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Stories from the Field

Hope for a Brighter Tomorrow: Rebuilding Preschools in Mullaitivu District

Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure, Improvement of Livelihoods and Empowerment of Women in the Northern and Eastern Provinces (RCI)



UN-Habitat Officer inspecting construction progress of Vallipunam Ramesh preschool in Mullaitivu

The Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure, Improvement of Livelihoods and Empowerment of Women in the Northern and Eastern Provinces (RCI) is a community infrastructure development project, contributing towards the sustainable rehabilitation and reconstruction of the conflict affected Northern and Eastern Provinces. Funded by the Government of Japan and implemented by UN-Habitat, the project supports returned and resettled Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to overcome their on-going hardships, exacerbated by the lack of basic services. Key project interventions include the construction of community centres, preschools, internal access roads, storm water drainage systems and community storage units.

The RCI project is supporting the construction of 28 preschools in selected villages in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts. The Vallipunam Ramesh preschool in Vallipunam village in Mullaitivu district

was recently constructed through a participatory planning and construction process with funding from the project.

Vallipunam village is located in the Puthukudiyiruppu (PTK) Divisional Secretariat (DS) division. The village consists of 601 families with a population of 1,844 people. The majority of the community are Tamil speaking Hindus, with agriculture being their main form of livelihood. Similar to other villages in interior Mullaitivu, Vallipunam was badly affected by the conflict. During its final stages, all families were displaced and lived with host families and in Internally Displaced Persons Camps for several years, resettling in the village during 2010/2011.

The initial resettlement period posed major difficulties as families had to restart their lives without basic infrastructure facilities such as permanent housing, water supply, road networks and public buildings. When UN-Habitat commenced the RCI project, a Community Action Planning Workshop was conducted to identify critical infrastructure needs of the village. The residents identified several urgent needs including the rehabilitation of an internal access road and storm water drainage system, a preschool, community study hall and marketplace. The preschool was selected by the residents as the main priority as the current preschool was functioning in a temporary building with minimal facilities.



The current temporary preschool building



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The preschool in Vallipunam was first established in 2001 in a temporary shelter. The school functioned for 7 years in this building, until it was completely destroyed during the conflict in 2008. Around 30 children were enrolled in the preschool at the time. When resettlement commenced, the Jesuit Refugee Service supported the village by constructing a 600 square foot temporary preschool building with a cement floor and walls and roof constructed with tin roofing sheets.



Mr. A. Ganesh, President of the Vallipunam RDS

The Vallipunam Rural Development Society (RDS) was selected by UN-Habitat as the implementing partner for the project. The PTK Divisional Secretariat provided support assisting in CBO selection and monitoring the construction progress. The Zonal Director of Education of Mullaitivu also actively supported the initiative by expediting the necessary approvals for the preschool design. UN-Habitat provided technical support to the RDS assisting with the design, bill of quantities and the sourcing of appropriate, cost effective building materials and skilled labour.

Mr. A. Ganesh, President of the Vallipunam Rural Development Society, stated “I know the hopes and expectations of our community. As the implementing partner I have a clear idea of what we need to do according to the work plan. We are hoping to have the opening ceremony of the preschool very soon”.

A total of LKR. 3,218,278 was spent on the construction of the preschool. With construction commencing in July 2015, the preschool is now nearing completion. It is 1,070 square feet with a large classroom, teacher’s room, kitchen and toilets (See Type Plan 1 below for details). The entrance to the preschool includes a ramp to provide disability access. The preschool will have a small playground with sand and water ponds for children’s play activities. The preschool has been constructed with cement blocks for walls and clay roofing tiles for the roof. To save precious timber resources, cement precast window frames and grills have been used throughout the building.

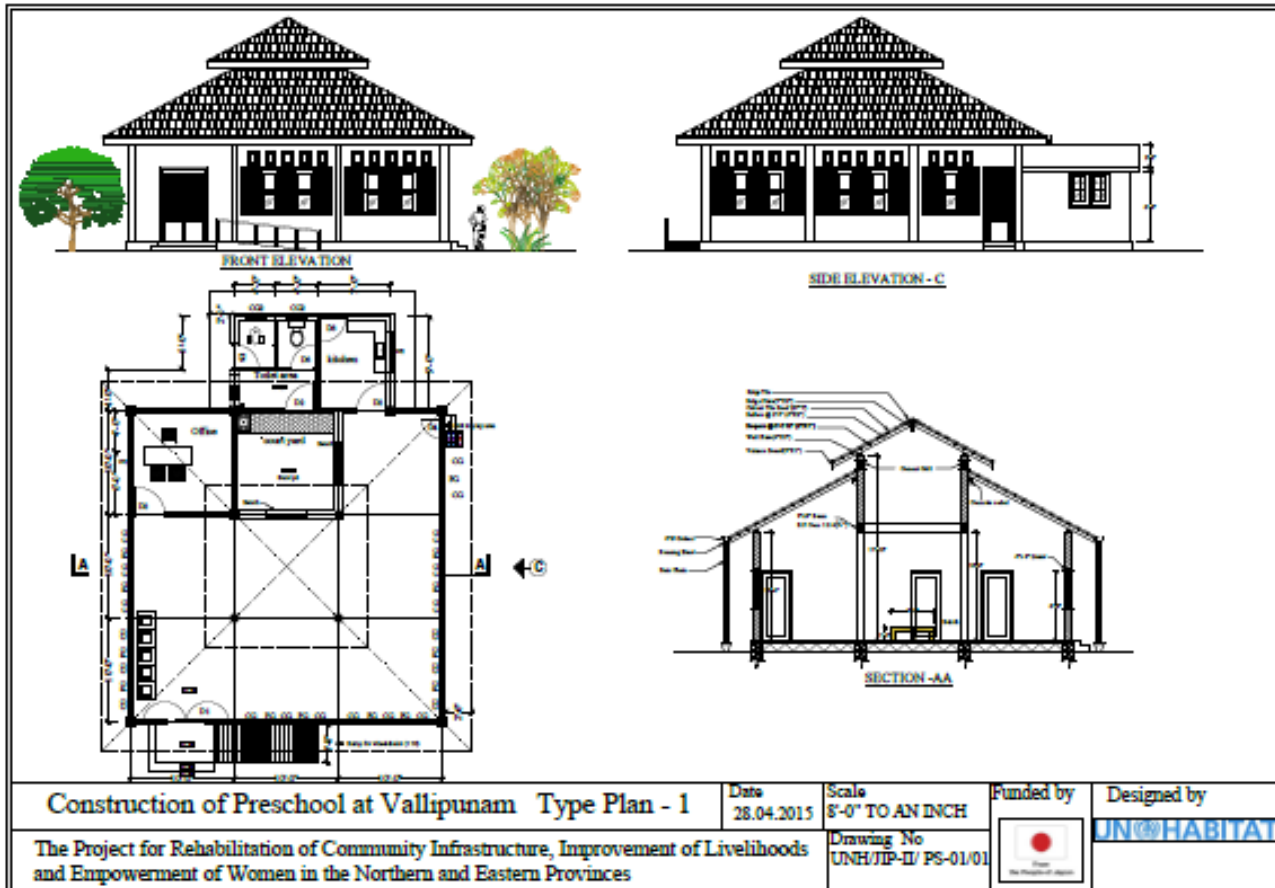


Little pre-schoolers eagerly await the opening of their new preschool

The interior has been painted in bright, cheerful colours with wall murals. Mr. I. Jayathaas, the Grama Niladhari of Vallipunam said “This project has progressed very well. The location for the preschool is ideal as the majority of families live nearby. I am very happy with the way it has been implemented involving the community.”



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Ms. U. Janitha, the founder teacher of the Vallipunam preschool, stated “Despite many difficulties, parents are very concerned about their children’s education. In my 15 year career as a teacher, I have seen many children not receiving a proper preschool education because of the conflict. There were no facilities or trained teachers especially as our village had no financial resources. I am sure every parent who has a child is looking forward to seeing this preschool completed. I am grateful to the Japanese Government for the funding support.”

The RCI Project is a community infrastructure development project, contributing towards the sustainable rehabilitation and reconstruction of the conflict affected Northern and Eastern Provinces. Funded by the Government of Japan and implemented by UN-Habitat, it is assisting communities to overcome the hardships caused by the lack of basic services, whilst rebuilding human capital and empowering women.

Implemented in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the project interventions include the construction of community centres, preschools, storage facilities, small irrigation facilities and the rehabilitation of internal access roads and storm water drainage systems. It follows on from the “Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure and Facilities in the Conflict Affected Areas in Northern Province”, also funded by the Government of Japan and implemented by UN-Habitat in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu from 2013 – 2015.



Ms. S. Sivamani – one of the preschool teachers and Ms. G. Vijaya, the Treasurer of the Preschool Management Committee.