



Dear readers,

Welcome to this issue of the SDC newsletter!

13 years after the advent of the Swiss humanitarian aid programme to Sri Lanka, SDC is preparing the phasing out of its humanitarian assistance by the end of 2015. Currently the focus is on ensuring the sustainability of the resettlement projects, as well as transferring lessons learnt and experiences gained to interested and relevant actors in the field. Switzerland's labour migration programme, however, will continue to support the implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy of Sri Lanka and provide services to labour migrants and their families.

In other news, the Swiss Minister for External Affairs, Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter visited Sri Lanka in March. This edition of the newsletter presents in particular his visit to the SDC projects in the North. Two other projects aimed at increasing the capacity of citizens to advocate for their rights and contribute to better governance in the country are also featured here.

We hope you enjoy reading the contents of this newsletter and also invite you to visit the SDC Face Book page [Swiss Cooperation Office Sri Lanka](#).

Jean Michel Jordan
Director of Cooperation

The visit of Federal Councilor Didier Burkhalter to Sri Lanka brings with it a new impulse to enhance bilateral relations

During a recent tour of Sri Lanka, Federal Councilor Didier Burkhalter visited Switzerland's reconstruction projects in Jaffna in the North of Sri Lanka. He toured ongoing projects in the village of Akkarai, where land has been recently released by the security forces for resettlement. Minister Burkhalter met with housing beneficiaries, village officials and local and district authorities and discussed the progress of the resettlement.



Federal Councilor Burkhalter greets a housing beneficiary in the village of Akkarai

The Swiss minister also held discussions with representatives of the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil National Alliance with a focus on the enhancement of economic cooperation between the two countries and the national reconciliation process. Reiterating Switzerland's willingness to further promote cooperation in all fields with Sri Lanka, he recognized the present administration's efforts to collaborate constructively with the United Nations and the international community and to address human rights and accountability issues. He offered Switzerland's support to sustain the efforts of the Sri Lankan Government in consolidating the reconciliation process by making available Swiss experience based on a longstanding tradition of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual coexistence.

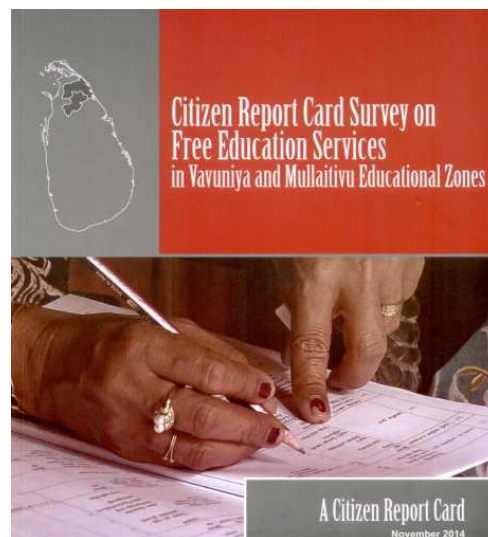
He also met the Chief Minister and the Governor of the Northern Province. The talks focused on the economic and humanitarian situation in the Province, as well as on the capacity building project implemented by the Swiss government in all provincial councils throughout Sri Lanka, to enhance skills of provincial officers in administration management and to train provincial councilors in statute drafting.

Making democracy and good governance work: The launch of the Citizen Report Card on public services

The **Citizen Report Card (CRC)** has been designed as a mechanism which allows people to play a constructive role in helping the state to fulfil its obligations. It is a simple but highly effective tool to share people's feedback about public services with administrators. The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) recently launched the Citizen Report Card Survey on free education services in the Vavuniya and Mullaitivu Educational zones at an event titled 'Co-creating Good Governance. SDC co-funded the CRC as a measure to support people to involve in governance and make their voices heard. As a result the authorities now have a better idea of the education services in these two districts.

CEPA, in collaboration with the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), pioneered the Citizen Report Card method in Sri Lanka last year. In a process with major public ownership and investment, community groups in Mullaitivu and Vavuniya identified education as their highest priority to communicate their concerns to the State and, after training in the method, carried out the assessment themselves. The Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore, provided technical expertise for the project, which was co-funded by the European Union and SDC.

The CRC which is a voluntary and confidential document should be filled by an independent body commissioned by the Government. This pilot project was initiated by CEPA to advocate for more such initiatives. It is up to the authorities to implement it in other districts. While noting the Government's commitment to its mandate to bring about good governance, addressing the event, the Minister of Public Administration, Democratic Governance and Buddha Sasana Karu Jayasuriya emphasized that changing an entrenched political system takes time.



Facilitating access to information through Migration Information Centres

Due to the establishment of Migration information centres within the Divisional Secretariat Offices, prospective migrant workers can now make informed decisions when contemplating labour migration. Not only is there better access to information, the migrant workers and their family members are further facilitated to discuss private matters with Development Officers in a more conducive environment.



A potential migrant worker receives information at the Migration Information centre in the Batticaloa District Secretariat

The MICs are manned by trained Development Officers for Foreign Employment who provide a valuable service to potential migrants as well as families of migrant workers. Migrant workers are supported to make informed decisions, check details of foreign employment agencies and look out for job opportunities. Additionally they can seek clarification on the maximum amounts payable to an employment agency, as well as other relevant welfare facilities entitled to foreign job seekers. Women especially find this service very useful since they have to approach the DS offices to obtain approval for their Family Background Report.

It is with this objective of maximizing the services from DOs, that SDC partner organizations have collaborated with Government authorities to establish nine labour migration information centres at divisional secretariat level. Nine more will be established in other working divisions of the safer labour migration programme. Special coordination meetings are organized at these information centres and in some divisions even legal clinic programmes are coordinated to assist the families of in service migrant workers who are in trouble at the destination countries.

A visibility message board fixed at the entrance of DS offices in local language provides all the relevant information and guidance available from the development officers at the information centre.