

## **Post conflict disaster recovery**

### **Challenges to house construction in Chilaw and Mannar District for the Tamil IDP in Sri Lanka**

#### **Lessons Learned from the uprooted people's rehabilitation program**

**Aloysius John**

#### **Introduction**

In conflict situations, it is the whole population which is sometimes subject to displacement due to physical insecurity created by war situations or because of fear. Most of the time, people are obliged to leave behind everything, leave their homes in precipitation, carrying with themselves the basic minimum necessary for their survival. The IDPs become totally dependent on external help for their day to day survival. They often lose their jobs or their traditional occupation and will have to adapt in the new environment. Sometimes the IDP have been out of their homes for long periods. In the case of Sri Lanka, they have erred for more than 25 years.

Housing in the post conflict context must be a major focus for humanitarian interventions. Need of the population to have access to shelter is an essential aspect in the rehabilitation process because it is the basic element which leads to the acquisition of other important assets, necessary for them to integrate themselves back in to the mainstream of the society.

In the post conflict recovery process, housing becomes an important challenge also, because it not only gives security and “normalcy” but it becomes the bases from which will stem other development activities leading to the development of the IDP and their socialization. This means it is not just a question of building shelter, but rather giving a holistic dimension to the recovery plan.

This paper, based on the Sri Lankan “uprooted peoples” rehabilitation experience, will argue that housing is a right and is the essential part of recovery program, which needs to be carried

out with method. It will identify the major challenges encountered in the program and will propose a framework for post conflict Disaster recovery for the future similar situations.

First it will take through a review of the housing program experience in the post conflict recovery; the methods used. It will, based on these reflections, identify the best practices and also the shortcomings in the implementation of the program. In this sense it is not a tool kit but rather a reflection on the different strategic approaches to be introduced in such similar situations and also the relevant methodologies to be introduced and the process to be engaged

The uprooted peoples program was initiated by Caritas Sri Lanka in collaboration with the EU and it has proven to be a success and it may serve as a model for other similar situation in other countries.

### **The Context of the program**

Sri Lanka has been confronted with a ethnic war which lasted more than three decades. At the beginning it was more in the form of riots and sporadic fights, but over the period of time it became militarized and it took the shape of an ethnic war. Since 1980, this war has had both economical and human cost, especially for the people in the north and north east. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers have either left the country and taken refuge in Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia and neighboring India. The death toll has gone beyond 100000 and hundreds of thousands are living in exile.

About 500000 people in the north and East have been displaced and put in displacement camps or they have taken refuge in host families in safer areas. The Sri Lankan ethnic crisis was a protracted disaster and a prolonged emergency situation. People were under emergency aid all along the years. They were receiving food and medical aid, education for the children in the camps etc. They did not have the right to work. Chandirka Banadaranaike's government initiated a peace process in 2003-2004 and later at the climax of the tsunami operations, chances for peace were present and perspective for the rehabilitation of the victims of war was also encouraging. It was at this juncture, the EU, decided to initiate a rehabilitation program on a pilot basis for the uprooted people in the cleared zones and Caritas Sri Lanka opted to take up this project.

The program started in 2005 and was ultimately implemented from 2006 in the different areas in the Tamil areas.

## **The Program and the intervention Methodology**

The program consisted of rehabilitating the displaced in the war affected, cleared areas wherever there was security and possibility to initiate a post conflict recovery program. From the beginning itself this program was meant to be comprehensive, meaning that the conditions for its implementation had to be met, that is the security of the people, the land issues must be dealt with and other conditions for their sustainable recovery, such as job opportunities and infrastructure had to be responded to.

The first step of the program was the preparatory stage which consisted of identifying the beneficiaries. Caritas started to identify the families.

The result of this first step was that 370 families were identified and the settlement location was also defined in close collaboration with the beneficiaries. Thus these families were to be regrouped and settled in Chilaw district (bordering Mannar), maintown Mannar and vavunya. The families were to be settled in clusters of 40 to 50 housing settlements.

***The first step consisted of identifying the most vulnerable families. The criteria for selection was that the families were ready to live in new settlements, engage in community development activities and ready to work with Caritas.***

***The caritas staffs were sent into the field and they did a mapping of the reconstruction areas.***

Regular contacts were established between these potential beneficiaries and the local caritas in order to dialogue, discuss and work with them on the houses. Since the beginning itself housing was introduced as a question of right and the people were encouraged to participate and contribute to the design and selection of houses and the building materials and also contribute in the construction of houses.

The second stage consisted of assessing the needs of the people, their capacities to become economically active and identification of the sector-wise activities. This again was done through the community organization process. The need analysis gave the possibility for identifying the sector-wise activities and also the means to carry them out. At this juncture, the need for community based approach was discussed and accepted both by Caritas and the local partners in the working area.

***In order to implement effectively and efficiently the program, the beneficiaries must be organized into groups or development communities. They must be given training on different aspects of development activities and how they should go about it. This is an essential dimension in the humanitarian response.***

The organization of the beneficiaries into a community was important to create dialogue among the members and also to study their capacity to take up collective activities, their sectors of professional occupation and also their capacity to collaborate among themselves in the construction process. It was also a means to assess the vulnerabilities and the capacities

This stage was determinant in the planning process where the beneficiary had to be motivated to come together regularly and also to develop a spirit of community.

The third stage consisted of sorting out the land issues and also getting the authorization from the local authorities. The location of the land had to be relevant and it had to provide facilities for the population to have access to livelihood activities. In the case of the families in Chilaw, importance was given to the lands situated in the coastal areas, where as in Mannar it was more urban area. In vavunya, care was taken to find the location wherein the families can undertake agricultural activities.

***Establishing contact with the local authorities and the army personnel in order to get their authorization is indispensable not only for construction clearance but also for getting the land entitlements and the liberty for the people to move freely.***

***The location of the lands must also be carefully studied in order to promote livelihood activities.***

The implementing partners, that is the local Caritas, was directly in contact with the provincial authorities and the army commanders posted in the region for getting the clearance for building the houses, to get the ownership certificates and also to get the clearance for getting the building materials which was under stringent rules and regulations.

These documents had to be obtained prior to the starting of the project and had to be shared with the communities so that they know what were their rights and the limits of their rights. Having efficient working relation with the authorities especially the army commanders was indispensable, especially in the ethnic crisis context because the situation was highly vulnerable and sensitive.

In the case of Caritas the national secretariat also moved the procedures with the army authorities at the HQ in Colombo and the government administration at the national level. This was one of the success factors in the program.

The fourth stage consisted in getting the house design and plan done through the architect, getting the procurement of the different materials keeping in mind the quotas and the procurement areas wherein they had to be brought. The housing plan was done through the

housing unit of Caritas Sri Lanka and the procurement was worked out between the emergency department, the architect and the local implementing partner. This was a delicate point which needed adjustments and sometimes ad hoc procedures in order to get the material. Having the authorization from the government and the army was one thing , but getting the procurements was another challenge. The implementing agency was under the mercy of material sales outlet which were either indirectly controlled by the army or by the LTTE or the local authorities. In any case these materials had to be brought from these sources and if it was not done, it was source of “complication” for the partner. Buying from these sources meant, increase in price and also delay in delivery of goods.

***Land localization and assets building and the procurement had to be planned with the due authorizations.***

***In spite of these authorizations, in conflict contexts, construction planning must keep in mind the control of the procurement of building materials and other items which are often under the indirect control of the corrupt army personnel or local authorities and the LTTE .***

In conflict or post conflict situations, the army and the belligerent groups tend to control building material stocks, food and other items in order to make money. They sometimes prevent other private sources from selling these goods. This has cost impact and also delays in the procurements, and often leading to difficulty in respecting the established procedures.

The fifth stage consisted of organizing the beneficiaries into development communities, capable of receiving the project. Community organization activities were undertaken, with the community organizing methodology and people were socialized to adhere to a common vision and capable of undertaking collective action. It was also necessary to keep in mind the potential tension within the community and the risk that the beneficiaries start fighting among themselves out of jealousy.

***Community organization, creating interdependency among the members and identifying resources within the community is essential for ensuring a community based approach to construction.***

***Moreover there is a need to take into consideration the capabilities of the beneficiaries to contribute to the construction of the houses.***

This stage was also a moment of preparing the people to help each other in the house construction, making them aware of mutual help, identifying the resources within the community, analyzing the capability of the community to undertake other income generating activities and getting involved in the economic activities for a sustaining the project. Infrastructure building within the settlement was also a priority for creating linkages within the community.

Getting the manpower mobilized from within the community was essential for two reasons : building interdependency among the members and also giving a means of livelihood. Secondly, getting the local community manpower was also a means to motivate them to be involved in the program and this contributed to community ownership. Beneficiary participation had to be promoted in order to ensure the sustainability of the project and also for promoting social harmony within the communities.

The sixth stage consisted of constructing the houses. At this stage, the authorization had been obtained, the materials had been procured and the community was already organized. The plan of the houses was agreed by the beneficiaries. The construction was done in close collaboration with the beneficiaries and the community leaders had been chosen and co-managed the whole process.

*Construction of houses in close collaboration with the community members and the local community leadership.*

The members participated in the different stages of the construction and contributed with manual work and other activities. This also gave a feeling of togetherness and a common ownership of the program.

The program was terminated with success in all the settlement areas a a certain number of lessons can be capitalized for future similar programs.

### **Lessons learned**

- At the time of the beneficiary selection a certain number of criteria were used. Settlement in the area for a period of time, having job opportunities and ready to live in a settled communities. People were also asked whether they were ready to contribute in the construction by lending work force ? For Caritas it was also indispensable to be sure that they were not helped by other NGO or they not help from other sources.
- One of the major issues was securing safe land with the possibility for the IDP to get their permanent entitlements. This had to be planned systematically with regular contacts with the local authorities and the army personnel. These discussions took time but were indispensable in order be ensure the sustainability of the program.

***1. It is important to have relevant selection criteria for identifying the beneficiaries***

***2. Before any reconstruction ensure that the land titles are obtained and well in place. This will ensure relevant execution and the sustainability of the program***

- Definition of the Most Vulnerable Beneficiaries

was part of the process. Caritas defined the MVB as follows: women headed families, Bread earners who have been wounded during the war,

presence of elderly persons in the families or low aged children. From the beginning itself these criteria were used in order to choose the families that were most vulnerable and at the same time resilient and capable of making the best out of this program.

***3. The construction programs in the post conflict situation must establish clear criteria for identifying the M.V.B***

- The sustainability of the program was to be ensured through community organization and building the beneficiaries into a community.

Community organizers brought them together in order to do awareness building, encourage them to mutual help, motivate them to choose the order of building the houses, designate those who should get the houses as a priority etc. This was very important for the emergence of a community.

***4. Build social capital through community organization and awareness building to motivate the people to live together.***

- The preparatory work in terms of procurements of building material and the procurements areas had to be well planned and programmed in order to avoid any delays. In these planning the local Caritas was constantly in contact with the local authorities, the army personnel and also with the local community

leaders in order to get the material to the construction area. Such a systematic planning was a means to enable smooth construction work and also avoid ad hoc decision makings.

***5. The procurements and procurement area for the building material must be well planned and organized. Take the necessary contact with the local authorities including the army.***

- The national secretariat seconded the housing unit in-charge to plan the houses and this was done in close collaboration with the community organizers, the beneficiaries and the local authorities. The amount for the house construction was fixed and within the amount, the planning was done in consultation with the beneficiaries. This enabled ownership and also the respect of the local cultural aspects to the construction.

***6. Ensure ownership of the project through the respect of the local cultural aspects and also by ensuring dialogue with the beneficiaries through consultation***

- Care was taken by Caritas to ensure that the new settlement areas were not from the livelihood opportunities. This was done through a careful analysis of the job affinities

of the beneficiaries and also the jobs they were engaged in. Not taking this into account would have created other problems for the people who would

**7. Coherence between the settlement area and the job opportunities is essential for building Economic capital**

have got a house but will not be in a position to earn a living. This was one of the preoccupation since the beginning itself and was also discussed with the community.

- In this post conflict situation, Caritas opted for community driven process with the accompaniment of a contractor. This decision was taken for two reasons : Owner driven process would have created a certain number of problems in terms of getting the authorization from the local authorities and the army. It would have been very difficult to get the materials distributed in a highly fragile situation. Secondly the beneficiaries would not have been able to assume the construction by themselves and would have found it difficult to complete the houses without outside help. Based on one of the experiences in Mullaitivu in the late 90's Caritas decided to opt for the community driven- contractor accompanied process.

**8. The construction method is of capital importance especially in the post conflict construction. Choice has to be made between : Owner driven, Contractor approach, Community driven -contractor accompanied process or a community driven approach. For the third model the role of the implementing NGO is crucial. The third method was well adapted in the conflict**

- The housing program was part of a community organization process in a post conflict situation and the construction of houses is one milestone. This must be well planned, well accompanied and the resilience of the community must be a constant preoccupation for the implementing agency. Community resilience can be achieved only through economical and social capital building, and this has to be part of the reconstruction program

**9. House construction must be part of a process and must be well planned. It must be community based for sustainability**

- In the post conflict or conflict context housing is socially and politically sensitive and regular contacts must be maintained between the local authorities and the implementing partner, between the people and the implementing partner and ultimately between the new settlements and the people already living in the area. In this regard, the work of the community organizers to build community harmony is important and this can be achieved through regular dialogue, common activities and peace building program.

**10. House construction is politically and socially sensitive. It is important to introduce peace building and awareness building activities to mainstream the new settlers into the local global community.**

Caritas introduced the peace building program in order to sensitize the whole population and mainstream the new settlers into the global community.

### **Challenges identified as lessons**

- In certain areas impossibility to respect the backdoors procedures in terms of call for tender for procurements, because the outlets were owned either by the army officials indirectly or they were owned by the local authorities. This was a major constraint and stringent procedures could not be followed. These kinds of practices are prevalent in post conflict or conflict situation and could jeopardize the normal implementation of the program. These situations are prevalent in conflict zone and putting the implementing NGO in a situation of dilemma with regards to the stringent respect of backdonor procedures and not achieving objectives or continue to implement the program without stringent application of the procedures.

*Such issues must be put on the table for transparent dialogue with the backdonors to avoid any misunderstanding at the end of the program.*

- The house constructions were at the mercy of the army and military officials who could at any time ask the project to be stopped. This fear was constant.

*In such situation there is a need to undertake lobby at the national level and eventually advocacy activities at the international level. Precautions must be adopted in order not to endanger the implementation of the program.*

- The movement of the monitoring project staff was a serious concern and sometimes they could not move freely. One important advantage was that the field staff was from the project site and could continue the work.

*There was a need to introduce security rules and guidelines to protect the staff and they had to respect them.*

- In the beginning the beneficiaries were reluctant to have a relation of confidence between themselves. But this was overcome through community building and creating leadership within the group.

*Ensure systematically a Community based approach and the staff must be trained in this field, to accompany the beneficiaries.*

- Financing the project was crucial. Each house got a back donor funding of 300000RsSL and the total cost was about 550000Rs.SL. ultimately the funds were

mobilized through joint funding with other partners and the houses were completed and given as a donation to the beneficiaries.

*Need to ensure relevant budgeting taking into consideration the post conflict situation and the prices which may fluctuate often.*

## **Conclusion**

In a post conflict reconstruction, the building new housing settlements require a great deal of planning, dialogue and negotiation with the authorities. It also requires a certain number of analyses with regards to the identification of skills, procurements of material and above all location of the building sites.

From the above experiences, it is clear that the post conflict reconstruction must be viewed from the post conflict recovery process and housing as one of the core miles stones which leads the peoples towards sustainable community based growth. In this process social and economical capital building is essentials aspects that one should not lose sight and on the contrary consider it as a priority.

In this process it is also equally important to initiate peace building activities so that the project contributes to the integration of the communities through peace and harmony initiatives.

The reconstruction process in the post conflict situation indicates that the whole process has to be situated between the “relief” and “development” activities and has to be undertaken in the logic of linking relief, rehabilitation and development activities.

Aloysius John

Humanitarian Expert

Part-time lecturer at Paris XII - university of Créteil.

# Framework For Housing Post conflict Recovery

