

NICARAGUA

IMMEDIATE NEEDS FOR CHILDREN AND WOMEN AFFECTED BY HURRICANE FELIX



UNICEF URGENTLY REQUIRES US \$ 2,085,000

1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is frequently hit by natural disasters which amplify the vulnerability of the extremely poor inhabitants, mainly indigenous population of the region. A combination of geographical isolation, social exclusion and frequent occurrence of hurricanes, flooding and pest infestations in recent years have further deteriorated living conditions, increased vulnerability and gaps of all human development indicators in comparison with other parts of the country.

Hurricane Felix made landfall in the northeastern town of Sandy Bay, Nicaragua on 4 September 2007, blowing off the roofs of 90 percent of the houses and knocking out electricity over a wide area. Nicaraguans affected by the disaster are estimated at between 60,000 and 100,000. The hurricane reached a highly dangerous Category 5 storm when it struck Sandy Bay, and was later downgraded as it headed overland to Honduras. Authorities suspended school activities and evacuated local communities.

Thousands of homes were destroyed or severely damaged in 50 communities. Temporary shelters were set up on higher ground and in schools located in stable buildings. There are over 13,000 people living in these shelters, but this number is shifting rapidly. Serious damage to the road, communication and public services infrastructure, and loss of crops and food supplies has been reported. Although it is too early to provide precise information on the final accounting of the damage, it is clear that there will be a serious water and sanitation problem. In previous emergency situations in the region, wells have flooded and been contaminated.

With the declaration of emergency, the on-going school year has been disrupted. In addition of schools being used as shelters, 80 percent of school infrastructure has been severely damaged by the hurricane. Support will be required to ensure continuity of education activities to complete the 2007 school year.

As rescue teams reach the most isolated communities along the river, the situation looks worse than initially expected. Preliminary reports indicate entire villages have been wiped out and no information is available on the situation of its inhabitants. These are very small and remote communities and it will take time to know the exact magnitude of the disaster.

Needs assessments are ongoing. Five members of the UNICEF staff are currently on the site to assess the education, nutrition, WASH and protection situation, along with the national and regional authorities and as part of UN inter-agency efforts. In the immediate response, UNICEF will support the government in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, protection and the reestablishment of educational activities.

Immediate supplies sent to the region during the first 24 hours of the emergency included four equipments for the production of chlorinated water, which can cover a population of 1,600 each per day; 500 water filters for family use and 3,600 blankets.

UNICEF staff are supporting education and health authorities to plan immediate actions for (i) education bridges as non-formal education modalities with flexible hours and alternative spaces, shelter organization and rapid re-establishment of education activities and (ii) ensuring proper nutrition of children 6-24 months. UNICEF is coordinating inter-agency response in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector, which includes NGOs. UNICEF Nicaragua is also working to meet the country's emergency water and sanitation needs with hygiene kits, water purification equipment, including filters and rehabilitation of wells.

PLANNED ACTIONS

Phase 1. Immediate response – September to December 2007

In this phase two population dimensions must be considered: a) Over 13,000 people currently in shelters with inadequate conditions due to severe damage sustained due to the hurricane. This population is likely to decrease rapidly within the first few weeks. b) A total affected population of up to 100,000, mainly scattered among disperse communities, where transport and communications are extremely difficult.

UNICEF has begun providing blankets and water purification equipment for the population in the shelters. During the next few days humanitarian activities will start reaching the more dispersed communities. Key interventions during this phase include:

- a) Nutrition of children 6-24 months: Procuring and distributing complementary food for 6,600 children age 6-24 months for three months, and related utensils for family use.
- b) Prevention of diarrhea and other water-born diseases: Providing access to well equipped oral rehydration (ORS) units. Replication and distribution of (already existing and tested) hygiene education material in local languages; support to community health promoters; equipment of ORS units.
- c) Tracking/registry of children and family reunification: Identifying children unaccompanied by adult family members and ensuring family reunification; Supporting mobile teams; information material; birth registration material.
- d) Psychosocial monitoring and recuperation of children: Implementing the "Back to Happiness" strategy with 3,000 children and adolescents involved in educational and recreational non formal activities.
- e) Education bridges and support for the rapid re-initiation of school activities, providing educational material and supplies to guarantee the continuity in the current school year for up to 10,000 children.
- f) Safe water and hygiene kits, filters and chlorine distribution, disinfection of water systems and wells, rehabilitation of latrines, control of mosquitoes, hygiene promotion and monitoring of water quality.

Phase 2. Rehabilitation – January to March 2008

The hurricane has severely damaged water sources (wells, aqueducts, rain water collection systems) and latrines. Communities have lost all their crops and food reserves, which is going to aggravate the already severe level of malnutrition in the area, where chronic malnutrition is estimated at 24 percent as compared to the national average of 16 percent.

UNICEF will focus on:

- a) Support to mobile medical teams to reach isolated communities and local health posts.

- b) Support for the rehabilitation/improvement of hygiene and sanitation conditions as part of a strategy to reduce vulnerability of the population in future emergency situations. This includes rehabilitation of water systems and wells, reconstruction of rain gathering systems, construction of latrines, reinforcement of local organizational structures, and water health, hygiene and nutrition education for families.
- c) Reestablishment of school activities: Improve affected school infrastructure to reduce danger for children, support Ministry of Education in establishing continuity in the school curriculum and training teachers to ensure the quality of learning between both school years.

Most of the communities affected are very isolated and can only be reached by small boats along the river or by helicopter. The logistics of all emergency and rehabilitation activities is therefore very complex, which increases costs for both transport of supplies and personnel.

3. ESTIMATED FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR PLANNED ACTION FROM SEPTEMBER 2007 TO MARCH 2008

TOTAL FUNDING REQUIREMENT

SECTORS	US DOLLARS
Nutrition	720,000
WASH	900,000
Education bridges	85,000
Re-establishment of education activities (education material, facilitators, minor rehabilitation of facilities)	250,000
Tracking/registry/identification and family re-unification of children	40,000
Logistics, transport and communication	90,000
Total	2,085,000

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

Debora Comini Representative Nicaragua Tel :+505 268 0687/8 Fax : +505 268 0694 Email: dcomini@unicef.org	Pierrette Vu Thi Deputy Director EMOPS, Geneva Tel: + 41 22 909 5601 Fax: + 41 22 909 5902 Email: pvuthi@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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