

Project Progress Report

31st July 2019

Empowering War Widowed Women

'Empowering war widowed women' – A project which, with your support, will ensure a better future for women heads of household in eastern Sri Lanka, who were widowed during the 30 years of civil conflict. It would also assist women who are faced with Gender Based Violence (GBV) issues and strengthen the Gender Based Violence.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project activities were implemented in Kiran, Batticaloa. To understand the current mindsets, and issues faced by women in this area, stakeholder discussions were held with community leaders, community members, children, members of youth clubs and women's groups. It was evident that although issues related to gender and Gender Based Violence are faced, these are not openly discussed.

Through this process of discussion and consultation, the first seven project beneficiaries to receive livelihood support were selected. The selected beneficiaries have received initial business training, following the 'Start your Business' training module and have received support with their selected livelihood options which include sewing, poultry farming, running a small grocery, and cardboard recycling. Their progress will be constantly monitored by project staff in order to ensure that the support provided is sustained and long term.

STORY OF PANGAJAMALAR PILLAIYAN



Pangajamalar's dream was to build her own tailoring business.

In 1992, at the age of 25, Pangajamalar Pillaiyan lost her husband when he was shot to death, leaving her with a son aged 2 years. Amidst the social stigma and rejection she faced as a widow, Pangajamalar was able to educate her son, who is now married and lives away from her with his family.

Pangajamalar currently lives with her brother, and is the main breadwinner. Her brother, a person with disabilities, became dependent on Pangajamalar following their father's death.

Through this project, Pangajamalar was provided with a sewing machine which she uses to earn an income of between Rs.300 – 500 per day. Through this support, Pangajamalar is able to earn an income to provide for herself and her brother, as well as realize her dream of building her own tailoring business.

1. PROJECT LOCATION

Koralaipattu South (Kiran) Divisional Secretariat Division is located in the northern part of the Batticaloa District and consists of both inland and coastal areas. Kiran is 27 km north from Batticaloa with a total population of 31,409 within 18 Grama Niladhari Divisions. Currently 1,490 women headed families reside in the division, 259 were widowed during the war. Struggling to provide for their families single-handedly, these women are identified as being the most vulnerable: often unable to provide basic necessities including food, education, health and sanitation.

2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 HOUSEHOLD ASSESSMENTS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

To assess the current situation and understand the key concerns of the community and women heads of households in particular, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with different groups of stakeholders and a household assessment was conducted with 60 women headed households.

Activity	Target group	# of events	# of participants
Household assessments	Women Headed Households	-	60
FGD	Officials / Community Leaders	1	12
FGD	Women's Groups	6	75
FGD	Female community members	1	20
FGD	Students and Children's Club members	2	40

2.1.1 HOUSEHOLD ASSESSMENTS

60 women headed households were assessed and the following observations were made:

Structure of House	Water & Sanitation	Facilities	Employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-permanent • Predominantly a combination of partially built walls and tin sheets and cadjan leaves • Cement or sand floors • Inadequately covered/protected windows and doors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% did not have sanitation facilities nor access to safe drinking water at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared to other households, women headed households own fewer "luxury" assets / facilities such as televisions, radios and bicycles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many engage in home-based work • Income earned through this is insufficient as it is done on a small scale due to a lack of capital and training



2.1.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A summary of the discussions is presented below:

Target Group	Participants	Topics of discussion and issues identified
Village Officials / Community Leaders (1 program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff of the Divisional Secretariat - Women's Development Officer, National Child Rights Promotion Officer, Economic Development Officers and Grama Niladhari Officer Staff from the Community Development Foundation (a local NGO working for women) Public Health Inspector Members of the Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS) Members of the Mother Support Group Doctors from the Mental Health Unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for Gender equality Characteristics of and reasons behind a "dysfunctional family" Existing problems and possible prevention measures of gender based violence (GBV) Existing referral mechanisms and village structures for reporting GBV issues and gaps in their functioning The need for construction of a family rehabilitation center and safe house
Women's groups (6 programs)	Women's groups in the villages of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sinnavembu Achiramam Thihilivettai Morokodanchenai Paalaiyadithona Korakallimadu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic issues currently faced such as unemployment and limited livelihood opportunities Social problems affecting widowed women such as marginalization, low protection and negligence due to cultural beliefs¹

¹ Culture has played a major part in stigmatizing single/widowed women. Due to this, these women face various barriers in taking part in certain community level ceremonies and religious activities or taking on leadership roles as they are regarded as unclean and a sign of bad luck.

Female community members (1 program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 women in leadership positions • The group included single women, war widows, ex-LTTE cadres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and economic issues faced by different categories of women and their vulnerabilities • Existing community view of gender • Prevailing gender based violence in the area
Children (2 programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 members of Youth Clubs • 25 school students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of gender • Gender roles in the home - natural work of women and men. Here children raised issues and concerns related to solving family disputes, alcohol consumption, early marriages etc. • Gender based issues in the community

To address the issues highlighted during the FGDs, the following actions have been planned:

Restructuring of case management

- As the Women and Children’s Desk at Santhively is not functioning, all current cases will be sent to the Vaalaichenai Women and Children’s Desk
- Terms of reference of the GBV desk to be drafted
- Police and Medical Officer of Health to be encouraged to be present at case conferences as necessary²

Qualitative record keeping

- Case records to be maintained as per the required standard and follow up reports to be generated as required

Capacity building

- Capacity building to be conducted for staff and stakeholders of the GBV desk and referral process on gender
- Existing divisional level task force to be strengthened and equipped to handle GBV
- Awareness raising amongst the community of the GBV desk and the referral system in place
- Awareness programs to be conducted at Vadamunai, Vahaneri and Akkurana on gender roles and responsibilities, and human rights, including child rights, especially of females

² A case conference refers to the discussion among relevant stakeholders after the initial inquiry on gender based violation incidents that are reported to the GBV desk.

2.2 LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT

Beneficiaries to receive livelihood support were selected in consultation with the Divisional Secretariat office, and needs were verified by World Vision field officers. These criteria for selection included:

1. Women headed households
2. Families directly affected by war
3. Families below the poverty line
4. Ex-military carders

Seven women were identified to receive livelihood support. Support varied from the provision of a sewing machine to support for a cardboard recycling business. Four beneficiaries were supported with poultry for poultry farming, one was supported with a sewing machine for a tailoring business, one was supported to run a small grocery shop, and another was supported to complete training to begin a business recycling cardboard into furniture and other items.

3. QUOTES AND GALLERY



Village officials and community leaders engaging in discussion

“In Kiran, we have handled many cases of Gender Based Violence related to alcoholism, predatory lending through microfinance and mother migration. However most of these are not reported and many women tolerate these issues and carry on with their day to day lives without a prevention mechanism. This is because many do not know where and how to report these issues. As such, the current referral mechanisms and structures need to be strengthened and the public should be made aware of them.”

“Women headed households are the most vulnerable group in our village and face many economic challenges. As a result, their children are often forced to drop out of school at a young age and go in search of employment to support the family.” **WRDS member from Sinnavembu**



Women's group discussion in progress



Figures from left to right: Student discussion on gender | Youth club orientation and FGD on gender and post war issues in families | a youth sharing the response of his group