

Rebuilding Lives through Rebuilding Homes: Shelter Support to Conflict Affected Families in Northern Sri Lanka

Sithamparapillai Thiyagarajah, Puliyankulam North, Vavuniya District



The A9 road, the primary highway connecting the city of Jaffna, boasts a number of newly constructed houses adjacent to the road. One house, painted in shades of blue, is situated in Puliyankulam North in Vavuniya and belongs to the Thiyagarajah family. This previously war damaged house was recently reconstructed by the family with financial assistance from the Australian Government.

Sixty five year old Sithamparapillai Thiyagarajah and his wife Jeyarani are the proud owners of this new two bedroom house, where they live with their youngest children, 19 year old Jeyaruban

and 20 year old Senthooan. Their four daughters, who are married with young families, have moved to homes of their own. Having lived in temporary shelters and IDP camps for over two years, all family members are relieved to finally have the security of a permanent home. Since completing their house with the grant from AusAID, the family is now adding a front veranda using their own savings.

Married in June 1972, both Jeyarani and Thiyagarajah worked as labourers in Puliyankulam North. They had eight children – six daughters and two sons, who showed good academic aptitude, studying up to their GCE Ordinary Level examinations. However, life was difficult for the family during the thirty years of conflict between the LTTE and the Government Armed Forces. They underwent many hardships and heart break which included displacement, loss of livelihood as well as the deaths of two family members.

In 2008, the family was displaced from their village due to the escalation of the conflict and they were compelled to move to several locations in the Mullaitivu district with thousands of other families. During this time, they lived in makeshift shelters and had little access to food and water. With the end of the conflict in May 2009, the family was relocated to the Ramanathan Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) centre in Vavuniya. Having lived at the IDP camp for over a year, they returned to Puliyankulam in early 2010. In September 2010, the Thiyagarajah family resumed their disrupted lives in a small makeshift shelter made of tent material, tin sheets and cadjan.

Project Quick Facts

Project: Shelter Support to Conflict Affected IDPs in the North of Sri Lanka

Duration: 2010-2011 (18 months)

Location: Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi districts

Funded by: Australian Government (AusAID)

Implemented by: Communities and UN-HABITAT

No. of Houses repaired/reconstructed: 3785

For the Thiyagarajah family, the financial assistance from the Australian Government to rebuild their war damaged house came at an opportune time. Having lived in temporary shelters for several years, to have a permanent house was a dream come true for the family. According to government specifications applicable at that time, the family received Rs.325,000 (Approx. US\$ 2,900ⁱ) in four instalments to build their house through the project “Shelter Support to Conflict Affected IDPs in the North of Sri Lanka”. It was implemented through a home owner driven, people’s process of construction, where the home owner had the primary responsibility of construction with technical input from the implementing agency.

As the implementing agency, UN-HABITAT provided assistance to the Thiyagarajah family including support in designing house type plans, preparation of BOQs, assistance with land tenure issues and advice on purchasing good quality building materials. The rebuilding process saw the entire Thiyagarajah family providing their labour and skills towards the construction activities. As the grant was for basic construction of the house, the provision of family labour meant that the overall cost was drastically reduced. The family participated in several activities including the preparation of the ground for the foundation, light masonry work, concrete block making and light carpentry work.



“We appreciate the trust shown by the Australian Government and UN-HABITAT by providing us funding to build our house” Sithamparapillai Thiyagarajah said. “To own our own permanent home has given us a sense of peace and security, and I am finally able to sleep well without anxiety. This has given us new courage and self confidence to face the future”. Discussing the active contribution of the family members he further stated “I am proud to say that my family and I provided the majority of the labour required for the construction”.

During the time of construction, the family started a small home garden where several varieties of fruit and vegetables such as snake gourd, chillies, egg plant and bananas are being cultivated. In addition, Jeyarani has also started a small poultry farm with several hens which supplements the family meals as well as their household income. The family is particularly grateful that the project commenced quickly and for the assistance on land tenure matters, as this enabled the family to construct and move into the new house in under one year.

The photographs depict Jeyarani with her son Senthoran outside their newly constructed house and the house during the construction process being inspected by UN-HABITAT staff.

For more information on the project, please contact:

Shelter Support to Conflict Affected IDPs in the North of Sri Lanka Project

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ⁱ The amount in US\$ is based on the exchange rate during project implementation: 1 US\$ = 112 SLRS.