EKTHA – UNITY

Newsletter of SAVE A FAMILY PLAN(SAFP)

Issue 7 : 2005 "***partnering with the poor for a just world***"

Water - Life Taking...Life Giving

by Lesley Porter (Executive Director, SAFP Canada)

On the eve of Save A Family Plan's 40th Anniversary of *"partnering with the poor"* in India, the tragic events that unfolded in south Asia on the morning of December 26th, 2004 were a profound reminder of the vulnerability and sad reality of the poor of this world. The initial news reports from our office in India confirmed that 13 of the 42 Diocesan Social Services Societies with whom SAFP partners, had been severely affected by the tsunami in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Magline (a widow) and her three children live in this small hut near the sea in Trivandrum, Kerala. A fish vendor before the Tsunami, Magline now fears the sea.

I recently traveled to India and the aftermath that I witnessed told the story that within seconds lives were forever changed. The sea withdrew more than a kilometer from the shoreline before the full force of the second deadly wave hit. Entire villages were submerged, then lost, as the "*wall of water"* crashed into their simple huts, destroying them, taking anything in its path—people, animals, boats, fishing nets, cooking utensils, clothing, motorcycles, crops, roads, power lines, etc. Village women died while they were out drying fish on the beach. Men were swept away as they gathered their nets. Children who had ventured further out to see fish, shells, rocks and even ancient antiquities that they had never seen before, did not have a chance of surviving. Women became widows; children orphans; men who were at sea returned to find their entire families dead. Many went missing.

The influx of such an enormous amount of seawater damaged their only sources of drinking water (government taps) and ponds that were used for general washing. It is said that it will take years for the high salinity to be leached out of the soil. A repetitive and utterly despondent sight was the endless roads, lined with women and young girls with their containers waiting patiently for water in the hot sun. In some villages the wait was two days. It was obvious that for the poor, the daily walk, struggle and absence of their right to water had only increased following the Tsunami. Water, one of the most basic human needs, was being denied.

Numerous water jugs line the streets of Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, as people wait patiently for up to 2 days for water trucks to arrive.

Thousands of sanitation systems were also destroyed from the seawater, compounding the widespread pollution, increasing the spread of disease and seriously compromising the health of the people. The outbreak of hepatitis was becoming common-place, along with contamination from E. coli. Lime and chlorine had to be spread on everything. The flies and rats were rampant. Sewage and garbage was swept back into the ocean. Traditional ways of achieving a livelihood had vanished with the water. Entire rice paddy fields had become contaminated. Coconut trees were dying. Boats were destroyed or damaged. No one was fishing. No one was selling fish. No one wanted to eat the fish.

Lesley Porter (Executive Director) stands on this deserted beach in the village of Keezha Manakudly, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu. Behind her, the damage from the tsunami is visible but people are not...many still live in fear that it will come again.

A relief camp in Quilon, Kerala is indicative of the living situation of thousands who have been displaced from their homes. Most families have only a small area such as this to call home.

The experience that had the greatest impact on me was walking through the interim relief camps. Here, families were living in cramped makeshift shelters. In some places the walls were made of nothing more than treated cardboard with a dirt floor and little privacy. Some of the shelters consisted of blue plastic sheeting or coconut leaves thatched together. So many of the camps had either inadequate or no sanitary facilities; improper or non-existent water supply; unhygienic areas for food preparation; no schools for the children. In the daytime, these shelters became uninhabitable due to the sheer heat. It was like being in an oven. This was and continues to be the reality for the poor who have no other options or resources.

These were a people still in shock and disbelief at the sheer magnitude of their loss. Any one visiting these camps could readily assess that trauma counseling would be necessary. Whether the poor would receive this service remained a question in everyone's mind. Children I spoke to feared that the tsunami would return. How could these people *"trust"* the sea again?

Selvaris, a fisherman by trade, lost his wife and two of his six children, his home and fishing equipment in the tsunami. Presently, the family is living in a temporary shed.

Every village with a relief camp was becoming a political hot-bed where disputes and high tempers were commonplace. Caste and religious conflicts added to the rising tensions. Project officers working in the camps noted an increase in alcoholism. The spread of HIV/Aids was also a grave concern. Even issues such as the dowry system continued to plague these areas.

I quickly sensed that it would be a real invasion of their privacy and grief to take photos in these camps. Being a foreigner, it also became apparent that it would not be safe to even enter some of these camps. This scene was not isolated but repeated throughout my travels to the tsunami areas.

The hope for me, however, was the visits to the village self help groups that have courageously pulled together to address some of the issues. In one area, 400 women, after losing their homes and living in relief camps, staged a *"sit-in"* on a main road to protest against the government's inadequacies in dealing with the disaster.

Having lost her husband to the Tsunami, this young widow from Perumanal, Tamil Nadu is hoping to be part of SAFP's "Tsunami Rehabilitation Program". A livelihood initiative will provide income to care for her child, as well as repair the damage done to her home.

It is through that hope, that SAFP will be supporting 1,121 families (predominantly widows with young children) under our "*Tsunami Rehabilitation Program".*

SAFP has planned several long-term sustainable projects:

- Providing six years support to 500 Tsunami affected families in Kerala and Tamil Nadu
- Construction and repair of sanitation and water systems (rain water harvesting, septic tanks, leach pits) for 210 families in Kerala
- Restoration of livelihood initiatives including training and equipment (fishing boats, china nets, coir production, carpentry, masonry, tailoring) for 411 families in Kerala
- Reforestation (planting mangrove trees) of coastal areas

To date, SAFP has been able to raise $328,514 toward our ultimate goal of $650,000 for the Tsunami Rehabilitation Program. With the generous support of our benefactors throughout North America, the Canadian High Commission in Delhi and our partners in India, these families will have renewed hope for the future following such a devastating tragedy.

SAFP Helps Work Toward UN Millennium Goals

by Laurie Chan (SAFP Volunteer)

In the year 2000, the 189 members of the United Nations (UN) pledged, through the adoption of the *"Millennium Declaration*", to significantly improve the lives of poor people in developing countries by the year 2015. Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) with measurable outcomes provide a framework for this promise (see sidebar).

M Millennium
D Development
G Goals

- ⇒ Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- ⇒ Achieve universal primary education
- ⇒ Promote gender equality and empower women
- ⇒ Reduce child mortality
- ⇒ Improve maternal health
- ⇒ Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- ⇒ Ensure environmental sustainability
- ⇒ Develop a global partnership for development

Recently, outgoing president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, said, *"that the fight against global poverty is the greatest challenge of our time."* (Globe and Mail, March 23, 2005) He believes that 2005 is a make-or-break year for development, and that if current trends persist; most countries will not meet most of the MDG's. The trends refer to a declining will, among UN member nations, including Canada, to maintain developmental assistance funding at promised levels.

In the late 1960's, World Bank president Robert McNamara asked former Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson to chair a Commission on International Development. This led to the *"Pearson Report",* a landmark document that addressed the crisis of global poverty and wealth disparity. One of the chief recommendations endorsed by the UN was that donor countries should aim to achieve an international development funding level of 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP). At the UN Earth Summit in 1992, world governments, including Canada, adopted Agenda 21, a program that again used 0.7% of GNP as an aid target for 22 *"rich"* donor nations. As of 2004, 17 of those nations have failed to reach this target, including Canada, which sits at 0.26%. By comparison, the USA offers 0.16%; the U.K., 0.36%; France, 0.42%; Denmark, 0.84%. (source: www.oecd.org)

What does all this have to do with a small Non Governmental Organization (NGO) like Save A Family Plan (SAFP)? Long before the UN promoted the eight Millennium Goals, SAFP was already achieving success with its family and community development programs. By continuing to partner with the poor and marginalized in India, SAFP has been able to facilitate quantifiable positive change in the health of families and communities, effectively helping local people improve their own lives. Like other organizations, SAFP depends on generous private donors and on the continuing support of the federal government through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In a March 2005 speech on Canada's evolving role in fighting poverty, Canada's Minister of International Cooperation, Aileen Carroll, said (in regard to pending changes in Canada's development funding strategy), "*...Canada's development assistance can be further enhanced where we have historical and people-to-people ties".* (source: www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/minist-e.htm)

There is no better example of those *"ties",* than in the Indian communities where SAFP has been working directly with local people for 40 years. This is a success story that Canada cannot overlook as it strives to meet its Millennium Goals in the next 10 years.

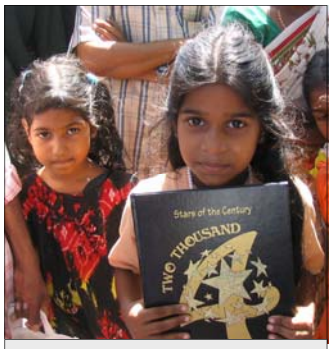
A Rewarding Experience

by Thomas Joseph (teacher)

I am a science teacher at St. Patrick High School in Thunder Bay, ON and in July 2004, I married fellow teacher Leanne Bickford. Most of my family live in Kerala, India and were unable to attend our wedding so Leanne and I decided to travel to India for our Christmas break to celebrate a second wedding reception.

Thomas and Leanne share a moment with the family assisted through St. Patrick's High School. In some ways, one could say the visit was bad timing, but in another way it was perfect. Here was their village devastated, and from thin air arrive Thomas and Leanne...a real sign, a link to love, support , and hope so needed .

Coincidentally, the high school where we both teach assists a family in India through Save A Family Plan (SAFP), so we decided to meet this family. Lesley Porter, Executive Director of SAFP in London, ON arranged a meeting for Dec. 27, 2004. Unfortunately, this was the day after the devastating tsunami hit Asia. The family, husband Stanley, wife Reethamma and daughters, Jomol 10, Josena, 5 and Johnamma 2, live in a coastal village about 40 kms from my parent's ancestral home in Kerala. The day we arrived, the village had been evacuated because 30 people had been swept out to sea and there were fears that another tsunami was on the way. The families of the village had been relocated to a school about 15 kms away. The scene was quite disturbing as people were gathered outside the gates trying to find out if their loved ones had been affected by the tsunami. We entered the school and found our family. They were quite happy to see us, although distraught because of the recent disaster. We were able to speak to the family through my father, K.S. Joseph since he speaks the local language of Malayalam. We also gave the family $300 that St. Patrick's raised and a copy of the school year book signed by the students. Since the



Jomol shows the year book sent by students from St. Patrick High School which contains a picture of her family.

family was unsure as to the extent of the damage to their home and fishing boat, (which they needed to make a living) they were quite relieved to receive the money.

It was an amazing experience! Often in North America, we send money blindly, but to actually meet the people you are helping is overwhelming. *Being able to make a difference in someone's life is quite rewarding; being able to meet them made it even more special.* We hope to see them again next year when we travel to India for my brother's wedding.

COME CELEBRATE SAFP'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY!

The inspiration for the organization that was to become Save A Family Plan (SAFP) came in 1965 when Father Augustine Kandathil, affectionately known as Fr Gus, heard the words from the International Eucharistic Congress in Bombay, India. Listening to Pope Paul VI's invitation to join together to alleviate poverty and hunger, Fr. Gus devised a simple idea to link families in Canada and India, sending 100% of the donation to India. Thus SAFP was born. This year SAFP celebrates 40 years of "*partnering with the poor*". Please join us:

Friday October 14, 2005
Bessie Labatt Hall, King's University College, London
7:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.
Tickets: $5.00

*** Dessert * Entertainment * Silent Auction ***

For more information call the SAFP office at (519) 672-1115 or email **safpinfo@safp.org**

Solidarity: a personal reflection

by Sandra McNee (Volunteer and retired Community Chaplain)

I have heard myself saying, somewhat self-effacingly, *"All I can do is, be in solidarity*". Stop! Turn that around, *"I am in solidarity".* As I pondered the word solidarity, I found it full of meaning. Further pondering, made me look inward and reflect that my understanding has been ever changing. Each decade had me define how I have been in solidarity or tried to be.

In my early decades, I was lucky to see parents and neighbours helping and sharing. Penny boxes for missions became habit during the church year. I grew up in rural Ontario where community work parties helped in times of illness and tragedy. Community and church taught love for our neighbour. As education and life's work began, any solidarity, I think, was motivated by obligation. Words such as, *"I need to",* and *"It is right",* come to mind. There was high energy to make changes to move toward fairness, but my actions lacked quality – *"Let's do it for them".* How I hate to admit that my efforts were without enough understanding and recognition of *mutual* needs. Worthy causes existed. I was involved, but not in solidarity.

After having lived some ups and downs in life, some sorting took place. I learned the difference between duty and solidarity. Two local events were turning around times for me—meeting immigrants and becoming aware of poverty. Maybe it was the beginning of wisdom, realizing we are all one in a common humanity. Doing and being are like two hands intertwined, that is, caring and solidarity. My needs are the *same* as another, whether locally or globally.

Community members work together during this participatory training activity to determine village needs to plan a water harvesting project under SAFP's Community Development Program .

In maturity, my solidarity is clear. Mother Teresa's chosen words have supportive meaning: ***"****We can do no big things, but only small things with great love".* I know that being attuned to calls of solidarity is the very essence of life, becoming my life's goal, my definition of who I am.

Maybe you, like me, know that first we are among family and neighbours, and through the Spirit, in touch with other human beings. SAFP is my vehicle to make connections with individual families and communities. Staff in Canada and India represent me in solidarity.

Whenever we are discouraged and think that we can do so little – stop – we need to look back, realizing that one by one, bit-by-bit, by their actions SAFP is our love and solidarity in action. I am hope filled and thankful to support SAFP as a kind of big family model of human beings sharing skills and resources. I want to be a part of SAFP. Some of us will go to India, but all will send solidarity through loving prayers, awareness, and support.

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

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