



Stories from the Field

Helping Communities Rebuild in Post-Conflict Killinochchi District *Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure and Facilities in the Conflict Affected Areas in Northern Province of Sri Lanka (RCIF)*

The Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure and Facilities in the Conflict Affected Areas in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka (RCIF) is a community infrastructure development project, contributing towards the sustainable rehabilitation and reconstruction of the conflict affected Northern Province. 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. Implemented in the districts of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, key project interventions include the construction of community centres, preschools, internal access roads and storm water drainage systems.



The damaged community centre in Thiruvaiyaru

The RCIF project is supporting the reconstruction of 19 community centres in the project areas. The damaged community centre in Thiruvaiyaru village in Killinochchi District was recently reconstructed through a community participatory construction process.

Thiruvaiyaru village is located in Karachchi Divisional Secretariat Division in Killinochchi district. The primary income sources of the community are agriculture and animal husbandry with the majority of farmers engaged in paddy and vegetable cultivation. The village was severely affected by the three decades of conflict. During this period, 386 families faced multiple displacements, with significant damage and destruction to the environment, infrastructure and the economy of the village. When people eventually returned to the village during 2010-2011, the lack of basic infrastructure

facilities created serious difficulties. As people need basic facilities to restart their lives, some families opted to migrate to urban areas instead of resettling in the village. The RCIF project, commencing in 2013 April, recognised that investment in the rehabilitation of community infrastructure facilities can help achieve the twin goals of assisting people to have access to basic facilities while encouraging their resettlement in their villages of origin.

In order to identify the priority infrastructure needs, Settlement Improvement Planning (SIP) workshops were conducted by UN-Habitat. This forum provided an opportunity for community members to identify prevailing issues and develop strategies to find lasting solutions. The Thiruvaiyaru community collectively identified the need to rehabilitate internal access roads, reconstruct the community centre and construct drinking water wells and a paddy store. The reconstruction of the damaged community centre was selected as the priority requirement of the village.

Community Centres form the main hub of the villages. It is used for community gatherings, village level administration, and to disseminate public information. It is the central location for community members to meet one another socially while Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and women's groups organise their activities in the premises. The Community Centres are also used for public meetings and for Government officials to meet community members to discuss



The interior of the damaged community centre



the village development issues. In addition, the Government health sector uses Community Centres to provide regular health clinics.

The original Thiruvaiyaru Community Centre, consisting of an 800 square foot building, was constructed in 1970. Following its destruction in 1996, it was rebuilt by the community in 2000. However in 2008 it was once again badly damaged. The Thiruvaiyaru community, having faced many economic hardships during the years of displacement, did not have the financial resources to rebuild. The Thiruvaiyaru Rural Development Society had renovated one room which functioned as their office space while most mass meetings were conducted under a tree.

The construction of the Thiruvaiyaru Community Centre commenced in early October 2014. Following a rigorous selection process, the Thiruvaiyaru Rural Development Society (RDS) was selected as the CBO to reconstruct the Community Centre. Officers of the Karachchi Divisional Secretariat Office provided support to UN-Habitat in the selection process. The Thiruvaiyaru RDS was responsible for the hiring of skilled construction workers and for the purchase of building materials under the supervision of UN-Habitat. The Government of Japan provided a grant of LKR. 2,524,000 towards the cost of construction.



The newly constructed Thiruvaiyaru Community Centre

The Thiruvaiyaru Community Centre was completed over 4.5 months. It consists of three rooms including a large meeting hall and separate offices for the Economic Development Officer, Health Clinic and toilets. Construction was undertaken using several environmentally friendly methods to save building material costs and to minimise the impact on the environment. These include the use of fair faced bricks to construct the walls. Skilled masons have been trained by UN-Habitat so that the methodology can be replicated elsewhere. Concrete door frames and window frames have been used to minimise the use of precious timber resources. Proper setting out, removal of top soil, recycling of construction debris and reusing excess mortar have been followed as good construction practices. The community has also provided their in-kind contributions by engaging in site clearing, storing materials, and record keeping. The Thiruvaiyaru Community Centre is now fully functional. The Health Clinics take place three Saturdays per month and the Government Officers are available for consultation 6 days per week while community meetings and gatherings are conducted over the weekends. The Karachchi Divisional Secretariat is the local authority responsible for maintenance and will ensure its long term sustainability.



A VRC review meeting in progress in the main hall.

Ms. Thasavaran, the Grama Niladhari of Thiruvaiyaru stated “We didn’t have a proper place to hold mass meetings and attend to our administrative work. Several Government field officers including the Grama Niladhari, Development Officer, Samurdhi Development Officers and Public Health Midwives have been working in the village without a proper building or facilities. We faced many difficulties, especially during the rainy season. We are grateful to the Japanese Government for this assistance.”

Mr. Mahendiaran, a member of the community stated “We were resettled in our village in 2010 without any basic facilities. We had no place for community gatherings and no opportunities for young people to

socialise. This project has helped to bring normal life back to our village. On behalf of our village, our sincere gratitude to the Japanese Government for providing funding and to UN-Habitat for their continuous support.”

In early March 2014, the building was officially opened by His Excellency Nobuhito Hobo, the Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka, during his visit to the Northern Province.

The RCIF project is being implemented in over 80 villages in the Districts of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu and will run from April 2013 – March 2015.



Opening of the community centre by H.E. Nobuhito Hobo, the Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka.