Highlights

- The Tonga Government continued with its relief effort with emergency supplies shipped or airlifted by the Governments of Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.
- First batch of UNICEF emergency supplies have arrived in Tonga with another bigger batch of 37 metric tons set to sail from Fiji on Sunday, 30 January 2022.
- The Government of Tonga has completed the immediate damage assessment and set to release the results soon.
- Tongan borders remain closed and only small military planes can use the airport because of continuing safety issues posed by the volcanic ash.
- UNICEF Pacific issued an appeal for USD 2.7 million and funding gaps remain.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Nearly two weeks after violent eruption of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Taa’pai volcano and ensuing tsunami, the Government of Tonga (GoT) continues to provide support to the most affected population in the island groups of Tongatapu, Ha’apai and ‘Eua. The emergency effort was buoyed by the arrival of relief items shipped or airlifted by the Governments of Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and United Kingdom. The initial batch of UNICEF emergency supplies has also arrived in Tonga aboard the HMAS Adelaide, courtesy of the Australian Government.

The Government of Tonga has completed the immediate damage assessment and is expected to share the results soon. The Ministry of Health reported health services in the islands Tongatapu, Haapai and ‘Eua have been affected with one service delivery point completely damaged. Schools that were scheduled to open on 31 January 2022 may be postponed by a week as all schools and ECE centers require cleaning of classrooms, including their water supply. Access to clean water is still the most expressed need, especially in Ha’apai. The displacement report of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) showed that 317 households or 1,525 persons were displaced by the disaster event, with 34% of them, or 513, being children under the age of 16 years.

Civil and commercial flights to Tonga remain suspended because of safety reasons as mounds of volcanic ash remain near the runways. Only small military planes that are less vulnerable to ash damage deliver relief supplies. Tonga has also kept its borders closed for COVID-19 precaution. Delivery of supplies have been done in a “no-contact approach”
with required disinfection and 72-hour quarantine for all incoming cargo. Communication has improved with international voice calls now possible but with limited capacity. Internet is also limited to those with satellite connections.

Funding Overview and Partnerships

Based on initial information as shared by the Government of Tonga and partners on the ground, UNICEF Pacific is appealing for USD 2.7 million to provide lifesaving support to children and their families in Tonga. This funding requirement is likely to increase once the Government of Tonga has released the results of the needs assessment.

UNICEF Pacific would like to express its sincere gratitude to the flexible funding provided by various donors through the Global Thematic Humanitarian Fund. A first allocation of USD 100,000 and further pledge of USD 250,000 of unearmarked funding will cover a portion of the most pressing lifesaving needs. UNICEF also thanks donors who made firm pledges potentially allowing to respond to urgent needs in the sectors of WASH, Health, Social & Behavior Change, Education, and Child Protection (psychosocial support).

However, currently a funding gap of USD 2.6 million remains (with USD 925,000 pledged). The biggest funding gaps concern WASH and Health, followed by Social & Behavior Change, Education and Child Protection.

Humanitarian Leadership & Coordination

The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT), which is co-led by the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office (UNRCO) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and composed of UN agencies and international NGOs, is leading the coordination with the Government of Tonga and the diplomatic missions. The PHT is based in Suva, Fiji. Under the PHT are nine clusters wherein UNICEF is the lead in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), co-lead with Save the Children in Education, co-lead with World Health Organization (WHO) in Health & Nutrition and the lead for Child Protection in the Protection cluster.

The Government of Tonga has adopted a localized cluster approach with ten clusters, including Safety and Protection; Health, Nutrition and Water, Sanitation; and Education. All the clusters are led by government ministries and coordinated by the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO). NEMO reports to the National Disaster Council of the Cabinet. The PHT clusters provide a supportive role to NEMO and the Tongan clusters. Initial damage assessments are still ongoing in some areas. The Tonga Government has formally made a request for assistance to the UN, the diplomatic missions, and the humanitarian community, and shared their initial list of supply needs for early recovery.

UNICEF Programme Response

The initial batch of UNICEF 10 tons of emergency supplies has arrived in Tonga on 27 January through the HMAS Adelaide of the Royal Australian Navy. These comprise of WASH and dignity kits, water containers, portable field test kit and recreational kits. Another larger batch of nearly 37 metric tons from UNICEF’s Fiji warehouse is set to sail to Tonga on 30 January aboard a ship chartered by the Fiji Government. This batch will include midwifery kits, inter-agency emergency health kits (IEHK), ECD kits, recreational kits, tents, water purification tablets, personal protective equipment (PPE), disinfectants, etc. Sincere thanks to the Governments of Australia and Fiji in facilitating the transport of UNICEF supplies to Tonga. UNICEF has recruited a national emergency officer in Tonga who will help coordinate the response on the ground. Three other local staff/consultants to cover WASH, health and nutrition, and education will begin work soon.

WASH

WASH remains a need in most affected areas in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and ‘Eua. The Ministry of Health (MoH) and NEMO are providing drinking water to affected populations, with water quality testing ongoing. UNICEF has firm work engagement with the MOH and has deployed the following WASH supplies for households, communities, and schools to support their effort:

- 2,000 Pacific Household Disaster WASH Response Kits which will benefit approximately 10,000 people. Special focus will be given to displaced families and vulnerable groups
- 1,000 WASH & Dignity Kits, which will benefit 5,000 people
- 50 Pacific School WASH Response Kits; this will benefit at least 2,000 students in 50 schools
- 125 sets of gloves and gum boots for health care workers for cleaning up communities, schools, and health facilities;
- 250 long raincoats as part of PPE for health workers
- 10 mist blowers for cleaning the environment
- 50 boxes of liquid detergent / soap for handwashing and hygiene
• 100 emergency latrines locally designed by NGO in partnership with Pacific WASH cluster led by UNICEF, which will benefit 100 households
• 100 squatting plates to provide sanitation to affected and displaced families, which will benefit 100 families
• 5 water pumps to be handed over to MoH for cleaning underground wells and pumping drinking water

Health & Nutrition
UNICEF and the government of Tonga will continue to reach out to the affected population conducting outreach services to ensure the continuity of essential health services. To support the set-up of temporary clinics, UNICEF has shipped 8 tents, IEHK basic health kits and midwifery kits that will be used to provide basic health services, giving children and their families access to basic health care. Cold chain equipment has been damaged in some health facilities and the health risks to children and their families from inhaling the ash will remain a public health concern. Since food security is also a concern, UNICEF will be providing nutritional assessment equipment for early detect any nutritional deficiency.

Child Protection
A counselling team has been deployed to ‘Eua to provide psychosocial support (PSS) to affected families. Protection cluster members have travelled to the Ha’apai group of islands on 26 January to provide immediate PSS and to better understand the needs of the affected populations there, which will inform the response and UNICEF’s support.

Education
Schools are scheduled to open on 31 January 2022 which may be postponed by a week. Initial reports from the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) indicated that all schools and ECE centers are in need of deep cleaning, including testing of their water supply. At least two schools in Tongatapu were damaged. Psychosocial support for children and their teachers, repair of damaged school facilities, and replacement of damaged teaching and learning materials are among the needs raised by the MET. Face masks for children and their teachers were also identified as a need. In response to these needs and as agreed with the MET, UNICEF is sending education supplies, including temporary learning spaces in the form of tents, ECD kits, recreational kits, WASH in Schools kits, liquid detergent for handwashing, and water bottles. These will help the 180 most-affected schools serving a combined population of 22,430 learners and 1,432 teachers and staff. UNICEF is also preparing to provide psychosocial support training including students and teachers through a local partner and technical support in the analysis of data gathered through damage assessments.

Social & Behavior Change
The situation requires sustained awareness on health hazards of volcanic ash, hygiene and sanitation, and specific care for children, pregnant women, and people living with disabilities. The MoH continues to address this by providing daily updates about the emergency situation over national radio. Health education messages promoting life-saving behaviors are being broadcasted on radio. UNICEF is supporting in the MoH in the development of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials with specific focus on hygiene promotion, dealing with volcanic ash and family care. A community feedback mechanism will be established to guide recovery actions.

Human Interest Stories & External Media
Website
https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/stories/i-cried-i-was-running

Social Media
https://mobile.twitter.com/UNICEFPacific/status/1486549353594449922?cxt=HHwWhMCrodlqwpKEpAAAA
https://mobile.twitter.com/UNICEFPacific/status/1486598036545441793?cxt=HHwWgsCswbbCuqEpeAAAA
https://mobile.twitter.com/UNICEFPacific/status/1486496120029077505?cxt=HHwWgoCjpY2WjKEpAAAA
https://www.facebook.com/unicefpacific/photos/a.484415085038/10160116856110039/

Media
Al Jazeera - https://mobile.twitter.com/UNICEFPacific/status/1485032552243277824?cxt=HHwWgMDRxZ_P8pspAAAA

Further Situation Reports will be released as the situation evolves and / or needs are identified.
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