

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

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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, we should do so.

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

- ?? 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. Fishman are eager to educate their children, so they have an opportunity to enter into different trades. (Interestingly, this is different then the information we gathered on our first visit to the village in Cuddalore. Fisherman 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, fisherman 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 loosing 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).

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