

## Stories from the Field

### Improving Accessibility in Remote Villages in Nuwara Eliya District

#### Human Development Initiative through Empowerment and Settlement Improvement in the Plantation Settlements in Sri Lanka

**March 2018, Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka:** Well-maintained internal access roads are vital for the smooth functioning of villages. In the central hilly regions of Sri Lanka, where the steep, mountainous terrain makes accessibility difficult, paved roads are a major asset for communities. UN-Habitat, through the project “Human Development Initiative through Empowerment and Settlement Improvement in the Plantation Settlements in Sri Lanka (HDI)” is providing a number of infrastructure facilities to selected villages in Nuwara Eliya District. These include community centres, retaining walls, Child Development Centres and internal access roads.



The completed internal access road in Kikilyamana GN division.

Funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the HDI project aims to empower and build resilient plantation communities with satisfactory

living conditions, safer settlements, better access to basic services and improved livelihood skills. One of the key objectives of the project is to improve community infrastructure facilities in remote villages based on priorities identified by the communities. The project is currently implementing 23 infrastructure initiatives in Nuwara Eliya District. At Kikilyamana Grama Niladhari (GN) Division, community members selected the widening and construction of an internal access road as a priority intervention for their village.

Kikilyamana GN division is situated in the Kothmale Divisional Secretariat Division. This GN division, consisting of three villages, has a population of 853 people consisting of 235 families. The main livelihoods of the residents are agriculture and employment in the tea estates. The Nuwara Eliya tea estate is located in this GN division and provides employment to a large number of residents. The nearest town of Pundaluoya, located 14 km away is visited frequently by the residents for their immediate needs such as grocery shopping and banking. They also visit the main town of Nuwara Eliya for employment, banking, business, and medical needs.

When UN-Habitat commenced project activities at Kikilyamana, a Community Action Planning (CAP) workshop was held in February 2017 to consult community members and identify their priority infrastructure needs. The lack of a well-functioning internal access road was identified as a major challenge during this meeting. The community members were facing severe difficulties in accessing the town centres from their village, especially during the rainy season as the existing road consisted of a two foot, narrow, unpaved footpath. This posed problems for residents especially during medical emergencies as no vehicular traffic was possible along the road. School children and elderly residents also faced difficulties due to its dilapidated state.

In keeping with UN-Habitat’s participatory process of project implementation, the Kikilyamana Rural Development Society (RDS) was selected to implement the widening and construction of the internal road. The use of a Community

Based Organisation (CBO) from the village to implement this initiative further strengthened community participation in the project, thus ensuring a sense of ownership of the public asset from the outset. The HDI project provided LKR. 7.9 Mn for the widening and construction of the access road through UN-Habitat, while the community provided a financial contribution of LKR.25,000 as well as their in-kind labour contributions through voluntary “shramadana” activities.



The internal road during construction.

When the project activities commenced, the identified land was cleared, levelled and landscaped with voluntary community participation. The community was also mobilised with the help of the Grama Niladhari and the estate management to remove fences and provide more space for the road. Written consent has been provided by the residents for the fence removal and road widening.

UN-Habitat provided technical support to construct the internal road. The assistance included preparation of detailed plans and technical designs and Bills of Quantities (BoQs). In addition, UN-Habitat supervised the physical and

financial progress and provided technical guidance on construction standards and materials. The road was constructed within a period of six months and was completed in December 2017. Mr. Dhanapala, the Estate Manager of Nuwara Eliya estate said “I regularly visited the site to check on the work progress. I noticed how hard the people worked even during heavy rains. I really appreciate the quality work.”

The completed internal access road, constructed with concrete, is 385 feet in length, six feet in width. A storm water drainage system of 425 feet in length has also been constructed. Earlier, soil erosion had been observed in some of the steep slopes along the road due to the lack of proper drainage. However, with the widening of the road to six feet, and the construction of the storm water drainage system with covering slabs and retaining walls, this problem has been mitigated.

One hundred and fifty (150) families residing in the Kikiliyamana Second Mile Post and Third Mile Post villages have directly benefitted from the new road. In addition, over 800 people in the GND as well as vegetable vendors from neighbouring villages and Government officials such as the Midwife, Police Officer, Development officer have benefitted through improved accessibility. Now community members can ride their bicycles, drive Tuk-Tuks (three wheelers) and small trucks to transport vegetables along the road. The Grama Niladhari, Mr. Amila Prasanga said “I thank KOICA, UN-Habitat and the community for the immense support given to construct the road. There are many school children, elderly people and farmers benefiting from this road. It is now easier for me to provide services to the community”.

The HDI project is contributing towards human development through capacity building of youth, communities and local authorities; increasing resilience of the communities through settlement planning and community infrastructure; and through awareness creation towards mainstreaming plantation settlements. It is implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Hill Country New Villages, Infrastructure and Community Development. It is expected to benefit over 10,000 persons directly and 250,000 persons indirectly in Nuwara Eliya district. The project is being implemented from January 2017 to March 2018 in the Kothmale, Nuwara Eliya and Walapane Divisional Secretariat divisions.