

Montreal, March 7, 2017



**Statement of UNICEF's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean at the Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas, Montreal, Canada, March 7-9 2017**

Your Excellency and Distinguished Colleagues

We would like to thank the Government of Canada for hosting the Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas.

At least 6,3 million children and adolescents are affected by emergencies in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and 13,1 million live in areas of high risk of flooding. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is therefore a priority for UNICEF in this region as children are among the most vulnerable to hazards.

In 2016 children were affected in numerous emergencies but mainly three; Ecuador, Hurricane Mathew and Zika. In supporting partners to operationalize the new DRR framework UNICEF will continue to promote, as appropriate, a multi-hazard approach linking measures to address disasters, climate change, conflict and epidemics as well as to work with its partners to promote the participation and rights of all children, and women, in DRR and their vital role in strengthening resilience. Children can and must be a pillar of our work. Their participation, contribution and, as a result, their resilience, is the best factor of DRR success.

UNICEF in LAC proposes nine areas in which the regional DRR platform must, of necessity, address in order to achieve its expected outcomes.

- **Stronger risk analysis:** Humanitarian and development actors need stronger risk analysis in order to develop more effective risk reduction and resilience building interventions. The work being conducted on InfoRM (risk index), initiated by OCHA and UNICEF in 2015, provides a useful model.
- **Quality education:** The Education system is a key to reducing disaster risk through its curriculum. DRR programs in education curricula and preparedness plans equip and strengthen children's ability to deal with emergencies, and mitigate the impact of future disasters. UNICEF stresses the fundamental right of all children to access good quality education, even more during and after an emergency.
- **Multi-sectorial efforts are needed to prevent and respond to emerging health risks associated with pandemics:** The Zika outbreaks demonstrate the potential devastating human, social and economic impacts if not controlled or prevented. An increased focus is necessary on vector-borne diseases that have the potential to spark epidemics or

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pandemics. The approach to improving the ability of countries to prevent, prepare for and respond to such emerging threats should be multi-sectoral.

- **Social protection programs need to be increasingly responsive to emergencies and in the longer term recovery:** These systems should have the flexibility and the capacity to build resilience of, and attend to those, who may be most negatively affected by a disaster (children from poor and extremely poor households, children with disability, pregnant and lactating women). Building on this, UNICEF LACRO has developed a conceptual framework and analytical tool destined to explore the links between social protection, disaster risk management and adaptation to climate change. Country case studies were developed for El Salvador and Guatemala.
- **Attention for children with disabilities:** In Latin America, there are around 85 million people with disabilities. Actors should establish standards and guidelines for attention to and participation of people with disabilities in DRR and emergency response through disability-inclusive DRR planning and timely and appropriate support to persons with disabilities in responding to disasters. Striving to address this challenge, UNICEF and CEPREDENAC conducted a comprehensive study to obtain an overall view and understanding the situation of disability and DRR in Central American countries, and developed guidelines for attention and participation of people with disabilities.
- **Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction** actors should work together. The Sendai framework and Paris Climate Agreement recognize the compounding effect of climate change on disaster risk. This includes more frequent and intense natural hazards as well as the increased exposure of people to the likes of sea-level rise, floods and drought. Addressing disaster risk is therefore a key strategy for climate change adaptation and every effort must be made to align policies, programs and capacities at every level. UNICEF LAC has recently compiled a desk review and summary of the main issues on climate change impacts and developed a draft *Adaptations and Programme Reference Tool*.
- **DRR and humanitarian actors need to pay greater attention to urban risk** and develop models of DRR. The LAC region in particular is one with very high levels of urbanization and while there have been efforts to promote *Safe and Resilient Cities* there is still not sufficient attention paid to addressing the DRR and resilience needs of urban communities and in particular children and youth.
- **The risks of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation** should be prevented and reduced. Child protection and DRR programming needs to encompass activities aimed at preventing and responding to the protection risks for children in times of disaster. UNICEF works to promote and strengthen the child protection systems and Community-based protection mechanisms for its important role in preventing or reducing the possible consequences of a disaster, helping to create a safer and more resilient community for women and children. As an example, work with national partners to ensure emergency preparedness plans for

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child protection, including appropriate referral services, are in place in all disaster-prone areas.

- Finally, despite major progress in the **reduction of undernutrition** in the LAC region, the capacity to prevent a deterioration of the Nutritional status of children following a natural disaster remains limited. Nutrition security implies much more than just access to adequate food, it requires access to appropriate micronutrients, safe water, hygiene and sanitation, access to quality health-care services, and improved household and community practices in child care, food hygiene and preparation and environmental health. UNICEF is supporting increased Nutrition preparedness and response capacity in LAC through three sub-regional support groups, including national nutrition focal points and other key stakeholders.

Your excellency and distinguished colleagues,

The effects of disasters on children are well documented and known. All of these effects have long-term consequences, not only for the children themselves, but for generations to come. It is our duty to work together and not fail their needs and their trust.

Thank you.