



Indian Housing Project

Case Study: From Temporary Hut to Permanent Home – Mrs. Sebastian Elysamma, Killinochchi District, Northern Province, Sri Lanka



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) have been selected for this project, which is being executed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. UN-Habitat is one of the IAs implementing the project in the districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna in Northern Sri Lanka. The 36 month project is being implemented from mid 2012 until mid 2015. During this period, UN-Habitat will support 16,800 families to reconstruct/repair their homes. Mrs. Sebastian Elysamma is one of the beneficiaries from Killinochchi

district, selected by the project to reconstruct her war damaged house in 2012.

Displaced from a rubber plantation in Raththota village in the Matale District in Central Sri Lanka during the ethnic riots of 1977, Sebastian Elysamma had relocated to Killinochchi district with her family. As she had no house or land of her own, she had no option but to remain in a camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) with her young family. When the IDP camp was dismantled, she cleared a two acre plot of land in Malayalapuram GN Division in Killinochchi and settled there with her husband and children. "Elephants used to frequent this area when we first settled here and we lived in a mud hut" says Elysamma, recalling the early years in Malayalapuram.

Elysamma's husband, a tailor by profession, passed away over twenty years ago and she brought up her family on her own, undertaking sewing orders from her neighbours. Four of her five children are now married and three live in plots of land she had subdivided for the children. She and her family were displaced twice from Killinochchi, in 1996 and in 2008 due to the escalation of the conflict between the Sri Lanka Armed Forces and the LTTE. Since returning to the village after their last displacement, she has been living in a transitional shelter with her 20 year old son, who is following an air conditioning course at the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA).



In September 2012, Elysamma was informed by the Grama Niladhari (Village Officer) that a mass public meeting will be held to select beneficiaries for the Indian Housing Project in Malayalapuram. She enthusiastically attended the meeting with other community members to learn about the project. At the mass meeting, Elysamma duly filled an application form, as her name was included in the master list based on information collected earlier by the Divisional Secretary.

Her application was scored based on several vulnerability criteria by UN-Habitat staff and the Karachchi Divisional Secretariat officials. Elysamma was selected for consideration for the first round of assistance as she had scored above 10 marks. Mrs. Elysamma came to know of her selection as the name list of those who were selected to be considered for assistance was displayed publicly in the village by the Divisional Secretary. Then a grievance period of one week was declared, for those with grievances on beneficiary selection to file their complaints with the Divisional Secretary. Elysamma did not have any complaints against her as she was genuinely affected by the conflict and was vulnerable, deserving immediate assistance for permanent housing support. At the end of the grievance period, the UN-Habitat technical team conducted a damage assessment survey of her existing house



and temporary shelter to verify the details provided by her, and selected her as a beneficiary.

Subsequently, Elysamma was requested to submit copies of her National Identity Card, Bank pass book and land ownership documents so that her file could be compiled and submitted to the Indian High Commission for grant payments. She was presented with several house type plans by the UN-Habitat Technical Officer, from which she could select the house design of her choice. The type plan of her choice was then amended to suit her needs and the standard Bill of Quantities was also modified according to the amended design. She received the first installment of Rs.100,000 (approx.770 USD¹) with the first batch of recipients on 2nd October 2012, the birth anniversary of Mahathma Gandhi and the launch date of Phase 2 of the Indian Housing Project.

Elysamma worked diligently to complete the foundation work of her new house. She worked closely with building material suppliers to purchase material such as rubble, sand and cement for the foundations. She then hired a skilled mason from the village to undertake the construction work and closely supervised the construction of the foundation. As her son was busy with his vocational studies at this time, she was compelled to hire unskilled labour to assist the mason. She was among the first 16 beneficiaries to complete the foundations and receive the second installment amounting to Rs.200,000. With this installment, she has already completed the walls up to lintel level. “My son and I now provide unskilled labour for the mason as labour costs are high and unskilled labour is hard to come by, as there is a great amount of construction going on in the area” states Elysamma, while helping the mason set up the shuttering planks for the lintel.



Elysamma’s third grant installment will be provided when the house reaches gable level. The final grant installment of Rs.50,000 will be released once the house is completed to the minimum standards specified by the project. In total, she will receive SLRS.550,000 from the Government of India. The completed house will consist of two bed rooms, a living room, kitchen and external toilet.

P. Jeyanthiran, UN-Habitat’s Technical Officer facilitating project activities in Malayalapuram village mentioned that Elysamma diligently followed advice provided by the project staff and managed the construction process efficiently. “Her enthusiasm and determination to complete the house as soon as possible, has led to her success” states Jeyanthiran. A Village Reconstruction Committee has been formed in the village and training programmes on basic construction technology, cost-effective building material purchasing, and hiring skilled masons and carpenters have been provided to the beneficiaries by UN-Habitat. The beneficiaries have also been trained in cement block casting and provided with block making moulds by UN-Habitat, in order to produce their own building materials. Jeyanthiran states that despite the operational challenges in the North, the warm welcome of the communities and the satisfaction of seeing beneficiaries such as Elysamma successfully constructing their houses makes his efforts immensely rewarding.

“Our family has never lived in a proper house” states Elysamma. “We have always lived in either transitional shelters or mud huts with cadjan roofs since we moved here. Once this house is complete, I will live here with my son until he gets married and then he can continue to stay here with his wife” she continues. “We are very grateful to the Indian government and UN-Habitat staff for helping us to construct this house.” she concluded.

Photos depict: Elysamma’s house under construction, with her temporary shelter in the background; Elysamma going through her land tenure documents; Elysamma supervising construction work.

¹ One US\$ = 131 SLRs