

Programme Area Summary

Country: Sri Lanka

Programme Area: Participation and Governance 2005 - 2010

What is the aim of the programme area?

Key actors in the reconstruction and development process, especially in the North & East, support conflict- and tsunami-affected communities to realise their rights of equitable access to quality basic services. This will be through increased community participation and responsiveness.

Why is VSO working in that particular Programme Area and region?

Sri Lanka is emerging from over two decades of armed conflict between the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The North & East province has borne the brunt of the conflict. A cease-fire has been established and a permanent peace is under negotiation. It is estimated that some 65,000 people have been killed, several times as many have been disabled and over 800,000 have been internally displaced from the North & East (within that region and in other parts of the island).

The problems of the already highly disadvantaged North & East province were exacerbated by the Tsunami of 26th December 2004 which devastated the coastal areas of the province. Issues of marginalization of communities in the North East provinces, lack of responsiveness, transparency and accountability, on both the part of the LTTE and the government have proved to be obstacles to the post tsunami reconstruction and development process. During this phase of reconstruction and development, the capacity of government departments and NGOs needs strengthening, as both struggle with the enormity of the task, but also with the sudden increase in funding available and the number of external agencies to deal with. The impact of VSO's work in these areas is evident in the way in which VSO partners have been able to respond to the Tsunami. However, the lack of organisational capacity and management is more evident than ever, and the assistance needs to be scaled up. The risk of poor planning and management of reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes cannot be underestimated, and it is crucial that the people's voice is heard at every level. VSO will seek to strengthen both the management capacity of development organisations, as well as their capacity to actively consult, engage with and encourage participation of the people in their work planning and implementation for both the immediate reconstruction and long-term development. VSO's work will take into consideration gender, ethnic and conflict issues, as well as lessons and good practice learnt from the other two programme areas of mental health and disability.

Key beneficiaries and partners:

The PAP will focus on NGO partner organisations whose mandate is to represent disadvantaged communities affected by the 20 year long ethnic conflict, predominantly in the North & East or those organisations in other parts of the country working for and with those communities; to support them to be aware of their rights and to direct their voice through channels in which it can be heard and acted upon. VSO will also work with the North East Provincial Council with whom we have had a strong partnership over several years. The North East Provincial Council (NEPC) is the largest service provider within the conflict devastated province and the biggest player in the post tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction process.

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

- VSO NGO and Government partners deliver and manage more appropriate, participatory, accountable conflict sensitive and gender sensitive programmes.

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- VSO NGO partners' respective communities increasingly inform and influence decisions, policy and practice that affect their lives.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements:

- VSO will place long term, short term and business partnership volunteers in partner organizations to build the capacity of these organizations in demonstrating transparent financial, organisational and human resource management systems – to both donors and beneficiaries; and to build their capacity in planning, project cycle management, participatory approaches, M&E, and fundraising.

Workshops, training & conferences, partner exchange visits/study tours:

- VSO will encourage regular dialogue through meetings, workshops and exchange visits for a professional group of volunteers and their counterparts working within the Participation and Governance goal. This will provide opportunities for sharing and learning, professional peer support strengthening networks and increasing interaction between key partners.

Support to national volunteering:

- The first steps towards exploring National Volunteering have already been taking together with our partner organisation Jaffna Social Action Centre who participated in a VSO funded study tour regarding NV. This will be an area that will be further developed in the coming year.

Advocacy and Global Education:

- VSO will build the capacity and competency of partner organizations to enable to them to influence policy makers by strengthening existing advocacy strategies or supporting the development of advocacy strategies, facilitating dialogue between issue based organizations and strengthening their capacity for networking thus promoting joint articulation of the voice of disadvantaged communities.

Providing grants and/or equipment for partners e.g. small grants fund:

- We provide small grants to partners on a regular basis for particular projects which enable partners to work more effectively.

Development of publications or other materials for training or communication:

- With the conclusion of the EC funded Strengths Project (March 2006) it was agreed that we will capture the learning by publishing several manuals for distribution amongst all VSO partners and volunteers. Eg: NGO training manual; Case Studies booklet; Learning by Doing projects booklets.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

VSO has been working in Sri Lanka for over three decades. During this period we have evolved from being seen as a volunteer-sending agency to being recognised as a development organisation that works through international volunteers.

VSO's distinctive advantage, which differentiates the organisation from other INGOs working in the country, is that we work predominantly through international volunteers who integrate with communities and share skills and learning in ways that are appropriate to the local context. This was highly evident in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami when there was an influx of INGOs into the country who were criticised for their highly inappropriate and non-consultative approach.

We have also gained several years experience in the area of capacity building of partner organisations, especially in relation to the EU funded Strengths project and we can therefore build on this learning for the implementation of the Participation and Governance programme.