Situation Overview

Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasa, a Category 5 cyclone packing 345 kph windspeed and waves of 3-14 meters, is barreling to Fiji. It is expected to be located very close or over the province of Bua at the eastern tip of the island of Vanua Levu in the Northern Division by 9 pm Thursday, 17 December. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) estimates that more than 850,000 people (96% of the total population), including 297,000 children, will be impacted in some way with half of them “severely” affected. Widespread destruction and damage to homes as well as other infrastructure such as schools, health facilities, water treatment plants, airports, jetties, roads and bridges, especially in the Northern Division, are expected.

The Government of Fiji has declared TC Yasa as a natural disaster for the whole of Fiji. The National Disaster Council has activated the National and Divisional Emergency Operations Centers and all evacuation centers. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) reported that 369 families (1,417 individuals) are currently staying in 53 evacuation centres in Central, Western and Northern Divisions. These numbers are expected to increase as the storm nears. All schools are closed, and public transportation have been suspended. A nationwide curfew starting at 4 pm Thursday (17 December) to 6 am Friday (18 December) has been imposed.

It should be noted that the international border of Fiji has been closed to contain COVID-19 and border restrictions will likely remain even with the onslaught of this cyclone. The government has been very successful in containing the...
spread of COVID-19 with only 46 total reported cases with no large-scale community transmission. All the recent cases have been imported or travel-related and the last community acquired case has been at least 242 days ago. However, Fiji has not escaped the damaging effects of the pandemic to the economy. According to the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Fiji commissioned by UNICEF, poverty rate in Fiji has increased during the pandemic between 2.29 to 13.29 percent with the Northern Division with the highest poverty rate. Children were also harder hit than the overall population as the child poverty rate was estimated to have increased between 3 to 15.3 percent.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response
The multi-country office of UNICEF in the Pacific is located in Suva, Fiji. UNICEF has mobilized its staff on the ground, partners and other resources to prepare for the response to TC Yasa.

Health and Nutrition
Health and nutrition supplies, including Inter-Agency Emergency Health Kits (IEHKs) were recently provided to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MoHMS) and distributed to the Divisions. Other Nutrition supplies including Vitamin A, RUTF, F75 and F100 are being released this week. UNICEF has offered readiness for support for assessment (cold chain, health facility functioning, nutrition), risk communication and information management to the Ministry.

WASH
The MoHMS has sufficient stocks of WASH kits and supplies for an initial response. IEC materials on water safety and hygiene are also available and ready for use. The Cluster Secretariat has circulated the draft WASH Action Plan and SOP to all partners for their review, inputs for finalization; the link to the 4W has also been shared with all partners. UNICEF has 1,100 household WASH kits pre-positioned in Fiji and more than 7,500 WASH kits in the Australian government humanitarian warehouse in Brisbane.

Education
The Ministry of Education and Heritage Arts (MEHA) has activated their own Emergency Operations Center. Schools have been suspended since 2 pm of Wednesday (16 December). All boarding schools were closed and students returned to their parents except for those from outer islands, Northern and Western Divisions who are billeted at the school until the weather clears up. The Education cluster took stock of each agency’s standing capacity. UNICEF in its warehouse in Fiji has prepositioned 61 tents (39-42 sqm tents and 22-72 sqm) and 136 school-in-a-box (SIB) good for 5,440 students while it has 195 tents (85- 42 sqm and 110-72 sqm), 116 SIBs and 3,600 school bags in the Brisbane warehouse.

Child Protection
The Fiji Safety and Protection Cluster met and reviewed the forms for rapid and in the full needs assessment and updated their 5W matrix. Child Protection is included in the needs assessment forms. UNICEF is ready to support the Child Services Unit (CSU) and Welfare Officers (WO) at divisional and district level to coordinate CP actors at national and sub-national level, and to visit affected areas to provide psychosocial support and identify children in need of care and protection. UNICEF will also support NGOs that are ready to provide psychosocial first aid (PFA)/counselling/child-friendly spaces. UNICEF has 17 recreation kits pre-positioned in Fiji and 145 more are in Brisbane.

Communications for Development (C4D), Community Engagement & Accountability
UNICEF supported Fiji’s NDMO to broadcast “Get Ready” messages via television and radio, providing information on how families can protect themselves from and respond to the cyclone. An agreement has been reached with the Fiji Broadcasting Company (FBC) for the airing of Get Ready radio ads and TV spots.

Communication and Advocacy
Ongoing campaign on UNICEF Pacific across all social media platforms: focus now on preparedness and staying safe as well as who to contact and how to find nearby evacuation centres which are far away from the sea or river. Coordination with media to get messages out on seeking shelter, and needs.
Innovation
UNICEF supported the NDMO in the development and activation of the platform #FindMyEC where people can find the Evacuation Centers (EC) that are nearest to their locations. The system is powered by RapidPro and recognized by all service providers in Fiji (Vodafone/Inkk/Digicel) through toll-free text. It can also be accessed through Facebook Messenger or Viber.

Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Strategy
UNICEF leads the clusters for WASH, education (with Save the Children), and health and nutrition (with the World Health Organization (WHO)) and is co-lead of the protection cluster (with UN Women) under the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT). The PHT is a network of humanitarian organizations that works together to assist Pacific Island Countries and Territories in preparing for and responding to disasters. It is composed of UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations and co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinators and the head of OCHA. UNICEF and the PHT support the leadership of governments and work within their respective political structures. Fiji have officially adopted the cluster approach in their humanitarian architecture. Unlike cluster systems in other countries, these mechanisms are active year-round and are the coordinating bodies not just for emergency response but also for disaster risk management and preparedness. UNICEF is providing support to the national clusters of Fiji in preparing for the cyclone, particularly the clusters where UNICEF is co-leading with the government ministries on WASH, Education, Health and Nutrition, Gender and Protection and the sub-cluster on communication and community engagement.

Next Situation Report: 20 December 2020

UNICEF Pacific: https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/

Who to contact for further information:
Sheldon Yett
Representative
UNICEF Pacific
syett@unicef.org

Vathinee Jitjaturunt
Deputy Representative-Programmes
UNICEF Pacific
vjitjaturunt@unicef.org

Cate Heinrich
Chief of Communications
UNICEF Pacific
cheinrich@unicef.org