

UNICEF ACTION IN GAZA

Update as of 27 July 2006

BACKGROUND

The situation in Gaza has remained precarious long before the current crisis in the Gaza Strip. Gaza was on the brink of a humanitarian disaster just recently and now is experiencing a humanitarian crisis that is having a severe impact on its population. The current situation is therefore unbelievable stressful for the Palestinians.

Public services, private sector and households all across the Gaza strip are experiencing major disruptions as a result of the incursions, closures, shortages of electricity, fuel and water. The health sector does not receive the steady supplies of fuel and electricity needed to store and transport safely vaccine and drugs, and for operating primary health care facilities. The lack of electricity and fuel is affecting water and sanitation as water distribution to households is being rationed; waste water treatment and disposal do not function properly. Municipal services too are affected by the lack of power and cannot process solid waste. As a result, there are concerns about public health due to the accumulated garbage and the risks of flooding of the sewage network.

Children are living in an environment of extraordinary violence and insecurity. Since January 2006, 63 children have died due to the conflict. Alone during the month of July, 33 children have died. The ongoing conflict is hurting children psychologically. Caregivers say children are worried and are showing signs of distress such as nightmares and fears. When playing outside children do not feel safe. UNICEF-supported counseling teams report a large increase in the number of requests for psychosocial assistance.

These new challenges arise in a context of increasing poverty, where 70% of the Gaza population is already unable to cover their daily food needs without assistance, and government employees, including workers in the health, education and social sector, have not been paid for 5 months.

ISSUES

Health and Nutrition

Gaza health system has been hard hit by water and electricity rationing resulting from the current crisis. All hospitals and 50 % of Primary Health Care (PHC) facilities in Gaza Strip operate now with generators, substantially increasing maintenance and fuel costs. Vaccines have had to be transferred from facilities without generators to the nearest facilities with generators. The added cost of fuel, generators and maintenance will significantly affect the Ministry of Health's budget over the coming months.

Central stocks of critical medicines, supplies and equipment were already low prior to the crisis and are now at critical levels. WHO estimates that 23 per cent of the essential drugs list will be out of stock within one month. This situation impacts negatively on all services including PHC facilities, neonatal units and mobile health clinics, undermining health care delivery to the children.

Child nutritional status is threatened by household poverty, restrictions imposed on the movement of food products and the fishing industry. It could deteriorates rapidly and go beyond the 11% of children currently stunted in Gaza. There are concerns about food safety resulting from power cuts and their effect on refrigerators at household, corner shop and industrial levels.

Water and Sanitation

Most of the 120 water wells, the 33 sewage pump stations and the 3 waste water treatment plants managed by the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) were powered through the power station destroyed by the Israeli Air Force (IAF) on 28 June 2006. Generators are being relied upon to power water wells and the pump stations. With 920,000 liters of fuel required for the back-up generators to power regular water supplies, pump stations and wastewater treatment plants daily, CMWU is concerned about the long-term costs of fuel, maintenance of such a large number of generators and obtaining spare parts. The CMWU is lacking the equipment and materials to repair damages to pipe networks as well as chemicals including chlorine.

A rotation mechanism is in place and access to water is restricted to a few hours per day. People living in higher floors face difficulties in getting water up to their apartments, thus making life more difficult for large families with young children, disabled people and the elderly.

The lack of electricity is also affecting the waste water treatment and disposal. None of the 3 treatment plants is functioning; raw sewage is pumped directly into the sea and most municipalities are unable to process solid waste which accumulates in the streets. This situation raises serious public health concerns and exposes the population to risks related to insects, rodents and the pollution of the aquifer, the seashore and marine life.

Communities living in combat areas, especially in the South near Rafah town and in the North, around Bet Lahia and Bet Hanoun have been repeatedly unable to access and maintain their wells and saw their water tanks and pipelines destroyed during the fighting. Disruptions in water and sanitation services have increased the risk of communicable disease. According to WHO intra-hospital infections among infants and children have already increased and there has been an indication that diarrhoeal diseases are on the increase in villages.

Child Protection and Adolescents

The ongoing fighting is hurting children psychologically. Caregivers say children are showing signs of acute stress, due in particular to shelling and aircraft sonic booms (more than 25 since 28 June). This is particularly true of communities living in combat areas in the South near Rafah town and in the North, around Bet Lahia and Bet Hanoun. UNICEF-supported child protection teams are reporting a large increase in the number of requests for assistance e.g. the psychosocial centre recently opened in Khan Younis reported 7 cases in May, 45 cases in June and 150 cases as of 20 July. These numbers are expected to increase significantly over the coming weeks.

An increased stress level among children is prompting negative behavioral change, which is having a negative impact on family and social life. It also undermines children's ability to concentrate and to learn thus jeopardizing their education. A high proportion of adolescents are 2 or 3 levels below their normal grade and end up dropping out of school to early marriage for the girls or unskilled labor for the boys. Yet adolescents who have frequently been in the direct line of violence have the most need for opportunities to acquire skills that will enable them to develop into productive citizens.

The current level of violence also affects social service delivery e.g. on 5th July a UNICEF supported child protection team visiting families near Rafah area came under fire from the Israeli forces and had to withdraw to avoid injuries. Families are afraid of sending children outdoor due to the level of violence. In some cases there is 50% decrease in the number of children attending UNICEF-supported safe play areas e.g. Brazil camp in Rafah. NGOs and the Ministry of Education are extremely concerned about the idea of gathering children and adolescents in one place, which may further expose them to shelling and shootings. Most summer recreational and remedial activities are put on hold, robbing children of the few chances they have to play and engage with their peers. Of the 60 summer camps planned this summer in Gaza, (compared to

200 in previous years), only 10 is taking place, again depriving more than 7,500 children of such recreational opportunities. Moreover the few existing youth clubs that cater for the large, vulnerable and volatile adolescent population, lack funding, and are poorly managed and equipped.

Children also suffer directly from the conflict. Since 27 June, 29 children were killed and 79 were injured in the Gaza Strip (Source: MOH). In addition they are being exposed to unexploded ordnances (UXOs), landmines and small arms increasing the risk of death and injury in particular along the border lines and in zones that are close to military and settlement areas.

Education

Although the current crisis does not yet directly affect school education, as the new school year does not start before 1 September, a number of issues however, undermine the sector.

Numerous recreational, cultural, sport and remedial activities, an integral part of education, have had to be cancelled due to the non-availability of funds and the current level of violence. The morale of Teachers is very low, having been without salaries for five months, thus making it difficult to find volunteers to organize children's' activities in schools and communities.

With continued incursions and random closures, it is likely that some children will not return to school on time and those who will return might not be able to afford education supplies. Appeals from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) for donors to support its school uniform initiative have not been successful to this date. The return of teachers to teaching remains in doubt as there is a lot of uncertainty as to when salaries will be paid.

Finally most of the teachers' training programmes have had to be put on hold or cancelled since committed funds became unavailable as a result of the conditions and restrictions imposed on the Palestinian Authority, with a direct impact on the quality of teaching.

UNICEF Action in Gaza

UNICEF activities In Gaza are undertaken as part of the 2006-2007 Country Programme programme which has a four-pronged approach to achieving its goal of contributing towards the realization of the rights of Palestinian children to survival, development, protection and participation as well as part of the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) which focuses mainly of humanitarian interventions based on the joint UN Needs Assessment Framework. The action is carefully coordinated with other UN agencies, including OCHA, UNRWA, UNDP, WFP, UNFPA, WHO, UNESCO to name a few, as well as non-governmental organization working in the same sectors. Frequent coordination meetings are organized in Gaza and Jerusalem accordingly.

Health

UNICEF provides all vaccines for children in Gaza. Beside the burden of the vaccine preventable diseases, infectious diseases like pneumonia, meningitis, account for about one fifth of the infant and under-five deaths, as well as for the burden of disease in young children. Most of them may be prevented through the administration of new vaccines like Haemophilus influenzae type B. In this respect, the newly added Hib vaccine has been procured and training has been conducted for MoH and UNRWA staff.

In response to the shortage of drugs crisis essential drugs for children under 5 years of age are being provided in partnership with other donors, including those needed for newborn children. 650 UNICEF baby hygiene kits and 300 family hygiene kits have been distributed to families affected by the recent incursions.

Given the importance of ensuring a continuous functioning cold chain system during times of limited or no electricity, UNICEF has supported selected PHCs with 3 generators and another 5 is being procured. We continue to assist the Ministry of Health (MoH) in monitoring and maintaining the cold chain system in order to identify and address any major breakdown in a timely manner. .

Within the framework of boosting action to improve newborn care package, 7 governmental hospitals will be upgraded through the provision of the basic supplies, equipment, and training of the paediatricians, physicians, midwives and nurses. Furthermore, 56 PHC facilities will be upgraded with equipment and staff will receive training on Integrated Management of Child Illnesses.

While a training programme for MoH and Ministry of National Economy staff on implementing, monitoring and testing of salt iodization (SI) and flour fortification (FF) processes took place recently in Gaza, an awareness raising campaign on these subjects will be launched.

Water and Sanitation

UNICEF intervention in the water and sanitation sector has been significantly scaled up recently. 566 UNICEF family water kits (for 10 families each) were distributed to affected communities or pre-positioned in coordination with local authorities. A total of 5 water tankers will be provided to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) to enable them to reach neighborhoods whose water network has been damaged. In response to concerns regarding the aquifer, UNICEF will support digging/rehabilitating, connecting and equipping 4-5 water wells to serve the most needy communities and essential facilities in Gaza governorates.

Following the destruction of Gaza's only power plant and its impact on water and waste water infrastructure, and to ensure a continued monitoring of water quality, UNICEF is procuring 25 water testing kits for the use by municipalities and MoH. Finally, an awareness raising campaign on hygiene, food and water preservation, targeting the population most at risk, will be launched in partnership with the Department of Health Education.

Education

UNICEF together with MoEHE, other UN agencies and partners are preparing a major Back-to-School campaign. The goal is to support students, teachers, and strengthen the education system so as to welcome children back into a quality learning environment when schools reopen in September. Children will receive school supplies, school bags and teacher will have at hand teaching kits (math and science), recreation kits. Children in the age group 6-14 from poor families will receive uniforms and shoes. In addition, a social advocacy campaign to draw support for education in the local community through the TV, local radios and newspapers, is about to be launched.

At this point, 888 recreational and school in a box and 45 sport equipment kits are already pre-positioned with counterparts throughout for this purpose. 50,000 school bags with stationery, math and science kits for about 200 schools is ready and 50,000 remedial education worksheets (math, science, Arabic and English) will be distributed to children before the start of the new academic year 1,000 teachers will receive training on the use of teaching kits. Extra-curricular activities such as thematic club will be introduced for selected schools as a complimentary approach to the psychosocial programme in schools. Furthermore, teachers will be trained on child-friendly school concepts to improve the learning environment in 30 schools. A Gaza Teacher Education Centre will be equipped and start functioning before the end of the year.

Part of UNICEF's emergency response to the Gaza crisis consists of supporting recreational activities that contribute to the overall educational achievements of children in partnership with NGOs and the MoEHE. Beyond summer activities offering creative reading and writing to about 300 children scheduled for July in the North, UNICEF will also cover the costs of summer recreational activities reaching about 4,000 children in the hardest hit areas of Gaza Strip. In a child friendly environment, children will be offered a range of activities under the supervision of facilitators, including theater, drawing and sports. Further than the recreational and educational facets of these activities, they also aim at allowing children to express and process the trauma and fear caused by the military operations they have witnessed.

Child Protection

At this time UNICEF supports five child protection teams (about 20 people each) that offer group counseling and home visits/individual counseling to children in acute distress, immediately after the occurrence of violent events. They reach approximately 3,000 children and 2,000 caregivers on a monthly basis. Addressing the increasing demand and complementing the work of the teams, a toll free line and 20 outreach/community psychosocial centres provide similar services as well as referral. In view of the recent crisis, UNICEF will support its counterpart to increase number of members in these teams so as to reach an additional 10,000 children and parents per month. 100 indoor recreational kits are pre-positioned with counterparts so that they can be distributed when families are confined at home. Moreover summer festivals will provide 25,000 children with opportunities to vent stress and engage with their peers in sports, artistic and cultural activities.

UNICEF also intends to cover the costs of coordination, transport and training of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOA) protection network in Gaza city to strengthen its capacity to identify children in need of protection and link up with the health, education and judicial sectors. Besides, sensitization sessions for 2,000 parents of school children will equip them with skills on how to better protect their children against violence. Along these lines, and convinced of the role children play in their own protection and in raising awareness amongst their peers, UNICEF has supported the establishment of a group of children in each of the 5 governorates who will be trained on child rights, and protection from abuse, violence and exploitation. Each group will then design a campaign in its own community around the issue of violence against children.

UNICEF oPt and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) have designed a Mine Risk Education (MRE) campaign including games and printed material to be distributed in summer camps and on open days for

children and their families, as well as TV and radio spots. While volunteers from the PRCS have been trained on Mine Risk Education and have already reached more than 800 children in high risk areas of Gaza Strip since April 2006, the project intends to reach a total of 25,000 children (aged 7-12) and their families.

Adolescents

Addressing the lack of opportunities available to this age group, UNICEF has fostered the creation of six youth clubs and two adolescent-friendly learning spaces. While the former will ultimately benefit 12,000 children, the latter will receive appropriate equipment and have staff trained on a range of issues (IT, sports, life skills, cultural activities, management and administration...), equipping them to reach 800 adolescents directly and about 10,000 indirectly. In addition, indoor play activities takes place regularly through trained animators from community-based organizations (CBOs) reaching around 6,000 children monthly.

112 UNICEF indoor recreational kits have been distributed to families in Bet Lahia and Bet Hanoun areas while 100 UNICEF indoor recreational kits are pre-positioned with Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) and ready to be distributed to beneficiaries as the needs arise. 500 more of these kits are being procured at the moment to be pre-positioned so as to strengthen communities' resilience and enable adolescents to cope better with future crises.

Also, UNICEF will support a trained team of university students in each governorate to provide peer support to 3,000 adolescents under the supervision of professionals from the psychosocial sector. Sessions will target adolescents who have directly suffered from the on-going conflict, psychologically and physically. Moreover, 12 TV interactive episodes on life skills will be produced and an existing toll free line will be promoted.

BUDGET

UNICEF's 2006 CAP requirement for West Bank and Gaza is US\$22.7 million out of which US\$13.8 million could be considered for Gaza.. In addition, the UNICEF regular programme for West Bank and Gaza amounts to US\$ 11.5 million, out of which US\$4.3 million is for Gaza. The breakdown of the two programmes is as follows:

PROGRAMME		Other Resources Regular	Other Resources Emergency	Total
A.	Child Survival, Growth & Development	1,250,000	7,488,000	8,738,000
B.	Universal Primary Education	1,000,000	3,267,000	4,267,000
C.	Child Protection	500,000	1,798,357	2,298,357
D.	Development and Participation of Adolescents	775,000	1,250,048	2,025,048
E.	Advocacy, Communication, Social Policy, PM&E	600,000	0	600,000
F.	Cross-Sectoral	165,000	0	165,000
Grand Total		US\$4,290,000	US\$13,803,405	US\$18,093,405