

# Siriyigama spice

Sri Lanka, April 2006

Siriyigama is a village on Sri Lanka's south coast about 1km from the sea and home to 200 families. These families lost one of their main sources of income when the tsunami wiped out the local fishing industry; the village relied on the industry to provide labouring work for community members.

Oxfam Australia has been working with the Siriyigama community for more than ten years and now, post-tsunami, is working with community members through Siriyigama United CBO, a local community based organisation, to provide livelihood and shelter programs for ten self help groups.

One of these groups, 'Diriya', comprises five women, each the main income earner in her family. With a loan from Siriyigama United CBO, these women have set up a spice processing business producing packaged freshly ground spices for the local market.

The group buys spices in bulk and then grinds and repackages them into smaller sizes. The women process chilli, coriander, pepper, turmeric and two different mixed spices. The spices are considered to be of good quality in the community and are cheaper than commercial spices by up to two rupees a packet.

The group also uses its grinding machine to grind chilli and rice for community members. Money made from this is used to service the grinding machine with any profits going straight to the women. The women are earning about 5,000 rupees (AUD \$64) a fortnight from the business – 2,000 rupees (AUD \$26) of this is profit.

The loan has helped these women in many ways: they no longer have to fish, or have their children fish, something they are scared to do since the tsunami; they have been able to save between 200 and 600 rupees each; ongoing business costs such as electricity and loan repayments are covered; and, once considered unworthy of credit, they are now able to run a business that supplies spices to all the homes in the village as well as three markets.

The business has brought these women together and they are proud that they are able to supply their community with quality spices as well as actively help others to set up self help groups like their own.