UNICEF Nepal Country Programme Review

(Final) Report
Volume I

18 November 2022

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Title	Review of UNICEF Nepal Country Programme (2018-2022)
Timeframe	April 2022 to November 2022
Date of the Report	18 November 2022 (Final)
Location	Nepal
Commissioning agency	UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia
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Contents

Acknowledgements

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEHRD	:	Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (of MoEST)
CFLG	:	Child friendly local governance
CFT	:	Child tracker survey
CP	:	Country Programme (Nepal)
CPAP	:	Country Programme Action Plan
CPD	:	Country Programme Document
CPR	:	Country Programme Review
CRC	:	Child Rights Convention
CSOs	:	Civil society organizations
CwD	:	Children with disabilities
DRR	:	Disaster risk reduction
ECD	:	Early childhood development
ECE	:	Early childhood education
ERG	:	Evaluation Reference Group (UNICEF ROSA)
FCHV	:	Female Community Health Volunteers
GoN	:	Government of Nepal
IMEP	:	Integrated monitoring and evaluation plan
INGOs	:	International non-governmental organizations
KII	:	Key informant interview
M&E	:	Monitoring and evaluation
MoEST	:	Ministry of Education, Science & Technology
MoFAGA	:	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
MoHP	:	Ministry of Health & Population
MoWSS	:	Ministry of Water Supply & Sanitation
MSPN	:	Multi-sectoral plan for nutrition
NCO	:	Nepal Country Office (UNICEF)
NGOs	:	Non-governmental organizations
ODF	:	Open defaecation free
OR	:	Other Resources Regular
PLGSP	:	Provincial & Local Governance Support Programme
PS	:	Perception Survey
PSN	:	Programme Strategy Notes
RAM	:	Results Assessment Module
RR	:	Core Resources for Results (Regular Resources)
SAM	:	Severe and acute malnutrition

SBC	:	Social and behaviour change
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals
SitAn	:	Situation Analysis
SPSS	:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ToC	:	Theory of Change
UN	:	United Nations
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	:	United Nations Children's Fund, (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
UNICEF NCO	:	UNICEF Nepal Country Office
UNICEF ROSA	:	UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia
UNSDF	:	UN Sustainable Development Framework
USD		United States Dollar
WASH	:	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	:	World Food Programme
WHO	:	World Health Organization

Chronology of key actions in the Country Programme Review

- Kick-off meeting with UNICEF ROSA to develop a common understanding of the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the CPR and to agree on the scope of the review and limitations (several rounds of discussions starting from 15 March to 25 March 2022);

- Initial meeting with UNICEF NCO senior management to discuss the ToR and the timelines for the Review (25 March 2022);

- Finalization of ToR for the Review (29 March 2022);

- Development of KII Guides and Perception Survey Questionnaire for review and approval by UNICEF ROSA (last week of March 2022);

- Initial series of discussions with Representative, Deputy Representatives, Section Heads and Field Office Heads (29 March to 7 April 2022);

- Presentation of the methodology to the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) (20 April 2022);

- Online Perception Survey from 15 April to 26 May 2022

- Presentation of the inception process to SMR Group (27 April 2021);

- Discussion with UNICEF NCO staff on federalization (6 May 2022);

- Presentation of the initial findings to UNICEF NCO (13 June 2022) and continue KIIs;

- Submission of the (draft) Report (16 July 2022);

- Preliminary comments from Evaluation Section, ROSA (19 July 2022);

- Submission of the revised (draft) Report (21 July 2022);

- Presentation of Review Findings to ROSA and NCO (10 October 2022);

- Submission of the Revised Report (25 October 2022);

- Comments from ROSA (15 November 2022);

- Submission of the revised version of the Report (Vol I) (18 November 2022).

Executive Summary

Introduction to the UNICEF Nepal Country Programme (CP)

The goal of the country programme is "children benefit from improved and equitable access to and the use of high-quality child-friendly services, improved care practices, protective and safe environments and better policies and resource allocation for children". The CP has six thematic outcomes with 22 outputs that target specific change in the lives of children, plus an outcome on programme effectiveness. Following the mid-term review (MTR) of the CP, an output on local governance was added to support improved planning and implementation for children at local levels. The CP focuses on all three levels of government with overall targeting of the most disadvantaged children, particularly focusing on the central Terai and far western areas of Madhesh and Sudurpaschim Provinces.

The Country Programme is reflected as the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP), a signed document between UNICEF Nepal Country Office (NCO) and the Government of Nepal (GoN). The sub-national activities are implemented through three field offices, Nepalgunj, Bharatpur and Siddharthanagar. CPAP was amended in 2020 following the MTR.

The Country Programme has been designed with a budget of about USD 150 million made up of USD 36 million from Regular Resources (RR) and USD 114 million from Other Resources (OR).

Purpose, objectives of the Country Programme Review (CPR)

The scope of this "light touch review" is limited to four domains (relevance, effectiveness, adaptation to changing context, and UNICEF's strategic positioning in Nepal). Only two OECD-DAC criteria of relevance and effectiveness have been covered as guided by the TOR and utility for the next country programme. The CPR, covering the period 2018-2021, is expected to inform programme design and support managerial decision-taking for the next country programme, and assess the performance of results. The Review focused on five thematic areas, namely, health, nutrition, education, social policy, and emergency/DRR. The main participants of the review were stakeholders (duty-bearers), who were mapped and identified in consultation with UNICEF ROSA/NCO.

Methodology

The review adopted a participatory and interactive approach based on an evaluation design matrix. A perception survey was undertaken using a group of stakeholders, which provided quantitative data on relevance and effectiveness, including stakeholder satisfaction of interventions. 94 stakeholders (out of 126 invited to participate) responded to the survey. Desk research was conducted using reports and other published and unpublished materials. Qualitative data were collected from interviews with 69 key informants comprised of 35 external stakeholders and 34 UNICEF staff members, using structured KII Guides. Save for five, all KIIs were conducted online.

Aspects of equity, gender equality, and ethical norms and principles were followed during the whole evaluation process. This evaluation followed the minimum standards laid down by UNICEF and UNEG. The qualitative information collected was analysed and triangulated to derive trends and conclusions. The data gathered in the Perception Survey were analysed using the statistical software SPSS.

The Country Context

Nepal is land-locked and has a population of 29.5 million with half the population in the Terai region. It is a highly diverse country, with 125 caste/ethnic groups speaking 123 languages and representing over 10 religions. Children under 18 is estimated at about 40 per cent.

The new constitution, promulgated in September, 2015, encompasses federal democratic republic governance restructuring the country to seven provinces and 753 Palikas (metropolitan cities and rural/urban municipalities), with substantial devolution of power to the sub-national agencies. Nepal was struck by an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 Richter Scale in April 2015; this and a series of afterquakes caused the death of about 9,000 people, and one-third of them were children.

The Fifteenth Plan (2020-2024) of the Government of Nepal aims to upgrade Nepal to a middle-income developing country by 2026. Over the past decades Nepal has made rapid progress on many fronts related to children's wellbeing. Under five mortality has steadily declined. Immunization rates of infants are at 84 per cent. Maternal mortality has also reduced. Stunting affects 31.5 per cent of children under five in Nepal; wasting at 12 per cent has not declined. Access to primary education is at 47 per cent (attendance rate). The completion rate for primary school is 82 per cent. About 40 per cent of children attending school are taught in a language other than the language they speak at home. Birth registration has increased to 77 per cent of children under five. About 22 per cent are engaged in child labour. About 33 per cent of women aged 20-24 were married before they were 18 years old. Access to improved water sources has improved significantly but the quality remains an issue. Open defecation has declined.

Nepal experienced several waves of the COVID-19 pandemic since beginning of 2020; it was worst hit with the second wave as daily cases reached up to about 9,000. The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the livelihoods of millions in the country and negated some of the gains. Children living in poverty rose from an estimated 1.3 million before the pandemic to about 6 million in August 2020. Schools were closed for long periods.

Findings of the Country Programme Review

Relevance

The 2018-2022 Country Programme (CP) is aligned to the Fourteenth National Plan (2016-2019) of the Government. The CP is directly linked to three of the UNDAF's four outcomes and is in line with UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018-2022), UN Convention on rights of the child (CRC) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Overall, the theories of change (ToC) are relevant and address the needs identified in SitAn 2017 and the country plans and strategies. In **Nutrition**, the outputs respond well to the situation in Nepal and have fairly clear and measurable indicators. There is about 10 to 15 per cent "unreached" children who continue to show wasting. In **Education**, the outcome is well reflected with detailed indicators, which are however not reflected in toto in the Results Framework. Although the ToC identifies "the most disadvantaged", the inclusivity is not explicitly reflected in the CPAP. The **WASH** outcomes are well reflected. Whilst the interventions are positively linked to bring about the desired changes, there are provincial differences (e.g., open defecation) which are not reflected in the Results Framework. In **Social Policy**, the outcome is reflected in the CPAP with well-defined indicators; however, the outputs are less clearly linked to the indicators.

The planning framework in Results Assessment Module (RAM) is strong: most indicators are well defined with baselines and annual targets. Exceptions include several instances of targets being identical to or lower than the baselines. The ToC uses national data which are not available for measuring targets. The initiatives of UNICEF NCO directly address Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 16 in Nepal.

In the planning process, selection of Palikas is somewhat unclear to the stakeholders and some sub-national agencies did not concur with UNICEF selections. Consultations at the Provincial level have been less frequent. Palika-level work plans

are not always discussed with the relevant sub-national agencies. UNICEF has not adequately "decentralized" its approaches to accommodate local planning and decision-making, and the Field Offices do not have the required flexibility to adapt to changing situations and revise plans accordingly. About 80 per cent of the stakeholders feel that the CP has considered national and provincial needs in planning; the expressed need is to expand geographic coverage of UNICEF thematic work, and include adolescents and women of reproductive age, generate provincial baselines, and include some of the marginalized communities and those in unreached areas.

Effectiveness

Achievement of the results: The self-assessed results for the CP are impressive. Overall, five out of the six programme outcomes are reported to be "on track" by the end of 2021. Many results have been achieved ahead of time in spite of COVID-19. In general, service delivery or coverage targets are more often achieved, while system strengthening and policy-level indicators are less often achieved.

In **Nutrition**, NCO-supported scaling up of a multi-sector nutrition plan (MSNP), enhanced the capacity of officials to enable them to monitor MSNP, maintained its programme on Vitamin A despite the COVID-19 outbreak, supported sub-national entities to incorporate nutrition in these plans, supported a web-based reporting system and databases. It is adopting more of an advocacy role after reduced funding, and nuances of these changes are not well understood by the stakeholders. Inadequate staffing and capacity at the sub-national level, sub-optimal coordination between the three tiers of GoN, issues with data collection at sub-national level, and inadequate SBC engagement have affected the programme's effectiveness. Wasting remains an issue.

In **Education**, the NCO continued to assist the Government to strengthen the education systems and improve learning outcomes. It supported the development of a national early childhood strategy and developed the local-level planning package for

Palikas. It promoted improvement of enrolment of out-of-school children and developed the early learning development standards report cards to assess children's development. It continued to lobby for inclusive education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it supported development of an education cluster contingency plan and self-learning materials for primary classes. It continued to train stakeholders on school safety and DRR. Inadequate sub-national staffing and funding by GoN, delays in fund transfers, difficulty in scaling up digital education, the inability of GoN to equip schools for inclusive education, and less-than satisfactory inter-agency collaboration have hampered progress.

The **WASH** component has made strides with very close stakeholder engagement on sanitation and WASH planning. The level of engagement is seen by the government as a good model which has been shared with development partners. Open defaecation has reduced, and the NCO is focused on achieving SDG targets. The Support for Water Safety Programme is taken as a model and will be scaled up in local authorities. It is also supporting the development of WASH-related statutes for the Government. There is a demand for expanding NCO work, particularly in WASH planning and in WASH in schools.

In **Emergency/DRR**, emergency support for Nepal (following disasters and COVID-19) and the support for preparation of emergency response plans for 50 Palikas are noteworthy. It also supported development of disaster preparedness and response plans for 15 Palikas and strengthening the crisis management information system. The NCO identified standby partners to be used in an emergency and piloted an important initiative, Anticipatory Action Plan, to pre-identify potential beneficiaries in an emergency. NCO contributed towards Children's Clubs and introduced Child Centred DRR work at the Palika level. The challenges included ambiguous interpretation of laws and statutes in federalized structures, difficulty of real-time monitoring on displacement of children ahead of monsoon, and the limitations of funds in Palikas.

In **Social Policy**, the NCO continued to build capacity on producing evidence on child poverty to adopt the multi-dimensional poverty index, which will provide a basis for resource allocation in the provinces. The NCO contributed to a range of policies and strategies applicable to national and sub-national levels. Its advocacy work resulted in extending the child grants programme to reach 370,000 children. It was also involved in implementing the cash transfer system covering a million children and launched a programme to monitor exclusions in this programme. The NCO continued to provide budget briefs to support government decision-making and for child budget allocations. During the pandemic, the NCO developed a child and family tracker survey to obtain real time data and rolled out emergency cash relief through the government system. The social policy component has faced a number of challenges such as: a lack of common understanding of social policy issues in the three tiers in the GoN; absence of relevant legislation; inadequate coordination between donors leading to duplication of work; inadequate information on children at risk of neglect, abuse and violence; and the minimal dialogue between stakeholders to support more effective policies concerning children. The UNICEF NCO has been the only UN agency to explicitly examine children-specific local governance issues at Palika level.

In equity, it is noted that some geographical areas of the country (e.g., hilly areas of Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces) and some marginalized communities (e.g., Badi and Musahar) are not adequately serviced by the donors, including UNICEF. Gender mainstreaming in the programmes is uneven, and reporting is inadequate. It is also observed that recognition of gender equality amongst both federal and sub-national agencies is uneven. Overall, resources allocated by UNICEF for strengthening equity and gender equality in the programme, including monitoring and evaluation (M&E), is inadequate. Use of Social and Behavioural Change (SBC) is uneven across thematic areas due to staffing and funding constraints.

Reporting in RAM is uneven; reporting of outcome indicators is inadequate but have been "approved". The annual targets are unclear and corresponding reporting is confusing. Monitoring plans are available across all thematic areas, and the reports have been made in a timely manner. Progress monitoring at the field level offices is inadequate. In general, the outreach materials produced by the UNICEF NCO are well received by the stakeholders, yet some key stakeholders do not appear to be receiving them.

CSOs are an important partner in the implementation of UNICEF's programme as they are familiar with the communities and have regular dialogue with them. Notwithstanding that, there were reservations expressed by sub-national officials on the capacity and commitment of some CSOs to further UNICEF's goals. Many were unaware of the selection process of CSOs.

There are a number of INGOs with substantial investments in children and UNICEF stands to benefit by closer collaboration with them in programme partnerships.

Factors contributing to the achievement (or not) of results

Federalization has brought out challenges. Whilst the WASH and Education programmes have somewhat adapted and been better accepted, there is lukewarm ownership expressed by some of the sub-national agencies as the work programme has been drawn up and agreed with the Federal Government. UNICEF's engagement at the provincial level is inadequate. Programme delivery is also affected by delays in enacting legislation related to federalization. Overall, the programme implementation suffered a set-back due to the **COVID-19** pandemic; UNICEF's response is much appreciated by the GoN, and the pandemic also provided new opportunities for UNICEF NCO to work with the GoN. UNICEF NCO and the sub-national entities have regularly experienced internal coordination issues and instances of inordinate delays in **transfer/ receipt**

of funds through the government fund transfer system, which is a constraint common to all development partners.

Adjustment of the Programme within a changing context

COVID-19: As in other parts of the world, COVID-19 caused an unprecedented impact on lives and livelihoods in Nepal. The **Government of Nepal** responded by launching a suite of relief measures which were better implemented during the second wave as the agencies had a clearer roles vis-à-vis federalization. The **UNICEF NCO** reprogrammed its work and launched the Child & Family Tracker Survey to assess the situation and needs of families with children during the pandemic and lockdowns. UNICEF NCO also gathered real-time data on health services through mobile data collection. Although UNICEF did not significantly change its programming based on this information, the data will be useful for the next cycle. UNICEF NCO's thematic area responses are considered timely and important contributions towards COVID-19 management. UNICEF NCO adopted strategies to deliver its programme within the COVID-19 context, and indeed provided some lessons of success (e.g. Vitamin A campaign in spite of COVID-19 restrictions). UNICEF recorded several lessons from COVID-19 work which included: the need for greater flexibility in funding to facilitate repurposing of programmes to adapt to changed needs and deliver results in an emergency; the engagement of local leaders in immunization and Vitamin A campaign; value of preparedness in DRR response using child clubs; and surveys (such as CFT) which provided important data useful for programme interventions. GoN stakeholders are very appreciative of UNICEF's initiatives and are likely to continue the successful initiatives after COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Federalization: Federalization was expected to improve the reach of support to the most vulnerable communities and to channel resources to Palikas so that the communities would benefit more. At the end of the first year of the CP, UNICEF NCO reported federalization as a key constraint in implementation; however, in the second year, it was considered less as a challenge and more as

an opportunity, and noted the need for additional human and financial resources to service 50 highly diverse and geographically dispersed Palikas. In order to address issues surrounding federalization, the CP added an output (under Social Policy) which was approved by GoN in 2021. An activity on systems improvement was added to other outcome areas.

At the **national level**, UNICEF NCO supports a range of ministries to formulate guidelines and strategies related to children in line with the policies of GoN. At the **provincial level**, UNICEF NCO supported policy level dialogues in provinces. At the **Palika level**, UNICEF NCO supports in periodic planning, annual plan formulation, and advocacy for children's welfare. The three field offices function as the liaison point between NCO and the sub-national government agencies. The Field Offices are also understaffed.

UNICEF's main challenges affecting performance vis-à-vis federalization are: top-down planning; selection of Palikas; inordinate delays in implementation due to fund transfer issues; inadequate "decentralization" of UNICEF operations; lack of key legislation to effectively devolve functions to sub-national levels; inadequate staff capacities and non-targeted capacity development initiatives by UNICEF; minimal engagement at the provincial level; non-synchronized financial year with the GoN; and inadequate coordination at Palika level. Overall, UNICEF NCO has been constrained to adjust to the new situation during this short period. While some challenges are beyond the control of UNICEF NCO, there is scope for internal adjustments to mitigate some of the constraints faced by the NCO.

UNICEF strategic engagement helping leverage policies and resources for children

UNICEF NCO is well regarded amongst the higher echelons of the Government and enjoys the confidence and trust of the agencies. It is noted for bringing global best practices for children's welfare and has a unique position with regard to Child Protection. In Social Policy, UNICEF exclusively examines children's social development issues.

In regard to WASH, Health and Nutrition, and DRR, there are a number of other UN Agencies, Development Partners and INGOs who are active.

UNICEF's influence in launching the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Plan and the expansion of the Child Grants and Dalit Child Grants Scheme are well recognized. In education, COVID-19 guidelines brought global practices. In the health sector, COVID-19 management is very significant. Its service delivery mode was well recognized.

UNICEF NCO has regularly pursued changes in policies, particularly in the light of federalization, and has contributed to the policy dialogue of GoN. It has a niche in policy areas relevant to children, and is best placed to take those forward. UNICEF's best practices have been sought by the development partners. Due to UNICEF's position, it has been invited to chair three important policy working groups.

UNICEF's adaptation to federalization is not as swift and convincing; it could have better demonstrated its focus by enhanced decentralization of its own business to mirror the GoN's federalization process and introduced better internal coordination to address the cross-cutting nature of federalization.

Lessons learned

- **UNICEF NCO has missed the opportunity to work closely with the Provincial & Local Governance Support Programme (PLGSP).** UNICEF could have adapted and built upon its past experience in decentralization and would have benefitted from engaging closely with PLGSP.

- **Some thematic sectors have better adapted to work in the federalization milieu.** The closer dialogue with local authorities has contributed to the success stories; the modus operandi employed in these sectors could be used in other programmes as well.

- **Local level changes to improve the lives of children due to interventions are well recognized by GoN agencies.** Most local authorities are not familiar with the indicators in the CPAP; however they appreciate the changes brought about by UNICEF NCO at the district and local level.

- **Changes in funding modalities by donors are likely to happen in the future with more funding being channeled to the GoN,** and UNICEF NCO needs to take examples from others to have alternate plans and/or exit strategies to keep the momentum of the programme without abruptly discontinuing the existing mechanisms which will negatively affect programme implementation.

Recommendations

Programme strategy and design

1. **In the new programme cycle, UNICEF NCO should focus on actions that will facilitate programme design and planning to enhance consideration of federalization concerns** (collaboration with PLGSP, decentralization of UNICEF operations, coordination of joint planning, develop clear criteria for Palika selection, use a focused capacity development programme in the provinces, and improve engagement with Provincial Governments/Ministries).

2. In equity and gender equality, UNICEF must comply with minimum UNICEF standards, and adopt a more robust gender responsive approach rather than the current gender sensitive approach and addressing the needs of children in difficult remaining pockets of unreached areas and disadvantaged communities (e.g., hilly areas of Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces; communities affected by caste and other social considerations).

3. **Develop theories of change which clearly show** the adequacy of the planned interventions and their convergence to demonstrate UNICEF NCO's contribution towards national targets.

4. **Expanding the Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) approaches across the programme and introduce appropriate**

performance indicators for SBC.

5. **UNICEF should** enhance focus on policy development and influencing the government on policies and strategies to address the needs of children.

6. **UNICEF may consider several new areas of work identified in this review** (e.g., the need to expand coverage of nutrition, WASH, social policy, DRR, inclusion of adolescents and women of reproductive age, and generate provincial baselines).

Programme delivery

7. **Before the launch of the next Country Programme, the NCO should review** (a) staff capacity in field offices, (b) re-examine selection mechanisms of CSOs for implementation, (c) ensure GoN acceptance of the consultants hired by UNICEF NCO, and (d) ensure that technical support provided via the Field Offices are need-based rather than on a predetermined basis.

8. **Delegation of authority (DoA) to the Field Offices should be reviewed** to improve delivery of the Provincial and Palika programmes.

9. **UNICEF should review its partnerships and internal arrangements** vis-à-vis (a) fund transfer mechanisms to GoN entities, (b) improve internal coordination, and (c) engage with INGOs in programme partnerships.

10. **Improve the reporting in RAM (and elsewhere) towards better consistency and ease in tracking progress.**

11. **Improve programme implementation monitoring** particularly in the Field Office operations where on-the-ground monitoring needs improvement.

Sharing of results and knowledge

12. **Improve communications with stakeholders,** in particular with its implementing partners on the Country Programme content, results, and highlights of achievements together with improvements made to the lives of children.

1 Introduction

In accordance with the UNICEF Evaluation Policy, it is necessary to conduct a Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) at least once every two programme cycles or once in a programme cycle if monitoring and audit information points to a significant shift in the programming context or a significant increase in the level of risk.

Whilst UNICEF Nepal Country Office (NCO) has conducted a Country Programme Review in the last cycle, the recent changes in the country context have necessitated another review characterized by a "light touch approach" that will seek views from a limited but carefully selected list of stakeholders and partners.[1]

This Country Programme Review commenced in April 2022.

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1. Terms of Reference of this Review (UNICEF ROSA).

2 The Country Context

Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia, wedged between China to the north and India to the south (*see Figure 2.1*). The population is 29.2 million, with 2 million living in the capital Kathmandu.[2] Only about six per cent of the population (1.8 million) live in the mountain region towards the north, while the hilly region is home to about 11.7 million people. The flat Terai region bordering India is home to about half of the country's population (15.6 million). The annual population growth rate is 0.93 per cent, the lowest recorded in 80 years.[3]

Nepal is a highly diverse country, with 125 caste/ethnic groups speaking 123 languages and representing over 10 religions.[4] Children under 18 make up a large proportion of the population, estimated at about 40 per cent.[5]

A 10-year armed conflict with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) ended with a peace agreement in 2006. The reinstated parliament adopted an interim constitution, declaring the country a secular, federal state and called for an

FIGURE 2.1: Map of Nepal with the provinces created by the new constitution

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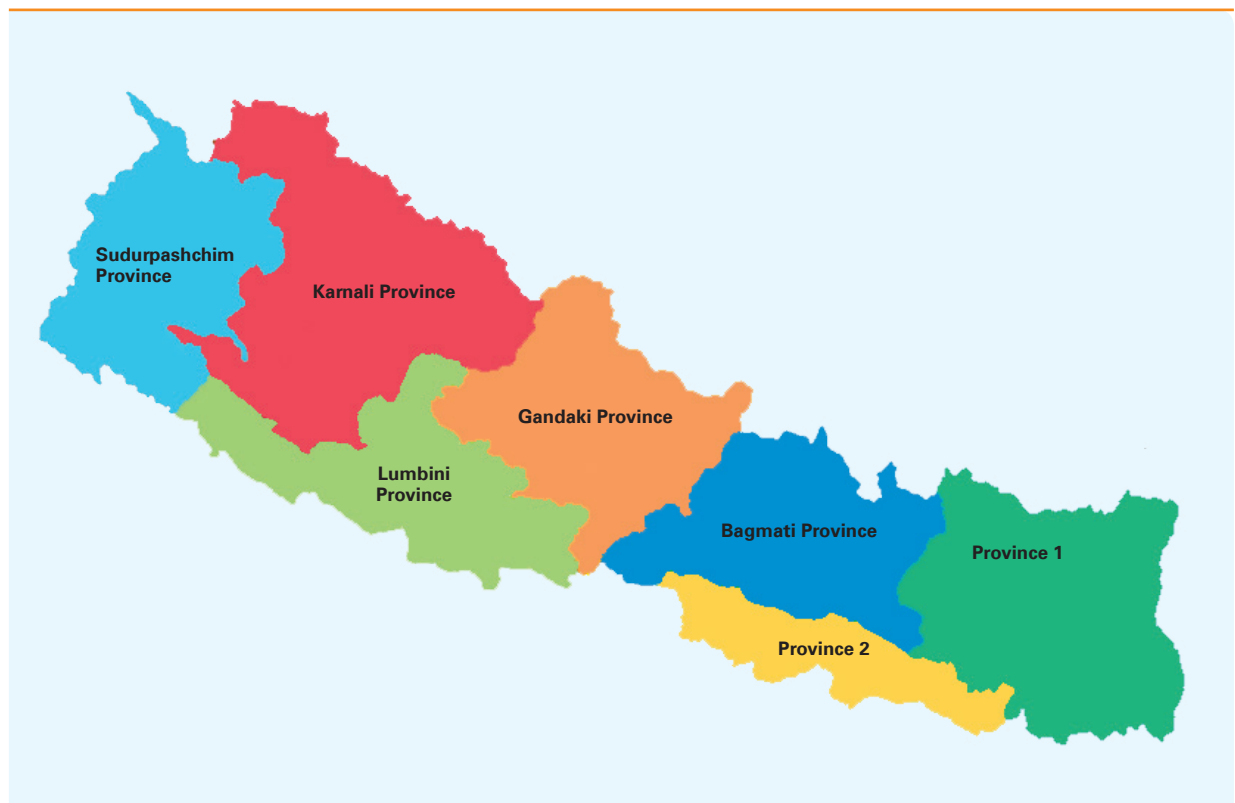
2.   Census 2021, Preliminary Report, Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal.
3.   Ibid.
4.   UNICEF Nepal, Situation Analysis, 2017.
5.   UNICEF Nepal, see: https://www.unicef.org/nepal/children-nepal

election of a constituent assembly.[6] The Maoists won the election to the constituent assembly in 2008. The assembly abolished the monarchy at its first meeting but was not able to provide a draft constitution by the end of its four-year term, and elections to the second constituent assembly were held in 2013. Some of the contentious issues during the drafting process were the number and boundaries of the proposed federal provinces, to what degree they would be based on ethnic identity, and the powers to be devolved to local and provincial governments.

While the vast majority voted in favour of the Constitution, there were protests from political parties of the Madhes (in the south, bordering India), which culminated in a general strike across much of the Terai that severely disrupted transport and health services and forced schools to close. Border points with India were also blocked, lasting from August 2015 to February 2016, which had a major impact on the life of people all over Nepal causing severe shortage of fuel, medicine, and essential supplies.

The new constitution, promulgated in September 2015, encompasses federal democratic republic governance and has defined social, economic, cultural, and environmental rights (including education, health, employment, housing, food security, social security as fundamental rights of the people). Furthermore, the Constitution has made the rights of children a fundamental right and has guaranteed their holistic development.

The new constitution divided the country into seven provinces and 753 Palikas (metropolitan cities and rural/urban municipalities), with substantial devolution of power to the provincial and local levels, including many government functions related to children. This would replace the functions managed by central, district (75) and village/municipality authorities (3,915) of the 1999 Local Self Governance Act (LSGA) (though the planned decentralization under the

LSGA was never fully realised; hampered by the ongoing conflict and the impossibility of holding local elections). Elections for federal, provincial and local levels were held in 2017, and when the elected officials took their office in the country's 753 municipalities in 2018, they filled a decades-long void in local democracy in Nepal. However, frequent changes in the political and bureaucratic leadership and delays in enacting legislation hampered social and other services. The second local level elections were held on 13 May 2022 (during this review).

On 25 April 2015, amidst the political turmoil brought about by the new constitution, Nepal was struck by an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 Richter Scale. Nepal lies in a seismically active zone and frequently experiences smaller earthquakes. The epicentre was Gorkha district, 76 km northwest of Kathmandu. It was followed by hundreds of aftershocks of magnitude four or larger, including one of magnitude 7.3 on 12 May 2015. About 9,000 people lost their lives, one-third of them were children. In the most affected districts, 70 per cent of birthing centres were damaged or destroyed, and close to 24,000 classrooms were damaged or destroyed, affecting the education of almost one million enrolled children.[7] The earthquake happened on a Saturday, the only day of the week when most schools are closed in Nepal.

Nepal experienced several waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first was in August-December 2020 when the number of reported daily cases went up to above 5,000. The second wave, in April-June 2021, was much more severe with reported daily case numbers reaching up to about 9,000. A third wave of similar magnitude occurred in January 2022, lasting only about one month and resulting in far fewer deaths than the second wave (up to about 15 deaths per day compared with reaching 200 deaths per day in May 2021).[8] A nationwide survey by the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) in mid-2021 estimated that two-thirds of Nepalis had developed antibodies against

6.　UNICEF Nepal, Situation Analysis, 2017.

7.　UNICEF Nepal, see: https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/nepal-earthquake-education-nearly-1-million-children-jeopardy-unicef

8.　See: https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/nepal

COVID-19. Through the COVAX facility, partner country dose sharing, and direct government procurement, 64 per cent of the whole population was fully vaccinated by March 2022.[9] Vaccine coverage was expanded to adolescents aged 12-17 in early 2022.

A preventive nationwide lockdown was imposed on 24 March 2020 (there was no evidence of community transmission at that time), sealing the borders with India and China, closing schools, prohibiting public gatherings, and halting international and domestic travel. Subsequent lockdowns were implemented during the second and third waves of the pandemic.

Two key contextual changes during the current Country Programme period stand out. First, the transition to a federal system of government, with local elected officials taking on new local functions at the same time the CP started. With this, the counterpart infrastructure was redesigned, while the CP and CPAP were already finalized. Secondly, COVID-19 presented profound challenges that required adjustment to the ongoing programme in order to respond to needs of children as well as continue working towards stated goals.

The Government of Nepal has formulated the Fifteenth Plan (2020-2024) with the aim of upgrading Nepal from a least developed country to a middle-income developing country by 2026[10] and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Social development

Over the past decades Nepal has made rapid progress on many fronts related to children's wellbeing. Under five mortality has steadily declined and in 2019 was at 28 out of 1,000 live births.[11] Most children are taken to a health care provider to receive treatment for acute respiratory infections (82 per cent) and diarrhoea (60 per cent).[12] Immunization rates are high, with 84 per cent of infants receiving their third dose of the DPT vaccine. While there has been much progress in child health, the neonatal mortality rate is declining slower, at 16 out of 1000 live births. More than half of children who die before their fifth birthday in Nepal is during the first 28 days of life.[13]

The maternal mortality rate is 186 (deaths per 100,000 live births), a significant decline from 553 in 2000. In parallel, the rate of skilled attendance at delivery has increased, now at 77 per cent of all deliveries. Most pregnant women (78 per cent) attend antenatal care, fewer attend postnatal care. Fourteen per cent of women give birth before the age of 18.[14]

Stunting, low height-for-age affects 31.5 per cent of children under five in Nepal (down from 58 per cent in 2000). Wasting, low weight-for-height affects 12 per cent of children under five (no significant reduction over the years).[15] About 62 per cent of infants are exclusively breastfed during the first five months of life (no clear trend of improvement).

There has been a significant increase in access to primary education over the past 20 years. The net attendance rate for primary school is higher (74 per cent) than in lower secondary school (50 per cent). The completion rate for primary school is high, at 82 per cent. Almost half (40 per cent) of children attending school are taught in a language other than the language they speak at home.[16] Only four out of ten children aged 7-14 can successfully complete three foundational reading tasks, the result is slightly lower for mathematics tasks.[17]

9.   Ibid; see: https://www.unicef.org/nepal/press-releases/over-7725-million-covid-19-vaccines-through-covax-facility-people-nepal
10. Originally expected to be by 2022, extended by five years due to COVID-19 setbacks (UNGA, 76th session).
11. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, National Planning Commission and Central Bureau of Statistics..
12. See: https://data.unicef.org/country/npl/. All data in this section are from this source unless otherwise noted.
13. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, National Planning Commission and Central Bureau of Statistics.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

Birth registration has increased to 77 per cent of children under five.[18] A large majority (82 per cent) of children aged 1-14 report having experienced physical or psychological aggression by their caregivers in the past one month.[19] Child labour is still common: one in five children (22 per cent) aged 5-17 years is engaged in child labour. One in three (33 per cent) of women aged 20-24 were married before they were 18 years old.

Access to improved water sources has improved significantly over the years, from 46 per cent of households in 1990 to 97 per cent today. However quality remains an issue, and 75 per cent of all water sources are contaminated with E. coli bacteria. The use of improved sanitation facilities has increased tremendously, from 6 per cent in 1990 to 94 per cent of households today. Open defaecation has declined from 69 per cent of the population in 2000 to 10 per cent in 2020.

The 2019 MICS noted that 10 per cent of children aged 2-17 years reported a functional difficulty in at least one domain. Estimates suggest that more than 80 per cent of individuals with disabilities do not hold a disability card that is required to benefit from government support. The disability allowance is one of five government social security allowances and provides cash transfers and specialized or subsidized services to people who hold a disability identity card. Many card holders do not receive the allowance, estimated at between 30 to 60 per cent.[20] The Child Grant Programme of the GoN has been implemented since 2009, initially focusing on Dalit children and children in Karnali region under the age of five. In 2016, the Government committed to the gradual universalization of the programme to cover all children under five nationally and doubling the benefit value.

There has been a significant reduction in poverty in Nepal, with the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line declining from 42 per cent in 1995 to 12.5 per cent in 2010 (the national poverty line was revised the same year, changing the estimate to 25 per cent living in poverty). Using the international poverty line, 15 per cent were living under two USD per day the same year.[21] More recent data has been used to estimate multi-dimensional poverty, showing a reduction in the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) from 30 per cent (MICS 2014) to 17 per cent (MICS 2019).[22]

The COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged lockdowns in Nepal had a direct impact on the livelihoods of millions in the country as well as outside – one of the key factors behind the poverty reduction seen over the past decades is remittances from overseas migrant workers. Tourism was also badly affected, negatively impacting household income in several regions of the country. The number of children living in poverty rose from an estimated 1.3 million before the pandemic to about 6 million in August 2020.[23] Schools were closed across the country from March 2020 onwards and in many areas remained closed for a full school year, with some shorter periods of being open. In August 2020, a UNICEF NCO survey found that 53 per cent reported loss of livelihood, 25 per cent reported reduced dietary intake for children and 21 per cent reported that their children were not studying.[24]

Reducing disparities will further improve social development in Nepal. The national averages for the much-improved indicators cited above mask significant disparities by factors such as region, language, caste, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and income.

18. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, National Planning Commission and Central Bureau of Statistics.
19. Ibid.
20. See: https://www.unicef.org/nepal/reports/nepals-cash-allowances-children-disabilities
21. World Bank, 'Poverty and equity brief: Nepal', October 2020.
22. See: https://www.unicef.org/nepal/reports/nepal-multidimensional-poverty-index-2021-report
23. See: https://www.unicef.org/nepal/press-releases/150-million-additional-children-plunged-poverty-due-covid-19unicef-save-children
24. See: https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/15281/file/Assessing_Secondary_Effects_of_COVID_on_Families_and_Chilren_In_Nepal_-_CFT_Endline_Report.pdf

3 Object of the Review

The object of this evaluation is UNICEF Nepal Country Programme (CP) 2018-22, which was developed in the context of the then ongoing Fourteenth National Plan (2016-2019) of the Government, which set the goal for Nepal to graduate to middle income status by 2030 "as a welfare state with social justice based on socioeconomic transformation and rapid poverty reduction."[25] The CP was designed to support priorities in this plan and continued progress towards SDG targets within the overall framework of the UN organizations in Nepal expressed in the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (2018-2022).[26] The Country Programme Document (CPD) is directly linked to three of UNDAF's four outcomes: social development; disaster risk reduction, disaster preparedness and resilience; and human rights, rule of law and governance. The CP was also designed to be in line with UNICEF's global priorities as expressed in the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018-2022). The CP is also aligned with the Convention on rights of children (UNCRC) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The CP refers to the impending decline in the working age population relative to the total population by 2047 and sets out to help Nepal capture its "demographic window of opportunity"; investing in today's children is critical to ensure that they are prepared to sustain the development progress. The programme aims to focus especially on disadvantaged girls, ethnic and low caste groups, those in hard-to-reach areas, out-of-school adolescents, and single- and child-headed poor households.

The overall outcome of the CP is that "children benefit from improved and equitable access to and the use of high-quality child-friendly services, improved care practices, protective and safe environments and better policies and resource allocation for children". In terms of coverage, the programme was designed to provide national and sub-national support and scale up successful interventions, but also to provide intensive assistance in a number of priority rural and urban municipalities (Palikas).

The CPD sought to support the country to:
a) Improve and ensure the uninterrupted delivery of essential services during the transition to the federal system of government;

b) Foster multi-sectoral programming on such issues as early childhood development (ECD), adolescents, and disability;

c) Enhance the national capacity for humanitarian action and an effective humanitarian-development transition, including disaster preparedness and resilience and sustainable recovery and reconstruction in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes;

d) Strengthen gender-responsive programming in all areas;

e) Promote positive behaviours, demand for services and the strengthening of social norms that contribute to the realization of child rights by means of innovations, behavioural-change communication and the improvement of relevant programmes, policies and systems;

f) Share lessons learned and best practices through South-South cooperation.

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25. UNICEF Nepal Country Programme Document (2018-2022).
26. The programme specifically targets SDG Goals 1, 3 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 16.

The programme has six outcomes with 22 outputs that target specific change in the lives of children. These are further described below. One additional outcome on programme effectiveness provides cross-sectoral support to the thematic programmes (this includes a specific output on DRR). Following the mid-term review of the CP, an extra output was added specifically on local governance, to support improved planning and implementation for children at local levels. In general, at all three levels of government, the programme was to focus on policy reform, improved supply chain management for basic services, capacity strengthening for operationalization of the federal system, overall targeting the most disadvantaged children, particularly focusing on the central Terai and far-western areas: Madhes Province and Sudurpaschim Province. In the remaining four provinces, broader policy and advocacy support is to be provided.

In **health**, the programme aim is improved and equitable access to and use of high-impact quality health interventions and improved healthy behaviours. Guided by the National Health Policy of Nepal (2019), and other strategic plans,[27] the programme addresses (i) neonatal and maternal mortality (through legal reform, quality improvement system, early detection of disability, promotion of care-seeking behaviour); (ii) childhood illnesses (through implementation of the Immunization Act, scaling up Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illness Programme, strategy to prevent pneumonia through reduction of pollution, and improved prevention and care for pneumonia and diarrhoea); (iii) adolescent health issues such as teenage pregnancies and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) (through strategy implementation, capacity strengthening of Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV) and health workers, and communication campaigns for promoting healthy behaviours). Operationalization of the federal structure for health would be supported through strengthening the Health Management Information System and e-health strategy as well as disaster preparedness/DRR.

The **nutrition programme** seeks to ensure that children, including adolescent girls and women of reproductive age have improved and equitable access to and use of an adequate nutritious diet and improved nutritional care behaviour and practices. The programme is guided by the Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP) II (2018-2022) implemented under the leadership of the National Planning Commission. The programme sought to support (i) adolescent, maternal, infant and young child nutrition and care through the "Golden 1000 Days" campaign, the baby friendly hospital initiative and the Maternal, Infant and Young Child Feeding Action plan, increase capacity of health workers and FCHVs, and communication approaches for positive behaviour change at scale; (ii) scale up severe and acute malnutrition (SAM) management interventions through support for SAM treatment centres and capacity development of health workers and FCHVs, social mobilization of caregivers, community and religious leaders; (iii) addressing micronutrient deficiencies through the national supplementation programme focused on Vitamin A and iodine deficiencies, advocacy and private sector engagement to strengthen local production of micro-nutrient powder and fortified foods; (iv) operationalization of federal system for nutrition programmes supported through the MSNP. In DRR, support would be provided to develop guidelines on resilience and DRR and CCA in relation to nutrition.

In **education**, the programme aim is to ensure that all children have improved access, participation, and learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education – in inclusive, safe and protective environments. Guided by the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (2016-2022) and its equity strategy, the programme sought to support (i) access to early learning in underserved areas through community-based Early Childhood Education (ECE) and parenting education feeding evidence-based advocacy for scaling up ECE nationally, capacity building of local levels to support school-based ECE, and development of teacher skills and quality teaching and learning

27. WHO Nepal, Country Cooperation Strategic Agenda (2018-2022).

materials; (ii) quality in basic education through policy development and planning, improvement of classroom teaching and learning, early grade literacy and numeracy, inclusive education, and innovations and research on teaching in multilingual classrooms; (iii) adolescents to enter formal school system through non-formal classes, communication strategies targeting parents to increase demand for formal education for working children, improving life skills of adolescents (Rupantaran curriculum); (iv) operationalization of the federal system within the context of SSDP.

In **child protection**, the programme aims to ensure that children have improved protection from all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation. This component is guided by the Child's Act[28] and policies and strategies related to children on child marriage,[29] child labour,[30] child trafficking,[31] and Nepal's commitments towards the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically, the programme would support: (i) strengthening of the child protection system within the federal structure by scaling up case management procedures, advocating for professionalisation of the child protection workforce, introduction of the Child Protection Sector Information Management System (CPIMS) to provide disaggregated data on protection issues, strengthening DRR capacity, and CCA preparedness at all levels; (ii) addressing violence and exploitation through support for improved legislation and policies across a range of thematic issues, communication strategies towards changing societal acceptance of these issues, strengthen capacity of government and systems to provide appropriate services to victims, (iii) review legislation and policies on children's access to justice, develop necessary regulations, protocols and guidelines, strengthen information management system on justice for children, capacity strengthening of justice and security professionals, psychosocial counsellors and social workers on gender-sensitive and child/friendly justice procedures, and pilot new

practices such as diversion, restorative justice and victim/witness protection measures.

In **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)**, the programme seeks to achieve that children and families have improved and equitable access to and use of safe and sustainable drinking water and sanitation services, and improved hygiene practices. It is guided by the WASH sector Development Plan (2016-2030) implemented by Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation (MoWSS). Specifically, the programme would support: (i) improved water quality by strengthening the water regulatory body, water safety plans, raising community awareness on household level water treatments, strategy to ensure access of unreached populations, and inter-sectoral collaboration for increasing access to safe water in education and health care facilities; (ii) scaling up the open defaecation free (ODF) movement and total sanitation concept, through engaging private sector to promote improved hygiene practices and markets for sanitation, advocacy for gender- and disability-friendly sanitation facilities in HF, ECD centres and schools, scaling up nationally the ranking of schools' provision of WASH facilities, media campaigns to create awareness on hygiene behaviours; (iii) operationalization of federal government structure for WASH system through development of a new WASH Act and revisions of policies to promote gender equality and social inclusion, mainstreaming DRR and CCA into existing policies, strategies and plans.

In **social policy, evidence and evaluation (SPEE)**, the programme aims to ensure that children benefit from strengthened policies and programmes that address child poverty, vulnerability and exclusion. This programme component is guided by the Fourteenth National Plan and the draft National Framework on Social Protection. The programme would support: (i) NPC and CBS to strengthen their capacity for evidence generation (measurement of child poverty, vulnerability and exclusion, and key emerging issues such as federalism, urbanization

28. The Act Relating to Children (2018), Government of Nepal.
29. Ending Child Marriages in Nepal (2017), UNICEF Nepal.
30. Child Labour Prohibition Act (2008), Government of Nepal, and the National Master Plan on the Elimination of Child Labour in Nepal (2011-2020).
31. Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act (2007), Government of Nepal.

and migration, and fiscal space analysis for social interventions); (ii) Scaling up the Child Grant Programme through technical support (impact assessment, use of IT, strengthening inter-sectoral linkages with birth registration, health, etc.); (iii) facilitate dialogue to co-create, share and use knowledge to support more effective policies regarding children, including dialogues with parliamentarians on legislation, policies, and budgetary matters.

Country Programme and Action Plan

The Country Programme is titled 'Country Programme and Action Plan' (CPAP), a joint working document between UNICEF NCO and GoN. It envisaged close partnerships with the United Nations system, multi- and bi-lateral donor partners, NGOs, and CSOs.

Country Programme structure

The Country Programme Office is situated in Kathmandu, headed by the Representative. The Deputy Representatives, Section Chiefs and other programmatic, administrative, and financial support staff are based there. The three Field Offices from the previous CP continue during this cycle albeit in different locations. The Field Office in Nepalgunj (in Lumbini Province) covers Karnali Province and Sudurpaschim Province. The Bharatpur Field Office had been shifted to the capital of Madhes Province (Janakpur) to cover Madhes Province. Finally, the Biratnagar office in eastern Nepal was shifted to Siddharthanagar to cover Gandaki and Lumbini Provinces. Province 1 and Bagmati Province were to be supported by the country office in Kathmandu (*see Figure 1.1*).

Budget

The CP is based on a planned budget of about USD 150 million over five years (*see Table 1.1*). Of this, USD 36 million was Regular Resources (RR) and USD 114 million was Other Resources (OR).[32] The OR component is dependent on development partners. The budget is at a similar level as the indicative budget of the previous CP (USD 144 million).

Figure 1.1: Organigram of UNICEF Nepal

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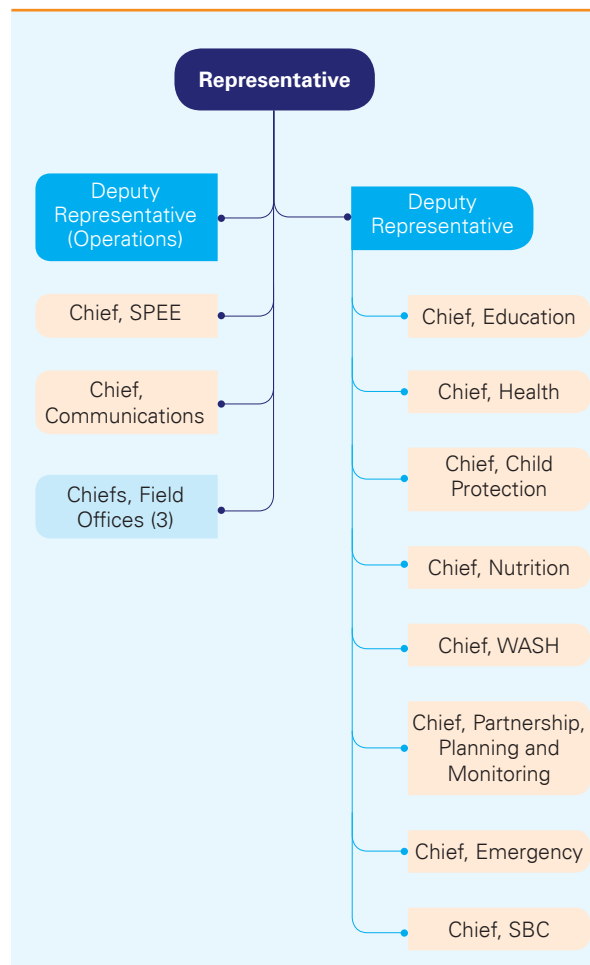
32.   UNICEF terminology: Core Resources for Results – Regular Resources (RR) refers to funding that is received by the organization without restrictions such as country or sector, from which country offices receive a certain proportion each year. Other Resources Regular (OR) refers to contributions from donors that are earmarked for specific purposes.

TABLE 1.1: Summary budget; Country Programme Action Plan (UNICEF Nepal) (USD)

Programme component	Regular resources (RR)	Other resources (OR)	Total
Health	3,200	15,700	18,900
Nutrition	3,000	33,000	36,000
Education	3,200	30,100	33,300
Child Protection	3,000	14,060	17,060
WASH	2,600	15,400	18,000
Social Policy, Evidence & Evaluation	2,500	3,000	5,500
Programme Effectiveness[33]	18,510	3,000	21,510
Total	**36,010**	**114,260**	**150,270**

The CPAP was revised following the mid-term review of the CP to ensure programmatic alignment to national priorities.[34] The Programme Strategy Notes (PSN) have also been revised accordingly. These revisions did not amend the Outcomes or Outcome Indicators. Also, the budget remained unchanged.

The Results Framework

The overall outcome of the Country Programme is stated as "children benefit from improved and equitable access to and the use of high-quality child-friendly services, improved care practices, protective and safe environments and better policies and resource allocation for children". There are six programme outcomes and one programme effectiveness outcome, as follows:

Outcome 1 By 2022, children, including newborns and adolescents, and women of reproductive age have improved and equitable access to and use of high-impact quality health interventions and improved healthy behaviours.

Outcome 2 By 2022, children, including adolescent girls, and women of reproductive age have improved and equitable access to and use of adequate nutritious diet and improved nutritional care behaviour and care practices.

Outcome 3 By 2022, all children, especially the most disadvantaged, benefit from improved access, participation and learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education within inclusive, safe and protective environment.

Outcome 4 By 2022, children and adolescents have improved protection from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Outcome 5 By 2022, children and their families have improved and equitable access to and use of safe and sustainable drinking water and sanitation services, and improved hygiene practices.

Outcome 6 By 2022, children benefit from strengthened policies and programmes that address child poverty, vulnerability and exclusion.

Outcome 7 The country programme is efficiently designed, coordinated, managed and supported to meet quality programming standards in achieving results for children.

The Review did not cover Outcome 4.

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33. Includes: Planning & Monitoring; Communications, C4D, DRR and Climate Change; and Operations. There is an error in the sub-total (USD 26,610) in the original document plus in the CPAP Addendum.
34. CPAP (2018-2022) Addendum, UNICEF NCO.

4 Purpose and the Scope of the Review

The purpose of the CPR is threefold:

1. Inform programme design and support managerial decision-taking at country office level in preparation for the next country programme. Recommendations are to be provided which must be specific enough that necessary actions can be determined in response.

2. Foster organizational and Nepal CO learning about what works and does not work, especially within a changing context such as the one experienced by the Nepal Country Office.

3. UNICEF has an accountability to design and implement programmes at a standard of excellence. The review will support accountability by providing an independent assessment of how selected results were achieved (or not) and the factors that contributed to the achievement or lack of it.

The overall objectives of the review are to:

- Provide an independent assessment of the extent to which the country programme is relevant to the needs of children within the local context (relevance);

- Provide an independent assessment of the extent to which anticipated results have been achieved or will be likely to be achieved and explanatory factors for their achievement or lack thereof (effectiveness);

- Provide an independent assessment of the extent to which the country office has contributed to results being achieved for children in Nepal;

- Provide an independent assessment of how the country has adapted its programming within the changing context including the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of the decentralization/federalization process;

- Summarize lessons learned and provide guidance on how the country office could strategically position UNICEF given the changing context and existing challenges.

Scope of the Country Programme Review

As per the Terms of Reference, this review is limited in scope ("light touch approach"), and focused on four domains/aspects (relevance, effectiveness, adjustment of programming within a changing context (COVID-19 and decentralization), and strategic positioning of UNICEF in Nepal).

Other parameters of the review are briefly outlined below:

(a) *Theory of change for the Country Programme:* The Review focused on the theory of change for the areas that were explored for a deeper dive under relevance and strategic positioning. Changes in the ToC across the cycle, including the extent to which these changes were implemented and the extent to which the implemented ToC is relevant to meet the needs of children were explored.

(b) *Results levels:* The Review focused on the effectiveness of the following "big budget" consumers:
- Education;
- Nutrition;
- Health;
- DRR/Emergency.

In addition to the above, a deeper dive on relevance was undertaken on the following outputs/thematic areas:
- Local governance;
- Nutrition.

(c) *Geographic and chronological scope:* The principal focus was on the present CP from 2018 to the on-going final year of the cycle. The scope of the evaluation was national but programming in the provinces was also assessed.

(d) *Participants:* As one of the important objectives of the Review was to seek information for the next programme cycle, the main participants of the Review were external stakeholders, confined to duty-bearers. In this regard, the Review team undertook a stakeholder mapping exercise (*see Section 2.4*).

(e) *DAC criteria:* In terms of criteria, this review focused on two of the six current DAC criteria based on the TOR viz., relevance and effectiveness. The other criteria were not a focus of this review.

The Terms of Reference of this review are included in the annex of this report (*see Annex 2.1*).

Stakeholders of the Country Programme

In the context of the CP, the rights holders include all children and young people who are the beneficiaries of the programme. The key duty bearers that CP engages with are the central and subnational government institutions, UN agencies, international, as well as national non-governmental and civil society organizations. (*see Annex 2.2* for roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders) The review team, in consultation with UNICEF NCO and UNICEF ROSA undertook a stakeholder mapping exercise and identified the stakeholders for this review (*see Figure 2.1*).

These stakeholders were broadly categorized into two groups, viz., (a) internal and (b) external. The internal stakeholders were further categorized into three sub-groups, namely: UNICEF regional staff, UNICEF NCO staff, and UNICEF Nepal Field Office staff. The external stakeholders included development partners, GoN agencies at federal, provincial and municipal level, UN agencies, CSOs, academia, and the private sector.

The Review Team analysed the stakeholders further, identified the rights-holders and their entitlements as well as the corresponding duty-bearers and their obligations (*see Annex 2.2*). In consultation with UNICEF ROSA, it was possible to identify institutions in the federal and sub-national entities that are essential duty-bearers for the realization of children's rights in the thematic areas of focus for the Review.

Main end Users and Use of the CPR

The Nepal Country Office (CO) is preparing for the next Country Programme cycle, with several related exercises either completed or on-going. The results of this review will be available for the development and fine-tuning of the objectives, components, and strategies for the new Country Programme, which will cover the period 2023-2027.

Aside from this use, the Review will be useful for government counterparts (ministries and other agencies) who receive direct benefits from the programme.

Finally, though the Review is limited in scope, the findings will be useful for improving the performance of the programme in the next cycle.

Stakeholder

Federal government
National Planning Commission

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission

Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen

Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration

National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority

Ministry of Education, Science & Technology and its agencies (Department of Education, Centre for Education and Human Resource Development)

Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation

Central Bureau of Statistics

Ministry of Health and Population and its agencies (National Health Education, Information and Communication Centre; Family Welfare Division; DONIDCR)

Sub-national government
Province Health Directorate, Lumbini Prov

Policy and Planning Commission, Madhes Province

Ministry of Social Development, Sudurpaschim Province

Social Development Division, Ministry of Law, Women Children and Senior Citizen, Lumbini Province

Ministry of Tourism, Rural & Urban Development, Lumbini Province

Parsagadhi Municipality Parsa, Raskot Municipality, Kalikot

Duty bearers/beneficiaries
Child Club, Kanchanrup Municipality, Saptari

UNICEF Nepal Country Office
Representative
Deputy Representatives
Chiefs and staff of thematic sections (Health, Nutrition, Education, Child Protection, WASH, Social Policy, CC/DRR and Programme Management)
Heads and staff of the three field offices
Head, PME

UNICEF Nepal Field Office staff
Heads and staff of Field Offices (Nepalgunj, Bhairahawa, and Janakpur)

UNICEF ROSA
Regional Advisor (Education)
Regional Advisor (WASH)
Regional Evaluation Advisor
Regional Nutrition Specialist

INGOs/NGOs/CSOs
NEEDS
Kanchanpur, CSO
World Vision
KIRDARC Nepal, Karnali Province
Save the Children, Nepal
Plan International, Nepal
Nepal Red Cross Society (CSO)
Child Club

Development partners/UN agencies
European Union
FCDO, UK
USAID
World Bank
UNDP
UN Resident Coordinator
WHO

5 Methodology

5.1. Review Principles

The Review adopted the following principles in order to ensure that the perspectives of equity, gender, and human rights were assured to the extent possible in this light review:

- Obtaining verbal consent from key informants for online interviews (*see KII Guides – preamble; Annex 2.6*);
- Conducting interviews in the local languages when necessary;
- Examining the extent to which elements of gender responsive programming have been incorporated into the design; and
- Integrating gender equality and human rights-based approaches as well as be guided by the principles of do no harm, leave-no-one-behind (SDG), impartiality, transparency, inclusivity and participation;
- Providing an opportunity to voice their views openly; and
- Respecting differences in culture and customs, religious beliefs, gender roles, age, and ethnicity.

Ethical standards

Ethical norms and principles were followed during the review. The Review Team maintained a free and an independent review process upholding evaluation ethics, in order to maintain the integrity and honesty. During the review, the team followed the ethical guidelines of UNICEF[35] and UNEG.[36]

The Review maintained integrity by respecting the stakeholders engaged in the Review and by adopting standard ethical principles and professional standards during the Review. Additionally, the Review Team ensured that there was no conflict of interest. Accountability was ensured by the team's background experience in ethics, quality assurance at different stages of the review, and proper data and information management. The Review did not engage children; therefore ethical clearance was not deemed necessary. The Review Team consisted of three males and one female with both national and international experience thereby ensuring diversity and representation. The consultations during the Review were carried out in an impartial and an objective manner based on the guides prepared for the purpose; all stakeholders were clearly informed of the purpose of the review, and their responses were voluntary. No audio recordings of conversations were made. The team ensured that the information collected both through interviews and for the online perception survey was kept confidential and not disclosed to third parties.

The Review was designed with a clear purpose and a systematic assessment process. This ensured that the Review results would benefit all stakeholders. Carbon neutrality was maintained by avoiding travel, including within Nepal, and by adopting online/remote interviews.

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35. UNICEF, 'Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis', Doc. CF/PD/DRP/2015-001, April 2015.
36. UNEG, 'Revised UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation', 2020.

Data/information collection

The data/information collection methods and tools were customized to obtain answers to the Review questions stipulated in the Terms of Reference under the given criteria (effectiveness, relevance, programme adjustment, and strategic positioning).

5.2. Methodology and Tools

A mixed-methods approach was used in this review to enable triangulation of data from different sources. The Evaluation Design Matrix (*see Annex 2.3*) summarizes and links the review criteria, key questions and sub-questions, indicators, and sources of information/data. They are briefly described below:[37]

Sampling of stakeholders for the Review

The Review Team used information from the stakeholder mapping exercise and the analysis of rights-holders and duty-bearers (*see Annex 2.2*) to identify stakeholders to be engaged in the Review. Relevant development partners and civil society organizations working in the review focused thematic areas were included as key stakeholders.

The selection of stakeholders for KII and the Perception Survey was undertaken in consultation with the NCO and ROSA through purposive sampling. In identifying the stakeholders, their engagement in specific sectoral activities in the UNICEF programme was considered. In the case of government and NGO staff, respondents were targeted from among line ministries and NGOs engaged in ongoing partnerships with UNICEF. Among donors, respondents were targeted on the basis of the level of their engagement in thematic areas that UNICEF is engaged in. Similarly, UN agency staff were selected from among agencies active in the same programme areas as NCO, or cooperating with it on joint initiatives. Furthermore, another selection criterion for Government was representation from all three different levels of the Government. In addition, two – three stakeholders who did not have partnership with UNICEF NCO, but active in the same programme areas were also selected.

Due to time constraints and the need for tentative findings by mid-June 2022 for the ongoing NCO planning process for the next programme cycle, the engagement of stakeholders had to be limited, and it was agreed not to include rights-holders in the Review, which was a drawback.[38] Furthermore, travel to the provinces for meetings with rights-holders was not possible.

After several rounds of discussions, agreement was reached at a meeting held with NCO on 20 April 2022 to select 40 stakeholders as external key informants and 30 internal stakeholders from UNICEF NCO and ROSA. All stakeholders for KIIs were chosen based on their designations and relevance to the areas of inquiry; thus there was no purposive gender application in selecting the stakeholders.

The participation of stakeholders in the Review was voluntary; they were informed of the Review by Representatives of UNICEF NCO and ROSA; the Review Team followed-up with the identified stakeholders to make appointments for interviews. The choice of language for the interview was left to the interviewee.

A summary of the stakeholders who participated in the KIIs and Perception Survey is included below (*see Table 3.1*). Of the 40 external stakeholders identified for KIIs, 34 participated (85 per cent), of which 9 were women.

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37. The methodology was presented to the Evaluation Reference Group comprised of Elke Wisch, James Patterson, Cairan O'Toole, Zivai Murira, Peter Harvey, Usha Mishra, Mohanlal Peiris, Anita Dahal, Carmen van Heese, Jessica Owens, Peter de Vries, and Sunita Kayastha.
38. During the course of the review, one rights-holder was included for a KII.

Table 3.1: Summary of stakeholder participation in KIIs and the Perception Survey

(a) Key Informant Interviews	No.	
Federal government	14 (18)	
Sub-national govt. agencies	5 (5)	
Development partners	4 (5)	
Palikas	1 (2)	
INGOs/CSOs	7 (7)	
UN Agencies	3 (3)	
TOTAL	**34 (40)**	
UNICEF staff		
ROSA	4	
Nepal Country Office	31	
Sub-total (UNICEF)	**35**	
(b) Perception Survey	**No.**	**%**
Federal ministry	11	11.7
Federal dept/agency	9	9.6
Provincial gov/agency	25	26.6
Palikas	8	8.5
Donor agencies	3	3.2
UN Agencies	3	3.2
National NGO/CSO	23	24.5
INGO	9	9.6
Private sector	1	1.2
Associations/networks	2	2.1
TOTAL	**94**	**100**

Assessment of the results framework

The Results Framework in the CPAP was amended between July and December 2020 following the mid-term review of the CP resulting in changes to some outputs.[39] However, the outcomes and outcome indicators remained unchanged. The progress was assessed by reference to the various progress reports (e.g., RAM, annual reports, other reports); their linkages to the review questions were assessed via interviews with stakeholders and through analysis of the data from the Perception Survey (*see Volume III of this*

report). Analyses of thematic theories of change were undertaken mainly through the desk review.

Notes:

- Four small group meetings were also held with UNICEF staff. Numbers in parentheses in Table (a) refer to the original number of stakeholders invited.

- Thirty-four (34) external informants were made up of 25 males and 9 females and 35 UNICEF staff (NCO and ROSA) were made up of 20 males and 15 females.

Desk review and analysis

The desk review was particularly helpful in assessing the effectiveness of the Programme. The review used three sources of information, as follows:

(a) RAM and annual reports (2018 to 2021) were used to map performance against targets in the Results Framework. These are summarized in these findings, but a detailed analysis is presented in annex (*see Annex 4.2*). The desk review was also used to analyse the theories of change as presented in the revised PSN Notes. The analysis provided key information on the review question on effectiveness ("to what extent targets were achieved and documented and whether they contributed to change for children"); further evidence from interviews and the Perception Survey was used to elaborate and triangulate evidence to derive conclusions.

(b) The reports generated by the NCO during the period under review (e.g., studies, evaluations, and other research or evidence) were reviewed in each thematic focus area and applied throughout the review where relevant, particularly for review questions related to relevance (whether programmes were adequate or appropriate to respond to needs).

(c). Other literature including GoN policies, strategies, etc.

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39. Addendum to CPAP (July-December, 2020)

The list of key documents reviewed, and other bibliography are in annex (*see Annex 2.4*).

Key informant interviews and tools

Selection of key informants was done purposively to ensure balanced representation across the programme sectors and geographical areas covered in the review. Beyond this objective, the main criterion in stakeholder sampling was the depth and relevance of knowledge held in the thematic areas being assessed of NCO. Semi-structured interviews and small group meetings were conducted with a total of 34 external (*see Table 3.1 (a)* and 35 internal informants (*see list in Annex 2.5*), using guides developed by the Review Team and reviewed by UNICEF ROSA (*see Annex 2.6*).

Due to elections and the national budget preparation, a few key informants could not be interviewed, in spite of repeated attempts by the national evaluators. Of the 34 interviews, 5 interviews were held physically, while the rest were held online.

Perception Survey

The Perception Survey (PS) was designed in consultation with UNICEF ROSA to capture the following aspects:

- Participants' nature of business and programmatic engagement with UNICEF NCO;
- Their perceptions on relevance and effectiveness of the UNICEF NCO programme; and
- Their perceptions on programme management, partnerships, outreach communications, and sharing knowledge of UNICEF NCO.

The survey was carried out online from 15 April to 26 May 2022 with stakeholders identified during the stakeholder mapping exercise (*see Table 3.1 (b)*). Of the 126 invited for the PS, 94 responded (75 per cent). Most who did not respond were from government agencies and local authorities from the provinces. These officials were pre-occupied with the elections. The Report of the Perception Survey is included in this report (*see Volume III*).

Data management

The reliability of the quality of data/information collected was ensured by using well-designed Field Guides to capture the required information and that same or similar responses would have been gathered if administered under similar conditions.

The review collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive qualitative data collected from KIIs were analysed and triangulated to derive trends and conclusions. Evidence gathered was cross-checked with sources other than the original source to seek verifications. This analysis was also used to identify any limitations experienced by the Country Programme during the period under review.

The data from the Perception Survey was analysed using the statistical software SPSS by a qualified data analyst under the supervision of the Team Leader. The descriptive statistics were separately reported jointly by the Review Team, and supplemented with data and information from the desk research and KIIs. Since the stakeholders for the Perception Survey were identified by UNICEF ROSA and NCO based on their designations or engagement pattern, gender balance in the respondents was not possible. However, as outlined in the section below, questions related to gender equality and equity were asked and responses were analysed to form the findings and recommendations of this review. Overall, a pragmatic and systematic approach was used to analyse the data received from all the m.

5.3. Integration of Gender Equality and Equity in review

To integrate gender, equity and human rights, the evaluation design had introduced relevant questions within the review questions and sub-questions. This included the review's specific inquiries into UNICEF's engagement with and targeting of the most vulnerable marginalized groups, children, adolescents and youth, as part of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda. The review tools for perception survey and KII included

standalone section on NCO's contribution to equity and gender equality and sought the answers to what more could be done. The findings are reflected in this report specifically for gender equality and equity.

5.4. Limitations

Limitations and mitigatory actions are shared below (see Table 3.2):

Table 3.2: Limitations and mitigatory actions

Limitations	Actions taken
Short time period available for the review.	Meetings were arranged after working hours and on holidays with the consent of the duty-bearers. In some instances, they preferred meetings outside of office time.
Low response to the Perception Survey.	Sending reminder emails regularly to the respondents.
Limited KIIs to complete the Review in a short time so that the results are available for the ongoing planning of the next cycle.	Key informants were identified in consultation with UNICEF ROSA and NCO who were able to provide comprehensive perspectives.
Difficulty of interviewing senior officials due to their involvement in the elections and annual budget formulation.	No mitigatory actions could be taken. In spite of repeated efforts, four high-level government informants and one Mayor could not be interviewed.

6 Findings of the Country Programme Review

6.1. Relevance

6.1.1 Overview

The current Country Programme was planned at a time when the country was recovering from the earthquake of 2015. The federalization process had just begun, but the devolution of power was at a very nascent stage. As a result, the exact division of functions between the three tiers of government was not yet defined. Furthermore, elections for local government were being planned. As such, at the time of programme design, UNICEF NCO did not have a full grasp of the working modalities in the newly-introduced, devolved, power-sharing mechanisms. The structure of the Country Programme was to be examined in light of these circumstances.

6.1.2 Adequacy of the implemented theories of change of the selected thematic areas

The following sections examine whether the theories of change adequately address the needs of children in Nepal and whether the intended outcomes will be realized.

Nutrition

Stunting is the key focus of the CP nutrition component. Nepal has had significant progress in reducing stunting over the past 15 years, from 57 per cent to 36 per cent (2016). Stunting remains high especially in younger children, and is linked with maternal undernutrition, feeding practices, lack of treatment for acute malnutrition

and infections, and deficiencies in micronutrients. Undernourishment contributes to an estimated 52 per cent of child mortality in Nepal, which has shown an improvement over the past decades.

> *By 2022, children – including adolescent girls – and women of reproductive age have improved and equitable access to and use of adequate nutritious diet and improved nutritional care behaviour and care practices.*
> *(Source: PSN Notes)*

The ToC for **nutrition** focuses on four main gateways (outputs) to the desired outcome which is improved access to adequate nutritious **diet** and improved nutritional **care** behaviours: (i) knowledge among caregivers and communities on nutrition and care practices; (ii) SAM treatment by health workers at sub-national levels; (iii) supplementation of micronutrients; and (iv) system strengthening and DRR for nutrition.

Reflecting on the needs and situation in SitAn, 2017, the outputs respond well to the situation in Nepal. Potential or expected changes are well integrated into the ToC. The ToC for nutrition is translated into a results framework with fairly clear and measurable indicators. Looking at the schematic illustration of the ToC, the list of interventions is long and broad, making it difficult to assess if there are gaps in terms of likely achieving the planned outputs. The four outputs feed well into the desired outcome.

As noted by Government stakeholders, about 10 to 15 per cent of children continue to show stunting in spite of long-term investments by many donors including UNICEF. These "unreached" populations such as Chamar, Musahar, Dusadh, Badhi, Barai, Mallah, Kewat, Koiri, etc., need attention for the nutrition programme to be more relevant to the needs of all. The reports also show that there is significant variation in stunting across provinces (Karnali 48 per cent, Sudurpaschim 41 per cent, Lumbini and Madhes Pradesh around 35 per cent with rural areas showing higher values than urban areas except in Madhes Pradesh).[40] The theory of change does not seem to focus on these issues.

Education

Education is a priority area under Nepal's Fourteenth National Plan (2016-2019). The education system has made significant progress in recent times, yet access to a quality learning environment remains a challenge. Furthermore, the youth need skills development for them to contribute to economic growth. The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) has identified several areas for focus, such as professional development of teachers, curriculum development, early childhood education, early grade reading, access and participation, inclusive education, recovery, risk reduction, and school safety. Additionally, decentralized service delivery will require system strengthening at sub-national levels.

> *By 2022, all children, especially the most disadvantaged, benefit from improved access, participation and learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education within inclusive, safe and protective environments.*
> *(Source: PSN Notes)*

The ToC for education has four outputs to reach the outcome, viz., (i) early childhood education, (ii) quality basic education, (iii) adolescent literacy and life-skills education, and (iv) systems strengthening (including DRR/CCA and Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP)). These approaches address the needs identified in SitAn, 2017.

The outcome is well reflected in the CPAP with detailed indicators, which are however not reflected *in toto* in the Results Framework. The interventions identified are relevant and are expected to bring about the changes envisaged.

Although the ToC addresses "the most disadvantaged", the inclusivity is not explicitly reflected either in the CPAP or RAM. In the relevant activity, the indicator, "the number of schools with UNICEF support using materials and support the inclusion of children with disabilities" is unclear as to the precise meaning of the term "materials" in terms of converting the activity to output. Disparities in ECD based on geography has been already noted in a report elsewhere.[41]

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Water, sanitation and hygiene are priorities in the Fourteenth National Plan, and are very relevant to the achievement of the SDGs. Although Nepal has made significant strides in improving water supply and in improving sanitation and hygiene practices, there are concerns on water quality and access to safe water. Open defaecation remains a matter of concern, particularly in some provinces, and faeces-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera recur in some areas. WASH interventions are also required to improve outcomes in other thematic areas; at the same time WASH requires support from other areas such as SBC and Early Childhood to achieve its objectives.

> *By 2022, children and their families have improved and equitable access to and use of safe and sustainable drinking water and sanitation services, and improved hygiene practices.*
> *(Source: PSN Notes)*

The ToC has identified three pathways to achieve the changes desired. These are: (i) safe water supply, (ii) improved sanitation and hygiene, and (iii) systems strengthening including for disaster risk reduction/climate change adaptation.

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40. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, National Planning Commission and Central Bureau of Statistics.
41. Oxford Policy Institute, 'Evaluation of the National ECD Programme', 2018.

The outcome is reflected in CPAP with well-defined indicators for safe drinking water and reducing open defaecation. Whilst the interventions are well-linked to bring about the desired changes, there are provincial differences (e.g., open defaecation) which are not reflected in the ToC.

Social policy (including local governance)

Nepal's child poverty trend is a major concern with the consequent possibility of poor physical and cognitive development. The social protection systems are important for reducing child poverty, but the systems are somewhat fragmented. The Child Grant system serves children well, but it is limited in distribution. The budget allocations for children are inadequate to serve the deserving population. Expansion of these programmes, including those for children with disabilities (CwD) require credible evidence and data, which are currently inadequate. There is also a need for strengthening child sensitive social protection systems to overcome barriers to a range of early childhood development objectives. These approaches are in line with the guarantees proclaimed in the Constitution of Nepal and the proprietaries set out in the Fourteenth National Development Plan of Nepal. Further, the programme will also help Nepal to contribute towards achieving the relevant SDG Goals.

The social protection approaches were to be put in place in the changing governance structures due to federalization. Implementation of the programmes will have to take into consideration the devolution of power, and the concomitant administrative arrangements and the implementation capacity at the sub-national level. Importantly, implementation of sub-national activities will depend on the devolution of the national budget.

> *By 2022 children benefit from strengthened policies and programmes that address child poverty, vulnerability and exclusion.*
> *(Source: PSN Notes)*

The ToC seeks to achieve the changes through interventions aimed at: (i) providing credible data and evidence on child poverty, vulnerability and exclusion, (ii) enhancing and expanding child-sensitive social protection systems, and (iii) supporting and strengthening partnerships for policy development and advocacy.

The outcome is reflected in the CPAP with well-defined indicators, however, the outputs are less clearly linked to the indicators.

Following the mid-term review of the Country Programme, a new output on local governance was created (6.4). This output contributes the social policy outcome by: (i) facilitating sub-national agencies to generate and analyse data and evidence (Palika profiles); (ii) improving the capacity for local planning, budgeting, and resource mobilization; (iii) empowering children to participate in decision-making; and (iv) supporting sub-national entities to formulate/revise laws and guidelines that are child sensitive.[42] However, the output lacks information on the important issue of coordination of actions of other players at the local level who have interests similar to those of UNICEF.

A note on indicators and RAM

- As per UNICEF guidelines, the theories of change use national data for baselines. They are also used for setting targets. Whilst it is clearly understood that UNICEF will contribute towards achieving the targets, RAM assesses performance by measuring the actual reach of the target, which should not be the responsibility of UNICEF as the national targets can only be achieved by larger initiatives involving government and other partners. Provincial, district, or Palika-level indicators are more appropriate to show the direct contribution of UNICEF.

- The planning framework in RAM is strong: there are, for the most part, well-defined indicators, with baselines and annual targets

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42. UNICEF Nepal Country Office, Programme strategy notes, Local Governance.

Results from the Perception Survey

■ In regard to the CP meeting the needs of children, 44 per cent and 55 per cent of the respondents stated, "very much" and "to some extent", respectively.

■ The 14 respondents who thought that provincial/Palika priorities have not been considered in the CP included five federal officials, one sub-national official, six NGO/INGOs, a donor and a UN Agency.

■ In regard to UNICEF changing its planning and implementation following COVID-19, 38 (or 40 per cent) and 46 (or 49 per cent) of respondents felt that UNICEF changed the plans "very much" and "to some extent", respectively (n=94).

that seem well planned with gradual progress throughout the CP period. Exceptions include several instances of targets being identical to or lower than baselines.

■ For most indicators, the sources vary from year to year (field reports, national surveys, administrative data, "other", etc.). This may result in differences in measurement affecting the value and making tracking of progress erroneous; however, the advantage is that the NCO keeps a "finger on the pulse" while waiting for final 2022 measurement.

■ Geographic area of scope is generally not defined. In some cases indicators appear national, though in other cases it can be inferred that they are related to focus areas, though this is not explicit. The consequence is that it is difficult to get a sense of the scope of the result.

■ Most result areas have a mix of what is referred to as "standard" and "additional" indicators, and the reasons for having two categories of indicators could not be elicited.[43]

Sustainable Development Goals: The initiatives of UNICEF NCO directly address in particular SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 16 in Nepal. The GoN finds this Country Programme contributing significantly towards fulfilment of its commitments to SDGs.[44]

6.1.3 Consideration of the needs of children in planning and implementation of the Country Programme

The Country Programme and CPAP have clear statements on UNICEF NCO's intention of targeting its programmes to "reach all children". However, this intention is not that strongly reflected in the Results Framework.

In the previous country programmes before federalization, UNICEF NCO implemented programmes in selected villages. For example, a flagship project of UNICEF NCO was the Decentralized Action for Children and Women (DACAW) project;[45] this together with its predecessor project, Decentralized Planning for the Child Programme, demonstrated the results of combining support for capacity development of local communities and government officials towards improving decentralized service delivery for children's wellbeing.

In the current Country Programme, Palika-level work is two-fold; certain Palikas are targeted for multi-sectoral support ("convergence Palikas") and others for sectoral support based on needs by each sector ("programme priority Palikas"). In light of UNICEF NCO's work on the DACAW project, it has over two decades of experience

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43. Staff involved in the original design are no longer available, and the relevant documentation is not available.
44. KII with senior Federal Agency staff.
45. UNICEF and the Government of Nepal, 'Improving Lives for Children and Women In Nepal', 2007.

on the convergence approach. The convergence approach is conceptualized by UNICEF NCO as "addressing all the rights of children, at the same time in a select number of the most vulnerable municipalities and provinces within the country. Through support to local government, convergence results in comprehensive delivery of quality services and local and community-based outcomes for children".[46] Further, programmes with an integrated approach are expected to ensure that:

partners and sectors work together to address key leverage points and adopt complementarity, synergistic strategies, delivery of multi-sector programmes by shared partners, and convergence of programme delivery to identified priority areas or population groups, and integration of relevant components of a sector into another sector's programme.[47]

UNICEF NCO works in five of the seven provinces in Nepal (Province No. 1, Madhes Province, Lumbini Province, Karnali Province, and Sudurpaschim Province). In general, these provinces are considered to be the "needy" provinces, having been identified through an analysis of Child Deprivation Index followed by sector specific deprivation analyses using the latest available data in each sector.[48] Indeed, many development partners and INGOs are active in these five provinces. This report provides a map indicating intensity of UNICEF thematic activities in the convergent Palikas and provincial profiles at a glance (*see Annex 4.1*).

The Review also noted that the convergence approach is heavily infused with service delivery type of support. In the event of UNICEF NCO shifting to a more upstream policy arena at the local level, there is a risk of reduced support for children, an aspect that needs to be considered in the next Country Programme.

Selection of Palikas for UNICEF work

UNICEF NCO uses the following criteria for selection of convergent Palikas:[49]

- Enabling environment including proven leadership of the Local Government;
- Presence of other partners;
- Balanced selection of Gaun Palikas and Nagar Palikas (where applicable);
- Consider accessibility especially in Province 6 and 7 (equity lenses should be considered);
- Consider children population;
- Selected Palikas will be presented in the order of priority by phases (I and II).

The programme priority Palikas are generally selected by thematic sections using local data and evidence.[50]

The selection of intervention districts in itself was well grounded on empirical studies, making them highly relevant as intervention areas.
(Source: Evaluation of the Child-centered Disaster Risk Reduction Programme in Nepal (2013-2018))

Planning process

The Review examined the programme planning approach adopted by UNICEF NCO in the current CP in the provinces mentioned in the previous paragraph. The process is led by the three field offices, where staff, sometimes with NCO staff, have consultations with Palika-level officials to determine the needs of Palikas. The consultations at the provincial level are less frequent. The needs identified through this process are matched with the Results Framework of UNICEF NCO to ensure that they are within the agreed CPAP. The resultant work programme and the implementing Palikas are incorporated into an agreement with the Federal

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46. UNICEF Nepal, 'Concept Note for Convergent and Integrated Approach to Programming in Nepal', 2018.
47. Ibid.
48. The Review did not have access to these reports.
49. UNICEF Nepal, 'Concept Note for Convergent and Integrated Approach to Programming in Nepal', 2018.
50. Some thematic sections use local data to track progress, but such data are not reflected in RAM and annual reports.

Government (a 30-month rolling work plan), and based on this agreement, annual work plans are prepared for Palikas. In regard to this process, the observations of the Review Team are as follows:

- On occasion, UNICEF staff did not have the opportunity to visit and/or consult communities and other stakeholders in the identified Palikas to obtain first-hand information on the situation due to their remoteness as well as funding and time constraints.[51]

- Some of the sub-national officials did not concur with the choice of the selected Palikas and contested their relevance as it has been agreed with the federal government.[52]

- Palika-level work plans are not discussed with the relevant Palikas before being presented for signature.

- Coordination with government agencies and between UNICEF and other partners who work in the same province is insufficient leading into overlapping work and duplication of efforts. Due to inadequate coordination, sub-national officials are required to attend many meetings of different donors, which is a strain on their time. The view of the high-level government agency is that donors should, at the Palika level, conduct joint planning exercises to avoid overlaps and reduce meeting time.[53]

- UNICEF has not adequately "decentralized" its approaches to accommodate local planning and decision-making, and that the Field Offices, although with delegated powers to sign provincial and Palika agreements, do not have the required flexibility to adapt to changing situations and revise plans accordingly.

- Although UNICEF NCO's intention is to reach all children, this does not happen in reality. Often difficult-to-reach areas are left out due to logistical problems, and some excluded communities (e.g., Badi and Musahar communities) are not covered in UNICEF or indeed in many other donor programmes.[54]

- UNICEF NCO's engagement is seen to be largely with Palikas; the engagement with provincial authorities is deemed to be inadequate in the planning process.[55]

Whilst the concept of integrated approach (convergent Palikas) is well-founded, there are no data to demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach in the focus areas (for example, improvement of selected indicators in the convergent Palikas vis-à-vis national data).

In summary, whilst the CP has attempted to provide for the needs of children, the evidence shows the need to expand coverage to some of the marginalized communities and difficult-to-reach geographic areas.[56]

The UNICEF NCO selects municipalities based on the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index to select the most disadvantaged/backward municipalities and does not distinguish between marginalized and non-marginalized communities in delivering the services except in child protection. Thus coverage data in terms of marginalized and non-marginalized communities across various areas except in child protection do not carry any significance.

Currently, the Programme Strategy Notes do not reflect UNICEF NCO approaches vis-à-vis gender equality and equity, particularly as they relate to marginalized communities.

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51. KII with sub-national staff and UNICEF Field Staff.
52. KII with senior provincial officials.
53. KII with the National Planning Commission.
54. KII with senior federal and sub-national officials.
55. Ibid.
56. KII with GoN officials and Development Partners.

6.1.4 Critical interventions that are missing or received low attention

The "missing interventions" are analysed using the situation described in SitAn, 2017, [57] a summary of which is produced below.

Nutrition: Nepal had achieved goals for reduction in proportion of underweight children (MDG) and micronutrient levels (e.g., Vitamin A, iron and iodine). Stunting was still high, particularly in the mid and far western hills and mountains (Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces). Wasting had not changed much in the past ten years and was higher among disadvantaged castes/ethnic groups and in the Terai.

Education: Primary level net enrolment was 96 per cent, with strong gender parity. Areas of concern included increasing the access to ECE, secondary school, and non-formal programmes; scaling up inclusive education at all levels and models for reaching out-of-school children; addressing quality at all levels within child-friendly school concepts for improved learning; and creating disaster resilient schools and meaningful contribution of children in this.

WASH: Use of improved sources of drinking water was near universal, at 96 per cent. Improved sanitation had reached 60 per cent. Remaining issues included expanding the ODF movement and related behavioural changes particularly in the Terai; expanding water supply in hard to reach areas; strengthening water supply maintenance nationwide; improving water quality; water and sanitation in urban centres with rapidly growing populations that require different technologies; increasing key hygiene practices to reduce disease and malnutrition; accelerate provision of menstrual hygiene management toilet facilities in schools; and increase resilience of WASH systems to withstand disasters.

Social policy: Social sector budgets had increased, particularly following the peace agreement, in health, education, and social protection, leading to increased allocations to child health, numbers of teachers in primary schools, and expanded social protection programmes. Remaining challenges

57.   UNICEF Nepal, Situation Analysis, 2017.

included further expanding SP programmes and increasing inclusion.

ECD: Access to ECD has increased rapidly over the past decades (from about 11 per cent in 2004 to 63 per cent in 2014). Coverage issues included increasing numbers of centres and teachers, but quality was a major concern, particularly in urban areas where many centres were private, and few monitored. The strategy to roll out implementation to achieve one year compulsory pre-primary education for all was not clear.

Children with disabilities: Health services targeting this group were practically non-existent, with scarcity of data on this group as a whole, remaining hidden and unreached by most services.

Urban poor: Pressure on social services in urban areas due to rapid urbanization, and risks for multiple rights violations for children among the urban poor noted. Previous achievements in different sectors would need reinforced support if not to deteriorate, particularly in WASH.

DRR: Following the earthquake and the recovery process, there was a noted urgency to systematically include risk-assessment and improving understanding of risk data in UNICEF programmatic work and advocating the same within government systems – to be child-inclusive as well as risk informed. There was an impetus to scale up DRR, CCA, and resilience programming to ensure current investments in recovery converted into long-term sustainable development.

Equity: Remained a cross-cutting issue, with particular gaps in each sectoral area depending on household income, gender, caste/ethnic and language groups, urban/rural location as well as geographic barriers. Lacking information on the situation of women and children with disabilities was a concern, with sparse data suggesting strong patterns of exclusion across basic services.

Concluding remarks

The CPAP overall responded to most of the issues presented in the preceding section through efforts directed at different levels and types of support (e.g., advocacy, policy development, guidelines and development of standard operating procedures, implementation and service delivery, and behavioural change communication (C4D)).

Cross-cutting issues such as supporting operationalization of federal structures in each sector is covered well in the sectoral summaries and for most represented by a separate output on system strengthening (and DRR). The system strengthening section generally responds to the need to increase local capacity for planning, budgeting, etc., and tracking of system performance to ensure quality service delivery. DRR is combined into the same output, covering capacity strengthening for developing policies, awareness raising, and technical assistance for real time reporting of service delivery.

A few of the main issues noted above are not evident in the CPAP narrative. These include:

- Education: Inclusive education;[58]
- WASH in urban centres;
- Social policy: Inclusion of Child Grant Programme (versus scaling up/coverage, which is noted);
- Urban poor (reference pressure on social services and rapid urbanization/internal migration) multi-sectoral;
- Disability is stated as a cross-cutting issue, but is not reflected adequately in the narratives (or results frameworks) in most sectors, with the exception of WASH;[59]
- Mainstreaming gender across all sectors is difficult to gauge; there is often a simple statement on inequities/disadvantaged or marginalized groups, that includes other groups that are excluded on the same issue.

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58. It shows briefly in the Result Framework but only as an indicator on "schools using materials that support the inclusion of children", which is a very limited approach.

59. Inclusion of WASH here is noteworthy; however, the Review did not have an opportunity to physically assess the WASH disability approaches to ensure whether they are about installation of accessible systems and infrastructure with technical approaches to enable access by differently-abled persons.

Education indicators are heavily gender disaggregated, child protection is not in some areas where it seems it could be (e.g., cases reported/referred, children in institutional care), similarly for health and nutrition on dietary diversity, immunization, drop out, etc. The Gender Review by ROSA in 2019[60] identified the following emerging issues from a gender perspective: adolescent pregnancy, adolescent mental health, increasing dropout rates of boys, unpaid and care work, and migration (both high out-migration by fathers leaving a female-headed household behind, and high female migration in some areas).

Below are the areas suggested by stakeholders to be considered in the new Country Programme (*see Box 1*).

6.2. Effectiveness

6.2.1. Overview

The Results Framework for the Nepal CP is not in the CPD itself, but in the CPAP signed with the GoN.[62] Following the mid-term review of the programme, an addendum to CPAP has been provided.[63] The outcome indicators remain unchanged in this addendum.

The self-assessed results for the Country Programme are impressive. Overall, five out of the six programme outcomes are reported to be "on track" by the end of 2021; the fifth is the health outcome and is considered "partially met". Across the Country Programme's 22 outputs, 4 outputs are already met and 13 are "on track". Only four outputs

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Box 1: Areas suggested by stakeholders to be considered in the new Country Programme[61]

- More focus on decentralized planning including closer dialogue with PLGSP;
- Nutrition (urban poor; children in difficult-to-reach areas; improving capacity of caregivers; introducing area-specific nutrition packages; using locally available foods for nutrition; growth monitoring and counselling);
- Improve coverage of adolescents and women of reproductive group;
- Children's participation (piloting CFLG in tole level in urban municipalities; expand Child Responsive Budgeting at the sub-national level);
- Support establishing provincial baselines on key children's indicators and an effective monitoring system;
- Attention to WASH in urban areas and semi-urban areas, in particular high-density areas;
- Increased efforts to integrate DRR into school system and teacher training;
- In light of the introduction and expansion of digital learning space, there is a need to develop policies and strategies to make digital space safe for children;
- Widen and implement inclusive social protection system for children with special focus on children living in poverty and with disabilities; pilot GIS-based entitlement tracking system for children;
- Strengthen the child-sensitive and child-friendly DRR systems at the sub-national levels;
- Expand the work on "ecozones" to reduce indoor air pollution.

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60. UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 'Nepal Gender Programmatic Review', 2019.
61. Sources: KIIs and Perception Survey.
62. UNICEF Nepal and Government of Nepal, 'Country Programme Action Plan (2018-2022)'.
63. UNICEF Nepal and Government of Nepal, 'Country Programme Action Plan (2018-2022) Addendum'.

are reported to be partially met and just one output is labelled "constrained" (*see Table 3.1*). Across the programme, status reporting (met, on track, partially met, constrained) is uneven and appears to be judgmental. For example, the nutrition output that is labelled "constrained" has three indicators that are all met or on track and the corresponding narrative annual report gives no further information on why it is constrained. Some results that are reported as "met" or "on track" have achieved a target that is of the same value as the baseline.

Summary findings across thematic areas

- At output level, many results have been achieved ahead of time or achieved well above target. This is impressive having faced two years of a pandemic. Some of these achievements are in training and have been undertaken remotely.[65]

- Coverage rates for several programmes with direct reach to children either did not decline as much as could have been expected during COVID-19 pandemic or bounced back rapidly in 2021.

- Most thematic outcome levels are noted as on track, but very few have reported updated data on the outcome indicators.

- In general, service delivery or coverage targets are more often achieved and well documented, while system strengthening and policy-level indicators are less often achieved, or progress is not well captured even if target is achieved (e.g., target set at the same level as baseline using a 1-4 scale).

The following sections examine the actual achievement of UNICEF NCO results for children, delivery of outputs and their contribution towards stated programme outcomes, and major factors influencing the achievement (or not). Additional details based on the desk review of reports are provided in annex (*see Annex 3.2*).

6.2.2. Achievement of results

(a) Thematic areas

Nutrition

Achievements: UNICEF NCO continued to assist the GoN in implementing and scaling up the Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan (2018–2022). During the period of the current programme cycle, UNICEF NCO has been able to expand the services to about 720 Palikas from 303 in 2020.[66] A noteworthy milestone is the considerable financial commitment from Palikas to address malnutrition as a result of the advocacy role of UNICEF NCO. The interventions included targeted provision of full packages for needy Palikas and partial packages to others.

Table 3.1: Overview of self-reported status for results by end 2021[64]

Component	Outcome	Outputs met	Outputs on track	Outputs partially met	Outputs constrained	Total No. of outputs
Health	Partially met		4			4
Nutrition	On track	1	2		1	4
Education	On track		4			4
Child protection	On track	1		2		3
WASH	On track	2		1		3
Social policy	On track		3	1		4
Total		**4**	**13**	**4**	**1**	**22**

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64. UNICEF Nepal, 'Results Assessment Matrix (RAM)', 2018-2021.
65. KII with Field Office staff.
66. KII with UNICEF NCO.

UNICEF NCO continued to enhance the capacity of GoN representatives at both national and sub-national levels to enable them to implement and monitor MSNP work and other nutrition problems.

UNICEF NCO supported the GoN on the development of national guidelines, strategies and procedures to address severely-wasted children. Due to the advocacy work of UNICEF NCO, the GoN expanded the treatment services for moderately-wasted children. UNICEF NCO also provided technical support for piloting treatment care in four districts; the follow-up by UNICEF NCO is expected to influence the GoN to expand the services to other areas.

In spite of the COVID-19 outbreak and the disruptions it caused UNICEF NCO was able to maintain its programme on Vitamin A supplementation reaching about 85 per cent coverage.[67] This success has led UNICEF to replicate such programmes in other countries.

UNICEF NCO has helped sub-national agencies to integrate nutrition in their plans and has trained sub-national staff to track budgets and performance. UNICEF NCO has observed some shortcomings in these processes largely due to insufficient staff at the sub-national level and insufficient monitoring data at the national level.

> *"MSNP work – this adds lots of value at the local level as municipal governments have started putting resources in nutrition and nutrition governance at all levels".*
> *Sub-national level official*

UNICEF NCO also supported the establishment of a web-based reporting system and the development of the requisite databases. A cadre of volunteers, supervised by the Policy Planning Division (GoN), has been in place to collect local data. There has been some set-back on the data collection and issues on data quality as a result of the transfer of responsibilities of the volunteers to Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), although UNICEF NCO continues to maintain seven Provincial Coordinators in its budget.

> *"UNICEF has been able to provide policy support in nutrition which have borne fruit. UNICEF can do much to improve the situation. For example, we have to change the food habits – that is why some indicators are not improving".*
> *A mayor*

Summary of reported achievements of outcome/outputs (*see Annex 3.2 for more*): The outcome indicators are not reported on; thus progress towards outcomes cannot be assessed.[68] It appears that UNICEF NCO does not have the requisite data. In **Output 2.1**, a majority of the targets were achieved in 2020 and in one output, the target was overachieved.[69] In **Output 2.2**, the target is available for 2020 only, and one target was met.[70] In **Output 2.3**, one target was achieved. In Output 2.4 (system strengthening), three out of five targets are on track, and one is not reported on.[71]

Assessment of effectiveness: Achievement of results has been affected due to a number of reasons, viz.,:

■ Historically, UNICEF NCO nutrition programme has been known for delivery of specific nutrient requirements. GoN's needs on nutrition appear to be on treatment, rather than prevention, which does not seem to be a priority. As a result of reduced funding, UNICEF NCO is now adopting more of an advocacy role with reduced service delivery; however, the nuances of these changes are not clearly understood by the sub-national entities, who

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67. UNICEF NCO, 'Annual Report', 2021.
68. RAM reports that the outcome is on track, although there is no evidence.
69. However, this output is labelled as "constrained", and the reasons for this conclusion are not available in the 'Annual Report' (2020).
70. RAM reports that this output as "met", which is not an accurate reflection.
71. There is a lack of clarity in some of the targets under this output.

expect full-service delivery. As a result, sub-national entities feel that UNICEF NCO should expand its services. The critical consideration is the balance between UNICEF's influencing role and service delivery in the provinces.

- The staff capacity/staffing of sub-national entities is inadequate for taking forward the nutrition initiatives; this will also impact possible work on custom-made packages which are being explored by UNICEF NCO. The staffing of UNICEF Field Offices too is inadequate as the areas to be reached are spread over a large geographic area.

- The coordination between and amongst the three tiers of government, especially at the Palika level is inadequate to effectively implement the programme and to avoid duplication of work.

- Data collection at the sub-national level is not to the expected level as sub-national agencies are unable to provide the required support for, and oversight of, volunteers who are tasked with data collection. Additionally, data from difficult-to-reach areas are not available. Gaps in data are a challenge for the implementation of the programme.

- In spite of long-term investments on nutrition by the donors, wasting is observable in about 15 per cent of the children. There are social

determinants surrounding nutrition reach such as poor maternal nutrition and low birth weight, which need to be addressed to achieve the full results of the programme.

- Inadequate focus on SBC approaches in nutrition is a cause noted during the review. Effectiveness of MSNP III will be enhanced with ramped up SBC approaches.

Stakeholder perceptions of nutrition work: The majority expressed satisfaction/moderate satisfaction on health interventions of UNICEF NCO (*see Figure 4.1*).

Education

Key achievements: UNICEF has provided long-standing support to the education system in Nepal. Overall, it has helped to strengthen the education system to provide inclusive education and improve learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education. It supported the development of the National ECD Strategy (2019-2030) with a focus on holistic early childhood development. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology (MoEST) and other Ministries, UNICEF NCO developed the 'Local Level Integrated ECD Planning Package', which is appreciated by the Government and implemented by a considerable number of Palikas.

Figure 4.1: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF Nutrition
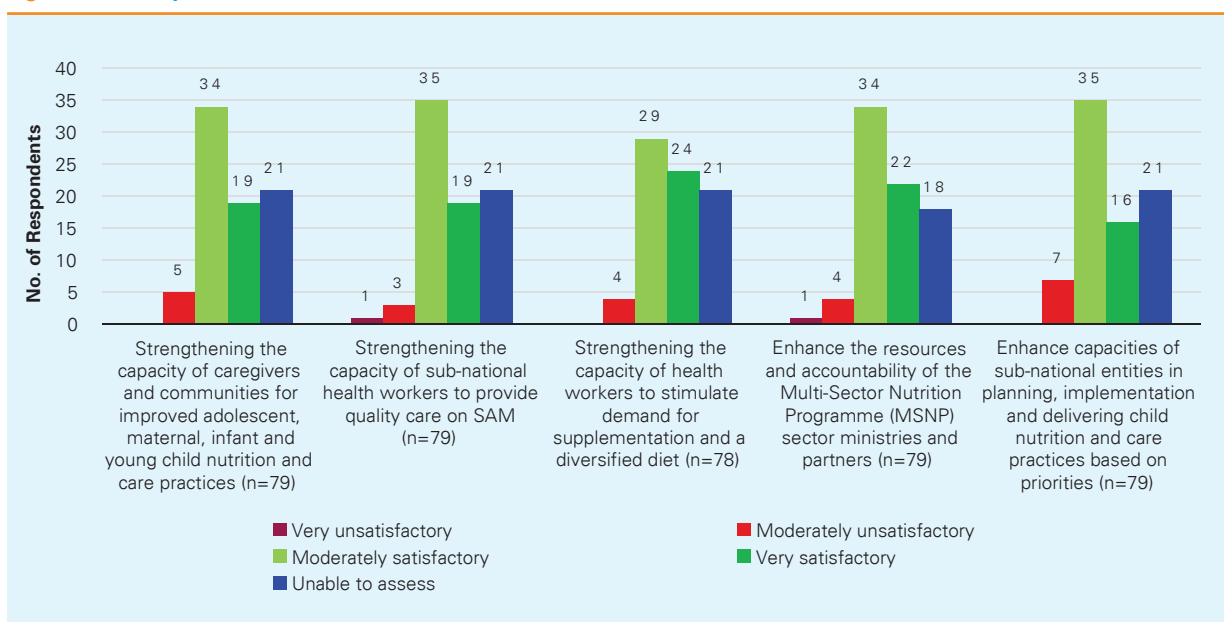
UNICEF NCO's support towards improving enrolment of out-of-school children has brought positive results. Its work on promoting the use of Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) together with Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) has progressed well, with the development of ELDS report cards to assess the children's development and learning, supporting the teachers on planning corrective actions, and advising parents accordingly.

UNICEF NCO, in terms of its global policy, is lobbying the GoN for inclusive education for differently-abled children and supporting specific teacher training. However, the GoN is constrained due to a lack of funds to provide the necessary facilities in all schools to cater for the needs of differently-abled children.

The education component responded well to support the GoN during the COVID-19 pandemic. It supported the development of the Education Cluster Contingency Plan to enable the GoN to respond to the pandemic, and developed guidelines for reopening schools.

"UNICEF ensured the right to education of the children even in the pandemic".
Sub-national level official

Additionally, UNICEF NCO supported the development of self-learning materials for primary classes, which were provided online and by hard copies to 175 Palikas. During the latter period of the pandemic, UNICEF continued supporting alternative learning approaches to be used when the schools are closed, and trained teachers on psychosocial support and online teaching.

UNICEF NCO also helped in building the capacity of sub-national entities on planning and designing programmes, and their monitoring which facilitated the preparation of education sector plans. As a part of the contingency plan, it trained stakeholders and teachers on school safety and disaster risk reduction measures.

"UNICEF's collaboration with the Government [of Nepal] is a long-standing partnership; it has brought global experiences to the table, and we are happy to be a part of that partnership, which has benefitted the country very much".
Senior federal government official

UNICEF's strategy of seconding an officer in MoEST has helped both UNICEF NCO and the Ministry to effectively implement the programmes.

Other notable achievements include: parenting education (including positive disciplining) to caregivers which is well received; UNICEF support on mother-tongue instructions; support for formal and non-formal education complemented with skills development programmes which have benefitted adolescents; and the introduction of Safe School Zones.

Summary of reported achievements of outcome/outputs (*see Annex 4.2 for more*): The outcome indicators are not reported on as there is no baseline and targets, except in one indicator which is not reported on; thus progress towards outcomes cannot be assessed.[72] In spite of these shortcomings, the outcome is rated on track by NCO. In **Output 3.1**, there are seven indicators of which three have been achieved; one on track, and the remaining three have no updated information. In **Output 3.2**, there are eight indicators; of these five have targets same as the baselines and are reported fully achieved. Two indicators are on track, whilst the indicator on CwD is lagging.[73] In **Output 3.3**, two of the four indicators are fully achieved by 2021; one cannot be effectively assessed as the target and the baseline are the same (yet reported as on track), and one indicator behind. In **Output 3.4**, the indicators on emergency work have been achieved whilst the balance three indicators cannot be effectively assessed as the baseline and targets are the same.

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72. RAM reports that this outcome is on track, although there is no evidence.
73. The indicator ("using materials that support inclusion of CwD") is unclear for the purposes of assessment.

Assessment of effectiveness: The programme has faced a few constraints, which have affected the achievement of the results, as follows:

- Challenges of working with sub-national entities largely due to inadequate education staffing in many Palikas/provinces to effectively support UNICEF programmes.[74]

- Inclusive education for children with disabilities is very much the way forward but GoN lacks resources to equip schools; GoN is currently planning to set up at least one special school in each province.[75]

- Lack of funding for a more comprehensive programme, expected by GoN;

- Delays in fund transfer for programme implementation (including UNICEF NCO's own delays);

- In order to be more effective, some of the education-related work requires collaboration with other agencies (e.g., those dealing with WASH, child protection, nutrition), which is not always evident.

- Whilst UNICEF NCO has contributed towards online education, there are still a number of areas such as access to digital devices, poverty, geographic remoteness, and consequent poor network signals needing attention to scale-up digital learning.[76] However, digital security to ensure the safety of children is becoming important in this context.

Stakeholder perceptions of education work: The majority expressed satisfaction/moderate satisfaction on education interventions of UNICEF NCO (*see Figure 4.2*).

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Key achievements: UNICEF NCO focused on sanitation, WASH planning (including hygiene), and water quality. In planning, it used local data to plan improvements, although this was before federalization. This approach, together with intense discussions at the local level resulted in a firm grounding of the programme at the local level. There has been engagement with federal ministries and agencies, the Association of Municipalities, private sector, development partners (e.g., UN Habitat on sanitation, WHO on water quality, WFP on school WASH), and the civil society in the planning process, which resulted in the GoN endorsing the WASH planning guidelines on climate-sensitive WASH interventions at the Palika level. This level of engagement is seen by GoN as a good model resulting in state ownership of the initiatives, and the model has been shared with development partners.[77] The success of this initiative is also attributed to significant inputs from using SBC approaches. These plans have been linked to an innovative Geographic Information System-based sector Management Information Systems for WASH, facilitating the progress towards SDG targets.

> *"UNICEF has not managed to bring together its portfolios for greater impact. For example, the health efforts are not linked to the education efforts to reduce disability and to ensure early identification of children with disability. The nutrition efforts do not link across the 1,000 Golden Days to ECD to early grade programming. School meals are being expanded and are falling victim to corruption in many priority communities but there are few links between UNICEF and WFP to ensure improved school nutrition efforts".*
>
> *Senior INGO official*


74. This evidence is also corroborated by other donors in the Education Sector.
75. KII with development partner.
76. Ackers, J., 'Long-term social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in South Asia; Proceeding of the International Webinar on Long-term social Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic', National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka, 2022.
77. IDPG Principals Meeting, 1 April 2022.

Figure 4.2: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF Education programme
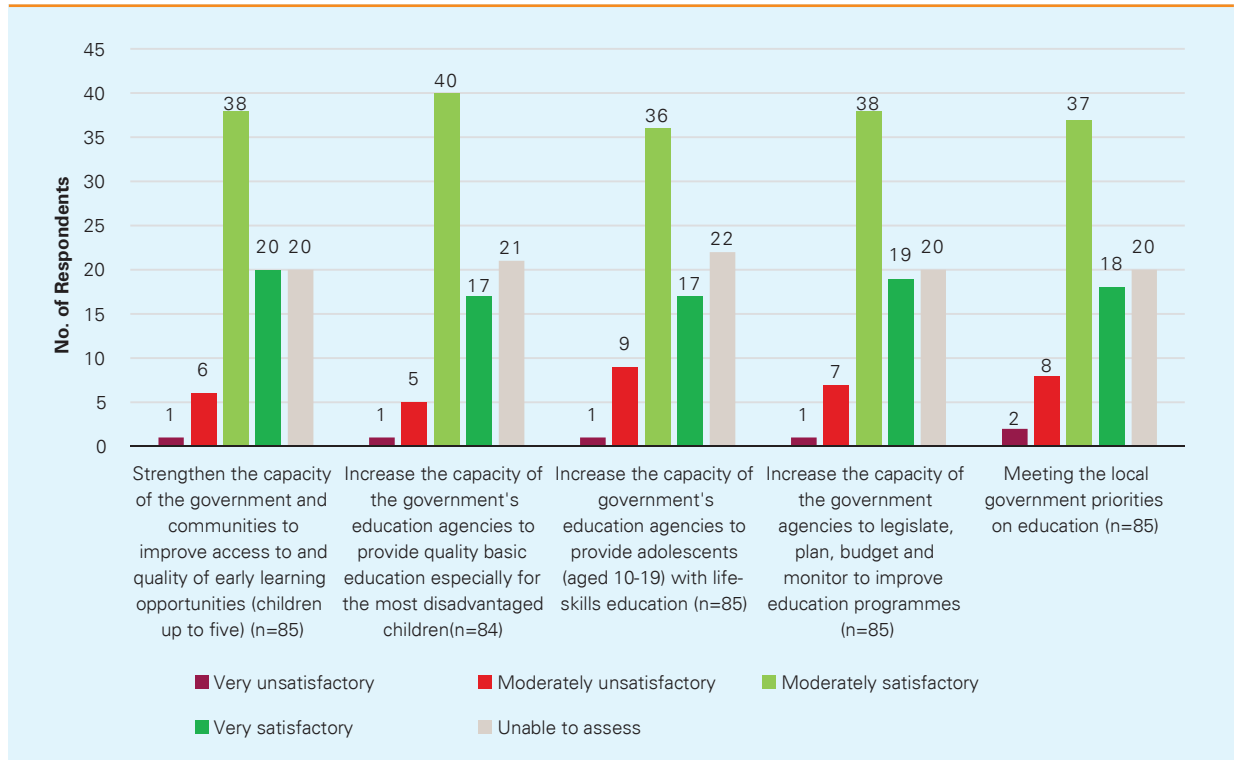
"The schools and local communities have benefitted very much from improvements of water supply and sanitation facilities in schools and local communities".

GoN provincial official

"The preparation of water safety plans, WASH plans and school WASH programme has helped us to understand the concepts better, and we are better equipped now".

A mayor

A noteworthy contribution is the reduction of open defaecation because of the interventions. There were provincial differences with some provinces achieving better results.[78] Reversal of gains has been observed in areas with disadvantaged communities due to difficulty of accessing the areas, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, UNICEF-targeted provinces show positive developments compared to other provinces.[79] However, UNICEF

NCO is pursuing the interventions to ensure that national SDG targets are met.

UNICEF NCO launched a water safety programme (Safe Water Community) by supporting a mobile laboratory owned by the GoN. It facilitated the development of water quality monitoring protocols in 37 local authorities and will use the lessons to up-scale this model in other areas.

"Extensive knowledge base and experience was gained in-terms of water, sanitation and hygiene...Learning from global evidence, cross learning and sharing".

Sub-national level official

Of particular importance to the GoN is UNICEF NCO's contributions towards developing WASH-related statutes and operational guidelines, and developing the capacity of officials in all seven provinces on these guidelines which will facilitate the local agencies to respond to emergencies.

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78. For example, in Province No. 2 there has been marked improvement in reducing open defaecation from 46 per cent to 15 per cent within two years during the current programme.
79. KII with UNICEF and provincial-level officials.

UNICEF NCO also supported the development of the N-WASH web portal of the GoN.[80]

Summary of reported achievements of outcome/outputs (*see Annex 4.2 for more*): Unlike other programmes. WASH has updated progress on outcome indicators. One indicator is on track and the other indicator (on safely managed drinking water) is not on track. In **Output 5.1**, the targets have been exceeded; in **Output 5.2**, one indicator each has been achieved and on track whilst two are behind. In **Output 5.3**, three out of six indicators have been achieved whilst reporting on two indicators is unclear. One indicator has no target.

Assessment of effectiveness: Overall, the WASH programme has not faced any significant setbacks to affect its programme. Unlike some other programmes, the WASH programme has received close to what is budgeted (see Section 4.3). Given the nature and spread of work done, there is a demand from the local authorities and other stakeholders to expand the WASH programme, particularly WASH planning[81] and an expansion of WASH into schools;[82] these will need to be considered on the availability of funding.

> *"UNICEF has supported access to WASH services to the community. These services should be extended to other areas because UNICEF's work is good and known to many. Government does not have the resources to expand these services".*
>
> Sub-national level official

Stakeholder perceptions of WASH work: The majority expressed satisfaction/moderate satisfaction on WASH interventions of UNICEF NCO (*see Figure 4.3*).

Climate mitigation, disaster risk reduction, and emergency response

Key achievements: In the UNICEF NCO programme, DRR and emergency are incorporated into other outcome areas (health, nutrition, education and WASH), and are reflected in their respective programmes. Each section has a focal point for this programme.

A key input to the GoN is the provision of emergency support following disasters and COVID-19. UNICEF NCO supported the GoN and sub-national entities to prepare Emergency Response Plans (ERP) and update them as needed. It provided direct support to prepare 50 Palika-level ERP plans; in addition, UNICEF NCO supported 15 vulnerable Palikas to develop Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans (DPRP). Other key inputs include technical support to MoFAGA to strengthen the Crisis Management Information Systems.

UNICEF NCO also identified standby partners to be used in an emergency, as a preparedness action. Likewise, it has piloted an initiative to introduce anticipatory action (pre-identifying potential beneficiaries in an emergency) with the GoN.

UNICEF NCO worked with Children's Clubs and schools to introduce child centred-DRR work at the Palika level, and work on "ecozones" to address indoor air pollution has begun.

> *"In the Child Clubs, we learned about the effects of climate change and natural disasters such as floods, which are regular in the villages we live. I was able to brief my family and neighbours on how to avoid or cope up with disasters. This was a unique experience which were not exposed to before."*
>
> Child Club graduate

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80.   Ministry of Water Supply, NWASH Dashboard, Government of Nepal, see: http://nwash.mows.gov.np/
81.   WASH Planning in the remaining Palikas require about USD 6 million (Source: UNICEF Presentation to IPDG (1 April 2022).
82.   KII with federal officials.

Figure 4.3: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF WASH programme
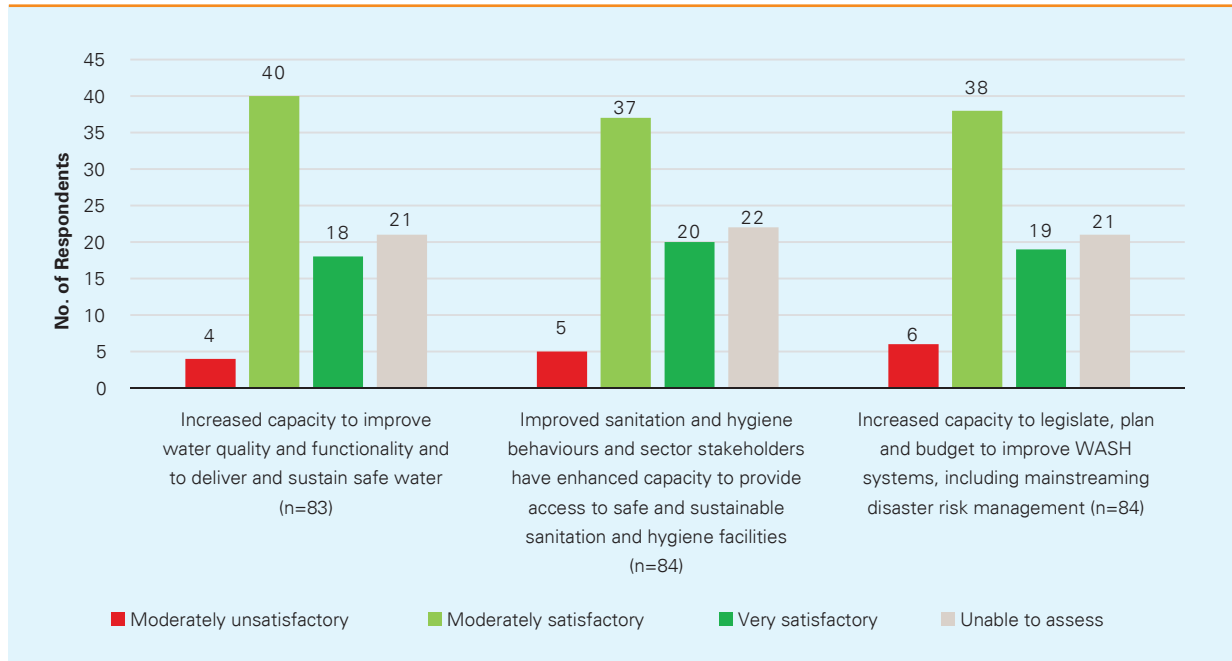
Summary of reported achievements of outcome/outputs (see Annex 4.2 for more): As indicated elsewhere, a single Output (7.3) provides the programme portfolio. There are five indicators, and all of which have been achieved by 2021. Some have overachieved 2022 targets as well. Of particular note is that the local governance indicator on planning and monitoring systems that address local-level risks has been achieved.

Assessment of effectiveness: The review notes some constraints which affect the effectiveness of the programme, as set out below:

- In the federalized system, there are DRR focal points in sub-national agencies who have the responsibilities for preparedness work. However, ambiguous interpretation of the relevant laws and statutes vis-à-vis federalization remain a concern and has been a constraint for smooth implementation of the programme.[83]

- Emergency Response/DRR is a cross-cutting issue requiring strong collaborations between partners. For example, UNICEF NCO has faced difficulty of real-time monitoring on displacement of children ahead of monsoon, which require strong inter-agency collaboration amongst GoN agencies,[84] particularly as early warning is not UNICEF's strength.

- Influencing Palikas for higher investments on emergency response/DRR has been a challenge because of competing demands for limited funds received by the Palikas.

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83. An example is DRR which is a concurrent subject falling under Schedule 9 of the Constitution. The national policies indicate the roles of sub-national actors. The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2017, followed by the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Regulation 2019 are the two key policy documents but the local government operational acts also provide specific roles on DRR at the local level. These have led to different interpretations by different levels of the officialdom, creating confusion.

84. KII with UNICEF staff.

Stakeholder perceptions of emergency/ DRR work: The majority expressed satisfaction/ moderate satisfaction on emergency/DRR interventions of UNICEF NCO (*see Figure 4.4*).

Social policy, evidence, and evaluation

Achievements: UNICEF NCO contributed to build national capacity to measure and produce crucial evidence on child poverty, by supporting the Central Bureau of Statistics to develop and adopt the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index, which is used to allocate resources in the social sector for children and also to select municipalities to implement multi-sectoral programmes of UNICEF.[85] Poverty analysis suggests that there is considerable room for manoeuvring in terms of increasing social expenditure through a range of strategic approaches.[86] In a decentralized context, child poverty analysis supports policy and planning decisions on where and how to allocate resources across the country.

UNICEF NCO contributed to a range of policies and strategies applicable to both national and sub-national levels. These include: the Men Engagement Strategy for Ending Violence against Women and Girls; advocacy on resource allocation in the social sector which resulted in extending the Child Grant Programme to 11 more districts to reach 370,000 children and families in 25 districts; and the National Integrated Social Protection Framework. UNICEF NCO also contributed to link the Child Grant scheme to online civil registration and vital statistics.[87] The cash transfer system is effectively implemented covering 1.08 million children against the target of 900,000 children in 2021. UNICEF NCO provided support to the local governments in monitoring the exclusion data in the Child Grants Programme due to a lack of citizen certificates and lack of awareness. Only 20 per cent of children under five years benefit from child grant cash transfers.[88]

Figure 4.4: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF Emergency/DRR programme
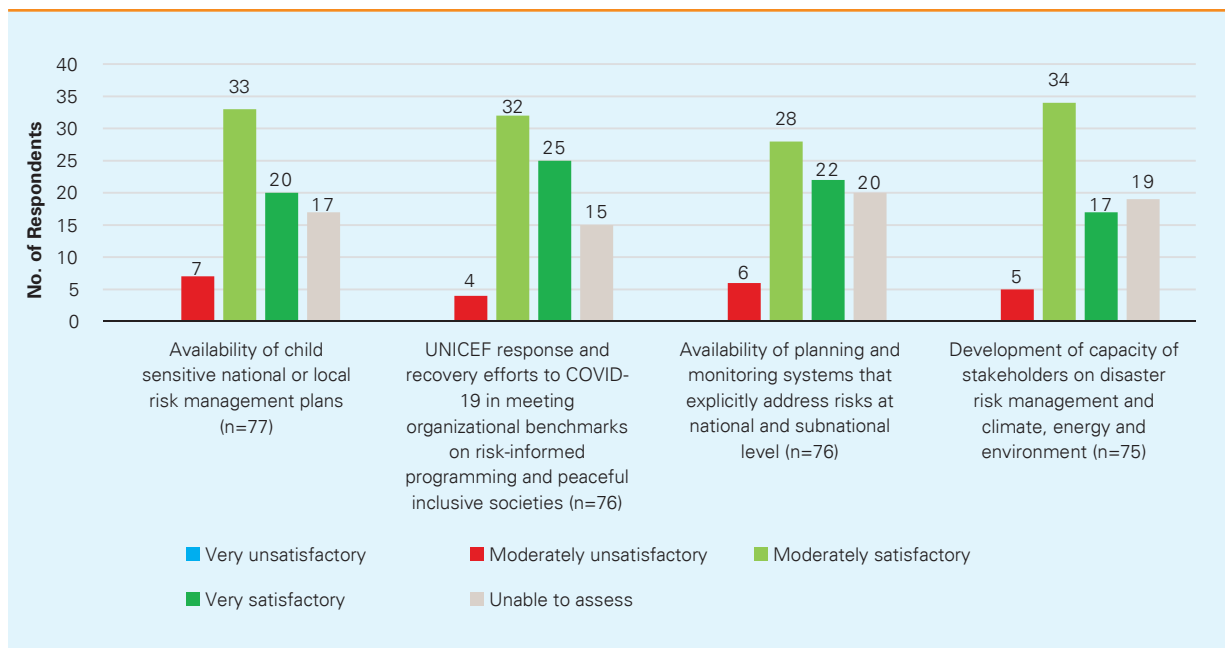
85.   Based on KII with UNICEF NCO.
86.   Programme Strategy Note – Social Policy, UNICEF Nepal, 2017.
87.   UNICEF NCO, 'Annual Report', 2021.
88.   UNICEF NCO, 'Annual Report', 2020.

"An issue with the child grants programme is the duplication of grants by different donors, including UNICEF. As a result, some families receive more than one grant."

Sub-national level official

UNICEF NCO provided budget briefs to the GoN enabling them to decide on allocations for children; the improvements to child budget allocations are attributed to the influencing work of UNICEF NCO. Five provinces are ear-marked for introducing participatory budgeting processes.

As a part of COVID-19 management, the Child and Family Tracker Survey was completed to obtain real time data; UNICEF NCO also supported the roll-out of cash PLUS emergency COVID relief through the government system for marginalized families.

UNICEF NCO, as the Chair of the Development Partners' Social Protection Task Team, provided assistance to harmonize social protection support to GoN.

Summary of reported achievements of outcome/outputs (*see Annex 4.2 for more***):** The social policy outcome consists of three outputs. There is no data reported for outcome indicators, and progress towards outcomes cannot be assessed. In **Output 6.1**, there is no achievement. In **Output 6.2**, there are four indicators; one is fully achieved, another indicator is overachieved while the remaining two indictors are on track. In **Output 6.3**, one indicator is reported as already achieved, one indicator is on track, one indicator is not on track and the remaining indicator is slightly behind the target.[89]

Assessment of effectiveness: Given UNICEF's position in the country, many stakeholders including development partners are of the view that UNICEF is best placed to influence the GoN on policies within the mandate of UNICEF. There is general perception that UNICEF should increase its efforts in the policy arena.[90]

Achievement of results have been affected due to a number of reasons, viz.:

- A lack of common understanding on social policy issues amongst three levels of governments; different interpretation on social issues, and inadequate guidelines to operationalize social protection work at the sub-national level.

- The Social Protection Act and National Social Protection Framework are not yet in place; absence of these legislations hamper social protection work. The impact of the social protection portfolio is to be examined in 2022.

- Inadequate coordination between donors leading to duplication.

- Adequate information on children at risk of neglect, abuse, and violence is not available.

- The dialogue between a range of stakeholders to create, share, and use knowledge to support more effective policies concerning children is minimal.

- Convening a broad range of stakeholders, including development partners, and carving out a space for the children's agenda at the national and sub-national levels are crucial to address child poverty but it is not taking place as expected.

"The big players sit in Kathmandu, but they do not coordinate with each other. Often times different donors support similar work in the Palikas."

Senior Government of Nepal official

A recent evaluation has also noted the need to consider changes to improve the social protection programmes (e.g., better integration of social protection system actors with emergency operational response actors, address barriers of emergency cash transfer programmes, strengthen M&E, and improve the understanding of the relevance of cash transfers across all UNICEF sections); this review concurs with these recommendations.[91]

89. UNICEF, 'Results Assessment Module' , 2021.
90.   KII with senior GoN officials and development partners/donors.
91. Economic Policy Research Institute, 'Evaluation of UNICEF's work on cash transfer programming in emergencies', 2021.

Stakeholder perceptions of social policy, evidence and evaluation: About 65 per cent of the respondents expressed satisfaction on the four parameters presented; about 20 per cent indicated dissatisfaction on partnerships to promote social policy, capacity enhancement to deliver child-sensitive social protection systems, and enhancement of national institutions on measurements and data generations (*see Figure 4.5*).

Local governance

Local governance was not a component in the original CPAP but was added in 2021 as an output (6.4) under Outcome 6 (Social Policy, Evidence and Evaluation) following a recommendation of the mid-term review of the CP. The PSN was approved by the GoN in October 2021. This output was formalized in the CPAP in the Addendum to CPAP.[92] The output is to be achieved via four key actions, viz.:

- Facilitating local governments (including municipalities) to produce disaggregated child data and use those data to develop municipal profiles;

- Facilitating local governments (including municipalities) with development plans that include specific activities that address child priorities;

- Facilitating local governments (including municipalities) with functioning mechanisms for child/adolescent and/or community participation in local planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes;

- Influencing local governments to ensure budgets include allocations to child priorities.

A nominal budget of USD 75,000 was made available for the work programme under this output.

Figure 4.5: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF Social Policy programme
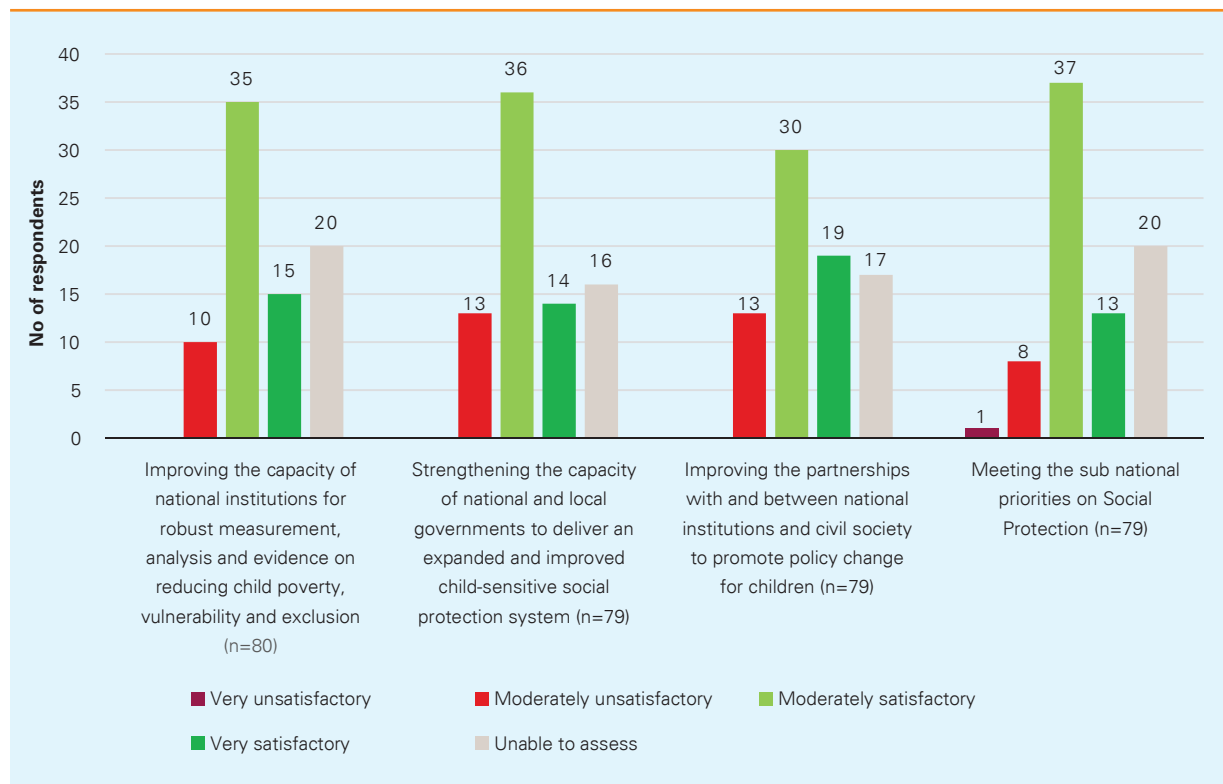
Summary of reported achievements of outputs (*see Annex 4.2 for more*): Under this output, there are six key actions. Of the six, the annual target relating to one key action (functioning mechanism for child/community participation in local planning) has been achieved. All other activities are not on track.[93]

> *"We started with zero status to establish a well-functioning rural municipality by formulating necessary acts, regulations, operational manuals, policies and guidelines during our tenure with the support of UNICEF. UNICEF has helped us to enhance our knowledge and skill to deliver services as per the expectation of local citizens."*
>
> *An elected representative from a rural municipality*

Local governance also appears as systems strengthening in other outcome areas; the achievements in those outcome areas are reflected separately. In summary, these interventions addressed increasing the number of local governments with comprehensive/ integrated sectoral plans; sub-national agencies using particular frameworks or monitoring tools/ mechanisms; development and use of policy instruments at sub-national level, and budget allocation monitoring and citizen participation in budget processes at local level. Compared to the overall NCO results, sectoral local governance indicators are somewhat less strong, with several not on track for 2021 targets. WASH, DRR, and nutrition appear to have stronger results on this.

Assessment of achievements: UNICEF NCO has been the only UN agency to explicitly examine children-specific, local governance issues at the Palika level.[94] Given that this review covers the period up to December 2021, there has been less than one year for UNICEF NCO to implement the actions. During this period, UNICEF NCO collaborated with MoFAGA to mainstream child-friendly local governance within the Provincial and Local Governance Support Programme (PLGSP); the interactions were limited but were aimed at introducing the subject of federalization into child-sensitive programmes.

> *"UNICEF efforts to streamline work in provinces is well recognized. However, there are number of constrains, in particular staffing and resources to fully implement the programmes. There are differences between federal and local governments as well."*
>
> *Senior official, sub-national agency*

A programme was also launched to commence a dialogue with sub-national agencies to apprise them on the modalities of incorporating activities that address child priorities in provincial planning.[95] Although at a nascent stage, some Palikas have taken up this in a positive manner.

UNICEF NCO provided technical support to the sub-national agencies to assist them with achieving the targets set out in UNICEF NCO work plans on local governance, in particular on planning, monitoring, and budgeting (for children's needs). UNICEF NCO also identified five provinces to target piloting the child-friendly budgets.

Stakeholder perceptions of local governance work: The majority expressed satisfaction/ moderate satisfaction on local governance interventions of UNICEF NCO. Overall satisfaction ranged from about 55 per cent to 70 per cent. About 25 per cent showed dissatisfaction (very unsatisfactory plus moderately unsatisfactory) on local planning, budget allocation for children, and inclusion of child priorities in local budgets (*see Figure 4.6)*.

(b) Cross-cutting areas

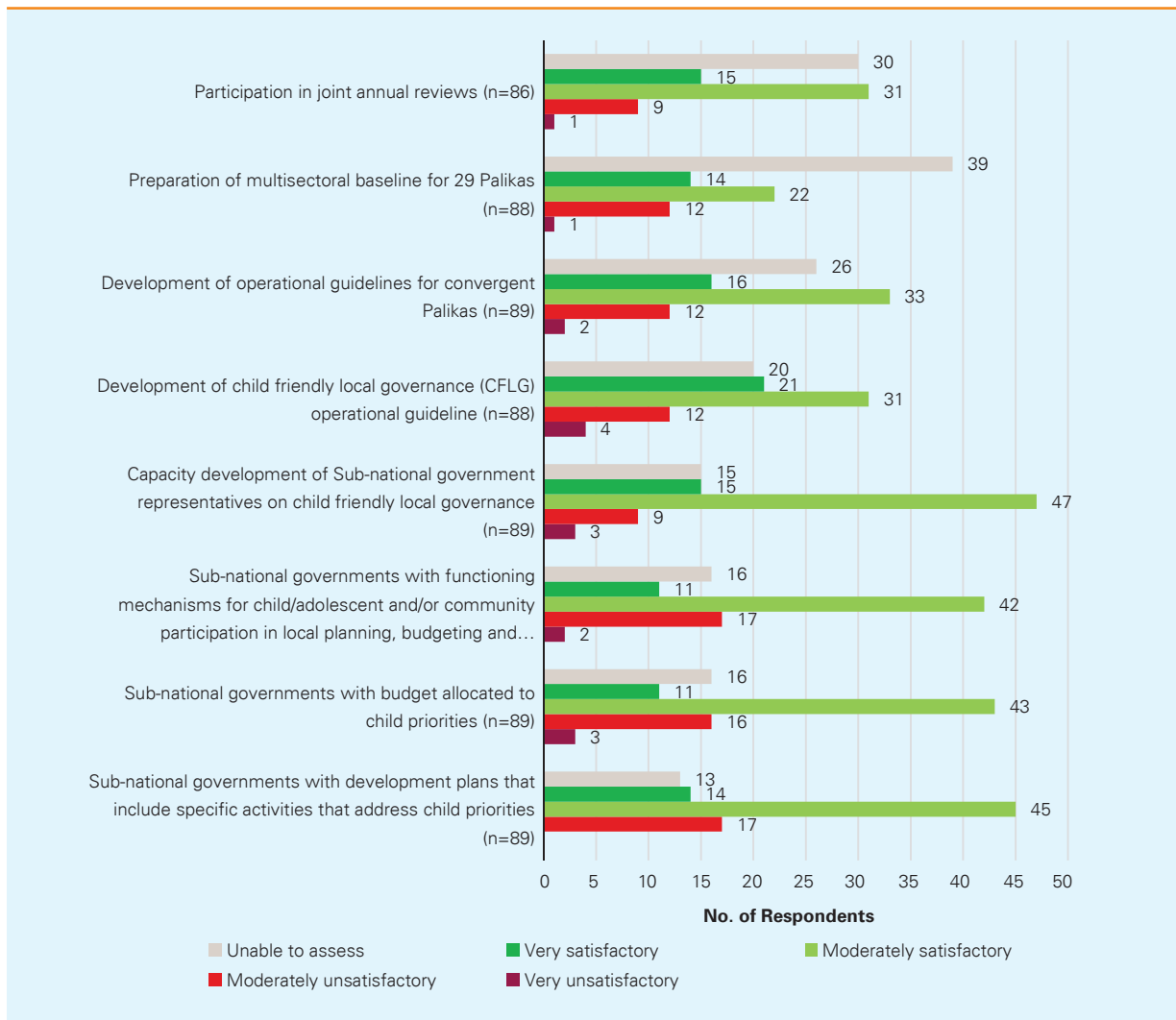### Equity and gender equality

Equity: UNICEF is committed to support, on a priority basis, the most disadvantaged children,

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93. UNICEF, 'Results Assessment Module', 2021.
94. KII with UNICEF staff.
95. It is acknowledged that UNICEF NCO actively assisted local agencies in planning, even before federalization came into force. These include the 14-step planning and baseline development.

Figure 4.6: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF Federalization programme

Figure 4.6 data (No. of Respondents):

- **Participation in joint annual reviews (n=86)**: Unable to assess 30; Very satisfactory 15; Moderately satisfactory 31; Moderately unsatisfactory 9; Very unsatisfactory 1
- **Preparation of multisectoral baseline for 29 Palikas (n=88)**: Unable to assess 39; Very satisfactory 14; Moderately satisfactory 22; Moderately unsatisfactory 12; Very unsatisfactory 1
- **Development of operational guidelines for convergent Palikas (n=89)**: Unable to assess 26; Very satisfactory 16; Moderately satisfactory 33; Moderately unsatisfactory 12; Very unsatisfactory 2
- **Development of child friendly local governance (CFLG) operational guideline (n=88)**: Unable to assess 20; Very satisfactory 21; Moderately satisfactory 31; Moderately unsatisfactory 12; Very unsatisfactory 4
- **Capacity development of Sub-national government representatives on child friendly local governance (n=89)**: Unable to assess 15; Very satisfactory 15; Moderately satisfactory 47; Moderately unsatisfactory 9; Very unsatisfactory 3
- **Sub-national governments with functioning mechanisms for child/adolescent and/or community participation in local planning, budgeting and…**: Unable to assess 16; Very satisfactory 11; Moderately satisfactory 42; Moderately unsatisfactory 17; Very unsatisfactory 2
- **Sub-national governments with budget allocated to child priorities (n=89)**: Unable to assess 16; Very satisfactory 11; Moderately satisfactory 43; Moderately unsatisfactory 16; Very unsatisfactory 3
- **Sub-national governments with development plans that include specific activities that address child priorities (n=89)**: Unable to assess 13; Very satisfactory 14; Moderately satisfactory 45; Moderately unsatisfactory 17

No. of Respondents

Legend: Unable to assess, Very satisfactory, Moderately satisfactory, Moderately unsatisfactory, Very unsatisfactory

and all UNICEF approaches are expected to have a focus on equity. UNICEF follows the principles in the CRC; there is evidence that focusing on the most disadvantaged children is a cost-effective approach for overall development and towards achieving the SDGs.

The situation in Nepal where gender, ethnicity, disabilities as well as geographical isolation (or difficult-to-reach areas) fits well into UNICEF's equity domain. The deprivations resulting from extreme income poverty affects the access to basic services such as health and nutrition, education, and sanitation and hygiene.

UNICEF has also developed tools to identify marginalized children based on evidence; however, a paucity of the requisite data precludes the use of such tools in the wider society. Although UNICEF NCO uses the Deprivation Index to identify Palikas, there are limitations in its use in identifying the most marginalized children.[96] The proportion of differently-abled persons in Nepal is estimated at 1.94 per cent, however, recent studies indicate that this figure is an underestimation as there are unrecognized/unreported cases.[97] Children with functional difficulties are estimated at 10.6 per cent in Nepal.[98]

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96. KII with GoN officials indicated that there are external pressures to influence the identification of beneficiaries in donor programmes, particularly in the provinces that need the services.
97. Social Science Baha, 'Social Protection of the Disabled in Nepal'; Resilient Social Protection for Inclusive Development; Himal Books, Chapter 9, 2021.
98. Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, National Planning Commission and Central Bureau of Statistics.

In the current programme, UNICEF NCO has adopted UNICEF's equity policies to the extent feasible.[99] For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it provided, with GoN approval, emergency assistance to Dalit communities and some others in difficult-to-reach areas. All thematic areas strive to focus on equity in their interventions.

In general, except in child protection and the COVID assistance mentioned above, the current programme does not differentiate between marginalized and non-marginalized communities. In child protection, only marginalized and poor families are provided cash grants. In order to be eligible to receive child grant, marginalized/poor families are required to submit citizen certificates, which many marginalized families do not have, due to lack of knowledge and access, which has impeded in effectively implementing child protection programme including expanding coverage and improving inclusion of children. This is the only programme where UNICEF NCO is facing a problem to expand the coverage. Discussions are underway between the UNICEF

Field Offices and Chief District Administration Office to resolve the issue of citizen certificate of marginalized communities (such as Mushar, Chhepang, Rahute, Dome, etc.) to expand the coverage of the child grant.[100]

The review however noted that some geographical areas of the country and some marginalized communities are not adequately serviced by the donors (e.g., Karnali and Madhes Provinces; Dalit community for wasting). This is an area where the UNICEF NCO may work with development partners and GoN authorities to develop a strategy to cater to those marginalized groups more fully.

A recent UNICEF study has reaffirmed that social spending, specifically social protection, has lowered absolute poverty and inequality. [101]

The results of the perception survey on UNICEF NCO's equity approaches in the programme are included in this report (*see Figure 4.7*). In the five parameters examined, about 75 per cent of the respondents indicated "very satisfactory" (ranging from 29 per cent to 38 per cent) and "moderately satisfactory" (40 to 46 per cent).

Figure 4.7: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF equity approaches
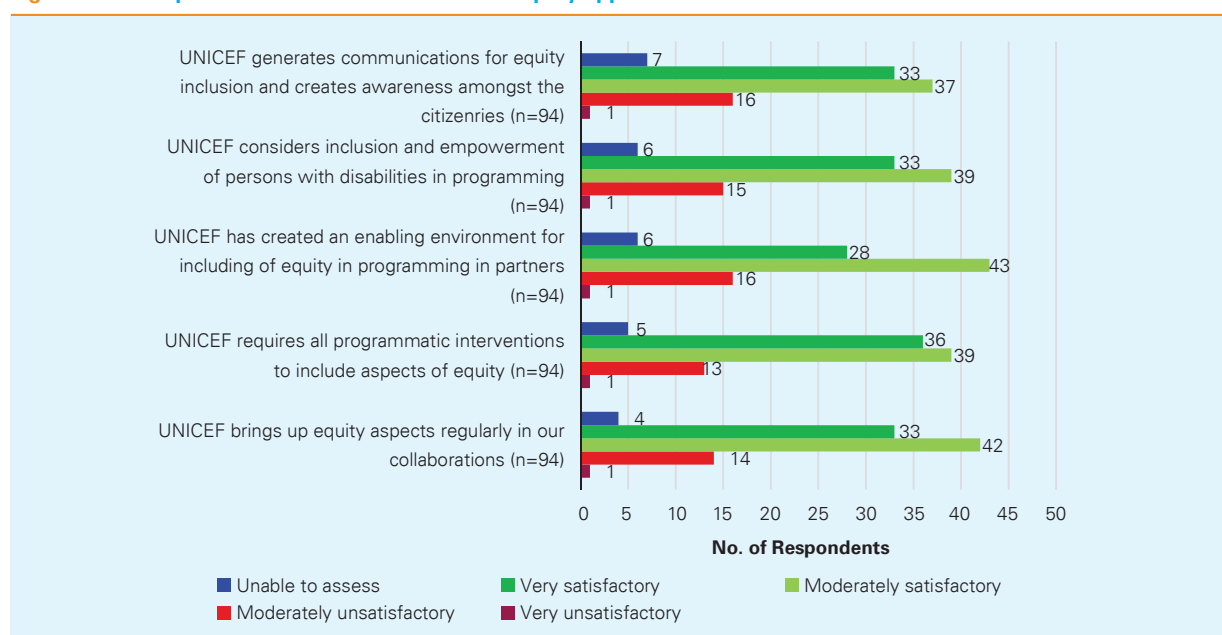
99. UNICEF, 'Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Needs', 2010.
100. Information from KII.
101. UNICEF, 'Strengthening the Evidence on the Correlation Between Fiscal Equity and Social Outcomes for Children', 2021.

Gender equality: UNICEF NCO follows its global gender equality principles and the thematic sections are cognizant of the need to focus on gender equality in programme planning. However, gender mainstreaming in the programmes is uneven. Indeed, the annual reports do not reflect the NCO's approaches and results on gender mainstreaming per se across the thematic areas, aside instances of reporting on GBV and gendered plans of GoN.

The review notes that the acknowledgement of gender equality amongst both federal and sub-national agencies is uneven. At the sub-national level, inadequate funding precludes them from making explicit gendered interventions. Overall, gender awareness at the sub-national level has to improve for them to make a concerted effort to mainstream gender in their initiatives.

It was the view of the federal level officials that UNICEF NCO should adopt a more robust gender responsive approach rather than the current gender sensitive approach so that the interventions will appear to have a stronger gendering element, which will be useful to GoN officials as an "eye opener". The Review concurs with this observation.

In the CPAP, many indicators are gender segregated; however, RAM reporting does not reflect disaggregated data for many indicators.

The findings of this review mirror a number of areas highlighted in a gender programmatic review undertaken in 2019,[102] and the NCO has faced staff and funding challenges to fully implement the recommendations.[103]

The Review also noted the need for enhanced resources within UNICEF programmes to strengthen gender effectiveness on monitoring and evaluation to ensure that NCO regularly monitors and reports on UNICEF NCO's contributions towards gendering GoN actions supported by UNICEF.

The Review notes the uneven situation with regard to the availability of gender disaggregated data. It was the view of senior government officials that UNICEF NCO should undertake a more detailed gender analysis and better integrate gender-responsive elements in planning. The Review Team concurs with this suggestion, as has been corroborated by an independent study.[104]

Data related to the perception of stakeholders on gender equality and social inclusion in UNICEF programming is included below (*see Figure 4.8*). In the eight parameters examined, the majority expressed moderate satisfaction and very satisfied ratings. However, about 20 per cent of the respondents were unsatisfied (largely moderately unsatisfied) on the parameter, particularly on gender budgeting and gender parity. This aspect needs attention.

Concluding remarks: In both equity and gender equality, programmatic interventions are uneven largely due to a lack of data, diffused programmatic focus, and technical and financial resources.

Social and behaviour change

UNICEF converted its Communication for Development (C4D) Network to support delivery of more focused social and behaviour change programmes. This requires improved institutional backing and operational and programmatic approaches.

UNICEF Nepal has identified C4D as an enabler and has included strategies using direct outreach, mass and social media, etc., to deliver the programme effectively. The output (7.4: Communication for Development) covers the current, rebranded SBC work.

> *"UNICEF has added value to our work with RCCE (social listening, swift content creation and debunking of rumour in pandemic period), which was a learning experience for us."*
> *Federal government health official*

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102. UNICEF ROSA, 'Gender programmatic review of the UNICEF Nepal Country Programme', 2019.
103. KII with UNICEF NCO staff.
104. UNICEF ROSA, 'Gender Integration and Effectiveness of the UNICEF COVID-19 Response in South Asia', 2021.

SBC was very active during the COVID-19 pandemic with its Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), and the stakeholders have commended UNICEF work.
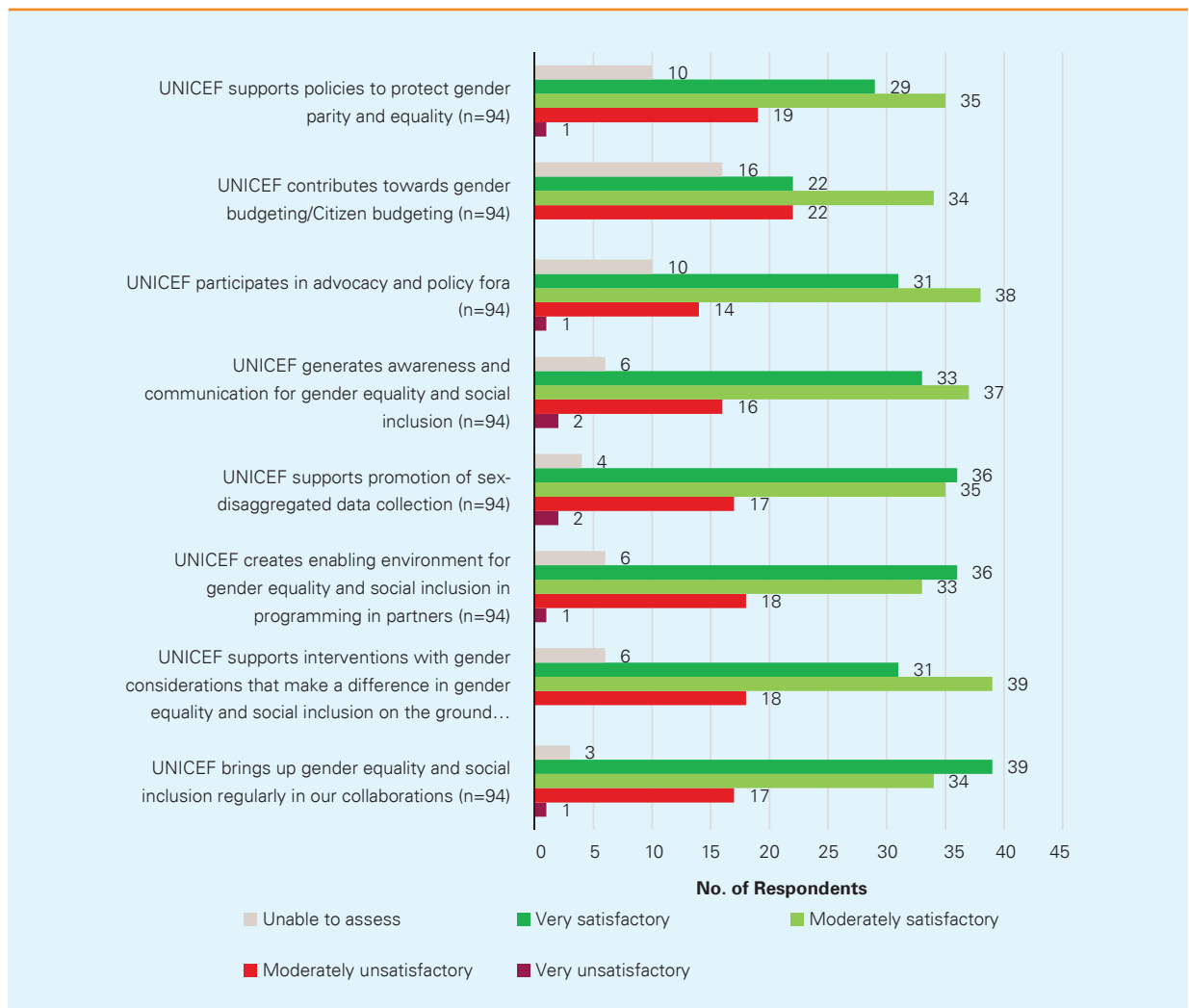
During COVID-19, SBC provided RCCE Guidelines which were endorsed by the GoN.[105] These guidelines are considered very useful by all levels of the Government. UNICEF NCO also supported the development of the 'Corona Capsule',[106] a media product aimed at controlling spread of myths and misinformation on COVID-19, which has been appreciated by the sub-national agencies.

"Even health workers refused COVID vaccine based on misinformation. UNICEF work managed to dispel these myths and improve vaccination rate."
Sub-national official

Of particular interest is SBC work on developing M&E capacity on SBC components. However, the Review noted the need to re-examine and fine-tune SBC indicators to enable better performance tracking.[107]

Figure 4.8: **Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF's gender equality and social inclusion**

UNICEF supports policies to protect gender parity and equality (n=94): Unable to assess 10, Very satisfactory 29, Moderately satisfactory 35, Moderately unsatisfactory 19, Very unsatisfactory 1

UNICEF contributes towards gender budgeting/Citizen budgeting (n=94): Unable to assess 16, Very satisfactory 22, Moderately satisfactory 34, Moderately unsatisfactory 22

UNICEF participates in advocacy and policy fora (n=94): Unable to assess 10, Very satisfactory 31, Moderately satisfactory 38, Moderately unsatisfactory 14, Very unsatisfactory 1

UNICEF generates awareness and communication for gender equality and social inclusion (n=94): Unable to assess 6, Very satisfactory 33, Moderately satisfactory 37, Moderately unsatisfactory 16, Very unsatisfactory 2

UNICEF supports promotion of sex-disaggregated data collection (n=94): Unable to assess 4, Very satisfactory 36, Moderately satisfactory 35, Moderately unsatisfactory 17, Very unsatisfactory 2

UNICEF creates enabling environment for gender equality and social inclusion in programming in partners (n=94): Unable to assess 6, Very satisfactory 36, Moderately satisfactory 33, Moderately unsatisfactory 18, Very unsatisfactory 1

UNICEF supports interventions with gender considerations that make a difference in gender equality and social inclusion on the ground…: Unable to assess 6, Very satisfactory 31, Moderately satisfactory 39, Moderately unsatisfactory 18

UNICEF brings up gender equality and social inclusion regularly in our collaborations (n=94): Unable to assess 3, Very satisfactory 39, Moderately satisfactory 34, Moderately unsatisfactory 17, Very unsatisfactory 1

No. of Respondents

Legend: ■ Unable to assess ■ Very satisfactory ■ Moderately satisfactory ■ Moderately unsatisfactory ■ Very unsatisfactory

105. UNICEF NCO, 'RCCE Guidelines' (in Nepali) , 2020.
106. ACORAB, 'Corona Capsule: An innovative radio initiative in times of pandemic', Kathmandu, 2022.
107. Some guidance is available in the document: UNICEF ROSA, 'Checklist on SBC integration in CP evaluations', undated.

The SBC unit services the other sections of UNICEF NCO based on the funding availability. Thus, the use of SBC is uneven across thematic areas. For example, SBC is very much integrated into the WASH programme, and its success at the Palika level is partially attributed to its strong SBC element. In health, SBC is embedded in all outputs; however work on psychosocial support is yet to begin. Other programmes such as nutrition and education have indicated their desire to engage SBC more closely in their work. Inadequate staff (only two staff members) and funding are a constraint for enhanced engagement of SBC with other thematic areas. Nonetheless, it is evident that closer engagement of SBC in other thematic areas will help in delivery of the respective programmes.

On a positive note, SBC did not find any barriers in implementation due to federalization; perhaps as they work directly with the communities.

> *"We are very pleased that we had an opportunity to work with UNICEF on SBC work – we created community platforms during COVID-19 to dispel myths and convey scientific information. It was a good learning curve."*
>
> *Implementing CSO*

(c) Programme management

UNICEF NCO implements its programme through the different levels of the Government and through CSOs.

The Results Framework of the CPAP provides the basis for tracking progress.[108] This framework sets out well-defined indicators with baselines (2018) and the targets for 2022. The Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan provides annual activities.[109] There have been difficulties for data gathering in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Indicators

The indicators in the CPAP have not been fully transferred to RAM for reporting. Thus there is disconnect between CPAP indicators and RAM indicators, on which NCO reports. In regard to the outcome indicators, the Review notes the following:

- Most indicators are long-term national indicators to which UNICEF contributes.[110] The targets use the same basis, and the UNICEF programme is therefore expected to achieve these targets. Lack of national data precludes NCO to report on progress, as evident from RAM. In the circumstances, the staff show an indifference to these indicators.

- Some programmes track provincial and local level indicators (e.g., open defaecation), which have been used to demonstrate programme effectiveness at the local level.

- In some instances, the geographic scope of the indicator is unclear; some appear national indicators, but some others appear to be of different spatial scope.[111]

- Based on the available evidence, it is unlikely that NCO will be able to report on the outcome targets due to a paucity of national data.

> *"We are in a continuing dilemma on the indicators and are not comfortable about them."*
>
> *Senior staff member, NCO*

Reporting

Reporting in RAM is uneven; reporting of outcome indicators is inadequate, but often stated as "approved". There is lack of clarity on annual targets and corresponding reporting. The review found several instances in narrative reports (e.g., annual reports) where the same achievement is reported in consecutive years. Furthermore, the narrative reports do not provide information for tracking.[112]

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108.   See Annex 1 of CPAP.
109.   Ibid; Annex 3.
110.   An example is the outcome indicators of education. It has Grades 3, 5, and 8 reading and comprehension baselines and targets.
111.   The Review was unable to elicit information on the historical aspects of planning.
112.   UNICEF NCO indicated that due to word limits, the annual reports do not carry full information.

Reporting on disaggregated provincial data would also be useful in gauging programme performance in the provinces.

Programme monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans are available across all thematic areas and the reports have been made in a timely manner. However, there are contradictions in M&E and RAM reporting largely due to issues in indicators.

The review noted shortcomings in progress monitoring at the field office level; whilst the office uses internal HACT for monitoring, actual on the ground monitoring was found to be sub-optimal. Progress vis-à-vis workplans has not been tracked regularly due to shortage of staff and the consequent delays are not recorded. This shortcoming is reflected in the difficulties faced by Field Offices on timely delivery of outputs at the sub-national levels.[113] The Review notes inadequate resources in the Field Offices to implement monitoring protocols. The CSO partners will also find it useful if UNICEF Field Offices could be more proactively engaged in field monitoring of activities on an agreed schedule.

The perception of stakeholders on UNICEF NCO programme management is shown below (*see Fig. 4.9*). Whilst about 65 per cent indicated their satisfaction on programme management, about 24 per cent were unhappy; the dissatisfaction is largely due to inadequate monitoring at the field level, and not sharing the monitoring reports.

(d) Communications/outreach

In general, the outreach materials produced by UNICEF NCO are well received by stakeholders. The Review noted that some partners appreciated the fact that UNICEF NCO shares reports for their comments. Yet, there were a number of organisations who felt that the reports are not shared and requested report highlights in Nepali language.

A number of sub-national agencies indicated that they do not receive information/reports from UNICEF NCO.[114]

(e) Partnerships

UNICEF NCO partners with many agencies in its work. Of them, 81 per cent were satisfied (36 per cent marking very satisfied) with their partnerships in implementing the Programme.

Figure 4.9: Perception on effectiveness of UNICEF Programme Management

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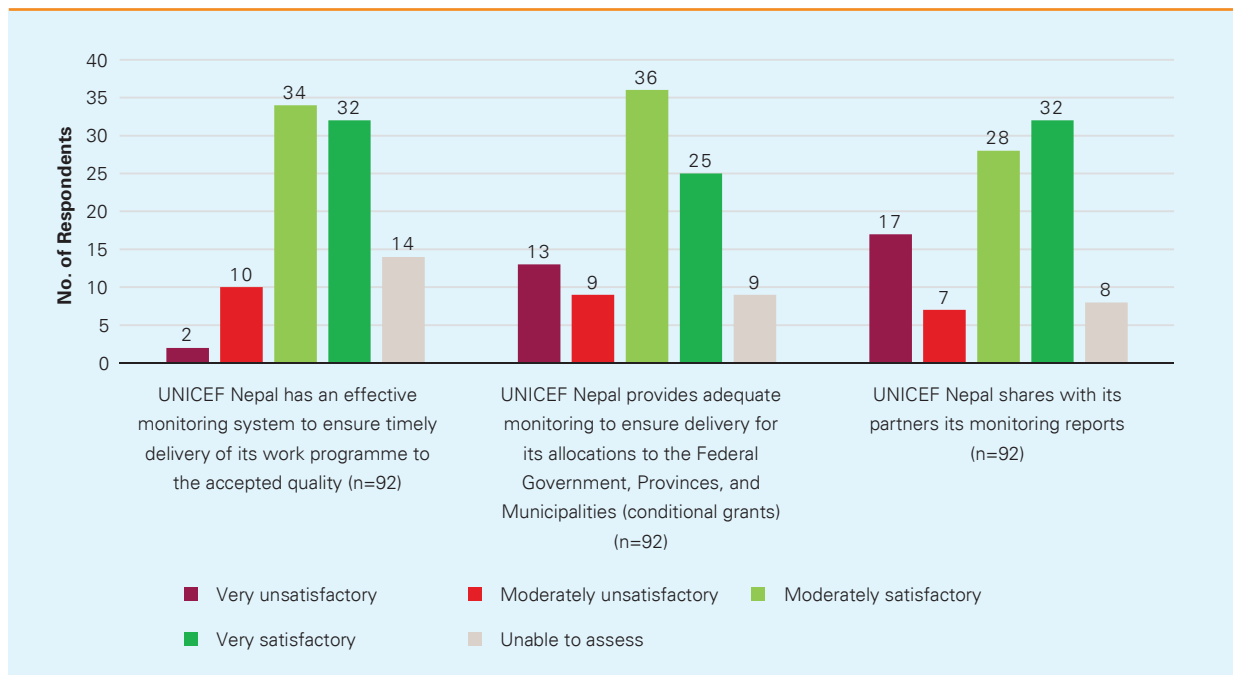
113.   KII with field office staff and sub-national government staff.
114. KII and Perception Survey.

■ 69.1 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with UNICEF NCO's sharing of information and reports. (Perception Survey)

Quotes from the Perception Survey

■ "Share valuable information clearly about progress, challenges and way forwards". (NGO)

■ "More work can be done to share the findings apart from posting on UNICEF's website". (Partner)

■ "UNICEF's extensive use of e-technology and, more recently, all work through the paperless system (KOBO tools etc.) and the notification mechanism is very effective and efficient". (Partner)

■ "No communications. We are not aware of what (is) happening". (Municipality); "No regular sharing is happening in sub-national level". (Sub-national official)

■ "A more collaborative approach to knowledge management and learning is the key. Focusing more on how KML actions can support programmes and actions not just limited to the UN system, but useful to other like-minded organizations as well. Collaborate on joint research actions and diffusion process". (INGO)

■ "Would be good to get right information on time. Sometimes we have faced significant delay to receive the information".

(Implementing partner)

Aside from GoN agencies, UNICEF NCO uses civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs for implementing their work programme, particularly in the provinces (implementing CSOs/NGOs). NCO has a database of CSOs but this has not been updated recently.[115] The Review noted that CSOs are an important partner in implementation as they are familiar with the communities and have regular dialogue with them. Notwithstanding that, there were reservations expressed by sub-national officials on the capacity and commitment of the CSOs to further UNICEF's goals. Many were unaware of the selection process of CSOs, which perhaps led to their perceptions on the capacity of CSOs.

These findings corroborate the findings relating to the selection of partners in the partnership review undertaken by UNICEF NCO.[116]

The CSOs themselves were of the view that their partnership with UNICEF NCO was beneficial to them as they were able to "learn the trade" and be a part of a larger programme.

Concerns were also expressed by sub-national officials on the process adopted to recruit short-term consultants and their competency. Currently, their Terms of Reference is cleared by the respective GoN agencies, but they are not involved in the selection process. The Review noted that some of the reservations expressed by GoN officials on the suitability of the consultants may in fact be a reaction to their lack of engagement in the selection process.

There are a number of INGOs with significant investments in thematic areas covered by UNICEF NCO. There is a sense of competition amongst them, and the Review noted the desire of those INGOs interviewed to collaborate with UNICEF NCO particularly in education, nutrition, child protection, WASH, and in social policy.[117]

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115. KII with UNICEF staff.
116. 'UNICEF's Partnership Review, Draft Report', 12 October 2020.
117. KII with INGOs and Senior Government Officials.

- "UNICEF has been providing not only financial support but also technical support in every step that enhances the capabilities of a NGO/CSO and thus producing better programme output". (Implementing CSO)
- "UNICEF should focus on the local government agencies and organizations who have large networks. NGOs and CSOs now in Nepal are not effective like before in terms of their performance and transparency". (Federal government agency)
- "I think many of the CSO lack adequate experience and they are also expensive. If the money is given direct to the government, more work can be done". (Federal government agency)
- "In my opinion the opportunity to work as a partner of UNICEF is a satisfaction for every organization". (Implementing CSO)
- "They (CSOs) focus only on budget; sometimes we are not sure whether they are competent; partners are not very good in their job [capacity]" (5 similar comments all from provincial government agencies)

Quotes from the Perception Survey

6.3 Factors Influencing the Achievement (or not) of the Nepal Country Programme Results

This section summarizes the factors, both internal as well as external, which have a bearing on programme implementation.

Federalization and the planning process

As elaborated elsewhere, the Programme has been constrained by the lukewarm ownership expressed by some of the sub-national agencies due to the fact that the Programme has been drawn up and agreed with the Federal Government.

Added to this situation is the low level of engagement of UNICEF NCO at the Provincial Government level.[118]

On the other hand, programmes such as WASH and education have better acceptance at the local level, and the successes of the WASH model have been brought to the attention of the development partners

Programme delivery is also affected by delays in enacting legislation related to federalization. For example, the Federal Education Act is yet to be passed; as a result, there is uncertainty over the roles and responsibilities of the education staff at federal and sub-national levels, and thereby constraining the work at the sub-national level. Likewise, as a result of the delays in enacting the Civil Service Act, Palikas are unable to recruit staff. As a result, key positions in the sub-national agencies, required for delivery of UNICEF programme, are vacant, and there is rapid staff turn-over necessitating UNICEF to "retrain" staff.

COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 significantly affected programme delivery in 2020 and 2021. With regular lockdowns, community work was not possible. Schools were closed for a long period, and most of the education work with school communities could not be undertaken. Given its position in the country, UNICEF was able to garner additional donor funds for a suite of actions to help GoN manage the pandemic and was able to repurpose the programme. UNICEF carried out a number of activities including surveys to establish the situation of children to mitigate the effects. UNICEF actions are narrated elsewhere in this report (*see Section 4.4*), but it noted several

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118. Key stakeholders were of the view that UNICEF NCO does not adequately engage with provincial governments – rather they are by-passed in dealing with Palikas.

■ "I think to support federalization process in WASH, more focus is needed on strengthening systems at municipal level for operation and management of WASH services for sustainable, efficient and effective service delivery, enhancing capacity for better governance. Municipal governments need to be in the leading position to implement. Support agency should provide technical and financial support". (Secretary of a federal ministry)

■ "It would be great if UNICEF could consider addressing the local context-specific problems and local priorities instead of only engaging so extensively through federal level ministries". (Development partner)

■ "UNICEF consulted federal ministry but no provinces"; "They consult federal ministry for agreements"; "UNICEF plans are approved by federal government and not by us". (Three sub-national officials)

■ "Currently we are working together with UNICEF help local level government to formulate WASH Plans. This intervention is very important because it will help local level government to plan WASH activities in their areas". (Implementing CSO)

lessons for working under emergency situations and for the next Country Programme. Overall, the programme implementation suffered a set-back, but the pandemic also provided new opportunities for UNICEF NCO to work with the GoN.

UNICEF funding and government allocations

The CPAP and the Addendum to CPAP are based on the premise of funding of USD 150,270,000 (made up of Regular Funding of USD 36,010,000 and Other Funding (donor funding) USD 114,260,000). The OR component is 76 per cent, which is somewhat high.

Overall, only about 50 per cent of OR funds have been realized up to December 2021 (against prorated budget up to December 2021) (*see Figure 4.10 (a)*). This is reflected in a reduced OR budget for health, nutrition, education, and to a lesser degree on child protection. In WASH, the expected OR funds have almost been realized (*see Figure 4.10 (b)*). Some of the donor funds (e.g., European Union funds for the Nutrition Programme) have been redirected to the GoN leaving UNICEF NCO with reduced funds for technical assistance only.

Fund allocation

The International Development Cooperation Policy of the GoN sets out aid mobilizing modalities.[119] In general, it is expected that all types of international development cooperation will be incorporated in the national budgetary system. However, the development partners and donors use different modalities for funding sub-national efforts. These include: direct payment to the Treasury, payment to provincial entities and Palikas directly, or working through third parties. Some development partners will reimburse GoN entities after the work is done, rather than providing funds upfront.

Figure 4.10 (a): Funding Situation (USD X '000))

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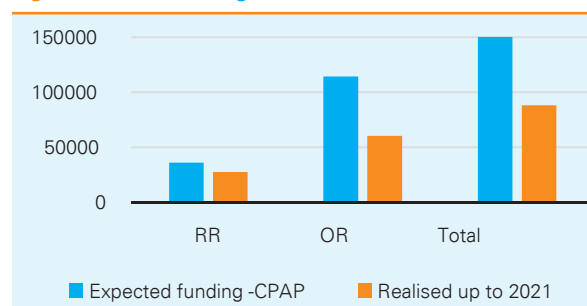
119. Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal, 'International Development Cooperation Policy', 2019.

Figure 4.10 (b): Programme funding up to 2021 (USD X '000) -comparison of estimated versus actual budget
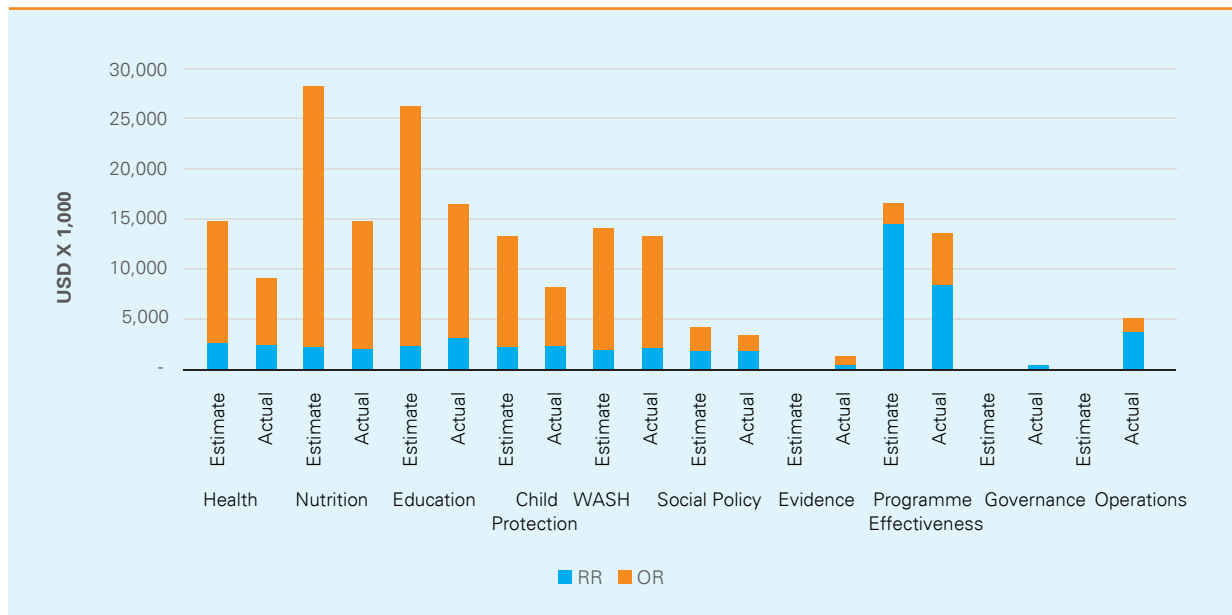
UNICEF NCO and the sub-national entities have regularly experienced instances of inordinate delays in transfer/receipt of funds. The Review notes instances where about six months have been taken for transfers; as result of these delays, the work plan could not be completed in time, and the funds had to be rolled over to next year. The Review noted an instance where about 80 per cent of the allocation had to be rolled over. The Review also noted that UNICEF has adopted various fund transfer mechanisms to overcome the issues with mixed results; delays in releasing funds at UNICEF NCO are also evident.

The constraints noted above are common to all development partners and donors. INGOs are able to adopt a different approach and overcome some of the difficulties, as they mostly work through national NGOs as local implementing partners.

Much of the UNICEF NCO programme implementation is through an on-budget, off-treasury mechanism and are normally implemented either directly through GoN agencies or through CSOs. There are very few activities that are reflected on-budget, on-treasury, and these also have delivery challenges both at the government as well as at UNICEF NCO level.

The GoN has several mechanisms to increase the efficiency and transparency of fund transfers. These include: Red Book transfers; direct transfers to Palikas, the SuTRA system;[120] technology innovation through block chain technology[121] to leverage innovative financing models to distribute resources, and increase the efficiency and transparency of internal processes. UNICEF NCO has an opportunity to examine these tools to identify the best option to streamline fund transfers.

6.4 Adjustment of Programming within a Changing Context

This chapter examines UNICEF NCO's adaptations during the current programme cycle to the following changing contexts:
- COVID-19 pandemic;
- Federalization.

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120. Sub-national Treasury Regulatory Application (SuTRA) is a planning, budgeting, and accounting software developed by the Ministry of Finance of the GoN. It is a web-based system developed for facilitating and implementing a structured financial management procedure of the sub-national governments.
121. UNICEF Office of Innovation.

6.4.1 Changing context caused by COVID-19 pandemic

As in other parts of the world, COVID-19 caused an unprecedented impact on lives and livelihoods in Nepal. Initially, the country went for about a four-month lock-down, one of the longest in South Asia. A large number of Nepalis returned from India causing pressure in the borders to manage safe flow of people and imposing on the Government to provide employment to them. All economic activities slowed down including overseas remittances from employment. Families with children were significantly affected. A survey involving 7,500 households showed that 61 per cent had no earnings during the preceding three months.[122] The same survey shows that about 6 million children in Nepal faced poverty, which is a four-fold increase from pre-COVID-19 era. Unlike adults, children run the risk of irreversible loss of cognitive and physical growth and development.

In terms of UNICEF's particular interest, it has been recorded that about 20 per cent of the children who live in the bottom two quintiles were at risk with increased undernutrition with potential consequences of stunting and wasting. Schools were closed for extended periods and the online facilities were difficult in the rural areas. This prolonged isolation in homes deprived the children of their normal socialization resulting in increased mental stress. There has been an increase in violence against children, child marriages, and GBV resulting in disharmony at the family level.

Response

(a) Government of Nepal response

The Government launched a suite of relief measures including cash transfers to mitigate economic hardships faced by the citizenry. Nepal has had episodes of national calamities, the latest being the earthquake in 2015; thus the Government has much experience in dealing with emergency situations. Yet, COVID-19 stretched the Government's efforts fully. A recent study noted that the Government adopted contrasting response strategies between the first wave (2020) and the second wave (2021).[123] These strategies were centralized by the federal government, largely on the basis of a lack of clear statutes to delegate functions to the sub-national agencies resulting in shortcomings in timely and effective delivery. However, during the second wave, the roles were much clearer with a better decentralization with the federal government liaising with donors for vaccines and other medical supplies while sub-national agencies taking the responsibility of isolation, quarantine, health care, and administration of vaccines.[124]

(b) UNICEF NCO response

UNICEF NCO adopted an infection prevention control approach to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the key response actions adopted by the NCO are summarized below:

- **Situation monitoring:** UNICEF NCO launched a longitudinal household telephone survey of 7,500 households covering 85 per cent of the municipalities in the country to assess the situation and needs of families with children during the pandemic and lockdowns (the Child and Family Tracker (CFT) survey). The survey also included telephone interviews with female health workers in selected districts. The first round of the survey in May 2020 is referred to as the baseline, with five iterations (July, August, October, December 2020, and January 2021). In 2021, there have been two thematic surveys on job and income loss (May 2021), and public health and social measures (June 2021).

- **Real-time data collection:** UNICEF NCO also gathered real-time data on health services through mobile data collection during 15 May to 31 August, from 336 health facilities in 35 districts (covering 6 out of the country's 7 provinces) using ONA. This was facilitated

122. UNICEF, Child and Family Tracker Survey, 2020.
123. KII with senior government officials.
124. Thapa, Manish, 'Government's response during COVID-19 Pandemic in Nepal', Munich Personal RePEc Archive (Paper No. 111666), 2020.

through the three field offices. Data is available online.[125] A report on this task notes several lessons that are very relevant for any service-based data collection during an emergency, and include: (i) weekly data collection was too much of a burden for health workers and data collectors; (ii) one call with health facility staff would take a minimum of 30 minutes (the questionnaire had 36 questions) and if one person alone did not have all the information it could take an hour and involve several people; (iii) refusal of health workers to provide information due to the overload of reporting requirements via different formats; and (iv) limitations in ONA software for data analysis and exchange.

The Review notes that information from CFT was useful to GoN authorities in deciding priority actions relating to the deployment of health services.[126] This information also enhanced the national knowledge on the situation of children during COVID-19. UNICEF NCO did not significantly change its programming in the current cycle based on this information; however, the information will be useful in future UNICEF programming in the next Country Programme. Although the analysis took time, the potential of these tools in emergencies such as flash floods in smaller geographic areas has been demonstrated.

UNICEF NCO's thematic area responses are considered timely and important contributions towards GoN's COVID-19 management strategies.[127] The following section provides an analysis of UNICEF responses.

In **health**, NCO supported MoHP with risk communication which was considered very useful and replicated by GoN. Its work on contact tracing and quarantine at federal, provincial, and local levels; PCR testing, case management, and on improving laboratory capacities and training of health staff have been swift. It provided 39 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, and the logistics of procurement and logistics of delivery are well appreciated at all levels of the GoN and other development partners.[128] In **nutrition**, UNICEF NCO maintained its tempo on the normal programme, and the achievements of Vitamin A administration which reached 85 per cent in spite of COVID-related difficulties are considered a model by UNICEF. It continued to support work on reducing stunting and wasting by convincing MoHP to restart outpatient treatment centres (OTC) and nutrition rehabilitation homes (NRH) to treat SAM, and the resultant 50 per cent reduction is a significant achievement to avoid reversal of progress in reducing stunting. The **WASH** programme was coordinated by UNICEF as cluster co-lead and provided direct support to over 70 cluster members on WASH services, critical supplies to communities, health care facilities, schools, etc. UNICEF's hygiene promotion campaign reached 3.15 million, and about 125,000 people benefitted from the installation of 559 contactless hand-washing stations at border crossings. The training programmes on WASH were considered very opportune and have long-term benefits on WASH acceptance by the community. These experiences are well recognized by the sub-national agencies as replicable efforts.[129] In **education**, UNICEF NCO supported 327 schools in 16 priority Palikas on inclusive learning. It switched to virtual training for teachers and introduced a new system for individual education plans for children with disabilities (CwD), advocated against use of schools as quarantine centres and cleaned 329 schools once they were reopened. UNICEF brought global experiences to determine school opening options and provided self-learning materials during isolation. UNICEF NCO also printed and distributed hardcopies to over 200,000 children from 175 Palikas across 7 provinces and circulated self-learning materials to 36,000 vulnerable children, including 200 CwD. As a specialist agency, UNICEF's contribution in education during the pandemic has been taken up with much enthusiasm.[130] In **social protection**,

125. See: https://ona.io/bibajracharya/68516/502812#/saved-charts
126. KII with senior GoN Officials.
127. KII with key GoN Officials.
128. Information from KIIs.
129. KIIs with GoN officials.

UNICEF advocated for protecting social spending, in particular planned investments in the Child Grants and launched a direct response with a one-off cash transfer to 10,000 families. UNICEF also supported the roll out of cash PLUS emergency relief through the government system. In emergency/DRR, UNICEF responded to floods, landslides, and cold waves with direct humanitarian assistance as well as trained municipal representatives and community members on DRR, climate change, and COVID-19. In **child protection**, UNICEF NCO supported continued service delivery through adaptation and scaling up mental health and GBV responses and early intervention mechanisms. A new protection-monitoring and reporting mechanism was established. UNICEF NCO scaled up parenting support interventions in response to CFT showing that half of all families experienced increased stress levels.

COVID-19 related work of the thematic areas was well supported by SBC, which provided RCCE guidelines endorsed by GoN,[131] as well as developing the 'Corona Capsule',[132] a media product aimed at controlling the spread of myths and misinformation on COVID-19. These initiatives are well accepted by the sub-national agencies.

Lessons learned from COVID-19 management experience:[133]

- The Country Office noted the need for greater flexibility in funding to facilitate repurposing of programmes to adapt to changed needs and deliver results on the ground such as in adjusting geographic locations and specific targets. The Field Offices could not make these changes without recourse to the NCO and limited the capacity to effectively respond in a timely manner.

- Engagement of local leaders on the immunizations led to proactive social mobilization, high coverage for the measles and Vitamin A campaigns in 2020, and resource allocations in local annual plans.

- Investments in preparedness paid off during the COVID-19 response, where Child Club networks and communities who were part of the CC DRR programme played a dominant role in relaying COVID messages.

- CFT was an important source of data on the situation and was applied to all programme interventions. CO anticipates incorporating real-time learning in the next Country Programme.

Quotes from the Perception Survey

- "UNICEF's work on COVID-19, especially SBC, has been visible in providing guidance and collaborative leadership to the government to promote critical life-saving messaging, and more need-based and regular information sharing". (INGO)

- "UNICEF's work has been supporting in strengthening Nepal Government's interventions in the provincial and local context; this enabled the government's line agencies to cope with emergency situation like COVID-19/Flood. The programme has also enhanced the capability of local as well as provincial government stakeholders in better management of information and timely response during emergencies". (NGO)

- "We are very thankful to the excellent COVID-19 response, including vaccination, logistics, and supply chain management, which were all efficiently handled by UNICEF". (Federal ministry)

Key Informant

- "UNICEF's leadership in providing guidelines for reopening of schools helped the Government very much; however, the process could have been more efficient if there was better coordination within UNICEF". (UN Agency)

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130. KIIs with GoN officials.
131. UNICEF NCO, 'RCCE Guidelines' (In Nepali), 2020.
132. ACORAB, 'Corona Capsule: An innovative radio initiative in times of pandemic', Kathmandu, 2022.
133. Annual reports of 2020 and 2021; KIIs.

6.4.2 Changing context caused by federalization

The Constitution of Nepal was promulgated in 2015 creating three non-hierarchical tiers of the government, viz., federal, provincial, and local. This timing predates the planning for the current CP. Nonetheless, UNICEF NCO was cognizant of the impending transition to a federal system of government. The elections in 2017 elected a new government, which reaffirmed the transition. The actual roll-out of federalism started with the new government taking office in early 2018, at the same time the Country Programme commenced implementation. The devolution of powers under the new constitution delegated subjects of interest to UNICEF into local, provincial, and concurrent lists, which provided the legal base to implement programmes.

Federalization was expected to improve the reach of support to the most vulnerable communities; it was also expected to channel resources to Palikas so that the communities stand out to benefit more in the new process.[134]

Federalization has two dimensions viz., conceptual and structural. The devolution of people's sovereignty and state powers to every level of government is conceptual. The existence of two or more levels of government is structural. In federalism, every level of government exercises an autonomous, self-governing, and collective form of government and no level of government is subordinate to another level. Nepal is a non-hierarchical federal country, where each level is independent.[135]

At the end of the first year of the CP, UNICEF NCO reported federalization as a key constraint in implementation and listed a host of challenges NCO had to manage.[136] Functions and financial systems previously managed at the central level had been devolved during the year, impacting systems, resources, and capacity at the local level to absorb new functions. Capacity was restrained by a lack of awareness, technical expertise, and resources. Much was still unclear. In the meantime, the GoN published a report setting out division of responsibilities between the three levels of the government.[137] In the second year of implementation, UNICEF NCO considered federalization less as a challenge and more as an opportunity – even an enabling factor.[138] It further stated that federalization would allow "greater engagement with local officials and has resulted in support being provided directly to government officials responsible for implementation". It noted the additional human and financial resources needed (to service 50 highly diverse and geographically dispersed municipalities) as well as a lack of donor funds were major constraints to service the Palikas.

The mid-term review of UNICEF CP examined the issues and recommended establishing an output to support federalization work. The new output was designed to contribute to enhanced capacity of the provincial and local governments to legislate, plan, budget, and monitor measures to addressing the needs of children at the local level and was expected to be implemented in close collaboration with MoFAGA and the Provincial and Local Governance Support Programme (PLGSP). In addition, governance was mainstreamed across sectoral areas, in the last output under each outcome which had a system strengthening focus. All sector PSNs have federalism under assumptions – that the establishment of a federal state with devolution of power will proceed smoothly and that the functional distribution of the different tiers of government will happen soon.[139] GoN approved this output in 2021, thus this review had only less than one year's work to assess.

134. KII with National Planning Commission.
135. The Constitution mentions a cooperative federal system with cooperation, collaboration, and coexistent forms of federalism.
136. UNICEF NCO, 'Annual Report', 2018.
137. Unbundling Federalism Implementation and Administration Restructuring Coordination Committee, Government of Nepal, 2019; Unbundling/ Detailing of List of Exclusive and Concurrent Powers of the Federation, the State (Province) and the Local Level Provisioned in the Schedule 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 of the Constitution of Nepal.
138. UNICEF NCO, 'Annual Report', 2019.
139. The PSNs are dated 2021 but are likely to have been written before.

In the PSN for Social Policy, the overall approach of UNICEF to federalism and decentralization is described. It is explicitly stated that this is intended to be implemented across different sectors, in all programmes and FOs.

UNICEF support

At the national level, UNICEF NCO supports the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA); Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST); Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation (MoWSS); and Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) to formulate guidelines and strategies related to nutrition, education, health, WASH, social protection and disaster risk reduction in line with the policies of the GoN. At the provincial level, UNICEF NCO supported the formulation of the periodic plan of Lumbini Province, including policy advocacy, advocacy for public financing for children, and rolling out of sectoral development plans. At Palika level, UNICEF NCO supports periodic planning, annual plan formulation, and advocacy for children's welfare. The support includes providing technical advice on programme matters, capacity development of sub-national staff, advocacy on the adaptation of good practices and systems developed under the Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) project under the previous CP (2013-2017), budget analysis, and providing support for national social protection system planning and system building in a decentralized context.

Field Offices

UNICEF Nepal has three field offices servicing the provinces in which they work; one of the Field Offices is responsible for two provinces. On behalf of UNICEF NCO, the Field Offices also enter into agreements with provincial and local governments. They are important "intelligence" points to pick up local level needs for consideration for support and function as the liaison point between NCO and the sub-national government agencies.

The Review noted that many sub-national officials regard field offices as de facto UNICEF in Nepal. As a consequence, their expectation is for the Field Offices to function independently and take decisions as the situation demands.

In general, stakeholders were of the view that field offices do not enjoy a level of autonomy required to perform their tasks efficiently and effectively. Even small contracts with third parties require approval from NCO, Kathmandu. Cumbersome administrative and procurement procedures requiring intervention of NCO are also constraints.[140]

The Field Offices are also understaffed. Where they have to serve more than one province, staff are stretched and unable to provide the required service to the expected quality. The technical expertise in the Field Offices is also limited; this is usually overcome by hiring consultants.

Assessment of UNICEF NCO performance under federalization

Implementation of the Programme in the federalized system has met with internal and external challenging situations, which are summarized below:

Internal challenges

- The planning process adopted by UNICEF NCO is perceived as a top-down approach, and the Review has been presented with evidence of exclusion of needs expressed at the Palika level. The sub-national rolling work plan is agreed with the Federal Government and is a point of dissention amongst the sub-national officials. Furthermore, there has been disagreement on the identification of Palikas for UNICEF interventions. As a result, there is a degree of reservation at all levels of government about the entire planning process.

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140. Sub-national agencies wish to be involved in the selection process of consultants (see Section 4.2.2 (e)).

- UNICEF NCO has not adequately "decentralized" its operations in keeping with the federalization to enable field offices to proactively engage in the planning process and make decisions in implementation.

- Capacity development efforts of UNICEF NCO are not well-targeted. There has been no formal sectoral capacity needs assessment nor assessment of the capacity development initiatives undertaken by UNICEF NCO. The training modules are often prepared by implementing partners and not always assessed for quality by UNICEF.[141]

- UNICEF NCO's engagement at the provincial level is minimal; the provincial needs are not adequately reflected in the work plans.[142]

- UNICEF's financial year is not synchronized with that of the Government; on occasion, this has led to difficulties of reporting.[143]

External challenges

- As the procedure governing the fund transfer system to sub-national levels is based on the Development Aid Policy of the GoN, UNICEF NCO has experienced difficulties in a timely transfer of funds to sub-national entities, causing inordinate delays in implementation.

- Some key legislations (e.g., Civil Service Act, Education Act) to effectively devolve functions are not in place. There is still a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of local authority agencies regarding some functions.

- Human resources and their capacities (and frequent staff turnover) at the sub-national level are not to the expected level,[144] thus programme implementation does not receive full attention of the agencies causing delays in delivery. Furthermore, political differences at the local authority level are not uncommon causing implementation difficulties.

- Inadequate coordination amongst GoN agencies as well as with development projects at Palika level results in duplication of efforts by donors.

Concluding remarks

The federalization environment has been challenging. UNICEF NCO has been constrained to adjust to the new situation, in spite of the fact that UNICEF NCO has previous experience of working with District Development Councils and Village Development Councils in planning and advocating budget allocations before the formal programme of decentralization was launched. In the new outputs introduced in 2021, it is too early to expect changes. While some challenges are external and beyond the control of UNICEF NCO, there is scope for adjustment of internal mechanisms and procedures to mitigate some of the constraints faced by NCO.

6.5 Strategic Positioning

UNICEF strategic engagement helps leverage policies and resources for children

UNICEF NCO is well regarded amongst the higher echelons of the Government and enjoys the confidence and trust of the agencies. It is noted for bringing global best practices for children's welfare. It has a unique position with regard to child protection, where UNICEF is considered a specialist agency and leads child protection advocacy in Nepal. UNICEF's contribution to the education sector is also regarded as very special, cemented by the long-term partnership with the Government.

In regard to WASH, health and nutrition and DRR, there are a number of other UN Agencies, development partners and INGOs who are active; indeed some bring more investments than UNICEF, and not surprisingly, the Government's positioning of the agencies depends on their investments.[145]

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141. KIIs with sub-national agencies.
142. Ibid.
143. Ibid.
144. KIIs with national and sub-national agencies.
145. For example, USAID investment in education is very high, compared to UNICEF.

Quotes from the Perception Survey

- "The provincial governments need to see UNICEF more as a serious partner and having more junior staff in most of the interactions along with INGO and NGO partners undermines provincial-level trust and commitment. At the municipality level this works well but to strengthen the provincial government more professional senior-level engagement is needed". *(INGO Representative)*

- "Not sure whether UNICEF has understood the federalism and its implications for us". *(Palika)*

- "The office cannot make decisions on our requests as it go to head office long time (sic.)"; "UNICEF take long time to approve our request because of head office Kathmandu" *(Both from Palikas)*

- "Child Grant Programme did not consider difficult working areas". (Palika)

- "Quick and efficient adjustment to increased responsibilities of municipalities". *(Donor)*

- "UNICEF agreements are with federal government". *(Provincial ministry)*

- "UNICEF shall invest in balanced way with CSOs and governments. Engagement and strengthening with local mechanisms and local government shall contribute better coordination with federal and province". (*Suggestion for improvement: Federal ministry*)

- "UNICEF is too much involved with issues of federalism; there are other agencies to do this". *(Federal ministry)*

- "UNICEF conducts workshops but we are not sure of results". (Sub-national official)

- "Fiscal year of government and UNICEF should be similar so that DCT modality will be helpful". *(Palika)*

UNICEF's influence in launching the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Plan (currently in Phase II with a possibility of Phase III) is well recognized by the authorities. It has brought significant donor funding for implementation and has very much benefitted the poorer communities in the provinces. UNICEF NCO has been successful in leveraging donor funding for the expansion of the Child Grants Programme from 14 districts to 25 districts, covering an additional 375,000 children. It also influenced GoN to increase the Dalit Child Grants Scheme. In education, UNICEF NCO has been able to provide guidelines on the reopening of schools during COVID-19, based on global practices. In the health sector, UNICEF's influence on COVID-19 management is very significant, and has been able to provide significant resources to the GoN.

As with many countries, policy changes require time and much effort. It is known that some key policies (e.g., Civil Service Act; Education, Social Protection) required for smooth implementation of the programmes, particularly at the sub-national level, are yet to be finalized. UNICEF NCO has been persistent in its efforts to bring about the required policy changes, particularly in the light of federalization. For example, UNICEF NCO emphasized at the International Development Partners' Group (IDPG) the need for enactment of pending bills and acts that are critical in further operationalizing social services at the sub-national level.

In the policy arena, there is scope for UNICEF NCO for specific actions. An example is the need to provide adjustments to the legal

framework to potentially use Social Security Allowances (SSA) during emergencies.[146] The need has been identified by UNICEF NCO, but the recommendation has not been taken forward.[147] In Early Childhood Development, the Review noted the continuing disconnect between the different GoN agencies which are required to provide inputs toward ECD for holistic implementation. This inadequate coordination has been noted in a previous evaluation as well;[148] this is an area UNICEF NCO could take focused action to influence the authorities to have a more effective coordination mechanism.

UNICEF NCO has also proactively shared its good practices with development partners which are likely to be adopted by them for national implementation.[149] Its positioning with GoN is demonstrated by GoN invitations to UNICEF NCO in national policy dialogues.[150]

The Review noted several instances of high-level officials/development partners cautioning that UNICEF needs to "work like a UN agency rather than like an INGO". This was an interesting observation and further analysis showed that this perception is due to UNICEF competing with others for programme implementation. It was the view of many that UNICEF should focus on the policy arena and leave implementation to GoN and CSOs. The sub-national agencies value UNICEF's service delivery mode; any immediate disruptions to this limited-service delivery will create a vacuum at the Palika level. An example is MSNP implementation when UNICEF NCO used donor funds for service delivery, in addition to higher level interventions. With the donor diverting funds to the GoN, field level disruptions to data collection and coordination at sub-national level are already evident.

Any move out of service delivery should be phased out, and UNICEF NCO will need to balance between service delivery and upstream policy work.

Results from the Perception Survey

- "UNICEF is not a major donor but has the trust of the Government as they are seen as being there for Nepal through thick and thin". (Federal Government representative)

- "Strong technical experts who are able to advise on policies in high-level government discussions". (Sub-national government representative)

- "UNICEF is very good in providing support for policy formulation. It would be excellent if UNICEF support GoN and other stakeholders during the development of national policies and strategies". (INGO)

- "Since UNICEF has been working with Nepal government at various levels, the collaboration and coordination with Nepal government has been proved very effective in implementation of the programme. Also the technical support from UNICEF and involvement of Nepal government in every steps has increased the ownership and thus contributed in the better effectiveness of UNICEF's work (sic)". (NGO)

From KII and Perception Survey

- "UNICEF should not consider itself as an INGO". (Development Partner; GoN official; NGO)

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146. Oxford Policy Management Institute, 'Coverage of Social Security Allowances in areas at risk of floods and droughts', (evaluation carried out for UNICEF NCO), 2020.
147. KIIs with GoN officials and UNICEF staff.
148. UNICEF Nepal, 'Evaluation of the National Early Childhood Development Program', 2018.
149. IDPG Principals Meeting, 1 April 2022.
150. An example is the UNICEF Nepal Representative being invited for the Opening Remarks at the Local Education Development Partner Group (Education Sector Budget Review 2022); 18 May 2022.

Overall, notwithstanding the work done already, it was the view of many stakeholders that UNICEF should enhance its focus on the upstream policy arena.[151]

Convening role of UNICEF

As stated elsewhere, UNICEF is an important partner of the GoN, and its position within the higher echelons of the Government is well recognized. UNICEF has demonstrated its ability to convene important groups to discuss matters of national interest; equally, Government agencies look towards UNICEF's convening ability as they feel that UNICEF has the influencing ability on GoN decision-making.[152] Given its normative role as a UN agency, its objective and independent status allows itself to function in a more inclusive manner compared to other partners.

UNICEF NCO currently holds important positions within the International Development Partners Group as follows:

- Co-Chair, Education Thematic Working Group;
- Chair, WASH Group;
- Chair, Health Group.

Positioning of NCO strategically within the changing context on government plans

Overall, the Review notes that UNICEF NCO is able to adapt itself to the changing demands and needs of the GoN. This is especially noted during the COVID-19 pandemic which saw UNICEF re-programming its activities to encompass COVID management work. During this period, UNICEF's humanitarian work took precedence, a point well recognized by GoN.[153]

However, as noted elsewhere, UNICEF's adaptation to federalization is not as swift and convincing. Whilst noting that adaptation to federalization is a long-term programme, UNICEF could have better demonstrated its focus by enhanced decentralization of its own business to mirror the GoN federalization process and introducing better internal coordination to address the cross-cutting nature of federalization.

Sub-national coordination is very important, especially with regard to horizontal collaboration amongst the Palikas at the sub-national level to address some of the key gaps in effective service delivery, and also to champion the agenda of children. This will only be effective with a strong field presence of UNICEF at the sub-national level.

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151. KIIs with different groups of stakeholders.
152. KII with senior government officials.
153. KII with senior government officials.

7 Conclusions

This section contains a summary of findings under the evaluation criteria.

Relevance

Overall, the Country Programme is highly relevant with clear alignment to the Government of Nepal policies and strategies, notably the Fourteenth and Fifteenth National Plans. The programme is also in line with UNICEF's global mandate and addresses the relevant international covenants. The work programme addresses the needs identified in SitAn 2017; several areas (e.g., coverage of nutrition, WASH, social policy and DRR; inclusion of adolescents and women of reproductive age, provincial baselines) that could not be covered have been identified. The Programme has added federalization to address the issues surrounding sub-national capacity to legislate, plan, and budget to address the needs of children in the changed context. The Country Programme has been designed with extensive stakeholder engagement, and it is notable that the CPAP is a signed agreement between UNICEF NCO and the Government of Nepal, signifying the latter's acceptance of the relevance of the programme.

The theories of change are robust with well-defined national indicators. The relationships between the outcome and the outputs, in most cases, are valid. The Country Programme addresses Nepal's SDGs relevance to the thematic areas of the CPAP.

The Country Programme and CPAP have clear statements on UNICEF NCO's intention of targeting its programmes to "reach all children". However, this intention is not that strongly reflected in the Results Framework. Notwithstanding this, the planning framework in RAM is strong: there are for the most part well-defined indicators, with baselines and annual targets that seem well planned with gradual progress throughout the CP period.

Although UNICEF NCO is expected to use a "bottom-up" approach in designing the CP, the sub-national agencies are not convinced that their real needs are reflected in the CP. The selection of Palikas is also contested by sub-national agencies, the level of coordination at the Palika level is sub-optimal, leading to overlapping work by different players. The Field Offices do not have the required authority to respond to the immediate needs of Palikas. Overall, UNICEF NCO's engagement with provincial authorities is deemed to be inadequate in the planning process. These constraints somewhat dilute the relevancy of the programme at the sub-national level.

The Perception Survey shows that over 80 per cent of the stakeholders are of the view that the CP has considered national and provincial needs. Whilst the CP has attempted to provide the needs of children, this review shows the need to expand programme coverage to some of the marginalized communities and difficult-to-reach geographic areas.

Effectiveness

The national indicators in the CPAP are not always reflected in RAM. This shortcoming is a constraint for tracking progress and measuring achievements towards the overall effectiveness and the outcome change envisaged.

The self-assessed results for the Country Programme are impressive. Overall, five out of the six programme outcomes are reported to be "on track" by the end of 2021; the fifth is the health outcome and is considered "partially met". At output level, many results have been achieved ahead of time or achieved well above target. This is impressive having faced two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reporting on output indicators is uneven; some thematic areas have not reported on outcome indicators, perhaps due to lack of data.

In the thematic areas examined, overall effectiveness of the work programme is demonstrated through contributions towards the outcomes in the respective thematic areas, although, as stated above, measurements (in RAM) are somewhat uneven due to a lack of reporting on indicators.

Some of the common causes affecting effectiveness across the thematic areas are: inadequate capacity at the sub-national level to support implementation, inadequate coordination amongst agencies at the Palika level, low engagement with provincial authorities, and ambiguous interpretation of laws and statutes at different levels of the Government.

In the current programme, UNICEF NCO has adopted UNICEF's equity policies to the extent feasible; however, the Review noted that some geographical areas of the country (e.g., hilly areas of Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces) and some marginalized communities (e.g., Badi, Musahar) are not adequately serviced by the donors. UNICEF NCO follows its global gender equality principles and the thematic sections are cognizant of the need to focus on gender equality in programme planning. However, gender mainstreaming in the programmes is uneven. Furthermore, acknowledgement of gender equality amongst both federal and sub-national agencies is uneven. Integration of gender in monitoring and evaluation is inadequate, and gender disaggregated data is not always available.

Reporting in RAM is uneven; reporting of outcome indicators is inadequate, but often stated as "approved". M&E plans are available across all thematic areas, and the reports have been made in a timely manner. However, there are contradictions in M&E and RAM reporting largely due to issues in indicators. In general, the outreach materials produced by UNICEF NCO are well received by the stakeholders.

Overall, federalization has also brought about challenges for implementation. The Programme has been constrained by the lukewarm ownership expressed by some of the sub-national agencies due to the fact that the programme has been drawn up and agreed with the federal government. Aside from issues of planning, difficulties with modalities of fund transfer to the provinces have delayed implementation considerably. Programme delivery is also affected by the GoN's delays in enacting legislation related to federalization.

COVID-19 significantly affected programme delivery in 2020 and 2021. With regular lockdowns, community work was not possible.

Adjustment of programming within a changing context

As in other parts of the world, COVID-19 caused an unprecedented impact on lives and livelihoods in Nepal. The Government launched a suite of relief measures including cash transfers to mitigate economic hardships faced by the citizenry. GoN adopted contrasting response strategies between the first wave (2020) and the second wave (202). During the second wave, the roles of national and sub-national agencies were much clearer with a better decentralization for delivery of services. UNICEF NCO's response was swift and well-coordinated. Whilst it re-programmed its work plans for 2020 and 2021, it launched a survey to collect data on the status of children, and collected real-time data on health services. Its contributions in all thematic areas are well recognized and complemented GoN efforts in its management of the pandemic. UNICEF also brought global practices to Nepal. Uninterrupted

Vitamin A supplementation during the pandemic has been recognized as a model. Vaccine and other medical supply logistics are considered very efficient. Overall, UNICEF NCO adjusted well to the situation resulting from the pandemic.

The Country Programme was designed prior to enacting federalization; in the initial years of the CO, federalization was listed as a key constraint with many challenges for implementation. The CP has continued to struggle with these challenges, many of which are beyond the purview of UNICEF NCO. The Country Programme has not been able to fully adjust to the new conditions. Firstly, its own operations are not decentralized to the level expected by sub-national agencies that expect UNICEF to respond to the needs of the provinces. In planning itself, there is a degree of dissatisfaction amongst the stakeholders, particularly those in the provinces, about inclusion of "real issues" of the provinces in UNICEF NCO work-plans. The situation is exasperated by the low level of liaison between UNICEF NCO and the provinces. Secondly, UNICEF NCO is working in a changing environment due to federalization as the sub-national agencies are also struggling to cope up with the changes. There is inadequate capacity, rapid staff turnover, and delays in enacting the necessary legislation which hamper smooth implementation. UNICEF NCO is caught between the power sharing struggle of the three tiers of the Government. Although it responded by adding an output on federalization with a nominal budget (0.37 per cent of 2021 budget), it has not been able to fully embrace the spirit of federalization required to adjust its programme design and implementation at the sub-national level.

Strategic positioning

UNICEF NCO is well regarded amongst the higher echelons of the Government, and enjoys the confidence and trust of the agencies. Introduction of global best practices for children's welfare is well noted, and it holds a unique position with regard to child protection. Its contribution to the education sector is also regarded as very special. In WASH, health and nutrition, and DRR, there are number of other UN Agencies, development partners and INGOs who are active; indeed some bring more investments than UNICEF, and not surprisingly, the Government's positioning of the agencies depends on their investments.

UNICEF has demonstrated its presence in Nepal strongly; its convening power is demonstrated by the number of high-level committees it chairs, and the expectations of GoN and indeed other stakeholders for UNICEF to take leadership in exploring matters of national interest related to children.

In terms of federalization, there are UN Agencies and donors who are well equipped to support the GoN in improving service delivery resulting from federalization. UNICEF NCO's role in federalization is to advocate on child sensitive policies and strengthen the institutional and organizational capacities of sub-national governments in order to improve service delivery of aspects relating to children's welfare.

8 Lessons Learned

The analysis of the evidence gathered during the review provided insights into both positive and negative lessons, which are briefly documented below. They should be read together with the recommendations.

1. **UNICEF NCO should have adapted and built upon its past experience in decentralization.** UNICEF NCO had been working with District Development Councils and Village Development Councils before federalization came into effect. With its experiences on local level implementation of programmes for children, UNICEF NCO missed an opportunity to work more closely with PLGSP to strengthen the local governance systems by carving out its own area of support required for fulfilling the needs of children. PLGSP will come to an end in the near future, but UNICEF NCO has the opportunity to collaborate and learn from the Project's experiences to focus its own niche for interventions in the next programme cycle to improve programme implementation in the provinces.[154]

2. **Some thematic sectors have better adapted to work in the federalization milieu.** The Review notes the performance of WASH and education in the provinces. The closer dialogue with local authorities is appreciated by them, and there is a better sense of programme ownership by the local authorities demonstrating the working modalities with the three tiers of the Government. The success of Vitamin A supplementation programme during COVID-19 is attributed to weekly meetings of the Nutrition Cluster at the sub-national level resulting in very close collaboration. Whilst this acknowledgement may be due to more obvious on-the-ground results (e.g., reduced open defaecation, online learning), the modus operandi employed in these sectors could be used in other programmes as well.

3. **Local level changes to improve the lives of children due to interventions are well recognized by GoN agencies.** The Results Framework, agreed with GoN, uses national indicators to measure progress and show results. Due to a lack of data on these national indicators, UNICEF NCO has experienced difficulties to demonstrate the changes sought in the CPAP. On the other hand, whilst most local authorities are not familiar with the indicators in the CPAP, they have appreciated the changes brought about by UNICEF NCO at the district and local level. This is largely due to the fact that local conditions are well known to the elected officials, and any improvements towards a better life for children are politically welcome and are therefore well recognized via-a-vis changes to the national indicators.

4. **Changes in funding modalities by donors.** The diversion of donor funding of MSNP show that such changes in the funding modalities, especially supporting the government through on-budget-on-treasury modalities are likely to occur again, as more donor funds are likely to be channelled to the Treasury in the future. UNICEF NCO needs to take this instance as a lesson to have alternate plans to keep the momentum of the programme without abruptly discontinuing existing mechanisms which will negatively affect programme implementation.

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154. During the Review, the Review Team learned that PLGSP may be extended beyond 2023.

9 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the analysis of data and information gathered during the Country Programme Review and are provided to inform the development of the next programme cycle. The development of these recommendations followed a series of consultations with the stakeholders. These recommendations were presented to the UNICEF NCO senior management at a meeting held on 16 June 2022.

Programme strategy and design

Recommendation 1: **In the new programme cycle, UNICEF NCO should focus on actions that will facilitate programme design and planning to enhance consideration of federalization concerns.** In this regard, the following actions are proposed for the next country programme:

■ **Collaborate with the Provincial and Local Governance Support Programme (PLGSP):** UNICEF NCO will benefit in its decentralization work by collaborating with PLGSP to effectively implement sectoral programmes in the provinces/Palikas and strategically identify UNICEF's inputs into decentralization efforts, taking into consideration the work of PLGSP.

■ **Decentralization of UNICEF operations:** UNICEF should ensure that its operations are more decentralized in keeping with federal structures, with enhanced planning and implementation responsibilities devolved to the Field Offices to ensure that the needs of children at sub-national level, including those in remaining pockets of unreached areas and excluded communities are truly reflected in the programme.

■ **Coordination of planning by development partners:** In order to avoid duplication at the local level, formulation of work plans jointly by the development partners is recommended (UNICEF may take this up with other development partners), particularly in thematic areas where other development partners are also active. In this regard, UNICEF NCO should take the lead in establishing Sectoral Clusters with representation from development partners at the province level for enhanced coordination.

■ **Developing rolling work plans with the provinces:** UNICEF NCO should adopt a decentralized planning approach and develop provincial-level rolling work plans (or 30-month work plans) to ensure that provincial needs are adequately captured in the work plans (e.g., area-specific plans). The consolidated provincial rolling work plans would be used for agreements with the federal government.

■ **Selection of Palikas for project interventions:** The NCO needs to develop, in consultation with the relevant government agencies, clear criteria for selection of Palikas for project interventions, and such criteria should be shared with the local government authorities.

■ **Capacity development at local level:** UNICEF should focus on building capacities at the local level to deliver UNICEF specific actions relating to children and social development aspects relating to them (some of these specific needs have been identified as: capacity of the legal practitioners at the sub-national level to address child protection concerns; updating databases to promote evidence-based decision-making processes

and in formulating annual plan and periodic plans, budgeting and monitoring; nutrition supplementation; support to technical committees).

It is also recommended that a capacity needs assessment be undertaken jointly with participating agencies and the effectiveness of capacity development efforts be assessed using appropriate tools.

■ UNICEF NCO must improve its engagement with provincial governments/ministries.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 2: **In regard to equity and gender equality, UNICEF NCO should focus on actions in programming to comply with the minimum standards in UNICEF ROSA strategy, subject to availability of funding.**

■ In **Gender,** UNICEF NCO must adopt a more robust gender responsive approach rather than the current gender sensitive approach to ensure that interventions have a stronger gendering element; additionally, disaggregated data collection in programmatic work, particularly at the sub-national level and difficult-to-reach areas is required for better gender-sensitive analysis.

■ In **Equity,** addressing issues of disadvantaged children is a priority, particularly in the remaining pockets of unreached areas and disadvantaged communities (particularly hilly areas of Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces as well as communities adversely affected by caste and other social considerations).

■ The gender and equity strategies to be adopted by UNICEF NCO in different programmes should be reflected in the respective Programme Strategy Notes (PSN).

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 3: **In the new country programme, develop theories of change and result frameworks where:**

■ The ToC clearly shows how the planned interventions converge to demonstrate UNICEF NCO's contribution towards the changes reflected in the ToC. Such an approach

is expected to address some of the gaps observed in the current programme between interventions at output level and very high-level outcomes relating to the contribution towards achieving the national targets;

■ Develop provincial Programme Action Plans or province/district-specific strategies with SMART provincial and/or local indicators to clearly demonstrate the programme results at the sub-national level; and

■ The outcomes and outputs are measurable considering the availability of data.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 4: Expanding social and behaviour change (SBC) approaches across the programme. UNICEF NCO should consider expanding the use of SBC approaches for better programme delivery, particularly in thematic areas which have not received adequate SBC support. Additionally, the SBC programme will benefit from including appropriate performance indicators, either separately or in other outputs, to ensure that SBC work can be tracked effectively.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 5: Upstream work: Given UNICEF's position in the country, it should increase its efforts on policy development and influencing the Government on policies and strategies to address the needs of children.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 6: **In the new Country Programme, UNICEF NCO may consider the areas and interventions identified during this review and presented in Section 3.4.**

Action: UNICEF NCO

Programme delivery

Recommendation 7: Before the launch of the next Country Programme, the NCO should review the following programme delivery aspects:

■ **Staff capacity in the Field Offices:** UNICEF should review the staff needs in the Field Offices based on the portfolio of

the Field Office and must ensure that there is adequate staff capacity to undertake the work programme, both in terms of thematic and geographic coverage. Where indicated, Field Office operational teams should be strengthened (e.g., Bhairawa Field Office).

- **CSOs:** In selecting CSOs for field implementation, the focus should be their competency and the field presence to provide the requisite services. UNICEF Operations should also maintain a database of potential CSOs and should be proactively involved in their selection. As a part of the engagement, UNICEF must strive to build CSO capacities, particularly in specific technical areas such as nutrition, WASH, health, and child protection.

- **Consultants:** When contracting consultants, particularly in the provinces, UNICEF must ensure that GoN agencies have no reservations on the competency and suitability of the selected candidates.

- **Need-based support:** UNICEF must ensure that the technical support provided via the Field Offices are need-based rather than on a predetermined basis.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 8: **Delegation of Authority (DoA) to the Field Offices should be reviewed to improve delivery of the provincial and Palika programmes.** The Field Offices are somewhat constrained in approving changes to the work plans requested by the local authorities as these require final approval from NCO. NCO may consider it useful to review the DoA limits to ensure that changes sought by local authorities can be attended to in an expeditious manner, if the changes are justified and are within the framework of the work plan.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Recommendation 9: **The partnerships and internal arrangements set out below should be critically reviewed to optimize delivery of the CP:**

- **Fund transfer mechanisms to GoN entities:** UNICEF NCO should critically review the current procedures and mechanisms on fund transfers to GoN entities in order to streamline NCO processes to expeditiously release funds. As some issues of fund transfer are common to other development partners, it is recommended that UNICEF engages with the key donors/development partners to identify and address constraints in speedy fund transfers for smooth implementation. The areas include: synchronizing financial years of UNICEF and the GoN; Red Book transfers; direct transfers to Palikas, reviewing the SuTRA system at the local level with a focus on UNICEF work; technology innovation through block chain technology[155] to leverage innovative financing models to distribute resources, increase the efficiency and transparency of internal processes.

Action: UNICEF NCO and GoN

- **Internal programme coordination:** UNICEF NCO has to strengthen internal sectoral coordination mechanisms to optimize delivery, particularly in cross-cutting areas.

- **Partnerships with INGOs:** In the new programme cycle, UNICEF NCO should engage with other INGOs who are active in Nepal and have secured substantial funding, sometimes more than UNICEF NCO, for work in thematic areas which are in the core programme of UNICEF. Joint work with such INGOs will add value to developing solutions for children's problems and will also allow UNICEF to allocate funds to niche areas where UNICEF enjoys special interest.

Action: UNICEF NCO and INGOs

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155. UNICEF office of Innovation

Recommendation 10: **Improve the reporting in RAM (and elsewhere) towards better consistency and ease in tracking progress.**

- In reporting progress in RAM and annual reports, annual achievements of indicators should be consistent with repeated reporting on indicators to allow ease of tracking, including reversal of progress appropriately noted.

- Given the limitations on reporting in RAM and the annual reports, NCO should develop internal tracking tools for progress on indicators, together with process milestones for early detection of implementation delays.

- As RAM does not capture the performance of field offices, appropriate performance indicators should be included in the RAM.

- Measurement of system strengthening is not adequately reflected in RAM and inclusion of appropriate indicators is recommended.

- Provincial disaggregation of reporting is also weak and NCO should focus on that to capture the important work of the Field Offices.

Action: UNICEF NCO and ROSA

Recommendation 11: **Improve programme implementation monitoring** to ensure timely delivery of the programme and to the expected quality, particularly in the Field Office operations.

Action: UNICEF NCO

Sharing of results and knowledge

Recommendation 12: **UNICEF NCO has to improve its communications with stakeholders, in particular with its implementing partners on the Country Programme content, results, and highlights of achievements together with improvements made to the lives of children.** Providing this information, particularly in Nepalese, will bring a close rapport with the stakeholders which will build confidence and trust amongst the implementing partners. Additionally, sharing monitoring reports with partners will build their confidence.

Action: UNICEF NCO

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