

In this edition....

- ...A three-day “lockdown” workshop produces inspired urban design for Mannar’s town plan
- ...Visible progress made on the women’s rice mill project
- ...A community tourism strategy gets the attention of the International Financial Corporation
- ...Successful overseas volunteer programs in 2013 will generate further ones in 2014



The past three months in Sri Lanka have been a mixed bag, of frustration and hampered progress on some of our larger projects and encouraging headway on our more community-level ventures. The political backdrop of this trip was vibrant and at times volatile due to the holding of the Northern Provincial Government elections and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM). The Government was also preoccupied with preparations for the forthcoming return to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in March of 2014.

A highlight of this period was having 15 overseas volunteers work alongside local counterparts on a range of projects. Although our town planning initiatives didn’t quite go according to plan, Diaspora Lanka brought out 11 Australian planning professionals who assisted to fast-track the Mannar urban development plan. Two volunteers came from Estonia to work on a community tourism strategy and an English-based activity program, while two further volunteers from Vietnam and Australia focused on establishing an ‘English as a Second Language’ (ESL) program.

Other pleasing developments included the progress made on establishing a rice mill so that women made vulnerable by the war can earn a daily income and the establishment of the Computerizing Mannar Villages initiative for children and youngsters in two more remote areas of Mannar.

Diaspora Lanka's Projects

1. Helping out

- Heart operation
- Video camera
- Asylum seeker support

2. Community advocacy

- Government, church, community agency negotiations

3. Business development

- Rice to Riches – women's rice mill
- IT Platform – youth business
- Computerizing Mannar Villages
- Mannar Chamber capacity building
- Community tourism strategy



4. Urban planning

- Mannar urban development plan
- Kulam/ponds rehabilitation project
- Foreshore development project
- Urban development "lockdown"

5. Social cohesion

- English as a second language program
- Mannar youth development
- Publications
- Knowledge transfers - volunteers and visitors

...To support our work financially, please go to page 21...

Get involved in Sri Lanka - development projects, business advice & planning, exposure visits, knowledge transfers, government negotiations, skills development, English language teaching

Get involved in Oz - dialogue discussions, project liaison, research, fundraising, media, conference organizing, committee roles (advocacy, PR, finance, web, admin, strategic planning)

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Australian Government 'stop the boats' publicity



"Without a visa do not come to Australia"

1.3 Asylum seeker support An intensive pamphlet and media campaign by the Australian Government was waged in fishing villages across Sri Lanka, warning potential asylum seekers not to come by boat. The recent strong deterrents have reduced maritime arrivals to Australia, discouraging "economic refugees". However the real losers are the genuine asylum seekers who are now stuck in places like Indonesia, not being able to move forward or backwards. The 'middle men' have abandoned them; they have no money for food or accommodation; they don't speak the language; they're not entitled to work; and they need to dodge police to avoid arrest and detention. Registration with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) takes between three to five years so until then, there is no financial relief available to them. Diaspora Lanka has been supporting small groups of young asylum seekers from Mannar during this difficult period. We support them not out of any political affiliations but because they are fellow human beings in distress.

Activities summary from last visit to Sri Lanka

- Continued financial support for basic food, accommodation and medicinal requirements for asylum seekers in Indonesia.
- Regular contact via mobile, skype and Facebook to offer support and advice.
- Have successfully assisted some to return to Sri Lanka.

Next steps

- Investigate options for those who feel they cannot return to Sri Lanka.
- Explore options for those who have returned but have no means to repay the substantial amounts loaned to them to come to Australia.
- Explore funding sources to develop employment programs for war-affected youngsters as an alternative to leaving Sri Lanka.

How you can help

- Contribute funds for short-term food, accommodation and medicinal needs.
- Assist to support unemployed young people to find local employment
- Explore ways for those asylum seekers who have returned to pay off their considerable debts.

Reflections

From personal observations, encounters and interviews with youngsters from Mannar, the major reasons for their desire to "go foreign" include a hopeless future outlook, a sense of helplessness and economic difficulties, as well as "rites of passage" based reasons. In a post-war context like Mannar where international NGO funds previously propped up the district and provided generous employment opportunities, the rapid withdrawal of such donor contributions has had, and continues to have, a profound downward effect on the local economy. A depressed fiscal outlook, new aspirational goals based on internet images of the affluent west, and a need to stretch wings cramped for too long by the war, have combined to provide the impetus for such risky maritime departures. Just as an Australian young adult may turn to London or Europe to signify their passage into adulthood, so too

for the Mannar youngster whose prospects aren't assured locally, and who wants to indulge in high adventure across the seas, often accompanied by friends.

The provision of career development and employment opportunities would do much to convince many not to leave. This becomes more difficult, however, if the youngster has had a failed asylum seeker attempt and is straddled with a debt that cannot be serviced by local wages in Sri Lanka. Even after failed asylum attempts and the associated hardships, such youngsters will, once more, try to "go foreign" because of this financial sword of Damocles over their heads. How best to support such individuals remain a quandary.

2. Community advocacy

Diaspora Lanka is frequently asked to advocate on behalf of individuals, groups and organisations on a range of issues. We meet with the hierarchy, officers and staff of government, military, community and religious agencies and commissions to represent or support those who have a concern or grievance. Diaspora Lanka's "there are no enemies" approach sees all parties as part of the solution.

3. Business development



Shanaka, Lentil as Anything, prepares for videoing



Foundations of the rice mill being constructed

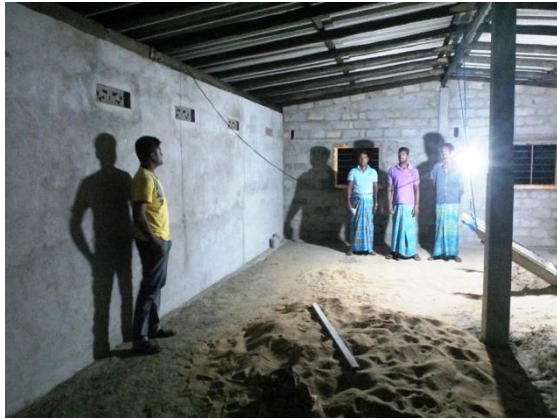
3.1 Rice to Riches: daily income for vulnerable women This is a livelihood program through micro business development in Manthai West Division in Mannar District. It targets vulnerable women - both war widows and returned internally displaced persons (IDPs) - across three villages where relations between Catholics, Muslims and Hindus are strained. A milling operation (rice, rice flour, curry, chilli powders) will provide a daily income for women, helping them back on their feet.

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka

- The overseeing committee (reps from Rural Development Societies (RDS) and Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS) of Pappamottai, Theanudayan and Kandal have functioned well, providing regular reports to Kamal Raj, from Diaspora Lanka.
- The iPledg! crowd-funder raised AU\$6,000 for the project, leaving an AU\$7,500 shortfall.
- Six site visits were made to monitor the construction progress from the laying of the foundation to the erection of walls and roofing. Machines for de-husking, de-stoning and grinding have been installed and three-phase power is currently being connected.
- The recruitment phase, including timelines, was discussed by the committee.
- Mill owner, Sasibawan, has contributed 30% of all expenses to date as set down in the MOU and once the mill is operational will start to pay back the 70% loan at a 1% interest rate. The repayments will go into a revolving fund to support additional livelihood initiatives.
- Ranjan, DL worker, and Tauri Tampuu, Estonian volunteer, compiled a book of recipes from the women of Mannar, one of the "rewards" of the recent iPledg! crowd-funding campaign.



Project committee members survey the progress



Walls and roof completed

Next steps

- Recruit female workers based on vulnerability criteria, skills and personal outlook.
- Raise remaining funds of AU\$7,500 to cover electricity connection costs and the first six months of the mill operation.
- Provide updates and rewards to all those who financially contributed toward the project.

How you can help

- Contribute toward the outstanding amount for the project: AU\$7,500.
- Consider personally supporting this women’s initiative by joining a support group to monitor the project’s development, keep in touch with the women, and to raise further funds.

Reflections

Since working closely with the established mechanisms of government - the Manthai West District Secretary and the relevant Grama Niladharis - and transitioning from a social enterprise model with a business edge to a business model with a social edge, the project has progressed at a great pace. Instead of a cooperative model, DL openly canvassed for one person to be the mill owner who would subsequently employ a workforce. The experienced rice mill owner has demonstrated great commitment to his business and has been responsible for driving the rapid and quality building construction process, working in cooperation with the committee and DL.



Kamal inspects the new machinery



The women are overjoyed by the progress



IT Platform staff meet Australian planners



Planners get to know the services offered by ITP

3.2 IT Platform (ITP) Eight young entrepreneurs and five staff in their 20s have commenced a business to provide computer services to underpin development in Mannar District, stalled as a result of 30 years of war. The business outlet offers graphic and web design services, computer repairs and maintenance, printing and photocopying facilities and spare parts sales. Recently ITP has established two outposts under the Computerizing Mannar Villages program. Diaspora Lanka assists with financial support, sourcing business and technical mentors and funding training and professional development.

Activities summary from last visit to Sri Lanka

- ITP continues to improve its profit margins and shoulder an increasing share of the costs.
- Currently Diaspora Lanka's contribution has decreased to 50% of staff/operational expenses.
- Some staff changes occurred due to other enticing employment and training opportunities.
- To meet a dire need for "motherboard" training, DL provided Rs 60,000 (AU\$525) for a five day intensive training course for three ITP entrepreneurs.
- ITP provided back-up IT and printing services to all 15 Australian and international volunteers, supporting them in their town planning, tourism and English language programs.
- During December volunteers from Vietnam and Estonia conducted weekly English language and activity programs for over 60 youngsters, culminating in a showcase event.

Next steps

- Find cost-effective transport solutions to provide services to far-flung areas of the district.
- Raise funds (\$500) for motherboard tools to repair failed computer motherboards.
- Review existing contract for financial support and negotiate a new contract in March 2014.

How you can help

- Assist ITP to develop its financial management, reporting capacity and a business plan.
- Contribute towards the AU\$800 per month financial contribution to ITP.
- Raise AU\$2,000 to purchase motherboard repair tools and a motorbike for distance travel.



Intensive motherboard training



The first IT Platform wedding

3.3 Computerizing Mannar Villages (CMV) To address the inequities between urban and rural areas within Mannar District and to provide a solid foundation of computer, IT and English ability for young people, two CMV centres have been established in Vidathaltheevu (Catholic) and Pudukudiruppu (Muslim) villages. Computer training and English language classes are being run for children and young people to serve as a basis for a brighter future. The CMV program is a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative of ITP and is being coordinated by Kamal Raj and Al Hathir.

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka

- Volunteers Huyen Lai (Vietnam) and Mirjam Link (Estonia) ran a December vacation program for school-aged children from the two villages, combining English learning and fun activities.
- Children's Day was celebrated in style at Pudukuduirippu with student presentations of poetry, stories, song and dance.



Selection of students from Pudukuduirippu



English class at Vidathaltheevu

3.4 Chamber capacity building Diaspora Lanka assists the Mannar Chamber of Commerce to respond to the business and training challenges of their membership across diverse sectors (commerce, primary production, industry) by financially contributing towards staff salaries and assisting with program planning.

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka

- Negotiated the use of the Chamber premises as a base of operation for Diaspora Lanka
- Held several meetings with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to promote and request funds for the "Vision Mannar" proposal which aims to:
 - develop and promote high quality Mannar products for export and tourist markets (eg. rice, dry fish, salt, palmyrah products);
 - build the capacity of a small number of SMEs to produce export quality items; and
 - reduce regional poverty and high unemployment particularly for vulnerable groups.
- Worked closely with Chamber staff to develop new projects and find funding.



Karnan, Roy and Siyam (CEO), Mannar Chamber



Chamber of Commerce Board members

Next steps

- Develop a detailed project proposal and budget for the UNDP that incorporates their feedback from the initial presentation.

How you can help

- Assist the Chamber to explore funding options to cover the AU\$170 rent for the premises.
- Volunteer to conduct “developing a basic business plan” workshops for Chamber members.

Reflections

The Chamber of Commerce has now resolved the many issues that were affecting its output and performance. This has made way for Diaspora Lanka to resume close working relations with its initial partner in Mannar. This visit has consolidated and expanded upon the planning work undertaken with the Chamber earlier in the year. A vision for Mannar’s business sector, plus new income generating business proposals based on community and sustainable tourism has led to greater levels of support from the Government Agent of Mannar.



Busy working on the *Vision Mannar* proposal



Fisheries Department meeting

3.5 Vision Mannar Vision Mannar is a district-wide business initiative that aims to develop boutique businesses based on Mannar’s famous products for tourist and export markets: mainly rice, dry fish, salt and palmyrah. Although Mannar was once famous for such products, the district did not benefit from this because of a lack of product development; branding and packaging; a reluctance to embrace new technology; and low standards in all stages of manufacturing and production. This project has many objectives - to value add to existing Mannar products, develop and promote high quality items for external markets, build the capacity of small and medium enterprises to produce export quality goods and to reduce regional poverty and high levels of unemployment (particularly for vulnerable groups). External funding of this project is essential.

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka

- Reviewed the extensive “Vision Mannar” proposal and budget completed by Diarne Kreltszheim, Diaspora Lanka volunteer, and Chamber staff in June last year. Also developed a modified and less funds-heavy version.
- Held several meetings with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to seek funds for the “Vision Mannar” proposal.
- Worked closely with Chamber staff to develop new projects and find funding.

Next steps

- Wait for UNDP feedback. The Government and UNDP are currently in negotiations about project and funding guidelines so until the outcomes are known, local resourcing decisions cannot be made.



Initial tourism strategy planning workshop



Surveying the guest houses in Mannar

3.6 Mannar’s Community Tourism Strategy Diaspora Lanka and the Mannar Chamber of Commerce are developing a community-based tourism strategy for Mannar. The strategy, positioned within the Government’s Tourism Strategy 2011-2016, includes a suite of 22 projects from substantial to modest that will affirm Mannar’s uniqueness, honour its rich cultural heritage and history and bring increased wealth to the people and businesses of Mannar District.

Activities summary from last visit to Sri Lanka

- Tauri Tampuu, a Diaspora Lanka volunteer from Estonia, has come for a three-month term to head a team that has been busy working on the strategy.
- Two major planning sessions were held, one at the start of the project and one two months later, to scope the strategy and identify the action projects.
- A high-level meeting was held with members of a World Bank consortium made up of the International Finance Corporation, TRC Tourism, Total Management Solutions Company, UrbanArc, Hitesh Mehta Design and Palmyrah House that had commenced exploring how to promote Mannar as a tourist destination. The consortium digested all our reports (including Mannarin Marumalarchi 2022, the town planning workshop and our Diaspora Fact-finding Mission reports) and met with us again to further discuss our tourism strategy and projects.
- The Chamber of Commerce and Diaspora Lanka were invited to present our strategy at a district-wide tourism meeting hosted by the Government Agent and the consortium.

Next steps

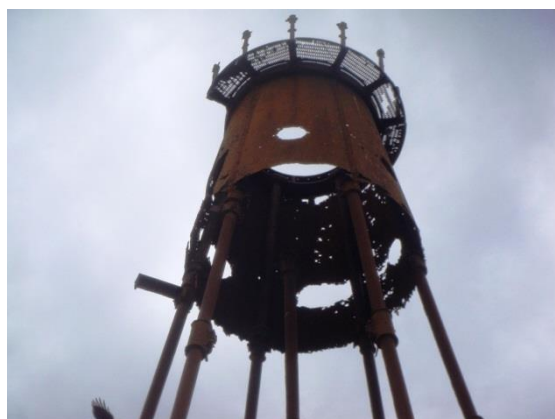
- The consortium is finalising their report and recommendations. They indicated that there would be a role to play for the Chamber and Diaspora Lanka.

How you can help

- Explore investment opportunities in Mannar’s fledgling tourism industry at a time of minimal development and competition.
- Provide advice and expertise in sustainable tourism and support the tourism committee.



Diron and Postin



Old Dutch lighthouse, Mannar Island



Tourism team ascend ancient lighthouse stairs



The burial site of the 40ft Muslim man

Reflections

Through a number of consultations, residents have recognized the benefits of tourism for Mannar and the need to take control of it themselves in order to minimize any adverse effects. They preferred small-scale, culturally sensitive, economically sustainable and eco-friendly approaches to tourism over the “high end” imposed western resort-styled models. They also talked about a custodial approach to tourism in which they both preserved their heritage and shared their unique local knowledge with others. A set of values by which all tourism activity shall be assessed has been verbalized and agreed upon by residents:

- Affirms Mannar’s uniqueness
- Uses local resources (natural landscapes and products)
- Engages in eco sensitive development
- Provides affordable and readily accessible services for tourists
- Creates low-cost tourist investment opportunities for local people
- Offers rich cultural experiences
- Ensures local employment and community benefit.



Kelvin writes up new tourist places of interest



Van drivers complete a tourism survey

3.7 Tourism-related initiatives A number of projects with low resource requirements, have been ear-marked for immediate action. These include improving guest house services and facilities, identifying tourism experiences to entice extended tourist stays, compiling historical data and oral history resources for tour guides, and packaging tours for diverse target markets.

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka

- A forum was held for the district’s van drivers to identify places of tourist interest and to gauge drivers’ interest in becoming tour guides.
- Research was undertaken to identify guest houses, assess their facility and services and compile a Directory of guest houses in Mannar.
- Oral histories were gathered from residents and religious leaders for use by tourist guides.

- Field trips were organised to identify both popular and uncommon sites of potential interest to tourists, including a boat ride on the Giants' Tank.
- Tauri contacted *Lonely Planet* who have agreed to come to Mannar in February, 2014 to update their Mannar information.
- A draft *Mannar Tourism Strategy 2012 to 2022* was developed.
- A draft *Mannar Guest House Directory* was developed.

Next steps

- Keep in touch with the consortium to explore joint projects after the release of their report.
- Research Mannar's history and write succinct cameos of significant events.

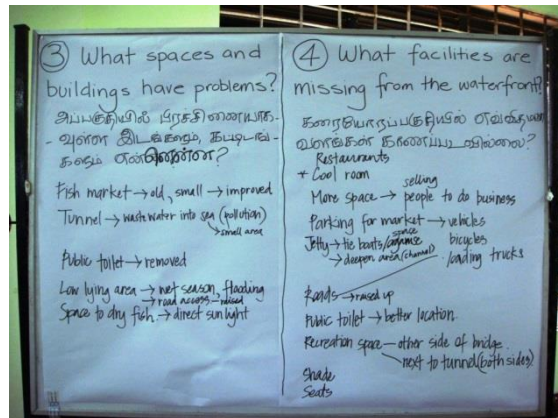
Reflections

Mannar is ripe for tourism investment as currently there is no significant tourist infrastructure. There is not even a tourist map of Mannar!

4. Urban planning



Foreshore development community consultation



Identifying "foreshore" issues

4.1 Mannarin Marumalarchi 2022 (*the renaissance of Mannar*) In late 2011, Diaspora Lanka and the Urban Council Mannar (UC) instigated a community visioning program to identify a people-centred plan for Mannar City for the next 10 years. Based on the major themes that emerged from the MM22 consultations, eight subcommittees were established to implement the plan: town planning, environment, eco-tourism, business development, education, community programs, women's development and finance.

Reflections

Due to the resignation in June, 2013 of the staff person responsible for the MM22 project, there has been little follow-up of the committees. The most active committee has been the Town Planning group which has worked consistently throughout that time. For the Mannar Urban Council to really take ownership of this program, DL will possibly need to fund a worker within the Council. Steps have been put in place to build up the following subcommittees in the next few months: education, business and eco-tourism.

Next steps

- Write a letter to existing members to determine their ongoing level of commitment to their chosen subcommittee.
- Recruit new members to the three highlighted subcommittees.

How you can help

- Help support one of the three subcommittees by providing expertise in the following areas: town planning, eco-tourism, business development and education.



Prabakaran, Town Planner, NPPD



PIA National Director, Steve Dunn

4.2 Mannar town plan DL works closely with the Urban Council Mannar (UC), Urban Development Authority (UDA) and the National Physical Planning Department (NPPD) to develop a people-centred town plan that incorporates Government plans for this urban precinct and will serve the residents of Mannar well into the future. This project is supported by Planning Institute of Australia members.

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka



The Oz Planners relax at Barefoot before Mannar



Post-breakfast with Australian High Commissioner

4.3 Knowledge transfers Diaspora Lanka brought 10 Australian planning professionals (town planners, landscape architects, urban designers, social planners) to lead community consultations and produce detailed drawings for two significant town plan projects - ponds rehabilitation and foreshore development. The Melbournians, members of the Planning Institute of Australia, and staff of private sector agencies Tract and Capire, contributed their expertise. The teams also visited the UDA office in Jaffna, assisting their staff write the Mannar development reports. While in Colombo, they were hosted to breakfast at the residence of the Australian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Robyn Mudie.



Well attended Kulam community consultations



Neil explains the design process

4.4 "Kulam" (pond) rehabilitation Mannar Island had more than 70 ponds ("kulam": sizeable water bodies) that were the natural drainage system for the low-lying island. Successive governments and residents encroached upon the ponds, filling them in for the construction of housing. The result has been serious annual flooding throughout the urban area. The remaining dozen or more ponds are mostly polluted and disused. The proposal was to rehabilitate the ponds and transform them into attractive recreational precincts in a town with little open and recreational space.

In partnership with the Urban Council, the volunteers conducted several community meetings with the many pond and foreshore project stakeholders. For the pond these were: St Xavier's Catholic Boy's School principal, staff and students, Hindu residents, Muslim mosque members and local residents. For the foreshore development these were: local traders, fisheries officers and fishermen, and Mosque trustees.

Several meetings were held with the staff and engineers of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) resulting in an agreement that Diaspora Lanka's planners will be responsible for designs for the Nedunkulam Pond based on community wishes and that UNOPS will fund and undertake the earthworks, drainage and landscaping. If successful, this partnership will be extended to cover the rehabilitation of two additional ponds.



Visit to Divisional Secretary regarding land issues



Nedunkulam Pond

Reflections

The planners completed their pond designs, which were welcomed by most of the community. Regrettably, late in the piece, the school, which borders the pond, withdrew its support as it wants to capitalize on any lands nearby for future school expansion. The Government Agent of Mannar has decreed that all ponds in Mannar come under the jurisdiction of the Urban Council which wants the ponds project to proceed. The Lands Officers of the District Secretariat are willing to ensure the project goes ahead. Further negotiations are now needed.



Consulting major stakeholder, St Xavier's School



Consultation with Moor St Mosque community



Many nights of painstaking inputting of data



Joy Pratheevan, Town Planner

4.5 Digitizing the land use survey – almost a year after completion of the land use survey by 22 Mannar youngsters, trained by the NPPD and UDA, a set of digitized maps has now been produced that captures the layers of information needed for the Mannar Development Report. Town Planner, Joy Pratheevan and Diaspora Lanka Officer, Kelvin Fernando worked tirelessly to complete this pain-staking work. Joy and Kelvin met most nights after their primary jobs to undertake this task, frequently working past midnight. This labour of love has produced up-to-date and essential maps.



Day one of the Lockdown



On the third day....

4.5 Urban development “lockdown” Looming deadlines for the Mannar town plan galvanised Diaspora Lanka into proposing a three day “lockdown” to produce an overall urban development concept for Mannar that would address major issues including drainage, roads, transport, areas of future settlement and town centre redevelopment. The concept was discussed with UDA’s Director of Development Planning and NPPD’s Director General who both gave their approval. Steve Dunn, National Director of the Planning Institute of Australia, came specifically to Sri Lanka to facilitate this three day “lockdown” workshop. Eminent Sri Lankan urban designers and architects, Colombo-based town planners, local technical officers, UNOPS engineers, Urban Council Vice Chairman and residents all worked hard to develop an overall concept plan for Mannar and structure plans for the various sectors (ie, infrastructure, economy, social and environmental).

Next steps

- Digitize the maps and drawings from the workshop for the report.
- Write up the material from the workshop.
- Integrate the “lockdown” material into the Mannar Development Plan Report.

How you can help

- Consider volunteering for the next Knowledge Transfer. We need urban designers, landscape architects and drainage/water engineers.



Meeting with UDA Chairman re MOU



Presidential Task Force (PTF) Secretary

4.6 Formalizing relationships Diaspora Lanka has hit a snag. Since July last year the Government Agent of Mannar (GA), Urban Council Mannar (UCM), the Assistant Commissioner Local Government (ACLG) and the Urban Development Authority (UDA), key partners for the past two years, now want DL to gain formal approval from the Presidential Task Force (PTF) before they will continue to work with us. Diaspora Lanka wrote to the PTF in 2011 seeking this approval. In a lengthy phone response, the PTF Secretary informed us that we did not need their approval for our activities because we worked through local agencies, and if project approval was required, the local entity would naturally seek that. Now the rules seem to have changed and DL is in the process of gaining such approval.



DL meets with Mannar GA



Discussions with Prof Rajiva

Activities summary from the last visit to Sri Lanka

- Presidential Advisor on Reconciliation Prof Rajiva Wijesinha and Jeremy met with Mr Divaratne, PTF Secretary, about the matter of formal approval. He would like DL to establish a formal relationship with the UDA to streamline and make more efficient our work with government. Mr Diva also rang the new GA, arranging an appointment for DL to meet him.
- DL met with the UDA Chairman who directed the UDA Head of Business and Jeremy to draft an MoU between the UDA and DL. The document was written the next day, discussed at a directors' meeting and forwarded to the UDA's legal section. A letter of request along with requested registration papers were also provided by DL.
- A follow up visit and phone calls were made requesting formal approval by the UDA and PTF.

Next steps

- Write to the UDA Chairman and request he inform DL of the progress of the MoU.
- Write to the GA of Mannar seeking his help in expediting the finalization of the MoU.

Reflections

Without the signing of the MoU by the UDA and written approval from the PTF, Diaspora Lanka's more strategic work is currently in a holding pattern.

5. Social cohesion



Grace outlines her vision for an English academy



Meeting with the Trilingual Centre, Mannar

5.1 'English as a second language' program – Grace, one of Diaspora Lanka's staff members has had a heart-felt dream of establishing an English academy in Mannar to give youngsters a real chance to learn English, which is the lingua franca of Sri Lanka and a global language that creates opportunities. Diaspora Lanka brought two volunteers, Huyen Lai, from Vietnam (for a six-month stay) and Margaret Bornhorst, a seasoned language teacher from Brisbane (for two weeks) to help develop curriculum and learning activities for English programs for youth aged 16 to 25 years. Research was undertaken to understand the extent of current English programs on offer, their effectiveness and any issues. The team has established a collaborative relationship with the Government's Trilingual Learning Centre and commenced a monthly English Teachers' Support Group.

Reflections

Due to the war, Mannar was isolated and young people's education was badly affected. Research has found that the English language remains an insurmountable problem for Mannar's youngsters, particularly those aged between 16 and 25. One of the reasons for them not gaining entry into higher education or into the labour market was due to a lack of English which is much in demand now. The research also concluded that the level of English that young people possess is very poor when compared to the number of years they have studied the language. Most cannot communicate even in simple English and don't have the confidence to try. Teachers of English also have a poor grasp of the language and limited teaching strategies. Both private language centres and government schools struggle to improve their standards and outcomes. Foreign English teachers are in high demand.

How you can help

- Consider volunteering as either an *English as a second language* teacher or someone who can participate in conversational English sessions for individuals or small groups.
- Purchase badly needed English resource books for the newly established library.



English and fun activities in a remote village



Estonia and Vietnam volunteers lead the program



Vares is passionate about helping youngsters

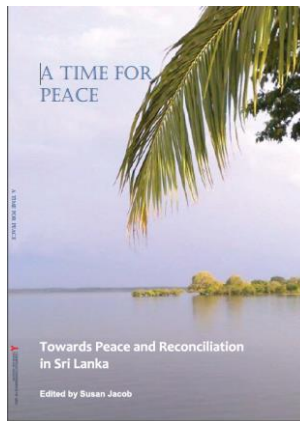


Vares, Arul and Paul Raj identify youth issues

5.2 Youth development In the post-war period, young people struggle to find a moral compass. The internet and Facebook have opened up worlds that were not conceived of a few years previously. Ethical and moral dilemmas have emerged as a result of a society in transition, from being strictly regulated due to the restrictions of war to relative freedom. This has created confusion within Mannar's young people about their life's direction. A group of passionate young adults are in conversation to work out what they can do to help their younger cohorts traverse the path of life in this current situation.



Cities, People, Places Conference, Colombo



A Time for Peace

5.3 Publications Jeremy Liyanage presented a paper, "Can Redesigning the Built Environment Facilitate Reconciliation?" at the International Urban Design Conference in Colombo in October, which has since been published along with another article, "Going Beyond 'Love Thy Enemy'" in the book, "A Time for Peace: Towards Peace and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka."

5.4 Volunteers Diaspora Lanka couldn't function without its dedicated volunteers from many parts of Australia and the world. Diaspora Lanka would like to express sincere gratitude for the part they play in rebuilding after war.



Steve Dunn, the National Director of Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), came to Sri Lanka, with only a few days' notice, to chair the Mannar Urban Development Lockdown. What followed was an amazing three-day workshop of tight, enjoyable, effective and outcome-delivering processes. In the main, Steve was also responsible for recruiting, training and coordinating the team of 10 planners who came to Sri Lanka. We are indebted to Steve for his passionate commitment, humility and generosity of spirit for Sri Lanka.



A big thank you to the 10 Aussie volunteers from various planning backgrounds that took a month out of their year to contribute their skills to a region of Sri Lanka struggling to get back on its feet. Divided into two teams and spanning a two month period, the volunteers were plunged into a schedule of community consultations, tricky negotiations, field surveys and investigations into land ownership plus writing and design sessions. Their outputs will be incorporated into the new town plan for Mannar.

Shamani hosts Team 1 in Colombo prior to Mannar



Tauri Tampuu from Estonia volunteered for three months in Mannar. This is one extraordinary young man. He brought a rare and impressive level of commitment to the tasks assigned to him, related genuinely with local people and was a great personal support to Jeremy. His primary project was to head up a team to develop a sustainable and community-level tourism strategy for Mannar. Tauri brought a strong work ethic balanced with loads of fun. His adoption by the community means he must return.

Tauri – an anthropologist at heart



Huyen Lai is another very special volunteer, from Vietnam, who will spend six months in Mannar. Huyen brings a “bad girl” drive to whatever she does and is passionate and hard working. Her heart, head and hands are aligned and she engages with honesty, humility and a learning spirit. Huyen was tasked with helping to establish an English language program in Mannar, building the capacity of existing English teachers, conducting language classes for students and supporting youth leadership development.

Huyen aims high yet is well grounded



Mirjam Link, from Estonia, has been yet another shining light. Mirjam is activity-focused and had a great outlet in conducting holiday programs for Mannar’s youngsters. Her “tom boy” energy is balanced by a deeply connecting and open disposition – always a mature presence to have around. Mirjam is also hard-working and takes initiative. She was also tasked with undertaking an evaluation of Diaspora Lanka’s volunteer and homestay programs. She was well loved by the locals and supported them through tough times.

The yin and yang are well balanced in Mirjam



Brisbane-based Margaret Bornhorst is a teacher of languages and came to Mannar to assist with the research and development for the *English as a second language* program. Margaret brings academic rigour, helpful know-how and oodles of positive energy so was a delight to have around for professional AND social reasons. Margaret spoke to many teachers and classes of students and together with Grace and Huyen, set up a support group for English teachers, making many valuable language resources available.

Margaret the perfect host who never had to cook!




Vilma and Lindsey from Melbourne are no strangers to Sri Lanka. Vilma is of Burgher heritage and came to Mannar to explore its Dutch history, with DL as the tour operators. Although a fleeting visit, Vilma and Lindsey were keen to know about other DL programs, a sign of their deep connection to Sri Lanka and their generous hearts. They offered to provide library books, write articles for newspapers which would bring some badly-needed publicity, and promote the annual Mannar Premier League hard ball cricket tournament.

Lindsey and Vilma learn about IT Platform's operation

to support our work ... see next page

How you can help...

Project and action		Amount \$
1.3 Asylum seeker support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute funds for short-term food, accommodation and medicinal needs. Assist to support unemployed young people to find local employment Explore ways for asylum seekers who have returned, to pay off their considerable debts 		
3.1 Rice to riches: daily income for vulnerable women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute toward the outstanding amount for the project: AU\$7,500 Personally support this women's initiative by joining a support group to monitor the project's development, keep in touch with the women, and to raise further funds 		
3.2 IT Platform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist ITP to develop financial management, reporting capacity and a business plan Contribute towards the AU\$800 per month financial contribution to ITP Raise AU\$2,000 for motherboard repair tools and a motorbike for distance travel 		
3.4 Mannar Chamber capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist the Chamber to explore funding options to cover the AU\$170 rent for the premises Volunteer to conduct "develop a basic business plan" workshops for Chamber members 		
3.6 Mannar Community Tourism Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore investment opportunities in Mannar's fledgling tourism industry at a time of minimal development and competition Provide advice and expertise in sustainable tourism and support the tourism committee 		
4.1 Mannarin Marumalarchi 2022 – Renaissance of Mannar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help support one of the three subcommittees by providing expertise in the following areas: town planning, eco-tourism, business development and education 		
4.5 Mannar urban development fieldwork and design project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider volunteering for the next Knowledge Transfer. We need urban designers, landscape architects and drainage/water engineers 		
5.1 "English as a second language" program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider volunteering as either an English as a second language teacher or someone who can participate in conversational English sessions for individuals or small groups Purchase badly needed English resource books for the newly established library 		

to support our work ...

1. Online contribution - www.diasporalanka.org then to the "Donate" page and "donate"

2. Simple donation by bank transfer

Account name: Diaspora Lanka Ltd; **Bank:** Commonwealth; **BSB:** 063 010; **Ac no:** 1183 7067
Reference: your name

After the transfer, email Stanley Stork (Treasurer) at swkrots@dodo.com.au informing him of the donation, your name and postal address and a receipt will be posted to you.

3. For a tax receipt

Send donation via bank transfer to Noonga Reconciliation Group Inc, a charitable institution and our partner organisation in Brisbane:

Bank: Bendigo Bank; **Bank BSB:** 633 000; **Account No:** 126052588; **Ref:** Diaspora Lanka

After the transfer, email Nigel Sloss (Treasurer) at donate@diasporalanka.org informing him of the donation, your name and address and a **tax deductible receipt** will be posted to you.



Vision - a reconciled and prosperous Sri Lanka through the efforts of a united, constructive diaspora

Mission - nurture a durable peace both in Sri Lanka and in diaspora countries through working for reconciliation and social, economic, environmental and political transformation in Sri Lanka

Values

- **Open hearted** – a global and united diaspora, demonstrating their heart connection to Sri Lanka by working for the peace and prosperity of the country
- **Reconciled** – an acknowledgement of the collective pain, dispossession and trauma caused by past conflicts and a commitment to journeying together
- **Cohesive** – the right of every Sri Lankan citizen, regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion, to enjoy equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the social, cultural and economic life of the nation

Strategic objectives

- **Leadership** – act as a credible link between the diaspora and communities in Sri Lanka
- **Governance** – ensure organisational integrity in processes and systems
- **Inquiry** – explore a constructive role for the diaspora in post-conflict Sri Lanka
- **Action** – undertake specific actions in response to identified issues in Sri Lanka and Australia
- **Outreach** – collaborate with global diaspora networks committed to a better Sri Lanka

Core principles

- **Constructive** – as Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and Sinhala people we play a positive role in post-conflict Sri Lanka recognising that all parties, including diaspora members and elected representatives, are part of the solution
- **Place-based** – coordinated, area-based and multi-stakeholder approach that uplifts a district through harnessing skills, experience and resources of private, public and voluntary sectors
- **Relationally interlinked** - recognising that the trajectories of people both in Sri Lanka and in diaspora communities are inextricably linked, that what we do here directly impacts what happens there
- **Actively involved** – that 'hands on' participation through local projects, knowledge transfers, exposure visits and reconciliation initiatives will nurture closer ties
- **Critically informed** – that proper analysis leads to a deeper understanding and truth, discouraging black and white understandings of complex issues.

Principles in action

- We seek to reframe the notion of a negative and singular-ethnic understanding of diaspora into an inclusive multi-ethnic and constructively oriented entity which models the change we want to see both in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.
- We attempt to understand the big picture of where a community is at currently, its past and where it wishes to position itself for the future. This helps us gain a strategic awareness and direction for any course of action we may pursue, knowing it is grounded in local knowledge gained through resident focus groups, interviews with NGOs, government officials, business owners and religious and community leaders, as well as government and private sector plans

- We adopt a place management approach which seeks to achieve territorial wellbeing and not just the privileging of discreet entities, eg an orphanage or school. It is a coordinated, area-based, multi-stakeholder approach to improving locations and harnessing the skills, experiences and resources of those in the private, public and voluntary sectors
- We endeavour to engage the context through a “there are no enemies” perspective and hence regard everyone as potentially part of the solution, seeking to confront issues not personalities
- We acknowledge and strengthen already existing local groups and structures and partner with these in various activities in order to avoid duplication, misunderstanding and arrogance
- We capacity build based on an understanding that we are all learners in this process and are all having our capacities enhanced. This is achieved through winning people's confidence and trust, identifying the micro issues and processes which require attention, offering personal support or providing links to outside assistance to address need
- We establish close, robust and enduring relationships with people on the ground, achieved through regular face to face contact, skype calls, email correspondence and joining with them in extracurricular activities eg outings, boating expeditions or cricket matches
- We present a “not cashed up” appearance (this being the reality) backed by a simple lifestyle approach, modelling a different way of engagement, placing maximum emphasis on local initiative and not dependency on external handouts. Our funds are used primarily to “kick start” initiative
- We act as facilitators and function in the background without a desire for public recognition; we want to have influence and effect without leaving a visible footprint, striving to leave our “ego” at the door.

Key activities

Sri Lanka

- Develop coalitions of support across ethnic, religious and geographic boundaries
- Understand the mind, challenges and aspirations of the Sri Lankan polity
- Develop a range of responses from strategic edge to good practice initiatives
- Ensure implementational capacity through ground staff teams, partnerships and networks
- Scale-up the learning from local contexts to inform strategies at a national level.

In Australia

- Establish an effective organizational base
- To facilitate constructive inter-ethnic relations and dialogue
- Establish close, robust and enduring relationships between Diaspora Lanka and people on the ground in Mannar
- Identify areas of expertise required in Sri Lanka and arrange knowledge transfer
- Promote an alternative “no-enemies” approach to the issues of Sri Lanka.

In Mannar

- Conduct formal and informal interviews and focus groups – residents, NGOs, government, business, religious leaders and communities
- Investigate government and private sector intentions for the area
- Identify the micro issues and processes which require attention and make links to outside assistance to address deficits
- Gain a strategic understanding and direction for interventions grounded by local input
- Pursue strategic collaborations and networks of reconciliation and community rebuilding
- Identify and prioritise projects for rebuilding efforts in regional Sri Lanka.