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## ***Our view of the problem of children without education in Sabah.***

### ***□ Plantation children:***

*Estimates range between 24,000 to 50,000 children at school age, who do not have access to government schools because of legal status, distance and poverty.*

*Our estimates based on the actual presence of an average of 3-400 school age children per 10,000 Ha of oil palm plantation at our project areas, indicates that the total number of children in Sabah could be above 40,000 in a total of more than 1,500,000 Ha planted with oil palm.*

### ***□ Immigrant town labourers children:***

*Estimates by various NGOs have indicated more than 10,000 children of immigrant labourers and IMM13 holders (people from Philippines with refugee status).*

*Our present town projects which number 1100 enrolled children in Lahad Datu, the 4. largest town in Sabah and over 200 children in the smaller town of Semporna are not yet covering the needs even in those areas. The indication is that the actual number of these children is probably not less than the 10,000 estimated in towns in Sabah and in fact the figure may be higher than that.*

### ***□ Indigenous groups in remote areas:***

*The Bajau Laut people, who have a traditional nomadic life between the east coast of Sabah and the shores of Mindanao and Sulawesi.*

*They are often without tradition for education and without basic documents such as birth certificates. In Sabah the bajau laut children, who live in town areas are often seen as beggars and searching for leftover food from restaurants in town areas. They are as such at high risk of abuse. The Dusun and Murut and other inland peoples, living in remote rural communities which are too far from nearest schools need support for preschool and follow up, so they do not drop out of school. We do not have an estimate of the total of these children without education. These children would be more likely to get government support as they are without any doubt locals.*

## ***Status of our projects:***

*Humana Child Aid Society is by April 2011 providing education for more than 10,000 children from preschool to primary 6 level in 116 different learning centres often in remote locations and of these 108 are in plantations.*

*Our total staff of teachers number 320 teachers, who are Malaysians or from the Philippines or Indonesia.*

*We are now in cooperation with UNICEF Malaysia to improve the lives of children in Sabah.*

*We have started 5 centres in town areas, whereof 4 are in Lahad Datu and 1 is in Semporna with a total of 1300 children.*

*Besides we have constructed 3 centres on islands off Semporna.*

***Our future plans for our involvement for children in Sabah:***

*1) Expansions of our plantation centres to new companies, willing to provide basic support for the children in the plantations.*

*The Indonesian Government is involved in the situation of the children in Sabah's plantations.*

*The Indonesian Government has provided important assistance by providing 109*

*Indonesian teachers to assist our projects.*

*The Ministry of Education Malaysia has is supportive of our projects, and they are issuing necessary permits for our teachers and our schools.*

*2) A special focus on children of the bajau laut group around the islands of Semporna, which largely have no access to schools. This projects ,which we work closely with the WWF about, will focus on teaching the children about conservation of the invaluable coral reefs around their living places.*

*3) Expanding the present Learning Centres in Lahad Datu, Semporna and Kalabakan to the towns of Sandakan, Tawau and Kota Kinabalu. This we hope to do in cooperation with other local NGOs as well as community based groups.*

## ***Issues.***

### ***Child Labour:***

*Our experience says that child labour, where children follow their parents in the field picking loose fruits without being registered in any payroll, is widespread in oil palm plantations, if there is no education provided and often will involve more than 50% of the children from 9 years and above.*

*If there is education provided for the children, the rate of full time child labour will drop to less than 10% and in some cases none at all.*

*Child labour in the plantations is usually practiced as children go with their parents in the field, since there are no parents to look after them at home.*

*In our opinion this problem can only be solved by providing education, as the choice of staying at home without adult supervision and without any other options of furthering their lives seems no better than to work in the field alongside their parents.*

*The children and the parents are usually overwhelmingly enthusiastic when education is provided as they are aware of the bleak future possibilities of spending an entire childhood without education.*

### ***Risk of becoming street children:***

*The children of immigrants and refugees (mostly in peninsular Malaysia, but in Sabah also many IMM13 holders), who are left without education in towns in Sabah as well as other parts of Malaysia are at high risk of becoming street children. With this follows all exposure to glue sniffing, drugs, petty crime and child abuses.*

*Also many plantation children have no wish to continue living in plantations, when they are adult. Some of these may end up in towns and with basic education at high risk of becoming street children.*

### ***Bajau Laut Children:***

*The bajau laut are a special concern, as they have as their background a life at sea depending on fishing and collecting along the East Coast of Sabah and to Mindanao, Philippines. They are mostly stateless.*

*As the bajau laut are exposed to urban settlement, as number of dangers arise.*

*Many of the children live a virtual street life, begging and scavenging for waste food from restaurants.*

*Unfortunately we see that a number of these children are recruited for fish bombing gangs, where the use of explosives or cyanide lays waste parts of some of the worlds most important coral reefs off Semporna in Sabah. When left impoverished and illiterate the lure of fast money combined with their diving skills make them easy targets by these groups run by people outside of the bajau laut community.*

*We are in a cooperation with WWF to educate the children and to train them as guardians of the coral reefs, which their ethnic group has depended on for generations.*

### ***Future prospects for the children:***

***We have seen that if these children are provided with a primary education, the majority of them will be sent by the parent's to their native country to join secondary education there. This is the case of many of the plantation children at our projects.***

***If the children grow up without education to become illiterate young people in Sabah, their chances of getting a proper future in Indonesia or Philippines are practically zero, and they will therefore mostly prefer to stay on as illegals in Sabah.***

***This is in our opinion a valid argument to counter the anti immigrant sentiments in segments of the local population, that education besides from ensuring the children's right as of the Child Rights Convention, also provides the key to solve the immigration problem.***

***At the same time it is of vital importance to highlight an image of these children as human beings with hopes and talents in order to counter the negative images of drug abusing street children living in hopelessness, which are often put forward in local media to an extent that some locals use the word "garbage" about these children especially in and around the state capital Kota Kinabalu. When witnessing these children in their school uniforms every day going to school is helping to counter the dehumanization.***

### ***Our recommendations for special concern:***

***We warmly welcome any support or involvement in the situation of stateless children here in Sabah also in connection with our projects.***

***The scale of the problems of lacking education for children in Sabah is much larger than Borneo Child Aid Society/Humana, being a small social NGO, can handle with our very limited funds and resources.***

***In spite of the number of children enrolled at our projects and the number of learning centres, we face some serious issues to secure future funding and also how to further develop our projects to provide space for the many children, who are not yet at school.***

***The following areas we would hope to see support for:***

- 1. Education and care for plantation workers children.***
- 2. Education and care for the large number of town children without education.***
- 3. Education and care for children of other special ethnic groups, such as the bajau laut and other remote communities.***

### ***Project Needs:***

***For our projects we are strongly in need of sustainable funding, especially in these times of present financial crisis, where we have seen some sponsorships discontinued.***

***Other project needs are for all kinds of school equipment:***

***Books for mini libraries,  
all kind of education materials,  
computers and printers.***

### ***Health: Multivitamins for the children***

***Given the remote distance of most of our projects also 4WD Vehicles, motorbikes and bicycles for teachers are important needs to further our projects.***

*We further emphasize the need to keep a special focus on children in plantations, , where education is seriously lacking in spite of strong efforts by some plantation companies towards sustainability.*

*One of the key factors is the RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil). The RSPO process has already caused a number of companies to start education for the children, but more action on this is still needed. In 2009 the UNICEF Representative participated with a strong speech at the RSPO roundtable to care for the children and the cause of children's education has come to the agenda of the RSPO.*

*Since 2010 we have received support from UNICEF and from the EU Delegation.*

*Also the RSPO is providing important support for our projects for the plantation children.*

*The children's cause needs strong champions.*

*We look forward to work also with other organizations about these issues for the benefit of thousands of children in Sabah and Malaysia.*

*Yours Sincerely*



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