



*Families look on despairingly at what was once the roof over their heads*

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## Burning homes...burning hopes...

Two fire incidents on consecutive days in two temporary shelter locations in Nagapattinam (and one more being reported as this issue is being published)..... Is it really an accident or is it caused? As the question lingers on, the sufferers in Nagai Ariyanattu Theru and Puthupalayam are scrambling around to find ways and means to nestle up somewhere and start a life from the scratch. People who had been traumatised by a series of mishaps in their life have again been inflicted with another. Is it fate or man-made, mischief or callousness while dealing with inflammables?

The Tsunami forced them to leave their native locations and live in transit for a while, before being relocated to temporary shelters. These shelters are so packed that a small spark in one is enough to gut the entire row of houses. And in an hour everything is lost - the day's meal, household items, clothing, students' notebooks and texts, everything...

Just like in any other accident, the stage is set for post mortem. A volley of questions are raised.....did the shelter conditions contribute to the fire? ...Were there any in-built facilities to extinguish fire? ...Were the shelters good enough to provide a decent living? ...Was the fire accidental, or deliberate?

Although the reasons for the spark are not known, there are plenty of reasons why the people would prefer to stay out of temporary shelters, such as dilapidated houses, scorching summer heat, packed conditions with narrow passages, and an unhygienic environment that gets worse by the day...

Options like fire retardant materials to mitigate the effects of fire accidents, and improving the sanitation in temporary shelters are being thought about, even though the accessibility and affordability of such materials may prompt the investors to think twice before investing in.

As many things are being tried and tested out for ensuring a decent living for the community, the question remains as how long do they have to wait for a safe abode? And as the shelter construction makes a tardy progress in many places, the owners and beneficiaries are left guessing as to when their hopes of their own house would be fulfilled ■

## Dreaming of a new world

Dream of a world where there are no direct elections to national parliaments, to state assemblies, not even to panchayat councils. Dream instead of a world where parliaments come to the streets. The whole world gets organised into neighbourhood parliaments of about 30 neighbouring families. Each neighbourhood of 30 families becomes a kind of a mini-world or a mini-nation. Each neighbourhood parliament has a neighbourhood cabinet, with a neighbourhood chief minister and ministers for various concerns like health, hygiene, environment, income generation, children's welfare, adolescent's guidance - and anything else that is relevant at its level.

Each neighbourhood parliament then chooses its delegates to represent them at the village parliament. The village parliament also has its cabinet with a village chief-minister and village-ministers for concerns existing at village level.

At the next level are the panchayat parliaments and their cabinets. And then block parliaments, district parliaments, state parliaments, national parliaments, international regional parliaments and finally the world parliament (mind you not United Nations but a world parliament).

This is a dream which is being implemented by Fr. Edwin and his team under the aegis of Voluntary Health Association of Kanya Kumari (VHAK) which they term as Neighbourhood Community Network

There are two types of neighbourhood parliaments in operation in Kanyakumari district:

1. *Anbiyam* – 700 neighbourhood parliaments of Christians
2. Human Communities – 7000 neighbourhood parliaments of non-Christian

Adolescents of about 30 families each come together in the network of neighbourhood parliaments of adolescents. Here they analyse the situation around them; discuss related issues; do

value clarification; take decisions; make plans and budgets; monitor the process, etc. In the process they get empowered and grow. These

neighbourhood parliaments network through representative structures to form 2,002 village parliaments, 125 panchayat parliaments, 9 block parliaments and a district parliament

**Adolescents are encouraged to take responsibility for situations that affect them. By accepting responsibility they grow as responsible citizens**

**In some villages problems that remained unsolved for years were solved through the intervention by children and adolescents**

**The aim is to have nearly 12,000 neighbourhood parliaments covering the entire district, and becoming a model for the nation**



Adolescents in these forums are encouraged to take responsibility for the situations that affect them. They begin taking responsibility for their neighbourhoods, and gradually, through their networks, reach out to the wider world. By accepting responsibility they grow as responsible citizens. They are given courses on personality development and psycho social inputs. Besides this, two publications - 'Manam Malarthida', a book of 30 stories, one for each day of the month and 'Suttram', containing information on neighbourhood and children parliament are being circulated among them.

In some villages, the problems that remained unsolved for years like the need for an access road, a reading room, better facilities at the day-care

centre were solved on account of the interventions by children and adolescents

The programme in the district is limited at present to the rural areas. The aim is to have nearly 12,000 such neighbourhood parliaments, so that the entire district is covered and this becomes a model for the nation. ■

In Joseph Colony village of Muthalagirichy panchayat, there are four neighbourhood adolescents' parliaments. They are well equipped with PLA techniques. A problem identified and prioritized by them was that there was no proper road and bus facility to their village. They submitted a petition to the Panchayat President. Though they were ignored initially, their efforts in cleaning the pathways and meeting officials moved the elders. With the cooperation and encouragement of the elders they succeeded in bringing buses and mending the roads of their village.

## Celebrating Global Action Week 2006

Avvai, an NGO working for the educational development of children in Nagapattinam District, organised the Global Action Week – 2006 in collaboration with Bharathi Women Development Centre (BWDC) and CCF India on 24 April 2006 at Sri Lakshmi Thirumana Mandapam, Nagapattinam. The Global Action Week is celebrated every year throughout the world to mark the importance of education and the importance of stakeholders on education. This year it is celebrated from 24th April to 30th with the motto of 'Every child needs a teacher'. The programme is a project of United Nations Convention for Child Rights (UNCRC).

Avvai organised village, district and state level talent competitions and cultural programmes for children. The village level programmes were conducted in 8 villages in Nagapattinam between 19-24 April. Children from Chandrapadi, Thideerkuppam, Nambiyar Nagar, Keezha Pattinacherry, Mela Pattinacherry, Samanthanpettai, Keechankuppam and Akkaraipettai got the opportunity to showcase their talents in drawing, speaking, reciting slogans and cultural programmes. All the children who participated were given prizes. Some children among them were selected participate in the district level programmes on 24 April. Nine from among these were then chosen to represent Nagapattinam for the state level competition at Chennai. Out of the five top prizes, three were won by the children from Nagapattinam.

Initially, Avvai had a plan of pooling the children for a public hearing in front of the district administration on the day of the celebration. As the officials were busy on election duty, this could not take place. However, an assessment of the status of education and infrastructure in the cited eight villages has been conducted. Avvai propagates that the teacher-student ratio of an ideal class room must be 1:30. Although, the number of teachers in these villages seems all right, the quality of teachers has come as a matter of concern. Besides, infrastructure facilities like toilet and compound wall need to be provided. "We have shared our concerns with all stakeholders in the district involved in education, including the district administration, community leaders and the children themselves with a hope of facilitating improvements," says Mr M. Krishnakumar, Secretary of Avvai.

As far as the Global Action Week project is concerned, the entire world is determined to make a difference in the education of the poor children, especially of the developing world. While the developing countries are busy planning policy level changes and implementing these in schools, developed countries strive to facilitate funds. At the micro level, districts like Nagapattinam, where literacy rate is low and that drop-out rate is high, marking of such occasions causes ripples that could potentially travel miles to herald better environment for education and a better future for the under privileged. ■



*Flowering talent*

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## NGO profile- Thirumalai Charity Trust

Thirumalai Charity Trust (TCT) was established in 1970 to promote health, education and rural development. During the initial years, TCT supported the educational institution of the South Indian Welfare Society in Mumbai. Since 1983, TCT has been active in rural development in Tamil Nadu. Through its rural development programme, TCT aims to

- Empower rural women through an integrated programme of women development.
- Reduce the burden of disease by providing affordable, appropriate and sustainable health care.
- Transfer knowledge and skills to women volunteers of the villages.
- Reduce the burden of debt on the poor and build a sustainable banking programme managed by women.
- Encourage and enable self management processes towards achieving sustainability and empowerment of communities.
- Promote environmental and social development in the villages.
- Device suitable programmes for long term rehabilitation of communities affected by disaster.

### TCT's Tsunami Response Programme

When the Tsunami struck coastal Tamil Nadu on 26<sup>th</sup> Dec, TCT rushed its volunteers to provide relief. It has a continued presence in the rehabilitation phase. Its Tsunami response has been in the following areas:

#### Livelihoods assets

A total of 154 boats and engines were repaired from the villages – Akkarapettai, Nambiar nagar, Vellapallam, T.R.pattinam, Velankanni, Samanthan pettai, Pattinachery and Ariyanattu theru.

In Kaluvanthitu, Sinthathari pettai and west Sathangudi villages where the people lost their livelihood assets, TCT distributed tailoring machine, cycles, grinding machine, goats and groceries benefiting around 60 families.

Uniforms were also distributed to the students of T.E.L.C. middle school in Karaimedu village benefiting around 360 students.

#### Water and Sanitation awareness

Awareness programmes on water characteristics, water borne diseases, safe drinking water, waste water management were done with women SHG members, school children, school teachers, and Balwadi teachers. Various competitions have been conducted on safe drinking water theme for the school children. Exposure visits to reverse osmosis plants elsewhere were also organised for the school children.



#### Desalination plant

In Nagapattinam district, after Tsunami, water sources became very saline. The community was facing problems of scarcity. After detailed surveys, villages were identified for desalination project. The first reverse osmosis plant in the district was started by TCT in Akkrappettai in mid Feb 2005. The mission of this project has been " **to maximise the distribution of good quality of water to the community at the full capacity of the plant**". Now TCT plants are operational in five villages - Akkraipetai, Chandrapadi, Nambiar nagar, Kuttியандியூர், and Nagore pattinachery. Each plant's capacity is about 24000 litres per day. Two more plants are on the anvil.

Water committees have been formed in each village to organise daily distribution and to eventually take over the management of the water project. TCT would train the water committee members to enable this process. A user fee of Rs 30 per household is collected by the committee and is being deposited in the water committee accounts in a local bank. The money collected, will, in due course, help the committee to meet the operating expense of the plant.

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## Disaster preparedness

The fondly praised and revered mother earth has become unpredictable with the changing conditions and recurrent natural calamities. Ecologists direct the blame to unscrupulous human practices, but, irrespective of the cause, the need of the day is for preparedness and planning for these situations.

With a view to giving a few skills to the youth of the tsunami-hit Kameswaram village of Keelvelur taluk of Nagapattinam on protection of the environment and disaster preparedness, Claretian Life Animation Project (CLAP) and Thanjavur Multi-purpose Social Service Society (TMSSS) – the NGOs working for the tsunami affected in Nagapattinam district, jointly organised a workshop on 18 and 19th April 2006 at St. Sebastian Church premises, Kameswaram. About 150 youth in the age group of 17-25 from villages across Nagapattinam to Kodiyakarai in the south attended the workshop. The sessions starting at 10 in the morning went on till 8.30 in the evening; wrapping up the days session with cultural programmes on the themes of the workshop. The cultural programmes were performed by professionals from Chennai.



*Giving direction for disaster preparedness*

Other than lectures and exercises on disaster management and protection of environment, the function provided space for creativity and innovation with cultural programmes and exhibition at the same venue. The exhibition was open from morning till in the evening. It included banners, posters and books on themes like protection of environment, health issues, human rights and education. The participants were also shown few educational films and documentaries in the afternoon.

Resource persons had come in from Chennai. The first day sessions included topics of eco-system and its functioning, the impact of over use natural resources, and ways to protecting environment. The second day sessions covered types of disasters, disaster preparedness, the role of different agencies/groups in disaster management from the



*Exhibition on disaster preparedness*

United Nations and the government, to NGOs, panchayats, SHGs, and local village bodies. The programme was well received and much appreciated by the participants. During the evaluation of the workshop on the final day, Mr Aravind of Meenavar Colony, Kameswaram and a participant of the workshop commented, "This programme is the first of this kind. It has given me confidence to face the situation, in case of further disaster." ■

P. Buruslin Mento

## Sanitation for all: Promoting dignity and human rights



**WORKS** Political will and a strong government role. Governments have a major role to play in rallying all sectors of society to the cause of improved sanitation. Sanitation programmes should cut across government divisions, and local authorities should be encouraged to develop their own plans.

**DOESN'T** Giving sanitation low priority. Sanitation has often lost out to other social services, including provision of safe water. It is commonly believed that safe excreta management requires large quantities of water but, in fact, a number of disposal systems require little or no water at all. Sanitation issues are also sometimes ignored because they are seen as embarrassing.

**WORKS** Promoting behaviour change. Providing adequate facilities is not enough. Families need to know about health-promoting practices and be motivated to adopt them. Even when modern facilities are not available, families can protect themselves from disease by disposing of excreta safely. It is also important to reinforce traditional knowledge and practices that are beneficial, such as washing before entering a place of worship, common in much of Asia.

**DOESN'T** A narrow focus on technology. Good facilities make little difference in households where it is considered safe to leave children's faeces on the ground; when children are afraid of latrines or are forbidden to use them; or when family members neglect to wash their hands after using the latrine. Hygiene education goes hand in hand with technology.

**WORKS** Reaching schoolchildren. Schools are one of the best places to teach good hygiene, and childhood is the best time to learn about it. Good habits developed in childhood can last a lifetime and are likely to be passed on to the next generation. In Mali, a hygiene awareness programme in schools and on radio helped halve the number of people suffering from dracunculiasis (Guinea worm disease), contracted from unsafe water.

**DOESN'T** Ignoring the family as a whole. Keeping the home safe and sanitary is difficult unless *all* family members learn about good hygiene. In Central America, the Healthy School and Healthy House programme provides hygiene education in schools and also trains community members to reach parents, grandparents and other caregivers at home.



Source: Unicef publication -SANITATION FOR ALL: Promoting dignity and human rights

## Events roundup - April

### **ADB Livelihood Meeting**

**3 April, 2006**

This meeting on livelihoods, organized by NCRC, was a follow up meeting on the Asian Development Bank (ADB) workshop on livelihood, held on 8 February, 2006. The agenda of the meeting was to identify NGOs who would be interested in joining hands with the municipality in starting up new Self Help Groups under the livelihood project of ADB. The Municipal Commissioner, Mr. V. Chakrapani, Mr. Vinay Kumar, Municipal Health Officer, and NGOs participated in the meeting

### **Agriculture Planning and Review meeting**

**5 April, 2006**

As a follow-up to the preliminary meetings held last month on deriving at implementation plans of the NGOs for the second agricultural season, a meeting was held with the participating NGOs in Agriculture at the NCRC office in the Collectorate. The meeting discussed the following:

1. Planning for second season: Implementation and Capacity building

2. Consolidating functions for first year's works
3. Holding Taluk level meetings
4. Organising workshops
5. Implementation in back water problem areas
6. Working on drainage systems
7. Assessment of need for coordination

### **Core group meetings on Children**

**6, 12 and 19 April, 2006**

The core group on children has got representatives from 12 NGOs

In the first two meetings 7 and 9 NGOs respectively participated

Facilitated by NCRC, the first two meetings looked at a range of issues pertaining to children in Nagapattinam including:

- Visit to the service home and orphanages to assess the conditions
- Strengthening of the Core Group
- The PM's schemes for Children affected by Tsunami

- Holding children's parliament session in the presence of local politicians
- Implementation of GO33
- Better and clean preparation of free lunch at school
- Vacant positions of teachers to be filled
- Better transport facility during school hours
- Temporary shelter environment not convenient for adolescent girl children to get ready and go to school in time
- Better toilet facilities in school
- Scholarship to be given to all children
- Special provisions to be implemented for nutritious food for children
- Better drinking water, sanitation, medication and electricity facilities to be provided
- Computer literacy for all students
- Programmes for drop-out children to rejoin schools to be arranged
- Children committee to be formed to address their own problems
- All the disabled to go in to the list of GO33
- Better facilities in day care centres

The meeting on 19 April attended by all the core group representatives discussed in detail the organising Children's Parliament. Mr. Kannayiram of UNICEF also attended the meeting.

A drafting committee has been formed to consolidate and come out with final draft incorporating all the above said points

### ***KRRC, TNTRC visits Nagai***

***19-20 April, 2006***

To observe, share and learn more about the happenings in Nagapattinam vis a vis Tsunami rehabilitation, representatives of Tamil Nadu Tsunami Resource Centre (TNTRC) and Kanyakumari Rehabilitation Resource Centre (KRRC) visited Nagapattinam. The first day introductory session, at SIFFS training centre, Tarangambadi, started with a brief presentation by Mr. Vivekandan, CEO of South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) about NCRC and the status of rehabilitation in general. This was followed by a presentation by Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) on NGO contribution to Agriculture reclamation.

Following this, the team visited the in-situ, new location construction sites and the SIFFS' fishermen society and had interaction with the community.

On the second day, they visited some more reconstruction sites, fish landing and fishermen society, Self Help Groups and also called on the district collector, Dr. J. Radhakrishnan. Towards the end of the day NCRC organized a sharing session of TNTRC, KRRC team with the NCRC team.

### ***NGOs meeting on Children***

***24 April, 2006***

NGOs working for children in Nagapattinam met to plan celebrations for anti-child Labour Day towards the end of April and summer cultural programme for the children. 17 NGOs participated in the meeting.

## **Webwatch**

[www.infochangeindia.org](http://www.infochangeindia.org)

Comprehensive resource with daily updates, news & views on the development sector in India with focus on children, health, women, pollution etc.

[www.indiatogether.org](http://www.indiatogether.org)

The India Together online publication -get in-depth information and news on development, policy and social issues related to India.

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