

Training Local Contractors to Guarantee Sustainability: World Vision and Builders Without Borders Canada

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World Vision's response to the tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka includes more than the reconstruction of houses and the rebuilding of infrastructure. It also includes programs dedicated to improve the well being of tsunami victims while promoting sustainable development in their communities. Offering people tools that improve their capacity to better serve their society is one way of achieving this.

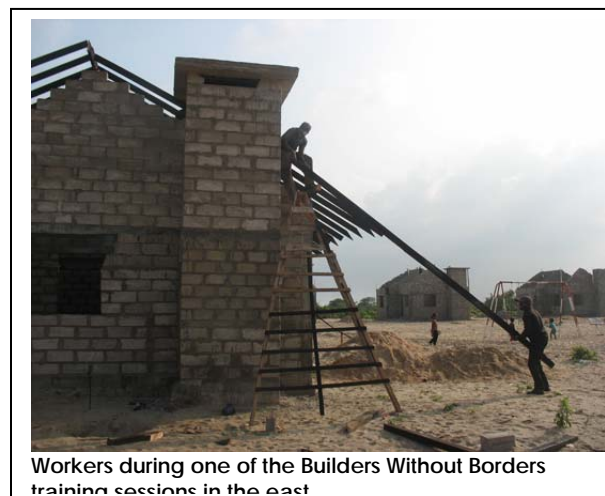
With attention geared towards finishing 3360 houses and 63 schools, the World Vision Tsunami Response Team in Sri Lanka is committed to building the capacity of labor crews and contractors to improve their performance on construction sites. Through

this knowledge transfer and training World Vision provides these workers with the ability to build a better Sri Lanka.

The initiative by the World Vision Tsunami Response Team in Sri Lanka, unique to the INGO community, to transfer knowledge of modern construction methods to local contractors was done in cooperation with Builders Without Borders of Canada; an international network of experienced tradesmen and tradeswomen who form partnerships with communities and organizations around the world to create affordable housing from local materials and to work together for a sustainable future. The main goals of the new initiative included how to build roof structures more efficiently, how to properly install doors and windows, how to lay concrete blocks professionally and erect gable walls at the right angle. The ability to do the latter simplified the problem of getting the correct angle on the block work of the gable wall.

These goals were achieved when three Builders Without Borders volunteers arrived from Canada to work with local contractors on World Vision construction sites in the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Ampara.

When asked what new skills the local contractors learnt, Rod Imer; Lanka Tsunami Response Team Construction



Operations Manager said, *"The first crew of contractors learnt how to use electrical power tools, and how to organize their work flow efficiently. They learnt the basic elements of roof construction as well as door and window installations. The second crew set up and managed a demonstration workshop where they prepared structures for roof construction and built various sample work elements to help build houses, i.e simple scaffolding for block laying and plastering, sawhorses for carpentry work, and making toolboxes."* The Builders Without Borders volunteers also constructed a roof framing that enabled local contractors to build roofs quicker and in a more efficient manner than before.

"Usually, many laborers climb on roofs and pass the hammers and nails among themselves without taking safety measures. Now they learnt how to safely carry their tools even if they are working on the roof," said Josephine Pillai, World Vision Tsunami Response Stakeholder Representative in Batticaloa. *"The most important lessons everyone learnt during this training was how to save time, work more efficiently, and keep the site neat and safe,"* she added. Many of the trainees were impressed of how prepared they can now be when working on a construction site. With no waste of time and resources they feel more productive. *"If one is prepared, it can all happen so quickly... You fix everything before hand, and then come to the site, tie everything together and put it up,"* said Josephine.

The most memorable aspect of this new venture was the training of four women from Ampara. *"Being encouraged by Julia Armstrong, one of the Builders Without Borders volunteers, the women asked her to teach them some of the basics of construction,"* said Rod. Julai added that *"the best part of this initiative was working with the young women. Their eagerness to learn was very rewarding,"*. For 10 days, four young women aged between 16 and 22 were trained in setting out timber structures and elements while learning to properly use hammers, handsaws and electric drills. By the end of the training, the women were proudly able to build sawhorses, scaffold-leaners, toolboxes and rafter assemblies. *"Learning these new skills allows the women to actively and professionally participate in the development of their community building projects in the future,"* said Julia.



Julia Armstrong teaching women in Ampara how to build sawhorses leaners

By the end of the training, the young women and men acquired new and better ways of how to conduct their work. *"The highlights of the initiative were training women and providing a rapid increase of efficiency by using power tools,"* Rod explained. When Builders Without Borders went back to Canada, the Lanka Tsunami Response Construction Team took on the responsibility of teaching roof construction techniques to those who were not enrolled in the Builders Without Borders training.

The World Vision and Builders Without Borders cooperation did not only result in a successful capacity building exercise. It also lifted World Vision International's profile as a community-oriented organization and promoted inter-NGO cooperation. *"This new initiative and the team that led it were well recognized by international organizations, centers of learning, various governmental representatives and other World Vision offices for their innovation and promotion of development. This makes us very proud,"* Rod said.

Implementing such initiatives does not come without its challenges especially amidst an escalating conflict in Sri Lanka where the increasing security situation interrupts the construction work on a few of the sites. Nevertheless, World Vision wishes to continue its cooperation with Builders Without Borders by employing leading hand tradesmen to work on the construction sites of three schools in Batticaloa. Building one new school, and adding buildings to two others by applying modern construction techniques will provide new facilities for 1990 students in a district where people know too well the suffering of the tsunami and the ethnic conflict.