

# USAID/OTI Sri Lanka Field Report

Oct - Dec 2006

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## Program Description

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program in Sri Lanka aims to generate greater support for a negotiated peace settlement to end the island nation's longstanding internal conflict. To accomplish this, OTI seeks to:

- Increase awareness and understanding on transition issues, and change attitudes sustaining the conflict, through information dissemination, advocacy, dialogue and debate;
- Mobilize and link peace constituencies through activities promoting inclusive, collaborative decision-making and resource allocation at the local level.

In the aftermath of the December 26, 2004 tsunami, which within one hour claimed the lives of nearly half the number of Sri Lankans killed in more than 20 years of armed conflict, OTI's field office infrastructure, experienced staff and strong partnerships helped support USAID efforts to undertake early, effective disaster response initiatives. In July 2005 OTI received \$22.5 million, allocated through the U.S. Congressional Tsunami Supplemental Bill, for small-grant activities to address recovery needs in the southern and eastern coastal areas. In support of the above mentioned objectives, OTI utilized the additional funding to stabilize tsunami-affected communities in six districts with its trademark peace building approach, valuing process as much as product, specifically through small-scale infrastructure rehabilitation, livelihoods restoration and activities fostering communication between citizens and local government authorities.

**Increasing Awareness and Changing Attitudes** - The dearth of accurate and balanced information, and limited opportunities for the general public to provide feedback to policymakers, has undermined confidence and progress not only in Sri Lanka's protracted peace process but in tsunami recovery as well. The OTI program supports media and information-related activities that empower citizens to participate more confidently in the national debate on peace and tsunami recovery. Activities utilize traditional and alternative media and the arts to improve knowledge, generate social discourse, and promote constructive, non-violent action on issues of local and national importance.

**Promoting Participation and Collaboration Among Diverse Groups** - In an effort to model decentralized decision-making and resource allocation, OTI supports citizens and local authorities to work together across ethnic and political boundaries to identify community improvement projects they can plan, implement and manage together, building relationships among people with diverse backgrounds and views. Among the projects that have resulted from these initiatives in both conflict- and tsunami-affected communities are rehabilitation of public markets, health clinics, schools and transportation infrastructure, and livelihoods-oriented skills training. Mobilization of large numbers of volunteer labor, a local tradition known as shramadana that cuts across cultural and political lines, is a central component of such activities.

The OTI program takes a bottom-up approach to peace building by working predominantly with community-based civil society groups, media entities and government officials. Now completing its fourth year, the OTI program is implemented by two primary partners -- Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) and Internews Network, Inc.

DAI oversees the \$51 million small-grants program and manages OTI offices in the capital of Colombo, the eastern towns of Trincomalee and Ampara, and Matara along the southern coast. From February 25, 2003 through December 2006, the OTI Sri Lanka program has awarded 648 grants worth \$24.9 million. DAI's contract runs through March 2008.

Under a \$1.3 million agreement signed in February 2006, the Internews-managed regional radio initiative bolsters OTI's emphasis on dissemination of accurate, balanced information from a multiplicity of viewpoints. The US-based media development organization provides practicing and aspiring journalists in the South and East with training and access to radio production facilities and equipment through resource centers known as "media houses." To date, more than 100 district-based journalists and staff from community-based organizations have been trained under the

project, resulting in more than 50 hours of current affairs and community-issues programming on air. "Real Voices Radio," the project's flagship program, is aired on Uva Community Radio in Bandarawela, which has a broadcast footprint in the East, South and Central Provinces. Sri Lankan diaspora - an important stakeholder in the peace, tsunami recovery and development processes - have access to programs through the Internet. The 18-month agreement with Internews runs through August 2007.

## Country Situation

**Armed Conflict Escalates in North and East** - The past quarter has seen a continuing dramatic increase in the level and scope of fighting throughout the North and East, particularly Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mullaitivu and Jaffna districts. This fighting has occurred in the form of air assaults, navy battles and ground skirmishes. Although on paper the ceasefire agreement (CFA) still exists, and the government continues to refer to it, the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran in his November 27th Hero's Day speech called it "defunct." The number of internally displaced people of all ethnicities is growing, particularly people from Jaffna, Batticaloa and Kilinochchi. The road that links Jaffna to government-controlled areas further south has been closed since August with resultant food shortages, and people are not being allowed to leave the district. Human rights abuses and abductions have also increased.

**Security Worsens in Colombo** – Two major attacks in the capital city - a suicide bomb targeting the Defense Secretary and brother of the President, Gothabaya Rajapakse, and the assassination of a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian - underscored the growing reality that the war cannot be confined to the North and East. In addition to increasing police and military checkpoints and road closures in Colombo, the government has reauthorized portions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which had been suspended following the ceasefire.

**Peace-related Politics** – Just prior to the failed Geneva peace talks of October 28-29, the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) signed for the first time a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) identifying common positions and approaches to issues of national importance, including the peace process. The UNP agreed to "extend support to the Government in the pursuit of a negotiated settlement to the on-going conflict while opposing terrorism in all its manifestations and upholding human rights," an approach that offers the possibility of a united Sinhalese majority to negotiate with the LTTE. Also, in a ruling with far-reaching implications for the peace process, the Supreme Court voted to demerge the Northeast Province, a decision hailed by the extremist nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and decried by the LTTE.

## USAID/OTI Highlights

### A. Narrative Summary

During the past quarter a number of longer-term tsunami reconstruction infrastructure projects have commenced. Due to their complicated nature these types of projects take longer to complete. Many of these initiatives are also in the eastern districts of Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee, where both weather and security issues can result in delays and work stoppages.

During this period OTI allocated the remaining funding earmarked for information dissemination activities linking tsunami-affected communities with the local government authorities that serve them. Many of these new activities support groups that are working to increase people's knowledge on important issues such as disaster response preparedness, mosquito-borne disease control and solid waste management.

Against the backdrop of decreasing space for unfettered dialogue and debate on issues related to the conflict, OTI continues to work with its media partner, Internews, to bolster coverage of news and issues from outside the capital of Colombo, and to increase the journalistic skill levels of regionally based reporters. During the past quarter Internews opened its second media house, in Ampara, concluding an initial training there on December 11 for a group of 18 Muslim, Sinhalese and Tamil journalists. The Internews small-grant advisory board reviewed the second of three rounds of proposals from local groups seeking support for small-scale, short term activities that aim to empower regional voices through production of radio content on themes of national interest.

### B. Grant Activity Summary

This quarter OTI signed 60 new grants worth \$4,852,750. Approximately 88% of these grants funded tsunami infrastructure, livelihoods, and information dissemination projects, while 12% funded local peace support projects

and related national initiatives.

A number of OTI projects are supporting the reconstruction and rehabilitation of libraries, community centers and transportation infrastructure in the tsunami-affected eastern and southern districts of Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Ampara and Batticaloa. In addition to the bricks-and-mortar improvements, OTI sees the rebuilding and modernizing of libraries as a way to bring the wider community together by establishing these buildings as safe places for members of politically and socially diverse communities to meet, discuss, and exchange information of interest and importance. Library management committees being formed or revitalized under these grant activities will be comprised of a wide cross-section of society and will meet regularly to identify needs, plan for improvements and oversee progress. Librarians and other staff will also be trained in modern library cataloging techniques and other skills; new books and multi-media equipment will help generate renewed interest in these community focal points and resource centers.

OTI continues to support efforts to raise pro-peace voices, as an alternative to the vocal minority advocating a military solution to the conflict. In October OTI supported a multi-ethnic student workshop for students from Trincomalee, one of the districts most affected by the war and the tsunami. Teenagers of all ethnicities discussed coexistence, conflict resolution and the benefits of peace for their communities. They also worked in groups to design posters reflecting peace and cooperation that were displayed to the public and are now being distributed widely in the region as part of a 2007 wall calendar. In early December, in commemoration of International Volunteers Day, OTI helped UN Volunteers stage a cultural music and dance show that brought together eminent Sri Lankan artists from all communities, along with key figures from national ministries and the private sector, to recognize the contribution of volunteerism towards peace and human development in Sri Lanka. Publicity from the event, including a press release quoting the US Ambassador's speech on the occasion, emphasized the imperative of sustainable peace in achieving development goals.

## Grant Approval Summary

Project Type	Grants Cleared Oct through Dec 2006	Estimated Budget for Cleared Grants Oct thru December 2006	Total Grants Cleared Since March 2003	Total Estimated Budget for Cleared Grants Since March 2003
Peace Support	10	\$ 577,298	423	\$12,582,009
Tsunami Infrastructure	29	\$2,171,882	97	\$ 6,129,124
Tsunami Livelihoods	8	\$ 538,911	34	\$ 2,230,727
Tsunami Information	13	\$ 1,564,659	21	\$ 1,875,390
Tsunami Relief			73	\$ 2,004,816
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>\$4,852,750</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>\$24,912,066</b>

## C. Indicators of Success

**Sports and youth: a pathway to co-existence in Anuradhapura** - OTI's support for an annual national athletics competition, held in a region known for its skepticism regarding negotiated peace, added a cross-cultural, coexistence theme to the event and further strengthened the program's ties with one of Sri Lanka's largest youth networks.

The National Youth Services Council's 18th Annual Youth Sports Festival, held October 5-8 in the ancient Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom of Anuradhapura, brought together more than 1,500 youth participants, as well as area school children and community members.

Through OTI's engagement, the theme of "co-existence through sports" took center stage during the four-day event. OTI supported pre- and post-competition publicity, incorporated the slogan into the awards, and organized a peace ballet for the participants and the audience in Anuradhapura town.

The competition was launched with a multi-cultural pageant, aired live on national TV and attended by national- and local-level government leaders including the Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, the Chairman of the National Youth Services Council, and the Chief Minister of the North Central Province. In his post-competition message, also broadcast nationally, President Mahinda Rajapakse said, "I believe that the strength and unity that occurs when youth from all parts of the country play together will be vital if the peace effort is to be a success."

#### **Promoting responsible, responsive local government in Ampara -**

Complimenting a larger USAID initiative aimed at improving transparency, accountability and service delivery at the local level, OTI has targeted support in the Ampara District for public officials who have demonstrated a commitment to good governance but sometimes lack the capacity and resources to implement their ideas. OTI carried out a series of planning activities and community consultations with local elected government bodies in Kattankudy, Ninthavur, Akkaraipattu and Alayadivembu, tsunami-affected areas in the eastern coastal districts of Ampara and Batticaloa. Facilitating positive interaction between Tamils and Muslim civilians as well as government officials, was a cross-cutting theme.



Sri Lankan girl competes in the high jump at the Youth Sports Festival, supported by OTI.

Priority needs identified included renovation of a lighthouse, rehabilitating and equipping public libraries, construction of bus stations, and the renovation of a public market. These projects provide essential infrastructure and public services while also raising public awareness regarding local government initiatives, generating community involvement in planning and decision-making, and building better relationships between communities and local government institutions. Through these activities, community members have come to feel ownership of resources, and local government has been able to provide better quality services to constituents. "We feel this library belongs to us," said one young woman from Kathankudy during a consultation meeting. "We had a say in what it would ultimately look like."

### **D. Program Appraisal**

Against the backdrop of a significantly deteriorating political-security environment, particularly in the North and East, OTI had its most productive quarter of 2006 with respect to tsunami recovery small-grant development, positioning itself to commit the balance of earmarked funding by April 2007 and aiming to disperse all monies by the end of the year. Particularly impressive was the speed and creativeness with which OTI identified opportunities to utilize almost all remaining tsunami information dissemination earmarked funds, including a unique, three-month multi-media initiative mentioned below. Internews filled two key staff positions and held its first training in Ampara, resulting in the first East Media House-produced content broadcast on regional radio. In addition, a visit by OTI's media specialist helped sharpen the program's focus on journalism development through content production in a way that makes the Matara and East media houses attractive to the Sri Lanka Press Institute for possible support beyond the lifetime of this project.

### **NEXT STEPS/IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES**

During the next quarter, OTI Sri Lanka will:

- Finalize all remaining actions needed in order to have a smooth handover of the program to the USAID Mission in March 2007
- Facilitate the activities of an external evaluation team that in January will review OTI's work over the past four years
- Kick off a district-based media initiative that will document through weekly TV, radio and newspaper stories some of the lessons learned from two years of tsunami rehabilitation, with a cross-cutting focus on the impact

of disaster recovery on a faltering peace process, and vice versa

- Jointly plan with key Mission staff small-grant and media activities that respond now to US government priorities in a deteriorating political-security environment and help set the stage for Mission interventions over the medium to long term
- Continue conversations with the Sri Lanka Press Institute and its supporters about opportunities for the SLPI to incorporate the media houses within its longer-term journalism development strategy