



**ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION
OF SEPARATED CHILDREN AND ORPHANS
IN EAST TIMOR**

**By the International Rescue Committee
in collaboration with
UNICEF East Timor - Child Protection**

May 2001

Project funded by UNICEF East Timor

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Preface

Considerations

This assessment was conducted from September 2000 to January 2001. The information provided dates from that time. Though numbers of enrolled children have changed slightly in the elapsed time, and some assistance has been given for building rehabilitation, clothes, and beds at various centres, the dilemmas and challenges discussed in the report remain unsolved. As assistance is severely cut back during 2001, the difficulties of these centres and the children in their care will continue to grow more urgent.

There has also been an increase of child centres in Dili during this time that has caused significant concern, as they do not have access to the resources, training and support as found at the older centres. The recommendations for action in this report have become only more pressing as these new centres develop, pushing the need for guidelines and mechanisms to protect the children in their care.

The fact that children continue to be sent to Dili and other towns, to stay in these centres highlights the urgency of needed work with parents, families and communities to care for children at home and to improve the opportunities and protection available to children at the local level.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their involvement in this project. The team at IRC has been wonderfully patient, hardworking, and professional. The time they took to build relationships and carefully gather information about individual children at risk was key to understanding the challenges we all face in assisting these young people throughout East Timor.

The assessment required long hours on the road and in the field across the 13 districts. The field team accomplished this with great humor and skill. They are Secundino Rangel, Raimundo Madeira, Manuel Dos Reis and Sonia Boavida. Secundino and Raimundo were integral to developing understandings of the conditions of children living in communities, using their skills developed with the Child Tracing Program. Manuel kept the team moving and safely brought us from one end of the country to the other. This assessment would not have happened without them.

Enormous energy and work went into interviewing actors in Dili and accurately building a national database of the children in centres. Jesuina Cabral Soares, Maria da Silva, and Maria Gusmao proved themselves equal to the challenge and provided essential insight into Timorese culture and practices. It was a joy to work with them.

Anne-Claire Dufay, Evelyn Vrouwenfelder and Dulce de Jesus Soares of UNICEF East Timor's Child Protection Section provided crucial support and information, patiently helping us grapple with the complicated issues involved in the need to provide care and, at the same time, ensure full protection of children's rights. Anne-Claire and Evelyn's thoughtfulness in reviewing, considering, and preparing the paper for publication was much appreciated.

Thanks also to Tania Mannhardt and Anna Korula in the Department of Social Affairs for including our work in their vision of future policies, and providing pertinent information from the perspective of UNTAET.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The lives of children throughout East Timor were severely affected by the violence and destruction which took place leading up to and following the Popular Consultation in August 1999. The forced displacement of more than three-quarters of the population of East Timor led to continuing violations of children's civil, political, social and cultural rights. Children suffered as victims of the violence. They saw their parents killed and their communities destroyed. Many were separated from families when the majority of the population was forced to flee to the mountains or West Timor.

As these children returned to their communities, with or apart from their families, they found houses and schools burned, means of livelihood destroyed and their way of life severely disrupted. The destruction exacerbated the problems that already poor communities faced. Children are now continuing to pay the consequences of this violence and poverty in lack of access to food, clothing, schooling, and health care. Many children who lost parents or were separated from their families returned to their communities more vulnerable than when they left. More than 400 children remain in Indonesia, still separated from their families more than a year and a half later.

UNICEF and IRC developed this assessment of the situation of Separated and Orphaned Children in East Timor in response to a request by the Task Force on Separated Children and Orphans. Partners in this Taskforce include UNTAET/ETTA representatives, NGOs, local groups and various people active/working in child centres. There was a concern that these groups of vulnerable children, in the violent aftermath of the August 1999 referendum, were: a) not getting the immediate care and attention they needed, and b) being taken into "orphanages" and other residential child centres around the country and thus deprived of their right to family life.

The assessment was initiated to provide hands-on information to:

- a) People working with the centres such as the Church, local NGOs, community based organisations, WFP and Social Services;
- b) People working within the UN Transitional Administration and the future government;
- c) Centre staff and administrators;
- d) The concerned community as a whole.

A special emphasis was placed on informing and advising those burdened with the difficult task of developing policies for the Rights and Protection of Children in East Timor. The assessment is intended to benefit and inform these policymakers in writing guidelines and policies.

A. Description of the assessment

A total of 37 child centres, boarding houses and boarding schools were visited and interviews performed throughout East Timor. The centres were evaluated according criteria based on access to resources and provision of services. In addition, a survey was done of the children in the centres. 1242 children were initially given the survey and of these 1242 children, full information was collected for 760. This 760 represents our survey group. There were 3 types of centres among the 37 visited

Chart 1: Types of centres assessed

	Full time child centres	Boarding Houses	Boarding Schools	Number of Children
Interviews and visits	22	13	2	1242
Complete sets of Questionnaires	14	3	2	760 (Survey group)

The statistics developed from the survey and additional interviews are presented in the following report.

Evaluation of the visited centres

The centres were evaluated according to 4 standards developed to measure the current capacity of the centres to access necessary resources and provide suitable living conditions, support, and services to the children. These standards of current capacity were: poor, fair, good and very good (the criteria and centres by name, city/town and district are described in the report). The following is a regional breakdown of the centres by these standards:

Chart 2: Regional Breakdown of Centre Capacity to Care

CONDITION	NUMBER	DISTRICTS
Very Good	4	Baucau, Viqueque, Lautem, Dili
Good	8	Baucau, Ermera, Lautem, Viqueque, Dili
Fair	17	Aileu, Ainaro, rural Lautem, Bobonaro, Manatuto, Manufahi, Dili
Poor	7	Rural Lautem, Bobonaro, Manufahi, Dili

B. Selected Findings from the Assessment

1. Most children in the centres are not “orphans”

This assessment originally started as a survey of “orphans” and “orphanages” in East Timor. However, we found that the use of both terms differed throughout the country. In addition, there are several kinds of residential arrangements for children seeking care or access to education in East Timor. A large percentage of the children in other centres come from the same background, face the same difficulties, and require the same protection, both within the centres and at home, as those in more “traditional” centres”, but may not be considered “orphans”.

In agreement with ETTA Social Services, the terminology was changed to child care centres, boarding houses and boarding schools. The assessment team surveyed 1242 children in the three types of centres to learn more both about their current experiences and their former family situations. From this overall survey, we were able to gather statistics investigating how many of the children are truly orphans, and how many still have access to family. The different Timorese understandings of the English word “orphan” and the alternate definitions in Tetun and Bahasa Indonesia for children without parents, provided an interesting insight into community perspectives on the needs of children, illustrating the perception that children with one parent or very poor families may be just as vulnerable as an “orphan”. The investigation of the children’s former family situations illustrated the following:

Chart 3: Results of Survey regarding the family situations of “orphaned” children

Number of Children	Both Parents are dead	One parent is still living	Two parents are still living	The Parents and Child are separated
Out of the 1242 children	19% (or 237) had lost both parents	46% of the children had one living parent	30% of the children had two parents	4% of the children were found to be separated from their parents

2. There are severe limitations on current quality of care for children in centres and in the community

Separated and orphaned children across the country are in serious need of immediate support in terms of food, clothing, clean water, health care, education and other basic services. Though many children are being sent to childcare centres to live because they can better provide access to education, attention, food and clothing than families or neighbours in their home villages, the centres also require immediate support, training and staff development.

Most centres cannot currently provide the minimum necessary standard of quality of care for the children staying there. This means that they may not be able to access or provide material goods such as clothing, beds, nets, blankets as well as electricity, water and food (basic food distribution was formerly done by WFP but they are now finishing this program). It also means that many centre staff, due to limited resources, training, time and energy, are currently unable to answer the emotional and developmental requirements of the children including needs for individual attention, supervised play and, when possible, intensive contact with parents and other family members.

3. Many children in centres are not able to go home to visit families and fulfil the right to family life

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, each child has the Right to Family Life. For most children with families who are staying in centres, this right is not being provided due to limited or non-existent family visits. These children are thus deprived of the essential role that family plays in a child’s development. Chart 4 shows the numbers of children who do not go home at all throughout the year. Most children who have the opportunity only go home once or twice a year, due to constraints of distance and lack of transport.

Some children are identified as needing protection from threats at home and are therefore kept in the centres during the holidays. The current capacity of centre staff and other community members to successfully mediate between these children and their families as well as provide education to parents to help them take better care of their children is limited and must be encouraged and supported.

Children’s ability to spend time with family, when possible, is further prevented because centres enrol children from outside their district, making travel more difficult. A policy of enrolling children only from within the district, could improve the chances for each child to spend more time with family or other community members.

Chart 4: Home visits and protection issues

Out of the survey group of 760 children and 37 centres:

Number of children who do not go home at all	Children staying in a centre with a sibling	Children identified as experiencing trauma	Centres enrolling children from outside their district	Centre staff that undertake formal family visits	Centres without adequate access to transport
15% (115 children)	125 children	21% (158 children)	17 centres	13 centres	16 centres

3. Centres have historically been the only social welfare net for children after the extended family

The tradition of sending children to stay in centres has historical roots and is deeply entrenched as a social welfare mechanism for families in need. Families and the Church are driving the use of child centres.

Residential centres are currently considered by many communities to be the best existing means for some children to gain access to resources that are unavailable in many communities. The supplementary training, personal attention, and access to resources provided in centres, most often by the Church, are seen as the only options available to children outside of the currently inadequate school system.

4. Use of child centres is directly related to the poor quality of and access to education

There will be little change in the practice of sending primary and junior students away from their families to live in centres until local schools are operating and become better able to provide a tangible and desired education. Though school reconstruction has commenced, the current plan for education will not be able to provide for the quality of instruction, individual attention, or facilities that are needed in the near future, especially in more rural or remote areas. As a result of the deficiencies of the former Indonesian and Portuguese school systems, many poor parents do not feel they have the capacity to provide support or guidance of their child's formal education.

C. Summary of Conclusions

- Immediate attention to improving care, support and education is essential for all vulnerable children in East Timor. Singular attention only to children who are already orphaned or separated treats only the symptoms of the problem. We cannot afford to wait.
- Immediate initiatives in support of child centres are necessary to improve the quality of life for children currently living without, or away from, their families.
- Programs encouraging the ability of families to care for their children at home must become a priority. Changing attitudes, building confidence, and enabling alternative daily or weekly arrangements will take significant time, consensus, support, and the development of affordable transport. However, action in this area is essential to defend these children's rights to protection as well as to family life.
- A wider outlook on vulnerable children and youth is required to better understand the special problems of these young people in East Timor. A national discussion is

necessary to highlight these problems and bring them to policymakers' attention at this crucial stage in the nation's development.

- ETТА Social Services, UNICEF, the Department of Health Services, the Department of Education, Human Rights, the Department of Legal Affairs as well as other concerned partners and/or responsible agencies have an important and immediate role to play for these children. This includes:
 - 1) Training and support to child centres;
 - 2) The initiation of monitoring, education and consultation processes around the issue of child protection at national level; and
 - 3) Active advocacy for the tangible expression of the rights and development of these children, within and between sectors, including Health, Education, Social Services and Human Rights;
 - 4) Active acknowledgement that poor quality of education and limited access significantly contributes to the use of child centres by poor children; and
 - 5) A concerted effort towards improving the quality of daily education and care within home villages, on the community level.
- Donors must be informed of the importance of supporting initiatives to help these and other disadvantaged children. Formal requests for funding in Social Affairs and by NGOs must put children as a first priority. Ignoring these children is not a productive option. Funding targeted to programs to help these children and youth is essential to building a peaceful East Timor.

Further, the transitional government has given extremely limited support to the Office of Social Services, which must take on the role of monitoring and advocating for orphans and separated children in the future. Serious attention must be paid to this office as the major link for vulnerable people into government. They must be supported to take over the monitoring, advocacy, and networking function needed to ensure that, according to their rights, children in centres and within communities receive appropriate care and protection.

D. Recommendations:

1. For providing better care to children in centres:

Training in the form of best practices workshops should be initiated to allow centre staff from different traditions to share their experiences in working with children in centres, with vulnerable families and in ensuring child protection, in the effort to develop criteria for “good care”. Information on child development, trauma, and the need for contact with family should be shared through these workshops. These regional initiatives should ultimately be aimed at developing guidelines and policy that can inform future legislation.

Support is needed to improve the quality of life for children currently staying in child centres. This should include direct assistance as well as livelihood and other small projects to help build strategies for sustainability where necessary. These projects must be initiated in a co-ordinated way. Age-appropriate assistance is needed in the form of financial assistance, nutrition, furniture, water and sanitation facilities, toys, recreational materials etc. This coordination should be assisted by Social Services or other relevant departments in the future administration.

2. For improving child centre practices and policies:

Guidelines and legislation are urgently needed to inform registration and monitoring of child centres, criteria for “adequate care” and enrolment of children in need of protection.

Children at each centre must be **registered with Social Services** in the current and future administrations, and their right to identity protected.

A national network of centres that can co-ordinate and monitor care of children should be created. Initial rules of centre registration must be immediately developed but this network and other responsible agencies should then further address issues around registration and the development of these guidelines for good practices to build consensus for child-focused social policy. Such a network could play an integral role in codifying policy to **localise centres** and encourage **family visits**, as well as in providing a forum for discussion of common problems such as provision of food, protection and **transport**.

3. *For strengthening the family and community's ability to care for their children:*

Building confidence and skills in parenting through direct programming for families and communities is crucial. These programmes should be directed towards increasing families' capacity to provide care for their children at home and to keep extended family relationships strong. Such initiatives should target young parents early and focus on youth as well.

Support to families and communities caring for vulnerable children should be implemented through school feeding projects and programming to assist widows and widowers with training and livelihood initiatives within their communities.

4. *For developing systematic information on children in need within the community*

A comprehensive registration that focuses on separated, orphaned and vulnerable children is needed to properly develop systematic and reliable information on the situation of separated and orphaned children living with extended family, foster arrangements and child-centres. Reliable statistics on the situation of vulnerable children are essential to future planning.

Training and sensitisation of personnel involved in the Civil Registration and Census to specific issues of children must be initiated to guarantee that the process is clear and generates accurate information.

5. *For protecting children through monitoring and legislation*

Accessing and developing local and national mechanisms for child protection should be initiated through: a) participatory meetings among partners involved in Child Protection; b) identification of community resources and actors who can and are currently assisting in the protection and care of children; and c) involvement of all relevant organisations and personnel. Training for these identified actors in child protection and initiation of local child protection committees will be important.

Raising awareness of the situation of children is essential. A National Forum on Children and/or other forms of national and local advocacy could be constituted to inform, discuss and develop new policy, norms and definitions for the appropriate protection, development and education of children in East Timor.

A cross-sector/interagency Campaign for Child Survival and Development should be initiated to raise awareness on the needs of young people at the local level. Children and youth should be involved as active participants.

Consultation in the development of child policies and legislation should occur on the local and regional levels in concert with awareness raising efforts.

Special protection programmes are needed for monitoring the situation of marginalised children (disabled, orphaned, street children, abused children as well as children in conflict with the law) in communities. These young people should have access to child lawyers/advocates who will monitor their case/experience and guarantee that their rights are protected. Identified responsible parties such as social workers, police, and church representatives should also be prepared to help defend the rights of these children. **The funding and recruitment of a formal child advocate** to handle current cases as well as to train public defenders and NGO court monitors on representing the interests of children, should be seriously considered.

6. *For targeting the education problem*

Advocacy for immediate improvement in the process and vision of educating children is essential during the formation of the new school system. The quality of teaching and learning must be immediately improved. With each delay, children are missing out on education essential to their development as citizens and adults. Current plans for development of the school system have started but will take time to have an effect on the current situation. These plans must be augmented to give serious attention to the quality of each child's education, with a special focus on primary-level students. In addition, communities must be given effective responsibility for collaboration in the formal and non-formal education of their children and assisted in efforts to support Government-provided basic schooling with non-formal initiatives and other programs such as apprenticeships and mentoring initiatives. Children in East Timor have waited long enough for help in rebuilding their lives.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Chapter I. Introduction

A. Background

During Portuguese rule in East Timor, a system of ‘boarding houses’ was developed around the limited number of schools available to East Timorese children in order to provide residence for an elite group of students coming from long distances.¹

From 1975, under Indonesian rule, this practice continued. Both the Church and the Indonesian Government ran facilities. However, the roles of these facilities altered as the school system was significantly expanded to include children who were previously denied education. Students still entered these establishments at the request of their parents or relatives. However, the children, unlike those during Portuguese times, often came from large and impoverished families, and included children of resistance members living in the mountains. Some of the houses became known as “orphanages”.

The development of these “orphanages” or “panti asuhan” was initiated in many areas by religious orders to provide a haven for children who lost their parents during the 25 years of struggle against the Indonesian occupation.² They continued to be residential educational facilities after the Portuguese model. As schooling became more accessible, increasing numbers of families were actively encouraged to send at least one of their children there.³ Children of resistance members were less visible among the larger numbers of children in centres, and thus, more protected from Indonesian authorities. Some centres were thereby able to play a crucial role in supporting the struggle. In some areas, this role was and still is a source of pride for the community.⁴

State-run (and funded) orphanages and boarding houses played a somewhat different role within East Timorese communities and were considered less desirable places to send a child. At the same time, students were sent from East Timor to school in other Indonesian provinces, and stayed during that time in boarding houses, while children of Indonesians and transmigrants used the State-run houses in East Timor.⁵ Community acceptance of these houses and the role they played varied greatly between communities. In districts like Manufahi and Baucau where there are larger Indonesian religious orders, orphanages were run by the Church but funded by the State and were more accepted by the community. In districts like Ainaro, the State-run houses garnered much less support. In general, however,

¹ These children were most often not orphans. School costs under Portuguese rule were high, restricting access to families with resources and connections.

² Thus, while the numbers of children entering centres as a result of the recent violence are less than was expected, the orphans in the care of centres were most often victims of the 25-year war.

³ An Indonesian government publication claimed that only 47 primary schools and 2 junior high schools were operating at the time of the Indonesian invasion. Other estimates show closer to 486, mostly primary schools. However, by 1996 the number of schools had increased across the country. 736 Primary (SD), 112 Junior (SMP), 53 Secondary (SMA) and 63 kindergartens (63) were accessible to a much wider population of children. A number of these schools were run by the Catholic Church. The number of students increased to close to 200,000.

⁴ The Salesian center at Venilale and the Carmelite center in Fatuhada in Dili were specifically noted. We asked if their role in the resistance made them a target for the Indonesian security forces but were told that only one sister at the center would know the identity of the FALANTIL children. We were also told the Indonesians were not aware of this practice.

⁵ While this system was used by the Indonesians in their larger campaign to assimilate East Timorese children into Indonesian culture, it is part of a larger trend where youth and students of all ages traveled throughout the Indonesian provinces to study in secondary schools, technical schools and universities.

“orphanages” played an important social welfare role in all districts such that children were regularly sent to centres if their parents and extended family were unable to care for them.⁶

When the East Timorese voted for independence in August 1999, the State-run orphanages ceased to exist and many Church members took the role of safeguarding and protecting these children, taking them to West Timor or to the mountains and bringing them back in late 1999. The majority of children from the disbanded Indonesian orphanages were returned to their families. The remaining children from the State-run centres, who had nowhere to go, have stayed in the care of the church. Other children who were previously in the care of church centres have remained there, often at the request of their families, in order to continue their education. There are also new children who have recently come to the centres since the violence around the Popular Consultation.

B. Reasons for this Assessment

Late spring 2000, the Taskforce on Separated Children and Orphans (which includes several local and International NGOs, UN-agencies, ETTA and the Church), felt it necessary to gather information on this issue. UNICEF approached the International Rescue Committee to perform this assessment with UNICEF support. A concern had arisen that there would be an increase in orphanages and an increase in children being sent to centres due to the violence of 1999 and the resulting deaths and separation of families. There were also indications that the older, as well as recently established “orphanages” were unable to provide basic necessities and had insufficient access to training and resources in areas such as shelter, food, hygiene, and educational facilities.

Taking into consideration the right of each child to family life, UNICEF, IRC and other partners believed that an assessment was necessary to investigate a) this possible increase of children in centres, b) the main reasons for children being in centres, c) the number of children in centres that do have family and d) the type of initiatives which could be developed to stimulate families and communities to care for these children in their home community.

Moreover, there has been and continues to be an overall lack of information on the situation of children on a national scale. This assessment was primarily developed to begin to inform the Task Force, especially UNICEF, IRC, ETTA Social Services, WFP, UNHCR, Donors and other responsible agencies about the current situation of separated and orphaned children across the 13 districts of East Timor, to better protect and support East Timorese children.

C. Objectives

The assessment generally aimed to:

- Analyse the questionnaires developed by the Task Force (and distributed to several centres) as well as information from other sources.
- Conduct a study of the situation of East Timorese separated children and orphans and the orphanage system past and present
- Analyse the results, recommend a policy and legislation to protect East Timorese children and strategize for the long-term development of community based support for separated children and orphans
- Encourage home visits and/or reunification of families whenever possible and in the best interest of the child

Ultimately, the assessment aimed to carefully examine the conditions and situations of the children who are now living away from their families both in centres and in the community in

⁶ See pg. 29 for further discussion on Parents’ capacity to care

order to begin developing policy, legislation and programs to improve their situation. This was to be done in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child and, in particular, every child's right to family life, with the ultimate respect for the **"best interest of each child"**.

D. Focus of Assessment

The taskforce was initially concerned that the displacement and violence of April-September 1999 would result in a substantial increase in separated or orphaned children being sent to "orphanages". However, our assessment, conducted from September 2000- January 2001, found that, in this new school year, while the numbers of children in Church-run orphanages have slightly increased from pre-Consultation levels, the expected phenomenon has not occurred. As a result, the study began to focus more pointedly towards developing a longer-term understanding of the historical East Timorese practice of sending children to be raised outside of the family, ultimately, in the effort to develop policy recommendations to appropriately address current needs within a Timorese context.

1. Three major issues confronted:

- **Poverty:** One of the main reasons why children are sent to centres is related to poverty. Therefore, any discussion on support for orphans and separated children, especially within the community, should address the central and overwhelming root causes of the poverty currently crippling families throughout the country.
- **Poor Formal Education System:** Current and historical problems in providing adequate basic education to all children have fuelled the practice of sending children away from their communities. Schooling issues such as high costs and inaccessibility combined with a lack of food, clothing and other resources have led children, communities and families to seek assistance from the centres.
- **Families' inability to care for their children:** Issues of maternal mortality, birth spacing, illiteracy, under-nutrition, disease, subsistence agriculture, inadequate access to markets, poor infrastructure, and women's disempowerment have restricted or prevented families' ability to care for their children, leaving them vulnerable and insecure.

2. Positive and concerning aspects involved in widening the focus of the assessment

2.1 Positive aspects

Changing the focus of the assessment from 'orphanages' to 'child centre'

The assessment originally aimed to collect data on "orphanages" specifically serving as homes for poor and orphaned children. We found that concentration on these particular criteria presented a false distinction and made it a point to visit all centres in the districts where children were in residence including self-professed boarding houses and boarding schools. This widened our perspective on the issue of 'orphanages' regarding terminology (distinctions between orphanages, child-centres, boarding houses and boarding schools) as well as a more complete understanding of the history of child-centres in East Timor.

Widening our outlook on children "in need"

Many of the children in each type of centre come from the same background, face the same difficulties, and require the same protection. As the centres usually serve a group of children with diverse histories (and not only separated/orphaned children), many people we encountered asked why we sought information specifically on separated and orphaned children when other children appear to be equally needy. This demand drove us to widen the scope of our outlook on children in need or in vulnerable circumstances in the effort to construct a more representational vision of the particular problems of children in East Timor.

Building trust and advocacy for family visits

As it became evident that the centres serve multiple purposes for communities in East Timor, and attending a centre is most often voluntary and supported by a family member, the assessment moved to focus on encouraging family visits, and maximum contact with the surrounding community, with an eye towards further discussions on the need for family reunification and child tracing in the future. Through discussions with centre staff and community members, we were able to begin to build a basis of understanding essential for further initiatives and communication with the centres and communities involved. We explained that we were not trying to immediately shut down the centres and bring the children home (such previous misconceptions resulted from the visits of several international representatives), but were trying to find acceptable ways, initiated by centre staff and community members, to improve the experience of each child according to their best interest. At the same time we committed to centre staff to share the reports of their reality with authorities in Dili.

2.2 Concerning aspects

Overall it is important to note that though the practice of sending children to centres is long established and accepted, that there are several serious realities we should not overlook.

Limited family visits and loss of ties to “home”

Many children still do not visit family and do appear to be at risk of losing their ties with home communities. In putting high priority on working with current practitioners to understand and assist the problems that children in centres face, the importance of the message that family life is crucial for each child has the potential to be lost. A number of the children can stay at a centre for 10-15 years spending no more than 2 weeks a year with family members. While many community members did not look at this as “detrimental”, peer interviews indicated that these children risk losing the networks of friends and relations involved in the very intricate extended families here. Future work with child centres will also be subject to the dilemma of legitimisation involved in assisting children in centres as it conflicts with the need to encourage families to keep their children at home.

Poor living conditions at centres

In addition, there are children currently in centres who are staying in very difficult circumstances. At 5 centres children are sleeping on the floor, at more than 10 they have only limited access to water. While families send their children to the centres for the quality of care they will receive, we found several cases where illness had been left too long without treatment, children received limited food and/or were doing difficult and hard work, and there was limited supervision.

Low value put on families’ ability to provide “what children need”

Some parents presented a countering argument that these children are still better served in centres than at home where, in many areas of the country, life is extremely difficult and similar poor conditions apply. We encountered a trend that, especially in poorer areas, less value is put on what a parent can provide in guidance, affection, and the importance of nurturing the emotional attachment between parents and children etc. than on the material provision and educational guidance available at the centre. Thus questions of quality of care dwelt more on food, clothing and education than on the less immediately evident but crucial “qualities” and connection that only parents (or other immediate and close family caretakers) can provide.

Poor quality of care cannot be excused

It is difficult to realistically measure the quality of care in centres in an absolute sense because this more material provision is often regarded in comparison with children’s experience at home. However, policymakers cannot be allowed to excuse or accept poor overall quality of care for children in centres because it might be better than what they might receive at home.

Children are living in dire need, in their communities, with families as well as in centres and these needs must be immediately addressed.

E. Research Methods

1. Scope of assessment (areas visited)

Due to the looming impediment of the rainy season, the assessment was first initiated in the 12 districts outside of Dili. In total we visited 30 centres where children were in residence outside of Dili (Bobonaro-2, Liquica-1, Ermera-1, Baucau-6, Manatuto-1, Aileu-1, Manufahi-6, Ainaro-2, Viqueque-4, Lautem-5, Oecusse-1)⁷. Within Dili District we specifically visited 7 centres where children are in residence, 7 feeding programs, and 2 afternoon activity programs for kids.

2. Tools

At each centre we interviewed centre staff and children and distributed or filled out the questionnaires developed by the Task Force on Separated Children and Orphans.⁸ Where the forms were left for staff to complete, follow-up discussions were held and the questionnaires supplemented by further interviews. Complete and updated sets of forms were gathered from 17 centres. Road conditions and reluctance of centre administrators prevented us from collecting questionnaires from 4 centres. However, interviews with children and staff of these centres indicated that the problems and family situations of children there were similar to others we found. Questionnaires collected by UNICEF last spring were used but had to be carefully re-checked because student enrolment at the centres changed with the new school year. The collection of questionnaires was entered in a database to be made available to UNICEF and ETTA's Department of Social Services.

To examine the situation of orphaned and separated children who have stayed in their communities we focused on 3 districts: Viqueque, Baucau, and Bobonaro. Due to the lack of current information about the needs of children within the districts, we chose to work with the lists of children currently benefiting from the World Food Program's Vulnerable Feeding Program that we knew to have been recently verified.⁹ However, these lists, as the only statistics available on orphans in most areas did not provide enough information for our purposes (For further information see Chapter IX. Developing systematic information on children in need within the community: Recommendations for Registration, pg.52). In Covalima, Ermera, Viqueque, Dili and Manufahi we distributed our own Data Forms (See Appendix II) designed to elicit information on separated children and orphans living within the community.¹⁰

3. Additional Resources

Information was further gained by work with IRC's Separated Children Tracing team and interviews with families seeking to be reunified. Discussions were also pursued with village chiefs, other community representatives and their children, organisations providing daily needs assistance and working in the development of the education system, community

⁷ There are two boarding houses in Covalima that we did not visit due to poor road conditions.

⁸ We did not distribute questionnaires to the 5 centres of Instituto Secular due to reluctance by Irma Maria Lourdes to have the children participate in the survey. We received a similar reaction from the Canossian sisters, and as the Canossians run Secondary school-related boarding houses (4), we substituted the questionnaires with in-depth interviews. Forms were also not provided to the 2 boarding houses at Don Bosco that care for the students at the Agricultural Secondary School.

⁹ Many vulnerable feeding lists had not been updated since March and May 2000.

¹⁰ These were not included in the database but did provide insight into the situation of some children in the communities. As the task of collecting information from communities in a systematic and reliable way became impossible, we were encouraged that OMT representatives in Covalima have adopted the forms for their own survey

programmers for the Children and Youth Development Program, as well as civilian police and military forces.

The results of these meetings, interviews, and questionnaires as well as discussions with local leaders, women's groups, youth groups, international and national NGOs, and members of the CNRT, UN administration, and UN agencies are presented in this report.

F. Constraints

1. Challenges and Problems in Collection of Data

There were substantial difficulties in compiling reliable and complete information on children both in the centres and in the community.¹¹ Not least was the problem that other groups working in areas affecting children also had very little information. The following problems hampered our work:

- Children are not currently a visible programming priority outside of Dili for local and international NGOs, UN partners and other agencies working in East Timor
- Very limited reliable information is available about vulnerable children
- Centre staff are often very reluctant to provide information due to former false promises, too many surveys, and limited action
- Centres are often very far from the nearest main road and access can be extremely difficult, especially during the rainy season
- Survey forms were not fully suited to the current issues of these children

2. Problems in Processing Data

Time involved in training of the project staff on data processing and statistics, problems with translation as well as the dilemmas of conflicting information provided by centre staff due to confusion from the survey forms further complicated the process of developing accurate and representative data on the children.

An in-depth discussion of the challenges is presented in Appendix I: Summary of Constraints.

¹¹ For further info see Appendix I.

Chapter II. Towards a Common Understanding of Children in Need

A. Defining an “orphan” in East Timor

Operating on the initial assumption that children who are full orphans (without two parents) were the most needy, we soon found that such distinctions are not immediately clear or true in a Timorese context. The role of language is illustrative in addressing the issue of children without parents.

1. Bahasa Indonesia

While most understood the English definition of “orphan” as a child with no parents, Bahasa Indonesia makes a distinction between children who have lost a father, “yatim”, lost a mother, “piatu”, and lost both parents, “yatim piatu”. In order to find numbers of orphans at different centres we often reverted to these more clear Bahasa Indonesia terms.

2. Tetun

However, in Tetun, a child who has lost one parent is called “oan kiak” (most often to describe children without fathers) which literally can also mean “poor child” and is often used that way. A child who has lost both parents is called “kiak hotu”, which can also be translated as “all poor”. While we did not often use these words in our assessment, preferring the more precise Indonesian (though interviews were most often conducted in Tetun), the Tetun meaning illustrates the central issue of poverty and portrays the significance of losing one parent.

3. “Orphan”

We did find that people use the word “orphan” to describe a child in need but we were careful not to bring our own strict definition. In many areas, an orphan is defined as any child who has lost a father. In other sub-districts people used the more common distinction of a child with no parents. Some considered children without a mother to be orphaned.

4. The reality in numbers

The range of children taken in by child centres before and after the referendum shows that most children in centres are not in fact “orphans”. **Of 1242 children, only 19% were full orphans.** Of this group we were able to reliably measure that, in total, **more than 46%** of the children had **one parent** and **30% had two parents**. We also found very few separated children staying in centres (4%). Although the majority of children staying in centres come, at least in part, for educational reasons, a common consensus was that they all were children “in need”. This consensus implies that community measurement of “need” is not directly related to whether or not the child has lost his/her parents.

Chart 5: Family situation of the children

Number of Children	Lost both parents	Have one parent	Have two parents	Separated
Out of 1242 children	19% (or 237) had lost both parents	46% of the children had one living parent	30% of the children had two parents	4% (51) of the children were found to be separated from their parents

B. Orphans due to violence v. Orphans due to poverty

The initial concern that a possible increase in orphans and separated children after the 1999 destruction might lead to an increase the number of orphanages, was rooted in the fear that a large number of children orphaned by the violence would overwhelm existing systems formerly developed to cope with children “orphaned” by the more historical effects of extreme poverty.

Although attention to the destruction caused by the violence in 1999 and the impact of the massive population displacement is crucial¹², it is essential to acknowledge that most of the problems children face are ongoing and existed before the referendum under an Indonesian administration sometimes ill-equipped to effectively address the situation. It is important to keep in mind that the majority of orphans¹³ and children we have encountered in the last 3 months lost parents or family before last year. This is not to say that they were not seriously impacted by the events that transpired from April until September or are not victims of the long war against the Indonesian government. The loss of family, shelter, crops, livestock, schools, water, and transport systems as well as the slow return rate of refugees from West Timor may have led new and different families to turn to the Sisters to raise their children.

C. Categorising Childcare Centres

As the only social welfare net for children and families in need outside of the extended family, centres serve a wide variety of functions and play many roles for the community. As a community’s troubles and needs change, so do the characteristics of the children at the centres. Thus there are many subtle differences in the phenomenon of child centres between Indonesian and post-referendum periods, between the districts and the urban centres of Dili and Baucau, and between established Church-run institutions and responses by lay persons to more recent community problems such as street children in Dili.¹⁴

1. “Orphanages” as a phenomenon

We did not find one centre in East Timor that falls under the strict category of “orphanage” where all of the children have lost both parents. Just as the definition of “orphan” illustrates the complexity of this issue, it is essential to note that the term “orphanage” in East Timor has a different connotation than in many other areas of the world. There are only a small number of children staying in centres who do not have family to go to (if possible) during the school holidays. For this reason, in this assessment we substitute the term “orphanage” with “full-time or residential child centres”, in addition to the boarding house or boarding school arrangements.

2. Child Centres as a safe haven

While the child centres care for children whose families cannot or will not provide care or access to education, they also fulfil a role in protecting a small number of children who would

¹² As international mobilization and funding has responded primarily to the results of the popular consultation and the following violence, it is understandable that programs are oriented towards righting the wrongs of that time. Programs that focus on the reunification of separated children illustrate this preoccupation. This said, it is still necessary to recognize the longer-term roots in order to solve these ongoing problems.

¹³ It was not possible to find out exact dates that children lost their parents though we understood that only a few at each center had lost parents as a result of the ballot-related destruction. High maternal mortality rates, high incidence of TB and other diseases, participation in the clandestine movement as well as the brutality of the Indonesian regime all seem to have contributed to the high death rate among parents of young children.

¹⁴ Forum Comunicacoes, in connection with the Salesians Sisters, runs activities for street children in Kaikoli, Dili. They are hoping to open a more permanent drop-in center for these children.

otherwise be at risk in their home environments due to inadequate parental care or other threats.

We found no common definition of such “threats”. Staff gave examples rather than criteria. One little boy, 2, is currently staying in Maubara where both he and his mother were given “safe haven” after the boy’s father, known to be “mentally ill” tried to kill him. Mary*¹⁵, 4, arrived at Soibada so badly malnourished and neglected that she could not stand or sit at the age of 3. The mother is “abnormal” (a common translation for crazy) and there is no known father. A brother and sister in their late teens stay at Instituto Secular in Dare where they were taken by a woman in Dili who found out that they were badly abused in their foster family. They did not attend school and were made to work for the family under very difficult conditions. Several other children facing neglect, malnutrition, and “lack of harmony in the home” were mentioned as needing special protection and assistance.¹⁶

While initiatives that allow children more access to their actual home situation can be pushed in families that need additional support to raise their children, the possibility of re-integration of children in need of “safe haven” back into family life clearly must be approached with significant caution and preparation.

When we pushed the issue of family visits and identification of extended family that could care for children, at least during the holidays, we received substantial support from all centre staff except in the case of children seeking special protection. These most often stay in the centres throughout the holidays. The staff in all centres with cases of children seeking safe haven were clearly wary of any movement to put these children back in their home situations without much more substantial monitoring and follow-up than they are capable of at present.¹⁷

While we have attempted to put forward some ideas on mechanisms for monitoring children under threat within a community, and alternative support possibilities, we believe this issue requires a more extensive, systematic and action-based discussion within communities, grassroots networks such as OMT, the Church, and the new Government. This discussion should focus on as to what “protection” of these children could mean and what constitutes a “threat” to their safety and development (For further discussion see Chapter X. Protecting Children: Selected Recommendations, p. 55). There was a clear need voiced for a more formal mechanism for follow-up of children’s cases in the home.

D. Identifying children in need within the community

1. Who is a child in need?

¹⁵ Names have been altered to allow for confidentiality.

¹⁶ Four children we spoke with directly indicated problems at home. One youth at the Collegio in Maliana could not speak about his father and did not give his name. He then broke into a sweat and could not speak. Other students indicated his father had left after a “dispute”. A fellow student indicated that he went to boarding school because his role with a militia group in 1999 put him under threat by people in his home community. In another case in Same, a child was injured in the leg and his family (extended) did not care for the wound or help him to medicate it. He was sent to a center away from Same and when we brought back there for medical treatment he adamantly refused to stay with his family. The sisters alluded to neglect/abuse at home. A youth staying in Maubara was entreated by his father to join him in West Timor. The youth’s mother is dead. He refused as his father is militia and he does not trust him. He said that he could not wait to be old enough to be a soldier so he could go and kill militia like his father.

¹⁷ There was concern expressed in the Special Working Group on Children and Youth that children do not participate enough in these decisions and their preference should be heard. The need for formal criteria for removing children from their homes is discussed later in the report.

While in each field visit, community members identified orphans as a group needing immediate attention, few were able to give us reliable data on the exact numbers of these children living in their village or area.¹⁸ As mentioned on page 11, members of various communities differed substantially in their definitions of orphans (from the loss of one parent to the loss of both) and took the opportunity to ask us what the assessment was truly meant to measure, the number of children without parents, or the number of vulnerable children who need assistance and protection. Though they expressed that it is important to address the needs of orphans, they also pushed the problems of children of poor, large, or otherwise disadvantaged families. In some cases that we found, extended families have taken in orphans so they are not necessarily more vulnerable than other poor children.

2. Discrepancies in care

This noted, we did find that many orphaned and separated children living within the community (in foster care or with extended family) are living in extremely difficult arrangements, without adequate nutrition or access to health care. These more general child protection problems should also be considered and given precedence even though this specific assessment focuses more on children in centres. Interviews with separated children returning to their communities around the country have shown a discrepancy in quality of care and willingness of substitute and extended family situations to provide fully for the child. Cases of neglect were found but more often, families just do not have enough food, assistance, access to resources, etc. to provide for the child. This often means that they don't have the resources to provide for other children in the family as well, though there was indication, in some cases, of favouritism. In poorer areas of Bobonaro and Viqueque it was corroborated that often children who are not of the immediate family do not get to go to school and are not necessarily treated equally to others in the household. However, for most children we came across, the family had eagerly welcomed them back, but was very much in need of further material assistance¹⁹.

One specific case highlighted the additional problem of lack of care by stepparents in cases of death of a biological parent or divorce. Davide*, 8, lost his mother. His father, who served with the TNI, remarried. In September, he and his family fled to West Timor. During their time in the refugee camps, his stepmother did not accept him and started neglecting him. An example of neglect was that he was fed plain rice and nothing else. Davide* left to live in the street, hanging around the market. He tried to get back to East Timor on his own and was handed over to the care of his grandmother at a cross-border meeting. She provides shelter and food for him but he has become nomadic and spends most of his time on the street. He is not currently in school.

E. Defining vulnerability

A much larger discussion is required in the social welfare field in East Timor on the definition of vulnerability. The numerous problems involved in developing reliable lists for the World Food Programme's "Vulnerable" Feeding Program have illustrated the confusion and pitfalls that currently exist in defining vulnerability, especially of children, across the country.²⁰ We

¹⁸ Most villages do have lists of "vulnerable groups" for the Vulnerable Feeding Program but they have been found to be highly flawed and only sometimes include orphans as a vulnerable group.

¹⁹ In follow-up visits with re-united families, the IRC Tracing team has found that children and their caretakers focus singularly on material problems and the family's daily needs. Food, clothing, conditions of schools, and the lack of teachers were listed as primary concerns.

²⁰ This process is currently being frustrated as well because, in some villages, in reaction to inconsistent WFP methodology and supervision, many people misrepresent the number of dependent children in the effort to get the food they need. In areas of irregular distribution, this becomes a necessary practice for some. As a result, lists and the information elicited are very unreliable and do not helpfully contribute towards an effective definition.

did not find anyone in our interviews who was able to give a common definition of what it means to be vulnerable in East Timor.

The WFP defines “Vulnerable Children” as “the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in East Timor including but not limited to:

- a) street children;
- b) orphans and unaccompanied minors;
- c) returnees; and
- d) children with disabilities or those affected by trauma or other psychological effects”²¹

While we found that these groups of children are likely to be vulnerable, some children who fall within these categories are being cared for within the community. Thus, they are often not worse off than other children in the same area. On the other hand, needy children who have only one parent; whose parent is disabled, incarcerated or mentally ill; children who were internally displaced and not considered refugees; or those who specifically need protection, are not suitably targeted by this definition. The question must be asked if returnees in general, now one year later, are more vulnerable than children who suffer from recurrent food insecurity or other livelihood problems due to poor harvest or isolation during the rainy season.

²¹ This is the standard UN definition of vulnerability currently being used in East Timor.

SECTION TWO: ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS

Chapter III. Assessing the Current Situation of Children in East Timorese Child Care Centres

A. Range of child-care centres

There is a large difference in the quality of care between centres, religious orders, districts, rural areas and urban centres. There are significant differences in the centres' missions and philosophies, as well as their criteria of acceptance, recruitment methods, interaction with families, and access to resources and training. These issues directly affect the involvement of centre staff with the child and the extent to which they know him or her, know details of the child's past, and can adequately provide for his/her individual needs. This involvement is related to the ratio of caretakers to children, their other duties, and the age of the children (see Social Services for specific information on each centre).

Our first effort was to differentiate between the full-time child care centres and the boarding houses, as there is not a commonly accepted term across the 13 districts that systematically distinguishes between the two. Child care centres in Indonesian are called "panti asuhan" and boarding houses are called "asrama". However, these terms were used interchangeably in some interviews denoting a wider lack of definition. The indicators used for the purpose of this assessment to differentiate between child centres and boarding houses were:

Chart 6: Differences between Boarding Houses and Full-time Child Care Centres

Characteristics	Boarding Houses (Asrama)	Full-time Child Care Centres (Panti Asuhan)
Average age range	13-19 Occasionally there are children under 12	5-19 The majority tend to be children 12 and under
Children attending school	All children are currently in school or graduated and still staying at the house.	Some children are too young to enrol in school or already left school and remain at the centre.
Payment or tuition	Limited payment is often required in currency or in kind. Several centres mentioned that more children do not come because they cannot afford to leave home.	There is no payment for these centres.
Mission of the centre	Most boarding houses are presented as places for children to stay while they attend school while also learning additional life skills and gaining the benefit of a structured space to study, learn and play.	Most child centres are described as places where children can be cared for, learn additional skills, and attend school. The purpose of safe haven and inability of parents to care for the children are more often highlighted than in the case of boarding houses.
Criteria for acceptance	This is often the ability of parents to provide food for the child, the child's acceptance into the nearby school (level of education), or availability of space.	This is more often resulting from the "need" of the child, especially younger children, though availability, and "first-come, first-serve" bases also condition acceptance.

We found though that the lines between the two kinds of centres were often blurred. At full-time child care centres we found children coming to board, to learn life skills, for protection,

because their parents could not care for them or send them to school, and because they had nowhere else to go.

Many children at boarding houses came purely for a place to stay while attending school, but there are those staying in these houses who are also seeking safe haven (not usually more than 1 or 2 at a centre), as well as training in life skills. Children were also staying in boarding houses because their parents could not adequately care for them at home or send them to school in their home areas. In the case of boarding houses, as parents often have to provide the child's food, the problem was more often one of access to a school or adequate teaching than ability to feed or clothe. While children in child-care centres were also there to access education, they commonly gave other reasons to justify their enrolment such as lack of resources and capacity to care.

B. Child centre data and information

Across the 13 districts of East Timor, according to these criteria, there are currently 23 full time child-care centres²² and 15 boarding houses. Two boarding schools in Maliana and Viqueque (Ossu) care for orphaned and separated children but there are also other boarding schools in the country.

The data obtained through interviews and questionnaires from boarding houses, full time centres, and boarding schools corroborated that there are similar reasons for children's stay at all the centres, as well as common trends in the circumstances of their immediate families, and the number of times they are able to visit their families during the year. The one significant difference was that the average age range of children in boarding houses was 13-19 and in full-time child centres was 5- 19. The presence of a significant number of children under 13 at the full-time child centres led us to concentrate our attention more specifically to potential protection issues there.

1. Statistics from the Survey group

We visited 22 full-time child centres, 13 boarding houses and 2 boarding schools and gave out a total of 1242 questionnaires to the children in these centres. The questionnaires were completed one on one with the children when possible, however, because of time limits, the sisters in the centres and boarding houses volunteered to fill in the forms together with the children. Upon return we noticed that on many of the forms information was missing and/or questions misunderstood. Therefore we chose 760 children with complete information as a survey group. These children represented a good cross-section of the children in centres, and reflected the larger situation of these young people.

Chart 7: Identifying a survey group

	Full time child centres	Boarding Houses	Boarding Schools	Number of Children
Interviews and visits	22	13	2	1242
Complete sets of Questionnaires	14	3	2	760 (Survey group)

²² Only 22 of the 23 were initially identified through district visits. In late December we found that there was another full-time child center operating in Balibo, Bobonaro that was previously unknown to the Church and UNTAET authorities in Maliana. It is currently run by 2 Indonesian priests. Information on this center could not be included in this assessment. Irma Maria Lourdes also operates 4 posts of her Instituto Secular in addition to the 5 assessed here. These 4 were not included as they run more as seminaries and less as child-care centres. However, young people are also in residence there.

2. General conditions of the centres through set indicators

A certain degree of subjectivity is obviously involved in comparing the conditions of each centre. The following indicators were drawn up to allow for comparison within the local context. The centres are compared here only to each other. There is no absolute judgement. The centres did not fall neatly into categories. Some that were comparatively “very well equipped and run” did not have water while some in greater need had access to both water and electricity. 3 of the 4 centres with “very good” conditions had much higher ratios of children to staff and 5 centres experiencing more difficulties did have steady access to food through the market. As a result these designations are just guidelines and indications of general conditions and realities of the centres.

We defined the indicators as follows:

Poor

Very limited access to resources, specifically food and clothing, lack of beds or bed sharing by more than 2 children, higher ratios of children to adult caretakers²³, while taking into account limitations in access to water²⁴ and electricity.

Fair

Limited access to resources, some supply of eating, cooking, washing, and learning materials, high ratio of child to adult caretakers, sometimes limited access to water and electricity and beds for each child, only half of the children with mattresses and nets.

Good

More stable access to resources (most often through the church), beds for at least more than half of children, mattresses and nets, adequate supply of materials, lower ratios of children to adult caretakers, higher levels of direct supervision, cleanliness and rehabilitation of the structure, access to water and electricity, and ability of centre staff to access human, natural and material resources within the surrounding community including health care, transport, security, etc.

Very Good

Stable access to resources through a well-established church, congregation, or other donation mechanism, beds, mattresses, nets, and supply of materials for each child, lower ratios of children to adult caretakers, higher numbers of trained primary caretakers, high level of direct supervision, cleanliness and rehabilitation of the structure, access to water and electricity, interaction of the centre with the surrounding community and ability to access the benefits and resources within.

²³ Ratios for the number of children to caretakers ranged from 1:4 to 1:30. While some of the centres with “poor” conditions had very low ratios, these measurements were often offset because of numbers of support staff rather than primary caretakers and teachers. Though some centres, like those run by the Salesians with “very good” conditions had higher ratios, there was a larger number of trained primary caretakers.

²⁴ “Access to water” means that there is a well, tank or piped in supply of water immediately accessible to the center. Limitations in access most often means that the children have to walk long distances carrying heavy buckets to bring water from rivers and streams. In the case of Maubara, because their current source of water is far up a very steep hill, they sometimes bathe the children in salt water. In Venilale, the children (some of them very small) have to drag their buckets to and from the river up a steep slope and some distance from the orphanage. A limitation in access to water does not necessarily indicate that there is no supply.

3. Outcomes

With these indicators, 7 out of 35 centres were found to be in poor condition, 17 were fair, 8 were good and 4 were very good.²⁵ (For specific details, see Social Services).

Chart 8: Condition of the centres

CONDITION	NUMBER	DISTRICTS
Very Good	4	Baucau, Viqueque, Lautem, Dili
Good	8	Baucau, Ermera, Lautem, Viqueque, Dili
Fair	17	Aileu, Ainaro, rural Baucau, Bobonaro, Manatuto, Manufahi, Dili
Poor	7	Rural Lautem, Bobonaro, Manufahi, Dili

Chart 9: Centres in Poor conditions and/or access to resources (7)

NO	NAME OF CENTRE	TYPE OF CENTRE	ADDRESS
1.	Sister PRR	Fulltime	Becora, Dili
2.	Samaria House	Fulltime	Fatumeta, Dili
3.	Odafuro SMP	Boarding House	Odafuro, Lautem
4.	CIJ Asrama Putri Maria Virgen	Boarding House	Same, Manufahi
5.	CIJ Sisters Betano	Fulltime	Same, Manufahi
6.	CIJ Asrama Renha Da Paz	Fulltime	Same, Manufahi
7.	Collegio Infante Sagresse	Boarding school	Maliana, Bobonaro

Chart 10: Centres with Fair conditions and/or access to resources (17)

NO	NAME OF CENTRE	TYPE OF CENTRE	ADDRESS
1.	Instituto Secular Aileu	Fulltime	Aileu
2.	Salesian Sisters Quelicai	Fulltime	Quelicai, Baucau
3.	Sao Luis Gonzaga	Boarding House	Ainaro District
4.	Sao Jose Baguia	Fulltime	Baguia, Baucau
5.	CIJ Sisters Baucau	Fulltime (temporary)	Baucau
6.	Sr. Margareta	Fulltime	Maliana, Bobonaro
7.	St. Clara FCJM	Fulltime	Vila Verde, Dili
8.	Santa Baquita	Fulltime	Cristo Rei, Dili
9.	Fundacao Hadomi Timor Oan	Fulltime	Pantai Kelapa
10.	Maubara Sisters Carmelita	Fulltime	Maubara, Liquica
11.	Collegio Dominicana da Soibada	Fulltime	Soibada, Manatuto
12.	Asrama St. Francisco	Boarding House	Fatu Berliu, Manufahi
13.	Asrama Putri St. Clara	Boarding House	Fatu Berliu Manufahi
14.	Instituto Secular Betano	Fulltime	Same, Manufahi
15.	Cutete Children's Centre	Fulltime	Cutete, Oecussi
16.	Instituto Secular Dilor	Fulltime	Dilor, Viqueque
17.	St. Yosef Panti Asuhan	School & fulltime centre	Ossu

²⁵ These do not include 2 of the 37 visited, including the Instituto Secular Kulu Hum which only cares for children on a temporary basis.

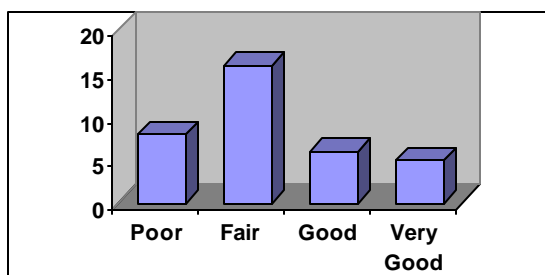
Chart 11: Centres with good conditions and/or access to resources (8)

NO	NAME OF CENTRE	TYPE OF CENTRE	ADDRESS
1.	Collegio Canossa Ainaro	Boarding House	Ainaro
2.	Sao Domingus Venilale	Fulltime	Venilale, Baucau
3.	Laura Vicuna Laga (Salesians)	Fulltime	Laga, Baucau
4.	Collegio Canossa Baucau	Boarding House	Baucau
5.	Collegio Canossa Ermera	Boarding House	Ermera
6.	Instituto Secular Dare	Fulltime	Dare
7.	Cannosian sisters of Miguel Arcanjo	Fulltime	Los Palos
8.	St. Fransiskus, FCJM	Fulltime	Viqueque

Chart 12: Centres that were found in Very Good conditions

NO	NAME OF CENTRE	TYPE OF CENTRE	ADDRESS
1.	Don Bosco Orphan Centre	Boarding House	Los Palos, Lautem
2.	Don Bosco Asrama Girls	Boarding House	Los Palos, Lautem
3.	Don Bosco Asrama Boys	Boarding House	Fuiloro, Lautem
4.	Collegio Uaida	Boarding House	Ossu

Chart 13: General conditions of the Centres



C. Centre enrolment and access to resources

Given the range of centres available to needy children, our question was; if a child cannot be cared for or attend school at home, how do they find their way to a centre? And how is it decided where they go?

Chart 14: Circumstances of Enrolment

Reasons	No. of centres giving this explanation for enrolment
Reputation of the centre and the skills they can provide	10
Direct action of the parish priest or catechist	10
In connection with attendance of children at a nearby school	4
Through NGO networks (OMT & FHTO) ²⁶	2
Because of the clinic on the premises	2
Because of previous stay in the Indonesian government orphanage	1
Through connections with the Protestant church	1

²⁶ Organisaçao Mulheres Timorese (OMT) and Fundasaun Hadomi Timor Oan (FHTO) run centres in Dili.

Numbers of Children Enrolling

While the number of children being currently institutionalised has not significantly increased from before September 1999, people perceive that more children are trying to enrol in these centres. It was not possible to accurately measure this, but we were able to assess that the current demand is not being met by the number of child centres available.²⁷

Of the centres we visited that had been established before September 1999, 17 had experienced some increase in enrolment of children, 10 had experienced a decrease²⁸ and 6 had stayed at the same enrolment. Considering that the number of orphanages have dropped by at least 12 since September 1999 (there were government-funded orphanages in each district), it appears that the overall number of children residing in centres in East Timor has, in actuality, decreased in the last year.²⁹ In spite of this trend, the large number and family status of children currently staying in centres is a cause for concern.

Access to Resources

Though numbers have not significantly increased, access to resources, and providing basic needs to children is a problem across the board. 12 of the centres were not receiving food from WFP or their implementing partners because they were not on the feeding list or are inaccessible by road at certain times of year.³⁰ The majority are surviving through the support of the Church or their congregations. We found very limited NGO support. When NGOs did distribute goods it was in a single instalment most often of a few goods in the categories of clothing, soap, cooking pots, mats, canned goods, or toys.³¹ NGOs are providing very little by way of regular assistance. Organisations mentioned as providing some goods include Action Contre le Faim (ACF), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), etc. Outside of these distributions, several cases arose of inappropriate aid from overseas partners including filled in colouring books, used cloth diapers, etc.

Phase out of vulnerable feeding

Vulnerable feeding, until March 2001, was the only type of assistance being regularly distributed to most centres but even in this program we found that some centres suffered from irregular distribution, provision of inadequate or unusable food items³², and, in a few

²⁷ We found that 21 centres were full to capacity. Though 10 centres show a decrease, demand to enroll in centres has increased. Five of these centres told us that they were limited in taking more children due to a lack of resources, damage to buildings or other issues. Five of the centres are currently building additional space. The sisters said that they are constantly being asked by parents and families to take in additional children. The number of centres before September 1999 was also unable to answer the demand. Several of the centres turned down children each year during the Indonesian regime, indicating only that it is not possible to measure how many more families turned to centres as a result of the destruction and how many children would currently enroll if given the opportunity.

²⁸ The centres with decreased enrollment indicated, with improved facilities and access to resources, that they could take a range of 10 and 60 more children. The majority could take between 10 and 20 more.

²⁹ We were unable to access any comprehensive figures on the number of children residing in centres before August 1999.

³⁰ These have been reported to ETTA Social Services but further follow-up is needed.

³¹ This includes both national and international NGOs but in terms of large-scale distribution, refers particularly to INGOs.

³² Sometimes items are distributed to the centres just because they are donated in bulk. Fruit loops, out of date chocolate, etc. were some examples of food distributed. The cereal was not distributed with the more important milk. Most centres receive only rice, and only sometimes corn and beans. In more accessible areas salt, oil and supplemental foods were being distributed but it is not standardized. WFP and implementing partners have sometimes expressed frustration with the problems of distribution, and the inappropriateness of donated food from overseas.

circumstances, inadequate amounts in comparison to the number of children.³³ With the completion of vulnerable feeding by CARE, and the phasing out of WFP's program by December 2001- April 2002, centres will be left with no formal mechanism for food distribution.

D. Daily life for children in the centres

1. Education

At the centres we were only able to clearly identify 34 children in the 37 centres not attending school. These include children who are too young to attend school or go part-time to church-run kindergarten (TK) as well as secondary school (SMA) graduates. The graduates were most often orphans and did not have a home to go to even though most had reached an age of majority. **Desired apprenticeships and vocational training were not available to the youths to whom we spoke.** The rest of the children attend lessons at schools nearby. Only in Laga and Ossu are there schools on the premises of the centre.

The conditions of the schools vary widely and in some, such as the government-run Laga primary (SD), the children only attend for 2 hours a day. At the Junior high school (SMP) in Maliana, lessons are not yet on a steady schedule.

2. History of poor formal education

Though the number of students served by formal schooling increased under Indonesian administration, the quality of the education itself was very often poor. Due to enormous barriers involved in training the current group of teachers, curriculum development, physical structure rehabilitation, and changing the language of teaching to Portuguese, quality of education is likely to remain poor for some time to come. Under Indonesian administration, primary-school children did not often attend classes for more than 3 hours a day. This has now been reduced to 2 hours in some areas. After walking an hour to school (the distances are now increased as the number of schools was cut) and back, in effect, very little energy can be given to learning.

For this reason, the fact that some centres are able to provide other activities, supplemental learning in language, reading and writing, and sometimes extra reading materials, can be very important for a child's educational experience.

3. Activities

Every centre visited provides some form of activities to the children so that their time is often scheduled from morning until bedtime. These activities include chores and skills training in safe water, personal hygiene, morals and church ethics at each residential centre. Other activities are sometimes offered for recreation and training including, but not limited to: music, drawing, sewing, agriculture, animal husbandry, sports, horticulture and religious studies. Most often though, there is limited structure and the quality of the activities depends highly on the motivation of the children and the ability of staff to give their attention and time. We did not see activities in progress at most centres but children say that they had time to play, learn and study. Some children spend more time doing hard work, most often in rehabilitating centres.³⁴ One child at a centre in Dili reported that he was made to work very hard. We noted these cases but did not find that many children complained of hard work. It is possible that the children would not willingly give us this information. Further discussion

³³ In Ossu, the centre and school received only 7 sacs of rice for more than 150 children to last one month. At Soibada, since distribution is irregular, 19 sacs of rice and 4 ½ sacs of red beans had to last 105 children for 3 months. This center was identified as specifically at risk at the end of vulnerable food assistance in Manatuto in March 2001.

³⁴ Instituto Secular in Aileu is being entirely built by the students staying there. New buildings in Cristo Rei have also been built by children.

within a best practice forum is needed around what labour children can be expected to perform (see Chapter VI., Recommendations for training, support and sustainability).

4. Levels of care and attention

We are concerned that the levels of attention and care provided to children are not currently adequate at several centres. While it was clear that centre staff appear to act with the best intentions, discrepancies in level of training, sensitisation to child rights and needs, and inability to access assistance does currently restrict the care that some staff can provide.

We were most concerned that some staff was not aware of the details of the lives of the children in their care. Some administrators of even small centres had to consult support staff to find out the ages, grades, or parent's names of some children. Many centre staff who filled out forms were unable (or unwilling) to give personal details of how and why the children came under their care. Some staff were not aware of the details of the home situations of children seeking safe haven. This is not to say that the staff does not show affection to these children. Some children seeking protection (especially under 5) were obviously very much loved and cared for by all in the centre. It is perhaps an indication though, of a larger problem. Concurrently, when we asked Timorese teachers if they were aware of children's family or home experiences during Indonesian times they said that was not the teacher's role. They also said they would not have known about or reported signs of abuse.

While residential staff would know more about children's daily lives by virtue of their supervisory role throughout the day, there appears to be little tradition of documenting a child's history.

This lack of knowledge can mean that some children are not getting the support they need. Further work to increase staff capacity to care for each child's specific needs is crucial (see Chapter VI, Recommendations for training, support and sustainability).

5. Children staying together with siblings

Despite these concerns, we are encouraged that, especially in cases of orphans and children seeking protection, there are many siblings staying in centres together. In Los Palos, the sister of one little boy who had been badly neglected at home brought him to the centre with another sister and they stay together. This has allowed the boy of 2 years old, to keep very solid connections with family and he enjoys enormous affection from his sisters. Out of the survey group, the total number of children we could identify staying with siblings in a centre was 125.

6. Health care

While centres like Venilale and the FCJM sisters in Viqueque have in-house nurses or doctors and can provide direct health care, and more than 5 centres are well connected to nearby clinics, there are at least 3 centres that we found that cannot easily access medical care for their children. At one centre we transported a boy, 15, who had a wound left untreated for more than 1 month to the district hospital. CivPol was alerted to the centre's isolation but there is no sustainable way for some centres to access health care. This must be taken into account when a formal registration process begins for centres.

E. Number of Children in Centres

At the time of assessment, 1509 children were staying in the study group of 22 full-time centres, 13 boarding houses, and 2 boarding schools.³⁵ This number includes children staying

³⁵ This does not include the numbers of children staying with the Instituto Secular Seminaries except for their specific centres in Aileu, Kulu Hun, Dare, Dilor and Betano. Sr. Maria Lourdes who runs the

in the more established boarding houses connected to schools who we found to be older and less vulnerable.³⁶ The number of children minus these is 1242. We were able to reliably complete questionnaires for 760 of this group of children.³⁷ These will be referred to as surveyed children (survey group).

F. Family Situation

Interviews were able to give us a larger scope and of the 1242 children, we found only 19% (237) who could be identified as orphans (having lost both parents). 51 (4%) were identified as separated where they clearly could not access one of their parents. A limited number of these did not know where that parent was.

Chart 15a: Family situation of the child

Number of Children	Number of children who have lost both parents	Number of children who have one parent	Number of children who have two parents	Number of children separated from their parents
Out of 1242 children	19% had lost both parents	46% of the children had one living parent	30% of the children had two parents	4% of the children were separated from their parents

Chart 15b: Children who have lost one parent

Mother is dead	Father is dead
130	320
17%	42%

We used the questionnaire survey group (760 children) to gain a more detailed understanding of these children's family situations. The number among these whose mother was dead and still had a father was 17% (130). For 42% (320), their father was dead but their mother was still alive. We clearly identified 5 children whose fathers had been killed by TNI or militia though the numbers are thought to be higher. Indonesian security forces had killed the mothers of 4 children (this is also thought to be higher). One child was identified as being herself badly injured and sexually assaulted by the security forces.³⁸ Three children noted that their father was lost and they did not know where he was.

These numbers are only an indication of the problems of these children. Especially in the cases where parents were lost or killed, the overall numbers are thought to be much higher. The survey did not specifically address the cause or date of death of parents.

Institute has 4 other sites that work with children but we were unable to access reliable numbers of these children.

It is important to note that this number, 1509 is likely to change slightly over the year as children come and go frequently from the centres. Over the 3 months, several changes in enrollment were made at each center.

³⁶ This number includes 45 girls staying with the Canossian Collegio in Baucau, 57 from the Canossian Collegio in Ermera, 27 girls and 70 boys from the Boarding houses to the Agricultural Secondary School at Don Bosco in Lautem, and 52 girls from the Canossian Collegio in Ossu. Fifty of 300 students in total from the Collegio Infante Sagresse (SMA) in Bobonaro were identified as separated or "orphaned", having lost one or both parents. As the Collegio is a well-established secondary school that draws children from well-to-do families from other parts of East Timor as well, we did not include the other 250 children in our study.

³⁷ For explanations of the difficulties involved in collecting this information see Appendix II, Summary of Constraints.

³⁸ This child, 16, is currently living with Sr. Maria Lourdes at the Instituto Secular in Dare.

1. Mental Illness

Twenty-three children noted that they stayed at the centre because their parent or parents were mentally ill. While this number only represents 3% of the total 760 children with questionnaires, the issue of mental illness was brought to us again and again and was a significant concern to centre staff. Church representatives in the villages seemed to think that children living in families where someone was mentally ill were particularly vulnerable and in need of assistance.

2. Capacity to Care

Chart 16: Families indicating that they cannot care for the child

Seventy-four percent (approx. 919) of the all children at visited centres reported that the parents could not care for them at home. This is used as a catch phrase for numerous problems. The first among these was the inability to feed, clothe, and pay for school. Attention to the child's education was also given. Inability to care for the child as one of 6 or more siblings in a family was also highlighted.

G. Family visits and child protection issues

Despite the many reasons families may send their children to stay in centres, the fact remains that many children in centres do have families. For these children it was important to find the level and quality of contact they have with home and how often during their time in the centre, they are able to participate in life in their home communities.

Several dilemmas were presented that **limit children's ability to go home:**

Families that Cannot Care
919
74%

1. Out of District

Only half of the centres (17) enrolled children specifically from villages and areas from within the district. This means that those children have much longer distances to travel to visit families or communities.

2. Home visits

Among the 760 children from 19 centres covered by the completed questionnaires, 15% (115) of 760 did not go home for the holidays but stayed the majority of time at the centre. For children who would go home if they could, the primary barrier was lack of transport (or lack of money to pay for transport). Only 13 centre staff performs some kind of formal family visits and these are further hampered by transport problems.

Chart 17: Issues related to family visits and protection

From the 760 children in the survey group we found that:		
	No of children	Percentage of children
Children never visit home but do visit extended families or receive visits	115 children	15%
Children never have contact with their families due to trauma	158 children	20.8%
Children highlighted as victims of abuse	21 children	2.8%
Children as victims of neglect	22 children	2.9%
Children with disabilities	23 children	3%
Children that seemed to be in centres because of protection issues at home	23 children	3%
Children staying in a centre with a sibling	125	16%
Children in centres not attending school	34	4.5%

3. Transport

At several of these centres the children have a rotation where some children go for one holiday and then trade turns with the others who did not go. Only 13 of the centres noted that they had some, if limited, access to transport. Only 5 had transport adequate for taking multiple children home or to school. 16 centres specifically highlighted that they had no access to transport.

4. No visits/children never go home

There are children, however, that never have contact with family. Centre staff reported that 158 children specifically suffered from trauma, though the number is thought to be far higher as only a few centre staff were attuned to this term.³⁹

5. Victims of Abuse, Neglect and children with disabilities

We were able to identify 81 children at various centres currently seeking haven. **Twenty-one children were highlighted as victims of abuse in the home** (this number is also expected to be much higher given cultural reluctance to admit to domestic violence). 22 were identified as primarily at the centre because they were neglected. We also believe this number to be much higher. It was very difficult to get a clear answer from centre staff. The more general reason given that the parents cannot care often included allusions to neglect. These allusions included 15 cases of life-threatening malnutrition. We did not feel qualified to further determine if the parents were neglectful without significant monitoring of the family situation. 23 questionnaires mentioned physical disability. 23 additional children had circumstances that seemed to indicate they were specifically staying at the centres because they were in need of protection from family members or other circumstances at home. Due to the reluctance of children and staff to allude more specifically to other domestic problems, it was very difficult to get an accurate sense of how many other children stay in the centres because an element of their home-lives poses a threat to their health and well being.

³⁹ Staff described children suffering from mental injury in most of the centres but they did not often use the term “trauma”. They described children who were unable to engage in play, who were scared to talk or to sing. Julia* was so badly traumatized by being assaulted during the violence that she lost the ability to speak. She now has begun to use a few words. It was thus very difficult to measure incidence of “trauma”. We found that PRADET, FOKUPERS, and IRCT have projects working with traumatized children and have more extensive information.

Chapter IV. Understanding the Current Child Care System

A. Reasons for sending a child to a centre

There are several (often compounding) reasons given by Church representatives, community members, and children themselves as to why children are currently staying in centres across the 13 districts.⁴⁰

1. Lack of access to and quality of the Formal Education system

They have limited access to education in their own village or sub-district (this is more often true for children in junior and senior high school (SMP and SMA). The centres are places where children can stay while they attend the local government or church school. Several interviews have indicated that recent delays in rehabilitating school buildings, problems with teacher selection, and the substantial reduction in government schools and numbers of salaried teachers has increased demand to stay at boarding houses near functioning schools. The lack of primary schools or schools only providing grades 1-3 has led many children we met to go to boarding houses at early ages. This is a particularly worrying trend as they are deprived of the benefits of home and family at age 8 or younger when development is still highly dependent on the emotional support of parental figures.

The system of education that existed before the referendum was also fraught with problems, low attendance rates, large class sizes, high levels of operational illiteracy among graduates, and an Indonesian-based curriculum not geared to the needs of East Timorese students. This has, historically, been the “normal” state of education for the majority of children. Parents looking to provide more for their children have consistently had to look outside the formal system.

Remarkably, although the children in centres are considered by the community to come from needy families, and are most times indeed needy children, in some cases, placing a child at a centre for the purpose of going to school may denote a commitment by the family to the child’s education and future. In fact, the children whose parents are using the centres as a vehicle for their education may be far less vulnerable than those who remain in the communities.

Several of the children told us that they stay at the centres because they can learn there, the discipline is important, and there is a place and time available to study. While these responses initially sounded geared to please, we heard similar reactions from children in many different parts of the country. Overall, it is clear from the interviews with these children that they look at education as key to their future.

2. Life Skills Training

It is also very attractive to send (or “entrust”) the children to the Sisters (or other centre staff) because of the education that they receive in “life skills”. This can include all or some of the following: training in safe water use and sanitation, discipline, nutrition, cooking, cleaning, sewing, agriculture, animal husbandry, carpentry, ethics, etiquette, religion, sports, music, reading, writing and Portuguese and English skills. It is common in each child centre that the children are taught these skills in the afternoons, as well as doing chores involved in running the centre that put these skills in practice.

⁴⁰ These reasons are presented in the order given overall in centres that have children in residence including the boarding houses and schools.

The capacity of the Sisters to provide this instruction ranges greatly from one centre to another depending on the ratio of caretakers to children,⁴¹ the resources available to the centre (sewing machines, tools, cooking utensils, seeds, animals), the initiative and commitment of the instructors, the age-range of the children⁴², and their interest and energy to learn.

Their ability to fulfil these functions is also dependent on their other duties. Many sisters have obligations to the parish, the schools, a clinic and other such services.⁴³ However, many also take a role in supplementary teaching, especially of younger children, where the school system is inadequate. At the centres in Laga and Venilale, the sisters play a large role in teaching the younger children to read and write outside of formal school hours. Under-trained teachers and under-resourced schools in many areas are finding it difficult to provide these basic skills.⁴⁴ Several parents have indicated that they are eager to send their children to stay with the Sisters because they can assist the child to study. This was especially noted in interviews in poorer areas of Baucau and Lautem where illiteracy is prevalent and parents often cannot supervise their child's learning process.

Another parent said that he sends his children away to a centre so that they learn skills other than those he can teach them thus allowing for progress, more experience, and a better life than the parent himself enjoys. He felt that centre and religious staff are considered, across the board, to have different and worthwhile skills to offer and that children who come back from orphanages are better trained, more polite, more fair, and good people. This observation showed the commitment of many to the current child centre system and the difficulty involved in any initiatives for change that do not work with both staff and parents.

3. Family's inability to provide care due to poverty and need

The following reasons were given to substantiate the claim that the family was incapable of providing appropriate care to the child:

Inability to feed

This was the most common reason for family's inability to provide care. While centre staff seemed to feel that this was changing with better harvests, increased availability of tools, seeds, and market opportunities, it should also be noted that vulnerable feeding programs

⁴¹ The caretaker to child ratios range from 1:4 to 1:30 and should be compared to current ratios in primary schools of teachers to students that can be as high as 1: 60. Though pre-consultation teacher student ratios more often averaged at 1:40, it is important to remember that school ran for only 3 or 4 hours a day for each rotation of students.

Considering many children come to centres from families that have lost a mother or a father, and families in East Timor tend to be very large, at home the ratio of caretaker to children can also be 1:4 to 1:12. Though the role of the parent should not be underestimated, many children come to centres because there are "too many" children at home.

⁴² Children 0-5 require much greater attention and time. Mdr. Marianne, at the FCJM center in Viqueque found that she spent a larger proportion of her time with the 5 year olds just starting school to help them learn basic skills. This work continued in the first few grades. Children 8-12 were mentioned as needing more supervision but less direct teaching, while kids over 12 were more capable of fending for themselves as well as supervising others.

⁴³ Center staff of at least 4 centres traveled on Sundays to give oratory in the villages, or provided this at the center. At 3 centres, the sisters ran clinics in addition to their duties with the children. Three groups of center staff ran kindergartens, 2 were heavily involved in teaching at the nearby SMP/SMA, 5 groups of center staff had commitments to NGOs or Grassroots movements, and 4 others specifically noted their work in the villages as time-consuming. For example, in Ainaro, the father and his staff who run the Sao Luis Gonzaga center conduct all the masses, confessions, and baptisms and also teach at the school.

⁴⁴ This was corroborated by Father Manuel at Don Bosco School in Fuloro, Lautem who said that many of the children who come to them after Grade 3 (the highest grade provided in their villages) often cannot read nor write. Unable to demote them to first grade again, already overtaxed teachers are left trying to provide special attention or the children fall too far behind.

have been reduced in several districts, lists left unrevised, and delivery sometimes unreliable, especially to the more distant villages. These programs are currently being phased out. Families that are currently vulnerable due to the poverty of their area, lack of access to markets and health care, and other opportunities currently available to other communities will continue to face a daily challenge in feeding their children. There is food insecurity in many areas of the country⁴⁵ that is unrelated to the destruction of last year. While rehabilitation and assistance may be helping families to regain their pre-referendum capacities, families that have always faced food insecurity will continue to do so.

Inability to pay for school

Families cannot afford the costs of educating their children (uniforms, clothing, supplies, tuition of church or other private arrangements⁴⁶). While there were only 4 government schools mentioned that charged tuition of children staying in centres⁴⁷, there are costs around schooling that cash-strapped families in all districts are finding difficult to bear. These include transport to school, food, school supplies, fees for teacher's materials, etc. It is important to note that since uniforms are not yet mandatory in most schools, fees are still relatively low compared to Indonesian times. Current difficulties in paying fees may result from poverty, lack of cash as well as priorities within the family, access to resources, and number of children to be educated.⁴⁸

Mental Illness of a parent⁴⁹

This was presented at 8 of the centres as a justification for residence with the sisters. Many different phrases were used including being "not normal", "crazy", "not good", and other characterisations in Bahasa Indonesia and Tetun. As is discussed below, it is essential to develop a community-accepted definition of mental illness and disability. This definition could then inform guidelines as to when a parent, who may suffer from any number of maladies, is incapable of caring for their child. It currently appears that the decision on capacity to care is being made by village catechists or sisters in the community as well as other family members⁵⁰. The criteria for this decision must be examined.

⁴⁵ Until there are clear statistics available on income levels, production, and population it will not be possible to measure if food insecurity is directly related to numbers of children in centres. The tendency to send students out of district further complicates measurement. However, centre staff did indicate that many of the children came from areas where there are serious problems with access to food.

⁴⁶ Most centre staff who are currently paying different kinds of fees at government-run schools said that they paid between 10,000 Rupia and 20,000 Rupia per child every 3 months. There is no set fee schedule and every school had different arrangements. Some church schools in Dili charge up to 3 USD per month. Junior secondary schools charge 5 USD.

⁴⁷ These are the Collegio Infante Sagresse (Maliana), Soibada primary school (Manatuto), Ermera SMP (Ermera sub-district), and SD Cristo Rei (Dili).

⁴⁸ In Indonesian times parents were required to pay for 3 different kinds of school uniforms (school, scout, and sports), textbooks, writing books and pens, small school fees, exam fees, and transport. This fee system has not been reinstated but current initiatives by communities to pay teachers themselves to make up for the close to 50% cut in teacher numbers, as well as problems in adequate distribution of school materials and books, indicates that more costs will be added to education.

⁴⁹ This did not appear to be a clinical definition but an indication of a parent's attention to the child, mental state, trauma levels, attention to personal and family hygiene and integration with their community. It also appeared to be used to describe various forms of depression. One discussion raised the question: how do mentally ill women have children? While responses indicated that many women suffering from mental illness are married but become incapable of care after the child is born, there were some cases cited where women known to be mentally ill have become pregnant out of wedlock. The community seems to deal with this by sending that child to a centre.

⁵⁰ In one example, a woman with 7 children watched her husband killed in front of her and now experiences a state of shock, trauma and depression such that her family stepped in and divided her children between their extended network. These decisions seem to lead to some of the children being sent to centres.

Loss of one parent

At many centres the sisters reacted equally to the loss of a mother or a father in their conviction that the surviving parent could not care. The reasons given were that if the father is lost, the mother does not have the access to resources necessary to care or does not have the capacity to care for a large number of children. If the mother is lost, they explained that the father does not have the knowledge or sense of responsibility to care. These distinctions leave open two areas for action: programs that provide widows with access to resources and alternative child care support in the form of day care centres (such as the Child-Friendly Spaces), as well as training to widowers in child care, community sensitisation and awareness of parental responsibility, and access to alternative support networks.

Loss of 2 parents

Of the children covered by the questionnaires, only 19% had lost both parents. Of these, the majority had lost parents before 1999.

Age of parents

This was perhaps the most curious reason given by children and the sisters as to why the parents were incapable of caring for the child. “Too old” was given as a reason in 15 of the questionnaires. While in some cases the parents were more advanced in age, several of these cases revealed that the parents were between 35 and 50. It was difficult to ascertain exactly what is meant when they say “too old” and this should be further investigated.

4. Family’s unwillingness to Provide Care

It is essential to note here that, in studying the perceptions of child centres and the families that send their children there, some families (it was not possible to attain an estimate) sending children are explicitly not poor or needy.⁵¹ These parents may also live in proximity to functioning schools. One interview showed that some send their children to centres so that they will not be “pampered” at home and will learn hard life lessons, skills, and experience by making their way at the centre.

5. Religion

This may have played a more visible role during Indonesian times when there were a larger number of religions with active congregations in East Timor. Certainly there are indications in sub-districts like Los Palos where there used to be Catholic, Protestant and Muslim orphanages, that the religious nature of the centres and their capacity to teach a specific religion (even to the extent that children staying in the centres continued on to seminary) played a role in the reasons why parents chose to send their children there. Currently, the majority of centres are run by Sisters and priests of different orders of Catholicism (with the unique exceptions of the Instituto Secular, the centre run by OMT and the Child Protection centre in Dili run by Fundasaun Hadomi Timor Oan). Thus, sending a child to a centre to ensure they are taught Catholicism as opposed to Islam is no longer an issue. However, religion still plays a very important, if subtle, role in the reasons why a family might send a child to the sisters.

Religious education has been taken very seriously in every sub-district we have visited. Very often, the catechist, Sister, or Parish Priest is the member of the community with the most access to children through oratory, catechism, and preparation for communion, mass, and their daily work with the community. They are most often the people who currently play both the roles of advocate and judge in cases of child welfare. Thus, through their duties and influence in the community, the villagers see the church-run centres as a safe, clean and

⁵¹ An example was given of a family that sends their child to the center in Maubara but lives in Kaikoli in a stable circumstance, has the resources to care for the child, and owns a car.

fortuitous alternative for their children. Further, religious education and training in ethics and etiquette were mentioned as essential benefits to living with church representatives.

Most importantly, religion is an essential and integral part of life in every community we visited. This may take different forms in villages that have integrated Catholicism into older, animist beliefs, but it is absolutely crucial to constantly keep in mind that the Sisters and Priests are held in the utmost respect. We heard a basic assumption throughout that to be educated by the Sisters or Brothers is inherently "a good thing". All initiatives developed to address the needs of children staying in centres and work with families in communities should take this assumption seriously into account.

B. Reasons A Child Does Not Go Home

Despite the testimony of centre staff that they, in large part, encourage children to visit their families during school holidays, there are **many children who do not return to a home**. While we counted only 115 among interviewed children who do not leave the centre during the holidays, the number is greater when you include the children who go only for 1-2 weeks during the year. This time is negligible in relation to a child's need to be part of family life. In most full-time centres, a child can stay for 5 to 20 years in residence.

It is common practice for older children in all alternative living arrangements including boarding houses, boarding schools, and extended family live-ins as well as orphanages to stay during the school year. However, there are also **younger children who do not go home at all during the year**. For the children who have parents or extended family who could provide care during the school holidays, there seem to be four reasons for this:

1. Distance

Children at all the centres we visited often come from other districts, sometimes as far apart as Manatuto and Oecusse. At least 17 Centres currently enrol more than 5 children from outside their district. It is unclear why children travel so far to attend school or join an orphanage. Reasons we have heard include:

- Family connection with the child centre or group of sisters
- Reputation of the child centre
- Presence of extended family nearby the centre
- As an answer to the problem that younger children who are sent to centres near to home, often try and run away back to their families.
- Further distances allow exposure to different communities and values.

2. Transport restrictions

The one-way cost for children to go home for the holidays can range from 15,000 - 80,000 rupia, more than many can afford. For the children who financially depend on the sisters and centre directors, the ability to pay depends on the centre's access to funds. The parents who pay a subsidy for their child to stay with the sisters are most often expected to pay their way home or have someone come and collect them. While most centres currently seem to be able to access money or vehicles through their church or NGO networks to assist the children to go home during the month-long school holidays, the expense and unavailability of public and private transport makes travel for the Christmas holiday (1 week) or other visits during the year, impossible for most who do not have family in the immediate vicinity. Thirteen of the centres have direct or limited access to a vehicle or motorcycle. More than 16 centres reported they had no access to transport. Even for those with limited access, it is not usually sufficient to assist the children to go home. Some of the sisters have policies where the children go home on a rolling basis. A few children go for the first part of the holidays and the rest go for the next part. This was also a result of transport restrictions.

3. Continuation of centre activities during the holidays

In Maliana several cases arose wherein children did not go home due to the desire to continue to be part of centre activities. While this was not widespread, it appeared to be a common possibility as the numbers of activities available to children (with the development of carpentry and sewing workshops, Portuguese and English lessons, and other activities in the pipeline for children and youth in different districts) begin to increase. Several students told us that they would stay with the sisters during the holiday to continue their language lessons.

4. Discomfort with the family situation at home

We were very interested to find that some children do not go home (either of their own accord, or at the decision of the centre staff) because their home situations are too “distressing”. The FCJM sisters in Viqueque mentioned that they have a difficult time when some children return from their homes because they are “traumatized” by problems within the family. While this did not seem to indicate abuse, Sr. Marianne felt that grief, lack of food, and other family problems made it very uncomfortable for children to go home.⁵²

⁵² See pg. 41 for more on the need to build formal criteria for these decisions.

Chapter V. Recognising Vulnerable Children living within the Community

A. Separated children

The problems of children who remain separated from their parents, now more than a year and a half later, are less straightforward than during the emergency phase which focused on tracing and immediate reunification. The number of separated children has decreased substantially. While IRC reports 400 cases of separated children still outstanding, not including 18 cases of children on other islands, and the children in orphanages in Java and Kalimantan, the majority of community representatives we spoke with stated their perception that there are no children in their areas separated from an immediate family member as a result of the displacement, and no families currently separated from their children. While more and more new cases brought to the Tracing team (with the exception of the Java cases) are no longer about separated children but are more often results of confusion over custody, divorce, nationality disputes and other family problems, many children have still not been reunited. Many of these delays result from the reticence or inability of refugees in West Timor to return home, but also from ongoing difficulties in negotiating with caretakers in other parts of Indonesia, and the Indonesian authorities.

B. Alternative living arrangements

Though the numbers of children living separately from their families as a result of the events of 1999 have decreased, there are large numbers of children who are living with other members of the community besides their immediate family. The reasons they give for these arrangements resemble those of children in centres. Those children who were readily identifiable in several communities were children who had lived in the government orphanages or other boarding houses to go to school and when they closed, were forced to make other arrangements. In Suai, the OMT representative estimated that 100 children are not living with their immediate families but staying in other arrangements in order to go to school. Fifty of these used to stay at the government orphanage. Before there was also an “asrama” at the church and 100 students stayed there. She was unable to verify where these children are currently staying but guessed that they are with extended family.

Some of these arrangements are with distant family and other households willing to board students. While this appeared to work well for many, the OMT representative was concerned that there was no monitoring of the situations or redress for children who were neglected, abused, or otherwise not well served by these substitute families.

This problem was highlighted because students living outside their immediate families are more recognisable. In contrast, it was very difficult to access information about the problems of children who are taken in by extended family and neighbours for reasons of protection, neglect, or assistance. The assumption we found in most communities was that children in need are the responsibility of the community and most we spoke with took offence that we would ask if there were any children not being taken care of in a household. However, some anecdotes do indicate that despite this sense of community responsibility, children are sometimes put in threatening or neglectful situations.

C. Foster Families

Fostering and substitute families have a long history in East Timor both throughout Portuguese and Indonesian times. Though further work is needed to understand norms of fostering, those interviewed agreed that a child’s experience was completely dependent on the motives and situation of the substitute family. Interviews with three generations of East

Timorese identified two ends of a care spectrum. On one side were the larger families that took in children for additional assistance in the fields or in homes such that the child was not adequately nurtured nor supported to go to school. On the other side, childless families that “adopted” a child as their own and cared for them as if they were biological offspring, more often helped them to attend school and move towards a better future. While our interview group found the trend under Indonesian times (as norms on child care have begun to change globally in the last decades) was towards “adoption” and integration of the child equally into the family, most felt that children continued to be taken in by some families for their ability to work, with less attention to their best interest.

The historical trend of sending children to foster families seems to have answered similar needs as are now addressed by centres and the continuing practice of substitute or extended family care. Some interviewed surmised that these children were also orphans, neglected, too poor, or otherwise in need of protection.

We only found one child who had been moved to a centre from a foster arrangement. Mena*, 11, at Sao Domingus Venilale, was put in foster care as a smaller child when she and her family contracted tuberculosis. Foster care was used to help quarantine the child. She was then moved to Venilale.

SECTION THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Chapter VI. Providing better care to children in Centres: Recommendations for Training and Support

A. Considerations

1. Fulfilling the right to family life

As research has shown, the family (even in the poor situations), is most often the best place for a child to fully develop his/her potential. Other caretakers, no matter how good the intention of the people involved, can never replace the emotional ties between parents and children. This assessment found that, in East Timor, poverty and threatened livelihood as well as severe deficiencies in the formal school system have a large influence on the choice parents make on whether or not to send their child to be raised in a centre. In many cases when there is a choice, parents seem to feel that they have the best interest of their child in mind. Therefore, in order to stimulate parents to keep their children at home or at least have an active contact with the children once in a centre, efforts should be made to address these basic.

2. The need to improve the quality of life at most centres?

We have concluded that as long as the current level of poverty, as well as a limited access and quality of education continue to exist, these centres will remain part of East Timorese society. The centres have been part of the cultural history of East Timor and even though we encourage children to be in their families, the reality of life in East Timor has taught otherwise. In order to protect the children currently in centres it seems an urgent matter to at least improve their basic quality of life.

This poses a dilemma as there are significant discrepancies in provided care between child centres, between religious orders, and between the various districts. This seems to be related to the extent the centres are networked into and supported by community leaders and have access to the resources available in the surrounding community, as well as the centre's ability to answer current needs within the community.

Recommending support may seem to encourage the presence of children's centres, which is not the case. Building relationships with those working in the centres, training them on child care, rights and protection as well as providing basic policies and guidelines, creating a system for centre registration and supporting Family visits as well as family reunification principles where possible seems the route to take for the future. This work will be a longer-term process, as change can only be achieved through a process of mutual understanding, support and training.

As international support decreases with the departure of the United Nations Transitional Administration, initiatives to improve quality of care must also identify ongoing sources of support. WFP's impending withdrawal from distribution of food assistance to vulnerable groups will test the ability of centres to find other sources of basic foodstuffs. This development is particularly worrying as alternative networks of support are not currently in place for many centres.

3. Developing overall standards of care in line with the 'best interest of the child'.

In order to increase the current quality of care, agreed standards are needed. Significant challenges are involved in developing better overall standards of care for children in line with the "best interests of the child". There has been substantial miscommunication between representatives of the international community and child centre practitioners (on previous

assessment missions and meetings during the emergency phase) on issues of child rights and institutionalisation of children. Many of the centre staff have understood that the international community would not support “orphanages” and have, as a result, instead of enthusiastically moving towards day care, become very suspicious of the motivations of international child protection mechanisms.

B. Recommendations for Training, Support and Sustainability

1. Training

1.1 Organise training sessions with Caretakers, Sisters, parents and others actors

Training is necessary to begin to tackle the above-mentioned challenges. In several conversations, centre staff were agreeable to the development of regional or targeted best practices discussions in the form of workshops or seminars that would allow staff from different traditions to share their experiences in working with children in centres, working with vulnerable families and enforcing child protection.

We specifically approached Salesian and Canossian sisters to share their experiences as these centres have been operating for the longest period of time and are well supported with resources and enrolment. These groups also have significant experience in home visits.

Many of the sisters and other staff at several centres have received training on child care in the past through the Church or studies in social work and are versed in Child Rights. While still increasing awareness of the “best interest of each individual child”, it seems important to access the experiences and teaching capability of these staff in the effort to raise awareness of other practitioners in a way that works within the Timorese context and is in line with basic standards of Child Development and Child Rights.

Attention must be paid to the wealth of experience of the Sisters. Several have pointed out that the international community has only recently come to East Timor and will be gone soon whereas the Sisters have been working with children here for decades. It is evident that centre staff are concerned that their role and skills are being underestimated. This highlights that any training that aims to develop new policies for these children, especially as regards family visits, must be done carefully and with respect. All planning must take into account the position that the Sisters and other centre staff hold in the community and the general reluctance of many villagers we met to take a stand diverging from that of the Sisters. It is essential that any training done enlist the skills and experience of religious representatives and that full consultation is encouraged in both planning and implementation.

While this may seem obvious, it is a concern that in the re-building of systems, old ways may be passed over by trainers. There is a long history of social welfare in this country provided by the Church, separate from the State system.

1.2 Organise ‘Best Practices Workshops’

Most centre staff agreed to a series of regional or smaller workshops with the participation of UNICEF representatives as well as the ETTA Social Workers to discuss best practices and address problems and concerns of staff, children, and the international community hands-on from a child rights, protection and care perspective. Further training identified by the practitioners during this exercise should complement this initiative.

1.3 Additional areas for training and awareness raising

- Care of Small children (under 5) and their special developmental needs through ECCD Training (UNICEF Early Childhood Care and Development Training). This is essential. Even though we only found 35 children under 5 staying in centres, these children were mostly there for protection reasons such as abuse or neglect. In general, the centres are less willing to take on children under 5.
- Special training in trauma care, and attention to protection must be made available to the caretakers of these children⁵³.
- Encouragement of family visits and stimulation of re-unification where possible.
- Care of Children between 6 and 12 and discussion of their age-specific developmental needs. Staff often spend more time in caring for children 5 and under because their immediate needs are more clear. The older children may not be getting enough of their attention.
- Care of children suffering from mental trauma and disabilities of various natures⁵⁴
- It is necessary to include other representatives in the community, especially groups with mandates such as OMT and OPMT who also aim to provide for children in their areas of responsibility. The opening of the Santa Baquita Centre in Dili by a Cristo Rei representative of OMT and their willingness to provide care at a centre for Street Children indicates that they should also be included in these trainings and discussions.

We recommend that UNICEF and ETTA Social Services and other concerned organisations could facilitate these workshops either formally or informally (on the job). Social Services has a role to play in enabling regional discussion in preparation of a future co-ordination mechanism amongst the centres. UNICEF is one of the organisations that is best placed to organise training sessions and/or provide materials. These would include Early Childhood Development and other age-specific training as well as extensive discussion on “Protection”.

2. Provision of Support

2.1 Direct Assistance to centres

Direct assistance refers mainly to distributions of materials and food. Most of the centres do not have well-developed resource networks and need more assistance. Our investigations showed that many at the centres are hoping to receive continued assistance from the new Administration, and from Social Services as was the case in Indonesian time.

Aside from a general lack of resources to assist the centres, there is a dilemma of expectations in deciding to support these initiatives. As previously mentioned, there has been significant concern that it might seem that International Partners as well as ETTA and the UN agree with children being brought to centres, if they provide support. We strongly believe a child is best provided for at home, as shown in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, as long as the needs of poor families are not met and the quality of the formal school system continues to suffer, an interim period is needed in which the international and local community work with the centres as much as possible.

⁵³ FOKUPERS, PRADET and ETWAVE are currently working with widows and children affected by trauma in the communities and should be invited to be involved in any training or other discussions.

⁵⁴ The care of persons with mental disabilities has historically been poor in East Timor as in many other disadvantaged areas of the world. This must be particularly noted in training center staff, parents, and community representatives both for the purposes of identification of mental illness-related problems in communities and of assuring appropriate care. We have heard several accounts of mentally disabled people being chained and kept locked up for years at a time specifically in three different villages in Lautem and Viqueque but it appears to be a wider phenomenon. We saw no indications of such abuse at any of the centres or families visited in this study.

a. Advocacy and Co-ordination of Assistance

There is a clear need for advocacy and co-ordination of assistance to child centres. Centres that need the most assistance are not receiving support and some centres receive more of certain goods than they can use. Due to several distributions of inappropriate assistance either by age or quality, and many false promises, centre staff are extremely frustrated at the lack of co-ordination and supply of assistance. There is a definite need for the East Timorese authorities (currently including ETTA Social Services, Human Rights, and Education) to play a role in co-ordinating assistance and visits to centres. They also have a responsibility to prepare a path for the future government to advocate with donors and INGOs to direct appropriate assistance to the centres and other vulnerable children living within the community.

b. Age-Specific Distribution of goods

There is a need for assistance of all kinds at each orphanage. The majority mentioned the need for clothes, basic and supplementary food, soap, cleaning materials, school supplies, learning tools, furniture, some netting⁵⁵, and play materials. However, several deliveries to centres have included colouring books already filled in, dirty clothing (used diapers), and other items ill-suited for the recipients. Continued provision of unsuitable aid is not helpful and further damages the relationship between centre staff and the international community.

c. Water Rehabilitation

The most pressing need of more than 12 centres was assistance in fixing or building new water systems. Water rehabilitation is an urgent priority for many centres (see Social Services for details). Responsible departments and agencies need to make progress on this issue. Given the Water and Sanitation program starting in Schools in mid-2001, further advocacy should be directed to include the centres in water system provision by implementing agencies in this ECHO funded project.

d. Small projects

Many centres have indicated interest in pursuing small projects including sewing co-operatives, small farming projects, weaving, and other initiatives. These centres tend to enrol older children but such projects, if age-specific, can be an effective training tool for children of many ages. There is also strong interest in a system of apprenticeships.

If these projects make use of skills of community members or offer training outside of the centre, they can also play a role in further development of the social networks for the centres and children in residence.

e. Learning Materials

After food and clothing and structural repairs, school materials were most desired. There is an extreme shortage of notebooks, pens, pencils, and more importantly, reading material in Tetun and Bahasa Indonesia. While some centres lucky enough not to have sustained too much damage in the violence were able to save part of their school materials, other centres lost everything. Children in East Timor generally have severely limited access to reading materials. Provision (and sustained supply) of learning aids in appropriate languages is essential.

⁵⁵ IRC Roll back Malaria Program, in 2000, distributed nets in centres throughout the country.

f. *Recreational Materials*

We found that youth in centres have very little planned activity or supervision and require recreational equipment, balls, nets, and sewing, art and music materials. The need for musical instruments was noted specifically at many centres. However, recreational equipment should not be given in lieu of basic needed items. There needs to be a co-ordinated plan. Piecemeal initiatives further exacerbate the current tensions resulting from a lack of effective action on the part of donors and NGOs.

g. *Toy making*

ETTA and UNICEF completed a workshop on Early childhood development and toy making in December 2001 in Dili, which targeted Kindergarten teachers and staff of Child Friendly Spaces. It is important to continue these initiatives not only because they emphasise the importance of play and provide children with toys but if they are oriented towards a larger community audience, such workshops can help people focus on children, triggering the larger necessary dialogue. Moreover, the workshops also focused on sustainable toys made from local materials, which can be used on the longer term.

2.2 *Support towards sustainability*

Such assistance, can only be seen as a short-term measure. Centres need to begin the discussion on how to develop strategies for sustainable practices. Ideas on such practices have included community gardens, related micro-enterprise that feeds into the centre, horticulture, and small agriculture initiatives. Sewing classes for women in the community are already ongoing at several centres and they might be encouraged to contribute clothing, etc. to the children in residence. Revenue from sewing and tailoring projects housed at centres could also contribute to caring for the children. While these are some initial ideas, each centre has different available resources and specific plans will be needed, using and complementing the particular skills available in the centres and communities.

Donors and international NGOs should be involved in helping this process and can provide invaluable inputs to sustainable exercises.

Chapter VII. Improving child centre practices and policies: Recommendations

A. Criteria for Registering and Monitoring Child Centres

1. Initiation of a Child centre Registration system

Child Centres have been registered *de facto* if they wish to receive food assistance from the World Food Programme but there is no formal process. Registration is important for a number of reasons. A registry of centres housed within ETTA Social Services (and in the relevant department in the future government) with continuously updated information on the number of children, their ages and special needs could assist in better informing assistance. Such a registry can be distributed to civilian police, health care providers (specifically mobile clinics), and the children included as beneficiaries in any civil planning for water, education, and other services. The possibility that potential centres could be denied registration if they were unable to provide adequate care should be further pursued with practitioners and other responsible parties.

2. Development of guidelines for Good Practices based on 'Best Practice Workshop'

There is a definite need, particularly since new initiatives for childcare are now beginning, for the development of guidelines for good practices, age-appropriate care, child protection, and keeping family connections strong. UNICEF and other organisations can play an important role in helping inform these guidelines in a consultative process with centre staff, children, and other concerned agencies. The potential for legal backing to these guidelines must be addressed in a national forum and by the network of centre staff.

These guidelines are essential in informing registration. ETTA Social Services should have the responsibility of reviewing centres that are not performing according to "good" practices, with the possibility of withdrawing, or denying registration when possibilities for training and other improvements are exhausted.

These guidelines would then form the basis of monitoring efforts both by ETTA Social Services and its future form in the new Administration, but also by the church and other recognised actors. It is thus essential that these guidelines be developed and agreed upon by the centre staff so that centres may play a role in self-monitoring provided care.

B. Guidelines for Placement of Children in Centres

1. General Enrolment

Guidelines for enrolment of children are also essential. Monitoring will need to focus not only on the quality of care the children receive, but also on who these children are, and if they truly need to be staying in a residential centre. As we found that a majority of children in centres do have family, if not parents, there needs to be clear criteria to guide enrolment practices.

While all guidelines will have to be introduced into the legal process by the Department of Social Affairs, guidelines on enrolment, like those on good practices and registration, should go through a thorough process of consultation with the affected actors.

The initiation of this consultation should begin with ETTA Social Services (and its future form), but will require the assistance of other concerned agencies, including donor support.

2. Guidelines for placing children with family problems in a centre

For a number of children, the centres serve as a safe haven. The majority of these children seeking safe haven were identified by the Parish Priest or a Sister in the village or sub-district who became aware of their situation and made the decision to move him or her from home into a centre.⁵⁶ We did not find specific and clear indicators or guidelines that were used for these decisions and this led us to believe that the decision often depends on an individual's opinion.

The discussions outlining criteria should seriously consider the process informing these decisions about a child's future. A definition of what conditions constitute a threat to the development of a child should be developed, also delineating what conditions are not harmful. We believe that before a child is removed from the home, mediation and/or support of extended family should be sought. Removal of the child from the home should be a measure of last resort in the accordance with the Right to Family Life and the development needs of the child.

C. Guaranteeing Registration and Identity of Children in Care

Policy should be put in place that requires the registration of all children staying in residential care through the centre registration process, with agreed periods for updating information. This registration could inform assistance and training, but would also facilitate monitoring efforts ensuring that the children need to be in residence and that their identity and rights are being fully protected. In the current legal vacuum, there is no regulation of which children are taken into centres and no current mechanism to ensure that their rights to identity are being fully respected. These mechanisms and regulations are urgently needed in the effort to protect children in East Timor, and assist in family reunification when possible, particularly in the case of separated children.

D. Development of a National Network of childcare centres

In the effort to develop these guidelines within a participatory process, we recommend that the Church, International NGOs, UNICEF, ETTA Social Services and other relevant organisations support the development of a National Network of childcare centres where children are in residence. This network cannot be posed as a government initiative to control the centres, as this is likely to cause enormous resistance. Efforts to localise centres, develop best practice guidelines and training, and ensure better care for children living away from home could be best achieved with co-ordination and co-operation between childcare providers. This already exists in many areas for centres run by sisters of the same order (i.e. Salesians in Baucau, Canossians in 5 districts, PRR sisters in Dili and Viqueque). However, this initiative must be “owned” by the Sisters and other centre administrators themselves.

E. Local Enrolment in Child Centres near Home Communities

We recommend the development of a policy to take children into the centres from the surrounding district and limit enrolment of children from outside districts and regions. This can help encourage family visits and limit currently debilitating transport problems that deny children access to home.

⁵⁶ There is a large discrepancy in the level of assessment, follow-up, and discussion with the family between parishes. The Salesian sisters in Baucau have the most comprehensive initiatives to do follow-up.

1. Challenges

It cannot be denied that there are substantial challenges in accomplishing this recommendation. Several parents interviewed adamantly supported sending their child far away either because:

- a. The parents attended that particular centre when they were children.
- b. The distance would prevent the child from running home.
- c. The hardship of distance helps the child learn life lessons
- d. Travelling far away allows the child to learn more about other areas of Timor, exposing them to other opportunities and knowledge outside of their own communities.
- e. Attachment of the child to a particular Sister who moves her area of operation was also given as a possibility. If the sister has been the primary caretaker, it could be highly disadvantageous to the child to break such bonds⁵⁷. These issues must be taken into account.
- f. A system for referral can only work if there are accepted criteria for acceptance into the centres, as recommended above.

2. Daily or Weekly care

Localising enrolment into child centres might allow children to go home at night, or as a second option, at least on weekends. This however, in many areas, hinges on the availability of transport.

Centres to be used for day care or only during the week can still provide the same services, enabling the Sisters and centre staff to continue to play their current roles as teachers, mentors, and caretakers. Day centres can still provide where families find it difficult, by way of food, clothing, supplies as well as lessons in life skills and a place and time to study. Yet at the same time, children would have greater access to family when possible. For children who do not have this access to family (for reasons of loss, or protection) other mentoring arrangements could be developed.⁵⁸

F. Formalised arrangements for family visits

Several of the centres encourage parents to visit their children. Others showed no indication of moving in this direction. We recommend that the centres and communities be pushed to institute family visiting days or special visits as well as regular home visits during the school term.

Don Bosco Child Centre in Lautem has a policy of allowing the children to visit their parents when they come in from the villages for the market on Saturday. Market visits could be instituted at many other centres in larger towns. Other weekend visits home for children specifically in the first 2 years are also encouraged. While transport remains a major problem, allowing and encouraging free access to children and families within a structured time and with some monitoring would be an important move in keeping contact between families and

⁵⁷ We did not find this to be a common reason given though people are well aware of who the sisters are at different centres and where they taught previously. It was unclear how many children would follow a sister or whether this would be allowed.

⁵⁸ Inevitably social jealousy could arise from this arrangement. There would have to be some understanding and acceptance of a standard to define which children were entitled to such facilities and care. Once we accept that for many the problem is poverty and lack of access to education, it is difficult to delineate a standard.

children in centres. Active encouragement of letter writing (where someone in the family can read and letters can be delivered) could also be useful. This does not need to depend on the development of a formal post. There are many informal mechanisms for delivering messages.

G. Increased access to transport

As previously noted, the current lack of home visits highlights a clear need for transportation available to children staying both in centres and in communities. Children often live in centres because they would otherwise be forced to walk 1-2 hours to school. It must be noted that transport has historically been a problem for children in East Timor but UNTAET/ETTA's cut in the numbers of primary schools and primary school teachers means that more primary students are walking longer distances than before. During the rainy season these children sometimes do not go to school at all. Further, children staying in centres, due to the cost and unavailability of transport do not go home.

Several possibilities have been suggested including subsidised community transport, grants of vehicles to be aided by a community-run fund for maintenance, etc. For the specific problem of children going home during the holidays, there is a need for travel scholarships. Subsidised bussing for specific holiday dates/ special weekends could also be arranged with current transport operators. (This is already occurring at some centres.)

Chapter VIII. Strengthening the Family and Community's Ability to Care for Their Children: Recommendations for Programming

Building confidence and skills in parenting

1. Family-based approach

Although we recognise them as a vulnerable group, the tendency to pinpoint orphans for assistance within the community risks enhancing differential treatment. With this comes stigmatisation and alienation within their households and communities. An additional danger is that targeting orphans can potentially encourage needy families to “give up” their children. Assistance aimed at orphans should rather go to strengthening the capacity of the immediate or extended family as well as to providing local alternatives for education and care that many families look for in the centres.

The following recommendations are related to and rely primarily on initiating communication and discussion from the national to village to family level, bringing attention to the situation of children, defining local priorities and developing community-based means to enable East Timor's next generation to a better future.

2. Building parent confidence and teaching positive parenting skills

The number of children living in centres because their parent(s) do not have the “capacity to care”, as noted in the questionnaires, indicates a central and dangerous problem in poorer and more vulnerable families in East Timor. The surveys revealed that parents (or single parents/guardians) could not provide the same training in life skills, they had too many other children and were not able to cope, they could not afford to feed the child nor buy clothes for school, they could not assist them in learning, and children staying at home would not have the same opportunity to study. The more difficult cases revealed that many young parents especially did not know how to feed, bathe, and provide health care to their children. In alternative arrangements, guardians suffered from apathy, depression, and/or ignorance and would often not seek appropriate support.⁵⁹ Therefore the children would not receive adequate care for extended periods of time.

UNICEF has already started to provide training in parenting skills and Early Childhood Development. This is an essential program for East Timor and must be made widely accessible to East Timorese on a local level. During our assessment, community members volunteered that parents might not be the best providers for their own children, although research and experiences all around the world indicate that parents are better emotional caretakers. Until the issue of parent confidence and capacity is addressed, families will continue to send their children away to be raised in alternate arrangements. The sisters at many centres have indicated an interest in working with parents. Current initiatives include, but are not exclusive to, the Salesian sisters in Laga and Venilale, the Canossian sisters in Dili and Ermera and the ADM sisters in Lautem. FOKUPERS and PRADET are also working with parents in communities. These initiatives must be strengthened and widened to cover the entire country.

⁵⁹ There is a case in Los Palos of a little girl, who at 2 years old weighed only 10 kgs when she was brought to the hospital. The mother of the child was apathetic to her care and the Doctor was unwilling to release the child back to the home. She explicitly told the mother that the child would be sent away if the mother could not assure that she would be cared for. The Doctor continued to keep to this position as she saw little change in the mother's attitude. However, towards the end of the child's stay at the hospital (the mother stayed with her), other mothers and women in the ward who were with their own children were able to give the mother the confidence, and the peer pressure, to bathe and feed the child so that, when the child was released in December, the Doctor felt able to allow her to go home with her mother.

UNICEF and other organisations can play an important role in the monitoring of these initiatives, harmonising the message, and providing necessary training of trainers. Co-operation with groups working in this area is also essential.

Building confidence in the skills required to be a positive parent, including basic information on healthcare, education and conflict resolution could begin in a non-formal school setting through a comprehensive program aimed at youth as well as new parents (for example in the UNICEF Child-Friendly Spaces and CYDP Youth Centres). As we found many young parents who were overwhelmed or otherwise vulnerable, we recommend that training in skills of positive parenting be started at the same time as training in pre- and post-natal care.

ETTA Education, the future government, UNICEF and other organisations could push interested groups to also take a role in health and skills education within schools. The formal school system is not currently positioned to provide this service. Any training of students will have to be taken on as a supplementary initiative.

B. Supporting families and communities caring for vulnerable children

1. Widows and Widower programs

Lack of resources, and not just confidence and capacity drive a single parent (widow/widower or unmarried parent) to give up their child to a centre. The development of programs that provide widows with access to resources and alternative child care support in the form of day centres (such as the Child-Friendly Spaces) are essential. Several groups are currently working with widows, the largest being the OMT network. Smaller local groups are focusing on widows of people killed by the Indonesian security forces, such as AKKOH in Ermera, but many local and international groups have projects in micro-enterprise and small projects to assist widows and their children. This work must be continued and strengthened with financial and training support.

Several initiatives have also been mentioned that would bring widows together to care for orphans in local communities, using micro-enterprise projects to support the household. Such local initiatives that keep these children connected to home communities and involved with extended family present an important option but should be assisted through training to pay special attention to the best interests of the children involved.

Further, widowers cannot be ignored. Many of the children in centres do have single/widowed fathers and communities readily surmised that these individuals could not care for their children alone. Training in child care, community sensitisation and awareness of parental responsibility should be encouraged for widowers and single fathers as well as mothers, perhaps through the OMT networks, the church and other local groups working at village level. International organisations currently providing training to widows should be encouraged to include widowers in their programming. Further, these men, often more than widows in a community, may not have access to alternative support networks, especially those among women. Local and international groups working with widows facilitating support networks should be conscious of including widowers in their planning.

2. Food support to foster and/or extended families?

Several initiatives have been developed in Lautem directly with WFP to support families to take in children who have lost parents instead of sending them to centres. In two cases, children under 5 lost their mothers in childbirth. One was given to the care of a neighbour and another (with 3 siblings) to an aunt who also had 7 children of her own. Both were living in poor rural areas. Arrangements were made for WFP to provide vulnerable feeding to those families because of the children taken in. These arrangements need to be further examined in encouraging an incentive system. It seemed to have worked in these areas on a case-by-case

basis. However, indiscriminate use of food incentives may lure families to take in children without primary consideration of the child's best interest.⁶⁰ Follow-up in the districts of these children staying in other families should be done to make sure that the foster parents of extended family have their best interest in mind. Equal treatment compared to the other children in the family is also an important indicator. In the longer term, as sustainability of food provision is not ensured, preference should be given to livelihood programmes for the whole family/community rather than to food incentives.

3. School Feeding

The currently considered school-feeding program can play an important role in helping families care for children at home. As WFP is considering phase-out of their programme, we recommend advocacy for school feeding to begin, particularly focusing on more rural areas suffering recurrent food insecurity.

⁶⁰ These cases occurred in Odafuro, Luro Subdistrict and Daudere and were reported by Jesuit Refugee Services, Luro.

Chapter IX . Developing systematic information on children in need within the community: Recommendations for Registration

A. Comprehensive registration

In order to systematically identify the number of separated, orphaned children and otherwise vulnerable children in East Timor, there is an immediate need for a comprehensive registration of this group. The assessment team has repeatedly pushed for the upcoming Civil Registration and census to pay close attention to the situation of orphaned and separated children as the most effective vehicle to begin the formal process of documenting these cases nation-wide.

There are enormous barriers to gathering correct information on children's status within the family. The purpose of the registration must be clearly defined and communicated in order that families give accurate information on children in their care. Unfortunately, the numerous other more piecemeal initiatives by NGOs and others to obtain this information have not had the necessary legitimacy or accuracy. There is an assumption that NGOs asking for numbers, and even Church representatives at times, are making a promise of assistance. This has caused an understandable frustration and anger among centre staff and families. The initiatives have also been operating under different definitions of vulnerability and "orphans" and information is taken for different purposes, also affecting the results. A national registration with a common definition of "orphan", "household", and "separated child", is the best way at present to assure more accurate results.

B. Sensitisation of civil registry and census personnel on registration of marginalised groups

1. Training

The Civil Registration and census officers (international as well as national) could be trained specifically in eliciting information about separated and orphaned children within the community. ETTA Social Services and a future government will have an integral role to play in developing and implementing this training with support from UNICEF and other agencies. However, it is important that the offices of census and registration recognise that accurately accessing this information is an urgent priority.

2. Special issues to be addressed in sensitisation training

The following are special issues that might confuse or restrict the collection of accurate information on children and should be addressed in training:

- a. The extended family blurs the lines of biology and very often a nephew or niece will be considered a son or daughter
- b. Suspicion of civil registration⁶¹
- c. Terminology and language⁶²
- d. Complex family situations and lack of adherence to formal guardianship regulations
- e. Children often do not use the same last names as their parents

⁶¹ There is a deep distrust of government in many areas of this country as a result of the Indonesian occupation. General education on the importance of correct registration that is clear and honest is important.

⁶² The terminology used to describe families in Tetun, as our assessment has found, is complicated and unclear to the non-native speaker. The definition of "oan kiak" or "orphan" is used differently across the country. It must be specifically asked if the child has a mother only or father only and there are many possibilities for confusion. Civil Registrars must be aware of the possible areas for confusion and be trained in asking clear questions that will access the important information.

- f. Children in the household might temporarily be in the care of a centre or other family member and so might not be registered as part of the specific family
- g. Awareness of alternative living arrangements

3. Vulnerable Children

In order to better access the most vulnerable children, it is essential that training include awareness of child and sibling-headed households and other arrangements where children are living alone. In one such arrangement in Wai-Bobo in Viqueque, several families from the village have sent their secondary school students to live in a house together without their families in order to attend school. These may not otherwise be reported in a civil registration and, depending on the age of the head of household, and their integration into the community, they may not be targeted by media and other methods used and so would be unaware of the need for registration. We found two cases of child-headed households in Kassa and Oecusse. While the numbers of children affected by these arrangements are not very significant, these children may be the most vulnerable.

C. Information for programming

Current programming has been severely limited by many factors including a lack of statistics. Though projects to affect the daily situations of children have not been a first priority, accurate information on the numbers of orphaned, separated and vulnerable children as well as their geographic concentrations is essential for future advocacy by NGOs, UNICEF, and Social Services to increase funding and attention to these children. Statistics gathered through the civil registration and census should be immediately shared with concerned agencies so they can strengthen their advocacy efforts and better coordinate current initiatives.

Chapter X. Protecting children: Selected Recommendations for monitoring and policy

A. Background and challenges

1. Traditional and formal legal mechanisms for Child Protection not sufficiently in place

Several cases have indicated that traditional community mechanisms for the protection of children are not currently functioning in the best interest of the child. One case in Ainaro district of repeated sexual abuse illustrated that new judicial systems are not yet functioning adequately and have left child victims vulnerable to repetitive abuse.⁶³ Communities also seem distrustful of using the formal system of justice for cases touching on abuse and power relationships, but do not always rely on traditional mechanisms to deal with these problems either. This missed link between systems has inhibited communities from dealing with teachers who abuse students. One teacher who used excessive violence towards a female student in Manatuto for “being stupid” has remained in his post. Another teacher who was known by the community to be a paedophile was employed by UNTAET/ETTA and later committed an offence against a 7-year-old. In several districts, resistance to reporting domestic violence cases to the police or local NGOs forewarns that protection of children in many communities is in jeopardy.

Research into past practices has shown that some local mechanisms to protect children have been in place in the past and may still function. While the efficacy and dominance of local practices differ widely, in most areas there are local leaders who are selected as “elders”. Of these, one is selected to be the “chief of customs”. Two parties in dispute will go to this leader, (also called *katuas*, *Lia nain*, or *Toko ada*) and they will sit together and hear the case. The decision of the *Katuas/Lia Nain* is final. We were told that if one party is not willing to participate in this exercise, then the case would be brought to the formal system (i.e. *CivPol*). In all cases brought before the *Katuas/Lia Nain*, in theory a guardian always represents a child (though not always in the best interest of that child according to the Convention). If the child has no parent, the mother’s brother is first responsible. After this there is an intricate web of responsibility related to dowry practices and other issues. It is clear however, that the system is theoretically designed so that an adult is always present at the child’s side.

Communities expressed that these structures were not permanently damaged by the destruction and population displacement of last year. The basic assumption that was repeatedly mentioned is that communities are responsible for the well being of all their children including any and all children living geographically in their village or area.

2. Community Responsibility

We also asked people about situations of extreme neglect where the parents were unwilling or unable (due to financial, mental conditions) to assist the child. Several people interviewed felt very strongly that the neighbours and other people in contact with the family do have the

⁶³ In this case a girl (14) was raped twice by her older sister’s husband over a period of months. He assaulted her again by digital penetration in October. The offender was arrested and taken to Dili. During this process there was a hearing where he was released on his own reconnaissance pending a trial at a later date. Limited evidence was heard at the bail hearing and greater weight was given to the defence’s story as he claimed that it was an accident. The offender returned to his village with no clear trial date and was free to continue his activities. Later, the two families reached an agreement and a payment of buffalo was made. The girl remains vulnerable and the lack of any definitive justice for her as well as his return may prevent further use of the formal system. *Civ Pol* indicated extreme frustration as they have worked hard to encourage victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse to use the systems available to them. The failure of decisive justice in this case might discourage others from coming forward.

responsibility to help that child. This was non-negotiable. These conversations proved very interesting not as indications of current practice, but of Timorese concepts of protection. It seems there is room to strengthen indigenous systems that are geared in theory to community protection of children.

It is evident, however, that, in order to strengthen these systems, and design legal backups for when traditional systems fail, the problems that children face must be more clearly defined.

Selected Recommendations

1. Accessing Traditional Mechanisms and Supporting New Initiatives for Child Protection

Community empowerment to protect and raise their own children will be most effective if all the available mechanisms and actors are pulled into the effort. New initiatives in child rights, survival, and protection should be aimed at all professionals and actors dealing with children in their own local context. These may include: health professionals, social workers, church members, NGOs, political and military actors, orphanage administrators, teachers, youth groups, and cultural leaders. Specific training in identifying abuse and neglect (FOKUPERS and ETWAVE are working on this) could also be important for education and health practitioners. Giving the responsibility for children back to the communities can best be accomplished if there is work towards a common vision and an accepted commitment.

It is recommended to:

- 1.1 Identify members of the community who are playing the role of chief of custom (“Katuas”, “Lia Nain”, “Toko Ada”) or others with the authority and legitimacy who can monitor and follow-up on cases of child protection. Increased awareness training on the village level, working with these identified leaders, should be used to improve the local methods of conflict resolution and welfare.
- 1.2 Identify a recognised mechanism (which can obviously be variable for each community) for bringing other family members into the process of protecting the child. This can include the meetings used by these custom/ culture chiefs, village chiefs, or other representatives, as well as formal family meetings, or other mechanisms accepted by the community.
- 1.3 Train church members as well as any social welfare or human rights-oriented NGOs, civil society representatives in each community how to help or work within established processes, but raise awareness of the other paths available, policies, and laws (when developed), to assist when the older systems fail or cannot be used. This awareness training must stress that removal of the child from their community should only be used as an absolute last resort.
- 1.4 Explore possibilities to set up local Child Protection committees in consultation and collaboration with communities in the districts.
- 1.5 Encourage organisations to advocate for children. Many children who have recently received protection at centres, or in placements in substitute families have benefited from the help of an advocate. JRS arranged WFP food support to substitute families to help them care for 2 foster children, and a doctor in Los Palos found a home with the Canossian sisters for three children who had been very badly malnourished. Village catechists and other religious representatives usually play the role of advocating for children in their areas, as do the village chiefs. This advocacy should be encouraged and supported where possible.

1.6 Parent-teacher associations have apparently existed at most schools in the past. Empowerment (and organisation) of these associations is essential, especially in any initiatives to develop educational bridge activities.⁶⁴ These associations could assist in initiating practical discussion of how communities can better protect and help their children learn within the community.

2. Raising awareness of and with Children

Through discussion on the local level

There is a need to begin discussions on the local level around the current expression of Children's Rights in the effort to inform a national debate. Though these discussions should be run by local representatives (Education officers, OMT, OJETIL, ETWAVE, or local student organizations), UNICEF and other organisations can play an important role in enabling this initiative either through funding, expertise, or support of another appropriate agency to implement the exercise.

Through a National Forum on Children

In East Timor there is still an extraordinary opportunity to shape policy across sectors to favourably affect children. However, a National mechanism is needed to push the focus of actors across country towards children and their needs, as the future of East Timor. Such a forum, if able to give voice to a national vision for children, would also give a platform for development of policy on the local and national level. The Child Rights Working group of the National NGO Forum, set up in December 2000 has started this process but will need significant assistance in building a national mechanism. It is important, however, that this process not become political in nature.

Several suggested areas of discussion include:

- Defining children's circumstances (orphan, vulnerability, separated child, neglect, the family)
- Defining priorities (push educating children to the forefront)
- Defining what constitutes a threat to a child
- Formal delineation of the extent of community responsibility and the responsibilities of the government systems
- Building operational linkages between health, education, welfare, labour, community development and civil society initiatives on the ground
- Consideration of a National Adoption policy (this is currently being discussed/developed by UNICEF and ETTA)
- Initiatives for enacting the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a Timorese context

Education and Advocacy on Basic Health Issues: Campaign on Child Survival and Development

Essential issues for advocacy and awareness also revolve around health education and pre/post-natal care. Targeting initiatives to deal with maternal mortality and financial and training support to single parents (widowers and widows) are essential for strengthening the family. Lack of finances, and death of a mother due to birth complications often leads to children being separated from their direct family and then perhaps to placement in centres. These subjects fall under the health and education sectors and are therefore not directly under the mandate of the developing, and necessarily limited, social welfare system. Therefore, a cross-sector approach is necessary to build a strong commitment to support families and prevent separation of children from their families.

⁶⁴ See pg. 51

Children are obviously an enormously mobilising issue. The crowds that turned out for National Immunisation Days across the country illustrated that people care deeply about the health of their children and that children's issues are capable of mobilising large numbers of people in the communities given the right organisation and appropriate financial resources.

These health and education issues should be approached from a child-directed focus. A focus on family and child welfare might allow access in to wider discussion and education on issues of maternal mortality, pre- and post-natal care, infant nutrition, as well as, at some point, more in-depth discussion on STDs and HIV. These issues, combined with work on child welfare and discussion of child protection in a co-ordinated campaign, might allow access in to more taboo issues if presented as a threat to child survival and development. After having said all this, we think that a Campaign on Child Survival and Development, building on the precedent of the NIDs and based loosely on its organisation, could be very effective in starting these discussions in villages that are currently suffering very high maternal death rates and infant under-nutrition.

Involvement of youth

Mobilising older youth to help run such a campaign might achieve several goals simultaneously: educating them as potential parents and current siblings, bringing in an important local voice, and accessing their resources of energy and labour. While this assessment does not specifically focus on the needs of youth, future planning and research must seriously look at this group. Youth are in need of skills development, vocational training, and activities to combat violence and other issues, but they represent a valuable resource. Young people must be brought in as active participants as trainers, mediators, advocates, counsellors and mentors, especially to children. These talents are not currently being tapped and young people are left excluded and alienated from the transition process. If this transition is to be successful, young people must become more involved in its facilitation and planning.

3. Consultation of East Timorese practitioners in the development of Child Policies and Legislation

Lack of consultation on the development and drafting of recent legislation has led to frustration among many East Timorese practitioners. While some mechanisms exist to consult on written legislation before ratification, local actors are often left out of the initial process. The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives a comprehensive prescription for child policy yet it is crucial that policy, especially on protection, be Timorese-developed and owned to become truly effective or implemented. Consultation in this case cannot mean only a review of draft legislation drawn up in Dili alone. We recommend that parent-teacher association meetings and other local forums could be used to help develop child protection policy and other legislation from its initiation. The Working Group on Children and Youth can also be asked to assist in this effort. The networks available to this group can provide important input to the process, informing new policy on protection and building consensus around it.

4. Creation of monitoring mechanisms for children in contact with the law

UNICEF has organised several training sessions on Juvenile Justice, Child Rights and Protection for Judges, public defenders, prosecutors and judicial officers as well as police officers, NGOS and the Church. These sessions began the discussion on the Rights of children in the legal system and the laws protecting them. However, extensive further work is needed to protect child victims of crime and children otherwise involved in the legal process as well as with local, more traditional mechanisms. There is a need to identify a party (such as police, social workers, local NGO representatives, as well as a child advocate/counsellor) responsible for monitoring any cases where children are involved as victims, witnesses or offenders, as it is clear that the formal court system is not yet able to fully support the rights of children.

Chapter XI. Targeting the Education Problem: Recommendations

A. Assistance to primary schools

Central to rebuilding East Timor is the re-establishment and improvement of primary schools in all 13 districts. There has been significant controversy surrounding the rehabilitation of schools, downsizing of the former Indonesian education system, selection and payment of teachers and budgetary resources allocated to education in the new East Timorese Administration.

It cannot be highlighted enough that the number of children, especially younger children, who are sent to live away from their families in centres, is significantly related to the condition, functioning and cost of the formal school in their home village or sub-district.⁶⁵

The school rehabilitation process has experienced a slow start due to a lack of materials and other constraints. Urgent attention should be given to the reopening and improvement of primary schools in each village as soon as possible. The current unfulfilled demand by children to stay in centres, due to the supplementary education and skills training they provide, illustrates that primary and junior schooling needs are not sufficiently being met in most areas. Education services must be reassessed and assisted to begin to truly “educate” and train these children in the skills they need.

Our assessment is that there will be little change in the practice of sending primary and junior students to centres until local schools are operating and better able to provide a tangible and desired education.

B. Handing education back to the community

Many communities developed a number of non-formal activities for children, brought in volunteer teachers and helped to keep children physically in school from 1999-2000. These communities stopped the activities when it was indicated that the formal system would be operating on October 1, 2000. Children in the communities that did not develop these activities did not have structured learning possibilities during that time. Communities in both these categories are now currently frustrated by delays in the rehabilitation of schools, snags in teacher recruitment, and the fact that many schools, as of 2001 are still not operating. Many of these are not expected to be ready for use until well into 2001. The lack of school opportunities and other options drives families to send children to where these opportunities exist away from the home and may also contribute to situations of neglect.

Further, even when the selected schools are refurbished, the current formal educational system is severely limited in the assistance it can provide in the form of teacher training, monitoring, curriculum improvement and supply of materials. We hope that the current and future administrations will try to assist communities and other groups to provide substantive initiatives in non-formal education in addition to significant improvement of the formal education system (and government run non-formal programs). In this regard, redistribution that examines the current limitations in education staffing and in government budget could be considered.

⁶⁵ Although there is a current lack of information on the status of schools, where schools have not been rehabilitated it appears that there are larger percentages of younger children in centres who profess to be there for education because school is not running in their village and their homes are a long distance to walk. This was particularly the case in Luro, Lautem; Betano, Manufahi; Aileu; Baguia, Baucau; Ossu, Viqueque; and Maubara, Liquica.

C. Developing a community bridge plan for education

The process of handing education back to the community is integral in helping communities keep and raise their children. Initial optimism around the October 1 start date of schools operationally meant that community-based initiatives (in the few areas they were active) were put aside in the understanding that the formal system would be up and running. In areas where schools are not ready, and where the current education is sub-standard, communities must again be given the full responsibility of educating their children and developing learning activities for them. There are several necessary steps to this:

- 1) Clear communication and acknowledgement of the problem by people in authority, realistic expected dates of opening and clear information on plans for schools in each village.
- 2) Honest explanation of what the formal system, when running, will provide and where community responsibility begins through village meetings, parent-teacher association meetings and other discussions.
- 3) A campaign on the local level to assist communities, NGOs, civil society groups, and interested individuals to develop initiatives for children in both formal and informal activities. This requires that the process of consultation and explanation be dynamic enough to mobilise people and means there must be a common acceptance of the goal of educating children.
- 4) Identification of people in the community with skills that can be accessed for children and the start up of quick impact activities (These can include formal classes, apprenticeships; youth service groups, youth mentoring, tutoring, sports leagues, art clubs, theatre, music, etc.).
- 5) Accessing of youth, church, elders, etc. as human resources. Bridging the education gap can bring in as many members of a community that are interested and should not be limited to teachers and parents.
- 6) In terms of actually engaging with the formal system, a few local NGOs in Dili have created their own schools. This is an important initiative though each school should be anchored firmly in the community it serves to best meet their needs.
- 7) Centre staff who are well respected for their teaching abilities in “life skills” could be approached as instructors and for other assistance.

Appendix I

Summary of Constraints - Challenges and Problems in Collection of Data

The collection of reliable data and information on children being cared for by centres and in other arrangements in the community was severely frustrated at different periods of time due to several factors:

a) Children are not a visible top programming priority outside of Dili

Almost everyone we spoke to was very concerned about the situation of children, especially those orphaned, separated and otherwise uniquely vulnerable. However, there are few groups in the districts who are currently mobilised to work with children. As a result, it was difficult to obtain information about specific children in the community and their individual states of vulnerability and protection. Further, funding to Social Services and other service providers to children has been extremely limited. This has severely restricted coordination of groups that have been “surveying” the situation but often do not find funding to implement programming. This has caused dashed expectations and increased frustration in already challenged communities.

b) Very limited reliable information on “orphans”

Within the scope of groups working on children’s issues, we were unable to identify any organisations operationally focusing specifically on orphans outside of the boarding houses and orphanages within the districts. Several groups are working with separated children but mainly from a tracing point of view. OMT in several districts has indicated interest in finding out the numbers of orphans in Covalima and other districts, and Commissao has done an in-depth assessment in 3 sub districts in Bobonaro to verify the data of the vulnerable feeding lists but these are limited initiatives. While many village chiefs have provided lists of widows, only some have lists of orphans and the definitions used vary widely. Sub-district church and CNRT representatives showed interest at accessing that information but were not immediately aware of the numbers of orphans in their communities. As a result, we were only able to take random samples of the numbers of orphans from more reliable vulnerable feeding databases and provided village lists.

c) Reluctance of centre staff to provide information due to former false promises, too many surveys and limited action

At a majority of centres, interviews with staff and administrators was restricted and difficult because of their extreme frustration at the inaction by the international community in regards to children in their care. Since last October many groups visited centre staff and led them to believe that they had been promised assistance. In the chaos of the early emergency, it is very possible that they were assured help. Even when they received nothing they still continued to talk to the many “assessors” who come for information, advice, and statistics in hope of some action. At this point, a year later, most that we spoke with had become very disenchanted with the international community and the UN and initially, several refused to speak to us or to cooperate with our assessment. While we were able to overcome these barriers in most instances, it did prevent an easy and open sharing of information. Thus, some of our time was spent providing answers on the processes at work and helping the staff look for other avenues to solve their problems. Their reluctance also inhibited our interaction with the children. While teaching us the barriers that these centres face in providing for children, these problems did prevent easy access to information.

d) Distance and access to centres

Due to distance, the poor conditions of the roads, limitations on air-travel, our own limitations on time and the time it takes to reach many of these centres we were unable to visit three of the more remote centres. The Salesians Sisters run two of these on the models of Laga and Venilale and one is run by Father Richard in Oecusse.⁶⁶ Despite the frustrations of continually being unable to access these and other centres, it served as an important lesson in the barriers that families and parents face in visiting children, children face in getting home for holidays, and centre staff deal with in accessing assistance.

e) Survey forms not fully suited to the current issues of these children

The questionnaires developed by the Task Force on Separated Children were very helpful as an initial tool to illicit discussion and get names and basic information. However, we found that they reflected concerns from several months back when the forms were developed and were less well suited to the current challenges that children and centre staff face. For example, they were less effective for cases where education is the prime objective and belied a biased assumption that the children were not in the centre voluntarily. As a result, we relied less on the questionnaires than originally planned.

It is important to note for other planned assessments that as centre staff were extremely reluctant to fill out the forms or to have them filled out by our team, a lot of the information received was only piecemeal. We processed the forms but found that there was significant misunderstanding of what the questionnaires were asking, a general lack of information about the children, and a reluctance to spend the necessary time.

Those more willing to assist in accessing the information often had larger expectations that we would be able to provide assistance, despite our protestations to the contrary and thus, it is possible that their presentation of information was shaped to make the need more immediate. It was clear that many of the centre staff manipulated the information to suit what they thought we were looking for in the hope of some action. While appreciating their initiative to provide for the children, it does make the information less reliable.

Due to these restrictions we relied more on our own observations, interviews with staff, children and community members. The observations and recommendations found here reflect information gleaned through these channels and delve into many areas not addressed by the original survey.

⁶⁶ IRC staff visited Father Richard's centre in preparation of this assessment.

Appendix II

Assessment tools – Survey Forms *Assessment of the Situation of Separated Children and Orphans in East Timor*

See the following forms attached:

1. “Information on East Timorese Separated Children and Orphans” form, developed by the Task Force on Separated Children and Orphans (Children and Youth Working Group)
2. “Data Form” prepared by the survey Team.