

Recovery of the war torn societies in Northern Sri Lanka: Restoration of Livelihood

Title: The land ownership – Key to voluntary return and recovery.



Thirty years of civil war in Sri Lanka ended in May 2009, which led to a large number from the local population migrating as refugees to different countries. Additionally a similar number have been locally displaced within their own country. Incidentally the last part of the war created as many as 437 000 population shifting from one place to another, but at the end they were moved to government organized welfare camps in the Vavuniya district. The welfare camps operated in Vavuniya are overcrowded and with poor facilities and services. This has created a severe humanitarian crisis to manage the large number of people flocking into smaller areas where the people were allocated. Space limitations and the underserved basic amenities became an issue of protection and rights issue. The crippling conditions created a major issue for women and children to protect themselves and children were finding it difficult to continue their education. The war also created large number of women headed households and people with disability, who were confronted with the safety and security of the future of their kith and kin. The government decision to release the people from the camps, was a welcome decision, but the task ahead was predictably large.

The people shifted to camps are those who have lost all the resources they were enjoying due to large scale war. More over some of them have also lost their property and belongings due to the occupation of others. In this connection some areas were retained by the army due to security reasons, and therefore the returnees were compelled to remain in the, camps in the border areas. The change story described in this article come from the women settlers who joined the FORUT funded programs implemented by RAHAMA in the northern areas. The program classified initially as risk area now has been filled with resettler families responsible for building their livelihood assets building process.

The MSC described by the women starts with that the baseline of the project of "o" because the areas destroyed by war has had all its social ,economic, physical, and economic infrastructures brought down to nil due to the conflict. The land they owned were shrub jungle and without any title or deeds. They wanted immediately, a piece of land to settle down with accommodation water and sanitation services with minimum protection. FORUT funded programs to resettle 320 families in four different locations, starting with the land rights issue, and engaged with the local government authorities to make sure to release the land from the defense agencies to ensure the land will be free from any security concerns. Then the working groups amongst the resettlers convinced themselves that if the land is available, the program can kick start, to ensure settlement for the people.

Most significant change?

Most significant change in the new settlement areas have been derived from the stories narrated by the women in the settlement areas.

320 household , all of them IDP returnees , with 1148 members have now obtained ownership of the land. These land plots were, mostly released from the authorities, added with shelter (320)water (39), and sanitation (320)facilities for those occupying the shelters. The children, who are now admitted to the schools, numbering 611 and additionally four preschools with 91 children are also prevalent. The land ownership now confirms the permanent houses for the families , because they live in their own plots of land.

A project review in the form of describing stories of the lessons learnt was carried out last December 2012 to understand the changes which took place in the different locations. The participants were mostly women who contributed to this "story telling" session which was concluded by saying the following ;

- The decision and arrangements to help us to find the land and its ownership in order for us to come back and settle down is to be considered as the major changing effect to build our livelihood.
- When the land is ready some of us decided to go and start our new life in shelters with water and toilet , which gave us protection and privacy .
- Being an area within a high security zone initially we were reluctant but once the community grew with more settlers, we built our confidence to strengthen the community organizations.
- FORUT/RAHAMA responsible for building the basic services and amenities, provided educational improvement in settlements so the families, which were more comfortable and to bring their children to the new schools ,which ensured the stability of the settlements to make a significant change.