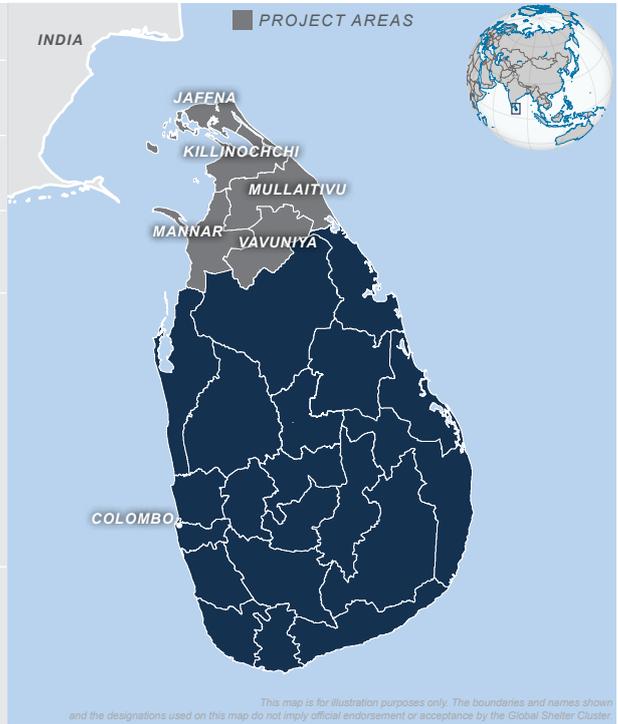


CASE STUDY

# SRI LANKA 2010–2016 / CONFLICT

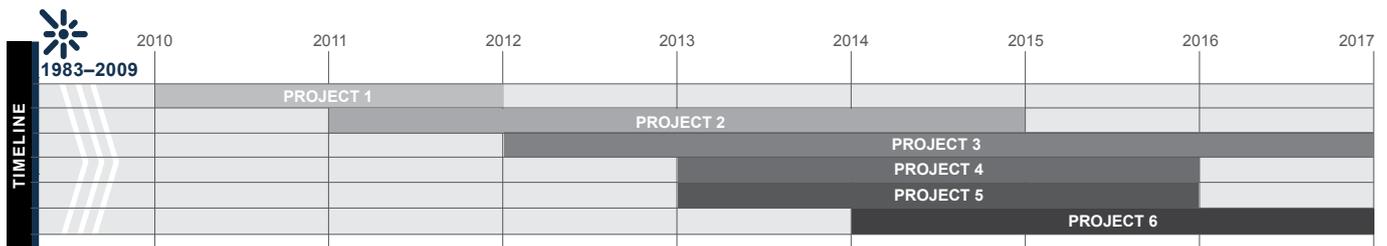
**KEYWORDS:** Housing reconstruction, Community engagement, Women’s empowerment

<b>CRISIS</b>	<b>Sri Lanka Civil Conflict, 1983–2009</b>
<b>TOTAL PEOPLE DISPLACED</b>	Approx. <b>450,000</b> people after the conflict
<b>TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED</b>	<b>160,000–200,000</b> units
<b>PROJECT LOCATIONS</b>	Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar districts in northern and eastern provinces
<b>PROJECT BENEFICIARIES</b>	<b>31,358 households</b> (122,297 individuals) supported with permanent houses (out of which 3,000 Female Headed Households) <b>420,000 people</b> indirect beneficiaries Others: 153 Women’s Community-Based Savings Groups comprising 1,513 members. 67 Women’s Self-help Groups with 1,750 members. 60 Women’s Rural Development Societies
<b>PROJECT OUTPUTS</b>	<b>31,358 permanent houses</b> built or repaired <b>520 infrastructure</b> facilities <b>150 trainings</b> on constructions skills for 2,400 builders and tradesmen
<b>SHELTER SIZE</b>	<b>42m<sup>2</sup>, 46.5m<sup>2</sup>, 51m<sup>2</sup></b> depending on the different projects
<b>SHELTER DENSITY</b>	<b>10.5–12.6m<sup>2</sup></b> per person
<b>MATERIALS COST</b>	<b>USD 2,915–4,933</b> for construction <b>USD 1,345–2,242</b> for repairs
<b>PROJECT COST</b>	<b>USD 4,538</b> per household on average



**PROJECT SUMMARY**

After the three-decade long conflict in the country, this multi-year reconstruction programme supported 31,358 returnee families in Sri Lanka through an owner-driven approach. With a budget of over USD 142 million, it provided permanent houses, infrastructure and communal facilities to conflict-affected communities, reaching over 420,000 individuals in seven years.



**Project 1:** Construction of 3,786 houses.

**Project 2:** Construction of 5,059 houses; 52 community wells; 20,000 trees planted, 10 rainwater harvesting systems.

**Project 3:** Construction of 17,944 houses.

**Project 4:** Community infrastructure: rehabilitation of 96 km of internal access roads and 6km of storm water drains; Establishment of 62 rainwater harvesting systems in public buildings; construction of 29 community centres and 22 pre-schools; planting of 76,184 trees.

**Project 5:** Construction of 4,569 houses and community infrastructure, as a continuation of Project 2.

**Project 6:** Community infrastructure, continuation of Project 4: construction of 45 community centres and 31 pre-schools; establishment of 76 rainwater harvesting systems; construction of 13 community storage facilities and 5 small irrigation channels; rehabilitation of 14km storm water drainage and 32km internal roads; planting of 70,568 trees.

**STRENGTHS**

- + New concepts were introduced in the conflict-affected communities.
- + Land tenure issues were resolved swiftly.
- + The project mainstreamed gender from the onset.
- + The owner-driven methodology was successful.

**WEAKNESSES**

- Lack of flexibility in operational procedures.
- Security restrictions were not sufficiently taken into consideration.
- Lack of flexibility in determining grant amounts.



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Returnee family outside their temporary shelter, with their damaged house in the background. The project supported households affected by the three-decade long conflict to return and rebuild their houses through an owner-driven approach, which also included communal infrastructure rehabilitation.

### SRI LANKAN CONFLICT

The Sri Lankan civil conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the government forces in the north and east of the country began in 1983. After a 26-year military campaign, the Sri Lankan army defeated the militants in May 2009. The conflict resulted in the displacement of over 1.4 million people over time. All five districts in the northern province were severely affected. A wide range of infrastructure was heavily damaged, including housing, water supply, public buildings, health infrastructure and education facilities. Estimates indicated that between 160,000 and 200,000 houses were damaged or destroyed. As of October 2009, there were around 450,000 people displaced, and the majority were living in camps within the Vavuniya district.

### NATIONAL RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

In November 2009, the government initiated a resettlement programme to enable displaced people to return to their homes, or at the least to their districts of origin. A special Task Force was established to oversee the implementation of the programme, donors were mobilized and coordination mechanisms activated at district and divisional level.

### PROJECT GOALS

The organization implemented the reconstruction programme from 2010 to 2016, aiming to support return and recovery by providing permanent housing, community infrastructure and improved facilities. It was funded through six projects by five different donors.

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The programme was managed from the capital, while in the field each project had a manager and a team that included engineers, technical officers, community mobilizers, monitoring assistants and administration support staff. Officers were located in four of the most affected districts during different times and for different projects. The programme was implemented via a network of community-based organizations that were either formed or strengthened by the lead organization.

Following an owner-driven approach, the families were responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring of their own construction projects. Their early involvement in the process ensured that the outcome reflected their own aspirations, in addition to fostering a greater sense of ownership. Even after the trauma and loss of the war, people displayed tremendous resilience and resourcefulness, once they were given the opportunity to be actively engaged.

The process also revived the local economy. By procuring materials and labour locally, the funds were directed and remained within the communities, while the families saved money by contributing their labour. Field-based project teams provided technical assistance and guidance.

### BENEFICIARY SELECTION

Selection criteria were agreed at the outset between the organization, the government and respective donors. The eligibility criteria included the following:

- The family owned the property;
- The family had been displaced due to the conflict;
- The family had returned;
- The house had been damaged or destroyed;
- The family did not own another permanent house anywhere else in Sri Lanka.

Because of these criteria, the project encouraged many displaced families to return to their places of origin, as they wanted a durable housing solution. Mass public meetings were conducted by the project team in each village after people had returned, which helped the organization to assess the status of the families against the criteria. A complaints and feedback mechanism was also set up to allow people to voice their concerns in the selection process.

To select beneficiaries, eligible households were then ranked according to a comprehensive set of criteria. Attention was given to vulnerable families, especially female-headed households.

## HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY

The loss of title deeds, land permits and other tenure documents was a key issue, as people had fled their villages during the conflict without documentation. According to the eligibility criteria, construction could not begin until new documents were available. The assistance of land officers in the district and divisional secretariats was instrumental in resolving these issues. The organization held regular mobile land consultations with the affected communities and the government officers. In a few cases, disputes arose over land ownership during the construction of houses. These were referred to the relevant government authorities for resolution. In some instances, where resolution was not possible, the housing grant was re-allocated to another beneficiary family.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During the programme, approximately 250 community-based reconstruction committees were formed, each consisting of seven office bearers and with a mandatory inclusion of 40 per cent women. This enabled both women and men to collectively determine development at intra-household, inter-household and community levels and acted as a means of consultation, encouraging female-male power balance. The committees were trained on bulk procurement of building materials, basic bookkeeping, mine risk education and participatory settlement improvement planning. Community members had a space to identify gaps and prioritize their own needs in the development of their villages. The committees were also empowered to voice the collective needs of communities with relevant government departments. For example, they helped many families to gradually regain their lands from military occupation.

## COORDINATION

The programme was implemented with a wide range of partners, including central government, local authorities, NGOs, CBOs, private sector and funding partners. It would not have been possible without the full cooperation of government officials at all levels. This cooperation was possible thanks to the good relationship that the organization enjoyed with central, district and local government, which had been fostered over many decades of engagement in the country.

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

As natural hazards periodically affect the project areas, DRR aspects were included in site selection, house location and orientation, as well as design of houses and community infrastructure facilities. Community centres and preschools – that would serve as gathering points during disasters – were located on high ground and had rapid drainage facilities. The road designs incorporated culverts and storm water drainage. For houses and community building designs, the following DRR features were incorporated:

- Raised foundations to protect from flooding;
- Specially reinforced foundations for structurally poor soils, such as expansive soils.
- Increased external wall thickness (150 mm) combined with a reinforced concrete ring beam at lintel level, to improve structural stability during strong winds and floods;
- Increased roof gradient (25 degrees), anchoring of roof to the ring beam and mortar restraining bands over roof tiles.



Roof work in progress in Vavuniya district. DRR features were included in roofs, foundations and walls. The gradient was increased to enable better run-off.

## MAIN CHALLENGES

**SECURITY, ACCESS AND APPROVALS.** Due to travel restrictions and security clearance requirements, careful planning was essential to maximize the time that could be spent with communities. Not being able to establish offices close to the affected areas was also challenging, but was later overcome, once infrastructure facilities were in place. Government approval was generally required for organizations to operate in post-conflict interventions, delaying implementation. However, this affected some agencies less than others, based on organizational mandates and presence in the country.

**UXOS.** The programme was delayed by the clearance process of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs) which posed a major risk to residents as well as humanitarian workers. In some instances, land mines and UXOs were found in cleared areas where construction had commenced. The organization held awareness programmes for community members on these risks.

**WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT.** The displaced population included many female-headed households, due to large numbers of men losing their lives in the war, as well as desertion by male household members due to the breakdown of family cohesion after the conflict. However, it was challenging to engage women in reconstruction. Many women were trained in construction skills, such as masonry and carpentry, to carry out construction work themselves and to supervise construction workers. This was quite novel to the culture of the region. Training was also provided on negotiation skills, to prevent extortion or exploitation by suppliers.

**MISUSE OF THE GRANTS.** In some cases, housing grants were not used for the intended purposes. Vulnerable families lacked regular income to manage their day-to-day expenses and were tempted to use the grants to meet their basic needs. Also, female-headed households often paid for additional labour, as they could not contribute their own. To minimize this practice, the village reconstruction committees formed self-help groups to support single women with heavy construction tasks. Female-headed households with no income were referred to livelihood organizations through inter-agency coordination meetings. Separately, some male household heads started to misuse their housing grant by purchasing alcohol. The introduction of joint bank accounts, making it necessary for both husband and wife to sign for a payment withdrawal, prevented men from using the grant inappropriately.



Damaged house in Mullaitivu district. One of the issues to solve in the reconstruction was land tenure, as many families had lost their titles during the conflict.

**FINANCIAL PLANNING.** Many families who received financial assistance for construction initially miscalculated the cost and overestimated the size of their houses, which would have resulted in incomplete houses. To prevent this, each family received education on financial planning prior to construction, and the project team monitored the whole construction process.

**CULTURAL PRACTICES.** Most communities in the conflict-affected areas believe in traditional cultural practices pertaining to their daily lives, which include the construction of houses. They thought that not adhering to all their beliefs would bring misfortune to their home. For example, people were unwilling to commence construction until auspicious dates, requested larger room sizes, or specific roof styles. This often led to delays in project implementation.

**WIDER IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT**

The project contributed to the peace process in the affected communities. Firstly, it created a stable home environment by enabling people to return to a permanent house and secure tenure. Secondly, involving the families and communities in the entire process generated a sense of ownership and enhanced community spirit that otherwise may have taken years to develop. Families and communities began to show self-confidence and initiative for further recovery, which was often not the case before the project.

Communities in the target areas had suffered severe disruptions to their social fabric during the conflict. Collective consciousness was largely missing due to various factors, such as social stratification based on caste and distrust among community members. Once the conflict was over, the caste system that prevailed in these societies started to surface. However, the establishment of reconstruction committees allowed divisions to be overcome and the communities to come together and support vulnerable families to build their houses, regardless of gender or caste.



Women engaged in construction training, Kilinochchi district. Gender mainstreaming was promoted through the mandatory representation of women in reconstruction committees, as well as involving women in capacity-building and construction activities.

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### STRENGTHS

+ **New concepts were introduced in the conflict-affected communities**, including quality management, affordable technology, Disaster Risk Reduction, construction safety, disability inclusion, environmental preservation and financial planning.

+ **Land tenure issues were resolved swiftly** thanks to coordination with government authorities. It was essential to settle disputes over land ownership at the initial stages of the project.

+ **The project mainstreamed gender from the onset**, by establishing minimum quotas for women's representation in reconstruction committees and including women's groups in infrastructure programmes. Gender was further integrated into the project by collecting sex and age disaggregated data and conducting awareness sessions on gender issues, including gender-based violence.

+ **The owner-driven methodology was successful** in mobilizing the community and empowering women, giving people a sense of ownership. This was possible thanks to the use of participatory approaches, such as community action planning and the establishment of a transparent complaints and feedback mechanism.

### WEAKNESSES

- **Lack of flexibility in operational procedures.** The situation on the ground demanded changes to existing operational procedures and tools, but the organization was unable to accommodate these.

- **Security restrictions on movement were not sufficiently taken into consideration** when establishing realistic project timelines. Staff members should have been located as close as possible to the project areas, to minimize time spent on travel and reduce security risks.

- **More flexibility was needed in determining the grant amounts and housing standards.** Conflict-affected families returning after displacement were particularly vulnerable and required additional support to construct their homes.



Completed house in Mullaitivu district. The use of reconstruction committees and community action planning methodologies helped restore social cohesion.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- **The project deviated from the linear approach to post-disaster shelter recovery**, challenging the necessity to move through the various stages of recovery – emergency, transitional, and durable solutions – and chose to **support a permanent solution at a much earlier stage**.
- **Coordination, awareness-raising and advocacy** are important components in a post-conflict situation, to deliver long-term sustainable shelter solutions for rapid recovery and return to normality.
- **Close relationships should be built with all relevant agencies responsible for unexploded ordnance and mines** (including security department, local civil-military affairs coordinator, public administrative officials), to ensure demining activities are conducted prior to the commencement of project interventions. In addition, awareness should be raised with communities – and particularly children – on the dangers posed by UXOs.
- **The expectation that people would contribute financially to the construction process was impractical**, as most returnees faced prevalent poverty, including the loss of able-bodied family members. However, in cases where the grants were insufficient, families provided unskilled labour and took out loans, out of their motivation to settle into a permanent home. **Rapid training programmes for construction workers became necessary**, to meet the labour shortages and facilitate families to substitute their own labour for hired labour to reduce costs.
- **Cultural beliefs cannot be ignored**, and greater flexibility in construction schedules needs to be allowed to accommodate traditional cultural activities. Therefore, **organizations should be familiar with the prevalent cultural practices when designing a project**. Where necessary, such reasons for delays should be made known to donors to avoid misunderstandings.
- **Permanent housing brings about a sense of permanency** for both individual families and entire communities. This would not be possible to achieve for transient populations. As such, **housing should not be delayed** until after the restoration of all other aspects of normalcy, such as regular employment or the build-up of savings.