Malawi COVID-19 Situation Report No. 1

Reporting Period: 24 to 28 March 2020

Situation overview

Malawi does not have any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 to date. A total of 4,350 people crossed the land and air borders entering Malawi between the period of 31 January and 28 March 2020. The majority of these people (1,742) returning from South Africa arrived through the Dedza border post. Of the total arrivals, 4,069 are still under a 14-day self-quarantine period, with 281 having completed their stay and discharged from follow up.

So far, all 31 cases tested in the Community Health Sciences Unit and the Blantyre College of Medicine laboratories returned negative results. The laboratory has received further test kits from Jack Ma Foundation (20,000), and WHO (1,000) which are adequate to test a maximum of 21,000 people. With the revision of the definition for ‘suspected case’ to “any person with fever and additional sign of respiratory illness, hailing from a country with local transmission is a suspected case”, it is expected that Malawi will also update its definition in the coming days. This will help to enrol more people for testing, especially those people coming across the borders.

Preparedness and response actions by UNICEF and partners

The Government of Malawi

- In line with the declaration of a National Disaster, the Government of Malawi issued directives with respect to public transport services across all modes of transport. This includes all international flights suspended.

Highlights

- The ‘State of Disaster’ declaration on 20 March in response to COVID-19 continues with closure of land and air borders for all commercial flights and buses starting 1 April 2020.

- With UNICEF support, installation of four sets of latrines and additional sets of hand washing facilities at the treatment units in Blantyre, Mwanza, Mchinji and Mzuzu has been completed.

- IEC materials including 3,000 posters and 20,000 flyers on COVID-19 prevention, handwashing and respiratory hygiene, have been disseminated through the participants of the recently-held orientation sessions to reach communities with the right messages and tools to sensitize people on the ground.

- Training for Rapid Response Teams was conducted in the nine UNICEF-supported districts (one for each district, 8 members in each district).
effective 1 April 2020 except for a few conditions like carrying health personnel, equipment and emergency relief items; carrying returning residents and general cargo.

- A Crisis Cabinet Committee on COVID-19, led by the Ministry of Health and the Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events, is in place.
- A series of meetings on COVID-19 convened by the high-level Cabinet Committee and the National Disaster Preparedness and Relief Committee have taken place.
- In addition to a daily coordination support to the Health clusters and Donor Group, UNICEF is co-leading the WASH, Education, Nutrition Clusters and Child Protection sub Cluster, all working on the COVID-19 National Plan.

UN System

- The UN Country Team (UNCT) as well as the Humanitarian Country team are actively contributing to the preparedness and response.
- In order to better advise the UNCT in supporting the Government in its delivery of the national COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, the UN Resident Coordinator’s office has set up thematic temporary working groups to support the UNCT, clusters and inter-clusters and the Department of Disaster Management Affairs in several areas. This includes analysis of the impact, implementation of the health response, communication, data and information management and financing.
- UNICEF is leading the C4D and communication working group and is a member of the other working groups.
- To ensure coordination and coherence, a COVID-19 coordinator has been identified at the Resident Coordinator’s office to support the above-mentioned UN Task Force.

UNICEF Support

Health

- Training for Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) in the nine UNICEF-supported districts\(^1\) (8 members in each district) has been completed while orientation of point of entry health and immigration officials is under way. The training of RRTs will enable members of the team, as first responders, to investigate suspects, collect samples for testing and provide first-level advices on case management and self-quarantine.
- A UNICEF-supported Human Resources for Health data compilation exercise has shown that the proportion of health workers to clients is in dire situation with one doctor serving 6,833 people and one nurse serving 2,987 people at a minimum compared to WHO recommendation of one doctor and one nurse for 1,000 people. Also alarmingly, only one pediatrician, one obstetrician and a gynecologist (OB-GYN) are serving 409,090 children/mothers while one anesthetist and one ophthalmologist are serving six million people in the country. Nearly two thirds of the health workers are in the government sector and the rest in private and Christian Health association of Malawi (CHAM) facilities. With the already overstretched health system, there are concerns that any increase in number of illnesses, which will arise in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in Malawi, will worsen the situation.

Child Protection

- Plans are under way for a Psychological First Aid training series for UNICEF staff and partners.
- Integration of child protection and gender-based violence mitigation and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) into communication for development messaging and strategies is continuing.
- UNICEF as co-lead of protection cluster continues to support the Ministry of Gender in the clusters’ preparedness efforts.

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\(^1\) Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzimba North, Dedza, Mwanza, Karonga, Mchinji, Dowa, Zomba (See map1)
UNICEF put in place contingency partnership agreements with two implementing partners (Save the Children and YouthNet and Counselling) to support with implementation of child protection COVID-19 response interventions.

Referral pathways for MHPSS services for printing and distribution amongst health workers are being finalised.

Preparation of the RapidPro system is underway to be used for information sharing with the frontline workers.

## Education

Following the declaration of disaster in the country, all schools and educational institutions closed from 23 March, two weeks before the scheduled mid-term closure which was expected to be 6 April. It is not yet certain if the schools will reopen on 20 April as scheduled. UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education and partners to strengthen/initiate alternative modes of delivery – such as distance learning through radio, support to homeschooling, etc.

## WASH

With financial support from DFID, UNICEF through its partner United Purpose has completed the following activities during the reporting period:

- Installation of four sets of latrines at the treatment units in Blantyre, Mwanza, Mchinji and Mzuzu.
- Installation of additional sets of hand washing facilities in the same four treatment units.
- Briefing frontline workers from the District Health Offices, where the four treatment centres are located to man the treatment units. A total of 32 health workers were trained (9 in Blantyre, 13 in Mwanza, 7 in Mchinji and 4 in Mzuzu).
- United Purpose in liaison with the Ministry of Health and Population at national and district levels is currently developing COVID-19 tailored Information, education and Communication (IEC) materials.
- Message dissemination to communities around the treatment centres has started in Mwanza and will soon be rolled out to communities around the remaining three treatment units. The messages being disseminated include proper hand washing, disinfection techniques appropriate dilution of chlorine and maintenance of social distance.

## Nutrition

- Key messages for Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) in emergencies including maternal and child feeding in the context of COVID-19 are being prepared.
- Sensitization of seven nutrition field monitors and health workers on COVID-19 preparedness and response will take place in April.
- A group of the Ministry of Health and Population management team is visiting nutrition rehabilitation units in 25 districts. The group of senior officials will support and guide the districts nutrition teams on better nutrition as part of the COVID-19 preparedness and response.

## Communication for Development

- Implementation of the risk communication plan is ongoing targeting 2,000,000 people in the UNICEF target districts with funding from UK Aid.
- Communication products have been developed, and the Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are being aired in 21 radio stations across the country.
- C4D messages have been broadcast via Facebook, Twitter and U-Report which have reached 208, 575 U-reporters to-date.
- Orientation sessions for opinion leaders have been conducted from 26 March to 28, 2020 with key stakeholders, faith-based organizations, community leaders, media, district officials in health, education and information departments, including districts commissioners.
- IEC materials including 3,000 posters and 20,000 flyers on COVID-19 prevention, hand washing and respiratory hygiene, have been disseminated through the participants of the orientation sessions to reach communities with the right messages and tools to sensitize people on the ground.
Social Protection

- UNICEF is supporting the Government to develop its national response plan in expanding the social cash transfer programme (SCTP) for the COVID-19 response. The plan is to reach 606,000 children in social cash transfer households with COVID-19 awareness and prevention messages and to facilitate cash top-ups to meet basic needs. This will be done in all 28 districts of the country.
- UNICEF also plans to expand the SCTP to four of the main cities reaching a target of 115,000 children and their families with predictable and regular financial support for six months to cushion the economic losses, and increased health care needs induced by the pandemic.

External Media and Communication

- UNICEF is working in close coordination with the Government, media, and UN agencies for enhanced and evidence-based communications on COVID-19 in Malawi. This includes ensuring that key messages are used in their contents, platforms, and events.
- UNICEF is working on establishing partnership with a major media outlet and the Malawi Institute of Journalism for consistent and holistic coverage and positioning of children-related issues on national coverage and discussions on the COVID-19 virus. A list of internal spokespersons, media Q&A, media key messages have been developed.
- UNICEF is also producing multimedia content to promote COVID-19 messaging and stories. These will be part of the ongoing communication and advocacy kit being disseminated through UNICEF social media and digital channels. In the past few weeks, we have already reached more than three million online audiences with our messaging. A comprehensive content (both in English and Chichewa) on COVID-19 has also been uploaded in the Internet of Good Things, which is accessed by more than 40,000 viewers.
- UNICEF will continue to use U-Report platform extensively to reach people with messaging on COVID-19 through SMS, polling, open-end questions, quiz, information bots, social media, etc.
- For the UNGC coordination on COVID-19, an online content depository has been created. UNICEF is populating this with relevant assets that other UN agencies can use.

Supply

- UNICEF is procuring supplies valued at US$600,000 through Supply Division, from international as well as local suppliers.
- Given the disruption in supply chains globally, MCO is conducting a Local Market Analysis exercise for PPEs, medical equipment and medicines to enable UNICEF to develop a database of potential vetted suppliers with available stock and capacity to deliver.
- A motion worth $2.4 million has been approved by HJSF partners requesting UNICEF to use the Procurement Services modality to source supplies for the COVID-19 response.
- WFP facilitated the transportation/shipping and delivery of PPEs and testing kits as part of the medical equipment shipped to countries in Africa for the COVID-19 response by the Jack Ma and Alibaba Foundation.
- UNICEF developed a National Tool for tracking supplies available in-country, and this has been shared with MoH for adoption thereby mapping and creating visibility on supplies available for the response.
- UNICEF met with the Permanent Secretary for MoH and other stakeholders who re-iterated the need for UNICEF to speed up procurement of the much-needed supplies and furthermore; requested that UNICEF highly consider procuring supplies locally as this action would also support the local economy during this difficult period.

Next SitRep: 06/04/2020

Photo caption: (2019 file photo): A young learner at Lupaso Primary School in Karonga washes hands after using toilet. UNICEF has intensified hand-washing messaging as part of the COVID-19 response in Malawi.

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