

UNICEF Annual Report 2006

Dan Toole, Director of Emergency Programmes speaks about ‘Forgotten Emergencies’ and the highlights of UNICEF’s humanitarian work in 2006

Q: What is meant by the term ‘forgotten emergencies’ in the context of UNICEF programmes and humanitarian work?

A: Forgotten emergencies really is a euphemism. It’s this idea that there are some places that we forget about. A better term is ‘neglected emergencies’ because donors and others chose to fund emergencies and they forget or neglect others. Every year is that there are a few very high profile emergencies that get a tremendous amount of money and then a large number of smaller but equally important emergencies that get very little funding, and a few places get almost no funding. We are really talking about those countries that are forgotten or even neglected by the community that funds humanitarian operations.

Q: How does UNICEF ensure that such ongoing ‘emergencies’, which are not on the front pages, are kept in the public awareness, continue to receiving funding and are sustainable?

A: First I must say that the press and funding are incredibly linked. In the ‘good’ emergencies we talk about the CNN factor – that once the big agencies such as CNN or BBC pick up an emergency, people become aware. And so the media has an incredibly important role to play in raising awareness, in getting people interested, and therefore in mobilizing funds for emergencies as well. We work very closely with the press. Every year we launch our [Humanitarian Action Report](#) with the press. Our country offices really try to provide human interest stories, either directly to the press – let’s say if they’re in Sudan, or maybe they’re in Myanmar or in Madagascar – or through our [National Committees](#). The National Committees themselves have very close relations to the press. What’s needed is an even tighter work with that press core to make sure that they understand not just that there’s a problem, because there are many problems in the world, but the real impact on children, and that all children have the same rights and therefore we have to respond.

Q: We hear and read a lot about conflicts in many countries but never about how they impact civilians, especially children. Why are children’s voices often not heard and how does UNICEF operate and advocate in that environment?

A: There are two issues. How do we give voice to people who are being exploited, being abused and having their basic rights to health and nutrition removed or not met? Whether in the Democratic Republic of Congo, whether in Sudan, Liberia or elsewhere. The first is to get the story out. One of the most exciting things right now for me is the environmental movement, where suddenly youth, celebrities and others have grabbed onto an issue and they are starting to make a major a difference. On emergencies, and on the forgotten or neglected places, the rights of children, we need to get that same kind of groundswell. Mechanisms such as [Voices of Youth](#), the interactive capacity that UNICEF has put in place via the website, is an amazing opportunity to involve young people, in the developed countries of the north for example, with people and children who are in the south.

Q: What are the criteria used, or what things should be in place before a country is no longer considered to be in an emergency 'phase'.

A: Emergencies unfortunately don't ever end nicely and neatly. When we did a study about two years ago of countries coming out of emergencies – both conflict as well as acute natural disasters – [we saw that] most countries start to make a lot of progress, and then about 60 per cent of the countries fall back. And that is particularly problematic for countries coming out of conflict because they often fall back into conflict. So part of the job of the emergency programme division, part of the job of our country offices even more importantly, is to monitor the situation and make sure that we don't suddenly drop a country because it all seems normal today, but we're ready to gear up again should they need it.

What we've seen is that early progress is really important. For example, recently the Nepal Peace Agreement, or the Sudan Peace Agreement two years ago. People see that peace agreement, they hear about it, and the public here in the US, or in the UK or Singapore may think well OK, now the problem is over. It's certainly not. That's just the beginning. People on the ground who live in that country want to see concrete progress. So a peace agreement or an election is one piece of progress, but if their kids can't go to school, or if the health centre does not have drugs – if there isn't progress in the social sector – people get frustrated and that's when they start to look at other means to solve their problems, which are guns, demonstrations etc.

Q: Tell us about the 'Child Alerts' that UNICEF started at the end of 2005? What factors trigger these reports for a particular country? What is their purpose? Has the organization noticed any significant gains in emergency funding to these countries or regions as a result?

A: The idea behind it was to share more than just press releases, to share more than photos. To help people around the world understand more in-depth what is happening in a country. The first one we did was on [Darfur](#) [Sudan]. We found from the response on the web was that we could put up a tremendous amount of information: it had sound, it had photos, it had history, it had in-depth analysis of the problems, and of the complexities. We know from the number of hits on the Internet that people were indeed very interested.

The idea is to mobilize additional support – more than funding. I am quite keen to ensure that young people – that people around the globe – actually engage in the work that UNICEF does and engage in fighting themselves in every way possible for the rights of children everywhere. I know that that means they have to know more, they have to understand situations. It's simple enough that they can take that first step.

We know that there are governments who look at them as well, but the real...[goal] behind it is was interesting the general public, interesting youth. There's a discussion forum linked to it so that people can ask questions and get answers, and they can discuss among themselves.

Q: UNICEF received its single, largest earmarked donation in 2006 – \$200 million over four years – for education in emergencies and post-crisis countries. What impact do you anticipate this will have on helping children and families in countries that are currently considered "forgotten"?

A: We were just delighted with this contribution of the Dutch Government of \$200 million. We have had trouble since I was Representative in Rwanda in 1995 getting people to realize education is a valid humanitarian intervention. People tend to think, 'Oh, education, that can come later. We'll do all the live saving first'. And what we've learned over the course of many, many decades of work in emergencies is that education first and foremost is about getting normalcy back – the patterns of life that are important to families and to children, to survival. Secondly, it's actually physical protection. In some of the worst

emergencies, the time that a child is in school is some of the only time when they are actually protected from abuse, they are protected from soldiers, etc. So it is actually an institution that can create life-saving protection. It's also about learning and the right to education, and that goes beyond life-saving.

The fact that the Dutch Government recognized this important element of any humanitarian response by giving \$200 million recognizes also then that within the international community that this is a valid humanitarian action.

A couple of things that will come out of this tremendous donation. First is we hope to get at least 10 million new kids in school. Because, as horrible as emergencies are, they're also incredible opportunities. We have, for example, 300,000 children in school in Darfur who were not in school before the crisis. We have more children in school in Afghanistan today than ever before. So that's where an emergency represents an opportunity to jump-start, to expand the educational opportunities for all children.

In addition, it will help us to improve the situation where children are already in school. It's a tremendous opportunity to get more children into school, improve the quality, and make sure that we can sustain it through to a development stage when governments pick up that education again.

Q: What were the highlights of UNICEF's emergency work in 2006?

A: The big innovation for 2006 was the expansion of our internal reserves. For the first time UNICEF went from \$25 million to \$75 for our internal emergency reserve [money set aside from regular resources] and we spent about \$40 million. We began to see that we didn't have enough money in our internal reserve – certainly the tsunami was a big element of that, Darfur, the drought and malnutrition crisis in Niger and elsewhere – to satisfy the expanding emergencies. Natural disasters are increasing, and with global warming they are likely to increase yet further. What we also know is that the poor suffer the most.

The donor mobilization of funds is increasing but the speed of response is still lacking. And so by increasing our emergency reserve the [Board](#) agreed that this was the best way to respond to emergencies. It meant that we could use UNICEF internal funds as the fastest mechanism of emergency response – whether for education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation. The first money is the most important money, because it saves lives the fastest.