



## SUCCESS STORY

# Rebuilding Aceh Democratically

### Tsunami victims rebuild communities, physically and emotionally



Photo: USAID/Virginia L. Foley

Halim, a community facilitator, helps Aceh villagers establish the Lampu'uk Recovery Center, identifying long-term goals while looking towards rebuilding.

***“Our training taught us to have a positive outlook rather than be negative looking,” said one woman who participated in a USAID program to help villages rebuild after the tsunami.***

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In 2004, a devastating tsunami hit Indonesia's Aceh region. People fled to the hills for safety. Those who survived returned home to destroyed villages. In Lampu'uk, a small fishing village near Banda Aceh, the damaged mosque was the only thing standing. Although the government told Indonesians to stay away from the village until it was safe to return, residents insisted on returning. Relief groups arrived and helped remove the rubble, bury the dead, burn trash, and collect materials to rebuild houses. They also brought food, rice, and tools. Former Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton heard about the effort and came to see the village, further motivating the villagers to continue their recovery efforts.

After helping the village with its initial clean-up, USAID launched a program in Lampu'uk and 56 other villages to help communities continue to rebuild. USAID helped them form planning committees that included a village leader, a religious leader, youth representatives, women, and experts on subjects such as agriculture, health, and farming. USAID provided training in empowerment and leadership as well as in evaluating needs and designing a long-term reconstruction plan. The committee identified and documented the community's top priorities and drafted a plan for rebuilding. Villagers reviewed the plan and signed a pledge to help it come to fruition. USAID's effort gave people hope that they could indeed rebuild much of what was lost. One woman commented, “You learned that when you fail, not to give up. Our training taught us to have a positive outlook rather than to be negative.”

The villagers' hard work was soon evident. They secured cash to build fencing. They built a new storage tank where they could store clean water. Entrepreneurs took out small loans to restart their businesses. Villagers collected coconuts on the beach to grow seedlings to replace the trees that had been destroyed.

USAID's training effort helped empower villagers to define their own goals and resolve conflicts. The villagers from Lampu'uk and elsewhere appreciate their new skills, and when disagreements or problems arise, they know what needs to be done — and they have the skills and tools to make it happen.