



**PROFILE**

## Chitra Suriyakumar: Living in Hope

**Chitra Suriyakumar, a 56-year old fisherwoman from Jaffna in the north of Sri Lanka, is struggling to rebuild her life post-civil war**

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Chitra Suriyakumar is a 56-year old fisherwoman. She has seven children—two male and five female. She is from the Inbacity fishing village in the Vadamarachchi area of Jaffna district, located in the northern province of Sri Lanka. Her husband, K. Suriyakumar is the former chairperson of the Vadamarachchi Fisheries Co-operative Society.

With the outbreak of the civil war in 1992, life as she knew it changed radically. Chitra and her husband struggled hard to keep the community united, and to get back the land captured for security purposes, which was

forcing people to live outside their houses, in camps. However, as the situation became worse, Chitra was forced to leave the village. She shifted to Kilinochchi with her son, as a displaced person, while her husband stayed back to continue with fishing, the only source of income for their family. In 1997, as the situation further worsened, her husband too was forced to shift to Kilinochchi.

With no source of income, they went through serious economic difficulties. Suriyakumar took to selling coconuts, to earn at least a meager income. The next blow came in April 2007, when Chitra's son was taken away by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to join the war. This was a period of great mental suffering and economic hardship for the family. They were displaced yet again

in 2009, when they were asked by the LTTE to leave for Puthukudirippu, during the final battle between LTTE and government forces. After April 2009, they were sent to the Menik farm camp being run by the government of Sri Lanka for internally displaced persons.

Reflecting back on her situation, Chitra says, "It is a miracle that god saved us to continue to live with these sorrows and difficulties in our lives. There is no point, however, of living without my children near me." Both Chitra and Suriyakumar have tried their best to find their son, without any success. They have heard all kinds of rumours—that their son is dead, or that he is still alive; they continue to live in hope.

The Suriyakumar family recently returned to their original home at Inbacity village. However, life is yet to return to normalcy. Suriyakumar does not have any fishing gear, as everything was destroyed during the war. So, he needs to start from scratch. Economic difficulties apart, Chitra continues to be highly disturbed. She is not ready to face society. All she wants is to see her son back.

Suriyakumar says, "My wife Chitra is only one example of thousands of such mothers who are waiting to see their children. We do not know when this will happen. But we live in hope. This is our country, our land, our water, and we love it. We can build up our future with the available resources. But there should be recognition of all people as equal citizens of the country. There should be an effective healing process for all these wounds. That day, we all will be in a situation to build up our livelihoods, our fisheries and agriculture, and the skills of our people. We are dreaming for that day to come". This is the dream of all the citizens of Sri Lanka, not just of Chitra and Suriyakumar. ❖