Humanitarian Overview and Emerging Issues

Children’s rights are still being affected as localized conflict continues in parts of the country and even where it has ceased, the situation remains difficult. Access is also increasingly becoming a challenge in some areas due to the security situation, and other procedural issues. Verifying displacement figures and reports of child casualties is therefore difficult.

In Al-Dhale Governorate in the south, security continues to deteriorate with great impact on the humanitarian situation and grave violation of human rights. Ongoing intimidations by parties to the conflict have impacted on people’s access to social services including health facilities and schools. There have been four attacks on hospitals, three attacks on schools and 24 children have been verified as killed or maimed. Advocacy efforts to allow humanitarian access to Al-Dhale continue at the highest levels. A total of 740 families are thought to have been displaced, though the actual figure is believed to be much higher. The majority of schools continued to be closed even after the mid-term break, with the education of 8,385 girls and 12,149 boys disrupted. One school lost its section for children with disabilities to heavy bombing, while schools located in the line of confrontation are being used as military barracks.

Although the conflict has now come to an end in Dammaj, Sa’ada, children are still affected as a few schools remain closed due to damage. UNICEF is responding to this by distributing five tents to be used as temporary classrooms. Access has also become restrained in certain areas due to the security situation, and other procedural issues. Verifying displacement figures and reports of child casualties is therefore difficult.

The total number of displaced people was 81,857 by 6th February.

In Arhab District, Sana’a Governorate, tensions mounted between tribal armed groups and Al Houthi/Ansar Allah. As a result, 4,000 students were affected as over 16 schools have been closed since December. Three of the schools were verified as used by Al Houthi/Ansar Allah to store weapons, as accommodation or to treat wounded armed group members. A Presidential Commission has signed an agreement between the two fighting parties to end the conflict however. Currently, all blocked roads are being unblocked and occupied schools are being emptied and made accessible and safe. No damage has been reported in these occupied school buildings however access remains difficult as the situation is still considered risky.

The situation in Amran remains tense despite the efforts of a presidential mediation committee to stop hostilities. Recent reports point at potential escalation from different sides of the conflict with a risk of further displacements. Verification efforts continue.

Highlights:

The 2014 Humanitarian Response Plan was launched in February with a total appeal of $592 million.

UNICEF’s appeal stands at $65 million, targeting 3 million children and adults.

1,677 children in conflict-affected areas of Sana’a have been screened for malnutrition.
More than one million children under 5 are acutely malnourished in Yemen. Over a quarter of these are so severely malnourished that they are likely to die from the condition. For many, poor access to adequate sanitation and safe water exacerbates the problem by increasing rates of diarrhoea and waterborne diseases that lower the immune system. In areas of conflict, the situation is made much worse as facilities are destroyed and people are displaced.

UNICEF supported by a number of donors and implementing partners, assists the Government to deliver an immediate response, providing therapeutic food and counselling. This has expanded tremendously over the last year, the number of severe acute malnourished children enrolled into a nutrition therapeutic programme almost doubled to reach close to 150,000 children in 2013. There has also been a significant scale up geographically with an increase in the number of facilities from just over 300 in 2012 to 1,358 covering all 22 governorates. The hardest to reach, including marginalized groups are also being cared for through mobile clinics and integrated services and over 2,200 health workers and 4,200 community health volunteers have been trained to support the programme.

However, approximately half of all children under 5 (more than two million children) are stunted in Yemen, the second highest level in the world after Afghanistan. Not only are these children short for their age, they are also likely to suffer from developmental challenges. With such a significant percentage of the country’s population affected, there is still a huge negative impact on the prosperity and development of Yemen.

The underlying causes are wide ranging, which may require more sustained longer term interventions to address. Very few children between 6 and 23 months consume a minimal acceptable diet, while exclusive breastfeeding is one of the lowest levels in the world at just 10 per cent. Nearly one quarter of children have frequent episodes of acute respiratory tract infections and 40 per cent of children under 5 suffer from diarrhoea, which is strongly linked to the fact that over half the population (13 million) does not have access to safe water and sanitation. This why an integrated approach, including water, sanitation and hygiene interventions, feeding practices and awareness raising activities, is so important for breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition in Yemen. Well-nourished individuals are more productive, learn better, work longer and earn more.

UNICEF has also actively and strongly engaged in the scaling up nutrition (SUN) movement, providing technical support during the drafting process of the multi-sectoral action plan. A visit by the SUN coordinator, who is also the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Food Security and Nutrition, underscores the country’s commitment.

At Al Wahda hospital, in Aden, South Yemen, children under 5 were being vaccinated regularly, but the number accessing infant and young child feeding services (IYCF) was very low even though both services were on the same floor. IYCF is crucial for advising mothers on good nutrition and preventing or detecting cases of malnutrition. The hospital decided on a simple solution - to put the services in adjoining rooms, and break a doorway into the wall between them. The impact was astonishing. Before the wall was broken down the IYCF advised less than 50 mothers each month, but since the services were brought together, they now see up to 250. Encouraging coordination of services that target the same beneficiaries makes sense as it can be very cost effective and is clearly extremely worthwhile.
NUTRITION

153 community volunteers from Hodeidah, 40 health staff from Aden and 85 community leaders, decision makers and religious figures from both governorates were trained in aspects of communication for development. Puppet theatre, paintings and poetry competitions were used to share and develop key messages for participants to use in the community.

1,677 children in conflict-affected areas of Sana’a have been screened for malnutrition, with 39 cases of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) detected and referred for treatment, 43 new cases of SAM in children under 5 were admitted to the outpatient therapeutic programme, while 47 children were discharged treated and cured.

A nutrition assessment focusing on IDPs in Aden and Lahj, displaced from Al-Dhalee was concluded. Preliminary results indicate that the nutritional situation of children under 5 is normal. However close monitoring will be required as the coping mechanisms for displaced families to provide for food and other essential services is stretched.

In addition, 1,300 hygiene kits were distributed to IDPs displaced to Amran City.

EDUCATION

1,430 children in four conflict affected villages in Al Dhale are able to continue their education through the provision of 12 tents, whiteboards, floor mats and other education materials. Emergency latrines for boys and girls as well as safe water points have also been constructed.

81 people were trained on: making teaching aids with local materials (35 teachers) and; teaching out of school children (19 male and 27 female literacy facilitators, five of who will be preparing out of school children from the Muhamasheen community to join the schools next year. Separately, 105 senior school staff attended a workshop aimed at improving supervision in Hajja, Hodeidah and Raymah child friendly schools.

WASH

34,631 IDPs and conflict affected people were given hygiene kits and access to temporary latrines. This also includes 16,170 children in and outside IDP camps, and 4,771 IDP children in 4 Schools in Harad District, Hajjah Governorate and Sa’da Governorates.

903 IDPs and conflict affected people, including 438 children received water filters in Sa’da and Abyan.

10,000 households in affected districts of Al-Dhale are being given water purification tabs.

6,500 WASH related posters and brochures were distributed as part of support to 9 schools in Razeh District, Sada’a Governorate. 72 teachers and students from these schools have received WASH Training, integrated with Health and Nutrition; 9 hygiene clubs have subsequently been formed to promote WASH messages.

20,847 girls and boys have been given back to school materials in Sada’a, Al-Jawf, Abyan and Lahj.

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Interagency Collaboration

The Humanitarian Response Plan was launched this month, with UNICEF involved in the following cluster appeals: $94.9million Nutrition, $29.2million WASH, $45million Protection, $14million Education.
CHILD PROTECTION

78,883 people including 23,406 girls and 32,592 boys received mine risk education under the leadership of Yemen Mine Action Centre (YEMAC) and in partnership with a wide range of local NGOs and international NGOs in Aden, Abyan, Amran Hadramaut, Lahj and Shabwa.

9,998 children (girls: 3,542, boys: 6,456) received psychosocial support services through community and school Based child friendly spaces in the governorates of Abyan, Al Bayda, Sana’a and Shabwah organized by CPI, DRC/DDG, Intersos and Mercy Corps. A total of 1,094 community members, including 588 children (148 girls, 440 boys) received awareness raising sessions on a variety of child protection issues such as child marriage, trafficking and violence against children by MoSAL, Intersos, and CPI in Abyan and Sana’a Governorates. In addition, 92 social workers, teachers, community volunteers, NGOs’ staff and children (33 female) were trained on PSS and other CPIE related issues.

1,091 adolescents (girls: 497, boys: 594) were reached with messages on child protection in emergency and how they can protect themselves from violence, abuse and exploitation in Abyan Governorate.

In February, a family of 8 (single mother, 3 girls and 4 boys) and 37 unaccompanied migrant boys were helped to voluntarily return to Ethiopia by IOM with assistance from UNICEF and DRC. Moreover, since January 2013, 29 children (2 accompanied girls and 27 unaccompanied boys) have been interviewed in Haradh IOM Migration Response Centre and are waiting for their safe return back to Ethiopia.

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