



## AFTER THE TSUNAMI, SRI LANKANS BAND TOGETHER TO CLEAN UP THEIR CITY

Grants funded by USAID and administered by DAI support rehabilitation in the city of Matara

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Southern Province, Sri Lanka—The 40,000 residents of the city of Matara were among the tens of millions directly affected by the tsunami that hit South and Southeast Asia on December 26, 2004. Soon after the initial disaster, Help-O—a local nongovernmental organization using goods and services quickly provided by DAI and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—began to coordinate a city-wide cleanup effort to pave the way for long-term rehabilitation.

Help-O is a leading regional humanitarian and development NGO that has the local knowledge and expertise to rebuild lives, but lacks the financial resources to fulfill its potential. As part of its immediate assistance program, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has funded Help-O and many similar organizations through the DAI-implemented OTI Sri Lanka Program. Having worked in Sri Lanka distributing grants to support peaceful reconciliation since the February 2003 peace accord between the central government and Tamil separatists, DAI staff have an established presence on the ground. They are able to move large amounts of money into the hands of groups like Help-O quickly and safely.

In the coastal city of Matara, an undergraduate student at nearby Ruhunu University—working for Help-O—organized 200 people to implement a comprehensive cleanup. Half were Matara citizens paid for their work; the remainder were volunteers from the university. To further involve community members and extend income-generating opportunities, Help-O paid local women to provide tea for the morning and afternoon breaks—during which time the team congregated to discuss ideas and lessons learned. In

the evenings, volunteers relaxed in a more social setting and discussed the future with community members.

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“Many people came for cleanup work but just scratched the surface and left—this is the only organization that seems to be doing a proper job.”

– Mayor of Matara,  
Southern Province

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At the end of the 10-day program, tangible progress had been made in the restoration of Matara. Arguably as important as these concrete gains, however, was the feeling of progress through action among the volunteers, and the burgeoning sense that as a community they would overcome



the disaster. In the seven weeks after the tsunami struck Sri Lanka, DAI has cleared more than \$1.7 million in 65 new OTI-funded grants to community groups and aid organizations in affected areas. An additional \$300,000 worth of grants will be committed by the end of February.