

TAJIKISTAN

**UNICEF RESPONDS TO THE IMMEDIATE
NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN
AFFECTED BY SEVERE WINTER
CONDITIONS AND AN ENERGY CRISIS**



14 February 2008

1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Tajikistan is not only experiencing the harshest winter in three decades but is faced with an evolving crisis that will likely have a significant impact on the already vulnerable situation of children and women. The country has one of the highest under-five mortality rates in the region.

Compounding the extremely cold weather is a severe energy deficit that has reached emergency proportions. Due to the increased demand and shortage of electrical supply from neighbouring countries, the level of the Nurek reservoir (where approximately 60 per cent of electricity supply comes from) has been run down to seven days of generating supply. The country will be deprived of a major source of electricity once the supply has been used.

Initial accounts from the field and various reports indicate the following:

- Several cases of new born deaths in maternity hospitals have been reported.
- Almost half of 74 Maternal and Child Health hospitals in the country reported an increase of acute respiratory infections and other child illnesses. Some districts reported death cases.
- The Ministry of Health's Republican Sanitary Epidemiological Service reports a difficult epidemiological situation due to the impact of the energy crisis on the supply of safe water. In normal times, about half of the population has access to piped water. Current estimates show that only 20 per cent of the population receives piped water now. The remainder of the population use sources that are not secure or safe yet with limited means available to boil water particularly in urban areas.
- In one of the major cities in the South, the wastewater treatment plan has lost its capacity to receive additional discharge in its unit. The overflow of the plant is discharged directly into the river which is the only source of drinking water for many communities living downstream.
- The series of economic and social shocks over the last two years (including the 2007 drought and locust infestation) has brought increasing concerns about food insecurity. Household food stocks are much lower than usual at this time of the year. There has been an increased sale of animals and other productive assets in several areas.
- Children in all 3,800 primary schools and 400 kindergartens learn in extremely severe learning conditions as most schools have almost no or very limited heating facility.
- Thousands of children, mostly from poor families, orphans and children placed in residential care institutions suffer double vulnerability. Some residential care institutions have placed most children in small common rooms; and some children have been sent to their families without individual assessments placing some children at further risk of being abused.

Of the estimated 7 million people affected by the crisis, approximately half are children, and close to 1 million are children under the age of five. Vulnerable to cold, hunger and trauma, children and women in this country require urgent life-saving assistance to be able to survive.

Using its existing emergency stockpile and regular resources, UNICEF has immediately responded to the emergency situation and since the last week of January has provided immediate life-saving emergency supplies to maternity hospitals.

UNICEF and its partners, including other UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organisations, are working closely with the Government of Tajikistan to respond swiftly and effectively to the crisis. To finance these efforts, the United Nations will launch a joint appeal this week and UNICEF will be part of the joint appeal process.

In the meantime, UNICEF is requesting an initial US\$ 2.5 million to meet the immediate life-saving needs of children and women in the affected areas.

2. UNICEF'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE: ISSUES AND ACTIONS

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Issues

The current combination of energy shortage and severe cold weather within the last few months has had a significant impact on the health of children under-five, particularly among newborns. Lack of energy and water supply in the majority of maternity hospitals results in poor peri-natal and neonatal care services. There are reports of newborn deaths due to electricity cut-offs. About 120,000 of 180,000 newborns are born in rural areas. Premature babies account for almost 15 per cent of newborns that are most at risk of dying due to hypothermia.

Urgent Actions

- Distribution of life-saving and critical relief supplies such as baby warmers, baby blankets, primary health kits;
- Provision of the primary health kits (that include essential drugs and basic health supplies);
- Distribution of the new formula of Oral Rehydration Salts;
- Provision of zinc 20 mg. tablets;
- Generators (5kv) to operate baby warmers and oxygen concentrators, needed for newborns
- Monitoring to ensure that women and girls have access to health services.
- Counselling on mothers for new-born and young child/health, care and nutrition development

The response prioritizes the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of the population. The total target population for the urgent response is about 2.2 million in 17 out of the 67 districts across the country. Of these 38,700 will be newborn babies; 160,000 children under-five and 40,000 pregnant women. UNICEF support to immunization will however have national coverage.

With the Ministry of Health's request and approval, UNICEF has already started the process of reviewing the cold chain system across the country. The country has recently completed a Vitamin A supplementation that covered more than 90 per cent of children under-five.

A catch-up measles campaign will be carried out in selected districts this year aimed at reaching about 50,000 under-five children. UNICEF-assisted procurement of government-funded measles vaccine is due to arrive this week.

Along with efforts to prevent and treat acute respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases, promotion of breastfeeding will be accelerated in cooperation with the MoH's Centre on Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses in priority at risk districts.

UNICEF and its partners will work to strengthen local capacities to ensure maternal and child health and care and nutrition service delivery. UNICEF has already provided technical and operational support to the Government by dispatching urgently needed supplies to the affected areas since the onset of the crisis in late January. UNICEF will work closely with the Ministry of Health and WHO and will help further assess the situation to determine what medium and longer-term actions may be necessary.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Issues

The unusually low temperatures of the past month have frozen and damaged many of the antiquated water lines used in urban areas. The irregular electrical supply experienced over the past months has also damaged water pumping infrastructure that has contributed to a very high risk of contamination of water in municipal reticulation systems. Water shortages will continue for up to two months.

Urgent Actions

- Provision of water purification tablets and water containers
- Chlorination of municipal water reticulated systems and water tanks in schools and hospitals
- Provision of water filters for use in schools and mass care facilities

- Rehabilitation of water storage tanks in mass care facilities
- Provision of hygiene materials, including soap, buckets and educational materials containing hygiene messages in local languages

In collaboration with UNDP, NGO partners and the authorities, UNICEF will assess the damage to water and sanitation infrastructure to determine what medium and longer-term actions may be necessary. UNICEF will work to strengthen local partners and Government authorities to restore water and sanitation services.

EDUCATION

Issues

Children in all 3,800 primary schools (including boarding schools) and about 400 pre-schools are studying in challenging conditions as most buildings have almost no or very limited heating. It is more serious in the mountainous and rural areas. The harsh conditions have affected schools to such an extent that teaching activities have now been seriously hampered. Temperatures in class rooms range from 0 to – 9 Celsius (32– 15.8 F) because of infrastructure deficiencies. Information from the field suggests that 90 per cent of rural schools have no functional heating system. Because of the acute shortage of electricity, schools that rely mainly on powered heating systems have essentially gone cold. Those children that are in attendance are wearing all the warm clothing they own. Participation is now down to about 40-50 per cent in most schools. The situation is also affecting teachers who find it increasingly difficult to continue with their duties. The latest information from the field indicates that most schools have reduced their operating hours from 7 to 2-3 hours each day.

Urgent Actions

- Provision of coal to primary schools
- Provision of stove and accessories to primary schools

In close collaboration with national and local authorities and NGOs, UNICEF will facilitate the work of partners and lead assessment missions to establish affected children’s educational needs and plan future interventions.

CHILD PROTECTION

Issues

Thousands of children placed in residential care institutions are affected by the severe cold weather and energy crisis. Due to the weakness of the child protection system, it has been very difficult to determine the exact number of children sent back to their own families or relatives. In general, the compound crisis exacts a terrible toll on children’s psychological health. They turn to parents who are themselves suffering from severe emotional distress.

Urgent Actions

- Distribution of hygiene kits, jerry cans, blankets, generators and cooking stoves to 84 residential care institutions all over the country;
- Provision of generator, coal and stove accessories to boarding schools
- Provision of high protein biscuits
- Distribution of recreation kits including toys and sport games to support children in activities;
- Provision of psycho social support to children in institutions, especially those in closed type institutions;
- Provision of psycho social support to parents/ mothers suffering from psychological/emotional distress
- Provision of ECD activities. For guidance, possible on-line access to the ECD “Handbook for Caregivers”.

The urgent response in Child Protection gives priority to about 10,000 children who are accommodated in residential care institutions across the country. These children are either orphans, abandoned children, children with disabilities, children whose parents have been deprived of their parental rights or are in prison, children in conflict with the law and children who are left behind due to parents migration to work abroad.

Local authorities and the established Child Rights Departments in eight districts of the country take a lead in the distribution and monitoring of UNICEF initial emergency assistance and have adopted strict measures to prevent further placement of children in institutions. In these same districts, follow-up of cases of children reintegrated to families are monitored. UNICEF jointly with the local government in the northern part of the country will assemble all directors of institutions, deputy heads of local authorities and Child Rights Departments staff this week to underscore the need to strengthen residential care institution's gate-keeping system in the districts.

During and after the emergency, UNICEF will tap the 40 trained social workers in eight districts, where the CRDs are functioning, to assess whether children could remain with their families and identify support and needs for monitoring. Currently, the child protection system in Tajikistan focuses on the role of the extended family.

COORDINATION AND LOGISTICS

Issues

In any disaster, coordination and logistics form a critical component of the overall response. UNICEF has assumed sector leadership in water, sanitation and hygiene and education and provides key support to health and nutrition and child protection. Sector coordination groups map out needs and identify the most appropriate response; ensuring efforts are complementary and preventing overlap or gaps in the overall response.

Urgent Actions

- Coordination, monitoring and support of water, sanitation and hygiene and education sectors and key support to health and nutrition sectors and child protection;
- Facilitation of technical assessments in these sectors.
- Logistics operation

UNICEF continues to work closely with the UN Disaster Management Team, OCHA and the government's Rapid Emergency Assistance Coordination Team (REACT) to keep abreast of needs and plan sector response.

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

UNICEF is currently working with partners and UN agencies in the preparation of a United Nations joint appeal that will be launched soon. In the meantime and in order to respond quickly, UNICEF is requesting an initial US\$ 2.5 million to meet the immediate needs of children and women in the affected areas. This amount will be folded into the upcoming Flash Appeal.

Table 1: Estimated funding requirements from March to August 2008**

Sector	US\$
Health and Nutrition	741,000
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	780,000
Education	505,000
Child Protection	300,000
Coordination and Logistics	200,000
Total*	2,526,000

*The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7%. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF's Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

**Funds received against this appeal will be used to respond to both the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women as outlined above. If UNICEF should receive funds in excess of the medium-term funding requirements for this emergency, UNICEF will use those funds to support other, under-funded emergencies.

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

Yukie Mokuo UNICEF Representative Dushanbe, Tajikistan Tel: +992 48 7011489 Fax: +992 48 7011495 Email: ymokuo@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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