

MEDIA RELEASE

120 days after Nargis: Children's needs are being met but threats remain Potential threat of water shortages in dry season needs to be addressed

YANGON, 1 September, 2008 — Children's needs in Myanmar are being fulfilled four months after the cyclone hit the Ayerwardady delta but challenges remain that could potentially endanger their lives, UNICEF said today.

Outbreaks of major illnesses have been avoided and routine immunization has been re-established. Children are studying in temporary safe learning spaces with new school materials. More than 17,600 children benefit from UNICEF's psychosocial activities.

However, the risk of drinking water shortages is looming in the coming months due to the contamination of ponds which needs to be addressed immediately, the United Nations children's body said.

"Despite ongoing efforts to pump contaminated water out of the ponds, there is a risk that not all the water ponds can be cleaned and refilled before the beginning of the dry season", said Ramesh Shrestha, UNICEF Representative in Myanmar. "It is crucial to identify high risk areas with potential drinking water shortages now and to work closely with the government, communities, and our partner agencies to avoid severe water shortages in the coming months."

The Myanmar government with ASEAN, UN agencies and other partners are working together in the Post Cyclone Nargis humanitarian efforts. UNICEF is leading the cluster for water and sanitation which coordinates the larger response with other UN bodies and non-governmental groups.

UNICEF supported the cleaning of 442 ponds. With the direct support of the Myanmar Government to communities and the additional help of aid agencies, a total of 1,800 ponds have been cleaned until today.

UNICEF, which also leads the education, nutrition and child protection cluster to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups such as women and children are not forgotten, also stresses the importance of building back better from which the people of Myanmar will benefit for generations to come.

"Even though the cyclone has caused a tremendous amount of suffering, this is also a chance to build back better and improve the situation of children and families in this country," said Mr. Shrestha.

Cyclone Nargis destroyed or damaged over 4,000 schools and more than 600 health facilities and separated hundreds of young children from their parents and close relatives. In the first 120 days after the cyclone hit, outbreaks of major illnesses have been avoided thanks to the immediate provision of clean water and sanitation facilities. More than 25,000 children have received measles vaccination and Vitamin A supplements. Over 130,000 essential learning packages to primary school students and installed in 100 safe temporary learning spaces and already supported the repair of almost 800 schools. More than 17,600 children are benefiting from psychosocial activities in 101 Child Friendly Spaces. Over 130 health assistants, nurses and midwives deployed to the worst affected areas for six months to support outreach activities. 18,000 latrines have been constructed.

For more information, please contact

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