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**THAILAND**

# FIRST PERSON

## Widowed Mother Becomes Breadwinner

**A woman who lost her husband and one son now lives off a small business**



Photo: USAID/Suzanne Ross

Taptim Boonluang with her remaining son in Kampuan village, in Suk Samran district, seven days after the tsunami.

***“Members of the woman’s group are all working many jobs to earn a living. The small business fund helps us buy equipment that frees up our time to produce and sell more products,” said Taptim Boonluang.***

Seven days after the December 2004 tsunami devastated coastal Thailand, Taptim Boonluang stood at the edge of Kampuan village’s waterway to the sea, dazed as she surveyed pieces of boats that had smashed into the shoreline. Before the tsunami, her wooden slatted home and hundreds of homes like hers, stood solidly on the canal embankments ready to receive fisherman and their payloads. Taptim’s husband and eldest son had perished as their boat was crushed in the mass of water and debris. With her youngest son clutching her side, Taptim hardly knew where to turn or what to do.

Although the government vowed to provide scholarships to children whose parents died in the Tsunami, this was little comfort for Taptim. Her burdens were great: with two critically injured elderly parents needing long term health care, she was not sure she could support her family without having her remaining son leave school to work. Taptim’s prospects seemed dim, but she knew she had to try to rebuild her life and keep her son in school.

Within a year, Taptim was well on the road to economic recovery. She had been elected as Secretary of her village’s revolving loan fund. Members of the fund received training from USAID in better business practices, from market assessments to financial accounting, forecasting, and reinvestment. The training helped the loan recipients establish quality control standards that ensured consistency in their products for larger scale distribution.

On December 15, 2005, Taptim was producing snacks with eight others for the upcoming Tsunami commemoration in Phuket. While rolling sweet sesame crisps over a griddle she described how the loan and other business activities helped her become her family’s primary breadwinner. She was in good company — other women who received loans from the revolving fund were also earning enough income to support their families alone.

Taptim misses her husband and eldest son tremendously, but she is doing everything to make sure her son can complete his education and, someday, support a family of his own.