

Liberia

Update on the context and situation of children

Liberia commemorated its bicentennial anniversary in 2022. This milestone anniversary while celebrated, also led to a number of dialogues and reflections on progress made and challenges facing the first independent republic in Africa. Despite the impact of the COVID pandemic and the Ukraine crisis, the economy of Liberia was relatively stable. The Liberian economy was projected to expand at an average rate of 5.2 per cent between 2023 and 2024 but slowed down to 3.7 per cent in 2022 because of rising global unpredictability and a commodities price shock, with inflation projected to average at 7.2 per cent yearly in 2022–2024, remaining modest and stable. While the situation and future macro-economic prognoses remained relatively stable, the impact of the on the Liberia households was different. The country witness fuel shortages and increase in food insecurity in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis. This resulted in shortages in some critical commodities – for example rice – and some disruption of services (fuel had impact on cost of transportation and some services due to heavy dependence on fuel-generated electricity supply). The UN and international partners worked closely with the Ministries of Agriculture and Health to conduct a rapid assessment of food security and nutrition to support the government in development of a response plan.

The political landscape remained stable while campaigning for the upcoming presidential and legislative elections, which will take place on October 10, 2023, started to pick up the pace. In 2022, the parliament approved the national budget which is considered among the largest in years, however, the budget allocated to the social sectors – including education and health remains modest to achieve the goals.

In July 2022, Liberia presented its second Voluntary National Review. On the SDG index, Liberia is placed 153rd out of 163 nations. Most SDGs are making modest progress and still face obstacles. Due to a shortage of statistics for monitoring progress, SDGs 4—Quality of Education and 10—Reduced Inequality—are of particular concern.

While men and women enjoy equal rights under civil law, gender disparities are common in customary law, which remains dominant in much of Liberia and disadvantages women in matters including inheritance and child custody. Violence against women and children, particularly rape, is pervasive. In February 2022, the Traditional Council of Liberia announced a three-year suspension on FGM. This bold step is a positive stride toward protecting women’s and girls’ rights in the country.

COVID-19 has remained a public health emergency during 2022. The ongoing Covid-19 vaccinations have added additional strain on the health system and have affected the delivery of essential health services. Liberia recorded 8,014 positive Covid-19 cases with 294 deaths, with a fatality rate of 6.59/per 100,000 people and a case fatality of 3.66 per cent since March 2020. UNICEF and partners continued to work with the Government of Liberia to support the Covid-19 vaccination rollout resulting in 81 per cent coverage. This is a milestone success for Liberia as it was the first country in West Africa to reach that level of coverage.

The measles outbreak occurred in all counties except for one county. UNICEF worked with other partners to conduct outbreak campaigns with 406,540 children 9 – 35 months vaccinated using an integrated approach with routine vaccines that improved immunisation coverage and vaccinated zero-dose children.

The GoL held national consultations in the lead up the transforming education summit (TES) and a follow up post TES national education conference was held in December 2022, which highlighted a number of significant recommendations, including commitments to increase the budget for education.

The publication of Education Statistics booklet established the Net Enrollment Rates at 58 per cent for early childhood education, 41 per cent for primary and 13.4 per cent for lower secondary level. The out-of-school rate remained high at 53 per cent. The education sector finalised the Education Sector Analysis, and a new Education Sector Plan (ESP 2022-2025) was developed.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) announced the completion of Liberia's National Household Social Registry for social intervention purposes. The Social Registry contains household information, including education, nutrition, healthcare income and expenditure, and other social services. The Social Registry will share vital and precise data with social protection partners intended for social protection intervention across the country.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Every child survives and thrives.

Health

UNICEF continued advocacy for the functionality of Primary Health Care to ensure access to quality health care at different technical fora and working groups. The financial and technical support extended to the Ministry of Health (MoH) led to the finalisation of the National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2022-2026), National Health Policy (2022-2031), and Essential Package of Health Services II (2022-2026) for UHC.

By December 2022, 176,146 (94 per cent) children aged 0–11 months were vaccinated with three doses of Penta vaccine nationally, compared to 150,702 (83 per cent) in 2021. Similarly, 178,609 (96 per cent) children aged 0-11 months received the first dose of the Measles vaccine compared to 136,776 (75 per cent). Measles outbreaks occurred in 14/15 (93 per cent) counties. UNICEF worked with stakeholders to conduct two outbreak campaigns during which 406,540 children (9–35 months) were vaccinated using an integrated approach with routine vaccines that improved immunisation vaccinated zero-dose children. UNICEF contributed to assessing the root causes of low routine immunisation in 10 counties and conducted the Comprehensive EPI Review. Evidence generated in the assessment and review is being used to develop the National Immunization Strategy. Advocacy for Public Health financing for Child Immunization and Community Health with MoH, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP), with support from other stakeholders, resulted in World Bank providing US\$ 3 million for the next three years for childhood vaccine procurement.

UNICEF contributed to the nationwide COVID- 19 vaccination campaign facilitating the procurement and custom clearance of 2,649,586 doses, in-country vaccine management, and logistics. UNICEF also supported fuel for vaccine storage in five southeastern counties, transportation of vaccines, data management, printing 2,318,517 vaccination cards, direct financial support to two poor-performing counties, and technical guidance for integrating COVID-19 vaccination with routine immunization services. A total of 3,255,863 persons have been fully vaccinated for Covid-19 since the onset of vaccinations in 2021. Through all stakeholder efforts, Liberia became the first African country by October 2022 to surpass the 70 per cent target set by WHO for COVID-19 vaccinations.

Results contribute to KRC#1, PAPD Pillar #1, CPD Outcome #3, SDGs #3 and #5, and UNSDCF Outcome #1.

Nutrition

UNICEF led the UN nutrition network, supporting the Government in conducting the RFSNLMA to assess the impact of covid 19 and the current food crisis on food security and nutrition. The assessment highlighted an increase in food insecurity (2.2 million population), global acute malnutrition (7 per cent), and the minimum dietary diversity of children aged 6-23 months at 4 per cent. The results raised

concerns among the stakeholders, including Government and donor community, about urgently addressing food insecurity and malnutrition.

UNICEF continued to provide technical support, capacity building, and supplies to MoH and worked towards improving nutrition at scale. More than 50 per cent (514 out of 1,076) of public health facilities and surrounding communities across the 15 counties provided direct nutrition interventions, including maternal, infant, and young child feeding (IYCF) and caring counselling and support, iron folic acid supplementation for pregnant women for the prevention of anaemia and micronutrient powder for home fortification of complementary foods. By December, 548,794 women, 66,867 adolescents and 178,550 children had benefited from nutrition interventions. Continued technical support for capacity building and nutrition supplies to MOH for the early case identification, referral, and treatment of children 0-59 months with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in 287 health facilities. By December 25, 486 children with SAM were treated.

UNICEF supported Government in implementing a package of adolescent nutrition intervention in 60 communities in 9 counties and 279 schools in 6 counties, reaching 66,867 adolescent girls (10-19 years) receiving weekly IFA supplementation, health education, and counselling.

Results contribute to PAPD Pillar #1, CPD Outcome #4, SDGs #2 and #3, KRC #2 and UNSDCF Outcome #1.

Every Child Learns

Continued advocacy and technical support of UNICEF and partners led to the publication of the Education Statistics booklet establishing the Net Enrollment Rates for education at early childhood, primary and lower secondary levels of schooling. The Statistics Booklet also established a baseline of out-of-school children. The booklet contributed to the finalisation of the Education Sector Assessment and new Education Sector Plan (ESP 2022-2025) to bring about educational transformation in the coming years. UNICEF provided technical assistance to the process through UNESCO in support of analysis at ECE levels. Advocacy work to strengthen accountability including in Public Finance Management in the sector continued in collaboration with traditional leaders and legislators.

Towards improved access, UNICEF supported the Government to continue piloting school quality standards as a multi-sectoral platform in 200 pilot schools in 11 counties, reaching 60,000 children (24,000 girls and 36,000 boys). In addition, 10,000 out of school adolescents accessed 17 newly established non-formal Alternative Learning centers. This pilot together with the ALP programme emphasises gender equity and inclusion, helping children at risk of dropping out with a package of services, including life skills-based education, youth advocacy, entrepreneurship, and self-management. Critical school materials, including TLMs for all 2,800 public schools reaching (206,000 girls and 309,000 boys) were provided, while 50 disability kits were procured to commence inclusive education in 50 of the 200 selected schools.

Towards improved learning outcomes, the programme implemented the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework for the continuous development of teachers. A teacher needs assessment was conducted for CPD needs evaluation, and 1,000 (324 female and 676 male) teachers were trained. A dedicated education radio platform was installed in 2022, with the ongoing integration of the learning passport for Digital Learning (DL) and formative assessment to strengthen foundational literacy (FLN) in partnership with three Teacher Training Institutes.

Results contribute to: PAPD Pillar #1, CPD Outcome #4, SDGs #3, #4 and #5, KRCs #3 and #4, UNSDCF

Outcome #1.

Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices.

In 2022, UNICEF supported equipment, materials, and training for 89 birth registration service providers on birth registration. Further, the birth registration information management system (BRIMS) was integrated into District Health Information System (DHIS, version 2) and became interoperable with Health Information Management System. The Integrated HIMS has been set up and rolled out to 98 birth registration centres. UNICEF's support led to the decentralisation and expansion of birth registration to 57 centres across the country, resulting in the registration of 167,860 (85,135 girls and 82,725 boys) aged 0 – 12 years.

With UNICEF's support, the MoGCSP conducted a situation analysis on children living on the street. Based on this analysis a roadmap addressing the needs of children on the street has been drafted. When finalised, the roadmap will serve as a framework to inform policy and programmatic actions. Similarly, recommendations of the Social Service Workforce Mapping and Assessment 2021 led to the development of a strategic plan inclusive of standard operating procedures, guidelines for case management of vulnerable and at-risk children, and a training curriculum for paraprofessionals, social workers, and supervisors. 139 social workers, paraprofessionals, and supervisors were trained in case management and supervision.

The training of justice actors continued to ensure improvement in child justice services. The diversion program reached 550 children (112 girls, 438 boys). The training of 118 (44 females, 73 males) Independent National Commission on Human Rights personnel and other ministries further strengthened alternative reporting and child rights monitoring.

In 2022, a total of 14,832 (9,347 girls, 5,485 boys) were reached with life skills education by 100 trained adolescent peer educators. Of this number, 215 adolescents (90 boys and 125 girls) were enrolled in technical and vocational skills training and internships. The action for adolescent programme was launched under the education programme with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) and ActionAid to commence non-formal accelerated learning for out-of-school adolescents and youth in 17 centres in 11 counties. 10,000 youths and adolescents are enrolled. Apart from being places for skills development, these centres will also be health mentoring and innovation hubs for young people. At least 36 youth advocates were trained to act as mentors and provide peer-to-peer support.

Results contribute to: PAPD Pillars #1 and #4; CPD Outcome #5, KRC #5, #6, #7, SDGs 16 and 17, UNSDCF

Outcomes #3 and #4.

WASH

Goal Area 4: Every child lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

The Ending Open Defecation Road Map 2025 was launched by the Government in November 2021. As a rollout of the Road Map, UNICEF launched a "Comprehensive and Harmonized Approach to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (CHATWASH) Movement" to accelerate WASH improvement across the country. Gbarnga Declaration was signed by all County Superintendents and key county officials in March 2022. The approach emphasised activities at the sub-national level engaging local communities and authorities. As a follow-up to the CHATWASH Workshop, a micro-plan was signed with the National Public Health Institute of Liberia to expedite the process further. Teams were mobilised at the county and district level to roll out the plan, and CLTS facilitators and WASH committee training were conducted.

UNICEF supported WASH Commission for the WASH Joint Sector Review (JSR), engaging the Stockholm International Water Institute as the lead consultant of the process. The JSR kicked off in December 2022 following intensive planning involving all stakeholders, and it will continue until the

first quarter of 2023. UNICEF collaborated with USAID to conduct a WASH BAT– bottleneck analysis tools- workshop to develop a regulatory framework for the WASH sector. The WASH BAT intends to identify key issues and devise mitigation strategies to improve the WASH sector's coordination, planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring.

54,129 persons were provided basic water services in 93 communities through the construction and rehabilitation of 5 small, motorized water systems, 88 hand-dug wells, and boreholes fitted with handpumps. A total of 31,200 persons were reached with basic sanitation through CLTS activities and the construction of four six-cubicle flush latrines. WASH interventions took place in 212 schools by constructing and rehabilitating WASH facilities in 12 counties. WASH interventions were carried out in 38 healthcare facilities through the construction and rehabilitation of WASH facilities, IPC training, supplies distribution, and waste management.

Results contribute to PAPD Pillar #2, CPD Outcome #5, KRC #8, SDG #6, and UNSDCF Outcomes #2.

Goal Area 5: Every child has access to social protection and lives free from poverty

In 2022, UNICEF collaborated with various line ministries MoFDP for adequate resource allocations for social sectors. In Health, UNICEF collaborated with the Department of Community Health to initiate a dialogue with Parliamentarians to discuss the domestic financing for Community Health worker's cadre. In Nutrition, UNICEF supported the detailed cost analysis of Liberia's Multi-Sectoral Strategy and Costed Action Plan for Nutrition (LMSCPAN). The LMSCPAN estimates that USD 278 million will be needed for five years across five ministries (Health, Education, Agriculture, Gender, Children and Social Protection) for nutrition. The LMSCPAN will be launched in February 2023.

As a follow-up to the Transforming of the Education (TES) summit, a national conference was conducted to strengthen education sector financing and address barriers to implementing previous education sector plans. The paucity of timely and reliable data was addressed through technical support towards resumptions of school data collection and analysis. Several subsector policies and strategies were completed, including the Teacher Continuous Professional Development (CPD), the validation of school quality standards, Teacher Management Policy and WASH management guidelines.

Programme Effectiveness

Capacity building on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) continued in 2022, covering 121 staff from CSOs and 62 UNICEF personnel (staff and consultants). 14 CSOs were assessed, and action plans to address gaps were developed to attain low-risk ratings within six months.

The facts-based posting on social media further strengthened trust in UNICEF as a reliable source of information on children-related issues. Through over 900 posts in 2022, the three leading platforms used, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have had over half a million impressions with 418,000 reaches. Facebook has gained 6,600 new followers totaling 449,000, around a 17 per cent increase, while Twitter has gained 2,500 followers representing a 19 per cent increase over the year, totaling 149,000 followers.

Through strengthened partnership and advocacy, UNICEF Liberia contributed to revising and updating the National Health Promotion Policy and Strategic Plan of the MoH and developing a National Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy to promote Integrated Civil Registration, Vital Statistics, and Identity Management Systems in Liberia.

Approximately 1,967,944 persons were reached with preventive lifesaving messages on COVID-19 and access to routine health services through the implementation of social behaviour change activities. Over 583,583 households were empowered with the knowledge to take positive actions related to

immunisation, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence through consistent communications for development actions.

UNICEF Liberia has continued to support the rollout of the Social Behavior Change Communication Strategy 2021. A high-level consultation on the SBC was held to enable high-level advocacy for policy and legislative and legislative actions to end violence against children. A total of 13,095 individuals were reached through various community engagement platforms that seek to raise awareness of harmful social norms and practices. UNICEF Provided technical guidance for developing, printing, and nationwide dissemination of more than 1,000,000 copies of posters and flyers of IEC/BCC materials to promote positive behaviour change. At least 60 per cent of the population was reached through Media engagements through seven national FM radio stations and local community language broadcasters of 32 community radio stations.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2022, UNICEF Liberia further built on its existing partnerships with other UN agencies across the sectors. In conjunction with UNESCO, UNICEF supported the government through the MoE in organizing a national consultation on quality participation in the Transformation Education Summit in September 2022. This technical support has enabled the country to have quality documentation reflecting the reality of the education system and the issues and challenges. Following the global summit, Liberia was one of the first countries in the West African sub-region to organize a national conference to follow the global summit momentum. The joint support of UNICEF and UNESCO was instrumental in organizing and facilitating this national conference, likely to improve domestic financing and initiate reforms required to achieve global quality standards. At service delivery level, UNICEF and UNESCO are developing a collaboration framework to implement teacher training for ECE and to support formative assessment at classroom levels. In addition, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and USAID continued collaboration as the core development partners reviewing the education sector plan implementation and ensuring coordination of external aid.

UNICEF and UNFPA supported the government through the MoYS in conducting a mapping assessment of the ongoing interventions targeting the at-risk youth population. The technical and financial assistance includes logistical support for data collection exercises at county level. The assessment findings will provide a basis for the draft programme for the empowerment and rehabilitation of the at-risk youth population in Liberia.

UNICEF has collaborated with UNFPA, UNDP, and WHO to develop a joint comprehensive peace-building and institutionalized rehabilitation programme for the at-risk youth population in Liberia. This joint programme builds on the lesson learnt from the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Disadvantaged Youth programme, which UNFPA and UNDP jointly implemented in partnership with the MoYS.

UNICEF collaborated with WHO, UNFPA, and IOM in a joint Multi-Partner Trust fund delivering Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health and Nutrition services directly benefitting approximately 475,488 people in the three counties covering 35 health facilities.

To review the paediatric HIV landscape and develop the next five years' Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission plan, UNICEF, in partnership with UNAIDS, supported the National AIDS Commission program through technical assistance and logistical support for bottleneck analysis.

UNICEF and WHO continued the collaboration in immunization (including the Covid-19 vaccine rollout). The partnership led to Liberia attaining the 70 per cent Covid-19 vaccination threshold in October 2022, reaching 80 per cent by Nov 2022, and is on course to achieve 90 per cent coverage. The continued joint support of both organizations has been instrumental in this significant achievement

and in the quest of integrating Covid-19 vaccination into routine immunization in 2023, as well as the rollout of the school-based vaccination programme. The recent introduction of the paediatric vaccine against Covid-19 has consolidated the complementarity between the actions of the two organizations.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Field presence in hard-to-reach counties characterized by the low level of human development parameters has proved to be instrumental in accelerating the achievement of key results for children. UNICEF Liberia created an outpost in Zwedru (Grand Gedeh County) that enhanced the visibility and reach of UNICEF's work in four southeastern counties. This field presence has further strengthened the multi-sectoral approach that has been catalytic to the achievements of Key Results for Children. The outpost established a close collaboration and coordination mechanism with the County Superintendent and county team. The reactivation of the coordination actors working in Grand Gedeh County facilitated improved monitoring and tracking of programme implementation, contributing to accelerating the key results for children, notably immunization, birth registration and monitoring of children's rights.

Building on the potential and initial learning from the field presence at Zwedru, UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to work with County Government. This is to improve multi-sectoral coordination among all actors, improve tracking and monitoring of the programme implementation, and build local capacities of county superintendent's office to plan, budget, implement, and report.

The alternative payment modalities continued to improve in managing cash transfers and mitigating multiple risks. These alternative payment modalities (Direct payment and Mobile Money payment) were implemented in response to the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer. The continued trust in alternative payment modalities has been effective and contributed to building internal and external capacities for risk management.

Proactive engagements with various line ministries and parliamentarians to increase domestic resource allocations to key priorities for Liberian children have gained momentum. UNICEF has initiated dialogue and advocacy with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund on issues of fiscal space and the impact of debt on the needs of children and the most vulnerable segments of society. This has made initial gains on various platforms. For example, following the Transformation Education Summit, the Government took the opportunity to organize a National Conference on Education supported by UNICEF. This conference was held under the leadership of the Vice President of the country, bringing together key national stakeholders, including traditional leaders, legislative representatives, the MoFDP, and education sector partners such as UNESCO, GPE and the World Bank. This national conference ended with a demonstrated political will to increase the budget allocation for the education sector gradually and to undertake the systemic and strategic reforms to launch the initiative "1 billion USD in five years for the education sector".

UNICEF collaborated strongly with Government entities to generate evidence to support policymaking and improve programme implementation. The implementation of recommendations of the formative evaluation of Key Results for Children #7 – Birth Registration conducted in 2021 has been instrumental in bringing transformational changes in the Birth Registration system and its financing. The formative evaluation was conducted jointly with MoH with strong technical support from the UNICEF Regional Office. A pilot of integrating Birth Registration Information Management System into DHIS 2 successfully concluded, and the integration has been initiated throughout the country. Similarly, the cost of human resources engaged in birth registration has been included in the annual health budget. However, allocations were not made as per the planned budget. UNICEF continues to advocate for allocations in the next financial year.

Building on evidence generation in the past two years through supporting the conduct of a Demographic and Health Survey, ongoing Population Census, Child Poverty Analysis, multiple programme evaluations, and RFSNLMS in 2022, UNICEF partnered with the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and MoFDP to undertake a Data Landscape Diagnostic and development of Data Strategy for UNICEF. The data landscape diagnostic informed the development of the data strategy with extensive technical support from UNICEF regional office and headquarters. Data Strategy will inform and guide UNICEF's investments for 2023- 2025. However, in this process, it was realized that investment in further strengthening the routine data systems deserves priority and continued support. More technical assistance and investments in the integration of data systems and timely availability of disaggregated data are critical to reaching the most marginalized children and women and addressing the challenges of inequality and inequity.

To ensure sustained community engagement, UNICEF deployed 15 United Nations Volunteers. These UNVs proved critical in enhancing community engagement in programme implementation and programme coordination at the community level. The UNVs were recruited, assigned to all 15 counties, and embedded in the County Health Team, increasing UNICEF's presence at the sub-national level. UNVs engaged communities, religious and traditional leaders, and local authorities. This engagement has strengthened the community feedback mechanism; it allows the communities' concerns and grievances to be addressed. The role of traditional leaders as part of community engagement has proven effective in advancing the prevention of harmful social norms and behavioral practices which put women and girls at a disadvantage. Targeting specifically the influencers such as Zoes, traditional and religious leaders, parents themselves, and teachers continued to stimulate interest in wanting to change social and gender norms which discriminate against women and girls.