

Annex 4: Brochure – Development after devastation



Development after devastation

In the wake of tsunami and civil war, mechanization and small-business development come to the rescue of Sri Lankan rural communities



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A UNIDO project helps farmers and artisans recover their livelihood

More than two decades of civil war plagued Sri Lanka with a dramatic deterioration of human security in general and a marked increase in the vulnerability of the weakest population groups. The tsunami of December 2004 imposed an additional heavy toll of death, devastation and suffering. The impact of both calamities was most severe in the northern and eastern coastal regions of the country, the island's breadbasket in the days before the armed conflict broke out. It is estimated that the fighting alone killed over 60,000 people and displaced many more, while the population displaced by the tsunami approached half a million. These misfortunes inflicted serious damage to the social and economic fabric of families and communities and greatly diminished productive capabilities.

In the fertile northern and eastern regions, agricultural productivity declined by up to 70% in the first decade of ethnic hostilities, and while over 35% of the population continued to earn their livelihoods in agriculture and fisheries, it was these economic sectors that took the brunt of tsunami devastation.



Since 2007, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has carried out the project entitled *Support for sustainable livelihood recovery among the conflict-affected population through improved agricultural productivity and community-based entrepreneurship*. Funded by the Government of Japan through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, the project has complemented the Sri Lankan Government's policies of rehabilitation and reconstruction and has been implemented in close cooperation with the chambers of commerce and industry in two eastern districts: Batticaloa and Trincomalee. A long-time provider of technical assistance to Sri Lanka, UNIDO also brought to bear its extensive experience



of interventions in post-crisis situations in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Uganda and elsewhere.

Breaking new ground in small-plot agriculture With food security as the most urgent challenge, the project helped some 3,000 households in rural communities revitalize agricultural activities and increase productivity by replacing traditional mostly manual methods with efficient crop-tending practices and mechanized operations. Sprinkler kits were provided and installed on selected small farms where demonstrations were carried out for the benefit of dozens of neighbouring producers of vegetables such as tomatoes, eggplant, onions and chilies.

It was the introduction of mechanization that made the crucial difference in the lives of farmers in the two eastern districts, the change that opened up a true development course beyond subsistence agriculture and dependence on relief. Agricultural machines such as tractors, power tillers and rice reapers and threshers boosted labour efficiency and overall productivity. Before the machines were handed over to selected groups of beneficiaries, project technicians conducted operation and maintenance training sessions attended by some 600 farmers; they also coached 30 local trainers called upon to provide further demonstration services. Focused on mechanized rice cultivation, a study tour hosted by the International



Continuing Education Centre of Sripatum University in Thailand gave 14 participants, including farmers, representatives of farmers' associations and technicians from the Sri Lankan Department of Agriculture, the opportunity to further acquaint themselves with state-of-the-art mechanization and crop management methods in rice farming.

An extensive training programme in the use of a multi-chopper for compost production was carried out for the benefit of 62 farmers from both Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The programme was conducted with the assistance of Department of Agriculture technicians who had taken part in the Thailand study tour.

Building up small businesses The second key objective of the project was rural entrepreneurial development focused on the weakest population groups: women (many of whom were widows and single mothers), the youth, displaced persons and returnees. The range of training programmes covered agro-processing, coir production, cloth printing, pot agriculture, bag production, and small-business management. More than 60 women from both eastern districts were trained in rice processing and in quality control, packaging and marketing of rice products such as rice flake and rice noodles (see photo on page 7). In Batticaloa, 15 women coconut farmers and their families were coached in coir extraction and the making of coir yarn and such coir products as mats and brooms. In Trincomalee, 20 women participated in a training of trainers programme in business planning and development, and financial management. Twenty young women already engaged in bag making attended courses that improved their skills in design, finishing and presentation and increased their production efficiency. Thirty-one project trainees in traditional batik printing are now successfully selling their products in the rural markets of the region and the recently rehabilitated tourism facilities.

To foster rural entrepreneurship development through knowledge transfer, the project organized another study tour in Thailand where Sri Lankan direct beneficiaries, most of





them women, as well as government trainers and extension workers visited community development groups and rural enterprises run by groups of women and engaged in processing agricultural products. Management structures, credit schemes, and packaging and marketing techniques were the subjects in which the visitors showed the greatest interest. Fifteen community development groups promoting cooperative production and self-help initiatives had already been established in each of the two Sri Lankan districts, and the lessons learned in Thailand were put to work with remarkable success.

The project also revived and improved significantly the technical capabilities of rural providers of services such as the production of simple tools and implements and the repair and maintenance of agricultural machinery and fishing boats. Sixty small metal workshops and thirty boat mechanics participated in this programme.

Stories of achievement The success of the UNIDO project has many faces, but some of them stand out and are worth portraying in some detail. On his two-acre farm at Kaluwanchikudy in Batticaloa, Markandu Vishvalingam used a well pump and a hose to water his commercial vegetable crops. Severely affected by the war and the 2004 tsunami, his farm was among those surveyed by a project expert who recommended improved irrigation systems to eliminate water, energy and labour waste and, as a result,

substantially reduce production cost. Visvalingam decided to get a sprinkler system for his half-acre chili crop and now, he says, “luckily I was selected as the first beneficiary by our farmers’ organization.” Earlier, he remembers, “it took me over four hours to water my chili plot, but now the sprinklers do it in two hours, and every month I save 100 liters of kerosene at the pump. Also, the crop weight has gone up by about 15% – and, all told, I make an additional Rs.16,000 (ca. US\$130) a month from my chilies.” Not only that Visvalingam’s income growth could hardly fail to convince his neighbours to follow suit, but he was – as provided by the project – to pay the cost of the sprinkler system to the local farmers’ organization so that the latter could purchase another one for another farmer.

A Batticaloa farmer who participated in the Thailand study tour on mechanized rice cultivation, Kulanthaivadivel Vasanthakumar, returned home with an innovative idea; he modified a power sprayer and turned it into a mechanized rice seeder similar to what he had seen in Thailand. “I like machines, they make one’s work so much easier,” he says, “and I knew I could do it.” The project management organized demonstrations of his innovation and a prototype was later shown at an industrial exhibition in Batticaloa.





A promise of peace The end of the armed conflict, in May 2009, and a gradual return to normalcy required a refocusing of project activities to the new market environment. The growing number of returnees from the refugee camps increased the demand for basic goods and services in Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The relaxation of security measures made it possible for goods produced in the east to be sold elsewhere in the country and even abroad, and the region started to capitalize on its significant tourism potential.

Extended to the end of 2010, the UNIDO project, in addition to providing the population of the eastern region with the tools for livelihood recovery, consistently sought to sow the seeds of ethnic reconciliation. Every attempt was made to ensure that the selection of training beneficiaries reflected the ethnic diversity of the region with Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil villagers, many of them young, spending days and weeks learning and working together. The Thailand study tour on rural entrepreneurship development was no exception in this respect, and two teams of participants representing all ethnic groups in Batticaloa and Trincomalee respectively agreed to continue to work together after their return home. It is this emerging bond of cooperation and tolerance which makes UNIDO feel confident that its project succeeded in accomplishing its mission of making a significant contribution to the new promise of peace in eastern Sri Lanka.



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