

## Brush strokes

**Aceh, October 2006**

*Story by Ian Woolverton*

Mahmulia's navy blue t-shirt is flecked canary yellow; her loosely-tied long dark brown hair, lightly speckled; her light coloured trouser pants, marked with brown paint: Mahmulia, 26, is a trainee painter.

"This is my second day of painting. Now I am a painter," giggles Mahmulia, a playful young woman full of energy, prone to bouts of uncontrollable and spontaneous laughter.

She is one of 37 women from Beuring In – a small village on the east coast of Aceh destroyed by the tsunami – who has been trained by Oxfam as a painter to be employed painting new homes built in the area.

Painting is an entirely new and exciting way for these women to make a living. Before the tsunami, it was a male-dominated occupation. Women's activities tended to centre on working the rice fields or sometimes a kiosk. Working the rice fields, however, is extremely tough work, says trainee painter Rusmiyati, 40, a yellow hijab wrapped round a face of olive skin. "If go to the rice field I have to be in the mud up to the middle. And it is very dirty in the head because the sun is very hot. And no time to rest."

The unprecedented scale of construction work in Beuring In means there's high demand for skilled painters to decorate newly built homes. And that, says a delighted Ainy Fauziyah of Oxfam, creates new job opportunities for women. "The women asked Oxfam if they could paint and we said yes! In this area, they will paint 48 permanent houses built by Oxfam. For each group of two or three painters, Oxfam give them 350,000 Rupiahs [AUD \$49]. For them it is enough."



Mahmulia paints the woodwork of a new Oxfam house. She supports her family with income she receives from this work, putting one of her sisters through school. Beurngin, near Lhokseumawe, Aceh province, Indonesia. Photo: Jim Holmes/Oxfam