

## UNICEF 2008 Humanitarian Action Report: Hinting an Impending Crisis?

The Humanitarian Action Report is UNICEF's annual appeal for children and women affected by emergencies around the globe. The report includes(1); regional and country chapters and human interest stories; an overview of funding requirements for 2008 and a look back at emergency funding in 2007; and a review of lessons learn from the tsunami disaster – one of the largest emergency situations ever faced.

### KEY FINDINGS

This report contains information on the humanitarian work performed by UNICEF. The report has detailed information on emergency situations and relief works performed in 39 countries including those currently affected by severe political crisis, such as Chad and Kenya. It also addresses countries struck by severe natural disasters, such as Mozambique, which has experienced devastating floods.

Among the 300,000 people who were forced from their homes into temporary camps in Kenya, almost 50% are children. In Chad, 30,000 of the 52,000 who have been driven from the country are vulnerable and urgently need help. UNICEF is providing assistance in health, education and nutrition in these countries. Similarly, the number of internally displaced persons in Sudan has grown to 2.1 million, and the conflict has damaged the safety and livelihoods of large portions of civilian population. The damage has spread across national borders, and thousands of children are in dire need of assistance and protection. UNICEF-supported programs in Sudan, totaling over US\$ 150 million, aim to boost health, nutrition and education, increase access to safe water and sanitation, and promote child protection and mine action(1). In West Africa too, nearly one million people are currently displaced by conflict and the resulting

under-nutrition is a major risk for young children. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than half of the deaths in young children are attributable to malnutrition(1).

The report highlights a worrying trend of women and children increasingly falling victim to systematic rape, often used as a weapon of war by different groups. The report also highlights how the conflicts often go hand-in-hand with natural catastrophes, blurring the lines between different types of disasters and reinforcing the damage wrought on the lives of children and women. For instance, when the political crisis broke out in Kenya following the election in late December 2007, people were already suffering the impact of drought and of the HIV and AIDS pandemic(1).

According to the report, better natural disaster preparedness has improved the situation in some countries prone to them. In Bangladesh, death toll from cyclones of similar intensity was 3,300 in November 2007 in comparison to 500,000 and 140,000 in 1970 and 1991, respectively. The report spells out the lessons learned from the tsunami catastrophe in 2004 – more efficient coordination between different stakeholders, importance of funding mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and better preparedness, including assisting communities to identify warning signs(2). These lessons have been put into place in Mozambique, where early warning mechanisms and pre-positioned emergency supplies enabled a quick first-line response that has helped nearly 95,000 people—mainly children and women— who have been displaced by the disastrous floods in the country for the second year in a row(1).

On the funding front, last year, 52 per cent of UNICEF's requested emergency funds were received mainly because of an increase in the contributions received from CERF. However, donor funding to UNICEF humanitarian programs decreased in 2007 by 14 percent from 2006 level of US\$ 513 million(1). In terms of thematic

## FOCUS

(unearmarked) humanitarian funds, the top donor in 2007 was Sweden with a total of US\$ 24 million. For 2008, UNICEF has called on donors to provide \$856 million to assist children and women who are victims of crises and emergencies around the world. UNICEF hopes that donors will respond favorably to the humanitarian appeals included in the report in order to enable it to address the needs and rights of the most vulnerable children and women in the world(1,3).

### NEED OF THE HOUR

UNICEF has done tremendous work with its partners to improve the coordination of humanitarian response in all sectors. India and the other regions of South Asia also suffer frequent natural disasters such as recent floods in Northern Bihar and Southern Nepal. Coordination is crucial for effective delivery of humanitarian aid. Communities and families must be equipped with knowledge and skills to prepare and respond better to disasters. To achieve this goal, partnerships with communities, governments, UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector are crucial not only to deliver the aid but also to pass on the information that can save lives.

Providing the health aid at the 'right place' and at the 'right time' can address emergency needs in a far more efficient way. The most urgent need of the hour is continued support to organizations such as UNICEF, and generosity of the donors to help the agency in closing funding gap to ensure the survival, protection and well-being of women and children in these emergency situations.

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