

She picks clams to save money for school.

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FREE time for Endang S. Taurina is not spent playing computer games, unlike for many children her age.

Instead, when the tide is low, the 10-year-old girl picks clams at the fishing village in Sungai Kecil, Bintan, where she lives.

The clams are sold to the villagers.

She saves the money she gets, hoping to use it for her university education when she is older, she says.

Endang wants to be either a teacher or a doctor when she grows up.

"I want to help more children.

"I can do this by becoming a teacher or a doctor," she says.

On weekends and after school, her time is filled with household chores and helping her 36-year-old mother keep an eye on her three younger siblings.

Still, the soft-spoken girl considers herself lucky to still be able to attend school despite the hardship her family faces.

Endang is one of the beneficiaries of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (Unifem) Singapore Chapter's education project, which hopes to put as many children in the Riau island back to school as possible (see other story).

The chapter was established in January last year to help women and children in the developing world who are living in poverty to help themselves.

Made up of volunteers from various professions, including doctors and dentists, Unifem has organised several trips to Bintan island in Indonesia's Riau archipelago to provide free medical and dental services.

Last Friday, at the launch of the one-year-old Singapore Chapter of Unifem, Endang spoke to some 150 guests about the difficulties faced by Indonesian children during the economic recession.

She also thanked Unifem Singapore for making it possible for her to continue her education at the village school in Sungei Kecil, where she lives.

She is the fifth child in a family of eight children. The youngest is a three-year-old girl and the eldest, an 18-year-old boy.

Endang's brother Indra, eight, is also a beneficiary of the project.

It is not just the economic recession that the family has to suffer.

Endang says in her soft voice that her father left the family eight months ago.

Her mother, Madam Sarinah, not only has to feed the family of eight children, but also take care of two of her late sister's children.

Speaking in Indonesian, Madam Sarinah, who accompanied Endang on the visit here, which was paid by the Bintan Resort Management, says: "I sell vegetables grown by neighbours and do cleaning jobs for people to earn some money to buy food for the family.

"Life is hard, but all my children try to help out wherever possible."