



EKTHA-UNITY

Newsletter of SAVE A FAMILY PLAN (SAFP)

Issue 10: 2006

"partnering with the poor for a just world"

Community Service Project: Lessons in Social Justice

by Maya Clarke, student, King's University College, London, Ontario

As a Social Justice and Peace student at King's University College, I had an invaluable opportunity to work with Save a Family Plan, as part of a community service project for my Social Justice and Peace 200E course taught by Dr. Pamela Cushing. During the term 2005-2006, we studied a selection of theoretical frameworks in social justice and peace and learned how to examine injustice and conflict from a variety of perspectives.

We applied learning from course readings by working on a local community service project. I think this course is one of the most popular courses with the Social Justice and Peace students at King's as it provides them with a direct learning experience on how to link class concepts with an actual situation, to see the complexity of action, and to plan what can be done to restore justice to the situation. The project involved volunteering — but also required reflection, analysis, group work, an actual project as well as final report and presentation to be shared.

I was very happy to be part of the class team assigned to work with Save a Family Plan. In collaboration with SAFP we determined our project would develop an updated Power Point presentation to be used as an educational tool by SAFP to help create more public awareness, understanding and support of Canada's International Development work. As students, we wanted the presentation to engage the public and raise awareness and understanding about global issues: how do economic, social, political, and environmental forces shape the lives of the poor in India? What does that mean to the Canadian public? How could we create a link with our project by creating awareness and understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures in India?

At the suggestion of Lesley Porter, several students on our team volunteered in the SAFP office, learning more about

the daily workings of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). We were made welcome by the office staff as well as the many volunteers at SAFP. When Lesley was in India our SAFP contact was Karyn Craven, Program Support Officer. The project with SAFP began in October 2005 and was completed in April 2006.

I was one of the students that chose to volunteer at the SAFP office on a regular basis. As a mature student and having worked on international development projects previously, I found a sense of belonging working at the SAFP office. I felt a sense of peace walking there from King's along the river through autumn leaves, then the icy winter path, and finally

experiencing the renewal of spring. Each time I went to the office I met different volunteers and students, all who were only too happy to help explain tasks to me and share stories of their experiences and travels to India. Lesley and Karyn and the office staff were committed to our project and always made time and tea for us! I particularly loved reading the family case stories, working on various office tasks, and always learning more about India, as well as the work of SAFP.

What did we learn? We learned

to work as a group and to engage with the course materials and follow through with group process. We learned to link our experiences working with SAFP to concepts presented in class. We realized the necessity of de-romanticizing the image of Indian women, so that we can appreciate them as people like us, all striving for the same things. We connected the readings of Paul Farmer, and the two classes of suffering (indirect and direct) to the experiences of Indian women. We saw the connection between hierarchal structures of power to the situation in India and the exploitation of the Indian people. Through our experiences at SAFP and our course work at King's we gained insight into our own personal motivation for wanting to be involved with social justice and peace work and international development.

We certainly learned more about India, the social injustices, the caste system, gender inequality, the concepts of micro-credit and sanghams, and the role of international development public education in Canada.



Social Justice and Peace students working with SAFP:
Maya Clarke, front row right.

Our Partners in India: Tsunami Rehabilitation in Quilon

by Laurie Chan, SAFF volunteer

One of four post-tsunami projects in India allotted funding by the Canadian High Commission (CHC) in New Delhi, through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), was an SAFF-proposed rehabilitation project promoting sustainable livelihoods for the affected populations in the Alappad Panchayat of Kollam (Quilon) District in the southern state of Kerala. The coastal village of 25,000 people, 63% of whose families were involved in the fishing sector, was severely affected by the tsunami of December 2004. The island-like project area, with a total area of about 7.38 square kilometers, sits at just seven metres above sea level, and is bordered on one side by the Arabian Sea and on the other by backwaters. 140 people lost their lives here, and 3,300 houses were left uninhabitable.

Quilon Social Service Society (QSSS), an active local development organization and longtime SAFF partner in family and community development programs, was chosen by SAFF India to be the implementing NGO for the Canada Fund Project. QSSS Director Fr. Romance Antony, Canada Fund Coordinator T. Sampath Kumar, and SAFF Canada Executive Director Lesley Porter travelled to several affected sites in January of 2005 to assess the extent of the damage in Kollam.

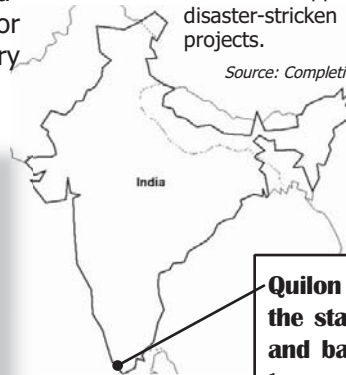
In a participatory process, 366 affected families were chosen to be involved in various livelihood initiative start-ups, for which respective Self Help Groups (SHG) were formed, and orientation and training provided.

The Alappad village project provided funding for 180 units of equipment, including 78 dug-out canoes, 10 China nets, 20 coir spinning ratts with raw material, 20 carpentry equipment sets, 20 masonry equipment sets, 20 farming equipment sets, and 12 tailoring machines. The coir spinning and tailoring equipment provided for the start-up initiatives of 52 women, while the remainder of the equipment units provided for those of 314 men.

According to SAFF India's final report to the CHC, significant lessons were learned from the project:

- Participation of community-based groups such as SHG's will ensure the sustainability of the projects at the local level.
- Skill development training and support services are essential for the success of livelihood initiatives.
- Linkages and collaborations with local governments and other like-minded organizations are very significant to ensure the project sustainability.
- Emotional support and counseling are also essential in disaster-stricken areas while planning the developmental projects.

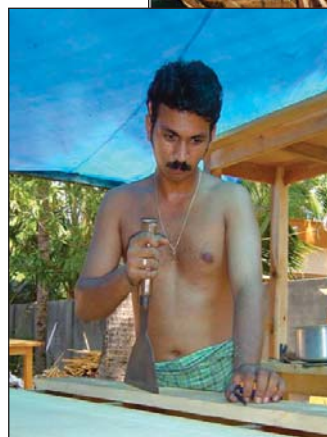
Source: Completion Report to the Canadian High Commission, New Delhi, Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI)



Quilon (Kollam) is a coastal area in the state of Kerala with river deltas and backwaters. The major agriculture crops are coconut and rice, and the major industries are fisheries and coir/coir product manufacturing.



SAFF partnerships... helping to create and revive occupational opportunities for sustainable rehabilitation and development of tsunami-affected families...



Top: Newly installed china net for fishing

Below: T. Sampath Kumar, right, handing over equipment for coir spinning

Right: Carpenter with new equipment

Far Right: New dugout canoes

SAVE A FAMILY PLAN PARTNER PROFILE: QUILON SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY (QSSS)

Established: 1960

Area covered: 845 sq. km. (includes 37 km. of coastline)

Population served: 1,663,998

Self-Help Groups: 1,066 (1,035 women, 31 men) representing approximately 18,000 women and 500 men respectively (source: SAFF)

QSSS AND ITS PARTNERS* ARE INVOLVED IN:

Human Resources: Leadership development, grassroots-level organization and promotion of credit unions and self-help groups are primary concerns

Education: Educational growth is necessary for sustainable development. QSSS and partners address this by offering functional literacy programs for adults, supportive education programs, career development courses, vocational and skills training, and scholarships. 98 Adult Education Centres serve approximately 9000 men and women.

Income Generation Programmes: QSSS policy is to encourage income generation that is market oriented but utilizes available resources and raw material, and is eco-friendly. Vocational training helps develop the skills needed for self-employment or collective occupations. Modernizing the traditional and rural employment sectors through technology transfer is helping to improve productivity. The prime target of QSSS is the fishing sector, given its economic and cultural importance to the region's population.

Gender Development: QSSS recognizes the socioeconomic status of the region's women as "abysmally low", and labels the prevailing gender discrimination as "dehumanising". Their policy is one of pro-active intervention that will serve to give women equal status in family and social life, through self-dependent growth made possible by access to training, credit, investment, and decision-making opportunities.

Relief and Rehabilitation: Although sustainable development is the overarching mission of QSSS, a relief fund exists to assist the destitute and vulnerable

Social Security: Approximately 6000 women have been enrolled in a plan providing security through insurance coverage.

Family Development: Based on a vision of achieving a just social order based on the equality and dignity of all human beings, QSSS strives to achieve sustainable development outcomes with its various partners. Through QSSS, SAFF beneficiaries have been able to invest in income generating projects that have led them to self-sufficiency and a sense of self worth.

Housing: A rehabilitation housing scheme was implemented in 2003 for coastal fisher families who lost their houses because of sea erosion.

Surveys: Identifying issues that concern local people is necessary before planning and implementing development interventions. A survey of members of the inland fisher communities revealed information on types of fishing, craft and gear used, marketing practices, ecological issues, and education and health issues.

Natural Resource Management: The densely populated areas of the coastal region put added stress on the already fragile natural environment. Sea erosion and flooding are regular hazards. Health issues include crowded living conditions, and unsafe drinking water and waste disposal facilities. Some QSSS and partner projects involve rainwater harvesting programs, watershed protection, solid waste management, and eco fisheries research.

Skills and Marketing: A Development Education Centre (Shreyas) has been established to provide training to fishers in alternative occupations, and leadership training. A Coir Technology Park there serves to develop the latest mechanized technology for ecologically friendly coir/coir yarn production, which is a livelihood source for much of the population. A coir technology centre for training and production also exists in another village, employing 20 women. A model dairy exists to provide training in this livelihood. A Fish Marketing Centre and networks of fisher sanghams facilitate resource/credit mobilization, and empower fishers to negotiate fair price for their product.

Source: www.qsss.org,

*QSSS partners have included Caritas India, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam Great Britain, Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), CIDA, SAFF, Joy Sowers Belgium, Play for Peace, and other local, national, and international agencies, both governmental and non-governmental

Did you know?

- The third of the eight Millennium Goals ratified by the United Nations (and pledged to be met by the year 2015), is to promote gender equality and empower women.
- In 1979, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly, and became an international treaty on September 3, 1981. As of March 2, 2006, over 90% of UN members (182 countries) are party to the Convention and therefore bound to its provisions.
- The UN Platform for Action, arising from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995 (and reaffirmed in March 2005) upholds the CEDAW, and calls for member states to "analyze from a gender perspective, policies and programmes..."
- Canada's International Policy Statement assures that gender equality results will be systematically and explicitly integrated across all CIDA programming within all sectors.

In our next issue, we will be discussing gender policy and the strategies that are being used by SAFF and its partners to empower women and to achieve gender equity. Mainstreaming gender concerns in development planning and programming is of paramount importance in achieving full and equal participation of men and women in decision-making and in realizing positive change in society, locally and globally.

"Forty Plus One"

• Help SAFF celebrate our 41st anniversary with a silent auction, dessert, & entertainment on Friday, October 13, 7:30 pm at Bessie Labatt Hall
• King's University College, London, Ontario.
• Tickets are \$5 each.
• Call 519-672-1115 for more info.

The Option for the Poor

by Beth Porter, friend of SAFP

Lisa, a young single mother of two who had fled from an abusive marriage, called on the telephone. Her voice was trembling with anxiety. She had just received a letter from Social Assistance to say that her monthly cheque would not be mailed because she had failed to submit documents regarding her separation. The papers had in fact been lost in one of her many moves to find cheaper accommodation. Without that cheque she could not pay her rent or provide food. The previous month, both her children had contracted a serious flu, which necessitated a taxi to get them to the hospital emergency. To cover the unexpected costs she had borrowed from the money set aside to pay her hydro bill and was now faced with a cut-off of that service. Without familial or social support, Lisa saw herself alone and without hope.

How do we see Lisa? Is she the author of her own misfortune? Do we place on her head the false stereotypes with which the poor are stigmatized? Do we see her through the prism of a society that focuses on economic rather than human deficits? Or do we see Lisa through the eyes of compassion and love, caught in the unjust structures which deny her the possibility to raise her children in dignity and to develop her own gifts? Lisa's life is lived out, not only here in our midst but in every country of the world. If our desire is to help people like Lisa have their personhood recognized and their voice heard, then we have taken an "Option for the Poor".

The option for the poor is deeply rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It stems from the prophetic voices of the Old Testament, which urged the Jewish people to show concern for the poor and the weak, the widow and the orphan. It is grounded in the gospels where we see Jesus, who chose to become one of the poor, reach out to the disabled and marginalized, defining His mission as bringing "good news to the poor", and who challenged his followers to find him in the "hungry, the homeless and the imprisoned".

The early Christian communities saw sharing with and caring for the needy amongst them as integral to their faith. The Church throughout the centuries has developed from a position of seeing the need to care for the poor, to one of deep solidarity with them in the work of social transformation. Papal encyclicals, the documents of Vatican II, and statements of Synods and Bishops' Conferences have put the Church firmly on the side of the poor, and in a position of challenge to governments and institutions which place power in the hands of the wealthy and exclude the poor from what they need to be fully human. As well, many Christian churches, other Faith Groups and people of goodwill have brought their own prophetic voices to the work of social change.

How do we embrace the option for the poor? The answer is both personal and social. In our personal lives do we look

to see who are the poor and how they might be included in the life of our society? Do we live simply, thus offering a sign of our solidarity with the poor? Do we pray for a heart of love and compassion so that we can see the marginalized as our sisters and brothers?

In a social sense do we seek out others who want to work for peace and justice and with them do a social analysis?

Are we willing to be involved in actions to press governments, corporations and institutions to review their laws and policies in the light of their impact on the poor? Do we use what means we have to enable the poor to be heard?

Fr. Donal Dorr, in his book "Option for the Poor", ends with these words: "The poor can no longer be seen as passive recipients of alms; they are, under God, the makers and subjects of their own history, the ones who play a major role in shaping the destiny of the world".



Are we willing to walk with them?



Kindly recycle this newsletter by sharing it with a friend!



We gratefully acknowledge the support of Canadian International Developmental Agency (CIDA) in the funding of this newsletter.



www.acdi-cida.gc.ca

The editorial team responsible for EKTHA-UNITY:
Frances Theilade, Carmen Sprovieri, Lesley Porter,
Lois Côté, Laurie Chan

SAVE A FAMILY PLAN

P.O. Box 3622
London, ON
CANADA
N6A 4L4

P.O. Box 611832
Port Huron, MI
U.S.A.
48061-1832

Phone: (519) 672-1115
E-mail: safpinfo@safp.org

Fax: (519) 672-6379
Web: www.safp.org

Charitable Registration Numbers

CANADA: BN 11914 1943 RR0001

USA: 98-600-4051

SAFP complies with the Federal Government of Canada's Personal Information Protection & Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) to ensure the confidentiality of our benefactors' personal information.