



## Stories from the Field

### Building Hope for the Future: Reconstructing the Tharmapuram Village Preschool *Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure and Facilities in the Conflict Affected Areas in Northern Province of Sri Lanka (RCIF)*



Play time at the Tharmapuram Preschool

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 that is 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 due to the lack of basic services. Implemented in the districts of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, some of the key project interventions include the construction of community centres, pre-schools, internal access roads and storm water drainage systems.

The project is supporting the reconstruction of 18 pre-schools in the project areas. The preschool in Tharmapuram village in the Kanadavali DS Division of Killinochchi District is currently being constructed through a participatory construction process.

The original preschool, located in the Tharmapuram Vidyalayam (school) premises, had been damaged beyond repair during the conflict. As the village lacked financial resources to rebuild a permanent building, the preschool recommenced operations in a temporary shelter constructed by the community with financial assistance from a church group. This building is approx. 600 square feet consisting of a class room and an office, with two foot high walls constructed with cement blocks and a cadjan roof. Around 40 children are currently attending the preschool. However,



this building is not ideal, as it is a temporary structure without basic facilities offering inadequate protection from the elements during the monsoon rains.

When the RCIF project commenced in April 2013, Settlement Improvement Planning workshops were conducted by UN-Habitat to identify priority infrastructure needs of the community. The Tharmapuram community identified a permanent preschool as a priority need for the village. As the RCIF project follows a participatory “people’s process” of reconstruction, the construction of the preschool was contracted to a Community Based Organisation (CBO) by UN-Habitat, the Tharmapuram East Rural Development Society (RDS). Following a rigorous process, the Kandavali Divisional Secretariat assisted UN-Habitat in the selection of the CBO and the reconstruction of the preschool commenced during the fourth quarter of 2013.



Teacher and pre-schoolers near the temporary preschool

The construction of the preschool is undertaken through a grant provided in four instalments to the RDS based on the physical progress of work, while technical supervision and advice is provided by UN-Habitat. Skilled construction workers have been hired and the construction materials purchased by the RDS. Special training on sustainable construction methods and disaster risk reduction features has been provided by UN-Habitat.

The construction of the new preschool is currently in progress and the teachers, children and parents are eagerly awaiting its completion. Suhanthi, one of the preschool teachers, stated “We have been facing many challenges due to lack of facilities. We are unable to function during rainy days as the building gets wet. We are running short of learning materials. Most of the families are poor and cannot afford to contribute financially. We are really looking forward to moving to the new building. It will provide enough space for children to play and learn. On behalf of the children, parents and the community, we express our gratitude to the Government of Japan providing funding for this initiative”.



Children at the entrance of the current preschool

Upon completion, the new preschool will be approx. 1,070 square feet. It will consist of a large class room, teachers’ room, kitchen and two toilets, one with disabled access.

The Tharmapuram East community has been providing their own labour contribution to clear the construction site, established water facilities for construction work and monitoring construction progress. It is anticipated that the pre-school will be completed in June 2014.

Mrs. Vasanthakumari Bavani, mother of pre-schooler stated “My youngest daughter, who is five years old, attends the preschool. She accompanies me every day to the preschool where I prepare mid-day meals

for the children. I earn Rs.100 per day, which is my only source of income.”



The RDS President, Mr. R. Raveendiran stated “The community members have helped us to clear and prepare the land for construction. We closely monitor the construction progress with technical support from UN-Habitat. We have been provided training on disaster risk reduction methodologies and the use of cost effective, eco-friendly building materials. We are using fair faced blocks to construct the walls.” A rain water harvesting system (RWHS) will be established to provide regular, cost-effective access to water in the preschool. Several environmentally friendly, cost effective materials have been used. Building debris is being used as back filling. The roof will be



New building under construction (left) next to the current preschool

constructed with Calicut clay tiles incorporating disaster risk reduction features such as roof anchors and roof bands to mitigate the impact of strong winds.

Local Government Officials including the Rural Development Officer, Grama Niladhari and the Divisional Secretary are closely involved in the reconstruction process. The Zonal Director of Education and Child Right and Probation Officer of the Divisional Secretariat provided input to ensure compliance of the pre-school building with the educational policy of the Provincial Department of Education.

The Tharmapuram Grama Niladhari, Mr. M. Rasaratnam stated “The conflict had many negative impacts on our children. Many children in our GN division were facing difficulties in obtaining early childhood and primary education. Learning activities of a child starts from pre-school where they can enjoy learning if the facilities are available and accessible. The new pre-school will be a great asset to our village”.

The parents are providing continuous support for the development of the preschool by participating in voluntary clean-up campaigns and organizing events such as sports meets. The new preschool will be used by children from several villages including the Tharmapuram East, Puliampokkanai and Tharmapuram West GN divisions and Sundikulam village.



The *Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure and Facilities in the Conflict Affected Areas in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka* is being implemented in over 80 villages in the Districts of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu and will run from April 2013 – March 2015.