



Healing Hands Matara – April Newsletter

It is good to be in summer time. In the UK I believe that all the clocks recently went 1 hour forward so that it is light in the evenings. Spring always offers new growth and possibilities. We are all full of energy!

This newsletter will be dominated by my amazing training programme trip to India, which was sponsored by SOS Malta. There were two main purposes. One was to learn all about **Rain Water Harvesting**, so that we can introduce it here in Sri Lanka. The second purpose **was to learn about issues relevant to women** so that we can return with fresh ideas of how to support our women here.

We started our training program in Raigad district, which is 4 hours away from Mumbai (formerly Bombay), with a team of five members from Matara, Sri Lanka.

There was so much to learn but by the end I had a good grasp of

- how to assess a village and to identify the existing and potential water resources
- understand the difference between surface water and recharge ponds
- study the various methods used to cordon the spring water

- learn different methods used for agricultural ponds
- learn the methods used for recharging the bore wells
- learn the methods used for siphoning the water from a tank
- to understand the issues relevant to women
- learn to make paper bags, as a livelihood program for women
- learn to do a PRA (participatory rural appraisal techniques)

You can imagine how it was daunting to start with, as I have absolutely no technical knowledge of such things. You have to learn fast!

We visited 15 villages where projects are ongoing or completed.

We participated in two Women's day programmes, in order to understand the issues relevant to women. We visited and learned how to make paper bags with old news paper and other recycled paper so that we can teach this to the women's sewing circle as we constantly need fresh ideas to sustain the project.





The team going to visit the site, where the villages have spring water all year round.

We met villagers to find out if there is a solution for their hardship concerning water.



Dr.Gokhale explained to us how to “Cordon spring” water.

In the village of Devghar-Kond the people run a joint forest reservation project. The women of this village run a self help programme and were an inspiration to us as they were so motivated.

An important aspect of this visit was to see how communities work together as sometimes I find that communities here resist this and work for an individual outcome. I was eager to learn new strategies for engaging co-operation at a community level.



The best day ever, my favorite, was spent on a women's day programme at Nagaon Jagamwadi, village, Mahad Taluka. More than 500 women participated. It was interesting to see the men taking part in doing the other chores, like serving food and other odd jobs. We all introduced ourselves and through drama and song they brought awareness relating to **Iron Deficiency** and other diseases afflicting women.



Pictures of the women's day

In this Village we saw a recharge bund built near the well.



Mudre – This village is trying for its second crop since they have adequate water. The NGO has built a large Bund and many Gabions. The villagers received the seeds from the NGO to try their second crop, which was not successful, but they are determined to try once again.

In Pimpal Kond we learnt about Participatory Rural Appraisal Techniques. We saw how they dug a trench and built an underground concrete wall. This is to help stop the seepage of water and retain the water for the well during the dry season.

The Toy Bus experience was great. The toy bus came from the Childrens Toy Foundation. They have a great puppet show, which all the children enjoyed, and also educational games

and puzzles. This would work brilliantly with the children on the tea estates as some of the children do not go to school at all.

Since I came back I am delighted to report that we may get help with a Toy Bus scheme from The Children's Toy Foundation in Mumbai, the Rotary Club of Kandy and hopefully SOS Malta! THANK YOU!



We will now roll our sleeves up and start to plan the projects here based on the amazing work we have witnessed in India. It will be invaluable to us here in Matara.

The entire Sri Lankan team appreciated the untiring efforts of the Indian team in sharing their knowledge without prejudice. We as a team learned so much on how precious water is to our day to day living.

To touch on our other projects - **Tea Estate Project**- we have enrolled 5 children (who can't reach our school) at the local Government school where we are paying for them to catch up.

Amazingly, two other estates have joined in sending their children to our school. You have to remember that the tea workers are very cynical of education and our purpose so this is a huge break through for Healing Hands.

We have started a vegetable garden to help the families grow food rather than rely on donations.

Children's fund- The children will spend New Year 9th April, together with the elderly/mentally challenged at the home. We have a calypso band to entertain everyone. This

has been generously sponsored by Mr. Stephan Kuehl.

Women's Centre - We have now established seven women's self help groups. This was an outcome of my trip to India. I have plans to undertake additional social work training for women's Issues. SOS Malta always stressed that there is so much to learn from India and I intend to continue to learn and develop with their help. *Thank you Claudia for your advice and sponsorship of these programmes.*

Elderly Home - I will try to send Melena (the nurse) and another person to India to learn how to handle the mentally challenged people, as we saw wonderful examples of how to improve our services with very small costs.

So a lot is going on. Overall I sense that we are winning peoples confidences. And that has to come first. Now the community is beginning to help each other more.

Our Pledge: Healing Hands of Matara is committed to work for the progress and welfare of women and children through programmes which offer social welfare, education, livelihood and support. We resolve to undertake our work in a spirit of tolerance and love.

With love to everyone who reads this newsletter and to everyone who helps in anyway no matter how big or small, every contribution means so much to us all here.

Kumari Kulatunga – Director/Co-ordinator