

**Statement of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
At the Third United Nations Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction  
Sendai, Japan 14-18 March**

Your Excellency and Distinguished Colleagues

We would like to thank the Government of Japan for hosting the Conference.

On behalf of UNICEF, I would also like to express our solidarity and sympathies to the governments and people of Vanuatu and Tuvalu as they address the aftermath of Cyclone Pam. UNICEF has been doing what we can to help people to cope, and we will continue to do so.

Disaster Risk Reduction is a priority for UNICEF and we appreciate the efforts undertaken to develop the post-2015 framework on disaster risk reduction. The focus on disaster risk reduction is an important contribution to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Global experience shows that the impact of disasters is felt most in the poorest and most disadvantaged countries — and by the poorest and most disadvantaged people — particularly children - within these countries.

By the end of the 1990s, climate-change related disasters affected approximately 66 million children per year. In the coming decades, this number is projected to reach 200 million.

Children are affected by disasters in myriad ways – death or injury, and the threat of disease caused by disrupted access to basic services such as health, nutrition, safe water and sanitation. By missing out on education, they are robbed of the opportunity to grow and nurture their minds during critical developmental years. Children can further suffer from psychological trauma, or face exploitation, violence, abuse, displacement, and separation from their caregivers. All of these effects have long-term consequences, not only for the children themselves, but for generations to come.

There is no doubt that children are among the most vulnerable to hazards. What is less recognized is that they have an important role to play in reducing risk. Girls and boys, have proven capable of mapping the hazards they face, identifying those people most at risk and advocating for change. They can play an even more significant role where they are part of national and community plans and processes. This was the case in Japan in 2011 and the benefits are clear.

UNICEF supports a post 2015 framework on disaster risk reduction that puts children at the centre of its agenda and addresses the following:

- Sound disaster risk assessments, based on data that is inclusive and is disaggregated by age, gender and disability.
- Primary health care systems that are informed by an analysis of risk including the risk of epidemics and pandemics, are decentralized and community-based so they not only reduce vulnerability related to health and nutrition, but are resilient and more sustainable themselves.
- Water, sanitation and hygiene services that consider all risks, including those additional risks posed by climate change, and build the adaptive capacity of communities themselves to deal with shocks and stress.
- A recognition of the special role that schools and education play in reducing disaster risk. This includes support to scale up structural safety of schools, emergency preparedness, and knowledge and education, as three pillars of comprehensive school safety.
- Social protection and safety net measures that are available to those most at risk to mitigate the impacts of floods, droughts and other shocks. These systems should be flexible enough to include those who will be most negatively affected by a disaster (children from poor and extremely poor households, children with disability, pregnant and lactating women) and supported by social workers to connect families to different social services.

UNICEF is committed to strengthening the resilience of all girls and boys to all shocks. It is also committed to strengthening the systems they require to flourish. Among other things, this will require better integration of humanitarian and development work, focused on the underlying drivers of risk. UNICEF will also continue to support the development of capacities for preparedness and effective response which lies at the heart of disaster risk reduction.

In supporting partners to operationalize the new DRR framework UNICEF will promote, as appropriate, a multi-hazard approach linking measures to address disasters, climate change, conflict and epidemics.

Last but certainly not least, as disaster risk is an intergenerational issue, UNICEF will continue 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.