



SNAPSHOT Mobilizing voters through ID provision

OTI is facilitating the provision of National Identity Cards for conflict-affected citizens in Sri Lanka's Northern Province.



Community members apply for National Identity Cards at USAID-funded mobile clinics.

"I have spent most of my life in war suffering from lots of displacement and resettlement... Getting an ID after 55 years of living, now I feel I'm a citizen of this country."

*- Atputharajah Tharmarani, 55
Recipient of a NIC*

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July 2013 – This September, the marginalized northern population of Sri Lanka will experience a historic event – the opportunity to vote in the first ever Northern Provincial Council Elections. In order to ensure all eligible voters are able to participate, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives has launched a program to provide necessary identification documents to those that lost important paperwork during the war. Through this program, USAID aims to reach 20 percent of registered voters lacking valid identification before the September elections.

To vote in Sri Lankan elections, registered voters must present a valid National Identity Card (NIC) at the polling station on Election Day. In the Northern Province, this requirement presents a significant hurdle, as an estimated 85,000 registered voters lack a NIC. Many lost their NICs while displaced during the country's 30-year civil war. Others never had one because they were living under a rebel administration. The absence of identification has ramifications beyond voting; NICs are also required to access basic government services and to travel freely throughout the country.

To help the residents of these communities acquire these critical NICs, USAID is partnering with the Centre for Human Rights to conduct a series of free mobile NIC clinics in Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mannar, and Mullaitivu districts. The clinics have operated since July 9th and will run through August 31st. To date, nearly 20,000 individuals have applied for NICs, and 6,200 NICs have already been issued. The clinics are accessible to all and are able to process NIC requests six times faster than the usual three months, ensuring the cards are received prior to Election Day. Another benefit of the clinics is that individuals can present unconventional documents to prove identity during the application process. This is an important work-around since many clinic participants lost other forms of identity documents during the conflict.

"I have spent most of my life in war suffering from lots of displacement and resettlement... Getting an ID after 55 years of living, now I feel I'm a citizen of this country," proclaimed Atputharajah Tharmarani, 55, at a NIC mobile clinic in Jaffna.

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