On 7th December, a powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2 hit Tajikistan with its epicentre 357 km south-east of the capital Tajikistan (Dushanbe) and 22 km of the Sarez Lake. The earthquake caused significant damages in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), particularly to communities living in Bartang valley. The confirmed total number of casualties is 2 and 10 are injured in GBAO. At least 21 aftershocks were recorded.

The most affected area Bartang valley remains isolated. Families in Bartang are reluctant to relocate referring to the need to take care of their livelihoods. The government-led assessment is ongoing, however, figures about affected population are fluctuating because of i) limited accessibility to the area; ii) information is mostly received over phone communication and iii) lack of data on internal and out-off country migration.

The immediate needs are food, shelter, warm clothes, schools equipment and energy source for affected people in Bartang. Further, to help to protect children and facilitate their psychosocial recovery from the traumatizing experience of the earthquake, specific psychosocial support is also a priority.

About 500 people affected by the earthquake were evacuated from Bartang to Rushon district. Presently, these people are accommodated in schools and pre-school facilities. Schools are functioning although some classes are occupied by evacuated people. A one-month school break, which annually starts on January, would allow to relocate the affected people to other shelters.

UNICEF, as part of an inter-agency joint assessment team, is currently working in the field to respond to the disaster by using pre-positioned emergency relief supplies and existing resources. This includes the provision of water tanks for communities, distribution of hygiene and emergency assistance kits for approximately 500-600 families.

About 500 people affected by the earthquake were evacuated from Bartang to Rushon district. Presently, these people are accommodated in schools and pre-school facilities. Although some classes are occupied by evacuated people, schools continue to operate. A one-month school break, which annually starts on January, will allow relocate the affected people to other places.

According to the latest information, the actual number of damaged and destroyed houses appear to be lower than initially estimated and currently stands at around 800 houses.

According to preliminary assessment figures: damaged infrastructures in five affected districts include:

- 130 houses destroyed
- 390 houses damaged
- 1 school destroyed
- 4 schools damaged

UNICEF is currently responding to the most urgent needs of children and communities with existing in-country resources and prepositioned life-saving supplies for approximately USD 110,000 for health, water, sanitation and hygiene and child protection.

The CEE/CIS Regional Office is allocating approximately USD180,000 to replenish the emergency stocks and fill humanitarian gaps.

At least 508 people, including 253 children have been evacuated to Rushon district centre.

4,794 people, including 719 children are displaced and/or isolated and are in need of assistance.

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Estimated Affected Population

According to the latest official information received, the number of destroyed and damaged houses is significantly lower than initially estimated and stands as of 15 December at 799 houses and the number of people displaced is now estimated to be 4,794 with an average of 6 people per household. In addition to houses, also critical infrastructure - including roads, medical points and hydro-power station and schools - have been damaged.

As the weather has cleared up the last few days, it made it possible to evacuate at least 508 people, including 253 children, from Bartang village Rushon district centre.

Humanitarian leadership and coordination

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan issued an overview of required relief and recovery assistance, which is based on an assessment done by the State Commission.

During a meeting with the Tajik Foreign Minister on 14 December, the UN Resident Coordinator, on behalf of the wider humanitarian and donor community, assured the Government of Tajikistan of its commitment to support the Government and address the critical life-saving needs of the most vulnerable affected families. The same day, Development Coordination Council (DCC) discussed a joint response to relief and longer-term recovery needs.

UNICEF, as part of the joint assessment team, is currently working in the field to assess the situation and respond to the emergency by using its pre-positioned emergency relief supplies.

Humanitarian Strategy

All humanitarian efforts are being coordinated through the REACT Secretariat, which is closely working with the Government and updating information on potential needs.

A rapid response team of REACT has been deployed on 17 December to support the ongoing inter-agency needs assessment process. It was planned to organise a one-day donor visit, however to the bad weather conditions, the visit is postponed.

Government Priorities

As a first step, the Government has prioritized the provision of food and temporary shelter for the displaced communities. Presently, the Government focuses its effort on clearing up roads and damaged houses and on evacuating the population most in need. Food assistance provided by the Government is considered sufficient for up to 2 months.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

UNICEF has released basic water and sanitation supplies (water tanks, containers, hygiene kits, water purification tablets) and education materials (classroom tents, school-in-box, recreational kits and C4D materials). These emergency relief supplies has been already pre-positioned in FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance’s warehouse in Rushon district. In addition, UNICEF is organizing psychosocial support with a local NGOs for children and their caregivers who are in need of psychosocial recovery among 505 households.

Next SITREP: 25th December 2015

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