

STUDY SUMMARY BRIEF



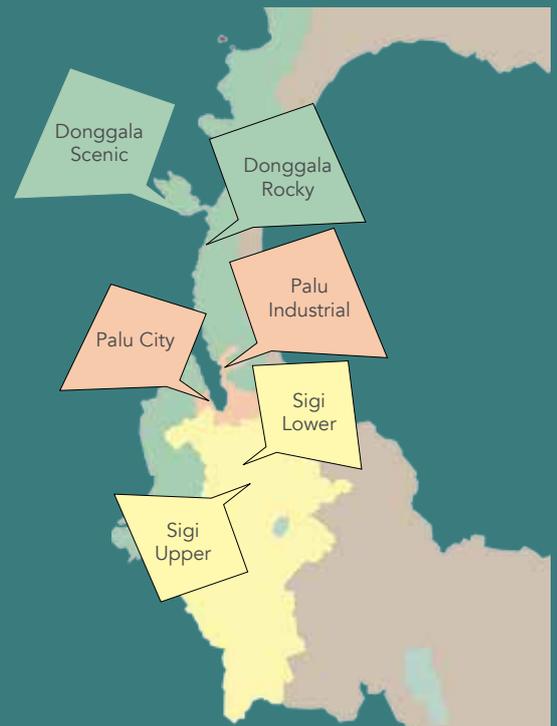
'Let's get back to our routine'

Listening to Children

affected by the Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami

The six key messages children shared are that:

- » They want a sense of normalcy restored as soon as possible - routines that fill the day and make them feel positive. This means proper school hours and lessons (albeit in temporary locations), provision of play and 'hanging out' space, and structured activities (younger children) or structured opportunities to help others and contribute to the recovery efforts.
- » They feel grateful to have survived and described stronger empathy, altruism and thoughtfulness toward others than before the earthquake.
- » They feel fearful and emotional at times but there seems to be limited understanding and awareness about appropriate recovery activities for children.
- » They need assurances that lessons are learned about the location and construction materials used in housing and facilities in the future.
- » They are eating less quantity and less diversity of food.
- » Adolescents receive less relief and support than primary-age children.



Why listen to children?

Children's experience of disasters differs from adults. They have priorities and needs that only they can accurately articulate. They have a right to participation. In order to respond better to their needs we must find ways to help them share their experiences, their feelings and their ideas for improvements.

Where did we go?

We selected two locations in each of three affected districts (Palu, Donggala and Sigi) based on secondary data which seeks to identify the more affected and disadvantaged areas. We intentionally selected both rural and urban locations and those on the coast and inland.

With whom did we interact?

A total of 244 children participated. 150 were primary-school age children (54% girls, 46% boys) and 94 secondary-school age adolescents (52% girls 48% boys). We also had opportunistic interactions with pregnant women and caregivers of small children to include their perspectives.

How we listened to them?

Our key principle was to put children at ease. So we emphasised playing with younger children and hanging out with adolescents in spaces they felt most comfortable in. This enabled us to simply chat, to get to know them and build trust. We started by asking small groups of friends to show us around each community and point out places that had changed

and begin to think about how they felt about these changes. Gradually, as trust was built, we introduced participatory activities to engage and explore issues further, always doing these in places where they felt uninhibited, safe and relaxed. The participatory activities included drawings of before and after the earthquake (younger children), photojournalism (adolescents), mapping emotions (all), animating puppets (younger children) or magazine cutouts (older children), acting out 'being the boss' and prioritizing needs. We were intentionally flexible about each activity and we facilitated many short interactions over several days to accommodate children's daily activities and recognizing short attention spans. Engaging children in hands-on activities created enthusiasm to participate, put them in the driving seat and moved away from conventional question-answer formats.

What children say are key changes they experience

1. Need for restoration of normalcy

Given that some time had elapsed between the earthquake and this study, both younger children and adolescents were keen to share that *'things are starting to feel normal again'* and that they are feeling better because of this. The loss of normalcy and the need to restore it as soon as possible was the most significant key change.

'Now we meet friends in school, that helps a lot'

(adolescent girl, 15, Palu City)

The most important element of feeling normal again is attending school. School is primarily a place to meet friends¹. Resumption of school provides an opportunity to interact with friends, get out of the home and return to some kind of routine. In some locations, particularly in Palu, children told us that quite a few of their friends have yet to return to school and that they are eager to see these friends again and feel it would be good for

1 Immersion studies carried out by Empatika across Indonesia have shown that children's motivation for going to school and choosing particular schools is primarily for friendship.

them to resume their routine.

Most children are attending school in temporary tents (provided through relief or community-constructed structures) with abbreviated hours and have yet to return to their normal lessons. Many say these tents are hot and crowded and teachers are often absent. Teaching resources are very limited. But this matters



Adolescent girls in Palu Industrial work on an Emotions Map to look at how their emotions have changed (with the dots indicating intensity) the past few months.



The 'sand hills' in Sigi Lower, one of the favorite areas in the community for younger children and adolescent girls despite being right next to the 'narrow river' which has caused bad flooding.

less than getting up each morning, preparing for school, spending hours together with friends and not being idle at home.

'We miss our regular school schedule'

(primary-age children, Donggala Scenic)

Children across locations were sad about the loss of their favorite play and hang out spaces. Like school, these places provided opportunities to get out of the home and interact with friends. In Donggala Scenic², an area formerly known as a place for leisure activities on the beach, younger children described how they had lost almost all of their favorite play areas including a small dock, their football field on the beach, the area of ketapang trees, and the community library. Only their volleyball field, located on higher ground, remains. The problem in some locations is not just earthquake and tsunami damage but occupation of former football fields and play areas by relief camps and temporary housing.

Adolescent boys have been able to establish new 'hang out' areas more easily than girls or younger children because of the greater freedom given to them to go around/outside of the community and their access to motorbikes. In some cases, adolescent girls have found that their parents have also become more protective and restrictive since displacement to camps or temporary accommodation. These issues are affecting girls' opportunities and space to socialize.

Children shared that the sense of normalcy is also restored through engaging in household chores. This, like school, provides routine but also provides something to do so that their time is occupied and they feel less bored. Adolescents repeatedly shared not having enough to do (especially as school time is short and study limited). For example, adolescent

² As shown on the cover map, we have used monikers for each location which correspond to contextual features about each community.



Adolescent girls and boys in Palu Industrial used to hang out at this now abandoned security post, which they said they've tried to keep clean but other people keep littering and even urinating there.



Across the locations, children's 'before' drawings often showed them doing some of their favourite activities and some of the places they liked to play. Many boys drew football fields where friendly matches might be taking place, while girls often focused on showing their old house and trees or flowers that they liked.

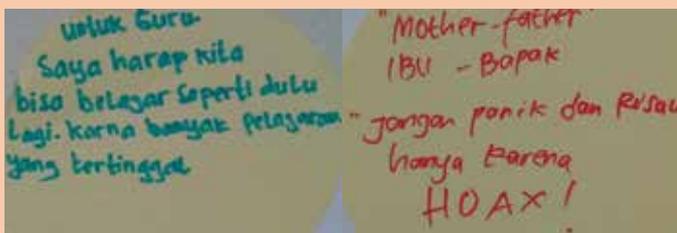
In this Sigi Upper girl's 'After' drawing (bottom left), she said she drew her house slanted because it collapsed during the earthquake. The right pair of drawings (before above, after below) is from a boy in Palu City.

girls in Sigi Upper felt they were, 'just doing the same things over and over again.' In their search for things to do, adolescent girls in Palu Industrial said they had joined a reproductive health information session which was actually targeted for mothers.

With school-related work and activities still limited, in many locations religious activities have filled part of this void for both younger children and adolescents. For example, children said they like to attend activities at the mosque or church (especially boys in Palu Industrial and Sigi Upper). This is providing something to do and structure to the day and many children shared that they felt they wanted to pray more than before the earthquake (especially girls in Palu City, Palu Industrial, and Donggala Scenic). Some described these activities as helping them feel better or fulfilling a need to become a better person after surviving the disaster.



Boys in Donggala Tourist chose a photo of the destroyed dock as a place they now don't like because it used to be one of their favorite hangout spaces and they are sad not to have it anymore.



Speech bubbles from adolescents in Palu City. On the left, a girl, 15, told teachers that, 'I hope we can study like before because we're behind in our lessons.' On the right, a boy, 14, asked his parents, 'Don't panic and worry only due to a hoax!'

2. Increased feelings of altruism

Another key change children shared relates to how they see relationships. Children in all locations shared how they had become more aware of others since the earthquake, especially others' needs and how they were coping with their situations. They recognized that their parents were facing hardships, describing their busyness and preoccupation around their homes including stress and a tendency to get angry more easily. Some children shared their parent's anxieties that they had not been able to return to their former livelihood routines yet like fishing or cultivation. Other children were concerned specifically about difficulties faced due to loss of income earning opportunities. Children and adolescents talked about purposely giving their parents space and seeking out their friends when their parents are getting angry or being 'grumpy'. Children also noted that some support for their parents is absent. For example, children in the Donggala locations said that healthcare services were now more limited such as in Donggala Rocky where the midwife has not returned yet.

'Everyday there's instant noodles. Morning or afternoon or night, there must be one meal with noodles'

(adolescent girl, 16, Palu City)

Children's enhanced awareness of others also extended to their friends. The change they described is one of greater appreciation of friendships and the need to nurture these friendships. Playing and hanging out together makes them feel better. For example, adolescent girls (Palu Industrial) shared that they have realized they used to spend a lot of time watching TV instead of being with their friends but now see the latter makes them feel happier. They appreciate friendship

How are mothers feeling?

Mothers often told us that, just as children shared, they were more stressed than before the earthquake. They told us this was due to money worries - 'money's not yet stable,' and fatigue dealing with the 'mess' left behind after the earthquake and tsunami and all the additional chores, such as fetching water. Some mothers admitted that they tend to get angry more quickly now, with a mother in Donggala Scenic explaining that this is because, 'my mind feels so heavy.'

more as described by younger children (Donggala Scenic) who shared that they don't get as angry with their friends as they did before the earthquake and have realized that 'we need to take care of each other.' Here they also talked about rebuilding their homes along the main village road where friends already are and not 'too far and (where) we would be lonely.

3. Eating less and less variety

Related to this increased awareness, children across locations talked about how they are eating less food and adolescents in particular felt they could help their parents by limiting their food intake. Children also talked about eating less because they were tired of the limited variety of food and many shared how they were sick of eating instant noodles.

Breastfeeding mothers in the Sigi locations shared that although they supplemented breastfeeding with formula milk before the earthquake they do so with more frequency now since they are getting free formula milk.

4. Feeling fearful and emotional

While many children shared that they often feel happy being able to play with friends and having some of their routine back to normal, some shared that is hard to be completely happy again with the uncertainty of their situation. Their main worries were about where they are going to live, when their parents will be able to earn again and some adolescents worried if they would be able to catch up in school. Some noted 'fast and frequent changes' in their emotions, where they might spend the day happily hanging around with their friends only to suddenly feel sad before going to sleep. Children, particularly adolescents, also talked about feeling 'miserable' and 'hopeless' because their parents got angry more easily.

Some shared that they felt pressured to 'move on'. For example, adolescent girls in Sigi Lower said they never tell their teachers about their feelings because 'our teachers just tell us "don't be sad".' In Palu City, some adolescents have internalized this and exhort their own friends to 'move on', particularly those who haven't yet returned to school.



Children in Palu Industrial work on 'Before and After' drawings to show how their lives and communities have changed.

'I want to have sessions like this, where I can share my feelings and not to be laughed at'

(adolescent boy, 16, Sigi Upper)

Both younger children and adolescents shared that they still frequently feel scared about the possibility of another earthquake, tsunami and flash floods. These worries are exacerbated by the rumours and hoaxes that are spread especially through social media, particularly in the Palu locations. These include fake earthquake warnings and other predictions. Even though many have realized these are hoaxes, adolescents shared that they cannot reassure their parents who still panic and ask the family to pack up and leave.

'My parents asked us to pack up our things late at night [because of the hoax]'

(adolescent girl, 15, Palu City. A boy said his parents have done the same.)

Meeting Children's Needs

Unsurprisingly given the importance attached to resuming school routine, children wanted the resources they feel are needed for normal school-going, less for their educational value and more for their symbolic contribution to restoring normalcy. Although some children and especially adolescents were concerned about falling behind with school work and about exams, the main issue for most children was resumption of school routine and being able to interact with peers and enjoy friendship. Both younger children and adolescents prioritized school supplies and equipment that would make school feel like school-going before the disaster. This means that they were particularly concerned about uniforms and shoes – having the correct regulation uniform was strongly enforced by teachers in schools before the earthquake and they worried about the possible disciplinary actions that teachers might take if they did not dress properly. Having proper uniforms endorses the need for children for conformity and reduces embarrassment of being singled out as different.

Adolescent boys and girls with more concerns about resuming their old life, maintaining image and their own agency expressed needs for personal items like toiletries, clothing and gadgets. Where relief items are pre-decided or are provided as a 'free for all', they feel they have little choice. Some adolescent girls in particular shared that they would like to be able to choose the brands that they like and shoes and clothes that they prefer.

Increased feelings for each other means that children want to spend more time with their friends than before. This in turn indicates that children want full-time school not truncated hours and they want places



A mango tree prepared by adolescent boys in Donggala Scenic as part of discussing their primary needs. Items placed higher up are felt to be more difficult to fulfill while lower items are considered the easiest. Items in the basket are those which have already been fulfilled.

where they can play and hang out together outside of the home. Child-friendly spaces that are provided by relief agencies as a norm within the camps are not being effectively utilised. There is scope to share these dedicated spaces more collaboratively among different organisations not just when there are structured activities but also for play and for adolescent girls in particular to hang out safely. Adolescents could be encouraged to arrange their own activities independently of outside facilitation, for example older children could run play and learning activities for smaller children.

Children also want to be able to express their concern for others by helping out their families and communities. Many children emphasized that they have already been helping a lot. For example, younger children in Donggala Scenic were glad to help out their families although they felt tired from helping out with so many chores around their homes. Children in Palu Industrial said that they realized that taking care of their younger siblings was more important now because their parents are 'busy worrying about other things.' Adolescent boys in Sigi Upper were



In Donggala Rocky, adolescents said they like this structure which was acting as their temporary mosque because it doesn't get as hot so is more comfortable to play in compared to school tents, the child-friendly space tent, or other tents in the community that are now empty.

proud of helping immediately after the earthquake clearing debris and helping to find bodies. However, adolescents in particular felt sidelined from being able to provide ongoing assistance. For example adolescent boys in Sigi Lower and Donggala Rocky said they really wanted help their communities during the recovery process but they didn't really know how to go about this.

'Because we have so much free time now, we end up playing girls games as well'

(adolescent boys, Palu Industrial)

Children particularly valued the process we used to interact with them as they told us that it is rare for them to talk about their emotions. Although adolescent boys in particular initially found it somewhat difficult to discuss their feelings, many said they liked the experience. A boy in Sigi Upper told us that he would like the opportunity to have more sessions *'like this'*, in a supportive environment where he wouldn't be made to feel self-conscious about his feelings. Response to these needs has been tightly defined to date, confined to very active group-based activities in some locations to one-off activities such as a presentation on 'what is trauma and how can you deal with it' in others. This indicates limited understanding and awareness about appropriate recovery activities for children. Some of the fun and relaxation activities we used seemed to meet at least some of children's need for time to de-stress.

Children also expressed emotional concerns about being stigmatized as relief beneficiaries, such as adolescents who described being given heavily used and sometimes ill-fitting clothes. Children in Palu were especially conscious of the fact that some of the them were severely affected by the earthquake and tsunami while others had hardly been affected at all. Rather than having targeted programs which single them out, emphasising play and activities where both those affected and those who were less affected

can participate together could reduce this kind of emotional distress.

The emotional anxiety caused by mis-information and hoaxes, especially in Palu but also by in Sigi Upper and Donggala Scenic needs to be recognised. Children need reassurance and improved information which could also include basic measures such as installing a simple messaging board in communities.

There is increased concern about the future and consequently need for assurances that communities would be better prepared if anything like the earthquake and tsunami happens again. Children talked about the need to feel physically safe. They hoped that future buildings would be constructed of wood rather than concrete or in other ways be less likely to cause injury if they collapsed. They talked about rebuilding away from the coast such as in the hills where it was safer. Some talked about wanting to re-build where it was accessible and close to other friends, for example along main connecting roads.

In general, it seems that adolescents have received less support both from within their communities and from outside parties and donors, and some noted that primary-age children tended to be prioritized for aid such as school supplies and equipment. Adolescents described frustrations with the distribution of aid in their communities, particularly for items like used clothing which they said had not been done in a fair or organized way. Adolescents stand to lose more from disruption in their education than primary school children because they may have to retake or delay exams, potentially increasing pressure to opt out of school as they (or parents) feel they are too old to continue school or that they need to earn an income. Given these issues the apparent prioritization of assistance to primary school children over secondary school children is questionable.



Children in Sigi Lower show researchers around their community, pointing out important places and things they like and don't like.