

Bridging Lanka



October - December, 2017

Leading stories....

- Kunchukulam youth discover new career paths under unusual circumstances
- The Muslim clerics celebrate the finish of their IT & English program with an eye-opening adventure
- The kitchen and café project for widows' livelihood hits turbulence.

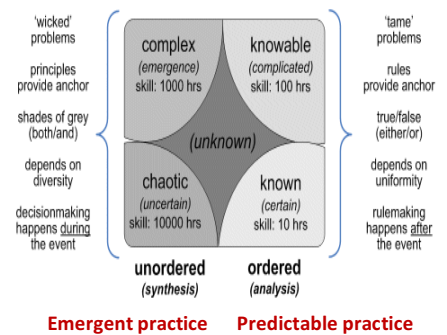


Inaugural MAD COW Tour leaves a profound legacy on Kunchukulam youngsters

Through Bridging Lanka's seven years' immersion in Mannar District, we have learnt much. To be sensitive to people and place, we have adopted an emergent planning approach as opposed to a linear, 'planned within an inch of its life' method of management. Serendipity and innovation become possible when things are messy and unpredictable as they are in Mannar with its violent past, natural disasters, problematic politics and malevolent gate-keepers.

Bridging Lanka's approach is based on the Cynefin framework which identifies four major 'decision-making contexts' or domains that define 'cause and affect' relationships. The first two domains – 'Chaotic' and 'Complex' – are positioned on the 'dark side' where sense-making is a challenge requiring thousands of hours of dedicated deep listening and experimentation, and is aptly termed, 'emergent practice'. This is Bridging Lanka's niche. The next two domains – 'Complicated' and 'Simple' – are more knowable and on the 'light side' ensuing more 'predictable practice'. Here Bridging Lanka seeks collaborations with others who can add greater expertise and upscale already trialled endeavours.

From this 'dark space' Bridging Lanka trials novel and emergent solutions to seemingly intractable dilemmas. We're on the road less travelled. Many detractors say, "Why don't you focus on one or two projects and do them well?" In response, we invite them to join us on a journey of discovery, embracing the chaos and complexity of difficult contexts that defy being ordered and squeezed into neat timeframes. Surprisingly the road leads to many oases along the way.



Sustainable Tourism



Volun-tourism: for those who want to ‘make a difference’, get valuable work experience toward career advancement or simply to delve more sincerely into local culture. Placements range from ten days to six months. Options include urban planning, landscape architecture and engineering to English teaching, office administration, graphic design, and more.



Reflect-tourism: this is tourism into the interior, of leaving one’s comfort zone and venturing into the unknown to rediscover one’s self, confront inner demons and work through life issues in a confidential and supportive environment. Many who are at cross-roads find their time in Mannar helpful and illuminating for the journey ahead.



Edu-tourism: students from overseas secondary schools and universities undertake field study tours in areas including women’s empowerment, veterinary medicine, social enterprise development, leadership, economy, environmental protection, international development and town planning. These educational activities count toward students’ course requirements.

Uniquely Mannar
Bridging Lanka seeks to create unique tourism experiences suited to the Mannar context. We’ve trialled four thematic offerings for more sustainable local tourism development. These are edu-tourism, volun-tourism, reflect-tourism, and contest tourism.



Contest-tourism: global teams of professionals are challenged to address ‘wicked scenarios’ together with local villagers in specific contexts where there are no easy solutions. A course of action may lead to unintended and negative outcomes, so collaborative efforts are pitted against complex and enduring dilemmas only for those who are up for a challenge!

MAD COW Meets Kunchukulam Youth

In October, ten intrepid professionals from Sydney, Australia, parachuted into the jungles surrounding the three Kunchukulam villages on the outskirts of Mannar.

Heading the expedition was maverick, Nic Tan who conceived of the MAD COW (My Aspirational Dream Coalition of the Wicked) tour concept and patiently built up a following over the best part of a year.

This was a tour with a difference. The ‘tourists’ were expected to help tackle the local issue of chronic youth employment in close collaboration with the affected young people.

This required a village immersion experience, adapting their professional expertise, contributing toward trial solutions and developing career options into the future.



Straight from the Colombo airport to Kunchukulam and an evening program to start building connection between the tourists and locals

Responding to a 'Wicked Scenario'

The tourists were given information about Kunchukulam for several months before coming over. They knew this community was cohesive, being entirely Catholic, was surrounded by dense forest high in bio diversity and was blessed with historic and famous places.

They also knew that the villages were socially isolated, that severe drought threatened agriculturally-based livelihoods and that the young people faced bleak future prospects due to an unemployment rate of around 49%. Also, that the forest was threatened by illegal timber felling and sand and gravel mining activity. Protected species including bears, deer and wild boar were being hunted to sustain limited incomes.

The MAD COW tourists were the 'guinea pigs' for exploring livelihood options for the young people that protected the forests instead of destroying them. A house in disrepair was transformed into a basic yet comfortable guest house for the visitors. Six young men, turned forest guides, hosted two spectacular walks, while others benefitted from local food and beverage services. In practical ways the local young people started grasping the possibilities of legal forest-based livelihoods.



The MAD COW tourists talk with the Women's Rural Development Society



The tourists are introduced to local Tamil food on their first night



LEFT: Intrepid forest guides loving this new eco experience
RIGHT: 20 tourists and locals on one tractor being driven to the start of their forest trek



Good Tour Guide Training

Matt and Saleem from International Finance Corp, part of the World Bank Group have been assisting Bridging Lanka to develop quality tourist services and products. As part of that commitment, a workshop on characteristics of an effective tour guide was an eye-opener for our Kunchukulam forest guides.

They learnt that a good guide speaks loudly and clearly, uses non-verbal communication, acts professionally, prepares in advance, knows the audience, provides necessary information, shares personal experiences, makes the tour dynamic, manages the group, knows first-aid and continues to learn and improve the tour.



In Kunchukulam young people meet to form a 'Careers Support Group' to continue to trial new legal livelihoods. Back in Sydney, the MAD COW crew continues to meet and plan projects in support of their Kunchukulam mates



Exploring New Tour Experiences

The Grama Sevaka from Kunchukulam alerted us to another special spot closer to the Madhu Church – Thadchanamarudamadu Kulam. The expansive and breath-taking environs, teeming with birds, fish and even a large colony of bats, would be most suitable for early morning boat tours.

The GS organised a cultural show by elderly songsters, who although a bit rusty, overflowed with enthusiasm for the opportunity to perform dances and songs from yesteryear. The demonstration tour ended with a visit to a kovil and a delicious locally cooked lunch.





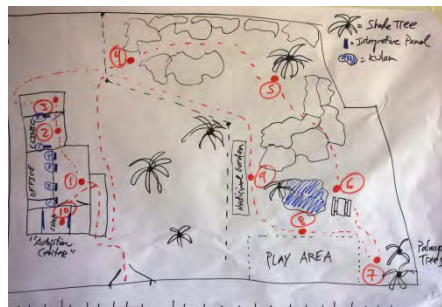
Kavi and his friends are budding artists who perform originals and covers for a growing number of audiences including entertaining tourists and volunteers at Bridging Lanka events



TOUR "STOPS" / STRUCTURE

- Welcome / Introduction**
 - Introduction: Guide, Bridging Lanka
 - Get to know your visitors?
 - Tour overview
 - Panel 1: History of Donkeys in Maldives
 - Panel 2: War Time / Resettlement
 - Panel 3: Modern Day Challenges
 - Panel 4: Bridging Lanka Programs
- Donkey Clinic**
 - Panel 1: Health Challenges
 - Panel 2: Health Solutions
- Donkey / Visitor Interaction**
 - "Donkeys love..." / "Donkeys don't love..."
 - Importance (Pop-up of human/donkey interaction)
 - Introduction of donkeys (Games, stories, recovery)
- Discovering Trail**
- Cashew Production**
 - Stages of Cashew production
 - Local uses

- Kilam / Rest Stop / Picnic Area**
 - Importance of water in Maldivian ecosystem
- Palmyrah Palms**
 - Importance of Palmyrah Palm in Maldives
 - Productive uses of Palmyrah (Food, household items, etc.)
- Children's Play Area**
 - "Bridging" connections between donkeys and school children / communities
 - Importance of awareness building (with signs)
- Medicinal Garden**
 - Traditional / medicinal plants & uses
- Gift Shop & Adoption Center**
 - Adoption Program
 - Donation Program
 - Volunteer Opportunities
 - Gifts / Merchandise for Sale
 - Thank yous & Goodbyes!



national and international attention is being paid to our donkey programs.

Matt and Saleem from IFC saw the tourist potential of both sites and ran workshops to identify a 'tour stop' structure, info panels and tour costing schedule for us.

Donkey Tourism Gets a Boost

With the near completion of the Donkey Clinic & Education Centre and the functioning of the Donkey Assisted Therapy Centre, much

Managers of premium tourist facilities, Palmyrah House and Kite Surfing Lanka want to send their tourists to the sites.



Differently abled children grow their self-esteem and confidence through donkey assisted therapy



Mr. Udaya (Palmyrah House) and Mr. Dilsiri (Vayu Resort and Kite Surfing Lanka)

ENVIRONMENTAL CARE



Sloth bears, deer, elk, wild boar and other animals are hunted down

STOP! In the Name of Love and Law

It is easy to order people to stop hunting but not so easy if there aren't alternatives to earn an income if crops fail due to drought. Currently some of our young people are defending charges of illegal hunting with possible fines or jail terms. But the imperative to stop hunting has just become more urgent.

Responding to the recent brutal killings of several tuskers (elephants), the government has adopted immediate measures to counter wildlife 'criminals'. A new 'Wildlife Force' comprising Police, Special Task Force (STF) and military will be set up to battle wildlife crimes and criminals across the country.

To safeguard the Kunchukulam young people from such dire penalties, the need to establish viable alternatives to illegal forest activity has become even more urgent for Bridging Lanka.



Persuading the Uptake of Organic Paddy

Due to the wide prevalence of cancers and chronic kidney disease our attempts to coax local farmers in Adampan, Mannar, have been successful. We meet regularly with six farmers who have volunteered for this trial program.

We have been working closely with graduates from Sri Lanka's 'green technology' Ruhuna University who are guiding the implementation of the project. Shashi, Prabath and Sameera are our experts.

After planting of the paddy seed, the farmers started following a schedule of first, second and third flooding of

the fields within 12 days before the applying of the first fertigation (one litre each of organic pest repellent and liquid fertilizer mix per acre).

From the 16th day onwards for a month (or until weeds are controlled), there is a rhythm of two days of flooding followed by three dry days. The second fertigation is then applied within 45 - 55 days at the stage of booting (panicle emergence). The cost of organic repellent and fertiliser for one acre is a competitive Rs 2,200 (AU\$ 19).





An Organic Champion

While most farmers use chemical fertilisers for better yield, one Muslim woman is sold out to organics! Mrs. Siddhi Fayiza from Adampan is becoming a local expert in doing chemical free cultivation.

Single-handedly she is inspiring others to trial organic home gardening. The major setback has been the prolonged drought and scarcity of water.

Mrs Siddhi Fayiza’s family is one of many displaced by the war in 1990, only returning in 2010 to reclaim their land. Of those we selected five families for our organic push. And we want Mrs Siddhi Fayiza to lead the way through training others!



Gang of Five

Together with Siddhi Fayiza, there will be five families who will start growing organic crops. They would have done so earlier had it not been for a lack of water. Let us introduce you to the remaining four families:

- Mr. Rizan is a farmer and living with his wife and child;
- Ms. Razeedha is an abandon widow. She has two children studying at school. She is without a regular income so finds it difficult to feed her children and afford their education;
- Ms. Fareeza is a widow who lives with her two children. One daughter is married and the whole family lives with her. She finds it hard to cope financially;
- Mr. Riyas is also a farmer. He has a wife and two children. His income is not sufficient to run his family. He has recently started home garden and poultry rearing.



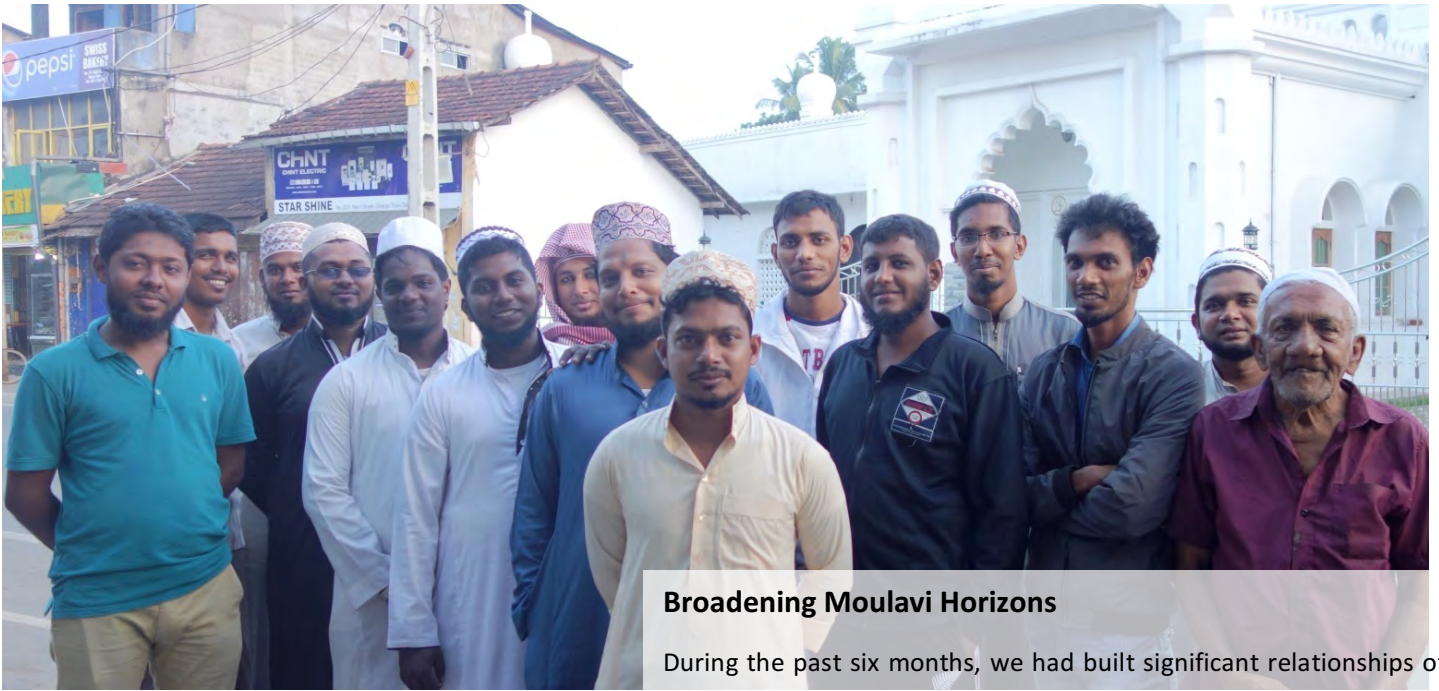
Rapid Response

The staff of Open Education in Kattankudy, Batticaloa District, were keen to assist this Muslim woman and her struggling family. In record time they agreed to fund a tube well to be shared with five families, two of the households headed by widows.

Bridging Lanka staff, Rojan and Anne, met with the families, contractors and labourers, and when there was a break in the wet weather, supervised the sinking of a 90 foot deep tube well.



RECONCILIATION & SOCIAL COHESION



Broadening Moulavi Horizons

During the past six months, we had built significant relationships of trust with our first batch of 12 Moulavis in our IT, English and Leadership program trial. Now they wanted an end of program excursion. After lots of hard study they wanted to have fun. For us it was to be a combination of a good time with widening horizons. We scraped together some money and set off!

With an early 3am start, we travelled south to the troubled towns of Aluthgama and Beruwala, the scene of ugly anti-Muslim violence in 2014. Here, Dr. Asees helped to organise a rich experience.



This is Our Muslim Heritage?

First stop – Masjidul Abrar Jumma Mosque in Beruwala. The Mosque Administrator, Mr. AWM Ajward told us this was the first mosque built in Sri Lanka in 920 CE by Arab Traders from Morocco and Turkey. So it was 1097 years old and one of 2,150 mosques in Sri Lanka. The visitors settled here as a result of the hospitality shown by the local Sinhalese community. The anti-Muslim Bodu Bala Sena would like people to believe that the Muslims only have a short history in Sri Lanka but this is clearly untrue. Thankfully there was no direct threat against this mosque by BBS. The Moulavis were so surprised to hear of their Muslim heritage and legacy.



Inter-faith Journey Starts

A visit to the 160 year old St Mary's Catholic Church was for many their first to a Christian establishment. Fr. Deshan Perera emphasized the need to affirm humanity above religious and ethnic allegiances but there was no local inter-religious committee. He also said the 2014 riots were sparked by politicians with vested interests.





Encounters with a Buddhist Monk

Maithri Moorthy, the priest in charge of a temple in Beruwala, spoke openly about the 2014 riots, saying that they were politically motivated. Relations had been good between Muslim, Buddhist and Catholic for decades. It changed when politically motivated outsiders started feeding misinformation. Extremists can easily influence both Muslim and Buddhists.

“Politics is everywhere and it divides. Even the police work according to a political agenda otherwise they are hammered by politicians. All government agencies are like this.” The monk was highly critical of his fellow monks in BBS whose strategy was to nurture extremist beliefs in their gullible followers.

Maithri Moorthy continued, “We have no formal mechanisms to promote religious and ethnic unity here. Such a network is important not only in Beruwala but everywhere. Our networks are informal but these break down and have to be resurrected. Almost all Buddhist temples here want unity with other religions but we have no formal plan or work.”

Many of the Moulavis were again surprised to hear such words from a Buddhist monk because in their minds, owing to recent incidents, they thought Buddhism was now pitted against Islam.



More Buddhist Light

At the Gangarama Buddhist Temple, Chanda Vimala Theru, was another inspirational Buddhist monk. He aspired to be a role model for a multi-ethnic and religious society. He said that the 2014 violence back-fired on the Sinhalese Buddhist community. He said, “As a Buddhist monk I feel real shame about these extremist actions. The majority should be protecting the minority.”

The Theru said that Beruwala was a multi-religious community. Muslim people helped to build this temple which has a 2,000 year history. He continued that during the tsunami, this temple was teeming with people. It was the Muslims who prepared food parcels and brought it to them for distribution. “Although local people are reasonable and want peace, politicians twist the people. Being Sri Lankan and having survived a war, shouldn’t we understand that national unity is more important than religious identity?”

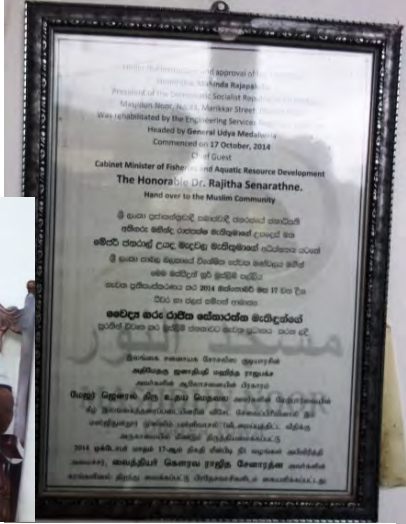


Time to put aside the serious stuff and have some fun!





Above: the rebuilt mosque after it was destroyed by BBS supporters



Top photos: Arson attack against a Muslim house by BBS
 Bottom left: Mr Mohamed, victim of the arson attack above
 Bottom right: plaque of apology by Sri Lankan President
 Below right: Mr Rifan

Black Saturday

According to Mr. Rifan, one of the victims, on Saturday 14th June, 2014, a 2,000 strong mob of Buddhists from neighbouring areas with government forces and police in the frontline, descended on Dharga Town on a rampage. A petrol bomb hurled at his house started a blaze. From his house he could see the mosque burning.

This was one of a small number of victims we spoke to about the violent riots in Aluthgama, Beruwala, Dharga Town, Kalutara District. Attacks on homes, shops, factories, mosques and a nursery left hundreds homeless and displaced 10,000 people (8,000 Muslims; 2,000 Sinhalese). The riots followed rallies by Bodu Bala Sena. The mainstream media was ordered to censor the news; The popular Muslim *No-Limit* clothing store in Panadura was gutted with Rs.400 mil in damages.

It was important to appreciate the outcome and consequences of anti-Muslim sentiments. Violent attacks against Muslim person and property has continued, with the latest happening in November when rows of houses and businesses owned by Muslims were burned in Ginthota, again in the South. This is an issue Bridging Lanka is taking very seriously.



A visit to the 300 year old Galle Fort Meeran Jumma Masjid (mosque) was a highlight. The library holding books hundreds of years old were dipped into by the Moulavis. The young student Moulavi was from Mannar.



Moulavi Leadership Sessions

Led by Dr. Asees and Jeremy, a number of topics were covered. Jeremy started with five elements of leadership – leading by taking initiative and thinking ahead, taking education seriously, being a leader/servant, living lives of integrity by practising what is espoused and taking physical care of one's body.

Dr Asees explained the place of Islam in the modern world – 27% of the world population is Muslim; Muslims are in the majority in 54 countries (95% Sunni and 5% - Iraq - is Shia). He presented a sweeping coverage of the western construct of Muslim as terrorist and its



ramifications, the significant contribution of Muslim civilisations and contrasting it to the inward, defensive stance of many Muslims in Sri Lanka; the significance of the Middle East and the role of America. He encouraged the Moulavis to engage their hearts and heads in ways they had not done before. Of the five pillars of Islam, one is social responsibility.

The Moulavis responded enthusiastically. They said, “Very, very important information.” “Very good to know what is happening in the world. My education is poor so good to hear of these important matters.” “Useful. Very happy. These can inform our Friday sermons.”

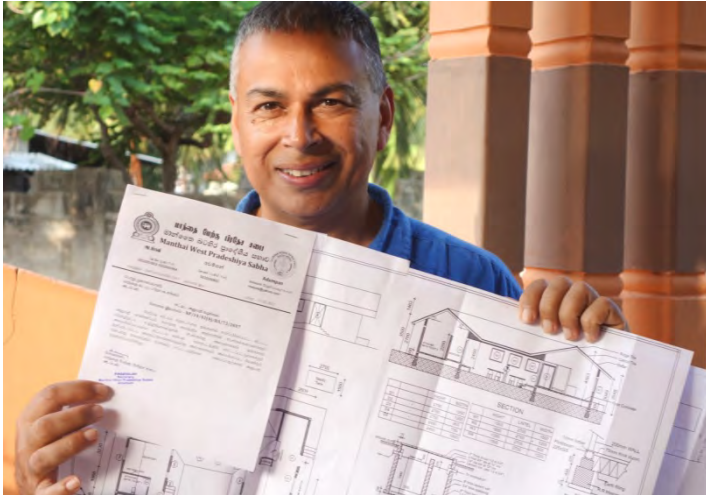
Reformed Bodu Bala Sena Devotees

Lakshitha and Sameera (foreground) spoke to the Moulavis about when they were avid BBS supporters. Both have similar stories of BBS reps coming to their temples and poisoning the minds of youth and adult alike against Muslims. Lakshitha said, “Before BBS came our objective was to serve people and support temple ceremonies. He changed our objectives to anti-Muslim ones. We were emotional young people with heating blood so we accepted their information without checking the facts.”

Both young people told how at university more senior students set them straight about Muslims. After that they campaigned against BBS. When the Moulavis heard their stories, their hearts were touched.



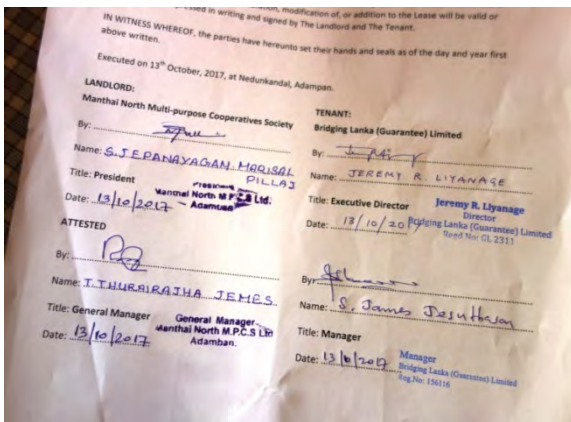
LIVELIHOOD FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS



Building Approval Finally Granted

After five months of tortured waiting, the Manthai West Pradeshiya Sabha (local council) approved the building plans for the women's catering kitchen and café. The Ministry of Health was also part of the approval process and this is where the plans got stuck. An overzealous officer refused to give the required approval based on minor technicalities that would normally be overlooked. Perhaps he was seeking an inducement?

Bridging Lanka's Technical Officer, Felix, and Assistant Manager, Rojan engaged a contractor based on a balance of quality and cost.



Pieces of the Jigsaw Coming Together

Two days prior to building approval, the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (MPCS) executives finally signed the Land Lease Agreement giving us a 30 year lease in exchange for us building them a small rural bank within our kitchen and café facility.

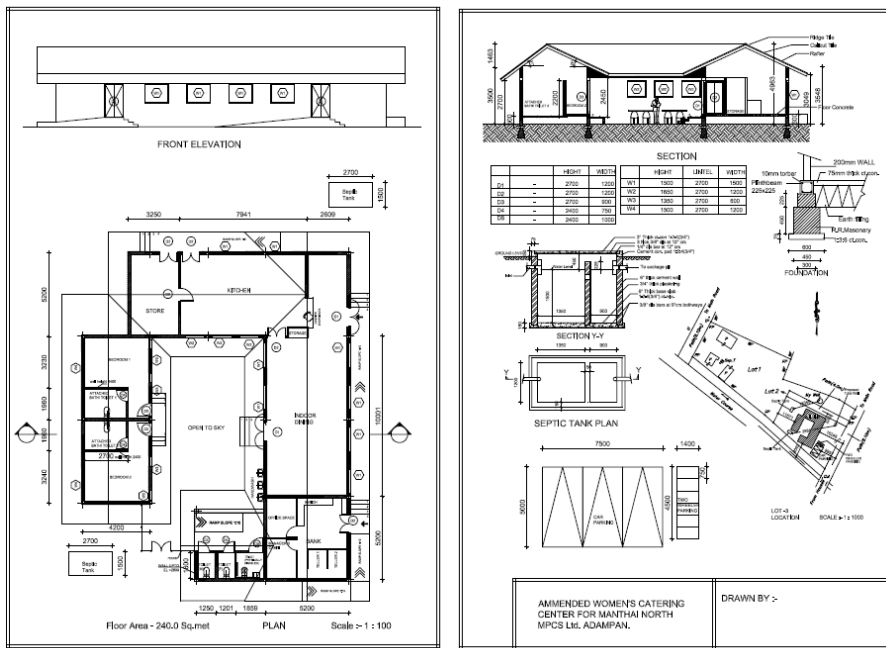
The signatures came on the last day before a change in committee. If the agreement had not been signed at that eleventh hour, most probably new committee members would have wanted to renegotiate the terms. The signing of the document happened in the nick of time!



Land Clearing in Anticipation

In June, Rojan and James arranged the clearing of the overgrown MPCS land to enable construction to begin. We'd hoped for a quick turnaround in building approval and we wanted to be poised, ready to begin construction at the drop of a hat. Our major financial sponsors of this project, Partners in International Collaborative Community Aid (PICCA), had been incredibly patient even though the building was meant to be completed by June 2016! Little did we know we'd have to wait for that approval for a further four months!





The kitchen plans that were finally approved by the Pradeshiya Sabha

ENGLISH FOR ALL

Progressing but Needs Specialists

Substantial effort on the parts of several committed English teachers has helped to develop Bridging Lanka's English programs. The challenge has been to find two anchor people - a volunteer native English speaker from overseas who can go to Mannar and support Mannar-based teachers. Such a person would help 'ground' and develop the English program there.

Ellen, Margaret, Margo, Cathy and Shyama from Australia continue to meet and develop curriculum resources for use in Mannar. In Mannar itself, English expert, Paul Raj, continues his weekly English classes for a group of adult professionals eager to learn English. They were busy preparing for their O Level exams. There are also weekend classes for local children to learn English, and these classes are held in the office.

The English classes for Moulavis three times a week was led by Romesh. Some Moulavis took their learning seriously. Others were distracted by busy schedules. Raseefa's weekly English classes in Puthukkudiyiruppu run smoothly. A student whose parent had withdrawn her from the class got bad school results and was promptly returned to Raseefa's class.

Heart-breaking News

Unfortunately, December brought bad tidings. The directors of Partners in International Community Aid (PICCA) informed us that the private donor who had committed \$25,000 to support the building of the kitchen had withdrawn from the project as the process had taken too long. Without additional funding the original PICCA grant of \$9,000 was now inadequate for the task. Unfortunately, PICCA decided that it was no longer able to support the project further at this point. This is a bitter disappointment for everyone in PICCA as much as it is for us at Bridging Lanka. However the biggest disappointment is of course for the widows whose livelihood project is now at severe risk. Our immediate challenge is to find \$49,000 within a six month deadline.

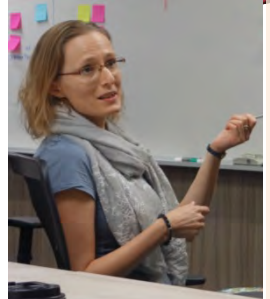
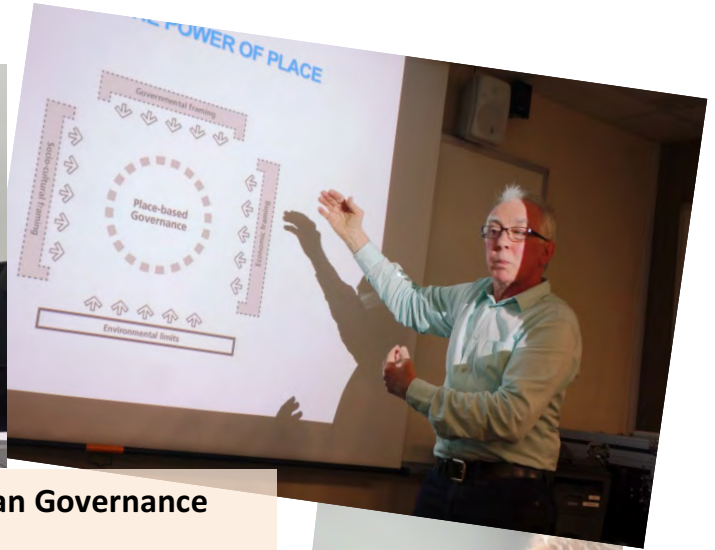


Above: Teachers, nurses and government officers attend Paul Raj's English classes;
Left: Paul Raj in full flight;
Below: International Children's Day celebrations in English class



Above: Raseefa checks an English exercise by her students
Left: Romesh's English class for Moulavis;

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS



Resilience Thinking & Emergent Urban Governance

Inspired by the work of Bridging Lanka, Professor Martin Mulligan from the Centre of Urban Research, RMIT University, Melbourne, organised a research forum at the National University of Singapore in November to which Bridging Lanka director, Jeremy was invited to speak. The forum also heard from academics from Sweden, Germany, UK, Sri Lanka, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia. Visakha, Bridging Lanka director, also participated in the forum.

In Prof Mulligan's words, "I led an RMIT study tour to examine the post-war recovery and rehabilitation work of an innovative non-government agency in the war-ravaged Sri Lankan provincial capital of Mannar and was a little surprised to realise how much a city like Melbourne might be able to learn from Mannar about resilience and decentred governance. This led me to the work of Indian urban scholar Ananya Roy on the need to get beyond the global dominance of Euro-American conceptions of cities and processes of urbanisation to look, instead, at such processes through the messy experiences of urban settlements in the global South. Now is a good time to 'decolonise' our thinking about urban governance and scholars associated with the Asian Research Institute can help to facilitate such a shift."



A New Captain

Mohan Gunasekara recently stepped behind the wheel of the Bridging Lanka ship to steer her in a good direction. Mohan was born in Sri Lanka but lived many years in Sydney, Australia. There Mohan notched up decades of experience managing refugee and community agencies before deciding to volunteer in Mannar.

As Director, Operations, Mohan will be taking over the day to day management of the staff and organisation, freeing up Jeremy to concentrate on strategic agendas as Bridging Lanka is being asked to expand its scope outside Mannar District.



Spreading the Message

As a follow up to Jeremy's visit and presentation to Board members of the Open Education Centre in Kattankudy, Centre staff paid a visit to see first-hand Bridging Lanka's work in Mannar. The visitors were shown our donkey programs, kulam protection efforts, livelihood and tourism based projects. We discussed our place-based and community development approach while the visitors were busy taking notes. In our last session, the Open Education staff gave us feedback:

The team recognised that in spite of challenges, Bridging Lanka brought fresh solutions to old problems while working with diverse people at grassroots level, NGOs, government, etc. Using donkeys, a naturally occurring yet abandoned resource for poor people's economic benefit and for disabled children, was inspired and "amazing". One staff person summarised what he observed: good planning, understanding the public, facing the challenges, negotiating with stakeholders and using volunteers.

Another praised our efforts to strengthen Muslim leaders and our aim to educate Moulavis so they could uplift the people. He said, "If you do this across Sri Lanka that would be very valuable." They saw that our projects like protecting the kulams, Moulavi leadership, forest-based-tourism and donkey programs were long-term cost-effective, sustainable and creative solutions.

STAFF RETREAT

Valuable at Any Cost

After the hire bus failed to turn up which delayed our departure by some hours, the Bridging Lanka staff set off to a guesthouse in thick jungle next to a bubbling brook at Kitulgala, Kegalle District. Near here on the Kelani River was where the famous World War II film, Bridge Over the River Kwai was filmed.

Over several days, volunteers Shyama, Chrissie and Lindy, prepared the retreat program. The focus was about articulating and grounding our individual and organisational values. The four days was characterised by soul searching, vulnerability, outrageous dancing, a warm coming together of a diverse range of people, role plays, presentations, lots of group work and swimming. The very bad phone and internet connection ensured we all stayed 'present'!

Present were staff members James, Rojan, Sinclair, Alhathir, Anne, Teena, Mowleesan, Kumanan, Felix, Prabath, also Bridging Lanka family member Kelvin, Kunchukulam youth reps Jerad and Johnsan, Initiatives of Change reps Shashi and Wima, together with volunteers, Ben, Chrissie and Lindy. Lastly Shyama and Jeremy, BL directors. So gathered here were Tamils, Moors, Sinhalese, Catholics, Muslims and Buddhists, diaspora members and foreigners – bridging ethnic, religious and geographic divides!

The results were in! The top organisational 'values' valued the most: 1. Being responsible; 2. Honesty; 3. Integrity; 4. Non-judgemental, and 5. Compassion. Time was spent exploring what they would look like in our everyday lives and work.

Jeremy delivered a session on 'victim' and 'perpetrator', saying Gandhi recognised them as one and the same. If we feel like a victim (powerless, hurt, blocked, rejected, unacknowledged, misunderstood), then the natural tendency is to 'perpetrate' (fight back, act against, undermine, gossip negatively, take revenge, start a war). He related it to the civil war and also our everyday dealings with each other.

In the last session participants were asked (a) Head – what was the most important learning? (b) Heart – what touched your heart? (c) Hand – what can you practise in Mannar? Here are the responses from two participants. Johnsan, one of the Kunchukulam youth answered thus: (a) preserve nature and have a more eco-consciousness, (b) role plays and last night's music, and (c) I want to preserve the Kunchukulam forests. Anne: (a) Self-reflection and reliance and not to follow others, (b) How Jerad and Alhathir jumped to Mowleesan's aid when he slipped and fell into the waters, and (c) collect lots of data before I do anything.

These types of getaways are important but also expensive. We acknowledge David Pargeter, former Executive Director, Uniting Church Commission for Mission Victoria & Tasmania, who contributed toward the costs of this retreat. Thanks David. Your legacy lives on.



Choosing Symbols with Personal Meaning



Heart: I want to love and have good relationships with everyone.

Sri Lanka: a small country but beautiful and diverse.



Eraser: I've got lots of bad behaviours that I need to erase.

Money: Everyone is running after money but there is much more to love.





Mowleesan slips and goes under. Alhathir and Jerad swim to his rescue and avert a dangerous situation



VOLUNTEERS



Machine-like

Ben Christie from Brisbane could only be described as a 'machine'. He volunteered for a month and took on back-breaking manual work at the Donkey Clinic construction site. He also worked to develop the guest house facility for Kunchukulam's eco tourism project. Everyone loved him!



Passionate

Lindy Drew-Tsang, Bridging Lanka director, visited Mannar for ten days. In her usual style she connected deeply with people, encouraged the new female staff and helped to both design and facilitate the staff retreat. Lindy 'absorbed' the BL operation and complexities well.



Astute

Chrissie Trousselot from Tasmania volunteered for a month on many projects including doing a storyboard for a promotional video to raise funds for the widow's catering project, donkey tourism and helping facilitate the staff retreat. Her insights and advice were invaluable.



Expert

Dr. Lisa Stelmayer from Austria, a vet extraordinaire, volunteered for ten days at the Donkey Clinic. She brought a suitcase full of equine medicines and equipment, performed castrations, treated abrasions and sores, and developed a procedure to assess, treat and tame feral donkeys.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Meeting with an Extraordinary Compatriot

While in Singapore, Jeremy was privileged to meet up with Prof Razeen Sally at the National University of Singapore. Nic Tan, Bridging Lanka treasurer, made the connection, urging Jeremy to make contact.

Prof Sally is a Sri Lankan by birth and since turning 40 is being drawn to return to Sri Lanka. Although residing in Singapore, Prof Sally returns each month to Sri Lanka as advisor to the Minister of Finance responsible for developing and executing the government's public

finance policy, economic policy and long term fiscal planning.

What struck Jeremy the most was Prof Sally's humility, great capacity to listen, his genuine interest in hearing about the work of Bridging Lanka and then his helpful and constructive advice. He offered to open doors both in Sri Lanka and Singapore for Bridging Lanka. He also said he'd visit us in Mannar in 2018!

He agreed to link us up with Candle Aid and Elmo & Bill Jayawardena who have the most comprehensive contacts list and will open doors with government agencies; Lorraine Bartholomeusz of the Sri Lanka Animal Welfare Society regarding donkeys; Chandra Jayaratne former Chair of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and active citizen on the Friday Forum. This could help with Urban Development Authority linkages; Hiran and Shiromal Coray of Jetwing fame regarding ethical tourism, and to invite them for a site visit; and Renton de Alwis, former Tourist Board chair who now runs a grounded, people-centred tourist guesthouse on the South promoting home stay and eco-tourism.

Quality 'Gap Filler'

Shyama Fuad is a dedicated Bridging Lanka director who spends many months in Mannar, helping fill the many gaps in our operations. Shyama can turn her versatile hand to anything – from nurturing new workers and ensuring volunteers are cared for in every respect, to developing English lesson plans, proofreading the many reports and project proposals, being a great 'follow up-er' and bugging all her friends and contacts to financially support our projects – and these are only a few of her roles!

In spite of her high rev level of activity, she is most known for her warm and caring self, especially if things aren't going well – a real 'bad weather' friend. The staff are most appreciative of this 'heart' approach. Thanks, Shyama, for all the unsung work you do for Bridging Lanka!



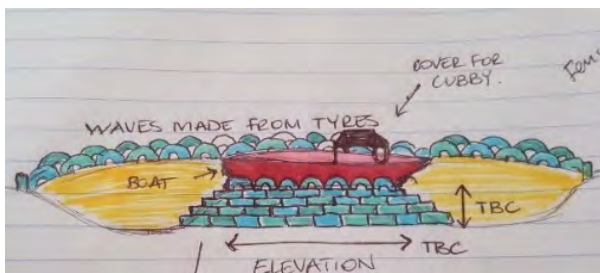
Community Dynamo!

Everything Lucinda Peterson touched in Mannar turned to gold. Her one month volunteering stint in July was a tour de force of serious community engagement and deep connection. "Heart" was stamped on everything she did, everyone she touched and wherever she went. BUT... the most astounding thing was when she returned to Melbourne, her passion grew even stronger! She set about scheming about to continue supporting the Children's Playground project in materially poor Santhipuram. Lucinda came up with great little projects to which she invited people to contribute toward as meaningful Christmas gifts. Over \$1,000 was raised for special child-engaging activities.



CHRISTMAS GIFT

Help build a playground for Christmas



Cubby Boat

Celebrating a sense of place, Santhipuram is a fishing village. This colourful boat will be set on an island in the park, surrounded by 'waves'. Help us reach \$1,500



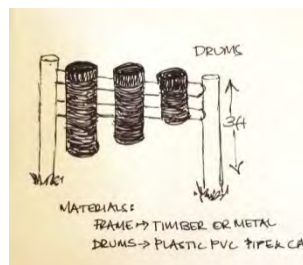
Slide

Of course, every playground should have a big slide! Help us reach \$2,000



Children's Library

"Reading is dreaming with your eyes wide open" – Unknown. Build a "library house" and fill it with books. Help us reach \$400



Drums

To accompany the new music wall – these drums will have children moving to the beat! Help us reach \$200

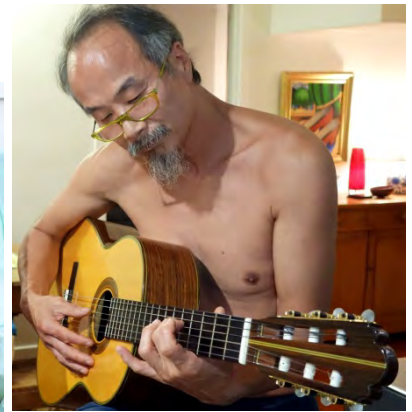


Sound Pipes

Vanakkam? Hello? Can you hear me? Children will enjoy chatting to their friends from one side of the playground to the other! Help us reach \$500

What Makes it Possible?

The foundational means that keeps Jeremy, Bridging Lanka director, afloat, enabling him to pursue his dream of reconciliation in Sri Lanka, is the generous provision given by Peter and Lindy Drew-Tsang. They offer, gratis, his board and lodging in their comfortable home in Brisbane, cope with a crazy schedule of comings and goings, run small fundraisers for important initiatives in Sri Lanka AND encourage their wider family to also support the cause! Without such generous love and care, this work in Mannar would not be financially possible. I am indebted.



Jeremy Liyanage, December, 2017

To be a partner in our work - visit our website: www.bridginglanka.org and pledge to our work in Sri Lanka – www.bridginglanka.org/donate

Also consider being one of our supporters and contribute toward our current online campaigns!

Campaign 1: Help us to move widows and vulnerable women out of poverty:

<http://bridginglanka.org/projects#modalcafe-refuge>

Campaign 2: Save our Kunchukulam forest and provide youth with eco-tourism jobs:

<http://bridginglanka.org/projects#modalprotect-forests>

Campaign 3: Join us in developing a leadership program for Muslim clerics:

<http://bridginglanka.org/projects#modalit-english-leadership-for-religious-leaders>

Bridging Lanka is a registered charity in Australia. All donations above \$2 are tax deductible

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