



## Stories from the field

### Conflict Affected Returnee Builds Permanent Home for Elderly Parents with funding from the Indian Government.



Sivasothi and her parents outside their new home.

**August 2015, Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka:** Showing resilience and determination following years of hardship and displacement, 52 year old Ms. Sellaiya Sivasothi from Mullaitivu district recently constructed a permanent house for her elderly parents with funding from the Government of India. Her new home is particularly special, as Sivasothi contributed much of her own labour towards its construction. Implemented by UN-Habitat in the districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi, the Indian Housing Project is a housing reconstruction project providing cash grants and technical guidance to returnee homeowners to rebuild their conflict damaged homes.

Ms. Sivasothi's parents, 88 year old Mr.Kanthar Sellaiya and 83 year old Mrs. Sellaiya Thangamani were selected as beneficiaries from Pulimchchinathakulam village in Oddusuddan DS division.

The Indian Housing Project follows a participatory homeowner driven process, giving each family the responsibility of managing the construction process of their own home, with technical assistance from the implementing agency. However, being elderly and in poor health, the couple were unable to rise to this challenge. In this instance, their daughter, Sivasothi who resides with them, came forward to help the parents.

Ms.Sellaiya Sivasothi, is the sixth child in the Sellaiya family of 11 children. Due to economic difficulties, Sivasothi and her siblings did not progress beyond the seventh grade in school. From a very young age, Sivasothi was engaged in agriculture related labour work to supplement the household income. During the three decades of conflict, her siblings had relocated to other districts leaving Sivasothi as the sole caregiver for her parents. In 2003, Sivasothi was selected for a masonry training programme and was provided with her own masonry tools at the end of the training. Armed with this useful skill, Sivasothi undertook masonry work in the village, earning additional income to supplement her regular earnings.



During the final stages of the conflict, Sivasothi injured her left leg in an accident requiring medical treatment. With the resettlement of families in Mullaitivu district, she returned to the village with her parents and lived in a cadjan roofed temporary shelter as they lacked finances to build a house.

After selection for housing support, Sivasothi commenced the house foundation work in March 2014. She planned to complete the foundation work within a month by hiring a skilled mason while she provided additional labour support. However, a few days after hiring the mason, Sivasothi discontinued his services due to poor quality of work. Soon after, she hired an assistant from the village to undertake foundation excavation work, while Sivasothi took over the masonry work with guidance from UN-Habitat. Despite her multiple duties, Sivasothi was able to complete the foundation work within a week. The UN-Habitat Technical Officer provided support by helping with the bills of quantities, measurements and advice on construction methods. By undertaking the work herself, Sivasothi saved LKR 20,000 from the cost of the foundation. She was also able to complete the superstructure work to window sill level without any external support. As her leg injury hindered Sivasothi from continuing construction work from lintel level, she hired a skilled mason for the remaining masonry work while she continued to provide support. She was also involved in producing cement blocks and constructed the outdoor toilet.



Sivasothi constructing the foundation.

Their 550 square foot house with two bedrooms, kitchen and living area was completed in April 2015. Constructing a permanent house is a much cherished dream for many families in the conflict affected areas. However, completing the construction work on time and within the allocated budget can be a challenge to many homeowners due to high expectations and lack of adequate labour support. Sivasothi, by effectively utilizing her training in masonry and by adhering to the basic house design, succeeded in completing her house, which is a testament to her determination and skill.



Tending to her green chilli cultivation in the home garden.

“I want to thank god for giving me strength during our difficult times and for keeping my parents safe, especially during the final stages of the conflict. My greatest wish is to look after my parents, which is why I remained single. I was disappointed that I could not provide them a comfortable, secure house to live in. I am happy that I have achieved this goal before they die. UN-Habitat staff supported me and appreciated my contribution in constructing this house. I am very grateful for all the support by this project.” Sivasothi stated.

Recently, Sivasothi was selected by UN-Habitat to establish her own home garden. With funding from the programme, about 10 varieties of vegetable seeds including green chillies, broad beans and eggplant were provided together with training on home gardening by the Agriculture Inspector. Sivasothi’s new home garden is now well underway and she sells the produce in the local market.



Sivasothi's parents in their new home.

The Indian Housing Project 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 implementing this project in the Northern districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna. Through a homeowner driven process, UN-Habitat will support 18,000 families to construct permanent homes from 2012 to 2015.