Fourth year Tsunami Accountability Report

December 2008

Organic agriculture takes root in Ampara District

PROJECT CONTEXT

The Eastern part of Sri Lanka is a very complex part of the world to work in, due to the ongoing internal conflict. Oxfam Canada has been working in the Ampara district of Sri Lanka, which is located on the eastern shore line of the island.

PROJECT PROGRESS

Oxfam Canada has been working in close collaboration with five local organizations and the Ampara District government administration. The program has supported over 10,000 rice farmers, market gardeners, goat breeders and poor women who were affected by the deadly tsunami in December 2004 and the long-standing internal conflict. A total of 165 self-help groups have been created, with 2818 members comprising of 2265 women and 553 men.

Despite the challenging work conditions, many positive changes have happened. The women and men we have supported have seen their household income increase, which is a direct result of their access to lessons on organic farming techniques, micro-credit loans, and new local produce markets. These new resources have also been accompanied with education sessions that promoted good business practices. Along with this has come increased access to water for both domestic and drinking purposes. All these factors combined have brought about the foundations for long-term, sustainable development in the region.

Improved gender relations and equal access to resources at the household level has been another major result of the activities being implemented. By working together in mix ethnic self-help groups (SHG), women and men are participating in peace building effort. This is truly significant in an area of the world which has been divided for decades due to the internal conflict.

Story of Ms. Jelestine:

Ms. Jelestine is 45 years old and a mother of six children. She cries when she tells of how unidentified gunmen killed her husband only a few months ago.

She was bold enough to marry her husband from the Sinhala community but continue to live in her Tamil town. The ongoing conflict could not deter them from enjoying life until the tsunami devastated their dreams as it destroyed their home and livelihood. She says: “We regained our lost hope when humanitarian agencies provided livelihood assistance. But my happiness was lost once again when my husband fell victim to the bullets. My SHG stood by me and the members visited me every day, brought food for me and my children. With their support and a loan, I started a small restaurant. I earn between $7-11 a day depending upon the season. I am also renting the boat my husband owned for $10 a month.”

The above-mentioned story is just one example that illustrate how 859 women engaged in income-generating activities and have managed to earn a monthly income that ranges between $65 to 200.

The practice of Diversified Agriculture Farming Technology (DAFT) promotes the use of organic pesticides and fertilizers and other techniques that have helped small-scale rice producers improve their household income by 20% per year.

DAFT practitioners also report a 200% reduction their cost of pesticide, a 21% reduction in the overall cost of production and a 20% increase in food grown. The organic techniques have also helped market gardeners improve their household income by 128%.

Income-Generating Activities: A total of 924 poor women have been engaged in various income-generating activities, primarily around rice farming and market garden food production. Out of the 924 women, 859 women received a loan from their self-help group (SHG). All 859 women have double their monthly income going from $30-75 before the loan to $65-200. These women have now begun the repayment of their loans with a small interest, and a new series of loans are being given out to the next round of women who are part of the SHG.

Story of Ms. Thayapuram Indirani:

Ms. Thayapuram Indirani, who had to flee her home due to the on-going internal conflict, is a proud member of Nehru income-generating self-help group. She had left behind her properties, earnings and friends, and took shelter on the east coast in Kalmunia in 2004. She lives close to the beach with her ailing husband, her 11 year old daughter and 4 year old son in a tsunami transition house.

“My SHG is my comfort, a place where I experience warmth, friendship and support.” Thayapuram said. With a loan of $150 from her SHG, she bought cooking vessels and bulk provisions and started selling lunch and dinner packs. Her husband who suffers from a weak heart supports her in the income generation activity.

She earns roughly $7 per day. She says that her ambition is to provide decent education to her children, to buy medicines for her husband and to buy a piece of land. She hopes to return one-day and live in her homeland.

Sustainable Agricultural Resource Center (SARC) is a federation of SHGs. A total of 8 SARC have been put in place by the 5 partner organizations. These federations have an overall organizing purpose which comprehensively tries to bring together the voices of the farmers and small business owners. A SACR federation has three level of governance: the General Body that is composed of all the SHG members; a Central

Committee with representative from the participating SHG and the Executive Committee. Women represent, at all levels of the federation, 63% of the governance members. The SARC Central Committee wrote a comprehensive policy which provides a broad framework on governance and management of the SARC.

SARC's assets handed over to Navithampali SARC and the members stand next to their new tractor.

To achieve the objectives laid out in the policy, Oxfam provided some farm tools and equipments such as tractor, harvester, sprayer, and drum-seeder. The SARCs will have their own office buildings soon along with seed storage and seed processing facilities. In a short span of two months, the SARCs have made significant profit from renting out the harvesters and tractors.

Improved access to quality water: In partnership with local organizations, four water tanks holding tanks have renovated. The farmers associations that manage the tanks have assumed the responsibility to renovate the tanks with technical backing from the agrarian department of the local government. As well, in 13 villages, water sources have been secured, for both domestic and farming use.