

Case Study on Volunteerism: ② Sri Lanka

Background

Sri Lanka, despite its small size, has a rich biodiversity distributed within a wide range of ecosystems. In the recent past, the ability of the Government to carry out development activities in order to accelerate economic growth and improve the distribution of income has been severely constrained by its involvement in unavoidable defense and security operations in the North and East of the country.

There are 4.5 million young people in Sri Lanka. Their sheer presence in numbers, and the fact that they have the energy to undertake physically demanding work over long periods of time, means that they are uniquely well placed to access remote places, where people need help. Volunteer Managers and young people explained in interviews that young people

Source: www.un.org

Volunteerism in Sri Lanka

From approximately the middle of the 20th century, volunteering in Sri Lanka began to evolve, its focus shifting from being mainly about 'charity work' to being more about development. Voluntary associations increasingly became development non-government organizations (NGOs).

Sri Lanka committed to achieving the MDGs in the 2000s. According to the Institute of Policy Studies (2010), this had a significant influence on social development thinking and on volunteerism in the country.

[Case Study 1: Education and skills development through volunteerism](#)

At the age of 21, Shanmugawel Arularasi found herself exploring different options and opportunities in her life, when she heard about the Mother Support Groups (MSGs) volunteer

programme run by UNICEF in her home town of Trincomalee. At that time she had little idea about what was expected of a volunteer. Arularasi decided to get involved, and the orientation programme she participated in provided her with new information on breastfeeding techniques, pregnancy care, personal hygiene, immunization, birth control and other issues.

The volunteers themselves, by being involved in the communication and implementation of various kinds of projects, are themselves benefiting by upgrading their skills. Respondents in the qualitative research were keen to point out that the quality and nature of the learning that stems from volunteering is extremely good, because of the sheer practical, rather than theoretical, nature of the knowledge acquired.

[Case Study 2: Innovative solutions](#)

The Puttalam area in the northwest of Sri Lanka suffers from the lowest rainfall in the country, and therefore, from severe drought. In Sellakandel, a small village in the area, a particular problem exists which stems from a lack of access to clean water – kidney disease. 28 young volunteers from the university came to the area after hearing about the issue, and engaged with local people to understand how best to help them.

It was decided that a tube well would be the best way to help, and, as a result, the volunteers organized themselves to build the well, which took them a month. The well is now completed, and 1,243 people in Sellakandel now have access to clean water and hope that the incidence of kidney disease will now fall, alongside other improvements in their quality of life.

Source: Sri Lankan Youth: Volunteering to Make a Difference

<http://flihtml5.com/adgh/nrvi/basic>