

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION REPORT 2009

MADAGASCAR

“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR ME IS TO PASS MY EXAMS.”

An overwhelming panic spread throughout the commune of Tanambe, a small town in the region of Alaotra Mangoro when both the Anony and Sahamaloto dams broke. Within a few hours, the water level on the roads was more than one metre high. Dozens of houses made of concrete and cement collapsed. Access to and communication with hamlets and villages in neighbouring communes have been cut off and lives have been lost. The educational sector has also been severely affected. Hundreds of students are now without classrooms.

On the morning of Monday, 18 February 2008, flash floods rose between the towns of Ambohimanarivo and Tanambe. The main road was cut at the village of Antsamaria, not far from Tanambe. Both Anony and Sahamaloto dams had been filled to bursting and, unable to contain such huge quantities of water, the dykes broke. For three long days, an overwhelming panic spread over the commune of Tanambe as water levels continued to rise. Houses made of concrete and cement collapsed one by one.

Authorities in charge of the region, alerted by the seriousness of the situation, immediately rented pirogues to take care of rescue operations and help transport those in need. The public primary school was washed away, leaving hundreds of children without their right to education.

UNICEF was already in the area and was able to assess the scope of the damage. Tents were set up to be used as temporary classrooms and several ‘school-in-a-box’ kits were given to the educational authorities.

Twelve-year-old Ratolojanahary, a fifth-grade student, testifies, “I would never have believed that it was possible to go back to school so quickly. This is my exam year, so I was very worried. I lost all my school things and my classroom is completely destroyed. Fortunately, this tent has been set up so that we can use it as a classroom. Our teacher informed us this morning that we should all come back to school. For me, I just have to pass my exams.”

While the parents’ association has taken the initiative of building additional temporary school structures with the debris found lying around the area, the students themselves are participating by collecting furniture that the flood waters had washed away.

The water level has now gone down and life is slowly getting back to normal. “Schools provide children with a protective environment free from danger. In emergency situations, setting up schools as soon as possible allows children to restore a sense of normality to their lives and helps them overcome psychological trauma and other forms of distress,” shared UNICEF Madagascar’s Education Officer Roger Ramanantsoa during a recent field visit. Recreational kits were distributed to allow children to play and take time to recover from their recent experiences. Tanambe’s students are among the most fortunate in Madagascar; due to the path of the cyclone, thousands of other students in the country are still deprived of their classrooms.

The number of damaged or destroyed classrooms is known to be at least 2,282 across the country. UNICEF’s contribution to the educational sector in times of emergency consists of providing materials for primary school education, mobilizing communities to ensure continuity in educational services, promoting recreational activities and providing technical assistance to national educational initiatives.