

A REPORT OF ACTIVITIES 2013

The historical factor, political development, economic expansion etc placed the plantation community out of the mainstream development of this country and they could not share the benefits of these developments equally as citizens of this country.

Though there have been remarkable progress in other plantation areas after the sixties(1960) Gonapitiya and Gonakelle were far behind in terms of developments. One of the major obstacle was the lack of educational facilities which is the key for all the other developments. So we had decided to focus our full attention and energy on education and incorporated the factors like social awareness, health, economic factors, political rights etc to this important aspect. We used education as the major tool to reach the society to address the problems.

In the first phase of the period under review we tried to create awareness among the parents of the children by conducting workshops and seminars and also we tried to include other workers as well in these programmes. Now the attendance for the parents meetings and seminars are remarkable. Specially the women play an active role in organising parents meetings and other functions connected with religion and festivals. At present the parents give full support and cooperation in the work.

The teachers and field staff make periodic visits to the students homes and visit also the other workers in the estates and discuss about the students progress as well as about our work. This allows us to get a feedback in return for our work so that we can change the direction if there is a need. As workers of Sandanam Institute we give suggestions and directions for the parents to arrange functions connected with international women's day, children's day etc. These functions were well organised and worked out with the help of our staff. These functions create opportunities to carry the message to the society.

Our work for **2013** started with a vision of a society where the benefits would be shared equally irrespective of race, religion, gender etc.

Our area is a remote backward place in the plantation. There is a good student community and working class people who were in badly need of among other services photocopying service. Our centre caters the people and it is a service we do for minimum cost. We also maintain a library where a small amount of books are available for children and youths. We also provide news papers for the readers who come to the Centre.

Saving Scheme

There is a regular saving scheme both in Gonapitiya and Gonakelle where every child is given a Till (money-box) to cultivate a habit in saving. When the Till is filled, the money is deposited in the child's name. When the student leaves the school the saving scheme continues.

Donations

Two computers (a stationary and a portable) were donated by Niran Sandanam and his colleagues from their company Dotone AB, Stockholm, Sweden. This would facilitate the children learn and develop their computer skills.

Work with the youths

Youths and children are the cream of the society and the part they play in the society is minimal since no opportunities are offered to them in terms of their need. We get involved with them directly and indirectly. We try to get them involved in most of our work. Most of the youths are driven towards liquor, use of tobacco and some other unruly activities mostly due to lack of needful entertainment or possibilities for recreation. So we have introduced hardball Cricket for youths and youngsters under the age of 14. The youths and children never had an opportunity to handle hard ball since they do not have the finance to buy the materials needed for this game which otherwise is very popular in the country. So during Dr .Sandanam's visit in the early part of the year, he bought the necessary materials and coached the selected teams and made them participate in tournaments in this area. Three teams of boys of 9 – 14 years were also coached and a tournament for them was arranged but in softball cricket because they were not yet ready with hard ball training. It was a well appreciated tournament.

The youths were given awareness information on the negative effects of alcohol and smoking.

Education

It is well known that education is the key to all developments, but the situation in the plantation is not up to the mark compared to the urban and rural sector or other communities. The plantations (Estates) are under the direct control of the management of companies and the plantation community is structurally marginalized. So we make use the preschools as the entry points to reach the workers where we give awareness in health, social problems and not least the need of education. Our main target is the under 21 years group who will be instruments to carry messages to the society. We believe that we can save these children from abuses and train them to guide the society in future.

In our two preschools there are about 90 children. Besides the preschool, we give complementary education, especially in Maths, English and Science. This complementary education is worked out in collaboration with the three secondary schools. Barathy Vidyalayam (Gonakelle), Princess College (Gonapitiya) and Sinhala Vidyalaya (Gonakelle). In Gonakelle adjoining the existing preschool building, a separate building is in progress which will be furnished according to the need.. This part of the building will also be used for this complementary education. Evening class rooms and a well designed music studio are being constructed. One of our students who got qualified in music in India will take care of the studio and conduct music classes in the future. For music interested persons in the area or from outside, there will be possibilities to produce his/her own music under the muscians guidance.

Scholarships

There are no science and commerce streams in the area for Advanced level students. So some needy

poor students are selected on the basis of their O/L results and sent to schools where these subjects are taught. We giving six scholarships to study Science and Maths. The tuition fees and boarding fees are met by the Sandanam Institute. One special student completed his music studies in India. Now he will be working in the institute's music studio once it is completed. Another one of our scholarship students is selected to the university to follow Engineering. Our first girl student has completed her advanced level and she either will enter the university or go to College of Education to follow a teacher training course. We meet the students as often as possible and give them guidance and monitor them in their studies. We also meet the parents of these students to get their viewpoint.

Our preschool teachers are continuously taking part in the training camps and workshops conducted by the Pradeshya Sabhas (local bodies) AGA office.

Exposure programmes

The staff, students and parents were taken on an excursion to Ella by the train in the early part of the year.

Two children's fairs were conducted in the middle part of the year. The children, parents and well wishers took part very actively in these events where the children brought hand made things and sold them in the fair which was a good experience for the students.

Some of the staff and students were taken to WOFORD in Vavunia on a study-tour. They were very enthusiastic and have produced their own report about the trip and the work done at this center.

Exhibition

A grand exhibition was organized by Sandanam Institute in July. A great variety of exhibits were placed for the public. The students, staff and parents displayed their creations. There were arts, handicrafts, sewings, knittings, fabric paintings etc. The exhibition went on for three days and it attracted a great crowd. It was appreciated and commended by many visitors. We must say it was an excellent show of talents we had seen.

Cultural events

We have given due importance for cultural events like Saraswathy pooja –which is connected to education and Kaman Koothu (a kind of folklore drama) which is quite unique in this area. Steps will be taken to introduce and train youngsters in this field since the old traditions are gradually disappearing. When our music section is completed a new format will be designed to renew the tradition of Kaman Koothu.

Though it seems Saraswathy pooja is more connected to religion, it has a meaningful connection with education. The goddess Saraswathy is the symbol of education (learning). It is purely arranged and worked out by the parents. Here the first letter of the alphabets is taught to introduce the child to the school system as well as to socialise the child to mingle in the society. The youths usually give their support to make the Saraswathy pooja a success.

Annual concert and awarding ceremonies

The annual concert was staged at Gonapitiya Princess College where students who had completed 3 years of preschool training were given a farewell and awarded the certificates and gifts. All the other students were given gifts. Many people took part in the function.

CHILDRENS DAY

Was celebrated in a simple way to highlight the issues that children face at school, home and in the society.

Using local resources during the period

We have purchased a piece of land in Gonapitiya this year and we hope that we can build a more spacier school for the preschool children. A small playground is also in our plan.

The Pradeshya Saba(local council) and Government agent are a great source of help for us. There is a training programme for preschool teachers. It is handled by the G.A's office and our teachers take part regularly.

Nutrition

Malnutrition is a major problem in the plantation. So our effective nutrition programme is worked out in bot hour preschools. While providing nutrition for the children we create an awareness among the parents to follow up a nutrition practice at home.

Staff training

We have a regular programme to update the knowledge of the teachers. We use to send them for the training given by the G.A's office. The teachers are sent to Chapel Haven Play School for observation and feedback. The Principal M/S Yamuna promised to evaluate our teaching and help us on the further course of action.

UNIFORMS

Uniforms and jerseys are stitched on a common basis and given to the students on subsidised rates. Uniforms were given at the beginning of this year and we reserve some uniforms for the late admissions.

Women's programme

Plantation women are the most important target group and we carry-out some meaningful programmes with them. Our teachers work not only in the school but also they work as field workers. They regularly visit the home and discuss with the parents the main issues and get a feed back to redesign our strategy. Their full support is important for us in organising meetings, cultural events and discussing matters with the management etc.

We have started sewing classes where knitting and embroidery are taught. We hope to give training in operating industrial sewing machines. Garment industry is one of the labour intensive industries in Sri Lanka. With proper training some may go into garment industry or get an extra income from sewing.

SUMMARY

We at the SANDANAM Institute of Pre-Primary Education have done fairly well during the period mentioned above in terms of creating awareness in education, primary health care(which includes physical, mental and dental), awareness of political rights, householding of resources, knowledge in safeguarding our environment etc.

Though our fund is limited we are obliged to expand our charity work as the need is in the growing. We have to build our youths as a vibrant force in order to get them involved and engaged in our work.

Computer knowledge is becoming irresistible in the future education in the world. So we will have to adapt to this demand and will be thankful to receive donations from any companies or private persons wishing to donate or even co-operate in building up of a computer centre which is in our agenda of future plans.

There are at the moment 90 poor children (aged 3-6) getting their preschool training and at the end of which they will be prepared for the primary school and guided towards the primary schools which are situated in and around the area.

Our present borrowed preschool building at Gonapitiya which is accommodating nearly 60 children is too small and in rather a bad shape. We have done some renovation. The problem is that we are risking to lose the building at any moment. There are no other preschools in our target area. There is a great demand for admission and the number of children will be increasing. We are in need of a new and spacier building to be able to accommodate most of the needy children and there is a hope that this will come true in the year 2014. We have bought a piece of land and waiting for fund to start putting up a building of reasonable standard. In addition we need to buy writing desks and chairs. A library corner would be appreciated by the pre and primary school children. Apart from this a mobile dental clinic is needed (we have voluntary dentists to serve 1-2days a week) to take care of the dental health of the children.

At Gonakelle, the infrastructure facility is not in proportion to the need. A small childrens park with swing, seesaw etc is rather an immediate need. A mobike would be of a great help to the field worker for his/her field visits and other urgent visits regarding the children.

For all these tabled needs we need funds. The committee will only be grateful to all contributors and well wishers who would help us to achieve the goal of helping more needy poor children.

The cost for the running of the two preschools at the moment is ca US\$20000 annually which is mainly covered by Dr. Sandanam but his well wishing friends also donate time to time with sums according to possibility.

Sandanam Institute

OF PRE/PRIMARY EDUCATION

We are very grateful to Dr. Sandanam who has been a constant source of help to strengthen our work by financing when ever needed. We are also very thankful to his friends in Sweden for their sympathetic feeling and support to sustain our institute and carry out our work successfully. We wouldn't have come to the level without the moral and financial support of the friends in Sweden. We would be very glad to welcome Dr. Sandanam's Swedish friends and friends from elsewhere to Sri Lanka whenever possible and share our joy.

Mr. Philip Ramiah

Coordinator

N.Ragukulanathan

Secretary, field assistant