Pre-positioning life-saving supplies to improve disaster preparedness

Overview

UNFPA aims to ensure that, during emergencies, the specific needs of women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region are met by governments, United Nations agencies and key stakeholders. One of the ways it seeks to improve this is through a regional initiative that supports the timely distribution of essential supplies by trained partners.

Since 2015, the UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office has managed a flagship Regional Pre-positioning Initiative, supported by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Between May 2017-2019, over US$ 1 million of crucial supplies for sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence directly reached almost 84,000 people affected by 28 emergencies across 10 countries.

As of 2019, the Regional Prepositioning Initiative focuses on 11 priority countries: Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga and Vanuatu. However, supplies are used across the Asia-Pacific region wherever they are needed most. Supplies are also pre-positioned in regional hubs in Brisbane, Australia, and Suva, Fiji.

In emergencies, an essential component of an effective humanitarian response is ensuring the availability of supplies that meet needs associated with sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence. UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, strategically pre-positions such supplies in disaster-prone countries and regional hubs in the Asia-Pacific region. This has helped UNFPA respond faster, better and more efficiently to humanitarian crises across the region.
Responding to annual floods

Myanmar experiences severe floods during the monsoon season. In the most recent years, several tropical depressions generated more than 260,000 people in 2016 in total, and UNFPA, with support from UN and other NGOs, provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane regional warehouse and transported by the Australian Defence Force. In 2017, UNFPA provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane, with items they need amid humanitarian disasters. Flashlights and whistles for security, providing women and girls with dignity kits are pre-positioned nationally through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health kits, including kits for clinical delivery assistance, rape treatment, treatment of sexually transmissible infections, and vacuum extraction. The kits were used in health facilities across the country, directly benefiting 1,000 people.

Supporting clean delivery after an earthquake

Following the 8.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Solomon Islands in January 2018, UNFPA provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane, with items they need amid humanitarian disasters. Flashlights and whistles for security, providing women and girls with dignity kits are pre-positioned nationally through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health kits, including kits for clinical delivery assistance, rape treatment, treatment of sexually transmissible infections, and vacuum extraction. The kits were used in health facilities across the country, directly benefiting 1,000 people.

Saving lives through reproductive health medical missions

Medical missions are a feature of emergency relief. In 2017, UNFPA, supported by the Australian Government, provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane, with items they need amid humanitarian disasters. Flashlights and whistles for security, providing women and girls with dignity kits are pre-positioned nationally through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health kits, including kits for clinical delivery assistance, rape treatment, treatment of sexually transmissible infections, and vacuum extraction. The kits were used in health facilities across the country, directly benefiting 1,000 people.

Helping women affected by the eruption of Mount Ambae

In the first four months of 2018, back to back Tropical Cyclone Ian and then Tita struck the Solomon Islands, UNFPA provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane, with items they need amid humanitarian disasters. Flashlights and whistles for security, providing women and girls with dignity kits are pre-positioned nationally through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health kits, including kits for clinical delivery assistance, rape treatment, treatment of sexually transmissible infections, and vacuum extraction. The kits were used in health facilities across the country, directly benefiting 1,000 people.

Pre-positioning has been a game changer for UNFPA's humanitarian work in the Asia-Pacific region.

For my country

To ensure that no one is left behind, every pregnant woman affected by disasters must be reached. This requires strategic planning of obstetric facilities in advance of disasters. In 2018, UNFPA provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane, with items they need amid humanitarian disasters. Flashlights and whistles for security, providing women and girls with dignity kits are pre-positioned nationally through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health kits, including kits for clinical delivery assistance, rape treatment, treatment of sexually transmissible infections, and vacuum extraction. The kits were used in health facilities across the country, directly benefiting 1,000 people.

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Providing maternity services in the shadow of a volcano

As part of emergency preparedness efforts, UNFPA-Papua New Guinea has developed customised dignity kits and other items to support sexual and reproductive health efforts during emergency response efforts, training and guiding responding and to provide broader scale support. The supplies include tents, food, menstrual equipment and clean clothes, and feminine hygiene products, potentially saving the lives of newborns. In the aftermath of the Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami, UNFPA sent 1,398 dignity kits to women of reproductive age. UNFPA partnered with local non-governmental organisations to support the distribution of dignity kits in the affected regions. These voluntary agencies reached 650 women with dignity kits in the displacement camps and distributed 1,160 dignity kits to women of reproductive age. UNFPA provided dignity kits in the wake of the eruption of Mount Mayon in the Philippines in January 2018 and at the request of the Government of Indonesia, UNFPA established nine reproductive health medical missions that provided essential antenatal, delivery and referral support for safe deliveries. In 2018, UNFPA provided dignity kits and other relief items on an Australian Defence Force aircraft from the regional warehouse in Brisbane, with items they need amid humanitarian disasters. Flashlights and whistles for security, providing women and girls with dignity kits are pre-positioned nationally through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health kits, including kits for clinical delivery assistance, rape treatment, treatment of sexually transmissible infections, and vacuum extraction. The kits were used in health facilities across the country, directly benefiting 1,000 people.

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Building capacity

In order to ensure the effective management and use of sexual and reproductive health supplies in emergencies, the Regional Prepositioning Initiative also supports capacity building initiatives across the priority countries. Between 2015 and 2018, 200 people from UNFPA, governments and partner organisations across eight countries completed humanitarian logistics training, and more than 60 people attended workshops on humanitarian preparedness and gender-based violence in emergencies.

The UNFPA Asia–Pacific Regional Office works with UNFPA Country Offices in the region to assist governments and civil society partners to reduce disaster risk, and prepare for and respond to emergencies. This is in line with the unique mandate of UNFPA to address sexual and reproductive health, and prevent and respond to gender-based violence during humanitarian crises.

Humanitarian context and challenges

The Asia–Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world. Nearly 45 percent of the world’s natural disasters occur in the region, and 95 percent of all people affected by a disaster in 2016 live in Asia-Pacific. Mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change are huge challenges facing all countries in the region, especially Pacific Island nations. The region is also home to a number of protracted conflicts and long-running conflicts resulting in large refugee and displaced populations.

The UNFPA Asia–Pacific Regional Office delivers UNFPA’s Reproductive Health kits to remote communities around Lake Kutubu, during the Papua New Guinea earthquake response. ©Robyn Drysdale/IPPF Humanitarian

Pre-positioning has improved the speed, quality and efficiency of humanitarian responses

Pre-positioning has provided new opportunities for UNFPA to advocate for measures to address sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence during humanitarian responses. It has also helped to build trust with governments and other partners. These outcomes assist UNFPA’s work in relation to the humanitarian, development and peace-building nexus.

Pre-positioning allows UNFPA to respond faster

Nationally pre-positioned supplies are readily available to implementing partners in an emergency, whereas those procured in the aftermath of a response often take weeks to arrive.

Even in countries where UNFPA is currently not pre-positioning supplies nationally, the close partnership between UNFPA and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has enabled supplies from the regional supplies warehouse in Australia to be on the ground within 48 hours of a government’s request for assistance.

Pre-positioning as part of preparedness efforts improves the quality of a response

Pre-positioning supplies enables customisation for the country context before an emergency. For example, dignity kits can include culturally appropriate clothing in suitable sizes.

Many of the priority countries face regular emergencies, and UNFPA has received feedback from affected communities on what they need most during disasters. These lessons on supplies can be built into the preparedness phase of the disaster cycle, to improve the quality of supplies available in the acute phase of a response.

Pre-positioning reduces transport costs

Transporting supplies by sea freight as a preparedness activity is significantly cheaper than air freighting supplies in the acute phase of a response. For example, during the flood response in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, transport of dignity kits from the supplier to the end beneficiary cost $1.50 per kit. In contrast, the cost of air freighting dignity kits during the acute phase of the response was quoted at more than $12 per kit. It also reduces carbon emissions.

National pre-positioning allows a response in crises that UNFPA would not otherwise be able to engage in

Governments across the Asia-Pacific region have invested significantly in humanitarian preparedness, but do not always have the capacity to fully respond to sexual and reproductive health needs. National pre-positioning of supplies can provide an entry point for UNFPA to support in this area, even when there is no formal request for international assistance.

Having supplies available in a country means that UNFPA can support small-scale responses for which a response might not have been feasible without pre-positioned supplies.

In areas where access to affected communities is compromised because of conflict, it is vital to have supplies pre-positioned that can be immediately used whenever temporary access is granted to humanitarian actors.

Pre-positioning strengthens partnerships

Pre-positioning has enhanced governments’ views of UNFPA as an essential humanitarian partner in the Asia–Pacific region.

Having supplies immediately available has given UNFPA a seat at the table when developing response plans. This enables UNFPA to advocate for the needs of women and girls beyond the provision of supplies.

The benefits of trust with governments, humanitarian actors and partners enable UNFPA to achieve greater results across the humanitarian, development and peace-building nexus in the Asia-Pacific region.

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