

Sandanam Institute

OF PRE/PRIMARY EDUCATION

A REPORT OF ACTIVITIES FROM OCT 2011 – SEPTEMBER 2012:

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 have 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 adress 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 attentance 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 and discuss about the students progress as well as about our work. This allows us to get a feed back 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.

The children's fair in 2011 was an important event in our agenda. A children's fair was held at Gonakelle where all our preschool children had actively taken part. The parents and wellwishers visited the fair, bought the things that the children brought for sale and encouraged the students. Another children's fair was held on 22.10.2011 at Gonapitiya where all the parents and workers patronized the fair. It was a great success.

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.

Religious festival function: Saraswathy pooja is an important event in our agenda. Though it seems to be 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. We celebrated Saraswathy Pooja at Gonapitiya and Gonakelle in a grand manner. The youths gave us the full support to make this function a success.

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.

Works with the Youths: Youths are the cream of the society and we get involved with them directly and indirectly. We try to get them involved in most of our work.

Alcoholism is a major problem in the plantation and our area cannot escape from this vice. Though we are not very successful in wiping out, we try to redirect them from alcoholism. We organized a workshop and worked out a program with the help of World University Service. We organized (cricket, vollyball) matches and get-together. These matches and fuctions are generally arranged during Dr.Sandanam's visit. Some times these youths are taken for exposure together with others. They give their support when we arrange the sports meet and annual concert.

Exposure programme: We have worked at more than three exposure programmes in this period of time. One in Dec2010-jan 2011 and another in July. In the first exposure we have taken the parents, youths and the Preschool children to the North-east of Sri Lanka which part had been devastated by the ethnic civil war. The group was led by Dr.Sandanam along with the staff. The workers and youth never had gone out of this estate and this educational excursion took five days, gave a different experience for the group. Though the problems of the plantation community is quite different, the group had the rare opportunity of discussing their problems, agonies and mental trauma they have undergone during the war and after. We visited Batticaloa and Trincomalee in the east and Jaffna and many other places in the north. The group shared the feelings of the inmates of a Boys Home who were very severely affected by the civil war. Though most of us are a part of the large tamil community, we have to learn some important aspects from them in terms of education, religious discipline and culture. One of the most important aspect is the thirst for education in spite of their adverse situation. We have learnt that the lack of diplomacy and stratagy led them to an inferior

position and it may lead us to think of a proper direction.

The second exposure programme was arranged in July-August and it was skippered by Dr. Sandanam. This was exclusively for the youths and scholarship students. This was almost a study tour for they have visited the most important cultural centres. They have visited Karunalayam in Jaffna and Vorad in Vavunia where the orphans and disabled are housed and cared. This exposure gave them a feeling to share the good things they had with them. This helps the students to build up their stamina and creates a sense to build up a peaceful society.

Dr. Sandanam never fails to take them to the airport and hotels when he leaves for Sweden after the holidays. These students have learnt a lot in terms of table manners and social etiquette. The students were taken twice to Negombo and to Colombo this year. If not for Dr. Sandanam, the poor students will never have an opportunity to visit the airport and share the experience in the hotels and beaches.

There is an annual programme of exposure for the preschool students and parents. We have taken them to the Pinnawala elephant park, Ambewela Farm and to Nuwara Eliya park. We hope to take them to Kandy to visit the Peradeniya University, Peradeniya botanical gardens, Gannovuwa agriculture research centre and to Dalada Maligawa in the near future. In 2012 the students travelled to Mannar where we visited a home for girls and a trip by train to Ella where we enjoyed the wonderful view of the waterfall.

SCHOLARSHIPS: We don't have science or 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. Sandanam Institute bears most of the expenses for our students. A special scholarship is given for a student to study music in India. It is pleasing to say that this student has passed his London examination in music with a Distinction. Along with these scholarships, some financial award is given for three students on their merits from Princess school, Gonapitiya and Barathy school at Gonakelle as incentive. We meet the parents and students of this nature, give guidance and monitor them in their studies.

USING THE LOCAL RESOURCES IN THE PERIOD: We tried to use the local resources to the maximum. The estate managements and the workers had mostly been antagonistic to each other. So we have tried to minimise this attitude. We invite the manager and workers for our functions, specially functions like sports meet and annual concert. We also invite the Grama Sevaka (Village Headman), local council members. We are in badly need of a Land to put up our own school building (as the present one is a temporarily borrowed building which might be taken back) at Gonapitiya and the parents hope to meet the manager for a decision in connection with this. We never miss to make use of the trade unions in the estate. We invite them to share some of our work during the festival time. Our field workers and teachers help them during the festival times. There is an opportunity of purchasing a piece of land in Gonapitiya this year and we hope that this will come through so that we can build a more

spicier school for the preschool children.

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. They have promised to give teaching aids and furniture for our preschool.

World University Service helped us to work out a programme on the anti-alcoholic drive. Alcoholism is a manace for this society. It eats up the economic stability and creates many social ills. Though we are not very successful, there is a change among the youths.

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 and one of the teachers is following a course of training given by the Gamini Dissanayake foundation. The teachers are sent to Chapel Haven Play School for observation and feed back. The Principal M/S Yamuna promised to evaluate our teaching and help us on the further course of action.

UNIFORMS: uniforms are stitched on a common basis. The parents and our institute share cost of the uniforms. Uniforms were given at the beginning of this year and we reserve some uniforms for the late admissions.

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 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.

There are at the moment 103 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 accomodating nearly 60 children is too small and in rather a bad shape. Besides we are risking to lose it 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 accomodate most of the needy children and there is a hope that this will come true in the year 2013. 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. At the moment the visits are done by foot which is time consuming and prevents from things moving fast.

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 achive the goal of helping more needy poor children.

The estimated cost for the school building would be aproximately US\$45000 and for the mobile clinic set it would be around US\$19000. All other items are calculated to cost aboutUS\$6000. The cost for the running of the two preschools at the moment is ca US\$16000 annually which is covered by Dr.Sandanam, his colleagues and well wishing friends.

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 colleagues and friends in Sweden for their sympathatic 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 else where to Sri Lanka when ever possible and share our joy.

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