

WAVE OF SUPPORT

Sri Lankans fight back with assistance from CUFA AND WOCCU.

By Peter Mason, CUFA Executive Officer



Sri Lankan communities had a long way to go to rebuild after the devastating tsunami in 2004.

The Credit Union Foundation Australia (CUFA) with the generous support of Cuscal has been working with the World Council of Credit Unions to undertake the credit union tsunami reconstruction project in Sri Lanka

The credit union movement in Sri Lanka was hit hard. The Boxing Day tsunami destroyed more than 200 village credit societies (credit unions) with many of the surviving members losing their livelihoods. Prior to the devastation of the tsunami there more than 8,500 primary societies (credit unions) with more than over 850,000 members.

Soon after the tsunami, Cuscal made a commitment to support CUFA's work to help reconstruct and assist the credit union movement in Sri Lanka. CUFA then approached the World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) to partner with them to undertake this work. WOCCU welcomed CUFA's partnership in the Sri Lankan reconstruction project and sought to capitalise not only on the funding that CUFA was able to bring to the project but also the opportunity to enhance and strengthen ties between the two organisations.

WOCCU has had a long history of working in Sri Lanka and were on the ground soon after the disaster. Through

a wide-ranging community consultation process, WOCCU and local partners developed a cohesive plan to rehabilitate and rebuild the affected primary societies and assist in strengthening the traumatised local communities.

Earlier this year CUFA undertook a monitoring visit to the Sri Lankan project. The monitoring visit included interviews with the various project beneficiaries as well as WOCCU program staff and management. Primary Societies were visited in Colombo, Modara Patuwatha, Dodanduwa, Moragalla, Sawthoon, Mohamathiya, Mageediya, Al-Hutha and Arrachachu.

At one of the meetings CUFA met with the Chair and Manager of the Kosgoda Primary Society which had



Attending the opening of rebuilt credit union branches in Sri Lanka.

recently reopened since having a new building built with the money donated by WOCCU. Since reopening this primary society has had a 50 per cent increase in membership. Membership within the Sri Lankan credit union movement is very different to that of Australia. Members must attend monthly meetings otherwise they lose their membership and so there is a high community participation in the affairs of the local credit union.

This particular community primary society lost 40 members to the tsunami, due to many of the members being fishermen. Before the tsunami Kosgoda Primary Society had assets totalling R1.6 million but it has now grown to R2.6 million as their community recovers and re-establishes itself. The Kosgoda Primary Society is also encouraging children to join and has been particularly successful in this goal.

During the visit, CUFA was assisted in the opening of eight rebuilt primary societies. These primary societies are located east of Ampara and were all in the path of the December 2004 tsunami. Many of the newly opened primary societies are very small but they all put a lot of effort into their grand openings. There were tree-planting ceremonies, garlands to be placed on the visitors, ribbons to be cut, plaques to be unveiled, deposits to be collected and of course tea and snacks for attendees. Whole villages came out to see their primary society opened and enjoy the festivities.

As work continues with the Sri Lankan primary societies, the communities are slowly recovering as members rebuild their lives and with it their financial strength thanks in a large part to the generosity of the international credit union movement.

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