



## **Aceh: Before the Tsunami**

### HISTORY

Before the tsunami, Aceh was a province of just over four million people, with 221,000 people resident in the capital Banda Aceh. The population is 99% Muslim, and Sharia law is applied in places. Politically, no overall party commands the Acehnese vote: support at the last election was divided between PPP (Aceh Besar, Barat, Selatan, Tengah) and Golkar (Aceh Tenggara, Utara, Singkil and Sabang), with pockets of support for PAN (Banda Aceh and Pidie). Only one district, Aceh Tenggara, voted PDI-P.

### DEVELOPMENT

At 67.7 years, life expectancy was above the national average (66.2), as were literacy rates (95.8% as opposed to the national 89.5%) and years spent in school (7.8, national rate 7.1)\*. Unemployment was 6.2%. Comparison with figures from 1999 show that Aceh was showing year on year improvements in all these areas.

### FIGURE FACT BOX

	1999	2002
Life Expectancy	67.6	67.7
Adult literacy rate	93.1	95.8
Mean years of schooling	7.2	7.8

### GENDER

Female literacy rates were 94.1%, compared to a national average of 85.7% and the percentage of women in senior official, managerial and technical staff positions was, at 45%, higher than in Jakarta (35%). The percentage of women overall in employment was also higher than Jakarta at 49% (Jakarta 36.6%).

### POVERTY

The indices show that Aceh was having some success in eradicating poverty, but major problems still existed. Some 48% of people had no access to clean water in 2002, an improvement on the 61.5% in 1999 but still below the national average of 44%, and a third of all households had no access to sanitation (national average 25 %). 35.2% of children under five were recorded as being under nourished in 2002, again considerably more than the national figure of 25.8% and no improvement on 1999 (35.6%). There were also particular problems in areas affected by the conflict with GAM, which also meant there was an existing issue with internally displaced persons prior to the tsunami.

## HEALTH

Health access was a major problem, with 38% having no access to health facilities, a figure that had actually marginally increased since 1999 (37.6%) and well below the national average of 23.1%. Infant mortality, while below the national average of 43.5 per 1000, was still 36.1 and nearly a quarter of the population (24.6%) was recorded as having health problems.

In terms of future development, there are two major messages to take from these figures. One is that even without the tsunami, Aceh was a province with urgent development needs. The other is that the vast amounts of money, resources and international support flowing into the region present an opportunity to improve the lives of the Acehnese people in the long term. There is huge potential for the reconstruction of the province post-tsunami to lead not to the restoration of Aceh as it was before December 26<sup>th</sup>, but to a province-wide improvement in the quality of life.

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**\*All figures are taken from UNDP's National Human Development Report, "The Economics of Democracy," published in 2004. The full report is available from UNDP's website at <http://www.undp.or.id/pubs/ihdr2004/index.asp>**