Protecting the frontline: A Health worker vaccinates a fellow health worker at Mganja Health Centre in Dedza, Malawi © UNICEF/2021/GUMULIRA

Reporting Period: 14 March – 14 April 2021

Highlights

• Despite the reduction in the number of new COVID-19 cases recorded 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 preventive measures are not observed.

• COVID-19 vaccination in Malawi began on 11 March 2021. As of 06 April 2021, 164,733 people had been vaccinated. Malawi aims to immunize 3.8 million people by the end of 2021. So far the country has received 510,000 doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine (360,000 COVAX facility, 100,000 AU and 50,000 from the Government of India).

• Results of a UNICEF supported survey conducted before the roll out of the vaccine show low trust among health workers with only 37 per cent of the respondents indicating that they trust the vaccine. The findings are low uptake observed since the vaccine was rolled out. Findings of the study will inform COVID-19 vaccination RCCE strategies. UNICEF is currently working with the Health Education Services (HES) unit in Ministry of Health to plan and roll out interventions to increase vaccine trust.

• The Ministry of Education and Teachers Union of Malawi, signed a consent order on 12 April to pave way for negotiations to end a week long teachers which strike which remerged on 6 April. This has made it possible for teaching and learning to resume on 13 April 2020.

• About 26,000 primary school learners can now learn in an improved socially distanced learning environment as a result of UNICEF’s provision of 650 portable chalkboards. The chalkboards have been distributed to disadvantaged schools that are conducting classes in the open space.

Epidemic curve of COVID-19 in Malawi as of 11 April 2021
Situation Overview

Malawi continues to experience declining numbers of COVID-19 cases. The number of cases has hovered around 20 for the past two weeks which is a significant drop by 50 per cent from the preceding two weeks. Presently Malawi is reporting nearly 2 per cent of the 1,316 cases reported at the peak on January 25, 2021. However, with the case fatality rate remaining at 3.34 per cent, among the highest case fatalities in the world, the number of deaths is not proportional to the decline in the number of cases, hinting a possibility that the number of tests being conducted are not adequate. Admissions to Intensive Care UNITs (ICUs) and hospitals have significantly reduced.

All these compared with high CFR indicates that the number of tests being conducted is so small and health seeking behaviour is not adequate. Presently the positivity rate for tests stands at 3.8 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 changed significantly.

As of 12 April 2021, 224,636 tests have been conducted out of which 33,859 turned out positive for COVID-19. Out of these, more than 27,000 cases were recorded in 2021 accounting for more than 80 per cent of all cases since the start of the outbreak. Since the beginning of the outbreak, 1,132 deaths have been reported (CFR=3.34 per cent) of which 943 have been registered in 2021 alone with 23 recorded in the past two weeks. Over 95 per cent of the confirmed cases are locally transmitted. A total of 31,572 cases (>90 per cent) have now fully recovered, while 1,021 cases remain active with 21 admissions receiving care. A total of 134 were lost for follow up.

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.

COVID-19 vaccination in Malawi began on 11 March 2021 As of 06 April 2021, 164,733 people had been vaccinated. The target groups include health workers (20 per cent), social workers (48 per cent), the elderly above 60 (10 per cent), people with comorbidities (11 per cent), and other groups (12.8 per cent). Malawi aims to immunize 3.8 million people by the end of 2021. The turnout for vaccination in metropolitan areas is high, while in rural areas it is low. Community engagement efforts to boost the turn out are well under way. Some community members including some health workers are putting up a resistance.

Programme response by UNICEF and partners

Humanitarian Strategy

The overall goal of UNICEF’s 2021 COVID-19 response plan is to minimize morbidity and prevent and address secondary impacts of COVID-19. With vaccination now included as a key strategy in the national COVID 19 control efforts, supporting the rollout of candidate vaccines under the COVAX strategy will be a key focus area in 2021 COVID-19 response by UNICEF.

Furthermore, the strategy will build on investments in assessing and responding to the immediate secondary impact of COVID-19 and ensure continuity of services education, child protection, social
protection, WASH, health and Nutrition. Therefore, MCO will strengthen its advocacy and support in strengthening coordination at both national and district levels.

Multi-sectoral approaches shall be promoted to ensure that children and women are effectively cushioned against COVID-19 and that they are supported to recover. Deliberate efforts will be undertaken to strengthen the linkages of humanitarian and development programming as one way of build back better from the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on development gains that have been made over the past decades.

**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**

- An additional 100,000 doses of AstraZeneca were delivered through the AU venture. This vaccine had short shelf life and was immediately dispatched for use, more than 80 per cent of it has been utilized. This brings the total number of doses so far received in Malawi to 510,000 (360,000 COVAX facility, 100,000 AU and 50,000 from the Government of India).
- UNICEF has facilitated customs clearance and handling of seven containers containing 13,000 packs of children’s (MUAC) measuring tapes valued at $50,700.00 and 2,510 sets of portable baby/infant length-height measuring system valued at $384,030.00 for the Ministry of Gender procured by nutrition to support the COVID-19 response. These supplies are currently stored at the Central Medical Stores Trust (CMST) Warehouse pending distribution by the Ministry in collaboration with UNICEF

**Summary Analysis of Programme Response**

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

UNICEF continues to support the national COVID response through technical assistance in coordination, case management, surveillance, and logistics sub committees. The Country Office has distributed COVID-19 prevention and treatment supplies to district health offices, treatment units, and field hospitals in this reporting period. The distributed supplies include oxygen accessories, tents, and assorted personal protective equipment (PPEs) that would benefit an estimated 500 cases of COVID-19. Contact tracing and follow up of active cases remained at the centre of intervention contributing to decline in the number of cases from communities.

With the case fatality rate in Malawi being among the highest, UNICEF is supporting quality of care at the treatment units by organizing and supporting partner initiatives in the area of health worker trainings. As part of continued capacity strengthening, UNICEF is taking part in the prioritization of districts for case management trainings as well as providing technical, logistics and financial support throughout the reporting period. The districts currently prioritised for training include Dedza, Mangochi, Salima, Ntcheu, Balaka, Karonga, and Zomba.
Continuity of health, education, nutrition and protection services

Learning in public schools was on hold for another week due to industrial action which remerged on 6 April. This round of the teachers stayaway ended after the two concerned parties, Ministry of Education and Teachers Union of Malawi, signed a consent order on 12 April to pave way for negotiations. This has made it possible for teaching and learning to resume on 13 April 2020.

To facilitate safe school reopening and improve the teaching and learning environment, UNICEF has provided 650 portable chalkboards to the Ministry of Education to distribute to disadvantaged schools that are conducting classes in the open space. This will help to maintain COVID-19 preventive measures regarding social distancing. The chalkboards will benefit an estimated 26,000 primary learners in the prioritized schools.

UNICEF continues to support District Social Welfare Offices (DSWOs) to provide community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to people affected by COVID-19 by providing MHPSS training. Between March 2020 and 7 April 2021, 525 frontline workers were trained as providers of Psychological First Aid (PFA). This enabled the DSWOs to reach more than 5,500 people in six districts (Blantyre, Dowa, Machinga, Mchinji, Mzimba, and Zomba) in 2021 of which 1,385 people (527 children and 858 adults) have been reached during the reporting period in Blantyre and Dowa district. This brings the total number of people reached with MHPSS through DSWOs with UNICEF support since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to more than 30,000.

In partnership with Malawi Police Service (MPS) and NGOs, Blantyre DSWO supported 89 street-connected children (48 boys, 41 girls) to reintegrate into their homes. This brings the total number of street-connected children supported by DSWOs for reintegration in 2021 to 348. 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, 167 children without parental or family care were supported, which brings the total number supported in 2021 to 780. Besides, from 30 March to 4 April, Blantyre DSWO conducted nine community awareness sessions on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which reached more than 7,800 people.

In addition, a partnership with Save the Children for the strengthening of the capacity of Community Victim Support Unites (CVSUs) continues. On 12 March, Save the Children handed over four CVSUs that have been rehabilitated in Machinga district, which brings the total number of CVSUs revamped by Save the Children in Machinga district to nine. UNICEF is supporting Machinga DSWO to revamp the remaining 10 CVSUs in the district.

Strengthening Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

To contribute to COVID-19 vaccine demand generation, UNICEF supported a survey aimed at understanding perceptions of health workers on COVID-19 vaccine. Though the survey outreach was low (with 80 respondents across the country), the information gathered indicates low trust among health workers corresponding to observations of low uptake on the ground. Only 37 per cent of the respondents said they trust the vaccine very much, 23 per cent said they don’t trust it at all and 22 per cent saying they have little trust while 18 per cent said they trust it moderately. The biggest worry mentioned was about the side effects of the vaccines and the speed under which the vaccine was developed. Findings of the study will inform COVID-19 vaccination RCCE strategies. With new reprogrammed funding from the Irish aid, UNICEF is currently working with the Health Education Services (HES) to plan and roll out interventions aimed at increasing vaccine trust. Activities will be implemented from May 2021. These include motivation through satisfied users of vaccines and
engagement of opinion leaders (religious leaders, chiefs, politicians, health workers) and people with comorbidities.

As capacity strengthening of religious groups for a coordinated, multi-sectoral response continues, UNICEF has partnered with Public Affairs Committee (PAC) to further empower and facilitate engagement of faith leaders for COVID-19 prevention in five districts of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mchinji, Mulanje and Mwanza. The initiative seeks to promote 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. These interventions are aimed at mobilizing 200,000 community members including young people, traditional leaders and school-based structures through community mobilization and digital engagement.

With support from UNICEF, 30 district sector heads, civil society organisations representatives and communities of faith in Nsanje and Chikwawa districts have been engaged with a call to action to synergize ongoing data collection platforms, enhance feedback mechanisms and improve accountability in the COVID-19 response. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health and the National COVID-19 Secretariat to undertake the initiative as part of the operationalisation of an RCCE Model called “Kulumikiza model” and an accompanying dashboard for visualisation of the data. The model whose design UNICEF supported is transformable and adaptable for other potential emergencies to collect and analyse data that can guide localised RCCE interventions. The initiative is aimed at enhancing ongoing tracking of COVID-19 incidence and OPD data at a local level to identify epicentres, high-risk locations and inform locally tailored planning and decision-making for RCCE activities as well as improve coordination at the district and community level.

Assessing and responding to secondary impacts of the outbreak

The COVID-19 Urban Cash Intervention (CUCI) call center, whose establishment UNICEF supported, has so far reported over 1,217 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 106,413 beneficiaries receiving the transfers out of a planned 199,413. UNICEF will also be conducting the targeting for an extra caseload of 7,000 households in the cities of Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba, to support the Government of Malawi to explore the application of categorical targeting approaches. Beneficiaries will include street children, child-headed households and elderly-headed households. This will bring the total number of CUCI beneficiaries up to 206,413.

In addition, UNICEF, in collaboration with the private sector, is supporting the Government of Malawi on the application of Know-Your-Customer verifications under CUCI for 93,000 households across the 4 cities. Verifications are conducted using the National ID and detailed household information stored on social protection databases.

Furthermore, UNICEF continues to support 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 supported Der Spiegel, a German publication, to produce a story on equitable distribution of Covid-19-vaccines across the world, highlighting the historic mission to ensure the equitable distribution of COVID-19-vaccines across the world, with a particular focus on the role of UNICEF. The article tracks the entire supply chain from manufacturing to users on the ground, including in Malawi.
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:** 12 May 2021

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