’s West and Central Africa region, has committed to supporting “Key Results for Children” (KRCs), specifically: Immunization, Prevention of stunting, Equitable and sustainable access to education, Improved learning outcomes, Protection of children from violence, Birth registration, and Ending open defecation.

A recent child poverty analysis, carried out by the government of Nigeria and supported by UNICEF, indicate high levels child poverty and child deprivation. Multidimensional poverty is manifested in varying degrees with 28% of urban children being multidimensionally poor against 66% of rural children experiencing multidimensional poverty. In order to end child poverty, Nigeria needs to harness its huge demographic dividends through judicious investments in health, nutrition, social protection, education and livelihoods - especially for young people.

With regards to child survival, while there has been notable progress in the reduction of neo-natal, infant and under-5 mortality rates across the country, the figures are still unacceptably high (39, 67 and 132 per 1000 births respectively). Disparities in survival rates exist according to geographical location and socioeconomic characteristics of children. Under-5 mortality rate is highest in Kebbi in the North west (252 deaths per 1,000 live births) and lowest in Ogun in the south west (30 deaths per 1,000). About 32% of children under age five in Nigeria are stunted, or too short for their age. Seven percent are wasted (too thin for height). Rural children have higher levels of stunting at 45%, wasting at 8%, and underweight at 28%, compared to urban children with 27%, 5% and 15% respectively. Apart from mortalities, children in Nigeria suffer from disabilities which result from denial of the rights of the child to survival. Focused and specific attention must be directed towards resolving socioeconomic factors that threaten the survival of the child through targeted investments in the provision of potable water, hygiene and sanitation.

In terms of education, there are an estimated 10.2 million out of school children in Nigeria. National completion rate at the primary school level was 55% with male and female rates being 59% and 51% respectively. At the secondary school (SS) level, national rate was 39% with male and female rates being 42% and 36% respectively. There has been a progressive decline in completion rates from primary to secondary schools. The government has the duty to provide inclusive and quality education to all through investments in education infrastructure and amenities and the provision of disability friendly amenities.

The situation of child protection indicates that the registration of births has improved over the years but is lower than expected (30%), with wide variations across states - 66% in Osun State and 3% in Zamfara State.

Some 1.4 million children are currently displaced and made vulnerable by the ongoing crisis in the Northeast. About 14 million children aged 5-14 years are engaged in child labour. Child marriages are more prevalent in the north than in the southern parts of Nigeria. About 60% of children under the age of 18 years have experienced some form of violence. Girl children have 87% likelihood of being victims of abuse than male children.

Several other issues in the development of the Nigerian child arise and deserve attention; relatively low level of child participation in the development of legislation and national action plans, reported increase in number of online children faced with bullying and harassment. The overarching recommendation is that government should invest more in social protection with focus on social safety nets, child grants and health insurance.

In 2020, Nigeria's economy is expected to experience its deepest recession since the 1980s due to the COVID-19-related disruptions, notably the disruptions to economic activity through infection control measures in the country and the lower oil prices and remittances resulting from the global impact of COVID-19. With the rate of economic growth remaining below the population growth rate, per-capita incomes would continue declining and better full-time jobs will be much harder to find. The performance of the oil sector has a direct effect on economic activity, jobs, government revenues, investment, and credit growth.

Half of Nigerians live in a household that receives remittances, which contributed about 20 percent of GDP in 2019. Nigeria's diaspora is concentrated in North America and Europe, where incomes have fallen, and unemployment is rising. Increased risk aversion among global investors has led to a decline in foreign portfolio investments. Workers have resorted to more tenuous, less productive economic activities, causing measures of economic precarity to spike.

The extreme poverty rate is expected to rise as a result of the COVID-19 situation, with the number of poor likely to increase by 15 to 20 million by 2022. The human and economic costs would be amplified if the global economic recovery is less robust or takes longer than hoped. Realizing the government's ambition of lifting 100 million Nigerians out of poverty by 2030 would be challenging even under normal circumstances. The onset of the COVID-19 crisis has made the task much more challenging and urgent.

Programme and risk management

The UNICEF country programme is closely aligned with the UNSDPF and the Government's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, 2017-2020. UNICEF leads the UNCT programme and operations management teams and result area 2 of the UNSDPF on equitable quality basic services (which anchors the UNICEF country programme). UNICEF leads the UNSDPF results groups for WASH and learning/skills development, and is colead for protection, health, HIV/AIDS and nutrition.

Timely and quality programme planning, monitoring, evaluation, innovation and reporting will enhance programme effectiveness. This will involve capacity-building of federal and state government and other partners in programme design and implementation; expanding and strengthening partnerships with all levels of Government, civil society, NGOs, the private sector and donors; and adequate resource mobilization. External communication will engage the media to advocate on key issues and to increase national investments for children.

Communication for development will strengthen the uptake of programme interventions. The country and zonal offices structure, staffing and business processes will be geared towards delivering results for children as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In addition to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the north-east, natural disasters, particularly flooding and disease outbreaks, inter-ethnic tensions and political unrest affect other areas of the country. Related risks include inadequate and unpredictable funding for the crisis in the north-east and other disaster-prone areas, and difficulties attracting staff to work in demanding conditions. The country programme is risk-informed and also includes mechanisms to make any needed adjustments. Emergency response and C/DRR are integrated into each programme component. The country office works closely with the regional office and headquarters on fundraising and human resources issues, and with the UNCT and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security to mitigate risks to staff.

This country programme document outlines the UNICEF contributions to national results and serves as the primary unit of accountability to the Executive Board for results alignment and resources assigned to the programme at the country level. Accountabilities of managers at the country, regional and headquarters levels with respect to country programmes are prescribed in the organization's programme and operations policies and procedures.

Monitoring and evaluation

The country programme's monitoring, evaluation and gender-review activities include mid- and end-year programme reviews. UNICEF will conduct spot checks and programme monitoring visits according to the harmonized approach to cash transfers, ensuring that agreed activities are being conducted as planned while simultaneously strengthening monitoring by partners. UNICEF will monitor achievement of biannual milestones and removal of bottlenecks using, for instance, lot quality assurance, random sampling and SMS-based reporting.

UNICEF will support federal and state bureaux of statistics to strengthen evidence generation on women and children and the impact of public policies on children. UNICEF will support a new multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) in 2020.

The evaluation strategy will focus on impact evaluations planned for all programme components and will examine the effectiveness of UNICEF support. Midterm and end-of cycle external evaluations of the UNSDPF are expected.

Lessons Learned and Innovations from 2020

The lessons learned in 2020 can be focused in a few key areas: what was learned when in the response to COVID, the importance of building the evidence base for children's issues, and the need to secure political commitments.

COVID response and proofing

In immunization, COVID-19 severely disrupted planned immunization activities, multiple Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs) were either postponed or outrightly cancelled. Lockdowns, stigma and movement restrictions adversely affected uptake of services at health facilities and multiple cVDPV2 outbreaks were reported putting strain on population immunity.

After the initial adjustments, the programme swiftly mobilized the VCM network, conducted multiple cascading workshop to sensitize them on COVID-19 risks and mitigations and integrated COVID-19 messaging with their routine activities. As lessons learnt, UNICEF mobilized the VCM network immediately after the restrictions were lifted and integrated COVID-19 related messages with their routine activities to raise caregiver awareness on COVID-19 risks and mitigation efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided valuable lessons for the nutrition programme. The restrictions brought about the closure of nutrition services. However, the use of existing platforms such as immunization and other critical services led to increased coverage similar to a pre-COVID-19 period. For instance, integrating nutrition services to seasonal malaria activities led to the achievement of 100 per cent coverage of Vitamin A, despite the overall national coverage of 26 per cent. In 2021 and beyond, the programme will strengthen this approach of integrating nutrition services with the health Page 6 of 7 Page 6 of 7 system. UNICEF will also continue to explore the use of virtual meetings and training on nutrition interventions to save cost. We saw the shift in delivering adolescent nutrition services from schools to communities when the lockdown began, and the use of adolescent peer-to-peer approach as an innovation. The nutrition programme will expand on this approach in the coming year to reach more out of school adolescents with nutrition services.

Timely strategic COVID-19 emergency preparedness response plan for education at federal and state levels, coordination with strategic partners such as radio and television broadcasters, adaptation and development of learning materials led to the successful implementation of home-based learning.

- Greater coordination between federal and state governments and other stakeholders and hands-on technical support in data validation and management helped harmonize the EMIS (Education, Management and Information Systems) tool and timely availability of data and expanding the coverage of schools. This leads to better inter and intra states comparison and reporting of data.
- support to evidence-based advocacy on gender-responsive enrolment drive, development of national enrollment drive framework and its subsequent operationalisation in all LGEAs within the federal and state governments led to on-time enrollment and girls participation and transition to high grades.
- Children in humanitarian situations need to have timely and sustained access to quality learning with foundational skills. Hence, radio and reading hubs, the adaptation of Teaching at Right Level materials to engage children in learning during the Covid-19 pandemic are some of the commendable examples. The hybrid community learnings centres in North-East Nigeria were innovative strategies used in the reporting year. These community learning hubs are supported with radio, reading and take-home learning and assessment materials to engage children in learning. Also, while schools were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U-Report digital platform (online and offline mode) was utilised for remote learning assessment to understand the learning level of children.

Building the evidence base

Continued investment in the multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) will provide a crucial view of the situation of women and children in 2021. The survey, initially planned for 2020, will be the first large-scale in-person household survey giving evidence on immunization and other key results for children.

The Intervention Profiling tool developed by UNICEF presents an innovative and powerful decision support tool providing policymakers and WASH practitioners the opportunity to objectively allocate resources and estimate cost of interventions using broader key performance indicators to assess the actual level of needs of states. By utilizing indicators such as security, poverty, gender/equity, etc., the Intervention Profiling tool identifies and targets those most in need of WASH services to ensure that no one is left behind. With constant advocacy and strategic dissemination tactics, the Intervention Profiling tool could be utilized by all stakeholders within the WASH sector.

Political commitment and advocacy

Securing highest-level political commitment to the Clean Nigeria campaign catalyzed a sub-national movement and momentum. It resulted in states leveraging internal resources to replicate the UNICEF model by developing state-wide ODF roadmaps and launching campaigns to end open defecation. By aligning the ODF Campaign with institutional mandates, Osun, Cross River, Ondo and Ekiti states declared a state of emergency for WASH while, Bauchi, Katsina, Nasarawa, Plateau, Ebonyi, Kebbi and Kwara states were able to increase investments in sanitation.

A major lesson learned in this reporting year is that high level advocacy to the executive and administrative arms of government must be consistent. For instance, a robust planning tool-- Education Sector Performance Assessment Tool (ESPAT) developed in collaboration with UBEC which will become a self-assessment tool for states on the holistic coverage, implementation and compliance with sector plans.