

Eastern and Southern Africa

Update on the context and trends

The Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR) was gripped by multiple crises in 2022. The Horn of Africa drought alone, a manifestation of climatic extremes, affected 36.3 million people, including 20.2 million children, taking countries in the sub-region to the brink of famine. Relentless and increasingly severe drought, flooding and cyclones occurred across the region, causing rising humanitarian needs. Large-scale disease outbreaks (cholera, Ebola, measles, polio, yellow fever) erupted in multiple countries while their public health care systems remained strained from the COVID-19 pandemic response. Political instability persisted in many parts of the region, with conflict hotspots, civil unrest and Non-State Armed Group activity. These compounding shocks gravely challenged progress, with most of the region's 265 million children already experiencing multi-dimensional poverty.

Effective UNICEF response involved all levels of the organization, including two Level-3 (L3) emergency responses for the Northern Ethiopia conflict and Horn of Africa drought, and four Level-2 (L2) responses for the Mozambique Cabo Delgado conflict, southern Madagascar drought, Uganda Ebola outbreak and global COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the year ended with some hopeful developments as well: The peace agreement signed between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front in November 2022 widened access to reach children who suffered vicious conflict. Concerned governments, UNICEF and partners helped avert a famine declaration in the Horn of Africa, while the preparedness and agility of the Ugandan government and its partners ended the Ebola outbreak.

Global macroeconomic volatility challenged forward movement for children and vulnerable families. Following modest economic recovery in 2021, the region's economic output slowed significantly in 2022. The Ukraine war was detrimental, diverting aid and investment elsewhere, hampering supply chains and trade, and accelerating inflation, which reached 25 per cent on average. Income opportunities decreased, and the cost-of-living crisis limited households' abilities to invest in children. Simultaneously, underperforming revenue flows and rising debt servicing costs led many governments to reduce social services spending.

Maternal, newborn and child mortality remain high, and ESAR accounts for a large share of global maternal and child deaths. The region continues to be disproportionately affected by public health emergencies. There was a notable increase in major vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, while the high and growing numbers of zero-dose children (3.5 million children unvaccinated in 2021) and trend in cholera and polio outbreaks reflect weak health systems, leaving large immunity gaps; multiple deprivations; and persisting inequities.

Home to two-thirds of all children and adolescents with HIV, ESAR remains the global HIV epidemic's epicentre. Despite positive trends, progress is insufficient to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets. Children are left behind in lifesaving treatment coverage (52 per cent compared to 79 per cent among adults). Gender inequity and other structural drivers heavily burden adolescent girls and young women, who account for 26 per cent of new HIV infections.

The regional nutrition crisis that started in 2021 continued in 2022. This was driven by the Horn of Africa drought and other climate-related events, the global food crisis, COVID-19, epidemics and war in Ukraine, and resulted in rising levels of wasting and increased famine risk, particularly in parts of Somalia. Approximately 3.9 million children were affected by severe wasting, and 28 million by stunting.

The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) context for children was affected by the increase in emergencies, namely drought in the Horn of Africa, where there were 10.5 million water-insecure people in 2022. Deterioration in investment in clean water and sanitation increased water-borne disease outbreaks. The economic impact of COVID-19 and the Ukraine war necessitated new ways of strengthening WASH service provision, including given the high cost of WASH materials.

In ESAR, 66 per cent of children under 5 years are at risk of poor developmental outcomes due to inadequate health and nutrition, exposure to stress and a lack of early learning opportunities—70 per cent of children are not enrolled in early childhood education (ECE). They are not thriving in the crucial first 1,000 days when mental and physical growth foundations are laid because of underlying causes like insufficient and unaffordable early childhood development (ECD) services; unsafe environments; stresses on caregivers; and fragmented, underfunded ECD policies.

With a 2022 school-age population (pre-primary–upper secondary) of approximately 215 million children, ESAR continued to experience a high proportion of out-of-school children and extreme learning poverty despite significant advocacy efforts to address the learning crisis exacerbated by COVID-19. The poverty cycle continues as children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly girls, tend to have the least education, and thus fewer opportunities. On average, only 16 per cent of total government expenditure in ESAR countries goes to education, below the recommended 20 per cent set by the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

Some 28.9 million children with disabilities remain overlooked in policy priorities and budgetary allocations due to lack of data, adequate policies and political commitment. Violence against children (VAC) and women increased due to emergencies and a prevailing context of increased poverty. ESAR remains the region with the lowest level of birth registration; over half its children have no legal identity. Women and girls continued to face elevated gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practice risks, especially as the impacts of COVID-19 and other crises reversed pre-pandemic gains in addressing child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Persisting gender discriminatory norms and poverty put adolescent girls at risk of early and unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. These factors also place the burden of care on women and girls and, as a result, expose them to increased risks during public health emergencies. The early pregnancies also have a direct impact on young mothers' education opportunities.

Given record-high global humanitarian needs, available funding was stretched throughout the year. This, combined with economic recessions, initially negatively impacted fundraising abilities. While private sector fundraising within the region remained a challenge, the ESA Regional Office (ESARO) and country offices (COs) ultimately mobilized resources that helped avoid famine in drought-affected countries and respond to outbreaks. Global public-private partnerships, innovative financing and market shaping trends were successfully leveraged in ESARO efforts.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Key area results

Alongside a new UNICEF Strategic Plan (2022–2025) and Regional Office Management Plan (2022–2025), 2022 marked the launch of the Regional Collaboration for Children (C4C), an approach to support COs and ESARO to collectively move the needle on a set of critical results for children and adolescents. It includes two regional flagships: (i) learning and skills for all children and adolescents and (ii) climate resilience, adaptation and children. Additionally, it includes five focus areas: (iii) addressing maternal, neonatal and under-five mortality through primary health care (PHC); (iv)

reducing stunting in early childhood; (v) ending violence against girls, boys and women; (vi) ending AIDS among children and adolescents, while improving sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); and (vii) expanding national cash transfer programmes and cash-plus approaches to address multidimensional child poverty.

The formulation of the C4C regional learning flagship engaged corporate expertise at every organizational level to identify and prioritize several main change strategies: ECE, foundational literacy and numeracy, young people's skills and employability and education financing. ESARO fully leveraged the UN Secretary-General's call to hold a high-level Transforming Education Summit (TES) to rally all countries behind the regional flagship on learning. ESARO played a leadership/coordination role to ensure COs supported their governments in TES preparations. To translate commitment into action, ESARO developed over 10 evidence products to support learning recovery from COVID-19 losses and build skills for all.

ESARO began operationalizing the C4C regional climate flagship, including supporting COs on environment/energy audits to green operations and initiating pre-feasibility studies to gauge the climate resilience of UNICEF-supported programmes. With the Development Bank of Southern Africa, ESARO designed the regional Climate Facility for Children as a climate financing mechanism for low-emission and climate-resilient social infrastructure and services under the Green Climate Fund. ESARO is working with youth ambassadors/young climate activists, including leveraging advocacy opportunities like the 27th UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) and Conference of Youth.

Aligned with the C4C focus area, ESARO emphasized PHC as the main avenue for ensuring equitable and efficient delivery of health services, including a focus on community health. ESARO prioritized strengthening quality, especially for maternal and newborn care; and interventions to improve immunization and bring zero-dose children back into the PHC system through accelerated actions and systems strengthening, community engagement and participation while supporting the interruption of all poliovirus types. Ensuring health system preparedness for public health emergencies to avert the erosion of past gains and health care digitalization to improve efficiencies were also critical areas.

ESARO's cross-sectoral HIV/SRHR response under the C4C focus area positioned UNICEF and partners, including donors, youth networks and academia to contribute significantly to results. ESARO's related thought leadership work included collaboration with the Global Fund to co-create Radio 4000, a podcast for implementers working to improve HIV and SRH services for adolescent girls and young women. The podcast amplifies these implementers' voices, provides a platform for discussion and disseminates good practices.

Under the C4C focus area on reducing stunting, ESARO prioritized systematic linking of social protection programmes with nutrition. ESARO also prioritized food systems transformation for children, with 15 countries engaged on it. A significant increase was seen on countries engaging in the school-age/adolescent nutrition and overweight prevention agendas (12 countries). Southern African Development Community (SADC) guidelines on school meals and nutrition were endorsed by Ministers of Education.

ESARO addressed water insecurity during the Horn of Africa drought through catalytic ground water mapping and drilling that increased borehole success rates and drought resilience. The Regional WASH Programme for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Communities in East Africa in three countries addressed the WASH and environmental and social safeguard needs of an estimated 362,500 refugees and host community members. ESARO led sanitation-focused South-South cooperation with Brazil and eight COs.

ESARO shaped ECD policy content in the region using the Nurturing Care Framework. The Africa Regional Convening to Support Parents and Caregivers was a major ECD policy and advocacy

milestone: Over 700 organizations participated and over 50 evidence-based interventions were presented. ESARO's contribution toward adding the ECD Index 2030, a module capturing key developmental milestones, to the national survey processes in five countries was an important step toward closing the SDG reporting gap.

Per the C4C focus area and to leverage SADC's influence to end violence in Southern Africa, ESARO and Headquarters initiated a statistical profile of violence against girls, boys and women to inform advocacy with SADC Gender Ministers. ESARO coordinated with COs on child protection advocacy and communication, resulting in a press release and multiple media interviews that increased awareness of child marriage and other forms of GBV related to the Horn of Africa drought. For the first time, ESARO mobilized dedicated multi-country funding for GBV in emergencies (GBViE) programming, which supported the drought response.

Under the cash transfers C4C focus area, ESARO prioritized change strategies such as systems strengthening for regular delivery. ESARO support safeguarded social sector budgets, strengthened national social protection systems and positioned child poverty reduction at the center of policy debate. Fifteen countries reported budget allocation increases in at least two social sectors and 19 governments improved open budget practices. Over half of countries improved the shock-responsiveness/inclusivity of national systems, and ten countries expanded cash transfers to benefit the poorest and most marginalized children, including in emergencies.

2022 marked a global organizational shift to strengthen UNICEF's social and behaviour change (SBC) function to respond to the growing importance of people-centered and science-driven approaches to change programmes. This called on ESARO to improve in-country capacities to define concrete and measurable social and behavioural results and select and implement the right strategies and tactics to achieve them. Ten COs were oriented to the SBC shift and over 350 representatives of government, civil society and local academia benefited from enhanced capacity on human-centred design and social norms.

COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) and demand for COVID-19 vaccination remained core, while public health emergencies and the Horn of Africa drought also required significant attention in terms of RCCE inter-agency coordination, social and behavioural data collection, social listening and funding mobilization. The SBC thought leadership agenda excelled, with two related ESAR research products awarded among the 2022 Best of UNICEF Research.

Building on the UNICEF Adolescent Girls Programme Strategy (2022–2025) and gender-transformative programming as a change strategy in the UNICEF Gender Action Plan (2022–2025) (GAP 3), ESARO invested in documenting promising approaches in centering adolescent girls' agency across programming and addressing persisting gender discriminatory norms. ESARO encouraged COs to foster direct engagement with organizations led by women, girls and youth through the development of a regional mapping of these entities. **ESARO also focused on contextualizing GAP 3 programming commitments within ESAR by** undertaking regional consultations with women/girl-led organizations to document feminist priorities for extending and adapting social protection in Africa.

ESARO prioritized enhancing youth-led advocacy and centering gender in high-level events, regional partnerships and resource mobilization by organizing regional youth advocacy champion training with young people from 12 countries who subsequently trained over 400 young advocates and led advocacy in their communities. ESARO formalized partnerships with the Global Refugee Youth Network and mobilized partners on climate justice for regional joint advocacy ahead of the Commission on the Status of Women.

ESAR's procurement throughput increased by 9 per cent to US\$1.19 billion in 2022, up from \$1.09

billion in 2021. ESARO supported effective procurement and timely delivery of immunization supplies, including COVID-19 vaccines and the capacity/resilience-building of national systems (e.g., on forecasting). Awareness increased in ESAR on available procurement services, pre-financing options and sustainability considerations. Regional collaboration was strengthened with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention on the COVID-19 pandemic response, and with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United States Agency for International Development to increase nutrition supply access. To bolster emergency preparedness, ESARO engaged in regional inter-agency supply and procurement planning.

2022 saw a focus on evaluation use. For example, the evaluation of the multi-year, multi-country District Health Systems Strengthening Initiative culminated in a practice exchange on how findings, lessons and recommendations were being used to strengthen and scale up ongoing and future initiatives. Likewise, ESARO-managed country programme evaluations (e.g., Malawi), and the L2 humanitarian evaluation (Madagascar) placed an explicit focus on engagement, co-creation and learning. Beyond ESARO's core support to CO evaluation functions, which yielded over twenty high-quality and useful evaluations, the focus on national evaluation capacity development (NECD) continued, a highlight being a one-week workshop on public policy evaluation in Comoros. ESARO invested in building and leading partnerships, including one on NECD that will drive related work in 2023, and through the UN Network for Evaluation in Africa.

The increase in emergencies led to a surge in demand for staff wellbeing and psychosocial support. While maintaining the integrative/systematic approach to delivering psychosocial support and innovative mental health initiatives, ESARO invested in increasing collaboration to respond to the needs of staff and their dependents. In 2022, group session/training/webinar attendees reached a cumulative sum of nearly 6,700, with over 700 individual sessions and cross-regional peer support volunteer training for 220 staff being provided. ESARO also initiated the mental health for managers project to strengthen staff resiliency.

ESARO facilitated First Action Initiative, Emergency Programme Fund and Global Humanitarian Thematic Funding allocation for CO emergency response and preparedness actions. Emergency response support to COs remained intensive throughout 2022, including to those affected by the Horn of Africa drought, Ebola outbreak in Uganda and to conflict-affected Northern Ethiopia.

Cross-cutting area results

Normative principles, including gender dimension

ESARO strengthened CO institutional commitments to gender equality and women and girls' empowerment by supporting gender programmatic reviews in two countries ahead of their new country programmes. ESARO strengthened adherence to GBViE principles by supporting GBV-nutrition programming in South Sudan and integrating GBV in public health emergencies guidelines into all the rapid assessments and cross-sectoral public health emergency response plans.

The adoption of a regional C4C climate flagship engendered a visible sense of urgency, purpose and mobilization across UNICEF in ESAR on the agenda. ESARO is part of the UNICEF pilot on mainstreaming environmental and social safeguards and has strengthened related institutional capacities in targeted countries. Where ESARO supports WASH in institutions, a regional energy assessment and an energy sizing tool were introduced to gauge energy needs for WASH, with potential application in other sectors.

Disability-inclusive programming capacity in the region was significantly enhanced in 2022 through evidence generation, capacity building and advocacy/communication. With ESARO support, we now know more about disability-inclusive education in the region, the situation of learning to earning for

youth with disabilities and cross-sectoral disability inclusive programming good practices. The region's capacity on disability-inclusive WASH programming was enhanced through cross-country learning sessions. Disability inclusion in communication was enhanced through social media, publication of stories and development of podcasts. ESARO also led the inter-agency working group on disability inclusion, bringing together other UN entities, and jointly organized a virtual dialogue on building cross-movement collaboration between disability and women's rights organizations.

ESARO worked with partners through the Regional Child Protection Working Group to improve capacity for the inclusion of children on the move in national child protection systems and services, with a focus on best interests procedures to protect the wellbeing of children at risk. The cross-regional PROSPECTS partnership, which supports learning to earning opportunities for displaced young people, will focus on protection issues in its second phase.

UNICEF scaled up work on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), with increasing levels of response and requests for support from COs elevating the portfolio. ESARO supported increased engagement on PSEA with governments, while helping disseminate the UN Technical Note on the Victim Assistance Protocol and transitioning from an existing implementing partner assessment tool to the similar, newly developed UN Harmonized Assessment Tool.

Efforts continued to strengthen Accountability to Affected Populations. For example, three COs received ESARO support to establish robust community feedback mechanisms that foster community participation and communication during emergencies. During the 2022 Ebola outbreak in Uganda, the mechanisms generated almost real-time data, helping partners to identify key community needs and allowing for quick response to rumours, misinformation and disinformation.

Influencing global/regional discourse and policy

Identifying, engaging with and leveraging global, continental and regional partners for children's rights was a key strategy for ESARO. This included influencing regional bodies like the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities [e.g., the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), SADC], among others. ESARO closely engaged the AU on making African education systems more effective, efficient and equitable. With other UNICEF offices and partners, this included planning a high-level Transforming Education in Africa side event on the margins of TES. During the event, a Declaration on Transforming Education in Africa and Youth Manifesto were presented to government officials, who will champion full endorsement in 2023. The AU subsequently announced education as the AU Theme for the Year 2024.

ESARO seized the opportunity of the Eighth Statistical Commission for Africa to engage in a side event to advocate for data for children and thereby establish UNICEF's presence as partner in statistics.

With IGAD, the UN Office for Project Services and International Organization for Migration, ESARO provided multi-sector support to border communities across the IGAD region. The ESARO-managed programme focused on many IGAD-UNICEF Memorandum of Understanding sector-specific priorities and built IGAD's capacity to coordinate multi-sector responses to health and socioeconomic shocks.

Several high-level regional coordination meetings of the UN system occurred, amidst growing concern over the continent's SDG progress. ESARO leadership participated in the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development's eighth session, and the Regional Coordination Platform meetings and retreats to review the UN system priorities and the value-add of the Opportunity and Issue-Based Coalitions (OIBCs) against the intentions of the UN Reform agenda. ESARO technical resources were mobilized to contribute to OIBCs in the areas of data, knowledge management, climate change,

gender, education and digital transformation.

On World Children's Day, the Presidents of Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and Namibia's Vice President gathered at a UNICEF-supported, children-led summit that resulted in the countries' leaders committing to promote and protect children's rights in their countries.

2022 saw the beginning of a five-year, US\$57 million partnership with Airtel Africa to provide access to a digital learning platform for learners across 13 countries, including seven in ESAR. ESARO partnership efforts prioritized the L3 Horn of Africa drought and disease outbreaks, contributing to a 60 per cent funding increase for emergencies in ESAR compared to 2021. ESARO also led/supported numerous regional multi-year partnerships for children (e.g., on digital learning). ESARO influenced the public agenda around business/child online protection, and advocated for key industries (e.g., extractives) to support efficient and transparent public financing for children.

ESARO supported growth of the Youth Agency Marketplace (Yoma), a digital platform for youth across the world to build and transform their futures by actively engaging in social impact tasks and learning to earning opportunities. In 2022, new Yoma user registrations reached 180,000—a 70 per cent increase compared to 2021.

Major emergencies and positive global opportunities called for strong external communication. ESARO raised the profile of the Horn of Africa drought through 70 interviews with international media, press releases and content creation to support fundraising. ESARO climate crisis advocacy included amplifying the voices of young ESAR climate activists, particularly during COP27, as well as working with new UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Vanessa Nakate. ESARO undertook sustained public advocacy on the learning crisis, fully leveraging TES and working with UNICEF Regional Goodwill Ambassador Tendai Mtawarira. ESARO supported UNICEF Africa digital communication platforms and the Regional Director's Twitter account with over 700 posts, resulting in an increase in followers from 15,000 to 21,800.

To strengthen thought leadership and the evidence agenda, ESARO initiated and deepened multiple academic partnerships with numerous universities in ESAR and other regions. Internal governance of research was strengthened to assure excellence in quality and prioritize evidence behind the regional flagships. ESARO continued to foster an evidence-to-action culture in 2022 through the establishment of the ESAR Programme Monitoring Framework and accompanying maturity model, while the rollout of the ESAR Data Strategy and Framework (2022–2025) sharpened UNICEF's approach towards national statistical systems for children.

Internal management

Key governance and management mechanisms were defined through the Annual Management Plan, with the Budget Committee regularly monitoring funds allocation, utilization and expiring grants. One efficiency highlight was the Johannesburg Hub Office attaining efficiency gains in the extension of its lease with WFP amounting to US\$37,000 annual savings. ESARO exercised close CO operations oversight and support, including through two regular programme budget review (PBR) processes, one special PBR and 12 mail poll-based CO budget reviews. Peer reviews were conducted for three COs to strengthen their internal processes, and four CO audits were supported.

Considering the COVID-19-related risks to personnel, ESARO supported a COVID-19 vaccine mandate, resulting in 100 per cent staff compliance. As part of the organization's duty of care, ESARO supported staff to utilize flexible working arrangements. To improve workplace culture, ESARO reviewed and analyzed UNICEF Pulse Survey results to enable effective action planning to address major observations. UNICEF Global Staff Survey results will be reviewed in 2023. ESARO engaged a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) consultant for support in addressing related workplace culture concerns. ESARO bolstered COs' human resource capacity for emergency preparedness and response through the coordination of surge personnel identification and deployment, while helping COs

integrate duty of care minimum standards into humanitarian response plans.

ESARO analysed emerging security trends and conflict incidents throughout the region in 2022, highlighting factors with the potential to adversely impact UNICEF programme delivery and staff. The analysis supported affected countries in reviewing their risk reduction measures. Analysis and security risk assessments delivered through meetings, briefings, review of contingency plans and standard operating procedures, as well as the direct presence of advisers in country, helped ensure UNICEF offices were ready to meet security challenges. ESARO also shared learning through cross-regional security working groups and built the capacity of CO security focal points to participate in country-level security cells and inter-agency security management teams.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

With global and regional urgency and priority mounting on climate resilience, renewable energy and environmental and social safeguards, ESARO was among the forerunners in articulating UNICEF's niche and strategies for addressing the climate crisis. Yet, uptake and initiatives at the country level have varied as COs seek conducive entry points. The global discourse on climate change is shifting from mitigation towards adaptation and resilience, especially among the most vulnerable communities. This finds UNICEF with a strong comparative advantage. Whether through generating data/evidence on climate impacts on vulnerable children, or through supporting climate-resilient WASH services in communities, schools and health care facilities, or climate-oriented education, ESARO is well positioned to build on the region's strong foundational work for children to sharpen and expand UNICEF's contribution to the climate agenda.

Against the newly launched UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy 2023–2030 and Strategic Plan, disability inclusion is yet to be fully mainstreamed in all programme areas, particularly operations and humanitarian programming. To fulfill the aspirations of the policy and strategy, ESAR needs sustainable funding for disability-inclusive programming, robust commitment to utilize policies and tools and adequately trained focal points in each office, while recognizing that there are woefully few persons with disabilities working at UNICEF. There is also weak capacity at both government and implementing partner levels, with potential partners not having disability inclusion on their agenda or organizations of persons with disabilities themselves have limited capacity. Strong leadership and commitment of the senior management will be key to ensure disability inclusion is a priority agenda.

ESARO turned challenges into opportunities to expand partnerships. In a highly competitive and challenging fundraising environment, ESARO pursued multiple pathways to attract and push for public and donor attention for the Horn of Africa drought, which turned into stronger partnerships with key donors, expansion into new donor bases, increased funding results and a new approach to combine emergency and resilience/nexus fundraising in one consolidated Horn of Africa Call to Action. New opportunities continue to arise to drive partnerships that merge public and private sector investments, such as in community resilience building and innovative financing. For example, UNICEF's multi-region Today and Tomorrow initiative is an integrated climate change finance approach to address ongoing climate crisis impacts while preparing for future emergencies that includes ESAR countries. ESARO learned through new ways of working with the UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office on the Airtel Africa partnership, providing valuable coordination lessons. 2022 demonstrated that ESAR's homegrown private sector can support in local emergencies but requires UNICEF to invest in digital fundraising infrastructure to maximize opportunities. 2022 also illustrated that business engagement is still not fully leveraged by COs and, despite great improvements, continues to

be underrepresented in CO strategic documents.

On SBC, lessons learned and innovative systems, tools and partnerships built during COVID-19 were leveraged to respond to other public health emergencies, including Ebola, cholera and drought, and to accelerate SBC results in selected regional priority areas. For example, the collection and utilization of social listening and community feedback insights and time-series social and behavioural science data were critical to inform successful evidence-based programming. UNICEF leadership of RCCE coordination platforms along with Ministries of Health enabled rapid activity scale-up for data-driven, community-centered responses. Strategic partnerships with faith actors, RCCE actors and experts on social norms programming proved valuable across regional sectoral priorities.

Partnering with regionally based academic institutions is an effective approach to locally ground innovations and better ensure that they are institutionalized. Examples include ESARO's tripartite partnerships with the University of Zambia and IQVIA on mentoring government leaders in data analysis and use and the partnership with the Universities of Cape Town and Oxford on multisectoral drivers and mitigators of adolescent HIV and SRHR risk. In both cases, UNICEF brings programming expertise to the academic collaboration. ESARO also worked with the WHO country office of Somalia to commission a study carried out by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Imperial College London that presented retrospective estimates of mortality across Somalia in 2022. The study will inform a scenario-based forecast model to enable anticipatory action and avert drought-related deaths in the future.

Provided the resources and space, more mature youth organizations can excel at building the capacity of less developed youth-led organizations as exemplified in ESARO's partnership with Y+, a network of young people living with HIV, where Y+ leaders are building the capacity of several national youth networks in ESAR on advocacy, resource mobilization and organizational development. Specific accomplishments included strengthened governing boards and internal policies, organizational strategy and proposal development, dissemination and partner commitments on ethical engagement of young people, and onward capacity building of sub-national networks.

In 2022, ESARO found success in enhancing its focus on helping governments improve budget credibility and execution to ensure value for money. This was achieved by: supporting a dozen COs to undertake diagnostic tools, including public expenditure reviews, public expenditure tracking surveys and procurement efficiency analyses; promoting open budget practices in 20 countries; and supporting related public finance management reforms, such as reviewing procurement laws. In Somalia and Zimbabwe, this agenda was boosted by the new regional partnership with the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, whereby finance and social sector ministries were supported by "coaches" to unpack execution bottlenecks in their health and education budgets.

Several positive experiences reaffirmed the importance of working together across sectoral areas. Investing in areas of convergence with programming and partnerships had many returns. For example, adolescent girls brought ESARO together around prevention and response to VAC, intimate partner violence, child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and HIV, as well as issues related to children on the move and girls' education. Investments in ECD can similarly bring us together around programming and advocacy. Results were enhanced when sectors collaborated to co-create interventions and strategically utilize joint delivery platforms to influence change. For example, public finance and social protection interventions were strengthened in 2022 by working closely together with nearly every programme section, which enhanced results across sectors.