



SEWALANKA FOUNDATION

Supporting Returnee Communities

Since the initiation of the peace process last year, an increasing number of displaced families are now returning to their original villages. The Security Authorities in Vavuniya have now approved and cleared certain areas previously known as the High Security Zone. These areas are now open for resettlement.

Sewalanka recently launched two projects in the North with partners Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German Agro Action-GAA), to provide basic assistance to enable recent returnees to resettle in their places of origin. The European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) have provided funding for these projects.

The ECHO project will assist 1700 returnee families in the Division of Vavuniya and in Pallai in the Kilinochchi District. The BMZ project concentrates mainly in the recently cleared High Security Zone in Vavuniya in the Government of Sri Lanka controlled areas. This project will support 1500 families to resettle following more than eight years of displacement. The main villages where families are returning are the Omanthai Maradankulam areas in Vavuniya division and the Kokeliya Pudiyasinnakulam and Palleoruwa areas in Vavuniya South.

The projects will provide basic shelter using a steel piping structure, thatched palm leaves (cadjan) for the roofing and cemented floors. The beneficiaries are assisted with tools and kitchen utensils and will start agricultural production in the Maha season with assistance for paddy

and vegetable cultivation. The basic tool kits provided have assisted families to clear the land and prepare them for building the shelter. Already, around 700 families have been assisted to build their shelters. The beneficiaries are producing the clay bricks for the shelter walls as their contribution to the project. Self-help groups are also formed to assist in the implementation.

The BMZ funded project will build a new school for Omanthai to replace the previous building that was completely destroyed in the conflict. It is anticipated that the revival of educational facilities will also stabilise the resettlements.

Five tanks are to be rehabilitated under the ECHO funding, which will assist farmers to re-cultivate paddy lands to ensure food security and provide a limited income. ■

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a future in fish culture?

Research by government departments and universities in the mid 1980's indicted that seasonal minor irrigation tanks offered considerable potential for fish culture. A 'seasonal tank' has an area of less than 80 ha and dries out for a part of the year. Over the past four years Sewalanka Foundation has been testing the viability of fish culture in seasonal minor irrigation tanks, to generate income for farmers and a cheap source of fish protein (food security) for villages predominantly in the dry zone.

Under programs co-financed by the British High Commission, OXFAM, Integrated Rural Development project, UNHCR and CARE, twenty three minor irrigation tanks, in four districts, have now been stocked with various combinations of Indian and Chinese carps and tilapia, by local farmers with the assistance of the National Aquaculture Development Authority. A preliminary analysis of the data collected from these stocking trials indicates that under optimal conditions:

- Fish productivity can reach as much as 675 kgs per ha
- Farmers can generate an income of as much as Rs20,000 per ha (Gross Profit) from the sale of fish caught from the tank



Releasing fingerlings: Regional Aquaculture Extension Officer, Mr J.A Aththula assists the fisherman at Katenwewa in Hambantota

While these results are encouraging in terms of the twin objectives of the stocking programmes – income generation and food security – it has not been possible to repeat each and every stocking trial. In fact only 20% of the 26 stocking trials conducted so far have generated a Gross Profit for the farmers concerned. The majority of stocking trials – 80% - have been a failure in terms of profits. Why? Two issues have repeatedly undermined the success of stocking trials.

Technical issues relating to tank suitability and the availability of fish fingerlings have caused the failure of several stocking trials. In particular water levels remaining too high have hindered farmers' efforts to catch fish. In other instances a lack of rainfall has caused stocked tanks to dry out too swiftly, resulting in fish not reaching an adequate size. A limited supply of fingerlings and or an insufficient variety of fingerlings, has also contributed to the failure of several of the stocking programs.

A second set of issues contributing to the failure of stocking programs are 'social issues'. Seasonal minor irrigation tanks are common property resources, managed by the local Farmers' Organisation, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agrarian Development. The priority use of the tank is for the irrigation of rice, with secondary uses such as bathing, water-



Hambantota: Fishing using a dragnet at Maha Indiwewa

Supporting Returning Communities



Harvesting: the mature fingerlings using a dragnet

ing cattle and irrigating non-rice crops given a lesser priority. Although subsistence fishing is common in many tanks it is not traditionally important and no local mechanism exists for managing fishing in seasonal tanks. Rapidly increasing the value of the tank as a resource, through the introduction of fish, can create considerable degrees of social conflict within a village and also between villages.

Several stocking programs have failed due to disputes between villagers over who has the right to harvest stocked fish. In other instances poachers from other villages have descended on a stocked tank and harvested most of the fish.

Sewalanka Foundation staff have ascended a steep learning curve over the last four years. From knowing very little about fish culture in seasonal tanks, many staff are now highly skilled in aquaculture extension. These skills and the experiences gained by Sewalanka Foundation over the last four years are now being put to use in a further series of stocking trials in Hambantota and Moneragala districts, in a project co-financed by the UN's World Food Programme.

The project plans to stock a total of fourteen tanks between 2002 and 2004: generating income for farmers and a cheap source of fish protein for local villagers. The lessons learnt from the successes and failures of earlier stocking programs have been incorporated into the new project design. Tank selection criteria have been revised and a new approach to resolving 'social issues' has been devised.



Transporting fingerlings: Small Fisherman's Federation at Nillumwewa

The results of these new stocking trials will clarify the extent of the 'opportunity' observed by researchers twenty years ago. One way or another we will know whether there is a future for fish culture in seasonal minor irrigation tanks. ■



Employing Women: The community contribute by making bricks for their shelters at Pallaiketheikulam



Working in teams: Shelter construction is underway in Maligai with ECHO funding assistance



Temporary shelter: A new shelter built with BMZ funding stands alongside houses bombed during the conflict

Building strong CBO's for Community Development

Two things were immediately apparent when I visited the Sewalanka Hatton Office. The first is that it is the smallest Sewalanka Office in the country and is lacking in the most basic of resources. The second is that this has in no way diminished the dedication and achievements of the two strong and determined women who coordinate the office.

The Sewalanka Workers Development Center in Hatton is run on a shoestring administrative budget coordinated by Ms Sivapackiam and Ms Felistias who have 15 and 7 years experience respectively in working with tea plantation workers. Their office, a small room inside a family house, is decorated with research and monitoring charts and it is clear that the women take pride in maintaining relevant up-to-date information.

Without any project funding, Ms Sivapackiam has coordinated the office since 1994. She has evidentially built up great respect with plantation workers and has firmly established Community Based Organisations (CBO's) in 12 tea estates. Self-sustaining savings and credit programs have been initiated through



Mr and Mrs Chandrakumar: received a Rs10,000 loan from their Sewa Society group three years ago to purchase two goats. If they sold all of their goats they would double their yearly income.

all 12 CBO's. Additionally, Ms Sivapackiam coordinates awareness, sporting and cultural events with the CBO's. Without any donor funding she is able to find sponsorship for just a few events a year, which rotate from estate to estate.

Ms Felisitas, who has been working at the Hatton Sewalanka office for the past year, says, "Ms Sivapackiam is really a very impressive character. If she has to fund the cultural and awareness events herself because the sponsorship was not enough, then she will do so. The people in the estates have so much respect for her because she has built up trust with them throughout the years".

In the Stockholm Estate, the Sewa Society CBO has 85 members. The CBO has established working groups for Education, Cultural, Economic and Community Development as well as a group for Labour Laws and Rights. These groups are assisted to conduct activities such as awareness, cultural and sports programs as well as an annual Women's Day Program. The group also manages an ongoing thrift, savings and credit program.

As of March 2003, the Stockholm Savings and Credit members had accumulated more than Rs43, 000 in their savings account.



Harsh Realities: With a daily income of RS121, saving is not an easy task whilst getting a loan from a private institution is near impossible.



Sewalanka Volunteer: Vijay Kumari, discusses loan repayments with Krisna Veni, who received a Rs5,000 loan to start a small shop

In turn, they had lent Rs42,000 for small enterprises including sheep and goat rearing, cattle farming, small business and home gardening.

Mr and Mrs Chandrakumar received a Rs10,000 loan from the group three years ago to purchase two goats. They have since bred and sold ten goats with a net profit of Rs40,000. They now have six goats and plan to take another loan for broiler chickens. "This business has made a big difference for my family. Even now if I sell the goats I will earn the salary I would get for working one year, six days a week labouring in the tea estate", explains Mr Chandrakumar.

Krisna Veni, a 27 year old woman with two small children, received a Rs5,000 loan to buy the merchandise to open a small general goods store. She says that without the loan, she would probably have been forced to apply for a loan from a formal institution. "If I did manage to find someone to loan the money I would have been forced to pay extortionate interest rates and it would have been very difficult for me."

Vijay Kumari, an intelligent and confident 23 year old tea plucker, has worked as the Sewa Society volunteer at the Stockholm Estate for the past five years. Her job involves collecting savings deposits and loan repayments, informing the community of the benefits of loans and savings and mobilising the community to participate in awareness training and events.

Ms Kumari says she enjoys the job because it provides her with the "freedom to meet and talk with the people on the estate". She says the training she has received from Sewalanka in social mobilisation and book keeping has given her skills that she hopes will lead her to opportunities other than plucking tea. She also works as a health volunteer for another NGO that works on the estate.

When asked about the visible benefits of the savings and credit program for the estate workers, Ms Kumari says low interest rates are the major benefit for the community who would largely be unable to secure small loans from banks. In regards to savings, she says that the leap in savings society members—from 30 to 85 in just a few years—is clear evidence that people are benefiting.

"If people had to travel to the nearest bank from here it would cost them Rs40 in bus travel and it would take a whole day", said Ms Kumari. People here only earn Rs121 per day so they can't save a lot. But with this program they can put away a little each week and they then have the opportunity to collect interest and to take out loans. This makes a big difference to us."

With twelve active and strong CBO's in twelve tea estates, the Hatton Office now plans to expand its operations. Participatory Needs assessments have been conducted in all 12 estates and these will be used to inform development projects that aim to address the health, economic, education and social development needs of plantation workers. ■

FAIR TRADE: Giving back to the Workers

In the Stockholm tea estate in Hatton, where Sewalanka Foundation has established a Community Based Organisation that manages a savings and credit program, "Fair Trade" is fostering impressive social change for the tea plantation workers.

The Fairtrade Foundation is the UK member of Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) based in Bonn, Germany. They pay Fairtrade tea producers between \$0.50-\$1 Euro for every kilo of tea purchased. Since it has been buying from the Stockholm estate in 1995, around 8 million Rupees has been channeled to a fund which is managed by a Joint Body comprising of representatives of management and workers.

The fund has enabled the community to establish electricity for three divisions on the estate and buy an ambulance for emergency purposes. Computer and vocational training for school graduates will also commence soon.

Dr Perera, who works at the estate medical clinic, volunteers for the community joint body. "It's clear to me that this fund has meant that this estate has better facilities for the workers than any other estate in the area", he says.

With Fair Trade benefits in this estate having a real impact on improving the lives of tea estate workers and their families, the message is clear for consumers with conscience: buy Fair Trade Products. You can read more about the Fair Trade Foundation at: www.fairtrade.org.uk

Community-Based Conservation

The Sinharaja Forest Reserve is Sri Lanka's last viable remnant of virgin tropical rainforest. The forest has been internationally recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) for its biodiversity and high number of endemic species. Despite this international status and strict legal protection of the forest under national law, forest resources continue to be degraded at an alarming rate.

The districts bordering the Sinharaja WHS are among the most densely populated in the country, but until recently, very few families lived in the immediate vicinity of the forest reserve, the Sinharaja 'buffer zone.' There were no roads into the area, and the small number of established villages could only be reached after many hours of hiking on forest footpaths. With little access to government services or external markets, these isolated communities depended on *hena* cultivation, home gardens, and forest products to meet their subsistence needs.

Over the past 15 years, the promotion of low-country tea cultivation and the opening of new roads have set in motion dramatic changes in the Sinharaja buffer zone. Settlers have flooded into the area and population pressure has increased. The high profit margin of tea has improved living standards, but it has also provided tremendous incentive for the clearing of home gardens and natural forest. Today, most of Sinharaja villagers are involved in smallholder tea cultivation, and the WHS boundary is a stark line between rich rainforest and monoculture tea fields.



Pure Kittel treacle: A Sinharaja Conservation Product

In September 2001, Sewalanka Foundation (SLF) assumed management responsibilities for an environmental conservation project in the Sinharaja buffer zone and began operating from a field office in Deniyaya, Matara District. The program faced many initial challenges. Communities in the area distrusted NGOs because they felt outside organizations were only trying to "sell Sinharaja."

In response to these concerns, SLF has developed a community-based conservation strategy, which focuses on mobilising Sinharaja buffer zone communities



DSCC members: at an Agroforestry training program

around environmental issues, strengthening their institutional capacities at the village and regional level, and linking them to external markets, information, and resource persons.

Last December representatives from village-level organisations in ten communities joined together to form the Deniyaya Sinharaja Conservation Committee (DSCC). The DSCC is in the process of registering as a People's Company and is assuming responsibility for coordination of conservation-based activities in the Deniyaya area.

With the help of SLF staff, DSCC members have started an agroforestry program for local tea smallholders that focuses on reducing the use of agrochemicals, introducing soil conservation measures, and increasing the diversity of the tea fields through intercropping. They plan to market the tea directly as a conservation product and use a portion of the proceeds to shift to organic tea production.

SLF and the DSCC are also trying to develop and support small enterprises that provide an environmentally sound alternative to tea production. Pure Sinharaja kithul treacle is being collected, processed and bottled by DSCC members. SLF and the DSCC are working with government representatives to establish village collection centers, which will facilitate the collection and marketing of home garden products such as ornamental plants, pepper, *ambum*, and areca nuts.

SLF has also been involved in reforestation and environmental awareness activities in the area. Mr. Lionel Wijesinghe, a SLF staff member and renowned Sri Lankan artist, has worked with local art teachers to develop a Sinharaja art program for 50



Art Exhibition: Honorable Minister Sagala Ratnayake discusses the rainforest-inspired artwork

schoolchildren and school leavers. In March, an exhibition was held in Deniyaya town to showcase the children's rainforest-inspired artwork. The exhibition, *Sinharaja Through Our Children's Eyes*, was opened by Honorable Minister Sagala Ratnayake and attracted more than 1,000 visitors from the Deniyaya region. A Colombo exhibition is planned for August.

In February, SLF opened a sub-office at the Kudawa forest entrance in Ratnapura District. The mobilisation process initiated in Deniyaya is now being expanded to the Kalawana region of the Sinharaja buffer zone. Cross-community discussions are being held, and DSCC members have traveled to the area to share their experiences with Kalawana community groups.

Sewalanka recently received funding through the UNDP Global Environmental Facility Small Grants Program to continue its work in the Sinharaja buffer zone. By building up self-sufficient local organisations capable of designing, managing and monitoring their own environmentally based economic activities and awareness programs, the project hopes to ensure the sustainability of conservation efforts in the Sinharaja buffer zone. ■

Sewalanka to be taken into German's homes and hearts

Reknown German singer, Claudia Jung, visited German Agro Action (GAA) / Sewalanka Foundation projects in Vavuniya in July to narrate a short documentary about the work of GAA in Sri Lanka. Jung was accompanied by the Michael von Lingen Film Production Team and two members of GAA, Barbara Chambers and Brigitte Schmitz.

The documentary will feature in an annual GAA TV Gala program on the German ZDF channel which aims to raise funds

for and increase the awareness of the work of GAA in developing countries. More than 6 million viewers are expected to tune in to this special event providing excellent exposure for the Sewalanka/GAA partnership.

The two hour Gala features a number of well-known German singers and personalities. This years Gala in October will feature Claudia Jung who will sing and narrate her impressions and experience of visiting GAA/Sewalanka projects in Vavuniya.



German Singer: Claudia Jung meets school children in Vavuniya

Jung and the documentary team visited areas of Vavuniya District in the vicinity of Omanthai and Maligai. This entire area, previous a high security zone, was only recently declared free for re-settlement. GAA and SLF are now assisting communities returning to the area to build temporary shelters and to restart agricultural production. Funding for

these projects is provided by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ).

Each year the Gala features three short documentaries that explain the situation of the communities GAA are working with. The point of this, says Chambers, is to bring the harsh realities of poverty into the homes of the German public. "Seeing is believing. We cannot take the entire German pub-



Taking Vavuniya to Germany: the filmcrew record the realities of life in Omanthai

lic to Sri Lanka to see our work but through this film on German TV and by showing a famous star visiting the project sites, we can bring people closer to the realities of life in the previous conflict area of the North".

Chambers says Jung was shocked by the massive destruction and by the suffering of people who had been repeatedly displaced because of the conflict. But she adds that Jung was also "most impressed with the work of GAA and Sewalanka and she deeply admired the determination of those she met to return to their home lands and to rebuild their ruined lives and country – and their determination for peace". ■

EVENTS & WORKSHOPS

National Wetlands Symposium

Sewalanka staff participated in the IUCN coordinated national Wetlands Symposium held at BMICH July 20th.

Sustainable Agriculture

A Field Day was held on Saturday 19 July 2003 at Anuradhapura Demonstration Plot attended by over 40 senior Sewalanka staff members and experienced farmers from Ampara, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee, Anuradhapura, Vavuniya, Jaffna, Puttalam and Kurunegala. The purpose of the field day was to establish a national network of innovative farmers who are practicing sustainable methods of agriculture. During the day, the experienced farmers shared their problems and some of the solutions they had found through experimenting.

SLF North Western and North Central Provinces

District Directors and staff from Sewalanka Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Puttalam offices held a one day workshop on the 27th June. The workshop had the purpose of integrating Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Puttalam, Kurunegala and Matale Districts into a single zone. The workshop identified viable opportunities and focus areas for the zone and formed an action plan to ensure that each of the districts within the zone have the capacity to work as self-reliant units.

Ryukoko University Study

Sewalanka assisted Professor Hishashi and a team from Ryukoko University, Japan on a study mission to Vavuniya, Killinochi and Jaffna in July.

JICA fact finding mission

In July, Sewalanka staff assisted the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on a fact finding mission to the North, East and South. The JICA team was led by special coordinator, Ms Isa Imazato.

Sewalanka will also coordinate JICA field visits in August to Vavuniya and Mannar where the JICA team will visit IDP villages.

Agriculture Study

In September, Sewalanka will coordinate a study of the Agriculture sector in Sri Lanka. The study will be conducted by the International Development Center of Japan (IDCJ). All Sewalanka districts will support the study mission.

Yokohama Youth Chamber of Commerce

Mr M. Yoshitaka and Mr D. Eisuke from the Japanese Youth Chamber of Commerce visited the Ampara District Office in July to attend a ceremony at Mandalagama School. The ceremony celebrated the cultural exchange of children's drawing between the children of Yokohama City in Japan and the children at Mandalagama School.

The Mandalagama children's drawings depicted their life in the village and were developed as part of the partnership project between Sewalanka and Save the Children, *Community Development through Children's Participation at Mandalagama School*. The drawings will return to Japan to form part of a larger cultural project in Yokohama on Sri Lanka.

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SEWALANKA Newsletter

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