

CAMEROON

UNICEF RESPONDS TO THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN AFFECTED BY THE REFUGEE CRISIS



12 February 2008

1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

An estimated 50,000 Chadians have fled recent fighting in Chad's capital, N'Djamena, to Cameroon. Although several hundred of them have returned to Chad in the course of the last two days, the majority of the refugees remain and are living in extremely difficult circumstances.

As of today, approximately 30,000 **vulnerable** refugees from Chad are concentrated in Kousseri and surrounding areas, in the North of Cameroon, across the Chari River bridge that separates Cameroon from Chad and its capital N'Djamena. Their number could increase significantly if the situation worsens in the coming days and weeks within Chad. As of Monday, the rebels are reported to have moved towards the East.

Most of the vulnerable refugees are children and women. As the vast majority of the population crossed the bridge from N'djamena on foot, they only brought with them the bare minimum. They lack essential items, such as blankets, water, food, cooking utensils, clothes and money. Several refugees are reported to be traumatized and a few malnourished children have already been identified. In the chaos of the escape from N'Djamena, several children were separated from their parents. One case of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) has been identified among the refugees. Although the results of the analysis are not yet known, it is possible that it will be confirmed as a Polio case. Confirmation or not, the risk of epidemics – measles, meningitis, polio and cholera – remains extremely high, given the relatively low immunization coverage of children in the area and the extremely unsanitary conditions prevailing in Kousseri.

The refugees are presently in two temporary sites close to the bridge – which is too close to the border and consequently vulnerable. UNHCR plans to relocate the refugees within one week to a more suitable campsite in Maltam, some 32 km from Kousseri that could host up to 100,000 people.

In any crisis, it is children and women who suffer most. Vulnerable to cold, hunger, trauma and disease, children and women in Kousseri require urgent life-saving assistance to be able to survive.

The immediate humanitarian needs are food, safe water, tents, blankets, non-food items and vaccines to address the potential disastrous consequences of the refugees living in the open, without any basic facilities, as well as prevent epidemics. Networks and support structures for the protection of women and children are also critical.

UNICEF and its partners, including sister UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organisations, are working closely with the Government of Cameroon to respond swiftly and effectively to the crisis. To finance these efforts, the United Nations Country Team has submitted a proposal to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). UNICEF is requesting for US\$950,000 to cover key interventions in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, immunization, maternal and neo-natal care and recreation and learning activities.

While the CERF funds will hopefully cover some of the requirements, additional needs will remain. In order to respond quickly, UNICEF is requesting an initial **US\$1,860,000** to meet the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women throughout the affected areas.

2. UNICEF'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE: ISSUES & ACTIONS

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Issues

In the aftermath of the Chadian crisis, many children are without food or shelter. The temperature in this period of the year in Kousseri is quite cold, windy and dusty. Children and their families remain exposed, and many of the injured do not have access to medical treatment. The sudden upsurge of population has put great pressure on the already overstretched existing health facilities and the city's only hospital. Overcrowding in the street and temporary sites, where refugees sleep outside without shelter, means an increased threat of acute respiratory infections, water-borne diseases and the spread of deadly diseases such as measles. Urgent medical supplies and nutrition support is needed to avert a loss of life. In addition,

it will be crucial to pay special attention to the needs of women and adolescent girls as they are most exposed in such a crisis situation.

Urgent Actions

- Distribution of life-saving and critical relief supplies such as blankets, sweaters and plastic sheeting;
- Provision of high-protein biscuits;
- Availability of medical kits including emergency drugs;
- Immunisation against Measles, Polio and Meningitis, couple with Vitamin A supplementation;
- Operational support for medical teams;
- Monitoring to ensure that women and girls have access to health services and safe deliveries.

UNICEF and its partners will work to strengthen local capacities to restore health and nutrition service delivery. UNICEF and WHO have already provided technical and operational support for Government health teams in the field. Polio and measles campaigns will be undertaken this week.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Issues

The drinking water supply in Kousseri and its vicinities, which is scarce in normal times, is absolutely insufficient to cover the enormous additional need created by the N'Djamena population. Faced with water shortages, people are resorting to unsafe sources, placing their health at great risk. The lack of sanitation facilities means that hazardous waste is left out in the open. The risk of dysentery, cholera and other water-borne diseases - particularly grave for children – is very high..

Urgent Actions

- Distribution of safe drinking water through renting of water trucks, distribution of water purification tablets and jerry cans;
- Organization of garbage collection and proper disposal of waste;
- Provision of hygiene materials, including soap, buckets and educational materials containing hygiene messages; and
- Establishment of latrines and refurbishing of water points as necessary.

In collaboration with UNHCR, partners and local authorities, UNICEF is assessing existing water and sanitation needs in the temporary camps as well as in the new Maltam camp being established by UNHCR in order to determine what actions are necessary. UNICEF will work to strengthen local partners and Government authorities to reinforce water and sanitation services. UNICEF will provide sanitation facilities in the CETIC camp. UNICEF has distributed an average of 48,000 liters of water per day of drinking water to the refugees through water trucking.

EDUCATION

Issues

UNICEF's long experience in emergencies has demonstrated that returning children to play and learning/school as quickly as possible is one of the most valuable emergency interventions that can take place. Recreation and education are keys to children's well being and long-term opportunities, and must not be interrupted during a situation of crisis. In addition, organised recreational activities and learning opportunities provide children with a sense of normalcy, which is crucial to their psychological well-being.

Urgent Actions

- Provision of schools-in-a-box, including materials like chalk, workbooks, pencils, knapsacks;
- Provision of tents for temporary schools to ensure minimum interruption to children's classes.

In close collaboration with national and local authorities, UNICEF will facilitate the work of partners and is participating in assessment missions to establish affected children's recreational and learning needs and plan future interventions.

CHILD PROTECTION

Issues

Armed violence, such as that currently being experienced in Chad, exacts a terrible toll on children's psychological health. Confused and traumatised, they turn to parents who are themselves suffering from severe emotional distress. Faced with frightening memories, children exhibit signs of stress, such as the fear of uniforms, inability to sleep and nightmares. Several traumatised children have been already seen among the refugee population in Kousseri. Psychosocial support for these children is crucial to their long-term well-being.

Amid the chaos of the N'Djamena battle and the escape to Kousseri, several children become separated from their families. Although some have already been re-united, others remain separated, and are currently in the care of the Cameroonian Red Cross. For the unaccompanied/separated children not yet identified, the risk of exploitation and abuse is high, especially in view of the deteriorating security situation in Kousseri, the local presence of armed men and the risk of children's recruitment by fighting forces. These children need to be protected and cared for, and their families traced as soon as possible.

An unknown number of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) and other remnants of war have been found in Kousseri. Some of the UXOs have been picked up by the population. While the local police and army are reinforcing security in the area and trying to ensure identification of all UXOs, they have indicated that they lack de-mining expertise.

Urgent Actions

- Distribution of recreation kits including toys and games;
- Establishment of child-friendly spaces where children can feel safe, play, and receive psychosocial support;
- Prevention of family separation, identification and support of unaccompanied and separated children, including family tracing mechanisms;
- Sensitisation of communities to the increased risk of exploitation and abuse;
- Communication for prevention of UXO accidents.

A network of Cameroonian Red Cross volunteers, several committees (youth, protection, hygiene) and 5 psychologists from the Ministry of Social Affairs has been created to provide psycho-social assistance. UNICEF will support this network and provide necessary materials such as recreational kits and training material. This network has a sufficient reach to cover the entire population of children and adolescents. With the work of this network, the refugee area has been divided in eight zones of interventions for psychological support to be provided by social workers.

UNICEF will support the creation of Children's and Women's Units to assist children, families and communities to cope with the crisis and to reinforce/regain healthy psycho-social development and resilience. Furthermore, UNICEF will give assistance to the organization of sensitization campaigns on child protection issues and unexploded ordnance.

A child protection monitoring and alert system will be put in place to report on, advocate against and follow up on systematic abuse, violence and exploitation of children and women, and ensure that appropriate response mechanisms are established.

COORDINATION

Issues

UNICEF is working in close collaboration with UNHCR to support interventions in water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, and education, and is also providing key support in health, child protection and UXO accidents prevention.

Urgent Actions

- Monitoring and support of nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene and education sectors;
- Facilitation of assessments in these sectors;
- Establishment of a temporary base (tent or building) where people can sleep, where supplies can be temporarily stocked when they arrive and before distribution, where people can meet to coordinate operations with other partners;
- Deployment of UNICEF Cameroon staff from Yaounde to Kousseri; and
- Monitoring, daily follow up and reporting of field actions.

Under the general guidance of the Resident Coordinator, UNICEF will continue collaborating closely with OCHA, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, UNDP and UNDSS to keep abreast of needs and plan sector response.

3. ESTIMATED FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR PLANNED ACTION FROM 7 FEBRUARY TO 30 APRIL 2008

UNICEF has already reallocated internal resources to jumpstart its response to this crisis. In order to continue responding, UNICEF is requesting an initial **US \$1,860,000** to meet the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women throughout the affected areas.

TOTAL FUNDING REQUIREMENT

SECTORS	Funds Requested USD\$
<i>Nutrition</i>	175,000
<i>Water and Sanitation</i>	500,000
<i>Health</i>	250,000
<i>Education & Child Protection</i>	180,000
<i>Partnership agreements</i>	100,000
<i>Emergency Consultant 3 months</i>	30,000
<i>Transportation (airfreight from offshore)</i>	500,000
<i>In country transportation</i>	125,000
Total	1,860,000

Further information on the UNICEF emergency programme in Cameroon can be obtained from:

Silvia LUCIANI UNICEF Representative Yaounde, Cameroon Tel: +237 2222 3182 Fax: +237 2223 1653 Email: sluciani@unicef.org	Esther Vigneau UNICEF EMOPS Geneva Tel: + 41 22 909 5612 Fax: + 41 22 909 5902 E-mail: evigneau@unicef.org	Gary Stahl UNICEF PFO New York Tel: + 1-212 326 7009 Fax: + 1-212 326 7165 Email : gstahl@unicef.org
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