



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY FOCUSES ON WOMEN IN DISASTERS

In the aftermath of the tsunami, International Women's Day (March 8<sup>th</sup>) 2005 takes the theme in Asia, "Rebuilding Women's Lives in the Aftermath of Disaster".

There is no gender breakdown of the victims of the tsunami; it devastated the lives of millions of people in Asia, regardless of sex, age, colour or income. But its longer-term effects hit women particularly hard.

ILO research shows that disasters tend to sharpen existing inequalities. The chaos and disorder that follows such catastrophes leaves women and girls vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse. Poor socio-economic standing means they may not be able to get the relief aid and resources they need or voice their needs when decisions are made about their future. The death or injury of a male breadwinner forces them to accept dual roles, as the family income earner as well as the main carer for children, the elderly and the sick. At the same time a lack of skills and work experience puts women and girls at especial risk of trafficking, prostitution, debt bondage, and other kinds of exploitation.

Yet, given the chance, women have a crucial role to play in post-tsunami rebuilding. They can drive recovery, not just of physical infrastructure but of families and communities.

In response to the particular strengths and needs of women the ILO established a skills development project for women from the two affected villages, teaching them incense stick (*agarbatti*) production. The traditional occupation of the people of Pudupattinam and Oyailikkupam was fishing and after the tsunami they had no other skills to fall back on. The women from these fishing communities were looking for new and alternative ways to generate income.

The initial training session attracted nearly 100 women from the two villages. A core group of 50 women were selected for a five-day skills-training programme in early February. The programme resulted in the successful establishment of a pilot *agarbatti* training-and-production unit in Pudupattinam village. Currently, about 100 women are producing an average of 32kgs of incense sticks per day. The Indian National Rural



Labour Federation (INRLF), an ILO project partner, has contributed to the success of this initiative by providing technical and marketing support through its women members from Vellore district.

Encouraged by this success the ILO will launch the second all-woman skills development unit in the tsunami-affected Pudupattinam Fisher Kuppam, Kalpakkam, Kancheepuram District. The launch will take place on 8 March, as part of the activities to mark International Women's Day .