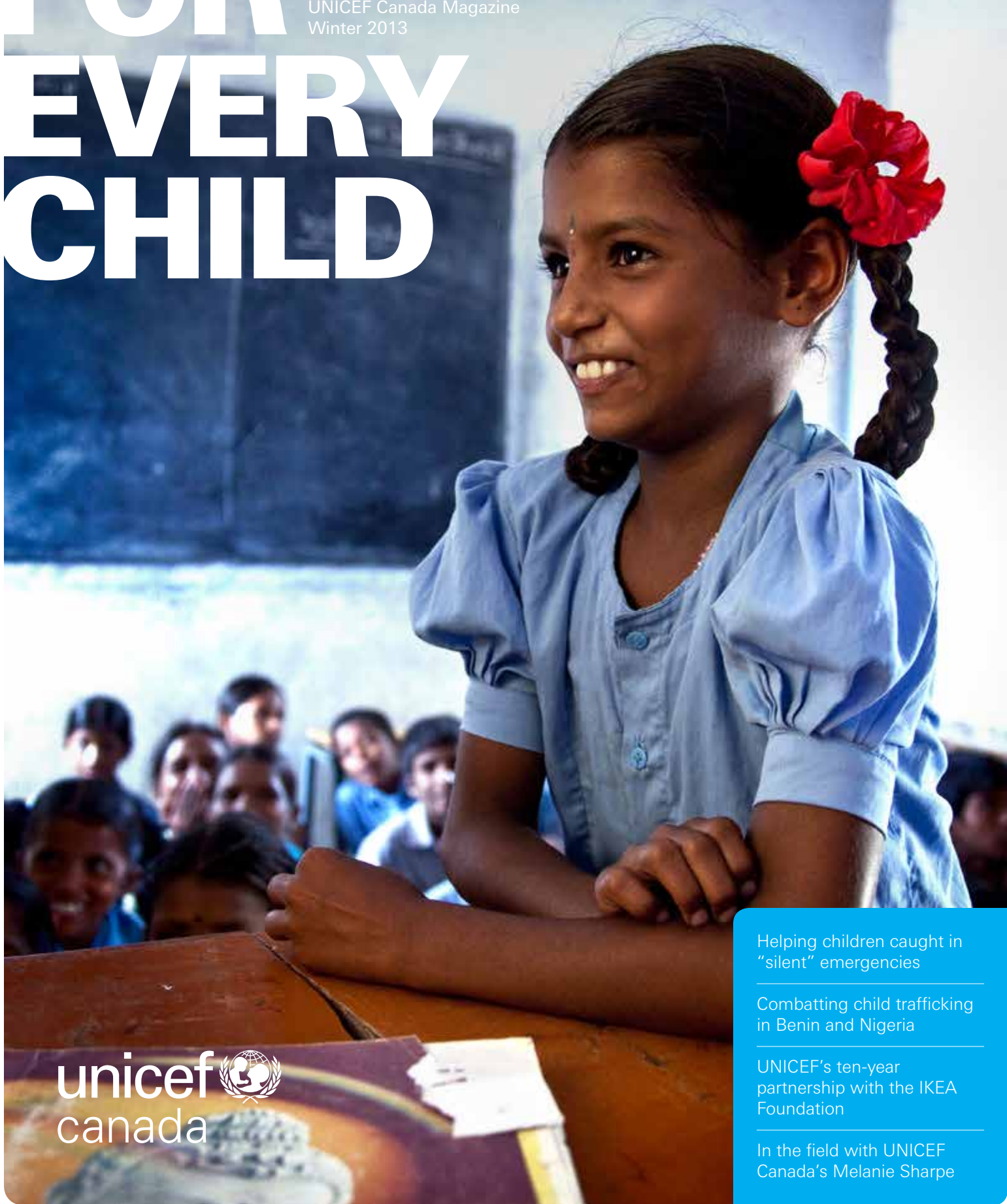


FOR EVERY CHILD

UNICEF Canada Magazine
Winter 2013



Helping children caught in
"silent" emergencies

Combatting child trafficking
in Benin and Nigeria

UNICEF's ten-year
partnership with the IKEA
Foundation

In the field with UNICEF
Canada's Melanie Sharpe

unicef 
canada

A message from President and CEO David Morley

Many people have told me that UNICEF's stories are our most powerful asset. When we talk about the children we save and protect or the field staff who often put themselves at risk, that's just a way of saying how far we're willing to go to save children's lives. But sometimes it's also powerful to tell the UNICEF story from an entirely different perspective. That's exactly what we've done in "A Story about a Pair of Boots" (page 8). You may have seen a picture of these boots over the last few months. We hope you enjoy the story they have to tell—and that you'll share the story with your friends. Visit unicef.ca to learn more about this campaign.



David speaks to a little boy during his recent visit to Haiti.

These boots signify a lot of things, but perhaps most notably they represent our reach. "Stories Not Told" (page 4) focuses on three examples of emergencies that haven't made the front pages, but are a priority for UNICEF. We go wherever the need is great and, thanks to your support, we can continue our mission around the world, often outside of the spotlight, to ensure that children survive and are kept out of harm's way.

None of what we do is possible without our supporters—because UNICEF is entirely funded by voluntary donations.

We are truly proud of what we have accomplished with longtime supporter the IKEA Foundation. Our decade-long partnership with the IKEA Foundation has enabled UNICEF to help over 74 million Indian children create better futures for themselves and their families, including children like twelve-year-old Mukesh Somagi Damore. Read Mukesh's story, and more about IKEA's commitment to child survival, in "The IKEA Foundation: A True Partner" (page 12).

Thank you for your ongoing and generous support. By making child survival a priority, you share in each and every one of UNICEF's accomplishments. You are a lifesaver.

President and CEO
UNICEF Canada

UNICEF is the world's leading child-focused humanitarian and development agency. Through innovative programs and advocacy work, we save children's lives and secure their rights in virtually every country. Our global reach, unparalleled influence on policymakers, and diverse partnerships make us an instrumental force in shaping a world in which no child dies of a preventable cause. UNICEF is supported entirely by voluntary donations and helps all children, regardless of race, religion or politics.

FOR EVERY CHILD

For Every Child
UNICEF Canada Magazine Winter 2013

For Every Child is a magazine published by UNICEF Canada. We welcome your comments and suggestions at foreverychild@unicef.ca.

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Girija, 11, from Bijanegere Village, India, worked in the cotton fields before being enrolled in school. The IKEA Social Initiative, implemented in conjunction with UNICEF, identifies child labourers and gets them back in school.

Inset photo:
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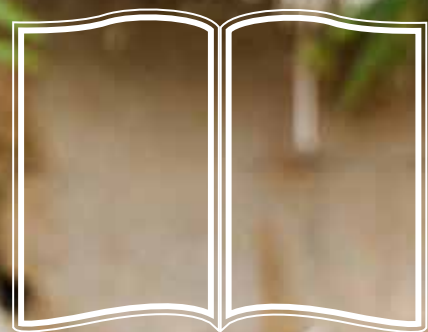


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Achille Pihigomeca, 12, sits on a bench in the village of Koaro, Libya. Achille and his family fled to Liberia to escape the post-election violence. They returned to find their home had been damaged and looted.



STORIES NOT TOLD

How your support helps vulnerable children caught in “silent” emergencies

Emergencies tear children’s lives apart, forcing them from their homes without secure food supplies or access to education, safe water or sanitation.

Some emergencies start with a bang—others, barely a whisper. Millions of children worldwide live amidst crises that persist for years. While some of these emergencies attract significant media and political attention, others never reach international awareness.

Every day, we respond to these “silent” emergencies, the ones that exist far from the public eye, with an unwavering commitment to saving and securing the rights of all children in all threatening situations.

“While catastrophes do not discriminate, they most severely affect those least able to withstand them: the most vulnerable children, living in the poorest and most isolated places, subject to the greatest deprivations.”

—ANTHONY LAKE, UNICEF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NATURAL DISASTERS

Ten-year-old Roy lives in Barinaut, an area decimated by the floods that swept through Northern Mindanao, Philippines, in December 2011 following Tropical Storm Washi. The equivalent of one month’s rain fell overnight, swelling the Mandulog River to a destructive torrent that crushed hundreds of homes.

Roy was jolted awake as water rushed through his house. Unable to see in the darkness, he grabbed at the objects floating past. “I had to hold on to something so I would not be carried away,” he said. Roy was swept through the village by the rushing water, clutching a piece of wood. Rescuers pulled him to safety the next morning.

Here, thanks to the generosity of people like you, UNICEF has:

- supplied therapeutic foods for malnourished children
- built latrines and handwashing facilities in schools
- constructed wells
- supplied hygiene and water kits
- established temporary learning spaces to serve nearly 1,300 children
- distributed school packs to 11,400 children and textbooks to 49 flood-damaged schools

CIVIL UNREST

Eric, aged 11, and his family sought refuge in Liberia when violence broke out in Côte d’Ivoire. “My three sisters cried all the way across the river, but finally we made it safely,” he explained.

Violence stemming from the November 2010 elections in Côte d’Ivoire led to the displacement of nearly one million people. The country’s damaged infrastructure and blighted education facilities left many more children vulnerable.

With your support, in Côte d’Ivoire UNICEF has:

- helped over one million children get back to school
- vaccinated nearly 6.5 million children for measles
- provided safe water and sanitation for over 800,000 people

In Liberia, the influx of over 180,000 Ivorian refugees fleeing violence put strain on a country still struggling to rebuild its education system after its own civil war ended a decade earlier.

Today, thanks to your support, in Liberia UNICEF has:

- helped the government improve education for Ivorian refugee students in Liberia to the standards in Côte d’Ivoire, ensuring a smoother transition for returning refugees
- assisted in the production of 315,000 primary textbooks and teacher guides
- ensured that these materials reached students in time for refugee children to begin the school year at the same time as they would at home

Eric, who wants to be a teacher, now attends school in Liberia and says he does not want to go back home—at least for now. “I want to stay here because it is safe and I can go to school and learn. I got a new bag and books from UNICEF and I don’t want to miss any of my classes!”

FRAGILE STATES

On July 9, 2011, South Sudan became the world’s newest nation. Shortly after midnight in the capital of Juba, South Sudan marked another first—the first baby born after independence.

Unfortunately, persistent conflicts and an influx of over 350,000 refugees returning to their homeland put pressure on South Sudan’s already strained public services. The new baby, named Independence Moses Spina, was born into a country where one in nine children dies before reaching the age of five, more than half of girls are married younger than the legal age and the risk of underage recruitment into armed forces remains high.

In South Sudan, with the support of generous donors like you, UNICEF has:

- provided health and nutrition services to over 2.5 million children
- provided refugees and returnees with access to safe water
- treated over 64,500 children under five for severe acute malnutrition
- helped to release and reintegrate 447 children from armed groups
- supported government to finalize a new program on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
- worked with the government to implement disaster-risk reduction programs to prepare for possible crises in the future



Recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, Louis-Georges Arsenault speaks with displaced children during a class in Roshanpura Community School in Pakistan.

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Louis-Georges Arsenault

Director of Emergency Programs

Canadian Louis-Georges Arsenault has been UNICEF's Director of Emergency Programs since March 2008. Before this, he spent three years as the UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh and has served UNICEF in a wide variety of roles for almost twenty years.

One of the most challenging assignments Mr. Arsenault undertook for UNICEF was his term as the representative in Afghanistan from 1998 to 2001. He managed one of UNICEF's largest humanitarian operations, coordinating relief and rehabilitation services to over 250,000 displaced people. He lobbied against the recruitment of children as soldiers and, despite the Taliban's edicts against them, initiated several projects to provide employment opportunities for women and education for girls.

What can UNICEF do in the area of disaster prevention? Is it possible to mitigate the damage by being prepared for the next emergency?

The catastrophic floods in Pakistan, the earthquake that killed hundreds of thousands in Haiti: these are just two examples of disasters that overwhelmed already fragile nations. We know that the number of natural disasters and the people affected by them is growing year by year.

Our work is increasingly focused on making sure that communities have a better capacity to absorb a risk or threat triggered either by natural disaster or conflict. It's about ensuring that there is a level of preparedness. It's true that the current financial environment is very difficult, but we have to make a strong case. We want to be able to decrease the need in the future. We need to invest now.

The Pakistani floods were one of the more challenging emergencies to manage logistically. Why is that?

The situation to begin with was challenging in some areas of the country, and the floods exacerbated the fragility of people's lives there.

It was a moving target because the floods moved from north to south with extraordinary speed. We were, with all our partners, in good shape executing our response plan, when suddenly we had to divide our resources and transfer some of our capacity, people, supplies and resources down south so we could minimize the impact of the catastrophe there.

We worked very hard to resume schooling as soon as possible. This is so important for children in crisis because it allows them to find some sense of normalcy amidst the chaos and destruction. Schools in emergencies are rarely in nice, fancy buildings. Here, they were temporarily established in tents. If we wait for the perfect set-up—a more comfortable or well-resourced solution—children are going to drop out, and it's so much harder to get them back to school. So it's crucial that we act fast, which is what we did.

Like in all emergencies, the first focus was on child survival, on getting food, clean water, shelter and medicine to families in desperate need. That is always our first task, the first things that must be done. Then come the longer-term goals: laying the groundwork for people to return to their homelands, back to a place that is livable, has basic social services—access to education, health care and so on—and has possibilities for livelihood. These are the things we continue to work on in Pakistan to this day.



Louis-Georges speaks with children attending a UNICEF-supported tent school in the Chota Lahore camp in Swabi District, Pakistan.

"We were, with all our partners, in good shape executing our response plan, when suddenly we had to divide our resources and transfer some of our capacity, people, supplies and resources down south so we could minimize the impact of the catastrophe there."

Before the floods, we had been making good progress in Pakistan on several fronts. The floods were a serious blow to our efforts to meet the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) targets for the country, but we are making up for lost time now.

What are you currently focused on?

Much of our focus this year has been on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, and particularly on Somalia and the refugee situation in Da'daab, Kenya.

In the Sahel, the worst-case scenario became reality in nine countries. These populations are under the radar again. They are not being heard about in the news, but these are communities that remain vulnerable and still need our support. There are situations like this in countries on at least two or three continents. Countries that need sustained support.

What would you say is the single most important characteristic UNICEF possesses that makes our emergency response effective?

I would say flexibility. Our flexibility allows us to respond to a crisis where there is no attention—we don't have to wait for funding to be in place first.



Special
Feature

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A STORY ABOUT **A PAIR OF BOOTS**



UNICEF'S FIGHT FOR CHILD SURVIVAL



This is the story of a pair of **BOOTS.**

The pages of this magazine are usually overflowing with powerful stories and images of the children we save and the innovations we develop, all made possible by the support of donors like you.

But what if we looked at child survival from a totally different perspective? From the perspective of a pair of seemingly unremarkable, run-of-the-mill boots? The boots in this photo have spent their existence travelling to often remote locations with one singular purpose: saving lives.

What would these boots say if they could talk?

They would tell us that they have travelled over 100,000 kilometres to fourteen countries including: Nepal, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Indonesia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Malawi, Mozambique, Haiti and Canada.

They would tell us how many children they've helped. The number is astonishing. If you bear in mind the vaccination campaigns they've organized, the schools they've helped build and the negotiations they've undertaken during emergencies, they've touched the lives of millions of children worldwide.

They would describe the special moments they shared with some remarkable children.

Like in October 2001, when they stood strong while UNICEF helped negotiate a temporary ceasefire in Afghanistan between the Taliban government, the opposing Northern Alliance and the international coalition to ensure the polio vaccination campaign could continue. The boots then set out for the Pakistani-Afghan border mountains on a donkey caravan, bringing vaccination supplies and schoolbooks to struggling children in one of the most isolated corners of the world.

Or the day after the earthquake in Haiti, when they came across a makeshift school of over 100 students on a remote hillside. The school had been cobbled together under a canvas awning. Three hours later, these boots

returned to the school with a UNICEF School-in-a-Box kit. As the box of supplies was opened the children fell silent, then their eyes grew wide and they bubbled over with excited chatter.

In a classroom high in the mountains of Afghanistan, they listened as young girls shared their aspirations—most dreaming of becoming teachers, nurses or doctors. One remarkable young woman stood up to declare she wanted to be an engineer, to help rebuild her country—its roads, bridges, houses and schools—and show that girls can build things just as well as boys. In this most conservative, remote community, thanks to UNICEF's support, she found the courage to dream big.

"They have survived deserts, snow-packed mountains, tropical rainforests, mangrove swamps, rocky shores, sand dunes and rhododendron forests. They've trekked over rolling fields, muddy tracks, dusty highways and open plains, through sandstorms and torrential rains, past mud huts and skyscrapers. They have worked their way through the post-tsunami rubble of Aceh, Indonesia, and the post-earthquake devastation of Port-au-Prince, Haiti."

Nigel has travelled the world to save children's lives, and he's been able to do this thanks to the generosity of our donors. He and his boots exemplify not only the distance UNICEF goes to reach the hardest to reach, but also the courage, passion and optimism with which our dedicated field staff do their work.

On November 1, 2012, Nigel and his boots received a fitting honour: induction into the Bata Shoe Museum. Sonja Bata spoke at the ceremony, noting that to her knowledge no other pair in the museum had as powerful and moving a story behind them as these boots. Perhaps not surprisingly, an emergency situation kept Nigel from attending: Hurricane Sandy had just hammered Haiti, and Nigel was coordinating the emergency response efforts of the United Nations.

Though Nigel now has a new pair of boots on his feet, it seems his work is far from over.

**NO CHILD
TOO FAR**



The array of landscapes these boots have encountered in the name of child survival is mind-boggling. They have survived deserts, snow-packed mountains, tropical rainforests, mangrove swamps, rocky shores, sand dunes and rhododendron forests. They've trekked over rolling fields, muddy tracks, dusty highways and open plains, through sandstorms and torrential rains, past mud huts and skyscrapers. They have worked their way through the post-tsunami rubble of Aceh, Indonesia, and the post-earthquake devastation of Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

By now, you must be wondering who these boots belong to. They are the much-loved property of Nigel Fisher, former President of UNICEF Canada, and lifelong humanitarian.



From left to right: Sharon Avery, Patsy Fisher, Sonja Bata and David Morley moments after Nigel Fisher's boots are inducted into the Bata Shoe Museum.

For more on our No Child Too Far campaign, visit: unicef.ca

Students in Bijanegere Village, India, are benefitting from the IKEA Social Initiative, implemented in conjunction with UNICEF, which identifies child labourers and gets them into school.

THE IKEA FOUNDATION: A TRUE PARTNER

Celebrating more than ten years of working together in India

As the largest corporate donor to UNICEF, the IKEA Foundation has committed more than \$200 million to UNICEF's programs to save and improve the lives of children and their families. For more than ten years, IKEA has been a key supporter, contributing to UNICEF's work through philanthropic donations, in-kind assistance and national-level fundraising and promotional activities. But what makes IKEA a true partner is the company's deep commitment to social responsibility and their direct engagement with issues affecting children. They have truly joined with UNICEF to tackle issues like child labour at their root causes.

Back in 2002, UNICEF and IKEA launched a campaign to promote children's rights in the carpet belt district of India, namely Uttar Pradesh. In 2006, the partnership was extended to include projects to end child labour in the cotton-producing state of Andhra Pradesh. In 2008, with the goal to promote child rights and child survival, the IKEA-UNICEF partnership expanded across fifteen states of the country, where more than 28 million children were engaged in child labour—47,000 of these were under the age of five years old.

Our decade-long partnership with the IKEA Foundation has delivered remarkable results in India. By the end of last year, funding from the IKEA Foundation enabled UNICEF to help over 74 million Indian children to create better futures for themselves and their families. The IKEA

Foundation's investment in India helps to improve child survival by combating malnutrition and improving water and sanitation conditions. It also promotes children's rights to education and protection, reaching out to children like twelve-year-old Mukesh Somagi Damore.

Mukesh used to wake up at 4 a.m. each morning to work a fourteen-hour day in the cotton fields in Dungarpur district. Labouring without a mask or any protective equipment, he constantly felt sick from the pesticides spread over the crops each morning. "I felt ill there; I always had a fever," he says.

With support from his local Village Child Protection Committee—an organization that is part of a UNICEF effort, supported by the IKEA Foundation, to mobilize local communities across the district to stop child labour—Mukesh is now enrolled in school, and he doesn't plan on stopping his studies any time soon. He has his sights set on becoming a teacher. "I'm not going anymore to work on cotton. I'm going to study," he says.

"What makes IKEA a true partner is the company's deep commitment to social responsibility and their direct engagement with issues affecting children."

TEN YEARS OF PROGRESS

EDUCATION IN INDIA

The ten-year IKEA-UNICEF partnership has truly made a difference by creating impactful programs that have drastically reduced child labour, installed nutrition programs and got children back in school. These programs have helped to improve the lives of 74 million children in India.

PROGRESS

13,120

children enjoying quality education in schools with trained teachers.

TARGET

2,900

schools to have trained teachers and quality education tools.

Schools with quality education for children 6-14 years of age.

TARGET

74%

of schools to have toilets, handwashing facilities and safe drinking water.

PROGRESS

67%

of schools have sanitation facilities.

Schools with sanitation facilities and safe water.

UPDATES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Thanks to the generous support of donors like you, UNICEF has saved more lives than any other humanitarian organization. Here's a look at some of the breakthroughs we've made worldwide together, in the fight for child survival.

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN IN LIBYA

More than 1.2 million Libyan children have returned to school following the conflict that took such a heavy toll on Libya's education system. During the conflict, schools were closed, damaged or used for military purposes.

With support from UNICEF, the Libyan government worked around the clock to rehabilitate infrastructure and clear rubble. Severely distressed children are receiving psycho-social support and work is underway to track internally displaced and other vulnerable children to ensure that they are enrolled in school.

"This is a massive operation and a huge achievement for the people of Libya," said Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

INDIA DECLARED POLIO-FREE

Once recognized as the world's epicentre of polio, last January India recorded one year without a single case.

India's large-scale polio eradication plan involved millions of vaccinators, community mobilizers, parents and caregivers whose efforts ensured that 170 million children under the age of five were vaccinated in two national immunization campaigns. India's achievement in stopping polio is proof positive that the disease can be eradicated, with the help of people like you.

But while we celebrate this milestone along with India, the fight against polio continues: an Emergency Action Plan has been launched against a threat of resurgence in Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Chad.

"Polio eradication is at a tipping point between success and failure," says Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization. "We are in emergency mode to tip it toward success—working faster and better, focusing on the areas where children are most vulnerable."

THE WORLD MEETS ITS FIRST MDG

Well in advance of the 2015 target, the world has halved the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water—and met its first Millennium Development Goal.

Between 1990 and 2010, over two billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources, such as piped supplies and protected wells.

But UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake warns that victory cannot be truly declared, as at least 11 percent of the world's population—783 million people—are still without access to safe drinking water, and billions are without sanitation facilities.

"The numbers are still staggering," he says. "But this progress is proof that MDG targets can be met with the will, the effort and the funds."



Girls queue to wash their hands before lunch in a village school in Senegal, a country making progress in the areas of nutrition, safe water access and education.

LOOMING THREAT OF WINTER A KEY CONCERN AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES

Around 30,000 Syrian refugees—half of them estimated to be children—are taking shelter at the Za'atari refugee camp in northern Jordan. The cold temperatures could have a serious impact on families who fled Syria wearing summer clothing and are living predominantly in tents.

"UNICEF's response includes warm clothes for children, hot water for showers and winterized tents for child protection spaces and schools," says UNICEF Jordan representative Dominique Isabelle Hyde.



A woman feeds ready-to-use therapeutic food to her malnourished daughter at the UNICEF-supported Routgouna Health Centre in Niger.

UNICEF RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS IN THE SAHEL

UNICEF was one of the first humanitarian relief organizations to sound the alarm for children in the Sahel region of Africa. In March of last year, we warned that there was little time left to stave off a disaster facing more than a million children under the age of five.

Many of our donors responded generously, enabling UNICEF to battle a crisis that was caused by poor rainfall and failed harvests—and that affected an estimated 10 million people. As malnutrition reached emergency levels, we sprung to action to deliver lifesaving supplies and provide feeding centres to treat children for severe acute malnutrition.



A girl stands in a fire-damaged house in Syria, where the conflict between rebel and government forces has taken its toll on children and their families.

DAVID'S STORY

UNICEF works to eradicate child trafficking in Benin and Nigeria

David, 13, now safely back at school in Za-Kpota, Benin, says his favourite subject is math and that he wants to become doctor.

A warm breeze blows into the fifth-grade classroom of Adjoko Primary School. Located in the southern community of Za-Kpota, Benin, this is a school that has successfully helped to re-integrate many victims of child trafficking. At the back of the room, thirteen-year-old David sits on one of the wooden benches provided when UNICEF recently equipped the entire school. David is a good student, even though he is very shy. Every time he knows an answer, he jumps off his bench and raises his hand. Math is his favourite subject. He says he wants to be a doctor one day.

A few years ago, David didn't dare dream of a future career. His father had died, and his mother, who could not afford to raise two children alone, asked David's uncle in Nigeria to take care of him and his younger brother, Job, during the school holidays. The children did not return to Benin when they were expected, however, and David's mother and other community members reported them missing. They turned to *Terre des Hommes*, an international NGO, supported by UNICEF, that rescues, rehabilitates and re-inserts child victims of trafficking back into their home community and family.

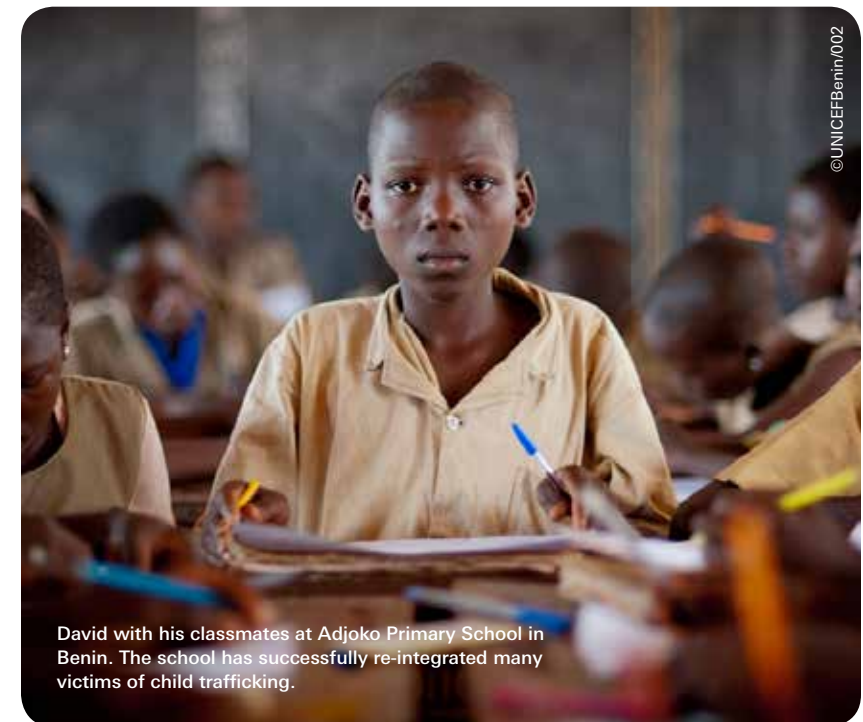
David and his brother were located in a quarry in Nigeria, where they had been working for days in the burning sun. When *Terre des Hommes* social worker Edouard da Costa found the boys, they started to cry. Edouard promised the brothers he would help them return home. After two weeks of negotiating with the uncle, the social worker secured their release. They are back home in their village in Benin, thanks to the help of a special police unit, the Central Office for the Protection of Children. And thanks to supporters like you.

When David tries to talk about his past, he starts to stutter and his eyes well with tears. The return home has been difficult, as his mother has never really recovered from the death of his father and his brother was sent to live with an aunt.

For children like David and Job, who are recovering from the trauma of trafficking, UNICEF provides a package consisting of a school uniform, books, pens and money for both breakfast and lunch.

The headmaster of the Adjoko Primary School, Rene Magliore Ahouanagansi, has been supervising the school for ten years, and he is deeply devoted to his task. Due to the success of the re-insertion program, the number of children at the school has tripled over the past ten years, and there is now need for more classrooms. Younger children sit on benches under the trees.

The headmaster has strong words for those who traffic children: "Child labour is a bad choice! If families face difficulties, we need to find a solution, but they shouldn't



David with his classmates at Adjoko Primary School in Benin. The school has successfully re-integrated many victims of child trafficking.

"When David tries to talk about his past, he starts to stutter and his eyes well with tears."

let children work. Children should go to school. This is my plea each and every day."

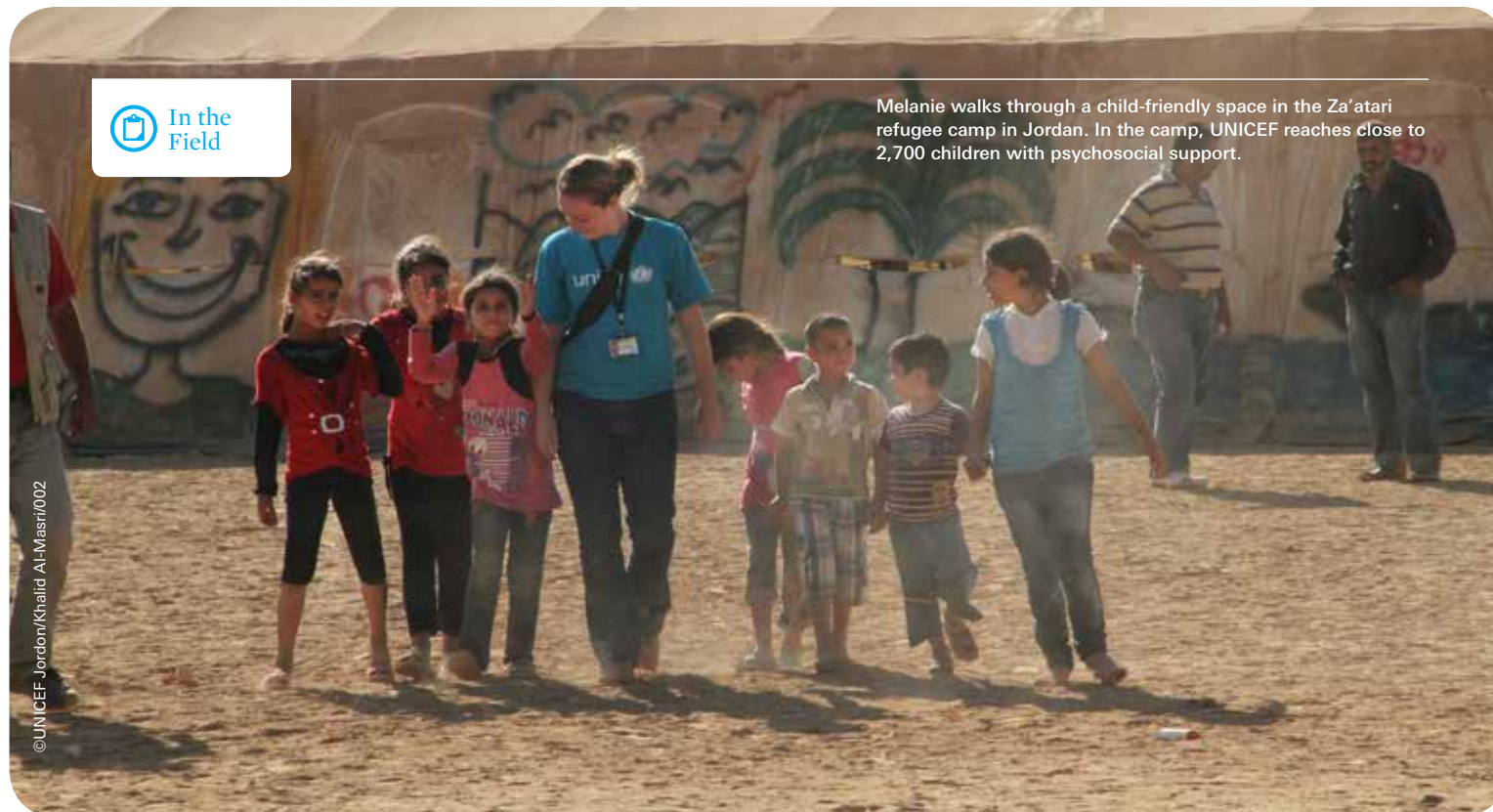
Increasingly, Benin's parents are recognizing the importance of education for their children, but there is still a lot to do with respect to public perception. UNICEF and *Terre des Hommes* are challenged in their work because of stories that spread through communities about the spoils of childrens' labour in Nigeria: after being sent to labour in the camps by their willing families, children return with new scooters, radio sets and iron sheeting to cover their houses. "They tell us that their children earned good money for them," says Headmaster Magliore Ahouanagansi.

There is still much to do here, but, thanks to your support, some 5,000 vulnerable children were identified by *Terre des Hommes* social workers in various villages throughout Benin and were provided with UNICEF kits to facilitate their return to school.

With your help, we will continue the fight to make child trafficking in Benin and Nigeria a thing of the past.

Did you know?

Child trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. It is a violation of their rights and their well-being and denies them the opportunity to reach their full potential.



Melanie walks through a child-friendly space in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. In the camp, UNICEF reaches close to 2,700 children with psychosocial support.



Melanie speaks with 13-year-old Noor, who fled her home in Syria with her parents and five siblings. Noor and her siblings attend UNICEF's school in the camp.

Survivors of Syrian Crisis seek refuge in UNICEF-supported camp

The ongoing conflict in Syria is forcing thousands of its citizens to cross the border of neighbouring countries in search of safety. Media Relations Specialist Melanie Sharpe reflects on the three months she spent supporting UNICEF's emergency response to the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. She was there from August to October of last year.

I spent a lot of time talking to families in the Za'atari refugee camp's registration area. These were the families that had just arrived from Syria. Most had been awake for days, making long dangerous journeys, often with young children and aging relatives.

Each time I visited the registration tent it was full of families, many sitting on the floor alongside the few possessions they had managed to carry with them to Jordan—often only two or three bags and, sometimes, nothing at all. Most people were quiet, fatigued and contemplating their new life in a dusty, hot, tented desert camp.

One woman I spoke to had only been in Za'atari for a few hours. Her eyes were wide and staring and every few minutes she would frantically look around for her children, who were sitting beside her.

She was too scared to let me report her name and explained she had been shot in the back by a sniper five months ago, miraculously surviving the ordeal.

I asked her why she finally decided to leave Syria.

"The violence is getting much worse now," she told me. "We couldn't stay any longer."

I remember thinking, what's worse than a mother being shot in the back?

The Za'atari refugee camp is not an easy place to live. Relentless desert dust covers everything and everyone. Sometimes the blowing dust was so thick I couldn't see more than six or seven feet in front of me. I would come home covered, dust in my eyes, ears and hair. It's hard to imagine that thousands of young children and their families live in this every day—but at least now they are protected from the terrible violence they were experiencing back home.

I must have spoken to hundreds of Syrians during my visits to the camp. As they described the horrors they had lived through, I was struck by how similar many of their lives were to mine before the conflict began.

Many families I met told me about their three- or four-bedroom homes back in Syria, with gardens, terraces and yards where their children used to play.

Some of the children I met told me they missed watching cartoons, like *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Tom and Jerry*.

One young mother flicked through photos on her mobile phone of her daughter in their living room back in Syria wearing a favourite new dress. "You see? Me and my family, we are not used to living like this," she said. Her eyes were swollen with tears and her clothes covered in dust.

I never knew what to say when I was told these stories. It's hard to comprehend that many people living in Za'atari led safe, middle-class lives before the violence began.

Now, most of these families have nothing but the clothes on their backs.

"One woman I spoke to had only been in Za'atari for a few hours. Her eyes were wide and staring and every few minutes she would frantically look around for her children, who were sitting beside her."

Did you know?

Since its opening in July, the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan has quickly developed the needs of a small city—especially for water. Every day, trucks ply their way through the camp, delivering more than one million litres of clean water.

In most cases, they told me their homes had been bombed or burned down, and their relatives killed.

These are the families UNICEF is reaching, thanks to the generous support of donors like you.

UNICEF has set up a measles and polio vaccination clinic in the camp. On the clinic's first day, I saw mothers waiting in a long line in the hot desert sun to ensure their children got vaccinated.

Every day I was in Za'atari I saw UNICEF's water teams working tirelessly with their partners on the massive logistical operation required to ensure everyone has clean drinking water, showers and toilets.

The child-friendly spaces set up throughout the camp are UNICEF's way of ensuring Syrian children can play, learn and, most importantly, begin healing from the emotional wounds that result after witnessing such horrific violence.

During one of my last trips to Za'atari, a group of children ran past me wearing bright blue UNICEF school bags on their backs. Thousands of children are now attending the camp's UNICEF-run school. Many of these students hadn't been to class in almost two years.

Nobody knows when the crisis in Syria will end, and as more families flee to neighbouring countries like Jordan, UNICEF's work only becomes more vital.



This backpack travelled 98,114 km to help save children's lives.

As part of the UN, UNICEF is active in more countries and saves more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization. We go where the need is great. Because **no child is too far**.

Spread the word at [unicef.ca](https://www.unicef.ca).



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