

FINAL — CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
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ED Briefing to Executive Board
April 14, 2020

Thank you, Madam President, for your support and leadership in bringing this Board together around UNICEF's COVID-response efforts.

And thank you to our Board members, calling in from all over the world. I hope you, your teams, families and loved ones are all healthy and safe during this extraordinary time.

I know you share my admiration and gratitude for the armies of first responders worldwide. Those health workers risking infection. Working extraordinary hours with little sleep, away from their families and loved ones. Contending with equipment and supply shortages.

I also know you join me in expressing solidarity with those families who have been affected by the disease, losing family members — and those facing economic hardships. Unable to buy food or medicine. Those waking up each morning filled with worry for their children's futures.

As UNICEF responds to this fast-moving crisis, and supports countries as they emerge from the pandemic when it ends, we must never forget the individual toll that COVID-19, and the unprecedented measures put in place to contain it, are having on children and families.

That's why this global emergency has united us — not only internally, within our own organizations, but across the UN family as a whole, and with our government and NGO partners worldwide.

UNICEF is proud to lend our expertise, our partnerships with governments and businesses alike, our programmatic reach in 190 countries, and our longstanding experience in emergencies to the global response.

In many ways, UNICEF was made for this kind of emergency. It is bringing out the best of our teams all over the world.

From emergency response.

To health, WASH and education.

To data and analytics.

To communications, fundraising and advocacy.

To the tireless work of our Supply Division in Copenhagen, keeping shipments of vital supplies and protective equipment flowing.

To maintaining our duty of care for our staff members and implementing partners alike.

To our wide array of partnerships businesses, NGOs and sister UN agencies — all in support of the governments we serve around the world.

As part of our UNICEF family, I know that you share my pride in our staff members' incredible work. Especially those in our country offices, and in our Supply Division, who are working around the clock, against incredible odds, to continue serving and supporting children throughout this crisis.

Thank you for supporting us as we, in turn support our dedicated staff members as they carry out their inspiring work.

Every part of UNICEF is engaged in this extraordinary effort, because the needs are growing more urgent by the day.

Not only from the immediate consequences of this fast-moving health threat.

But from the long-term consequences of it.

As the global recession deepens...as millions of jobs are lost...as spending power evaporates...as the cost of food and basic medical care rises...as health and social systems continue to crumble under the strain...millions more children will be locked into lives of poverty and want.

Low-income countries will be unable to recover and rebuild systems without significant assistance and generosity.

But in fact, this crisis affects every country, rich and poor, threatening to roll back the progress countries have made to secure better, healthier and safer lives for people in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

And over both the short and long-terms, children will pay the highest price.

While children have largely been spared the direct health impacts of COVID-19, the full effects of the pandemic — particularly the unprecedented measures to contain it — go beyond COVID-19 itself.

On their health — as systems weak and strong alike buckle under the strain of responding to COVID, jeopardizing critical health interventions, including immunizations and other basic services.

On their nutrition, as the cost of food goes up and families struggle to get by.

On their education — with 1.5 billion children and young people out-of-school, many of whom rely on school for their only daily meal.

On their mental health — as they struggle with uncertainty, fear and stress.

On their protection — as we've seen in past health emergencies like Ebola, children during pandemics face increased levels of violence, exploitation and child labour.

On the rights of girls and women. Not only because 70 per cent of health care workers are women, potentially exposed to COVID. But because the containment measures and economic fallout can result in teenage pregnancy, child marriage, or domestic violence, as girls and women are locked into houses with abusive partners. And predators are using the pandemic as an excuse to inflict horrifying violence on women and girls.

But perhaps the children most at risk are those living through humanitarian crises like conflicts and disasters, or those on the move as migrants or refugees.

Right now, 420 million children live in fragile or conflict-affected areas. They're at a double disadvantage, as already-weak health, education and social systems are shattered by both the fighting and COVID-19.

These children live in overcrowded conditions, often in active war zones, with limited or non-existent access to health care. A family of six, eight, ten or 12 can be living in one room. Self-isolation is impossible — and may even be counterproductive, if different generations are isolated under the same roof.

UNICEF is rapidly scaling-up our responses to meet all of these needs.

Our first strategic priority is to contribute to the public health response being led by WHO.

We're scaling-up our community engagement efforts to provide children, families and caregivers with information and tools to promote simple but effective health interventions, like handwashing and social distancing.

We're ramping-up access to proper handwashing supplies, hygiene and medical kits to schools and clinics, and in shelters and camps.

Despite extreme market conditions, our Supply Division is maintaining a growing pipeline of vital supplies like gowns, masks, gloves and oxygen concentrators to protect health workers and treat severely ill patients.

To date, we've procured over \$131 million-worth of PPE, and have made or scheduled deliveries to 51 countries. During the month of March alone, we delivered more than 400 air shipments of PPE and other vital supplies, despite widespread disruptions to the global air travel industry.

Working through the Supply Chain Inter-agency Co-ordination Cell, UNICEF is leading a joint, UN-wide tender process to urgently access substantial quantities of these critical items for the global response.

We're engaging with over 1,000 suppliers and industry leaders around the world — including local industry — to develop solutions to current market restraints and secure the quantities needed at appropriate prices.

And we're working with governments on border and transport restrictions to keep these goods flowing.

Our second strategic priority is to continue delivering and shoring-up vital health, education and social services — particularly for the most vulnerable.

For example, we're supporting distance-learning for children who can't access school — including using online, radio, television and SMS platforms — including those living in refugee camps and in conflict areas.

We're working with WHO to help local authorities shape contextualized health responses that fit the needs of each community — particularly for countries with weaker healthcare systems.

We're adjusting our programming to shore-up vital health services, like emergency obstetric care, vaccinations, treatment of malnutrition and WASH.

We're developing alternative, tailored strategies in low-income settings, or in areas where self-containment policies are impossible to implement — such as camps or urban slums — or for populations on the move.

For example, in some sub-Saharan African countries, we're supporting handwashing stations and physical distancing measures at distribution sites, along with proactive temperature checking and disease screening in crowded settings.

We've developed new programme guidance to ensure that our country offices and implementing partners are better-equipped to support the needs of women and girls in this emergency, and protect them from violence, abuse, teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

We're ramping-up psychosocial counselling for children and young people who are dealing with the stress of lost family income, containment measures, and missed school.

We're also adjusting our responses in fragile and humanitarian contexts.

This means continuing to screen and test for the most common diseases — like malaria and acute respiratory infections — and to immunize for major child killers like measles.

We cannot allow these diseases to thrive unchecked — especially in humanitarian contexts. Our responses — and will — must continue.

We're working with humanitarian partners and local authorities to overcome border closures and travel restrictions to keep supplies flowing.

And we're working with them to get appropriate exemptions for humanitarian personnel and mitigation measures to deploy surge teams safely.

Access is essential. UNICEF echoes the Secretary-General's call for authorities to work closely with UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinators to ensure that both aid and personnel can move quickly and effectively to support the most vulnerable.

To support all of these needs, UNICEF recently launched our revised HAC appeal, in conjunction with the system-wide Humanitarian Response Plan.

It's one of our largest appeals ever. We call on our Member State partners to urgently match its ambition with more flexible funding that we can apply to this rapidly evolving crisis and build stronger systems for the future.

Last week, UNICEF also joined the WHO in the Solidarity Response Fund for COVID-19, developed by the UN Foundation and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation, to support our work with vulnerable children and communities all over the world.

We're in discussions with the World Bank and other international financial institutions, as well as other public and private partners and individual donors, to summon more funding to support children's needs throughout this crisis.

And throughout, we're reminding our partners of the many existing needs that still must be funded outside of our COVID response. These needs will endure beyond the pandemic's end, and we must ensure that our current response does not come at the expense of our existing programming for children and young people.

But as we fund and respond to these needs, we are particularly concerned with the long-term socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

The next phases of the crisis will hit the world's most vulnerable children and families hard.

Especially as the recession deepens. Early estimates anticipate global income contracting by anywhere from one to three per cent this year, making 2020 the worst year for the world economy since modern records began. This could throw a hundred million more people into extreme poverty around the world.

The longer the pandemic, the deeper the recession and longer the recovery. Combined with the high likelihood of bank and business failures, bankruptcies and today's record levels of public and private indebtedness — and the dim likelihood that a vaccine will be developed until 2021 — prospects for a quick and evenly spread recovery are bleak.

In short — the poor will grow poorer. And the ranks of the poorest will grow larger.

UNICEF is ready to work with governments to help us design, fund and implement systems that can help families and children avoid the worst effects of the crisis.

Like the rapid expansion and scaling-up of social protection systems. Cash transfers, for example, can quickly help families secure food, health care and other basic household needs. Especially in countries where families depend on the informal economy for their income. UNICEF's experience in this area would be a good model to follow.

This could also involve the expansion of health and unemployment insurance, and direct support to businesses to prevent job losses.

We cannot ignore the fact that the effects of this crisis will reverberate far beyond the pandemic's end. Which is why UNICEF supports the Secretary-General's call for a large-scale response to this crisis, amounting to at least 10 per cent of global GDP.

As a global community, we must be prepared to support countries as they rebuild, recover, and put in place the systems that children and their families will need in order to achieve the sustainable future we all want to see.

UNICEF looks forward to working with your governments in this vital work.

Internally, our Business Continuity Plans have been working well. We're committed to "staying and delivering," while working to ensure that our staff members and implementing partners have access to treatment if they become ill.

We've issued new Emergency Procedures for our Country Offices, with simplified measures to adjust programme delivery for COVID-19 while, at the same time, maintaining existing emergency operations. And we continue to work with our many implementing partners to simplify and speed-up these processes even further.

In programme countries especially, we're still in the early stages of the emergency response and we must remain vigilant and nimble — not just in our response, but in fulfilling our duty of care to our staff and partners.

At the same time, our organization is taking this opportunity to identify places where we can modernize and streamline our ways of working.

We're now reflecting on the changes and adaptations we've made to our business model and practices over the past weeks, to see how these might be sustained after the pandemic subsides.

We'll continue focusing our resources where they're most needed, and where they can help us best accelerate results.

In many ways, our ability to meet this great challenge demonstrates our strength and agility as an organization, and where we need to take UNICEF in the years ahead.

But we cannot do it without you.

As we respond and help countries recover, we need your support in carrying some key messages back to the decision-makers in your capitals.

1. Help us echo the Secretary-General's call for debt-forgiveness and restructuring.
2. Help amplify our call for the increased production and transportation of critical supplies across borders — especially in the poorest countries.
3. While we're very grateful for the excellent donor response to the COVID emergency so far, we continue to require substantial and flexible regular resources to support children quickly and effectively.
4. Finally, as you respond to COVID in your own countries, please also look at the potential negative impacts of the response. We must not allow children's education, immunization or protection to fall victim to COVID as well.

This is an historic crisis, demanding a significant global response.

With your help and support, I know that we can answer this call.

Once again — thank you for your support at this extraordinary time. I look forward to our discussions today.
