

UNICEF India

Annual Report 2025

Acknowledgments

This narrative annual report summarizes the key programme results achieved by UNICEF in India over the course of the year 2025. To learn more about the UNICEF programme in India, including details at the outcome and output level, as well as financial analyses, please visit the UNICEF Transparency Portal www.open.unicef.org.

UNICEF would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to all partners whose collaboration and contributions supported the achievement of results for children.

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Contents

Section 1: Update on the Context.....	4
Section 2: Major Achievements and UNICEF's Contribution.....	7
Section 3: Challenges, Lessons Learned and Future Outlook.....	13

Section 1

Update on the Context

India is the world's most populous country, with an estimated population of 1.46 billion, of which approximately 460 million are children under 18 years [1], which accounts for 17.85 per cent of world's youth population [2]. This demographic structure continues to present significant potential for India's future underscoring the need for sustained investments in child development.

Urbanization is steadily rising, with 37 per cent of the population living in urban areas in 2024[3] and projected to exceed 40 per cent by 2030.4 Migration trends – 18.9 per cent rural-to-urban and 15.9 per cent urban-to-urban – reflect significant internal mobility that affects continuity in education, child health service utilization, and housing access for children of migrant families [4].

India's economy maintained strong momentum in 2025, with real GDP growth estimated at 6.4 per cent for fiscal year (FY) 2024/25 and 8.2 per cent in Q2 of FY 2025/26 [5]. India aims to become the third-largest economy by 2030, with GDP projected at US\$ 7.3 trillion [6].

According to Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) Study and down-to-earth database India was hit by extreme weather events on 331 of the first 334 days of 2025, up from 295 in 2024. From 1990 to 2024, India sustained average annual disaster related losses equivalent to 0.4 per cent of GDP (OECD Economic Outlook 2025 on Disaster Risk Financing). The natural resource base (e.g. food-water-nutrition) that sustain services for children (human security) will continue to come under stress due to changing climate and ensuing extreme weather events.

India is ranked 26th globally on UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index reflects its high vulnerability, with 34 million children at risk from riverine flooding by the 2040s, highlighting the urgency of child-sensitive climate adaptation [7]. Climate change and environmental risks further compound vulnerabilities, with children facing heightened exposure to extreme weather events and pollution-related health impacts.

The National Plan of Action for Children (2016) recommends allocating 5 per cent of the Union Budget to children. However, for FY 2025/26, the share remains 2.3 per cent, similar to the previous year. Between FY 2024–25 and FY 2025–26, the total allocation for children increased by 5.6 per cent rising from approximately US\$ 13.2 billion to US\$ 14.0 billion [8]. Key schemes saw notable increases: Samagra Shiksha, an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12 (over 11.5 per cent), and PM SHRI aims to achieve quality and excellence in school education (over 66 per cent) [9], signalling government commitment to investing parts of education responses.

India improved its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ranking from 109th in 2024 to 99th in 2025, reflecting progress on several indicators [10]. Multidimensional poverty fell from 29.2 per cent in 2013–14 to 11.3 per cent in 2022–23, lifting nearly 248 million people out of poverty [11]. On child-related SDG targets, India is on track to meet goals for survival: the under-five mortality rate declined to 29 per 1,000 live births in 2023 [12] down from 30 in 2022, and the maternal mortality ratio fell to 88 per 100,000 live births (2021–23) [13], a substantial improvement from 130 per 100,000 live births in 2014–16.

Birth registration coverage improved to 90.6 per cent [14] and access to safely managed drinking water as required by SDG 6.1, moved from being unreported to reaching 76 per cent [15].

Despite these gains, accelerated efforts are needed in nutrition, education, and child protection. Anaemia among children aged 6–59 months remains high at 67.1 per cent [16]. The government has scaled up Anaemia Mukh Bharat and fortified rice distribution, and implementation quality and behaviour change remain critical.

Education indicators show mixed progress: primary retention improved to 92.4 per cent, but secondary level

dropout persists at 11.5 per cent, and retention declined slightly to 62.9 per cent [17]. Citizen-led surveys indicate improvements in learning levels. The proportion of Standard 3 students able to read a Standard 2 text increased from 20.5 per cent in 2022 to 27.1 per cent in 2024. In arithmetic, the proportion of Standard 3 students able to do subtraction increased from 25.9 per cent in 2022 to 33.7 per cent in 2024 [18].

According to the NCRB's Crime in India 2023 report, crimes against children increased by 9.2 per cent, rising from 162,449 cases in 2022 to 177,335 cases in 2023. This pushed the reported crime rate to 39.9 per 100,000 child population (up from 36.6 in 2022). In 2023, kidnapping and abduction accounted for 45 per cent of all reported offences against children, while Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO)-related reported crimes comprised 38.2 per cent. Notably, more than 97 per cent of POCSO perpetrators within the reported cases were known to the victim [19].

Child marriage prevalence remains at 23 per cent among women aged 20-24, and 16.3 per cent among those aged 18-19, with girls from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately affected [20].

Continued inequities remain across states, rural-urban locations, and socio-economic groups. Rural under-five mortality is higher (33) compared to urban (20). Children from the poorest quintile experience mortality rates more than twice those of the richest. India ranks 131st in the Global Gender Gap Index, with slight improvements in economic participation but continued gaps in political empowerment [21].

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Section 2

Major Achievements and UNICEF's Contribution

Building on the 2024 Programme Review, in 2025 the Country Office intensified policy and systems-level programming to advance equity, sustainability, scale and impact for child-focused results in India. Given the country's size and complexity, results were pursued through differentiated strategies tailored to governance levels, equity priorities and contextual realities. UNICEF strengthened gender-focused and adolescent-centred approaches across programmes, ensuring that interventions addressed harmful norms, expanded girls' agency and improved access to adolescent-friendly services.

Every child survives and thrives

India continued to advance toward SDG 3, with government-led improvements in maternal, newborn and child health supported by UNICEF's upstream technical contributions across 23 states.

To contribute to improving quality at birth, UNICEF convened national and state institutions and supported the Government's Midwifery Initiative across seven states by establishing 22 midwifery training institutes and deploying 150 midwifery educators and 700 Nurse Practitioners in Midwifery. This expanded government capacity for midwifery-led care, resulted in more than 98,000 safer deliveries and informing future government scale-up. UNICEF also strengthened newborn care by supporting readiness for immediate Kangaroo Mother Care (iKMC) and Continuous Positive Airway Pressure in 107 districts, training over 2,100 providers and enabling 150,000 small and sick newborns to receive timely care. Modelling across 18 Mother and Newborn Care Units demonstrated zero-separation and iKMC practices, with 12,858 newborns benefiting—leading to updated national guidelines and toward nationwide adoption.

UNICEF helped strengthen India's primary health-care architecture by supporting the digitization of frontline service delivery, building the skills of auxiliary nurse midwives and enabling interoperable health-data ecosystems. Reproductive and Child Health 2.0 (RCH 2.0), conceptualized with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, expanded to 20 states for real-time tracking, high-risk identification and data-driven decision-making, with nationwide coverage expected as rollout continues.

Immunization equity advanced as UNICEF supported the operationalization of the Zero Dose Implementation Plan—a strategy in 143 low-coverage districts, identifying and reaching children who have not received any routine vaccine. Through civil-society partnerships, 35,574 zero-dose children were identified and 18,000 vaccinated, while hesitant or resistant families of 87,395 children were mapped and followed up in high-risk villages. Micro-planning approaches were improved by including and leveraging community influencers who created real-time feedback loops, enabling districts to rapidly adjust outreach and improve coverage among the most underserved.

In 2025, government systems continued to deliver essential nutrition services as India marked 50 years of the Integrated Child Development Services. UNICEF contributed to this in 14 states, home to nearly 85 per cent of India's children, through technical support for programme planning, capacity building, and quality monitoring. The Government reached 52.4 million children with Growth Monitoring and Promotion services, using new digitized registration system. Community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) expanded to 64 additional districts in three states, saturating coverage to 100 per cent of districts in UNICEF-supported states. This contributed to the treatment of approximately 1.4 million severely wasted children under five, up from 1.1 million in the same period of 2024. UNICEF contributed to developing standard operating procedures (SOP), improving take-home food rations, strengthening management information systems and data use, and revising

national guidelines for infants under six months of age at nutritional risk, helping government to better target vulnerable infants.

Under Anemia Mukht Bharat (AMB), the national flagship programme to reduce anemia, UNICEF's technical assistance focused on strengthening supply chains, counselling tools, and monitoring. This contributed to government programmes reaching 67 million adolescents and 23 million pregnant women with weekly iron and folic acid supplementation, a 22 per cent increase from 2024. Further, UNICEF supported Centres of Excellence in development of national guidelines on parenteral iron therapy for pregnant women.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) and state governments to strengthen community-based behaviour change platforms to improve awareness and uptake of essential nutrition practices, developing social and behavioural change (SBC) SOPs, and leveraging 92 million women through Self Help Groups, 200 community radios, and 600 CSO and academic partners through Poshan Ghar network, a UNICEF-created multi-stakeholder platform supporting the national strategy.

MoWCD partnered with UNICEF on Impact for Nutrition (I4N) to enhance Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) linkages. Through advocacy and capacity-building workshops, I4N engaged 70 Central Public Sector Enterprises and district administrations in more than 15 states, channelling US\$ 0.7 million in CSR investments toward nutrition-focused interventions. Responsive parenting via I4N reached 2.2 million caregivers and children. As part of a national expert group, UNICEF partnered with MoWCD to develop an Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy brief for NITI Aayog's Chief Secretary Conference, strengthening state-level foundations for integrated interventions. UNICEF further supported states to plan and integrate convergent ECD interventions into existing service delivery platforms and to operationalize national guidelines for Navchetna programme, strengthening nutrition, health, and life-skills education for adolescents and caregivers.

Every child learns

UNICEF worked with national and 17 state governments to improve how children learn, contributing to repurpose US\$ 17.8 million in government resources toward evidence-based pre-primary, primary and secondary education programmes. To improve the evidence-based decision making for equity, UNICEF conducted extensive secondary data analysis and supported the capacity building of state and district officials in eight states on its use.

UNICEF's investment in training ECD workers on play based learning and teachers on stronger instructional practice in literacy and numeracy, supported 13 state governments to improve the quality and targeting of early-learning programmes for disadvantaged children. Working as One UN, UNESCO — with UNICEF and others— released a landmark report [1] on multi-lingual education to inform how language-inclusive learning must be delivered in classrooms, a complex challenge for improving literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Two national decisions on early learning were supported by UNICEF and partners through consistent policy engagement, participation in Chief Secretaries' Conference working groups, development of policy briefs on foundational literacy and numeracy and on ECD, and hosting multi-stakeholder fora. NIPUN Bharat Mission, the Government's flagship mission on foundational literacy and numeracy, is being extended to Grade 5 and joint guidelines on the co-location of Anganwadi centres in schools were issued by MoWCD and the Ministry of Education (MoE) to ensure age-appropriate school entry and continuity in early learning.

A technical paper on prioritizing secondary education by UNICEF together with policy-level engagement contributed to MoE hosting a national consultation and to a secondary stage mission being proposed in the revised Samagra Shiksha 3.0 norms, the national funding mechanism for school education. Follow-up multi-stakeholder consultations with 10 states in the south and west —supported with state specific data briefs— resulted in Kerala and Rajasthan planning secondary education reform roadmaps in 2026 and Tamil Nadu

convening consultations on teacher professional development and learning outcomes — critical steps to improve classroom practice and learning.

Although gender parity has been reached at all levels of the education system and girls outperform boys on most subjects, girls still lag in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. UNICEF continued its support to seven state governments to build models for experiential learning through low-cost maker spaces, which equip adolescents with critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Evidence [2] from pilots in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana showed improvements in student confidence and teacher innovation in classroom practice.

Learning to earning

To build employability skills and enable the school-to-work transition, government is investing in career guidance for students in grades 9–12. Following national adoption of career information cards developed by UNICEF, 16 state governments were supported to model credible career guidance programmes through blended teacher and career counsellor training, materials development and awareness raising on career options among students and parents. India has nearly 371 million young people, and 2025 showed strong progress in expanding opportunities and strengthening pathways from learning to earning for many of them. A key insight was that system-level solutions accelerate equity and scale. Embedding innovation learning within public education systems—such as through the School Innovation Marathon—demonstrated that when problem-solving and entrepreneurship are adopted within existing government structures, participation grows rapidly and inclusively.

Every child empowered and protected

UNICEF supported government across 17 focus states in strengthening child protection systems. This contributed to over 200,000 child protection and allied functionaries applying improved knowledge of legislation and case management, contributing to more consistent child-centred responses. Through collaboration with government and other partners, mental health and psychosocial support services reached over 3 million children, adolescents, and caregivers, strengthening coping and recovery. Diversion and non-custodial measures benefited more than 9.4 million children in conflict with the law (3 per cent girls), reducing reliance on detention and promoting rehabilitation. Social protection schemes and services supported over 1.5 million vulnerable children (80 per cent girls), improving access to essential support. Comprehensive case management with government and civil society partners enabled the reunification or placement of nearly 163,000 children (55 per cent girls) in family-based care, reducing risks of unnecessary family separation and institutionalization.

UNICEF also played a convening role in advancing national dialogue and policy coherence. With the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, UNICEF co-hosted national-level engagements on inclusion of children with disabilities within broader disability commitments and policy narratives, opening pathways for a joint policy document to strengthen direction and accountability for their protection and well-being.

Aligned with the Government's Child Marriage Free India campaign and Mission Shakti, a national flagship programme which aims to enhance the safety, security, and empowerment of women, UNICEF supported the operationalization of 200 costed multi-sectoral action plans on ending child marriage - driving policy action and scaled interventions to prevent child marriage and strengthen adolescent empowerment in 15 states.

Behavioural insights informed strategies such as the rollout of the 'Adolescent Parenting' module, which supports caregivers in addressing harmful norms and behaviours. Government led initiatives - including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Kishori Vikasam and Advika — were supported through UNICEF's technical assistance toward institutionalization and rollout, enabling state owned delivery mechanisms for adolescent participation, agency, and protection from harmful practices — reaching 9 million community members and 2.7 million

adolescents (65 per cent girls), with a focus on marginalized communities.

Every child lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

In 2025, India achieved a major milestone toward SDG-6 by significantly improving access to safely managed water and sanitation services. With sustained technical support from UNICEF, the Government strengthened programme monitoring systems to ensure Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services met quality, accessibility, and sustainability standards. The WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme support enabled the Government to comply with global monitoring standards which contributed the national coverage for safely managed water supply from 'no viable data' until 2023 to 76 per cent, while safely managed sanitation services increased from 52 per cent in 2023 to 63 per cent in 2025.

UNICEF remained a key partner in system strengthening and capacity building across 16 states, contributing to 12.9 million people gaining household toilet services and nearly 260,000 villages sustaining open-defecation-free status with waste management systems. On water supply services, UNICEF's policy advice and technical support helped government efforts and facilitated access for 22.9 million people to safely managed water services and for 1.2 million people to climate-resilient water systems.

WASH in institutions advanced through standards, training, and monitoring support. In schools and health facilities, UNICEF worked with government counterparts to integrate gender, equity, and social behaviour change priorities in WASH programming, reaching approximately 38,000 institutions. UNICEF supported integration of WASH and climate-resilient standards in schools, with 75 per cent of schools completing Clean & Green self-assessments and initiating improvements.

UNICEF continued advancing child-sensitive climate action through its Sustainability and Climate Action Plan by integrating climate-resilience considerations with child-sensitive approaches, across health, child protection, nutrition, education, and WASH, while strengthening foundational systems, generating evidence, and promoting greener operational practices. A major achievement was the engagement with over 12 million children and young people in climate action - strengthening youth participation and helping their voices inform climate resilient programming. Operationalizing Meri LiFE as a national engagement platform showcased how a unified digital backbone can mobilize millions of young people for climate action, while creating new entry points for offline engagement of those with limited digital access.

Every child has an equitable chance in life

In 2025, India advanced toward more equitable, child-responsive governance systems. UNICEF contributed to national reforms that strengthened public financing, local governance, and social protection for children. To place children at the centre of policy and budget decisions, UNICEF supported national efforts to monitor child deprivations and investments for children, working with NITI Aayog, MoWCD, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), and UN agencies. UNICEF helped develop methodologies for equity analytics within government systems, which will be scaled through state statistical institutes for continuous monitoring and policy use.

UNICEF strengthened domestic financing monitoring with MoF, proposing a standardized child-budgeting methodology for the Union Budget through the newly established Child Budgets Committee. This increased the visibility of child-focused investments and improved the Government's ability to track and plan allocations - including for children with disabilities, girls, youth, and early childhood development. UNICEF's evidence and policy guidance informed several states' submissions to the Sixteenth Finance Commission, promoting predictable, equitable financing for child outcomes.

Recognizing the central role of Gram Panchayats in service delivery, UNICEF worked with state governments to

leverage financing under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, national flagship programme for strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions, and supported performance-based planning using the Panchayat Advancement Index across 16 states. More than 500,000 elected representatives were trained, and over 24,000 child and women friendly resolutions were adopted, institutionalizing participatory, gender- and child-sensitive governance.

To advance equity at scale, UNICEF provided technical support to strengthen pro-poor, gender-responsive social protection systems. This contributed to improved design and delivery of cash-plus schemes for adolescent girls across nine states to support for households and children without parental care across 12 states, building girls' agency and linking them to skilling and complementary services.

UNICEF also supported the Government to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems, improving last-mile birth registration and reaching 12.5 million infants in five focus states. Innovations such as RapidPro for community engagement and India's first national social protection capacity-building programme further advanced modernization and delivery systems for children.

Change strategies and enablers

UNICEF advanced key change strategies to accelerate progress across the six programme outcomes of the GOI-UNICEF Country Programme – health, nutrition, child protection, education, social policy & social protection and WASH and climate change - by integrating child rights, gender equality, equity, climate resilience and disaster-risk perspectives into government systems; strengthening the quality and use of evidence; and expanding youth, private-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships to scale impact.

In 2025, through engagement with nearly 25 million young people, YuWaah (Generation Unlimited India) demonstrated how India's growing youth ecosystem can become a powerful driver of national development when platforms for learning, skilling and participation are aligned within government systems. YuWaah supported in strengthening youth-responsive policy design, bringing youth voices and evidence into national processes, including the draft National Youth Policy and the National Entrepreneurship Strategy. These contributions helped ensure that youth aspirations, inclusion of young women and youth who are not in education, employment or training, and pathways to work informed national policy direction.

To protect child rights in the context of climate change and escalating disaster risk, UNICEF continued to collaborate with national and state governments to strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR) frameworks. A key focus involved optimizing utilization of public finance for DRR for the benefit of children. For instance, in Assam, UNICEF provided technical expertise to review multi-departmental proposals, facilitating the effective use of US\$133 million in central government funding. UNICEF led a multi-agency UN initiative deploying artificial intelligence - driven disaster risk management planning across 75 Panchayats. This innovative localized system is ready for statewide expansion, ensuring scalable, data-driven resilience for vulnerable communities through the upcoming joint national programme of MoPR and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

UNICEF supported government counterparts to apply evidence-based, equity and gender-responsive SBC strategies across key ministries and departments to improve demand for services and address harmful norms. Five state governments were supported to generate and utilize in-depth behavioural insights enabling them to design more effective approaches while an academic network was strengthened to provide ongoing research support on children's behaviours and social norms.

UNICEF India's Communication Advocacy & Partnership (CAP) advanced child rights by transforming evidence into child-focused narratives and compelling calls to action. The India launch of *The State of the World's Children 2025* positioned child poverty as an evidence-based policy priority for public investment in children. CAP's collaboration with strategic partners expanded child-centric, digital-first advocacy, countered misinformation and reinforced trust and credibility of the UNICEF Brand. Digital and media engagement maintained steady growth.

Eight Ambassadors, Celebrity Advocates, and Digital Influencers, together with six Youth Advocates and creative youth content creators fueled campaigns that resonated with young and appealed to broader audiences. UNICEF's Evidence Team strengthened decision-making through high-quality research, evaluations, and knowledge services. The team conducted a systematic evidence gap mapping and systematic reviews across programme areas to refine priority technical support to partners. To promote the use of evidence, learning and data for results, knowledge products were shared on the Knowledge@UNICEF platform; and the third Evidence for Children Roundtable was hosted with strong partnerships with academia, and civil society.

Programme and operational enablers

Programme and operational effectiveness was enhanced through stronger UN collaboration under the UNSDCF, including joint climate-resilience and WASH work with UNDP, UNEP, FAO, IFAD and WHO; multisectoral disaster-risk planning with NDMA and the UN Disaster Management Team; social-protection and governance efforts with UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA; youth engagement and education collaboration with UNESCO and UNFPA; and shared data-system support across outcomes, positioning UNICEF as a constructive contributor to UN80 coherence and collective impact. Internally, UNICEF advanced governance, digital workflows and risk-informed processes; improved financial and programmatic assurance, compliance and resource optimization; and integrated liquidity planning and GST refund processes to streamline delivery. Workplace improvements have strengthened accessibility, environmental standards and staff safety. A comprehensive Staff Support, Learning and Development Strategy reinforced leadership, inclusion and wellbeing during organizational transitions, and continuous monitoring of supply chains with coordinated bottleneck resolution supported operational efficiency.

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[2] Case study of Maker Spaces in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana: Understanding stakeholder experiences, 2025, UNICEF (Draft report)

Section 3

Challenges, Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

In 2025, India continued advancing toward its long-term vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the Government's aspiration for a developed, inclusive, resilient, and self-reliant nation. Shifts in global development financing constrained many local NGOs, research institutions and international partners working on equity, affecting their ability to complement government systems. UNICEF remained focused on strengthening national and subnational systems so that all children - especially those furthest behind - benefit from India's progress.

Equity must be built in from the start

A key lesson of 2025 was that scale alone does not ensure equity. Intentional design choices, a sharper analysis of the specific needs and barriers experienced by marginalized population groups, meaningful community participation, adequate budgeting and steady supervision are essential from the outset. Persistent gaps in equity surfaced across sectors, including uneven rollout of maternal nutrition packages; fragmented urban malnutrition responses; socio-cultural and digital barriers that hinder many disadvantaged children to obtain full access to quality services; and variation in frontline worker readiness for new interventions. Adolescent vulnerabilities such as child marriage and mental health concerns remained influenced by entrenched social norms and uneven referral mechanisms.

UNICEF's experience underscored that differentiated programming is essential for achieving equitable results in India's diverse rural, tribal, peri-urban, and urban contexts. Impact was strongest when strategies reflected state capacity, governance maturity, and socio-cultural norms. Efforts in zero-dose immunization, climate-resilient WASH and access to social protection showed that policy, programme design, and government budgets must explicitly incorporate equity considerations to ensure that consistent reach to the most marginalized groups. Higher-capacity states benefited most from upstream policy engagement and systems reforms, while disadvantaged geographies required targeted support such as improved data systems or proof-of-concept models to demonstrate scalable solutions. Overall, differentiated programming strengthened government ownership and addressed barriers to advancing children's rights, supporting India's commitment to leaving no child behind.

Building on this approach, UNICEF continues to promote participatory programme design with marginalized and disadvantaged groups, such as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, so that equity is embedded throughout delivery systems.

Strong systems sustain strong services

India's substantial investments in social-sector infrastructure underscore a central lesson: service quality must be sustained even as climate shocks intensify. Experiences in WASH, nutrition, health, and education showed the importance of robust operations and maintenance, reliable supply chains, sustained investments, and well-functioning supervisory systems. For example, UNICEF's work on climate-resilient WASH—including technical support for climate-resilient operation and maintenance policies that ensure equitable and sustainable services across communities, schools and health-care facilities. UNICEF also contributed to improved supply-chain and service-delivery reliability, while promoting inclusive and environmentally responsible procurement.

Internally, UNICEF's operational improvements—optimized travel and meeting protocols, increased virtual engagement, and greater UN agency co-location—enhanced efficiency and responsiveness. Joint procurement, shared fleet arrangements, and digital workflows positioned UNICEF to support government systems more effectively. Looking ahead, UNICEF deepens support for climate-resilient service-delivery systems, strengthens state-level financing, and optimizes resource utilization by providing catalytic technical support for evidence-

based planning and effective implementation, aligning with national ambitions in innovation, sustainability, and strong decentralized service delivery.

Digital delivers when it works for the frontline first

India continued expanding digital platforms for service delivery, training, and monitoring, reflecting a strong commitment to technology-enabled governance. Several new tools showed promising potential for improving real-time data availability for better programming; at the same time, maximizing benefits requires further attention to data quality, frontline usability, and full-scale deployment. Routine data systems in select sectors still face inconsistencies, for example, digital tools for anaemia screening, growth monitoring and beneficiary registration have partial coverage in some locations; adoption of digital learning and mental health platforms, varies across states depending on infrastructure and coordination.

India's digital public infrastructure provides a strong foundation. With continued improvements, these systems can deliver even greater equity and efficiency. UNICEF works with government partners to strengthen child-sensitive data standards, including for instance optimizing rollout of digital tools for nutrition and early childhood development, and support states in improving data flow, integration, analysis, and real-time feedback loops.

Young people thrive when systems link skills to real opportunities

India continued to place strong emphasis on adolescents and young people across multiple government programmes, with progress in expanding access to skilling, employability, participation, and livelihood initiatives. Multiple states strengthened their youth platforms for skilling and engagement and partnerships with industry and education departments, reflecting recognition of young people as drivers of innovation and economic growth. These efforts have expanded opportunities for many adolescents and young people, especially where digital learning and vocational pathways have grown rapidly.

Sustaining quality and reach requires continued investment in coordination and communication mechanisms that enable system-level impact. Some young people, particularly those from tribal communities, urban poor settlements, and aspirational districts, still face structural barriers that limit access to emerging opportunities. Looking ahead, UNICEF will deepen partnerships with government and industry to expand equitable access to skills and employment pathways; strengthen integration of mental health, life skills, and employability support; and promote youth-led innovations aligned with national priorities. These adjustments will enable YuWaah and partners to operate more adaptively while advancing inclusive, scalable outcomes, supporting young people meaningfully participate in and benefit from India's growth.

Across all areas, the unifying lesson of 2025 was that designing for equity, sustainability, resilience and data-driven decision making from the start leads to more scalable results. UNICEF will continue aligning with government flagship programmes, supporting equity-focused programming, and strengthening evidence use, policy advice and technical assistance for systems strengthening. By grounding national ambitions in child and youth centred systems strengthening, UNICEF helps facilitate every child benefit from - and contributes to - India's inclusive, resilient, and self-reliant journey toward Viksit Bharat 2047.