

MADAGASCAR

Helping Malagasy children go back to normalcy after the cyclone season

In northern Madagascar, the last cyclone season has destroyed everything in its way: roads, bridges and entire communities – more than 1,500 homes, over 100 classrooms and many health centres have been ravaged.

“I was playing with my friends when it started to rain very hard. Our village is very close to the river and we became scared when the water level started to increase,” explains 14-year-old Razanajandry. Most of the houses in the communities of Ambondrona and Ambodimadiro have disappeared under the floods, leaving hundreds of people without shelter.

“When I ran home, my parents were packing our belongings to flee as quickly as possible. A few minutes later, the floods washed away my house and everything disappeared below the water,” remembers Razanajandry sadly.

The most urgent needs for the affected population were food, potable water, essential drugs, shelter, sanitation, cooking utensils, and education materials. A few days after the floods, UNICEF delivered emergency supplies to the hardest hit. However, the destruction of the national road system and the isolation of most of the flood-stricken communities posed logistical challenges to relief efforts. To reach the affected population, all means of transport – trucks, boats and helicopters – have been used so far.

Flash flooding also destroyed the borehole well of Razanajandry’s community. To prevent the risks of water-borne diseases and epidemic outbreaks, UNICEF distributed family water kits, hygiene items, household water purification supplies, containers and soap. In order to restore water supply and to improve quality and access to safe water, UNICEF also rehabilitated the borehole, thus women and children no longer had to walk long distances to fetch water from springs and streams.

By mid-March, school lessons had to be temporarily suspended as the school had been seriously damaged. Razanajandry, who is in T5 grade of the primary school, was very worried. He really wanted to pass the exams and get the Primary School Certificate, in June. However, with the disruption of the lessons, it was going to be very challenging for him to obtain his degree and continue his studies in the secondary school.

In all across Madagascar an estimated 659 classrooms were destroyed as a result of the cyclone season. UNICEF focused its response on bringing all children back to school by providing tents and ‘school-in-a-box’ kits in an attempt to facilitate a fast recovery to normalcy. After Easter holidays, all children were again attending the lessons. Razanajandry passed his exams and got the Primary School Certificate at the end of June.

However, once children are back to school, conditions must be improved. "More than 112 children have been enrolled," explains the Head of Ambondrona School, Lalauairina Perle. "Since there is not enough room in the tent for all students at the same time, we have organized two shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. It is really urgent to build a new school similar to the one we had before the floods to meet the needs of all enrolled students," adds Ms. Perle.

UNICEF is reconstructing 95 classrooms within five regions affected by the cyclones, one of them in Ambondrona. The construction of an additional 90 cyclone-resistant classroom structures is under way with community participation. These structures are expected to be in place before the beginning of the 2007/2008 school year in September.