



### Indonesia: Job retraining key to construction in Aceh

**Meulaboh, Aceh, September 2005** - By nine o'clock in the morning, the Mulia Hati centre in Meulaboh on the west coast of Aceh, Indonesia, is buzzing - literally. The whirring of tens of sewing machines is so loud it makes talking hard, though the women communicate with smiles and gestures. In the main room, others lay out sheets of material in the familiar Indonesian school uniform colours of white and dark red while their children play outside.

The women are at Mulia Hati, a centre for women's employment and support operated by Samaritan's Purse and funded by UNDP that opened just a few weeks ago but has already become a second home to the women working here. Eight months after the tsunami, signs of change and renewal in Aceh are becoming clearer by the day. Houses are going up, children are back in school and even those still in temporary housing are starting to return to work.

UNDP, which initially supported short-term employment through a cash-for-work programme that employed people on short-term contracts to do manual labour as a way of handling the clean-up process and getting money directly back into the economy, has now shifted its focus toward long-term employment opportunities. A key part of this is skills training.

While many people in Aceh are looking for work - the tsunami swept away many food stalls and shops that supported them - the vast rebuilding task facing Aceh needs huge quantities of skilled manual labour. In many families the main breadwinner was killed and other family members must try and find employment to support the rest of the family. Women who lost their husbands have particularly struggled to support their families. To address these needs, UNDP has supported a range of programmes. The Mulia Hati centre in Meulaboh has been set up to specifically cater to the needs of women. The centre is training women in tailoring techniques - at present they are making much needed school uniforms - and catering: the Mulia Hati Café, which opened at the start of August, is doing a roaring trade in tuna steaks and chicken burritos. There is also a walk-in women's counselling centre to help support the many women who are not only still traumatized by the tsunami, but have also the networks of female friends who used to provide vital emotional support.

Kartini, 30, a tailor, says she's been working at the Mulia Hati centre since the start of August. "I made clothes professionally before the tsunami - I lived in Kampong Padang Seurahe with my husband and our two children and I had a good business with lots of loyal customers. We lost our village in the tsunami, and my husband and one of my children died. Now I live in a tent with my brothers, Rima, my four year old daughter, and my baby Rafi Karanda - I was five months pregnant when the tsunami hit." Working at Mulia Hati, she says, lets her earn money and "also gets us out of the IDP camp environment."

"We live very closely together there and it's stressful - and there are so many memories of what happened. Eventually though I would like to start my business again. It's easier to manage childcare and a profession if you work at home, and I liked making clothes for my customers."

Down the road at the ILO Job and Training centre, a team of men at their bricklaying class is practicing new skills on a wall behind the office. These not only provide a means to earn an

income, but will also provide Aceh with much-needed labour for the reconstruction effort as it continues to move up a gear. Aceh is desperately short of the thousands of skilled workers - builders, brick makers, plumbers, welders, etc. - who are needed to handle the huge job of rebuilding the province. Over three days, these men will learn the essential skills of bricklaying - enough for them to find vital employment.

Kurnia, who worked as a radio installation worker for 11 years, found there was no demand for his skills. "I had to find something else to do," he says. "I applied for some positions with international NGOs working in Meulaboh, but I didn't hear anything back. So I decided to sign up for this three-day training course in bricklaying at the ILO job centre. It's not necessarily what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I really need a job and the biggest market at the moment is in construction. There are plenty of openings in Meulaboh now, so I'm confident that once I've learned these basic skills, I can pick up a job easily."

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