

PRESS RELEASE

As Sri Lanka faces worst drought in 40 years, a new UNICEF report highlights how globally children will be most affected as climate change worsens unfolding water crises.

An estimated 365,232 children are currently affected by Sri Lanka's drought, the country's second water-related emergency in under 12 months

Photos and video are available for download here:

<http://weshare.unicef.org/Package/2AMZIFDME09>

Colombo, Sri Lanka, 22 March 2017 – Some 600 million children – or 1 in 4 children worldwide – will be living in areas with extremely limited water resources by 2040, according to a UNICEF report released on World Water Day.

The report, *Thirsting for a Future: Water and children in a changing climate*, looks at the threats to children's lives and wellbeing caused by depleted sources of safe water and the ways climate change will intensify these risks in coming years.

According to the report, 36 countries are currently facing extremely high levels of water stress, which occurs when demand for water far exceeds the renewable supply available. Warmer temperatures, rising sea levels, increased floods, droughts and melting ice affect the quality and availability of water as well as sanitation systems.

Population growth, increased water consumption, and higher demand for water largely due to industrialization and urbanization are draining water resources worldwide. Conflicts in many parts of the world also threaten children's access to safe water.

All of these factors force children to use unsafe water, which exposes them to potentially deadly diseases like cholera and diarrhoea. Many children in drought-affected areas spend hours every day collecting water, missing out on a chance to go to school. Girls are especially vulnerable to attack during these times.

Whilst Sri Lanka is not listed among the 36 countries facing extremely high levels of water stress, Sri Lanka and its children are already experiencing the impact of climate change, with a cycle of climate related disasters resulting in dire consequences for the most vulnerable. The country is currently in the midst of its worst drought in 40 years, with over 1.2 million people, including 365,232 children directly affected and in need of humanitarian assistance. This follows May 2016's widespread flooding and landslides, caused by Tropical Cyclone 'Roanu', that led to the loss of life and widespread damage, displacing over 300,000 Sri Lankan's.

"UNICEF's new report could not come at a more relevant time for Sri Lanka", said **Tim Sutton, UNICEF Sri Lanka Representative**, adding "As we speak we are in the middle of the country's worst drought in 40 years, the second major water-related emergency we have faced in the past 12 months alone. We know that water emergencies not only endanger lives and limit the availability of safe water – essential for health and life - but have multiple knock-on effects such as destroying crops, increasing farmer indebtedness and driving food insecurity. These drastically impact children, especially the most vulnerable. We must take collective action to respond to the

ongoing drought, and to ensure that Sri Lanka is ready and prepared for future water challenges, so that children's futures are not jeopardized."

The poorest and most vulnerable children will be most impacted by an increase in water stress, the report says, as millions of them already live in areas with low access to safe water and sanitation.

The report also notes that:

- Up to 663 million people globally do not have access to adequate water sources and 946 million people practice open defecation.
- Over 800 children under the age of five die every day from diarrhoea linked to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene;
- Globally, women and girls spend 200 million hours collecting water every day.

The impact of climate change on water sources is not inevitable, UNICEF says. The report concludes with a series of recommendations that can help curb the impact of climate change on the lives of children. Such measures include:

- Governments need to plan for changes in water availability and demand in the coming years; Above all, it means prioritizing the most vulnerable children's access to safe water above other water needs to maximize social and health outcomes.
- Climate risks should be integrated into all water and sanitation-related policies and services, and investments should target high-risk populations.
- Businesses need to work with communities to prevent contamination and depletion of safe water sources.
- Communities themselves should explore ways to diversify water sources and to increase their capacity to store water safely.

"UNICEF is working with the Government in Sri Lanka and partners to address the immediate water needs of 365,323 children affected by the drought, and to build increased resilience in water supply services, to ensure the most vulnerable are protected from the worst impacts of climate change in Sri Lanka" **said Sutton**, adding "We are calling on our donors to support this vital work."

UNICEF Sri Lanka is appealing for USD 1 million in funding support for the drought response.

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Notes to Editors: *Thirsting for a Future: Water and children in a dangerous climate* is the third in a series of reports issued by UNICEF on the impact of climate change on and its effect on the lives of children. The reports include recommendations for how to minimize these impacts and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on climate action. The other reports are [Clear the Air for Children](#) and [Unless We Act Now](#).

About UNICEF: UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

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