

Reconciling Peace and Justice: Economic Development and Community-Building in Sri Lanka

Project Goals

- ◆ Understand and evaluate how an economic development organization can utilize its capacities to incorporate peace-building activities into its work
- ◆ Encourage children and young people to think about peace and their voices in the peace process in creative, nontraditional ways
- ◆ Document the stories, struggles, and hopes of people affected by the war from diverse parts of society and the country

Personal Goals

- ◆ Form relationships with individuals from many different political, social, and ethnic backgrounds in order to understand their different cultures, attitudes, and constructed histories
- ◆ Learn and write about a conflict, a country, and a people that receives very little attention from the American media
- ◆ Understand what “peace and coexistence” means to a country in the middle of war and to explore the relationship between peace and economic or social justice

Activities

- ◆ Facilitated a workshop for university students throughout the country who were brought together to role-play a political negotiation to the ethnic conflict
- ◆ Interviewed displaced families in Sinhala and Tamil villages in the Northern areas about their life stories
- ◆ Assisted Sewa Lanka in planning peace-building activities by collecting information from other local NGOs, conducting a village exchange program, and organizing cooperative children’s games

Key Dilemmas

- ◆ How do I talk to people who are suffering from such dire economic conditions or a history of human rights abuses about “peace” and “coexistence”?
- ◆ What does it mean to be an American studying peace work in a war-affected developing country?
- ◆ How can I remain hopeful for an end to the conflict in a situation of escalating violence and political turmoil? If I cannot remain hopeful as a foreigner, how can I expect the Sri Lankan people to remain hopeful?



Jennifer attended the sports meet of the children living in a temporary resettlement village in the border village of Vavuniya.

Important Learnings

- ◆ In order to talk about peace and coexistence, one must address the problems of inequality and economic and social injustices. This places an economic development agency like Sewa Lanka in a special position to take on this kind of peace work.
- ◆ There is a great need for incremental peace work on a grassroots level, in spite of the discouraging levels of distrust and fear that pervade the life of civil society. Yet the initiative and directive for these programs must come from the people themselves and not from foreigners. I was very sensitive to my role as a foreigner in Sri Lanka and the danger in associating Western ideologies with developing countries.

Poem

This poem is by Sister Fatimanayaki, a Catholic nun involved with Caritas Sri Lanka. She is an encouraging and radiant spirit. I worked with her as a facilitator for the Peace Laboratory with the University students. This is one of her published poems on peace, for which she has won awards.

But now—why—

*When the whole world is moving rapidly
With its discoveries of science
And the multiple theories of Psychology
Theology, Sociology and Philosophy.*

There is no Peace, Harmony, and Oneness?

*Our nerves are stormed
And our ear drums blocked
With the sound of guns, bombs, bombing
Air-attacks and shooting!*

*Humanity shouts out with one accord
Peace... Peace... Peace...*

*Be aware little Babe,
Since the world is exhausted with non-stop war.
Awake your people.*

To live in love, peace, and oneness,

So that we may once more

Sing that glorious song of the angels

"Glory to God in the highest

And on earth peace among men"

Without any distraction of

Caste, Creed, Nationalities, Languages

And Religions.



Top: Jennifer traveled often with Kaushyla, a Sri Lankan intern at Sewa Lanka. This man-made tank serves the water needs of surrounding villages in Kurunegella.

Above: Kamala pounds the rice paddy for eating and selling. She was displaced to this temporary Sinhala village of Ullukkulam with her three children and owns the village store. **Right:** A wood carving made by local villagers.

