

Mali

Update on the context and situation of children

Despite a 30-month political transition, structural reforms and the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, insecurity is still widespread amid a climate of fear, crime, and population displacement. Increasing constraints on humanitarian access are a major concern. In 2022, the UN Department of Security and Safety reported 1,258 security incidents. Conflicts often result in egregious violations of child rights. Administrative delays and the socio-political situation complicated the programming environment for all Key Results for Children (KRCs). The damage to public institutions and mass population movements have cut children's access to essential services and undermined social protection. Young children and adolescents continue to pay the highest price for family separation, displacement, violence and exploitation.

About 7.5 million people, 34 per cent of the population, need humanitarian assistance (52 per cent women, 56 per cent children and 15 per cent people with disabilities). This is a significant increase on the 3.6 million figure of 2020 and 5.1 million in 2021. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has increased to 401,736. In 2022, it was estimated that 1.8 million Malians were food insecure, a 41 per cent increase over 2021. The Ukraine crisis has caused surges in the prices of food and fuel.

According to the World Bank, the national poverty rate rose from 42.5 per cent in 2019 to 44.4 per cent in 2021. By mid-year 2022, it was reported that 41.3% of children were living in poverty. Economic growth forecasts have fallen from 5.2 to 4.2 per cent. Sanctions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) have further undermined the economy, reducing government revenues and freezing international development assistance. The Government has been forced to cut budgets, especially for social services. Inflation is expected to reach six per cent in 2022. Of 191 countries, Mali ranked 186th on the Human Development Index. Under current conditions, it will be hard to improve this ranking.

Climate-related hazards in Mali include droughts, floods, and crop pests. These exacerbate malnutrition and hunger and have become significant in the large agricultural production regions of Sikasso and Segou as well as Kidal, a nomadic pastoralist area. Local fishing, agricultural, and livestock activities are shifting southward to areas where population density is already high. This can provoke local conflicts.

Mali's health system has been in danger of collapse since the socio-political crisis of 2012. This has reduced the quality and use of services. High turnover of government staff and the frequent re-assignment of health workers and teachers from place to place have further reduced capacity. In 2022, only 45 per cent of Malian children were fully vaccinated (KRC1) (down from 56 per cent in 2015). This increased vulnerability to diseases such as measles (716 confirmed cases). By the end of 2022, Mali had endured four waves of COVID-19, with 20,468 cases and 658 deaths in 2021 and 32,771 confirmed cases and 743 deaths in 2022. Risk communication, community engagement and accelerated vaccination limited infections and allowed reduced services and economic activities to continue in some areas.

Stunting (low height for age) rates among children under five (21.9 per cent over the last two years) are among the highest in Africa (KRC2). According to the 2022 Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) survey, the national severe acute malnutrition (low weight for height) rate was 10.8 per cent. 49.8 per cent of children under six months are being exclusively breastfed (compared to 47.6% in 2021) and 21.3% of children 6-59 months were

benefitting from dietary diversity (20.5% in 2021).

On the positive side, between 2010 and 2021 Mali's maternal mortality rate is estimated to have fallen from 660 to 317 per 100,000 live births, neonatal mortality from 39 to 33.4 per 1,000 live births, infant mortality from 77 to 61.6 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality from 130 to 97.1 per 1,000 live births. On the other hand, the number of incidents of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) at home, school, and in the wider community is increasing. According to recent data, 98 per cent of the survivors of some 10,000 cases of GBV are women, and 38 per cent are girls under 18. Mali ranks 155th on the Gender Inequality Index. In addition, 54 per cent of women aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18, and 16 per cent were married before the age of 15. There has been no progress on this issue since the establishment of the baseline (54 per cent) for the KRC6 in the country programme.

Among the 6.5 million school-age children in Mali, more than 2.3 million (35 per cent) are out-of-school. Dropout rates and learning losses are very high, especially for girls and children from poorer households. To make matters worse, by the end of the 2021 – 2022 school year, 1,766 schools (SDG4) had been closed because of insecurity (102 more than reported in 2021). This affected more than 500,000 students and 10,000 teachers. This will have a devastating impact on their physical and psychological well-being and access to the ancillary services provided in schools.

The proportion of the population using basic water services was 83 per cent in 2021 (surpassing the target of 81 per cent). Data were not available for 2022. More than 96 per cent of internally displaced persons are living without reliable access to water. Nationwide in 2022 only 20 per cent of households had access to safely managed sanitation.

In the third year of country programme implementation, UNICEF continued to ensure that its programme and priorities are in line with national priorities related to children as defined in the Transition Action Plan 2021-22, the National Development Plan (CREDD 2019-2023), UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2024, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union 2063 Agenda. The programme is also aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan, and regional priorities on Key Results for Children (KRCs 1, 2, 4, 6 & 8).

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2022, UNICEF continued to work with the Government and the National Transitional Council to fulfill its mandate to protect the rights of all children and adolescents. Through the 2020-2024 Country Programme of Cooperation, in partnership with a wide range of UN, multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental and civil society organisations, and as reported previously, UNICEF is following a life-cycle approach, with a focus on children at different stages of both decades of their childhood. The aim is to deliver a mutually agreed integrated interventions that leaves no vulnerable and hard-to-reach children behind and assists Mali to meet its national and international commitments to its children. This means building a continuum of support to ensure a child's full development (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 27).

The theories behind the lifecycle approach are that all stages of a child's life are connected with each other, with the lives of other people, and are influenced by the broader social-ecological environment they live in; it is crucial to examine both risks and protective factors throughout a child's life, including taking action to ensure the best start in life for children and their caregivers; there are two critical windows of opportunity to influence development and cognitive trajectories positively: early childhood and adolescence.

Pillar 1: The early years (0–5 years): to achieve significant and sustainable long-term progress at

national and sub-national level for four KRCs adopted in Mali.

UNICEF has promoted immunisation as an entry point for several associated interventions. To increase local capacity, improve results and bring vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks under control, UNICEF provided significant amounts of immunisation supplies. There were no vaccine stock outs during the year. Between 2021 and 2022, districts that have at least 80 per cent of children 0-11 months vaccinated with DTP3 increased from 56 to 69 per cent (2022 target 85 per cent). DTP3 coverage increased slightly to 94 per cent (annual target 79 per cent).

UNICEF and WHO supported a catch-up plan in the 6 underserved regions through an integrated community engagement strategy, the strengthening of last-mile delivery of vaccines and health supplies, and solarisation of health facilities.

In response to a measles outbreak, around 387,000 children aged six months to 15 years received measles vaccines (92 per cent coverage rate). There have been no cases of polio transmission since 2019. However, Mali still could not be certified as free of maternal and neonatal tetanus. By the end of 2022, only 12.48 per cent of the target population were fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

In a significant development, the President of Mali signed Decree 2022-0220 in April 2022, making Community Health Workers' (CHWs') role in the health system official. UNICEF has provided the government and partners with Rapidpro, a digital tool for the efficient collection and transmission of birth registration data, combining civil and health registration systems.

As planned, the country office (CO) provided operational costs and technical support to all health districts for at least three interventions: deliveries at health facilities, antenatal care and screening for malnutrition (KRC2). A little more than 5,000,000 under-fives were screened for acute malnutrition by community actors, while an additional 1,256,000 mothers were screened for mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC). UNICEF supported the development of a national strategy for the prevention of stunting in children under-five and the scaling up of exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding and micronutrients supplementation. In the first round of a nutrition intensification campaign, roughly 6.8 million children aged 6-59 months received one dose of vitamin A, (a six per cent increase compared to 2021). The government also adopted the national WASH in nutrition strategy.

Access to basic sanitation and the elimination of open defecation (KRC8) are still priorities. With assistance in sanitation marketing from UNICEF, more than 230,000 beneficiaries are now living in 269 villages certified Open Defecation Free. At national level, five per cent of households were still practicing open defecation. This falls short of the CPD target of four per cent and will make it difficult to reach the government's commitment to reduce open defecation to one per cent by 2026.

Pillar 2: The formative years (6–12 years), facilitating successful transitions, with an emphasis on safe and inclusive quality education and the prevention of violence and exploitation.

In 2022 the primary school completion rate reached 54 per cent (53.20 per cent for girls) compared to 47 per cent in 2019. Community engagement, and social and behaviour change awareness-raising campaigns about school enrolment were central to this increase. The UNICEF target for access to formal and non formal education for children affected by conflict or insecurity was exceeded (over 183,000 children reached against a target of 156,000). The programme achieved this success using the risk-informed Humanitarian and Development Nexus programme which made it easier than normal to operate in hard-to-reach areas. UNICEF initiated a "Cash Incentives to Support Teachers and School-based Staff" project to cover transportation and other basic expenses. This has so far reached 1,401 teachers in 792 permanent and temporary schools.

By mid-2022, an estimated 42 per cent of primary and lower-secondary school age children were out-of-school (annual target of 45 per cent). UNICEF operated a "Back to School" campaign,

incentivising almost 27,000 children (57 per cent girls) to return to school. It was reported that only 64,515 (54 per cent girls) of the 155,000 children in humanitarian situations expected to benefit from assistance from UNICEF and partners had access to formal or non-formal basic learning opportunities. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and local education authorities' efforts to re-open 143 schools with almost 27,000 children (44 per cent girls). To support distance learning, UNICEF supplied 5,577 solar radios and USB drives to more than 470 listening clubs. The second phase of the radio education program will include validated lessons on 79 radio stations with a target audience of some 500,000 children.

In a major breakthrough, the recommendations from the technical review of the Education sector (PRODEC II) were approved. UNICEF led country-level support to the Transforming Education Summit (TES) and supported the development of a teaching module integrating gender transformative pedagogy in the public schooling system. However, the humanitarian crisis led to the suspension of the Global Partnership for Education.

UNICEF used the life-cycle approach to WASH services in schools to strengthen the maintenance capacity of school management committees in 113 primary schools, (against the annual target of 50). This strengthened collaboration among the education, nutrition, WASH, social protection, and gender sectors. Further, UNICEF provided training for more than 34,000 members of 3,000 school management committees on their roles and responsibilities in the management of schools' child protection and psychosocial support.

Pillar 3: The second decade (13–18 years), focusing on adolescent empowerment, skills development, well-being, the promotion of child-friendly behaviour and the prevention of violence and exploitation. (KRC6)

UNICEF invested in providing psychological support in transit and orientation centres to more than 28,400 conflict-affected adolescents (47 per cent girls). This is a significant increase from the approximately 20,800 adolescents supported in 2021. It followed earlier investment in the capacity building of social workers in case management, standard operating procedures, and referral. In 2022 almost 800 GBV alert committees were formed with support from the Spotlight Initiative, UNICEF and UNFPA acted as the first level of referral and management of cases. There are almost 8,000 committee members (50 per cent women). They are getting trained in GBV prevention, referral, response, legal assistance and psychological first aid. With UN support, the government has established 15 one-stop centres around the country to provide holistic care for GBV victims. Coverage is low, dependent on external funding, and often consisting only of psychological support.

Interactions between the traditionally vertical child protection, education, health, and gender sectors allowed girls and adolescents to define for themselves opportunities for coordination at both programmatic and geographic levels. In 2022 UNICEF supported the validation and official launch of the national strategy and plan for the abandonment of child marriage.

Experienced social workers have started to identify vulnerable children when visiting health facilities so that teachers can refer them to critical child protection services. In addition, UNICEF has helped almost 3,400 out-of-school children (55 per cent girls) with resources for secondary schooling or with vocational training opportunities such as sewing, hairdressing, soap-making, fabric dyeing, agro-processing, sheep fattening, catering, and poultry farming. Although this result remains below the planned target of 80,000, it far exceeded the total of 700 adolescents reached in 2021.

Pillar 4: An enabling environment for community resilience through active participation in social service management, monitoring and social protection.

In 2021 the government fully funded the cash transfer component of the national social protection response plan. It aimed to reach one million households with cash transfers of about US\$ 180 each to

counter the impact of COVID-19. The momentum thus created led to the adoption of a decree which now specifies the establishment of the unified social registry. However, in 2022, the country faced economic sanctions which led to significant cuts in social sectors budgets, including the cash transfer programme.

More than 65,000 people benefited from Humanitarian CASH transfer (6.5 percent of the target), with aims at addressing immediate needs of the poorest and most marginalized by providing them with socio-economic opportunities to enhance their livelihoods and strengthen resilience against shocks and stresses. In addition to that, UNICEF provided technical assistance and direct programme implementation and funding of cash transfers to Government, allowing 646,800 children to be covered by cash transfer programmes. Community-based committees have signed 'performance contracts' that include the establishment of grievance and redressal mechanisms to handle complaints and refer them to the central level.

To increase resilience and youth participation, UNICEF supported the training of more than 11,800 young people and adolescents (50 per cent girls) in conflict prevention techniques. The beneficiaries are now carrying out community-based conflict prevention interventions in nine regions of the country.

National public financial managers have been sensitized to the child-friendly programme budgeting approach, the gradual integration of policies and budgets in the social sector, and the development of plans financed through flexible and accessible funding mechanisms. UNICEF also provided technical assistance to help local governance structures strengthen and finalise their local development plans (34 PDESECs).

Pillar 5. Programme effectiveness

UNICEF works through five field offices with 231 staff (33 per cent women) of whom 29 per cent are International Professionals from 28 different nations (19 per cent industrial). In the Annual Management Plan there are provisions for the monitoring of 10 workplace culture indicators. Duty of Care was prioritized, and mechanisms for attending to staff well-being in the context of an L2 emergency and COVID-19 were further strengthened.

UNICEF Mali exceeded its resource mobilisation target for 2022, raising US\$ 200.8 million in regular and emergency Other Resources (ORR and ORE). This included US\$ 26 million in carryover from 2021. US\$ 42.4 million came from the Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeal. Mali CO efficiently utilized >98 per cent of allocated budget in 2022.

UNICEF strengthened communication with partners, donor reporting, and contribution management. The office established new or expanded partnerships, including with the World Bank, Korea, Germany, China, and Turkey. Advancing the Business for Results agenda was challenging, given limited private sector development in Mali.

The CO implemented its Supply Plan for a total cost of US\$ 57 million (37 percent of expenditure). A procurement strategy was developed by the CO, to circumvent access difficulties related to WAEMU and ECOWAS sanctions.

The CO carried out HACT assurance activities and enhanced its capacity to strengthen coordination, quality reporting and the follow-up of recommendations. There were 105 spot checks, 18 audits, 333 programmatic visits and 55 micro-evaluations (exceeded targets).

The Business Operating Strategy helped to reduce costs by using common Long-Term Agreements and shared premises. The level of cost reduction of the office operating budget is at US\$19,591, under the target set at US\$600,000.

The CO went through an internal audit covering the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 May 2022. Control processes were classified Partially Satisfactory, Improvement Needed. The combination of programme effectiveness review and the audit recommendations led to a series of strategic programme shifts and risk mitigation measures to be implemented from 2023 onwards.

As the WASH, Nutrition, Child Protection, and Education cluster lead, UNICEF supported enhanced interagency planning, coordination and information management, to strengthen preparedness for ongoing and sudden emergencies, UNICEF developed contingency plans for all field offices. The plans enabled rapid response in each hub at critical times during the ongoing emergency.

UNICEF Mali continued investing in national statistical systems to gather data on progress towards the CPD outputs and outcomes through initiatives such as the UN Data and Statistics Strategy, the WCAR Data Strategy Framework, third party monitoring, level 3 monitoring, studies, and the implementation of 3 out of 6 costed evaluation plan activities (KRC#1, KRC#2, Multi-Country Evaluation of UNICEF's Humanitarian Response to the L2 Crisis in the Central Sahel).

UNICEF provided technical assistance and training for the development and deployment of a community health information software tool system (DiscMali). Over 3,000 end-users have been through training for the collection, analysis and use of information for decision-making.

The CO adopted the gender-transformative approach by promoting girls' education and access to social services, promoting menstrual health and hygiene, and preventing or responding to GBV. The approach included development and contextualization of training modules on gender equality, sexual division of labour, GBV, and gender discrimination. However, by mid-2022, only 735 children aged 6 -12 years who experience violence had been reached by health, social or justice/law enforcement services (the target was 4,000).

UNICEF led social communication and behaviour change activities to eliminate violence against children and to prevent child marriage and, with more than 196,000 people involved, exceeded its target of 150,000 participants. A network of child protection committees is now in place and needs support.

Awareness of the threats posed by climate change is low. UNICEF funded the participation of three delegates at the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) summit in Egypt. With the Regional Solar Technical Institute UNICEF and 35 WASH stakeholders began to explore and exploit the potential of solar-powered water supplies. As part of 'greening-the-office', UNICEF installed a 170-kW solar system in the CO in Bamako.

UNICEF Mali continued to increase its reach and share of voice to strategically position UNICEF as the leading voice for children, with children, in support of advocacy and fundraising efforts in both the humanitarian and development sectors. In 2022 UNICEF Mali increased its share of voice against competitors and expanded its share of voice with brand mentions on key child rights themes, especially around GAPS with a focus on the learning crisis. Continued advocacy with government resulted in increases in children's participation in child rights awareness activities and government messaging aligned to the GAPS.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

With UNDP and UNICEF support, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Status Report 2022 to the High-Level Political Forum. UNICEF also provided technical assistance for the fifth public hearing of the Malian Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) on "Sexual Violence and Violations of Children's Rights in Conflict Situations". With UNDP and Lawyers Without Borders Canada, UNICEF also supported the participation of young women and men in transitional justice mechanisms.

For the Mali UNSDCF UNICEF was lead agency for social services and social protection (Axis 3). UNICEF led the OMT-HACT group and participated in the Joint UN resource mobilization group with Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme.

UNICEF developed partnerships with 138 Government entities, eight United Nations agencies and multiple public sector donors (the World Bank, the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development, The Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), the governments of Germany, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Japan, and Denmark) as well as 72 local and international NGOs. Partnerships with young people remain at the heart of UNICEF strategies.

UNICEF and UNFPA received renewed funding for the joint programme for the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Mali (2022-2030)", involving six other UN agencies and several women's and youth rights organizations. UNICEF and USAID jointly managed the Health Dialogue Group. UNICEF advocated for health systems resilience within the UHC framework for the Continuity of Essential Health and Nutrition Services, helping maintain critical services throughout the COVID-19 epidemic. As Nutrition lead and Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement UN network convenor, UNICEF has strengthened partnerships, coherence and harmonisation with FAO and WFP. The Regional Directors of International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF signed an agreement for the implementation of an MOU on Children On The Move.

UNICEF played a minor role in some partnerships. It promoted the inclusion of HIV prevention for girls and young women in the Mali application to the Global Fund. Under the leadership of UNAIDS, it supported the introduction of HIV testing services in pre- and post-natal care services. It also contributed in a small way to the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel by enhancing the capacities of 15 youth and 21 women-led organizations to foster social cohesion through the engagement of children and adolescents as agents of peace.

Continuing an upward trend in partnerships with non-profits. UNICEF signed 68 programme documents with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). 210 implementing partners were involved and a total of US\$ 64.3 million was provided for cash transfer programmes. As the WASH, Nutrition, Child Protection, and Education cluster lead (with Save the Children), UNICEF supported enhanced interagency planning, coordination and information management.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Constraints

The safety of all staff continued as major concerns especially in the north and centre of the country, with numerous reports of assault, intimidation, arbitrary detention and other forms of mistreatment. Agencies were also vulnerable to the theft and looting of relief supplies. These concerns constrained programme implementation across all sectors.

Restrictions on field visits led to a lack of reliable data and inaccurate estimates of measles and COVID-19 cases. UNICEF and others are trying to use alternative data collection instruments including such as Level 3 and third-party monitoring. During the last quarter of 2022, UNICEF developed a data strategy framework, “One Stop Data Management Point”.

Opportunities

UNICEF can provide more budgetary and other support than at present to scaled-up, long-term and risk-informed local systems so that they can play an appropriately important role in pre-empting and responding to shocks and stressors and mitigating the impact of conflict, displacement, hunger, poverty and climate change.

UNICEF can build on relations with local institutions and community leaders to develop holistic and integrated approaches and reposition Social Behaviour Change as a cross-cutting strategy rather than standalone programme.

The ‘agile’ approach, using mobile teams of social workers, psychologists and others to visit families and communities and provide psychosocial support to the most vulnerable children through individual and small-group activities could contribute to ending violence against children and gender-based violence.

Lessons learned

Outputs and activities that systematically incorporate the views and voices of children speaking out against violations of child rights contribute to improved results and contribute to the sustainability of outputs and outcomes.

Children and young people are often more at ease than their elders with the role of digital technology in their lives.

Communities, families and children of either sex can often have greater trust in Community Health Workers and other local actors than in civil servants or other government workers.

The socio-political crisis, ECOWAS sanctions and the COVID-19 emergency showed not only how effectively national systems can meet humanitarian needs but also why it is important to link humanitarian and development interventions

A multi-country FGM evaluation showed that community engagement in the reduction of child marriage and FGM contributed significantly to programme success. In response, the child protection and gender sections are developing targeted interventions based on the real costs of community engagement.

In 2022, UNICEF supported research on the empowerment of women and girls for the programme to support resilience, food security and nutrition. Recommendations were made for advancing equality between women and men, and girls and boys.

UNICEF consolidated its technology for development (T4D) portfolio and developed technology platforms to monitor results in emergencies, with protocols for data collection and analysis such as WASH-FIT, computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPIs), the educational management information system (EMIS) and open data kit (ODK) platforms for real-time monitoring of interventions.

A PSEA specialist in the country office is helping counterparts from government and NGO structures

to conform with UNICEF PSEA standards and procedures.

Information from field trips and interviews with beneficiaries can be used to strengthen resource mobilisation and relations with donors. The use of this type of personal evidence at the various public and private events organised by UNICEF has built confidence in UNICEF's capacity and led to the mobilization of additional resources.

Taking lessons learned forward

UNICEF will continue to help young people and children express their views, voice their concerns and explore and implement solutions to the problems they face.

Emergency stocks will be pre-positioned in all regions as an essential requirement for reaching those in urgent need in a timely manner.

To strengthen Malian leadership and ownership of the country programme, the life-cycle approach will be used to develop local integrated monitoring and evaluation systems. This could also lead to a more holistic, coherent, and coordinated UNSDCF than at present.

Digital awareness and skills development for staff and their counterparts will be a priority to facilitate the use of new technologies in the Country Programme.