



Training in how to press earth bricks.  
Photo by CRS staff.



Training in carpentry skills. Photo by CRS staff.



Completed permanent shelter. Photo by CRS staff.

# Shelter Construction Through an Owner-Driven Approach

**Project Title:** Special Operations Appeal (SOA) for Tsunami-Affected Communities

**Location:** Sri Lanka—Districts: Batticaloa, Ampara, Galle, Matara

**Date of disaster:** December 26, 2005

**Type of disaster:** Tsunami

**Type of response:** Urban and rural

**Project period:** 3 years

## Accomplishments

- 12,616 transitional shelters (T-shelters) built within the first year
- 10,713 permanent shelters built within 3 years
- Water and sanitation facilities, community halls and rehabilitation of schools

## THE INNOVATION

### Participatory Design Process with Community

Pilot models were constructed with different design and material options for feedback from homeowners.

The design was refined using community feedback and considering local capacity, supply chain and feasibility of replication.

### Change from Contractor-Led to Owner-Driven Approach

In the initial experience of working through contractors:

- Contracted work did not meet required quality or timeliness.
- CRS observed local labor being exploited by contractors.

CRS and Caritas shifted from contractors to an owner-driven approach and experienced:

- Revival of the local economy by tapping into local skills.
- Reduced potential for exploitation of local labor.

Catholic Relief Services with its partner Caritas built four different T-shelter models, keeping in mind local traditions and cultural practices. Households had the flexibility to choose the placement of the doors and windows, select the roof type and so forth; thus a large variation of designs evolved in the process. In a few cases, homeowners invested additional resources and added extensions or finishing, such as tiling or false ceilings.

## DELIVERY MECHANISM

- Homeowners led the process of finalizing the design, completing site plans and identifying local skilled workers.
- The technical staff of CRS and our partner Caritas reviewed the design, specifications, timeframe and payment procedures with homeowners and skilled workers.

- Homeowner and local skilled workers procured and stored materials.
- Local skilled workers began homeowner-monitored construction.
- Homeowner and CRS/partner technical officer signed off at each stage of completion, triggering payment.

## CHALLENGES

Quality control of materials was a challenge, addressed by:

- Not accepting substandard materials
- Building a competitive environment among local suppliers
- Educating homeowners on quality issues

## REFLECTIONS

Humanitarian agencies:

- Should provide maximum flexibility and choice to participants of relief and recovery programs.
- Should support families who have experienced devastating loss to be active managers of their recovery. Educating homeowners, as the ultimate “end user,” on their responsibilities in monitoring the construction process was key. Homeowners at first passively benefited, feeling they should accept whatever was given; project team encouragement of their role in managing the process helped increase sense of ownership.
- Can add value to reconstruction programs by building upon available local skills and resources.

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF PAYMENTS

Homeowners were encouraged to open bank accounts. Making payments through bank accounts had a number of advantages:

- More efficient management and accounting of payments
- Greater homeowner awareness regarding overall cost of their houses and how project money was being spent
- Minimized opportunities for corruption

**For more information, contact [pqpublications@crs.org](mailto:pqpublications@crs.org).**

CRS and our partners worked with community members to establish the following system for payments, monitoring and quality control by stages:

Stage 1: Foundation

Stage 2: Sill level

Stage 3: Lintel level

Stage 4: Roof level

Stage 5: Roofing

Stage 6: Internal wiring and plastering

Stage 7: Completion (painting/flooring)



T-shelter to be upgraded. Photo by CRS staff.



Exploring interlocking stabilized earth blocks. Photo by CRS staff.



Permanent shelter in construction. Photo by CRS staff.



Completed permanent shelter. Photo by CRS staff.