



## Indian Housing Project

### Empowering Female Home Owners to Reconstruct Houses in Northern Sri Lanka

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. UN-Habitat is one of four Implementing Agencies (IAs) in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, focused on the districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna. From 2012 – 2015, UN-Habitat will support 16,800 families to reconstruct and repair their damaged homes. Mrs. Inkaran Srikanthy is one of the project's beneficiaries from Killinochchi District.



Mrs. Inkaran Srikanthy, a 32 year old mother of three children, lives in Ponnagar village situated in Karachchi DS division in the Killinochchi District. Separated from her husband since 2009, she is her family's main bread winner. Showing remarkable courage in facing life's many challenges, Srikanthy is gradually rebuilding her life disrupted by years of conflict. With a cash grant of LKR.550,000 from the Government of India, she is reconstructing her conflict damaged home with technical assistance from UN-Habitat. Srikanthy is managing the house reconstruction process while contributing her own labour to supplement the housing grant.

Srikanthy's family had been badly affected by the 30 year conflict. They had suffered multiple displacements and lived in temporary shelters in different locations. With the escalation of the conflict in 2008, the family was compelled to move from Killinochchi to Mullaitivu District. Following months of displacement, they moved to Chettikulam Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Vavuniya District in March 2009 where they resided for over a year. Srikanthy recalls numerous difficulties faced by her family during their displacement due to the lack of proper sanitation and inadequate shelter from the elements.



When the family returned to Ponnagar in July 2010, they found their home damaged beyond repair. As the family had no shelter, Government agencies and humanitarian relief organizations had provided Srikanthy with basic construction materials including cement bricks and roofing timbers to build a transitional shelter. As Srikanthy had no regular source of income and no support from her husband, she commenced working as a labourer in the village. Her daily wages are supplemented by her mother who also works as a labourer a few days a week. In addition, Srikanthy undertakes sewing orders from neighbours and friends, thereby supplementing the monthly household income.

In October 2012, Srikanthy was selected as a beneficiary of the Indian Housing Project to reconstruct a permanent house. As a female head of household, she has been given priority support. Technical assistance is provided by UN-Habitat in all construction activities including the selection of a suitable house plan, obtaining local authority approvals and selecting skilled labour and quality building materials. As the project follows a "home owner driven" process of construction, Srikanthy is responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring of the construction with the assistance of the UN-Habitat technical team.



In December 2012, Srikanthy received her first grant installment of LKR. 100,000 for the house foundation work. Upon successful completion of the foundation work, the second instalment of LKR. 200,000 was released to construct the superstructure. The third grant installment of LKR. 200,000 was provided for the roof work and other remaining finishing work. The house is approx. 550 square feet with two bed rooms, living room, kitchen and outdoor toilet.



Srikanthy and her family were very happy to be selected by the Indian Housing Project as they had no financial resources to rebuild a house. She completed the house construction within 8 months and is planning to move into the new home in September 2013.

The family had faced several challenges during the construction process including the lack of access to a regular water source. Therefore, they arise as early as 3 a.m. every day to collect water from the village common wells to ensure sufficient water for construction and daily consumption. Srikanthy also carefully monitors the construction work done by the skilled mason to ensure adherence to the time schedule and payment of labour costs.

Ms. M.Geetha, the UN-Habitat Technical Officer responsible for supporting Srikanthy’s house construction, commended her diligence: “Srikanthy has gained knowledge and expertise in construction work following the technical training provided by UN-Habitat as well as practical experience through her own labour contribution. Due to her careful planning, commitment and the contribution towards the construction she is completing the house on schedule while saving labour costs. Other project beneficiaries are now seeking her advice.”



The skilled mason hired by Srikanthy had initially requested LKR.50,000 to construct the house up to gable level. However, Srikanthy had successfully renegotiated the charges to a daily rate and completed the house up to gable level at a total cost of LKR.35,000. She had also contributed her own labour towards the masonry work by assisting the skilled mason, resulting in a saving of LKR. 30,000. Srikanthy’s labour contribution includes minor masonry work, fetching building materials and water to the construction site and mixing cement.

In addition to her responsibilities with house construction, she actively participates in community service activities in the village. She is the Secretary of the Village Rehabilitation Committee (VRC) that assists beneficiaries with construction activities and monitoring progress. She is also a member of the Civil Security Group and The Women’s Affairs Society of the village. “My greatest wish is to provide a proper education for my children. I am planning to start a tailor shop once I shift to the new house. And I believe this income will help in fulfilling my children’s needs without having to depend on any external assistance” Srikanthy stated.

The “home owner driven” methodology used by the Indian Housing Project strengthens family relationships, enhances beneficiary’s skills in construction and leadership. It also empowers men and women to manage their own recovery, thereby reducing dependence. Srikanthy’s remarkable achievements in rebuilding her home demonstrate the resourcefulness and resilience of women in the North of Sri Lanka on their road to self-recovery.

**Photographs: Srikanthy with two of her children; Srikanthy sewing clothes in her temporary shelter; The house during construction; Srikanthy outside her newly built permanent home with two of her children.**