

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION UPDATE

LAO PDR

23 September 2008

URGENT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE NEEDED FOR COMMUNITIES HIT BY FLOODS IN LAO PDR

- Severe floods impact on health, nutrition security and sanitation of poor families
- Increased threat to children from water and vector-borne diseases
- Rehabilitation required of schools and classroom materials
- Children in need of protection against trafficking and other forms of exploitation



1. ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Heavy rainfall in and around the Mekong watershed caused the most severe floods in living memory in Lao PDR between 12 and 18 August 2008. Preliminary reports indicate that thousands of hectares of crops have been inundated. A total of 865 villages (48,925 households) of 53 districts in eleven provinces with a population of approximately 200,000 have been affected by the storms and floods. The northern and central regions of Laos were particularly severely affected, according to the Lao National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). Flash floods were also reported causing eight deaths.

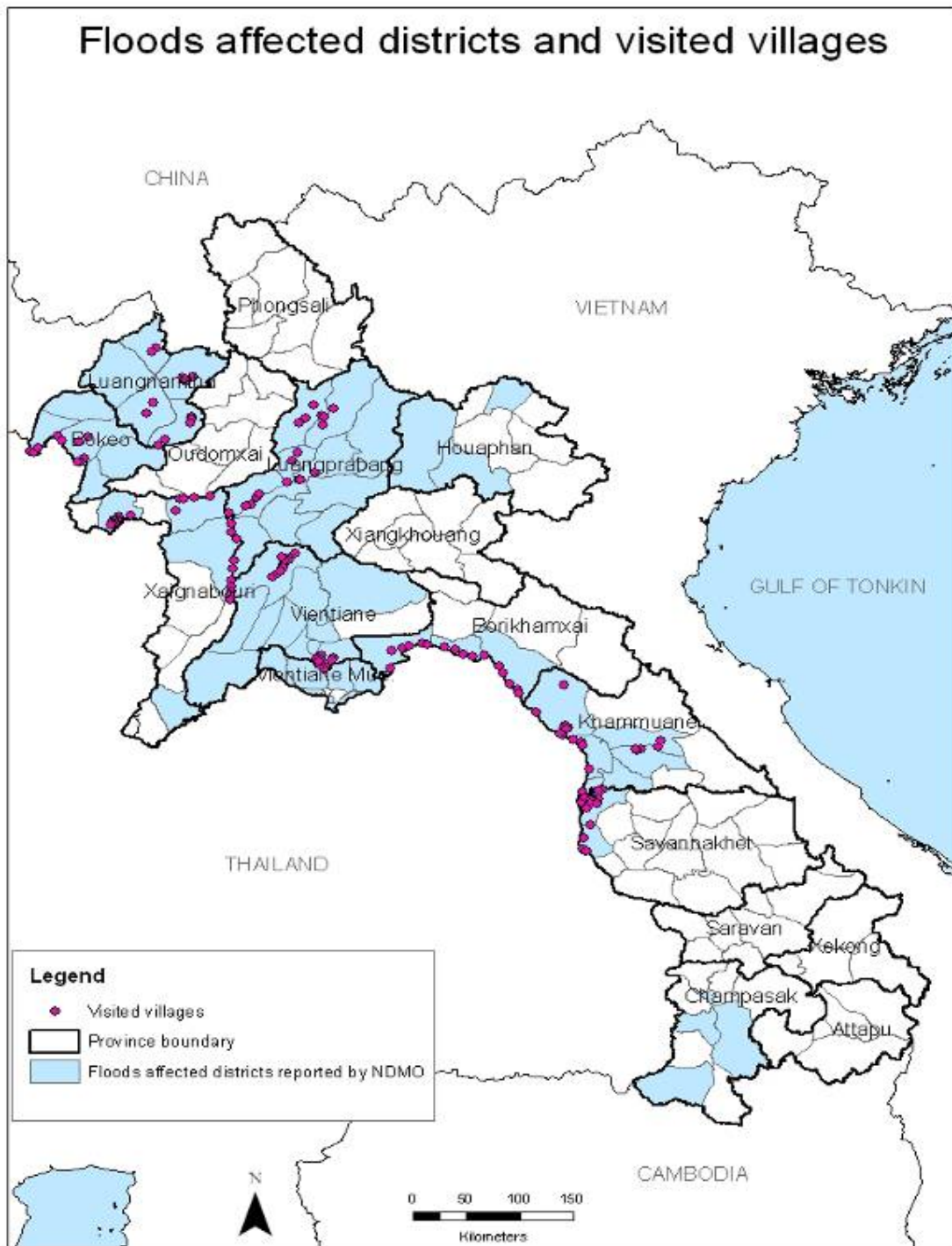
A Rapid Assessment was set up by the "IASC in-country Team for Natural Disaster Response Preparedness" to provide an overview of the floods' immediate impact. UNICEF co-led the support to the government in undertaking this Rapid Assessment together with WFP and all key UN agencies and stakeholders.

The Assessment has shown that the flood damages to health, nutrition and sanitation have been severe in addition to compromising the main source of livelihoods, the agricultural sector, including crops, aquaculture, livestock and agro-forestry. Even as water levels in the river Mekong continue to drop, if not addressed, the impact of floods may be felt for years to come and may pose serious mid- to long-term threats to health, nutrition and food security, welfare and livelihoods of the affected population, especially the resource-poor and vulnerable households. Families who were already close to the poverty line risk dropping below it due to the loss of rice paddy, food stocks and other assets. Care-givers who already struggled to ensure their children received a sufficiently nutritious diet will find the task even harder. Health services that barely ensured minimal care to a community's needs before the emergency now face having to deal with a range of disease outbreaks and public health concerns triggered by the floods, especially if food and clean water supplies are not made available as a matter of urgency. In addition, damage to infrastructure has made poor communities even poorer. Some 136 primary schools were seriously damaged as were many roads and bridges. The recent global surge in food prices, which also affects Laos, had already strained household coping strategies, and access to food by many households has been limited.

UNICEF had immediately reacted to the crisis situation by providing emergency life-saving relief support to affected communities, in particular children and women. In the first few weeks of the response phase, assistance was provided to directly improve the conditions of the most vulnerable populations in the areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, as well as support to the rapid assessment of the needs.

The UNICEF Lao PDR funding requirement to respond to this crisis amounts to US \$2,300,294. A total of US \$500,294 has already been received from the Central Emergency Response Fund. This Humanitarian Action Update summarizes the funding gap and requirements for a strengthened UNICEF's response in the sectors of health and nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection and education for a total of **US\$1,800,000 for a period of 12 months**. It is launched in conjunction with the Joint UN Appeal for Flood Recovery and Rehabilitation in Lao PDR that identifies key humanitarian and early recovery needs of the affected population over the next twelve months. Provisions will be made by the UN and the government to review the appeal after the findings of an in-depth medium to longer-term needs assessment are available.

MAP 1: AFFECTED DISTRICTS AND VILLAGES VISITED BY THE RAPID ASSESSMENT TEAMS



2. UNICEF RESPONSE: ACTIVITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Health and Nutrition

Issues: Out of the total number of flood affected populations, it is estimated that there are 25,000 children under five and 10,500 pregnant and lactating women, who need health and nutrition assistance. In the aftermath of the flooding, there is a potential threat of water-borne and vector-borne diseases such as severe diarrhea, leptospirosis, cholera, typhoid, dengue fever and malaria. Cases of these diseases have been reported.

There is also concern about vaccine preventable diseases such as measles, polio, and tetanus due to unsanitary conditions and to the fact that routine immunization coverage was very low prior to the floods. Moreover, dermatitis and conjunctivitis caused by exposure to flood water and close contact with others as a result of overcrowding, as well as respiratory infection may arise.



Family at flood relocation centre, Vientiane province

Given that routine immunization coverage has not reached the entire population for many years, the prevention and control of vaccine-preventable diseases is urgently required. The risk of measles outbreaks is somewhat mitigated by the successful national campaign (targeting children aged between 9 months and 15 years) conducted in November 2007.

But for many children this was their first dose and they require two to ensure complete immunization. Because wild poliovirus is still considered to be circulating in neighboring Myanmar, and as a result of disruption to sanitation systems and low routine immunization coverage, there is now a higher risk of a polio outbreak than before the flood.

A significant amount of children were considered malnourished prior to the flooding. According to results of the MICS3 2006 survey¹, 40.4 per cent of children in Lao PDR younger than age 5 are moderately stunted and 15.8 per cent are severely stunted. Almost 2 in every 5 children under 5 (37 per cent) are moderately underweight, and 6.4 per cent are wasted. Another recent survey specifically demonstrated malnutrition in the two areas most affected by the floods, the Mekong Corridor (34% underweight, 9.3% wasting and 44.7% stunting) and Northern Highlands (32.8% underweight, 6.5% wasting with 0.5% of severe cases and 58% stunting)². Generally, the underlying causes of poor nutritional status include food insecurity, poor child feeding and care practices, poor sanitation and hygiene conditions, and poor health environment. These factors have been exacerbated by the impact of the floods, which have caused increased food insecurity with a change in food consumption towards less nutritious foods, concentration of defecation area on foot paths near to communities and a higher incidence of diarrhea among the population. Deficiency of micronutrients is also a major national health problem. In addition, the current soaring food price situation in the country is further exacerbating the nutrition and food insecurity of vulnerable families.

The most immediate and greatest needs are linked to clean drinking water, hygiene, basic maternal, child health and nutrition services, and child feeding and care practices. Provision of basic health and nutrition services is urgently required in order to address these concerns.

Actions:

- Support to the work of health and nutritional surveillance mobile teams to provide integrated health and nutrition services to children and women in the affected villages. These include immunization of children under five against measles and polio; pregnant women against Tetanus Toxoid; vitamin A supplementation and de-worming; oral re-hydration therapy of diarrhea; monitoring of nutritional

¹ MICS3 (2007), calculated with the NCHS reference standards. Data from MICS 2006 is subject to change. The final data and report should be launched in October 2008.

² CFSVA 2007, calculated with the WHO reference standards.

status; detection of cases of severe acute malnutrition in children under five and provision of therapeutic feeding. These interventions will be delivered along with the promotion of infant and young child feeding practices (breastfeeding, complementary feeding etc)

- Provision of multiple micronutrient supplements for children, pregnant and lactating women through the health and nutritional surveillance mobile teams.
- Provision of technical training to the health and mobile teams on nutrition surveillance and monitoring.
- Capacity building of health staff, communities and families on community-based management of severe acute malnutrition approaches (Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food) and follow up visits by the health workers for monitoring of children's progress.
- Distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets to children and families for prevention of malaria and dengue fever.
- Organization of IEC activities to ensure diffusion of health and nutrition messages (diarrhea prevention, promotion of breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding, etc.).
- Capacity building of health and nutrition emergency preparedness and response for the Ministry of Health focal point staff at central, provincial and district level, as well as to other key stakeholders. Technical assistance, coordination and monitoring of health and nutrition emergency activities.

Water and Environmental Sanitation

Issues: The majority of the flood-affected communities were using protected and unprotected dug wells prior to the floods. It is reported that more than 5,300 dug wells have become unusable due to flooding. In addition 50 gravity-fed water systems and 196 bore holes were damaged and urgently need restoration. Preliminary assessment data indicates that many sanitation facilities cannot be used and people are defecating in flood water. Similarly the water supply and sanitation facilities in schools and health centres have been affected and urgently need assistance. The lack of clean water and poor sanitary conditions are putting the health of these communities at great risk. Even before the flood diarrhoea was the second biggest killer of children in Lao PDR. Diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases which are common in natural disasters pose a serious threat to children in the affected areas.

Actions:

- Water treatment and hygiene kits will be distributed to the affected rural communities. Kits include purification tablets, buckets and water containers for the disinfection and storage of the drinking water and soap, for both personal hygiene and laundry needs. Enough HTH chlorine powder and a coagulant for the rehabilitation of a dug well, and the sanitization of latrines will be distributed with the emergency kit.



Decontaminating flooded well, Vientiane province

- Rehabilitation of damaged water supply and sanitation facilities in communities including health centres and schools. Support will include restoration of pipes as well as fixtures and fittings for the damaged facilities. Water quality testing and promotion of household water treatment (bio-sand filters, rainwater jars, etc) will be conducted to ensure that in the long term communities have access to safe water supply. In addition the local authorities will be supported in the construction of new emergency latrines in relocation centres for affected communities.
- Purchase of pumps for dug well rehabilitation/cleaning in affected villages. Affected wells need to be recovered by pumping out flood water and treated with chlorine solution. The provision of de-watering pumps will enable concerned provincial teams to provide required rehabilitation services in a timely manner.
- Risk reducing communication activities and materials regarding clean drinking water and sanitation and in support of the above mentioned activities. Various communication channels will be used to promote better hygiene practices and materials will be developed for radio, TV, and outreach mobile teams.
- Coordination of water and sanitation activities for sector emergency response. UNICEF will continue to take the lead in the coordination of all WASH-related activities in support of the government and address the immediate needs and early recovery. UNICEF together with UN-Habitat will play an important role in supporting the government in the development of mid- and long-term interventions related to disaster preparedness on water and sanitation including micro finance scheme for emergency response. Focus will be made on capacity building of national counterparts at all levels. Training workshops will be provided to enhance knowledge and skills on emergency preparedness, rehabilitation of water supply infrastructure and community based cleaning of dug wells and water sources.

Education

Issues: A total of 23,800 primary school students (11,115) and 680 teachers (332 females) have been adversely affected by the storms and floods. Whether experiencing a delayed start of the school year, attending school in a temporary location or in schools with damaged floors, walls or without proper classroom furniture or textbooks, these students and teachers will not be participating in their right to education in an environment that is conducive for learning.

Schools were closed for regular holidays during the height of the flood, but were scheduled to reopen again from 1 September onwards. Available data from the Ministry of Education identified approximately 136 primary schools in 21 districts in six provinces that have been seriously damaged by the storms and flooding. In approximately 45 villages with the most severely damaged primary schools in Vientiane capital, Vientiane, Borikhamxay, and Khammouane provinces, the opening of the school year has been delayed until the schools can provide a safe and healthy environment protected from wind, rain and muddy floors. Schools constructed from less durable material such as straw and bamboo have suffered the brunt of the damage and need to be completely rebuilt. In schools constructed from brick and cement, the heavy winds and excessive water damaged the roofing sheet roofs and cement floors and walls. Approximately 91 schools in the provinces mentioned above and Oudomxay and Xieng Khouang, although operational, are also moderately to severely damaged and will need to be repaired to ensure a safe and healthy teaching and learning environment for the children and teachers.



Flooded school, Vientiane province

In addition to the structural damage to schools, the IASC Rapid Assessment identified the need for furniture, textbooks and blackboards. In 25 bamboo or wooden three classroom schools, often without walls, all of the classroom furniture (students' and teachers' desks, benches and cupboard) was swept away by the flood water and needs to be replaced. In the majority of the 111 cement and brick schools with walls and locked doors, much of the furniture has been damaged by the flood water but can be repaired by the community and does not need to be replaced. In approximately 60 cement and brick schools with locked cupboards in each classroom, the textbooks stored on the lower shelves need to be replaced. The majority of the 655 blackboards in the 136 severe to moderately damaged flood affected schools also need to be replaced.

Actions:

- Procure and transport essential supplies for school repairs, including classroom furniture, to 45 villages in four flood-affected provinces: Vientiane capital, Vientiane, Borikhamsay, Khammouane,
- Procure and transport blackboards for 136 schools and textbooks for 60 schools in Vientiane capital, Vientiane, Borikhamsay, Khammouane, Oudomxay and Xieng Khouang
- Monitor the process of repairing the damaged primary schools and replacing the damaged blackboards and textbooks

Child Protection

Issues: In the aftermath of a disaster, women and children are at heightened risk of being exploited or trafficked, as they may need to financially contribute to their own or their family's basic survival. This is particularly true where long-term livelihood options are not available. The threat of exploitation or human trafficking is likely to increase six to 12 months after a disaster rather than being immediate. Moreover, increased movement of families to urban areas may also be observed, thereby increasing the number of street families with children living or working in the streets for survival.

Data gathered during the Rapid Assessment indicates that there is limited awareness on the importance of vulnerability and the effects on women and children during disasters. Families and communities often fail to grasp how disasters may psychologically affect children and fail to understand the longer term implications of these.

The assessment shows that some villages in Khammouane Province, for instance, reported 'missing young people' who have previously left their homes to work in another country (Thailand). This trend is likely to increase as a result of diminished opportunities for employment in Lao PDR. Psychosocial support to children will help them cope with the situation and restore well-being. More importantly such support will reduce their vulnerability to socio-economic consequences of disasters such as trafficking, children coming in conflict with the law, HIV/AIDS and different forms of exploitation.

Child protection in Lao PDR is relatively new and the least understood by many sectors in the Lao society. Moreover, protection mechanisms are underdeveloped, understaffed with limited technical capacity of staff. This will therefore require intensive resources in time and people.

Actions:

- Identify children exhibiting signs of trauma and stress, refer and/or provide counseling as needed;
- Establish recreational activities and non formal learning activities which will identify those children with additional protection needs;
- Identify and strengthen community-based mechanisms to support children who are deemed to be most vulnerable as a prevention mechanism against exploitation, abuse and violence.
- Build capacities and skills of government and other stakeholders at all levels on preparedness and response to the protection of children and women;
- Provide preparedness and response reference tools and materials to child protection focal points in government ministries to increase understanding on the importance and value of protecting children and women during disasters

The interventions will target approximately 25,000 children and women, (100 people per village in 250 villages) most affected by the recent floods and who experience floods every year in the five most affected provinces of Champasak, Savannakhet, Bolikhamsay, Khammouane and Vientiane Province. Focus will be on those children and women who have been displaced and had to live in houses other than their own or in evacuation centers.

Coordination and Implementation Arrangements

The response to this disaster is being led by the Government of Lao PDR, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of coordinating development partners' emergency assistance. The United Nations Resident Coordinator leads the United Nations response under the umbrella of the wider IASC. At the technical level, the humanitarian community is coordinating closely with the Lao National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the line ministries through work in IASC sectoral groups. For this emergency, UNICEF has

been designated as the sector focal point for the WASH sector, is co-leading the Health and Nutrition sector and continues to coordinate the Education and Protection Sectors as in the past.

UNICEF coordinates and implements its responses very closely with the government, the UN and NGO partners. In particular, for each of UNICEF's areas of responses, specific activity and supply plans have been agreed upon. The modalities of implementation will follow, as much as possible, the procedures already established amongst UNICEF and its partners. A strong monitoring and evaluation framework is guiding the close review of the outcomes and impact of supported interventions. Together with the corresponding line Ministries, UNICEF staff will be undertaking regular monitoring visits to the affected provinces and report regularly on advances and challenges for the emergency response. Regular information will be shared with all key stakeholders involved in the emergency response to the floods.

Throughout all its sectoral interventions, UNICEF will strive to strengthen the disaster preparedness and response capacity of the national counterparts at Central, Provincial and District level, as well as the government's coordination capacity for providing a timely, effective and efficient response to this current and possible future emergencies in the framework of human rights and child rights.

3. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

A Joint Appeal for Flood Recovery and Rehabilitation in Lao PDR has been launched by all UN agencies and partners assisting the government in the response. It identifies key humanitarian and early recovery needs of the affected population over the next twelve months. **The UNICEF component summarizes the requirements for a strengthened UNICEF's emergency and early recovery response in the sectors of health and nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection and education for a total of US\$1,800,000 for a period of 12 months.** Provisions will be made by the UN and the government to review the appeal after the findings of an in-depth medium to longer-term needs assessment will be available.

Table 1: Estimated funding requirements from September 2008 to August 2009**

Sector	Amount (US\$)
Health and Nutrition	800,000
Water and Environmental Sanitation	600,000
Education	250,000
Child Protection	150,000
Total*	1,800,000

*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 in Lao PDR can be obtained from:

Laila Ismail Khan Representative UNICEF Lao PDR Tel: + 856 20 5516100 Fax: + 856 21 314852 Email: lismailkhan@unicef.org	Dermot Carty EMOPS UNICEF Geneva Tel: + 41 22 909 5629 Fax: + 41 22 909 5902 E-mail: dcarty@unicef.org	Gary Stahl Deputy Director PARMO UNICEF New York Tel: +1 212 326 7009 Fax: +1 212 326 7165 Email : gstahl@unicef.org
---	--	--

HUMAN INTEREST STORY

Clean Water the Priority for Families after Laos Floods, but other Needs are Apparent Too.

September 5, 2008: Sendin village, Vientiane province: In the nine years that he's been director of Sendin primary school, Sengtun Vongsay has had more than one opportunity to reflect on the destructive force of the nearby river Nam Ngum.

Now he stands beside the outside wall of the school's main classroom block and points to a grubby tidemark that runs across the pink plasterwork about 30 centimetres above his head.

"The water came up to here this time," says Mr Vongsay. "It stayed there for more than a fortnight before it began to recede."

A glance inside the classrooms reveals the damage the murky waters have left behind: wide cracks and holes have opened in the concrete floor, which is covered in a thick and pungent layer of slime. Wooden desks and benches lie in a broken and sodden heap.

For the time being, pupils from the damaged classrooms have been squeezed into the school's other block, which sits on higher ground and was less seriously flooded.

"We managed to move the books out in time," says Mr Vongsay. "But it's going to be quite a job to get the place repaired and ready for use again."

A muddy track leads links the school to the rest of Sendin village (population 1,211), which is situated some 40 kilometres north of the capital, Vientiane. It lies in a flat, fertile region that was hit hard when the river Mekong and many of its tributaries burst their banks in mid-August.

The house belonging to 42-year old Mrs Boualaphanh and her two children was engulfed by floodwaters that at one point reached two metres deep.

"We were marooned for days on the second floor," she recalls. "We managed to buy just enough water to drink for the first two days. Then we managed to find a boat to take us to the dispensary where we got more."

This morning, Mrs Boualaphanh, together with her daughter and two-year old grand-daughter, has joined other villagers at the temple close to the river bank. Water containers, soap, chlorine tablets and other life-saving hygiene supplies provided by UNICEF have arrived, and are being handed out to families worst-affected by the floods.

As in most flooding emergencies, it's the shortage of clean water that's the most pressing problem in Sendin and other communities affected by the floods. Staff from the the Ministry of Health and the National Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply (Naam Saat) are on hand to give instructions as to how the supplies should be used.

Rehabilitating the ground wells that have been filled with dirty flood water is a critical issue. Engineers from Nam Saat are going around the village helping well-owners flush out gallons of fetid brown water from each well.

"The wells are very dirty after the flooding, so people cannot use them," says UNICEF water and sanitation officer Bandith Leuanvilay "So we come and demonstrate to them how to empty the well, how to use the chlorine in the right way."

The emergency supplies reaching Sendin are just a small part of UNICEF's ongoing response, which swung into action as soon as the extent of to the flooding became clear. Northern and central regions of Laos, as well as the capital, Vientiane, were severely affected, with extensive damage to rice paddies, homes and infrastructure. An initial survey established that at least 765 villages had been affected in seven provinces. An appeal to regional and international donors this week is being issued this week.

"Once the funds are available, UNICEF will be helping deliver assistance to all affected communities not only in terms of water and sanitation, but also in the areas of health, nutrition, and education," said UNICEF Representative Laila Ismail-Khan. "Together with the rest of the United Nations family, UNICEF will play its part in helping Laos recover from what has been one of the more painful episodes in its recent history."