Highlights

- As of 3 June 2020, a total of 55,339 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 1,194 deaths, were reported in West and Central Africa Region (WCAR), representing 892% increase since April 16th, 2020.
- 20 out of the 24 countries in the region are reporting cases of community transmission.
- Over 128 million children and youth are directly affected by nationwide school closures in West and Central Africa.
- Fourteen countries (Benin, Senegal, The Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Nigeria, Gabon, DRC, Cabo Verde) have launched continuing learning at home for children through distance and remote learning (radio, TV programmes, and in some cases e-learning platforms). Overall in WCAR, governments with UNICEF’s support reached more than 6.7 million children with distance/home-based learning.

Situation Overview and Needs

The COVID-19 pandemic continues its progression in West and Central Africa (WCAR). WCAR accounts for 50% of confirmed cases and 43% of deaths in Africa Region. The top 5 countries in WCAR reporting the highest number of confirmed cases are: Nigeria (10,819), Ghana (8,297), Cameroon (7,144), Senegal (3,932) and Guinea (3,886). In WCAR, West Africa accounts for 69% of all confirmed cases. The CFR remains quite high in West Africa especially in Central Sahel countries already affected by humanitarian crises (Niger: 6.77%, Burkina Faso: 6% and Mali: 5.77%) and in countries with weak health systems like Liberia (9%), Sierra Leone (5.13%) and Mauritania (4.42%). In Central Africa, only Chad reports a high CFR (8.22%).

According to data shared by WHO as of 19th May, 1,810 health care workers were infected by COVID-19 in 18 countries in WCAR with Nigeria (401), Niger (169), Cameroon (131), Cote d’Ivoire (124), Guinea-Bissau (105), Ghana (99), Mali (94) and Senegal (93).
d’Ivoire (116) and Ghana (102) among the countries reporting the highest numbers of infected healthcare workers.

The nutrition situation in the region is also of great concern. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that more than 11 million under-5 children will be acutely malnourished in 2020, of which 4.1 million of its most severe form. It is expected that there will be a significant deterioration of food security conditions (see Cadre Harmonisé exercise, March 2020) with the current COVID-19 pandemic constituting an additional major threat that could lead to a rapid deterioration of the nutritional situation.

In the education sector, over 128 million children and youth are directly affected by nationwide school closures in West and Central Africa (all 24 countries have closed all schools). School closures put gains made in access to education and learning at risk, especially in a region that already had an estimated 41 million of out-of-school children between the ages of 6 and 15 years before the onset of the pandemic. Burkina Faso will be one of the first countries planning to progressively re-open schools, starting with exam classes on 11 May 2020.

Coordination and Partnerships

In West and Central Africa, UNICEF is supporting governments in the development and implementation of their COVID-19 response plans. UNICEF’s Regional Office and all UNICEF Country Offices have all developed dedicated response strategies that will contribute to outbreak control as well as the mitigation of the collateral impacts of the pandemic and the response. These include support to Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), provision of critical WASH-Infection Prevention Control (IPC) materials, the continuity of essential health and social services for children, adolescents, women and vulnerable population across the areas affected by COVID-19. UNICEF is leading the coordination of regional partners’ support on RCCE pillar, and co-leading the Operational Coordination, the case management, WASH/IPC, and the logistic & operational support.

UNICEF’s Regional Office also works on partnership engagement with Mobile Network Operators to support facilitating mobile money, cash transfer and access to education in the region.

UNICEF’s COVID-19 response

Risk Communication and Community Engagement

The UNICEF-led Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Regional Working Group launched a new information sharing website for RCCE actors across the region.¹ The available community engagement tools have been sourced from multiple organizations across the region and are tailored to the unique cultural contexts of the region. The website is searchable by category, language and country, is updated with new materials twice weekly and allows community networks such as religious, youth and women groups to submit their own engagement materials and tools.

The regional global Inter-Faith COVID-19 Campaign was launched with the participation of dozens of religious leaders who committed to respond to the crisis, providing more coordinated and evidence-based support for the protection and well-being of children and their communities. The initiative aims to mobilize

¹ West and Central Africa RCCE website: https://coronawestafrica.info/
religion leaders, women of faith and interfaith youth within the world’s largest multi-religious network *Religions for Peace*, through its interreligious councils at country level to support COVID-19 preparedness and response.

**Medical and WASH supplies, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)**

UNICEF has developed a document to highlight the regional WASH COVID-19 related orientations for country offices. In coherence with the UNICEF global WASH response framework, the Regional Office is supporting the country offices in four main areas:

1. Support to Government-led WASH/IPC coordination, including through WASH clusters
2. Hygiene programming
3. IPC in health care facilities, schools, communities and households
4. Analysis of the gains and impact of WASH response to ensure long lasting changes

Over 1.2 million people have already been reached with critical WASH services, and 4858 healthcare facilities staff and community health workers were trained in infection prevention and control procedures.

UNICEF has also worked to document the impact of COVID-19 on the WASH sector and WASH programs in the region. The most frequently reported impacts are: (a) constraints in program implementation due to restriction of staff movement and limitation of people gathering, (b) increase in prices of WASH products and WASH services (c) disruption of WASH product availability on local markets, and (d) suspension of WASH in School programs due to schools’ closure, and slowdown of community sanitation programs.

**Supply**

While during the first phase of the response, UNICEF access to PPE was constrained due to global high demand, the situation has improved, and the region has started to receive its first allocations. The Regional Office is working closely with UNICEF Supply Division transport unit to identify solutions for transport and delivery in country. Plans to deliver PPE in a dozen of countries have been developed, either through the few existing commercial flights still operating or through charted flights (which in this reporting period included charters to Nigeria and partial charters to Mali and DRC). The WCARO Supply section is providing guidance to Country Offices for local procurement of PPE (masks and face shield), including the use of 3D printing technology for the production of face shields.

**Provision of Healthcare Services**

As the co-chair of the regional working group on immunization, UNICEF has been instrumental in coordinating support to priority countries. Two countries (Niger and Cameroon) have already received tailored guidance and recommendations for continuation of fixed, outreach and mobile immunization sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as measures that they could be taken to minimize the COVID-19 virus transmission during immunization sessions.

UNICEF is also working closely with its partners, including WHO, to finalize guidance on outbreak response during the COVID pandemic.

**Nutrition**

UNICEF in close collaboration with partners is providing technical guidance and support to country teams, including key messages on COVID-19 in IYCF promotion interventions. In all countries of the region, UNICEF is also providing technical support to Ministries of Health in the development and dissemination of adapted nutrition national guidelines.

**Education**

UNICEF’s regional education interventions on COVID-19 are contributing to other sectors by providing health education, WASH in schools and child protection services. UNICEF’s education approach to the COVID-19 response is guided by the ‘readiness’ agenda of the Global Education Strategy, focusing on countries and children that are affected by the virus, including the most vulnerable and excluded children in the most remote areas.

Fourteen out of the twenty-four countries (Benin, Senegal, The Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Nigeria, Gabon, DRC, Cabo Verde) have launched continuing learning at home for children through distance and remote learning, (radio, TV programmes, and in some cases e-learning platforms).
During the reporting period, the Regional Office has released guidance on digital learning related to COVID-19 response and beyond. This guidance builds on two years of research and work to develop digital learning toolkit as well as newly available resources on COVID-19 response.

Adaptations to ongoing UNICEF programmes

Health
In CAR, the MRI Task force co-led by UNICEF and WHO recommended the continuation of outbreak response including measles campaign, while activities in other countries (DRC, Chad and Nigeria), had to be put on hold due to the risks related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF is working to assess risks of vaccine stock out in light of flight restrictions. No country has experienced vaccine stockout to date.

Nutrition
Programme implementation modalities for the continuity of nutrition services are being adjusted (i.e. to door to door strategies instead of mass gathering for malnutrition screening and VIT A supplementation, reinforcement of family-led MUAC approaches, provision of PPE to health facilities and health workers with EPP materials, pre-positioning of nutrition supplies).

UNICEF is supporting the training of health workers on integrated management of acute malnutrition, while reinforcing awareness communication targeting communities on nutrition in the context of COVID-19. Close contact is maintained with nutrition critical donors in the region on programmatic adjustment needed due to COVID-19 pandemic, while support was specifically given to some countries on proposal development and submission to get new funding opportunities.

Child Protection
With regard to child protection, UNICEF is working to ensure that essential social services such as health and civil registration centers remain accessible (i.e. in Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Ghana). While family tracing and reunification are ongoing, UNICEF is also providing temporary care for vulnerable children in foster care families or in centers that have been equipped and provided with adequately trained staff (i.e. Cameroon, Senegal, Chad).

WASH
In WASH, humanitarian hygiene kits distribution and water trucking modalities are being adapted to avoid any population gathering in line with governments measures.
Supply
While fully engaged in the COVID-19 response, UNICEF’s supply team is also working to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on regular programmes. Sea freight, which representing more than 90% of volume of goods transported in the region, is currently not significantly impacted by the crisis. UNICEF has identified vaccines that are most at risk of shortages and is working proactively to mitigate risks of immunization program disruption. UNICEF has adapted from its usual supply routes, for example by chartering vaccine deliveries from India and other parts of Asia, for Nigeria, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire and CAR. A total of USD 83 million of non-COVID programme supplies have been delivered in the region since 1 March 2020.

Funding Overview
Out of required USD 393.3 million to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19 in West and Central Africa, the region has received generous contribution of USD 40.1 million from the Governments of Japan, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and United States of America, Education Cannot Wait Foundation, Global Partnership for Education, and the French National Committee for UNICEF. The region faces a funding gap of USD 323.9 million to meet the growing immediate humanitarian needs of COVID-19 affected and at-risk population.

External Media
The Regional Director took part in a UN regional virtual media briefing with regional directors of other UN agencies and gathering dozens of journalists from international, regional and national media outlets to offer an overview of the UN response to COVID-19 in West and Central Africa. On the digital front, the UNICEF West and Central Africa website recorded an increase of almost 160% in visits between mid-March and end of April (compared to the previous 5-week period), with six countries of the region part of the Top 10 visitors, including several French-speaking countries. This increase was mainly linked to the regional COVID-19 portal established on the regional website. On regional social media platforms, young people of several countries in the region have already shared their voices as part of the WCARO phone video initiative #COVID19Diaries, with the movement being picked up in ESAR (Tanzania and Zimbabwe) and LACR (Jamaica). The engagement rate of several of these videos exceeded the industry average of 8%, with for instance 12% engagement for some videos.

West and Central Africa COVID information site: https://www.unicef.org/wca/coronavirus (in French)

UNICEF in action in West and Central Africa

DR Congo: Education Minister launching the country’s first UNICEF-supported radio-based learning programme, with UNICEF DRC. © UNICEF/UN025703/Desjardins;

Central African Republic: UNICEF-supported Listening clubs in Bambari
Sao Tome and Principe: Neusa Carvalho, Youth and Development officer, at National Television presenting UNICEF supported action plan for Youth for prevention and response to COVID-19.

Republic of Cameroon: Sensitizing on handwashing with UNICEF support

Cote d’Ivoire: UNICEF is distributing hygiene kits as well as beds toys and mattresses to vulnerable children in a protection center in Adjame, Abidjan.

Niger: UNICEF-supported Community leaders use community radios, mosque speakers, towncriers and vehicles equipped with speakers to disseminate information messages.

Guinea Bissau: UNICEF partners with national red cross volunteers on coronavirus sensitization activities in three regions affected by the pandemic.

Mauritania: UNICEF supports a hotline for the public to get the necessary information on COVID-19.

Gambia: using risk communication and community engagement to counter misinformation and help communities to prevent COVID-19.

Nigeria: Through a UNICEF-supported project in Borno State, vulnerable women learned to sew and are currently producing cloth masks to protect against COVID-19.

Equatorial Guinea: UNICEF-supported IPC training in collaboration with WHO and Spanish NGO Instituto Carlos III.

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