

SRI LANKA



UN-HABITAT

FAST FACTS

Post-tsunami Sri Lanka

- 35,322 dead
- 21,441 injured
- 4,968 missing
- 516,150 Internally Displaced People (IDPs)
- More than 95,000 houses destroyed

(Source: Government of Sri Lanka)

A NEW HOME,
A NEW LIFE

UN-HABITAT Post-Tsunami Reconstruction Effort in Sri Lanka

Ameena Umma, a widow from Maruthamunai, Kalmunai. Ameena is no longer afraid about having to build her house all alone. Now, she has the support of community members

"UN-HABITAT did not come with contractors or house plans. But they had vision ... they tried to help us regain our confidence in ourselves – something the tsunami had destroyed. UN-HABITAT officials encourage us to prepare our own house plans"

Hemlatha, Chairperson, Kovilwatta CDC, Galle

The tsunami that smashed into Sri Lanka on December 26, 2004 was the worst natural calamity in the history of this island-nation. It ravaged the southern coast — the most densely populated and urbanized part of the country. Its impact was even more severe in the conflict-scarred North East where people had already suffered displacement for over 20 years. The damage cost the country around US\$ 1.3 billion. As in every disaster, the worst-affected were the poor and the traditionally disadvantaged.

One year on, the signs of devastation remain — broken homes, broken lives, broken dreams. In some places, the wreckage has been turned into a monument: in Perilaya, the site of the infamous train derailment along the Colombo-Galle railway line, several carriages have been preserved as a tribute to the thousand or more people who died as the passenger train was swept from the rails.

The challenges are immense. Not only homes and public buildings, but also basic services and social cohesion have crumbled. Problems of rehousing all those whose homes were swept away persist. There are unresolved issues about land and location. Until new land is provided for those made landless, the rebuilding process is likely to remain slow. But the crisis has thrown up an unique opportunity for families and communities to come together. Through 'Community Action Planning', many communities are planning, prioritizing their needs, and regaining their confidence so badly battered by the gigantic waves. As a new year dawns, tales of loss and despair are giving way to hope.

A New Home,
A New Life and New Hope

Nona Kasina, a 35-year-old housewife from Talapitya, Galle, is one among the thousands of tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka looking forward to the year ahead in her new home. The tsunami destroyed the roof over Nona Kasina's head but not her spirit. The mother of three, bereft of all hope just a year ago, celebrated moving into her new home this October with a housewarming party. Invitees included friends, relatives as well as local government and UN-HABITAT officials who helped Nona realize her dream — a new home. Nona's husband, the family's breadwinner, was out on work most of the time as the house was built. Nona knew little about buildings or about managing large sums of money. But confronted with the task, she learnt to cope. Along with her daughter Safina, a high-school student, Nona helped out with house plans, oversaw the construction work, and managed the funds — SLR 250,000 given by UN-HABITAT. "Our new home has a higher roof than what we had earlier. Now, it is cooler indoors. The kitchen is more spacious and has a chimney. The new toilet has better drainage," point out Nona and her daughter.



Nona Kasina's house-warming party.

As the lead agency within the United Nations system for coordinating activities in the field of human settlements, UN-HABITAT is part of the gargantuan effort to place communities and families like Nona's at the centre of the post-crisis rehabilitation underway in Sri Lanka.