

# UNICEF CHINA 2016-2020

FIVE YEARS OF RESULTS  
FOR CHILDREN IN CHINA

unicef   
联合国儿童基金会

携手为儿童



# PREFACE

Over the last five years, UNICEF China has kept its commitment to children's rights at the centre of its work. We are proud of our impact. We have improved the health, development and protection of children, and we have always focused on the most vulnerable.

We have seen UNICEF's Barefoot Social Worker model develop from an experimental project into a programme that is being adapted and rolled out to every village in China. Our Conditional Cash Transfer programme, which provided subsidies on request to pregnant women and children under 1 year of age, saw an increase in the uptake of 9 essential maternal and child health services – from 73 per cent in 2013 to almost 82 per cent in 2018. The most vulnerable groups benefited most from this programme.

Our success depends on our partnerships. UNICEF has productive relationships with key partners in the government who are working towards the same goals of upholding children's rights. We are also building our partnerships with academia, the private sector and with civil society, so that we can do more, and reach more children and youth.

We are committed to leaving no child behind – whether they are a girl or a boy, a child with a disability, or a child from a particular economic, ethnic, or religious background. We will build on what we have achieved so far, until all girls and boys in China have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.



*Cynthia McCaffrey*

Cynthia McCaffrey  
Representative  
UNICEF China



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# CHILDREN IN CHINA



In the last 40 years, China has achieved considerable progress in economic and social development. China's 1.4 billion people – 19 per cent of the world's population – are enjoying a higher standard of living than ever before.

The country's 300 million girls and boys have shared many of the benefits of this development. In 1991 the newborn death rate was 33.1 out of every thousand live births; by 2019 it had dropped to 3.5. The gross pre-primary education enrolment ratio increased from 56.6 per cent in 2010 to 85.2 per cent in 2020. While children's status overall has improved, there are still challenges to fully realizing children's rights. Not all children are benefiting equally from progress – particularly girls, children in poorer regions, those affected by migration and those with disabilities.

China has announced the achievement of eradicating absolute poverty in rural areas.

Relative poverty, however, still affects the children of China, particularly the most vulnerable. The effects of COVID-19 threaten to jeopardize hard-won progress.

While progress has been made in children's health, challenges persist. Between 1990 and 2013, the prevalence of underweight among children under 5 years of age decreased from 13.7 per cent to 2.4 per cent. Yet, stunting and anaemia remain a problem, and child overweight and obesity rates have grown rapidly, particularly among boys.

More work is needed so that children benefit equally from improvements in health. Under-five death rates have declined significantly, but over half of deaths occur in the neonatal period, and there is a need to improve services, particularly in poorer regions and among migrant populations. Air pollution and inadequate sanitation continue to affect children's development. Children also need emotional and mental support and services.

Some children in China – especially the most vulnerable – continue to experience threats to their rights to be protected from violence and abuse. There has been

progress in child protection over the last five years, with the adoption of laws and policies that are designed to improve the protection of children. More social workers are being provided to children, as well as safe spaces for girls and boys to play and learn. There is still a need for national-level data on violence against children.

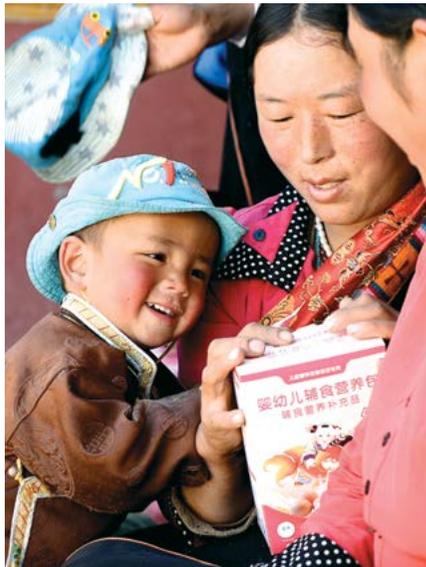
China has achieved universal access to nine years of compulsory education. Now the challenge is ensuring that all children – including those affected by migration and those with disabilities – can equitably access high-quality education. There are still significant disparities in access to and quality of pre-primary education across regions and population groups. There are also urban-rural differences in senior secondary education enrolment, and many adolescents are left without the skills needed to meet the challenges of life and work.

There is a need for deeper understanding among policymakers of the multiple vulnerabilities that children face, as well as social protection that is responsive to multidimensional child poverty. There is also a need for improved social assistance during emergencies and disasters, including relief for disadvantaged groups.

**A key part of UNICEF's work in contributing to children's rights has been to focus on equality for girls, children in poorer regions, children affected by migration, and children with disabilities.**

Working with the Government of China, UNICEF's approach over the last five years has been 'pilots to policy to results at scale'. This means providing evidence and insights from in-the-field pilots, and turning them into innovative solutions for development challenges, and informing the government's programmes and policies. A key part of UNICEF's work in contributing to realizing children's rights has been to focus on equality for girls, children in poorer regions, children affected by migration, and children with disabilities.

During 2016-2020 UNICEF also worked with partners in China to build their capacity for South-South cooperation. Influencing and informing China's efforts to improve the lives of children in other countries has presented a further opportunity to promote and protect child rights.



# HEALTH

In 2016-2020, UNICEF worked with government agencies, academia and the private sector to improve the survival, health and development of women, children, and adolescents, particularly those in underdeveloped areas.

Our approach included: capacity building of health workers; sharing skills that help families make healthy choices and access services; promoting safer environments in schools, health-care facilities and communities; and, generating evidence for programme design and policymaking.

The experiences from UNICEF's pilots contributed to the development and revision of nearly 20 key health-related government action plans, guidelines and standards to enhance the quality of services provided to pregnant women, children and adolescents. Examples include the National Child Survival Strategy, the China Child Health Action



Plan (2018-2020), the National Action Plan on Childhood Obesity Control (2020-2030), clinical standards on Early Essential Newborn Care (EENC), and the National Guideline for Rural Sanitation. UNICEF also developed a warning signs checklist that has been adopted into the National Public Health Services Package, serving as the single standardized community-based tool to monitor the development of all children aged 0-6 in China.

Scientific findings have proven that during pregnancy and the first three years after birth, we lay down critical elements of our future health, well-being and cognitive capital. Supporting these children has been a priority for UNICEF, together with the Government of China. For example, the Ying Yang Bao programme

– which distributes a soybean-based food supplement to families with young children – reached a total of 9.47 million children aged 6-23 months in 832 poverty-stricken counties by 2019. The programme reached 96 per cent of the target population. Similarly, the coverage rate of the EENC core interventions showed significant improvement in pilot areas: immediate skin-to-skin contact increased from 35 per cent in 2017 to 80 per cent in 2019, and early initiation of breastfeeding within 90 minutes increased from 45 per cent in 2017 to 65 per cent in 2019.

UNICEF's support has been a crucial component to the reform of the national health information systems on maternal and child health (MCH). Results include: the establishment and roll-out of an integrated national MCH platform and a data exchange system across provinces. Additionally, the UNICEF-supported Healthy Family App (HFA) helps to tailor information to caregivers, increasing access and ease of services and interactions with health-care providers.

Research has also been a priority in UNICEF's work. UNICEF-supported

research generated 48 peer-reviewed articles, including 6 seminal papers, collectively titled *Adolescent Health in China: Epidemiology, Policy, Financing and Service Provision*, published as a supplement to the *Journal of Adolescent Health* to strengthen the evidence base on adolescent health services and policies.

UNICEF was among the first international organizations to support the government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, by procuring emergency supplies and training frontline workers. UNICEF provided over 90,000 health facilities staff and community health workers with personal protective equipment (PPE), and 134,000 people with water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) supplies and services. UNICEF-supported online training modules for health workers relating to the management of COVID-19 reached almost 640,000 views. The Safe School Return campaign, jointly launched by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention had 130 million views online. UNICEF also provided 42 million children, parents and caregivers with mental health tips and information.



## UNICEF'S ECD PROJECT

Health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning and protection in the first 1,000 days of life are crucial, and that is why UNICEF worked with government partners to establish a workable model for Early Childhood Development (ECD) for children under 3 years old. The work aimed to both provide support for every child in this age group and reduce the damaging effects of early life risks for individual children at risk of developmental delays.

A package of essential ECD services consisting of an ECD counselling manual, home visiting counselling cards, and a care group toolkit was provided through health clinics, home visits, community-based group sessions, and ECD service centres. There has been progress, with the government replicating these successful ECD services from 14 counties in 5 provinces to 26 counties in 9 provinces. Additionally, the Home Visiting Toolkits for children left behind have been adopted in 27 counties of 12 provinces. UNICEF is continuing to support the expansion of ECD services to all children aged 0-3 in China, particularly children in disadvantaged areas.

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# CHILD PROTECTION



UNICEF has been supporting government partners as they build the country's child protection system, so that children in China are better protected from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

In 2016-2020 support focused on policy and legislative reform, developing the capacity of social workers and the judiciary, piloting service models, and generating evidence so that policies designed to protect children can be effective.

There has been significant progress in child protection over the last five years, with the establishment of a specialized juvenile procuratorate in the Supreme People's Procuratorate and a new Child Welfare Department in the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), and the adoption of laws and policies that are designed to improve the protection of children. Two key laws are the Family Violence Law and the revised Law on the Protection of Minors, to which UNICEF provided technical inputs and facilitated international exchanges.



## Children play games at the child-friendly space in Letang Village in Guigang, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

© UNICEF/China/2020/Ma Yuyuan

Progress has also been made in strengthening the social service workforce for child welfare and protection. The UNICEF-supported MCA China Child Welfare Demonstration Project with its community-based Barefoot Social Workers (BFSW) was launched in 2010. Today, 663,000 Child Directors (mirroring BFSW) have been appointed at the village level, with 48,000 Child Welfare Supervisors at the township level. UNICEF has also been working to ensure BFSW are adequately trained, including in disability equality, so that they can provide children with disabilities with high-quality services.

UNICEF continued to advocate for improving access and quality of social work services for children in rural areas, through UNICEF-supported social work service pilots in eight provinces. This has provided good models, practices and guidance for the national scaling up of social work stations across China by the

Ministry of Civil Affairs since October 2020. With government partners UNICEF continued to pilot its Child-Friendly Space initiative, which provides children with a safe environment to play and learn in their community. The Government of China has now set up Children's Places, which mirror UNICEF's Child-Friendly Spaces, in almost 300,000 communities.

An estimated 169 million children aged 6-17 years in China have access to the internet, and UNICEF began working on online protection in 2017. UNICEF has been working with government and industry partners, taking an approach that focuses both on the opportunities and challenges for children in the digital world. Challenges tackled include cyber-bullying, harmful content, excessive use, and privacy protection. A key part of the approach to advocacy has been to empower young people to have a say in how they are protected online.

# DIGITAL YOUTH: MY LIFE, MY FUTURE

During an online dialogue on protecting children and young people online, we heard from Zhao Chen, 19. Zhao Chen, who is visually impaired, shared his story about the challenges he faces while surfing online and using new technologies. Systems designed to verify identities – such as captchas – can create barriers for those with visual impairments, like Zhao. Zhao proposed using artificial intelligence and big data to remove these barriers.

“I hope that in the near future anyone who has impaired mobility, speech or hearing will have access to all the opportunities that digital technology offers. And no matter how different we are physically the world will respect us and treat us well.” – Zhao Chen

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# EDUCATION

In education, UNICEF has been focusing on improving learning and skills for girls and boys, building the capacity of teachers, strengthening the education system, and providing evidence to inform decisions about educational policies. A priority has been to ensure that vulnerable children aged 6-16, including children with disabilities, have access to nine-year compulsory education.

Through community-based early childhood development (ECD) centres, UNICEF piloted a model to support ECD for children aged 0-3 years and their families. In 2020 the experiences of this pilot were incorporated in a national policy directive to develop care services for children under 3 years of age. UNICEF also continued to support the Government of China in promoting play-based early learning, as well as improving the quality of kindergartens and the professional development system for early childhood education

(ECE) teachers. Experience and evidence generated from pilots have informed the development of government policies, standards and guidelines such as the National Kindergarten Quality Assessment Guidelines, Kindergarten Teachers' Competency Assessment Tools, National Kindergarten Teacher Training Guidelines and Resources, as well as the first ever ECE Manual for Mayors and Governors.

UNICEF has been working with government partners to make all schools in China 'Child-Friendly Schools' (CFS). Since 2016, this has involved piloting and scaling up social and emotional learning (SEL), sports for development, innovative teaching and learning, and teachers' support projects. UNICEF's pilots on innovative teaching and learning provided important evidence and informed the Ministry of Education's policy to strengthen training of teachers in rural areas. Approximately 466,000 students and 18,000 teachers in western and central provinces benefited from UNICEF-supported projects between 2016-2020.

To equip girls and boys with the skills needed for life and work in the 21st century, UNICEF has continued testing and developing life skills modules for both

in-school and out-of-school adolescents. The programme was delivered through life skills and adolescents participation projects in secondary and vocational schools of 28 pilot counties, focusing on transferable skills, including self-awareness, problem solving and communication skills. Building on the programme, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education are now prioritizing the scaling up of the 21st century skills programme and integrating it into the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system.

With the Ministry of Education, UNICEF has continued to improve the quality of education statistics, including through the disaggregation of data according to age,

sex and geographical location. UNICEF also helped assess the government's Special-Post Teacher Program, which provides funding to recruit university graduates to work in rural schools in Central or Western China, mainly in remote and educationally disadvantaged counties.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF worked with government partners to send out gender-responsive and practical messages and tips about COVID-19 prevention and psycho-social support, as well as on safely returning to school, through traditional and social media channels, reaching hundreds of millions of children and parents in China.

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE WITH LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

After taking UNICEF training courses on 'Life Skills for Girls' and 'Social Emotional Learning', Li Jinqiong, 15, went on to win first prize in two painting competitions. The courses helped Li Jinqiong build her confidence by providing an opportunity for her to develop and demonstrate her creative talents.

"I've always loved painting, but never had the courage to participate in competitions. I found my confidence and courage through the training courses. I'm quite different now from who I used to be."

– Li Jinqiong

# SOCIAL POLICY



Between 2016-2020, UNICEF helped the government address children's best interests through its poverty reduction programmes and social protection systems. Support included gathering and communicating evidence, facilitating policy dialogues, and building networks and partnerships among the government, academia and other policy influencers.

The Government of China achieved its poverty reduction goal of lifting rural populations out of absolute poverty, according to its official rural poverty line. Even with this achievement, further work is needed so that the social protection system in China captures more of the deprivations faced by specific groups, particularly children.

UNICEF has contributed to a deeper understanding of multidimensional poverty, including commissioning studies of the overlapping monetary and non-monetary



poverty that children experience. With this evidence UNICEF has advocated for increased investment in Basic Public Services (BPS) relevant to children's well-being. The government, with UNICEF's support, has consolidated and updated the list of commitments on BPS, and drafted child-friendly policies around urbanization.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Civil Affairs in its legislation and reform of the social assistance system, by generating evidence and sharing international experiences – while prioritizing child-sensitive perspectives. UNICEF highlighted the need for improved social assistance during emergencies and disasters, including relief for

disadvantaged groups in emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

From 2011 to 2020, UNICEF cooperated with the Ministry of Commerce to implement the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme in 15 counties of 3 provinces. The objective of the programme was to promote the uptake of essential health services among pregnant women and children from western and rural areas, including those in ethnic minority groups. The project resulted in increased use of health services by pregnant women and children under 1 year of age. Vulnerable groups such as mothers from the poorest townships and adolescent mothers benefited the most from this programme.

**A girl, who is left behind by her migrating parents in Yudu, Jiangxi Province, draws a picture in August 2020. The National Health Commission and UNICEF China launched a project in 2017 that focuses on improving the health and development of rural left-behind children.**

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## THE CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME

Wang Shinyu couldn't stop crying as she recalled giving birth to her two daughters. "My family was poor, and my parents-in-law didn't give me any money to go to the hospital. I was so scared because I heard from my sister that women can die if they bleed a lot during delivery." She lives in Pumi village, in a remote mountainous area of Yulong County, Yunnan Province. The government covers the cost of essential maternal and child health services, including hospital delivery, but other costs such as transport to health facilities still discourage people from using health services in poor, rural areas of Western China.

Thanks to support from the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme implemented in Yunnan Province, Wang Shinyu had a different experience when she had her son in 2016. "Sister Xu [the community health worker] said it would be good for me and for my son if I enrolled in CCT, and when it was time for us to go for health check-ups, she always reminded me of the dates. And with the money CCT provided, my husband could even come with me to the hospital. I feel like this is the first time I was taken care of while having a baby."

Photo: Wang Shinyu with two of her children.

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# INFLUENCING CHINA'S GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT



UNICEF's work around the world supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and it is underpinned by a commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As China invests more in other countries, UNICEF seeks to build capacity in China for global engagement in line with international norms and standards.

UNICEF worked with the government to increase investment for children in China's international development cooperation in 19 countries: Cambodia, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Zimbabwe. In 17 of these countries, UNICEF has

been working with partners in China and recipient countries to deliver 19 projects, supported by China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF). These include projects that focus on maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH), malnutrition, humanitarian responses to disasters, and COVID-19 response in early childhood development. UNICEF also aimed to put children's rights at the top of the agenda at the High-level Meeting on China-Africa Health Cooperation in 2018, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2019.

Another priority has been influencing the sharing of knowledge between countries. Topics have ranged from COVID-19 prevention and emergency management, to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). UNICEF worked with the International Health Exchange and Cooperation Centre of the National Health Commission of China to develop and deliver technical trainings for public health officials and practitioners from eight African countries.

## 'SCHOOL-IN-A-BOX' BRINGS HOPE TO LEARNERS AT BANGULA PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MALAWI

Priscilla Dave (left) is one of the learners at Bangula Full Primary School in Nsanje, Malawi. Like many other children there, she lost most of her school materials after Cyclone Idai struck the area in March 2019. Priscilla's parents have been preoccupied with recovering from the cyclone, leaving little time to focus on her learning. UNICEF, with support of China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), has equipped children like Priscilla with a 'school-in-a-box' to ease their families' burdens and help their education continue. Priscilla, who dreams of becoming a bank manager, said: "These books have enabled me to keep up to pace with my studies and helped me practice mathematics when I am at home."



Priscilla Dave with her mother after school.

© UNICEF Malawi/2020/Thoko Chikondi



## UNVEILING A SPECIAL CARE BABY UNIT TO SAVE NEWBORNS IN SIERRA LEONE

With the support of China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), UNICEF and government partners from Sierra Leone and China opened a Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) in Kailahun District Hospital in Sierra Leone, in September 2020. This unit provides expert care for sick newborns (babies up to 28 days old), most of whom need life-saving specialized equipment.

UNICEF worked to ensure the supply of critical drugs, commodities, and equipment, as well as staff and on-the-job training at the care unit. To increase utilization of the facility by nearby communities, UNICEF led awareness raising activities among local healthcare providers in September 2020. Since then, the number of babies referred to the SCBU by other hospitals or communities has increased significantly. A total of 80 newborn girls and boys were admitted in October and November of 2020.

© UNICEF Sierra Leone/2020/Mutseyekwa

# EMERGENCIES, EVIDENCE, EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT



In addition to the work in sectors like health, education and child protection, UNICEF has also been providing support that cuts across all these sectors, to uphold and advocate for child rights.

Long before COVID-19 struck, UNICEF has been responding to emergencies and helping reduce the risk of disasters. UNICEF provided humanitarian supplies to areas affected by natural disasters (mainly flooding) in Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan and Jiangxi. Between 2015-2018, UNICEF's Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Model Building Pilot Programme helped increase national and local capacities in DRR and resilience, equipping families, communities and service providers to be better prepared for emergencies and responding to them.

UNICEF has been working with China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and other partners to improve how data on

children and women is produced and used. Major data products such as *Children in China: An Atlas of Social Indicators* (jointly published with the National Working Committee for Children and Women and NBS) and *Women and Men in China* (jointly published with NBS and UNFPA) are widely used by government counterparts, academia and the public. UNICEF also contributed by bringing international experiences to survey design and techniques. China has been customizing and integrating modules of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) for various large-scale surveys in recent years, including Breastfeeding and Dietary Intake, Early Childhood Development (ECD), and Water, Sanitation, and Handwashing.

In communications, UNICEF has been highlighting child rights as a key part of sustainable development in China. World

Children's Day (WCD - 20 November) has become a signature event to celebrate the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN General Assembly in 1989, with cities lighting up in blue across China. UNICEF has been steadily reaching more people with messages related to children's rights. Since 2017, UNICEF's hashtag #WCD on Weibo has had 1.6 billion views so far.

In 2016-2020 UNICEF's commitment to China was demonstrated through a series of high-level visits. There were eight visits by UNICEF's Executive Director or

Deputy Executive Director to China over these five years. The Executive Director met with a range of senior representatives including from: The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the State Council, the Ministry of Commerce, the China International Development Cooperation Agency and the All-China Women's Federation. In all these meetings, UNICEF's leadership focused on building relationships with partners in China, in the best interests of children. With a delegation of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Executive Director also met with President Xi Jinping.



**Jacob Mbeya, UNICEF Deputy Representative to China, hands relief items to a child in Yongjing, Gansu Province, which was hit by floods in August 2018.**

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