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## **UN Food Agency Wants to Scale Back Sri Lanka Program (Update1)**

May 26 (Bloomberg) -- The World Food Program, the world's biggest humanitarian agency, wants to scale back its feeding program in Sri Lanka almost half a year after the Dec. 26 tsunami disaster that devastated 12 countries in the Indian Ocean.

The United Nations agency is feeding close to 1 million people in the South Asian island nation, the worst-affected country after Indonesia in the tsunami catastrophe. Giant waves that pounded two-thirds of the island's coastline killed more than 30,000 and more than half a million people lost their homes.

`` The government asked us to extend the feeding program till July and after that we want to reduce it to the most needy because we don't want to create a dependence mentality," said Mio Nozoe, head of the World Food Program in Galle, in southern Sri Lanka, one of the worst hit areas in the tsunami.

Sri Lanka has received \$3 billion in donor aid to build 100,000 new homes, roads and hospitals in the tsunami-affected areas. The slow pace of aid disbursement threatens to hold back reconstruction and revival of livelihoods of fishermen and others who make a living along the coast. A slower recovery may threaten Sri Lanka's \$18 billion economy, which thrives on tourism, agriculture and garment exports.

`` The worry is that Sri Lanka won't get the aid disbursement quickly enough to rebuild itself, judging from previous cases of aid packages which don't come through as promised," said Arjuna Mahendran, chief economist and strategist at Credit Suisse Private Banking in Singapore. `` That means rebuilding will be held up and social problems emerge along with economic concerns of the budget deficit getting bigger."

### Livelihoods

Many of the fishermen and others whose livelihoods were affected by the tsunami are still finding it hard to return to their normal lives, the United Nations has said.

`` We need to get people back to their livelihoods in order for them to stop depending on food handouts," said M. Hanifa, a doctor who works with the UN in Galle. `` Fishermen say give me nets and a boat and we can get back to our lives."

The UN is distributing rice, lentils, cooking oil and sugar to about 130,000 people in Galle, a city in the south of Sri Lanka.

The United Nations Development Program says about 60 percent of the fishermen on the southern coast, including Galle, have received catamarans. S. M. Somaratne, the UNDP coordinator, said in an interview in Galle. Some fishermen however, haven't gotten fishing nets.

### Boats and Nets

`` They want motor boats and nets, something they had before the tsunami," said Somaratne. `` The faster we get them back on their feet, they will rely less on ration cards for food."

In the northeast of the island, where almost half of those killed lived, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, a charity based in Kilinochchi in rebel-controlled territory, has been helping the displaced build houses with the help of volunteers, the group said in a statement on its Web Site.

Tsunami-affected communities in the northeast say fishing is their main occupation and want help to allow them to earn a living, the TRO statement said.

Erisha, 21, who is in the process of moving from a tent she shares with her parents and two older brothers into a semi-permanent house, says she would like a sewing machine like the one she lost with the tsunami.

"I used to tailor clothes before the tsunami," Erisha said, standing outside her new dwellings which stands in a plot of land on elevated ground 100 meters away from the beach. "I'm self-employed and a new sewing machine would cost me 26,500 rupees (\$265)."

#### Permanent Homes

The Sri Lankan government says its top priority is to build permanent homes for those displaced by the end of this year. The process of acquiring land to meet a new regulation that requires building to be at least 100 meters away from the water, will take time, said Saman Jayasekera, an officer with the government's district office in Galle.

"It's taking time but we want to finish all the houses by the end of this year," said Jayasekera in a phone interview in Galle. "In the meantime, we are offering interest-free loans from the Bank of Ceylon for 100,000 rupees for people who want to buy fishing boats and other tools for their livelihood."

Tsunami-displaced families have been told a different story. Government agents who come to monitor the living conditions in the refugee camp where Erisha and her family reside say they will have to wait two years for a permanent home.

"They said we can get a real house within two years," Erisha said as she watched her family's makeshift kitchen being built outside their new plywood dwelling.

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