

"The sea is not ours; we borrow it from our children and grandchildren. Therefore, we must preserve it for their future. It doesn't matter how hard that will be."

For years, Nasrita, head of the Marine and Fisheries Office (DKP) in Aceh Barat, has held these words close to her heart. They have inspired her to carry out significant work towards ecological conservation and preservation of the fisheries.

In December 2004, when the tsunami ripped through the Indonesian coast, Aceh

In a move that strengthened the work started by Nasrita, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) initiated co-management practices along with other local agencies such as the *Panglima Laot*, the police department, and local governments in conserving marine resources. The fisheries co-management activities are part of the programme of fisheries rehabilitation and reconstruction for tsunami-affected communities in Aceh province. The programme started in 2007 and is funded by the American Red Cross.

"In carrying out my work, I have never faced significant obstacles," says Nasrita. "I only need to be more patient in dealing with the fishermen. Generally speaking, I have received support even though the work environment is dominated by men. In fact, my negotiations sometimes become easier because the fishermen pay more respect to me as a woman."

Nasrita also made mandatory the replacement of illegal fishing gear with standard gear. She did not negotiate with vessel owners who had repeatedly breached the law; instead, she arrested them and revoked the operational license of their vessels. Eight vessels were booked in 2009.

Within a year, marine conservation efforts have begun to show positive results in Aceh Barat, where trawling or using explosives to kill fish are today banned activities. "Thank God!" says a relieved Nasrita, "I am pleased that both the government and the community have begun to realize their roles and responsibilities towards co-management".

Nasrita hopes that soon marine fisheries in Aceh Barat will be free from mini-trawling and other illegal fishing practices and that the initiative will spread throughout the other districts of Aceh. ❏

PROFILE

Nasrita: Saving Marine Resources

Nasrita, Head of the Marine and Fisheries office (DKP) in Indonesia's Aceh Barat, carries out significant work to improve fisheries management

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Barat in Aceh province bore the brunt of the devastation. During her first year of heading the Marine and Fisheries Office, Nasrita realized that not only had the tsunami destroyed most of the coral reefs on the coast but that whatever remained was being fast depleted by the mini-trawlers used by local fishermen. Nasrita knew that the coral reefs sustained the livelihoods of nearly 1800 fishers in the district and that their continued destruction would mean the destruction of the community.

The first step Nasrita took, therefore, was to issue a ban on the use of mini-trawlers in the reef areas. "Many fishermen were complaining about the low volume of catch", she says. "For that reason, I approached them with the idea that in order to protect marine resources, it was vital to adopt environment-friendly fishing practices."