

Sri Lanka



Photo: IWDA

Empowering women to rebuild lives after the tsunami

The Boxing Day Tsunami left an estimated 500,000 people homeless and displaced in Sri Lanka. IWDA's five-year reconstruction fund focuses on some of the most vulnerable survivors – women.

Our local project partner is the grassroots women's organisation, Kantha Shakthi, and the reconstruction program is focused on the badly affected Hambantota and Matara districts, in southern Sri Lanka. The first priority is to help women cope with their grief and trauma and create support networks.

Five Kantha Shakthi field workers – or 'social mobilisers' – have received intensive training in grief and trauma counselling. The social mobilisers go from door to door and speak to women individually. The primary aim is to help women overcome their grief and resolve day to

day issues. It is also a data collection process – a way to identify their ongoing needs.

Kantha Shakthi's Director, Rohini Weerasinghe, says response to the mobilisers has been very positive and encouraging. But, as Rohini says, their biggest challenge is the uncertainty and fear.

Mobilisers have helped affected women to form village-level community discussion groups. The aim is to build solidarity among women, so they can work together to tackle their problems.

Long-term support is crucial to rebuilding lives devastated by the tsunami; that's why Kantha Shakthi's next priority is to help affected women develop their livelihoods through peer supported savings groups.

“Kantha Shakthi staff have given affected people a real sense of hope and confidence, that they can rebuild their lives, and even have an opportunity to improve them.”

Rohini Weerasinghe, Director of Kantha Shakthi, Sri Lanka

