

## Stories From the Field

### Supporting Families to Rebuild Their Homes in Northern Sri Lanka

*Mrs. Kamalathasan Maheshwary, Kanakarayankulam, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka*



The “Support to Conflict Affected People through Housing” project is a housing recovery initiative supporting returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the North of Sri Lanka. Funded by the European Union (EU), the Australian Government (AusAID) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and jointly implemented by UN-Habitat and SDC, the project provides cash grants and technical support to home owners in the districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi.

Mrs. Kamalathasan Maheshwary, a 30 year old single mother of three from Vavuniya, is one of the project’s first beneficiaries. The family was selected because their house was badly damaged during the conflict and Maheshwary and her family were living in a temporary shelter for more than a year. In mid 2011, Maheshwary began re-construction of her home, following a ‘Home Owner Driven’ construction process, and brought the two bedroom house to completion in early 2012.

Maheshwary has been the sole breadwinner of her family during the past six years after her husband Sithaparapillai Kamalathasan left the family in 2006 following a domestic dispute. As they had depended upon Kamalathasan’s income, his desertion left the family helpless. In order to ensure the wellbeing of her mother and three children, Maheshwary started a small poultry farm which helped the family earn some money to meet their basic needs.

In addition to her responsibilities as a single parent, Maheshwary also had to deal with issues caused by the conflict. Originally from Kandy in central Sri Lanka, Maheshwary’s family

#### Project Quick Facts

**Funded by:** European Union, Government of Australia, SDC

**Location:** Vavuniya, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar Sri Lanka

**Duration:** January 2011 – June 2013

**Key outputs:** Reconstruction and repair of conflict damaged houses.

**Implementing partners:** UN-Habitat, SDC, conflict affected communities



had settled in the Northern Province over 20 years ago. The family had been subject to multiple displacements during the thirty year conflict. In February 2008, her family were compelled to move to Vishwamadu in Killinochchi district and to areas in Mullaitivu district with thousands of other families, where the final stages of the conflict was in progress. The family survived this difficult time and were transferred to an IDP welfare camp in Vavuniya in April 2009. In December 2009, having spent nearly eight months in the IDP camp, they were resettled in their village of Kanagaryankulam. Since she had no regular income or livelihood, Maheshwary



started working as a labourer. She recalls the difficulties faced with limited access to drinking water and food due to her strained financial situation. Maheshwary is now working at Sri Lanka Red Cross where she is being paid a regular monthly allowance supplementing their poultry farming income.

Maheshwary was delighted to be selected as a beneficiary. As a female headed household, her family was given priority assistance by UN-Habitat. Financial assistance of Rs. 500,000 (approx.4,000 USD) was provided in five instalments to employ a mason to construct the house. Maheshwary was responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring

of the construction with the help of her mother, 65 year old Muniyandi Velamma and the UN-Habitat technical team. Similar to other families selected under this initiative, Maheshwary also contributed her own labour towards the reconstruction effort in the spirit of the 'Home Owner Driven' process.

"I never expected housing assistance to be provided to my family this quickly" Maheshwary said. "With the difficulties I have undergone during the past few years, I never dared to hope for a permanent home for my family. I was more interested in making ends meet to ensure my children and mother had their basic needs".

She also said that her income, barely sufficient to meet the family's basic needs, would not have been enough to construct a house. "I am so proud that I contributed to the construction of my own house as a labourer throughout the process. I am grateful to the donors for funding this project and giving us a secure place to live. My children now have space to study and do their school work and my family have proper shelter from seasonal rains". Her children, Ushanthini, Ushnathan and Thushagini are attending school at Mallawi and Kanagrayankulam and the family is steadily rebuilding their interrupted lives.

The **Support to Conflict Affected People through Housing Sri Lanka** project will support over 4,600 families to reconstruct and repair their conflict damaged houses, with the main share of the funding coming from the European Union. The Government of Sri Lanka is supporting this initiative and additionally attracting funding for larger scale infrastructure projects.



**Photographs:** 1. Maheshwary during construction, 2. Maheshwary with her mother and daughter outside the temporary shelter; 3. The newly constructed house; and 4. Maheshwary bringing her youngest daughter home from school.

For more information on the project, visit the UN-Habitat website: <http://www.unhabitat.lk/project7a.html>