

Providing a lifeline

By Guy Clarke, Oxfam Australia Deputy Field Representative, India

Jayageetha's husband, Maya Krishnan, was in the next village when the tsunami hit their home in Kannikovil, a Dalit village, in the Cuddalore District of South India. Jaya was at home with their two children, son Mathan aged five, daughter Manimozhi aged seven and Jaya's mother in law, Kalyani.

Kalyani has a disability that makes it difficult to walk and it was only because her friends and relatives carried her that she was able to join the rest of her family who had run terrified to a muddy hillock behind their village.



Jayageetha and her family ran terrified from their village when the tsunami struck. Photo: Guy Clarke/OxfamAUS.

Once the tsunami waters had subsided, Jayageetha and her family returned to their home to find with some relief that theirs was not one of the 40 or so houses in the village that had been totally destroyed. While most of the house was still standing they had lost everything — clothes, the stove, cooking equipment, fishing nets, grain, a tape recorder and the television.

Maya Krishnan was a fisherman by trade, unusual for a Dalit, and his livelihood had afforded his family a fairly comfortable living. But with the tsunami it simply meant they had more to lose. His boat was damaged and his outboard motor ruined — he has not returned to the sea since.

Since the tsunami the family has moved back into their house and made the best of what was left. With help from the government and non-government organisations they have managed to cope.

Oxfam Australia has supported families like Jayageetha's in Kannikovil village through our local partner organisation Social Awareness Society for Youth (SASY), with three months worth of rice, lentils and milk biscuits for the children.



Oxfam Australia has distributed rice to 15,000 families. Photo: Guy Clarke/OxfamAUS.

Jayageetha explains that without the rice, life would have been so much harder. She says that borrowing money in the village has not been an option since the tsunami as the money lenders are no longer prepared to give loans.

“Things would have been very difficult...the rice is of really good quality and the biscuits have been helpful for the children,” she says.

Paroothan, a woman in her 50s who is sitting with us, has a very clear answer to the question, what would have happened without the food received from SASY — she says simply, “I could have died without it”.

Oxfam Australia and the local partner network have provided much needed and very welcome assistance to almost 14,000 families like Jayageetha’s across the coastal belt in South India. More assistance is required and Oxfam Australia will continue to work in these communities to support the rebuilding of livelihoods, so that people like Maya Krishnan can go fishing again and provide for his family once more.

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