

# **Final Progress Report Balangoda & Weligepola**

**Mobilising for Empowerment**

**IWDA Program 2006-2007  
Project Reference : 170 N2**

1 . Name of the project : Mobilising for Empowerment

2 . Reporting Period : 2006 July 1 – 2007 June 30

3 . Project Objectives:

**Long term objective**

To achieve economic, social and political empowerment for women, allowing them to take on leadership roles within the family and community.

**Short –term objective**

Improve access to credit to enable women to initiate self employment, enhance dignity, and improve solidarity so that they can overcome challenges in their daily lives.

**3. Reaching the objective**

When judging the progress made towards meeting our objective, one important measuring rod is the growth of our membership. 120 small groups had been formed by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, with a total membership of 603 individuals.

The awareness raising conducted for these women and the transformations their lives have undergone is yet another victory. The women now are unafraid to discuss the problems they face within the family, the effects of alcohol and drug use and the violence and sexual abuse at the small group meetings. There have even been instances when the mobilizers, through dialog and education have been able to save women on the verge of committing suicide.

The International Women's Day celebrations the demonstration and the march held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2007 made evident the leadership qualities cultivated in the women of Balangoda. With the Kantha Shakthi members from Matara and Tangalle joining hands with the women of Balangoda, this event involved over 700 participants. The celebrations which involved speeches, songs and plays was organized by the social mobilizers and members of Balangoda. The contribution from the 30 rural women identified for leadership training was outstanding at this event. Slogans for the demonstration agenda of the meeting, Publicity for the event, compeering and refreshments on the day were all handled by them.

The protest rally held in opposition of opening a liquor store at the Weligapola junction has resulted in the the closing down of the establishment with the authorities not granting permission till date. The dedication and perseverance of the Kantha Shakthi mobilizers and members in this battle is widely recognized and appreciated in the village.

The mobilizers themselves conducted 2 awareness raising workshops, specifically catering to the young women in the area, as they felt it an urgent need. Such an initiative showcases the level of capacity and leadership qualities developed in the social mobilizers. The mobilizers and some small group members proved to be resourceful for other work of the organization as well. It is they who trained the women of Matara and Tangalle in taking the post tsunami project to the next phase by setting up 2 collectives. Some women of Small groups have come to the leadership of the family and community through courage and innovation.

The above facts show that besides economic development, the women have experienced social and political empowerment. These observations in the field reiterate the the overall objective of the Kantha Shakthi Organization.

#### 4. Activity Report

An activity report for the time period considered in the report has been prepared. Each activity has an objective formulated to facilitate the overall objective of the project.

#### Activity Objectives 1 & 2

- **Enhance livelihood opportunities of women in Small Groups**
- **Improve self perception and solidarity among women.**

The following activities were carried out within the last year with these objectives in mind.

120 small groups had been formed by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, with a total membership of 603 women. The funds built up by all the small groups is Rs. 1,455,988.00. This fund has provided loans for improvement in standard of living and livelihood opportunities of the women. A breakdown of the loans taken by the women is provided in the table below.

<b>The reason for acquiring the loan</b>	<b>Loaned amount LKR</b>	<b>Number of women who took loans</b>
To grow vegetables	207364.00	124
To grow paddy	28250.00	17
To grow tea	36500.00	23
Business purposes	34600.00	37
Small business	58200.00	33
Housing loans	18000.00	4
Legal needs	6650.00	1
Medical needs	52600.00	68
For the education of the children	71900.00	102
To pay back a loan	24585.00	18
Consumer needs	228326.00	185
For Travelling	27650.00	55
To pay share capital to the collective	3030.00	6
To contribute a friends' common fund	18100.00	10
For a Social function	1600.00	2
To buy furniture	31250.00	4
To reclaim a pawned item	3750.00	1
TO give an advance to buy a tractor	10400.00	1

To buy clothes	3500.00	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>866255.00</b>	<b>692</b>

According to the above statistics members have engaged in credit transactions 692 times, taking loans amounting to Rs.866255 out of which Rs. 364914.00 has been given for income generating activities. This makes up 42% of the credit provided.

Besides providing credit facilities, activities are designed for the small groups to build unity and friendship between the women and develop their skills. It also provides the women with a platform to discuss and share their hardships and to resolve disputes and problems.

At each small group meeting, time is allocated for story telling, singing , dancing and sharing experiences. This exercise goes a long way in confidence building and brings out the hidden talents of the women. Most importantly it gives them a chance to break away from their monotonous routine and have a good time.

Prior to the inception of the small groups, these women had no space to share their problems but at the weekly meetings discussion and dialog between members and sharing their experiences is an item on the itinerary. Examples of such issues discussed are depicted below.

- The mobilizers came to know of a woman in Weligapola whose husband's addiction to liquor led her and her children to face violent behaviour and abuse every single evening. The mobilizers visited this house regularly and spoke to both husband and wife. They have now heard from the small group members that the husband has now changed his ways.
- A member of a small group spoke of how she and her husband don't speak to each other and that their relationship is non-existent for some time now. her husband also accuses her of carrying on extra-marital affairs and is eternally suspicious of her. Once again with the intervention of the mobilizers this misunderstanding has been put right and there is unity among husband and wife.

In such instances the support from social mobilizers and small group members helps the women of the area to halve their burden and often to resolve the problem.

Yet another facet of this project is to promote 'labour sharing'. Members of a small group share the labour involved in a fellow member's endeavor. This saves them the payment which would have been made to hired labourers and saves time as well. A few such instances are given below:

- Ploughing
- Shifting sand
- Household chores
- Vegetable cultivation and harvesting
- Cultivation of yams
- Work in the paddy field
- Helping at funerals

Awareness raising is an important component in this project. Themes which have been covered during the past year at small group meetings are as follows:

<b>Theme</b>	<b>No. of Women/ Participants</b>
Natural division of the sexes Vs. division of gender created by society	320
Gender and society	420
Democratic family Vs. Traditional family	537
Do women need gender equality or the fair value/status	282
Leadership	475
Violence against women	307
Mental and physical subjugation of women within the family	100
Selected verses from “ Sirith Mal Dama” A series of folk poems which speak of the right way to live	166
Ethnic conflict	450
Women's issues	295
Concept of 'Dowry'	145
Loan repayment and discipline	167
The consequences of pesticide use	127
Child rights and child abuse	252
AIDs awareness	45
Importance of nourishment for the girl child	40
Labour sharing	155
Loyalty and harmony within the family	111
Small business management	73
Relations between parents and daughters	82
Unity and cooperation between husband and wife	5
The need for rest and relaxation for women	18
Sexual exploitation of children	15
Human Rights	20
Age of marriage	55
Obsolete traditions	70

For more effective results the mobilizers use techniques such as debate and forum theater when dealing with these topics.

While working in the field, the social mobilizers have identified 30 women who showed capacity and potential in hard work, self confidence and leading others. Special attention is given to these women to build their leadership qualities. While they play a big role in organizing all events and activities, it should be specially mentioned that 2 of these women have begun serving as mobilizers themselves in the Handagiriya and Diyavinna areas.

Judging by these activities and their encouraging results, the first two activity objectives seem to have been fulfilled beyond our expectations. Ideas expressed by a small group member from Hnadagiriya, Menike Wannisuriya is attached as annex No. 1.

### **Activity Objective 3**

- **Provide credit on a larger scale to members of the collectives**

To date 9 collectives have been established with 401 members. The total funds of the collectives amount to Rs. 3,314,220.00 and loans are provided to members to enhance economic activities house building and other important needs. A breakdown of the loans taken is given below.

<b>Reason for obtaining the loan</b>	<b>Amount LKR</b>	<b>Number of women</b>
To grow vegetables	361,000.00	39
To plant tea	140,000.00	18
To grow paddy	30,000.00	4
To make yogurt	5,000.00	1
Business purposes	110,000.00	15
To grow fruits	25,000.00	4
To grow flowers	10,000.00	1
To buy an oven to bake cashew	5,000.00	1
To grow beetle leaves	10,000.00	1
For brick business	35,000.00	4
To make a barb wired fence around a land	10,000.00	1
To repay a debt	25,000.00	1
To reclaim a pawned good	20,000.00	2
To obtain a land license	50,000.00	1
To build an extension of houses	440,000.00	37
To build a toilet	5,000.00	1

To obtain electricity to house	10,000.00	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,291,000.00</b>	<b>132</b>

Following are a list of small businesses carried out with the aid of loans from the collectives.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Business/Project</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>
1	Vegetable cultivation	78
2	Small scale trade center/business	31
3	Cultivation of passion fruit	06
4	Sweet meat making	12
5	Tea cultivation	45
6	Incense stick making	02
7	Wood carving	01
8	Sewing and fabric painting	03
9	Brick making	07
10	Handi-crafts	05
11	Pepper cultivation	04
12	Making powder from rice	01
13	Flori culture	04
14	Mushroom cultivation	04
15	Packeting Tea leaves	01
16	Banana cultivation	06
17	Paddy cultivation	03
18	Cashew cultivation	08
19	Making flower pots	01
	<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>

The benefits of being a member of the 'Chinthamani' collective, both economic and otherwise, in the

words of its' treasurer is attached as annex No.2.

#### **Activity Objective 4**

- **Develop the capacity of social mobilisers in awareness raising and facilitating small groups**

Apart from economic empowerment and independence, raising the level of education and awareness of women is an integral part of the project. This knowledge is taken to the members through the social mobilizers and so educating them and broadening their horizons is a priority for our organization. A number of workshops were conducted in this regard while these efforts were supplemented by booklets and discussion kits compiled and distributed to be used at meetings.

Four workshops were conducted in the previous year, covering urgent issues and themes:

- Womens' issues
- Womens' Rights
- Feminist power and leadership
- Gender based division of labour and motherhood

The topics of the discussion kits circulated are included in Annex No. 3.

A social mobilizer's view on this awareness raising strategy is given by Elanda as annex No.4.

#### **Activity Objective 5**

- **Enable women to cope with crisis and emergencies.**

The women living in our project areas live amidst extremely difficult conditions and are often faced with unexpected obstacles and accidents. The existence of an emergency fund is therefore a great relief for these women. During the last year emergency loans were taken for the following reasons:

- To carry out medical examinations for a woman who fell ill.
- Traveling fare to seek help from the police, the courts, etc.
- Traveling fare for mobilizers to rush to a location at the news of an incident of violence.

The value of such a fund in a remote village such as Balnagoda is immense while it also facilitates the mobilizers to carry out their duties in a timely and effective manner.

### **5. Problems and Achievements**

#### **Obstacles**

The lack of transport facilities for mobilizers to travel to remote areas like Diyavinna, Medagan Oya and Kahatapitiya has proven to be a major challenge. Traveling to Illukkumbura along very bad roads and time constraints of plantation women are other challenges. The heavy rains and thunderstorms have made it near impossible to reach small groups at times while the long holiday period in the month of April due to Sinhala and Tamil new year caused a considerable delay and set back in the programme.

## **Achievements**

The opportunity to join hands with the women of Matara and Tangaalle in several programmes, especially the International Womens Day celebrations has been an encouragement for all the women involved. The special interest taken in addressing the unique problems and challenges faced by the young women in Balangoda has been yet another victory for our organization.

## **6. Plans for the Future**

- To continue on going activities of small groups and Collectives.
- To overcome economic challenges through solidarity by forming women's trade clusters.
- To organise exchange programs with a view to learn from strengths and weak nesses of one another.
- To develop the management capability of social mobilizers.

Report prepared by Ruwani Renuka  
Translated by Nadya Perera  
Date 2007 July 30

## **Annex 1**

### **The womens' contribution to the Economic development of our village**

It was during a time when we were burdened with monetary constraints with empty promises and corrupt dealings of politicians, that Kantha Shakthi came to our village.

The dedication of the mobilizers who worked tirelessly to organize and educate us, thereby raising our standard of living will always be remembered fondly.

Ours is a farming village and due to extreme weather conditions (dry weather, most of the year) commercial crop cultivation is a challenge. Although the men and women work equally hard in the fields, the lack of seeds and fertilizer make things difficult.

Since forming small groups and collectives, we have built a fund through our own savings and timely access to seeds and fertilizer is no longer a problem. We now generate a sufficient income and are able to put aside savings on a regular basis in our own bank.

The weekly (Wednesday) Womens' fair inaugurated by Kantha Shakthi has been extremely valuable to us as it provides us the opportunity to market our produce at competitive prices.

Along with economic stability, unity within the family and between member households has improved considerably and we all enjoy a higher standard of living and peace of mind.

I feel we were merely struggling for survival before but are living in the true sense of the word now, with more awareness and peace of mind.

Manike Wannisuriya  
Handagiri Rejina Collective  
Handagiriya

## Annex 2

### **Benefits of belonging to the Chinthamani collective**

As rural women we are expected to shoulder a tremendous amount of responsibilities and be trapped within the 4 walls of the house. Cooking, cleaning, washing, and looking after the children were all we were seen fit for. After becoming a part of Kantha Shakthi and becoming a member of the collective things have changed drastically. We perceive ourselves differently now-as capable individuals who are unafraid to step out, who deserve to be happy. Irrespective of the level of education, the collective provides a platform for all women to interact, learn, and showcase their talents. Women, who have not performed, sung or danced since their school days have once more found confidence to take the stage. The chance to forget our trials and to relax and enjoy ourselves in a group is one of the greatest benefits of being a part of this programme.

Through the credit scheme and training opportunities women are able to find self employment and other income generating avenues, thus becoming economically independent. At present our members are engaged in making mosquito nets, handi-crafts, and small scale trade enterprises while others cultivate tea and vegetables.

The welfare fund in our collective provides considerable relief at times of demise in the village.

Belonging to a small group also helps us in so many different ways. It builds unity among women living in the area and provides each one with a support system. The ability to share one's problems with others is of immense importance. The opportunity to take an emergency loan from the small group fund in the instance of a child falling ill or similar situation is also a great relief for us.

The awareness raising that is carried out within the collective too has gone a long way in changing our lives for the better. The social mobilizers initiate dialogue on important themes and lessons are taught through dialogue, debate, and even drama. 'Maintaining unity within the family', 'equal labour distribution among men and women in the household', 'dealing with alcohol use by male members in the family' and 'domestic violence' are some of the issues discussed. Being made aware of our rights and being able to discuss on how best to practically tackle these issues with the mobilizers has been immensely helpful.

We have also been enlightened on how to raise our children with affection and understanding and how to guide them when they are faced with a problem of their own.

Serving as the treasurer of the Chinthamani collective, the personal development I have gained is immeasurable. The lessons I have learnt in leadership, organizational skills, and account keeping has helped me to manage my time, enabling me to manage my family life, while pursuing my higher studies as a university student and generating an income all at the same time.

I am ever grateful to all at Kantha Shakthi and our mobilizers for improving our standard of living and bringing order and meaning to the lives of all the members of the Chinthamani Collective.

**Kumari  
Treasurer  
Chinthamani Collective**

### Annex 3

#### **Areas of awareness raising conducted for mobilizers within the past year**

- Violence against women
  - related to economic activity
  - cultural violence
  - religious Violence
  - social Violence
  - violence within Government institutions
  - armed Conflict (Ethnic conflict in the North and East)
  - related to new technology
  - globalisation and violence
- The gravity of the issue of violence against women and sexual offenses perpetrated against women.
  - Deformation and damage caused to sexual organs of young women
  - What causes such violent behaviour.
  - Gender inequality (Power and gender roles)
  - Conflict resolution mechanisms in society
  - Use of alcohol and drugs
  - Religious beliefs and traditions
  - Media
  - Physical and psychological causes
  - Social factors
  - Police and court system
- Power and decision making
  - Power centers
- Family and power
  - How an individual becomes powerful
  - Sources of power and domination
    - Obsolete traditions and customs meant to subjugate women
    - The manner in which the 'woman' is represented through the media
    - Violence and abuse perpetrated against women in times of conflict and war
    - Poverty and women
- Leadership
  - What is leadership
  - Characteristics of a good leader
  - Feminist power and leadership

- What is 'feminism'?
  
- Female heads of households
  - Discrimination against women who head house holds
  
- Gender division of labour
  - Motherhood
    - How does motherhood empower women?
    - How does motherhood disempower women?
  
  - Sex and gender
    - Personality traits and behavioural patterns
    - Politics of dress
    - Communication
  
  - Conflict resolution and management among women and building unity among them

## Annex 4

### **Taking awareness raising of social mobilizers to the small groups**

Under the guidance of the resource persons who have trained us we have understood the need to be aware of a wide range of subjects as social mobilisers. I believe that it is important to have a general idea of how to deal with several diverse topics, rather than gaining an in depth knowledge of a few selected topics. This is due to the experience I have gathered in the field which has showed me that the individuals we come across vary in their level of capacity to understand, their attitude, and their living environment and personal histories. No two people are alike.

While one may be faced with a domestic crisis, the other may be involved in a land dispute while another will be faced with external pressures of a different nature. No matter how complex in nature, each of these cases requires support and needs to be resolved tactfully, through awareness raising and transformation of attitudes.

The awareness raising is carried out in a well planned manner. Resource persons are brought in to conduct programmes on selected topics for us, which are supplemented with discussion kits prepared by the Colombo Office. Domestic violence, Gender roles and division of labour, Democracy in the family, Human Rights and the Ethnic conflict are topics we have already received discussion kits on.

It is the knowledge that we gain from the workshops and the discussion kits that we discuss first among the mobilizers and then take to the small groups once a week. We also carry out awareness raising at Collective meetings and special meetings conducted for several small groups living in an area.

As mobilizers we need a certain amount of flexibility in the field. Most often we approach a house hold with a plan to educate them on a certain topic but once we arrive, we face unexpected problems and disputes, which need our immediate intervention. In such instances we must adapt to the circumstances and shift our priorities to suit the situation.

We work in challenging environments against daunting odds

There are women who undergo sexual harassment and marital rape at the hands of their husbands. Offences carried out against young girls and children too are on the rise. Addiction to illicit liquor and drugs is a burning issue contributing to the increase in violent behaviour

I recall an incident where a woman working as a family health officer, broke down while relating her story to me. Even other villagers pleaded with me (almost challenged me) to make her husband change his ways. A man who came home drunk every evening to abuse her and destroy her belongings, she had been driven to the point where she was prepared to leave the house with her children. It was evident that having someone to listen to her story itself was a great relief for her.

We continued to visit her house almost everyday. We eventually got the opportunity to speak to her husband and engaged him in conversation about our journey and our programme in general. On our next visit we addressed his drinking problem and he began to argue. But we had a strong case. Point by point we showed him the consequences of drinking both to his own health and to the family. Gradually we spoke of the children and how the fighting and violence affects them and their studies.

We persevered and are proud to say that he is now a changed man.

Not all cases are this successful however, as some individuals are more difficult to change and only offer lip service in our presence.

We come across individuals who are hostile and set in their ways. At times we are driven to liaise with the police and legal bodies for the resolution of a problem.

It is important to be non-judgmental and patient with the individuals we meet for they are often victims of circumstance, addicted to illicit liquor, suffering from ignorance and poverty. Our culture and society tends to discriminate and judge people, especially women unfairly. We as mobilizers need to be more progressive and look at things differently, thereby changing the attitude of the people we work with. We try to investigate in to the reasons which cause them to behave in such a manner and then approach the problem in a tactical manner.

When raising awareness in an area a challenge we face is the inability to reach the entire population. For effective results parallel awareness raising has to be conducted for the men folk. Innovative and imaginative methods to raise awareness is another area we want to improve on. We hope to use video/film as a tool to reach a wider audience in the future if financial constraints can be overcome. At present we have found street theatre to be a most engaging and effective way to reach the masses. There were areas with a shortage of lavatory facilities and the villagers polluted the road sides and water holes. The mobilizers working in the area put together a play which addressed this issue. Once the people were engaged we went ahead with organizing them to build man holes through labour sharing and loans from the small groups for raw material.

Thus, awareness raising is carried out by us not only through discussion and dialogue but also through intervention and assistance in their more urgent problems, thereby showing them the benefits of applying what they learn to achieve a better standard of living.

D.M. Elanda  
2007/07/12