



Stories from the Field: Vallipuram Elumalaipillai, Malayalapuram, Killinochchi District, Northern Sri Lanka

Indian Housing Project

The Indian Housing Project (IHP) is a housing reconstruction project funded by the Government of India and implemented through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Sri Lanka. Four Implementing Agencies (IAs) are executing this project in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. UN-Habitat is one of the IAs working in the Northern districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna. The 36 month project will be implemented from mid 2012 until mid 2015 and will follow a home owner driven process. During this period, UN-Habitat is expected to support 16,800 families to reconstruct/repair their homes.



Mr. Vallipuram Elumalaipillai is a beneficiary selected to reconstruct his war damaged house in Killinochchi district. Using the housing grant of SLRS.550,000¹, Vallipuram has successfully completed his house within four months.

59 year old Vallipuram operates a small retail shop and this is his main source of income. He lives in Malayalapuram village in Karachchi DS division with his wife, Thavamanidevi, and three of his five children. His two youngest children, aged 15 and 9, are attending school at Bharathipuram Tamil Maha Vidyalaya while his two eldest daughters are married and have moved to Jaffna and Batticaloa districts. Seasonal crops from the home garden such as green chillies, beans, tomatoes and cassava are sold in his shop. Recently, Vallipuram was diagnosed with mouth cancer and is undergoing regular treatment at the Jaffna Hospital.



The Elumalaipillai family have been affected by the 30 year conflict in Sri Lanka. Since 1986, they had been displaced multiple times. With the escalation of the conflict in 1995, the family moved to Killinochchi from Jaffna and settled in Malayalapuram village. During their most recent displacement in 2008, the family had been compelled to move to several locations to avoid conflict affected areas. The family was finally relocated to Ramanadapuram in Vavuniya district where they lived for more than two years from May 2008. In July 2010, the family returned to Malayalapuram village. As the family home had been destroyed during the conflict,

Vallipuram and his family lived in a temporary shelter constructed from tin sheets as they did not have the financial resources to build a permanent house of their own.

In August 2012, Vallipuram was selected as a beneficiary under the Indian Housing Project. He received his first grant payment on 25th September 2012 and commenced construction work with the assistance of the UN-Habitat field team who helped the family select a suitable house plan and provided advice on construction work and building materials.

As the project followed a “home owner driven” method of construction, Mr.Elumalaipillai and his wife were jointly responsible for the planning, organizing and construction of their house from the outset. His wife and three

¹ USD 1 = SLRS.127



of his children provided unskilled labour towards the house construction which enabled the family to optimise the housing grant. The family had constructed the house foundation using their own labour with technical guidance from UN-Habitat. The rest of the construction work was undertaken by skilled masons who were hired on a daily wage basis.

When the house was completed up to window sill level, Vallipuram received his second payment of SLRS. 200,000 from the High Commission of India on 9th November 2012. After completing construction up to lintel level, he received his third payment of SLRS, 200,000 on 15th December 2012. The final payment of SLRS.50,000 was received by the family on 7th January 2013 after the house construction was complete. The UN-Habitat field team supervised the construction work and certified the payments at each stage.

The Elumalaipillai house is 600 square feet in extent. It has been constructed with cement blocks, timber roof beams and clay roofing tiles. Grandis timber has been used for roof work and a mix of Teak and Palu timbers for doors, windows and frames. Since the family was well ahead of schedule, they had purchased the building materials themselves, with mixed results. The roofing tiles purchased at SLRS. 41.75 each had subsequently been reduced to SLRS. 37 in the market. However, they were able to make a marginal gain on cement as the cement price had increased by SLRS. 100 since the family purchased their cement requirement.



One of the key challenges faced by Vallipuram and his wife during house construction was the monsoon rain which affected the Northern Province during the months of December and January. The couple estimate a loss of 14 working days due to torrential rains which made construction difficult. There had been heavy rains each time they finished making cement blocks as well as when reaching construction milestones such as completing up to window sill and lintel level. However, the family is positive about the overall impact of the rain, as it also assisted them in certain aspects of construction such as hardening the cement blocks. The rain was also a welcome gift as they were able to collect rain water for construction work, since Malayalapuram village is a water scarce village.



Vallipuram stated that the main priority for the family upon return to their village was to build a permanent house so that the family could live safely. Hence, during construction, the entire family had concentrated on completing the house as quickly and efficiently as possible. The house was completed within a period of four months, enabling the family to occupy their house in January 2013. Their new home has a living room, a shrine room, bedroom, kitchen and an outdoor toilet. With the completion of the house, the family is now focussing on developing their retail shop.

Discussing their experiences of the past few years, Thavamanidevi stated: “We desperately wanted a permanent house to live in. With the destruction caused by the war it was never within our reach. This was an opportunity for us to get involved, provide maximum contribution and complete the house in a very short time. I thank the Indian Government for providing this opportunity and UN-Habitat for supporting and encouraging us to complete the house”.

Photographs: Mr. and Mrs. Elumalaipillai with their son outside the completed house, Mr and Mrs. Elumalaipillai outside the temporary shelter with their youngest son and daughter; Mrs. Elumalaipillai outside the house and in her small retail shop.