

## Ghana

### Update on the context and situation of children

Ghana faced economic setbacks in 2022 driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine-Russia war and record level food, fertilizer and energy prices. Its GDP growth is expected to slow to 3.5% in 2022, inflation exceeded 50%, the debt to GDP ratio reached 76%, the Ghanaian Cedi depreciated significantly, and Ghana's credit rating was downgraded (Moody's). These short-term economic shocks which tightened domestic financing conditions are accompanied by longer term trends such as decreasing revenue collection, and declining Official Development Assistance at 3.1% of Gross National Income (World Bank, 2020). This has further shrunk fiscal space and undermined Government of Ghana's (GOG) ability to fund critical interventions for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In an effort to regain macroeconomic stability, anchor debt sustainability and protect the vulnerable, IMF and GoG reached a staff-level agreement in December 2022 for a 3-year Extended Credit Facility (ECF) of US\$3 billion.

Communities on Ghana's northern borders continued to receive persons of concern (estimated 4000 POCs) from Burkina Faso due to the Central Sahel crisis, stressing already strained public services and infrastructure. With no respite expected in such movements, there is a potential for conflict between the local communities and incoming POCs.

#### Key developments relevant to children and young people in 2022:

**Goal area 1 - Every child survives and thrives:** 97.5% of children 0-11 months were vaccinated with 3 doses of DTP-containing/Penta vaccine nationally (District Health Information Management System - DHIMS, 2022). The maternal and newborn health Quality of Care programme was scaled by GoG to all 16 Regions and now covers 186 facilities. 13 Walk-in Cold rooms, 36 Ultra Low Cold Chain Equipment and 507 Vestfrost ice-lined refrigerators have been installed as part of UNICEF-supported immunization cold chain system strengthening. Persons receiving at least 1 dose of COVID-19 vaccines in December was 40.5% and persons fully vaccinated was 30.9% of total population respectively (Ghana Health Service, 2022). 2.5 million children under 5 years benefited from lifesaving Vitamin A supplementation and 3.5 million adolescent girls benefited from anemia prevention through Iron Folic Acid supplementation (DHIMS, 2022).

**Goal area 2 - Every child learns and acquires skills for the future:** Net enrolment rates (NER) at pre-primary level increased to 89.3%, while at primary level, NER reached 78.8%, indicating improvements in right-age enrolment (Educational Management Information System- EMIS, 2022). The transition rate between primary and secondary school remained at 92.5% and lower secondary school completion rate increased to 83.1% (EMIS, 2022). With UNICEF support, the scale up of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sub-system in 60 districts through play-based, parent-run programming by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ghana Education Service (GES) benefited 75,000 KG learners. Under GIGA, 34,704 schools were geo-mapped to [www.projectconnect.world](http://www.projectconnect.world).

**Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices:** Children under 1 whose births are registered increased from 70% in December 2021 to 75% as of October 2022 (Birth and Death Registry, 2022). The number of children living in residential care institutions nationwide remained above 3,000 (3,460) (MoGCSP, 2022). Gatekeeping and more structured inspections of all residential care institutions needs to be improved. While the UNICEF-supported Integrated Social Services (ISS) and the Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS) was expanded to all 16 regions, social welfare staffing levels are 55% below the minimum guidelines. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened risks of child marriage and unintended pregnancy as

well as hindered access to critical services, such as adolescent sexual and reproductive health services. A study on the impacts of COVID-19 on adolescent girls revealed 20.8% of adolescent girls had discussions to consider marriage during the pandemic. The Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) study (awaiting publication) indicated that 27% of children interviewed (13-17 years old) had experienced CSE in the past 12 months which was higher in areas with high concentration of in-land fishing, mining, and oil activities while young people aged 18-24 experienced CSE in their childhood in cocoa, mining, and in-land fishing areas.

**Goal area 4: Every child has access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment:** An additional 3.2 million people accessed basic water, 6,200 rural communities achieved Open Defecation Free (ODF) status, 65,000 urban households accessed basic sanitation, and school children from an additional 800 schools accessed improved WASH services (WASH Sector Review Report, 2022). However, 75% of Ghanaians continue to lack access to basic sanitation services, 17.7% continue to practice open defecation and only 48% have access to handwashing stations with soap and water available (Population and Housing Census 2021). 36% school toilets are dysfunctional (EMIS, 2019/20) and approximately 30% of health care facilities lack basic water services (National Development Planning Commission Sustainability Check Report, 2020/21). With UNICEF support, 4 additional financial services providers were onboarded onto the Revolving Loan Schemes i.e., Basic Sanitation Fund (BSF) and District Sanitation Fund (DSF) to add to the existing roster of 10 financial institutions. A collaborative sector effort (including UNICEF) led to the endorsement of the National Water Policy by Parliamentary Select Committee on WASH and submission of a national Hand Hygiene for All Strategy (HH4A) with operational guidelines to the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources for its endorsement.

**Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life:** 83,415 Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) beneficiaries were enrolled with UNICEF support onto the National Health Insurance Scheme, with 17,502 beneficiary cards replaced under the ISS programme (LEAP Quarterly Report, 2022). Sustained UNICEF advocacy resulted in the 2023 national budget proposal doubling the LEAP grant value from GH¢45 per month to GH¢90. The COVID-19 relief cash transfer reached an additional 53,151 people not on any safety net programme. The NDPC incorporated the UNICEF-supported District League Table (DLT), which highlights inter-district inequities, into its planning and monitoring processes. UNICEF advocacy contributed to the safeguarding of social sector financing in the GoG-IMF ECF agreement. UNICEF, through its support and child rights focus, supported GoG with the successful completion of its 2022 Voluntary National Review (VNR).

## Major contributions and drivers of results

### **Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives.**

UNICEF provided technical and financial support for the development of the Health Sector Medium Term Development Plan 2022-2025. UNICEF also provided technical support to the Ministry of Health (MOH) to develop the Essential Health Services Package, a critical guide for the implementation of Ghana's Universal Health Coverage Roadmap. UNICEF provided technical leadership as the chair for the Health Development Partner Group.

With UNICEF support, Ghana continues to make progress in routine immunization. 97.5% of children aged 0-11 months were vaccinated with 3 doses of DTP-containing/Penta vaccine nationally. In response to a polio outbreak, UNICEF supported a risk assessment and 2 rounds of Polio National Immunization targeting 6.6 million children under 5 in all districts. UNICEF provided technical support to the Ghana Health Service (GHS) to successfully deploy and manage COVID-19 vaccination and implement a social mobilization strategy that contributed to high coverage during the campaigns. 2,123 Community-based surveillance volunteers were trained to improve community-based surveillance and reporting.

UNICEF supported the Marburg virus response through provision of category 3 personal protective devices and technical assistance through the ‘Integrated Outbreak Analytics’ team for outbreak investigation. A yellow fever outbreak in unimmunized nomadic populations in the northern part of Ghana required a coordinated government response which UNICEF actively supported.

As UNICEF’s continued support to the COVID-19 response, an oxygen quantification report was completed and a National Policy on Medical Oxygen and costed implementation plan was developed. 300 additional oxygen concentrators were procured and distributed to improve availability of medical oxygen.

UNICEF procured cold chain equipment to strengthen supply chain systems for health including last mile commodity management system with a focus on immunization cold chain system at all levels. 31 walk-in cold rooms and walk-in freezers (WICR/WIFR), 507 Vestfrost ice-lined refrigerators, 36 ultra-cold chain equipment, and 1400 vaccine carriers were procured to improve cold chain infrastructure. 2,000 health workers were trained to manage the equipment.

UNICEF supported the national launch of the Nutrition Scorecard and its roll out at the sub-national level. To ensure working mothers can breastfeed while at work, through UNICEF support to GHS, 300 corporate organizations were mapped to assess the presence of breastfeeding corners, identify their areas of need and follow-up with targeted support to create baby friendly facilities. UNICEF supported the development of quarterly Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS) bulletins whose findings show a poor food security and nutrition outlook.

## **Goal area 2: Every child learns and acquires skills for the future.**

UNICEF continued to provide technical leadership as the chair for the Education Development Partner Group and co-chair for the Education Sector Working Group with the MoE. UNICEF coordinated the development of the System Capacity Grant (SCG) application to secure funding from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). This will support MoE to strengthen Ghana’s capacity to undertake Education Sector Analysis.

Through UNICEF support, 2.5 million listeners benefitted from the Lively Minds radio programme, with episodes covering oral hygiene, problem-solving, language skills, socio-emotional development, non-physical discipline, and disability. This intervention was complemented with play schemes on problem-solving, fine motor skills, imagination and instructions in classrooms that influenced the play-based, parent-run ECE programme. This was scaled up by MOE to reach 75,000 KG learners. UNICEF supported the organization of the ECE Policy’s orientation workshops for 100 Municipal/District Chief Executives, Planning/Budget and Social Welfare Officers to mainstream ECE content into decentralized planning.

UNICEF support ensured the review of the Inclusive Education Policy. UNICEF coordinated with the National Council on Persons with Disabilities and Ghana Federation of Disability Organizations to mobilize 200 people for the Global Disability Summit. 57,000 children were screened for early disability detection and support, and teachers were equipped to harmonize the Ghanaian Sign Language Dictionary.

UNICEF’s technical support contributed to government’s approval of the DL approach for Ghana and benefitted 36,518 learners (including 18,432 girls) with improved foundational skills in English and Mathematics. Teacher capacity was built and they will continue to deliver this pedagogy across 235 schools from 47 districts in the 6 new regions. UNICEF continued to support the use of sports to promote the Safe Schools programme and equipped 13,214 pre-tertiary officers and teachers to support 425,439 students.

UNICEF supported GES to strengthen its structures for education delivery, and through the Regional Education Offices, completed the development and validation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) needed to empower district directorates of education in planning, coordination, and monitoring. The mobile School Report Card (mSRC) application was scaled up for real-time data collection, planning and decision-making.

UNICEF continued to support the government's efforts to make up for learning losses due to COVID-19. The national broadcasting corporation and its 32 affiliate stations as well as 100 private radio stations were supported to broadcast recorded lessons in 4 core subjects to 5 million learners in basic schools nationwide.

To Reimagine Education, UNICEF is collaborating with MoE on the deployment of the Learning Passport as a digital learning management system for access to learning via online and offline modalities and accelerating internet provisioning in schools through the GIGA initiative.

### **Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices.**

Ghana has a more equitable and integrated child protection system due to sustained efforts of UNICEF and its partners. UNICEF supported development and implementation of relevant policy and legal frameworks, particularly the passage of the Legislative Instrument and development of SOPs to enforce the Births and Deaths Registration Act 2020; the development and finalization of the National Child Online Protection Framework for the Cybersecurity Act 2020; the development of the Operational M&E Plan 2022-2024 for the National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage 2016-2027; the finalization and launch of the National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Human Trafficking 2022-2026; the development of the new National Plan of Action (NPA3) for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour 2022-2026, based on the assessment of the implementation of the previous NAP covering the period 2017-2021; and the development of a new Road Map on Child Care Reform.

With UNICEF support, key child protection indicators, aligned with the Child and Family Welfare Policy and Justice for Children Policy, were incorporated into the Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs) of all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). UNICEF worked with the NDPC to review Annual Action Plans (AAP) of all 261 MMDAs and ensure child protection indicators are included.

UNICEF supported the scale up of ISS, SWIMS case management system and Community Engagement Toolkits in 160 districts which resulted in at least 100,000 children receiving prevention and responsive services. This included 95,292 adolescent girls receiving prevention and care services through the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the UNFPA-UNICEF Programme on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health in Ghana. 2 million people were reached with messages on various child protection issues through mass media and social media as part of the Ghanaians Against Child Abuse behavioral change initiative.

UNICEF supported the Ghana Police Service and the Judicial Service of Ghana to make criminal justice services more accessible and child- and gender-responsive through pre-service trainings of over 3,503 police officers on the 'Standard Operating Procedures for Handling Child Victims, Witnesses, and Offenders' and with the establishment and operationalization of 3 Child-Friendly Gender-Based Violence courts, 1 juvenile court, 3 women and children interviewing rooms within the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit and technical support continued to be provided to the Digital Forensic Lab.

### **Goal area 4: Every child has access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment.**

Building on years of demonstration of service delivery models, UNICEF focused on systems strengthening in 2022. The review of the Rural Sanitation Model and Strategy was completed with key recommendations for Government to scale up. National Hand Hygiene for All Strategy and the operational guidelines were finalised in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. The Sanitation Financing Assessment showed that demand-led action is the most cost-effective approach. If coupled with revolving loan funds, as done in few UNICEF-supported districts, the blend provides a cost-efficient programming model for sanitation. The ongoing revolving loan schemes (BSF and DSF) were improved by engaging 4 additional financial service providers and expanding the loan scheme to 2 additional districts. To expand access to affordable financing, UNICEF is working with partners towards the establishment of a National Sanitation Revolving Fund.

The National Water Policy, updated with UNICEF's technical and financial support, was endorsed by the Parliamentary Select Committee on WASH. The formative study of the initial implementation of the Water Safety Plan approach was completed with an intention to inform further refinement of the country's approach for scale-up.

With UNICEF support, 69,000 people from low-income high-density urban areas (including 15,000 children) gained access to safe water through an initiative supported by the Government of Denmark and implemented through a strategic partnership with the Ghana Water Company. This initiative demonstrated innovative financing for low-income households to secure water connections through flexible payment terms to enhance affordability, as well as direct financial support to 1,350 households to have access within their premises.

In sanitation, an additional 4,486 households have access to basic services and 24 communities were declared open defecation free. WASH infrastructure in 28 schools and 48 healthcare facilities were improved benefitting 8,666 school children and 3,046 outpatients per day with safe and sustainable WASH services.

#### **Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life.**

UNICEF's support to NDPC ensured a child-centered, evidence-base focus through special reporting mechanisms, such as the VNR, UPR and the independent report of Civil society Organizations (CSOs) to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). UNICEF supported evidence generation through several knowledge products, such as the Situation Analysis of the Rights of Children, fiscal space analysis for social protection, several sector and thematic based budget analyses, cost of inaction study on reproductive health, and a revised District League Table report for 2021. In the face of the current economic crisis and constrained fiscal space, UNICEF's targeted technical advice and policy advocacy during the GoG-IMF negotiations for an Extended Credit Facility programme contributed to the safeguarding of social sector financing in the agreement. UNICEF's advocacy led to the 2023 national budget proposal doubling the LEAP social protection program's cash transfer payment value.

UNICEF supported Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) capacity building of CHRAJ personnel and engaged in on-going national processes to ensure stronger child rights focus in Business and Human Rights (BHR). UNICEF provided technical support to government's social protection response by expanding the ISS initiative from 100 to 160 MMDAs and ensuring better alignment with government's decentralization framework and policies. UNICEF partnered with the World Bank to provide COVID-19 transfers to 53,151 eligible persons not on any safety net programme. Cash transfer delivery was monitored through an interactive voice response survey deployed in 3 local languages and English. UNICEF continues to be a leader in the production of high quality and innovative research in the social protection sector. The LEAP and ISS impact evaluation baseline was completed, and a Vulnerability and Exclusion study was developed to further improve social protection targeting and interventions.

#### **Cross-cutting Areas:**

**Emergency Preparedness and Response:** UNICEF engaged on a capacity risk assessment for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) conducted by the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative which highlighted weak DRR systems, low disaster response preparedness and the need to strengthen capacity of National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO). UNICEF contributed to the strengthening of emergency response mechanisms through the Inter Agency Working Group on Emergencies (IAWGE) and the UN Country Team. UNICEF led the programme criticality assessment for the UN, which aims to balance UN personnel activities against security risks.

In response to the Sahel crisis, pre-positioned supplies were distributed in 4 communities covering 50% of the affected families fleeing instability in Burkina Faso and arriving in northern Ghana. Improved water and sanitation facilities were provided in 7 communities to 6000 individuals including host community members. An assessment of emerging vulnerability gaps and priorities across nine districts at risk of the Sahel crisis has been commissioned.

**Social and Behavior Change (SBC):** UNICEF supported campaigns for emergency response for Polio, COVID 19 and Yellow Fever using mixed strategies including social mobilization, community engagement, digital approaches, and misinformation management. Hesitancy against COVID 19 vaccine was reduced from 67% to 26% between 2021 to 2022.

More than 256,000 people in community spaces were directly engaged through intersectoral community dialogues, drama, radio, CIC, van announcements, wall-murals, print and social media on UNICEF cross-sectoral interventions. The UNICEF-supported Agoo platform assisted 690,059 calls with information on COVID-19 prevention, child protection, and adolescents' issues. The SHE+ call center supported 2,400 young people with information on reproductive health issues.

The SBC team finalized the integration of SBC modules into curricula of 3 academic institutions including 2 public universities. The universities and the Nursing council have endorsed the modules for accreditation and SBC is now integrated into the academic training system in Ghana.

**Adolescent, Gender, Youth and Innovation:** UNICEF continued to invest in adolescent girls' empowerment and well-being in line with government's strategies and the UNICEF Gender Action Plan. 2.6 million adolescent girls were reached with services. UNICEF, as part of the UN Gender Team, supported the government with advocacy activities around gender equality including International Women's Day and 16 Days of Activism against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.

UNICEF supported the Ghana Library Authority to establish 10 pilot Youth Engagement Centres (YEC), reaching 14,480 adolescents and young people with digital skilling, entrepreneurship training and career development activities. UNICEF supported youth organizations such as the Green African Youth Organization (GAYO) and Youth Climate Council (YCC) to build capacity of youth as climate negotiators, incubate climate advocacy initiatives, and consolidate Ghanaian youth's climate perspectives for COP27. UNICEF continued to leverage U-Report for youth engagement on strategic issues that UNICEF, government, and other stakeholders need input on. The Generation Unlimited (GenU) initiative was advanced with the development and dissemination of the Country Assessment of Youth to key stakeholders. A portfolio of 10 youth-focused initiatives that will improve education, entrepreneurship, employment, and engagement opportunities for adolescents and youth (including girls and the vulnerable) was developed.

With support from KOICA, UNICEF launched a 5-year programme to expand social impact entrepreneurship and digital public goods in Ghana through the UNICEF StartUp Lab, engaging 20 Ghanaian startups in the 2023 accelerator programme.

**External Communications and Advocacy:** UNICEF reached an audience of 47 million people via social media and broadcast, printed and online media coverage to highlight UNICEF programming,

learnings, and achievements with GoG and other partners. UNICEF worked closely with partners within the GES to launch a public advocacy campaign entitled ‘It’s About Ability’, celebrating the potential of children with disabilities through sports. This campaign yielded significant media and social media coverage and provided children, with and without functional difficulties, the opportunity and space to discuss their challenges on national media platforms.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF contributed substantively to the technical development and finalization of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2025. UNICEF co-chaired the United Nations Sustainable Development Programme Result Area Group 2 focused on ‘Social Investment in People’, chaired the Inter-Agency Working Groups focused on Youth and on Programme Criticality, and chaired the UN sub-group focused on Scaling Up Nutrition.

UNICEF leads or co-leads several sector working groups - including for Health, Education, WASH, and Gender Equality - and participates in technical coordination groups. Multi-stakeholder partnerships with UN and government have helped institutionalize and leverage forums such as the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System which releases quarterly bulletins. UNICEF continued its cooperation with UNFPA on 2 joint programmes: the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage and the Programme on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health in Ghana.

UNICEF initiated strategic partnerships with CSOs such as SEND Ghana and the National Coalition of NGOs on the Rights of the Child to drive open national dialogue on public finance management and policy advocacy. UNICEF worked with other UN agencies to ensure a strong child-focus in the VNR and the UPR. Advocacy through strategic partnerships, such as with the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) increased attention to Water Safety and WASH in Emergencies at decision-maker levels. UNICEF engaged diverse stakeholders in the validation process of the Country Assessment of Youth, commissioned as part of GenU in Ghana.

UNICEF supported youth-led organizations such as GAYO and YCC on their climate advocacy initiatives and action. UNICEF supported Ghana’s Local Conference of Youth and a youth negotiator training programme which provided spaces to 330 young Ghanaians to discuss climate change and build capacity in climate negotiation. 2 youth trained in climate negotiation participated at COP27 as youth negotiators accompanying Ghana’s official climate negotiation team.

Partnerships were advanced with private sector partners in the Education Sector, such as Jacobs Foundation, Mastercard Foundation and Louis Vuitton. Strategic collaborations with Global Affairs Canada, Japan, Germany, USAID, KOICA, and Norway were important to achieve results across the child rights agenda and, especially in the health and nutrition sectors. With support from the SDG fund, Denmark and the Netherlands, UNICEF continued to advance innovative financing approaches to catalyze public and private resources for sanitation.

KOICA supported a 5-year programme to scale the UNICEF StartUp Lab programme, an impact accelerator for youth-led businesses working to advance SDGs for children and young people, including through digital solutions. Japan supported UNICEF’s efforts to build resilience within communities and respond to needs of displaced people arriving from Burkina Faso into the border regions of northern Ghana.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

Several lessons were learned, and innovations introduced by UNICEF directly or through its support to

government in 2022.

UNICEF explored new channels such as community-based volunteers for community surveillance and leveraged universities for SBC capacity building. It continued to Reimagine Education through digital learning solutions, strengthened information management systems, and drove denominator-based planning approaches in its programme design and implementation.

2 assessments conducted in 2022 have implications for UNICEF programming inter-sectorally and cross-sectorally.

**1. Key Findings from the VNR:** Ghana launched the 2022 VNR report on the implementation of the SDGs. The report, the second since 2019, was prepared through a collaborative process which involved the UN (including UNICEF), development partners, CSOs, private sector and the youth (engaged by UNICEF through U-Report). Its findings demonstrated the need to redouble efforts to bring about critical socio-economic transformations and fulfill the promise of the SDGs. Key learnings and next steps relevant for UNICEF programming included:

- The assessment of the progress on implementation of the SDGs showed a high level of access to water and electricity (almost at universal levels), gender parity at the KG, primary and JHS levels and high completion rate despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- However, unemployment and inequality have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Open defecation, waste collection and management are improving but at a slow pace. Other challenges include a huge funding gap, low adoption of science, technology and innovation, and timely access to reliable and disaggregated data.
- Achieving the SDGs largely depends on sustainable and innovative financing mechanisms. While GoG demonstrated its commitment to ensuring SDGs are aligned with the national budget, financing gaps persist within the current macroeconomic context. This requires a deliberate effort to connect private sector, development partners, social entrepreneurship, innovation, and research to critical SDGs action. Though some gains have been made in private sector contributions, there remains enormous and untapped investment opportunities for SDGs.
- Investment in youth must be strengthened to address rising unemployment. GoG's YouStart initiative provides opportunities to support youth entrepreneurs with start-up capital. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement is an opportunity to boost the productive sector of the economy and address unemployment. Addressing vulnerabilities including persons with disabilities requires the widening of social protection coverage and intensification of infrastructure provision in key sectors such as health, education and sanitation services.
- Effective research, monitoring and evaluation systems are required to evaluate the impact of programmes and identify critical success factors, bottlenecks and population groups which are being left behind. Collaboration between local and international research institutions and implementers at all levels must be advanced. Collaborative efforts to build the capacity of MMDAs and MDAs and establish strong connections between CSOs and research institutions will encourage tracking progress.

**2. Key Learnings from the Country Assessment of Youth:** Ghana's rapidly growing population of 31 million with 56% of the population under the age of 25 has led to the emergence of a youth bulge. This has the potential to create a demographic dividend. UNICEF, in support of GenU, commissioned a country assessment of the youth ecosystem in Ghana focused on secondary education, technical and vocational training (TVET), employment, entrepreneurship, and engagement.

- In secondary education, poor educational outcomes (access and quality), lack of relevant career counseling services, barriers to tech-assisted education and online learning, and misalignment between curriculum and pedagogy for learning transferable and ICT skills persist. Progress against these constraints will need public-private partnerships for accelerating connectivity and

digital skills training, a focus on pedagogy for ICT skilling, and in-school and out-of-school counselling services in collaboration with the private sector.

- In TVET, inconsistency in curricula and certification for apprenticeships, no well-functioning skills anticipation system, inadequate infrastructure and training, and an overall low demand for TVET due to socio-cultural biases emerged as constraints to build an industry-ready workforce. Targeted skills development programmes for vulnerable groups, private sector engagement for better alignment on skilling needs in the country, and increased advocacy and awareness of the value of TVET will help alleviate these constraints.
- Challenges in employment include demand-side factors, supply-side factors, and a mismatch between demand and supply. Unemployment rate among youth (15-35 years) is 19.7%. Underemployment persists with 45.5% of youth working less than 30 hours per week across the formal and informal sectors. Gender and regional inequities are exacerbated by lack of pre-employment support. A review and restructuring of government pre-employment services could improve employability of youth, supported by an improvement in the provisioning and quality of internships, apprenticeships, and induction trainings. Youth-focused investment in growth sectors of the economy will help realize accelerated gains from youth employment.
- Youth entrepreneurs have limited access to capital, operate in a challenging business and legal environment, and are concentrated in the informal sector. Despite this, 80% of entrepreneurs consider entrepreneurship to be a good career choice. Scaling up of support services such as business counselling, mentoring, and business development support, especially for female entrepreneurs, is critical. The entrepreneurship curricula should include social entrepreneurship, have an experiential component, and emphasize entrepreneurship skill building. GoG programmes such as YouStart have the potential to accelerate youth entrepreneurship, if designed and implemented well.
- Lastly, civic engagement among youth is low, and there are gender and regional inequities in access to civic engagement and participation opportunities. This is driven by a lack of leadership training in school, negative socio-cultural norms and attitudes around youth engaging in public discourse and low digital engagement due to lack of access to ICT tools. To overcome this, adults and community leaders' capacity to include youth in social dialogue can be improved. Youth capacity to engage constructively in advocacy efforts can be strengthened and decentralized youth spaces to engage with policy makers should be created