

Returning Home - An IDPs Dilemma

Hope is rising with the sun, in the East. But fear and apprehension are also part of the potpourri of conflicting emotions running through the minds of IDPs.

They are huddled together on the ground, outside a temporary make-shift shelter. The overpowering feeling of dilemma is apparent on their faces. The group that is gathered consists of a few middle-aged couples, young children and older relatives. This is a community from Muttur East, displaced due to the conflict in northern Sri Lanka.

A representative of a local authority had informed them just hours ago that they can go back to their homes or more specifically to their area of origin. According to the information they had received, the families will have to stay in a transitional shelter provided in a school on the border of the High Security Zone (HSZ).

But they do not know how long this transitional period will last before they can finally move into their own homes located within the HSZ. Their chief dilemma is trying to decide whether or not to leave the welfare camp in Palameenmadu, Batticaloa which has served as a temporary home. Here, each family has a separate temporary shelter built by NGOs operating in the area, and they feel relatively safe. "We



do not know for how long we will have to remain in this new temporary shelter" says Rani whose home is located within the HSZ.

She also expresses fear for the safety of her young daughters in a new environment. The transitional shelter is likely to be a common hall for a large

number of families, a far cry from their separate enclosures in Palameenmadu.

Sarajini however is all smiles. "My house is outside the HSZ and we can return directly to our house," she says. But her excitement is mixed with fear and apprehension because as she says, they do not know what awaits them.

Through others who have returned they have learnt that most of their possessions have been stolen by looters. Part of the fear is due to the fact that going back will involve seeking work in Muttur, where Tamils fear retaliatory attacks by the Muslim community. Many

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of the labourers have to go to Muttur to seek work and several local authority offices are also located there. "I will have to go to Muttur, but I may have to come back without my head" says Raju, Sarojini's husband with a grim smile.

"We do not know for how long we will have to remain in this new temporary shelter" says Rani whose home is located within the HSZ.

In another camp closer to the Batticaloa town, housed in what was once a school named Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya, some IDP families who have been asked to return to their areas of origin, have decided to stay back. One family has three grown-up sons and the mother, Rajini says that she feels safer in this welfare camp in Batticaloa where there is less possibility of her sons being abducted by armed groups.

But staying back has meant being de-registered and having their IDP card

cancelled. As a result, they have lost their identity and status as IDPs, together with free food ration entitlements.

"If peace arrives, we will go back," says Sarojini with a distant look in her eyes.

The HSZs have been established for security purposes in areas close to army camps and other key locations including harbours and airstrips, allowing security forces primary use of the area. Special permission is required for any new developments in these areas. The HSZs remain a challenging factor in resettlement efforts.

A report issued by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in May 2008 which examines questions of the HSZ and other land related issues states that Jaffna has the largest extent of land covered by HSZs and a large number of affected families live in welfare centres in the north and eastern provinces. Further, an 81.5 sq.km sea area is out of bounds for fishermen and 12,259 acres of land cannot be used for agriculture due to the security situation and this has led to a serious loss of livelihood.

According to the report, in more recent returns, steps have been taken to ensure that the affected people have more information and "Go-and -see" visits are increasingly becoming the norm. However it adds that this approach needs to be strengthened and people need to be given the option to move or stay in displacement for the time being. Although recent developments on the ground suggest that the HSZ is being reduced, there have been no gazette notifications or circulars to that effect. This has led to some confusion.

Land and property are a means of generating livelihood as well as accumulating wealth that can be transferred to the next generation. It is also an indicator of a person's wealth and status apart from being an avenue to access economic opportunities.

However these IDPs are faced with a number of issues in this regard varying from contested land ownership, access to land and property as well as original livelihood, loss of documentation and title and communal tensions over land.

Coming Back to School

NRC Makes it Possible

There is excitement in the air. Children rush across the corridor as they prepare to start a new school day. But it's not just any other day. The students of



Kurinjamunai GTMS are preparing to begin classes in a new school building, reconstructed by the Norwegian Refugee Council with funding from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. There is anticipation written all over the young faces. On this first day of July, the feeling of a new revival is brimming within this school which not long ago was a site of total devastation. Today the enthusiasm is evident in the flowers that peep out

from hand made vases attached to the newly painted walls, balloons tied to windows and excited chatter.

This school in Batticaloa's Manmunai West Division, houses 136 students from grades 1-5. It was one among five schools that NRC chose to assist. The students of Kurinjamunai GTMS received a brand new school building, owing to the extent of the damage suffered by the school in the conflict between the Military forces and the LTTE in 2006. The reconstruction at a cost of almost four million Sri Lankan rupees consists of one long building that houses four



classrooms and a separate principal's quarters. A six foot tall parapet wall has been added around the compound and the water tank repaired.

"The children are very happy to have this school says," S. Murugesupillai, principal of the school. For a year after the loss of the once solidly built School, classes were held in temporary learning centres, constructed with tin sheets. They are happy to be able to finally come back to their school, he says.

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World Refugee Day 2008

Celebrating the determination and strength of IDPs

World Refugee Day was celebrated with a colourful combination of speeches, song, dance, drama and games at the Sithamparapuram welfare centre situated in the Vavuniya District of Sri Lanka. NRC was a key participant at the event organized by UNHCR together with the Rural Development Foundation. The event brought together about 400 refugees from two government welfare centres where NRC provides assistance. Government officials and religious leaders of the area as well as other village community joined in the celebrations. One of the highlights was the distribution of prizes among those who won games at the event.



“I Didn’t Give Up” says this NRC beneficiary

A few years ago when Shanthi got displaced in the conflict with her three small children, life seemed hopeless. She traveled from the Northern province with her husband, a labourer and resettled in a temporary shelter provided by NRC, in the Batticaloa District. Despite her circumstances Shanthi was determined to make things better. She managed to set up a boutique on one side of her shelter. Together with some help from her mother, she also brought the land which she now occupies. The location of her boutique enables her to serve the farming community in the area, who visit her boutique for meals and other grocery items. “I make Rs.6,000-7,000 a day and sometimes more,” she says. Now she lives with renewed hope of providing a better life for her children.



“One NRC” answers cry for kerosene in Batticaloa

Bringing some light to IDP camp sites

The concept of “One NRC” was evident when all four of NRC’s chief projects came together between April and July this year, in a new Endeavour to distribute Kerosene to the IDPs of Batticaloa. One of the novel features of the project was that beneficiaries included both IDP families as well as host families.

Kerosene has been a crying need in the area after supply stopped early this year as the INGO supplying Kerosene to the area had to halt the project owing to a lack of funding

While a component of the distributed kerosene was used for cooking by the families, one of the main uses was to keep the lanterns burning in the night. This is especially required among families with children who need to study and do school home work in the evenings. About 70% of IDPs have no electricity.

The distribution which was a culmination of efforts was a success. During the first phase in April, 2062 families in IDP camps and 2027 host families were provided four litres of kerosene each. The distribution continued in May when 4648 families consisting of 14, 225 individuals in six DS divisions benefited. In June 3897 families received Kerosene.

In July NRC facilitated Internews to distribute FM radios to IDPs and host families in conjunction with the kerosene distribution. Approximately 1624 families benefited from this joint programme.

NRC’s CMT, PMT, Shelter and ICLA projects participated in the distribution programme.



No Place Like Home

Wimalawathie Stanley is 46 years old and has been a widow for eight years. As she waits in line for her quota of kerosene, her lively conversation in both Tamil and



Sinhalese, in an area where the latter is heard very little, makes her stand out in the crowd. Originally from Weligama in Southern Sri Lanka, she says that her family moved to Trinco in the eastern coastbelt, when she was a child. It was there that she later met Kumaraswami Stanley. They fell in love and married. It was an inter-racial marriage as she

was a Sinhalese and he a Tamil but they had a happy marriage. She used to help her husband with his fishing business, a business inherited from the latter’s father. Following his death she managed the business by herself. In December 2004 she suffered a great blow when she lost three sons to the Tsunami. The business was also damaged but was subsequently rebuilt. Two years ago in 2006 when conflict erupted she had to flee Sambur in Muttur leaving everything behind. “I left in my night clothes, I couldn’t take anything with me” she says. Adding “now I hear there is nothing left”. Her older daughter now hosts her in a camp in Kiran, in the Batticaloa district. “If we are allowed to go, I want to go back “she says. The fishing boats and nets that formed the foundation for her livelihood are now gone but she feels that there is no place like home.

Using Local Legislation to Find Solutions for Women



Kalmunai's ICLA team in action

When the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was introduced in 2005, ICLA staff was happy. Here was a law they could work with, one that would make a difference for so many people.

The act criminalized all kinds of violence against women and became a tool for those advocating against domestic violence. It was more specific than the penal code and its definition enabled even potential victims to seek redress. Another special feature was that, it went beyond physical abuse to encompass mental or emotional abuse.

The new law enabled victims to petition court to obtain protection orders for remedies varying from evicting an abusive spouse from the house to obtaining maintenance support. It also provided the magistrate powers to take the facts of a case into consideration and recommend family counseling in order to protect the family unit.

For the first time children were allowed to petition against their parents

or guardians through a guardian or probation officer, where the victim was a child.

“We discuss the facts of the case with the client and if it fits within the definition of the act and we find that there is a case, we assist the individual to prepare a petition and represent him in court,” says an ICLA staff member in Kalmunai. Clients are provided guidance and counseling on the remedies available and ICLA assists them further to gather evidence for the petition. The new act is clear and concise and is easy to work with, she says.

NRC was the first to introduce the act in the area and file cases in keeping with the its provisions. To ensure that more people benefited, ICLA organised training workshops for local authorities and NGOs to familiarize them with the new provisions.

Through its awareness programmes, ICLA staff has been able to disseminate knowledge on the legal framework and

procedures to a wide group including IDPs, protection partners and the general community. It is important to inform women that there is a remedy available to them. Especially in welfare centres and IDP camps where protection for women and children is a critical issue.

At present the ICLA office in Kalmunai is heading the Ampara district Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) unit which consists of NGOs, INGOs and local authorities. This network also directs people in need of legal advice to ICLA apart from the direct clients it receives. Kalmunai has 14 IDP and Tsunami IDP camps at present while the Ampara district has 602. Over half of the complaints received by ICLA are from women.

The lack of safe houses that can provide female victims of violence with protection, privacy and security is a gap in the Ampara district, says this ICLA staff member.



Displaced Again

A fire drives the displaced out of their temporary homes

In a conflict affected country, grappling life without identification documents is one of the biggest challenges that an IDP faces. It is a situation that sometimes causes a sense of fear and hopelessness. In Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, 110 families lost their belongings and identification documents in a fire that burnt their camp to the ground, in July this year.



The aftermath of the fire at Poonthoddam camp

The extent of the damage left little hope for IDPs who were seen rummaging through the debris in a futile attempt to retrieve some of their possessions.

Around 450 people lost their homes and belongings in the fire that engulfed the Poonthoddam camp on 17th July. Reports from NRC's field office in Vavuniya said the fire damaged all the temporary shelters within the camp and injured two elderly residents who were admitted to the Vavuniya hospital. Believed to have been caused by an electric short circuit, the fire continued for one hour before the residents of the area, security forces and fire fighting units managed to douse it.

NRC's ICLA programme joined relief efforts to provide assistance to the IDP families who lost their belongings and temporary homes by addressing one of the main problems, the loss of identification documents.

Immediate steps were taken to process and forward duly filled application forms for birth certificates and marriage certificates to the respective district secretariats in Mullativu, Vavuniya, Jaffna, Hatton, Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya, Matale and Kandy.

NRC has also accepted a request to cover expenses for photographs required for new identification documents. Meanwhile, the IDPs have received temporary shelter in a nearby school until alternative arrangements are



made.

The total number of IDPs in the Vavuniya District as at end of June 2008 was 82,176, individuals and 21,166 families. This figure includes IDPs living in 42 resettlement and relocation villages on lands allocated by the government, those temporarily living in five IDP villages with the intention of returning to their original homes as well as IDPs living with host families and in the District's two welfare centres. The latter two are considered to hold the majority of the displaced people.

Access to IDPs in the Vavuniya District is restricted due to the ongoing conflict in the north. The suspension of mobile phone reception in the area has made communication a challenge.

A bicycle belonging to an IDP that was badly damaged in the fire

Quenching a Thirst for Humanitarian Work

Meeting Point



Coming to Sri Lanka has been like crossing a bridge and discovering a calling says Jadhav Subash. For seventeen years he worked with a national NGO in India with a focus on development work. But it is his work with NRC in Sri Lanka that has awakened his spirit with new vigour and drive for humanitarian work. "I worked in different areas, in various positions and on a number of assignments," he says speaking about his experience in a variety of different geographical locations mainly working to uplift the poor. But he discovered that providing emergency relief to people in a crisis brought him a new satisfaction.

His initial involvement with NRC was in 2006 when he got totally immersed in tsunami relief work upon his arrival in

It is a learning organization that allows you to develop your skills, he says speaking of his experience at NRC. "There is transparency in the system and less bureaucracy".

Sri Lanka.

It was an unexpected turn of events that took him away from his home in South India planting him on neighbouring soil and opening up new vistas. A friend

who also worked in the NGO sector had joined NRC in Sri Lanka and was working on a project to build shelter using cost effective technology. "It was a community driven programme using local skills and my friend insisted that I was necessary to carry out the programme," he reminisces.

In 2006 Subash took up his appointment in Sri Lanka as a consultant for the construction of houses using cost effective building technology. Two months later it was proposed that he take up an appointment as International Consultant for Tsunami camps. As a result he became the Consultant for Care and Maintenance of Tsunami camps, for a period of one year.

Since 2007, he has been the project coordinator for Shelter and Resettlement.

He feels that one of the main achievements during this period has been the new project concept begun in early 2006, based on community participation in housing. "All the construction work was done by the community," he says proudly. Instead of just handing out money this scheme ensured that materials were provided to the beneficiaries on an installment basis and construction was regularly monitored to ensure that it conformed to Sphere standards and maintained minimum humanitarian standards.

Working with host families has been one of the biggest challenges. In Batticaloa, where he is stationed, about 50% of the IDPs

live with relatives and friends, also know as host families. Working with host families is a challenge that not every NGO is ready to take up, he says.

During the period from June 2006 to

May 2007, 1400 shelters were provided to facilitate this special group who were giving a helping hand to assist friends and relatives in need by providing shelter within their premises. These host families were provided with temporary shelter constructions in the veranda sections of their houses or in their gardens. The other challenge is the difficulty of reaching IDPs due to the restrictions imposed as a result of the security situation. "I want to help them in their time of need" says Subash who says he feels frustrated when he can't reach affected IDPs on time.

The cultural adjustment has not been difficult. As an Indian there are advantages as well as disadvantages", he says. Communication among the locals has been relatively easy because he speaks Tamil although it is not the same as that spoken in India. He feels that one of the disadvantages is that he looks like a Sri Lankan but has an Indian accent when he speaks. This sometimes poses a difficulty for him at checkpoints. It has also meant restricting his movements as a security precaution.

Working with NRC has been somewhat new and challenging for Subash. It is a learning organization that allows you to develop your skills, he says speaking of his experience at NRC. "There is transparency in the system and less bureaucracy". This in his opinion allows staff to carry out their work effectively.

During the last two years, his work with NRC has brought Subash a great deal of satisfaction. "I have been working with a large number of IDPs and it gives me satisfaction to know that I was able to contribute towards elevating their suffering", he says.

The emergency phase which brought him the greatest satisfaction has taken new dimensions. But he is keen to work in other countries where he may get an opportunity be involved in more emergency humanitarian work.



NRC SL Gets Trained in Balanced Score Card System

A new strategy map in the pipeline

To give NRC strategy a boost, staff from the head office in Colombo and district offices came together for a training on Balanced Score Card, a strategic planning tool and management system, from May 12-15. NRC managers and programme coordinators participated at the workshop held at Amaya Lake in Dambulla, where a draft Strategy Map for 2008-2010 was prepared.

A lively and open discussion with new ideas and objectives led to the preparation of the strategy map and contributions from participants on past experiences both in Sri Lanka and in other countries proved useful in the process of arriving at a more focused strategy in dealing with the everyday challenges faced by NRC staff.

Some of the main points of discussions included drawing an Advocacy Plan and locating accessible channels to carry out advocacy work, leadership training at management level as well as technical training, increasing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable IDPs in the North.

Reaching target groups in the North has been a challenge since NRC's Jaffna office was temporarily closed in 2006



The trainers from Oslo

owing to security reasons. Gender mainstreaming as well as improvements to administration and finance policies were also discussed.

Other challenges expressed included improving cross programme cooperation and communication between the head office in Colombo and district offices, as well as the critical issue of maintaining

donor support.

NRC HQ is in the process of providing training on Balanced Score Card (BSC) to all NRC country programs. The strategic planning tool and management system has been introduced to all NRC country programs with only a few more countries remaining on the list.

BSC has been used extensively in business and industry, government, and nonprofit organizations worldwide to align business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improve internal and external communications, and monitor organization performance against strategic goals.



The workshop in progress

Building Hope: A Community Centre in Vakaraï

A gift from the Norwegian Scouts and Guides for the children of Batticaloa

The foundation looks strong and promising. Like the tree at its centre, sprouting fresh green leaves across the branches, it speaks a language of resilience and continuous hope.

The Vakaraï Community Centre, the first of its kind in the Batticaloa district is currently under construction. It is being built with funds raised by the Norwegian Guide and Scout Association, according to a design provided by an NRC trainee with a background in architecture. The tall tree preserved in the middle of the foundation is one of its unique features.

The construction is now gradually taking shape on a 250 perch land next to the Thirumahal Vidyalam, located along the main Vakaraï Road en route to Trincomalee.

The plan for the centre contains some additional features including a stage for performing drama, a storage facility, seating arrangements along the inside wall of the building which would also serve as reading space, separate toilets for males and females and cupboards.



An overview of the community centre currently under construction

The garden area will also provide recreational activity for children and youth through facilities such as hanging rope, sliding ladder, climbing wall and table tennis.

The centre will especially benefit the adjoining school by providing it with hall space and recreational facilities.

It will also serve the immediate and adjoining village communities.

Thirumahal Vidyalam is attended by 413 students from four villages in the Panchikerny GS Division. The school has been damaged by shelling and classes are currently being conducted in five temporary learning spaces constructed by

NRC Awaits Sebastian's Return



Sebastian Goodfellow (32), a driver attached to NRC's Batticaloa office went missing on the 16th of May this year. The last contact Sebastian had with NRC was on Thursday 15th May when he dropped off some NRC staff at a Hotel in Colombo and left the vehicle at the head office. Although he had been in contact with his wife and a colleague during the course of that same night, he has not been seen or heard from since. Efforts to locate him continue.

During the course of the last three months NRC has been following up Police investigation into the matter

and has extended its full support and cooperation for these efforts. The matter has also been brought to the notice of relevant government actors and a complaint has been lodged with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. Support and cooperation has been sought from the diplomatic community and International organizations such as the ICRC and Amnesty International.

Sebastian Goodfellow is a father of three young children. Together with his family that no doubt misses him, NRC continues to wait for his return.





OUR MANDATE

The Norwegian Refugee Council shall promote and protect the rights of all people who have been forced to flee their countries, or their homes within their countries, regardless of their race, religion, nationality or political convictions. The Norwegian Refugee Council shall in all ways seek to provide viable, durable solutions with regard to both its spokesman activities and its emergency relief efforts.

The Norwegian Refugee Council is a private Norwegian Foundation, independent of any religious or political allegiance.

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