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SRI LANKA SUPPORTING REGIONAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAM (SuRG)

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2011 QUARTERLY REPORT



JANUARY 2012

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Cover Photo:

Members of a Women's Rural Development Society in Trincomalee District attend a project orientation organized by a SuRG partner.

Photo courtesy of Tetra Tech ARD/SuRG

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACLG	Assistant Commissioner of Local Government
APS	Annual Program Statement
AU	American University
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCN	Cooperating Country National
CEaT	Community Empowerment and Transformation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLG	Commissioner of Local Government
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DAN	Dish Asia Network
DG	Democracy and Governance
DS	Divisional Secretary
EP	Eastern Province
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GN	<i>Grama Niladbari</i>
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HDCC	Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce
H.E.	Her Excellency
HR	Human Rights
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KCP	Karuna Center for Peacebuilding
LA	Local Authority
LAPP	Land Administration/Protection of Property Program
LG	Local Government
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MLGPC	Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSI	Management Systems International
NEIFR	North East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation
NELSIP	North East Local Services Improvement Project
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NIC	National Identity Card
OCPC	Organizations' Council for Peace and Co-existence
OD	Open Dialogue
ODU	Organizational Development Unit
OLD	Official Languages Department

OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PGF	Participatory Governance Forum
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PS	<i>Pradeshya Sabha</i>
PTF	Presidential Task Force
Q	Quarter
RDS	Rural Development Society
RISEN	Reintegration and Stabilization of the East and North Program
Rs.	Rupees
SE	Social Equity
SL	Sri Lanka
SLCJ	Sri Lanka College of Journalism
SuRG	Supporting Regional Governance Program
S/WGI	Secretary of State Office of Women's Global Issues
T.A.	Technical Assistance
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
ToT	Training of Trainers
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UC	Urban Council
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
WG	Working Group
WIN	Women In Need
WRDS	Women's Rural Development Society
YATV	Young Asia Television

INTRODUCTION

In March 2008, ARD, Inc. was awarded Contract No. 383-C-00-08-000501-00 to implement the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Sri Lanka Supporting Regional Governance Program (SuRG). The initiative was designed to build on USAID/Sri Lanka's democracy and governance efforts to address development needs resulting from the then ongoing conflict. The program was intended to support regional governance in the Eastern Province and Polonnaruwa District by focusing on four program components (social equity, local governance, community empowerment and transformation, and open dialogue) with crosscutting activities that reinforce governance improvements around the betterment of human and community security. After the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) in May 2009, SuRG expanded its programming to include targeted initiatives in the Northern Province.

In December 2010, USAID extended the contract base period from February 2011 to June 2012. A modification to Section C of the contract and the budget was signed in July 2011. The modification to Section C reflects changes in the operating environment in Sri Lanka and USAID programming priorities. It also stipulated that Tetra Tech ARD award grants to the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, the American University, Women in Need and the Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce. Option year funds increased the total budget to \$13,920,762 and the contract end date was extended until February 28, 2013.

Activities this quarter were focused on the development and start-up of follow-up and new grants. Awards to eight of nine regional partners based in the East and Polonnaruwa were made for programs that build on and expand activities implemented with Annual Program Statement grants completed late last year. The grants, valued at Rs. 14,875,425 include three Social Equity (SE) grants and five Community Empowerment and Transformation (CEaT) grants. Also under development this quarter were follow-up grants to three partners.

The Local Governance team worked with regional and national officials to develop a technical assistance and training program for the Northern Province. After surveying all local authorities in the province, the team developed a plan based on the SuRG Eastern Province LG program and identified the 17 priority LAs, based on need, with which to implement the program. The LG team also finalized program development for a new grant to a national partner that is expected to be awarded and initiated early next quarter.

This report covers the period from October 1–December 31, 2011, and details these activities as well as progress on ongoing contract implementation. Highlights for the quarter include:

- SuRG awarded eight follow-up grants valued at Rs. 14,875,425 to partners from the East and Polonnaruwa to build on and continue SuRG-funded activities completed last year.
- Finance Standing Committees in four SuRG partner LAs met to discuss their 2012 budget. The Committees also identified new income sources, made projections on funds coming to the PS, and discussed various forms of community contributions for planned activities of the PS.
- The Board of a national partner with support from AU honed its organizational strategy and mandate. Board, staff and regional stakeholders completed a workshop on Project Cycle, Planning and Budgeting.
- A SuRG partner conducted three inter-faith forums, two advanced forums, and two beginners forums on topics including social transformation, co-existence, and comparing religious psychology. A total of 205 persons (143 male, 62 female, including 89 Buddhist monks and 29 nuns) participated in the events held in Ampara, Monragala and Polonnaruwa.

- A partner conducted CBO capacity building workshops and trainings in the Batticaloa district for a total of 315 participants. Activities included four one-day awareness-raising workshops on the roles and responsibilities of CBOs, and influencing policy and service delivery; one workshop on preparing training materials and curriculum; and 10 workshops focusing on leadership and legal documentation.



Arumbergal

Resource people for a partner's CBO capacity building workshops develop curriculum in Batticaloa.

- A total of 456 new clients and 203 repeat clients accessed WIN's Jaffna and Puttalam Crisis Centres for psychological counseling. Three hundred six new clients and seven repeat clients accessed WIN's Jaffna and Puttalam Crisis Centres for legal services and court representation.
- WIN Centres in Jaffna and Puttalam conducted awareness-raising sessions on gender-based violence and how to access local services for 234 community members, midwives, government officials, health care workers, Samurdhi officers and doctors.
- KCP conducted four intra-faith and three inter-faith workshops with 78 religious leaders, and 80 religious leaders and 14 youth in attendance, respectively. Participants were from Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist faiths.
- A regional partner conducted 10 legal awareness sessions and two workshops on the importance of legal documents for 308 persons. The partner also implemented WRDS capacity building trainings for 79 WRDS members in communication, leadership and negotiation.
- HDCC held its 2010 Habantota District Entrepreneur of the Year Award ceremony. HDCC also implemented trainings entitled, "Start Your Business," "Together We Can Achieve," and "Managing a Business," for a combined total of 79 women participants. Ten small business loans (valued at Rs. 877,000), including one loan which was approved in the previous quarter, were released to women entrepreneurs.

I.0 CONTRACT IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

I.1 SOCIAL EQUITY

During this quarter, the SuRG SE team worked closely with partners to develop initiatives and grants that build on their previous SuRG-supported programs. In December 2011, grants valued at Rs. 14,672,800 were approved for four regional grantees. In addition, funding requests for two national partners were developed for grants to be awarded early next quarter. The SE team also continued to support and monitor ongoing activities of two partners.

In November 2011, the SE team conducted an evaluation of the lawyers workshop held for eastern lawyers in December 2010. The workshop focused on three areas of substantive and procedural law vital within a post-conflict environment—namely, the legal consequences of conflict-related deaths and disappearances and obtaining death certificates, succession and inheritance of property vis-à-vis partition and testamentary cases.

The evaluation was conducted in two phases, the first in Ampara and Batticaloa and the second in Trincomalee. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the training vis-à-vis how the lawyers were applying the skills learned in their practice and how the local communities in the Eastern Province were benefiting from the training provided to lawyers. Eleven lawyers from Ampara, nine from Batticaloa and eleven from Trincomalee were interviewed individually with a questionnaire developed jointly by the SuRG SE and M&E teams.

The evaluation findings pointed to the value of the workshop, with participants commending both the workshop sessions and the resource material provided, which they continue to use, as well as share with peers. This evaluation, as with previous evaluations of this nature, pointed to the continued need for capacity building of lawyers in the North and East and the value of participatory and practical approaches to such training. A majority of lawyers stated that it was this aspect together with the quality of resource personnel that set the SuRG trainings apart from other lawyers trainings conducted in these regions.

“I had to take up a testamentary case with regard to some bank assets some time ago. After taking the case, there were so many complications that I didn’t know what to do and began wondering why I had taken on the case. After sometime I decided I could not do the client justice and asked him to find another lawyer, but the client found it difficult to find another lawyer who was willing to take the case. Then I was able to participate in the SuRG training, where all the steps to a testamentary case were taught to us in a comprehensive manner. After the training I felt confident I could take on the previous case again, so I called the client and informed him that I would like to take on the case once again. I was confident this time, and in the end the outcome was successful.”

ATTORNEY-AT-LAW, TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT

“USAID Supports Publication of Legal Text in Trincomalee”

As a December 2011 article from the Tamil newspaper *Thinakkural* explains, a SuRG partner is demystifying law and making it accessible to all through its publications of legal pamphlets.

The publications are targeted to residents of Trincomalee, but the partner has received requests for copies from civil society groups, individuals and legal practitioners from the Tamil speaking community throughout the country. The Commissioner of the High Court for the Northern Province, the Legal Officer, Eastern Provincial Council, and others have expressed their appreciation for the much needed materials. The Chairman of the Plantation, Rural Education and Development Organization points out, “The booklets... [are] on very important subjects about which the people in the plantation have very little or no knowledge. [It] would be of great blessing and will expose them to new knowledge. ...We can train the 200 odd teachers and equip them with these valuable documents and they would be able to reach thousands and thousands of people.”

In addition to interviews with the participant lawyers, the SuRG team also used this opportunity to meet with two District Judges, and two magistrates. Both District Judges stated that they had observed positive changes in the application of the laws by lawyers who attended the SuRG training, particularly in partition cases. Both these judges had also received copies of workshop materials which they considered to be valuable additions to their legal libraries.

Topics for future training workshops were also discussed with lawyers during the course of the interviews. Findings in this regard will be of particular importance to the SE team in order to develop its future trainings. Topics that were most commonly mentioned included procedural aspects of trials and criminal defense matters, bail laws, the Domestic Violence Act, Quazi, maintenance laws and land matters. The findings, including comments on content and design, will be used to develop the agendas for the proposed one-day district workshops that SuRG will implement over the next quarters.

The SuRG team is finalizing the findings of the evaluation for appropriate dissemination early next quarter.

I.1.1 NEW GRANTS

ARD055

A grant was awarded to the partner on December 1, 2011 for its “Promoting Peace and Security in the Batticaloa District” program. The program aims to promote social cohesion, well-being and security among targeted Tamil and Muslim communities.

The partner commenced project activities by recruiting new staff and renting out a new office. Initial meetings were then conducted with relevant DSs, during which, approval was sought and obtained for project implementation. The partner is currently awaiting approval from the three DSs.

Meetings were also held with the chairpersons of the three relevant *Pradeshiya Sabhas* (PSs), during which the respective chairpersons agreed to work closely with the partner and their staff, particularly with regard to addressing public needs and grievances, made through the partner. The police officers in-charge in two relevant police stations also approved project activities and agreed to work closely with the Civil Protection Committees and participate in their meetings regularly.

The partner has studied existing case records and conducted a series of discussions with community mobilizers and village leaders to identify those who lack important legal documentation. Staff will assist a minimum of 200 beneficiaries in securing the necessary legal documents. An orientation meeting was held with the registrars and *Grama Niladharis* (GNs) of the relevant Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions in order to secure their support to register marriages, births and deaths and assist in the process of retrieving copies of missing and/or lost documents.

The partner has formed three task forces with five members each comprising community mobilizers, RDS representatives and village leaders to work with relevant stakeholders. Task force I will work with five DSs;

Task force II will work with the Eastern Provincial Council, three *Pradeshija Sabbas*, the Ceylon Electricity Board and National Water Supply and Drainage Board; and Task force III will work with the Civil Protection Committees. These Task Forces will advocate both on issues identified during the previous grant such as land title, school dropouts, lack of internal roads and road renovation, electricity and drinking water supply, illegal liquor production and alcoholism as well as issues to be identified in the future.

The partner has commenced preparations to conduct four workshops for community mobilizers and village leaders on land rights and related issues, local authorities and citizen participation, fundamentals of advocacy, and fundamentals of gender and the Domestic Violence Act. A local NGO working in the same areas as the partner will collaborate with staff to develop the curriculum and conduct these training programs.

ARD052

A grant was awarded to the partner on December 15, 2011 for its “Raising Awareness of Human Rights in Vulnerable Communities in Ampara District – Phase II” program. The project aims to integrate the concepts of responsibilities, rights and equality in the minds of the beneficiaries and expand their understanding of how to address inequities in society.

The partner commenced work on the program with the recruitment of an Administration and Finance Officer, a Project Officer and a Field Officer, followed by a short orientation program for both continuing and new staff. A program introduction meeting was also conducted with the relevant Divisional Secretaries. The DSs confirmed their approval for the project and assured the partner of their support and cooperation, particularly in the provision of necessary data on WRDSs within their respective divisions. Similarly, project staff also visited the relevant *Pradeshija Sabbas* to introduce the project and obtain the support and cooperation of the chairpersons and their staff.

The partner’s Human Rights Course is scheduled to begin early next quarter and consists of 132 hours of classroom sessions over a period of six months. The previous curriculum was revised with the support of a Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo, and other course resource persons. The course will now cover the Domestic Violence Act, Maintenance Act, Quasi matters and the Public Property Act.

Advertisements for course placements were distributed in villages and through letters to the Divisional Secretariats, *Pradeshija Sabbas*, the Municipal Council, CBOs and other governmental and non-governmental departments and organizations. Two preparatory meetings were also held with the resource persons.

With regard to the human rights awareness-raising sessions, also scheduled to begin early next quarter, two meetings were held with the relevant Divisional Secretaries and *Gramma Niladharis*. Staff explained the purpose and process of the proposed awareness-raising and obtained approval from the officials. Following these meetings, project staff visited two villages and selected participants for the program with the help of the respective GNs of these villages.

Partner staff met with the DSs, Women Development Officers and GNs of the above-mentioned DS divisions with regard to proposed capacity building sessions for members of WRDSs. These sessions will cover human, women and child rights; legal remedies and support; community issues and proposal development; and leadership and office management. Following these meetings project staff carried out discussions on the proposed programs with the committee members of village WRDSs. These committee members were then requested to select 10 active members to participate in the training programs.

ARD053

The partner was awarded a grant on December 1, 2011 to continue the work it had begun under a previous SuRG grant. The program entitled “Raising Awareness of Human Rights to Mitigate Negative Impacts on Vulnerable Women and Youth in the Ampara District” aims to enable women, men and youth to protect their rights and develop a social structure that supports their needs.

During the previous grant period, the partner worked in three DS Divisions. Beneficiaries from these locations will continue to receive assistance under this grant as well. In addition, beneficiaries will also be selected from one additional DS Division. During this quarter, the partner selected the eight villages to include in the program.

The partner then conducted a series of orientation programs for its staff in which monthly plans were drawn up for the period between January and March 2012. Partner staff then made a series of visits to Phase I beneficiaries of their psychosocial and legal aid programs and discussed the possibility of working with them once again as part of the activities under the current grant.

1.1.2 ONGOING GRANTS

ARD033

The partner commenced its “Essential Document Support” program in August 2011. The program aims to assist resettled communities in 24 GN divisions in the Batticaloa District to acquire basic legal documents.

The partner carried out discussions with members of the WRDSs in the selected GN divisions in order to understand training needs, particularly in the areas of communication, leadership and negotiation. Input on the design of the workshops and their curricula were sought, and the draft agendas for the workshops were put together by the workshop resource person, in close consultation with the WRDS members. A total of 79 women from 23 of the 24 targeted WRDSs participated in these meetings.

Following these meetings, and the development of the curriculum, the partner conducted four residential training workshops on the above-mentioned topics. Seventy-four members from 24 WRDSs participated in these workshops.

The trainings modules were designed to be practical and learner-friendly. Participants were introduced to the topics through group discussions, presentations, role play activities and games, in addition to lectures. Some of the subtopics covered included effective communication; causes of barriers in communication; improving communication skills; improving leadership skills; dynamic decision-making processes; characteristics of good leadership; self-analysis and critique; negotiation skills in different environments; and challenges when faced with contradictory views.

After the completion of each workshop two women were selected from each of the 24 WRDSs to form four working committees comprised of 12 members each. These committees were to share lessons learned at the workshop within their villages and also contribute to future activities in their villages. Each of the four working committees was to meet twice a month. However, due to heavy rains in the area over the last few months, only two of a total of 16 meetings planned for the quarter, were conducted. All 12 committee members of one committee were present at the first meeting held during the quarter, while only eight were present at the other. The committee members who were present were informed of the need to collect information necessary to conduct the mobile legal clinics at the two meetings.

In this quarter, NewArow also conducted two workshops in collaboration with an INGO working locally for community, including WRDS members. The workshops focused on the importance of personal documents



SuRG partner holds an awareness-raising session in the Batticaloa District to help community members prepare their documents for an upcoming mobile legal clinic.

and methods to obtain them. Resource partners explained to participants the need to maintain important documents and used real application documents and case studies to take the participants through the various issues that arise when applying for such documentation as birth, marriage and death certificates.

A total of 40 individuals participated in the two workshops. The INGO prepared the curriculum and provided pamphlets and other useful material to the participants and one of their lawyers facilitated the workshops which also introduced participants to the new Death Registration Temporary Provisions Act 2010. This session was of particular importance to those who lost loved ones as a result of the conflict or whose loved ones disappeared and were therefore unable or unwilling to apply for death certificates.

Ten half-day workshops were also conducted with support from the INGO to raise awareness in 10 broader community villages on similar issues. A total of 307 individuals participated in these workshops. During these workshops, partner staff identified 85 cases of urgent documentation needs. The partner has since continued to follow up with each of these individuals to help them prepare the necessary files to apply for their documents, which can be submitted during mobile legal clinics planned in the next quarter.

1.1.3 SECRETARY OF STATE OFFICE OF WOMEN'S GLOBAL ISSUES GRANT

WOMEN IN NEED (WIN) / JAFFNA, PUTTALAM, NATIONAL

WIN was awarded a Secretary of State Office of Women's Global Issues grant for its "Domestic Violence is a Human Rights Issue: Expanding Prevention and Enhancing Support Services in Post-war Sri Lanka" project through SuRG in July 2011. Into its second quarter, the project has satisfactorily achieved its targets with regard to client servicing as well as outreach and awareness-raising. Nonetheless, some of the project components continue to be faced with obstacles and challenges, described below in detail.

WIN conducted a total of six awareness programs for local communities, midwives, government officials, Samurdhi officers, health care workers and doctors during the last quarter; the first three were held in Jaffna and the latter three in Puttalam.

A total of 99 people participated in a community awareness workshop conducted in the village of Kaddudai in Sandilipay DS Division of Jaffna in October 2011. The workshop focused on violence against women, including domestic violence and teenage pregnancies. WIN also used the opportunity to create awareness of their services and how to access them amongst the people who participated. The village was chosen due to the presence of a high number of recent returnees from the Vanni, as well as high prevalence of alcohol abuse and reports of violence against women and children. Several media were used in order to discuss these issues, including discussions, questions and answers and a street drama on domestic violence and its impact on the family and on women. The local community participated actively in the day-long program and also requested that WIN support their village with programs targeted particularly towards controlling the alcohol and substance abuse problem that they saw as the source of most ills within their community.

In the second workshop of the quarter held in Jaffna, 30 midwives from 11 MOH divisions participated and shared their experiences with WIN staff. This workshop focused on gender-based violence, its causes and means of prevention.

A third workshop was held for government officials including Divisional Secretaries, Women Development Officers and Child Rights Protection Officers of the Jaffna district. Eight officials participated in this workshop, which dealt with themes similar to the workshop for midwives and also oriented the officers to WIN and its activities. The workshop provided a forum for WIN Jaffna staff to raise issues they encountered in the course of their work directly with the officials and discuss better means of addressing these issues.

In the Puttalam District, the first awareness workshop for the quarter was conducted for 25 health care workers. Some of the topics discussed were the duties and responsibilities of health workers, identifying victims of domestic violence and the legal aspects including laws related to the crime of domestic violence.

A second workshop targeted Samurdhi officers and once again discussed matters pertaining to the responsibilities that these officers face in terms of identifying and reporting incidents of violence against women, including domestic violence; the consequences of domestic violence and how to deal with them; and legal aspects of domestic violence and related laws. A total of 44 Samurdhi officers participated and WIN staff noted that the workshop was one of the most engaging ones they had conducted in recent times due to the enthusiasm and genuine concern shown by the participants to the topics discussed.

The final workshop for the quarter in the Puttalam District was conducted for doctors. Twenty-eight doctors participated in this workshop which covered topics such as medical intervention and the role of medical professionals in addressing issues of domestic violence. WIN staff also introduced the doctors to the services they provided and the means through which they sought to address the issue of violence against women.

WIN Awareness Raising Sessions

Participants	Number
Jaffna	
Community Members	99
Midwives	30
Government Officials	8
Total Jaffna	137
Puttalam	
Health Care Workers	25
Samurdhi Officers	44
Doctors	28
Total Puttalam	97
TOTAL	234

During the reporting period, a total of 456 new clients and 203 repeat clients accessed WIN's Jaffna and Puttalam Crisis Centres for psychological counseling and 306 new clients and seven repeat clients accessed WIN's legal and court representation services.

All clients who access WIN's services are directed to a counselor before any other support is provided. This ensures that the clients have the space to talk and share their feelings and stories within a safe environment. Clients are then guided through the available options and helped in the process of choosing their preferred means of redress. Other family members and caretakers of the victim are also educated so as to help them better understand what to expect and how to support the victim within a given situation.

Women subject to violence can also access legal advice and court representation through WIN Crisis Centres. While legal advice is given to clients on any legal issue, WIN lawyers represent clients in court on cases filed under the Domestic Violence Act, and in cases involving maintenance, divorce or where women are subject to severe forms of violence such as rape, incest and sexual abuse.

Meanwhile, WIN's 24-hour hotline responded to 4,458 calls between October and December 2011. Callers are counseled over the phone and provided with as much support that is needed to divert an emergency. They are then directed to the nearest WIN Crisis Centre.

A number of challenges continue to impact program implementation. WIN continues to face difficulties in finalizing the curriculum for the family court counselors. The current Chief Justice has stated that all new activities involving court staff have to be approved by her. While she is currently in the process of prioritizing various programs, she has unfortunately stated that court counselors are at this time not a priority.

1.2 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

The CEaT team focused its activities this quarter on developing and awarding follow-up grants to regional partners who completed SuRG APS-funded programs late last year. By the end of the quarter, five of these grants valued at Rs. 9,653,625 were awarded. Start-up activities began in December 2011. These follow-up grants will build on work done last year and will predominantly focus on strengthening the capacity of CBOs to be able to adequately identify community issues and needs and effectively advocate to local officials for the resolution of the issues and for adequate service provision. The CEaT team also continued its support and monitoring of ongoing grantees.

In October 29, 2011 representatives from SuRG partner organizations along with SuRG technical staff participated in two gender workshops. The workshops were the second phase of a gender training program intended to increase participants' understanding of gender equality and provide tools for mainstreaming gender throughout programs and in their organizations. They were also intended to facilitate productive and positive dialogue around gender relations and power and make the appropriate linkages into future program design, development and implementation. The workshop was held in two groups; the first group was comprised of participants from Ampara and Batticaloa and the second included participants from Trincomalee.

“For a society to develop well, both women and men need to be involved. By educating other women who were not involved in this workshop we can help promote women’s development. The family, village, and town are a good base.”

PARTICIPANT, SuRG GENDER TRAINING, TRINCOMALEE

During the quarter, there was one Quarterly Review Meeting held for partners from Ampara and Batticaloa. Eighteen persons from five partners attended the review session. The one-day session provided opportunities for partners to present their work and share best practices and lessons learned and extend their network. The session also included time for partners to review M&E and financial recordkeeping practices. SuRG local governance (LG) staff presented the project’s LG model to engage CBOs in Participatory Governance Forums (PGFs). Two representatives from OTI/DAI were also in attendance to share information on the USAID/RISEN program and how SuRG partners might access OTI funds.

1.2.1 NEW GRANTS

ARD057

In the latter part of December 2011, the partner commenced its second SuRG-funded project entitled, “Strengthening Peaceful Co-Existence through Multi-Ethnic Community Participation” in the Trincomalee District. Based on the lessons learned in Phase I of the program, the partner plans to strengthen community co-existence by continuing its work with 15 Peace Committees and 15 youth groups. The partner will work to further strengthen the capacity of these groups and their linkages with government officials in order to find solutions to community concerns.

During the reporting period, project staff was recruited and an orientation program for staff completed. Nine youth groups held monthly meetings primarily focusing on the objectives of the second phase of the project. Community issues of concern were raised including school dropout rates and the need for community volunteers to engage in community activities and take on important issues. A total of 117 youth attended the meetings including 70 males and 47 females.

ARD059

In mid-December 2011, the partner was awarded a follow-on grant for their SuRG-funded “Community Empowerment and Mobilization for Muslim and Sinhalese Communities Co-Existence Project.” The project aim is to further strengthen peaceful co-existence and interaction between Muslim and Sinhalese families living in the seven villages in the Polonnaruwa District.

Project start-up activities held during the reporting period included a project orientation session for partner staff to introduce them to the project objectives, activities, outcomes and financial plans. In addition, a project implementation plan was prepared by the partner at the session. Basic awareness meetings were then held with five village committees to introduce them to the project objectives and to obtain community support.

“Our discussion here today is like the light emanating from a kerosene lamp...We must take our people to the point where they see themselves first as Sri Lankans and then as Muslim, Buddhist, Tamil, Sinhala or whatever other identities they have. We must make people question why people harm others in the most violent of ways, make them blind, disabled and psychologically sick. It is only through the understanding that others are also just like us, that we can think of moving towards a clearer understanding.”

**MUSLIM MOWLAVI, PARTICIPANT IN PARTNER INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE FORUM
MAHA-OYA, AMPARA**

ARD064

In mid-December 2011, the partner commenced its “Strengthening Community Co-existence through Social Mobilization of Women’s and Youth Groups” project in the Trincomalee District. Based on the lessons learned and successes of their previous SuRG-funded program, the partner plans to further strengthen existing women and youth groups in their 13 most active and productive partner communities.

During this reporting period, project staff was recruited and an orientation session was held to explain the project objectives, goals, activities and budget. The partner engaged and met with a lawyer who will seek approval from the relevant DS to implement project activities.

ARD058

A grant was awarded to the partner on December 20, 2011 for their “Engaging People’s Forums and Local Authorities to Empower Communities” project. The project aims to enhance participatory local governance in 28 GNs in the Polonnaruwa District. This project is the second phase of a SuRG-funded project which was designed to increase community participation in local governance and decision making, enhance the ability of elected and government officials of the PS to engage citizens, and create an ongoing mechanism for citizen and local authority (LA) engagement. The partner worked with the most remote and underserved 10 GN divisions during Phase I and successfully formed 10 People’s Forums and engaged them in the PS’s four Advisory Committees. In Phase II, the partner plans to form 18 new People’s Forums in the remaining 18 GN divisions and will bring together community leaders in each of the 28 project GNs in a Central People’s Forum. Each of the newly formed People’s Forums will nominate representatives to participate in the PS’s existing four Advisory Committees as a primary method to raise community issues with government officials. At the same time, the partner will work with the LA elected members and staff to help them better understand the role of the community in local government and engage them in decisions regarding local development and governance.

Since commencing the grant, the partner recruited staff and held project orientation meetings with project staff and the *Pradeshhiya Sabha* chairman and staff. The objectives of this meeting were to orient participants on

project activities and objectives and to prepare a participatory project implementation plan. Due to poor weather conditions in the area, field work was delayed and is scheduled to start on January 1, 2012.

ARD054

On December 15, 2011 the partner was awarded a grant for its “Relationship Building Between Diverse Social Groups in Tamil and Muslim Communities” project. The grant builds on activities implemented by the partner and funded by SuRG last year and aims to build strong relationships and trust across ethnic communities in eight neighboring villages in Batticaloa District.

With this grant the partner will continue working with eight partner villages in four Divisional Secretariats. These four DSs play a vital role in the agricultural and economic activities of the district. The eight vulnerable villages include pairs of neighboring Tamil and Muslim villages in each of the four DSs. Through this grant, the partner will support partner communities’ efforts to address unresolved problems that farmer groups and WRDSs previously identified as priorities. Groups of paired Tamil and Muslim villages will together advocate to local authorities on behalf of their communities to address issues of common concern.

The partner initiated its project with a meeting with the relevant DS to obtain approval for project implementation. The DS advised the partner to get approval directly from the Government Agent in Batticaloa. In addition, the partner hired three new project staff members—one project coordinator and two social mobilizers. Monthly and quarterly plans were developed for January to March 2012. Partner staff made orientation visits to farmers’ societies, WRDSs and youth groups. Teachers were selected for the Sinhala language classes—both for the advanced course and the beginners’ course.

I.2.2 ONGOING GRANTS

ARD047

The partner continued to implement its technical assistance and capacity building project. Phase I of the project is focused on building the organizational capacity of the SFM. During this quarter, the AU-Peacebuilding Development Institute (PDI) and the implementing partner’s Board made significant progress towards strengthening organizational capacity. A representative of AU-PDI traveled to Sri Lanka as part of the project start-up and to conduct an evaluation to tailor the topics and themes of the first AU-PDI training sessions. The AU-PDI Director of this project then traveled to Sri Lanka to conduct a Board and Staff Work Planning Workshop and conduct a workshop on project planning and budgeting with the implementing partner’s staff and regional constituents. AU-PDI and the implementing partner also finalized and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining their relationship, roles and responsibilities for this project.

During the reporting period, the implementing partner made large strides in formalizing its operations and re-establishing linkages with prior regional staff and partners.

Board Development

The role of the implementing partner’s Board has recently changed. The Board now serves in more of an advisory role than it had previously and will be less involved in program implementation. In light of this, the upcoming capacity building workshops with the Board will focus on defining and delineating the role of the Board and how it should function to drive the organization forward through strategic planning, fiscal oversight, networking, and overall organizational leadership.

Focus/Identity as an Organization

During AU's project Director's meeting with the implementing partner's Board, there was much discussion about creating a new identity as well as discussion regarding the need to decide on the partner's stance on key issues related to the Muslim community. As such, upcoming trainings will also include sessions on generating a focus for the organization and a consensus among Board members about the vision and scope of activities they should support.

Regional Representation

The partner's regional network which used to operate throughout the country is now dissolved and no longer exists in any formal manner. This poses several problems for the partner as they try to recruit participants for their programs and monitor the impact. The partner will need to devise a plan to re-engage its regional networks and expand its reach to new partners and individuals.

Other Funding

The partner needs to explore a variety of potential funding options to help maintain the momentum that is being built through its partnership with AU. This project serves as the launch period for the partner and it needs to work toward more sustainable funding means.

Board and Staff Work Planning Workshop

AU's project Director facilitated a workshop with the eight members of the partner's Board in December 2011 to explore the current situation of Muslims in Sri Lanka, to discuss the purpose of the partner organization, and to develop a strategy for shaping the organization moving forward.

Participants explored areas for action in the context of the Muslim minority and different levels of actors and forces across the affected population. Following this analysis, the Board and staff worked together to determine areas on which to focus, decide which partners to work with, and explore what kind of organizational structure would be most suitable for the partner.

The team developed a work plan for the year to implement activities with AU. They also determined that internally displaced persons (IDP) and resettlement issues would be central to the partner's programming and the focus of future funding. They determined that partner programming will revolve around the following four major themes:

1. Land Issue/IDP resettlement.
2. Inter community harmony.
3. Policy reforms.
4. The eviction of Muslims in Colombo and suburbs.

Project Cycle, Planning and Budgeting Workshop

AU facilitated a Project Cycle, Planning and Budgeting workshop in December 2011 to identify priority areas of intervention for the partner and formulate proposals the partner can use to continue its programming. Present at the workshop were 14 participants including 12 males and 2 female board members, current national office staff and former regional directors and staff. The main objectives of the workshop were to provide basic training on the program cycle, identify future programs of partner/AU in the regions, and prepare a detailed proposal for at least one new program. The partner intended to include representatives

from the different regions in the workshop; however, the regional infrastructure that used to exist has dissolved, so they were not able to attract as many participants as they had hoped. This lack of a regional network was deemed a major issue for moving forward with the partner's programming.

The time allotted for the workshop did not prove sufficient to generate a complete funding proposal. However, a very basic planning framework was produced. Partner staff will continue to work with the framework to develop a comprehensive proposal the organization can use to pursue funding. The partner is working towards completing this proposal by the end of January 2012.

The current and interim CEO of the partner is currently a consultant with a three-month contract. The contract is scheduled to expire at the end of January 2012. The partner is recruiting a new CEO to take over by February 1.

ARD034

During this reporting period, Arumbugal continued its "Community Empowerment through CBO Capacity Building" program to build community advocacy capacity in the Batticaloa District.

The partner's efforts this quarter were concentrated on strengthening capacity and leadership of CBOs. They implemented four one-day mobilization and awareness workshops. The workshops introduced project activities and explained the roles and responsibilities of CBOs in the community. Fifty-four persons (38 males, 16 females) participated in the four workshops. After the awareness sessions were held, 330 members of 33 CBOs (RDSs, WRDSs, and Fisheries Societies) from 11 villages in seven GN Divisions were selected to attend a workshop focusing on strengthening the capacity and leadership of CBOs to be held in the next quarter.

In November 2011, the partner implemented a curriculum development workshop for project capacity building workshops to be conducted in the next quarter. Four members from a training pool in Batticaloa (part of a local NGO called Management and Technical Skills Development Association), a representative from an INGO working in the area, and members of SuRG and Arumbugal staff participated. The team reviewed priority training needs identified by CBO members in previous meetings and identified four primary training themes: leadership, legal documentation, credit and finance management, and office management. Each training theme was assigned two training days. The INGO agreed to facilitate the legal documentation workshops. Participants completed the preparation of the workshop materials, modules, and training agendas.

The partner began conducting the workshops this quarter with a series of two-day capacity building workshops in 10 villages, for 229 members of CBOs. Nine of the workshops focused on leadership and one workshop focused on legal documentation acquisition. The leadership training resource persons focused on the importance of good leaders, how to identify good leaders, leadership qualities, and leadership personality traits. After the training, the partner was informed of several examples in which CBOs restructured their respective organizations and key positions of the organizations to ensure that leaders were identified and adequately placed in the organizations.



Arumbugal

Participants in a SuRG partner legal documentation workshop fill in sample application forms.

Legal documentation training was facilitated by INGO staff with legal background and extensive experience working on documentation acquisition programs. The area has significant documentation needs (birth, death and marriage certificates, in particular) and therefore, CBO members require training to assist community members in acquiring their documentation. CBOs who receive the INGO training will later organize mobile legal clinics to coordinate activities such as filling in forms, identifying needs and issues and providing proper guidance to community members attempting to acquire documents. The legal documentation training concentrated on filling in forms for late registration of birth, marriage, and death certificates. Training activities were practical, and also provided basic explanations of relevant legal procedures as they pertained to documentation acquisition. The INGO team also discussed issues related to land deeds and permits, conflict death registration, domestic violence and maintenance and provided practical exercises where possible.

ARD048

The Karuna Center for Peacebuilding (KCP) continued work on the “Inter-religious Cooperation for Community Development and Social Empowerment in Trincomalee and Batticaloa Districts, and Padaviya Division” project. During this quarter, KCP conducted four intra-faith workshops, three inter-faith workshops, and three inter-faith district meetings. They also held 26 village meetings to identify community problems and needs which were led by the project’s core group of religious leaders with support from their implementing partner’s program staff, and 24 inter-faith committee meetings to design upcoming inter-faith community projects.

“This is the first time I’ve had the opportunity to work with other religious groups within the district. I now understand the importance of coming together to share our different ideas about building social harmony.”
 HINDU PRIEST, BATTICALOA
 KCP INTER-FAITH COMMITTEE MEETING

“Now that I am able to understand and have built mutual trust with other religious groups, I know we are all equal.”
 BUDDHIST PRIEST, PADAVIYA
 KCP INTER-FAITH COMMITTEE MEETING

Intra-faith Workshops

Intra-faith workshops for each of the participating faith groups jointly led by KCP and the partner were held this quarter for participants to develop trust with both implementing organizations. The

workshops also provided KCP and the partner with the opportunity to hear the views and concerns of each faith group about the project, community issues and reconciliation in general.

The intra-faith workshops provided a safe environment for each group to share their hopes and concerns about the project and to express their ideas about what their faith has to offer on the subject of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and tolerance. Peacebuilding aspects of the workshop curriculum provided a context for exploring the root causes of ethnic and religious tensions and the many ways that years of civil war have affected the social fabric of local communities.

Each group engaged in lively discussions about the spiritual aspects of their respective faiths that relate to peacebuilding and reconciliation, as well as the opportunities and obstacles their faith possesses when considering the goals of mutual understanding and cooperation. An outside facilitator was brought in to give training on basic participatory community needs assessment to equip participants with tools to determine the kind of community problems that might be addressed in the upcoming community projects.



A Catholic nun, Buddhist monk and Muslim mowlavi from Padaviya attend KCP’s inter-faith training session.

The four intra-faith workshops were almost fully attended with 20 participants each at the Christian, Muslim and Hindu workshops and 18 at the Sinhala workshop (78 out of a planned 80 in total).

Community Meetings to Identify Key Issues

After the intra-faith workshops, religious leaders from each district organized community meetings to identify the problems their communities face in day-to-day life. The leaders used tools they learned in the participatory needs assessment section of the training, such as focus group discussions, individual interviews, and secondary data collection. The Buddhist group did not have enough time between its intra-faith and the subsequent inter-faith workshops (see below for details) to conduct a thorough process to identify problems and needs. However, the group was still able to exchange with the other faith groups their impressions of the needs of their communities and will continue the needs assessment as the projects are developed.

Sarvodaya staff, including *Shramadana* societies and divisional staff, supported religious leaders in organizing the community meetings and discussions. They held 26 meetings as indicated in the chart below.

Inter-faith Workshops

Three inter-faith workshops were held during the reporting period with a total of 94 in attendance at all three workshops including 22 Buddhists, 25 Hindus, 21 Christians, and 26 Muslims. The project’s core group of 80 religious leaders participated along with 14 youth representatives. At the start of the inter-faith workshops, some participants commented that they had never spoken to a member of one of the other groups. One Buddhist monk proclaimed, “When we were young, we were told not to walk with Tamil people and we were clueless about them.” A Muslim youth representative stated, “My parents used to tell me not to drink or to eat from the same glass or cutlery used by Sinhalese people.” Over the course of the workshops, participants discussed the teachings of each religion and explored similarities of all traditions in fostering peace, harmony, respect, and equality. Group members acknowledged that while these abstract concepts were not necessarily practiced, at least their values and goals were shared.



A Catholic lay leader, Hindu Priest and a Buddhist Monk from Trincomalee attend KCP’s Inter-faith training.

KCP: Participation at Community Meetings and Discussions by District and Gender

District	Number of meetings	Total Participants	Male	Female
Batticaloa	10	316	170	146
Trincomalee	8	140	49	91
Padaviya	8	101	49	52
TOTALS	26	557	268	289

candidness what they had been taught about each other and how much they had to re-learn.

To deepen the understanding of the role of identity in the context of violent conflict, participants looked at the realities of having multiple identities, finding those that overlap and share features such as Sri Lankan, educator, religious leader, woman, soccer player, etc. The psychology of “wounded identity” was also explored which again is a shared identity among ethnic and religious groups, as many have been targeted and harmed in Sri Lanka due to their ethnic and religious identities. The group discussed themes related to how people are socialized to develop prejudices, indulge in stereotyping, and grow up to hate other groups. Participants shared with varying degrees of

This kind of exploration led to discussions about the special status of religious leaders as leaders and role models. Each made commitments to develop inter-religious activities and make him or herself visible with members of other religious groups when they return to their communities.

The last part of each workshop was devoted to planning community projects. KCP and the partner emphasized that these projects must combine community development and empowerment with inter-faith interaction. This had not been fully understood by all as many questions arose about the feasibility of doing projects which crossed ethnic communities. Two Buddhist religious leaders from Padaviya felt that Buddhist community members would not like the idea of bringing other religious leaders to their community to implement inter-faith work. As such, program staff organized additional community meetings to introduce the program activities and to get buy-in from community members.

Tension also arose around two other issues. First, participants were divided into groups for the inter-faith workshops, largely according to their availability, but the resulting groupings had participants from different faith groups in each district who lived in communities that are quite far apart. This did not lend itself to creating community projects in which an inter-faith dimension could be easily and practically incorporated. Secondly, though KCP attempted to be clear from the start that there were limited funds for the projects and that participants should think small, once the participants engaged in community problem assessments, many practical needs emerged. Participants worried that the process created unrealistic expectations for community members.

To address these issues, the partner organized inter-religious district meetings with all participants in each district to discuss the parameters of the projects in more detail. Participants formed inter-faith project groups that are more practical in terms of the geographical locations of the communities they represent. Guidelines for the scope, focus, and price range of possible projects were also clarified. The partner reported that by the end of the meeting, misunderstandings had been cleared up and participants seemed ready to fully develop their project proposals.

Inter-faith Committee Meetings

Twenty-four inter-faith committee meetings to design the inter-faith community projects were held in each of the three project areas. The meetings were jointly organized by the religious leaders and district partner staff. Each meeting included a small number of religious leaders representing each faith group, and community groups who will be involved in implementing the projects. The meetings helped community members to understand what the religious leaders will be doing in the program and the overall objectives of the program. The partner also secured the commitment of community members to participate in program activities as opportunities arose. In three communities in Padaviya, community committees were set up to implement community projects in each respective location.

Inter-faith Community Development Projects

During this quarter much progress was made on designing and preparing the groundwork for the inter-faith community projects which will be implemented next quarter. After receiving the proposals, the partner field staff will prepare a summary of each proposal submitted which will be reviewed and commented on by KCP and SuRG. Partner district teams with the participation of religious leaders will incorporate those comments, revise proposals as needed and approve projects after reviewing them once again with KCP. Criteria for approval will include a strong inter-faith component, clear community interest, ethnic and gender balance, sustainability, an appropriate budget in keeping with USAID regulations, and beneficiaries who include the most needy and vulnerable. The maximum amount per project that KCP is willing to fund will be Rs. 1,000,000.

In Padaviya, 13 proposals were submitted for approval; in Batticaloa six proposals were submitted for approval. Trincomalee proposals were delayed due to an internal partner staffing issue but are due for submission by January 15.

Project proposals include a range of activities such as language classes, inter-faith sports festivals, awareness-raising on religious teachings as they pertain to peace, youth camps, *sbramadanas*, and vocational trainings. As many as 25 proposals will be submitted from Trincomalee.

Inter-Faith District Meetings

After the intra- and inter-faith workshops, the religious leaders came together at the district level for the first time. The purpose of the meetings was to review what was learned and the experiences that participants gained during the various workshops and the problem identification assessments. The leaders were also responsible for finalizing the inter-faith community development projects. At the beginning of the meetings, concerns were expressed about community expectations, resulting from the many meetings and discussions with community members.

The religious leaders wanted to prove to their community members that they were able to deliver on various commitments, and as such they brought with them their own agendas. There was criticism that the amount of available funding for projects and the requirement of an inter-faith/inter-ethnic focus on the projects had not been clear enough.

By the end of the meeting, a safe space was created for participants to express their feelings and concerns. They felt listened to and respected, and received clear guidelines for the projects including just how much money in sum is available for projects for each district. They also recognized that creating community development proposals with a strong focus on building inter-faith relations is a top priority.

ARD036

The partner continued implementing its project in Sinhala and Tamil communities from six villages in Trincomalee District. The partner struggled with implementation after several key staff left the organization, causing significant delays in program delivery and problems with financial management. The partner is supposed to work with nine CBOs including a mix of youth and farmers' groups, WRDSs and RDSs. As of the end of this reporting period, SuRG had determined that two of these organizations did not exist at all and the other seven barely exist. By the end of December 2011, out of a scheduled 36 meetings to be held with CBOs, only 11 had been held. Several activities during the reporting period were scheduled to commence and did not, including CBO orientation and needs assessments; reorganization of existing CBOs; and volleyball skills camp and equipment distribution.

While the program initially appeared to get off to a good start with activities launched on time, the program came to a halt with the departure of key staff including the grant signatory. A replacement for the partner representative was never appointed by the Board of Directors. SuRG staff visited the partner a number of times discussing the areas of concern and asked them repeatedly to acquire key staff to move activities forward. After an unsuccessful attempt by the partner to respond to SuRG requests, SuRG issued a notice on December 22, 2011 in a meeting with the partner Board of Directors, to suspend activities until an authorized representative of the partner was officially appointed to the SuRG grant in a letter and a qualified financial officer recruited. The partner was given until January 30, 2012 to respond to SuRG's requests. In the event that the partner is unable to complete the tasks outlined in the notice letter, SuRG has stated that the grant will be terminated.

The partner did complete some tasks during this reporting period. They engaged 219 Sinhala and Tamil members of farmers' groups, youth groups, and WRDSs to participate in seven project orientation meetings and Kovil Committee meetings. Orientation was followed by sectoral meetings with WRDSs, youth groups, and farmer societies. Four youth groups decided at their sectoral meetings to initiate the process for CBO registration. The Youth Services Officer in the area agreed to help register or re-register youth groups as needed. Many youth groups in the area had lost their registration certification during the war periods of displacement.

One WRDS discussed their priority areas of concern during their meeting including the need for a better system of drinking water and adequate housing for community members. The partner plans to discuss these issues with service providers at the next available opportunity. A Kovil development committee was formed to initiate and coordinate the rehabilitation process of a Kovil used by Sinhalese and Tamils. The partner will assist in the planning of a *pooja* at this site once the Kovil is re-built. The farmers' organization which is part of the Kovil Development Committee obtained government funds (Rs. 520,000) from the Ministry of Agriculture to renovate the roads which lead to the Kovil.

A curriculum for Sinhala and Tamil language classes was prepared. Teachers have been identified and classes are scheduled for youth to begin next quarter provided the partner's activities get back on track.

ARD038

The partner continued implementation of its "Supporting Women's Political Candidacy in Trincomalee" project which began in August 2011. The project is implemented in two Divisional Secretariat Divisions of Trincomalee District and is aimed at increasing political influence and participation of women in the Trincomalee District. During this quarter, 32 women were selected to participate in the program from 16 of the 30 project villages bringing the total to 60 women since the beginning of the project.

During this reporting period, women project participants identified issues of importance to their communities including school dropouts, women migrants to the Middle East, high unemployment, and discriminatory hiring practices of the government, among others, during a series of trainings and meetings.

Three two-day residential trainings were conducted in an effort to develop the skills of participants so they could effectively participate in local politics. Fifty-seven women (50 Tamil and 7 Muslim) participated in two training sessions focused on leadership. During the leadership training, sessions addressed leadership styles; communication; management; motivation; conflict management; positive thinking; women as leaders; and democratic principles. Seventeen women (14 Tamil and 3 Muslim) attended a third training session on gender issues. The training focused on issues of gender equity and women's participation. Sessions were geared towards motivating participants to become more active in politics by providing their input on issues and becoming advocates when possible. Trainings were



"I'm very proud to say that I lead my family successfully, which means I'm not authoritative but I can still influence others. Likewise, I can lead my community. We must be the change we wish to see."
A participant in a SuRG partner Leadership Training

"If we don't see ourselves as leaders, then how will others see us as leaders? This leadership workshop gave us an opportunity to study ourselves and develop our leadership skills."

PARTICIPANT IN PARTNER LEADERSHIP TRAINING, TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT

facilitated by a visiting lecturer of political science from Colombo University, who helped facilitate both leadership and gender workshops, and a freelance journalist and sociology lecturer from Colombo University, who worked on the leadership training only.

The partner worked with the women beneficiaries to lead four monthly discussions

to identify women's issues at the village level and to develop strategies for advocacy interventions in the targeted DS Divisions. Issues discussed included economic power dynamics in the community and in the home, male support for women's participation in this type of program, political connections, and violence

and politics. The women who participated in the initial trainings organized and facilitated the discussions with the assistance of the partner where necessary. Ninety-three women participated in the four meetings including 81 Tamils, 11 Muslims and 1 Sinhalese.

The partner also led a discussion for 44 women (39 Tamils and 5 Muslims) around the Tamil film entitled, “Indra.” The film is about a group of villagers and their conflict with a neighboring village leader as their community begins to prosper. The film’s theme focused on peaceful coexistence between two rival communities. Every 10 to 15 minutes, the partner paused the film for a discussion about relevant issues. The exercise encouraged participants to relate what they saw in the film to the real challenges they and other women face as they attempt to become leaders in their respective communities.

ARD049

The partner continued to implement activities under their grant entitled, “Deepening Buddhist Practice of Social Engagement and Interfaith Dialogue.” The project aims to empower and strengthen participating Buddhist clergy’s ability to engage in and contribute to inter-community and inter-religious reconciliation and co-existence in the districts of Monaragala, Ampara and Polonnaruwa. During this quarter, the partner developed drafts of three Advanced Dialogue Forum modules and one Beginners Forum module, and implemented two Advanced Dialogue Forums (24 persons), two Beginners Forums (64 persons) and three Inter-faith Forums (117 persons). Tamil language classes have also started in Ampara, Monaragala and Polonnaruwa for a total of 86 persons including 12 females.

The partner held an Advanced Dialogue Forum in Monaragala for monks and nuns who participated in its previous SuRG-funded program and religious leaders belonging to other religions. Participants included three monks, four nuns, one *mowlavi*, one *kurukkal*, and one Christian father. The two-day Forum, entitled, “Religion for Social Transformation & Inter-faith Coexistence and Social Transformation” was held in October 2011. Participants engaged in discussions about the terms ‘difference’ and ‘division’ when thinking about society, behaviors, attitudes, contradictions, dimensions of violence, social hierarchies, and culture. A discussion about sustainable peace also took place in which participants began to question attitudes embedded within their own identities. The Forum was facilitated by a member of the Faculty of Cultural Studies, University of Colombo.

“...the Kurukkal and Mowlavi are religious leaders whom we have seen and passed by on our way to the village, but this is the first time they have visited our temple to have a dialogue with us, and this is because of this program. The building where we are gathered today is being constructed from last year, and this is not only for us, it is for all Sinhalese, Muslims, Tamils and for all people living in this village. All can use this building for their children, or any type of cultural event, as this will be a Cultural Center... We need to see not only this temple built, but also the village Mosque and Kovil.”

MONK, AMPARA DISTRICT

A second Advanced Dialogue Forum for the district of Monaragala was conducted entitled “Comparing Religious Psychology and Western Psychology with Special attention to Buddhist Psychology.” The same group of religious leaders who attended the first Advanced Dialogue Forum participated. Topics discussed included the Evolution of Religious Psychology, Secularized Psychology, History of Western Psychology, Methods of Western Psychology, as well as different philosophers such as Aristotle, Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant and Buddhist Psychology. The Forum was facilitated by a professor and former Head of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology, University of Peradeniya.

The first Inter-faith and Community Dialogue Forum for the project was held in November 2011 in Ampara. Thirty-five persons participated including 28 Sinhalese, 6 Tamils, and 1 Muslim. The Forum aimed to create a social space for inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and engagement among religious leaders and

community members. Discussion topics included ‘What is Interfaith?’ and ‘Respecting Views of Other Faiths.’ An important conversation unfolded about how considering the views of other faiths does not make one an extremist. The Forum created opportunities to invite a newly settled Hindu *kurukkal* to the village kovil and a Muslim *mowlavi* to visit the temple for the first time.

A similar inter-faith forum was held in Monaragala in November 2011; 49 persons (35 Sinhalese, 11 Tamils, and 3 Muslims) attended the meeting. Community members who participated in inter-faith discussions during the previous SuRG grant and created a CBO for Monaragala district, were present to support this inter-community dialogue. The diverse group of participants solicited an array of ideas on how to handle inter-faith dialogue.

The partner hosted an additional forum for Ampara District in December 2011 with 33 in attendance including 26 Sinhala, 5 Tamils and 2 Muslims. The Forum was organized on behalf of a border village to bring together Tamil and Sinhala community members. This was a follow-up meeting to a forum hosted in Ampara previously in which a participating Chief Monk highlighted the need to discuss and address problems faced by people in remote regions and relationships among the two ethnic groups. The Forum was facilitated by a Chief Monk from Galle. Also noteworthy was the presence and participation of members of the North-East Interfaith Forum for Reconciliation (NEIFR) who represent Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims in the areas of Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Ampara and Anuradhapura.

The first Beginners’ Forum for the Polonnaruwa District was held in December 2011 with participation by 30 monks and 8 nuns. The program introduced the project, its components, goals and objectives. During the open dialogue session, the clergy in attendance questioned the aims of the project, expressing concerns about the partner’s political agenda, involvement in politics, or interest in taking the clergy into the political realm. Others questioned if the partner was an NGO. These concerns were all discussed and put to rest by the partner’s facilitators. Another Beginners’ Forum was held in Ampara which was attended by 23 monks and 3 nuns.

Tamil language classes started up in all three districts this quarter. A total of 31 monks registered for the classes in all three districts.

1.2.3 SECRETARY OF STATE OFFICE OF WOMEN’S GLOBAL ISSUES (S/WGI) GRANT

HAMBANTOTA DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (HDCC)/HAMBANTOTA

The Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce (HDCC) continued the implementation of its “Promoting Entrepreneurship and Empowering Women in the Hambantota District” project.

During this reporting period, HDCC held discussions with government officials and rural women leaders to extend HDCC’s services within the district. This activity is part of HDCC’s plan to link their activities to women’s development organizations and government officers in the district. Six meetings were held during the quarter with the Child Development and Women’s Affairs Office at the Divisional Secretariat in Ambalantota and Lunugamvehera. Meetings also took place with representatives from Divineguma (a local NGO) program staff from Angunakolapelessa and Tangalle, as well as with rural



HDCC Women Global Entrepreneurs of the Year: (from left to right) merit award winner Ms. K. P. A. Chamila Sudarshani; silver award winner Ms. W. M. Sriyani; and gold award winner Ms. E. A. Dilani Sandamini.

women leaders from Tangalle, the Southern Development Authority, and Tissamaharama. Sessions held included discussions on recruiting potential loan recipients. Subsequently, six recruitment sessions were held to select beneficiaries of project loans. One hundred seventy-four women participated in these recruitment sessions, 65 of whom were screened for loans and 25 selected to receive loans.

HDCC then held a four-day ‘Start Your Business’ workshop for these 25 women. The training covered how to start a business, identify relevant legal issues, maintain records, and the importance of a positive attitude and relationships with customers.

These 25 women then prepared and submitted their business plans to HDCC; 11 loan applications were forwarded to the Project Evaluation Committee which has loan approval authority for the project. Ten loans were approved and nine loans were released to beneficiaries. An additional loan, approved in the previous quarter, was also released. The ten loans released during the quarter were valued at Rs. 877,000. Ten mentors were appointed to support the selected entrepreneurs.

Once receiving the loans, business reviews take place through field observation visits. During this quarter, 30 field observation visits were conducted. In addition, one recovery visit was conducted for each of the 10 beneficiaries who received a loan.

The first installment of these loans was disbursed at a ceremony held at HDCC with the participation of the United States Ambassador to Sri Lanka, H.E. Patricia A. Butenis. The Ambassador took part in a discussion with the loan recipients and their mentors. She spoke about the importance of women assuming an active role in economic activities and how the project can help improve opportunities for women entrepreneurs of Hambantota District.



U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka, H.E. Patricia Butenis disburses the first tranche of a loan to Ms. D. Dinusha Seuwandi to invest in her beauty salon in Walasmulla Town, Hambantota. The loan is administered by HDCC through their S/WGI grant.

HDCC New Loans to Women Entrepreneurs

Name	Residential area	Type of Business	Loan Amount
A.A.D. Anoja Lasanthi Kumari	Tissamaharama	Furniture business	Rs. 200,000/-
S.W.A. Devika	Tissamaharama	Coconut oil mill	Rs. 125,000/-
D. Dinusha Sewwandi	Walasmulla	Beauty culture, bridal dressing and children’s garment	Rs. 52,000/-
M.L. Ranga Randunu	Tissamaharama	Printing of digital banners, stickers and designing name boards	Rs. 60,000/-
H. K. Seetha Mangalika	Lunugamwehera	Bakery	Rs. 50,000/-
G. Sudarshani Kanchana	Tangalle	Sweets production and sale (sesame)	Rs. 75,000/-
A. D. Asoka Kumuduni	Angunakola pelessa	Retail marketing	Rs. 150,000/-
P.M. Nirosha	Angunakola pelessa	Garment manufactures	Rs. 50,000/-
W.G. Monika	Ambalantota	Beauty salon	Rs. 85,000/-
V.G. Sudarma	Tangalle	Garment manufactures	Rs. 30,000/-

During the quarter, HDCC also conducted workshops on “Managing a Business” and “Together We Can Achieve” in two locations for 54 business women in the district.

In December 2011, HDCC held its 2010 Hambantota District Best Entrepreneur Award Ceremony. The event is designed to encourage the local business community to improve standard business practices and to achieve a productive and successful level of entrepreneurship. The competition has now become a benchmark and a driving force for the local business community to explore more ethical approaches in their businesses. As part of their S/WGI grant, HDCC included categories for best women entrepreneurs in the competition. Four women won awards at the ceremony.

I.3 LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The SuRG Local Governance (LG) component focused its activities this quarter on the development of a training and technical assistance program for newly elected *Pradeshiya Sabbas* (PSs) in the Northern Province. In addition, the LG team continued to work with 11 SuRG LA partners in the East—facilitating monthly working group meetings and supporting Participatory Governance Forums (PGFs).

The team also continued its monitoring of ongoing Level II Tamil and Sinhala language training for 28 LAs and the Commissioner for Local Government (CLG) and Assistant Commissioner of Local Government (ACLG) offices in the East.

In addition, SuRG LG staff worked on the development of a proposal to strengthen the institutional capacity of a PS in Ampara and another PS in Polonnaruwa to mitigate corruption and enhance good governance. The prospective partner will support and strengthen the PGF in Ampara and the People’s Forum in Polonnaruwa formed under their SuRG-funded APS grant. SuRG LG staff traveled with the partner to both locations to introduce them to key local authority officials and community members, and to familiarize them with how the PGF works and local conditions and concerns.

I.3.1 NORTHERN PROVINCE TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SuRG worked with local government officials in the North as well as in the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils (MLGPC) in Colombo this quarter to adapt its training program from the Eastern Province to the needs and local context in the Northern Province. With support from a local consultant, a former Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, SuRG solicited advice and data from a number of officials to determine appropriate and priority content for the program as well as for selection of priority local authorities with which to work. SuRG consulted the following officials in the design of the program.

- Mrs. R. Wijeludchumi, Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, Northern Province;
- Mr. A. Sivaswamy, the Chief Secretary of the Provincial Council;
- Mr. S. Achchuthan, the Commissioner for Local Government, Northern Province;
- Mr. A.B. M. Ashraff, North East Local Services Improvement Project Coordinator, Ministry of Economic Development NELSIP Coordinator; and
- The staff of the Organizational Development Unit (ODU)/ North.

The program will provide technical and language training to elected officials and government staff from 17 PSs to:

- Enhance participants’ understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the PS;
- Engage citizens in planning, prioritizing and implementation of local projects and service delivery;
- Increase the capacity of PSs to manage their offices, finances and budgets;

- Strengthen the leadership capacity of elected local government officials and key staff;
- Enhance PS capacity to implement participatory planning and develop project and income generation programs; and
- Increase communication among PS elected officials, government staff and citizens.

Activities will include three residential training programs for three government officials from each participating PS on participatory planning and proposal writing; office management and administration; and participatory governance. These training sessions will be followed by “echo training” workshops held in each district. These workshops are intended to provide participants with an opportunity to raise issues that arise from the application of new learning and skills to their work in the *Pradeshiya Sabhas*. They will also reinforce key concepts and extend new concepts and skills to others in the PS who were not able to attend the residential training session.

After the training and technical assistance is complete, SuRG will develop a comprehensive resource package (in Sinhala, Tamil and English) to leave with the Organizational Development Unit and MLGPC for replication of training in the Northern Province and beyond.

SuRG will also work with the Official Languages Department (OLD) to provide Tamil and Sinhala language training to interested PS officials.

A concept note summarizing the program was submitted to USAID on October 10, 2011. Once the concept note was approved on November 10, 2011, SuRG submitted it to the MLGPC for approval, to begin implementation. Approval from the Ministry had not yet been granted at the end of this quarter.

In preparation for implementation, SuRG and its consultant, using the SuRG 2008 survey of the Eastern Province as a starting point, developed a questionnaire designed to provide the information necessary to determine the current condition of each of the 34 local authorities in the Northern Province. The questionnaire was disseminated with assistance from the Northern Province Ministry of Local Government, the Northern Province Commissioner for Local Government and the DS offices. Data was grouped into five areas:

- Geographic Location and Demography
- Social Infrastructure and Quality of Life
- Financial Strength and Resources
- Management Capacity
- Physical Infrastructure and Services.

All 34 local authorities, including one Municipal Council, five Urban Councils and 28 *Pradeshiya Sabhas*, provided data and were ranked accordingly; the highest scoring LA indicated the greatest need for assistance. Data was based on best available information, but in some cases, might not have been as current as hoped for due to a general paucity of information on the North, and the ongoing movement of the local populations. For the most part, population data was collected from the relevant DSs. Resettlement figures were provided



SuRG Partner

Member of the SuRG partner PS discusses the budget with community leaders at a PGF meeting.

by the LAPP project and are likely to be more current, resulting in a few instances where total population figures were less than the total resettled.

LAs proposed:

- Represent an estimated population of 433,105 (35% of the total population of the province), of which 68% are resettled. This is 55% of those resettled in the North as of September 31, 2008.
- Include nine LAs with majority TNA representation; four with majority UPFA representation; and two with majority TULF representation. Two of the selected LAs have not yet held elections.
- Include three LAs which serve a mixture of Tamil and Muslim communities and 14 serving an almost entirely Tamil population. The total population served in the 17 proposed LAs includes approximately 90% Tamils, 10% Muslims and under 1% Sinhala; this closely mirrors the breakdown in total population throughout the entire Province.

A detailed breakdown of the selection criteria used to rank LAs is included in Attachment I.

1.3.2 EASTERN PROVINCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

LA Working Group (WG) meetings are held each month. This quarter 33 WG meetings were held in SuRG's 11 partner LAs. Agenda items at these meetings included:

- Existing source documents for budget preparation including previous budgets, final accounts, participatory plans, citizen complaints and PGF meeting minutes, and drafting the budget;
- Analysis of revenue, grant, expenses for the previous year and fixing variations;
- Bid openings, preparing contract documents and awarding contracts for the North East Local Services Improvement Project (NELSIP) activities and ongoing monitoring of progress;

SuRG Partner PS 2012 Budget Passed with Impressive Community Involvement

On December 22, 2011, a SuRG partner *Pradeshya Sabha* (PS) approved its 2012 budget with overwhelming support from the community. The approximately 50 community members present in the gallery were a testament to their involvement in the process and delight in the outcome.

The Participatory Governance Forum (PGF) and PS Standing Committees were formed in 2010 with support from SuRG, providing a mechanism for direct communication and coordination between the PS and the community. PGF sessions include active participation of RDS representatives, religious leaders, school principals and other local leaders. The r PS Chairmen asked the community members to identify their priority projects for the 2012 budget. After much discussion and negotiation at the October and November 2011 PGF and Standing Committee meetings, the PS and community representatives agreed to include funding for the construction of an office building and a playground parapet wall, and the renovation of existing gravel roads and drains in the budget. The Secretary of the PS noted, "I don't see any shortcomings in the budget. We invited the Financial Standing Committee formed by SuRG twice to hear their concerns before the completion of the budget. Citizen participation is 100% through monthly PGF meetings."

The involvement of citizens was critical not only to the development of the budget but also to getting it passed. Ultimately all but two councilors voted for the budget in spite of strong political pressure to oppose it. A community member looking on from the gallery explained, "...it is a great victory for the Chairman to get the 2012 budget passed as most of the politicians from outside are against it. But we know the development process of the budget because we were involved in each and every step through the PGF meetings and Standing Committee meetings."

Even those councilors who opposed the budget due to political reasons agreed that the budget reflected the wishes of the people: "We know the development process of this budget and how the concerns of communities and department heads have been incorporated in the budget. It has been nicely compiled. The number of people sitting in the gallery is evidence of this."

The sense of accomplishment and optimism felt by those present was summed up by opposition leader who stated, "I swear the budget for the year of 2012 will definitely make [this PS] a golden city."

- Amending participatory plans and finalizing final accounts; and
- Staff transfers, new staff arrival and work allocation in 2012.

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE FORUMS

Participatory Governance Forum (PGF) meetings are held monthly in all 11 of SuRG’s partner LAs. This quarter, 33 PGF meetings were held. In each of SuRG’s 11 partner LAs, the 2012 budget was developed with community consultation through the PGF. Each of these budgets has been approved by the LA Council in meetings held in December 2011. In one PS, the meeting was notable for the significant number of community representatives present in the gallery. Please see box “SuRG Partner PS 2012 Budget Passed with Impressive Community Involvement” for further details on the PS’s participatory budgeting process.

Development projects included in the budgets were selected from participatory plans, PGF meeting minutes and complaints raised by the community. Projects included in SuRG’s partner LA budgets are indicated in the chart below.

In the four partner LAs, the formation of the Finance Standing Committee enhanced the participatory budgeting process. At these meetings the Committee:

- Helped to define line items for fund allocation and how to handle funds for each line item;
- Identified new income sources;
- Estimated funds to be obtained from funding agents and the government; and
- Discussed strategies and viability of community contributions for PS activities.

I.3.3 LANGUAGE TRAINING

This quarter, 289 government officials (139 men, 150 women) from the Eastern Province continued Level II Tamil and Sinhala language training. One hundred one officials were studying Tamil and 188 officials were enrolled in Sinhala classes. The first 108 hours of the course were completed this quarter in 16 of the 29 project locations (28 LAs and the CLG and ACLG offices). The remaining 13 locations will complete the first 108 hours by the end of February 2012. Once all locations complete the program, SuRG will initiate the 108-hour Phase II in all 29 locations.

I.4 OPEN DIALOGUE

SuRG continued its efforts to support and pursue opportunities for aspiring journalists. In Trincomalee, SuRG convened a meeting of the graduates of the SuRG-funded Diploma in Journalism course for aspiring female journalists to discuss their interest in pursuing further training and opportunities to put in practice their newly learned craft.

SuRG informed the women that, provided they met all of the standard entrance criteria, SuRG would arrange for them to be priority recipients of scholarships for the Sri Lanka College of Journalism 2012 Diploma Programme in Colombo. Six of the women submitted an application for the program.



Graduates of the Diploma in Media Training Program from Trincomalee discuss future training options with SuRG staff. Six graduates applied to the SLCJ 2012 Journalism Diploma Programme and two applied to YATV’s OTI-funded “Training on the Production of Radio Dramas for Social Change.”

However, none were able to complete the application process as it requires them to travel to Colombo for a written examination and an interview. All six of the women's families would not permit them to make the journey.

SuRG also invited the women to apply to the USAID/OTI three-month residential program "Training on the Production of Radio Dramas for Social Change" to be implemented by YATV in Colombo. Five women applied and two were selected for the training which began in December 2011.

ARD045

SuRG 2011 Sri Lanka College of Journalism scholarship recipients completed their diploma course and passed their last semester exams this quarter. Graduation for the 2011 class will take place early next quarter.

As part of their final activities this quarter, the 20 scholarship recipients completed the second stage of internships at the following media houses:

- Print—Virakesari, Thinakkural, Sudar Oli;
- Television—Sirasa, Shakthi, Derana, DAN; and
- Radio—DAN Tamil Oli, Vettri and Sooriyan.

Print students produced several lab newspapers; each student in the class served as the editor of a separate issue during this exercise. The radio and television stream students produced newscasts where each student served as the news director for a separate newscast.

A month after the students completed their coursework, three scholarship recipients found employment at YATV, DAN TV and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation on Tamil language radio programs.

The partner accepted applications and held entrance exams for the 2012 Diploma Programme. The program has been extended from a 12-month to an 18-month course which will end in May 2013. Tetra Tech ARD/SuRG is in consultation with USAID to determine whether scholarships for the program can be awarded since the SuRG contract ends prior to the course.

ARD013

During the reporting period, SuRG continued its efforts to close out the partner's grant which ended on July 31, 2011. The partner's CEO has been unreachable since September 2011. During the previous reporting period, SuRG received several complaints from service providers who were contracted by the partner to undertake activities as part of the SuRG grant, about unsettled payments for their services. Despite a number of verbal requests by the SuRG Grants Officer and Program Officer to respond to those complaints, no action was taken. SuRG then sent a team including the Finance Director, Grants Officer and Program Officer to conduct a financial audit. During the audit, the team was able to speak with the CEO and the service providers. The partner's CEO agreed to make all payments and provided a written response to that effect in August 2011. SuRG later provided a report on the audit to the partner, with no response. The partner has since closed their office; they did not inform SuRG and have discontinued all communication with SuRG staff. The partner completed all agreed-upon activities with the exception of printing a newsletter and SuRG has settled all financial commitments with the partner. However, SuRG has not been able to officially close out the grant.

ATTACHMENT I: NORTHERN PROVINCE LOCAL AUTHORITY SELECTION CRITERIA

NORTHERN PROVINCE LOCAL AUTHORITY SELECTION CRITERIA

Geographic Location and Demography

- ❖ Population : Total population; ethnic breakdown; gender breakdown
- ❖ Accessibility: Distance from provincial capital
- ❖ Resettled Population: Number of resettled individuals
- ❖ Urbanization: Percentage of population in the assessment tax area

Social Infrastructure and Quality of Life

- ❖ Poverty: Head count index--% of population below the National Poverty Line
- ❖ Unemployment: Level of unemployment
- ❖ Education: % of students who passed O Levels
- ❖ Health: Maternal mortality rate per 1000 live births

Financial Strength and Resources

- ❖ Government Grants: Average total government grants obtained 2005 – 2010
- ❖ External Assistance: Average total external funds received 2005- 2010
- ❖ Revenue Base: 2010

Management Capacity

- ❖ Key Staff: Availability of key staff
- ❖ Staff Vacancies: % of vacant cadre positions
- ❖ Participatory Governance: Approved Citizen Charter; participatory planning and budgeting per MLG & PC guidelines
- ❖ Office Building: Availability of office building for the PS

❖ Office Equipment: Availability of basic office equipment and facilities

❖ Financial Management: Satisfactory preparation of financial accounts

Physical Infrastructure and Services

❖ Roads: Number of population served by motor able roads

❖ Water supply: % of population with portable water

❖ Electricity: % of population with availability

❖ Library: % of membership over total population

ATTACHMENT II: SNAPSHOT



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SNAPSHOT

Community and Local Authority Find Common Ground through Road Mapping Exercise

Business Loan Helps Entrepreneur Reduce Work and Increase Income and Capital for Re-investment



Chandima Arambepola, TT ARD/SuRG

M.G. Priyanga Jeewani makes sweets from machines she purchased with a loan from HDCC funded by S/WGI.

"I want to expand the business. Family commitments, especially the children's education, make it very difficult for us to save money for capital, but now this is not just a dream but an actual possibility. I am very grateful for having been given this opportunity because without it I would still be pounding those sesame seeds."

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Ten years ago, from a bag of pounded sesame seeds M.G. Priyanga Jeewani made sweets to be sold at a neighboring grocery shop. With no capital to invest and no one to ask for help, she toiled day and night, pounding the seeds and making the sweets by hand. Today however, with support from the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI), Priyanga has replaced the labor-intensive production process with machines, helping her increase both her income and the capital she has available to re-invest in the business.

Priyanga is one of 50 businesswomen who will be receiving the support of S/GWI to either establish or improve an existing business. For women of the Hambantota District – located in the deep south of Sri Lanka – opportunities available to improve businesses and access loan facilities are difficult to obtain. It is for this reason S/GWI, awarded a grant to the Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce (HDCC) to provide 50 prospective and existing businesswomen in the District with small loans and training on how to manage a business.

Priyanga explains, "When I heard about this opportunity to obtain a loan I was wary at first, not knowing what the preconditions would be. Although I had approached commercial and development banks, their preconditions were difficult for us to meet because I have no assets to call my own and so the loan applications were rejected. But the process of accessing the loan from the Chamber was easy and very beneficial to my business."

Along with the other businesswomen identified by HDCC for assistance, Priyanga attended a training conducted by the Chamber to help her reevaluate her business and develop a new business plan to submit to the Chamber for a loan. Following a review of her business plan, the Chamber approved a loan of 150,000 rupees to purchase the much needed machinery. According to Priyanga, the two machines she purchased – one to pound the sesame seeds and the other to produce the sweet mixture – are basic, user-friendly, but quite effective and efficient.

"I'm not so tired anymore. The work load and the pressure to meet the sales targets were extremely high but now, I'm more relaxed. Before, even with the help of two other people, I could only pound and prepare sweets from about 5 kilos of sesame seeds. But now, thanks to the machines, I can make sweets from 20-25 kilos of seeds a day. The net profit from the sale of the sweets has doubled. I used to make about 30,000 rupees a month, but now it has nearly doubled. My ultimate aim is to increase the value of production to 100,000 rupees." Unlike in the past and as a result of the trainings, Priyanga diligently tracks and updates her record books daily which helps her track production and sales.

Currently, she is preparing to meet the increase in demand for sweets in April when Sri Lankans celebrate their traditional New Year. Supported by her husband who acts as the distributor of the sweets, she remains confident and positive of meeting her targets. "I'm planning to hire two people to help us during this period. This way, we can plan to meet the demand. Because we have not compromised on the quality of the product, the demand for it remains quite high and for the first time in many years, I am confident of actually meeting demand."

With the support from HDCC and S/WGI, Priyanga has gained confidence to meet the challenges of the future. "The past ten years have been very difficult for my family. We lived through some extremely tough financial times....now the burden has been lifted."

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