



Oru Paanai Report 2010 from Dr. Dan Muthuveloe

At the beginning of the year, Oru Paanai was involved with feeding 1000 odd children in 15 schools in the Jaffna peninsula. However following a field trip to Sri Lanka made by Dan Muthuveloe the work of Oru Paanai has gigantically increased.

Visit to Batticaloa

Dan visited Batticaloa and met with Mr Paul, the Zonal Director of Education for Batticaloa. Mr. Paul was keen that Oru Paanai extends its help to not only the 27 schools in Vavunathivu but to 17 more poor schools from neighbouring areas.

He also visited the Vavunathivu area west of Batticaloa town with Bernard Piragash a local aid worker. The Vavunathivu area which has 24 villages is connected by long causeway and bridge with Batticaloa town.

The area has 27 schools. Puthumandahathady Hospital is the local peripheral unit of the Health department. The area was under LTTE control until recently and there was a stand off between the army and the rebel forces across the causeway for many years. The people were therefore cut off and as a result they suffered great deprivation. Once a day a bus would arrive from the Town at about 9 am and return at about noon. Teachers arrived and returned on the bus.

The people are very poor. Cultivation is very difficult. Fresh water is scarce despite the Unnichai dam not far away. Wells are few and dug by identifying under ground springs using water diviners.

Parents in this area do not understand the importance of education for their children. The children are sent to out to work to earn a living even before they are 10 years old. Children walk many miles bare foot and reach school any time before 10 and soon by noon they begin their walk home as the teachers would have taken the return bus back to town. None of the children could speak or understand any English. Some 10 year olds could not read Tamil fluently.

The World Food Programme provided rice and dhal often infested with insects. Murunga leaves were used commonly as the vegetable. The parents took turns in cooking the mid day meals. The teachers complained that at night, wild elephants would break open the store room of the school to get at the rice and dhal. They were planning to build bunkers to hide the food from the marauding pachyderms.

Dan also was privileged to meet Mr. M.T.A.Nizam, the Director of Education Eastern Province at Vaharai Mathiya Maha Vidyalayam and address a meeting of 500 Principals and school heads. Mr. Nizam welcomed the contribution of Oru Paanai and requested help to 203 small and poorer schools. Mr. T Anandaroban Assistant Director of Education provided a list of the 203 schools.

Visit to Puthukulam Maha Vidyalayam Sasthrikoolankulam

Mr. T.Amirthalingam introduced Mr. S. Kamaladas an English teacher in the school as the person in charge of the provision of mid day meals. The school has 960 students. They are able to purchase 30 kilos of vegetables a day with the Rs.600/- funds we provide per day. The Principal daily personally visits the kitchen and oversees the cooking and serving of the food. Most teachers also partake of the food.

Visit to Puliyanakulam Zonal Director of education

The area covered by this zone included Nedunkerni and Omanthai Divisions. Mrs Anton Somarajah the Zonal Director was very pleased with the work of Oru Paanai. She welcomed its contribution and added in Tamil the following proverb.

“ உண்டி குடுத்தார் உயிர் குடுத்தார்”

“Giving food is giving life”

She said that hunger and starvation are real in Vavuniya. One child was seen taking a part of her school meal home for her younger sister, she said.

A meeting with the Principals and heads of schools was arranged and was well attended. The work of Oru Paanai and the accounting mechanism were explained. Since September 2010 we are helping to feed 3250 children from 35 schools in Vavuniya north.

Meeting in Killinochchi

Mr Murugavel the Deputy Zonal Director of Education, Killinochchi with Manickavasakan Nirmalan arranged a meeting of school heads at St Theresa's College in Killinochchi. Heads from areas such as Karachi, Kandavalai, Pallai, and Poonakari attended the meeting. The heads were very keen that I visited their schools. This was promised at the next occasion I visited Killinochchi.

Since September 2010 we are helping 23 schools in feeding 2450 children

Visit to Jaffna Zonal Director of Education

It was a pleasure to meet a fully committed educationist in Mrs. A.Vedanayagam. She is inspirational and visits schools ad hoc from 7 am on her way to work. She also attends community cultural events in the evenings and weekends encouraging music, dance and drama.

She expressed her gratitude to Oru Paanai for the help with enhancing the quality of the mid day meal. She arranged a meeting of Principals and heads of schools in her zone who would benefit most from Oru Paanai.

At this meeting too, which was well attended, the work of Oru Paanai and the accounting procedures were explained.

Since September we are helping 37 schools in the Jaffna peninsula to feed 7000 children

Visit to schools in Jaffna

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The following schools were visited:

Periyapulam MV
Osmania College
St. Benedicts School
Kantharmadam Saivapiragasa Vidyalayam
Senguntha Hindu College

National College of Education Kopay

A 42" TV monitor was donated to the College for use as a means of connecting with a class of students via Skype. The NCE of Kopay is a Teacher Training College, teaching young men and women the art of teaching different subjects. We were interested in helping would-be teachers of English with spoken English. The President of the College Mr. Yoganathan was very enthusiastic and welcomed our help and input.

It has been lately acknowledged in Sri Lanka that the teaching of English is vital. English is hardly spoken in rural homes and children are not exposed to hearing the language being spoken. Teaching a language that is not commonly spoken is indeed very challenging. In Jaffna and many rural areas English teachers are few and need help and encouragement.

Skype connection was established with the help of Dialog dongle. Volunteers from the UK could connect with the class room in the Kopay College and have a dialogue in English with students. This is what we have been able to do.

It is early days. Our hope is that we can encourage spoken English, which then makes it so much easier to learn to read and write.

Present commitment of Oru Paanai

Killinochchi zone - 23 schools - 2451 students
Vavuniya North - 35 schools - 3247 students
Jaffna - 37 schools - 6018 students
Vavunathivu - 6 schools - 1060 students

101 schools 12,776 students

Since September 2010, the schools Oru Paanai is assisting with the provision of mid day meals include schools from Vavuniya North, Killinochchi, Jaffna and Vavunathivu in the Eastern province.

We have had several requests from other zones too - schools from Mannar Batticoloa and the islands off Jaffna.

The challenge is great. We need to redouble our efforts.

Your support is important and is needed. Please help.