

Welcome to UNICEF's South Asia Region Media Link Issue 3 April 28, 2006

The South Asia Media Hub is a humanitarian contact point and information service based in New Delhi for international media covering the South Asia region. The Media Hub aims to provide the latest country specific news, information and resources on child survival, welfare and rights issues as well as developments in UNICEF'S Indian Ocean tsunami relief and recovery response in India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Its overall objectives are to promote UNICEF'S priorities for children and progress towards achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Through its extensive field presence in South Asia and its network of Communication Officers, the Hub can connect media to people and projects on the ground in health, education, protection and HIV and AIDS.

Putting media in touch with UNICEF's work for children and women in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

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3. GLOBAL & REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

3 May South Asia launch of UNICEF's Progress for Children - A Report Card on Nutrition in New Delhi

This report card – part of a series in which UNICEF monitors progress for children in the lead up to 2015 – charts national and regional progress towards the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 and according to the UNICEF report current trends show the world is still far off track.

Good nutrition is the platform for all human progress and one of the most fundamental tests of global development. This UNICEF report reveals the results of efforts since 1990 to reduce the proportion of underweight children in the world. Its conclusions are stark: in a time of plenty we are making a staggering lack of progress to combat under nutrition in children. Today, despite humanitarian promises and appeals, under nutrition remains a global epidemic related to half of all child deaths. Giving the latest numbers and trends on under nutrition, region-by-region and country-by-country, this report debunks myths surrounding under nutrition - its causes and its solutions. And it singles out examples of giant leaps made by some countries that could point the way forward in the decade ahead.

The Report will be launched at 12.30pm at UNDP in New Delhi by the UNICEF Regional Director Cecilia Lotse who will then present a South Asia region overview. Presentations from UNICEF Representatives from Nepal and India will follow concluding with a panel discussion on under nutrition, hunger and poverty.

A global launch will take place at UNICEF Head Quarters on May 2 hosted by the UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman Ms. Catherine Bertini, Chair of UN Standing Committee on Nutrition

For more information or advance copies of the report please contact the South Asia Media Hub. The report will be available on www.unicef.org from May 2, 2006

4. NEWS & RESOURCES BY COUNTRY

AFGHANISTAN

Tom Koeing, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General to Afghanistan, denounces attacks on schools

Expressing shock and sadness over the attack on a school in Kunar Province which left six children dead and fourteen injured, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General to Afghanistan, Tom Koeing emphasized the need to keep women and children outside the area of conflict. Urging all Afghan communities and the entire international community to condemn this atrocity, Mr. Koeing re-iterated the fundamental human right of all children to education.

http://www.unicef.org/media/media_33271.html

On the eve of new Afghan school year, UNICEF warns of continued threat facing women and children

Kabul, 21 March 2006: As Afghanistan's new school year began, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director, Ms. Rima Salah warned of a continued threat facing Afghan women and children from high rates of child and maternal mortality, low levels of school enrolment and neglect of children's fundamental rights. Ms. Salah recognized the recent spate of incidents against schools in some part of Afghanistan as undermining the cause of development. "Attacks against education are attacks against the most basic rights of all Afghan people," she said. "We urge communities and authorities to work together to find ways of ensuring all children enjoy the opportunity to go to school."

Afghanistan Resources:

UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan <http://www.unama-afg.org/>

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh responds to first case of polio in five years with massive immunisation campaign

On April 16, the first of three National Immunization Days (NIDs) went ahead throughout Bangladesh in response to the re-emergence of the poliovirus in January after an absence of the disease for more than five years. Preparations for the three month long campaign, aimed at immunizing a total of 18 million children under the age of five years, began in March and involves the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people across the country. The other two NIDS will take place on May 13th and June 11th. The last reported case of polio was in August 2000.

International observers praise the Bangladesh Measles Vaccination Campaign

Bangladesh's Measles Catch-up Campaign organized from Feb 25-March 16 in which approximately 33.5 million children between 9 months to under 10 years of age were targeted has come in for lavish praise from international observers. Latest figures from WHO say that the world's largest Measles Vaccination campaign reached 99+% of 33.5million children in 3 weeks. Measles is the fifth leading cause of death among children under five years of age in Bangladesh. Annually, an estimated 20,000 children die from measles in the country. The Measles Catch-up Campaign involved 50,000 skilled vaccinators and 750,000 volunteers covering 62 districts and 5 city corporations.

Bangladesh girls highlight safe water issues for children at the World Water Forum

March 2006: Adolescent safe water and hygiene promoters Dolly Akhter and Shamina Seltu from Bangladesh made their presence felt in delivering a call to action to world leaders assembled at the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City. Dolly and Shetu are among 6000 adolescent girls involved in a Government of Bangladesh water, sanitation and hygiene project for urban slums, supported by UNICEF and CARE. Each are leaders of their local adolescent girl hygiene monitoring group. These girl led groups go from house to house checking that their neighbours wash their hands with soap before eating and after defecating, use safe water and encourage the use of hygienic latrines. These groups have become so empowered that they are now successfully advocating against child marriages and are collecting money to help pay school fees of children out of school in their neighbourhoods. Participating in the Children's World Water Forum has not only given the girls extra kudos in their communities but interacting with adolescents from across the world has helped in broadening their goals for their country.

BHUTAN

"Young People on Wheels: Promoting Awareness on HIV/AIDS" to continue till end of 2006

April 2006: Under the flagship banner of "Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS", "Young People on Wheels: promoting awareness on HIV/AIDS," a project initiated by UNICEF and the Youth Development Fund (a local NGO) has been extended till the end of 2006. In 2005, as a part of the initiative, many out-of school youth were recruited and trained as trainers on HIV/AIDS sensitization. With artists from the Bhutanese film industry, the "Young People on Wheels" took the message on HIV/AIDS to 8 districts in the country through skits, songs and dances, reaching more than 10,000 people including school children, youth and local communities. Now, UN agencies in Bhutan are jointly supporting the "Youth on Wheels" to tour the remaining 12 districts of the country. The group started their tour in April 2006 and will be visiting the most remote communities in Bhutan, expecting to reach as many young people and children as possible with prevention, support and care messages on HIV/AIDS.

National Consultation on Woman and Child Friendly Judicial Procedures

28-31 March 2006: The first ever National Consultation on Women and Child Friendly Judicial Procedures was organized by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in Gedu, Bhutan from 28-31st March 2006 with support from UNICEF, UNDP and UNIFEM. The Consultation was attended by approximately 75 officials comprising judges from all districts, legal officers, police, gender focal points, NCWC members, NGOs, Media, representative from the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Centre, health officials and UN agencies. The aim of the Consultation was to review present legal procedures in terms of the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination

of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and to develop a course of collaboration between the Royal Court of Justice and the NCWC) on instituting women and child friendly judicial procedures.

INDIA

CHILD MARRIAGE

Community action against child marriages

15 April 2006: The village micro-planning process initiated by UNICEF in partnership with HALO Foundation (NGO Partner), in the villages of Lohara block, Osmanabad district of Maharashtra identified child marriage as one of the critical problems in the area. Child marriage curtails the educational opportunities for women, affects their health and makes them more vulnerable to domestic violence. In Hipparaga-Rava, one of the villages in Lohara block, almost 43% marriages (12 out of 28 marriages) in 2005 were underage marriages.

http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1537.htm

More case studies from India on steps against child marriages:

- Karnataka: http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1534.htm
- Maharashtra: http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1537.htm
- West Bengal: http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1541.htm
- Bihar: http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1542.htm

SAFE MOTHERHOOD

Janani Suraksha (maternal protection) Helpline, a 24 hrs emergency obstetric care telephone service launched in Dholpur, Rajasthan

12 April 2006: Rajasthan, a state steeped in history, is known more for its myriad colours, imposing forts and martial traditions and less for having a maternal death rate of 670 per 100,000 live births which is significantly higher than the national rate of 540 per 100,000 live births. These numbers are a stark reminder of the worrisome maternal health situation in the state. Janani Suraksha (maternal protection) Helpline, a 24 hrs emergency obstetric care telephone service was formally launched on April 11 to address this problem in some measure and mark the Safe Motherhood Day in Badi block of Dholpur district in the state of Rajasthan. The Community Health Centre (CHC) in Badi caters to 170 villages, with a population of approximately 201,000 and has been set up as a model for Referral Transport for Emergency Obstetric care, with the support of UNICEF, Rajasthan and the Government Health system. Since its initiation, in the last three months, 30 women have taken advantage of this helpline and 10 women were near missed cases, who survived. Rajasthan has a maternal death rate of 670 per 100,000 live births which is significantly higher than the national rate of 540 per 100,000 live births.

http://www.unicef.org/india/health_1533.htm?q=printme

UNICEF has unveiled a new method to save mothers' lives: the Maternal and Perinatal Death Inquiries Method, or MAPEDI.

Developed and implemented with Johns Hopkins University in the United States, MAPEDI uses what is called the 'verbal autopsy method' to gain insight from people in communities who have firsthand experience with the tragedy of maternal mortality. Equipped with a detailed MAPEDI questionnaire, UNICEF India volunteers have begun conducting one-on-one interviews with family members and health care workers in six high-risk districts. The data collected at these interviews will be analyzed and presented to local communities for review. The new tool is being used in collaboration with the Government of India as part of the National Reproductive and Child Health Programme, which is supported by the World Bank and seeks to significantly reduce maternal mortality rates.

http://www.unicef.org/india/health_1525.htm

More approaches to saving mothers lives in India:

- Orissa: http://www.unicef.org/india/health_1527.htm
- West Bengal: http://www.unicef.org/india/health_1529.htm

EDUCATION

Jharkhand ready to roll out enrolment drive

24 April 2006: The state of Jharkhand has reduced the number of out-of-school children from 1.3 million in 2000 to .38 million in 2006. The state is in the process of launching a mammoth enrolment drive "School Chalein Hum – Abhiyan 2006". A state-level workshop led by Chief Minister Arjun Munda and Human Resource Development Minister Pradeep Yadav was attended by most state ministers and elected representatives, deputy commissioners (heads of districts) and regional commissioners. "We cannot rest till the remaining children come to school," said Jharkhand Chief Minister Arjun Munda at the workshop. The workshop was held to get all the departments involved on the issue of education, as the Chief Minister said, "Education is everyone's responsibility." The children who are currently out-of-school are those belonging to socially and economically weak communities and groups, including linguistic and religious minorities, tribal groups living in habitations scattered over hills and forests.

http://www.unicef.org/india/education_1548.htm

India Resources

www.unicef.org/india

MALDIVES

Tired of taking the bus? Take the boat instead!

MALE – MALDIVES – 9 April 2006: Two bright yellow buses were crossing the high seas last week on their way to a new home in Laamu Gan. Islanders will use the new \$US 36,000 buses, brought in from India, to ferry some 610 primary school pupils to three schools. Laamu is one of the only atolls in the Maldives big enough to require a regular school bus route. At present, nine vans and minibuses take children to school, but the service is costly – up to 100 Rf per month for some children. "Many children on Laamu are missing out on extra curricular activities because they live too far away from the school," says Ameena Mohamed Didi, head of the UNICEF funded programme to introduce school buses to Gan. "We have heard that up to two-thirds of children from some schools are missing out because they simply can't afford the bus fare. These two bright yellow buses will help these kids, especially the children living in IDP camps." Laamu was one of the worst hit atolls when last year's tsunami struck. Over 100 children attending school on the island still live in makeshift camps, awaiting their homes to be repaired. Many of these families do not have an income. The school buses will be run by the Ministry of Education, who will charge a nominal fee to each child for their use.

Working to prevent drug addiction and the spread of HIV/AIDS among young Maldivians

MALE – MALDIVES – 27 April 2006: Three former drug addicts and several policy-makers are among 17 Maldivians heading to Indonesia for the next two weeks to study addiction, its treatment and the link to HIV prevention and care. The initiative is part of UNICEF's support to the government to reduce heroin use among young people, which is rampant throughout the tiny island nation, and to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The study tour is being jointly organised by UNICEF and Yakita, an Indonesian NGO with experience in drug education and treatment. It will teach the Maldivian attendees about the dangers of drug use and HIV, how to speak to young people about drugs and how to support people that want to give up.

"This is a great opportunity to listen to the feelings of other people trying to beat addiction. Giving up heroin is hard work – but it is made a bit easier when you have the support of other people going through the same thing. Many people believe that 'once an addict, always an addict,' but today we are going to show that addicts do recover – and can be helpful in the fight against drug use," says Adeel, a UNICEF consultant on adolescence and substance abuse. Adeel is helping *Journey*, a local Maldivian organization formed by recovering addicts who are trying to educate young people about the dangers of drug use – as well as helping users to recover.

Heroin use in the Maldives is very high among young people, with some islands reporting up to 30 percent of young people using the drug. UNICEF will be working with the government and NGOs to help reduce the number of young

people experimenting with and using the drug, as well as offering support to community-based rehabilitation services for young people.

NEPAL

Nepal Joint Statement: Adults must make sure that children are not involved in rallies

KATHMANDU, April 24: The high number of children injured in recent demonstrations in Kathmandu and other locations should be a matter of deep concern to all Nepalis. Both those organizing rallies and those involved in policing them have a responsibility, under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to ensure children are not harmed. Organizers of rallies must ensure that children are not being tasked to find missiles, tyres or other implements. They must actively discourage children from taking part in any rally that has the potential to become violent. Specifically, they should ensure that children are kept away from hazardous actions such as throwing stones. Security forces, as part of their obligation to exercise restraint and use the only minimal necessary force, need to be especially careful not to injure or otherwise harm children.

Putting children first: Nepal's national vitamin A campaign proceeds despite unrest

KATHMANDU, Nepal, 19 April 2006 – Despite the escalating political turmoil that has hit Nepal in recent weeks, a national distribution of vitamin A capsules and de-worming tablets started today. About 3.3 million Nepalese children, ranging in age from six months to five years, are expected to receive vitamin A capsules as part of the two-day nationwide campaign to protect children's health by boosting their immune systems.

Families turned out in hordes for the start of the drive, braving the current bouts of political agitation as well as bad weather. In Kathmandu, parents clutched their babies and umbrellas as they gathered outside health clinics for the biannual vitamin A distribution.

http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nepal_33515.html

UNICEF concerned that children a casualty of recent demonstrations

KATHMANDU, April 13 – UNICEF has expressed its deep concern at reports that children have been injured, arrested and detained in the recent demonstrations in Kathmandu and other cities. "Children have no place being near demonstrations that could turn violent," UNICEF Representative Dr. Suomi Sakai said today. "It is of great concern that children, some under the age of 10, have been seen taking part in demonstrations and have been injured and arrested. "While children do have the right to freedom of expression under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), their parents and guardians also have the right and responsibility to ensure that children are exercising their rights in an age-appropriate manner.

http://www.unicef.org/media/media_33370.html

Nepal Resources

- **UNICEF Nepal Situation Analysis of women and Children 2006**

Contains the latest data and analysis on maternal and child nutrition, basic education, gender, child protection, sanitation, hygiene and water, health services, maternal and child mortality and HIV/AIDS

Several of the important development achievements in Nepal in recent years affect the lives of children and women more than anyone else: the 40 percent reduction in under five mortality from 1991-2001, the increase in primary school enrolment by 30 per cent from 1995 to 2005—girls' enrolment increasing by 50 per cent in the same period—and access to water in rural areas increasing by 65 per cent from 1991-2001. The ongoing conflict threatens to reverse or halt progress in these and other areas that are fundamental to the well-being of children and women in Nepal. We have seen schools become a place for recruitment or indoctrination. Travel and movement has become an exposure to interrogation and harassment. Family life has been disrupted by fear and even direct violence. In response, to ensure their safety, families may decide to take their children out of school or not enroll them in the first place. They may be more reluctant to seek basic health services if it requires travel. At the same time, the conflict affects service delivery. Schools have been closed temporarily both nationally and locally. Health and education services in remote villages are often running with significantly reduced support and supervision. As always, it is the most

vulnerable who will be hardest hit. The conflict also has a more direct impact on the lives of children and women in Nepal. Family structures are shaken when households are increasingly headed by women due to increased migration, when the whole or parts of the family become displaced, and when children move alone or with a family member to urban areas or India seeking security, work and education. Serious human rights violations include detention of children, children killed or injured, and recruited as child soldiers.

- **UNICEF Report. Violence Against Children in Nepal Series 2. A Study of the system of school discipline in Nepal.** April 2006
- **UNICEF Report: Violence Against Children in Nepal – Child Sexual Abuse in Nepal.** April 2006
- **UNICEF’s Juvenile Justice in Nepal series 1: Juveniles in Detention- Police custody Monitoring Report.** March 2006
- **UNICEF Report: Victim-Activated Explosions Nepal.** 2005

All of these UNICEF Nepal publications (and more) are available electronically from the UN Nepal Information Platform <http://www.un.org.np/reportlibrary/reportlibrary.php?bc=r&type=document#>

PAKISTAN

EARTHQUAKE

UNICEF roles out Welcome to School campaign in the earthquake zone

UNICEF is assisting the Ministry of Education to ramp up the “Welcome to School” campaign, making sure that the tents, supplies and all the logistics arrangements are in place so that schools are opened immediately in the home villages where the internal displaced population affected by October 8th, 2005 earthquake are heading. As an initiative “Welcome to School” looks forward to a year from now when it aims to have all of the 450,000 children aged 5-12 years who were in school all over the affected region before the earthquake back in education, as well as bringing in 30 per cent of the children not enrolled before, focusing on increasing the number of girls and catering for orphans and children with disabilities. At present, more than **254,000 children** (78% of target) are enrolled in **3112 UNICEF assisted schools**. To make this happen, every week, hundreds of trucks transport educational supplies to earthquake affected areas. For this operation, airlifting also has been required to reach mountain areas where there is not road accessibility due to landslides. In support of IDP returns, UNICEF is issuing departing students with school certificates, which testify to their attendance in camp schools. Detailed records of each student have been collected for proper follow-up action in villages of origin.

Seeing the earthquake through children’s eyes

ISLAMABAD, April 20, 2006 -- When a devastating earthquake struck northern Pakistan some six months ago, it was quickly dubbed the “children’s catastrophe” due to the high number of young casualties. “The children were fascinated with cameras – squinting through the viewfinder, pretending to pose and snap away. For all but three of the children it was the first time they had held a camera.” About half of the affected population of more than three million were 18 years old and under. What was worse is that the powerful quake struck on a school day, when most pupils were in school. The aftermath was shocking even to the most battle-hardened humanitarian aid workers. Some 10,000 schools were leveled, and thousands of students and teachers were killed instantly. Many remain with permanent injuries. Despite the distress they suffer, children are often the most resilient survivors. As part of an innovative project to help amplify the voices of children and to promote participation and empowerment, UNICEF Pakistan along with CommunitySpeak, a local NGO, launched the “EYE SEE: Looking at Life From a Different Angle” project. http://www.unicef.org/pakistan/reallives_1540.htm

Earthquake families return home

MANSEHRA, 17 April 2006 – Six months after the earthquake killed more than 70,000 people in northern Pakistan, a massive return process is underway. Around 160,000 earthquake survivors have managed to outlive the harsh Himalayan winter, in camps and tented villages in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. UNICEF, working with the Pakistan Government, other UN agencies and NGOs, has been providing assistance in the camps in the areas of education, water and sanitation, health and nutrition and child protection.

As of mid-April, about 8,500 families have returned to their places of origin. As the people return home, UNICEF is literally pushing many of the services it has been providing in the camps up into the mountain villages.

http://www.unicef.org/pakistan/reallives_1538.htm

UNICEF supports services for women and children disabled by earthquake injuries

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, 23 March 2006 – Among the most vulnerable of the thousands injured in last October's earthquake are those who suffered severe spinal injuries. In a society where disability is not easily addressed, UNICEF is providing support by helping Pakistan's National Institute of the Handicapped (NIHd) to establish a special ward for injured women and children. Some of these earthquake survivors will never walk again and need vital support, which until now has been scarcely available in some parts of Pakistan. "Now things are better"

http://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media_1494.htm

Trauma counselling

According to GoP at least 38,500 patients were treated by doctors and trauma counsellors at 13 mental health facilities established at Manshera, Muzaffarabad, Batagram, Rawlakot, Bagh, Balakot and Shangla by the MoH during the relief and rehabilitation operation. Around 46% of the patients were women and 19% were children.

Pakistan Resources

www.unicef.org/pakistan

SRI LANKA

UNICEF deplores death of under-age recruit.

Colombo, 16 April 2006 – UNICEF deeply regrets the death of a 17 year-old child in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) auxillary killed on 13 April in a reported claymore mine incident in North Vavuniya. This incident underlines the risks children are exposed to when used in direct combat or in support roles such as delivery of supplies. Recruitment of children is a direct violation of their right to protection from violence. UNICEF calls on the LTTE to immediately release all under-age recruits within its ranks and to cease recruitment of children. UNICEF conveys its condolences to the family for their loss.

TSUNAMI

Calming Down the Fear

UNICEF supported Ministry of Education programme to build up teacher's capacity to support children affected by the *Tsunami*. While the emergency phase is over in Sri Lanka, the psychological impact of the tsunami is still being felt by adults and children around the country. Guidance and counselling programmes in Sri Lankan schools are providing long-term assistance to teachers and students in providing emergency preparedness skills and training people to address and support the well-being of teachers and students affected by the tsunami. The training programme implemented in 423 tsunami-affected schools around the country is part of the Ministry of Education's National Plan to Mainstream Psychosocial Wellbeing Through the Educational System, which will support 2500 schools from across the Island.

UNICEF Publications and Resources available from the South Asia Media Hub

The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded & Invisible

2005 and Beyond: Accelerating Girls' Education in South Asia (ROSA, February 2005)

Surviving Child Birth and Pregnancy in South Asia (ROSA, December 2004)

Report on the U.N. Regional Consultation on Violence Against Children in South Asia, Islamabad, 19-21 May.

* Media are welcome to make an appointment to come into the Media Hub located in UNICEF New Delhi and browse through reports, publications, country files containing news clippings, web articles and situation reports from the region.

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About UNICEF

For 60 years UNICEF has been the world's leader for children, working on the ground in 158 countries to help children survive and thrive from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for poor countries, UNICEF works to advance the Millennium Development Goals by supporting child health and nutrition, quality basic education for all boys and girls, access to clean water and sanitation, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of governments, businesses, foundations and individuals.

www.unicef.org