

## Update Number One

### **Project and Local Organization**

During Michele and Philip's visit, the IICRD and ASSEFA team worked to ensure that the project would meet the current needs of children in the coastal communities of Tamil Nadu and fit with ASSEFA's long term goals for child-centred programming. The scope of the project expanded to address the needs of all vulnerable children, with special attention given to those who suffered due to the tsunami. Activities will be undertaken in four areas in Tamil Nadu, including Cuddalore, Marrakaram, Chidambaram, and Pondicherry.

ASSEFA is eager to establish a separate cell or office, focused on child rights, child development, child participation and vulnerable children in Pondicherry. IICRD will work closely with ASSEFA to set-up this new research and programming cell, in an effort to positively impact ASSEFA's children and youth focused programs across India.

ASSEFA is a well-established Indian NGO, working to reduce poverty primarily by supporting livelihood development. Their work spans 7 states across India, with the majority of activities taking place in Tamil Nadu. Following Gandian principles, ASSEFA focuses on welfare for all, non-violence, and non-discrimination. Poverty reduction strategies include livelihood development, micro-credit, women's self-help groups, and education programs. The Coastal Area Development Project (CADP), started in February of 2005, works mainly with communities who were directly or indirectly impacted by the tsunami. ASSEFA commits to working with communities for 10-15 years, fully supporting their development. CADP has enabled ASSEFA to begin work in many new communities, and IICRD's efforts will be concentrated in these new communities.

### **Child Development Facilitators**

In each village, ASSEFA hires local "animators" who are responsible for coordinating children's activities that (will) include evening schools, children's clubs, and recreational activities. Animators are typically women, aged 18-29. A criterion was established with which to select the Child Development Facilitators(CDFs), from the larger group of animators. The criteria identified included:

- ?? Understand the issues
- ?? Respect for children and ability to interact well with them
- ?? Experience working with children
- ?? Have time to commit to this project
- ?? Good team-cooperation skills
- ?? Interest in being involved in the project
- ?? Ability to document
- ?? Creative with a sense of humour
- ?? Strong interpersonal relationships with communities and colleagues
- ?? Good communication skills

Animators were asked to fill out a short questionnaire, answers were reviewed and then a group discussion was held. The objective of the process was to assess the women's interest, experience and aptitude in child development issues. These three factors emerged as the most important areas, as it was not possible to demand that each individual meet the entire criterion.

Themes emerging from the selection process:

- ?? Prizes/presents are given to children to encourage their participation in events/activities.
- ?? Children are naughty and slightly out of control.
- ?? Grandmothers play an important role in children's lives, offering support, guidance and attention.
- ?? Children are engaged in many village activities and ceremonies at temples.
- ?? Children should participate in festivals and group activities rather than in big community decisions.
- ?? As community workers we should work with children, their families and their communities to address problems that have been identified.
- ?? Activities designed for children should focus on the strengths and abilities of children.
- ?? Children should be made to feel important; adults need to listen to children.
- ?? Girija told a story about Lord Murga as a young boy. His father Shiva was making an important decision and when Lord Murga heard of his father's decision he advised his father to take the opposite course of action. Although his son was only a child, Shiva took his advice. This story was used to demonstrate that if the Gods listen to children then so should we.

We selected eight animators from Cuddalore, Marakaram, Chidambaram and Pondicherry, who will receive IICRD training and support, and will hopefully emerge as leaders in their region providing ongoing training and guidance to other animators. The Child Development Facilitators, as they will be called, all showed a high level of interest and commitment to children and are very eager to develop their skills. The level of experience varies greatly within the group, as does their level of education (all have completed standard 10 and the highest level of education is a BA). It will be important to work closely with the CDFs to provide techniques and tools that they can utilize in their work.

To assist in this process and to coordinate the project for ASSEFA, a project lead was identified. Dr. Amsa is a young naturopathic doctor who has been working with ASSEFA in community development for the past six months. She graciously left her position, managing health programs in Chidambaram, to work on this child-focused program.

### **Training**

A 2-day training session was organized for the Child Development Facilitators. Topics included child development, child rights, vulnerable children and psychosocial rehabilitation, experiential games and activities, and the Triple "A" process, particularly community mapping and focus groups. (If you are interested in seeing the specific contents of the training, I can post the training documents Michele developed.) The training was a great time to develop a team spirit and solidify interest in and dedication to the project. It also gave the IICRD team the opportunity to get to know the CDFs and understand what further training would be required.

After Michele and Philip left, Amsa and I delivered a 1-day training session on documentation and gave a detailed session on community mapping. Training will be an extremely important component of this project, in order to develop the capacity of the

CDFs and the local animators. There is solid commitment on the part of ASSEFA to build the capacity of its staff in child-centred programming. Over the next few months, we will be providing ongoing training sessions for the CDFs, to go deeper into the subject matter and cover new areas such as child participation. The CDFs will be responsible for training the local animators in their region, and this training will be commencing shortly.

### **Pilot Site Selection and Visits**

The Child Development Facilitators worked with their respective offices to identify appropriate pilot site communities. The four pilot site communities will be models for the four larger regions. Training and activities will take place in these four communities, which will enable the CDFs and animators to learn hands-on skills and appropriate tools. The lessons they learn in the pilot sites will be shared with the other communities in their regions, primarily through animator training sessions. The pilot sites will also provide IICRD with a location to develop deeper programming, such as the garden model.

Criterion for the selection of the pilot sites included:

- ?? Tsunami affected coastal areas, particularly vulnerable communities
- ?? Communities with relatively high levels of poverty, poor sanitation and hygiene, caste or religious differences, lack of government or NGO support
- ?? Cooperation of the village
- ?? If possible, have an ASSEFA school nearby
- ?? Relatively easily to reach for majority of animators/CDFs
- ?? Contain a suitable place for community meetings (school, hut, banyan tree)

Amsa, the local CDFs, animators and I have conducted two pilot site visits. Amsa has been away on holiday, so I have been unable to collect her more detailed notes. The following is what I have collected, but I will add richer detail as soon as possible.

#### **Marakkaram:**

With long sandy beaches and the blue water of the Bay of Bengal, Koonimedu Kuppam is a picturesque coastal village. Brightly coloured new boats, with NGO logos painted on the side, line the sea shore. Smaller wooden catamarans (similar to west coast canoes) are dispersed between the larger motorized fishing boats along the shore. Like most fishing villages, the families here enjoyed relative prosperity. Homes are of medium size, constructed mainly of concrete, with wooden carvings of Gods and other decorative elements. It is not hard to see that these are well loved houses that have been home for many decades. The houses are set back just a few hundred feet from the water, and line orderly streets moving back from the shore. Approximately half of the homes were completely destroyed by the tsunami, reduced to rubble. Some of the newer homes fared better, but still suffered structural damage. Walking down the dusty streets, the destruction appears quite random, with some homes left standing while little remains of others.

We spoke with a women sitting in front of her damaged but functional home. After a few minutes, 15 men joined in the discussion, eager to speak about their experiences. They shared the following:

- ?? They were eager for ASSEFA to come and assist them and they were very willing to work cooperatively.
- ?? There was a need for a Bhalwati (child care centre for young children).

- ?? Aid groups have provided 50 boats to a village that previously had only 27.
- ?? Many of the fish that used to be plentiful are now difficult to catch. Thus, the fishing is not as prosperous a trade as it once was. Fishmen are eager to educate their children, so they have an opportunity to enter into different trades. (Interestingly, this is different than the information we gathered on our first visit to the village in Cuddalore. Fishermen there spoke of an overabundance of fish, which had driven down the cost of fish. I have read in the papers that the drastic change in the ocean floor could be one of the causes of this, but no scientific studies have yet been undertaken.)
- ?? A store owner had lost Rps.10,000 in the tsunami, all his supplies were ruined.
- ?? 23 people were killed by the tsunami in the village.
- ?? The community is pushing forward and eager to get life back to normal. There seems to be a good relationship between community members and an eagerness to improve their lives.

We visited the government Bhalwati, (child-care for young children under 5), which is very close to the ocean as well as to the village temple. Although the temple was completely destroyed by the tsunami, the Bhalwati was unharmed. The village leader has kept the Bhalwati locked for fear that the children could be trapped inside in the event of another tsunami. He plans to reopen the building in 15 days.

There is a well-placed ASSEFA thatched hut in the centre of town, across from the temporary shelters constructed after the tsunami. The ASSEFA hut is not being used at present because it does not have a gate to keep out the animals and men who come to sleep in the shade. The temporary shelters are small and cramped, with thin walkways in between. They are very small and extremely hot inside. It is easy to see how quickly these palm and tin shelters could burn down, as other shelters have recently. There is talk that people could be living like this for at least another year or two.

The government is rebuilding the primary school which was destroyed during the tsunami and currently school is being conducted in a tin structure. An NGO is running a bhalwati for the next 3 years and providing nutritious food for young children. They seem to be well received by the community.

We met with a local tailor, a disabled man, whose store and home were not touched by the tsunami. We also met with the secretary of the village leader. The leader is eager to work together with ASSEFA. They would like a list provided of all activities we intend to undertake, so that this can be provided to other NGOs and government to reduce duplication.

This is definitely a middle-class village, fishermen have enjoyed relative prosperity in the past. But it is also one of the worst hit villages in Marakkaram. With unreliable fishing stocks, the village is at risk of losing its livelihood. There is a strong sense of pride here, and the resiliency of the people is incredible. There are not a lot of NGOs working in the area, and the villagers are eager to cooperate with ASSEFA.

Chidambaram:

Like many villages, there are basically two hamlets in Parangipettai, divided by caste. The first area we visited was central in the community, and was not visibly affected by

the tsunami. There is a government built playground here and a bhalwati is held under a banyan tree until the government constructs a building (not tsunami related).

We walked down towards the water, across sand-dunes where 20 casteless families are living and met with 3 elderly women sitting outside of their home. A group of approximately 25 people quickly grew, comprised mostly of women with young children and a few men. The villagers expressed the following:

- ?? Their area was affected by the tsunami, when flood waters came up around their homes.
- ?? In the monsoon season the water floods the area, to about waist height. They asked for help to construct buildings that would withstand the annual floods better than their mud huts. The land they are living on is government owned, so it would be best to move the 20 or so families to another location.
- ?? This would be a good area for ASSEFA to work in, but the village is not yet ready to deal with children-focused programming, their basic needs being too many.

We moved on to the part of the village where temporary shelters have been constructed for the families who lost their homes. We spoke with a few women and a gentleman, inside one of the temporary shelters. The families have been “adopted” by Oxfam Bangalore and will have new homes constructed for them, complete with bedrooms, kitchens, and indoor bathrooms. There was no specific need for the help of ASSEFA, as the needs of these families and their children were being adequately cared for.

As we were leaving, a confrontation sprung up among the villagers. Amsa was quick to intervene and engage the villagers in a discussion in order to put the dispute to rest. The villagers in the centre of the community (those that were relatively unaffected) were unhappy because they have been repeatedly overlooked by NGOs and the government when aid was delivered to the village. There were some individuals who were very eager to receive aid and were demanding that ASSEFA provide it. ASSEFA is committed to working with villagers over the long term, and does not plan to engage these villages in relief work. This process and the importance of development programs, at this stage in the recovery process, was explained to the villagers.

Due to the high level of support Oxfam is providing to the hardest hit families in the community, we decided that we could find a more suitable area to work in. Although the families whose homes were flooded each year required significant support, we felt this would be better suited to an ASSEFA home and livelihood project. Amsa is eager to work in another area she identified near one of the senior staff person’s village. She felt that because the CDFs are new staff members they were easily influenced by the pleas of the villagers. More work must be done with them to help them see the larger context of the work that is required in villages across Tamil Nadu.

### **Save the Children and School Mapping**

Michele, Philip and I attended the first school mapping conducted by ASSEFA, as part of their program with Save the Children Finland. I was also able to attend the second school mapping exercise. School mapping engages children aged 7-14 from approximately 8-10 villages in the design of a centrally located school. Children are encouraged to discuss what it is they would like to have within the school yard and within the school building, as well as to design the basic structure of the school.

In the first exercise approximately 50 children were gathered together, under a brightly coloured tent. The process was led by a facilitator who guided and prompted the children through the process and by an engineer who helped children to draw their ideas on a large white board. Although the process did well to engage children in the design of their school, there were a number of lessons learnt. Working with the children to discuss ideas prior to the mapping exercise would have deepened the process. This would have also enabled children to identify, on a much deeper level, not only what they wanted to see in their schools, but also what they did not want to see. Children's participation in the upkeep and management of the school would have solidified children's ownership of the process. Age and gender appropriate exercises would have increased the participation of younger children and girls.

The second exercise was altered based on lessons learned. A large group of 150 children attended, so children were divided into smaller groups of 6-8 based on age. The small groups developed their own ideas about the school they wanted to build, some developing group maps. Children were then brought together to develop a collective school map. The small group mapping enabled the children to go deeper into the process, but resulted in a very long day. Staff attention to engaging girls increased their participation, but the large number of children made it difficult to ensure individual attention. Again, children's participation in the larger process should have been discussed and a more deeper exploration of what makes up a school would have been beneficial.

Save the Children Finland is working with ASSEFA to set-up 7 Child Resource Centres (CRCs) in Chidambaram. ASSEFA plans to build schools, with the CRCs attached. Save the Children was very excited to learn about the community mapping process and IICRD was invited to assist them in doing community mapping in their pilot site in Chidambaram. This will be the first participatory exercise that engages children in discussions about their communities in Tamil Nadu.

Next up...I will post a report on the first community mapping session with Save the Children Finland later this week.

Please let me know if this was helpful. I would like to know what type of information you are looking for, so I can be sure to include it. Please also check out the photos in the gallery!