

Water for Wannai

An Oru Paanai project to provide water to families in the Wannai



www.orupaanai.org.uk

An Appeal for Water for Wanni

Dear friends

We are writing to seek your support in our quest to bring water to the Wanni.

In the past 6 years, we have worked in the Wanni to bring relief and assistance to the people recently resettled in the area. In our rehabilitation work, we have found that the scarcity of water has been a major obstacle in resettling the displaced, both in terms of household needs as well as in cultivation.

It has been heartening to note that nearly all displaced people without land have been given small pieces of land, ranging in size from 10 to 20 perches to 1 or 2 acres. Many have also been fortunate enough to receive assistance to build homes.

Most people, however, did not have their own supply of water. Even the few that had conventional wells did not have water during the dry season (June/July/August). Last year's prolonged drought was devastating, and young coconut, areca nut and banana trees withered away due to the lack of water.



Water for home cultivation was never considered by the authorities to be an important basic need for the people of Wanni. There have been no plans to provide water to peasants who are agricultural manual workers.

The provision of sufficient water for basic domestic needs and home cultivation ('Veettu thottam') in rural homes, will go a long way towards alleviating poverty and hunger. It would also have the added benefit of encouraging the production of food for home and community.

There is no doubt that if these families had sufficient water for home cultivation, they could make significant headway in the recovery of their livelihood. Interest free, easy repayment loans will be made available to those who need funds to develop home cultivation, animal husbandry or a cottage industry. A 'Veettu thottam' with a few coconut trees, and vegetables such as aubergines, okra, runner beans, corn, green chillies, ground (pea) nuts etc would be more

than just for subsistence. It could well make poverty and hunger a thing of the past.

We believe that deep Tube wells with appropriate attachments, could be provided at affordable prices.

We would aim to provide 1000 wells in the next few years. This would require a major fund raising effort involving international aid agencies and / or Government grants.

With the above in mind, we in Oru Paanai are launching a pilot project to drill 10 tube wells in the Wannai. The pilot is estimated to cost £10,000/-

We have Ministerial support in this venture, which is essential for sustaining this project in the medium and long term. Cabinet Minister D. M. Swaminathan has pledged his personal support. He will facilitate access to the data already in the possession of statutory bodies such as the Water Resources Board, which will be helpful in planning the details of this project.

We are appealing to you to make a contribution to help us run a pilot to build ten wells. This would enable people who receive this support to become self sufficient, instead of remaining supplicants dependant on the largesse of the general public and the government forever.

If you agree with our views and are able to help, please send us a cheque, payable to 'Oru Paanai Water'. Or, if you would like to contribute direct via BACS, the sort code is 20-82-70 (Barclays Bank) , a/c no. 33770001.

If you are a UK tax payer and wish to Gift Aid your contribution please complete and post the attached Gift Aid form. See back page, and post to the address on page 6)

Thank you so much. Your help is greatly appreciated – it will help the hapless people in the Wannai who have suffered so much in the past 35 years and are now trying to rebuild their lives.

Best wishes

Bala Gnanapragasam and Dan Muthuveloe

*Joint Leads
Oru Paanai Water Project*

Water for Wannai

A report on the context and the need

An Oru Paanai¹ project to provide water to families in the Wannai

Background

After the war ended in May 2009, tens of thousands of families in northern Sri Lanka who had been displaced were resettled in the Wannai², in Sri Lanka. Many of these families had experienced multiple displacements during the conflict and lost loved ones, often the heads of households.

It is believed that 30% of these households are now headed by a woman, and large numbers are also afflicted by various disabilities. Before the war, many of these families would have been engaged in agriculture and fishing, and some had been operating their own small-to-medium sized businesses, while others would have been engaged in manual labour.

To try and encourage the creation of new, self-sufficient communities, the resettled families were granted small plots of land. These varied from 10 to 20 perches in area. Some had land of their own ranging from ½ acre to 1 or 2 acres. The resettled were also given government assistance to build homes.

Water

The land which these families were given was fertile and suitable for agriculture. However, clean and reliable water supplies, essential for the sustainability of these new households, were not put in place as part of the resettlement project.

The resettled families had their piece of land and a house, but no reliable water supply for domestic use and for home cultivation. As a consequence, the resettled households have become largely dependent on bowsers for their water supplies, and plastic water cans placed in front of homes have become a familiar sight throughout the Wannai.

¹ Oru Paanai (OP) is a registered charity established in 2008 to help alleviate hunger amongst children in northern Sri Lanka. This project has steadily grown, and OP now supports 391 schools to feed 43,400 children. OP is also engaged in projects in education and in assisting children who are hard-of-hearing. More information is available at the website www.orupaanai.org.uk

² Wannai includes the districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya north and areas of Mannar east

Over half the families do not have access to a well. Even those who do have access to wells, which are predominantly conventional wells 50-60 feet deep, have found that these wells dried up during the dry season. Last year's prolonged drought resulted in young coconut, areca nut and banana trees withering away due to lack of water.

There are major projects planned to provide piped water supply to the towns of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu with the aid of foreign governments. There are also many large and small rain water-fed irrigation tanks to irrigate rice fields and large agricultural lands.

Our concern however is the resettled family and its livelihood, particularly with respect to the provision of food. There are no major employers in the Wannu and manual labour is scarce and uncertain.

Home cultivation ("Veettu thottam") could provide food for the table and may even produce some income. This could be a sustainable, self-reliant source of livelihood. Water is needed for each household to avail itself of the potential of home cultivation.

The situation that has unfolded is particularly hard on the home-maker, invariably the mother. It is she who faces the arduous task of fetching the water from wherever in the vicinity water is being dispensed from a communal facility - a communal well shared by over 20 families.

Such a system reduces the dignity of women to an intolerable degree. It is also the case that the task of fetching water seriously hinders a mother's ability to fulfil her primary role, that of caring for her children and managing the home.

The shortage of water also has a serious impact upon the ability of families to maintain proper standards of hygiene and makes them highly susceptible to disease.

Livelihood

The resettled family has no means of livelihood. There are no local industries or major employers. Access to manual labour is scarce and uncertain.

This lack of water supply to a rural agricultural community, deprives it of the obvious means of livelihood. These destitute people are left with a house and land, but with no water to cultivate a home garden producing cash crops to feed themselves and perhaps make a livelihood too.

Feasibility study

In the longer term, the solution is to provide all those families living in suitable locations with tube wells that could reach depths of 80 to 150 feet to provide water throughout the year and be sufficient for domestic needs and for home garden / cultivation.

According to the figures available from the D.S. offices in Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, over 80,000 families were resettled. In Mannar and Vavuniya the number of resettled families number around 40,000.

Of the 120,000 resettled families in Mullaitivu, Killinochchi and Mannar Divisions, where the scarcity of water is gravest, we estimate that there are over 50,000 families who do not have access to their own water. Providing each of these families with deep tube wells is an enormous undertaking.

Oru Paanai wishes to kick-start such a project with a feasibility study, based on the provision of a small pilot scheme of 10 wells, to enable information to be derived upon which a detailed plan could be prepared. At this stage we envisage that such a plan would be extended to the provision of 1000 tube wells over a period of two to three years.

Issues to be addressed by the pilot scheme would include:

- **The identification of suitable areas for drilling:** It is understood that the Water Resources Board has detailed plans and maps to provide this information. We will require government support to access such data in the possession of statutory bodies.
- **Costs:** At present, the cost of drilling a well would be some LKR 200,000/-, through the use of existing well-drilling companies. These costs would include electric pumps and water storage tanks. This amount would be well beyond the pockets of the families concerned. It is our belief that these costs could be greatly reduced by the potential magnitude of the project, increased competition amongst the existing businesses and new entrants. We shall also look at the possible creation of a not-for-profit social enterprise company to undertake the project, and calculate likely costs and benefits of such a step.
- **Assessing sources of finance,** including from the government and international charities and NGO's, to contribute towards costs. In particular, we need to explore the possible involvement of World Vision which has a proven track record in the provision of water and sanitation in many parts of Sri Lanka.

- **The nature of community involvement**, particularly to ensure water resources are used wisely. It is vital that the community is involved in all aspects of the project, not only as stake holders but also as co-owners of the underground water resources. There needs to be widespread education in rain water harvesting and conservation to ensure the optimum use of water. For example, we may need to reconsider the ways in which the water is used to irrigate home gardens. The traditional method of flooding the water channels with copious quantities of water is highly wasteful. Also, rainwater conservation and its collection in man-made ponds and tanks need to be facilitated and encouraged.
- **Determining criteria** by which families would be given priority to take part in the project.
- **Reviewing and making recommendations** on the financial contribution to be made by those families securing wells. The wells would not be provided free as this would risk them being under-valued by the community. Rather we would envisage recipients coming up with up to 20% of the capital cost, perhaps making use of interest free loan finance that will be made available for those in need of assistance.
- **Interest free, easy repayment loans** will also be made available for those who need funds to develop home cultivation, animal husbandry or a cottage industry.

Conclusion

This pilot project, if successfully implemented, could provide the resettled families with sufficient water for home cultivation, which will enable them to make significant headway in regaining their livelihood and dignity. A 'veettu thottam' with a few coconut trees, and vegetables such as aubergines, okra, runner beans, corn, green chillies and ground nuts (peanuts) would be more than just meagre subsistence; it could make a significant contribution to making poverty and hunger a thing of the past.

Oru Paanai

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