

Humanitarian Emergencies

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Introduction

During humanitarian emergencies, many of the rights of children are regularly compromised and violated. Children are the most vulnerable victims of any humanitarian crisis. Environmental disasters such as hurricanes, floods and earthquakes increasingly cause widespread destruction, especially in areas where overcrowding and poverty are already endemic. Armed conflicts similarly destroy basic service infrastructure and tear families and communities apart, denying children their rights to health care, clean water, nutrition, education, identity, play, protection from abuse and other rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some humanitarian emergencies command intense but brief world attention, spotlighted by television cameras. Others silently but persistently take a toll in human lives and potential.

UNICEF works with its international partners to protect all children, everywhere, at all times. In times of disaster, UNICEF helps ensure children their rights to potable water, food, shelter, education, reunification with their families, preservation of their identity, special protection as refugees, and to the full scope of their rights under the Convention.

Most students develop their perceptions - and misperceptions - about humanitarian emergencies from the news media. While such emergencies can occur anywhere in the world, their frequency and severity is disproportionately borne in the developing countries, where poverty plays an integral role. Teachers can address these timely global issues in the classroom to help students translate their concerns into understanding and action, and develop a balanced perspective on humanitarian emergencies, integrated with curriculum strands and objectives. The activities in this file encourage students to explore the causes and effects of humanitarian disasters, and to examine the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES:

Activity One: Understanding Humanitarian Emergencies

1. Disaster Myths and Realities
2. Children's Rights in Humanitarian Emergencies

Activity Two: Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies

1. Deconstructing Disaster
2. Emergencies in the News

Activity Three: Taking Action for a Humanitarian Emergency**Other Resources****Slide Show****Edunotes****DESCRIPTION:**

Students will examine UNICEF global education concepts of human rights, interdependence, images and perceptions, social justice, conflict and conflict resolution, and change and the future in relation to humanitarian emergencies and disaster relief. A series of activities is provided which can be used in part or in whole, connected by the teacher to curriculum strands and objectives. The classroom-ready activities are presented in a sequence which follows the UNICEF Education for Development cycle from understanding, to personal response, to informed action.

DEFINITIONS FOR USE IN ACTIVITIES**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: ONTARIO**

Geography Strands: Geographic Foundations; Space and Systems; Human-Environment Interactions; Global Connections; Understanding and Managing Change; Methods of Geographic Inquiry

History Strands: Communities; Local, National, and Global; Change and Continuity
ESL

Health Strand: Living Skills

Biology Strand: Ecosystems and Human Activity

Earth and Space Science Strands: Weather Dynamics; Weather Systems

Social Science Strands: Self and Others; Personal and Social Responsibilities; Social Challenges; Diversity, Interdependence and Global Connections

TEACHING/LEARNING:

This activity file is a collection of lesson plans that can be used collectively or in parts, connected to the regular curriculum, to help enable students in intermediate/senior grades to:

- understand the principal economic, social and environmental implications of humanitarian emergencies
- identify how children's rights set out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child are imperiled or protected in humanitarian emergencies, and understand how this international treaty is used to help effect policy and practice that protect children
- analyze the types of recovery assistance effected in humanitarian emergencies
- develop a basic plan students could organize and execute in order to raise funds for UNICEF in support of humanitarian emergencies

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Activity 1: Understanding Humanitarian Emergencies

1. DISASTER MYTHS AND REALITIES

In this activity, students identify and debunk common myths and misperceptions about humanitarian emergencies.



Resources

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- copy and cut up one set of the Disaster Myths and Realities Cards
- Disaster Myths and Realities Answer Key



Procedure

PROCEDURE

Step One: Introduce a discussion on humanitarian emergencies. Present the terminology provided in the introduction to this activity file. Create a list on the chalkboard of some examples of "humanitarian emergencies". For each, identify the cause(s). Discuss:

Where do you think most humanitarian emergencies occur? Why?

What are the impacts of these events?

Who is affected the most by disasters?

What do people need?

Where does assistance come from?

How long does it take to recover?

Step Two: Divide students into twelve pairs or small groups. Give each group a Disaster Myth Card (6) OR

Disaster Reality Card (6). Invite the groups to move around the room so that each group can locate a group that has the corresponding Myth or Reality Card. The two corresponding groups (matching one Myth Card and one Reality Card) should join so that eventually there are six groups. Each larger group can then read their Myth Card and their Reality Card to the class, without identifying which statement is the myth or the reality. Encourage the class to decide which statement is the reality and which is the myth, and discuss why.



EXTENSION

Have students view the Slide Show (on-line or from printed images you copy from the Web site), match a myth from the Answer Key or Myth Cards to each image, and discuss the questions provided with the slide show.



HANDOUTS

- [Disaster Myths and Realities Cards](#)

2. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

This activity introduces the concept of children's rights, and explores the concept in connection to humanitarian emergencies.



RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- blank cards, several per student (e.g. cue cards)



PROCEDURE

Step One: Introduce a discussion on children's rights: What are "rights" (something all people should have or be able to do)? Why do children have specific rights (set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) as well as rights that all humans have (in both international instruments and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms)? More information about these concepts is available at www.unicef.org/crc/.

Step Two: Gather ideas from the class about what rights they think children have. Students could write their ideas on blank cards, one right to each card. Compare the students' ideas to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (see full text at www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm). Add articles from the Convention to students' original rights cards, one card per article.

Step Three: Locate the articles of the Convention (rights) that students think might be affected in humanitarian emergencies, and post these cards separately. Discuss why these rights are vulnerable in times of emergency, and why children are a high risk population in emergencies. Invite students to peruse the reports on www.unicef.org/emerg/ to see how children's rights are advocated and protected in emergencies.

Slide Show



Edunotes



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Activity 2: Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies

1. Deconstructing Disaster

This activity applies concepts of children's rights and the economic, social and environmental dimensions of humanitarian emergencies to a simulation exercise in which students plan a settlement and respond to an emergency affecting it.



Resources

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- one piece of chart paper for each student pair
- one set of markers of various colours including red, black and blue for each student pair
- one Disaster Card and Settlement Card for each student pair

You may need to make more than one set of the cards, depending on the number of students in the class.

- one Disaster Impacts and Recovery Chart per student pair



Procedure

PROCEDURE

Step One: Discuss types of settlements and their infrastructures (cities, small towns, rural areas,...) and general patterns of settlement (by water bodies, in mountain valleys,...). Use large and small scale maps to illustrate examples. Discuss any differences in these infrastructures and patterns related to poverty and wealth.

Step Two: Have the students work in pairs to plan a settlement on chart paper. Give each pair of students a sheet of chart paper, a set of coloured markers and a

Settlement Card. Ask the students to use their Settlement Card as a guide to extrapolate and map out an imaginary settlement in coloured markers (except for the red colour). Their maps should include, among standard cartographic features:

- geographical/topographical situation
- population density
- types of residences
- basic service infrastructure including roads, sewage, water source(s), schools, health care facilities, power

Step Three: Once their maps are complete, give each pair of students the Disaster Card that matches their Settlement Card, and a Disaster Impacts and Recovery Chart. The Disaster Card describes an event that is causing a humanitarian emergency affecting the settlement. The students decide how this event will affect their settlement: The students should complete the first column (Description of Impacts) on the Disaster Impacts and Recovery Chart. Then, students use red markers to show the immediate impacts of the disaster on their maps -- how the settlement has changed, including in these ways.

If Activity One (part 2) was done previously, the students can suggest how children's rights have been affected by the disaster. Finally, the students should describe, in the third column of their Chart, what kinds of disaster relief are needed.

Step Four: The students form groups of three pairs, present their maps and charts to the group and discuss:

What will the community still be able to do, what will they be unable to do?

How will this disaster affect the rights of children in the community?

What will be needed to recover from the disaster?

What do children need and how will they get it?

When will the disaster be over?

What will be permanently changed by the disaster?

Step Five: Using the suggestions from the group, the student pairs can add to the descriptions of impacts and to

their assistance plan for recovery.

2. Emergencies in the News

This activity challenges students to examine reports of humanitarian emergencies they find in the media.



RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- news clippings and reports on a (current) humanitarian emergency.

Refer to the section "Other Resources" for Web sites with current and archival emergency reports and updates.



PROCEDURE

Step One: Invite students to bring news clippings (headlines, articles and photos) from newspapers, newsmagazines and written summaries of televised news coverage on humanitarian emergencies. The teacher can also download emergency updates and reports (see Resources and Materials section above). Display the materials around the classroom and invite students to peruse them, then discuss the questions below.

Alternatively, group the news items into reports of similar emergencies, and in jigsaw format, divide the class into groups with each group reading and discussing the questions below for their particular emergency. The students can then recombine into new groups, with each member representing a different emergency, to compare and contrast their observations.

1. What kind of emergency(s) is reported?
2. Where does it occur?
3. Who is affected?
4. How are children and their rights being affected?
5. What factors may be exacerbating the emergency?
6. What factors may be helping to alleviate its impacts?
7. Who is providing assistance for recovery?
8. What kinds of assistance are being provided? Are they adequate?

9. What destruction can't be easily remedied with humanitarian assistance?

10. How do the economic circumstances of the affected region impact on its ability to recover?

11. Why is it important that organizations like UNICEF exist to respond to emergencies regardless of the political, cultural or religious nature of the affected populations?

12. What information about the emergency, the people and place affected is missing from news sources? Who are the experts interviewed? In what terms are the affected groups described? How are they seen to be reacting to the disaster?

13. Could this disaster happen to your community? If a similar disaster were to occur, how would the effects be similar and different than in the affected region?

Step Two: If a humanitarian emergency is currently being reported in the news, ask students to continue to access and bring to class new information on the emergency on a daily basis. The Web sites cited in the section "Other Resources" are good sources. Students can create a scrapbook or bulletin board of articles, headlines and photos. Discuss what new developments are occurring in the nature of the emergency, its impacts, the responses to it, and recovery.

Step Three: Divide students into small groups. Each group can focus on a facet of the impacts of the emergency (e.g., commerce/trade, food supply and nutrition, health care, communication/roads, water/sanitation, power, shelter, children's rights). Groups should review the news items from Steps One and Two, and answer the following questions:

1. How has the emergency(s) impacted your focus area?
2. What assistance is being provided to promote recovery?
3. How does your focus area relate to the other groups'?

Invite a whole-group discussion on the observations.



EXTENSION

Print the map of Unstable Environments and add new emergencies to it. Analyze any geographic patterns that emerge.

Learn more about the history, economy, culture, society and normal daily life of the country or region affected by the emergency.

Explore media literacy principles in connection with the media coverage of the emergency. See www.onlinenewspapers.com for news reports of emergencies from the perspectives of different countries, particularly the affected country(s).

Research the sensitivity of your local area to environmental disasters and create an emergency preparedness guide that discusses how children and families can protect themselves if disaster occurs and what resources would be available in an emergency.

[Slide Show](#)



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Activity 3: Taking Action for a Humanitarian Emergency

This activity involves students in positive, responsive action for a current humanitarian emergency, by creating and implementing a fundraising plan to assist UNICEF in its efforts to protect children and families affected by humanitarian emergencies.



Resources

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- paper and pencils for making notes, brainstorming and recording the activity



Procedure

PROCEDURE

Create a fundraising plan to help UNICEF in its efforts to protect children and families affected by an emergency. Consult UNICEF news releases at www.unicef.ca and/or www.unicef.org/emerg/ for updates on current and recent humanitarian emergencies, and how UNICEF is helping. Donations can be sent to UNICEF directly on-line or by mail or phone (see information at www.unicef.ca). Activity Two, Part 2 is recommended as a preparation for this activity.

To develop your fundraising plan, consider:

1. How you will raise funds
2. The duration of your fundraising appeal
3. What adults will need to help and how
4. Where the fundraising will take place and from whom
5. What materials will be needed and how they will be obtained
6. Who you need to contact for permission or other arrangements
7. How and where you will advertise the fundraising

activity(s)

8. Who will take responsibility for treasury and banking

Students can keep a journal of this activity and consider whether they feel that it is important to participate in an assistance project like the one organized in school, and what they have learned and how they feel upon its conclusion.

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Slide Show

IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DISASTER

Students can view the slide show of snap shots different types of humanitarian emergencies around the world on-line, or the teacher/facilitator can print the images and the captions and have students match each image to a myth/reality of disaster (refer to Activity One). Each slide is accompanied by a series of questions relating to disaster myths and the rights of children.



Slide # 1

An aerial view shows houses and other buildings half-submerged in a flooded landscape in the province of Gaza, Mozambique, a region severely affected by torrential rains in 2000.

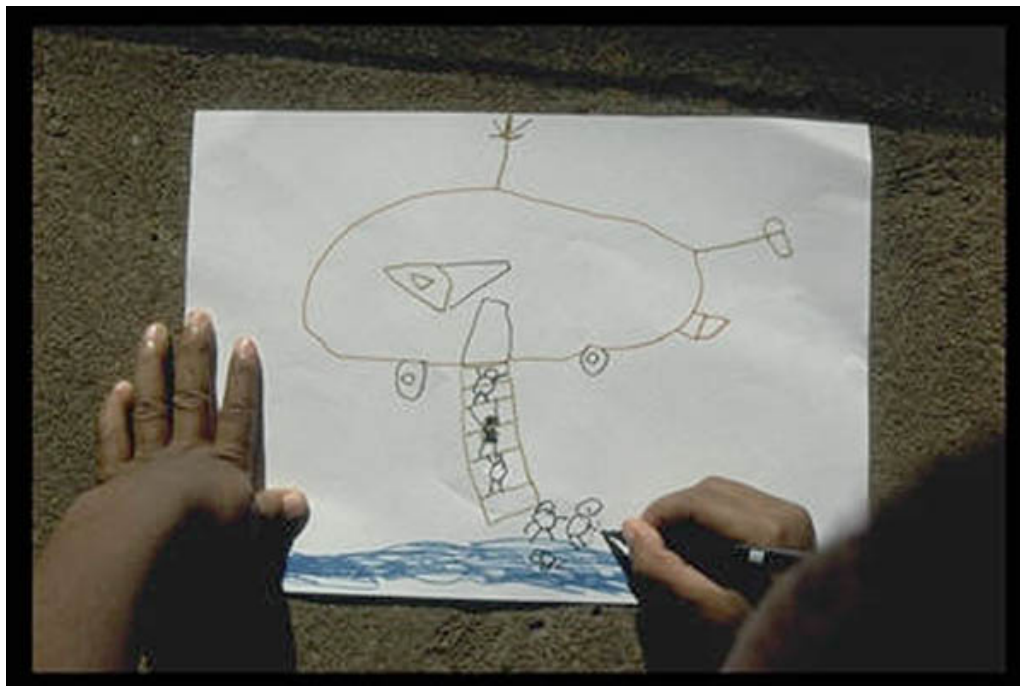
Myth: Disasters are random events.

Questions:

Where is the risk of flooding highest?

Why are poor people in developing countries more at risk of flooding and its impacts than people in economically advantaged countries?

What children's rights would such flooding jeopardize?



Slide # 2

The drawing of a six-year old child shows a helicopter rescuing people from flood waters. At the time, the child lived in a warehouse in the Poli Caju Chamanculo factory that housed some 3,000 people displaced by flooding, in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. UNICEF provided safe water, medicines and food, delivered in trucks. All the children in the warehouse were out of school because their schools were damaged during the floods and alternative arrangements had not yet been made.

Myth: Epidemics and mass hunger are inevitable after every disaster.

Questions:

Why do disasters increase the risk of epidemics like diarrhea and typhoid?

What kind of emergency preparations and responses can alleviate the impacts of a humanitarian emergency?

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Slide # 3

A boy leads a small girl down a dirt street past makeshift wooden homes, one of which flies the Colombian flag. These formerly empty lots are now inhabited by people left homeless by the January earthquake in the municipality of Calarca, in Columbia.

Myth: Foreign visitors with any kind of background are urgently needed to help in disaster areas.

Questions:

Why are foreign visitors not always an appropriate response in an emergency?
What kind of outside expertise and assistance might be most useful?

Slide # 4 Truck Red Cross Picture

A Red Cross truck takes supplies down a dangerously icy road during Canada's ice storm of January 1998. Over the course of a week, thousands of people were without heat and basic services, and were unable to travel or communicate due to the damage from the ice.

Myth: Disasters only affect people in developing countries.

Questions:

What is social insurance?
What might be the effects of a crisis such as an ice storm if people lacked social and home insurance?



Slide # 5

This slide shows the remains of a school in Mahanaro, in southeastern Madagascar. Like most public buildings, and nearly all homes in the town, the school had been totally destroyed by the cyclones that hit the region at the end of February 2000. In addition, school books, tables, and benches were waterlogged by torrential rains.

Myth: Life returns to normal within a few weeks of a disaster.

Questions:

How do you think the myth that life returns to normal within a few weeks' applies to this photo?

What children's rights are compromised by humanitarian emergencies such as this one?



Slide # 6

Scenes from Venezuelan mudslide.

Myth: Disasters are the result of unpredictable "natural" occurrences such as

extreme weather conditions.

Questions:

What causes mudslides?

Why are mudslides better termed "environmental disasters" than "natural disasters"?

Why are mudslides more likely to become disasters in densely populated, economically disadvantaged areas?

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Web Sites

www.unicef.org/emerg/

UNICEF international Web page for humanitarian emergencies for features including:

What is UNICEF doing in response to emergencies?

Where is UNICEF working in emergencies?

What are UNICEF's special concerns and issues?

How can you help?

Emergency reports and updates

Country backgrounds

Reference library and related sites

Cartographic section maps

www.nytimes.com/learning

The New York Times Learning Network Lesson Plans

Books and Lesson Plans

Oliver-Smith, Anthony and Susanna M. Hoffman, Eds., *The Angry Earth: Disaster In Anthropological Perspective*, Routledge, London, New York, 1999.

Enarson, Elaine and Betty Hearn Morrow, Eds., *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women's Eyes*, Praeger, Westport, 1998.

Lewis, James, *Development In Disaster-prone Places: Studies of Vulnerability*, Intermediate Technology Publications, London, 1999.

Fischer, Henry W. III, *Response to Disaster: Fact Versus Fiction & Its Perpetuation*, *The Sociology of Disaster*, University Press of America, New York, 1998.

Twigg, John and Mihir R. Bhatt, Eds. Understanding Vulnerability: South Asian Perspectives, Intermediate Technology Publications, London, 1998.

Middleton, Neil and Phil O'Keefe, Disaster and Development: The Politics of Humanitarian Aid, Pluto Press, London, 1998.

Fountain, Susan, Education For Development: A Teacher's Resource For Global Learning, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1995.

Pike, Graham and David Selby, Global Teacher, Global Learner, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988.

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UNICEF Activity File

Activity 2: Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies

Settlement Cards	Disaster Cards
<p>A. A town located between the mountains and the sea. The poorest families live on the mountain slopes.</p>	<p>A. Hurricane: Damaging winds reach 125 km/hour accompanied by thunder, lightening, and heavy rains and sea swells.</p>
<p>B. Due to high unemployment and poverty rates, many people live in low-income trailer parks on an open field.</p>	<p>B. Tornado: A destructive, violent, whirling wind is accompanied by a funnel-shaped cloud. The wind speed at the vortex is between close to 200 km/hour.</p>
<p>C. Large populations of displaced people live in a refugee camp "tent city" with no sewage system, and are reliant on the river for water for all their needs.</p>	<p>C. Cyclone: Rotating winds bring a violent storm and heavy rainfall.</p>
<p>D. The city is built on a floodplain at the mouth of a large river basin. The poorest people live in makeshift homes along the river and tributary banks.</p>	<p>D. Flood: Due to heavy rains, the local river rises, flooding out all the buildings. Water has risen almost over the treetops. The flooding occurs during the night. In the aftermath, some areas are permanently submerged and others are newly formed.</p>

<p>E. Densely populated urban area in an affluent country.</p>	<p>E. Ice Storm: Extraordinary weather conditions cause huge amounts of ice to form on everything, cutting off power, freezing water pipes, and causing road accidents.</p>
<p>F. A small, isolated, rural community of soybean farmers in a developing country who must work very hard to make a profit.</p>	<p>F. Locusts: Swarms of grasshoppers descend, eating every bit of vegetation in sight.</p>
<p>G. A beach town in a developing country, reliant on tourism and the fishing industry.</p>	<p>G. Tsunami: A large destructive sea wave is generated by an earthquake or volcanic eruption.</p>
<p>H. A huge city in a developing country, with many poorly constructed buildings. Often, due to unfair labour practices, workers are locked in buildings during employment hours to prevent theft.</p>	<p>H. Earthquake: Violent shaking is caused by earth tremors.</p>
<p>I. In this big city in a mountain valley, many of the economically disadvantaged families live on the outskirts. There is one road into/out of the city.</p>	<p>I. Landslide: Masses of rock and earth slip down the mountain side, brought on by heavy rains.</p>

<p>J. A small community in an affluent country, dependent on farming for its livelihood.</p>	<p>J. Drought: A long period persists without rain.</p>
<p>K. A small farming community in a developing country that has one main road into/out of town. The children have to travel along this road to get to their school.</p>	<p>K. Armed Conflict: A rebel group landmines the road to/from the community, and the farmland around it.</p>
<p>L. A bayside community that relies heavily on the shellfish industry for income. Most people live close to the bay and spend a great deal of time in or around the water.</p>	<p>L. Water Pollution: A local industry dumps highly toxic chemicals into the bay.</p>
<p>M. A small settlement in a developing country, with one communal water source - a small lake. There has been a long dry season, and farm animals have begun to use the lake as well.</p>	<p>M. Disease Outbreak: The local water supply becomes contaminated with bacteria, causing epidemics of diarrhea and cholera.</p>
<p>N. A medium-sized city in a developing country. Great strides have been made in providing health care, education and other rights and services to the people.</p>	<p>N. HIV/AIDS: Over the last decade, a steady increase in the HIV/AIDS epidemic has come to a crisis, and one in every ten people have HIV/AIDS. Schools and medical clinics are being closed for lack of teachers and health workers, and children are being orphaned and left to care for younger siblings.</p>

O. A large city in an affluent country, reliant on a nearby nuclear power plant for employment and energy.

O. Nuclear Accident: A nuclear reactor, about 20 km away, has suffered a meltdown.

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Activity 2: Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies

Deconstructing Disaster: Disaster Impacts and Recovery Chart

Disaster: _____

Type of Impacts	Description of Impacts	Assistance for Recovery
Physical Environment	•	•
Residences	•	•
Roads	•	•
Sewage	•	•
Water Source(s)	•	•
Schools	•	•
Health Care Facilities	•	•
Power	•	•
Daily Life	•	•
Children's Well-Being	•	•

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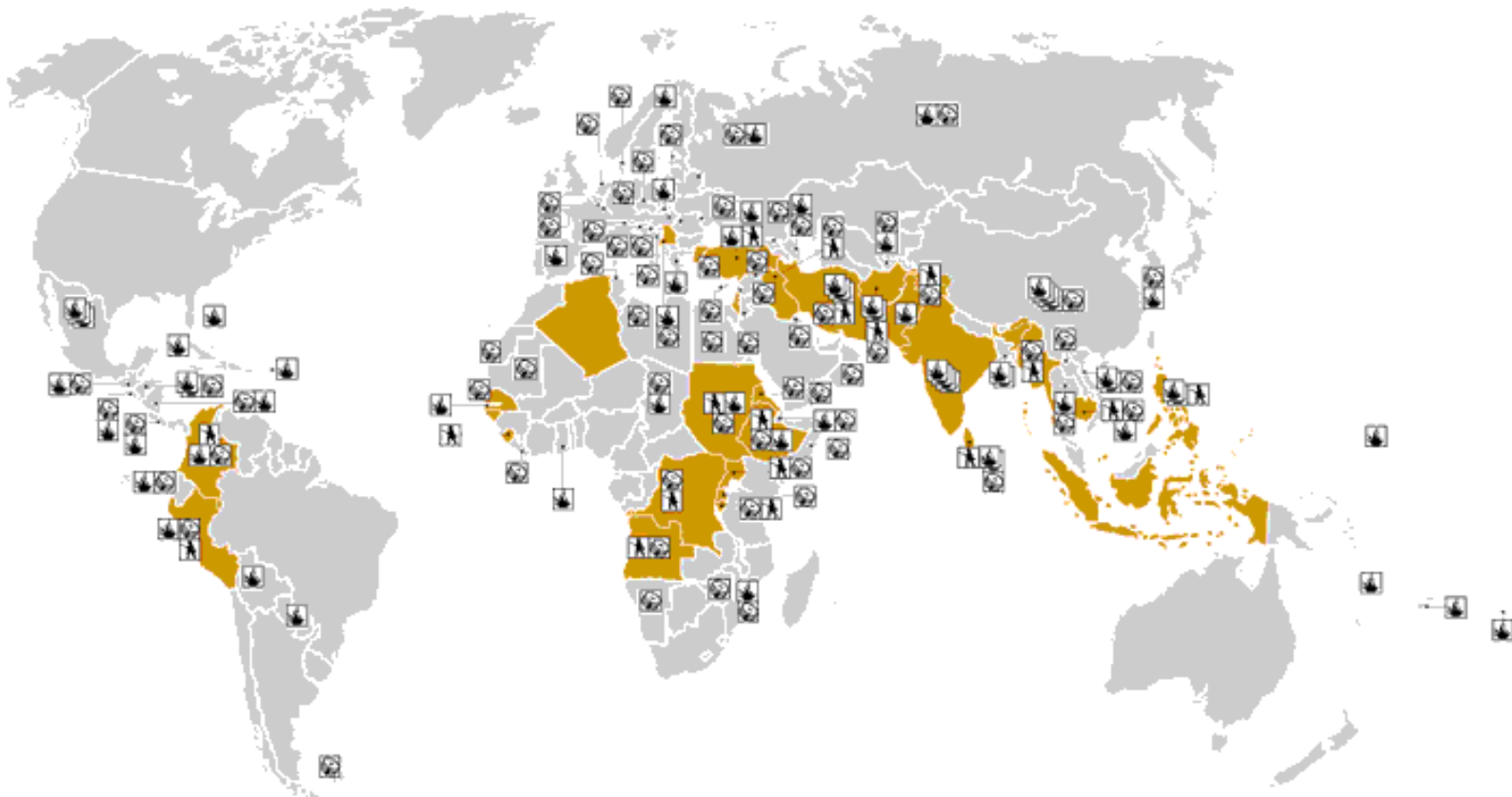


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UNICEF Activity File

Activity 2: Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies

Unstable Environments



Maps were revised after publication of The State of the World's Children 2000.

Conflict and disaster

Major armed conflicts 1998

Children under 15 reported fighting in major armed conflicts 1997/1998 in either government forces, armed opposition groups, or both

Natural disasters Jan.-Oct. 1999

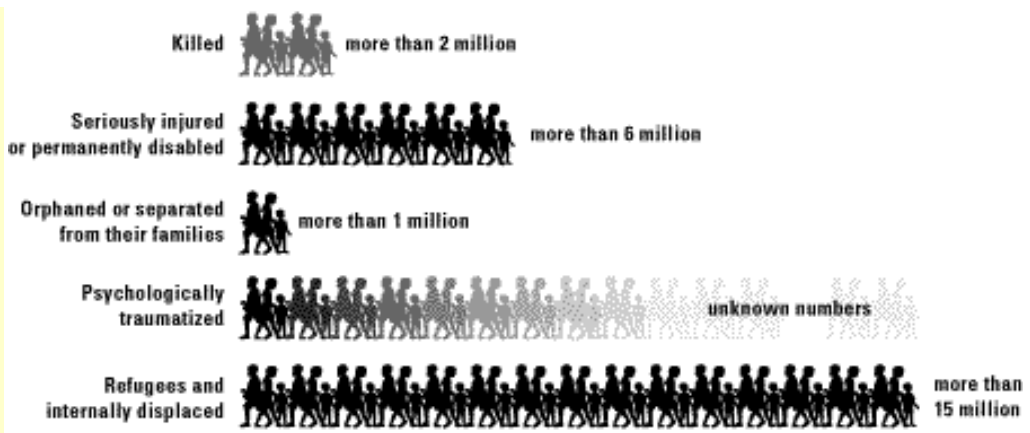
Landmines or unexploded ordnance threaten civilians

The toll of war

Child victims of armed conflict 1990s

Source: UNICEF; UNHCR; US Committee for Refugees.

Sources: M. Sollenberg, P. Wallensteen and A. Jato, 'Major armed conflicts', SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Oxford University Press, 1999; Brett and McCallin, Children: The Invisible Soldiers, Rā dda Barnen, 1998; UN OCHA; UN Mine Action Service.



Cost of removing one landmine: \$300 to \$1,000
8,000 to 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year



Sources: International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 1999; UNICEF

Anti-personnel landmine producers

China, Cuba, Dem. People's Rep. of Korea, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar, Pakistan, Rep. of Korea, Russian Federation, Singapore, Turkey, United States, Viet Nam, Yugoslavia

Source: International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 1999.

Approximately 540 million children in the world - one in four - live in dangerous and unstable situations .

- Children and women are the majority of the civilians who suffer, physically and psychologically, when their country is ripped apart by war and conflict.
- Children - some as young as 10 - are forced or coerced into services by governments and /or armed opposition groups.
- Environmental catastrophes, such as floods, hurricanes and earthquakes, also have grave effects on children.

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation

of any
frontiers.
Dotted
line
represents
approximately
the Line
of Control
in Jammu
and
Kashmir
agreed
upon by
India and
Pakistan.
The final
status of
Jammu
and
Kashmir
has not
yet been
agreed
upon by
the
parties.

General Notes

Map 6. Unstable environments: Using the SIPRI Yearbook 1999, a 'major armed conflict' is defined as prolonged use of armed force between the military of two or more governments, or of one government and at least one organized armed group, incurring the battle-related deaths of at least 1,000 people during the entire conflict and in which the incompatibility concerns government and/or territory. Information on child soldiers refers to children under 15 reported as fighting in major armed conflicts in 1997/1998 in either government forces, armed opposition groups, or both. Data on child soldiers is not easy to verify, especially in countries with no government system of birth registration that would allow to confirm a child's age. In some of the European countries shown, landmines or unexploded ordnance date back to the Second World War and may be less of a threat to civilians than in other countries. Using information from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the map shows many of the natural disasters of concern to the humanitarian community, although not all countries where a natural disaster took place are shown.

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UNICEF Activity File

Activity 1: Understanding Humanitarian Emergencies

Myth: Disasters are random events.

Reality: Some areas and people are more vulnerable than others, due both to geographic/environmental conditions (e.g., living in an earthquake zone) and to human political/economic/social conditions (e.g., poverty, population density), which are often interrelated.

Myth: Epidemics and mass hunger are inevitable after every disaster.

Reality: The likelihood of epidemics/mass hunger may, and often does, increase during and after disaster - particularly in economically disadvantaged settlements - but this vulnerability can be reduced and epidemics circumvented with adequate emergency preparedness plans and immediate relief responses.

Myth: Foreign visitors with any kind of background are urgently needed to help in disaster areas.

Reality: Local knowledge is usually stronger, more readily available, and more cost-effective than international – although specialists are sometimes needed in times of crisis. Certainly, cross-border assistance in the form of materials and monetary transfers is often required.

Myth: Disasters only occur to people in developing countries.

Reality: Disasters do happen in affluent countries, and people may lose their homes, their livelihoods, and sometimes their lives. However, the frequency and severity of emergencies is often borne more heavily in developing countries because of interrelated poverty, population and environmental conditions.

Myth: Things are back to normal within a few weeks of a disaster.

Reality: Daily life is usually far from normal within a few weeks of disaster -- can take months or years, and some changes are permanent.

Myth: Disasters are usually the result of unpredictable "natural" occurrences, like extreme weather conditions.

Reality: Many "natural" disasters are often facilitated by human activity: the links between clear-cutting of forests to landslides and floods; the rapid spread of disease with poverty and high-density population; the lack of adequate educational and medical facilities and insurance; the instability of settlements associated with shantytowns/high density populations in environmentally marginal lands and hazardous areas such as mountain slopes and floodplains.

The Myths and Realities Exercise and information has been adapted from the work of Megan Rock, Global Education Coordinator, Red Cross, Toronto.

UNICEF Activity File

Activity 1: Understanding Humanitarian Emergencies

DISASTER MYTHS AND REALITIES: ANSWER KEY

Myths:

- a. Disasters are random events.
- b. Epidemics and mass hunger are inevitable after every disaster.
- c. Foreign visitors with any kind of background are urgently needed to help in disaster areas.
- d. Disasters only affect people in developing countries.
- e. Life returns to normal within a few weeks of a disaster.
- f. Disasters are usually the result of unpredictable "natural" occurrences such as extreme weather conditions.

Realities:

- a. Some areas and people are more vulnerable than others, due both to geographic/environmental conditions (e.g. living in an earthquake zone) and to human political/economic/social conditions (e.g., poverty, population density), which are often interrelated.
- b. The likelihood of epidemics/mass hunger may, and often does, increase during and after disaster - particularly in economically disadvantaged settlements - but this vulnerability can be reduced and epidemics circumvented with adequate emergency preparedness plans and immediate relief responses.
- c. Local knowledge is usually stronger, more readily available, and more cost-effective than international – although specialists are sometimes needed in times of crisis. Certainly, cross-border assistance in the form of materials and monetary transfers is often required.
- d. Disasters do happen in affluent countries, and people may lose their homes, their livelihoods, and sometimes their lives. However, the frequency and severity of emergencies is often borne more heavily in developing countries because of interrelated poverty, population and environmental conditions.
- e. Daily life is usually far from normal within a few weeks of disaster –

recovery can take months or years, and some changes are permanent.

f. Many "natural" disasters are often facilitated by human activity: the links between clear-cutting of forests to landslides and floods; the rapid spread of disease with poverty and high-density population; the lack of adequate educational and medical facilities and insurance; the instability of settlements associated with shantytowns/high density populations in environmentally marginal lands and hazardous areas such as mountain slopes and floodplains.

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Humanitarian Emergencies

Understanding
Humanitarian
Emergencies

Responding to
Humanitarian
Emergencies

Taking Action
for a Humanitarian
Emergency

DEFINITIONS FOR USE IN ACTIVITIES

Some of the terminology in this activity file will need careful explanation to students. The following definitions may be helpful as a starting point, but do not claim to be representative of all ways of thinking about these concepts. In particular, discuss the differences between "disaster" and "emergency" (the disastrous impacts of an event can be mitigated - emergency is a more balanced descriptor); "natural" disaster and "environmental" disaster ("environmental" as a descriptor acknowledges that many events that seem to have natural causes, such as floods, earthquakes and hurricanes, are in fact exacerbated in cause and effect by human factors such as deforestation and poverty).

Humanitarian Emergency: A generally sudden, unexpected event that disrupts normal daily life, destroys basic infrastructure and puts populations at risk to survival, development and protection. Some emergencies, however, may be crises that arise from a longer time span of contributing factors, such as HIV/AIDS.

Disaster: A tragic, devastating event that hits an area - usually unexpectedly - leaving destruction in its wake. Examples include earthquake, hurricane, typhoon, flood, drought, landslide, epidemic, war, nuclear malfunction.

Natural Disaster: Term used to describe a sudden, catastrophic event related to climate, weather, geology and other environmental factors.

Environmental Disaster: Term used to describe a catastrophic event related to climate, weather, geology and other environmental factors, acknowledging the interrelationship of human factors in exacerbating the causes and/or impacts of the event. Rather than a sudden occurrence, the event may be a climactic manifestation of an ongoing problem such as deforestation.

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