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SRI LANKA

SNAPSHOT Creating Economic Opportunity to Improve Lives

Road improvements and small business investments create new economic opportunities in areas hit hard by Sri Lanka's civil war.



Women at the USAID-funded Kiran bakery remove freshly baked bread from the oven.

“The project connects marginalized people with the outside world and increases their chances to sell their products and make a real income.”

*--Vavidel,
Muruthanai Village Leader*

March 2013 – Through USAID assistance, a new economic corridor is emerging in a formerly isolated and war-torn part of eastern Sri Lanka. The Kiran area was cut off from the outside world during the nearly 30-year conflict, and its population today is largely unskilled with limited livelihood opportunities. As part of its work to help such communities recover and become more resilient, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives renovated 20 kilometers of rural road, connecting four previously isolated villages with 1,400 residents, in order to facilitate their access to markets and new livelihood opportunities.

With their roads in disrepair, Kiran residents felt isolated and abandoned. “Having 20 years of government servant experience, I can say that the officials and communities of this area suffered due to their lack of mobility and the conditions of the interior roads,” said Vavidel, the leader of Muruthanai village. The rehabilitated road is a tangible sign of stability and development in this community, but it also has substantial economic implications, providing area farmers and small business owners with better market access. Dairy farmers in previously inaccessible villages, for example, are now selling their milk to outsiders. “The project actually connects marginalized people with the outside world, and increases their chances to sell their products and make a real income,” explained Vavidel.

OTI has also worked directly with community groups to develop new income-generating activities that will help them take advantage of this opportunity. Most recently, OTI worked with a local women's group to open a bakery, providing relevant skills, equipment, and facilities to its members.

“Now, we are confident that we can improve our economic status...and villagers can now get bakery items next door when they used to have to travel for miles. The road has improved so we can add a delivery service too – soon, people can get goods on their doorstep,” said Somalini Pulenthiran, a member of the society.

Telling Our Story

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