



## Indonesian ‘orphans’ on the increase as Tsunami pushes parents into poverty and children into institutions

In the immediate aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami disaster, it was feared that an exceptionally high number of children had become separated and that most of those were orphaned. No actual figure was available on the number of children who had lost one or both parents but many news media reported on the tens or even hundreds of thousands of ‘tsunami orphans’. This, in turn, led to great public concern in support of these children. Government, and non-government, agencies set to work to provide a registration and tracing system for children who were unaccompanied or looking for their family. The Family Tracing and Reunification Network (FTR)<sup>1</sup> was established and it registered 2831 children unaccompanied or separated from their parents (January 2005-May 2006). About 700 of these had lost both parents and another 1301 did not know the whereabouts of both parents strongly indicating that they are also orphans.<sup>2</sup>

The government responded decisively to concerns that children were being separated and sent away from their communities and families, including possibly through trafficking. It issued a range of decisions to freeze all adoptions intra- or inter-country, and to prevent the transfer of children abroad. It promulgated a brand new *Policy on Separated Children, Unaccompanied Children and Single-parent Children affected by Emergency Situations*<sup>3</sup>. The policy states clearly that “children receive the best care when they are in a family environment and remain in their community, culture and religion”. It highlights that in emergencies, separation from family and community should be prevented, support for family based care prioritised, and institutions should only ever be used as a last resort.

Despite this important policy, it became clear that many new children’s homes (*Panti Sosial Asuhan Anak*) were being built in post tsunami Aceh and that many existing institutions were receiving significant numbers of new arrivals. It became crucial to understand how the disaster had affected the care situation of children in Aceh. Were children being placed in institutions as a result of the disaster and if so, what were the circumstances of those placements? In addition, what impact did the tsunami have on the children’s homes themselves - their population, function, finances, and their ways of operating?

### *The Research*

The Ministry of Social Affairs (DEPSOS) recognised that it had the responsibility to ensure that the whereabouts and situation of separated children in Aceh was fully known and that their needs were assessed. After the tsunami it has provided direct support to the Department of Social Welfare (DINSOS) in Aceh (whose capacity was weakened by the tsunami). With support from Save the Children, DEPSOS

<sup>1</sup> The members of the FTR Network are the Ministry of Social Services (DEPSOS), the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment (KPP), the provincial Department of Social Affairs (DINSOS), UNICEF, Save the Children, ICRC, Cardi/IRC, LCO, Muhammadiyah, Pusaka, and the Child Fund.

<sup>2</sup> FTR Database figures as of 15 May 2006. (DINSOS-Save the Children)

<sup>3</sup> Indonesian Government Policy on Separated Children, Unaccompanied Children and Single-parent Children affected by Emergency Situations. DEPSOS, 11 February 2005.



# Save the Children

decided to carry out a rapid assessment of all children's homes in Aceh with a particular focus on tsunami affected children.

The assessment was carried out between December 2005 and March 2006. The research, methodology and guidelines were designed by two Save the Children protection advisers seconded to the Directorate of Children's Services in DEPSOS. The research was carried out by a team of DEPSOS social workers deployed to Aceh with financial support from UNICEF. In addition, the social workers were supported, where they were still active, by the PSM (Pekerja Sosial Masyarakat), a network of community social workers.

## *Key findings*

### A. The Situation of the children

1. As of March 2006 there were 207 active children's homes in Aceh caring for 16,234 children, (9,567 boys and 6,667 girls or almost 60% boys and 40% girls). This includes both children's homes often referred to as 'neglected children's homes' or 'orphanages' (Panti Sosial Asuhan Anak) and homes for the Disabled that care for children (Panti Sosial Penyandang Cacat). (193 Neglected Children's Homes and 14 Homes for the Disabled)
2. A further 10 children's homes were found not to be active any longer at the time of the research.
3. The total number of children in these institutions who are victims of the tsunami is 2,589 or 16% of the total population in the homes. Of those 1,470 are boys and 1,119 are girls. (57% boys and 43% girls)
4. The overwhelming majority (more than 85%) of child victims of the tsunami in the children's homes still have at least one parent alive. Over 42% of the children still have both parents and 43% have one parent alive. This data is significant because it shows that contrary to frequent reports in the media that the tsunami has resulted in very high numbers of orphans, the number of real orphans who have been placed in the children's homes is actually much smaller. Only 10% of the tsunami-affected children in the homes are real orphans with another 4.5% who still do not know the whereabouts of their parents.
5. Among tsunami affected children in the homes that have lost one parent, there is a higher percentage of children who are fatherless (yatim) (33.15%) than children who are motherless (piatu) (9.67%).
6. The age of child victims of the tsunami in the children's homes ranges from a few months old to above 18 years old. The biggest group is aged 13 – 15 (37.25%), followed by the 6 – 12 years group (34.76%), the 16-18 group (22.01%) and above 18 years of age (5.25%). The 0-5 year old group is by far the smallest, at 0.73%.
7. Of 33 children in the homes for the disabled in Aceh that were identified as victims of the Tsunami, 30 had an actual disability and 3 had no recorded disability. Only one child was identified as disabled as a result of the tsunami.



# Save the Children

8. The overwhelming majority of child victims of the tsunami were placed in the children's home by their immediate family (97.54%). Parents (one or both) were most often responsible for the decision to place the child in the Home and this was followed by other family members or relatives.
9. Over 50% of the children were placed in homes immediately after the disaster but almost the same number again were placed some time after the disaster itself (47%). This indicates the interplay of different factors in the decision to place a child in the institution, with later placements more likely to be the result of the impact of the disaster on carers and families' ability to care for a child due to loss of earnings, employment or housing. If taken with the findings which show that the overwhelming majority of child victims of the tsunami in the children's homes still have at least one parent, we can conclude that *secondary separation*, or separation as a result of the impact of the disaster on the capacity to care, rather than loss of carers, is a major issue in post- tsunami Aceh.
10. The majority of child victims of the tsunami were placed in the children's homes within 3 months of the disaster, and over 75% of children had already been there for over 10 months, at the time of the research. This timeframe indicates that their placement was not just a short term crisis response but a longer term care decision.
11. The overwhelming majority of child victims of the tsunami in the homes are presently attending school (over 98%). All children in the regular children's homes attend local schools in the community. Children placed in the Dayah/Islamic boarding schools that also run a children's home attend school within that institution.
12. Over 70% of children were placed in children's homes relatively close to their original home location. However, a significant number of children were placed in institutions outside of the district of home location. Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh are particularly noteworthy in that regard as the children's homes in both Districts care for significantly high numbers of children from other Districts. Considering those both Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh were among those areas worst affected by the Tsunami, there can be no doubt that the high number of new institutions that have been built since the Tsunami in those two Districts (10 out of 17) must have had an impact on their ability to attract children.
13. The overwhelming majority of child victims of the tsunami in the children's homes have had at least one meeting with their parents. 50% have had one meeting and 46% have had more than one meeting.
14. Once in the institutions, children have tended to remain there. While the relationship between child victims of the tsunami and their parents and families generally seems to be maintained, the likelihood of these children returning home was seen to be much more remote. Only 8 cases were identified as being in process for an eventual return (0.52%). There is a widespread expectation that children placed in children's homes should remain there until completion of secondary education.

## B. The situation of the Children's Homes



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1. Despite the existence of a few Children's Homes in Aceh as far back as the 1930s, the research shows that the majority of institutions were established relatively recently. Over 90% of children's homes were established after 1980 and 43% of those after 2000.
2. This trend has become particularly acute since the tsunami with 17 new children's homes being established in 2005 and two more in the process of being established at the time of the research. These were expected to be up and running by 2006. In addition, a number of organisations have reported plans for the building of many more institutions for 'tsunami orphans' and neglected children or expanding the capacity of their current institution.
3. The vast majority of children's homes (95%) are owned and run by private organisations including NGOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and religious organisations. Only 5% are owned and run by the Government.
4. The research identified a number of issues relating to the registration process, in particular that 35 of the children's homes identified by the research did not figure in the DINSOS data. Of these, 18 children's homes were established prior to 2005 and 17 newly established since the beginning of 2005.
5. In addition, there is no system for the registration of the individual institution. Those who establish a children's home do not need to register as long as they have a SIK number (Surat Izin Kegiatan or Letter of Authorisation) showing that their parent organisation is registered as a social organisation. 32 Children's Homes did not possess the registration number (SIK) from the Provincial DINSOS department in Aceh.
6. In the immediate post Tsunami context, the enormous humanitarian outpouring coming in with a range of new donors seeking to disburse considerable sums of aid has been a major factor in driving up the number of new Children's Homes being established. Substantial new funding has been injected into institutional care responses in Aceh as a result of the Tsunami both from the Government and from non governmental organisations, local and international.
7. In addition to funds that they receive through their own organisations or through private donations, the children's homes also receive government funding through the Deconcentration Fund started in 2000 following the decentralisation process and the Subsidy Program for Additional Food Costs for Social Care Institutions which is part of the government compensation for the rise in the price of fuel (BBM).

In the post tsunami context, the children's homes are also now receiving considerable financial assistance from the *Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi* (BRR) which is the government's coordinating agency for the reconstruction of Aceh. Children's homes received more than IDR 20 billion (US\$ 2.2 million) in 2005, another IDR 14 billion (US\$ 1.56 million) in 2006, and are due to receive another IDR 15 billion (US\$ 1.67 million) for the year 2007<sup>4</sup>. This represents a four-fold increase in financial aid to children's homes from the Government. This funding is to support the internal development of the institutions, including rehabilitation, operational programmes, management, income generating activities, schooling equipment and food assistance.

8. While the level of assistance depends on the source of funding, most funding is linked to the number of children in the Children's Homes, particularly children affected by the Tsunami. As a

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<sup>4</sup> Information provided by the Social Director of the BRR. Mr De Ronnie on the 9 August 2006 in Banda Aceh.



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result, the majority of Children's Homes have developed registers identifying these children together with funding proposals for donors. Others are proposing building Children's Homes with larger capacity on the basis that they will be able to find the children.

9. There is clear indication that this results in damaging recruitment practices as no assessments seem to have been carried out on the needs of children and their families or alternative ways of supporting children within their families and communities. Instead institutions have every reason to be going out to recruit children in order to receive the aid, and to keep these children longer term within these institutions, whether these children have remaining parents or whether they could actually be supported within their families.

The findings from this research have clear implications for the Government and the agencies who are working to support the care of children within families as they show that a serious challenge to these goals lies ahead if more is not done to strengthen the capacity of families, including single parent families, to care for their children in these post Tsunami phase.

Aceh is at a crossroad in terms of how it responds to the challenge of caring for its most vulnerable children. These children have lost much in those disasters but still have families, relatives and communities who, in many cases, are willing to take responsibility and care for them if sufficient support and appropriate recognition of their important role is available. The question now is whether this support is going to be made available or whether it will continue to benefit institutions rather than children.

### *Recommendations*

1. Interventions directly targeting families who are facing challenges in the care of their children should be prioritised, in line with the Government's stated policy on children affected by emergency situations, with particular focus on supporting single parent families and extended families that are caring for tsunami- affected children.
2. Funding by the Government and private donors should be shifted away from supporting institutional solutions and instead support family and community based interventions that are sustainable, including ensuring families can afford full education costs for their children
3. The BRR should consider reviewing its funding of children's homes and should prioritise direct family support interventions for funding. It should also ensure that its existing funding to the children's homes is being monitored closely and independently to ensure that it benefits the children in those institutions.
4. No new children's homes should be built in Aceh without prior assessment (reviewed by DEPSOS and DINSOS) which shows a clear need for such an institution. The assessment should be in line with the stated government policy of encouraging family-based care whenever possible.
5. The situation of the youngest tsunami-affected children in children's homes, particularly those under 5, should be reviewed urgently by DINSOS and alternative family based care outside of the homes should be sought for these children.
6. Discussions should take place immediately between DEPSOS, DINSOS and the managers of children's homes to discuss recruitment practices and put in place a case review system with the aim of supporting eventual return to family care or, when that is not in the best interest of the child, to



## Save the Children

consider alternative family care solutions. The child's own wishes in relation to care arrangements should be sought and given serious consideration.

7. Regular contact between children and their parents, families and other relatives should be encouraged and facilitated including schemes which support frequent home visits and facilitate communication and transport.
8. The FTR Network should follow up on the possible tracing needs of children identified in this research and support, whenever possible, family reunification.
9. DINSOS should develop an effective and centralised registration and accreditation system for each children's home in addition to the ORSOS registration process.
10. DEPSOS and DINSOS should put in place a data collection system to ensure that data from the Districts on all children's homes is available and updated on a 6 monthly basis. This would also ensure trends in relation to care placements are monitored effectively.
11. Updated and accurate data on the situation of children affected by the tsunami including number killed, displaced, who have lost carers, living with extended families, in school, who work, in residential care disaggregated by gender and age should be compiled by the relevant government agencies. Such data should be made public in order to ensure that interventions are targeted effectively.
12. The government's *Policy on Separated Children* should be disseminated more widely and discussions should take place within DEPSOS, DINSOS and other relevant government agencies including the Ministry of Education, of practical steps to be taken towards its implementation.
13. A major public awareness campaign on the importance of a family environment to the wellbeing and rights of children should be developed by the government together with the agencies working within the FTR Network.
14. More comprehensive research should be undertaken to assess the quality of care provided for children in institutions in Aceh including ensuring that minimum standards are followed. A monitoring system should be developed to ensure regular assessment of these institutions and funding and accreditation should be linked to the institutions providing quality care for children.
15. DEPSOS should ensure that its standards for the operation of child care institutions are understood and implemented in Aceh, in particular it should ensure that the children's homes begin to play their role as outreach institutions to support children and their families rather than operating purely as residential care institutions.
16. The important links between the placement of children in children's homes and education should be analyzed further. Research should be undertaken to understand how the various financial support schemes for education such as Operational Aid to Schools (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah BOS*) impact on the capacity of the most vulnerable families to access education for their children.