

Dear readers,

Welcome to this issue of the SDC Sri Lanka newsletter!

The year is already half over and Switzerland is in top gear to complete the resettlement programme in northern Sri Lanka. With plans underway to phase out humanitarian assistance by the end of 2015, measures are in place to ensure as much as possible the sustainability of projects. Several activities are being lined up to transfer experiences from 13 years of assistance to interested and relevant actors in the field.

In July this year SDC signed a Letter of Agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Employment regarding continuous collaboration in the Safe Labour Migration Programme with the intention of promoting decent work, safety and well-being of migrant workers and their families in Sri Lanka. This Letter affirms the commitment made in the MOU signed in July 2014 and the programme will be continued for an additional four years. This edition of the newsletter presents a case study where a young woman was prevented from migrating in an unsafe manner due to lack of information, through the timely intervention of a CBO leader. Two other projects aimed at empowering the community to restore and sustain their livelihoods are also featured here.

We hope you enjoy reading the contents of this newsletter and also invite you to visit the SDC Face Book page [Swiss Cooperation Office Sri Lanka](#).

Jean Michel Jordan
Director of Cooperation

Northern hospitality personified: The Traveller's Rest Stop in Mankulam

"After 18 months of hard work, we are looking forward to finally do what we always wanted: serving fresh and tasty food to travelers along the A9 and being ambassadors of hospitality of the Northern Province!" Yogarani Alahendran, the chair lady of MWRDS says proudly.



Through its Small Grants Programme, SDC supports local organizations to implement projects which in turn lead to creating and improving income generating opportunities for the community. The Mankulam Womens' Rural Development Society (MWRDS) was one of the recipients of this grant. The newly opened *Traveller's Rest Stop and Handicrafts Sales Centre* generates an income for around 50 women who benefit as shareholders and/or staff and another 30 or more community members who sell their agricultural products and handicrafts at this new and vibrant marketplace. They serve fresh fruit juices, hot drinks, meals and hot snacks prepared hygienically according to traditional recipes mostly sourcing local produce.

The MWRDS plays a pivotal role in the community with a special focus on disadvantaged households. They have also been successful in securing more funds to re-activate and enhance the social, educational, and economic services offered to their members. The Travelers' Rest Stop is located strategically along the A9 road which connects Colombo with the previously isolated and conflict-affected Northern Province. Mankulam, in the Mulaithivu District was one of the worst conflict affected areas in Northern Sri Lanka. Currently, while travelling along the A9, long-distance travellers, especially females, children and differently abled persons have limited options available to rest and refresh. The Rest Stop houses clean toilets which can be used by travelers for a small fee.

Impoverished female-headed households, large families with young children and elderly heads of households in particular are benefitting immensely from this new establishment. The women underwent several trainings on topics such as hygienic and creative food preparation and business management. The Handy Craft shop sells various items made out of Palmyra and coconut shell and local specialties such as fresh, dry fish, and spicy pickles. The establishment of the rest stop was financially supported by USAID through the VEGA/BIZ+ programme, SDC and the Palmyrah Development Board of Sri Lanka. Technical support was provided by Swiss Labour Assistance.

Economic recovery through sea weed cultivation!



The seaweed is dried in bamboo rafts

The population returning to their places of origin after many years of displacement face multi-fold challenges, especially with regard to restoring income generating activities. Most of them depend on the traditional income sources like fishing, farming and daily labour. Through the creation of producer groups, the streamlining of products to actual market needs and a niche marketing strategy, SDC partner Swiss Labour Assistance supports the creation of additional income sources in economically weak areas.

With a high demand in the export market, 'Seaweed Cultivation' is one of the business activities introduced to the fishing community in Pallikuda in the Kilinochchi district.

Currently 24 members of the Fisheries Society, 10 female & 14 male, have created their own company. Technical training

and support on sea weed cultivation is provided by the end buyer Hayleys Agriculture Holdings Ltd. With the initial support of SAH, the society set up 240 bamboo cultivation rafts. With a benefit of Rs.1000-1500 per raft, one family can increase their monthly income to about Rs. 30,000 per month. Especially women headed families now have a renewed opportunity to earn a substantial income.

'I am a spinster and looking after my elderly parents with great difficulty. Being involved in seaweed cultivation I am confident that my financial income is adequate to look after myself and my parents. My group members support me to care for my rafts when they're in the sea and in return I help them during harvest time. My future ambition is to increase my 10 rafts to 30 rafts' - Ms. Sellaiya Kanista.

The end buyer Hayleys is ready to purchase any amount of quantity of dry seaweed due to the high demand in the international market. Local government officials acknowledge the market demand for sea weed as a sustainable source of income for the local community. The authorities have initiated numerous discussions on the development of the producer groups and their support requirements. Plans are underway to extend the sea weed cultivation to the Valaippaddu area as well. The harvesting of seaweed is, however, subject to seasonal changes of currents. But the programme is a positive example of how to diversify and expand business activities and strengthen the local marketing capacity.

Trained as a para-legal CBO President prevents un-safe Migration of young woman

"With proper and timely advice we were able to release our daughter from the difficult situation she was in. We were advised to lodge a complaint at the Police station and this helped get our daughter back home" - Mrs. Selvarani.

Desperate for a better source of income, 23 year old Tharshini from the Mullaithivu District, was contemplating labour migration. Her husband had no stable job and the family needed a way out of their current living conditions. A sub-agent also residing in the same village approached her with a promise to find a job for her through his contacts. Facing censure from her family, however, Tharshini decided not to migrate. Yet the persistent sub-agent coerced her to travel to Colombo and meet yet another sub-agent. At this stage Tharshini claims she refused to go any further in the process and was then held against her will for five days and not allowed to communicate with her family until she agreed to migrate to Dubai. She also alleges that she was asked to pay a sum of 140,000LKR to the sub-agent.



A relieved mother with her daughter Tharshini

It is to protect people from falling victim to such situations that Switzerland supports a Safe Labour Migration programme in Sri Lanka. One component provides reliable information to Migrant workers and their families so that they can prepare themselves for the full cycle of migration. Key figures in the community are also selected and provided with training in order to help others avoid such situations or escape from them.

Fifty-five year old Selvarani is the President of the Kaiveli Woman's Rural Development Society. Recently trained to be a para-legal within the safe labour migration programme, Selvarani heard about Tharshini's plight and coordinated with lawyers from the Centre for Human Rights Development to get proper advice. Upon lodging a complaint at the Police station, the Colombo-based sub-agent was ordered to release Tharshini from their custody. But though she was released her national identity card and passport were not returned to her and she has to file a separate complaint. She sold her mobile phone and found her way back to her family. Given their firsthand experience with the sub-agent, Tharshini and her family now make every effort to inform and prevent others in the community facing a similar situation.