

Giving families hope

By Guy Clarke, Oxfam Australia Deputy Field Representative, India

Vullaver Street is a Dalit area of Peria Kalapet, a small fishing village a few kilometres from bustling Pondicherry town. It is here that 20-year-old Babani, her husband Kumar and their two boys Bala Murugam and Balaji live, or rather lived, before the tsunami.

Babani's family home was built shortly before the tsunami with borrowed money used to buy the small parcel of land and to pay for the modest construction. It now stands destroyed.

Since 26 December, Babani and her family temporarily lived in the local temple and have since moved to the main road where they sleep in a cattle shed belonging to a friend. During the day Babani comes back to the village, where she feels at home, but where almost 50 houses were destroyed and three people died.

Babani remembers standing with her family outside their house watching the incoming water. It wasn't until the water reached their toes that Babani and her sons ran to the main road, about 1km inland, where they boarded a vehicle and traveled to Tandivarnam. Kumar, a contract worker for a drugs company earning 50 rupees (about AUD \$1.50) a day, was not at home that day.

That same evening the whole family came back to see what the receding water had left behind. The house was destroyed and clothes, food, ornaments, utensils and electrical equipment all gone or ruined. Babani and Kumar had done a lot to provide a decent home for their two young sons and it had all gone leaving them with nothing but debt. Kumar has had no work since the tsunami.

Oxfam Australia's partner in Pondicherry, an organisation called HOPE, has distributed



Babani and the house she lived in with her family before the tsunami. Photo: Guy Clarke/OxfamAUS.

100kg of rice, 25kg of lentils and milk biscuits to each of more than 1,300 families along the Pondicherry coast, providing families like Babani's with three months worth of staple food stuffs.

HOPE has also distributed full sets of kitchen utensils to replace essential items lost in the tsunami. Along with other support from private philanthropists, government and non-



Babini and her family lost everything in the tsunami. Photo: Guy Clarke/OxfamAUS.

government organizations, families are out of immediate risk and are looking to the future.

The challenge now is to provide longer term support in the form of housing and livelihoods. Oxfam Australia and its partners along the coast are supporting communities through the distribution of small livelihood grants and plan to provide the necessary investment to ensure that savings and credit schemes, which have been decimated by the tsunami, are able to begin again without delay.

Families like that of Babani's are still in trouble, life is worse than it was, but at least with the support of the Australian public and the millions of people around the world who have been moved to give, life will return to "normalcy", as they say around here, sooner rather than later.

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