

Meet Meenatchi...

Meenatchi Vimala (47) lost her husband during the war. Since then she has been taking care of their son Thileepan (aged 18 now) and her two sisters, her brother and her nephew. Ambika (30) her youngest sister is speech impaired and her brother Nallathamby (29) cannot walk from birth. Rasalatchumi (38) her other sister is a single mother as well.



Meenatchi's husband used to be a fisherman who also worked as a labourer in the paddy fields until he was forcibly recruited by an armed group. Meenatchi was three months pregnant with their son at that time. She kept searching for him even after the birth of their baby but could not locate him and later was informed that he was killed in the war.

"I had no income while he was gone," Meenatchi says, "and I had undergone two heart surgeries, so I could not do any heavy work.

Before my marriage, I worked in a house in Colombo for 20 years and became conversant in the Sinhala," she says, "After my husband's death, I accompanied people who could not speak Sinhala, as a translator, when they had to go to hospitals in Sinhala speaking areas. They would pay me about Rs. 100 to Rs. 300 and I used that money to buy milk for my son. During paddy harvesting, I visited the paddy fields to beg for a little paddy for my family."

But she wanted to have a proper livelihood to support her son and her family. "I would've loved to make string hoppers and sell, but pounding the flour was difficult so I settled on making chilli powder for selling because that was easier," she says.

With the little money she had, she bought some dried red chillies. Her sister roasted them and got them ground at the mill and she weighed and packeted them for selling. People in her village bought the chilli powder from her. Later she obtained an industrial grinder from the government.

She spent her earnings on school supplies for her son, for his classes and to provide for the rest of her family. The business brings her around LKR 8,000 (USD 41) every month.

The travel restrictions imposed by the government has made it difficult for her to sell her products. Sometimes when she is short of money, she would borrow from the neighbours on credit.

Meenatchi is in need of support to fix the current grinder and to get a packaging machine so that she can do a better quality packaging and put her product to a better market.

If you would like to partner with us to support Meenatchi click on the link below and please state her name under comments when making the donation.

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