

# HELPING CHILDREN IN CHILE, REBUILDING WITH HOPE

Six months after the earthquake.



**Save the Children**

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## CHILE, CONTEXT OF A DISASTER

In Chile, on 27 February 2010 at 3:34 a.m. there was an earthquake which had a magnitude of 8.8 on the Richter scale and lasted one minute, with the epicenter in the towns of Cobquecura and Cauquenes, located on the border between the regions of Bío Bío and Maule, in the center-south of Chile.

The ensuing seaquake struck a good part of the Chilean coast, with the highest number of losses of life and property a few hundreds meters inward on the coast.

This earthquake is considered the second strongest one in the history of the country and the fifth strongest in the world. The earthquake affected from Santiago to Temuco, with an impact at a distance of 700 kilometers in the regions of Valparaíso, Metropolitan area of Santiago, O'Higgins, Maule, Bío Bío and La Araucanía, where over 13 million people live, that is, 80% of the country's population.

However, the regions of O'Higgins (VI), Maule (VII) and Bío Bío (VIII) reported the highest number of victims and destruction due to the disaster on 27 February.

The earthquake was followed by various aftershocks ranging in magnitude from 5 to 7.2 degrees on the Richter scale, as well as smaller, practically daily, tremors for the next two months.

After the earthquake began the emergency stage during which several problems had to be addressed, such as the destruction of homes (440,000 in the devastated areas), crisis in basic services, collapse of communication services and a generalized feeling of insecurity.

The first priorities established by the authorities were restoring basic services and providing medical care to the affected population, emergency shelters, transportation, communications, and the search for missing people. Many of these needs are still a priority in the regions hardest hit, coinciding with the subsequent reconstruction stage, the start of the school year, winter rains and celebration of the National Holiday for the Bicentennial of the Republic.

Government figures indicate that nearly 2 million people were directly affected and 521 lost their lives due to the disaster. Likewise, 813,634 homes were affected and 200,000 seriously damaged. It is estimated that of the 2 million people affected by the earthquake, 1,200,000 are children.

The seventh region of Maule was one with the most damages in the country. This area concentrates a significant number of the deceased who have been officially identified.

While destruction concentrated on the coast due to the seaquake, the inland cities and towns in the region suffered structural damages in their constructions. Old adobe buildings were severely damaged or completely destroyed, and more than half of the old districts in the cities were razed after the earthquake.

Cauquenes is one of the most affected provinces in this area where 68 people lost their lives. Just in the municipality of Cauquenes, 1,697 homes were destroyed, and 8,862 were declared uninhabitable.

The old age of the constructions, primarily made of adobe, together with the impact of the tsunami, left nearly 40,000 people homeless in the whole province.

According to the International Labor Organization, ILO, a total of 93,928 workers have lost their job as a result of the earthquake<sup>1</sup>, 28,090 of them from the region of Maule. It is estimated that 74.4 percent (50,500 people) from a total population of 67,871, have been affected by the earthquake.

The estimated population under the age of 18 is 20,491, of which it is calculated that 15,000, that is 72.2 percent, has been affected by the disaster.

The province of Cauquenes is subdivided into three municipalities – Cauquenes (41,217 inhabitants, 14,518 of which are children), Chanco (9,547 inhabitants, of which 3,882 are children), and Pelluhue (6,414 people of which 2,091 are children).

In line with its mission, Save the Children is working with the most vulnerable and the most affected areas in the three municipalities of this province of Maule.

Cauquenes was already considered a province of limited resources before the earthquake, with an extensive rural population whose main livelihood is agriculture, temporary employment and fishing.

While the average monthly income in Cauquenes is CLP<sup>2</sup> 450,000, this province, like the whole of Chile, suffers from a poor distribution of wealth. Many families in Cauquenes earn only CLP 65,000 a month. As in the rest of Chile, children are considerably more affected by poverty than adults.

According to UNICEF's children index, Maule was number 11 of the 13 regions in Chile (year 2000) in terms of habitability, health and income, and number 12 in children's education<sup>3</sup>. In an emergency, people in poverty are usually the ones most affected and the ones with the fewest capabilities and resources to recover.

In the province of Cauquenes, region of Maule, there is still a deficient provision of services, especially for children living in remote rural areas. In fact, many families state they have not received adequate information on the services they are entitled to, especially with regard to access to housing (system to apply for subsidies, prove they are victims, etc). In these areas, an unspecified number of families have received insufficient aid and continue living in improvised structures or houses damaged by the earthquake.

The deficient assistance for families affected in the province is evidenced by the fact that, although it is estimated there are 8,200 homes damaged by the earthquake, the plans to provide emergency housing is limited to only 1,600 shacks, out of which only 800 have been delivered<sup>4</sup>. However, sources from the three municipalities of the province insist in stating that in Cauquenes more than 1,600 have been delivered, in Chanco nearly 800 and in Pelluhue the same amount.

<sup>1</sup> Situation Report from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 24 to 30 May 2010, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/VDUX-85ZQ2E?OpenDocument&rc=2&cc=chl> (download full report in pdf format)

<sup>2</sup> Note: CLP = Chilean Pesos

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, 2006: <http://www.unicef.cl/unicef/index.php/Indicadores-de-la-Infancia>

Note: at present, there are 15 regions in Chile.

<sup>4</sup> "El Cauquenino", May 2010.

## SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN THE EMERGENCY

While there is an evident concern for the promotion and protection of children's rights, even more so during a disaster, the children of Chile have faced a sociopolitical context that has gradually taken legislative, educational and cultural measures to enhance their social integration.

In this regard, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, subscribed by Chile in 1990, has become a significant tool for the necessary reform of the legal systems for the "protection of minors" based on the concept of "social irregularity".

19 years after ratification of the Convention, progress in the country has been significant, but there is still the major challenge of the abolition or restructuring of the «Law of Minors», in light of the principles of the Convention.

The Children's Rights Committee regretted in 2007 that "... the reform of the Law of Minors (Law N° 16618 of 1967) had not yet been implemented in order to come up with a comprehensive law for the protection of minors, as recommended by the Committee in its previous final comments of 2002".

The opportunity for children and adolescents to exercise their right to participate is still limited in the country. Some institutions, primarily NGOs, have deployed several initiatives to promote participation through congresses, parliaments and children's councils, in different territories in the country. UNICEF, in its turn, has led opinion surveys in the last few years on various topics, which have helped to understand and include the view of children on the matters that affect and interest them<sup>5</sup>.

Violation of children's rights is addressed by the National Service of Minors, SENAME, dependent on the Ministry of Justice. As of 30 June 2009, 66,147 children had been assisted by the special children's protection system administered by this institution. Of these, 13,236 had been deprived of their family setting in programs of residential or closed care, with 933 minors under the age of 6. All other children are cared for through ambulatory or semi-closed methods, which, according to institutional policy, must be prioritized over those of closed care.

According to the Third Study on Child Abuse, conducted in 2006 by UNICEF, 75.3% of children are victims of some type of physical or mental violence by their parents. More than half of the cases are of physical violence and one out of every four, severe physical violence.

Between 1994 and 2006 there has been a marked decrease in severe physical violence and an increase of psychological violence from 34.2% to 25.9%. In 1994, this type of violence represented 14.5% versus 21.4% in 2006. Thus, minor physical violence decreased slightly between 1994 and 2006, from 28.7% to 27.9%. Violence, while transversal of socioeconomic distribution, has various manifestations. Psychological violence is greater in the sectors with more resources, while physical violence is more frequent in more financially vulnerable sectors<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> "The Voice of Children", UNICEF.

<sup>6</sup> Third Study on Child Abuse, UNICEF, 2006

In a recent UNICEF study, 90% of participating children presented symptoms of psychological suffering<sup>7</sup> after the earthquake. Most reactions aimed at children in the response following the earthquake focused on single actions or short-term psychosocial support, with activities programmed for children outside school. Children with more severe needs received specialized care and guidance. However, several months after the earthquake, many areas of everyday life are back to normal for children, and psychosocial interventions have started to decrease. All children have returned to school, although some of them are operating under two shifts.

Nonetheless, there are serious concerns regarding continuity of protection of children in the aftermath of the earthquake. Children are currently living in difficult conditions and with overcrowding in many places in Pelluhue, Chanco and Cauquenes, the three municipalities belonging to the province of Cauquenes, region of Maule. This, together with considerable stress, suggests children may be at a high risk of exposure to gender or intrafamily violence, abuse and neglect. Violence and abuse were already severe problems before the disaster, with unusually high levels of sexual abuse –including incest- and physical abuse.

Protection and psychosocial services have few resources and they are limited in number, with a preponderance of services specializing in assisting cases as opposed to preventive programs and awareness of the players involved.



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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, 'Let's rebuild children's lives', 2010



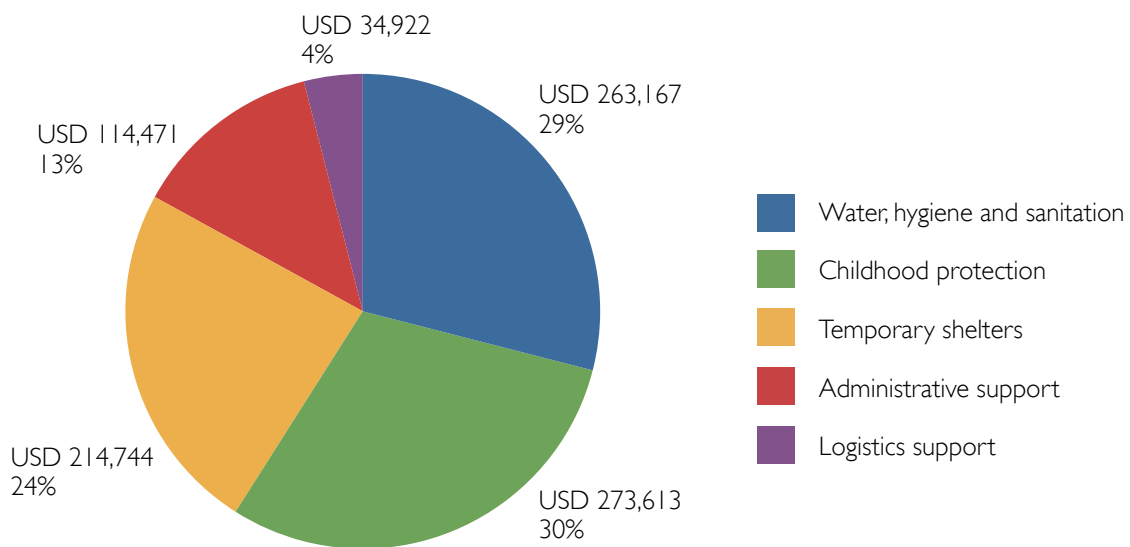




# 2.

## ACTIONS BY SAVE THE CHILDREN

### FUNDS PROVIDED FOR INTERVENTION IN THE EMERGENCY



### EDUCATION AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Children are the ones most affected by the earthquake, causing them anxiety regarding their future, their welfare and that of their families.

Save the Children has collaborated, from the very start of the disaster, in the process of enabling 334 primary and secondary school teachers in 10 schools and 37 microcenters in the rural urban and urban areas of Chanco, Pelluhue and Cauquenes in the management of stress in children, as well as with relation to various psychosocial support techniques, which were later necessary to establish Child-Friendly Safe Spaces.

Together with the efforts for Child-Friendly Safe Spaces in the sector of education, play kits and books were delivered as part of the process to reinforce attendance and continuity of children at the educational centers, benefitting a total of 2,852 children in the province.

Around 21 Child-Friendly Safe Spaces were established, operating in schools and district councils. They were coordinated by teachers and over 117 community volunteers. About 1,825 children have regularly attended these spaces, making evident progress and little by little returning to their everyday activities both inside and outside school.

Similarly, work is being done on the process to generate awareness on the topic of intrafamily violence and children's rights. So far, 45 people (mothers and fathers linked to the schools) who are members of community organizations are being enabled in these topics.

To date, 2,020 boys and girls are participating and linked to a process of child participation to contribute to the reconstruction of their cities. Their proposals shall be submitted to local authorities for their consideration.

Save the Children has worked from the beginning with provincial and municipal education authorities, as well as those in charge of child protection nationwide.

Recently, a radio campaign was launched in the province with positive messages regarding children's rights and the promotion of good treatment of children, which is still being aired.

**Next steps:**

In the coming weeks, Save the Children will make sure children have access to the authorities to be able to submit proposals and claims regarding the reconstruction of their cities.

Input shall be provided to the various initiatives and proposals of children in order to provide continuity and support for the participants of the activities at the Child-Friendly Safe Spaces together with strengthening the education sector by securing enhancement of the learning processes.

## WATER, ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Save the Children continues being one of the organizations leading the process to access water, sanitation and hygiene locally in the province of Cauquenes. Geography hinders access to clean water since many wells have dried up in rural areas, as well as being affected in some cases by incipient local droughts.

In order to facilitate ready access to water, at the start of the response Save the Children delivered 1,000 family jerry cans to store water.

At present, it is building eight water towers in rural communities, which are part of a water distribution system that will benefit over 3,250 people so far. Likewise, it is working in the repair of greywater wells, which have benefitted around 120 people.

Given the concern of rural communities, Save the Children is evaluating water quality in agreement and coordination with local authorities so as to prevent situations that could be harmful for people's health.

Sanitation has covered severe situations of septic tanks which had collapsed or were saturated during the earthquake in the rural communities. So far, over 460 people from communities in poverty have benefitted from this. The installation of chemical toilets at the start of the emergency and the repair and construction of toilets, especially in rural sectors, has allowed reaching about 830 people, children as well as adults.

Around 11,500 people have benefitted from receiving family hygiene kits at the various municipalities of the province, both at district councils and temporary shelter camps. Around 1,909 boys and girls from schools and microcenters have benefitted from receiving school hygiene kits to help prevent respiratory diseases affecting the population this winter.

1,637 children together with 532 teachers and members of the community have received information at various workshops regarding hygiene habits and prevention of diseases derived from the lack of hygiene.

Recently a radio campaign has been launched to reinforce messages on hygiene habits, essentially aimed at children in the province, which is still being aired.

**Next steps:**

In the coming weeks Save the Children will ensure that the information derived from the water tests conducted reaches the authorities in order to take the necessary measures to address and resolve any possible issues that may arise.

Continue the process of installation, reception and implementation of water towers to benefit the community and install water kits in those areas where this has yet not been done.

Provide input to the various initiatives and proposals of children in order to provide continuity and support for the participants of the activities at the Child-Friendly Safe Spaces together with strengthening the education sector by securing enhancement of the learning processes.

## TEMPORARY SHELTERS

Save the Children's actions have focused on articulating the efforts made by the local governments and various non government organizations in order to be able to improve temporary shelters – known as shacks. In this regard, thermal insulation (to fight the winter cold) and against humidity (protection against rain and dew) has been fitted in more than 285 shacks, having so far reached over 1,128 people in the three municipalities where the intervention is taking place.

Together with this and the water, sanitation and hygiene actions, a process to build 40 ecological kitchens (Lorena type) is being conducted, using appropriate technology systems known in the rural areas, in order to address critical cases. So far slightly over 190 people have benefitted from this.

**Next steps:**

In the coming weeks Save the Children will complete the process to deliver and install thermal insulation kits and the building of kitchens together with the community.

Save the Children will ensure working with local authorities to address those situations and places where assistance is still required.



## 3.

A BETTER FUTURE  
FOR THE CHILDREN OF CHILE

Save the Children would like to remind the international community, donors and governments that:

- Children are the most vulnerable during the aftermath of a disaster. Child protection services must be strengthened immediately to ensure they are protected against abuse, negligence, exploitation and violence.
- To ensure the right all children have to shelter and water, to child protection services and to receive timely and appropriate aid, with a special emphasis on those in rural or urban areas that are remote or difficult to access.
- Planning of reconstruction should emphasize children's participation in order to rebuild communities that are more protective and inclusive of children.

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