



Fiji Flood 2009 Early Assessments:

A perspective from UNICEF



Fiji's worst flood

- **Thursday 8th to Sunday 18th January:** Two Tropical Depressions sweep over the Fiji Island Group – with severe flooding experienced in 3 major divisions of Fiji (Northern, Western and Central) – considered to be the worst ever in Fiji's history – worse than the 1956, 1972 and 1999 flooding. 11 people die, six of which are children. The majority of these deaths are due to drowning and landslides.
- **Saturday 10th January:** Affected divisions activate their Emergency Operation Centres (EOC) and a national Emergency Operation Centre is activated. Over 9,000 people are displaced to 122 established Evacuation Centres (ECs), the majority in the Western Division.



Fiji's worst flood

- **Thursday 8th to Sunday 18th January:** Two Tropical Depressions sweep over the Fiji Island Group – with severe flooding experienced in 3 major divisions of Fiji (Northern, Western and Central) – considered to be the worst ever in Fiji's history – worse than the 1956, 1972 and 1999 flooding. 11 people die, six of which are children. The majority of these deaths are due to drowning and landslides.
- **Saturday 10th January:** Affected divisions activate their Emergency Operation Centres (EOC) and a national Emergency Operation Centre is activated. Over 9,000 people are displaced to 122 established Evacuation Centres (ECs), the majority in the Western Division.
- **Sunday 11th January:** A State of Natural Disaster is declared for the West of Fiji. District Offices in the affected areas begin providing emergency food rations to families occupying the Evacuation Centres. The Fiji Red Cross Society mobilizes three Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) in the Western Division to assist district DISMAC teams in Nadi, Lautoka, Ba and Rakiraki to evacuate and look after people affected by floods. The Fiji Red Cross provides essential supplies such as clothing, cooking sets, blankets as well as 20 litre water containers to Evacuation Centres and deploys a first aid team to provide immediate medical attention as well as counseling to the bereaved families.
- **Monday 12th January:** Awaiting request from Government, UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP Pacific Centre, UNDP and WHO) meet to discuss possible humanitarian assistance. Hotels, Resorts, Punjabs, Nestle, Digicel, Faith-based Organizations, Rotary, Individuals and others start to contribute relief items.



Fiji's worst flood

- **Tuesday 13th January:** An emergency cabinet meeting takes place with most members of cabinet then traveling to the Western Division to observe the impact of the flooding.
- **Thursday 15th January:** UNICEF Pacific receives request from Fiji government and sends to DISMAC – bulk supplies of Water Purifying Tablets, Soap, collapsible water containers (10 litres and 1500 litres), oral rehydration supplies, and broad spectrum antibiotics.
- **Sunday 18th January:** Flood waters begin to recede and the army and police mobilize for large scale cleaning in Nadi and Sigatoka towns. As flood waters subside, many people begin to move out of the Evacuation Centres to their homes but continue to return to Centres at night.
- **Monday 19th January:** All Evacuation centres based in schools are ordered to close in an effort to have all schools officially open on 26th January. Evacuees are moved to community halls and churches. The closure of certain Centres results in tensions, with some families refusing to move out of fear of not receiving any additional assistance.
- **Thursday 22nd January:** Flood waters in the 3 affected Divisions completely recede. All Evacuation Centres in Northern and Central Divisions have closed, although there are 900 people still residing in 21 Evacuation Centres in Western Division (a majority of these are in Nadi District).



Assessments

- With support from NDMO and the Fiji Red Cross Society, Divisions undertake assessment focusing on people needing food, and damage to agriculture, housing, roads and bridges (results out on 14th January).
- **Limited information collected on the situation of displaced families and in particular on women and children – always among the most vulnerable in natural disasters.**
- UNICEF undertakes initial assessment of situation of children and women in Evacuation Centres in Lautoka, Sigatoka, Nausori, Ba and Labasa January 16th to 19th




Assessments

- In addition, by January 26th:
 - REDR undertakes an assessment of the water situation in West
 - SOPAC undertakes a technical baseline survey of hydro-meteorological boundary conditions and impact to buildings and structures
 - A socio-economic assessment of the impact of the disaster is planned jointly between SOPAC and UNDP
 - UNICEF advocates with MoH for a rapid nutrition assessment



UNICEF's initial assessment January 16th-19th

- 12 Evacuation Centres (EC)
- 1 Shelter (Burebasaga)
- 1 village (Waivou)
- Divisional/District Health Officers
- Divisional/District Education Officers



UNICEF's initial assessment January 16th-19th

- Tool draws upon global UNICEF rapid assessment templates as well as tools used in other countries (Myanmar in particular):
 - Tool is shared with all members of the UN and other partners in Fiji to include any additional questions and for comments. UNFPA requested additional information on pregnant women.
 - UNFPA and UNOCHA join UNICEF for the assessments in Ba and Labasa.
 - Results are discussed with NDMO and used to inform and guide UNICEF's emergency management plan



Health

- No Medical Services available within EC's
- No EC visited by health worker in last week
- Closest facility: hospital, but note that these are without water & electricity
- Main illnesses for children under 5: diarrhea
- Main illnesses overall: diarrhea; skin disease; ARI/cough



Water & Sanitation

- Water for Washing Purposes:
 - Piped, Rain Water, Flood Water
 - Easily accessible but not always sufficient
- Water for Drinking:
 - Piped, Water Tankers
 - Easily accessible, but often insufficient and of poor quality (silt)
- Sanitation:
 - Flush toilets predominant but also open defecation reported
 - Majority are separated for girls/boys
 - Waste disposal remains significant problem with minimal collection of rubbish



Nutrition

- Overwhelming majority of mothers are breastfeeding, and in some cases special spaces set up for this purpose. No reports of solicitation for formula feeding noted in EC's.
- Sufficient food seems available in the EC's, however attention needed to ensure children accessing a variety of food groups. Limited foods available for toddlers and weaning children.



Education

- Teachers also amongst affected-a possible difficulty in returning to school postings
- Many parents (two thirds interviewed) do not think children will be returning to school on Jan 26th
 - School damaged (12 schools in Nadi & Lautoka Districts)
 - Educational materials destroyed
 - No money
 - School occupied as EC



Child Protection

- Only 1 EC reported a case of separated children (3 siblings have been sent to an EC for their safety whilst parents protect household belongings)
- No registration process currently in place for the EC's (or children within these)
- Minimal trauma to children reported, although individual stories are emerging
- Limited safe play areas for children and young people in EC's



UNICEF's second assessment February 3rd-6th

- To assess elements of the flood response to date as well as to identify new requirements – accompanied by Divisional staff in same areas as initial assessment.
- Pinpoints:
 - Weaknesses in food ration and water container/tablet/instruction distribution
 - Need for health team visits
 - Good coverage, comprehension and uptake of public information on hand washing, boiling water, careful rubbish disposal, food safety, breastfeeding but vigilance needed
- Results discussed with NDMO



Some reflections



- Initial assessments vital but current tools in Fiji need to go beyond infrastructure damage
- Human dimensions and humanitarian principles must be included in initial assessments and monitoring
- In particular, children face very different challenges and have very different needs to adults during disasters
- When disasters strike, do we think “children”?