



INTEGRATED PROGRAMME FOR EMPOWERING CONFLICT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES IN NORTH AND EAST SRI LANKA

A UNTFHS funded project implemented by UNICEF, ILO and UNDP
October 2010 – September 2013

Beneficiary Stories

Background

Communities in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka have for many years borne the brunt of the decades-long conflict, including the loss of family members, repeated displacement, the loss of productive income and assets, interruptions in basic social services, and the difficulty of living in an environment of insecurity and militarization. With the opportunity to resettle and rebuild their lives and communities, many face additional obstacles in their path. For former combatants, many of them young at the time of their recruitment, they lack the skills and training to enter into formal employment. For women, many of them widowed during the conflict, they face challenges in obtaining death certificates, disqualifying them from claiming inheritance and pensions. And, for all of the conflict-affected families, reconciliation and increasing social cohesion remains tenuous.

To address these multifaceted insecurities, UNICEF, ILO and UNDP collaborated on the integrated programme to support conflict affected communities rebuild their lives with funding from the UNTFHS. With a special focus on female headed households, ex-combatants, and children, the project aims to: (i) reintegrate ex-combatants with skills and vocational training; (ii) improve access to protection, justice, and legal documentation; (iii) increase socio-economic opportunities in fisheries and agriculture; and (iv) promote sustainable peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion among conflict-affected families

Empowering vulnerable communities through employment



Prior to 2011, many of the women in Jayanthiyaya, a border village in the Koralaipattu Central Divisional Secretariat in Batticaloa District, largely Muslims, were not engaged in any viable entrepreneurial activities. Affected by the conflict and subsequent resettlement, a number of women within the community were widows.

To support these women, the joint UN programme held a community planning workshop with members of the village Women's Rural Development Society (WRDS) to identify viable group enterprises. These included businesses in flour and spice grinding, milk-based sweets making and savoury snack making. Meanwhile, ILO also supported the renovation of the operation centre, business and skills training, procurement of equipment, tools and raw material, and training on packing and labelling for the three enterprises.

Fifteen women are engaged in production activities in the three ventures, with each of them earning around Rs. 4,000 per month. The products are sold at the weekly market, nearby shops and in the neighbouring villages. Selected women have also been encouraged to act as mobile sales persons. In addition, the joint programme established a community fund of Rs. 600,000 for operating a revolving micro-credit scheme for the benefit of members willing to run individual enterprises. So far, 50 families have received a loan ranging from Rs. 10,000 to 20,000 through this scheme, which has enabled them to engage in viable livelihood activities. With little or no income prior to this, the women of Jayanthiyaya have found strength through these activities, camaraderie as an active group of entrepreneurs, and are now better able to support their families.



Empowering children affected by the conflict



Once a child soldier, Kanthi* was recruited to join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) while she was still in school. With the end of the war, however, she was among the many child soldiers who were identified for rehabilitation through a national programme.

Today, Kanthi looks to the future with renewed hope as she happily manages the only shop in her village, Vavuniya District in northern Sri Lanka, with the help of her mother and elder brother.

Empowering young, conflict affected children such as Kanthi was crucial for helping to rebuild lives and communities. Through the joint UN programme, the agencies provided financial support as well as assistance in schooling and income generating opportunities.

Playing a key role during the rehabilitation process, UNICEF worked closely with the authorities to ensure the protection of children's rights while also monitoring their progress, thereby guaranteeing suitable support throughout the process. Although she



was reunited with her parents on January 15, 2010, there was still a long road ahead for Kanthi. With her education disrupted during the conflict, Kanthi was determined to go back to school. UNDP provided support to obtain vital documentation, including her birth certificate, which was crucial for gaining admission to school and taking the national exams. Kanthi took the GCE Ordinary Level examination in December 2011. Having completed her examination, she was keen on engaging in a small business venture. To pursue this dream, Kanthi received support from ILO to start a small shop. The training and guidance provided by ILO helped equip her with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage and maintain a small business, thereby further empowering her and enabling her to take charge of her own life.

Empowering youth through greater employment opportunities

T. Kugadas, from a village of Batticaloa District, suffered injuries to his spine during fighting in 2005, resulting in him being confined to a wheelchair. Although he received training on mobile phone repair during rehabilitation, he faced numerous challenges upon his return home, including difficulty engaging in income generating activities to support himself and his family. In 2010, he was identified for assistance under the UN programme, receiving reintegration assistance from UNICEF.



However, Kugadas was determined to establish a mobile phone repair workshop, building on the skills and knowledge gained a few years earlier. Therefore, ILO provided technical and financial assistance to Kugadas to help him establish his workshop, ensuring economic security. Today, Kugadas, who is now 25 years of age, is earning a monthly income of Rs. 7,500. With this income, he is better able to support his family members. Moreover, having found strength through his work, Kugadas is now confident that he can meet the challenges of the future.

Children born in India to Sri Lankan parents receive their citizenship certificates

During the conflict, some people who lived in the northern districts fled to India and stayed in refugee camps for many years, some staying for as long as 20 years. Currently, many of them are returning back to Sri Lanka with the hope of rebuilding their lives. However, with their return, many are facing a major obstacle in establishing citizenship for their children.

Typically, children born in Sri Lanka to Sri Lankan parents receive Sri Lankan citizenship at birth. However, children born in India to Sri Lankan refugee parents do not automatically receive Sri Lankan citizenship. Instead, they must follow a long and complicated process. For these returning children, citizenship papers are a pre-requisite for receiving other civic documents such as the National Identity Card, which allows them to enroll in education, to receive social service assistance, to open bank accounts, and to participate in civic processes like voting. Often cited as a critical issue among the people returning from India to Vavuniya



District, UNDP identified facilitating the citizenship application process as a priority under the joint UN programme.

In a collaborative effort, UNICEF and village level officers (Grama Niladaries) working in the District refer returning children and young people to UNDP for citizenship support. Moreover, ILO also highlights the importance of attaining citizenship as part of their livelihood and skills training programmes.

UNDP project officer Mr. Mohamed Ziyath recounts the process: *“once we receive the information about children and young people through UNICEF and Grama Niladaries, we organise ‘pre mobile clinics’ to explain the process and collect applications to convert Indian birth certificates into consular birth certificates, which are equivalent to Sri Lankan birth certificates. We then ensure that the applications are handed over to the central record room in Colombo. Once people receive their consular birth certificate, the project organises a ‘citizenship mobile clinic’ with the support of the Immigration Department to accept citizenship applications and other supporting documents. Immigration officers check all the certificates, certify them and bring them back to the Immigration Department’s head office in Colombo. Applications are then forwarded to the Defense Ministry for further approval. Once cleared by the Defense Ministry, the Immigration Department will issue the citizenship certificates to respective District Secretaries”.*



Jointly with District officials, UNDP holds a small event to distribute the certificates among the children and youth. Their parents are also present at these occasions. Since its inception, the project has enabled 300 children to receive citizenship in Vavuniya. The project is hoping to process 150 more applications during the remainder of 2012.

**Name has been changed*

This document is based on beneficiary stories submitted by the joint UN programme team.