



Rebuilding His Own Home: Sivakanthan of Mullaitivu District

Indian Housing Project

The Indian Housing Project (IHP) is a housing reconstruction project funded by the Government of India and implemented through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Sri Lanka. Four Implementing Agencies (IAs) are executing this project in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, including UN-Habitat. The 36 month project will run from mid 2012 until mid 2015 and will follow a home owner driven process. During this period, UN-Habitat is expected to support 16,800 families to reconstruct or repair their homes.

Mr.S.Sivakanthan is a selected beneficiary to reconstruct his conflict damaged house in Mullaitivu District. Using his skills as a trained mason, Sivakanthan is constructing his own house. Describing his experiences as a project beneficiary, Sivakanthan said: “We are very fortunate to build this house with the help of the Indian Government. I am proud to say that my wife and I have been providing all the labour necessary to build this house, without hiring any construction workers. This has given me a great sense of achievement and ownership”.



29 year old Mr.S. Sivakanthan and his 28 year old wife, Mrs. S.Ushanthini live in Suthanthirapuram Grama Niladarai division in the Puthukkudiyuruppu (PTK) DS division of Mullaitivu District. The couple have three daughters, Thanusiya (6 years), Tharmila (4 years) and their youngest daughter, Thadhayani, who is just 3 months old. Sivakanthan’s main livelihood is vegetable cultivation.

Sivakanthan’s family had been badly affected by the three decades of conflict in the North. Their home had been completely destroyed and the entire family displaced for over three years. With the escalation of the conflict in Mullaitivu in early 2009, the family was relocated to Menik Farm Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Vavuniya, where they lived for over two years. When the Government of Sri Lanka commenced resettling IDPs, the family returned to Suthanthirapuram in June 2011. As their house had been completely destroyed during the conflict, Sivakanthan built a small temporary shelter with cadjan and tin sheets. As the couple lacked their own financial resources to construct a permanent home, they were extremely happy to be selected by the Indian Housing Project as beneficiaries of a LKR.550,000 housing grant to fully reconstruct their home in September 2012.



As the project follows a “home owner driven” method of construction, Sivakanthan and his wife are jointly responsible for the planning, organizing and construction of their house. Generally under this methodology, skilled construction workers are hired by the home owners to undertake specialised masonry and carpentry work as most beneficiaries do not have the required construction skills. However, with his masonry skills, Sivakanthan is the primary construction worker. His wife contributes her time and effort by fetching water, cement, bricks and other building materials to support Sivakanthan. The UN-Habitat field team has helped Sivakanthan select a suitable house plan and provided guidance on the construction process and in obtaining quality building materials.

Sivakanthan obtained masonry skills training during his stay at Menik Farm IDP camp in Vavuniya, where he participated in a practical masonry training programme for six months. The training was



conducted by the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA). “I now realise the value of the training given by NAITA when I was at the IDP camp. This training and the advice and support given by UN-Habitat have greatly helped me construct my own house” Sivakanthan stated.

With their first grant instalment of LKR.100,000 received in October 2012, Sivakanthan commenced the house foundation work. At the same time, he joined a group of beneficiaries from his village to procure cement and sand in bulk. The Village Rehabilitation Committee (VRC) of Suthanthirapuram established by UN-Habitat has actively supported the beneficiaries in their construction activities including bulk procurement of building materials from local suppliers Sivakanthan has also manufactured his own cement blocks required for house construction. Training on cement block making and the block making moulds have been provided by UN-Habitat for the housing beneficiaries.

The foundations and superstructure have been entirely undertaken by Sivakanthan. In February 2013, with the house completed up to window sill level, Sivakanthan received his second instalment of LKR.200,000 from the Indian High Commission. In anticipation of the roof work, Sivakanthan has placed an order to purchase timber rafters and clay roofing tiles with local suppliers. On 25th April 2013, an auspicious day in the Hindu calendar, Sivakanthan placed a “wall plate” on top of one of the walls in order to commence roof work. This is an extremely important tradition for Hindu home owners. By proactively planning his construction work in advance, Sivakanthan is rapidly working towards completing his house well ahead of schedule.

Vythilingam Jegatheepan, the UN-Habitat Technical Officer responsible for assisting Sivakanthan, was impressed with his achievement of building his house on his own. “Sivakanthan has been constructing his house within the stipulated time period, whilst adhering to technical guidelines. The family’s enthusiasm and sense of ownership are the main reasons for this remarkable achievement”.



In addition to construction work, Sivakanthan and his wife are rearing a cow and cultivating vegetables in their home garden. As Sivakanthan’s main livelihood is farming, he cultivates vegetables such as eggplant, ground nut, chilli and black gram.

Sivakanthan and Ushanthini are looking forward to moving into their permanent home in July 2013. It will have a sitting room, shrine room, two bed rooms, a kitchen and an outdoor toilet. “We lost all our belongings during the conflict. We suffered immensely without even our basic needs being met and had to spend many sleepless nights in temporary shelters. The Indian Housing Project has paved the way for a new life for our family. We are very grateful to the Indian Government for providing us this housing grant” Ushanthini stated.

Photographs: Mr. Sivakanthan and Mrs. Ushanthini outside their temporary shelter with their youngest daughter; Mr. Sivakanthan constructing his house, Vythilingam Jegatheepan, the UN-Habitat Technical Officer at the construction site.