

## EAPRO COVID-19 Real Time Assessment Initial Report for UNICEF Malaysia Country Office

14 October 2020

### 1. Introduction and Purpose

The UNICEF Malaysia Country Office kindly agreed to take part as a focus country in a Real Time Assessment (RTA) exercise being carried out across the world. The RTA process, as adapted in East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region, has an objective of identifying early perspectives and assessment on the COVID-19 response; analysing the data gathered to extract learning for the region and the wider organisation; and based on the findings and conclusions co-create recommendations for UNICEF further consideration. The Malaysia Country Office (CO) was one of six EAP offices participating in the multi-stage data gathering for the RTA. For the six countries, the full data gathering process included: (a) a desk review carried out by the RO Evaluation section; (b) CO survey; (c) Government and Implementing Partners (IPs) online survey; and (d) identifying a small sample for Key Informant Interviews (KII). These KII are drawn from Frontline workers supported by UNICEF and beneficiary families. The intent of the KII are to learn lessons from the perspectives of interviewees on the UNICEF COVID-19 response.

The purpose of this paper is to respond to a request from the CO for an initial report drawn from the RTA exercises in Malaysia. The Independent Assessment Team (IAT) envisions that this paper will inform an upcoming country management team discussion in the context of rising COVID-19 cases and increased likelihood of going back to lock-down. At the time of writing the KII are not all finalized; but those available have been incorporated into this document. This paper presents the findings and some conclusions from the RTA data gathering stages mentioned above.

The surveys completed by the country office and by government and IPs asked questions on the same broad areas with a view to understand progress so far and enable some basic comparisons between what the UNICEF team concluded and the perspective of other stakeholders. However, the country office (CO) surveys were designed to be carried out in every country across the region, thus the survey had open questions that would take the variety of UNICEF offices in EAP region into consideration. The CO survey prime purpose was to obtain the view point of relevant managers of the COVID-19 response, whose compilation would lend to a greater understanding on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic across the region. The surveys for government and IPs differed in that these were designed to have resonance with these particular informants, and draw on their perspectives. So, the questions asked were adapted, but still tried to cover similar areas with respect to the CO survey. What is set out below is an attempt to draw out the CO findings and compare these with those of government and IPs as far as possible. In some cases questions were asked on a 1 to 10 scaling, some asked for responses on a “drop-down” menu of options, and other questions were open and allowing space for qualitative replies from responders. Where scores for government and IPs are given these are averaged scores from all responders. With respect to these averaged scores: (a) there would be no further comments on the scoring if there was no major outliers in

scores given by different partners and government informants – (b) had this been the case the divergence would have been extracted, presented and described.

Note that in most cases, unless stated, “Partners” refers to responses from government, private sector and IP informants. With a sample of five completed surveys returned (2 Government, 2 NGOs and 1 private sector partner) disaggregating between these partners does not add much value or considered particularly robust<sup>1</sup>. Thus the methodology for analysis takes this point into consideration. Only a small number of questions were directed at particular partners, specifically requiring only Government or only NGOs to respond to the question.

Finally the KII are brought into the analysis to understand where views from the field are in congruence with those presented in the surveys, and where there are divergence. The view point from the field cannot be considered representative in any manner, and various forms of selection biases prevailed in the methodology. Yet they provided additional insight due to the nature of KII work, and the confirmation or non confirmation of findings from the survey findings would be used in the team’s triangulation endeavour.

## 2. Analysis and findings from the Malaysia RTA process so far

### Adaptability: how did responses adapt to the COVID-19 challenges?

The Desk Review of the CO reports and COVID-19 Response Plans indicates that CO gradually shifted its COVID-19 response interventions. This moved from addressing immediate supply and information needs to emerging challenges related to secondary impact of the Movement Control Order (MCO) in education, social protection, mental health and child protection. Augmented focus developed on marginalised populations and positive messaging as discrimination towards migrants and refugees increased. Furthermore, “non-citizens” were outside government assistance packages. The CO carried out multiple evidence generation activities to better identify the challenges that different target groups were facing. These factors helped to drive the adaptation that UNICEF undertook in Malaysia as noted below. The CO reported in their survey the following as the most significant ways the **office adapted** its work to respond to COVID-19 from a range of options:

- Scaling up programmes and/or supplies to reach larger numbers of affected people including the most vulnerable groups;
- Scaling up the use of digital platforms for remote programming and monitoring;
- Strengthening cross-sectoral programming;
- Enhancing coordination with external partners.

When asked for a score on the **degree of adaptability** the office had adopted in response to the changing context the CO rated themselves 8 / 10. A slightly different question was asked of partners which focused on UNICEF’s ability to scale up as needed and the average partner score was 7.5, indicating a closely aligning view to the CO score and a positive overall view on adaptability.

The above was confirmed during a KII. Please see box below:

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<sup>1</sup> A total of 7 responses were received but 2 were incomplete with very little questions responded to

Quote from a KII: Rating of 1 to 10.

10- very suitable. Especially the masks. The masks are quite expensive, there are parents who work at plantation, so they got no money to buy the masks. The students also educated their parents when they return back home from school. Their parents are more aware of the issues, especially on how to clean themselves, their hands. The student's parents are mostly unskilled laborers, some don't know how to take care of their hygiene, their awareness of hygiene and is very low, so when the children go back home, they are role models to the parents on this. The children can make their parents aware.

The presentation on how to use the supplies are all very helpful – it's just that the toothbrushing slide it's too late at the end, perhaps this kind of presentation can be emphasized so the children can also teach their parents at home.

The next broad area of enquiry related to implementation. The CO team noted the **external factors** that drove changes as: (1) the need to increase coverage / outreach of programming and delivery; and (2) to address the evolving needs of populations, including vulnerable groups, stressing the need to support non-citizens outside of "state provided assistance packages".

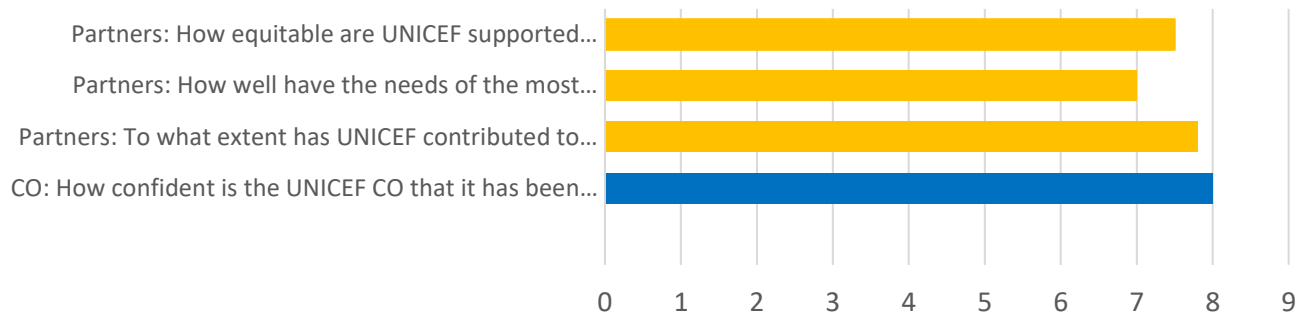
## Equity: identifying and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable

The desk review of situation reports and evidence generation activities suggested that the CO identifies needs of the target population based on the rapid assessments, survey or studies through adapted use of the established digital platforms (i.e. U-Report) or in partnership (with UNCT on impact assessment and Joint study with UNFPA: Families on the Edge).

The CO survey asked for a score on the level of confidence the office felt that **targeting the most vulnerable** had been successful and this was scored at 8 / 10. The CO survey noted the key means undertaken to ensure the most vulnerable were reached:

- Advocacy with Government/others on addressing gaps in provision for particular populations;
- Increasing coordination and data sharing and use across sectors /partners;
- Commissioning additional multi-agency, multi sectoral analytical work;
- Engaging with specialist agencies such as disabled people's organizations, gender specialists;
- Innovative use of technology: further examples given on this in RapidPro, SMS and social media channels to conduct surveys, disseminate information reach non-citizens, and monitor and advocate on government decision making.

Partners were asked a broader range of questions relating to equity to try to determine their perspectives on success in identifying and reaching the most vulnerable populations. The CO and average scores from the partners are shown in Figure One. The averaged scores from the five partners are lower than the CO score, but only slightly. From qualitative responses, the focus on non-Malaysian populations in particular was seen as both essential and valued by both the CO and partners.

**Figure 1: Identifying and meeting the needs of most vulnerable**


It should be noted that challenges were documented during the Desk Review (DR) process. Specifically, the desk review notes:

..... in the areas where digital or remote implementation is not possible, which often includes services for the most vulnerable and marginalized, interventions were disrupted and this challenge remains.

KII indicated that coverage of Alternate Learning Centres may need to be expanded to meet obligations UNICEF has under Leaving No Child Behind (LNCB). The replenishment frequency of disposable items and consumables used to fight the spread of COVID will also need a more detailed analysis. One KII confirmed the distant learning finding, specifically with respect to Online Educations, where approximately 50% of migrant/non documented children may have difficulties in accessing the education material. KII respondents share common concerns that refugees, migrants and stateless population in urban and rural areas might be the most affected vulnerable groups which have not been supported by ongoing assistances by government nor other humanitarian actors in Malaysia.

**Anonymized Quote from a KII:**

The masks and soaps are all very useful, previously the children only wash hands briefly. Now they also bring back home the soaps. But so far the supplies are still enough – UNICEF & \*\*\* gave supplies two times.

So we had actually shared this with \*\*\*\*\* (name of another Community Learning Center (CLC)) in \*\*\*\*\* (religious institution) – they didn't get the assistance. We also shared with \*\*\*\*\* (another name of CLC) in \*\*\*\*\* (name of area). There are many CLC that still haven't received any assistance. But so far our supplies still enough.

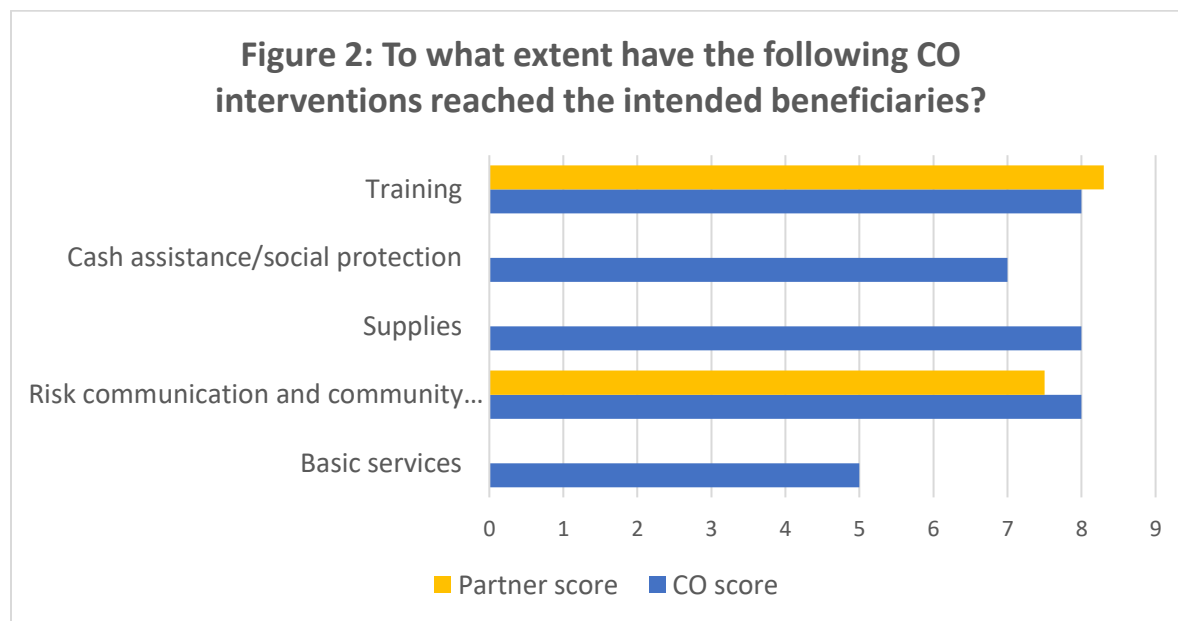
## Reaching beneficiaries through different interventions

The desk review of Situations Reports indicated some major challenges for the CO to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised during the Movement Control Order, such as delivery of essential supplies and continuation of basic essential services (i.e. polio immunization, psychosocial support for children at risk and children with disabilities).

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On the other hand, one KII with a member of the Kita Connect network was extremely positive on the opportunities to learn, connect with friends and take part in activities during lockdown. However, this and other KIIs noted the continuing difficulties faced by children who cannot access education and support online. When asked about online solutions for the most vulnerable groups in light of lockdowns, one KII noted “Online would work 50%. Most [vulnerable families<sup>2</sup>] cannot afford a smartphone. Just a few parents can get this online with the children at home. So we are depending so much on the teachers who are attending online [sessions] to transfer information to children.”

Questions were asked of both the UNICEF CO and partners in the surveys on interventions reaching beneficiaries. In Cash/social protection and Supplies partners marked these as not applicable to them (the Basic services question was not included in the partner survey). Where partners did comment (RCCE and training) their scores were close to the UNICEF CO score.



**Anonymized Quote from KII:**  
 There are many children that don't go to schools, so they only get food assistance at home through the ..., there are still many being left out -- out there. At least for the children at our schools, when they go home, they can go back to school to restock [the masks]. But other people out there still don't have enough money to buy masks, and they don't have enough awareness either. For example, in my village, there are many who tend the farm and work at a plantation, their kids are not in school. And our school is not responsible for them, so they are left behind.

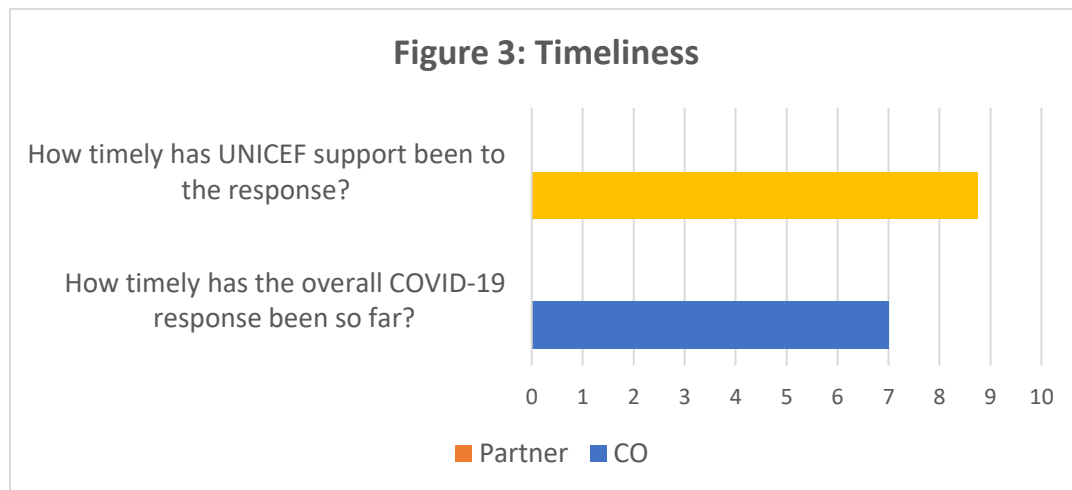
### Timeliness

On timeliness a similar question was asked of the UNICEF country office and all partners. As can be seen from figure three the CO had assessed the overall response as seven out of 10 and partners, having been asked a more focused question on the UNICEF contribution, scored this query as 8.75 out of 10 score.

<sup>2</sup> Red text in brackets added as an extrapolation from the statement by the IAT.

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KII informants were also positive about timeliness of support, despite the significant challenges of lockdown. A KII involved in Kita Connect was very positive on the how quickly related interventions were adapted for COVID-19 lockdowns and the contributions this made to young people in mental health, simply helping them keep busy and engaged when normal interactions were closed off.



The table below the presents CO survey results to the query “identify the main factors that helped and hindered timeliness”. It is interesting to note that the enabling factors are all internal to the organization whereas the hindering factors are drawn from external factors.

Timeliness: Enabling factors	Timeliness: Hindering factors
L3 SSOP and the simplification of procedures created an enabling environment for the CO e.g.: ability to form new partnerships / redesign of current work, fast tracking procurement of supplies etc	Lockdown / lack of access
Resource mobilisation and funding levels	Challenges in getting requests/approval from the Government side due to reluctance of the Government for the UN assistance in the response
Technical support provided by RO and HQ	

Anonymized Quote from KII -- Question was: *Did you/your community receive what you needed the most **in time** for it to be useful?*

Very useful, because we don't get any other assistance. The teachers also don't have money to buy the masks, we are very frugal, we change the mask only once a week, because we're afraid that it will run out. That's why we still have enough.

## Success and value addition: particular successes in the response

The CO response to this question is quoted in full below. On a very initial review of other EAP country surveys, the IAT found at the Malaysia CO response resonates with other responses.

Response from CO Survey:

Online youth engagement has been one of the success throughout the COVID-19 response, while mental health has been identified as an opportunity for future programming. UNICEF Malaysia quickly conducted a survey to understand the needs in the unprecedented scale of emergency globally and found out mental health and psychosocial wellbeing has turned out to be the most urgent and needy topic to be addressed among young people. UNICEF Malaysia has created a new digital platform to meaningfully engage young people to hear their concern and share their stories among young people to address MHPSS needs. Given the school closure and lock down, online space became a space for social mobilization under RCCE pillar of response and C4D section had to explore a way to engage young people online beyond usual social media posting by the Communication section. This has been an opportunity to engage young people with a topic of their interest (MHPSS) and informed our office approach in MHPSS in the next country programme. The crisis also triggered very important and long avoided discussion on quality of education in terms of income and geographic division of students as well as created new opportunities to expand decision to thousands of non-Malaysian children in the country. It also exposed weakness of child protection and social protection systems, thus, open opportunity for further reforms.

There are findings in areas such as innovating on digital platforms to enable young people to communicate; the growing appetite to act on mental health; and framing UNICEF's role in the next phase to tackle other important issues arising from both COVID-19 and systemic factors that continue to hinder the equitable access of young people to the support their needs. There were very positive KII from adolescent that engaged in KitaConnect and other online platforms.

Most KII reviewed indicated a good feedback mechanism had been established through WhatsApp with beneficiaries. The feedback mechanism as it relates to Accountability to Affected Population can be considered as a success in the Malaysian context.

### 3. Looking ahead

A final set of questions asked open ended questions of both the CO and partners on what they would recommend UNICEF focused on in future. The table captures these responses and shows emergent themes around mental health and reaching those without access to technology; **how to achieve the right partner balance to suit the different demands of the fluid context**; working innovatively; and strengthening monitoring.

	UNICEF CO survey	Partners survey	Partners survey
<b>More of?</b>	<p><b>Explore new partnership to address children's MHPSS</b> needs online and to address immediate supply needs among the most vulnerable groups that we do not directly provide services during regular programme.</p> <p>Use of social media in a wide scale as proven to be successful. The identification of new channels to communicate with <b>vulnerable communities with limited access to technology and social media</b></p>	<p><b>Mental Health Support</b> in particular post MCO situations</p> <p><b>Equal engagement</b> at the grass root and high-level stakeholders</p>	<p>UNICEF further support for <b>refugees, and the students</b> (supplies). Some schools for migrants not being supported (eg Syrian schools)</p> <p>Get <b>teenagers more active in advocacy!</b> UNICEF can play a role in activating and supporting them</p> <p>UNICEF has gone from listening to what youth want, <b>to actually applying it and amplifying the voices of youth.</b> This is exactly what it should be doing more of. "To have adults listen to what you say, and see it be applied, that's a pretty big thing."</p> <p><b>Indigenous children.</b> They are still lacking in many ways like education, health.</p>
<b>Less of?</b>	<p>Using the traditional ways of cooperation with existing partners (for development) to <b>address humanitarian needs.</b> We need to carefully consider whether we will work with the existing <b>partners specialized</b> for development programme for humanitarian response. We need to work more with humanitarian partners for humanitarian response, while we work with existing partner, traditionally for development programme, for system strengthening and supporting the government</p>	<p>Duplication of programmes</p> <p>"Paperwork (if that is possible, but the current process is not that bad at all)"</p>	<p>No complaints</p>
<b>Do differently?</b>	<p><b>Diversify NGO partnership</b> to quickly distribute hygiene supplies either multiple partnership or sub-contract modality</p>	<p>To ensure programmes are <b>tailored for Malaysia</b> a high-income developing nation Support innovative processes to national/local partners</p>	<p>Surgical type masks provided too big and difficult for young students to tie</p> <p>General comments on the difficulties of reaching those</p>



	UNICEF CO survey	Partners survey	Partners survey
			<p>children who cannot access online education &amp; resources and the need to support local teachers to try to keep these children engaged</p> <p>Many organizations, NGO or government organizations who'd like to team up and help UNICEF to do certain programmes and events, but we don't know how to reach out. UNICEF could be more open to collaborations and teaming up with programmes, even small events, it would also boost the rate of involvement with more networks, and the rate of programmes being done because it doesn't happen by itself.</p>
<b>Possible new areas of work?</b>	<p>Setting up partnership with service-delivery oriented NGO for the most vulnerable groups to activate emergency partnership. Strengthen monitoring/fact finding mechanism over Government and other agencies actions/decision to support adequate response prevent possible use of emergency situation for unnecessary human rights restrictions/limitations.</p>	<p>Mental Health and resilience in particular response to violence and extremism</p> <p>Family livelihood through cash assistance programmes</p>	<p>Groups of refugees and undocumented children, stateless and not documented are also very vulnerable who continue to need support, and also indigenous children</p>

## How to ensure we are Leaving no Child Behind (LNCB)?

The CO and partner surveys had questions on LNCB.

Partners commented on quite wide-ranging needs in geographical areas plus an emphasis on children with disabilities. Areas that may need to be strengthened to better attain the goal of LNCB:

- Extending coverage and depth of programme for urban and rural poor

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- For rural poor, special focus to improve internet connectivity
- Adapted programming for children with disabilities in rural Sabah and Sarawak, urban poor, single parent families, parents who lost income due to pandemic
- Additional focus on refugees, migrants and stateless children.

Some of these responses are supported by KIs, as one respondent identified refugees as the most left behind in Malaysia, while others identified ALCs with less connectivity in rural areas are the group needs further support.

The UNICEF CO response focused more on analysis and evidence generation to build understanding and build the case for future Malaysia CO investments and working with the government:

The Malaysia CO can first respond to immediate needs with a quick assessment with existing tools and channels, but need to adjust/revise its response plan (medium term) based on the evidence generated as part of initial response. Social policy colleagues [can] play a key role to investigate and generate medium and longer term [information on the] impact of COVID-19 to inform office wide pivot to recovery and beyond. There is a need to further strengthen the relation with the Government as regards the emergency response despite Malaysia not being traditionally prone to emergency situations.

## Desk Review

As part of the RTA process, a DRAFT desk review has been established for Malaysia which can be found as an embedded file here. Malaysia Country Office's response on the desk review would be highly appreciated.



Microsoft Word 97 -  
2003 Document

## Raw and Anonymized Data

In case the Malaysia CO would like to view the raw data gathered, please send an email to [kraffii@unicef.org](mailto:kraffii@unicef.org); and possibility of sharing anonymized data can be explored.