Highlights

• The COVID-19 vaccine was launched in Malawi on 11 March 2021 in Zomba and Mzuzu districts concurrently, presided over by the State President and Vice President respectively. As of 15 March, 890 health workers and other frontline workers have been vaccinated. So far, no Adverse Effects Following Immunization (AEFI) have been reported.

• Despite the reduction in number of new cases observed in Malawi over the past few weeks, the state of national disaster which was declared on 12 January 2021 is still in place as the Government is mindful to prevent a third wave which is possible if the preventive measures are not observed.

• Learning in public schools resumed on 9 March 2021 after a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Education and Teachers Union of Malawi was signed to end an industrial action by teachers. The industrial action started on Monday 22 February; the day schools were supposed to reopen after five weeks of school closure due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in the country since early January 2021.

• The grievance and redress call centre under the COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention (CUCI) which was established with UNICEF support is now operational and has so far reported over 67 cases from both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries making inquiries on the CUCI payments. The CUCI intervention was launched recently and is being implemented in Malawi’s four main cities (Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba) with 63,624 beneficiaries so far receiving the transfers out of planned 199,413.
Situation Overview

Malawi has continued to experience a reduction in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 919 cases reported in the past two weeks compared to 5,682 registered in the preceding two-week period; a reduction of 84 per cent. However, the positivity rate has remained high at 6.4 per cent while the case fatality rate has remained unchanged at 3.3 per cent. Overall there is reduction in the number of suspects seeking testing in various testing sites. This could be one of the reasons why few cases are being confirmed. However, out of those that turn up for testing, the proportion that return positive results has not changed hence the sustained positivity rate; refer to above graph.

As of 15 March 2021, 208,678 tests have been conducted out of which 32,864 turned out positive for COVID-19. Of the positive cases, 79 per cent (25,045) have been recorded in 2021 with 919 registered in the past two weeks. Since the beginning of the outbreak, 1,084 deaths have been reported (CFR=3.3) of which 896 have been registered in 2021 alone with 40 recorded in the past two weeks. About 96 per cent of the confirmed cases are locally transmitted. A total of 26,607 cases (81 per cent) have now recovered while 76 cases are under investigation. Thus the total number of active cases to 5,039 across all the 28 districts.

Despite the reduction the number of new cases observed in Malawi over the past few weeks, the state of national disaster which was declared on 12 January 2021 is still in place as the Government is mindful to prevent a third wave which is possible if the preventive measures are not observed.

A historic launch of the COVID-19 vaccine in Malawi took place on 11 March 2021 in Zomba and Mzuzu districts concurrently, presided over by the State President and Vice President respectively. The President also took the opportunity to visit and officially open the Zomba Field Hospital before the vaccine launch. Just over 50 people attended the event representing a wide range of key opinion leaders in society including but not limited to politicians, government officials, religious leaders, traditional leaders, academia, frontline health workers and Medical/Nursing Associations. The number of people invited was kept to a minimum to ensure good social distancing in line with the current COVID-19 containment measures set by the Government. As of 15 March, 890 health workers and other front workers had been vaccinated and no Advance Effects Following Immunization (AEFI) have been reported.

Programme response by UNICEF and partners

Humanitarian Strategy

UNICEF Malawi is working in the following areas of strategic priority against COVID-19:

- Public health response to reduce coronavirus transmission and mortality
- Continuity of health, education, nutrition and protection services
- Assessing and responding to the immediate secondary impact of COVID-19
- Strengthening Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

UNICEF maintains critical preparedness and response operations, including operational humanitarian access corridors and delivery of services in Health, Education, Child and Social Protection, WASH, Nutrition and Communication for Development (C4D). This is being done to prevent and control
infections, ensure continuity of education, promote positive behaviours, prevent transmission and ensure the protection of children rights, especially of the most vulnerable ones.

**Humanitarian leadership and coordination**

- To support coordination, the Humanitarian Country Team is holding bi-weekly meetings
- Clusters continue to meet for better response coordination. Information relating to COVID-19 resource mobilization, allocation, programmatic implementation (RM and 5Ws) is regularly being updated. Currently the clusters are finalising the development of the 2021 COVID-19 response plan.
- UNICEF is the co-lead agency for the Education, Nutrition, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Protection Clusters, while also playing a key role in the Health Cluster.

**Malawi COVID-19 Supply Chain**

- The first consignment of 360,000 doses of COVAX vaccines and corresponding syringes and safety boxes has been received and distributed to 29 districts. Immunization has started with the President of Malawi receiving the first dose.
- UNICEF has facilitated the distribution of assorted WASH supplies valued at $13,965.97 to flood affected people in Karonga through Malawi Red Cross. The distributed supplies include 531 buckets of various sizes, 10 tarpaulin sheets, 10 chlorine bleaching powder 65%, 25 kg drum, 612 Soap, toilet, bar, approximately 1kg and 588 Female sanitary pads. **Although the supplies are meant for response to floods, they will also make it possible for the affected families to adhere to the COVID-19 prevention measures particularly handwashing and maintain hygiene at the displacement sites where they have sought temporary shelter.**
- UNICEF has commenced an engagement process with Universities in Malawi regarding local production of PPEs as part of support to the UNDP led initiative to buy local and build capacity.

**Summary Analysis of Programme Response**

**Public health response to reduce coronavirus transmission and mortality**

Seventeen key resource persons (7 female, 10 male) from the Ministry of Health and district local governments of Lilongwe, Blantyre, Dowa, Mzuzu, Karonga and Mangochi were trained in school health promotion on 3 March through UNICEF partnership with Malawi Red Cross Society (MRCS) and funding from the Irish Embassy. The trainers will be master trainers for teachers on school-based surveillance and infection prevention and control (IPC). This will ensure that COVID-19 response becomes part of the overall school health actions by equipping teachers and learners to be part of the overall surveillance and IPC.

In addition, MRCS has continued to support the screening of all travellers entering Malawi at Kamuzu International airport (KIA), Mangochi and Songwe borders. In the past two weeks, 1,821 travellers (1,002 males, 819 females) were screened. All travellers entering through KIA had valid negative COVID-19 certificates. However, most of the travellers entering the country through Mangochi and Songwe border points mostly drivers, did not have COVID-19 negative certificates. Government through MoH is working with the driver’s association of Malawi to ensure that all drivers are tested on arrival at the POEs.

**Continuity of health, education, nutrition and protection services**

Learning in public schools resumed on 9 March 2021 after an agreement was reached on 8 March and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Education and Teachers Union
of Malawi was signed to end an industrial action by teachers. The industrial action started on Monday 22 February; the day schools were supposed to reopen, after five weeks of school closure due to a surge in COVID-19 cases experienced in early January 2021.

As co-lead for education cluster, UNICEF continues to support the Ministry of Education to strengthen coordination, ensure comprehensive and coherent education responses during COVID-19 pandemic for continuity of learning, safe return to school, and wellbeing of teachers and learners. To this end, UNICEF has further strengthened inter-cluster collaboration with Protection, Health and WASH clusters and requested the engagement and leadership from Ministry of Education to lead collaborative initiatives with all relevant clusters to ensure that synergies in emergency response.

Work on the provision community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to the people affected by COVID-19 is continuing. During the reporting period, in Blantyre, Machinga, Mchinji, and Zomba districts, 1,619 people (415 children and 1,204 adults) received community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) through the District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs). This brings the total number of people reached since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to around 28,900 of which more than 4,000 people have been reached in 2021. In addition, 44 returnees (33 males, 11 females) received psychosocial support from DSWO Machinga on 4 March.

Also, during the reporting period, DSWOs in Zomba, Mchinji, and Machinga supported the reintegration of 49 street-connected children (31 boys, 18 girls) into their homes in partnership with Malawi Police Service (MPS) and NGOs. This brings the total number of street-connected children reintegrated with DSWO support in 2021 to 259. Support for children without parental or family care, including follow up of reintegrated children and children in institutions, continued through a partnership with DSWOs and Save the Children. During the reporting period, 103 children without parental or family care were supported, bringing the total number supported in 2021 to almost 600.

**Strengthening Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)**

UNICEF is providing technical support to the Publicity and Demand Creation Sub-technical working group that aims to guide the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination activities. This is being done through sharing best practices on interventions, messages and materials/tools. So far activities implemented by MoH, with support from USAID-funded HC4L, Red Cross, and COOPI include the development of print materials which were disseminated through social media, briefing of spokespersons in 15 districts and airing of radio spots on COVID-vaccination schedule and priority groups. The Ministry of Information has conducted orientation of journalists and will continue this exercise to orient district information officers and communities through the National Initiative for Civic Education.

The MoH continues to lobby for support to respond to fears of vaccination and information needs, particularly misinformation about vaccine safety and efficacy. Partners are gathering more insights to inform the second round of materials development. A UNICEF online survey has been deployed on the Internet of Good Things platform and responses are being monitored and analysed to guide the materials development process.

In partnership with PACHI, a local NGO, UNICEF, is incorporating RCCE messages into existing interventions. It includes joint interventions in Neno district with other district-based NGOs where 20 youths have been trained to make masks and distribute for free to vulnerable individuals along with COVID-19 messaging that reached 300 people. These interventions also reached 21 prisoners with
COVID-19 prevention messages through a district NGO that distributed free masks and soap to prisoners. The SRH and COVID-19 messages have reached 540 people in six primary schools. In Kasungu, PACHI supported the district office to train three teams (21 members) on COVID-19 vaccination. The team members included clinicians, nurses, data clerks, Health Promotion Officers and HSAs.

In its continued efforts to support RCCE interventions, UNICEF has been rolling out the RCCE dashboard as a tool for evidence-based advocacy decision making and localizing RCCE interventions. With several platforms and partners conducting RCCE work, duplication of efforts and difficulty to mount cohesive RCCE both at national and sub-national levels were observed. The first partner mapping which registered 41 partners has enhanced the linkages between epidemiological data and RCCE activities ensuring that interventions become more cohesive and systemic. In collaboration with the RCCE Sub-Cluster and the Public Communication Cluster, a second round of mapping has been planned in April.

UNICEF has collaborated with the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) to support positive social and behaviour change and adoption of positive practices with faith leaders in Malawi for engagement, dialogue, exchange, feedback, mobilization and immediate call to action to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The interventions which will include high level advocacy, capacity building to district inter-faith coordinating committees, community and digital engagement will be rolled out in April in the districts of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mchinji, Mulanje and Mwanza.

Assessing and responding to secondary impacts of the outbreak

As part of its assistance in the implementation of the COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention (CUCI), UNICEF supported setting up an innovative call centre to ensure an effective grievance and redress mechanism which is now operational and will transition into a permanent feature of the social protection system. The call center has so far reported over 67 cases from both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries making inquiries on the CUCI payments. The CUCI intervention is being implemented in Malawi’s four main cities (Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba) with 63,624 beneficiaries receiving the transfers out of planned 199,413.

Furthermore, UNICEF will be supporting the development and broadcast of awareness messages on CUCI and the call center through Malawi’s leading radio and TV stations as part of the CUCI communication plan. The messages will also be accessed through various social media platforms. The combination of platforms is expected to enable the messages to reach over 15 million people in the country.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

UNICEF documented key events such as the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccines in Malawi and the start of the vaccination exercise in Malawi. These materials were shared with media and other partners, leading to wide coverage including by Forbes.

During the reporting period, UNICEF published the following stories:
On the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine in Malawi
On the arrival of COVAX vaccines

5
UNICEF continued to use social media platforms to spread messages about COVID-19 prevention and to build confidence in COVID-19 vaccines.

**Funding Overview and Partnerships**

In 2020, UNICEF received US$ 17,190,743 contributions from public and private donors against a funding requirement of US$ 55,600,000. UNICEF wishes to express its sincere gratitude to all partners whose support has been critical in maintaining and scaling up the response to COVID-19 in 2020. As the country continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, funding availability is very critical for UNICEF for demand creation interventions for COVID-19 vaccination uptake and continued RCCE intervention to promote preventive measures. UNICEF therefore looks forward to continued support from donor partners. A response plan for 2021 has been developed.

**Next SitRep:** 14 April 2021

**Who to contact for further information:**

- **Rudolf Schwenk**
  Representative, Malawi
  E-mail: rschwenk@unicef.org

- **Fungma Fudong**
  Chief of Communications,
  E-mail: ffudong@unicef.org

- **Matteo Frontini**
  Community Development and Resilience Chief of Section
  E-mail: mfrontini@unicef.org