Latin America and the Caribbean

The region of Latin America and the Caribbean is marked by extreme natural disasters, ranging from intense hurricanes, torrential rains and flash flooding to prolonged drought, intense volcanic activity and devastating earthquakes. In addition to the repeated loss of livelihood that leaves the most vulnerable populations in a cycle of poverty, displacement caused by disaster increases risks of abuse, sexual and gender-based violence, HIV transmission, exploitation and trafficking – each already a significant problem in the region. Severe droughts are causing serious water shortages in South America’s Gran Chaco region from Paraguay to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and food and nutrition crises in Central American dry corridors stretching from Guatemala to Honduras and Nicaragua.

Currently, nearly 24 per cent of children under age 5 in the entire Latin America and Caribbean region are stunted due to poor nutrition.¹ Lack of preparedness for and response to these crises increases risks for women and children, who are already extremely vulnerable. With great disparities between rich and poor in the region, the main challenges to disaster response are addressing the needs of the poorest and working with national structures for more effective disaster management.

The consequences of such disasters can be seen in countries throughout the region. In 2010, the earthquake in Haiti took the lives of more than 220,000 people, including more than 100,000 children. It led to worsening poverty, the displacement of more than 1.6 million women and children and an outbreak of cholera in provinces across the country. Severe droughts elsewhere have caused food shortages and nutrition crises, especially in the dry corridors of Central America – Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – and the Chaco region encompassing the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Paraguay where, according to the Survey on the Situation of Indigenous Populations,² 94.3 per cent of indigenous households are suffering from food insecurity. Sudden-onset disasters or a worsening of the drought has the potential to create a situation of severe acute malnutrition. In addition, developments are subject to the influence of seismic activity all along the Pacific ‘Ring of Fire’, El Niño and global climate change, making them all the more intense and unpredictable.

These events call for strengthening response and widespread advocacy of disaster risk reduction goals among all segments of the region’s population, including children. Prior to responding to disasters, focusing on developing long-term solutions to such problems as the spread of preventable disease, and lack of sustainable water supplies, sanitation systems and hygiene promotion activities is equally critical in bettering the lives of people in these most marginalized areas.

UNICEF is requesting US$13 million for its 2011 humanitarian work in Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen preparedness and response to the many disasters that affect the region. A strong focus will be on strengthening disaster risk reduction mechanisms in cooperation with national governments and partners. UNICEF is committed to developing evidence-based approaches, therefore contribution is sought to undertake a comprehensive study of the impact of disasters on the well-being of children and to generate evidence on the return of investments in disaster risk reduction. UNICEF will continuously monitor activities in the region and promote the exchange of good practices.

Funding for regional activities will focus on assisting countries that are highly vulnerable to natural hazards and which have limited coping capacities, as well as those which face notable disparities (regional technical assistance to all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, direct contributions to countries not already included individually in the 2011 Humanitarian Action for Children³ or those possibly facing emergencies in 2011). In turn, this effort will increase capacities for emergency assistance for a minimum of 500,000 children affected by disasters through a multi-sectoral approach. In addition, funding received will set in motion activities for the reduction of disaster risk for about 1 million children in the most vulnerable countries of the region – including Barbados, Belize, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti,
Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. This will include provision of safe education for 500,000, safe water and sanitation for 100,000, prevention of post-disaster forms of child abuse and violence, psychosocial traumatic consequences, including messaging on key health promotion messaging (hygiene, HIV and AIDS messaging and assistance) for about 1 million children and prevention of deterioration of nutritional status for about 100,000 children in Guatemala, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and other vulnerable countries.

The main challenges of response to disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean are addressing the needs of the poorest in a region with the greatest disparities between rich and poor, and working to empower emerging national structures for disaster management. To address these challenges, UNICEF is focusing on an innovative approach that combines: reinforcing governmental capacity to respond to emergencies, with UNICEF technical or direct operational support when needed; assisting national partners through coordination support in key sectors as defined by the humanitarian reform cluster responsibilities, either using the formal cluster mechanisms or a cluster-like approach;4 and increasing efforts at risk prevention and mitigation in the various sectors (education, WASH, nutrition and protection) essential to reducing the risks faced by children in emergency situations (e.g., school preparedness and education around disaster risk, resistance of water and sanitation systems, surveillance and timely detection and treatment of undernutrition, and prevention of all forms of preventable disease, and of child abuse).
CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN AND WOMEN

Millions of women and children in the Latin America and Caribbean region remain trapped by grim economic conditions that are compounded by fallout from natural and human-made emergencies. Inequality and poverty continue to be the region’s main challenges: In 17 countries, more than one third of the population lives below the national poverty line. According to the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report, the region accounts for the most unequal countries in the world, including Brazil, Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In places where development gains are recurrently wiped away when disasters occur, the poorest tend to remain in a chronic cycle of poverty.

The disasters that mark the region are made worse by poor sanitary conditions and a lack of access to safe water, a combination that leaves this already vulnerable population susceptible to increased health risks for diarrhoea, pneumonia and other diseases. These emergencies also raise acute malnutrition levels, especially in countries like Guatemala and Haiti, where 43.4 per cent and 24 per cent of children under age 5, respectively, are in a state of chronic malnutrition.

Violence, abuse and exploitation, already critical problems in this region, increase with the displacement that follows disaster. About 550,000 children have been trafficked and are still in a situation of exploitation, while 6 million children suffer severe abuse, including abandonment. Parental abuse is the cause of death for 80,000 children under the age of 18 annually.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2010

In 2010, UNICEF estimated that US$1.8 million was needed to fund its humanitarian work in Latin America and the Caribbean. As of October 2010, no funding had been received. The regional office, however, was able to use funds from the Disaster Preparedness Programme of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (DIPECHO) that were carried over from 2009, as well as resources from the Government of the Netherlands and UNICEF emergency thematic funds to respond quickly and effectively when the earthquake devastated Haiti. In 2010, the Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office (TACRO) responded swiftly to send emergency supplies, deploy surge capacity and provide technical assistance to support the response and recovery operations during major emergencies in Chile and Haiti. Following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, the regional team immediately mobilized emergency supplies for shelter (tarpaulins and blankets), water, sanitation and health (water tanks, jerry cans, oral rehydration salts), education (School-in-a-Box and recreation kits) and other emergency items from its regional hub in Panama. It also deployed specialized human resources, such as emergency operations specialists to set up the first operational base to support field operations based in Santo Domingo, communication and child protection specialists. It also furthered the goals of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action by providing technical support to UNICEF and cluster response strategies in education, protection, and water and sanitation, encouraged the inclusion of disaster risk reduction aspects in the 3-6 months early recovery programming, and developed a Transformative Agenda for Children to convene all humanitarian actors to work towards achieving common goals for the future of Haitian children. In response to the cholera emergency which started late October 2010, the regional office organized immediate air supply delivery in the first week, with 470,000 chlorine tablets, 32,000 sachets of oral rehydration salts, 200 family water purification kits and other emergency items. It also provided a senior health specialist and supported the identification of specialized human resources to be deployed from the region both in Haiti and to support contingency planning in the Dominican Republic.

These operations confirmed the importance of UNICEF’s focus on preparedness. Throughout the rest of the year, aid was provided to country offices across the region during similar, if less severe, disasters. In Chile, the regional office supported coordination efforts by the Government in the aftermath of the February earthquake, specifically through the deployment of dedicated capacities to coordinate WASH activities, in cooperation with Oxfam, and the implementation of psychosocial recovery activities for children. During Tropical Storm Agatha, the office provided surge capacity support to ensure coordination and technical assistance to the WASH sector to benefit children and their families in El Salvador. When floods washed through the northern part of Brazil, support was provided to the Government to deliver shelter supplies. During the first announcement of a state of emergency caused by a severe drought and food shortage in the dry corridor of Guatemala, nutritional response was supported in terms of strategic planning, development of fundraising documents and surge capacity of a nutrition specialist for technical assistance.

In Colombia, the regional office continued to provide technical assistance to address the forced displacement and recruitment of children by illegal armed groups, and provided specific support to strengthen capacities of the national WASH and education partners by organizing emergency and risk reduction capacity-building activities. At the tail end of the hurricane season, the regional office assisted the Belize country office in developing an emergency fundraising strategy to support the government request for assistance in nutrition and education after Hurricane Richard devastated the country. The regional office shipped jerrycans and water tanks at the request of Barbados in support of post-Hurricane Tomas displaced people in St. Lucia and St. Vincent and supported flood-affected Colombia, Costa Rica, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to identify supply needs and develop emergency fundraising strategies.
TACRO also continued to strengthen emergency preparedness and response by organizing Early Warning, Early Action trainings in 11 countries, which benefited about 200 UNICEF staff. It conducted 17 capacity-building workshops for disaster risk reduction activities in the education sector, involving a total of 681 nationals, 28 NGO staff and 101 UNICEF staff through DIPECHO and Dutch-funded programmes related to education in emergencies. TACRO continued to play a convening role for WASH partners in the region and formalized the regional WASH cluster as part of the Risk, Emergency, and Disaster Task Force Inter-Agency Workgroup for Latin America & The Caribbean (REDLAC). In addition, TACRO advised country offices in Colombia and Nicaragua to initiate capacity building through national WASH platforms, with cluster/UNICEF support. This process is currently under way in Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

HUMANITARIAN ACTION: BUILDING RESILIENCE

On 13 October 2010, in commemoration of the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, TACRO promoted and supported the organization of events and activities in the Latin America and Caribbean region to raise awareness and educate children on disaster risk and building a culture of resilience. In Ecuador, a dedicated disaster risk reduction space in the Science Museum was unveiled; in the Dominican Republic, a fair for children was organized within the framework of a wider national conference on disaster risk reduction; and in Panama, an art exhibit, including live performances and the final of the ‘Risk Land’ National Olympics game took place in the ‘Conéctate’ ministry of education building.

On 13 October, the Interactive Museum of Science in Quito opened an exhibit that tackles the origins and effects of disasters through multimedia displays and an interactive playground. “Girls and boys will learn about how to contribute to disaster prevention through these games,” said Lucia Mosquera, communications officer at the museum. Ms. Mosquera described the exhibit as an innovative space that will promote the importance of awareness in disaster risk prevention.

PLANNED HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOR 2011

TACRO, together with partners including government agencies across the region and other international agencies through the REDLAC mechanism, will continue to strengthen its ability to respond quickly to the array of natural disasters that characterize the region, as well as humanitarian situations deriving from socio-political issues. UNICEF will work to build adequate emergency assistance capacity response, with goals of immediately reaching 500,000 women and children affected by disasters or socio-political developments. It will also work to prevent or reduce emergency risks for the 1 million most vulnerable and poorest children in the region.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE (US$2,000,000)

TACRO will analyse and communicate the needs of children and women in emergency situations to national governments and partners through REDLAC at the regional level and through the United Nations Emergency Technical Teams (national inter-agency humanitarian platforms coordinated by OCHA), as well as provide technical assistance so that a minimum of 500,000 children will be adequately assisted in emergency situations.

- Country offices will be trained in regional emergency preparedness and response plans, and in tools such as the Early Warning, Early Action system. TACRO will monitor the future implementation of these practices among country offices and in partnership with governments.

- To address the Core Commitments for Children response sectors and share data with governments and public audiences regarding disaster impact on children, TACRO will develop and adapt appropriate tools. This will be done in cooperation with the Government of Brazil as a pilot country to be systematized throughout the region. The office will also develop strategies for advocacy and communication.

- TACRO will prepare its operational capacities in order to be ready for immediate response to an emergency by confirming availability of supplies at the regional supply hub in Panama and maintaining an inter-agency roster for deployment of human resources during crises. It will also work with regional partners to coordinate cluster support mechanisms prior to disasters.

MULTI-SECTOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DISASTER RISK REDUCTION) (US$2,300,000)

TACRO will support reducing the disaster risk to 1 million children in the most disaster-prone and vulnerable countries, such as Barbados, Belize, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.9

- In-depth quantitative and qualitative research will illuminate the impact of disasters on children in Latin America and the Caribbean; TACRO will develop recommendations for proven disaster risk reduction activities in a holistic approach, including all relevant sectors and their inter-connections.
TACRO will work to strengthen cooperation between country offices and government partners by providing technical assistance to address disaster prevention and mitigation in a multi-sector coordinated approach focusing on the most vulnerable.

Regional advances in disaster risk reduction will be tracked and collected in a public database in order to develop awareness and increase civilian participation, as well as to encourage international experience-sharing to promote South-South cooperation.

**NUTRITION (US$1,500,000)**

TACRO will build capacities to support nutrition surveillance, timely detection and response to severe and moderate acute malnutrition cases. In addition, TACRO will promote the prevention of undernutrition through community-based approaches, with a specific focus on Guatemala, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia and increased activities in Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Uruguay.

Materials that promote nutritional surveillance and ensure an adequate and timely response in emergencies will be culturally adapted and available in Spanish.

Regional advocacy for promotion of good nutrition practices, especially in priority disaster-prone areas already affected by chronic malnutrition, will be undertaken through community-based approaches, in cooperation with the Pan American Health Organization and the World Food Programme, among other partners.

**HEALTH (US$1,200,000)**

UNICEF, together with partners including government agencies across the region and other international agencies, will focus on minimizing the health risks of the chronically poor population and continue to strengthen its ability to respond quickly to the array of natural disasters that characterize the region, in coordination with regional actors through the cluster mechanism.

To prevent or reduce emergency risks for the 1 million of the most vulnerable and poorest children, UNICEF will work to build adequate emergency assistance capacity response, with the goal of being able to immediately reach 500,000 women and children affected by disasters or socio-political crises.

UNICEF will support capacity-building activities and operational assistance for vaccine coverage, deworming medication and insecticide-treated mosquito nets for malaria and dengue-endemic areas.

The regional team will provide technical assistance to government offices and partners to increase availability of antibiotics, oxytocin, iron/folic acid and antiretroviral therapies, and will ensure one basic emergency obstetric care facility per 100,000 people.

**UNICEF will participate in the health cluster led by the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization to coordinate actions and support the diffusion of educational and health-promotion messages through community-based organizations and NGO networks, as well as national and local media channels.**

**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH) (US$2,500,000)**

TACRO will work to assess local governments’ ability to support water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion in emergency situations and disaster risk prevention and mitigation.

Regional readiness will be strengthened for emergency WASH supply delivery, surge capacity of WASH experts and cluster coordinators, and provision of technical support in water and sanitation systems and hygiene promotion in emergency situations, in cooperation with regional partners such as Oxfam and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, especially in high-risk locations that can be affected by extreme disasters such as hurricanes and flooding.

Regional advocacy will be strengthened for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness in the WASH sector and global tools from the global WASH cluster will be adapted to the regional context to enable the provision of technical support in priority countries, such as Colombia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and others.

**CHILD PROTECTION (US$1,500,000)**

One of the main goals for 2011 is to raise awareness of protection risks in emergency situations and increase the capacities to better protect children and women from exploitation, abuse and violence, and unaccompanied children in emergency situations.

TACRO will also raise awareness and provide technical assistance for the strengthening of national child protection systems and national response capacities in emergency situations with governments and partners. It will coordinate with the regional protection working group for Latin America and the Caribbean and the relevant national coordination entities to strengthen their capacity and achieve a better response to child protection issues in emergencies.

The office will undertake regional capacity building to strengthen internal capacities and those of partners, as well as create a regional roster on child protection in emergencies and translate and adapt guidelines to better prevent and respond to all forms of abuse to children.
EDUCATION (US$2,000,000)

To ensure accessibility to education in emergency situations, TACRO will work with relevant government bodies (ministries of education and civil defence) and partners to support emergency response and reduce disaster risk and impact through the following structural and non-structural measures:

• Technical assistance will be provided to government agencies and partners to strengthen educational response in emergency situations.

• TACRO will advocate regionally for disaster response, prevention, mitigation and preparedness in the education sector. UNICEF will ensure that strategies are implemented in countries that will not receive any DIPECHO or Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition funds – including the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Panama, Paraguay and the Plurinational State of Bolivia – to ensure equal capacity development and participation.


3. For Colombia, Guatemala and Haiti, please refer to the countries’ dedicated chapters in the 2011 Humanitarian Action for Children.

4. Sectoral coordination mechanisms through standing national platforms with government leadership (disaster management agency and sectoral line ministries), with the specific support of the sector cluster-lead agency and active national and international partners.


6. While there are multiple sources of information, and often they vary, it is widely agreed that chronic malnutrition is the most prevalent nutrition problem in the region. Based on recent estimates using the new World Health Organization standards of 13 countries (Argentina, Boliva, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Peru) by the Pan American Health Organization, the condition affects approximately 23.5 per cent of children under the age of 5 in the region. Lutter, Chester K., and Camila M. Chaparro, ‘La Desnutrición en Lactantes y Niños Pequeños en América Latina y El Caribe: Alcanzando los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio’ [Malnutrition in Infants and Young Children in Latin America and the Caribbean: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals], Pan American Health Organization, Washington, D.C., 2008.


9. For Colombia, Guatemala and Haiti, please refer to the countries’ dedicated chapters in the 2011 Humanitarian Action Report.