

ZAMBIA

School supplies for 60,000 children in Zambia's flooded areas and hope for a way forward

Beginning in December 2006, severe rainfall produced extensive flooding throughout Zambia, damaging housing and water and sanitation facilities; hampering service delivery in both the health care and education sectors; directly disrupting the lives and livelihood of almost 300,000 people, and indirectly affecting almost 1.5 million people in 41 separate districts across the country. As a result, the Government of Zambia called for the assistance of the international community.

To help respond to the humanitarian needs throughout Zambia's flooded areas, UNICEF turned over 640 'school-in-a-box' kits to the Ministry of Education, thus providing educational supplies to more than 60,000 children and 1,000 teachers in six provinces. Staff from the Ministry of Education and UNICEF came together in late April for the handover of the educational materials to the severely affected rural areas. The Minister of Education, the Hon. Geoffrey Lungwangwa (MP), noted that the heavy rains had disrupted education in more than 322 schools throughout the country, and that these supplies would help children return to school and provide a sense of normalcy for those who may have been traumatized by the floods.

With the extreme rainfall period earlier in the year, the impact on rural lives in parts of the country has been severe. The flooding was often so exceptional that some districts reported 40 to 50 per cent reduction in school attendance – mainly due to infrastructure damage and displacement. UNICEF's direct donation of US\$ 133,171.73 illustrated the strong partnership between the agency and the Government of Zambia. Reflecting back on the crisis, UNICEF Representative in Zambia Lotta Sylwander observed that "UNICEF was able to respond to a request from the Ministry of Education received in the very early stages of the flooding. We know that in periods of crisis the continuation of children's education is vital, not only for their psychosocial development but also for the continuation of their lives. It was a very rewarding experience to work with the Ministry of Education in this time of trouble, and we hope to continue working hand in hand for the benefit of Zambian children and women."

And so, last April, as the sun set into the Zambian horizon, a truck and its vital cargo began to move forward. The Ministry of Education's truck with its UNICEF-sponsored contents was off not simply to deliver chalk, pencils and books to Zambian children waiting for an education; it was on its way towards a return to normal life in Zambia. And, for over 60,000 of its children, it was hope for a way forward.