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## Aceh Government to Go It Alone

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The Aceh Provincial Government will single-handedly oversee the completion of the tsunami recovery process as the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Council has effectively completed its four-year mandate, Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf said in Jakarta on Thursday.

"However, the council has finished 90 percent of the process and our part is not really too difficult," Irwandi added.

The governor said that the provincial government was planning to spend Rp 9 trillion (\$828 million) next year on the rehabilitation program that was implemented after the 2004 tsunami, which killed more than 168,000 Indonesians.

He said the major part of the local government's spending would go on education and job creation.

"Around Rp 2 trillion will be used to handle unemployment problems," Irwandi said.

The expiration of the Council's term brings to a close a number of projects, which have been a much-needed source of income for many local Indonesians, the governor said.

"Though many of the workers are not from Aceh, the projects have provided many people with a living," Irwandi said.

In a bid to tackle chronic unemployment in the province, 15,000 hectares has also been set aside for agriculture because "most Acehnese make a living from the agricultural sector," Irwandi said.

"From 2006 up until now, we have successfully reduced the level of unemployment from 48.5 percent to 23.3 percent," he said.

"Rp 1.6 trillion will be used for education. We are committed to saving 20 percent of the total budget for education," he said.

"There are now hundreds of Acehnese studying abroad to get postgraduate degrees," Irwandi added.

However, the governor said that permanent housing was still in short supply.

Although the council had said most of the tsunami-affected Acehese people had been re-housed, about 3,000 still live in barracks, Irwandi said.

Making matters worse, the governor said that some of barracks had been occupied by people from other provinces. He said that he had asked the central government to provide alternative accommodation for them.

"There are people from North Sumatra who came to Aceh and said that they were victims of the tsunami, but they cannot prove that they are Acehese," he said.

"They cannot speak the Acehese language."

He added that the current economic slowdown had affected funding and that "some of the investors who previously pledged to invest [in Aceh] have gone."

However, the provincial government will still receive funding from the World Bank and the Multi Donor Fund, or MDF, which is backed by a number of nations and international financial institutions, the governor said.

Funds totaling \$692 million will be used by local authorities to continue the rehabilitation process up to 2012, with the National Planning and Development Board managing the fund, Irwandi said.

Multi Donor Fund director Shamima Khan said that her organization would try to ensure further development was sustainable.

"Though it is not easy for the government, even if it takes time and effort, it is important to carry on maintaining the assets that have been transferred to the [provincial] government," Shamima said.

She said the management of infrastructure such as roads and the sewerage system was now under the control of the local authority.