

## Tsunami: Aceh Widows Begin Rebuilding

A bottle of lemon squash was all that remained of AisyahSabi's food stall in front of her home near the beach in the Indonesian province of Aceh.

The devastating walls of water from last December's tsunami cut short Sabi's efforts to become an entrepreneur and lift her out of poverty.

Her stall and her home were completely wiped out.

"So I don't know what to do now. Go home? There is no home. Work? But I don't have anything anymore," Sabi says. "All I have is my uncertainty."

Two years ago, Sabi joined PEKKA—the Woman Headed Household Empowerment Program—after her husband was killed in Aceh's armed conflict. She turned to the group for help after struggling to raise two young children on her own in a community where widows often have few opportunities, little support and almost no voice.

It was only a few weeks before the tsunami that Sabi received a small loan from PEKKA to buy goods for her stall.

The PEKKA program, which is part of the World Bank sponsored Kecamatan Development Project in Indonesia, aims to address the needs of widows and women living in areas of conflict by providing training and small scale loans. Sabi's story is featured in a [PEKKA-produced video](#) which dramatically documents the effects of the tsunami on the people of Aceh. It shows the devastation left behind, the rows of tents survivors now live in, and the battle to clean up and begin again.

Now with only a single bottle of lemon squash left, Sabi is trying to work out how to pick up the pieces of the life she once lived.

Her answer is to try again and set up shop—but this time at her younger sister's home. So every day, after prayers, Sabi can be seen wandering through the rubble left after the tsunami searching for

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## VIDEO



[View PEKKA video about the people of Aceh](#)

## IT'S A FACT

Widowed women living in war torn regions are among the poorest of Indonesia's 28 million people living in poverty. In a number of villages in Aceh, 40% of the households living on less than \$1 a day are headed by women.

any usable wood.

The tsunami claimed the lives of about 14 widows, who had been members of PEKKA.

While the trauma runs deep for many, Nani Zuliminarni, the national coordinator of PEKKA says the future is especially daunting for the surviving widows.

"There are some villages which were totally damaged, so all the people must be moved," she says. "They've lost their previous community systems and particularly for women who are heads of households, well, they are on their own."

Zuliminarni says for these women, the feelings of sorrow, isolation and trauma can't be shared, making it even harder psychologically.

With the recovery and reconstruction effort now underway, the PEKKA program is working to help the widows and also other community members in affected areas.

"Our efforts are starting from providing cash money for them, to buy daily foods and re-start their economic activities," Zuliminarni says.

"We also plan to help them rebuild their houses, provide scholarships for their children and contribute in the process of building public facilities for the affected areas."

## THINK ABOUT IT

PEKKA helps widowed women overcome isolation by providing them with job training and small scale loans. One initiative was to provide women with cameras so they could become photographers.

Until the PEKKA program started in 1999, no development project in Indonesia had ever worked with widows—let alone widows in areas of large scale civil conflict.

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Other members of PEKKA in parts of the country not directly affected have also been rallying to the cause, Zuliminarni says. For instance, some women have invited widows from Aceh to stay with them in their own poor homes, providing food and helping with cooking.

"The widows groups in other provinces also help them by collecting money, cent by cent, for their friends in Aceh," Zuliminarni says. "We only have limited funding."