At a glance: Haiti

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Creating a Haiti fit for children, three months after the earthquake

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At the Champs de Mars settlement camp in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a young boy and his mother adjust to living in a new refugee home.
PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, 9 April 2010 – As Haiti slowly moves forward after the 12 January earthquake, UNICEF is set to release a comprehensive report taking stock of humanitarian efforts on behalf of the children of Haiti.

The report, to be released next week, provides an overview of the progress made so far, as well as a critical look at the challenges ahead – all with an eye to the future, in the hope of transforming Haiti, with children at the centre of the plan.

‘A children’s recovery’

"UNICEF has said from the beginning that the earthquake was very much a children's emergency," said UNICEF Haiti Acting Chief of Communication Edward Carwardine. "And it's also important that this now becomes a children's recovery, that we put children at the forefront of the agenda as we move forwards, that we make sure their voices are heard, that their needs are identified and clearly spelled out, and that their rights are upheld as we move forwards."

The upcoming report, Mr. Carwardine added, “tries to sum up what's been achieved, but also identifies where the needs still are, where there are still gaps – and there are many things that still need to be done for children.”

One of these children is 13-year-old Shasha Liza. The earthquake destroyed her home and killed her father. She's now living in a small tent with nine other people.

"It's not easy to live in this camp," she told a visitor. "If we had proper tents, and better access to water, it would be easier to stay here for a longer period of time. It's difficult now – it's filthy, and when it rains, all the dirt turns to mud."

Shasha is anxious to return to school, and because of the earthquake, she now wants to study politics and become a senator, with the goal of changing the Haitian Government from within.

Return to learning

With schools across the country beginning to re-open, Shasha’s dream is now becoming a little more accessible.

UNICEF and its partners are working hand-in-hand with the Government of Haiti to return more than 700,000 students to school over the next two months. On 7 April, Minister of Education Joel Desrosiers Jean-Pierre joined UNICEF Acting Representative in Haiti Françoise Gruloos at the re-opening of L’Institution Sacré-Coeur. More than 1,000 eager students showed up for the event.

"We have to go back to school," Mr. Desrosiers Jean-Pierre told the students. "It's our only chance to succeed after the earthquake. So, dear children, I invite you to take up your school activities once again."

Education, nutrition and protection

Education is one of three key areas UNICEF has identified as being crucial for the future of Haiti's children. So far, UNICEF has distributed hundreds of School-in-a-Box kits and some 1,400 school tents for temporary classrooms.
"It's about ensuring education for every child – an inclusive education, an education that presents no barriers or obstacles to children to come back to school," said Mr. Carwardine. "It's about ensuring that we focus on the nutrition of children. Undernutrition has been a major problem here in Haiti, even before the earthquake, and so we want to make sure that as children move out of this current emergency, that they don't fall victim to yet another emergency, which is one of malnutrition.

“The third area is protection,” he added. “It's not just about protecting children in these difficult times; it's also making sure there are systems and structures in place that provide a long-term safety net for children, that their rights are protected, and that their welfare is very much at the heart of everything we do here – whether it's about policy or projects or services, that children have this protective environment in which they can grow up out of this disaster.”

A Haiti fit for children

To help create such an environment, more than 19,000 Haitian children are reached each day through child-friendly spaces and recreational activities supported by UNICEF and its partners.

UNICEF is also improving the lives of vulnerable earthquake survivors with a new rapid-assessment programme to monitor all of the temporary camps in Port-au-Prince.

Teams of young Haitians are fanning out across the capital on motorcycles, visiting each camp every two weeks. They quickly evaluate the conditions, which helps direct resources to the people who need them most.

Whether the focus is education, nutrition or protection, in the end, the work being done here is about one thing: creating a Haiti that is fit for children.

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Video

8 April 2010: UNICEF correspondent Thomas Nybo reports on the ongoing efforts to create a Haiti that is fit for children, three months after the earthquake.

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UNICEF correspondent Nina Martinek reports on the situation of children in Haiti three months after the earthquake. Produced by Nora Nonet.

VIDEO high | low

Broadcast-quality video on demand from The Newsmarket

UNICEF situation report

Children of Haiti: Three Months After the Earthquake [PDF]

Earthquake in Haiti

Preventing sexual violence

'Children in Haiti: One year after – the long road from relief to recovery' [PDF]

Press release: Earthquake anniversary highlights needs

One year on, despite gains, children at risk

with video

A young survivor thrives in school

with video

Fresh start in a mountain village

with video

Rebuilding the education system

with audio

Education from the ruins
Teams of young Haitians are fanning out across the capital on motorcycles, visiting each camp every two weeks. They quickly evaluate the conditions, which helps direct UNICEF’s response. UNICEF is also improving the lives of vulnerable earthquake survivors with a new rapid assessment programme to monitor all of the temporary camps in Port-au-Prince.

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