



SNAPSHOT Mobilizing voters through ID provision

OTI facilitated 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*

Telling Our Story
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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 launched a program to provide necessary identification documents to those that lost important paperwork during the war. Through this program, a total of 21,282 ID card applications have been facilitated – representing nearly a quarter of all northern voters registered but without valid ID – and more than 10,000 have already been issued and delivered. The remainder are expected to be issued and delivered by Election Day, September 21.

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, as 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 partnered with the Centre for Human Rights to conduct a series of free mobile NIC clinics in Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mannar, and Mullaitivu districts. The clinics operated from July 9th to August 31st. The clinics were accessible to all and were able to process NIC requests six times faster than the usual three months, ensuring that the cards will be received prior to Election Day. Another benefit of the clinics is that individuals could 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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