

## INDONESIA

# STILL SO MUCH TO DO

The tsunami in 2004 was an absolute catastrophe for the Indonesian province of Aceh. The giant wave swept 170,000 people to their deaths and destroyed much of the province's infrastructure. Looking back, Imelda Leiwakabessy from Indonesia can see that, despite the terrible losses, this major disaster also brought about a major opportunity – a chance for a new beginning.



"After thirty years of civil war between the separatist rebels and the Indonesian army, the tsunami, macabre as this may sound, had at least one positive effect on Aceh Province: the survivors realised that there are more important things than war and that Aceh could only succeed in reconstruction if peace were re-established. So they entered into peace negotiations at last," says 29-year-old Imelda Leiwakabessy of the situation at that time. She adds, "There wasn't any functional municipal administration anymore. Offices, archives and especially the knowledge in the heads of many officials were simply no more. Plus, after the tsunami, a wave of international aid washed over Aceh that had to be coordinated somehow."

At the time the tsunami struck, Leiwakabessy just happened to be on her way to Stuttgart, where she was studying environmental technology and municipal development. With her Master's degree in her pocket, she then returned to Indonesia at the start of 2008. "At that time my parents and friends in Jakarta couldn't understand how I, a Christian, could accept a job with the city government of the provincial capital Banda Aceh: they considered Aceh, which is Moslem and rich in raw materials, very tough terrain even before the tsunami hit," explains Leiwakabessy. But she has never regretted the decision she took back then.

### More opportunities for women

For almost two years now Leiwakabessy has been supporting the municipal administration with organisational development, project management and cooperation with international organisations. She works closely on these matters with her boss, Deputy Mayor Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, and other international development experts in the Banda Aceh administration. "A woman in the mayor's office – that, too, was unthinkable in Aceh before the tsunami," says Leiwakabessy, referring to Djamal, who has a keen interest in achieving equality for the women of Aceh.

At the beginning, Leiwakabessy primarily coordinated the activities of the international organisations participating in the reconstruction in Banda Aceh. Djamal recalls how it was: "During this phase Imelda Leiwakabessy was extremely important to us. With her knowledge of languages and her social skills, she often helped us to make contacts where they were needed and to clear up misunderstandings." It soon became clear to Leiwakabessy that many of the reconstruction efforts were running parallel to one another. So she joined forces with two German administrative experts and convinced her boss to set up a superordinate coordinating team. This team has been meeting once a week ever since to better harmonise the activities of the

international organisations with those of the 24 administrative divisions. "This way the only measures that get implemented are those that conform to the development strategies of the provincial administration and that show some promise of being sustainable. We simply need to be more systematic and to see that our planning is sounder," explains Leiwakabessy.



Back in Indonesia again: Imelda Leiwakabessy (2nd from right) together with her colleagues.

### Standing on your own two feet

"Now that most of the organisations have gone home again and money has become scarce, the municipal government sees that

the time has come for us to stand on our own two feet. This is not easy. We not only have to use our shrinking funds more carefully, but we have to be sure we have the know-how we need to manage the newly created structures – whether a waste treatment plant or an emergency early-warning system – on our own in future, without expensive international expertise," says Leiwakabessy, describing the challenges ahead. And Djamal adds, "To make sure that municipal employees can handle their tasks professionally in future, we are currently setting up a small training academy for our 8,000 administrators. Here, too, Imelda plays an important role as project manager and intermediary."

"In my opinion, the city government has made good use of this new beginning and the international aid we received to make things better and more transparent than before," says Leiwakabessy. But she is realistic as well. "Organisational development and genuine processes of reform cannot be accomplished within a matter of months. They need a lot of time. I'd really like to stay at least until the training academy is up and running. I would also like to get some more environmental protection projects going. Then there is the matter of budget administration and internal and external communications – these urgently need to be improved as well." She breaks off and puts her thoughts in a single sentence: "There is still so much for me to do here."

#### The programmes:

German development organisations were active in reconstruction following the tsunami of 2004. With support from the **Integrated Experts Programme** of the Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM), two administrative experts from Germany worked in the city administration of Banda Aceh as consultants to the mayor and the deputy mayor.

These two experts had the idea of recruiting an Indonesian expert with a German education. He or she would then not only be able to clear away linguistic and cultural obstacles but, ideally, would later carry on the process of reform that they had begun. Imelda Leiwakabessy was excellently qualified for the position and had, following her studies in Germany, a strong interest in returning to Indonesia once more. This is why CIM is supporting her work through the **Returning Experts Programme** which is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Not long ago, the city administration of Banda Aceh received further reinforcements. Two more returnees from Germany are now actively engaged in strengthening women's rights and promoting economic development in Banda Aceh.

#### The ideas behind them:

The German experts and Leiwakabessy, with their combined expertise and different cultural perspectives, were able to achieve far more together than they could have individually. The German experts passed on much of their professional knowledge, work experience and contacts to Leiwakabessy so that, after their departure, she could carry on the work they had started together. The city administration of Banda Aceh is able to pay Leiwakabessy around EUR 90 a month, a salary that would not generally be enough for a German-educated expert. CIM makes assignments that have a significant development-policy status more attractive by offering salary subsidies and other perquisites through its two programmes. Re-entry into professional life in the country of origin is thus made easier for returnees like Leiwakabessy.

#### Links:

CIM and its programmes: [www.cimonline.de/en](http://www.cimonline.de/en)

Municipality of Banda Aceh: [www.bandaacehkota.go.id](http://www.bandaacehkota.go.id)