

150,000 children in Viet Nam are still at risk of malnutrition more than a week after Typhoon Damrey

An estimated 150,000 children under 5 years old are at risk of malnutrition and over 80,000 pregnant and nursing women in need special care. Children in poor remote areas are still underserved by relief efforts.

Phu Yen Province (Viet Nam), 13 November 2017 - 11 month-old Ngan lives in a small fishing community in Phu Yen province in southern Viet Nam, one of the worst hit areas by Typhoon Damrey. Her father works as casual worker on a fishing boat and the family is struggling to make ends meet in normal time. Ngan has suffered from malnutrition since her parents first consulted the district health centre. Lack of knowledge about proper feeding practices often leaves Ngan's parents helpless when their daughter is not growing fast enough.

But this is not a normal situation for Ngan's family. When Typhoon Damrey hit the village in the early hours everyone was still asleep and their house was severely damaged by the strong winds. Luckily no one in the family was hurt. In the chaos of the first two days after the storm Ngan's parents were unable to get meat or fish on the local market and even though there is now food available for local purchase the family can't afford to buy in large quantity so they have had to reduce portions. Ngan is not getting enough food, and her mother is also not eating enough and she has difficulty producing enough milk to keep breastfeeding her child.

Typhoon Damrey, one of the worst storm to hit Viet Nam in years, swept through largely poor, rural areas of Viet Nam with deadly force. It hit poor communities where the nutritional status of children was already of concern with malnutrition rates above national average. Populations in that region rely heavily on agriculture and fish farming for their livelihood and the storm also caused extensive damage to the agricultural infrastructures which is impacting the capacity of poor families to earn a decent living to care for their children.

During the rapid assessment mission UNICEF staff has met with several vulnerable children like Ngan who are the ones who suffered much more from the ongoing consequences of the typhoon. This situation was compounded by lack of communication at community level ahead of the typhoon on how to prepare and protect themselves.

In addition to malnutrition children are also exposed to an increased risk of waterborne diseases. Drinking water supply was interrupted for several days after the storm and people had to resort to unclean water for their consumption. The typhoon has also worsened the sanitation situation of the affected populations leading to increased open defecation as latrine facilities have been damaged. This leads to hygiene related risks for health.

UNICEF is stepping up its efforts to support national relief efforts to help the most affected families and children. Specific interventions look at addressing the increased risk of malnutrition through micronutrients and calories supplements for children and breastfeeding mothers and by training health workers on how to detect and treat malnutrition. In addition, to address the acute risk of waterborne diseases the organisation will provide products to families for water purification at home. UNICEF has worked to raise public awareness in the

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affected region to ensure that people are aware of the risks and can also adopt good hygiene and sanitation behaviours.

In the recovery phase, public communication campaigns in communities are critical to help families affected by the typhoon and promote important skills for parents to adopt to save lives. In addition, raising public awareness on the importance of disaster preparedness through mass and social media plays an important role to trigger support to affected people and to improve resilience against future natural disasters.

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