

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
Second regular session 2012
11-14 September 2012

Thematic discussion on the work of UNICEF in humanitarian situations

Background document

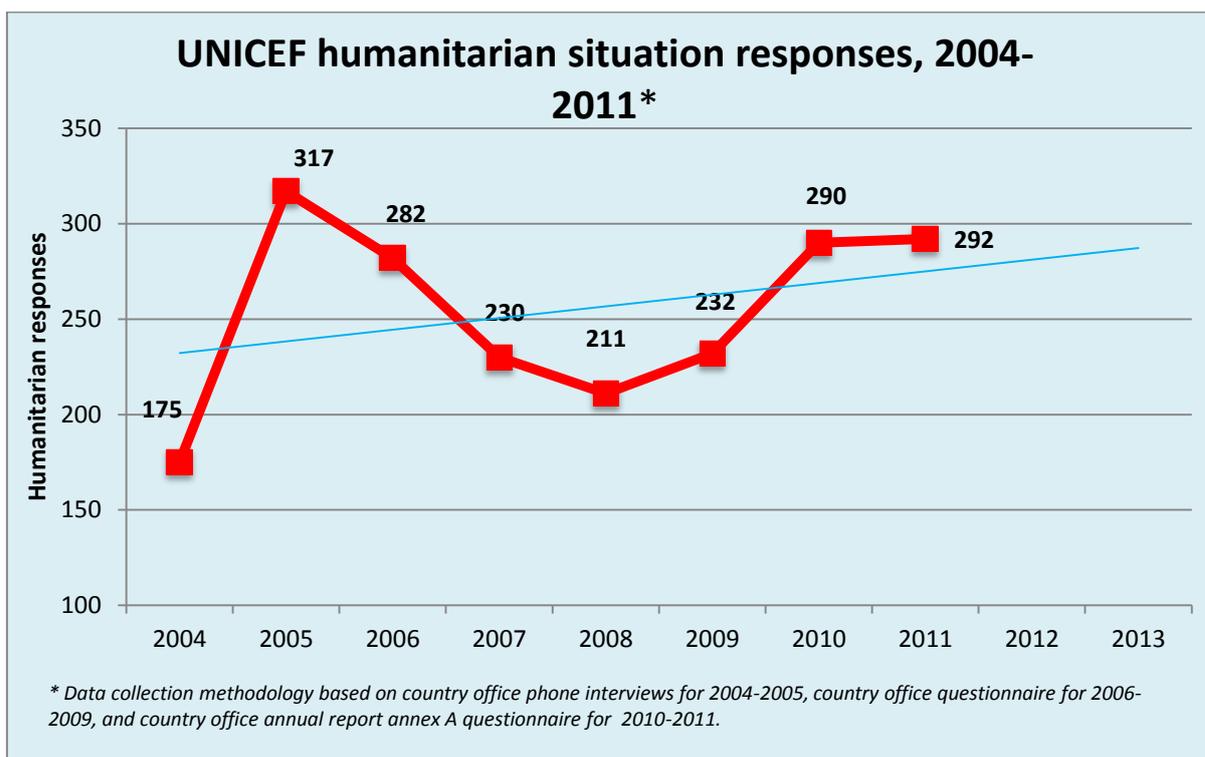
I. Humanitarian action as a core part of the work of UNICEF

1. Children and women are most affected by humanitarian situations. Two of the three children dying before the age of five live in fragile and conflict-affected contexts¹. Complex emergencies and natural disasters worsen children's nutrition rates, especially where the problem is chronic. They strain already stretched water and sanitation systems, at times forcing families away from reliable sources. Disease outbreaks are more prevalent, children are forced to drop out of school and learning is interrupted. The threat of child exploitation and abuse increases. Women and adolescent girls are vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and increased risk of HIV infection. Children with disabilities, who often experience marginalization and disempowerment in non-emergency contexts, become even more vulnerable in times of crisis, facing an increased risk of injury, abuse and neglect.

2. Since the current medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) began in 2006, UNICEF has responded to more than 1,500 humanitarian situations of varying scales – an average of over 250 per year. In partnership with national Governments, civil society partners and other United Nations agencies, UNICEF works in some of the most challenging environments in the world to deliver results for millions of children and women whose rights are threatened by natural disasters or complex emergencies. Overall humanitarian expenditure (counting only Other Resources - Emergency) for 2011 was four times greater than in 2002 and comprises a quarter of the overall budget of UNICEF. In addition, UNICEF work in these contexts also includes interventions from non-humanitarian funding sources, making this proportion significantly higher. The presence of UNICEF before, during and after emergencies, its added value of delivering a multisectoral approach and a vast network of partners position it to integrate humanitarian action and development. This enables UNICEF to be a key actor in fragile situations, where over 1 billion children live – almost one-sixth of the world's population. Sixty-eight per cent of UNICEF total expenditure at the country-office level in 2011 was dedicated to fragile and conflict-affected situations in 47 countries and territories².

¹ World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development, 2011, p. 62; World Bank.

² Analysis of UNICEF Country Office 2011 expenditure based on World Bank and OECD-DAC INCAF definitions of fragile and conflict-affected situations.



3. UNICEF works with partners to support efforts by host Governments and civil society in emergency preparedness and response, recovery and resilience-building through humanitarian action and development. Its focus on resilience includes community empowerment, strengthening social service-delivery mechanisms and safety nets, and capacity development to enable communities to better withstand and recover from shocks. It does this by supporting the delivery of programmes in nutrition; health; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); child protection; education; and HIV and AIDS. UNICEF also has responsibilities for leading or co-leading clusters and areas of responsibility for nutrition; WASH; education; child protection; and gender-based violence.

4. In addition to its child protection mandate enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF has been given a very specific role with regards to the protection of children affected by armed conflict, as mandated by Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011). UNICEF engagement in this framework includes monitoring of grave violations against children, establishing programmatic interventions to prevent such violations, assisting victims, supporting efforts to implement safeguards to end violations, and working globally to develop and influence policy and guidelines. UNICEF is also a key advocate for achieving the rights of children and women through the broader agendas for protection of civilians and women and peace and security as articulated in mutually reinforcing Security Council resolutions³.

5. Working with partners, in emergency/humanitarian, recovery or fragile situations, UNICEF in 2011 assisted an estimated⁴:

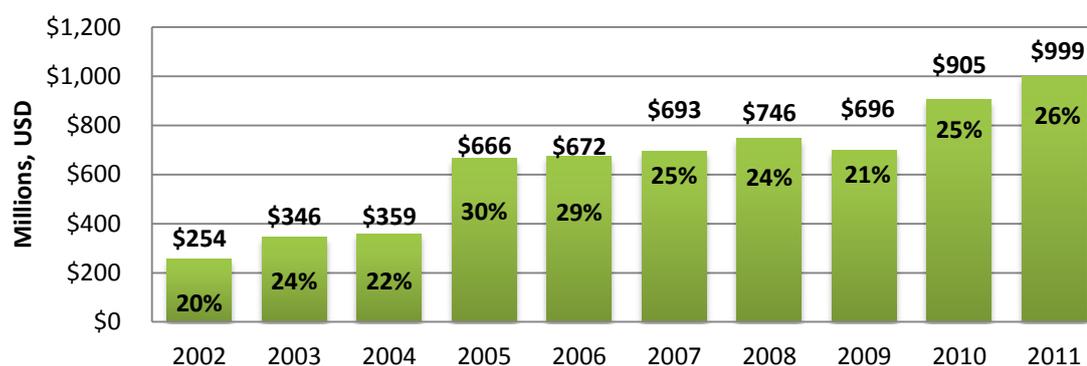
³ Security Council resolutions 1265, 1296, 1325, 1674, 1738, 1888, 1889, 1894, 1973.

⁴ Annual report of the Executive Director of UNICEF: progress and achievements against the medium-term strategic plan (E/ICEF/2012/10), page 13.

- (a) 1.8 million severely malnourished children aged 6-59 months through therapeutic feeding programmes;
- (b) 52.3 million children aged 6 months to 15 years vaccinated for measles;.
- (c) 2.57 million families received two insecticide-treated nets;
- (d) Over 18.5 million people with access to safe water to agreed standards;
- (e) 4.86 million people with access to appropriately designed toilets;
- (f) Over 10.2 million children with access to WASH facilities in their learning environment;
- (g) 8.76 million school-aged children, including adolescents, accessing formal and non-formal basic education (including temporary learning spaces and play and early learning for young children);
- (h) Over 2 million children with safe access to community spaces for socializing, play, learning, psychosocial support in general, etc.;
- (i) Over 11,600 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups reintegrated;
- (j) 835,000 pregnant women with access to HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment including prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

6. This included the multisectoral response in the Horn of Africa, where UNICEF mobilized its global resources in the aftermath of the declaration of famine in parts of Somalia, drought across Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, and a refugee crisis. In 2012, UNICEF and its partners have mounted a major response to the nutrition crisis in the Sahel – and its multiple impacts on children and women – as well as cholera and other outbreaks and the crisis stemming from the unrest in Mali. It substantially scaled up its programmes throughout the Sahel to meet the increasing nutrition caseload and other basic health needs, with the number of health centres offering treatment for severe acute malnutrition and other major diseases increasing from 3,100 in 2011 to over 4,700 by the end of May 2012. This has enabled UNICEF and partners to treat some 337,000 children under the age of five. Measles vaccinations have reached 1.6 million children and 7.3 million families have been provided with insecticide-treated nets as part of malaria control programmes. Elsewhere, response and recovery have continued in the Horn of Africa, as well as to emergencies in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

Emergency (Other Resources-Emergency) expenditure as percentage of total expenditure, 2002-2011



*Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami thematic funding programme budget allocations were active from 2005 to 2010.

Source: Executive Director's Annual Report, 2002-2011.

7. UNICEF is committed to mainstreaming humanitarian action as part of development programmes, despite the challenges. Most notably, the international aid architecture still separates humanitarian and development assistance into different frameworks and funding streams although practically, both forms of assistance often co-exist and are not linear. UNICEF addresses this by advocating for more flexible funding for both the humanitarian and development contexts, and through a programmatic response that builds on national capacities. Global trends, such as climate change and communities' growing vulnerability to recurrent crises, make it necessary for UNICEF to include building resilience and reducing risk in all phases of country programmes. In Niger, for example, structures gradually put in place for previous crises established basic systems that have supported the current response. A stronger analysis of risks and vulnerabilities can systematically integrate prevention, mitigation and preparedness interventions into the organization's programmes.

8. Situations of fragility⁵ are an area of particular concern. The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States aims to enhance collaboration in some of the most difficult contexts and collectively contribute to peace. UNICEF is examining ways to better address the root causes of fragility, where further investment is required to contribute to peace and development. These include better leveraging its humanitarian action in developing national capacities and finding innovative approaches to support the delivery of basic social services in very low-capacity and weak institutional contexts. Partnerships are even more central to success in these contexts.

II. Strengthening systems for response

9. Recent experiences have underscored the challenges facing UNICEF within the broader humanitarian community in responding to large-scale emergencies. Within a few months in 2010, the organization had to mobilize a global response to two major emergencies (the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods) and several others. This stretched UNICEF capacities and tested its systems to respond effectively.

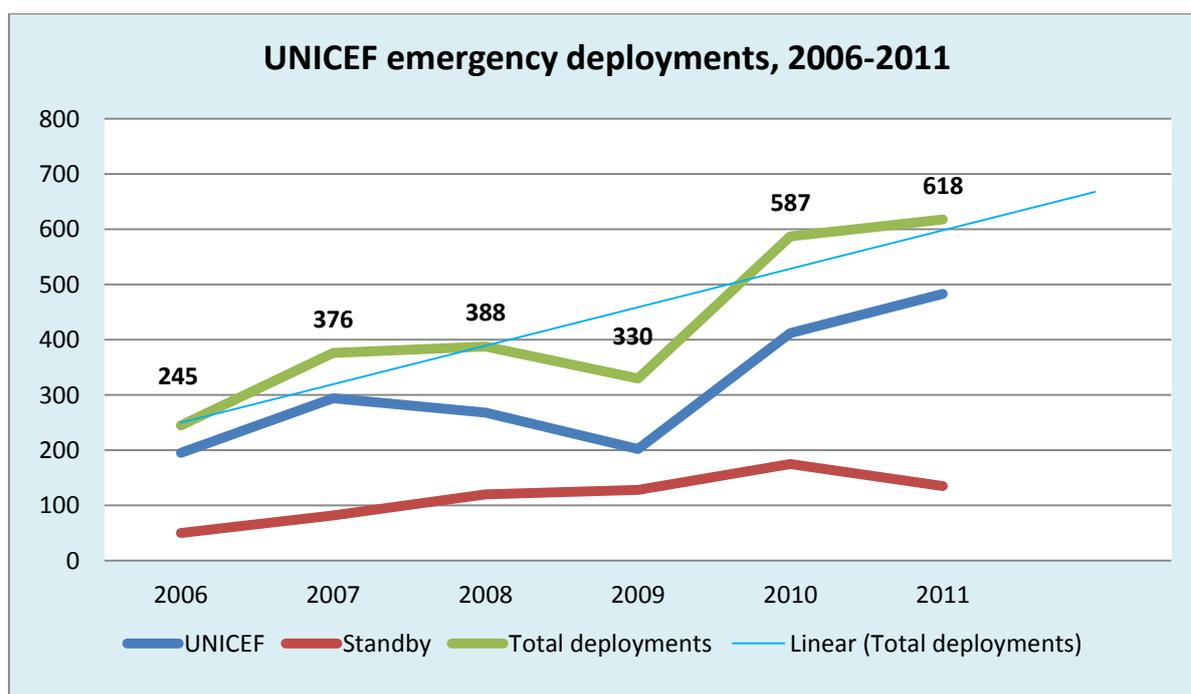
⁵ "Fragile States" is the term used for countries facing particularly severe development challenges: weak institutional capacity, poor governance, and political instability. Often these countries experience ongoing violence as the residue of past severe conflict. Ongoing armed conflicts affect three out of four fragile States. See [World Bank, Definitions of Conflict](#).

10. Lessons from these experiences have better prepared UNICEF for an immediate, organization-wide mobilization to respond to the scale and complexity of a large-scale, **Level 3 emergency**:

- (a) For the first time, the UNICEF Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure (CEAP) defines a Level 3 emergency on the basis of five criteria: scale, urgency, complexity, capacity, and reputational risk;
- (b) When activated by the Executive Director within 24 hours of a crisis, the CEAP puts in place a simplified and unified chain of command for responding to the emergency, to be led by a Global Emergency Coordinator directly accountable to the Executive Director;
- (c) The CEAP clarifies roles and responsibilities, and automatically activates simplified standard operating procedures and the deployment of an Immediate Response Team;
- (d) Activation also signifies that additional surge deployments are prioritized, Emergency Programme Funds are allocated and results-based monitoring is further adapted for the humanitarian response.

11. The CEAP was first applied in the Horn of Africa crisis in 2011. More broadly, UNICEF is streamlining and simplifying several of its procedures for all emergencies.

12. Operationally, strengthened partnerships and internal systems enabled UNICEF to **deploy emergency personnel** (in addition to existing country capacity) more efficiently in 2011, with surge support totalling 618 personnel (an increase of 5 per cent from 2010 and 87 per cent over 2009). In 2010, UNICEF restructured its dedicated emergency human resources unit and adopted simplified procedures for human resources in emergencies which include a policy for expedited recruitments and fast-track deployments. These have proven to be useful in recent emergencies, with shorter deployment times. For example, recruitment of personnel was more than a week faster for the Horn of Africa crisis in the second half of 2011 (19.5 days) when compared to the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake in January 2010 (27 days).



13. The recent large-scale responses have also underscored the importance of the rapid mobilization and shipment of essential life-saving **supplies** during the first 24-72 hours in the aftermath of a disaster. In 2011, UNICEF undertook one of its largest supply pipelines in its history for the Horn of Africa response, providing supplies for therapeutic and blanket supplementary feeding, health, water, sanitation and hygiene. Supply Division's Copenhagen warehouse is central to the UNICEF emergency response capacity. Emergency supplies can be packed and shipped within 48 hours of receiving an order, which is key in meeting immediate needs. UNICEF has a standing global response capacity for essential emergency items to cover at least 250,000 people. In addition, country offices also have inventories of emergency supplies, in particular where crises are recurring.

14. As part of its organization-wide refocus on equity and results monitoring, UNICEF is working to strengthen **results-based monitoring** in humanitarian action. The need for high-frequency monitoring of results of both UNICEF-supported programmes and the humanitarian clusters it leads is even more pressing in these contexts. This requires specific tools and systems in support of national structures. Country offices now have a monitoring tool kit for use in humanitarian situations, enabling them to adapt the tools to their context and track results against targets in real time. This has been implemented – and continues to be refined – in responses in Côte d'Ivoire, the Horn of Africa, Pakistan (in 2010 and again in 2011) and in the Sahel. Better monitoring of results facilitates, for example, tracking of children admitted for therapeutic feeding or of people provided access to safe water by programmes supported by both UNICEF and the clusters it leads. UNICEF is also committed to the systematic evaluation of its major humanitarian engagements, both in real time and after the immediate response has subsided. In recent years, reviews of its responses to the Haiti earthquake and Horn of Africa have enabled the organization to make changes to address gaps.

15. Humanitarian **programming** has made similar advances. Community-based interventions, such as the management of acute malnutrition, are reaching more children, enabling them to receive earlier treatment and prevent their situation from deteriorating. Efforts to provide social protection through national systems – such as Kenya's social protection programme, the Social Development Fund in Yemen and the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan – contribute to increased access to services, mitigate the impacts of predictable shocks and build resilience at the community level.

16. Based on best practices as well as learning from recent emergencies, UNICEF pursues a number of other strategies to enhance its own and its partners' abilities to deliver humanitarian assistance consistent with humanitarian principles articulated in General Assembly resolution 46/182⁶, including in conflict-affected or highly insecure environments. These include investing in national and subnational systems to enhance service delivery in a manner that increases resilience (as in Ethiopia, Niger and Pakistan); partnerships and long-term arrangements with key non-governmental organizations (as in Somalia); and innovative approaches to programming in high threat-environments, through remote implementation, third party monitoring and the application of due diligence measures. This improves the capacity of the organization, for example, to continue vaccination campaigns and support the treatment of severe acute malnutrition amidst conflicts or where insecurity impedes access. UNICEF has worked to increase staff capacities in international humanitarian law to enhance humanitarian

⁶ [General Assembly Resolution 46/182](#), Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, 19 December 1991.

response, including as part of humanitarian country teams. UNICEF promotes a structured approach to risk analysis and management both around security risks for staff and other risks.

17. **Gender equality** is key in humanitarian action to respond to the distinct needs of all crisis-affected girls and boys, and UNICEF has strengthened efforts in this area. Strategic and effective programme design through assessment and planning tools allow for programmes to be built on an understanding of a population's specific needs. Evidence-based internal and inter-agency "gender markers" also enable UNICEF to track the expected contribution of projects and programmes to gender equality, including in humanitarian situations. Examples include needs assessments in the Horn of Africa that consulted both women and men; cholera prevention messages in Haiti that targeted men specifically; and establishing separate discussion groups for adolescent girls and boys in child-friendly spaces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to build life skills and challenge prevailing attitudes about sexual violence.

18. The UNICEF **early warning** system, including enhanced preparedness tools, monitors the situation of children and women in each programme country and the relevant level of the country office's preparedness to support national capacities to respond. In 2011, 76 per cent of 129 country offices were assessed as having achieved a minimum level of preparedness for an emergency.

19. The fast evolving field of humanitarian action also demands **strengthened staff capacity**. UNICEF draws consistently on system-wide humanitarian references that are incorporated into its core learning programmes. Humanitarian-specific guidance is now available for all staff working in humanitarian situations, in addition to orientation material for those being deployed to crises. Training and support tools are offered through emergency preparedness and response training packages; online communities of practice; and an electronic learning package on the UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, its central humanitarian policy.

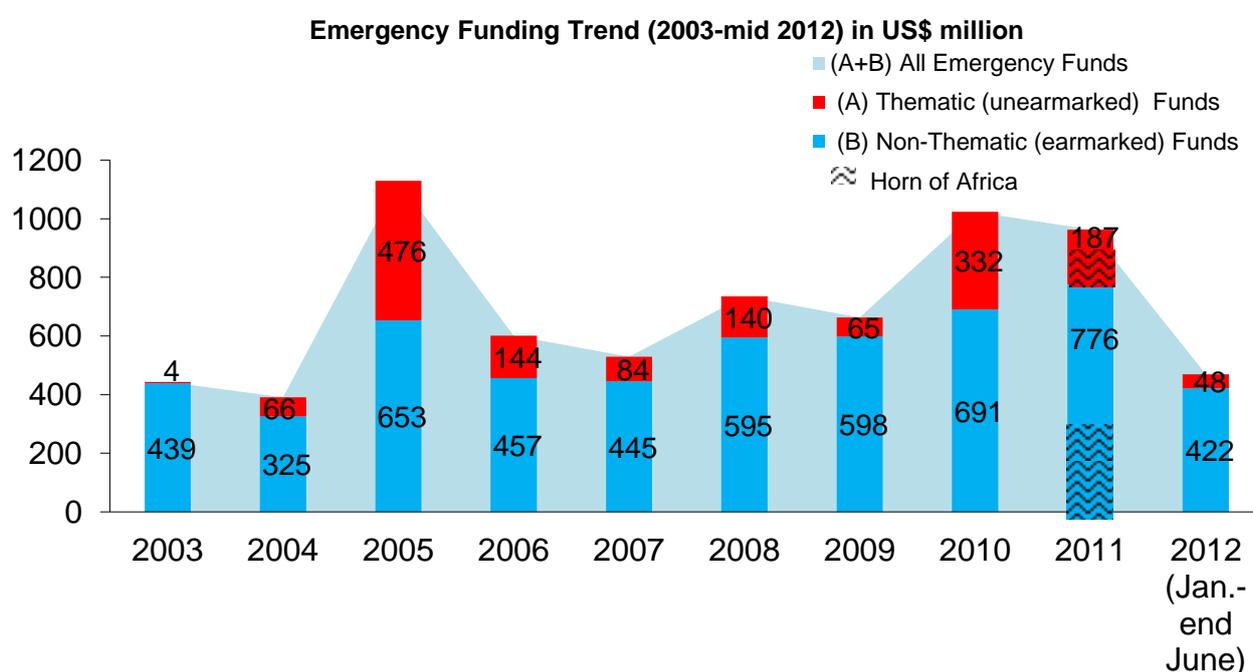
20. UNICEF has also sought **innovative approaches** to enhance its programming, such as emergency cash assistance to households. This has been successfully used at scale in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through voucher-based non-food-item fairs, and in Niger and Somalia for nutrition and WASH programmes. In Uganda and Haiti, UNICEF has adapted mobile technologies and SMS messaging for field monitoring and other purposes, such as for family tracing and reunification, specifically in emergency situations.

III. Challenges and the way forward

21. While humanitarian situations like the emergency in the Sahel are acknowledged early in the crisis, this does not always lead to **timely action**, because of insufficient data and competing priorities. Often, investments are not made until the crisis gains global attention. The risks of operating in contexts of weak institutional capacities to maintain programme delivery reinforces the need for **mutual accountability** and a shared approach to risk amongst stakeholders. The process of **scaling-up** response, although strengthened in part can still be accelerated, through further simplification of procedures for all emergencies and increased further use of partnerships. UNICEF must also find ways to enhance its cooperation in **refugee settings**. While some Governments such as those of India and Indonesia have made significant progress in strengthening preparedness and response through national disaster systems including for early warning, operationalizing **disaster-risk reduction** in development cooperation requires further attention.

22. The UNICEF presence in humanitarian situations means **greater risks to staff and partners**, on the front lines. Security incidents increased significantly in 2011, including the deaths of 13 UN staff of which three were UNICEF staff members as a result of the deliberate attack on the United Nations premises in Nigeria. The organization continues to address the safety and security of staff while maintaining its ability to remain present in the most complex or threatening environments. UNICEF has revised its security management policies and procedures reinforcing the United Nations Security Management System, and has invested in strengthened capacities of country and regional offices for the management of staff safety and security, with a gradual increase in the numbers of dedicated security advisers being employed in and/or in support of high-threat working environments.

23. **Mobilising funding** to support humanitarian action also remains challenging in a difficult financial environment. In the past two years, UNICEF has received its highest level of humanitarian contributions since 2005, due largely to the responses to the emergencies in Haiti and the Horn of Africa. Governments, National Committees for UNICEF, private donors, corporations and foundations continue to support generously the responses to large-scale emergencies. The UNICEF Emergency Programme Fund, which provides loans to country offices, and the Central Emergency Response Fund are important funding mechanisms to facilitate humanitarian action. Longer-term and predictable funding for chronic and lower-profile crises remains difficult, however, especially in the areas of preparedness and resilience. Un-earmarked funding gives UNICEF essential flexibility to direct resources for the delivery of life-saving supplies and services to where they are needed most. Often, though, funding does not provide this flexibility. In the Sahel, for example, only 13 per cent of funding received in the first five months of response was un-earmarked⁷.



⁷ Funds received as of 9 July 2012.

IV. Contributions to the broader humanitarian system

24. Strengthening internal systems for more efficient response, coupled with significant responsibilities in the cluster approach, have enabled UNICEF to make key contributions at the inter-agency level to the IASC Transformative Agenda. Many of the systems that UNICEF developed following the emergencies in Haiti and Pakistan – the declaration of a system-wide emergency, the criteria for Level 3 designation, Immediate Response Teams and a greater focus on results-based monitoring in emergencies – contributed to similar inter-agency mechanisms. The IASC has agreed on the need for specific improvements to the international humanitarian system – specifically on coordination, leadership and accountability – and UNICEF continues to help shape this architecture. This work has placed an immediate priority on a large-scale Level 3 global response and a system-wide Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism.

25. Principals have agreed on the activation procedure for a Level 3 emergency and the ensuing leadership arrangement. UNICEF has played a further role on strengthening system-wide results-based monitoring through coordination mechanisms and tools, and has advocated for a strategic plan to align priorities, approaches and targets of all actors, including humanitarian clusters.

26. UNICEF has also worked to strengthen its capacity to deliver on its cluster responsibilities, while using that work to inform the broader work on humanitarian coordination. Beginning in 2012, clusters and areas of responsibility led or co-led by UNICEF for nutrition, WASH, education, child protection and gender-based violence have been located together in Geneva in one organizational unit, with core costs covered by regular resources. This integration is providing opportunities for stronger internal management, greater efficiencies, harmonization and collaboration across clusters and opportunities for strengthened partnerships. The consolidation of global clusters will also enable more predictable support to countries facing large-scale emergencies and in promoting and supporting national coordination mechanisms. It will facilitate more substantial contributions to an inter-agency vision and plans to strengthen system-wide cluster capacity in key response sectors. As part of the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism, UNICEF has also committed to immediately deploy global cluster coordinators to a Level 3 emergency.

27. UNICEF will continue to strengthen the broader response to Level 3 emergencies as well as the wider humanitarian system. It supports the need to strengthen the leadership of humanitarian coordinators and enhance the accountability of humanitarian country teams, within the framework of a strategic plan with clear agency accountabilities. It is further committed to nominate more staff to the humanitarian coordinator pool, an area where it can improve. In leading three clusters and two areas of responsibility, UNICEF will support clarifying cluster accountabilities and defining minimum commitments for cluster partners.

28. Work remains building on the progress of the Transformative Agenda, primarily in clarifying improvements in responses to non-Level 3 emergencies and field implementation. At the same time, the post-2015 agenda is being constructed, and the MTSP developed. Both of these are key opportunities to reinforce the importance of humanitarian action within the scope of sustainable and equitable results for children..