



UMCOR Helps the Tsunami's Poorest Survivors Get Back to Work

Beach Clearing Project is the First of Many in UMCOR's \$8 Million Commitment to Sri Lanka

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South Asia Emergency

UMCOR: HELPING MORE THAN TSUNAMI SURVIVORS

Before the tsunami struck, Sri Lanka was already suffering from the effects of a prolonged civil war. The country has been divided between the Sri Lankan Government-controlled region and areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Divisions between Sri Lankan communities often occurred along ethnic (mainly Sinhalese and Tamil) and religious lines (Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim).

This history of conflict resulted in 340,000 people who fled their homes and are now internally displaced in Sri Lanka. The tsunami added about 550,000 more to the number of displaced people. In some areas people who fled the civil war live in camps just down the road from people displaced by the tsunami. UMCOR is seeking to meet the needs of both populations. Those affected by the ongoing ethnic tensions are in need of relief in many of the same ways as the tsunami population. UMCOR, along with the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka is seeking to serve all groups affected by the twin tragedies of war and tidal waves.

A total of 360 men and 69 women directly benefited from the beach clearance program. The project brought them one step closer to returning to their work fishing the shores along eastern Sri Lanka. The incomes they earned for their work helped their families and communities, indirectly benefiting an additional 1,716 people.

THE TSUNAMI TOOK IT ALL

The fisher folk of Batticaloa, Sri Lanka watched their livelihoods wash out with the tides the day the tsunami struck their beaches. Their nets, boats, homes—even the beach itself—disappeared in the churning water. It is difficult to discern a starting point for rebuilding when so much was lost and so much needs to be done.

“Since the tsunami we have felt alone and without help. Through UMCOR, now we see hope.”

UMCOR and the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka are helping orchestrate the many activities that must occur for these fisher folk in eastern Sri Lanka to have their livelihoods back. The first problem to tackle was the beach strewn with debris from the waves. This was more than just picking up litter on the sand. Clearing this beach meant unearthing whole palm trees that were embedded in the shoreline with their stumps or branches exposed. It required a team of people to dig and remove these stumps that, if left buried, would easily tear the fishing nets as fast as the fishers could cast them.

MANY HANDS MAKE SMALL WORK

Using the beach clearing project as a form of community mobilization and temporary employment, UMCOR initially planned to work with 16 fishing societies in the area. But, on the day of the planning meeting 28 societies showed up. With the agreement of the initial 16, all 28 societies were included the project. In one week the entire six-mile stretch of beach used by the societies was cleared of debris. The locals said the area looked better than it did before the tsunami.

Each society fishes on an allotted portion of beach. To encourage members from the various groups to work together to get the job done, UMCOR asked them to work cooperatively to clean each other's

sections. In addition to working together, they also cooked and ate together, fostering a spirit of camaraderie. Two members from each society were elected to work on the cooking crew, providing sustenance for everyone.

UMCOR supplied tools, cooking supplies, and food, and paid the workers for their time clearing the beach to supplement their incomes. One man expressed his gratitude, "Today I have something to eat." He said, "Today I have money." The people involved in beach clearing expressed thanks for UMCOR not only organizing and supporting the project but also working along with them.

NEXT STEPS TO RECOVERY

Providing a debris-free beach is only the first step of many to help the fishing industry in Batticaloa get back on its feet. There is still much debris underwater that must be removed to protect the fisher's nets. They need to replace nets, boats and equipment as well as rebuild their vadhis, structures that sit on the beach away from the tide.

The vadhis serve as tool sheds and resting areas for fisher folk who are working on the beach. Oftentimes those who are fishing at night or early morning hours will spend the night in the vadhi to watch the boat that is kept on the beach and to be ready to fish when the conditions are right. The tsunami waves reclaimed 33 yards from the beach. In many places half of the beach was lost. Rebuilding the vadhis out of the tide's reach on the now narrow beaches means constructing them on private property. UMCOR is working with the fishing societies and the government to gain permits to rebuild vadhis on the privately owned land.

UMCOR is also working with suppliers, net makers, and boat builders to replace the equipment that was washed away. The nets and boats must be made by hand. It takes about one month to weave a new net.

ONE PROJECT OF MANY

This project is just one of many that will help Sri Lankans affected by the tsunami and civil strife. UMCOR committed \$8 million to relief and transitional development work in this island nation.

COUNTRY FACTS	Sri Lanka
POPULATION	19,287,000 (2002)
LANGUAGES	Sinhalese (official); also Tamil and English
ETHNIC GROUPS	Sinhalese 74%; Tamil 18%; Arab 7%; Burgher, Malay, Veddas 1%
RELIGIONS	Buddhist 70%; Hindu 15.5%; Muslim 7.6%; Christian 7.5%
LITERACY	92.3%

For more country fact information about Sri Lanka visit gbgm-umc.org/country_profiles/.

