

Flooding in Mexico, Central America & the Caribbean

Immediate Needs for Children, Adolescents and Women Affected by Flooding in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, 3 November 2007



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UNICEF URGENTLY REQUIRES US \$3,260,000

1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Following several days of torrential rains, including from the passage of Tropical Storm Noel (since upgraded to a hurricane), several countries in Central America and the Caribbean are facing severe floods, which have submerged entire villages and left thousands homeless and destitute. In some cases, such as in Mexico, these floods are the worst in decades. In other countries, such as in Haiti and Nicaragua, they are only the latest in a series of devastating floods to hit the region over the past few weeks.

In **Mexico**, the worst flooding in more than 50 years has affected more than a million people, of whom more than a third are children. At least 7 rivers in the state of Tabasco have overflowed, leading to a declaration of emergency in all 17 municipalities. The situation has been described by Mexican President Felipe Calderón as: "extraordinarily grave". 80% of Tabasco is underwater, according to the state Governor, and more than half of the region's 2 million people have been affected. Most of these people have been displaced to temporary shelters, greatly increasing their risk of exposure to disease and limiting their access to food, safe water and vital medicines. Approximately 70% of schools are believed to have been damaged and classes have been suspended in all areas, affecting 400,000 students. 100% of state crops are believed to have been lost. Meanwhile, in the neighbouring state of Chiapas, 11,000 additional people have been affected due to heavy rains and the overflowing of rivers.

The Mexican Government is combining emergency relief efforts at local level with the System of Civil Protection of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of National Defence: Main actions involve relocating the affected people to temporary shelters and providing them with food, medicines and water supplies. So far, 280 temporary shelters have been set up. More than 1,000 soldiers of the national army are helping to evacuate victims; important social mobilization at the national level is also in progress.

In the **Dominican Republic**, Tropical Storm Noel brought heavy and prolonged rainfall to much of the country over a period of days, causing rivers to overflow their banks and major flooding to hit low-lying areas, as well as landslides and the destruction of bridges and roads in many areas. The most affected areas are Santo Domingo, Distrito Nacional, San Cristóbal, Peravía, Azua, Barahona, Pedernales, Independencia, Bahoruco, San Juan de la Maguana, Santiago, Puerto Plata, Espaillat, Salcedo, Duarte (especialmente Bajo Yuna), María Trinidad Sánchez, La Vega, Monte Plata, Moseñor Nouel, Hato Mayor (especialmente Sabana de la Mar), El Seibo (especialmente Miches), Sánchez Ramírez, Dajabón, Montecristi, Santiago Rodríguez, La Altagracia and San Pedro de Macorís. According to the latest official figures, 82 people have been killed and 43 are missing, 65,412 are displaced of which approximately 25,000 are living in shelters. 90 communities are currently isolated, and approximately 16,353 homes have been affected. These figures are likely to rise, particularly as forecasts are calling for additional rains, which could cause further flooding and landslides.

In **Haiti**, rains and flooding have devastated most departments since September. The latest floods occurred following the passage of Tropical Storm Noel, which passed through Haiti on 29 October, 2007. Heavy rains, strong winds, landslides, and high waves caused damage to agriculture, houses and infrastructure (including water and sanitation systems), health facilities and schools in multiple departments.

During the past week, the Department of Civil Protection has recorded 43 dead, 19,500 affected and 6,000 houses destroyed or damaged. Over 14,000 people across the country have been displaced and have either been evacuated to temporary shelters (which are often unable to meet demands on potable water, sanitation, basic health services) or are living with neighbours or relatives, often in already crowded houses.

Tropical Storm Noel has created acute and urgent humanitarian needs for children, who represent half of the victims. UNICEF, in partnership with the government and international and national non-governmental organisations, has provided immediate humanitarian assistance to children and women. Nevertheless, additional resources are required to ensure that the basic rights of children are met, to contribute to the rehabilitation process of the affected zones and to reinforce emergency stocks as the hurricane season is not yet over.

In **Honduras**, 47,000 people have been affected, among them nearly 23,000 children. The Government has declared yellow alert in the Departments of Colón Gracias a Dios and Atlántida and green alert in the Departments of Islas de la Bahía and Cortés, as rainfall is expected to cause new floods. High nutritional

vulnerability prevails in the Southern Region of the country due to food scarcity, and the flooding has increased the risk of leptospirosis and dengue. The school system has come to a halt in affected areas, with schools being used as shelters.

These latest floods compound the damage caused by Hurricane Felix in August, which affected the most vulnerable populations in the southern side of the Valley of Sula and in the northern region of the country, as well as in the capital city. Poor rural communities in the southern region of the country were severely affected by floods.

According to the latest information, no families are presently displaced, as most affected have returned to their homes. However, the response capacity at the community, civil society and government levels has been overwhelmed by the cumulative effect of successive natural phenomena which, coupled with extremely high prevailing levels of poverty, jeopardize the possibility of an adequate response during and after emergencies. The greatest risks are yet to come, as the country lacks either a risk management plan or the resources required to cope with the situation. Following the immediate distribution of relief, affected families, mostly peasants, are usually left to themselves despite having lost critical household assets and stocks, social infrastructure and public services (especially education and water).

Nicaragua was also hit by the heavy rains, adding to the damage caused by Hurricane Felix. Approximately 32,000 are affected, at least 11,000 of which are living in temporary shelters. Most of these shelters are in schools, which puts at risk the finalization of the school year in several municipalities. 8 are reported dead and one disappeared; 11 bridges have been destroyed and some communities in the north-west are out of reach. The humanitarian community is deeply concerned about food security over the next months, as continued rains jeopardize the next harvest.

In support of the affected Governments, UNICEF and its partners, including other UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organisations, are working to respond swiftly and effectively to the crisis. According to initial estimates, UNICEF will need **US \$3,260,000** to contribute to meeting the urgent needs of children and women throughout the affected countries.

2. UNICEF'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE: ISSUES & ACTIONS

In support of Government efforts, UNICEF Mexico has stocks ready and is preparing to provide families with emergency and education supplies. UNICEF has also offered assistance in terms of psychosocial recovery of children, and support to local authorities in order to ensure classes resume as promptly as possible and in the best possible conditions.

In order to ensure an adequate response to the children affected by the emergency, including a prompt resumption of classes, UNICEF Mexico requires funds for the following:

- **School supplies:** UNICEF Mexico has in stock 4,200 school kits. However, UNICEF requires additional school supplies to benefit 400,000 children and adolescents including: school kits for teachers and children, backpacks and didactic materials.
- **Domestic supplies for children and women:** UNICEF Mexico will provide domestic supplies, including basic personal hygiene items for children and women, water containers, cooking and household items to meet minimum standards of survival conditions.
- **Support to light rehabilitation of schools:** UNICEF will support light rehabilitation materials for damaged schools, especially those that are not covered by risk insurance. This support is a priority to ensure a prompt resumption of classes.
- **Psychosocial support:** UNICEF will provide recreational kits, technical assistance and logistical support for activities related to psychosocial recovery especially for children in temporary shelters.

In the Dominican Republic, children will be exposed to diseases like acute diarrhea due to contamination of potable water supplies, acute respiratory infections due to high humidity and viruses in the atmosphere, and gastroenteritis due to consumption of contaminated food. Helping children in the immediate and post-emergency period will be critical. The UN system is providing the Government of the Dominican Republic with support to coordinate the response efforts. A five-person UNDAC team has been deployed, and UN Agencies have already made available approximately US\$ 350,000 to respond to immediate needs. A Flash Appeal is expected to be released on Monday, 5 November.

In coordination with the Dominican Red Cross, UNICEF DR is providing 1,800 hygiene kits, bottled water, blankets and baby food for children under five in some of the most affected areas. Further support of this kind will be required, since much of the help that is being channelled is not adequately focused on children. UNICEF is advocating for a stronger focus on the needs of the under-5 population. In response to early indications from the Government, UNICEF, in collaboration with national partners, will also support the implementation of children's psychosocial recovery activities.

The most important immediate needs relate to:

- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:** provision of bottled drinking water, hygiene kits and eventually light rehabilitation of local water systems;
- **Health, Nutrition and Family Essentials:** provision of oral re-hydration salts and other essential medicines, baby food, family cooking kits and blankets;
- **Education:** Light rehabilitation of affected schools;
- **Psychosocial recovery:** technical support, training materials and workshops to support national partners;
- **Logistical support:** for transport, assessments and monitoring.

In Haiti, UNICEF is monitoring and assessing the overall health and nutrition situation in the flood affected zones, especially the impact of lack of access to safe water. UNICEF is working on solutions to address the immediate needs in water and sanitation. UNICEF has already provided emergency supplies consisting of hygiene kits, cooking kits, water containers and blanket to 1,000 families in the affected areas, and will be monitoring closely with partners the acute malnutrition trends. In education, UNICEF is providing flood zones with school supplies and other necessary materials lost in the disaster. Ten public schools have already received school kits and additional school supplies are destined for school children to lessen the financial impact on parents. Assessments are in progress to identify the number of schools and students in need of additional supplies.

A particular concern for the education sector is that schools are often used as provisional shelters, which disrupts education activities even in non-affected areas. In order to help schools restart their normal schedules, even if they are still sheltering displaced people, UNICEF is providing temporary shelters to be used either as classrooms or to shelter people during the day. In coordination with education activities, UNICEF will also undertake psychosocial interventions to address trauma from the floods and displacement. Experts team will be deployed to affected areas to help children come to terms with the stress and loss caused by floods and help children recover a sense of normalcy.

UNICEF Honduras is providing emergency medical kits, oral re-hydration salts, hygiene kits and cooking kits, blankets as well as water disinfection tablets and hygiene education materials, as well as, educational kits for around 400 schools. Two water tank trucks were set up to ensure provision of safe water in San Manuel and Potrerillos, and pumping equipment was provided to Pimienta. Four hundred journalists have been trained to ensure proper communication in emergencies. In poor neighbourhoods of Comayagua and Tegucigalpa, students and teachers have been trained on risk management through "riesgolandia" methodology.

More rains are expected, which may produce new floods and displacement of populations. In view of the present shortage and the expected situation in the near future, the head of COPECO, the national emergency response authority, formally requested support from the international community to build up a minimum stock of key items to respond to emergencies. In response to this request, UNICEF plans the following interventions (based on a target population of 50,000 people):

- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:** Rehabilitation of water systems; purchase and preposition Family Hygiene Kits.
- **Health and Nutrition:** Purchase and preposition Emergency Health Kits and Family Cooking Kits and Blankets.
- **Education:** Light rehabilitation of affected schools; purchase and pre-positioning of education kits.
- **Social Mobilization:** Training materials and workshops for emergency preparedness, for schools and journalists.
- **Logistical support:** For transport, assessment and monitoring.

UNICEF Nicaragua has supported mobile medical teams; provided generators to maintain the cold chain; begun cleaning and chlorination of wells; and provided 12 tents for medical treatment, since hospitals were full. At this stage, the most pressing needs are for the prevention and treatment of leptospirosis, malaria and dengue.

- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene:** Rehabilitation of water systems; cleaning and chlorination of wells; vector control;
- **Health:** Purchase and distribution of medicines for leptospirosis, malaria and dengue; purchase of medical gloves; support for mobile medical teams (health brigades).

3. ESTIMATED FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

UNICEF is requesting **US \$ 3,260,000** to meet the immediate needs of children and women throughout the affected areas for the coming six months.

Mexico

SECTORS	Budget (US\$)
Education	1,025,000
Domestic supplies (Cooking kits, Hygiene Kits, etc.)	300,000
Psychosocial support	90,000
Social Mobilisation and Logistical support	85,000
TOTAL	1,500,000

Dominican Republic

SECTORS	Budget (US\$)
Water Sanitation and Hygiene	300,000
Health and Nutrition	250,000
Education	175,000
Psychosocial Recovery	50,000
Social Mobilisation and Logistical support	40,000
TOTAL	815,000

Haiti

SECTORS	Budget (US\$)
Water Sanitation and Hygiene	140,000
Health and Nutrition	84,000
Education	70,000
Technical support and monitoring	51,000
TOTAL	345,000

Honduras

SECTORS	Budget (US\$)
Water Sanitation and Hygiene	90,000
Health and Nutrition	95,000
Education	100,000
Social Mobilization and Logistical Support	15,000
TOTAL	300,000

Nicaragua

SECTORS	Budget (US\$)
Water Sanitation and Hygiene	100,000
Health and Nutrition	200,000
TOTAL	300,000

GRAND TOTAL: US\$ 3,260,000