

## CHILD PROTECTION

### Sector Analysis

The Tsunami has resulted in temporary erosion of the protective environment for an estimated 50,000 children. This includes children who have lost parents, children living in temporary shelters, as well as other children living in the hardest Tsunami-affected districts where normal community lives and routines have been severely disrupted. This has all resulted in a weakening or breakdown of the normal child protective mechanisms and increased vulnerability of children - including to trafficking and exploitation, although no cases have been confirmed so far.

The immediate national response to ensure adequate protection for these children was swift. Further strengthening of the family and community protective mechanisms is, however, needed. This includes the early restoration of family livelihoods since inadequate family income significantly increases the risks of child abuse, sexual and labour exploitation and trafficking. The priority is to accelerate the return to normalcy for these children as quickly as possible. In the short term, there is a need for special measures to ensure adequate protection for the most vulnerable – those without parents – including psychological support through a broad community based psychosocial recovery programme.

#### **Care and protection of children without parents:**

The more than 1,000 children who have lost one or both parents are potentially extremely vulnerable. Two of these children are being cared for by the State and all others by extended families in accordance with Thai traditional practice. The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security began registration of all orphaned children immediately post-Tsunami. Most information has been collected from school based roll calls and may not capture young children and adolescents. The adequacy and comprehensiveness of the registration system is improving but needs further strengthening to ensure that all children without parents are known and their situation tracked over the coming year.

Province	Children without one or both parents*	Children in temporary shelters**	Children psychologically affected**
Krabi	134	200	
Phang Nga	470	1,800	
Phuket	165	-	
Ranong	67	-	
Satun	13	-	
Trang	23	-	
<b>Other*</b>	<b>208</b>	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,080</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>50,000</b>
<b>Source: Ministry of Social Development and Human Security</b>			
<b>* parents died in Tsunami provinces but reside in other provinces ** UNICEF estimates</b>			

The adequacy of immediate care and protection for these children must also be verified. This will include the identification and relationship of caregivers and their capacities to fulfil their new roles. This is important since most extended families have lost their livelihoods and may not have the means to adequately care for an additional child. Short term cash grants for families caring for orphaned children are being given but grants are inadequate for all but immediate needs and may not have so far been given to everyone eligible. Early restoration of livelihoods for families caring for children without parents is a priority.

Another priority is to ensure adequate Social Development Ministry staffing in the affected districts to strengthen the current registration systems and to continue home visits to all families over the coming year. Additional staff have been assigned but on a temporary basis.

A longer term solution is now needed to ensure adequate monitoring of the situation of orphaned children (and other vulnerable persons / families) over the coming year.

There is a risk of severe stigmatisation of orphans by separating them for special attention. This has been seen with school visits by well-meaning visitors / donors and in media reporting. This will need to be closely followed and if necessary public information materials disseminated through media and other channels to better inform the well-meaning public.

**Care and protection for children living with parents:** Around two thousand children are living in temporary shelters pending reconstruction of their destroyed homes. Parents continue to be pre-occupied with searching for missing relatives and securing incomes. In this situation, when parents are unable to provide the normal care and support for their children, vulnerability increases. Children may be left alone for long periods in an environment in turmoil. They may be approached by well-meaning and sometimes not so well-meaning strangers. In shelters, formal care facilities are being put into place and this must to be completed with urgency. In some shelters, Ministry of Social Development staff have been assigned temporarily to provide care and support for young children, in other places this is provided by NGOs. The vast majority of children are not in shelters but live in their original home and parents need to make firm arrangements for child care – both for protective reasons as well as to support the psychological healing process for their children.

**Psychosocial support:** The Tsunami has had a psychological impact on an estimated 50,000 children living in the twenty affected districts across the six provinces. Children are suffering from the very sudden, dramatic changes in their normal routines. In some cases children have lost their homes and are living in temporary shelters, their families have lost their means of income. In some cases children have lost friends and classmates - almost 300 school children have died or are still missing. In other cases children have lost their school building. Almost one thousand children have lost one or both parents. Five weeks post-Tsunami, around 10% of children in the worst affected schools are still away from school. "Fear" is reported to be the single most important reason for non-attendance at school - families wishing to stay together after their traumatic experiences.

Helping these children to recover psychologically is now one of the highest priorities by doing all possible to return the family / community environment to normalcy as quickly as possible. Psychological recovery activities were initiated immediately post-Tsunami. Getting children back to school was successful and various psychosocial recovery activities are underway - led by the Ministry of Health's Mental Health Department and supported by a number of other institutions and organisations, including UNICEF. Schools and teachers are very important components in the recovery. Teacher training has started to help them carry out relevant school based psychosocial activities as well as to identify children in distress. Information materials for teachers and for families / caregivers have been disseminated. Sports and play materials are now being provided to schools and child development centres to ensure play and recreation – essential to psychosocial recovery. All of this needs to be continued, expanded and better coordinated for greatest impact.

**Especially vulnerable children:** Government and agency assessments and field visits in Tsunami affected areas have highlighted serious barriers to restoring the protective environment for certain children. Children of ethnic minority families living on some nearby islands (Koh Surin for example) do not attend school and have never attended school and do not benefit from protective support of teachers and the school environment. Little is known about the situation of children of migrant workers in Tsunami affected areas – as most of these are not registered for official work in Thailand. Despite these barriers, it is imperative that adequate protective measures are in place.

**Loss of livelihoods:** An inadequate family income significantly increases the risks of child abuse, sexual and labour exploitation and trafficking. The livelihoods of over 100,000 people have been affected across all six affected provinces. Restoring family incomes as urgently as possible is also a key contribution to the return to family and community normalcy and therefore to a strengthened protective environment for these children. Considering the important contribution of the school to overall child protection there is an urgent need for interim support to protect children's education from now until tourism, fisheries and related sectors are re-equipped and revitalised (See the UNDP/World Bank/FAO Livelihoods Assessment January 2005 for more details).

**Child protection mechanisms:** In the late 1990s, Thailand embarked on a process of strengthening child protection environments in nine pilot priority provinces countrywide. The new Child Protection Act of 2004 reinforces this effort and the country is now committed to ensuring its full implementation. A number of weaknesses in the protective environment for the most vulnerable children were already known before Tsunami. Tsunami has, however, served to highlight these weaknesses. Among these are weaknesses in child protection actions at community level and the lack of Government human resources at the district level for implementation of measures specified in the Child Protection Act. Strengthening of the provincial, district and community protective mechanism is a priority in the Tsunami affected provinces with key lessons learned used to inform the same process in other provinces.

**Code of Conduct for United Nations Staff to protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse:** The Code of Conduct is not universally known by UN staff and partner agencies and this should be urgently reviewed by the UN System Agencies in Thailand.

**Immediate and medium term priorities:** Immediate priorities are to ensure the psychological recovery of children and to ensure care and support for orphaned children. To ensure the rights to protection for all children in the Tsunami affected communities there is a need to already begin building a stronger community, district and provincial child protective environment in line with the Child Protection Act of 2004.

Tracking of key protection indicators, including education attendance, over the coming year will be especially important to follow the impact of Tsunami-induced economic changes on protection. This should be especially for girls, who are known, by international experience, to suffer disproportionately in these types of situations. The risk of significant gender disparity is therefore high.

### **Objectives (Appeal Objectives January – July 2005)**

- Provide psychosocial support to social services providers (teachers and health and community workers), provide training and orientation for these groups on child care and support
- Strengthen capacities for psychosocial care and support to children and their families in affected populations and specialised psychosocial care and support for traumatised children and families
- Identify separated and/or unaccompanied children and ensure that systems are in place to reunite them with their families (immediate or extended)

### **Activities**

- Carry out wider and more thorough assessments of the situation of children in the six provinces including in the Burmese language
- Deploy additional psychosocial support teams in all six affected provinces by 7 January

- Increase the number of community based child rights volunteers to cover additional affected areas in all six provinces
- Support both the Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Interior to rapidly set up a registration system for separated, orphaned, and missing children
- Conduct in-school activities as part of the psychosocial support and ensure referral system to specialised services
- Establish improved coordination system for partners to provide improved technical support and capacity development to Government
- Provide recreational materials to affected areas