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FIRST PERSON

Clean-up Efforts Create Jobs and Hope

Cash-for-work program creates jobs and helps rebuild communities



Photo: Debbie Tomasowa, Mercy Corps

After losing her home, two older sisters, a nephew and a niece to the tsunami, Ainul Mardiah joined a USAID cash-for-work crew. “I really enjoy working here because I’m here with friends... instead of just thinking about the water on that day,” she said.

Her colorful, loosely fitting clothes do not seem to restrict Ainul Mardiah from moving around, scooping dirt and other trash off the ground. A 50 year-old single woman from Miruk Lamreudeup in Indonesia’s Aceh Besar area, Ainul joined 200 men and women in one of USAID’s cash-for-work programs to clean up the village, which was devastated by the December 2004 earthquake and tsunami.

“I lost my two elder sisters, one nephew and one niece,” she said. “I lost everything in the earthquake as well, including my house in this area.” Then she suddenly smiled and bashfully pointed to her bright colored shirt, saying that the clothes she wears are not even hers.

“You see this?” She pulled part of her skirt up enthusiastically to reveal a long dry scar on her leg. Ainul explained that she tried to escape the water by catching a ride on a passing truck already filled with people. “This is because I fell when I lost grip when we were running with many people to catch the truck,” she said. “People were running all over the place... in many different directions! It was so confusing.”

It was Ainul’s third day cleaning what used to be part of Miruk Lamreudeup. Chatter and laughter are commonly heard at the site these days. “I really enjoy working here because I’m here with friends,” Ainul said. “It’s refreshing! Instead of just thinking about the water on that day.”

She admitted that she is tired, but she is happy to be able to work again. “What I earn here is not too much, but it’s good enough for now,” Ainul explained.

USAID employs 15,000 people in Aceh province in cash-for-work programs that will benefit 75,000 people.