

Media Update

8 November 2022

UNICEF

SUMMARY

This is a summary of what was said by UNICEF’s Director of the Division of Global Communication and Advocacy, Paloma Escudero – to whom quoted text may be attributed – on the climate crisis, record flooding and what must happen for children at COP27

8Nov Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

“Good morning from the COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh. UNICEF is here working with youth climate activists from around the world to spotlight the impact of the climate crisis on the poorest children.

“According to a UNICEF analysis released today, 27.7 million children in 27 countries have been impacted by flooding so far this year, just in 2022 and counting.

“In Chad, the Gambia and north-east Bangladesh the worst floods in a GENERATION were recorded this year. For Pakistan, the floods were the worst on record.

“These rolling disasters are straining the ability of governments and the international community to respond at the enormous scale needed. And placing millions of children as we speak TODAY at severe risk of starvation, disease, exploitation and death.

“I saw this myself last week when I was in Pakistan visiting the worst-affected areas. There, 11 million children are in need of immediate assistance.

“In Larkana, I met a 15-year-old girl called Sugrah, who showed me the rubble of her beloved home. Two months earlier, as floodwater seeped into her house, the roof above her began to collapse.

“Terrified, she grabbed her younger brothers and sisters and fled to a nearby bypass, where they lived for weeks in a makeshift tent made of plastic bags and sticks.

“But Sugrah was lucky. In a village where the flood water reached 5 feet, or 1.5 meters, villagers told us that not all the children who tried flee made it.

“Now consider Sugrah’s story, but multiply it by the highest factor.

“In the weeks since the unprecedented floods devastated Pakistan, the emergency has become a multi-headed monster.

“Pakistan’s worst floods in 100 years have killed at least 615 children, and left 10 million girls and boys needing immediate, lifesaving support.

“The floods have contaminated drinking water, which is spawning deadly water-borne diseases such as acute watery diarrhea, which compounds already acute malnutrition. Estimates suggest close to 1.6 million children in flood areas could be suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

“The stagnant water is a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes, increasing the risk of malaria and dengue. There are crises on top of crises.

“Without urgent action, many more vulnerable children and young people will lose their lives in the days and weeks to come. And without climate action, hundreds of millions more will almost certainly suffer like those in Pakistan.

“We are reaching final warnings. Right now Pakistan is drowning in the world’s inaction.

“One of the most important but heartbreaking things about climate change is that its most horrific impacts are often reserved for those who are least responsible for creating the problem.

“International climate scientists found the recent Pakistan floods were made worse by climate change, and predicted the intensity of the country’s rainfall will “significantly” increase as the planet continues to warm. Pakistan is on the

frontlines of the climate crisis but its contribution to global emissions is less than 1 percent.

“In Africa, just like in Pakistan, children are paying the price for a climate disaster not of their making.

“From the extreme drought and risk of famine in Somalia to the erratic rains across the Sahel, UNICEF is being challenged to respond at an unprecedented scale to emergencies that have all the markings of climate-induced disasters.

“So, today, from the floor of COP27, UNICEF challenges world leaders to also respond at an unprecedented scale.

“PREVENTING - governments and big business must prevent a climate catastrophe by rapidly reducing emissions.

“PROTECTING - UNICEF urges leaders to take immediate action to protect children from climate devastation by adapting the critical social services they rely on.

“PREPARING – prepare children for the changing world by educating them on climate change, teaching them how to respond to disasters and equipping them with green skills for future jobs.

“PRIORITISING - Last year, developed countries agreed to double support for adaptation to \$40 billion a year by 2025. At COP27, they must present a credible roadmap with clear milestones on how this will be funded, as a step to delivering at least \$300bn per year for adaptation by 2030. At least half of all climate finance should flow towards adaptation and children should be PRIORITISED in these decisions.

“And, let us remember, communities can only adapt to so much. UNICEF also urges world leaders to agree immediate funding for the children who are facing, and will face, irreversible climate losses and damages. Governments MUST close the finance gap for addressing loss and damage at COP27.

“Decisions about climate change – including in these halls – need to be inclusive, especially of young people from the most-affected places. But let’s also be clear: We don’t need young people to keep raising the alarm; we need people with power to start acting.

“Alternatively, if discussions continue to dominate over deeds, then the catastrophe for the children of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Chad, Nigeria and so many others, will be nothing compared to what is to come.

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FACT SHEET

Over 27 million children at risk as devastating floods set records across the world.

Number of children affected by flooding in Chad, Gambia, Pakistan and north-east Bangladesh highest in over 30 years

SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt/GENEVA/NEW YORK, 8 November 2022 - As COP27 gets underway in Egypt, UNICEF warns this year has brought overwhelming flooding to at least 27.7 million children in 27 countries worldwide.

A large majority of the 27.7 million children* affected by flooding in 2022 are among the most vulnerable and are at high risk of a multitude of threats including death by drowning, disease outbreaks, lack of safe drinking water, malnutrition, disruption in learning, and violence.

“We are seeing unprecedented levels of flooding all around the world this year, and with it, an explosion in threats to children,” said Paloma Escudero, head of the UNICEF delegation for COP27. “The climate crisis is here. In many places, the flooding is the worst it has been in a generation, or several. Our children are already suffering at a scale their parents never did.”

The aftermath of floods is often more deadly for children than the extreme weather events that caused the flooding. In 2022, floods have contributed to the increased spread of major killers of children, such as malnutrition, malaria, cholera and diarrhea:

- In Pakistan, more than 1 in 9 children under five admitted to health facilities in flood-affected areas of Sindh and Balochistan were found to be suffering from severe acute malnutrition.
- In Chad, 465,030 hectares of farmland were destroyed, worsening the already dire food insecurity situation.
- In Malawi, torrential rains and flooding by tropical storm Ana in January 2022 caused extensive damage to water and sanitation systems, which created the perfect conditions for a cholera outbreak. The outbreak has claimed the lives of 203 people, out of which 28 are children. To date, 1,631 children have been infected with cholera.
- Together with other climate shocks and conflict, floods have caused the projected number of children in South Sudan facing high levels of food insecurity to surpass the rates seen during the conflict in 2013 and 2016. Additionally, the United Nations recently warned that some communities are likely to face starvation if humanitarian assistance is not sustained and climate adaptation measures are not scaled-up.

In addition to threatening the lives of millions of children, the flood waters have disrupted essential services and displaced countless families:

- The recent floods in Pakistan damaged or destroyed nearly 27,000 school buildings, forcing 2 million children to miss school.
- In South Sudan, 95 UNICEF supported nutrition sites have been affected by floods, hampering the delivery of life-saving and preventative malnutrition services for 92,000 children.
- An estimated 840,000 children were displaced by floods in Nigeria in recent months.
- Heavy rains and flooding in Yemen triggered floods causing extensive damage to shelters in displacement sites. Up to 73,854 households were affected, and 24,000 households were displaced.

“COP27 provides an opportunity to chart a credible roadmap with clear milestones for finance for climate adaptation and solutions for loss and damage,” said Paloma Escudero. “Young people from the most affected places on Earth are drowning in climate inaction. Enough is enough. Lives are on the line – children need action now.”

As well as pressing governments and big business to rapidly reduce emissions, UNICEF urges leaders to take immediate action to protect children from climate devastation by adapting the critical social services they rely on. Adaptation measures, like creating water, health and education systems that stand up to flooding and drought, will save lives.

Last year, developed countries agreed to double support for adaptation to \$40 billion a year by 2025. At COP27, they must present a credible roadmap with clear milestones on how this will be delivered, as a step to delivering at least \$300bn per year for adaptation by 2030. At least half of all climate finance should flow towards adaptation.

UNICEF also urges parties to find solutions to support those who will face climate losses and damages beyond the limits of what communities can adapt to. UNICEF is calling on governments to close the finance gap for addressing these irreversible changes for children.

AT COP27, UNICEF CALLS ON ALL PARTIES TO:

1. PREVENT. Revisit their national climate plans to cut emissions drastically and urgently to prevent a climate catastrophe.
2. PROTECT. Secure clear action on adaptation that protects every child from the accelerating impacts of climate change through the Global Stocktake and Global Goal on Adaptation
3. PREPARE. Advance climate change education and meaningful participation to prepare children and youth through the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) Action Plan
4. PRIORITIZE. children and youth by accelerating climate finance investment in climate-resilient social services that reach the most at-risk children, and unlock progress on loss and damage
5. Commit to child-sensitive climate action by aligning with and operationalizing the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action

UNICEF's immediate humanitarian response to flood affected countries is wide-ranging across all sectors: health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection, and education. A lack of funding, however, has hampered the response in many countries. For instance, the funding gap for the humanitarian response in Pakistan currently stands at 85 per cent.

UNICEF is working to strengthen resilience of communities and health infrastructure to withstand disaster-related hazards, and increasingly linking our work on humanitarian response and longer-term climate adaptation.

Notes to editors:

* For this analysis, which is the first of its kind, UNICEF utilized official numbers collected by government emergency agencies or the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In some countries, disaggregated data for children affected by floods was available. In countries with no disaggregated data, UNICEF estimated the number of children affected by flooding by extrapolating the percentage of children in the national population.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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