

Former Foes Restore War-torn Sri Lankan Infrastructure and Livelihood Together

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BACKGROUND

Civil War in Sri Lanka. In July 1983, the Liberation Tigers Tamil Eelam killed 13 soldiers in Jaffna, sparking 26 years of bloodshed that left an estimated 130,000 dead.¹

The Tamil Tigers, a militant organization fighting for a separate state in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, began their challenge to the government with the Jaffna attack. War raged on the island, fuelled by politics and ethnic issues among Sinhalese Nationals, which comprised 75% of the population, Tamils (15%), and Muslims (9%). It was not until May 2009 that the civil war ended with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers at the hands of Sri Lanka's military.

Post-Conflict Challenges. As the civil war raged on, Sri Lanka's environment, economy, and physical and social infrastructure suffered heavily. The cost of the 26-year war has been estimated at \$200 billion.² After the conflict, bouts of droughts and floods compounded Sri Lanka's woes. Survivors faced starvation and the economic system was equally hungry for livelihood to repair infrastructure damage.

Hardest hit was north Sri Lanka. More than 277,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) were squeezed into 32 welfare camps. There was limited transportation and training facilities, no investments and banking services, and limited means of livelihood. There was also an urgent need to provide employment opportunities for more than 2,500 families, and to rehabilitate field irrigation canals and rural access roads.

APPROACH

On 19 August 2010, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$2.5 million grant to help restore the livelihood of IDPs.³ The project targeted those most vulnerable—with no sources of income—from Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Muallaitivu, Mannar, and Vavuniya districts.

The project focused on rehabilitating irrigation canals and rural access roads so that IDPs could revive agricultural

Highlights

- Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war—coupled with droughts and floods—destroyed physical and economic infrastructure, resulting in poverty, starvation, and unemployment.
- Post-conflict emergency assistance focused on rebuilding roads and canals, training people, reestablishing livelihood, and encouraging savings.
- Tapping internally displaced people for the interventions facilitated their integration into the community, built their financial and livelihood skills, and increased their sense of empowerment.



Improvement of rural road in the Vavuniya District of north Sri Lanka

Photo by Sri Lanka Resident Mission

income generation, training of more than 2,000 IDPs to improve agricultural productivity and access to markets, and encouraging the practice of monetary savings in the banking system so that IDPs could begin sustainable ventures.

Cash-for-Work. Finding labor for infrastructure reconstruction was a crucial hurdle. The answer was found among the IDPs themselves. A flexible cash-for-work program was developed such that any beneficiary from all five districts could be engaged and paid to undertake infrastructure rehabilitation. As soon as the IDPs were resettled, their manual labor was tapped for rebuilding roads and canals, a job which earned them 550 Sri Lanka rupees (SLRe) daily.

The cash-for-work program was implemented through the establishment of 57 community-based organizations which served as the employment and disbursement unit. An 8-hour workday for each beneficiary was set for 5 to 6 months, providing temporary income. Most IDPs used their daily wage for children's education and basic household needs.

¹ *The Economist*. 2012. Shattered Lives. The number of casualties, however, is still subject to intense debate. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2012/11/sri-lankas-bloody-civil-war>

² Asia Economic Institute. *Economic Impacts of Sri Lanka's Civil War*. http://www.asiaecon.org/special_articles/read_sp/12556

³ ADB. 2010. *Project Data Sheet: Project 44201-012, Post-Conflict Emergency Assistance for Livelihood Restoration of Resettled Internally Displaced People in the North, also known as JFPR9150-SRI*. Manila. <http://www.adb.org/projects/44201-012/main>

Saving for the Future. Next, a savings habit was instilled in the IDPs. Out of their daily wage of SLRe550, SLRe200 was deposited into newly restored banks as prescribed by the project's compulsory savings scheme. Some of them were depositing money in the bank for the first time since no banking system existed in the area during the conflict. The money saved was then invested in self-employment activities where they received training from the project's agricultural skill development program. Government training institutes conducted seminars on food processing, carpentry, and livestock, among others.

RESULTS

By 31 December 2012, 2,674 beneficiaries had been employed in the cash-for-work program building over 360 kilometers (km) of rural access roads and connecting 83 km of field irrigation canals to paddy fields. Of the beneficiaries, 55% (1,459) were women. The project exceeded targets, and its success merited additional funding and implementation extension of 4 months until 30 April 2013.

Project Implementation Lessons. Beyond the infrastructure development and poverty alleviation in northern Sri Lanka, valuable project implementation lessons were also gained.

This project was implemented by the project implementation unit (PIU) simultaneously with another grant to support livelihood and gender equality.⁴ ADB's project officers realized that it was possible to use one PIU to implement two projects with different executing agencies provided that the PIU has extensive experience in implementing ADB projects. This led to cost reduction and better coordination among bilateral donors, non-government organizations, divisional secretaries, and village officers as they cooperated to rebuild the war-torn area.

Transparency and fairness were also important. The wage system for beneficiaries needed joint approval of the chairman of the community-based organizations, the technical officer of the PIU, and the divisional secretary. This transparency earned the trust of stakeholders and beneficiaries, making participation easier and the IDPs more comfortable with the transactions.

Sustainability. After the project, the community-based organizations will maintain the rehabilitated field irrigation



Restoration of tank embankment in Jaffna District
Photo by Sri Lanka Resident Mission

canals and rural access roads with assistance from local authorities. After training, the beneficiaries started self-employment in the agriculture, handicrafts, masonry, and carpentry sectors.

Project officers also noted that the practice of setting aside savings will likely be continued as beneficiaries have seen the advantage of maintaining bank accounts for their livelihood and in cases of emergency.

Most of all, harmonious community work and unity among the villagers were achieved. Tamils were the most numerous among the beneficiaries, numbering 2,284. They were followed by 213 Muslims, 150 Sinhalese, and other IDPs.

Their differences set aside, former foes during a bitter period in Sri Lanka's history have united to gradually repair what the war had broken.

Related Links

- Post-Conflict Emergency Assistance for Livelihood Restoration of Resettled Internally Displaced People in the North
<http://www.adb.org/projects/44201-012/main>
- Improving Connectivity to Support Livelihoods and Gender Equality
<http://www.adb.org/projects/39619-022/main>

⁴ADB. 2009. *Project Data Sheet: JFPR9143-SRI, Improving Connectivity to Support Livelihoods and Gender Equality*. Manila.
www.adb.org/printpdf/projects/39619-022/main

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