



## SUCCESS STORY

# Restoring Textile Workers' Livelihoods

**Replacing equipment lets hundreds of women get back to work**



Photo: USAID/Zack Taylor

USAID's Jeff Allen presents Piyawathi De Silva new coir spinning equipment.

***"This equipment will give us a new start we couldn't have made otherwise without money," said Piyawathi.***

In rural Madampagama on Sri Lanka's southern coast, December 26 began for Piyawathi De Silva and her two daughters with their usual work of spinning coconut husks (known as coir) into rope. Before the morning was over, the sea had swept away all of Piyawathi's equipment—and her means to help her fisherman husband support the family. Piyawathi is one of about 3,000 coir spinners in Sri Lanka to lose their livelihoods in the tsunami. Yet she considers herself lucky: more than 75 members of the community of coir workers along the south coast were killed.

Just five weeks later, Piyawathi and other spinners were back at work, thanks to help from USAID and its partners.

Double-wheeled spinning units used by Piyawathi and other workers are fabricated by local blacksmiths and carpenters from wood and bicycle rims and are worth \$20 each. In eight hours, three people can produce 30 pounds of coir rope for a profit of \$3. Most spinners are married

women, and the process is a family affair: often three generations of women can be found working together on the wheels. USAID funded the purchase and distribution of 500 spinning sets for the neediest workers and collaborated with partners to supply 100 more units, as well as bales of raw material needed to produce coir rope.

"This equipment will give us a new start we couldn't have made otherwise without money," said Piyawathi after receiving her supplies on February 9. "From the profits we earn from this batch, we will buy more raw materials. Eventually we can begin to replace some of the things we lost."

Livelihood-restoring programs such as this are a key facet of USAID's strategy to help Sri Lanka recover from the tsunami's devastation. Immediately after the disaster, USAID provided emergency food, shelter, water, sanitation and medical supplies. But now it is helping Sri Lanka plan its long-term recovery, by establishing cash-for-work programs to clean up debris and repair damaged property. Small loans are helping people repair boats, reopen shops and start new businesses. USAID is also working with international and local organizations to provide psychological and social support to help individuals, families and communities cope with the trauma they experienced.