Figure 1 A young boy in Malawi washing his hands with soap. © UNICEF/UN0317681/

### Highlights

- The first three COVID-19 cases were confirmed on 2 April in Lilongwe. As of 7 April, a total of eight cases have been registered (3 in Lilongwe, 4 in Blantyre and 1 in Chikwawa).

- With the UK Aid funding, UNICEF supported the Government to calibrate the existing reverse transcription–polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) machine, one of the most accurate laboratory methods for detecting, tracking, and studying the coronavirus, at the National Reference Laboratory. Malawi now has three laboratories to test COVID-19.

- Over 8 million people have received COVID-19 prevention messages through mass media channels including radio. About 100 opinion leaders have also been oriented on disseminating COVID-19 prevention and response messages to communities.

- UNICEF has procured supplies valued at US$600,000, both from local market [worth $75,000] and from offshore/Supply Division [worth $425,000]. The supplies include medicines and equipment for treatment of 84,000 cases such as critical WASH supplies like buckets, soap, and chlorine.

### Situation overview

- On 2 April, Malawi confirmed three COVID-19 cases in Lilongwe's residential Area 9. The very next day on 3 April, another case was confirmed in Blantyre about 350 kilometres south of Lilongwe bringing the total number of cases in Malawi to four. Three more cases (2 from Blantyre and 1 Chikwawa) have been registered on 7th April as well as the first death. This brings the total number of cases registered to eight.

- As of 5 April, a total of 5,320 high-risk travellers were being monitored daily out of which 46 had been discharged after completing the 14-day mandatory self-quarantine. Screening of all travellers entering Malawi is ongoing. The Ministry of Health (MoH), with support from partners, is actively tracing and monitoring persons exposed to patients with confirmed COVID-19. However, this is a challenge.
as it requires a real-time technique to ensure that contacts are located and isolated on time to interrupt community transmission.

Preparedness and response actions by UNICEF and partners

Government of Malawi

- The state of disaster, declared on 20 March, continues.
- On 4 April, the President announced additional measures to support containment, increase the capacity of the health sector, and to mitigate risks for the economy.
- A Crisis Cabinet Committee on COVID-19, led by the Ministry of Health and the Disaster Management Affairs and Public Events, meets weekly to coordinate response measures to the pandemic.
- The National Disaster Preparedness and Relief Committee also continue to meet, and reviews recommendations from the cluster system.
- All Clusters are regularly meeting and are closely monitoring the situation in addition to finalizing the National Plan while at the same time supporting the implementation of preparedness and response actions. UNICEF is co-leading four of the clusters – WASH, Nutrition, Education and Protection.

UN System

- The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) met on 2 April to discuss the draft multi-sectoral National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. The Government was requested to incorporate education, logistics, and food security clusters in the revised Plan. Also, there was an agreement to ensure full coordination and support to the Plan at the local level by the NGOs and the UN to maximize the response and reach all communities.
- In addition to the Clusters, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) has put in place technical working groups (health coordination, socio economic impact, communication, financing and information management) to support the coordination mechanism. UNICEF is leading the Communication for Development and Communication working group and is a member of the other working groups.

UNICEF Support

Health

- With the UK Aid funding, UNICEF supported the Government to calibrate the existing reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) machine, one of the most accurate laboratory methods for detecting, tracking, and studying the coronavirus, at the National Reference Laboratory. The Laboratory is currently processing most of the samples from suspected cases.
- In addition, with support from World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), laboratories in the College of Medicine and the Malawi Liverpool Well-come Trust have started testing for COVID-19. The laboratories equipped with supplies from Jack Ma and Alibaba Foundation (20,000 test kits), and WHO (1,000 test kits) have now the capacity to test up to 21,000 people.

Child Protection

- UNICEF continues to work with government counterparts including Social Welfare, Malawi Police and the Judiciary, at national and district levels on COVID-19 preparedness and response, to ensure continuity of essential services for child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response.
- With support from UNICEF, needs assessment on mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) including the capacity to deal with the increased caseload, has been undertaken in Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, Ntchisi, Dowa, Nsanje, and Machinga districts. Efforts are also underway to integrate elements of MHPSS into training for health workers. A booklet on referral pathways for MHPSS has been developed for their and social welfare officers' use. Basic MHPSS content has already been shared which includes the impact on children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.
- UNICEF is ensuring that child protection and gender-based violence mitigation and mental health and psychosocial support elements are integrated into communication for development messaging.
- UNICEF, as co-lead of Protection Cluster, continues to support the Ministry of Gender in preparedness efforts.
Education
- With technical support from UNICEF, the Ministry of Education has set up 'continuity of learning task force' with an aim to explore innovative ways of learning during the school closure.
- The Ministry of Education has uploaded education materials on their website, on a trial basis, targeting lower secondary students. UNICEF is working with the Ministry on the preparation of educational materials for other levels including upper secondary, primary and early learning as well as the Emergency Radio Education Programmes.
- As the cluster co-lead, UNICEF continues to support the Ministry of Education with coordination of the education cluster and has updated its COVID-19 preparedness and response plan.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
- UNICEF, through its partner United Purpose, has reached a total of more than 15,000 people with messages on handwashing with soap and related hygiene messages for the prevention of COVID-19 in four districts (Blantyre, Mwanza, Mzimba, Mchinji) where treatment units are located.
- The four districts have also received 1,600 hygiene promotion posters printed by UNICEF. Furthermore, Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) in two of the four districts (Mwanza and Blantyre) have, with UNICEF support, conducted a total of 16 sessions and demonstration on proper handwashing.
- Hygiene promotion and message delivery using mobile vans have also been initiated. This is being done at night and in the morning, to avoid attracting large crowds. UNICEF has produced COVID-19 prevention jingles which have been approved by the Ministry of Health for airing. UNICEF is now engaging with local radios for the airing.
- District-level coordination and consultative meetings are ongoing in the same four districts. On a national-level, weekly WASH cluster meetings continue every Tuesday. UNICEF is a co-lead of the WASH cluster led by the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development.

Nutrition
- UNICEF has supported the development related key messages for Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) in emergencies including maternal and child feeding. Among other messages, mothers will be counselled/advised to continue breastfeeding should the infant or young child become sick with suspected, probable, or confirmed COVID-19 or any other illness. The messages will be disseminated through community care groups and Community Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) platforms.
- A group of MoH management team continues to visit nutrition rehabilitation units in 25 districts to support and guide the districts nutrition teams on better nutrition as part of the COVID-19 preparedness and response.
- UNICEF as co-lead of the nutrition cluster continues to support the Ministry of Gender in preparedness and response efforts.

Communication for Development (C4D)
- About 100 opinion leaders have been oriented on disseminating COVID-19 prevention and response messages to communities. Further amplification of these messages is expected to continue through the recently oriented influencers.
- Posters (70,000) and flyers (200,000) with messages on COVID-19 prevention have been distributed, targeting communities.
- Over 8 million people have received COVID-19 prevention messages through mass media channels, including radio.
- Community Engagement (CE) sessions, including community radio dialogues, edutainment by partners, is ongoing as planned. Adaption of materials for CE sessions through existing/agreed platforms is planned for mid-April.
- The coordination and harmonization of C4D work by all partners, including the UN and I/NGOs, is ongoing.
Social Protection

- UNICEF has supported the Government to develop the social protection component of its COVID-19 national response plan focusing on increased transfer values and coverage of the Malawi Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP).
- UNICEF is actively engaged in the socio-economic analysis group under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator to jointly monitor and report on the economic effects of COVID-19 on the country and at household-level. UNICEF, together with other agencies, will focus specifically on the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 on Malawian urban and rural households (current SCTP beneficiaries included) with the aim of supporting a better understanding of the impact of the crisis and better designing of preparedness, response and recovery interventions.
- UNICEF has strongly advocated for an economic response which expands existing social protection programmes to increase coverage as well as the adequacy of transfer values.

Supply

- UNICEF is procuring supplies valued at US$ 600,000 through the UNICEF Supply Division, international and local suppliers. Local supplies worth US$ 75,000 have been received. International orders will be delivered between mid-April and mid-August 2020. The supplies include medicines and equipment for treatment of 84,000 cases of COVID-19 as well as critical WASH supplies (buckets, soap, chlorine).
- To meet the challenges posed by the disruption in supply chains globally, UNICEF is exploring the potential to procure critical items like PPE, medical equipment and medicines locally.

Communication

- UNICEF is working in close coordination with partners including the Government 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, briefings, etc.
- UNICEF is planning to partner with a media company with wide national-level coverage to ensure consistent and holistic coverage and positioning of children-related issues on national coverage and discussions on the COVID-19. Also, as part of the media engagement, we are proactively responding to media requests and queries.
- UNICEF is producing several multimedia contents (Chichewa and English) to promote COVID-19 messaging and stories. These will be part of the ongoing communication and advocacy kit being disseminated through various online and offline channels, including national media. Our social media messages have already reached more than four million online audiences in the past two weeks.
- UNICEF is partnering with UNICEF Malawi Champion, Sangie, a famous Malawian reggae artist to produce a song targeting children, youth, and their parents. The song will promote awareness and prevention messages.
- UNICEF is continuing to upload content on COVID-19 on the Internet of Good Things, which had over 34,000 pageviews the past week.
- 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. So far, UNICEF has conducted two U-Report polls on COVID-19. The first poll was sent out to 195, 358 U-Reporters with a response rate of 24% (46, 724) https://ureport.mw/opinion/3989/. The second poll on coping with school closures was sent out to 209,157 U-Reporters with a response rate of 21% (43,000) https://ureport.mw/opinion/4090. UNICEF also has a chatbot on COVID-19 that has now had 400,002 interactions.

Next Situation Report: 2020/04/14


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