



Stories from the Field

Building Hope for the Future: Rebuilding Preschools in Sri Lanka's Conflict Affected Northern Province *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, pre-schools, internal access roads and storm water drainage systems.

The RCIF project is supporting the construction of 18 pre-schools in selected villages in Killinochchi and Mullaitivu districts. The pre-school in Sivanagar village in Mullaitivu is currently being constructed through a participatory construction process with funding from the project.

Sivanagar village is located in Kathaliyar Samalamkulam GN Division in Oddusuddan DS Division. The village consists of 268 families with a total population of 787 people. Farming is the main livelihood in the village. This village, similar to hundreds of others in the Northern Province, was severely affected by the three decades of conflict in Sri Lanka. From 2008-2009, during the final stages of the conflict, families were displaced on multiple occasions and were relocated to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Vavuniya District. When the Government of Sri Lanka resettlement process began, families gradually returned to the village during 2010-2011. The initial period of resettlement posed difficulties as the families had to restart their lives without basic infrastructure facilities such as housing and water supply.

The Sivanagar preschool, which was established in a temporary shelter in 2006, was completely destroyed in 2008. Following resettlement, several organisations had supported the construction of a temporary pre-school building consisting of a concrete floor, tin sheet walls and a cadjan roof. However, this building had to be abandoned due to its unsafe structural condition. This resulted in the preschool being relocated in the Navalar Social Centre in Oddusuddan. However, this location is also not ideal for a preschool as it is located in a private building and is situated in a low lying area prone to flooding during the monsoon rains.



Damaged preschool at Sivanagar



Teachers and children outside their temporary preschool located at the Navalur Social Centre in Oddusuddan.

When the RCIF project selected Kathaliyar Samalankulam GN division for assistance, a Settlement Improvement Planning (SIP) workshop was conducted in August 2013 to identify the priority needs of the community. The participants, including the Grama Niladhari Officer, Community Based Organisations (CBO) representatives and community members identified several community needs including housing, a community centre, health clinic, internal roads, public library and a preschool. The community selected the construction of the preschool as a priority.

Following the preliminary planning, reconstruction of the preschool commenced in November 2013. As the project follows a participatory people’s process of reconstruction, the rebuilding of the preschool was handed over to a CBO through a community agreement. Following a selection process, with support from the Divisional Secretariat and the Zonal Education Office, the Sivanagar Rural Development Society was selected to manage the design and construction process.

Following the preliminary planning, reconstruction of the preschool commenced

The design for the preschool was selected by the community from the three type plans presented by UN-Habitat at a mass meeting. Based on the design and bill of quantities, a total grant amount of LKR. 2,612,000 was allocated for the construction. The payment is provided in four instalments to the CBO, based on the physical progress of work. Skilled construction workers were hired and the construction materials purchased by the CBO under the supervision of UN-Habitat technical team. Special training on sustainable construction methods and disaster risk reduction features



New Sivanagar preschool under construction.

has been provided by UN-Habitat. Several environmentally friendly, cost effective materials have been used such as fair faced block work.

Discussing the construction progress, Mr R. Suntharasa, President of Sivanagar Rural Development Society, said “As the implementing partner of this project, our organisation has been given clear guidance by UN-Habitat. As the work has been progressing on schedule, I am confident that we will be able to complete construction soon.”

Once completed, the preschool will be 1,070 square feet in extent. The building consists of a main hall and study area, an office room, kitchen and toilets. Ms. John Nelson Mehala, recently appointed Grama Niladhari of Sivanagar village stated “The location for our preschool is ideal as majority of the families live nearby. I’m very happy with the progress of the preschool construction and help monitor the progress with the community members”.



Ms. Sivananthan Mangaleswari, the founder and first teacher of the village preschool is happy with the new building. “Despite numerous difficulties, parents give priority to their children’s education.” She said. “During my 25 years’ experience as a teacher, I have seen children facing many hardships as the village preschool did not have proper facilities. I am grateful to the Government of Japan for providing us with the funding for the preschool.”



Preschool teacher, Ms. Sivananthan Mangaleswari,

Ms. Sivam Yogeswari, a mother of two children, stated “I was really happy when I heard that this project was supporting the construction of a preschool in our village. I have two sons. My youngest son will be attending preschool during the next two years. My husband is working as a mason in the construction of the preschool, so we get regular updates from him”. Ms. Jeyarasa Tharini, mother of a five year old pre-schooler said “Earlier I had to take my children to the children’s playground in Mullaitivu town which is 30 kilometres away from the village. Now, as the preschool will have a children’s playground, I no longer need to travel far.”



The Sivanagar Rural Development Society has been implementing their work diligently in order to complete construction on schedule. In addition to the planning, supervision and monitoring of the construction work, they have constructed a tube well using their own resources in order to speed up the construction work. Tree saplings have been planted in the school premises to provide shade and to create a conducive environment for the children.

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.