

Lilis Suryani: “I want to share my knowledge and skills with my communities”

Lilis Suryani works on the family owned farm in Bulasat village in South Pagai, Mentawai Islands, North Sumatra. Lilis's family does not live in this village, but as the farm needed taken care of, Lilis, the oldest child, was sent to Bulasat village to manage the farm, which helps to financially support her parents and siblings. Lilis not only runs the farm business but she also runs a daily needs business.

The aftermath of the tsunami had significant impact on her and her family's livelihood. It became very difficult to attain a decent income as the residents from her village had relocated to higher ground, leaving their previous jobs in Bulasat village and resulting in a profit decrease. The tsunami not only affected her farm and daily needs business but affected her family's income from fishing.

On the 25th of October 2010, the islands were hit by an earthquake 78 km southwest of Pagai Selatan Mentawai, West Sumatra, with a magnitude of 7.2 SR and a depth of 10 km. Minutes later, this earthquake was followed by a tsunami and a series of aftershocks. These events have resulted in severe damages and losses to the population residing in the Mentawai Islands. Four sub-districts have been directly affected by the earthquake and tsunami: Pagai Selatan, Pagai Utara, Sipora Selatan, and Sikakap. Around 509 people were killed, 17 wounded, 21 were missing, and 11,425 people were displaced.

As a result of the tsunami and earthquake and the dominance of the agricultural and fishery sectors, many people in affected communities have lost their income source as fishing equipment were washed away, harvests were disrupted, and more importantly displaced people were taken away from their prior livelihood sources and have had to start over.

Before the tsunami, Lilis' father would supplement the family income by catching and selling fish. Though after the tsunami had struck, her father stopped fishing because of personal trauma from the tsunami, her father was too afraid to go back in the ocean. In the fisheries sub sector, 1,936 residents are reported to have a loss of livelihood not to mention the reduced supply of marine fishery of about 328.51 tons. In total, 2,072 households that had been affected by the tsunami in addition to households living in high risk areas were relocated to the 11 relocation areas in the land sites. The tourism sector, which is the second largest sector in Mentawai, also incurred losses, though to a lesser extent of 10.6 percent.

When Lilis heard about the ILO's light meals training program, she jumped at the prospect as there are currently no light meal producers in her community. Considering the abundance of natural resources in the Mentawai Islands, the main goal of the light meals trainings is to help the community move forward by equipping the residents with the necessary training and tools which would enable them to further explore the development of these resources.

“When I heard about this training opportunity, I just quickly grabbed this once in a life time opportunity,” said Lilis. She joined the training program as a means to not only develop her skills and knowledge, but to also employ this opportunity in a manner which would benefit her community. “After my training, I wish to invite young jobless women from my community to learn the tools of the trade. I want share my knowledge and skills that I gained from the light meals trainings with my community. They can produce light meals to be sold to other nearby towns in Mentawai, like Sikakap and Tua Pejat city that, in turn, will improve their living conditions and income.” (*)