

Three Months On:

Save the Children's Flood Relief and Recovery for Children in Pakistan

October 28, 2010

The Worst Disaster in Pakistan's History

Pakistan's monsoon rains began in July 2010, just as they have in years past. But this year, the torrential waters soon spilled over riverbeds, swept away villages and farms and cut a swath of destruction through an area the size of England. The waters engulfed thousands of communities and isolated many others, taking 1,600 lives and continuing to affect 20 million people, 10 million of them children. The massive scale of the crisis and destruction of roads and bridges have complicated relief efforts. Save the Children, which has provided assistance to more than 1,698,000 children and adults over the last three months, warns that only a fraction of people who fled the rising waters and lost their homes have received emergency relief. According to the United Nations, at least 7 million people remain without shelter in the flood-affected areas.



"We have floods every year but they are small and don't cause any damage. So we kept waiting, expecting it (the water) to stop. But soon it reached my house. So we took everything we could carry and left. When we came back in the morning, our house had completely disappeared. We escaped with our lives. Everything else was swept away." Gulnaz, age 11, Swat Valley. Photo: Save the Children Staff

Overview of Save the Children's Emergency Response



Two boys wait on line to register their families for shelter supplies. Photo: Jason Tanner

Save the Children, working in cooperation with local, regional and national government agencies in Pakistan and with the support of our global donor family, has delivered assistance to more than 1,698,000 flood-affected people in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. With support from generous donors worldwide, we are delivering emergency health care, treatment for acute malnutrition, distributing food in cooperation with the World Food Programme, providing homeless and displaced families with tents and shelter materials, distributing family health and hygiene supplies, and addressing children's emotional needs through child-friendly spaces, which offer them supervised activities in safe places. Still, children and families are now threatened by

outbreaks of cholera, dengue fever and other communicable diseases that fester in the contaminated water and poor conditions in the camps.

For 30 years, Save the Children has invested in education, health care, nutrition, protection and livelihoods for children and families in Pakistan. We have risen to the challenges of emergency response in previous natural disasters, including critical assistance following Pakistan's devastating earthquake in 2005. With staff in position and the capacity to mount large-scale humanitarian programs, the agency launched relief efforts to meet this latest disaster as soon as the floodwaters began to rise.



Boys play with a puzzle at a child-friendly space in the Swat Valley.” I was so scared I cried. The adults cried too,” Raheel (at right) said, describing the days when the river flooded. All the children here are one way or another affected by the floods. Photo: Kristina Granquist

The Flood’s Impact on Children

The impact of the floods on Pakistan’s children cannot be overstated. Now three months into this evolving natural disaster, an estimated 10 million children have been affected – some 2.8 million under age 5. Lack of access to health services for children and pregnant and lactating mothers continues to be a critical concern. According to the UN’s health cluster, basic health services, even those in areas available outside the flood plain, have been overwhelmed. With nearly 8,000 schools out of use – either damaged or taken over as makeshift settlements for displaced families – the future education of school-age children is an added concern. It may be a long time before they can return to class.

The Evolving Demands of the Crisis

As floodwaters recede region by region, Save the Children’s disaster relief response is shaped accordingly. In Punjab, most of the 8.2 million people displaced during the first two months of flooding have left the camps. However, in the worst-affected areas of Balochistan and Sindh, 1 million displaced people still remain in temporary shelters, and relief assistance will be necessary for some time to come.



Halima, 3 months old, is carried through the water as her family struggles to return home through inundated areas in Sindh province. As the flood waters slowly recede, many families are attempting to make the journey home — most with no food, no water and few belongings. Their children are dehydrated, hungry and suffering from diarrheal diseases. They travel long distances on foot over destroyed train tracks, wade through chest-deep water and finally board wagons pulled by tractors for the last stretch of their journey. As the vehicles pull them across the flooded plains, they survey the destruction that drove them from their homes. Photo: Colin Crowley

AS THE FLOODWATERS RECEDE: OUR RESPONSES FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

Shelter and Non-Food Items

Save the Children has provided more than 43,345 families (346,760 people) with tents or shelter kits for temporary housing, and non-food items including household kits, which enable families to prepare food, and hygiene kits to prevent disease and keep their shelter and surroundings safe and healthy.

Food

In collaboration with the World Food Programme, Save the Children continues to provide food assistance to children and families. To date, we have reached 106,433 families (851,464 people), distributing over 22,000 metric tons of food in flood-affected districts. Due to the increasing threat of malnutrition among young children, Save the Children is also providing a blanket supplementary food ration with peanut-based, ready-to-use supplementary food to prevent the rise of acute malnutrition.

Water and Sanitation

From the start, lack of clean water has undermined the health of flood survivors. Rivers and wells are polluted with sewage and run-off debris, and sanitation facilities are virtually nonexistent – ideal conditions for the spread of waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, a major killer of young children.

Save the Children has taken aggressive actions to prevent outbreaks of disease by distributing hygiene kits and conducting hygiene awareness sessions. The water and sanitation team has installed hand pumps and tube wells to improve local water supplies and provided families with water purification tablets for drinking water. Constructing latrines and washrooms, particularly near clinics and child-friendly spaces, is yet another strategy for preventing the spread of disease.

Health and Nutrition



Four-year-old Khaista is examined by a doctor for a fever and cough. Her mother says she had been playing in contaminated water. At this Save the Children-supported clinic in the Swat Valley, each day the doctor sees about 50 people with flood and water-related illnesses, including diarrhea, skin diseases, dehydration and upper respiratory infections. Children are at increasing risk from these illnesses and from malnutrition which makes children even more vulnerable to life-threatening illnesses. Photo: Jason Tanner

For millions of young children, this natural disaster has evolved into a child survival crisis. The floods damaged or destroyed more than 450 health facilities, limiting services in areas where access to health care was already a challenge. Save the Children has delivered health care to over 300,000 people through 58 mobile health units, four diarrhea treatment centers and 54 existing health facilities across our focus provinces.

Save the Children is supporting the revitalization of existing health care facilities by providing medicines and medical supplies, placing medical staff and supporting outreach activities and ambulance services. We also are helping to prevent malaria through the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets, and educating families on the appropriate use of the bed nets.

As part of the health and nutrition response, Save the Children has begun specialized nutrition treatment programs to address the growing rates of acute malnutrition in children, a condition that can quickly become life-threatening. Through mobile and

fixed clinics, the organization has provided lifesaving care to more than 306,000 children and adults, treating illnesses such as malaria and pneumonia, common causes of death among children. It also is installing hand pumps, latrines and clean water points — all critical to survival and mitigating the spread of disease.

Child Protection

Save the Children has established 153 child-friendly spaces (CFS), with 11,024 children (5,233 girls and 5,791 boys) registered in the last week. In all, a total 78,834 children have participated in supervised play and learning activities at a child-friendly space. A CFS allows children to get back to the routines of childhood, which is critical to their recovery. The space also provides a protective environment for children while their parents work to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Education

An estimated 8,000 schools have been affected, either damaged by the floods or taken over as shelters for homeless families. Save the Children has established 66 temporary learning spaces, trained more than 1,900 teachers and conducted over 300 health and hygiene sessions for children and communities. Over the coming months, Save the Children will reconstruct and refurbish more than 200 schools, provide school supplies and mobilize and train Parent Teacher Councils.

Livelihoods

The Pakistan government estimates that 17 million acres were under water, sweeping away farmland and crops and destroying livestock. The next planting will be harvested in April, but only if the land is cultivated in the next few weeks. Farmers have no resources to buy seeds and fertilizers, so restoring

livelihoods and food security in affected communities is a top priority. Save the Children is providing seeds and tools for agriculture and kitchen gardens, and help to vaccinate livestock against disease.

Save the Children is also distributing food vouchers to extremely vulnerable female-headed households, reaching 18,500 families already, and will continue to address the immediate food needs of another 62,500 flood-affected families (500,000 people) in KPK, Punjab and Sindh provinces.

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGY TO MOVE FORWARD

Continued Assistance to Flood-Affected Families

Save the Children will continue to provide relief assistance to flood-affected children and adults still seeking shelter in temporary camps, and will work to keep children safe and healthy as their families make the difficult transition back to their former homes and communities. Our highest priorities will be:

- Continuing to distribute food and non-food items to homeless families still residing in camps;
- Ensuring access to medical treatment through mobile health services and existing clinics for children and adults, while monitoring and responding to health problems among children, pregnant and lactating women and other vulnerable groups;
- Treating children suffering from severe and moderate acute malnutrition at treatment centers, providing breastfeeding counseling to mothers and promoting breastfeeding practices;
- Improving the health status of children and their families by increasing access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities;
- Ensuring protection of children against abuse and exploitation as we expand the number of child-friendly spaces and temporary learning centers in flood-affected regions;
- Supporting education of children through reconstruction and refurbishment of schools and providing essential learning materials and teacher training;
- Working with farmers and households to restore agricultural production and other income-generating livelihoods.

Global Investment in Pakistan's Recovery

Without a major investment from the government of Pakistan and the international community, it will be years before flood-affected children and families recover from this disaster. Save the Children is supporting a unified recovery effort based on:

- Urgent and substantial humanitarian funding to meet the critical needs for recovery;
- Investing in long-term assistance for destitute families to help build back their homes and livelihoods;
- Making children's needs and rights a top priority and recognizing that the crisis in Pakistan is a child-survival emergency as children face serious health risks;
- Prioritizing education for children in the overall relief and recovery effort;
- Integrating child protection into the immediate and long-term response, as children are particularly vulnerable to a range of risks during emergencies;
- Investing in disaster preparedness and risk reduction efforts to ensure long term protection for families in flood prone areas.



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