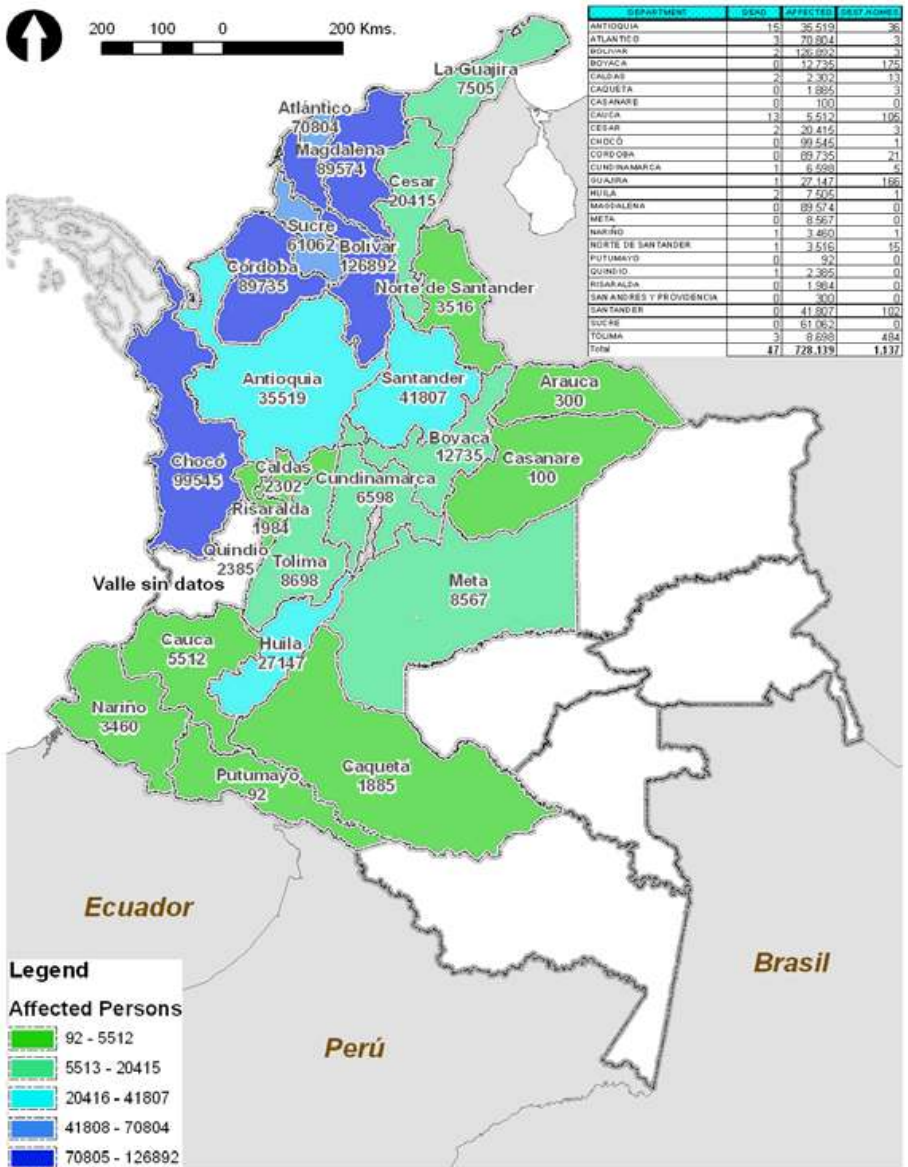


# COLOMBIA FLOODS

UNICEF Responds to Immediate Needs of Affected Children and Women



Number of Affected Persons Second Rainy Season  
 Cumulative September 15th to November 27th, 2008  
 Source: DPAD



The names shown and the designations used on this map does not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNICEF

10 December 2008

## 1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Colombia has been severely affected by floods and landslides caused by extreme rainfall which began in mid- September and which has seriously increased over the last two weeks. According to the Colombian Institute for Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y estudios ambientales –IDEAM), this heavy rainy season (associated with tropical depressions crossing the country and cyclone systems which have been moving through the Caribbean over the past three months) has been one the harshest and most disastrous of recent times in Colombia, not only for the level of precipitation but also for the high level of damage caused in different regions of the country.

Children and pregnant women require urgent life-saving assistance and psychosocial support is required to help children overcome the emotional impact of the emergency and enable them to recover their wellbeing. In order to uphold children's right to education, as the school year has ended, support is needed to ensure that education activities can resume at the planned start of the new school year in February 2009. In addition, it will be important to provide children with pedagogical recreational activities during the two-month school break.

Reports by the National Department for Disaster Prevention and Assistance (DPAD) establish that 935,500 people are affected (equivalent to 189,000 families) in 27 of the total 32 Departments of Colombia. It is estimated that about 40% (374,000) of the total population affected are under the age of 18. Official reports as of 6 December 2008 record that 60 people have died, 91 are injured and 18 are missing. The Colombian Government reports that 2,020 houses have been destroyed, 78,203 houses have been damaged<sup>1</sup> and 52,000 hectares of crops have been destroyed by floods.

The most affected regions of the country are the Department of Chocó (because of the overflowing of the Atrato, San Juan and Baudó rivers), La Mojana and the Magdalena Medio Region. On 29 November 2008, a state of public calamity was declared for the Department of Chocó. On 1 December 2008, official data for Chocó registered a total of 98,890 people affected (approximately 41,500 children), la Mojana showed a total of 90,262 persons affected (approximately 38,000 children) and Magdalena Medio a total of 144,650 persons affected (approximately 58,000 children).

Consequences of the floods and landslides have been aggravated by underlying vulnerability due to internal armed conflict, especially in the Department of Chocó. Communities in these areas frequently are the victims of homicides, child recruitment and occupation of their communities by illegal armed groups. Access to food and transportation were already limited before the emergency. These conditions complicate the response by national or local authorities, who face restrictions in their operations in many areas. The crisis also exacerbates the serious conditions of the Embera, Tule and Wounaan indigenous peoples that live on the banks of the Atrato, San Juan and Baudó Rivers in Chocó. These communities are comprised of 5,339 families. According to a joint study by the WFP, UNDP and UNICEF<sup>2</sup> before the flooding emergency, 94.3% of the studied indigenous population were suffering from severe food insecurity. The emergency could cause a high number of child deaths from malnutrition and diarrhoea in the coming weeks. The rainy season is not over yet, and it is expected that the number of emergency events (flash floods and landslides) and people affected will continue to increase in the coming days. According to IDEAM<sup>3</sup> forecasts, precipitation should continue and increase in northern and central Colombia, with the possibility of flash flooding, landslides, floods and avalanches.

UNICEF and its partners, including sister UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations, are working closely with the Government of Colombia to respond rapidly and effectively to the crisis. UNICEF is requesting the sum of US\$1,700,000 to cover key

---

<sup>1</sup> Consolidado Segunda Temporada Invernal, Dirección de Prevención y Atención de Desastres, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Estudio de Situación Nutricional y de Salud de los Indígenas del Chocó. UNDP WFP y UNICEF, November 2008. ("Study of the Nutritional and Health Situation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chocó"). According to the main data in this study, made before the emergency between April and June 2008, the chronic malnutrition of children under 60 months of age stood at 73.3%, severe chronic malnutrition was 42.4%, prevalence of ADI was 57.9%. 39.9% of the children between 12 and 24 months of age had not received any vaccination.

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies

interventions in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene, health and nutrition, education and protection throughout the affected areas over the coming four months.

## **2. UNICEF'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

In line with the Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies, UNICEF is ensuring preparedness and response to the flooding emergencies in Colombia in the areas of health and nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; basic education; and child protection. Internal resources are already being used to respond to the ongoing crisis at this stage.

UNICEF is monitoring the situation closely in coordination with other UN agencies and maintaining close contact with the National Department for Disaster Prevention and Response (DPAD), national, regional and local authorities, as well as non-governmental partners. The Governor of Chocó has written to the UN RC/HC to request support. On 29 November 2008, UNICEF visited Chocó and discussed humanitarian needs with the Governor of Chocó, the Mayor of Quibdó, as well as the Minister for Environment, Water and Territorial Development, who was visiting the region on behalf of the President of Colombia. The Minister declared a state of calamity in Chocó after witnessing the severe situation in the Department. The local committees of disaster prevention and relief have provided information regarding the bleak conditions of children which have not been profiled in media reports.

UNICEF will work jointly with the other UN agencies and the national and local authorities in the National Emergency System, complementing the response of the national and local authorities to promote and uphold the rights of the children affected by the emergency. In the first stage, UNICEF will concentrate its efforts on supporting the immediate response through the urgent actions described below.

The Director General of the National Department for Disaster Prevention and Assistance (DPAD) has requested support from United Nations Emergency Team (UNETE) to undertake joint rapid needs assessment missions. Four parallel missions are taking place (4-6 December 2008) to assess the humanitarian needs deriving from the floods: 2 in Chocó, 1 in La Mojana region and 1 in the Magdalena Medio region. In addition, UNICEF is joining efforts with OXFAM and Save the Children to ensure that children receive priority attention in the emergency in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene, education, health and nutrition and child protection. UNICEF has been active in the Magdalena Medio region in providing support through implementing partners, including the Catholic Church. These actions include implementation of psychosocial support strategy called Return to Happiness, birth registration activities, and the provision of hygiene kits and recreational supplies.

### **Health and Nutrition**

#### **Issues**

As indicated above, health and nutrition conditions already were complex before the flooding. Authorities have warned about the high risk of infections, diarrhoea and malnutrition. The provision of health services in the affected areas is practically non-existent, or has been severely affected by the emergency and the armed conflict. The National System for the Attention of Emergencies has allocated technical, logistic and financial resources to address the most urgent needs for water, food and shelter for the most affected population, including children. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) is delivering food rations and has assigned teams of experts to assist children and pregnant women affected by the rainy season. The Colombian Red Cross (CRC) has delivered emergency humanitarian aid for the affected population – comprising food and non- food items, mattresses blankets and mosquito nets, and other items. UNICEF is supporting local institutions with the transportation and logistics due to the high costs of transportation to distribute life-saving supplies in remote indigenous communities affected areas.

#### **Urgent Actions**

- Dispatch health and nutrition experts to support the National System for Disaster Prevention and Assistance at national, regional and local levels in the coordination of health and nutrition sectors

within the framework of the special needs of children, pregnant women and adolescents in emergencies

- Support the distribution of life-saving and critical relief supplies for primary health care of children (especially oral rehydration salts) procured by local institutions
- Strengthen the implementation of the IMCI strategy in affected communities
- Support a campaign promoting maternal breastfeeding and strengthening of social and community networks for their protection and support
- Provide operational and technical support for medical teams working in emergencies on children's health
- Promote community-level good practices for the attention of health and nutrition of children and pregnant women affected by the emergency
- Provide technical assistance to ensure effective cold chain management for vaccines
- Capacity development activities on sexual and reproductive health for personnel in charge of temporary shelters and for teachers and parents

## **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene**

### **Issues**

Water, sanitation and hygiene conditions have been seriously affected. Virtually no riverside community has safe drinking water, and the floods have worsened the original dire conditions in many places. Access to safe drinking water sources and a proper disposition of excreta, together with hygiene promotion, will be absolutely essential for saving lives. Working jointly with the National Emergency System, UNICEF will provide water solutions with filters, rehabilitation of damaged water systems and chemical purification units. Basic sanitation solutions will be implemented for families affected. Good hygiene practices will be promoted.

### **Urgent Actions**

- Coordinate with all the institutions in the emergency area
- Evaluate water and sanitation conditions. Verify the need and implementation of measures
- Provide supplies (filters) and water storage tanks
- Provide chemicals and water quality control equipment
- Rehabilitate community water supply systems
- Promote good hygiene practices through community leaders and youth volunteers
- Distribute personal hygiene kits
- Provide basic sanitation supplies

## **Education**

### **Issues**

Although the school year has ended and the following one will not begin until February 2009, most of the rural school infrastructure has been damaged by the flooding, or is currently being used as shelters. National authorities have promised to evacuate the schools being used as shelters before the first of February. However, it will be necessary to provide the schools and students with adequate materials for beginning the new school year. Temporary classrooms will be installed and schools will be repaired or supplied with materials, including school kits. In close collaboration with national and local authorities, UNICEF will facilitate the work of partners and participate in assessment missions to establish immediate priority educational interventions.

### **Urgent Actions**

- Coordinate the education sector at national and local level
- Provide technical tools and methodologies for teachers working in emergencies
- Provide school kits for children living in the areas most affected by the emergency
- Procure supplies for adequate temporary classrooms
- Provide supplies for rehabilitating schools
- Provide 15 school tents to be used as temporary classrooms

## Child Protection

### Issues

Practically all the Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities affected by the emergency live in areas heavily affected by the conflict and with the presence or control of armed actors. The conditions of vulnerability deriving directly from the flooding (increase of intra-family violence, exploitation, abuse and abandonment) are compounded by the risk of recruitment by illegal armed groups, which could increase significantly under the population's current living conditions.

Through its implementing partners, UNICEF will support child-friendly spaces and psychosocial recovery activities for children left homeless and displaced by the floods. Personnel trained in the "Retorno a la Alegría" (Return to Happiness) methodology will perform community psychosocial recreational therapy and train community agents and groups of youths.

### Urgent Actions

- Raise communities' awareness of the importance of psychosocial support activities, and advocate for child protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect
- Provide psychosocial support activities for children affected by the emergency through the child-to-child strategy
- Capacity development activities to personnel in charge of temporary shelters and for teachers and parents on the prevention of violence, sexual abuse, and maltreatment, and on sexual and reproductive health
- Training and provision of technical tools and methodologies for teachers and community leaders working in emergencies
- Provide recreation kits
- Support the activities of the Support Units of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute
- Identify and support unaccompanied children
- Establish child-friendly spaces where children can feel safe, play, and receive psychosocial support
- Guarantee birth registration of emergency-affected children through use of mobile Registry Office units

## Coordination and Logistics

### Issues

The consequences of the flood emergency have been aggravated by previous conditions deriving from internal armed conflict, especially in the Department of Chocó, the Mojana and the Magdalena Medio regions. The communities in these areas frequently are the victims of homicides, child recruitment and occupation of their communities by illegal armed groups. Access to food and transportation were already limited before the emergency. These conditions also complicate the response by national, regional or local authorities, who face security restrictions in their operations in many areas. UNICEF will place special emphasis on creating awareness of the need to prioritize attention for children in emergency situations and will support logistics to ensure that humanitarian relief reaches vulnerable populations, particularly indigenous and Afro-Colombians. Efforts will be made to strengthen emergency information systems to assess, monitor, report on, advocate and communicate on the situation of children and women.

### Urgent Actions

- Coordinate, monitor and/or support the nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and child protection sectors
- Provide logistical support to ensure the delivery of life-saving strategic supplies to remote communities
- Strengthen emergency information system to address the rights of children affected by the flooding emergencies

UNICEF will continue collaborating closely with the United Nations Emergency Team (UNETE) and the Inter- Agency Standing Committee (IASC) mission to keep abreast of needs and plan emergency response.

### 3. ESTIMATED FUNDING REQUIREMENTS FOR PLANNED ACTION FROM DECEMBER 2008 UNTIL MARCH 2009

In order to respond quickly and effectively, UNICEF is requesting US\$1,700,000 to meet the immediate needs of children and women throughout the affected areas for the coming four months. This emergency response will feed into the United Nations joint response plan as soon as it becomes available. Early funding will contribute not only to saving the lives of children affected by the emergency but also to supporting their psychosocial recovery. Where possible, the funds will be managed in a flexible way to effectively respond to the changing necessities of children affected by the flood emergency, cognizant that the rainy season will continue throughout the months of December and January.

**Table 1: Estimated funding requirements from December 2008 to March 2009\*\***

Sectors	Funds requested in US\$
Health and Nutrition	490,000
Water , Sanitation and Hygiene	620,000
Education	290,000
Child Protection	145,000
Coordination and Logistics	155,000
<b>Total *</b>	<b>1,700,000</b>

\* The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7%. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF's Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

\*\*Funds received against this appeal will be used to respond to both the immediate and medium-term needs of children and women as outlined above. If UNICEF should receive funds in excess of the medium-term funding requirements for this emergency, UNICEF will use those funds to support other, under-funded emergencies.

Further information on the UNICEF floods emergency programme in Colombia can be obtained from:

Paul Martin UNICEF Representative Bogotá Tel: +571 312 0090 Fax:+ 571 3210620 Email: <a href="mailto:pmartin@unicef.org">pmartin@unicef.org</a>	Dermot Carty UNICEF EMOPS Geneva Tel: + 41 22 909 5601 Fax: + 41 22 909 5902 E-mail: <a href="mailto:dcarty@unicef.org">dcarty@unicef.org</a>	Gary Stahl UNICEF PFO New York Tel: + 1-212 326 7009 Fax: + 1-212 326 7165 Email : <a href="mailto:gstahl@unicef.org">gstahl@unicef.org</a>
--	--	--