IMMEDIATE NEEDS

GUATEMALA

Immediate Needs for Children and Women affected by drought

From September to December 2009

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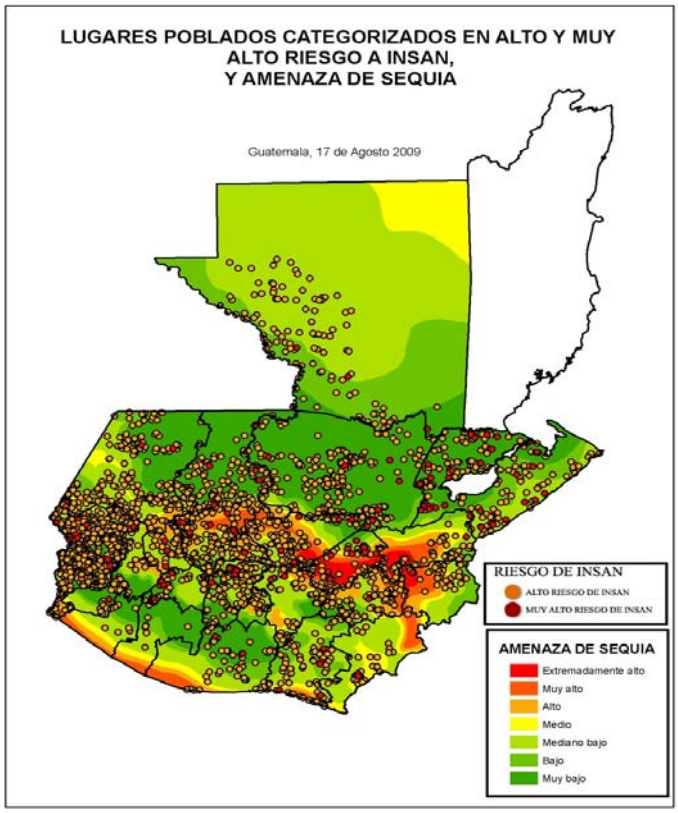
1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN AND WOMEN

In the third quarter of 2009, Guatemala continued to be severely affected by erratic rains and the loss of agricultural crops due to the return of El Niño, which occurs every two to seven years. The El Niño phenomenon – one of the strongest ever recorded in the region – causes irregular rains and unusually high temperatures which negatively affect crop production and, subsequently, food security and nutrition levels. El Niño, combined with the impact of the international economic crisis, has led to a recent sharp rise in unemployment, drop in household incomes, food shortages, and disease. Particularly vulnerable are the rural poor who live in the most affected area - the Dry Corridor of the country. Women and children currently represent 80 per cent of the victims of the crisis and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Due to the situation, on mid September the President of Guatemala issued Government Decree 10-2009 declaring a 'State of Public Calamity'.

Preliminary data show that the food crisis in the Dry Corridor has already had a tragic toll, with 20 children dead and over 100 in critical condition being monitored in intensive care units of various health centres. A rapid assessment in the second week of September by the Ministry of Health further revealed that in 8 of the 22 departments in the country and from 17,444 children assessed, 3 per cent of children under five present acute malnutrition and 45 per cent have some form of malnutrition.

Recent reports from the Ministry of Health also attribute the erratic rains to an increase in the prevalence of preventable childhood diseases - mainly malnutrition, diarrhea and acute respiratory infections – especially in the Dry Corridor. There are now an estimated 54,000 families at extremely high risk of food and nutrition insecurity, and a further 400,000 families estimated to be at high risk. The effects of El Niño are expected to escalate and last beyond the northern hemisphere winter season (March/April 2010), and make 2010 the warmest year ever in the region.



Additional financial resources are needed to save lives and to ensure the basic rights of children. On 11 September the government formally issued an appeal to the international community for an amount of US$ 100 million, in order to respond to the emergency. The humanitarian assistance needs for the affected children and women will be confirmed through a rapid assessment in the field.

UNICEF and its partners are working closely with the Government of Guatemala to respond swiftly and effectively to the humanitarian needs. UNICEF is initially requesting an amount of **US$ 2,550,000** to meet the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women in the Dry Corridor zone.

2. UNICEF RESPONSE TO THE EMERGENCY - ISSUES AND ACTIONS

Programmed actions

UNICEF together with partners will support humanitarian aid interventions in the affected communities with the aim to prevent mortality and reduce morbidity among children and women. These actions will focus on nutrition, water and sanitation.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Key issues

With the evolving drought, agricultural crop losses, international economic crisis and the resulting loss of family income, the impact on the nutrition level of children is expected to strongly increase. Preliminary field evaluations show that the current crop damage will already worsen the overall situation.

Another critical element is the inadequate infant and young child feeding practices. There is a lack of practical support for breastfeeding or access to suitable complementary food. More emphasis on promotion and supportive environments for exclusive breastfeeding is required, as well as orientation on supplementary feeding.

Immediate Actions

In order to treat approximately 600 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, the Ministry of Health has already distributed 2,000 therapeutic formulas supplied by UNICEF for inpatient care (F-75 and F-100) to the main hospitals in 10 affected areas (Cuilapa, Jutiapa, Progreso, Zacapa, Jalapa, Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz, Alta Verapaz, Quiché and Sololá). Financial support has also been given by UNICEF to the Ministry of Health for hiring additional human resources for inpatient care and for training health staff for managing cases of severe acute malnutrition. Awareness education has further been initiated to promote breastfeeding through the recording of 15 radio spots to be broadcast through the radio network with local and national coverage. In addition, UNICEF and the Ministry of Health are preparing instructions for emergency preparation and use of supplementary formula through local health centres and hospital networks in the event breastfeeding is not viable due to reduced nutrition levels.

UNICEF, jointly with the Ministry of Health, and partners, and approximately 50 municipalities, will take adequate and timely steps to further prevent deterioration of malnourished children through the provision of technical support and essential commodities and supplies. These include:

1) Strengthening current capacity to provide integrated maternal and child care:
   - Increase the coverage of outreach health and nutrition care to the affected communities;
   - Expanding health and nutritional surveillance systems to the affected communities with special emphasis on children and mothers;
   - Reducing risk of disease and death from severe acute malnutrition and related diseases (mainly in vulnerable groups).

2) Provision of effective treatment and care for severely malnourished and high-risk children:
   - Support the provision of targeted therapeutic foods to high risk families through the health centres and public hospitals network.

3) Nutritional assessment and surveillance:
   - Identify severely acute malnourished children;
   - Strengthen the health centre actions on children nutrition recovery and extended to the community level;
   - Specific activities to support exclusive breastfeeding and feeding for young children along with the other interventions.

4) Micronutrients supplementation:
   - Strengthen the government capacity in providing iron and folic acid supplements to pregnant and breastfeeding women;
   - Strengthen vitamin A supplementation programs for children under five;
   - Provide iron chelate to malnourished children with anaemia.

5) Communication and social mobilization:
   - In affected areas, UNICEF, in coordination with NGO partners, will provide counselling to mothers on exclusive breastfeeding and basic, locally available, low-cost available food.

These activities will be carried out by trained educators in communities with higher malnutrition risk.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Key Issues

Poor quality water increases diarrhea and acute malnutrition risks, especially among children under two years of age. Data from the affected departments within the Dry Corridor indicate that only 34.2 per cent of the rural population has access to safe water. It is of utmost importance to maintain and improve access to drinking water in the affected communities and to ensure the minimum hygiene and sanitation conditions to help reduce the risk of possible diseases that may further affect food and nutritional insecurity.

Immediate Actions

UNICEF jointly with the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance, and local governments, and other partners will contribute to the acquisition and distribution of essential materials related to water, sanitation and hygiene.

- Operational, technical and financial support to the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance, as well as municipalities to improve the availability of water for human consumption in affected areas in the Dry Corridor;
- Mobilization of health technical personnel to advise on safe water handling, disinfection and environmental sanitation to communities and municipalities in the affected areas of the Dry Corridor;
- Development and dissemination of key messages on water and sanitation, water-borne disease prevention at the household and community level. At the time of writing UNICEF is already supporting health authorities in the distribution of communication materials on safe water and sanitation in the affected areas.

COORDINATION AND LOGISTICS

The United Nations Country Team is coordinating the United Nations System (UNS) response. UNICEF will be coordinating with related governmental entities, United Nations organizations and other humanitarian aid partners.

Nutrition: Ministry of Public Health, World Health Organization (WHO/PAHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Ministry of Public Health, WHO/PAHO and municipalities

UNICEF is the lead agency for the Nutrition and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene clusters at the country level. The implementation of activities will be coordinated with the United Nations System Agencies, Funds and Programmes, also with members of the Humanitarian Network.

3. ESTIMATED FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR PLANNED ACTION FROM OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2009

UNICEF is currently working with its governmental and non-governmental associates on the implementation of a CERF submission to be made by United Nations System in Guatemala. In order to respond quickly, UNICEF Guatemala is requesting an initial amount of US$ 2,550,000 to meet the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women in the affected areas during the next three months.

Table 1. Estimated funding requirements from September to December 2009*

Sector	US$
Health and Nutrition	1,500,000
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	1,000,000
Coordination and Logistics	50,000
Total**	**2,550,000**

* 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.
** 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.

Further information on the UNICEF emergency programme in Guatemala:

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