

Building Communities
Three years after the Tsunami

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Returning to Aceh

After the cameras have gone

Three years ago the world's media trained its eye on South East Asia – specifically, Indonesia and the devastation inflicted by the Indian Ocean Tsunami. Today the media has gone and reconstruction is firmly underway. But there have been problems. In the voluntary sector, the Tsunami has come to mark a distinct turning point in the way that NGOs and relief agencies react to huge scale disaster, and as the longer-term effects of the disaster are felt, how relief agencies respond and plan for more than just the immediate aid.

It has now become clear that in the rush to help people – to try and normalise a tragic situation – corners were cut and strategic planning processes were ignored. The focus was very much, understandably, on immediate relief.

Members of UWC reacted immediately, as did most across the world who watched and heard the events unfold on their televisions or over the internet. Graduates and students frantically began to fundraise and offer support. UWCSEA is our College closest to the epicentre of events and was one of the first to react. They are now the last UWC College to remain active in the affected region.

In response to the disaster the College asked a team of volunteers to travel to Aceh to identify and develop a sustainable long-term project to help Acehnese students. Here Susan Edwards, teacher at UWCSEA and member of that first team, tells us about the work of the last three years and questions what the future holds.

Nearly 23,000 students and over 1,300 teachers were lost and over 300 schools were damaged or destroyed by the Tsunami in the two districts of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar alone. These are the published facts.

In early 2005 a group of UWCSEA

teachers, parents and graduates travelled to Aceh to look for areas where the College could add the most value (see *United World* May 2005). Amidst the devastation and human tragedy that we encountered we were lucky enough to meet an Acehnese community leader working to rebuild his community – Bapak Nazar. Over the past three years we have worked extensively with him to identify areas where we can actively help and continue to provide sustained support.

We first identified a middle school, SMP4, in the downtown, market area of Banda Aceh. It was one of hundreds of schools destroyed or badly damaged by the earthquake and Tsunami. With

generous financial support from Trafigura, Global Energies and UWCSEA fundraising activities, funding was provided for the rebuilding of SMP4 and the new school opened for the students in March 2006.

Tsunami Education Fund

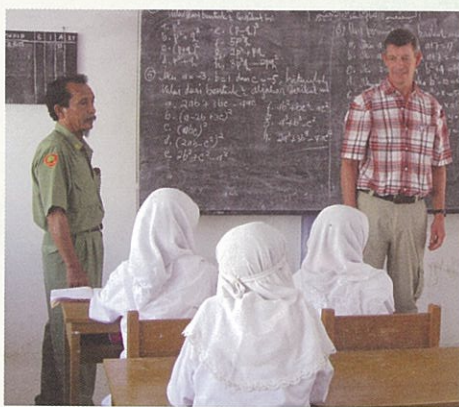
One major aspect of our work in Aceh is the establishment of the Tsunami Education Fund (TEF). Starting with eight students at SMP4, the Tsunami Education Fund has to date helped close to 300 children in over 60 schools in the Banda Aceh area. Bank accounts are opened in each child's name, and monthly deposits are made to contribute to expenses such as transportation (there are no school buses and a student's whole monthly allowance can be taken up by transportation costs), books, uniform, tuition or school lunches.

TEF funds certainly do not cover the entire educational expenses of a primary or secondary student. The modest payments in the TEF project are not meant to make students (or their new family) dependent upon the funds, but to give motivation to the students. The psychological impact of the support is one of its most significant factors: the TEF students are part of a group, they have a leader in the local community who looks out for their welfare and cares about their future. Bapak Nazar hopes to see the children through to a stage where they will be independent adults. Plans are now underway for several of the TEF students who have completed secondary school to work as helpers on this project – giving them the opportunity to give back to their communities and remain part of the group.

The TEF students range in age from grade 1 (6-7 years old) to high school seniors. Rather than a short term or one-off payment, the plan is to fund each TEF recipient through high school. The project is a whole-College affair: teachers, students, graduates, parents and project week groups visit Banda Aceh several times each year to meet the TEF students, observe their progress through their school, and keep in touch.

We know that careful, detailed work is needed to keep the project running. Bank accounts must be opened – for most children this is their first experience with a bank – and an understanding of the mechanism by which they receive the money and the requirements to continue funding (a copy of each semester's school report) is important for the project to succeed.

For the students of some schools this has worked very well, thanks mainly to the inspired and proactive leadership and support from the local head of school and



teachers. In other schools it has not been as successful. We have learnt that on the ground support is incredibly important: in schools where the leadership is indifferent, we have found students left to wonder how their bank accounts work, and bewildered as to why they aren't receiving funds. These are all areas that we are seeking to work on and improve with help from local contacts.

It is the local committed teachers and head of school who have really enabled TEF be a viable long-term programme. Without their support, TEF would have been a one-time event, providing some initial funds, and then unable to continue as we would have lost contact with the students.

Using models of development learned from our association with grass-roots organisations connected to the College through the Global Concerns Programme, UWCSEA's Aceh Project is the culmination of our understanding to date. Managed solely by teachers, parents, students and graduates in partnership with Bapak Nazar, the Aceh Project continues to grow and we continue to learn.

What next

Most schools have been rebuilt by now. The last schools which are being constructed are in some of the hardest hit areas – people waited to see if the community would return before building the schools. While the home rebuilding projects have varied in quality and some rebuilt communities are not yet occupied, the rebuilt schools often have excellent facilities and are fully occupied.

But help is still needed: with teacher training, generating and putting into practice ideas for extra-curricular activities



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and particularly with training on the new donated materials and computers. There are schools with new computers which are still unused as the teachers do not know how to incorporate them into their lessons. The IB now runs elementary teacher training at 14 schools in Banda Aceh specifically to try and address some of these issues but there are still many more schools facing these problems.

We have met many inspiring heads of school – not looking for donations, but thinking about for the welfare of their students: some Heads are organising full-day instruction for their students – academic classes in the mornings with activities in the afternoon until 4 or 5pm. But this is not always the case: when visiting an elementary school which conducts two half-day sessions for its many students we found that although the afternoon session started at 2pm, by 2:30pm only the deputy principal had appeared.

It is not just the physical loss of buildings and resources that has impacted on local education but the loss of experienced teachers as well.

In some case university students have been recruited to teach. We met Pak Feri Kurniawan at SD4, a local elementary school, where he was in charge of a class of 32 noisy, enthusiastic students. Pak studies English at the university, his students have clearly picked up some of the language, but he is still learning how to lead and conduct his classes. Their energy leaves him dizzy some days.

Three years on, the cameras are mostly gone, and the NGOs are beginning to pull out: most are expected to be gone by 2009. Groups are coming in to assess the relief efforts – evaluating health programmes, community rebuilding efforts, education projects. The local community is not looking forward to the exit of the NGOs. Besides the loss of jobs, there is also the loss of direction, “when they go it’s like the light in front of the house goes out.”

As UWCSEA continues to visit schools, we are lucky to enjoy a gracious and warm reception. We can see definite signs of progress, and so much that is yet to be done. Now, there is time to reflect and to consider the way forward. One Head of school reminded us that the effort here is not just to recover from one day’s events in 2004, but from the nearly 30 years of conflict that preceded it. A whole generation has been affected and the recovery is from civil strife combined with a natural disaster. The challenge is huge.

Project week

In 2006 three UWCSEA Grade 11 (IB1) groups chose Aceh as the focus for their Project Week. The students organised after-school clubs in science, maths and English at Acehnese high schools and set-up donated computers from UWCSEA at a middle school. The Project Week groups visited again in 2007 and more are expected in 2008.

At the College

UWCSEA currently has three Acehnese scholars at the College, one of whom was selected by the National Committee of Indonesia and the remaining hold three-year scholarships (including the Grade 10, Foundation IB course) that are funded equally by Trafigura and UWCSEA. These three-year scholarships will continue with one Acehnese scholar starting Grade 10 every year.