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Humanitarian Action for Children

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South Asia

South Asia is highly prone to natural and human-caused disasters, and the nature and magnitude of disasters have become more intense and frequent due to climate change, environmental degradation and rapid and uncontrolled urbanization. Following the heavy 2019 monsoon rains, 25 million people (36 per cent children) were affected by floods across the region, including over 20 million people in India, 4 million in Bangladesh, 500,000 in Nepal¹ and 300,000 in Afghanistan.² The floods displaced millions of people and damaged infrastructure for basic social services, leading to reduced access, deterioration in the quality of services, increased risks of disease outbreaks and heightened protection challenges. Concurrently, Afghanistan and Pakistan are recovering from one of the worst droughts in decades. Some 1.2 million people in Sindh province, Pakistan, are experiencing crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity.³ Drought conditions have exacerbated the already elevated levels of child malnutrition, with acute malnutrition rates as high as 29 per cent in Sindh, more than double the emergency threshold.⁴ Countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan remain on high alert for a major earthquake; and cyclones and floods remain a major threat to Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In India, 38 per cent of the country is at risk of drought due to the poor monsoon rains.⁵ In addition, 6.3 million people are affected by protracted conflict in Afghanistan⁶ and 2.9 million internally displaced people and returnees in Pakistan require assistance.⁷ Since 2018, the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has grown to nearly 1 million. With no concrete progress made to date on the voluntary and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, 1.2 million refugees and people in host communities, including 683,000 children, are at risk of disease outbreaks, flooding and protection risks, and require urgent humanitarian assistance.⁸

Regional humanitarian strategy

The UNICEF humanitarian strategy in South Asia aims to strengthen country capacities to ensure timely, effective and quality emergency response. This includes enhancing inter-agency coordination and building skills at the regional, national and sub-national levels to address the needs of women, children and adolescents during emergencies. UNICEF will also invest in regional and national capacities for emergency preparedness by facilitating regular regional risk analysis, supporting the development of robust country contingency plans, conducting simulations and strengthening national and sub-national partner capacities. The Regional Office for South Asia will continue to strengthen capacities on humanitarian cash transfers, accountability to affected populations, gender-based violence, disability, inclusion and engagement of adolescents and youth in emergency response. The humanitarian strategy will feed into an overall approach to facilitating a comprehensive sustainable and enabling environment that leaves no child behind – whether due to shocks, disaster risk or poverty – by developing and implementing risk-informed policies and programmes. UNICEF will support country offices to develop and improve social safety nets and shock-responsive social protection mechanisms to respond to repeated droughts, floods and other shocks and build community resilience. The South Asia Regional Rapid Response Mechanism and country emergency rosters will be further strengthened to increase deployable capacities. Given the high-risk context, which is characterized by the repetitive and predictable nature of disasters, UNICEF will invest in evidence generation and knowledge management to better apply best practices and lessons learned throughout the region. In South Asia, disaster trends and conflict dynamics have sub-regional dimensions that require strategic approaches and collaboration. UNICEF will therefore continue to strengthen regional partnerships, including with the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation Disaster Management Centre and other stakeholders, to fulfil the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) and address the immediate needs of children.

Results from 2019

As of 31 August 2019, UNICEF had US\$1.5 million available against the US\$7.5 million appeal (20 per cent funded).⁹ With financial and technical support from the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, country offices in the region reached over 250,000 people (over 40 per cent children) affected by drought and flooding with humanitarian assistance. In Nepal, UNICEF provided multi-sectoral assistance to 169,000 flood-affected children. After the hotel and church bombings in Sri Lanka, UNICEF provided psychosocial support to 4,000 children. Capacities for emergency preparedness and response were strengthened at both the regional and country office levels, though these activities were curtailed in smaller countries due to lack of funding. More than 120 staff members from the Regional Office and the Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka country offices were trained on emergency preparedness and response during the year. Training was completed for the last batch of the Rapid Response Mechanism roster members, increasing the pool from 30 to 65 staff members representing all areas of responsibility, in line with the CCCs, who are now ready to deploy at the onset of an emergency. During the recent floods, which affected multiple countries in South Asia, roster members and staff trained in emergency preparedness and response played a key role in supporting the Bangladesh, India and Nepal country offices to develop and implement the UNICEF response and promote the rights of children. In line with the Grand Bargain commitments, the Regional Office continued to strengthen UNICEF capacities on humanitarian cash transfer programming and accountability to affected populations. To strengthen the linkages between humanitarian action and development programming, UNICEF continued to promote risk-informed programming across the region through trainings in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Given high staff turnover, the Regional Office also continued to support country offices to implement the new Emergency Preparedness Procedure using the Emergency Preparedness Platform. However, significant funding shortfalls meant that some planned activities had to be curtailed, which limited results for children, particularly in smaller – but still high-risk – countries.

Funding requirements

UNICEF requires US\$7.5 million to support regional- and country-level humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction in South Asia in 2020. This includes US\$6.2 million to support country offices to respond to localized but sudden-onset emergencies, such as earthquakes, floods, displacements and disease outbreaks. While the likelihood of drought, flood or earthquake emergencies is very high in Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka according to the Emergency Preparedness Platform risk analysis, these needs have not been captured in country-specific international appeals. The requested funds include a provision for immediate assistance in any of these countries and will be used to strengthen regional and country emergency preparedness systems. This includes strengthening emergency preparedness capacities at sub-national levels, rolling out rapid response mechanisms at the country level, conducting emergency preparedness and response training and developing long-term agreements and memoranda of understanding with partners. Funds will also be used for regional technical support and to develop regional partnerships focused on scaling up child-centred disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response, risk analysis and knowledge management in South Asia.

Sector	2020 requirements (US\$)
Emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction	500,000
Emergency response support	6,250,000
Regional technical support	750,000
Total	7,500,000

¹ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'South Asia Floods: Humanitarian snapshot', OCHA, 25 July 2019.

² Famine Early Warning Systems Network, 'Afghanistan Food Security Outlook: June 2019 to January 2020', FEWS Net.

³ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Asia and the Pacific: Weekly regional humanitarian snapshot 30 July - 5 August 2019', OCHA, 5 August 2019.

⁴ Natural Disasters Consortium, 'Sindh Drought Needs Assessment Report', January 2019.

⁵ United Nations Children's Fund, 'India Humanitarian Situation Report: Monsoon update No.3', UNICEF, 13 August 2019.

⁶ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Afghanistan: 2019-2021 Humanitarian Response Plan', OCHA, 2018.

⁷ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Pakistan: Humanitarian dashboard - transition 2019 (1 January - 30 June 2019)', OCHA, 30 June 2019.

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Bangladesh Humanitarian Situation Report No. 51 (Rohingya Influx)', UNICEF, 17 June 2019.

⁹ Available funds include US\$1.4 million received against the 2019 appeal and US\$117,106 carried forward from the previous year.

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