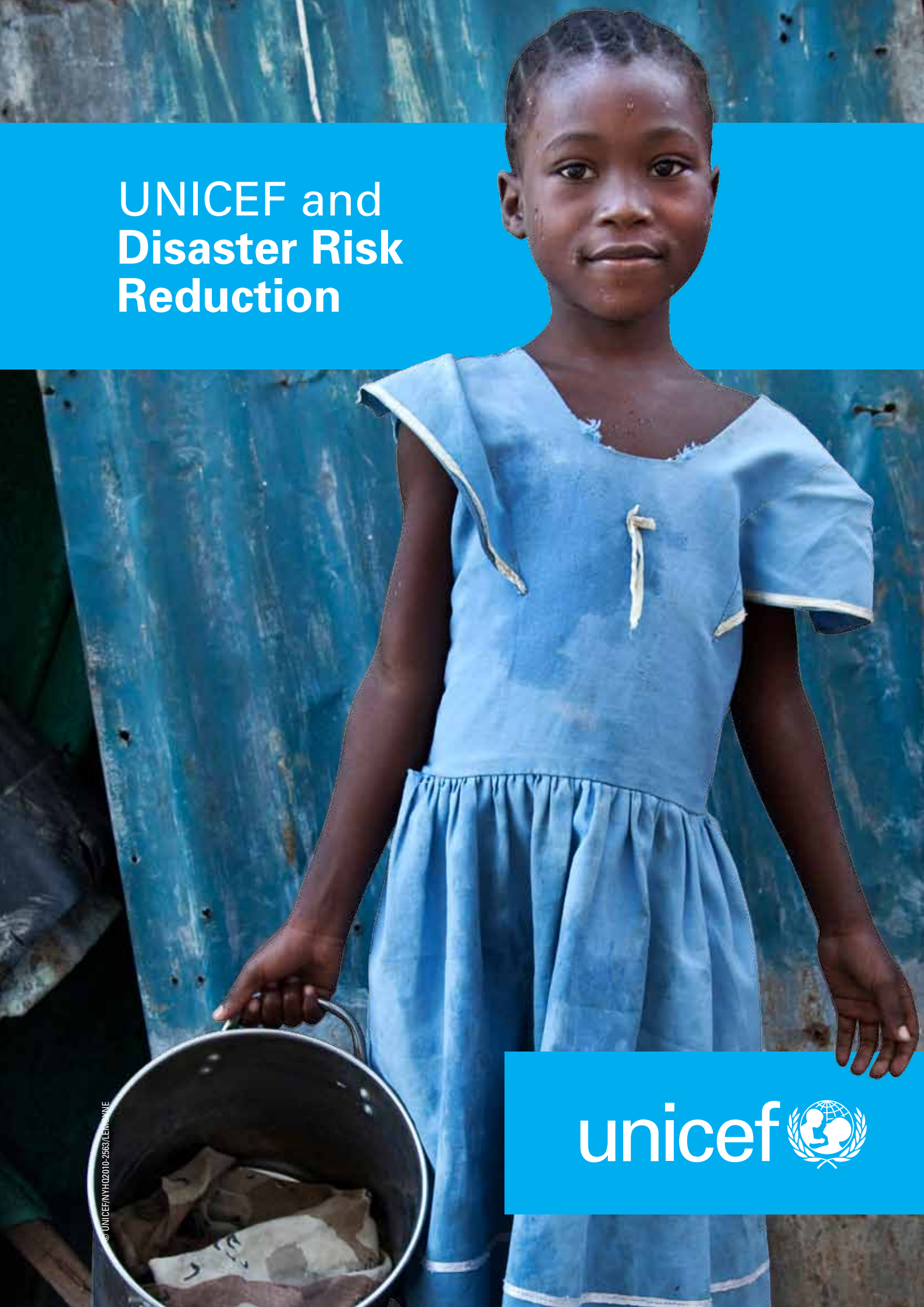
UNICEF and **Disaster Risk Reduction**



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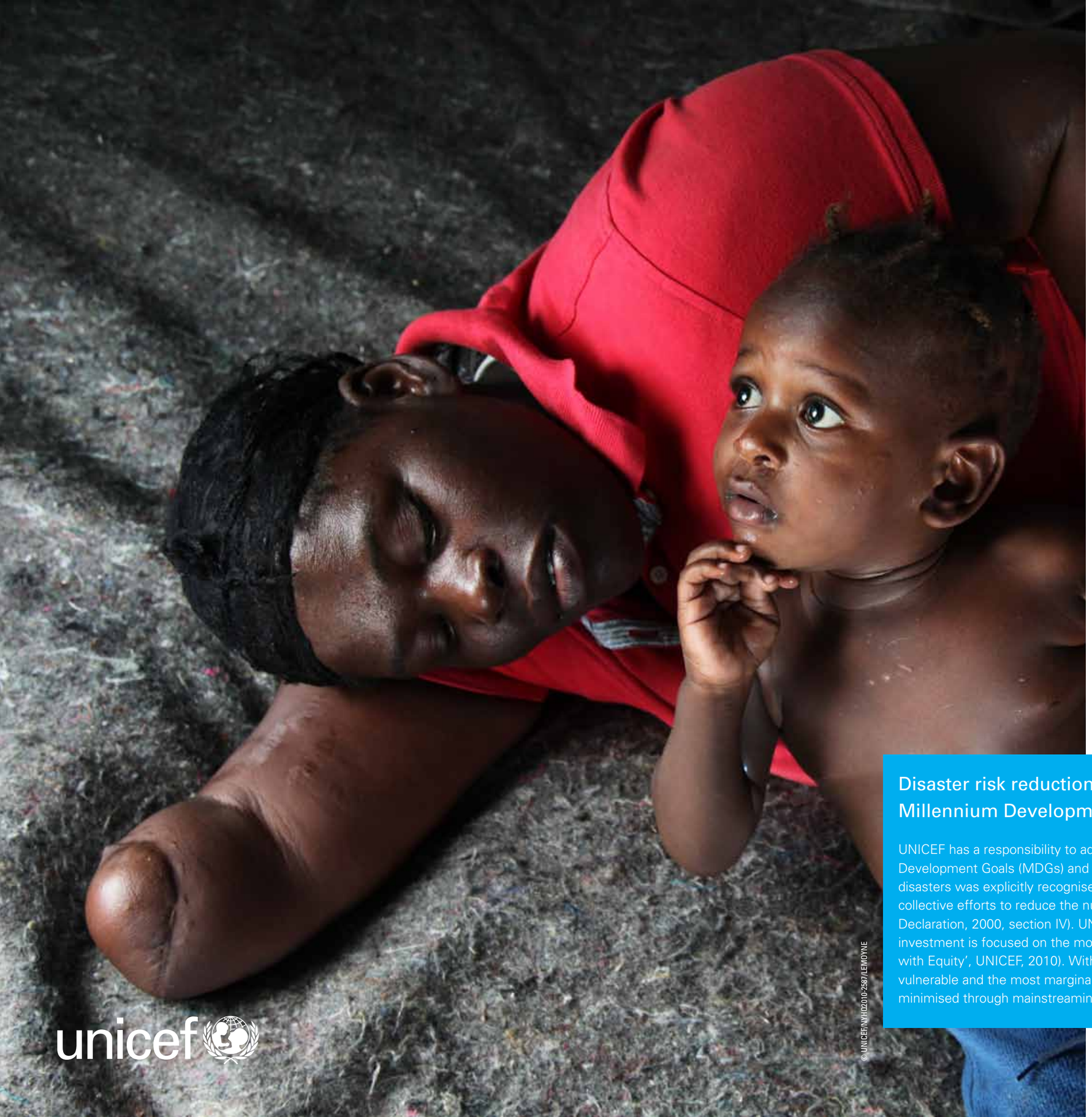

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What is Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)?

Disaster risk is the potential loss expressed in lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services, which could occur to a particular community or a society due to the impact of a natural hazard[1]. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a systematic approach to identifying, assessing and reducing that risk. Specifically, the purpose of disaster risk reduction is to minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society in order to avoid (prevent) or to limit (mitigate and prepare for) the adverse impacts of natural hazards, and facilitate sustainable development. Disaster risk reduction is also recognised as a key climate change adaptation strategy.

Why is DRR important for UNICEF?

Disasters and disaster risk are on the rise. The number of people affected globally by disasters has been increasing by an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 per decade, since the early 1970s, with 250 million affected per year over the last decade[2]. Ninety-five percent of disaster deaths occur in developing countries. Climate change impacts are projected to increase the numbers of children affected by disasters from an estimated 66.5 million per year in the late 1990s, to as many as 175 million per year in the coming decade[3].

Disasters negatively impact children's and women's rights, disproportionately affect poor countries, erode development gains and set back progress in achieving the MDGs. Disasters thus exacerbate already existing vulnerabilities and inequalities of boys, girls, women and men. As disasters are a function of hazard, vulnerability and capacity, they are both a humanitarian and a development concern. With a mandate combining humanitarian relief with long-term development objectives, UNICEF recognises its crucial responsibility to integrate DRR across its work. UNICEF's presence before, during and after a disaster also means that it is ideally placed to address disaster risk and to undertake risk reduction measures.

Disaster risk reduction, UNICEF and the Millennium Development Goals

UNICEF has a responsibility to address disaster risk as it impedes progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the realisation of child rights. The risk to development stemming from disasters was explicitly recognised in the Millennium Declaration, with an objective to "intensify our collective efforts to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters". (Millennium Declaration, 2000, section IV). UNICEF is committed to achieving the MDGs with equity, ensuring that investment is focused on the most disadvantaged. (See 'Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity', UNICEF, 2010). With the impacts of disasters falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable and the most marginalised, UNICEF has a strong incentive to ensure that disaster risk is minimised through mainstreaming risk reduction measures in its work.

[1] Adapted from ISDR, 2009
[2] Humanitarian Costs of Climate Change, Tufts, 2009
[3] Save the Children, Legacy of Disasters, 2007

Disasters and Children's Rights

Children typically represent 50-60 percent of those affected by disaster. Children are directly affected by death and injuries as well as from diseases related to malnutrition, poor water and sanitation - conditions that are exacerbated by disasters. In addition, disasters disrupt education and can cause psychological trauma. Disasters also separate children from their families and increase vulnerability to trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) children have inalienable rights in all circumstances - including disasters, when they are at their most vulnerable - and the right to participate in decisions that ultimately affect them. The CRC and disaster risk reduction are mutually reinforcing. For instance, educating a child about disaster risk and empowering the child to use that knowledge supports Article 6 (life, survival and development), while ensuring the participation and voice of a child in disaster risk reduction efforts upholds Article 12 (respect of the child's views). UNICEF also recognises the importance of gender in disaster risk reduction – and that ignoring the different capacities of girls and boys means undermining those of the community as a whole to address disaster risk and cope with disasters.

UNICEF's approach to DRR

UNICEF has long recognised the importance of disaster risk reduction. UNICEF fully supported the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in the 1990s. In 2005 UNICEF committed to the Hyogo Framework for Action and in 2006 became a formal member of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) System. Since 2006, UNICEF has played a key role not only in strengthening the ISDR System but has been an active participant in a number of global, regional and national networks.

Hyogo Framework for Action: five priority areas:

1. Ensuring that DRR is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation
2. Identifying, assessing and monitoring disaster risks and enhancing early warning
3. Using knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience
4. Reducing the underlying risk factors
5. Strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response

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UNICEF's DRR goals:

1. DRR for children and women is a national and local priority
2. Different risks faced by girls, boys and women are identified and addressed
3. Safer and more resilient conditions for girls, boys and women
4. Strengthened humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery through capacity development

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DRR and the WASH sector

Across the world, UNICEF is supporting governments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which include increasing access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Ensuring sustainability of resources through water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes is key to UNICEF's work. However, the actual and potential impacts of climate change on water resources are becoming abundantly clear and will impact WASH and other programmes. In order to assess these risks, UNICEF has developed an analytical tool assessing hazard, vulnerability and risk, as well as developing strategic action plans to respond to these risks. Prioritising the most vulnerable countries, UNICEF is currently carrying out country assessments, which include facilitated risk workshops to analyse the vulnerability to climate change of the WASH sector, current WASH programmes and country office capacity. These assessments will be rolled out across all 101 countries with UNICEF supported WASH programmes, focusing initially on the 60 priority countries.

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At the global level, UNICEF has integrated DRR into its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF's central policy on how to uphold the rights of children affected by humanitarian crisis. UNICEF is increasing its investment in both preparedness and in reducing risk through its response and early recovery work.

At the country level, UNICEF is working to integrate DRR into its programming, focusing particularly on building partnerships with government and civil society from the national to the community level. This involves integrating DRR into both UNICEF's regular country plans and into the overarching United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), so that risks are assessed and monitored as part of planning processes.

In countries and regions with a high risk of disaster, UNICEF promotes explicit approaches to reducing risks through all its core programmes. UNICEF works to promote and help ensure an adequate and specific focus on the rights and vulnerabilities of girls, boys, adolescents and women in all DRR initiatives.

Global Advocacy on DRR and Children

UNICEF is an active member of the Children in a Changing Climate coalition, working in close partnership with Save the Children, Plan, World Vision and the Institute for Development Studies (University of Sussex), to ensure children's unique experiences of climate change impacts and disasters are recognised in policy and practice. The coalition began in 2007 and continues to host events, disseminate research and highlight the importance of child-centred DRR and climate change prevention and adaptation. The coalition has produced a number of publications, including the research report 'Children and Disaster Risk Reduction: Taking stock and moving forward', which highlighted the unique roles that children can play in DRR activities through case studies from across the world. In 2010 the coalition developed innovative research aimed at understanding the long-term impacts of disasters on child welfare and development, and at identifying enabling environments for child-led DRR. This publication, which will be released in 2011, is an important step towards better understanding how children are affected by disasters, and how to make DRR work to their benefit.

DRR and Education

UNICEF is working in disaster-prone areas across the world to ensure that school buildings are safe, that teachers and students are prepared for potential disasters and that DRR is included in school curricula. In Central Asia (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan), UNICEF partnered with the European Commission and others to implement a programme on DRR and education. At the national level more than 50 senior government officials engaged in the programme while 10,000 teachers and disaster management officials were trained on school safety and 380,000 school children were taught basic life-skills to help ensure their safety at school and within their communities.

Examples of UNICEF's DRR work

DRR for girls, boys and women is a national and local priority

- To highlight the impact disasters have on children's rights and the importance of reducing disaster risk, UNICEF included this issue on the agenda of a High Level Meeting on International Cooperation for Child Rights in the Asia Pacific Region in October 2010. The resulting Beijing Declaration, signed by 28 countries, made an explicit commitment to promoting child-centred disaster risk reduction.
- In Cote d'Ivoire in 2010, UNICEF worked with the UN Country Team to support the establishment of a national DRR platform to advance the Hyogo Framework for Action.

Different risks faced by girls, boys, adolescents, and women are identified and addressed

- In Kenya, in order to gain a better understanding of disaster risk faced by children and women, UNICEF led a process to carry out a gender-sensitive vulnerability and capacity assessment at the district level. In partnership with the Kenya Red Cross and local government, this participatory process helped inform local and national humanitarian and development plans.
- In Haiti, UNICEF partnered with Plan International to ensure children's voices and their perspectives of disaster risk were included in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and subsequent recovery plans.

Safer and more resilient conditions for girls, boys and women

- In Algeria, to reduce disaster risk posed by earthquakes, UNICEF supported activities in 64 schools. This included the training of emergency focal points (teachers and children), the provision of emergency and first aid kits and the establishment of evacuation plans. Simple life schools, such as to 'duck, cover and hold' (a measure to reduce the likelihood of a being hit by falling objects during a quake) were also included in school curricula.
- In Bangladesh, UNICEF has set up permanent Child Friendly Spaces as part of the community-based child protection system in flood and cyclone-prone areas, to provide community outreach and support, as well as resilience programmes and activities, such as swimming classes. In the aftermath of disasters, the Child Friendly Spaces are used to provide a safe recreational and education place, and for the registration and follow up of separated and orphaned children.
- In Ethiopia, UNICEF's nutrition team is working closely with the government, other UN agencies and NGOs on food security preparedness in seven emergency-prone regions of the country. The objective of this work is to enhance response capacities to rapid onset emergencies at field level.

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Strengthened humanitarian preparedness, response and early recovery through capacity development

- In Mozambique, UNICEF and WFP co-led an inter-agency process to develop a joint UN programme on capacity development for government and other partners for emergency preparedness. This resulted in enhanced early warning, more timely response and ultimately lives saved during the 2009 floods.
- In the Maldives, UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Education, accelerated the construction of Child Friendly Schools in the aftermath of the tsunami, in the effort to 'build back better' and ensure that children are able to study in a safe environment which can withstand potential hazards.

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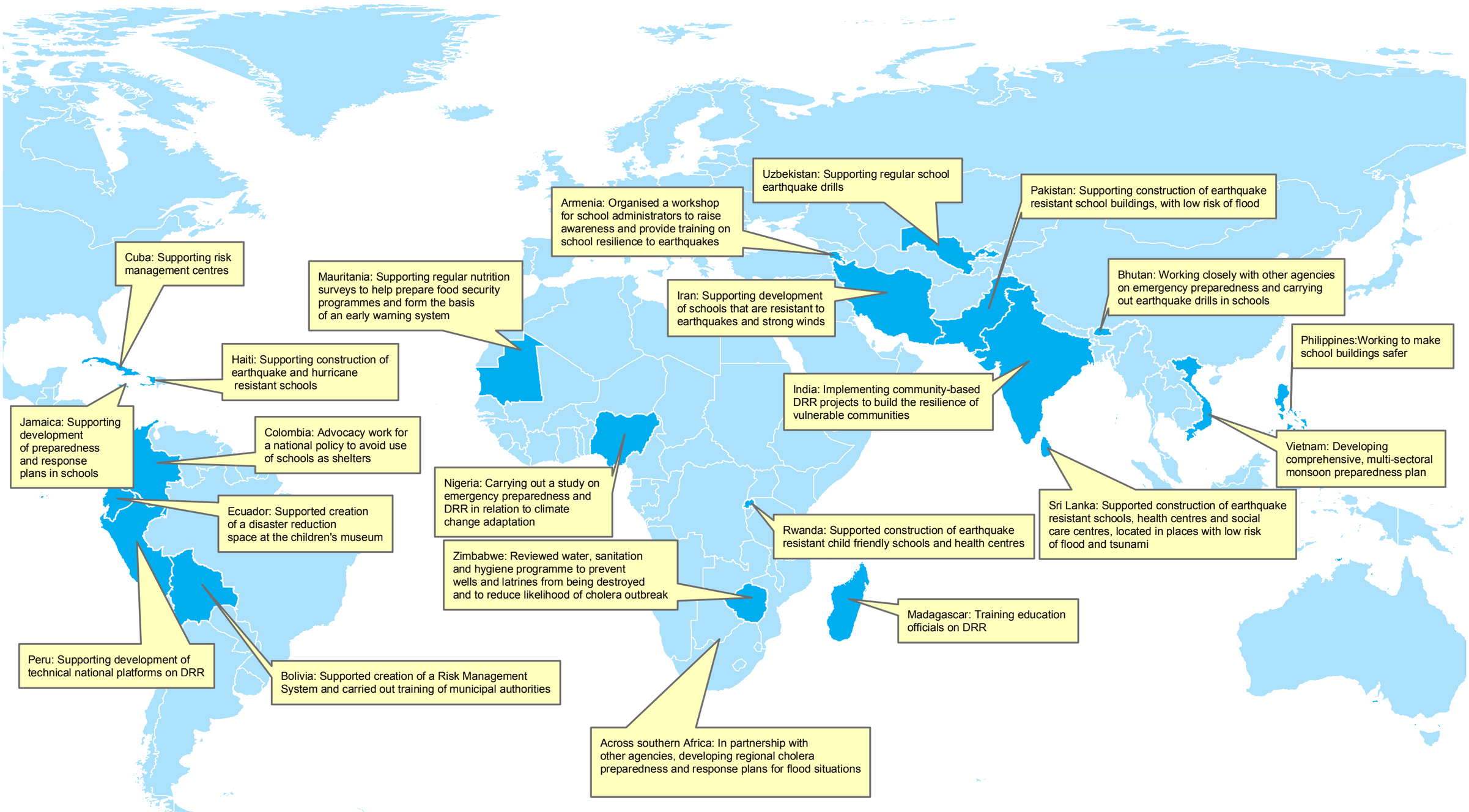
Examples of UNICEF's work on DRR across the world



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

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