UNICEF Peru:
Creating a world of opportunities for children of the Amazon
Amazonian population in Peru: 1,087,663
Introduction

Peru is a country with a population of almost 31 million people. The Amazon accounts for 60% of the national territory but is home to only 9.41% of the population. It is Peru’s most ethnically and linguistically diverse territory.

There are five regions located in the Peruvian Amazon, (also called the Peruvian jungle): Amazonas, Loreto, Madre de Dios, San Martin and Ucayali.

While the Peruvian Amazon is rich in natural resources, this wealth has not translated into the well-being of its inhabitants. Activities such as the extraction of rubber, petrol and gold have exposed the Amazonian population to exploitation, migration and diseases of the western world.

Accessing this area by land is difficult, if not impossible. Providing basic health services, education, protection and water and sanitation are among some of the major challenges faced by the Peruvian State.

The exclusion of Amazonian communities is reflected in the situation of children and adolescents. For example, chronic malnutrition affects 4 out of every 100 children under five years of age in Lima (Peru’s capital) compared to 29 out of every 100 in the rural regions of the Amazon.

The inequities between children living on the coast, in the highlands and jungle are surprising, but are even greater when the comparison is made between the urban coast and the rural jungle.

Sixty-eight per cent of indigenous children and adolescents in the Peruvian Amazon live in poverty. Three of the five Amazonian regions have the highest rates of multidimensional child poverty: Loreto (80%), Ucayali (77%) and Amazonas (76%). UNICEF works in these three regions.

Child Survival and Development, Education, Protection, Public Policy and Prevention and Risk Management are the main areas of UNICEF’s work for children and adolescents in the Peruvian Amazon.

Paul Martin
Representante
The Amazon, a region of inequities

Peru has become an upper middle income country with disparities between those living in urban and rural areas. Amazonian regions are a clear example of this situation, as illustrated by the following indicators:

- The national average for neonatal mortality is 12 per thousand births; the average for the Amazonian regions is 15.4 per thousand.
- In the coastal regions, 82.4% of pregnant women receive their first pre-natal check-up in the first trimester; in the jungle, only 71.5% of women access this service.
- The national average of home births is 10%. In the Amazonian regions, this average rises considerably to 34%.
- Nationally, 46 out of every 100 children between 6 and 36 months are anaemic; in the Peruvian Amazon, the rate increases to 52 out of every 100 children.
- On average, 17.5% of children under five suffers from chronic child malnutrition; the rate reaches 19.2% in urban areas of the Amazon and 28.8% in rural areas.
- While the national average for access to pre-primary school is 80.7% and 92.9% for secondary school; in the Amazon the rate is 72.8% for pre-primary school and 87.14% for secondary school.
- Only 10 out of every 100 second-graders in the Amazon meet basic learning standards in mathematics; nationally the average is 17 out of every 100.
- Nationally, the repetition rate for secondary education is 4.5%; in the Amazon it is 7% and in the Amazonian region of Loreto it is 9.2%.
- While the national average of children under five years of age without a birth certificate is 4.2%, the average is 9.9% in the Amazon and increases to 12.1% in rural areas.
- Nationally, 19.5% of mothers and fathers physically discipline their children under five years of age. In the jungle, this figure increases to 24.5% of mothers and 24.2% fathers.
- The highest rates of early pregnancy occur in rural areas (20.3%) and in the jungle (23.7%).
The highest percentage of pregnant teens and teen mothers are found in Amazonian regions: Amazonas (30.5%), Ucayali (27.3%), Loreto (25.3%), Madre de Dios (23.1%) and San Martín (21.7%)

What limits the development of children in the Peruvian Amazon?

- Amazonian communities are located in the most remote areas of Peru, which are mostly only accessible by boat. Providing services, materials and qualified professionals to these communities is complex and often requires a greater financial investment by the State. There is also a burden on the community because people must invest more time and money to access the services they need.

- The formation of public policies and implementation of development programs generally lack an intercultural approach. Moreover, there is also disinterest among many qualified professionals to work in these remote regions.

Challenges in Ensuring the Right to Health

- Inadequate health facilities and limited infrastructure.

- Health personnel require capacity-building.

- Acceptance of early sexual activity and marriage of girls and adolescent girls with older men.

- Reduced HIV / AIDS prevention due to beliefs and or myths about its association with witchcraft.
Challenges in Ensuring the Right to Education

- Limited reach of the education system in rural areas and indigenous communities.

- Insufficient number of teachers and high turnover of teachers assigned to intercultural bilingual education (IBE) schools. It is estimated that an additional 25,000 IBE teachers are needed on top of the 32,000 already practicing.

- Low quality of pedagogical training.

- Textbooks distributed in schools are mostly published in Spanish.

Challenges in Ensuring the Right to Protection

- Among other causes, violence is a product of cultural norms and perspectives which justify physical punishment and verbal abuse as forms of discipline for children. Children are perceived as lesser beings and not as rights holders.

- Lack of culturally appropriate protection services for children and adolescents.

- Limited knowledge about the determinants of violence in indigenous Amazonian contexts, which would allow for an understanding of social and cultural dynamics and facilitate the creation of culturally relevant prevention strategies.

- The allocated budget for protection is limited and focuses on responding to incidents of violence. Greater investment is needed in prevention, especially in remote communities.
UNICEF Peru, Working to Ensure the Rights of Amazonian Children

UNICEF has had an active presence in the Peruvian Amazon for many years. Working in the regions of Amazonas, Loreto and Ucayali, UNICEF has provided technical assistance to regional and local governments with the aim of ensuring that public policies realize the rights of children. Below is a summary of UNICEF’s work in Amazonian regions.

Health, Survival and Child Development

- UNICEF, in partnership with the International Zinc Association, has helped supply multi-micronutrient zinc tablets to the regional health directorates in Amazonas, Loreto and Ucayali to reduce the incidence of child diarrhoea.

- UNICEF has established a public-private partnership with the Spanish foundation Probitas and Peru’s Ministry of Health to help improve the clinical diagnosis and treatment of communicable diseases such as HIV / AIDS and Hepatitis B among indigenous communities in the regions of Loreto and Amazonas. Through this partnership, the foundation has supported the construction of two clinical laboratories in the province of Condorcanqui in Amazonas and in the province of Datem del Marañón in Loreto.

- UNICEF provides technical assistance to the regional health directorates in order to increase the number of health facilities that provide quality and culturally relevant maternal health services.

- UNICEF promotes Early Childhood Development and prevention of anaemia and chronic child malnutrition by strengthening the system of Community Surveillance Centres.

Education

- UNICEF supports the Ministry of Education’s implementation of the National IBE Policy, which includes the establishment of standards for IBE schools.

- UNICEF has contributed to the creation and revision of national and sub-national databases on IBE schools and teachers.

- UNICEF has prepared disaggregated data on the supply and demand of Intercultural Bilingual Education.
UNICEF supports the development of IBE curricula with the participation of indigenous teachers and community leaders.

With the support of the Government of Canada, UNICEF conducted a midterm evaluation of the seven-year program, "Improving Basic Education for Indigenous/Rural Children in Southern Andean and Amazonian Peru", in five provinces in the Andes and the Amazon.

UNICEF has contributed to the generation of evidence for the design of the new results-based budget program on Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE).

In partnership with national and regional universities, UNICEF has developed diploma programmes aimed at strengthening the capacities of local and regional education managers, principals and indigenous teachers in management and pedagogy.

**Protection**

UNICEF continuously supports RENIEC’s work to ensure universal access to birth registration among Peru’s most excluded populations, especially indigenous children and adolescents.

UNICEF, in partnership with the Innocenti Research Centre, the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and RENIEC, is concluding a study on Governance and Birth Registration in two regions of Peru (Ucayali and Ayacucho). This study will identify problems that arise in the registration process.

UNICEF provides technical assistance to the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations to create a culturally appropriate protection system for indigenous communities and to ensure the implementation of protection services with quality standards.

In partnership with the Embassy of the United States and the international NGO Coaches Across Continents, UNICEF has trained coaches and educators who work in football schools sponsored by USAID in San Martin and Ucayali. The sport for
development initiative promotes sport and play as tools to foster the development of life skills, conflict resolution, gender equity and healthy lifestyle habits.

**Public Policy**

- UNICEF provides technical assistance for the formulation of Regional Plans of Action for Children and Adolescents (PRAIA).

- UNICEF supports the updating of regional development plans to incorporate a focus on human rights and equity. These plans prioritize reducing chronic malnutrition and preventing violence.

- UNICEF has supported the strengthening of management capacities of public officials through a diploma programme focused on formulating public investment projects for children.

- UNICEF has contributed to increased allocation of public funds for social spending on children. UNICEF promotes evidence-based strategies, strengthens the capacity of planning officials and provides technical assistance to local and regional governments.

**Risk Management**

- With UNICEF’s support, the regional governments of Amazonas, Loreto and Ucayali have developed disaster risk reduction plans that guarantee children’s rights to education and health in emergency situations.

- The Loreto and Ucayali regions have incorporated lessons learned and recommendations in their emergency response plans based on evaluations conducted by UNICEF and partners. The evaluations highlighted deficiencies in the responses to disasters in 2012. Both regions have improved their communication mechanisms and are able to better manage disaster and emergency situations in remote districts. UNICEF has also contributed radio equipment
Stories from the Field

Pepe, a Cocama hero

“When the doctors came and said there are three types of diarrhoea, I asked for the floor and explained that for us, the Cocama, there are seven types of diarrhoea,” says Jose “Pepe” Alves, a community worker responsible for working with health promoters in the parish of Santa Rita de Castilla in the Loreto region.

His short frame and serious face, worn by the Amazonian heat, provide quite the contrast with the grandeur of his work. The satisfaction of seeing children grow up and live healthy lives motivates him to travel back and forth between the parish’s thirty communities. He makes this effort to share his knowledge with community workers and monitor the growth and development of local children.

His work dates back to the nineties when a cholera outbreak started taking the lives of Amazonian community members. Aware of the need to strengthen hygiene practices and to supply oral rehydration salts to victims, he undertook long walks to reach the different communities. "In those years, thanks to UNICEF’s support in providing rehydration salt packets and promoting hand-washing, we prevented the deaths of many children,” he recalls.

After defeating cholera, Pepe’s mission became to support the Buen Inicio (“Good Start”) programme that was implemented between 2000 and 2006 in Loreto. The programme aimed to help mobilize local authorities and communities to care for the growth and development of children under the age of three and pregnant mothers.

Pepe’s parish of Santa Rita de Castilla has continued this work and currently supports 70 Cocama, Urarinas, and Cocamilla communities. Progress is already being made. In San Roque, one of the communities, chronic malnutrition has decreased significantly from 23.8% in 2010 to 16.9% in 2012.

Pepe is aware that problems still remain, including the prevalence of anaemia. For now, Pepe is already trained in detection and teaching prevention. That’s how we leave him, waiting for his boat to take him to the communities he has to visit this weekend.
METZA MEA, The Story of a Beautiful Girl

Deep in the jungle, in a tiny multi-grade school in the community of Callería, a small girl spells out "METZA MEA" with wooden alphabet pieces. "It is my name," she says proudly. Her teacher, Mateo Barbarán, adds that in the Shipibo language, the language of instruction in this little school, Metza Mea means "beautiful woman".

One year ago, Metza Mea's life changed forever. The Ucayali River, along which her community was built, burst its banks following the heaviest rains in 15 years. Her home, her possessions and her school were all swept away.

She and hundreds of other children in the region were forced to relocate, losing between 45 and 60 days of classes. But thanks to the commitment of the educational authorities and the support of the international community almost every child displaced by the flood successfully completed the academic year.

"With UNICEF's technical assistance and the financial support of Government of Canada, we were able to develop a one-of-a-kind emergency curriculum," explains José Díaz of the Ucayali Regional Education Directorate. "Capacity and competency development were prioritized, and we took a cross-sectoral approach for the subjects. We used the floods as a learning resource to help build understanding of why natural disasters occur and what preventative actions need to be taken."

Incorporating the local language is also a critical element in this community-based approach to education. In Ucayali, there are around 45,000 children who speak more than 14 languages other than Spanish. Experts note that teaching children in their mother tongue results in high self-esteem and strong cultural identity, whereas primary education in Spanish often results in failure for both individual students and the educational system as a whole.
"Sometimes parents do not want me to teach in Shipibo, as they believe that it is much better for their children to learn Spanish early," says Mateo. "But when they see that their children are able to learn much faster in their mother tongue, they stop worrying."

Witnessing Metza Mea and her fellow classmates enjoying a story about the yellow world of animals, Mateo remember the words of Angela Bardales, a facilitator from the Regional Government of Ucayali Public Investment Project: "Materials used in the classroom have to be produced taking into account the community's sensitivities and views."

The production of materials like the story that captured the attention of Mateo’s students was facilitated by the support of the Government of Canada and UNICEF. "We have formed work teams that include community elders. With the advice of specialists we create teaching materials in the language of the community and, each time the project facilitators visit, they check to see if we are using the materials correctly ", says Mateo.

"I'm in a shell. When it opens I come out yellow. Who am I?" This is the riddle posed by Mateo, which leaves us thinking that maybe in a few years the small beautiful woman and her companions will leave the shell – leave Callería and become the bilingual teachers that the Ucayali region needs.
“The Kollpa of huambrillos and huambrillas”, A Space for Education and Protection during Emergencies

The torrential rains and subsequent flooding at the start of 2012 suspended classes, destroyed homes and left thousands of children in Loreto unattended and unprotected.

Once the flood victims were properly evacuated, the Regional Education Directorate of Loreto – with technical support from UNICEF – converted 35 schools, which had served as shelters, into recreational spaces. The aim was to give children safe spaces to spend their free time while their parents worked. This is how "The Kollpa of huambrillos and huambrillas" (“Boys’ and Girls’ House”) model was born.

This alternative to education, entertainment, and protection improved the situation of affected children and adolescents. These spaces helped reinforce values such as solidarity and respect. The participation of teachers in the area ensured that the activities included themes relevant to the emergency situation, including preventive health, citizenship and coexistence, risk management, and nutrition.

The vast majority of students had lost their study materials, which is why UNICEF distributed school kits, as well as personal hygiene kits to promote healthy hygiene habits. Participating teachers were given recreational kits containing balls, puzzles and board games so they could organize recreational activities.