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## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

### Reviving His Livelihood in a New Home: Mr. Santhirasekaram of Akkarayan West Village, Killinochchi District

The “Support to Conflict Affected People through Housing” project is a housing recovery initiative supporting returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the North of Sri Lanka. Funded primarily through a Grant of € 11.8 million by European Union (EU), it is built on the previous EU investment in reconstruction, notably in the housing sector through the North East Housing Reconstruction Programme (NEHRP). Additional donors include the Australian Government (AusAID) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Jointly implemented by UN-Habitat and SDC, the project provides cash grants and technical support to home owners in the districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi to reconstruct and repair their conflict damaged houses.



Sixty five year old Mr. Santhirasekaram is a project beneficiary who is the owner of a recently constructed house in Killinochchi District. His house has provided not only shelter from the elements but is also a comfortable space to practice his livelihood as a motorcycle mechanic.



Despite being a person with disability, Mr.Santhirasekaram, who lost his right leg in 2008 remains a source of inspiration to his family and his community alike. Having overcome all odds, his livelihood consists of being the main motor mechanic of his village. Expertly attending to all motorcycle repair work in his workshop, his customers include men, women and school children with their bicycles. A widower for over two decades, Mr. Santhirasekaram lives together with his son, S.Pratheepan and daughter-in-law.

As motorcycles, scooters and bicycles remain a popular mode of transport in the Northern Province, his workshop has slowly become a hub of activity while his mechanical expertise making him exceedingly well known amongst the Akkarayan West community.

Mr. Santhirasekaram has been a resident of Akkarayan for 30 years. His son recalls their wattle and daub house that had sections of the wall dissolve during the monsoon rains. In 2008, Santhirasekaram’s family was displaced as a result of the escalation of the conflict in the Northern Province. With thousands of other families, they lived in Menik Farm Internally Displaced Persons Camp in Vavuniya District from April 2009 for almost one and half years. Once the Government resettlement process began, they returned to their village in 2011. However upon their return, Santhirasekaram found his semi-permanent house reduced to rubble due to the damage





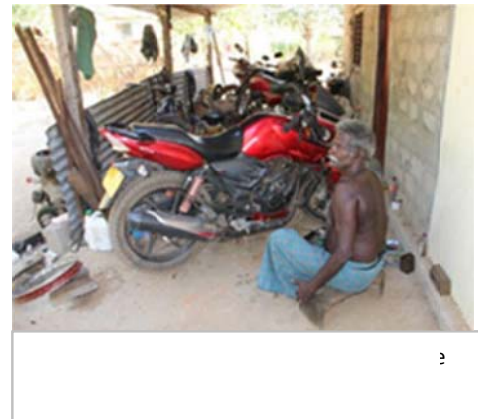
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caused by war and weather conditions. This was the turning point in Mr.Santhirasekaram's life, he soon successfully revived his livelihood as a motor mechanic in a makeshift workshop. His son too commenced work as a day labourer and farmer in order to contribute towards the household income. His son, Pratheepan mentions that his greatest wish was to build a permanent home where his father could live and practice his livelihood in comfort. However, for the Santhirasekaram family, building a permanent house was beyond their means. In August 2011, when the “Support to Conflict Affected people through Housing” commenced project activities in Akkarayan village, the family hoped that they too would be eligible for support to rebuild their damaged home. Based on beneficiary selection criteria, their family was selected for housing assistance together with other conflict affected home owners. As an elderly person with disability, and due to his inadequate financial resources to rebuild his home, Santhirasekaram was entitled to a housing grant of LKR.500,000.

Having received the first installment in November 2011, Santhirasekaram embarked upon constructing his new home by hiring skilled construction workers with his son providing his own labour support towards the process. The first installment of Rs.100,000 was provided for foundation work, with the next two installments provided upon completion of work up to DPC level and gable level respectively. The last installment of Rs.50,000 was provided in July 2012 for the completion of the final phase work including fixing sashes, rendering and painting of the house. UN-Habitat provided guidance on the entire construction process and facilitating the selection of a suitable house plan, purchasing quality building materials and obtaining planning approvals. In the spirit of the home owner driven process, Santhirasekaram supplemented the grant with savings earned from his work.



His new house is approx. 600 square feet, consisting of 3 bedrooms, living room, kitchen and a toilet. A front verandah has been added to the main house using their earnings during the past year.

Mr.Santhirasekaram and Pratheepan are thankful for the financial support provided by the donors that has enabled them to reconstruct their home. ‘The donors gave us financial support to rebuild the house and helped us restart our lives in this new home. We are very grateful to the donors for including our village in this programme’. Sathirasekaram is now looking forward to continuing his motor mechanic work in the comfort of his new home.

***The Support to Conflict Affected People through Housing in Sri Lanka project is supporting over 5,000 families to reconstruct and repair their conflict damaged houses. The Government of Sri Lanka is supporting this initiative through the identification of priority community needs in the project locations. The project will be completed in early 2014.***