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SRI LANKA

SUCCESS STORY

Displaced Find a Temporary Home

Temporary homes help restore normalcy for families displaced by the tsunami



Photo: USAID/Zack Taylor

The Disannayakes stand in front of their new, temporary home.

“We will stay dry when the rains come,” said Disannayake, bouncing his youngest, 2-year-old Nandan, on his knee. “We can lock up our things, and most of all our family can have some privacy. It’s a real home.”

Since the tsunami swept away his home and livelihood, Sri Lankan fisherman B. Disannayake and his wife Mahalini have heard a lot of promises. Few have been kept.

“None of us has had a full night’s sleep for weeks,” a weary Mahalini said. “The heat in the tent has been unbearable for the children, so one of the babies was always fussing and waking up the others. The older children had a hard time making it to school in the mornings.”

But in March 2005, the promise of a better place to live was finally kept. Atop the foundation of their old house now sits a 200-square-foot transitional shelter with a zinc-aluminum alloy roof, canvas walls over a steel frame, and a door that locks. The family once again has a home they can call their own.

“We will stay dry when the rains come,” said Disannayake, bouncing his youngest, 2-year-old Nandan, on his knee. “We can lock up our things, and most of all our family can have some privacy. It’s a real home.” On learning that USAID funded the building of his shelter, Disannayake replied, “Thanks, America.”

With so many people displaced by the December 2004 tsunami and the economy in such disarray, this structure will likely be the family’s home for the next year or two. Sparsely furnished with a donated bed, sleeping mats, garments and cartons containing a few recovered possessions, the shelter nonetheless affords the family the key elements to maintaining the pride and dignity of living as a family. More than 10,000 of these shelters are being built in the south and east of Sri Lanka. Shelter beneficiaries like Disannayake can earn up to a month’s wages by helping to build their own and others’ homes.

Temporary shelters like these in the southwest of Sri Lanka are only the beginning of a long-term effort by USAID, in coordination with the government, to get hundreds of thousands of displaced people back into real homes. For the Disannayake family, it has put one key piece of the puzzle back in place. Once the fishing industry recovers and the family is again earning a regular income, they can begin to save for a permanent house, which may well feature the same aluminum roof that kept them dry during that first rainy season after the tsunami.