

INFORMAL BRIEFING TO UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD
on the HUMANITARIAN SITUATION in SOUTH ASIA
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Slide 1: OVERVIEW – UNICEF and the South Asia Region

1. Today it is my distinct pleasure to brief you on the Humanitarian Situation in South Asia and UNICEF Humanitarian Response.
2. One third of the world's children live in South Asia (approximately 621 million of the over 1.7 billion population). There are a staggering 340 million adolescents in South Asia – 19 per cent of the total population in the region and 30 per cent of the world's adolescents. Nearly 130 million South Asians live in informal urban settlements. There are 53 UNICEF offices (eight country offices and 45 field/sub offices) with 1774 staff.
3. The South Asia region is highly prone to disasters including flooding, droughts, earthquakes and climate change; the region registered also refugees flows. According to the Fragile Risk Index 2019, five of the eight countries categorized between high warning (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal), alert (Pakistan) and high alert (Afghanistan).
4. Conflicts, humanitarian crises and man-made disasters continue to affect the region, particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Due to conflict-induced internal and cross-border displacements, 9.3 million people in Afghanistan and two million in Pakistan were displaced and are in need of assistance in 2018. The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan was further hampered by drought, affecting more than three million Afghans which is likely to rise to ten million in 2019 and an estimated 5 million in Pakistan were affected by drought. The recent terrible violence directed to families gathered in churches and hotels on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, resulted in 265 people, including 52 children, killed. It demonstrates the vulnerability countries like Sri Lanka face when they are still in process of state building and reconciliation from an extended past conflict.

Slide 2: Bangladesh - Rohingya Crisis

1. UNICEF Bangladesh has invested in preparedness, providing support and contributing to system strengthening catered to a wide range of humanitarian situations: floods, cyclones, etc. Yet currently the Rohingyas crisis response dominates UNICEF humanitarian interventions in the country.
2. Nearly one million Rohingya live in refugee camps around Cox's Bazar district (one of 64 districts in the country) - 710,000 having fled from Myanmar in August 2017 in addition to the existing caseload - now almost 2 years ago. I would like to acknowledge the role of the Bangladesh Government in responding to a crisis of this magnitude. They have done a tremendous job and should be applauded for welcoming and hosting the Rohingyas in their country.

3. The humanitarian crisis has gradually stabilized, - the living conditions in the camps have slightly improved and the Rohingyas have more and better access to basic services as I witnessed myself when I visited the camps a week ago. Already in January of this year the Rohingyas crisis was declassified from an L3 to a L2 emergency.
4. I use this opportunity to share that UNICEF undertook an evaluation of the L3 emergency response. Overall, the evaluation team found that despite the obstacles posed by this crisis, UNICEF rose to the challenge. The evaluation noted a range of impressive achievements in reaching children and their families and addressing their plight such as scaling up, advocacy, sector leadership and service delivery. However, the evaluation also identified several areas in need of improvement including clarity on coordination arrangements; overcrowding of facilities; limited advance knowledge of the deteriorating situation; and selected areas of strategy and planning enhancement.
5. Meanwhile a total of 1.2 million Rohingyas and people living in host communities, including 683,000 children, are at risk due to disease outbreaks, flooding, abuse and exploitation, and still require (prolonged) humanitarian assistance. UNICEF continues support in all areas of responsibilities (Nutrition, Health, WASH, CP, Education) and leads the sector coordination for WASH, Nutrition and the subsector on Child-protection as well as co-leads with Save the Children the Education sector.
6. Congestion remains the central challenge for the response all Sectors, with space constraints resulting in continued protection issues and poor living conditions, in locations at risk of landslide and flood. Similarly, reports of gender-based violence and abuse across the camps underscore the need to increase sexual and gender-based violence preventive aspects, case management, counter-trafficking programming and psychosocial support for children and adults.
7. Despite the challenges there are also key accomplishments. I will highlight 4 of them:
 - Almost 260,000 children (which is 85%) of all aged 4-14 are now attending a learning facility and grouped according to their learning abilities or competencies of whom 180,000 are supported by UNICEF and its partners. This is twice as many children having learning opportunities than this time last year.
 - Immunization coverage has increased to 89%, reaching 171,505 children following 9 different campaigns held over the past 21 months, including the world largest campaign on cholera vaccination.
 - Less children are malnourished now with the prevalence of acute malnutrition falling from 19% to 12%. (i.e. 104,022 children)
 - Adolescent programming has been strengthened and skills training component has been introduced. Aim to reach 40,000 adolescents in the camps and host communities.
8. UNICEF remains firmly committed and our current strategy will focus on sustaining and improving the quality of life saving interventions, including shifting to semi-durable materials for learning centers and public spaces that could be used for cyclone shelter. In addition, strengthening systems for service delivery for both host communities and the Rohingya while at the same time strengthening social cohesion and confidence building in the affected communities. The program will prioritize the needs of adolescents including occupational and life skills training and participation opportunities.

In concluding, - the real solution lies in finding durable solutions. As ASG Mueller statement on her visit to Myanmar a few weeks ago (14 May) – that “*the Government of Myanmar has taken some steps to implement the Rakhine Advisory Commission, yet more needs to be done to address root causes and durable solutions needs to be found*”. She further underlined “*the right of displaced people to voluntarily return home, in safety and dignity, to resettle to another place of their choosing*”.

Slide 3: Conflict and Displacement – Afghanistan and Pakistan

1. Afghanistan - The security situation remains extremely volatile surrounding elections, peace talks, and the continuing conflict between State and Anti-Government Elements (AGE). Some 9.3 million people are affected by the protracted conflict in Afghanistan and 6,3 million people remain in need of assistance, among whom 3,8 million children (<18). Committed to serve those affected, - working in this high-threat environment with collateral consequences is still a prominent risk for humanitarians of which the attack on 8 May was a sober reminder.
2. UNICEF and its partners reached 1.6 million children, women and other emergency-affected people with humanitarian assistance last year, focussing on those affected by drought, conflict and returnees from Iran and Pakistan. The areas of most importance include:
3. Nutrition: The nutritional situation in Afghanistan continues to be alarming. Almost 4 out of 10 children (37%) are stunted; 1 in 10 (9.5 per cent) children are wasted, including approximately 600,000 children who require treatment for severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and almost 2 out of 10 (17.4%) infants are born with low birth weight. Moreover, 3 out of 10 adolescent girls (31%) are anaemic. The 2018 drought is likely to extend through mid-2019 (next harvest period), further aggravating the unfortunate nutritional situation. The findings of the most recent nutrition surveys across Afghanistan shows that many provinces are currently above the emergency threshold of acute malnutrition.

UNICEF responded by ensuring 1,163,746 (89 per cent) of eligible girls 10-19 years were reached with Weekly Iron Folic Acid; leading implementation of 2 of the 15 districts implementing Community based nutrition packages and as the sole provider of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) for all children under the age of five years in Afghanistan. To date, 300,000 children under the age of five, suffering from severe acute malnutrition, do not have access to treatment services mainly due to the lack of adequate resources and capacity to provide services through decentralized facilities, closer to communities. UNICEF has a humanitarian funding gap for nutrition of US\$ 13.5 million in 2019, and current stocks of RUTF will be depleted by September.

4. Education: The ongoing conflict and rapidly deteriorating security situation saw the number of attacks on schools in Afghanistan surge from 68 in 2017 to 192 in 2018 and in the 1st Quarter of 2019, there are 29 verified attacks against schools and personnel (45% increase compared to the same period in 2018). This marks a worrying trend. Over the past four years, attacks on schools included deliberate targeting of school buildings, threats and forced closures and the abduction and killing of education personnel. Also,

the number of schools closed due to insecurity nearly quadrupled between 2015 and 2018. By the end of last year, more than 1,000 schools remained closed, denying half a million children of their right to education, and contributing to the 3.7 million 7 to 17-year-olds already missing out on their schooling – nearly half of all school-aged children in the country, of whom 60% are girls. (2.2 million girls.)

UNICEF is working with partners to provide early learning opportunities; and informal and accelerated community-based education, which involves running classes in community buildings and homes, helping to reduce the risk of insecurity on the way to school. Over 264,000 children and adolescents have been provided with access to quality education in 2018. UNICEF also will continue to advocate -In close collaboration with education partners, authorities and UN bodies, for protection and reopening of schools in line with International protocols and the Safe Schools Declaration.

5. Water, sanitation, and hygiene: Activities continue to be the top priority for UNICEF and partners during drought and flood emergencies. To date, 1.1 Million people have been supported with WASH Assistance that includes Non Food Items, clean water, and culturally-sensitive latrine and bathing facilities as well as MHM services. 20% of WASH projects are supported with sustainable/durable solutions. UNICEF Afghanistan received an additional USD 5 million in February from USAID for the humanitarian WASH response and agreed to support the sustainable WASH solutions through the next 4 years with an additional USD30 million for the development part of the programme, another good example of the humanitarian development nexus.
6. In Pakistan decades long displacement is ending in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Merged Districts (KPMD ie ex-FATA), as just over 16,000 temporarily displaced families remain (out of an initial 471,126 families!) yet are bound to return this year. This provides an opportunity to pilot the 'New Way of Working' linking humanitarian relief to longer term recovery/development work in post conflict contexts. The Government of Pakistan, supported by the UN and World Bank is one of the first countries in the world to put in practice the New Way of Working in KPMD and developed the FATA Transition Plan (FTP) which aims to address socio-economic challenges and vulnerabilities in FATA over a three-year period (2018-2020) through the achievement of four outcomes: a) Livelihoods and Economic Growth, b) Basic Services, c) Resilient Recovery and d) Governance and Justice.
7. The overarching purpose of the FTP is to ensure that returns of the TDPs are sustainable and bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and large-scale implementation of medium term development actions, - aligned to the GoP 10-year Socio Economic Plan. UNICEF is currently working on a DFID funded UN joint programme led by the Resident Coordinator (RC) and in collaboration with FAO, UNDP and UNWOMEN to ensure the sustainability of the returns process and strengthen the social contract between the state and citizens. The programme will achieve these overall aims by: a) strengthening resilience in return communities, especially by restoring livelihoods; b) supporting the improvement of, and access to, health and education services; c) supporting the local and provincial governments to become more effective, accountable and responsive; and d) supporting the improvement of the enabling environment for inclusive economic growth.

1. Drought: In addition to conflict, social cohesion and security challenges as just discussed, – the nature and magnitude of natural disasters is becoming more intense and frequent because of climate change, environmental degradation and uncontrolled rapid urbanization in South Asia. For instance, the cycle for droughts is becoming shorter and more frequent– with examples of Afghanistan and Pakistan experiencing one of the worst droughts in decades.
2. In Afghanistan alone, more than 3 million people were affected by drought, and that number is expected to rise to 10 million in 2019. 22 out of the 34 provinces were affected by the drought, and the findings of the most recent nutrition surveys across Afghanistan shows that these same provinces are currently above the emergency threshold of acute malnutrition
3. The Government of Pakistan estimates that some 5 million people were affected by the drought in 26 districts in Sindh and Baluchistan and Government of Sindh declared some southeast and western districts as calamity hit area. Pakistan drought conditions resulted in acute shortages of food, fodder and water spurring the spread of water-borne diseases and exacerbating the already high-levels of child malnutrition and while also threatening livelihoods, increasing displacements and forcing affected people to adopt negative coping strategies, such as withdrawal of children from school and forced early marriage.
4. The 2018 National Nutrition Survey (NNS) which will be shortly released, suggests that malnutrition rates among children in Sindh are as high as 29.1 per cent which is nearly double the emergency threshold. In Baluchistan, the global acute malnutrition among children under five is reported as 18.6 per cent while malnutrition among pregnant women is 37 per cent. The new government has developed a national 100-day plan in which malnutrition is a key priority in going forward.
5. The government of Pakistan, under the leadership of National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMA) in collaboration with the respective Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) of Sindh and Baluchistan are coordinating the drought response. UNICEF, in line with the strategy of the Pakistan Humanitarian Country Team, is complementing the Government’s response to ensure effective humanitarian assistance to the affected communities in a timely manner and will support the Government to develop longer term drought mitigation plan to address longer term structural issues. This will provide an opportunity to integrate risk informed programming into the Government sector development plans yet another example of the humanitarian-development integration.
6. India and Sri Lanka experienced severe drought over the past three years, yet even worse Floods. In 2018, Kerala in India -experienced one of the worst floods in decades, with more than 23 million people affected, including 7 million children, and over 200,000 people displaced. The floods destroyed lives and livelihoods, damaging more than 100,000 homes, and requiring over US\$4 billion for recovery and to build back better. UNICEF complemented Government efforts during the flooding in Kerala, with rapid response to 868,000 children with psychosocial support, 500,000 people with access to safe water and 580,000 people with access to WASH facilities and rolled out of the community engagement platform and promoting accountability to the affected

populations during the recovery process. More storms occurred, - i.e. Cyclone Titli affected more than 7 million people around the Bay of Bengal, particularly Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and some parts of Bangladesh and just two weeks ago, Cyclone Fani affecting 16.5 million people. The Government lead a massive evacuation operation keeping many out of harms ways. The Government should be saluted for the investment in preparedness and response mechanism put in place.

7. UNICEF is working in close collaboration with the State and Provincial Governments on prevention and preparedness measures. Child centered risk programming and disaster risk reduction system strengthening, evaluating all hazards and risks, are rolled out throughout the countries in the region to inform programs. It is important to note the return on investments in preparedness and risk reduction are starting to pay off. In that context I like to acknowledge DFID for its generous support to enabling UNICEF to move the needle forward on preparedness including in South Asia. More still needs to be done yet stepping up on preparedness is well on its way in all UNICEF country offices in the region.

Slide 5: Health risks: Polio

1. Afghanistan and Pakistan are the last two countries in the world where wild poliovirus is circulating. UNICEF is concerned to observe that polio virus circulation is not reducing. In 2018, 33 children in Afghanistan and Pakistan were paralysed by polio. So far in 2019, 26 such cases (19 from Pakistan, 7 from Afghanistan) have been reported. Environmental surveillance also shows that virus transmission is widespread in both countries.
2. UNICEF has declared polio eradication as a level 3 emergency, in line with WHO's declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, UNICEF and WHO are working in close support of government to stop polio transmission.
3. Because people move across borders, no country is completely safe from polio until it has been eradicated globally. The recent detection of poliovirus in Iran illustrates this.
4. Stopping polio needs to remain high on the political agenda. The global eradication effort needs to be completed for once and for all, so that all children will be safe from this terrible disease.

Slide 6: Thank you

In my presentation today, I hope I could highlight a few of the humanitarian situations that are of particular concern in South Asia.

His Excellency, Chair and Distinguished delegates, -
let me end by thanking all of you for all support over the years. We continue to count on your financial contributions to bridge a USD 150 Million funding gap. Let us together improve the wellbeing of the 621 million children in the South Asia region.
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