

**European Union/ Netherlands****Fisherwomen for fisherwomen**

*Women of fishing communities in the Netherlands have been raising funds in solidarity with women of tsunami-affected fishing communities*

**By Cornelia Quist, a member of Vinvis and a member of ICSF**

Immediately after the tsunami hit the coast of several regions in Asia, the women of VinVis, the women-in-fisheries network of the Netherlands, contacted one another to discuss what action to take. The traditional fishing communities were obviously affected most by the tsunami and being fisherwomen themselves, the VinVis women felt deep sympathy with the victims. On 31 December 2004 they registered a new organization called "Fisherwomen for Fisherwomen in Asia", and began to raise funds in their local communities. They distributed self-made posters and information flyers through the local shops, schools, fish market and auction. They approached schools to mobilize the children in support of their campaign. They sent press releases to the local, regional and even national media. The response was good and their action also caught attention at the national level. All funds raised by VinVis are meant for reconstruction activities in fisheries, in particular activities that benefit fisherwomen and their families.

Fundraising actions in support of the tsunami victims have been massive in the Netherlands and also in Europe. There is a severe competition between various private initiatives, all wanting to help from their own perspective. In particular, the affected tourist belts in Sri Lanka and Thailand are very popular targets for fundraising, and many villages and fishing families in these areas are "adopted" by various private initiatives started by people who had visited as tourists. But also from the fisheries sector there are many private initiatives that raise funds to help affected fishing communities with new boats and gear. Many of these initiatives, though well-intentioned, carry the risk of causing all kinds of new disruptions.

To help the tsunami-affected fishing communities in Asia in an appropriate way is a complex thing and, therefore, VinVis is very glad to have contacts with fisher(wo)men's organizations that represent the interest of the affected fishing communities in Asia. Through these contacts, VinVis has immediate and genuine information channels to learn about the real problems and needs. VinVis wants to be assured that

the rehabilitation projects they support are planned in consultation with the affected fisherwomen and are of real benefit to them.

VinVis, therefore, feels it is not only her responsibility to raise funds to help the victims, but also to raise awareness and to warn against all forms of help that could create ill-effects for local circumstances and environment and cause social disparity and conflict among the fishing community. That is why VinVis campaigns against the transfer of fishing boats and gear from Europe, but also warns against the indiscriminate distribution of locally made boats and gear. VinVis also advocates that aid should focus not only on the rehabilitation of fish capture activities, but also pay attention to the post-harvest activities, which provide an important source of livelihood for women of fishing communities, and to a community-based management of the resources.

VinVis tries hard to encourage co-ordination and co-operation where it concerns aid from private initiatives in the Netherlands to the affected fishing communities in Asia. VinVis also strongly promotes the foremost necessity of consulting fisher(wo)men's organizations from the affected areas. VinVis realizes that reconstruction is a long-term process and, therefore, needs solidarity, partnership and commitment. Do you feel the same?

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