

Author's note: This is written for a local English speaking newspaper to give an overview of what SIJ Club members are doing.

Small Club, Big Heart.

How a small group of women can make a big difference.

January 13, 2005

On the night of January 7, 2005 a huge 25M3 capacity truck rolled out of the British International School campus, headed for Aceh, heavily laden to its full capacity with the combined donations organized by Soroptimist International of Jakarta and the British International School community.

All of this started when Soroptimist International of Jakarta, a small community service club of 17 professional women called an emergency meeting after seeing the news on TV about the tsunami the day after Christmas.

Even before knowing the full extent of the devastation and the loss of lives in Aceh (at that time estimated at "only" 4000) the Club decided that they had to do something to help. One of the club members, Lily Kasoem decided to go to Aceh with her daughter, Amanda (22) immediately. Club members put together 6 boxes of used clothing, medicine and medical supplies that can be carried by two persons. Lily and Amanda arrived in Aceh 4 days after the Tsunami and the next day managed to reach an isolated group of survivors about 40 kilometers outside Banda Aceh. They were the first outsiders these survivors have seen in 5 days since the tsunami. Meanwhile club members donated their own money and then sent out appeals to friends, contacts in Jakarta and throughout the world for more donations of clothes, food, medicine and funds.

Upon their return to Jakarta on New Year's Day, Lily and Amanda reported to the club their harrowing experiences during the 3 days in Aceh. Amanda wrote a 6-page personal account. Amanda's story ("*Apocalypse Now: 3 days in Aceh, 4 days after*") was sent out to friends and contacts who in turn forwarded to others. Along with Amanda's story was included a description of what the SI Jakarta club has decided to do i.e. to help a local community to rebuild their village social and "concrete" infrastructure. The project is dubbed "**Adopt a village**" Program.

The response to the appeal and Amanda's story was overwhelming: 25 cubic-meters of donation of clothes, medicine, medical supplies and food; and over US\$27,000 were collected in 6 days. And 2 days later it stands at US\$35,000 and keeps increasing as I write. The donations came from NZAID Jakarta, Beiersdorf Indonesia, The British International School, World-Wide Movers, Hilton Munich/International, many individual donors and of course from the Soroptimist clubs from all over the globe.

The recovery, healing of the village community and the rebuilding of the village infrastructure is going to take a huge, coordinated, and well-planned strategy and implementation. At the meeting to present to donors the efforts and achievements of the club on January 11th, Julie showed an inspiring PowerPoint Slide Show to the song "Heal the World" which had impressed the donors and guests. At the meeting Yanti Nisro, SI Jakarta National Representative said "*It will take much longer than two-three years to rebuild the community. And it's going to take much more than US\$27,000. But*

this is just a good start. SI Jakarta is committed to be there for the long haul.” Julie Marsaban, Honorary Secretary added: “We are only a small club -- all volunteers, but ironically, it is because of that fact that some donors chose to help us, rest assured that we don’t have a huge administrative overhead and that we are all committed. Meanwhile the truck that left Jakarta last Friday is just arriving in Medan as I speak. Lily, Yanti and Amanda will meet the truck in Banda Aceh tomorrow.”

Lily was not able to attend that meeting because she was not well due to exhaustion and had to rest up for pre-dawn start the next morning. We were worried about her but she insisted on going.

One of the objectives of the January 11 meeting, attended by 7 SIJ members and 25 guests, was to recruit new members. At the end of the meeting, 7 guests signed up to learn more about Soroptimism, hoping to join. Meanwhile boxes of donations continue to come to the drop off points. SIJ and BIS are preparing a new truck load of essentials, food/drink etc. for the next shipment.



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