



SEWALANKA FOUNDATION

Newsletter

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In light of the recent escalation in violence in the north and east of Sri Lanka, the issue of peace building and reconciliation has again become a major talking point for national and international development organisations working across the country.

As a development NGO actively working in the conflict-affected northern and eastern areas, Sewalanka Foundation has been implementing relief, rehabilitation and socio-economic development projects to displaced communities for the past 13 years.

With an understanding that inter-ethnic and –religious peace-building and reconciliation are the key to the sustainable socio-economic development of these areas, Sewalanka has always worked to engage communities in peace-building activities implemented through its development platform.

As a result of the renewed threat of violence in the north and east, Sewalanka recently reconfirmed its commitment to the peace process through the development of a committee who will work to develop and implement a coordinated national program to promote peace building and reconciliation, not only through Sewalanka projects in affected areas, but at a national level.

“Sewalanka has an extensive local network that cuts across geography, class, race and religion,” Sewalanka Chairman Mr Harsha Kumara Navaratne said at the committee’s first meeting held to discuss the peace situation.

“While we currently implement components of peace building through each of our programs, we have realised the importance of developing a more coordinated approach; a uniform program or policy that will be implemented nationally in everything we do.”

“We are aware that peace is a sensitive issue, and as such we will work to ensure that any program that we develop is done so through a participatory, open dialogue both internally and externally,” Mr Navaratne said.

“This means Sewalanka staff, partner organisations, the communities within which we work, the Government, LTTE and other relevant organisations.”

“Already we have begun to utilise this our extensive network and will continue to do so to ensure that we establish a program that works toward removing the threat of war and violence in all communities across the Island,” he said.

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"Images of cultivated paddy fields and traffic on rehabilitated roads portrayed rays of hope held by students."



>> Captions for images

A new phase for IFSP

Sewalanka Foundation and partner German Agro Action (GAA) have successfully moved into the second phase of the six-year Integrated Food Security Program (IFSP); a development project located in the country's north.

Providing support and assistance to conflict-affected communities located in the Wannu area (the DS Division of Vavuniya North and the northern part of the Vavuniya DS Division), the first phase of the program was completed in September 2005 after three years of successful development and implementation. Staff have now moved smoothly into the second and final three-year phase, due for completion in 2008.

Targeting 52 villages, the IFSP project utilises a strong social mobilisation approach to empower communities to determine their own development needs and identify the most appropriate methods by which to achieve these.

The main objectives of the program are to improve food security through the sustainable use of existing resources, strengthen self help capacities (by developing and strengthening community-based organisations [CBOs]), construct physical rural infrastructure and promote peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

In March/April 2005, an evaluation was carried out, giving project partners the opportunity to reflect on the first phase and to develop and plan for the second phase. Evaluating the internal processes and outcomes, ISFP staff then assisted consultants with an objective external evaluation of the program.

Following the evaluation process, project partners came together to consider the results of both evaluations in a two-day planning workshop held in Vavuniya

For more information, contact Ms Lakshi Abeyasekara, Regional Director North, on 024 222 1354 or at sewavav@sltnet.lk; or log onto www.sewalanka.org and click on the IFSP logo.

Investment in the future: Nedunkerny Mahavidyalaya

The Nedunkerny Mahavidyalaya School is located in Vavuniya North Division. Following the destruction of the school buildings during a period of intense conflict in May 1997, 1500 students and 43 teachers were forced to flee the area.

Three years later lessons were resumed in the shade of trees nearby the ruins of the original school. Eight teachers conducted lessons for the first 16 students.

Five years later in June 2005 a new 15 classroom-building was constructed. By the end of 2005, 23 teachers were providing tuition to 546 students.

In June 2005, the Nedunkerny Mahavidyalaya School took part in a drawing competition organised by the IFSP project staff, where students were invited to express their experiences of life before and after the signing of the MoU Cease Fire Agreement.

The competition was designed to support awareness development regarding the ongoing peace and reconciliation process among the population of the project area.

Equipped with wax and watercolors and only two and a half hours within which to complete their work, 32 students between the ages of 10-19 impressed the organisers with their creative drawings and paintings.

Images of cultivated paddy fields and traffic on rehabilitated roads portrayed rays of hope held by students. The improvement of infrastructure as well as the availability of transport facilities was also evident among the pictures, as were reflections of life in the area, with depictions of parents working hard to cultivate their lands.

A two-step approach

Phase one:

- Implementation of rehabilitation program

Infrastructure investments including rehabilitation of water tanks and access roads and the reconstruction of community halls.

- Establishment of basis for future social mobilisation

Developing and strengthening CBOs.

- Awareness creation and vocational development

Implementation of skills training and awareness building programs.

- Improving living conditions through agriculture and livestock inputs and the development of secure markets for produce.

Aims were achieved through the formation of CBOs and by assisting in the registration of existing CBOs. Several exchange programs were organised in order to improve the situation in the project area. For example farmers were given exposure to external information through their participation in tailor-made training courses, as well through participation in cultural exchange programs. The documentation of project activities

Phase two:

- Further CBO development and establishment of self monitoring system
- Strengthening social mobilization in order to develop existing farmer groups and CBOs
- The capacity building of project partners, project staff and field officers

In order to achieve the goals of the second project phase and ensure sustainability of activities, CBO development will become the major priority. For example, farming CBOs will receive further training and assistance as a coordinated body and the formation of saving and credit groups will be further developed in order to strengthen self help mechanisms and increase the access to capital in remote project areas.

The peace and reconciliation process will also become a priority for the following three years, with a Peace and Reconciliation Advisor from German Agro Action consulting on future project activities.

Project documentation will also remain a priority in the second phase, with plans to work on the documentation of concept development, as well as the implementation of an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system. ■

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Sewalanka is working closely with specialists from long-term partner organisation, German Agro Action (GAA), and a committee of representatives from districts across the country has been established to drive the process at a national level.

A participatory planning workshop involving staff members, CBO representatives and religious leaders from various locations across the country, was held in March.

As a result of these and further discussions between Sewalanka management, a strategic paper will be developed and considered by both internal and external organizations and groups.

This paper will seek to unify current district and project level Sewalanka peace building activities, as well as to ensure the coordination of national level programs.

To date these programs include the Islander Youth Centre (see following page for more information), an inter-religious program and exchange and study visits between Sinhala and Tamil communities.

For more information, contact Mr Abdull Ghaffar Naushad Ahamed, Project Assistant, on 011 254 5362 or at sewahq@sri.lanka.net ■

"...being a part of this program has made us realise that we are all the same - young people wanting to make a difference. It's really good! "



>> Top: Students in the field with NISVA volunteer

>> Middle:

>> Bottom: Ms Kamabishanthini and Mr Bandara

Young working together towards peace

The last four months have been busy for 24 students participating in an intensive six-month leadership and agricultural training program at the Islander Youth Centre in Rajanganaya, near Anaradhapura.

Developed as a training centre to nurture young people from communities across the country, the Islander Youth Centre has been established by Sewalanka Foundation in partnership with German Agro Action (GAA).

The first of its kind in Sri Lanka, the Centre has been developed in response to requests by LTTE and Government officials, community leaders and NGO representatives; to create a platform for open dialogue and relationship building between Sri Lanka's young leaders.

Sewalanka Foundation Chairman Harsha Kumara Navaratne said the Centre would give young people the opportunity to come together to share ideas in a neutral environment.

"We realise that there is currently no platform for young people from different religions, ethnicities and geographical locations to come together and openly and honestly discuss issues affecting their own lives and those of the communities within which they live.

"Through the Islander Youth Centre we hope to fill this gap and give our country's future leaders the opportunity to establish a network through which peace building and participatory development can be practically implemented across the Island," he said.

The Centre's location, on 150 hectares of farmland bordering Wilpattu National Park, was chosen for its central location on the Island and for its farming capacities.

Depending on the season and the division of labor, activities will include assisting resident farmers with chena cultivation, organic paddy farming, homegardening, inland aquaculture, livestock rearing, dairy milking, etc. They will also participate in harvesting, food processing and meal preparation. The philosophy behind this learning is that the shared experience will not only build relationships between the participants, it will also increase their respect for traditional agricultural livelihoods, and contribute to inter-generational understanding.

The first stage of the centre's development; training, research and accommodation facilities; was completed in June 2005. Construction is now underway on a second training facility that will consist of three classrooms, a library and accommodation facilities for 30 students. Once established, this second facility will become the main training area, leaving the current building as a base for administrative staff and a farm office for local farmers to meet and discuss ideas and methods.

For the 24 students currently training at the centre, the six month course has been developed with a slightly different intention in mind. Nominated by Sewalanka field officers from across the country, it is hoped that a number of

these students will take up positions as staff when the Centre opens in June.

With this in mind, the students have been busy learning about various agricultural methods through theoretical and practical study, undergoing language training, improving their hospitality skills and developing their capacities as future trainers and caretakers through activities in conflict resolution, critical problem analyses, consensus building, facilitation and group dynamics, participatory decision making and implementation strategies.

With a focus on organic farming practices that limit the use of chemicals, the initial farm training provided to the students has included tuition from experienced instructors visiting from Japan as volunteers with the Nippon Skilled Volunteers Association (NISVA). Three volunteers have been working with the students since October and will work with Sewalanka for a total of six months.

Regular sporting, drama and leisure activities have assisted in the development of important support networks amongst the group of 20-31 year olds.

When the completed training facility opens in June 2006, a shortened version of the program currently being implemented will be offered in a two-week format to young men and women between the ages of 18-30 years. Participants will include members of civil society organisations who are actively working on social, political, and environmental issues.

Field staff from Sewalanka and other NGOs, local government and LTTE officials will help to identify potential participants for the programs. Two programs will be held each month, with each program catering to 30 students.

A three-day weekend course for specific groups will also be offered at the Centre. These courses will target Sri Lankan schools, university students, young trade union leaders, young religious leaders, and media representatives.

The program objective is based on a multiplier effect; when program participants return to their own organisations, they can share the knowledge gained and will be positioned to apply what they have experienced to fellow community members through their organisations.

Sewalanka field staff will provide follow-up support to participants and will facilitate future exchange visits between participating organisations.

It is hoped that within the first year the Centre will train enough young leaders to impact community-based organisations in all of Sri Lanka's District Secretariat Divisions.

Two students currently training at the centre are Ms R Kamabishanthini and Mr J.M.N Nandana Bandara.

Mr Bandara is a 29 year old from a village in Monaragala and was nominated for the program by a Sewalanka field officer.

"I have really enjoyed the training so far," Mr Bandara said.

"What we are learning is not only important for our own development, but for the benefits it will bring to our villages and districts."

"Being a part of this program has given me the opportunity to meet and make friends with many other young people from different areas, backgrounds and religions," Mr Bandara said.

"Some of us are Tamil and some Sinhalese and many of us have different religions, but being a part of this program has made us realise that we are all the same – young people wanting to make a difference. It's really good!" he said.

Ms Kamabishanthini is a 24 year old from a small community in conflict-affected Nedukenny in Vavuniya, and was put forward by a Sewalanka staff member as a viable candidate for the program.

"Our days are very full but enjoyable," Ms Kamabishanthini said.

"I hope to go back to my village and get a house and create my own garden using the methods I have learnt here.

"I also hope to work with my community to share the information I have received and assist them with their farming practices," she said.

Deputy Director of the Centre, Mr Chandana Mallawarachchi, said that the impending opening would mark an exciting time for Sri Lanka's youth.

"This is just the first stage of what we hope will become a really important national program," Mr Mallawarcchi said.

"Our program mission is to provide a forum for young leaders to analyze national issues, develop consensus building and facilitation skills, and build relationships across the ethnic, religious and geographical divides that have developed in this country," he said.

"The students that we are training now will be at the forefront of this development and should be very proud of themselves and the work that they are doing.

"I have no doubt that this will become an important place for our young people and look forward to playing a part in its development," he said.

Cont. page 07...

"I decided that I wanted to assist with the work Sewalanka was doing because Sewalanka staff are working with the poorest of the poor throughout the country."



- >> Top: Students with instructor at Unatwatuna computer centre
- >> Middle: A student practices her typing skills at the Ahangama centre
- >> Bottom: Mr Sampath meets with a women's coir producing group.

Information technology: Access for all

The development of IT skills is becoming an important asset for Sri Lankans of all ages. Computer literacy not only increases opportunities for young school leavers looking for employment or applying to university, it is also instrumental in expanding income generating opportunities for adults.

With the Tsunami destroying or damaging established communication/IT centres in the country's south, Sewalanka Foundation has developed an IT project funded by Japanese-based NGO, Peaceboat.

Focusing on Tsunami-affected communities, the project consists of three communication centres established in or near temporary shelter sites in Galle District. The centres provide free IT training and practical application opportunities through courses delivered by experienced trainers. The three sites chosen for an initial two-year project period are Unawatuna and Ahangama in Habaraduwa DS Division, and Kahawa in Hikkaduwa GS Division.

Officially opened in October 2005, the sites are equipped with computers and printers and are staffed by trained volunteers from the communities in which the centres are located. With plans to upgrade facilities at each site through the purchase of a combined printer, fax, scanner and copier unit, the training courses will be developed to cover a broad range of IT skills.

The computer centres currently offer up to three courses taught to a standard curriculum developed and monitored by an experienced Sewalanka IT Coordinator. There is a course run for young children (6-12 years), a course for youth and young adults (12-20 years) and an open course for adults and those who have completed the young people's course.

Over 300 students are currently undertaking courses in the centres. Course lengths vary between six and nine months depending on the centre and the course. The courses predominantly focus on familiarising users with basic functions in Microsoft Windows and in the later courses, developing skills in the use of Microsoft Office programs, graphic design programs and internet and email facilities. Skills in scanning, photocopying, printing and faxing are also taught to better equip the students for office work.

Based on the overwhelming success of the current sites, Sewalanka has received funding for an additional four new centres; two in the western district (Colombo and Moratuwa) and two in the south (Kalutara and Tangalle).

For more information, contact Mr Ajith Tennakoon, Regional Coordinator, South on 091 223 3441 or email slfgalle@sltnet.lk

In addition to the Peaceboat centres, Sewalanka Foundation has completed a three-month computer training program in Tengalle.

The centre, funded through Concern, catered to 50 students between the ages of 16 and 22. The three month course was run by an experienced trainer employed by Sewalanka, with students given access to four computers and one printer. Ongoing funding is currently being sought. ■

In the field with a Sewalanka officer

Mr Wellalage Duminda Udaya Sampath has been working as a Sewalanka field officer in Ahangama for the past 13 months. A local to the area, Mr Sampath lost his home when the Tsunami waves struck the coastline, leaving him living in a Sewalanka temporary shelter site with his family.

Having worked to support community groups during previous disasters, Mr Sampath quickly volunteered to assist Sewalanka field staff to perform their duties in the shelter site in which he lived.

Proving himself efficient in his tasks, he was invited by Sewalanka to join the organisation as a field officer. In doing so he undertook training in the development of business plans, as well as comprehensive psychosocial training. He is now working with community-based organisations to assist in the redevelopment of livelihood activities.

His daily duties include regular visits to the communities within which he is working and attending CBO meetings. He is also responsible for identifying and developing small groups of people who are working in similar sectors so that activities are coordinated and opportunities for income generation strengthened.

Once these groups are established, Mr Sampath is able to develop field training programs that include vocational skills training, business and microfinance training.

One local group that Mr Sampath regularly visits is a women's coir producing group in Ahangama. The 33 members of this group have been meeting weekly in three small groups at the local temple for over six months. During their meetings they share experiences and discuss business ideas and prospective markets. Each of the women has just completed a workplan based on training provided by Mr Sampath and he will now work with project coordinators to determine funding based on these plans.

Mr Sampath also works with the Sewalanka Enterprise Development Company (SEDCO), to establish reliable markets for the women's coir production.

When asked, the women said that they had previously found it difficult to find a market for their produce, however by establishing the CBO and working with Sewalanka, they now have a secure market and income.

"My favourite part of the work I do is discussing issues with the Tsunami-affected families in the transitional shelter sites," Mr Sampath said.

"I decided that I wanted to assist with the work Sewalanka is doing because Sewalanka staff are working with the poorest of the poor throughout the country.

"I believe that if we work hard helping the organisation reach its goals through its vision and mission, then there is no limit to where we can go," he said.

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The Islander Youth Centre will be operated with the support of a national advisory council including representatives from all of Sri Lanka's main linguistic and religious groups and geographical regions. Although Sewalanka Foundation will be responsible for maintaining the Centre and facilitating the programs, the overall program will be guided by this council.

Island Youth Centre objectives

1. Increase the capacity of young leaders to facilitate non-violent social change
2. Provide a forum for dialogue and relationship building across conventional ethnic, religious, political, and geographical divides
3. Create a dynamic network of active, committed organizational leaders.

The proposed project is expected to produce a network of young leaders who:

- Value diversity, respect the views of others, build understanding across communities and have a strong culture of dialogue
- Support good governance through critical thinking, creative problem solving, and participatory decision making
- Respect traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices, and value the Island environment
- Can strengthen the countries 30,000 CBOs and small NGOs, facilitate social change within their own communities, and provide the basis for a sustainable peace.

For more information, please contact Mr Abdull Ghaffar Naushad Ahamed, Project Assistant, on 011 254 5362 or at sewahq@sri.lanka.net

"This is very good for me because it will allow me to start weaving again like I was doing before the Tsunami..."



>> Habiba receives her handloom from Sewalanka staff and USAID/Revive representative

Handlooms delivered in the east

Before the Tsunami, weaving formed a traditional part of life for many community members of Marathamunai, a small village located on the east coast of Sri Lanka.

When the Tsunami hit the area in 2004, the waves destroyed not only homes, but the tools with which many had undertaken their livelihood activities; fishing equipment, business premises and stock, and the precious handlooms used for weaving.

Following the emergency relief and rehabilitation phase undertaken by Sewalanka staff in the region, a need for livelihood regeneration support for the weaving community was identified and funding put forward by USAID/Revive.

Upholding Sewalanka's mandate of social mobilisation, staff have since been working with the community to establish and strengthen groups (CBOs) of weavers in the area. In doing so, CBO members are able to work together to determine and develop activities that will most benefit their collective needs and, with support from Sewalanka through grants, micro-finance, training and market development advice, ensure the continuation of important income generating activities.

As a part of this commitment, on January 19, Sewalanka distributed 50 handlooms to the village CBO to assist members with their weaving activities. 800 additional looms will be provided to the village during the course of the project (due for completion in April) along with 150 yarn winding machines and 150 warping machines. Three hundred and ninety three sheds will be constructed to provide shelter for workers. CBOs will also be provided with assistance from SEDCO to establish links with local businesses to allow for the procurement of raw materials and to develop markets in which to sell their products.

A total of 1911 families in Marathumanai will benefit from the livelihood project.

For more information, contact Mr Francis Binney, Regional Coordinator East on 011 254 5362 or at sewahq@sri.lanka.net

Through the eyes of a Marathumanai survivor

The Tsunami took Habiba's sister and her home, leaving her living in a temporary shelter with her own three children, her sister's three children and her aging father. With her husband recuperating in a Colombo hospital from a debilitating sugar disease, Habiba is committed to generating an income to support the household.

In the past year, Habiba joined a CBO and was the recipient of one of the 50 handlooms distributed.

"This is very good for me because it will allow me to start weaving again like I was doing before the Tsunami," Habiba said.

"It means that I can start earning an income again and produce good products that will be sold in the market.

"It is also very good for Marathumanai because weaving has been a part of life here for many generations and I am happy to be able to continue this tradition," she said. ■

Permanent Housing in the North

With the emergency support phase for Tsunami-affected individuals in the North of Sri Lanka successfully completed, Sewalanka is working with CBOs to rehabilitate communities through the construction of permanent houses and the redevelopment of livelihood activities.

The construction of permanent houses is a project that has been developed in partnership with German Agro Action (GAA) with funding from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

As part of the program and in line with the Government-coordinated resettlement program, Sewalanka will build permanent homes for 505 families; 90 houses in the villages of Kottadi and Suppermadam in Point Pedro in the district of Jaffna, 134 houses for the people in Maradankerny (what district is this in?), 181 families in the Mullaitivu District, and the construction of roofs for 100 houses in Kallaru.

Of the 90 houses targeted for Kottadi and Suppermadam, 10 houses have been completed since construction began in November 2005. In Maradenkerny, 30 houses are in progress at a level of 90% progress and 20 constructions in Mullathivu are underway. These houses will be completed and ready for occupation by the end of March 2006, after which a second stage of construction will begin.

All 505 houses are due for completion by August 2006.

Sewalanka's Director of Special Projects, Ms Lakshi Abeyasekara, said that a significant factor contributing to the rapid progress of construction so far had been the commitment of beneficiaries.

"Families have been very active throughout this whole process," Ms Abeyasekara said.

"From the planning, to the actual construction - it is great to see the families out on the sites each day, enthusiastically taking part in the creation of their new homes." she said.

The permanent housing program is being implemented and coordinated by the Sewalanka /GAA Tsunami office in Kilinochchi, in coordination with the Jaffna district office.

A nation-wide livelihood program funded through Norwegian Oxfam (NOVIB) will also ensure activities geared toward developing and maintaining income generation activities within communities. In the north, NOVIB-funded activities will be implemented by Sewalanka staff in Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu.

For more information, contact Ms Lakshi Abeysekara, Regional Coordinator North on 024 222 1354 or at sewavav@sltnet.lk. ■

"From the planning, to the actual construction - it is great to see the families out on the sites each day, enthusiastically taking part in the creation of their new homes."



>> Top: Permanent house during completion

>> Bottom: Completed houses in Kottadi

"I am continually impressed by the dedication of Sewalanka staff and the relationships they have with their communities."



- >> Top: Thomas Ramsson, Tourism Development Advisor
- >> Middle: Psychosocial staff from the south with EMDR trainers
- >> Bottom: Manik Farm opening ceremony attended by GAA representatives and Sewalanka staff (see overleaf for details).

Volunteering at Sewalanka

Volunteers from Britain

Ms Kate Hulbert-Powell joined Sewalanka in January and will work as an advisor to the Social Development Division. Ms Hulbert-Powell comes to Sewalanka from time spent working in Indonesia as a researcher/project designer/supervisor for a research organisation aimed at ensuring appropriate conservation and development initiatives specifically for communities in the Wakatobi marine National Park. She holds a Masters in Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.

Mr Francis Binney also joined Sewalanka in January and will undertake the role of Fisheries Consultant and Regional Coordinator for Ampara and Batticaloa Districts. Mr Binney was trained as a Marine and Freshwater Biologist at the University of Essex, England and has spent the last two years working as a Behavioural Ecologist and later a Fisheries Scientist and Field base co-ordinator of Operation Wallacea in South East Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Volunteers from the Netherlands

Mr Guus Kusters and Mr Maarten Kolk joined Sewalanka Foundation in February and will work as volunteers for a six month period. Designers by trade, Mr Kusters and Mr Kolk will work with local communities on the west and south coast of the country to develop new handicraft products using traditional materials and techniques (eg pottery, handloom, clothing, woodwork, cane).

Volunteering in community-based tourism

Name: Thomas Ramsson

Title: Tourism Development Advisor

Location: Head Office, Galle, site visits

Where have you come to Sri Lanka from?

My hometown is Washington DC, USA.

Length of time you have been with Sewalanka?

Three months

Length of time you plan to be with Sewalanka?

Until tourism projects have been successfully implemented.

Life before Sri Lanka?

Before moving to Sri Lanka, I lived in Seattle, WA for three years. I worked for the British Consulate's Commercial Team (UK Trade & Investment), conducting business development activities on behalf of British SME's operating or seeking to operate in the United States. I worked in many sectors, specializing in renewable energy.

What led you to undertake this role?

After living and travelling abroad, I realized I wanted to work in international development, and when the opportunity came to volunteer with Sewalanka, I realized this was the perfect opportunity to learn all about development work from a grassroots level.

What do you hope to achieve during your time at Sewalanka?

During my time with Sewalanka, I hope to develop Sewalanka's tourism activities in Ampara, Galle and Sinharaja to achieve a scale which provides sustainable alternative income generation for local communities through home stay tourism and community owned and operated tours and activities. I hope the communities we are working with will become a model for future community-based tourism (CBT) activities not only in Sri Lanka, but worldwide.

How do you think this will be achieved?

Prior to my arrival, a considerable amount of tourism work was done by Sewalanka staff and volunteers. They had made linkages with the communities and other stakeholders and put together the framework which we are now using for CBT. This guidance has allowed us to begin developing work plans for each district. I look forward to advising District level staff on the implementation of the work plans in 2006. We are also making linkages with international tour operators and other stakeholders to bring tourists to CBT communities once the training and infrastructure has been completed.

Do you have any reflections on your experience so far?

I am continually impressed by the dedication of Sewalanka staff and the relationships they have with their communities. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country with some of the friendliest people I have met. My favourite Sri Lankan foods are rice and curry, especially red rice and parippu!

I never realized how many people can fit on a bus until I came to Sri Lanka! ■

Meetings

A coordination meeting between Sewalanka and German Agro Action staff was held in Sewalanka Office premises at Vavuniya in February. The meeting provided a forum for information sharing, project (Sewalanka/GAA projects) progress reports, and discussions surrounding the current security situation in the area.

Sewalanka's Chairman, District Directors/Project Managers of Mannar, Trincomalee, Kilinochchi, Mullaittivu, Jaffna and Vavuniya and all expatriate staff of GAA were present at the meeting. ■

Training

Eco-tourism training

Sewalanka Foundation, in partnership with ICEI (Istituto Cooperazione Economica Internazionale), is developing community based tourism initiatives in Ampara District. While Sewalanka will conduct social mobilization, ICEI will train 20 community members as guides and provide them with an office and equipment to conduct CBT tours.

To train the 20 community members, ICEI contracted Sri Lanka Eco-Tourism Foundation to develop a 'train the trainers' program for five local candidates. Sewalanka Ampara District Coordinator, H.G.I.J Harshana was selected by ICEI to participate in this program.

Harshana participated in a two-week training program at the end of February, at which he was not only provided with training as a tour guide, but the skills that will enable him to train local guides in Ampara District. Harshana will specialize in archaeological tours, but has also learnt a host of skills including knowledge of history, flora & fauna, cultural awareness, and environmental conservation. ■

Psychosocial training in the south

Sewalanka's southern psychosocial staff took part in the first week of a two week Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) training program at Sahanaya Institute of Mental Health's Gorakana training facility in February.

The program provided the participants with a better understanding of the EDMR method (clinical treatment to assist people who have experienced psychological difficulties as a result of a traumatic experience) and gave them the skills with which to use the method as a form of psychotherapy.

Participants included psychosocial focal point staff from Kalutera, Galle, Matara, Hambantota and Colombo.

The second part of the program will be held at the end of April.

Two participants from the course were selected to take part in the Child & Family Resilience Project; a 'train the trainer' program which addresses psychosocial needs and increases the capacity to support, treat and train others.

The participants join 78 others on the four-week intensive training course which will result in a certificate as level one trainers who will be considered 'Expert Trainers in psychosocial care.' ■

Livelihood development training

Sewalanka's livelihood development officers and coordinators have been busy undergoing training to ensure that beneficiaries are receiving professional advice and support for their livelihood activities.

Three main training programs have been developed and implemented (or are in the process of implementation), to ensure that every stage of the livelihood redevelopment process has been catered to.

Pre-feasibility training

This gives staff the ability to confidently identify appropriate beneficiaries and projects for the provision of grants and loans. This training program was completed mid 2005, with ____ staff members receiving training.

Feasibility study and business planning

Provides staff with the skills to advise on the planning and implementation of business ideas. Includes financial planning, strategy development, production, management and marketing. This training program was completed mid 2005, with ____ staff members receiving training.

Small business counselling

Develops the skills necessary to provide advice and support for operational businesses. Using diagnostic tools, staff are able to confidently assist beneficiaries in evaluating their businesses and identify problems and potential solutions.

This six-day training course was provided to 21 participants from the southern region in March, with courses planned for the eastern and northern regions by the end of April.

Entrepreneurship training program

Based upon CEFE methodology, this training program will be presented by business experts and will provide participants with an understanding of entrepreneurship training practices.

This course was held in the east in March.

Sub-office opening

Sewalanka celebrated the opening of its sixth sub-office (the second Sewalanka-owned office) in the Tamil community of Thambatti, Ampara, with a traditional ceremony on 30 January.

Alongside Sewalanka Chairman Harsha Kumara Navaratne, 54 elderly community members and over 100 staff members watched as milk was boiled over in line with Hindu custom, an oil lamp lit and a ribbon cut by Sewalanka's Secretary to the Chairman, Ms A.M.R.K Adikarinyake .

The auspicious number 54 was chosen in line with the second celebration of the day, the 54th birthday of Mr Navaratne.

Following the ceremony, the first meeting was held in the building's conference room, with presentations given by Mr Navaratne and senior Sewalanka staff.

The two storey building will provide a base for field coordinators in the east district, a manager, an administrative officer and support staff. It has training facilities and three guest rooms to accommodate those utilising the facilities. ■



- >> Top: A child completes the formalities during the opening of the Ampara transit house
- >> Middle: One of the newly constructed bridges in Deniyaya
- >> Bottom: Women from the Moratuwa sewing class display their products.

Opening transit house for abused children in Ampara district

Sewalanka staff joined with UNICEF staff, government officials and Ampara community members to celebrate the opening of the district's first safe transit house for children.

A child-friendly environment, the house is designed to provide a temporary home for abused children between the ages of six-19 years who are unable to live with their families or in alternative care.

The official opening ceremony for the house, held on 9 January, included the hindu custom of boiling milk over, the Sinhala tradition of lighting an oil lamp, a bible reading to represent the Christian faith and a ribbon cutting ceremony. Song and dance performances were also given by children from the local community.

Funded by UNICEF, the home has the facilities to cater for 12 children at any one time – six male and six female, with a maximum length of stay at three months per child.

Whilst a manager and two caretakers will provide day-to-day care for the house and its occupants, the District Child Protection Committee; a committee made up of psychologists, government and police representatives, and UNICEF and Sewalanka staff; will be responsible for the management of the project.

Sewalanka Ampara will provide administrative support, training opportunities for staff and will remain responsible for the maintenance of the property. ■

Bridges and community centre completed

During the unusually heavy monsoon rains of May 2003, the villages near the Sinharaja Forest Reserve entrance in the Deniyaya area of Matara District were severely struck by a combination of floods and landslides.

Thousands of people were affected by the floods that washed away homes, public buildings and the bridges that formed vital links to agriculture, markets, schools and other communities.

Already working in the area on the Sinharaja Buffer Zone projects and the Sinharaja Village Trust, Sewalanka, with the assistance of the Royal Danish Embassy (New Delhi), responded immediately to the disaster through the provision of humanitarian relief via the community's established CBOs.

In June 2004, Sewalanka formed a partnership with the Japanese Government and the People of Japan (through the Japanese Embassy in Sri Lanka) to carry out the 'Restoration of Basic Facilities Affected by Floods/Landslides in Matara' project. This project involved the reconstruction of five bridges in Mederipitiya, Weligepitiyawatta and Aluthgedara, Kiriwalagama and Kiriweldola villages and the construction of a community centre/pre-school at Mederipitiya village.

Following the completion of construction in October 2005, an official opening of each of the five bridges and the community centre/preschool was held on 7 February 2006.

Along with speeches and the cutting of a ribbon at each site, community members shared traditional and modern dance and song performances. Sewalanka staff congratulated the communities for their involvement at every stage of the project development and implementation. (The communities took part in project planning, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation, and teams from each village worked alongside experts in the construction process.) ■

Sewing training in Moratuwa

A fashion parade and speeches marked the completion of a three-month sewing course held in a Sewalanka/Concern temporary shelter site in Moratuwa, on the country's west coast.

Dressed in blouses, skirts and dresses, the 14 participants modelled their bright creations to an audience of CBO members, donor representatives and Sewalanka staff. Certificates were presented to all participants and the official pledge of an electric sewing machine for the future use of the community was given by Nippon Skilled Volunteers Association (NISVA) representative, Mr Takao Makino.

Combining a livelihood development program and a 'train the trainer' initiative, the project has been implemented to develop the income generating ability of local women through the production and sale of clothing, as well as to provide already competent sewers with the skills and confidence to conduct similar training courses in communities across the country.

Course participants included women from the adjacent Sunandopanda post-Tsunami transitional shelter site and a number of experienced sewers from CBOs based in Ampara, Galle and Kalutara. NISVA provided the participants with experienced instructors, sewing machines, cloth and the necessary tools with which to undertake their tasks.

During the ceremony, the women presented the children of the local community with pants and shirts sewn during the course.

The project was initiated through a partnership between Sewalanka and Japanese NGO Nippon. Identifying the need to bring skilled volunteers over from Japan to provide expertise to local villages, six volunteers from NISVA arrived in Sri Lanka in October 2005 – three to work for six months on an agricultural program in Anaradhapura and three to work on the sewing project in Moratuwa.

Sewalanka is currently replicating the project in Galle and will continue to adapt and implement the project in a number of communities across the country. ■

School opening for Menik Farm

The Menik Farm community celebrated the official opening of their new school on 11 February. Mr Heinz Seidler, German Agro Action (GAA) Country Representative and the zonal Director of Education, Vavuniya, officially opened the building during a small ceremony.

The German Ministry for Economic Cooperation Development (BMZ)-funded building is the second school building constructed in the past two years by Sewalanka Foundation and GAA. It comes as part of the Returnee communities through SLF/GAA resettlement program. ■

Building a stronger future

Sewalanka Foundation has embarked on a national capacity building and strengthening exercise to ensure the sustainability of its services as one of the country's largest NGOs.

In just 16 months, Sewalanka Foundation has grown from an organisation with 380 staff and financial resources totalling Rs.365 million, to a team of over 800 with accrued project funding of Rs.216 billion.

To discuss the future of the rapidly expanding organisation, a national planning workshop was held in March 2005. By the conclusion of the meeting, participants had identified the need to develop a program that would expand the capacity of the organisation to support current and future growth.

As a result, Sewalanka Foundation has enlisted the services of MDF South Asia; a consultancy offering training and services to enhance organisations within the development sector.

Sewalanka Foundation Chairman Mr Harsha Kumara Navaratne said he was confident that the process would ensure the long term sustainability of Sewalanka's services.

"We have grown enormously as an organisation in a very short period and believe that it is vital to strategically develop our capacity to support this growth," Mr Navaratne said.

"Sewalanka's mission has and always will be to enhance the capacity of rural communities," Mr Navaratne said.

"The devastation caused by the Tsunami in 2004 shattered thousands of communities and left families with the difficult task of rebuilding their lives.

"To ensure that we can continue to provide the highest quality of support and assistance to these communities, and at the same time maintain our commitment to conflict-affected families in the north and east, we are working towards developing and strengthening our current structure, processes and systems," he said.

"The process we have chosen focuses heavily on participation from staff across the country and at every level of the organisational structure.

"We realize that this is not something that management alone can effectively achieve. Future planning for Sewalanka needs to come from within the organisation so that we can continue to grow and prosper as an effective and accountable NGO," he said.

So far:

Five regional workshops have been held throughout the country; in Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Trincomalee and Vavuniya.

A strategic orientation workshop has also been held to consolidate findings from the regional workshops. Once consolidated, the findings will be considered by senior management and an implementation plan put forward, adopted upon consensus and implemented.

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