Asia and Pacific Region

From earthquakes to cyclones to monsoons, 89 per cent of people who suffered from natural disasters in 2009 lived in Asia. In Pakistan alone, 20 million people were affected in 2010 by flooding that submerged one-fifth of the country’s land area, prompting UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to state: “Their hardship is on a scale I have never seen before. Words cannot describe what I have seen, what I have felt while being in Pakistan. It requires a response to match.” UNICEF’s ability to bolster prevention, readiness and response is crucial to lessening the impact of crises when they occur. Every missed opportunity to prevent risks and mitigate the impact of natural hazards and every failure to respond effectively to emergencies of all kinds result in a ripple of life-altering consequences, diminishing survivors’ health, nutritional status, and access to education and adequate water and sanitation. What’s more, emergency conditions also heighten children’s risk of separation, exploitation and abuse.

There has been no shortage of complex emergencies in the region, notably the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as protracted humanitarian crises in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Security conditions for staff movement and the smooth implementation of programmes still remain a concern, in particular in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

UNICEF is requesting US$1.1 million in 2011 to continue its work on disaster risk reduction and on improving the delivery, speed and coordination of emergency programmes in a region characterized by increased frequency and intensity of disasters. Without regional and in-country capacity development aimed at prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response, the wellbeing and lives of millions of vulnerable women and children will continue to be threatened. It is imperative to strengthen country office capacities to provide basic services before, during and after emergencies.

In Humanitarian Action for Children 2011, the Asia and Pacific Shared Services Centre (APSSC) is seeking additional funds to address such predictable smaller-scale emergencies as the Mongolian dzud – a summer drought followed by extreme cold and heavy winter snow, typically forecast in advance, that devastates livestock.

In 2011, the APSSC will continue to provide technical support to UNICEF country offices for disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness and recovery in order to secure reliable access to essential services for women and children in line with the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs). Through its unique and innovative structure with specialists in the four cluster areas that UNICEF is leading globally – nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); education; and child protection – APSSC will continue to strengthen UNICEF’s capacity to deliver cluster accountability at the country office level. This will include establishing strategic partnerships; mapping capacity, and defining standards and protocols; building the capacity of cluster members, including government counterparts; and strengthening inter-cluster collaboration. As a member of the regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee network, APSSC will further advocate for agencies to have a focus on children and other vulnerable groups.

UNICEF is currently scaling up its involvement in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the region. APSSC has recently employed a new Senior Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist to ensure that reducing risk gets prioritized and mainstreamed into the emergency response, early recovery and development efforts of the organization.

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN AND WOMEN

Disasters triggered by natural hazards in Asia-Pacific in 2010 included earthquakes in Afghanistan and China and a category four cyclone in Fiji and Solomon Islands.
In Mongolia, heavy snow during the slow-onset *dzud* disrupted road transportation and hindered access to basic services, which was a concern for pregnant women, the elderly and vulnerable children. In addition, *dzud* led to a loss of an estimated 8.5 million heads of livestock.

Flooding and torrential rains during the cyclone and monsoon season were particularly fierce in 10 countries, but especially in Pakistan, where four provinces – Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Punjab and Sindh with a total land area of the size of Italy – were deluged. Existing vulnerabilities worsened in Pakistan, including children at risk of separation, abuse and exploitation. Roughly half of nursing mothers reduced their breastfeeding and about 15 per cent stopped entirely, citing in part lack of privacy.

Security concerns for staff movement remain. In areas of Afghanistan previously perceived as relatively safe, humanitarian workers are being increasingly targeted. In Sri Lanka, there are still 580,000 internally displaced persons and more than 100,000 in Mindanao in the Philippines. The numerous disasters threaten the countries’ prospects of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and require interventions ranging from early recovery and disaster risk reduction to climate change adaptation and, ultimately, sustainable development.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2010**

In 2010, UNICEF estimated that US$1.9 million was needed to fund its humanitarian coordination and technical support work in the Asia and Pacific region. As of October 2010, a total of US$987,637 had been received, representing 52 per cent of the goal. Through UNICEF’s Asia and Pacific Shared Services Centre, preparedness activities were strengthened in 13 out of 22 country offices during the yearly monsoon and cyclone season. During the flooding in Pakistan, APSSC provided massive surge capacity for a prolonged period, sending the regional emergency adviser as well as senior nutrition, education and WASH emer-
UNICEF's priority remains strengthening the ability of all 22 country offices in the region to prevent, mitigate, prepare for and respond to emergencies affecting women and children. Working with regional partners, the Asia and Pacific Shared Services Centre will focus on mobilization of resources for prevention and preparedness as well as swift mobilization of resources for emergency response, ranging from supplies to financial support to aid workers. Training and development of in-country capacity for risk assessments, emergency preparedness and humanitarian response, in line with the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and the wider framework of UN humanitarian reform, will also be a priority.
TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO UNICEF PROGRAMMING IN EMERGENCIES (US$500,000)

APSSC will continue to support UNICEF’s ability to help nations prepare for and react to a range of disasters in the region caused by natural hazards and complex emergencies. APSSC will:

- Review and update preparedness activities of the country offices, in line with the CCCs, and ensure their inclusion into UNICEF programming and management tools such as Annual/Rolling Work Plans, Annual Management Plans and/or new country programme documents.
- Enhance Government, partner and UNICEF staff capacity on the revised Core Commitments for Children and develop performance indicators through in-country training initiatives, including simulations.
- At the onset of emergencies, provide support and/or facilitation and advice about access to financial and human resources as well as supplies to ensure a coordinated and results-based response.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO UNICEF CLUSTER LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY (US$400,000)

With senior specialists in all four clusters areas – WASH, nutrition, education and child protection – APSSC will continue to help UNICEF country offices fulfil their Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster leadership and accountability requirements, as laid out in the CCCs. APSSC will:

- Advise country offices on how to set up effective management processes, including new lines of accountability for enhanced cluster leadership, inter-cluster and inter-agency networking and cluster focused contingency planning.
- Strengthen the capacity of UNICEF offices, counterparts and cluster members through the development and adoption of tools, including national and regional training initiatives such as the inter-cluster consultation planned in March 2011, intending to build on the ‘accountabilities framework’ and related ‘roles and responsibilities matrix’ as devised at the global accountabilities workshop in 2009.
- At the onset of an emergency, support UNICEF country offices in identifying timely and adequate human resources and provide advice on coordination strategies.
- As a member of the regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee network, advocate for agencies to have a special focus on children and vulnerable groups and also encourage inter-agency joint initiatives.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (US$200,000)

Considering the frequency and intensity of natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region and the trend of more extreme events in the future due to demographic changes, haphazard development, poor environmental management and climate change, the Asia and Pacific Shared Services Centre is well situated to address future risk reduction challenges. Going forward, interventions will focus on building the resilience of countries, regions and cities by identifying and assessing disaster risks, reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing capacities across all UNICEF thematic areas (e.g., education, WASH, health, nutrition, HIV and AIDS, and child protection). APSSC will:

Introduce disaster risk reduction to UNICEF country offices across the region by facilitating introductory sessions, providing technical support and reviewing Common Country Assessments, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and UNICEF country programmes.

- Promote comprehensive risk assessments in hazard-prone regions of member countries to target UNICEF’s community-based and child-focused disaster risk reduction interventions.
- Develop technical guidance on how to undertake systematic vulnerability/capacity assessments to integrate disaster risk reduction across all UNICEF thematic areas.
- Support the development of specific disaster-risk-reduction action plans and seek integration of climate change adaptation and disaster-risk management approaches.
- Support the organization of a regional knowledge network focusing on challenges and lessons to be learned from promoting country-specific legal, institutional and participatory arrangements for addressing disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.