

COPING WITH A DISASTER


How Behaviour Change and Community
Engagement Supported Survivors of
the February 2023 earthquake in Syria





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The 6 February earthquake caused catastrophic damage to large parts of north-west Syria

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INTRODUCTION

The massive earthquake which struck Syria in the early hours of 6 February 2023 left a devastating blow to a region already suffering the profound consequences of 12 years of conflict and crisis.

Across broad swathes of Syria and eastern Türkiye, the destructive impact was enormous. Of more than 8.8 million people in the two countries who suffered the consequences of the earthquake and the huge aftershocks that followed, around 3.7 million were children or pregnant or nursing mothers.

In Syria, as the scale of the disaster became clear, so too did the vast needs of the affected population. Apart from the fundamentals of food, shelter, medical assistance, safe water and sanitation, children urgently required protection and education services. It was quickly apparent that the earthquake had added a new layer of suffering onto that left by more than a decade of violence and upheaval.

As one of the international organizations who joined the response alongside the government, UNICEF focused on supporting people who had moved into emergency collective shelters which were set up in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Many were located in schools. Whole families squeezed into classrooms, playgrounds and other spaces with only limited access to safe water or toilets. The unhygienic conditions meant that diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases were a risk. Skin conditions such as headlice and scabies were soon being reported as well.

It was to help address such issues and to give broader support to the emerging humanitarian response that UNICEF's Social and Behavioural Change (SBC) team was deployed across the earthquake-affected zone. Their task, in keeping with UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action*, was to strengthen critical protective hygiene practices such as regular handwashing, proper sanitation, and promoting protective practices.

But the strategy had broader behavioural objectives as well. Given the acute psychosocial needs of those affected by the earthquakes, and the high levels of trauma and stress evident among children and adults alike, it was vital that the displaced population became empowered to undertake an active role in the response. Community participation and a sense of collective responsibility would help the healing process.

*The Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action – the CCCs – are UNICEF's central policy to uphold the rights of children affected by humanitarian crisis. The CCCs promote predictable, effective and timely collective humanitarian action, and clearly outline the areas in which UNICEF can best contribute to results.



Timely and relevant materials played an important part in encouraging good hygiene practices in the collective shelters

© Al-Ihsan/Aleppo

INITIATING THE RESPONSE

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, UNICEF's SBC teams conducted a series of field assessments to identify the principal behavioural challenges facing populations in the main affected areas of Aleppo, Latakia and Hama. The data generated by these multi-sectoral assessments were analysed and elaborated through consultations with partner NGOs and community members living in the collective shelters.

From this process emerged a Social and Behavioural Change and Community Engagement (SBC-CE) Plan focused on reinforcing positive WASH and health practices and on addressing the psychosocial needs of the earthquake-affected population. The strategy prioritized a people-centred approach based on community-led action plans and effective stakeholder coordination. A real-time monitoring system and gathered social evidence would allow ongoing enhancements to the plan.

Working in close collaboration with colleagues in programme sectors including WASH, health and nutrition, education and protection, the SBC-CE plan focused on five key results:

- Improved access to WASH facilities and services for people living in collective shelters and host communities;
- Enhanced capacity of community members to mobilise their own efforts to adopt sound hygiene practices;
- Reduced risk of waterborne and infectious diseases among displaced families and host communities;
- Increased resilience and ability to cope with the threat of earthquakes among children both in and out of school;
- Enhanced female participation in SBC-CE activities.


Of greatest concern were the overcrowded collective shelters where desperate families sought help in the days after the earthquake. Apart from the extremely cramped conditions, safe water, toilets, electricity, and rubbish disposal were all in desperately short supply.

Early assessments confirmed that efforts to establish effective health and WASH services risked being compromised unless complemented by systematic social and behaviour change interventions which would promote proper hygiene practices among the displaced communities.

As an immediate response, SBC staff at UNICEF head office in Damascus produced a package of materials complemented by social media posts promoting vital health and precautionary measures related to the earthquake. “We benefited from work done under earlier emergencies particularly that of COVID and Cholera to save time by utilizing some of those existing resources” Said Sahar Hegazi, SBC Chief of Section in Damascus. “Immediately after the Earthquake, SBC initiated response with local partners through our subnational level offices while ensuring timely coordination across UN and NGOs partners at national level for an effective response”. She added.



Within days of the earthquake, messages with lifesaving advice for survivors were being delivered across 25 different internet platforms in Syria. Between February and the end of November 2023, a UNICEF -backed social media campaign, promoting various positive health and hygiene practices, reached families and caregivers in 695 communities in five governorates. Analysis showed that the online messages reached 855,419 children and adults and prompted engagement with more than 762,001.



Ensuring the messages were understood and acted on in the chaotic setting of the collective shelters was a major challenge. In Latakia, some 28 schools had been set up. Those in schools had 8 classrooms and accommodated an average of 60 families. One of the largest shelters was in the sports stadium, a huge open space accommodating around 2,500 people.

In Aleppo, the situation was even more challenging. Around 176 shelters were hurriedly set up in and around the city, some in schools, others in mosques, churches and public gardens or in streets close to the ruins of people's homes. Overcrowding, lack of privacy and a shortage of basic needs (food and non-food items) were the main issues.

In this complex setting, UNICEF's SBC teams began direct interaction with the displaced population. Many of the displaced people cared about securing enough to eat and drink and a place to sleep. Observing good hygiene and cleanliness in general was seen as a second priority.

"We tried to engage with the displaced families," said Huzayfa Alahmar, SBC officer with UNICEF Aleppo. "We told them – yes, your basic needs are important but how you behave in the shelter is also important. And if you don't follow this guidance, you and your children could end up catching some other more serious disease, even cholera."

Cholera was considered a particular threat especially around Aleppo following a serious outbreak of the deadly waterborne disease in the region in late 2022 which killed around 40 people. However, this recent experience did mean updating messaging for immediate use, saving critical time.

"We strengthened the healthy habits that every individual must follow to protect himself and his family from diseases, especially in the shelters" Health and Nutrition Partner, Aleppo

Within a matter of days, volunteers were taking key messages to the shelters, explaining to each family the importance of keeping toilets, showers, and other wash facilities clean and of using only drinking water provided by UNICEF or its WASH sector partners. Reminders about the importance of regular hand washing and other positive hygiene practices were consistently done. Consequently, although some cases of acute watery diarrhoea were reported in some shelters, there were no confirmed cases of cholera.

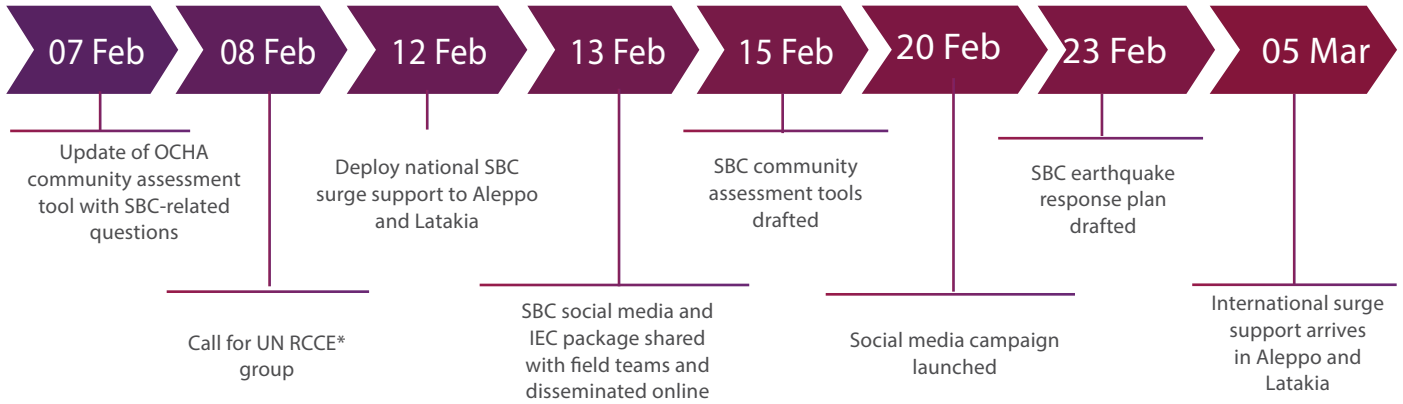
"Confronted by the threat of diseases that spread after disasters, we have strengthened the healthy habits that every individual must follow to protect himself and his family, especially in the shelters," said Zelal Shebash, SBC technical coordinator with Palestine Red Crescent Society, Aleppo.

Amid the cramped accommodation and inadequate washing facilities, other health issues soon surfaced. Cases of headlice were soon reported in some shelters, followed by scabies.

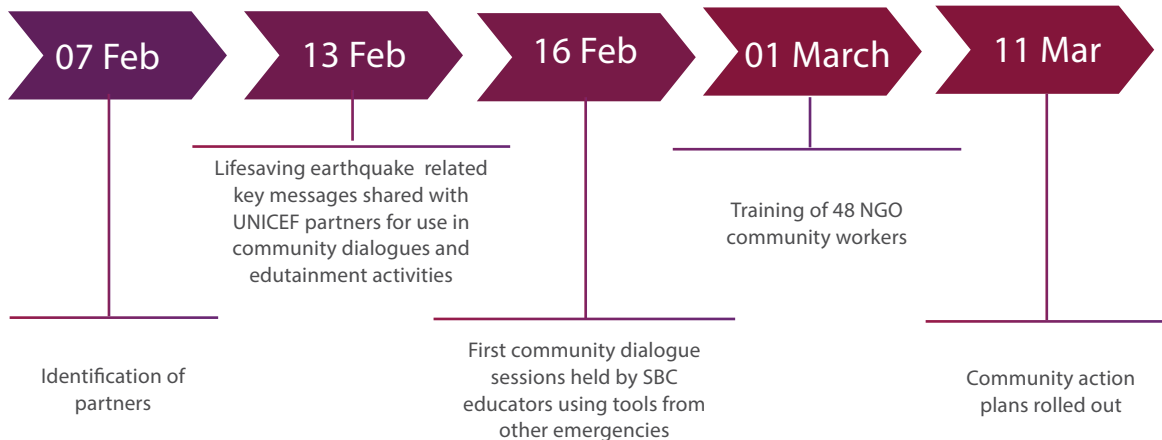
"People found it embarrassing to talk about these conditions," said Alahmar. "The solution we found was for community mobilisers to go around the shelters, speaking to each family in turn, noting the cases of headlice and scabies that they found. We could then arrange for a dermatologist to make discreet visits, providing affected families with special shampoo and other treatment "I know many children in the shelter who had lice. I am glad that I joined these (health and hygiene promotion) sessions to learn how to keep clean and protected from this disease." Ali, 8-years old, shelter resident

SBC RESPONSE TIMELINE AFTER 6 FEBRUARY EARTHQUAKE

DAMASCUS NATIONAL LEVEL



ALEPPO AND LATTAKIA FIELD OFFICES





The Sports City Stadium in Latakia governorate was among the public venues used to shelter families displaced by the earthquake

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MAKING THE DISPLACED PART OF THE RESPONSE

The next stage of the SBC response was designed to engage members of the displaced community and involve them in the task of finding solutions to the day-to-day problems of living in the shelters. This was done by identifying community members who could help address a variety of environmental, health and child protection practices that were putting children's health and wellbeing at risk.

"Our aim was to give people in the shelters a role in a way that would increase their collective sense of responsibility," said Muhamed Suleiman, an SBC specialist with UNICEF regional office in Amman, Jordan, who was deployed to support the response.

"We wanted them to understand that by working as a group, they could do something to make their lives better, and take some ownership of their situation."

At first, this outreach and engagement with communities presented challenges, especially in Aleppo, where many people who had survived long years of war and social dislocation were unaccustomed to being asked their views on issues affecting their day-to-day lives.

An important supportive role was played by community volunteers, a network of university graduates who were already involved with a range of UNICEF partner organisations across the city, supporting the provision of health, education, WASH and protection services. Each partner NGO was asked to nominate three volunteers who were then trained in techniques of winning the confidence of the affected community in each shelter.

The first step was to build a basic profile of each shelter's population. Once basic data on age, gender and background had been collected, individuals with specific skills could be identified. Some were older people who were already respected in their community. But many were young people eager to get involved in improving their surroundings. Through peer-to-peer training sessions, these shelter volunteers gained an understanding of various behavioural issues, including hygiene promotion, and how to organize activities for children.

For some girls especially, becoming a volunteer was an important – even lifechanging -- experience. Many lacked any kind of work experience due to the highly conservative communities they came from.

"I remember one girl volunteer who told me she hadn't seen the sun in six weeks because her parents were too worried about her safety to let her go outside the shelter," said Suleiman from UNICEF Regional Office. "We cleaned up a room and got some chairs and tables where she was able to do drawing and art with some of the children. She was so happy and wanted to do more."



UNICEF hygiene supplies are distributed to earthquake-affected families in Aleppo

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ADDRESSING SENSITIVE ISSUES

Because they came from the displaced population, the community volunteers were able to address issues that might have caused sensitivity. For example, some girls and women complained about being harassed while walking through darkened school corridors at night to reach the bathrooms. Once the problem was raised with the families, solutions quickly emerged, such as having male relatives to accompany the women and ensure their safety. Additionally, and as part of community initiatives, solar-powered lights were installed to ensure passages were lit at night.

The limited availability of water for bathing was another source of tension. Frequently, after a consignment of water was delivered, the first two families in line would empty the water tank leaving little or nothing for other people in the queue. Community mobilizers resolved the issue by fixing shower-time limits for each family, ensuring that everyone was able to meet their basic hygiene needs.

Practical solutions like these were integrated within a Community Action Plan. This document, drawn up collaboratively in each shelter, allowed the residents to map out the different ways in which they wanted to address the critical WASH, healthcare and psychosocial needs that they faced.

Community volunteers oversaw the process of developing the plans but were always careful to avoid the impression that “outsiders” were imposing their views on the displaced population.

“The SBC response strengthened the spirit of cooperation and solidarity in the community, and encouraged people to provide assistance to each other” Child Protection partner, Aleppo

“The Community Action Plan helped win the trust of the communities because the volunteers were consulting all the time about the problems and the solutions and then following up,” said Aman Elwan, SBC officer in UNICEF’s Homs field office, and who was also managing earthquake response in Lattakia. “This meant they had the feeling that they were involved in fixing their own problems, not just relying on others to do things for them.”



In the overcrowded shelters, UNICEF - supported health workers dealt with numerous cases of headlice and scabies

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PARTNERS WORKING TOGETHER

From the outset, the SBC-CE response to the earthquake was a collaborative effort involving a full range of national and international partners who were brought together within a Coordination Group jointly led by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). Originally set up to handle the COVID-19 response, the Coordination Group was now given adjusted terms of reference. New sub-groups relevant to the post-earthquake setting were added. Sub-national coordination mechanisms were agreed for Aleppo and Latakia.

Besides coordinating the development and testing of SBC materials and messages, the Group was responsible for coordinating efforts to counter misinformation that might undermine public and community trust in the earthquake response. Offline and online tools for tracking and managing rumours were developed together with a data base of evidence that could be used to reinforce positive practices and knowledge.

The Coordination Group also took on responsibility for suggesting content of community engagement volunteers and the documentation of SBC-CE best practices and lessons learned.



Volunteers used interactive theatre to help promote the importance of hand washing among children

© Mosaic/Lattakia

LEARNING THROUGH ENTERTAINING

“Stay away from buildings! Listen to your parents’ advice!”

Wrapped up against the winter chill of northern Syria, around a dozen children sat in a circle, chanting the slogans and clapping energetically to the rhythm.

“When an earthquake happens, stay away from windows, stay still and don’t panic!”

These children were among the survivors of the most devastating earthquake to strike the region in decades. Several weeks on, they and their families were living in one of the numerous collective shelters set up around Aleppo to shelter people whose homes were left uninhabitable.

These “Edutainments” were among a variety of participatory activities organized by UNICEF SBC team and its partners to help children (and adults too) understand how to protect themselves in case another earthquake or aftershock should strike. They also provide them with a welcome distraction from their bleak surroundings.

“These activities contributed to raising awareness about earthquake risks, preventive measures, safety and security and disaster preparedness,” said Reham Mowakkeh, SBC technical coordinator with UNICEF child protection partner Al-Ihsan. “They contributed to the recovery process, changing social behaviour and building resilience.”

To engage children on health and hygiene issues, the edutainment activities used some innovative approaches. In one game, called Hygiene Circles, the children would move from one circle to another, learning how to brush their teeth, cut their nails and comb their hair. Another game featured a hula hoop race in which children competed against each other in their knowledge of healthy habits.

The experience of the February 2023 earthquake, of losing their homes and communities and being unable to attend school, left many children deeply distressed. Those identified as requiring more intensive psychosocial care were referred for specialist care.

Parenting skills were another focus of the key activities for SBC community volunteers through community dialogues and edutainment activities. The aim was to help parents support their children during extended periods in the shelters, to accept their anger and concerns, and deal with problems through positive disciplining techniques.

Organizing activities for children or adults was initially hampered by the shortage of trained staff and volunteers needed to lead them. In the early days, UNICEF’s regular NGO partners were fully involved in the immediate humanitarian response, delivering food, bedding, and other essential supplies. Many NGO staff also had the needs of their own families to take into consideration. As government ministries initially prioritised the relief effort, the scope for behaviour change interventions initially was not highly prioritized.



Training of volunteers was critical to ensuring an effective SBC response to the earthquake

© Mosaic/Lattakia

LOCAL PARTNERS STEP UP THEIR INVOLVEMENT

Over time, however, the situation eased and more local NGOs were able to release staff to join the SBC effort. Typical of these organisations was Mosaic Human Relief and Development, a longtime UNICEF partner in the province of Latakia.

As soon as they could be made available, more than 50 Mosaic volunteers were trained on different aspects of the behaviour change work in collective shelters. Around half of them were assigned to develop Community Action Plans identifying the primary health and other priorities for five collective shelters in Latakia. That was the start of six months of engagement during which the Mosaic team conducted community dialogues and engaged shelter residents in hygiene promotion, cleanliness campaigns and other activities.

Edutainment activities were designed to highlight health risks associated with cholera, leishmaniasis, headlice, parasitic worms, scabies and poor dental hygiene. Every effort was made to ensure these learning events for children were as entertaining as possible. A puppet theatre promoted personal hygiene and children competed with one another in their knowledge of healthy habits. The winners received soap bars and cleaning materials.

"I like the joint activities of mothers with their children, I feel closer to my son when we learn and play together," said Nour, a 27-year-old mother in a shelter in Latakia. "Families need to learn about common diseases and how to prevent them."

Organising education activities as a means of keeping children occupied and helping more traumatized individuals recover from their experiences was recognized as a priority from the outset. Volunteers met each family, encouraging parents to send their children back to class whenever possible, and promoting pre-school learning support for children who were unable to enroll (or re-enroll) in formal classes.

Protection issues have been given prominence with the large number of cases of gender-based violence (GBV) reported especially in the shelters. Through their interactions and discussions with shelter residents, community volunteers raised awareness about how to identify GBV cases as well as those of child abuse and neglect, and how they should be reported for specialized services.



Children in earthquake-affected areas of Latakia governorate take part in UNICEF-organised recreational activities

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REACHING OUT TO THE LOCAL HOST COMMUNITY

While SBC initiatives helped build solidarity within the shelters, it was equally critical to reach out to people living in the surrounding neighbourhood. Given the large number of displaced families, the potential for resentment and even hostility towards them was evident.

Early in the response, Community Action Plans included different activities designed to reduce the potential for tension, among them clean-up campaigns involving youth and adolescents and recreational programmes for children living around the shelters.

“In Aleppo, the spontaneous community cohesion which we saw during the earthquake response was truly impressive” UNICEF partner

These efforts to engage with local families and businesses, triggered some generous responses. Some households invited shelter residents to use their showers while a laundry offered its services at a big discount for displaced families. In Aleppo, a man installed a power cable from his building so that people in the shelter next door could use the electricity from his private generator, free of charge.

“After the earthquake, one of the main effects of the response was community cooperation,” said Reham Mowakkeh, with UNICEF child protection partner, Al-Ihsan.

“It has strengthened the spirit of cooperation and solidarity among them and encouraged people to provide assistance and support to each other, whether through participation in relief work or providing practical assistance to those affected.”

“It is very important to educate people to address misinformation that can lead to spread of rumors”. Amal Al-Nasser, community volunteer, Aleppo



A volunteer with a UNICEF supported mobile health and nutrition team distributes flyers explaining how families can safely store drinking water

© UNICEF/UN0825954/Haddad

ALEPPO: THE SBC RESPONSE

“We ran to the street and I remember hearing the earth cracking and shaking. That sound was horrible. Everyone was panicked. We slept in the street or our cars for the first two days.”

UNICEF SBC technical consultant Joud Mahmoud was asleep at home in Aleppo with her husband and three-year-old daughter when the earthquake struck. Like everyone caught up in the shattering events of 6 February 2023, her memories are coloured by the destruction and fear that she saw all around her.

The recollections of her SBC colleague, Huzayfa Alahmar, are equally vivid. *“It was really awful. All the people were in the street, the streets were full of cars. No one was in their homes.”*

Located less than 100 kilometres from the epicentre, Aleppo suffered extensive damage and loss of life in the 7.8-magnitude earthquake. Hundreds of people were killed or injured in and around the city, and dozens of buildings collapsed. The sense of shock was profound, even for a population which had endured so much during Syria’s long years of conflict and upheaval.

UNICEF and its partners began work in the collective shelters where people left homeless had congregated. The rapid deployment of SBC and other programme staff got under way even as UNICEF’s own Aleppo office was being relocated from the 14th floor of an office block to new ground-floor premises.

The outreach teams comprised 38 volunteers initially, but numbers grew to reach 78 within a month. Their chief focus were the collective shelters in Aleppo city and accessible rural areas to the north.

The terror that gripped the city made it all the more crucial that SBC interventions included clear behavioural messaging to help people to protect themselves amid the ongoing aftershocks.

The work started with simple awareness-raising messages on hygiene and health, but during the first few weeks, even this was challenging as the displaced families were preoccupied with fulfilling their most basic physical needs.

Once a degree of composure had been restored among those in the shelters, the volunteers were able to begin community engagement initiatives, identifying individuals who could take on the task of promoting protective practices around various key issues.

Activities continued over the next two months, with health educators and other staff working long hours to meet the demands required of them both in the shelters and later (at the government’s request) in host communities.

With the displaced population distributed across so many locations, coordination with partner organisations remained a constant challenge. Yet important successes were achieved: which helped children prepare for more possible aftershocks, families were being introduced to messaging that highlighted the danger of cholera and the protective value of immunization.

Central to the progress made were the highly flexible Community Action Plans that framed the various SBC interventions. In each shelter, the community selected a group of mobilizers whose task was to conduct consultation sessions that would identify the hygiene, health, protection or other priorities the group were experiencing and devise appropriate responses.

In the first six months after the earthquake, nearly 258,000 people (including 116,080 children) in earthquake-affected areas of Aleppo governorate were engaged with key lifesaving messages on how to behave during earthquakes and on correct hygiene practices and other health-related practices. More than 345,000 adults and children received crucial information on earthquake risks and cholera prevention through social media posts, flyers and brochures.



Children taking part in edutainment activities in rural Lattakia.

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ALEPPO PARTNER FEEDBACK:

“The rapid response in providing awareness-raising sessions and psychological first aid on a comprehensive scale had a positive impact on the recovery of those affected by the shock to which they were exposed. What needs improvement is coordination between different sectors and services to ensure that those affected have access to services and meet their needs.” Diala Otry, SBC technical coordinator, Fouadi.

“The biggest impact of the SBC response that we observed was increased awareness of the necessity of breastfeeding, sterilizing water, and of increasing the rate of vaccination among children. We also learned the importance of networking with authorities and other associations to cooperate and meet different needs, and the need to train staff on disaster management.” Manar Salhabji, SBC Coordinator, Syrian Association for Child Cancer Care and Treatment.



NGO partners used games and quizzes to engage with children and promote vital hygiene messages

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COASTAL AND CENTRAL ZONE - THE SBC RESPONSE

Although regions further south of the epicentre suffered less structural damage from the earthquake, the psychological impact on the population was still huge. That realization was brought home to UNICEF SBC Officer Ghiath Shaheen when, during a powerful aftershock in Homs, he watched in horror as a panic-stricken college student threw himself from an upstairs window.

“Even after so many years of war and crisis in Syria, people were not prepared for an emergency like that earthquake. I don't think anyone can truly be prepared for that,” said Shaheen. “Experiencing another disaster on top of so many others was just too much.”

In the days following the earthquake, the SBC-CE team in UNICEF's Tartous field office set about assessing how they could provide the most effective support to the broader emergency response. Every programme needed help, but priorities had to be decided.

“The scale of what had happened was hard to fathom,” recalled Aman Elwan, UNICEF SBC officer in Homs. “But everyone had a responsibility to do whatever they could to make the suffering of those people less.”

Nowhere was the urgency of social and behaviour change interventions more apparent than in the collective shelters. Conditions were dire and before long, relations between the families sharing the same cramped space were close to breaking point. Even though many were from the same neighbourhoods, they were soon trading accusations over the lack of cleanliness in the toilets and showers.

While UNICEF WASH teams worked on installing more toilets and showers, SBC volunteers who had worked on previous responses to COVID-19 and cholera were being rapidly deployed. With their inter-personal communication skills, the volunteers set about organizing community dialogues and edutainment activities for children during which key messages around hygiene and positive health practices could be explained and reinforced.

Next the focus turned to working with the displaced communities and helping them understand that they needed to take responsibility for keeping the shelter facilities functional and clean.

Progress in rolling out the SBC response varied. In Latakia and other coastal areas, for example, the scarcity of active UNICEF partners meant that only five shelters could be supported initially until suitable NGOs had been brought on board and their outreach staff trained.

Over time, however, the teams were able to expand their remit into other programmes. One priority was the organization of drills during which children were taught how to protect themselves in the event of another earthquake.

Another was the promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding practices. The importance of this issue was highlighted when consignments of infant formula milk began to be distributed freely in the shelters, raising concerns that many new mothers would be discouraged from breastfeeding.

Between May and the end of August 2023, nearly 7,500 people (including 3,411 children) in collective shelters were engaged around correct hygiene practices and other health-related practices. More than 3,100 adults and children received crucial information on earthquake risks and cholera prevention through flyers and brochures.

An important role was played by the Directorate of Health in Latakia in coordinating the efforts of health and nutrition partners and stakeholders during the EQ response, including referral mechanisms. This was carried out through UNICEF officers under DoH leadership.



Latakia was among the areas most severely affected by the earthquake

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COASTAL ZONE PARTNER FEEDBACK

“The health situation was improved by promoting social behavioural changes, including hygiene campaigns and educational activities, and organizing maintaining in WASH facilities. These efforts led to increased adherence to personal hygiene instructions and the preservation of public facilities.”

“Engaging in effective dialogue sessions was essential for communicating with survivors of earthquakes, regardless of their individual circumstances and diverse stories of survival. Therefore, training team members in communication skills, interactive theatre, activity creation, public speaking, and dialogue techniques was needed to enhance their ability to carry out their roles effectively.” Asrar Hadad, SBC technical coordinator, Mosaic Human Relief and Development, Latakia.



A group of children interact during an outdoor game in Al Khandaq collective shelter in Hama governorate

© UNICEF/UNI437348/Hazori

LESSONS LEARNED

In a humanitarian setting that could scarcely have been more challenging, the months after the earthquake were a demanding test for the Social and Behaviour Change and Community Engagement strategy undertaken by UNICEF and its partners. Some important lessons have already been integrated into the 6-month response strategy drawn up by UNICEF Damascus with the support of UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

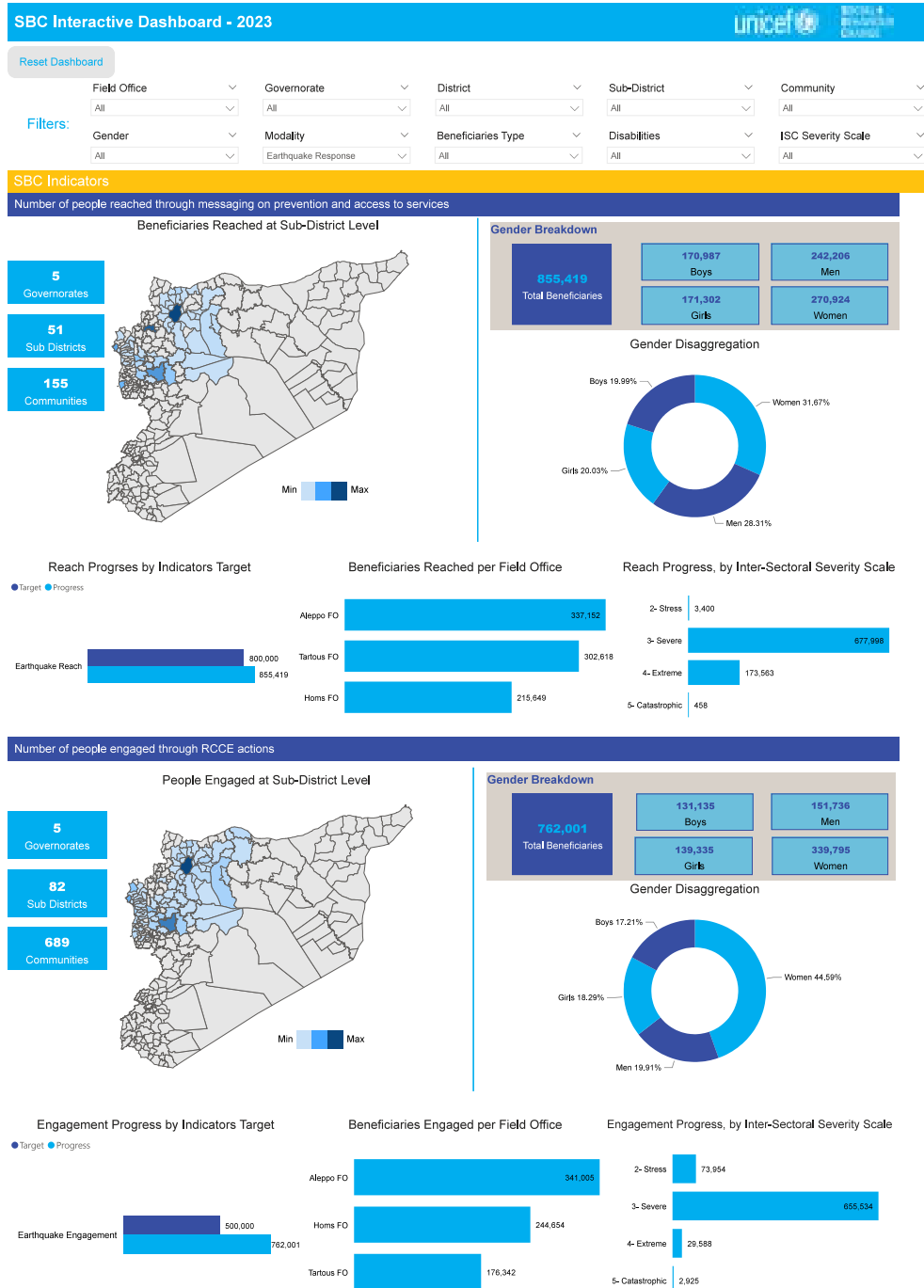
This strategy drew on the Core Commitments for Children (CCC) and other global emergency standard operating procedures as well as Community Engagement guidance documents in order to develop a people-centred approach, founded on effective community engagement through community-led action plans and stakeholder coordination in the collective centres.

“We helped people transform the negative impact into a positive one, breaking their barrier of fear by emphasizing behaviours that should be followed during such disasters” Health and Nutrition partner, Aleppo

The earthquake led to a realignment of SBC internal plans, taking into account the capacity development of partners and volunteers who remained in the front line of the response. The earthquake response also prompted the creation of the SBC dashboard that is now being expanded to include SBC other programmes interventions in addition to emergency related activities.

The emergency underlined how, emergency preparedness has been critical, for example, SBC materials that were developed for previous emergencies can served as an important interim solution, allowing SBC activities to begin even before new materials were developed. It also demonstrated the importance of improving community readiness, and the provision of more training for volunteers and relief teams to reinforce their skills in delivering SBC interventions and cope with disaster situations more broadly.

The SBC-CE dashboard developed following the earthquake allowed UNICEF and partners to track the various SBC-CE interventions that were carried out in five affected Governorates (Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Tartous and Latakia). By the end of November 2023, the response had reached 695 communities and involved 15 implementing partners. The interventions reached a total of 855,419 people and recorded engagement with 762,001.



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for every child