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SRI LANKA

SNAPSHOT New Children's Park Fosters Community Reintegration

The re-establishment of a children's park signals a return to peace and provides a safe space for interaction among diverse ethnic groups.



Tamil and Muslim girls play together at the newly opened Kilinochchi Children's Park in northern Sri Lanka.

"When I went to the town yesterday, I was surprised by the crowd of children in the park. Not only the children but also the adults feel safe and happy when they are in the park."

*--Sri Sutharsan Thiruyaru,
Kilinochchi resident*

Telling Our Story

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May 2013 – Sri Lanka's 30-year civil war destroyed much of the infrastructure in Kilinochchi, including a children's park where local children once played. In the park's former space, a war monument was erected that now reminds residents daily of the suffering they endured.

But now, with USAID assistance and through cooperation with local government officials, Kilinochchi, an ethnically diverse community in Sri Lanka's Northern province, is rebuilding. The new Kilinochchi Children's Park, rebuilt from scratch in a formerly empty lot, opened on May 4, 2013. While the war monument still remains in the old park space, the new park has offset the community's frustration over the monument and provides hope for a peaceful future.

"Our children had in their mind only war and its effects," said Nadanashanmugam Gowrithasan, Assistant Director of Planning for Kilinochchi. "Due to lack of space all of our children were further and further frustrated and mentally unable to come out from the war and their [internally displaced persons] life. But now you can see how children are excited."

During the war, Muslim families were forcibly displaced outside of Sri Lanka's northern region by rebel forces. Now, they have begun returning to Kilinochchi to rejoin Tamil families that remained in the area throughout the conflict. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives supported the local government to re-establish the children's park through installing new playground equipment and landscaping the grounds. The new park provides a safe space for reintegration and reconciliation for the more than 20,000 families comprising this resettled population.

By carrying out the activity through the local government, USAID also helped to restore confidence in the public sector's ability to deliver services to citizens.

"It is a landmark," said resident Sri Sutharsan Thiruyaru. "I never expected it to happen as none of the officials or politicians are thinking about our children, but now I feel some of them are thinking about us. When I went to the town yesterday I was surprised by the crowd of children in the park."

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