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Stories from the Field

Water for Life: Providing Fresh Water to School Children in Mannar. Renovation of Mini Water Supply Scheme in Palaikuli Government Muslim Mixed School.



School children washing their hands before meals.
 All taps are connected to the tube well.

Water is a precious resource in Sri Lanka’s dry zone. As most rural areas are not linked to pipe borne water, families usually obtain water from available sources including wells, rivers and irrigation tanks. The village of Palaikuli in Mannar district is no exception. As the mini water supply scheme in the village was damaged by the conflict in the early 1990’s, residents faced severe hardship in obtaining fresh water. With funding from the “Improving Living Conditions in Returnee Areas of Sri Lanka through Housing “ project, the water supply scheme was repaired in mid-2014, providing fresh water to over 74 schoolchildren and 60 families in the village. Altogether, 400 people have benefited from this infrastructure initiative.

Palaikuli village is located in Musali Divisional Secretariat Division, four kilometres from the Mannar - Puttalam main road. The main livelihoods of the community who are predominantly Muslim, include fishing, paddy cultivation and cattle farming. The community had to leave their village in 1990 when the LTTE ordered all families to vacate their homes within 36 hours. For many years, the internally displaced families lived with friends and family in the neighbouring districts. They finally returned to the village after 2010, during the resettlement of Mannar district by the Government of Sri Lanka. As much of the village infrastructure had been damaged during the conflict, the returning families needed assistance to rebuild.

The *Improving Living Conditions in Returnee Areas of Sri Lanka through Housing Project* is a housing recovery initiative providing support to returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Funded primarily through a grant of € 11.8 million by the European Union (EU), it is built on the previous EU investment in reconstruction



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in housing through the North East Housing Reconstruction Programme and the “Support to Conflict Affected People through Housing” project. Donor partners include the Australian Government and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). From 2012 to 2014, 75 families were supported in Palaikuli village to construct their damaged homes with funding from the first phase of this project.

As most of the families in the village are conflict affected returnees lacking adequate financial resources, they were unable to rebuild the damaged infrastructure of the village including the water supply scheme. This resulted in hardship for the entire community, particularly the school children, as they had no access to fresh water during school time.

When the second phase of the project commenced in Palaikuli village in 2013, a Settlement Improvement Planning Workshop was conducted by UN-Habitat to identify the main issues affecting the community and to collectively identify solutions. During this workshop, community members identified the need for a permanent water supply scheme to address the lack of potable water during the dry season.



Palaikuli Government Muslim Mixed School.



Palaikuli RDS members inspecting the tube well

In March 2014, the project provided funding to renovate the mini water supply scheme in the Palaikuli Government School. As the project follows a participatory process, the renovation work was entrusted to the Palaikuli Rural Development Society (RDS) through a community contract, following a selection process by UN-Habitat. With a grant of LKR.2,628,500, the RDS commenced work on the water supply scheme. Technical assistance including the design of the tube well, preparation of the bill of quantities, advice on building materials and hiring suitable skilled workers was provided by UN-Habitat. Skilled construction workers were hired and construction materials purchased by the RDS members. The Divisional Secretary and Zonal Director of

Education had granted necessary approvals and provided administrative support towards the smooth implementation of the project.

The renovation of the mini water supply scheme was completed in September 2014 and the school children and teachers are now using the facilities. They have easy access to potable water to wash their hands before and after meals and a ready supply of water in the toilets and kitchen. The renovated water supply scheme includes a tube well, an overhead water tank and taps and washbasins for class rooms, school kitchen and toilets. Outdoor taps have also been installed in the garden as additional hand washing facilities.



Outdoor hand washing facility near the school kitchen.



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In addition to the internal water supply network in the school, a water collection point with four taps has been installed adjacent the school premises to provide direct access for community members. Nearly 60 families in the neighbourhood collect water from this point for drinking and cooking while water from streams is used for bathing, washing of clothes and kitchen utensils.

The President of the RDS, Mr.S.Harees, said “We had regular meetings to monitor progress and to share responsibilities. Each member of the RDS was in charge of a specific task which made it easy to implement this project. The community members helped us a lot by providing their time and energy through voluntary work, including clearing the site for the tube well.”



Women fetching water from the water supply scheme.

The Grama Niladhari of Palaikuli Mr. S.H.Navavi stated “The construction of this mini water supply scheme was a priority need of the entire village. We are very happy about the assistance given to us by the donors, in addition to the funding given to reconstruct 75 houses. Scarcity of water during the dry season significantly affected the children, even impacting their regular attendance. Now the children are enjoying their time in school as they have easy access to clean water. Our heartfelt thanks to donors for fulfilling this urgent need.”



School children during their mid-day meal break.

The “Improving Living Conditions in Returnee Areas of Sri Lanka through Housing” project is being implemented from January 2013 to June 2015 in the districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar in the North and Batticaloa in the East. The project will support the reconstruction of 4,600 houses and a number of infrastructure initiatives including 12 preschools, 14 community centres, 20 wells and the rehabilitation of approximately 32 km of internal access roads.