

News from the field
October, 2007



I have now been in Sri Lanka for over two months and the time has certainly flown by! I spent my first few weeks visiting the four current projects, meeting the people who have been working hard to ensure the projects continue to run smoothly, and getting used to life in Colombo.

The projects are all running smoothly and in their final stages. In Samarakoon Watta, an opening ceremony was held for the long awaited community building. This was a low key affair, attended by a representative of the local organisation we are working with, as well as several community members who have been actively involved throughout the project, and myself. Two Buddhist monks also attended and led the traditional chanting to ensure the safety and prosperity of the building, as per local tradition. A larger opening celebration involving the whole community will take place in the next few weeks. The project assistant is currently trying to arrange a date, which is both auspicious according to local tradition, and is a day when local TV cameras will be available to film the proceedings! It looks set to be a great day, and I'm expecting to experience lots of singing, dancing and speeches! It will be a real honour for me to be present after all the hard work put in by Raja, Helen and the community members to make this building a reality.

In Kalpitiya, we continue to work on another building project, the completion of a pre school in Ammathotam. Building works, as anywhere, are a long and arduous process in Sri Lanka, but we will soon start the final phase of this building and the completion is being eagerly awaited by local community members and children. While visiting Kalpitiya, I visited two of the other pre schools supported by SLCT, which were thriving, and I had the chance to play with the children as they played 'dressing up', coming out with a weird and wonderful array of clothes!

At the Uplands school in the hill country, we are continuing the work on the playground for use by the school children and local community. It is already in use for various games and activities, but the current work will enable a larger area to become useable. The school was an absolute delight to visit, the children shy and courteous, and the headteacher and his wife were inspirational and remarkably committed to their school.

In Telwatte, the community heavily affected by the tsunami, the project continues to go from strength to strength. The original savings club set up is working so well, with 125 members, that another club has been set up so an additional 100 community members can become involved. We are providing support to this club to ensure it can become as effective as the original group. We are also currently planning a review of this project, with the emphasis being placed on involving community members in analysing the successes and limitations of the project. This will mean all parties involved can learn from the process and we can ensure the sustainability of the work that has been done in Telwatte.

Back in Colombo, I am working on ensuring SLCT is up to date with all the NGO registration processes, as well as making progress with Sinhala language classes. I'm not quite at the stage of being able to discuss the details of the projects with my Sri Lankan colleagues yet, but my attempts at general conversation are being greeted with much amusement and appreciative laughter in the communities we are working with.

We hope to make significant progress in all of the projects over the next two months, with the completion of the Kalpitiya pre school and Uplands playground, as well as ensuring the smooth functioning of the new Samarakoon Watta building, being current priorities. I have been welcomed into each of the communities with traditional Sri Lankan hospitality and I am enjoying working on these diverse projects to ensure sustainability for the future.

Beth
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