

Alternative Care for Children without Primary Caregivers in Tsunami-Affected Countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, July 2006

Executive Summary

The assessment on Alternative Care for Children without Primary Caregivers in Tsunami-Affected was completed within three months, including visits Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand, the Tsunami-Affected countries.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation

Findings

In all four countries, national laws cover provisions for the protection of children who are abandoned, orphaned, neglected and abused. As State parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the four governments are undertaking measures to harmonize national laws, policies, and programmes with the CRC. The countries are also signatories to other international instruments for the protection of children. In addition, regional commitments have to be implemented in accordance with membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In all the countries, it is apparent that poverty is the main reason for children entering alternative care. Other reasons are prolonged illness, disability or death of parents; abandonment by parents; and family breakdown causing neglect, abuse and exploitation of children. Some parents send their children to residential facilities for the purpose of education.

Residential care is the major and primary response to assisting children without primary caregivers. It is the most visible, accessible and readily available service to address immediately the needs of children requiring shelter, care and education. Residential care comes in different forms: reception centres or child protection centres, residential nurseries, children's homes, orphanages, training/boarding/monastic schools, and family/cottage complexes.

Degrees and forms of family and community-based programmes for children without primary caregivers vary, including adoption, foster care and kinship care.

Data on children without primary caregivers is limited; where data is available, it is not disaggregated by age, gender, the nature of problems and the types of services provided. Concise and reliable documentation on children in care is not always available.

Case management is limited. Many children are moved from one institution to another. Visitation or continuing contacts with families is minimal. There are no indications that older children participate in decision-making relative to their placement. There are neither case plans nor reviews of the placements of children, yet these are essential in permanency planning.

There is a lack of professional social workers (particularly in Myanmar) and the capacity of staff working with children is limited.

Collaborative partnerships between and among governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), the private sector, donor agencies and United Nations bodies are evident in all countries. A multi-sectoral approach is generally used in many inter-agency activities.

All four countries have initiatives in varying degrees and forms to promote the CRC. A variety of advocacy and social mobilization activities by governments in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund {UNICEF}, international and local NGOs, communities and children are in place.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this assessment indicate some positive progress and initiatives for children without primary caregivers. The best environment for children's optimum development is within their own families. To ensure children remain with their families wherever possible requires major support and priority consideration by governments and other stakeholders. Protection for children in residential facilities must include quality care. All efforts must be made to reunite children with their own families or otherwise to place them in adoption through approved and monitored processes, and to deinstitutionalize the children in a timely and appropriate manner.

The commitment and political will of governments, with the support of UNICEF and other partners, are imperative to realize the fulfillment of all the rights of children without primary caregivers, including those in tsunami-affected countries.

Recommendations

- A continuum of child welfare services (supportive, supplemental and substitutive).
- Programmes to prevent the separation of children from their families (including family support and other services) should be available alongside alternative family- and community-based programmes such as adoption, foster care, kinship care and guardianship.
- The quality of care for children should be improved.
- Governments of the four countries must ensure that standards for alternative care are in place to guarantee the quality of care and the rights of children whose needs cannot be met within their own families. All types of residential care facilities including boarding and/or monastic schools under the management of faith-based organizations should follow government-set standards.
- Case-management systems should be in place to ensure timely and appropriate movement of cases. Training of para-professionals and all staff is necessary so they understand the developmental stages of children and their behaviour, and are gender-fair and sensitive to children's needs. Moreover, effective case management is possible with trained professional social workers as case managers and case workers.
- Advocacy and the promotion of children's rights services should be strengthened.
- As State parties to the CRC, governments are obliged to harmonize their national laws and policies to the standards set by the CRC.
- A comprehensive information, educational and communication programme should be directed at all levels towards a sustained advocacy to stress the essential role of family and community in protecting the rights of children.

- It is essential to build and expand partnerships in order to enhance coordination between local and national agencies and to direct available resources into more responsive child protection programmes. Existing coordinating structures at all levels in each country must be strengthened to address child protection issues in a combined and coordinated manner.

Research Geographic Coverage by Area

Tsunami-Affected Countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

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