



MEDIA RELEASE

Flood-affected children and women face risk of malnutrition

Dhaka, 19 September 2004: Over one million Bangladeshi children will face the risk of acute malnutrition in the following months if immediate actions are not taken during post-flood rehabilitation efforts.

Assessing the challenges at hand, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) said this is also a critical time for over half a million pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers who face the risk of serious malnutrition.

The floods have already had a great impact on children making them particularly vulnerable to disease and diarrhoea.

Without intervention, the number of acutely malnourished children in the flood-affected areas could rise to more than one million within 6-8 weeks. This could potentially place thousands of children at risk of illness and death due to malnutrition. Babies born to malnourished women are particularly at risk. As they have low birth weight, they are more likely to get ill and their overall development could be severely impaired in the years to come.

Commenting on the situation, Morten Giersing, UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh said: "We are taking immediate steps to access the most vulnerable children and women to ensure basic health and nutrition as a life saving priority."

UNICEF will provide daily supplements of fortified blended food to prevent malnutrition among children and women in the most vulnerable households. UNICEF will also distribute iron-folate supplements to prevent and control anaemia in pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. In addition, UNICEF will support a nationwide campaign to provide Vitamin A capsules as well as de-worming tablets for children.

Reciprocating similar view, Mr. Douglas Casson Coutts, WFP representative in Bangladesh said: "One of the serious fallouts of the floods has been a further deterioration of the nutritional status of the affected ultra-poor. Therefore we have already planned to provide extra rations of fortified blended food to young children as well as pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers."

Poor sanitation, lack of food, water-borne diseases and loss of family income have all contributed to the increased level of malnutrition among children during this year's floods.

The World Food Programme aims to improve the nutritional status and household food security by providing vulnerable families with a basket of food items, including rice and wheat, pulses, oil and iodized salt. Extra rations of fortified blended food will be provided to infants and young children as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women. The agency will also

distribute 750 grams of high energy biscuits daily for over the next ten months among 80,000 primary school children in the worst flood-affected districts.

To ensure that most flood-affected areas are covered and the nutritional supplements reach those who need it most, UNICEF and WFP are closely coordinating their efforts in both planning and implementation through a joint taskforce.

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