

REPORT ON PROJECT ACTIVITIES

PROJECT TITLE: Training female faith leaders in interfaith dialogue for peace in Sri Lanka

PROJECT CODE: 15-A-052

Purpose of the Activity

The project was the second phases of an initiative in which female religious leaders received basic conflict mediation training, ran interfaith dialogues and organized religious celebrations where mixed faith communities could learn about each other's religion. This project set out to provide 20 of these women with intensive training in intra/interfaith dialogue facilitation. The project adopted different tools including workshops, mentoring, intra/interfaith dialogues, exposure visits and livelihood development activities. Through these activities the project has trained a 20 member interfaith core female resource pool and 100 member peer group and they touched more than 500 lives through their different activities.

Content and method of the activity

- Three day workshop for the 20 women at the start of the project to introduce concepts and ensure good working relationships.
- Peer group formation for coaching, mentoring and field visits.
- Intra/Interfaith Dialogues
- Interfaith actions – celebrations, gatherings to share life stories, solidarity actions, peer trainings
- Livelihood trainings on reproducing and recycling/ food processing/ branding/labelling/packing and marketing
- The women sell their products in markets of different faith groups.

Course of actual events

The project selected 20 women (representing 4 regions, 4 religions and 3 ethnic groups) who had participated in phase one of the project (which trained 113). As second step 2 day workshop conducted to develop an understanding of each other's areas of expertise, hopes and those of women in the country through mapping. The women developed common understanding, developed friendships and created a shared space.

Following the workshop, field officers conducted field visits to develop follow up activities. Based on the planning they were able to conduct series of intra and inter faith dialogues on basic concepts, values, beliefs, practices, symbols, dresses and celebrations of different faiths. Following interfaith dialogues they were able to start interfaith phase following series of mentoring and coaching sessions and have a far greater understanding of other faiths and ethnicities. The women then passed on their learning to the communities they represented and these communities started building relationships with other faiths and ethnicities.

The women working in Colombo went to a two day workshop in Jaffna (a northern province severely affected by war) accompanied by other religious leaders. Forming WOMAN group (interfaith) in Jaffna was significant. (pls do see the report attached). The women visited a village called Savakkutty which had been severely affected by war but had created a women cooperative society (105 members) which was a great inspiration for all women. The women's group learnt how to making jam and other food processing to preserve the fruits and vegetables they grow under CPBRs home gardening initiative. Following the trainings they started "Interfaith woman stalls" in their weekend/handicrafts markets. It was a moment they have taken the message to wider community to spread the message that all religious and ethnic groups can work together and live together. Because of the uniqueness of 'Interfaith woman' banner most of people visited the stall to understand the concept and to know the story and their products sold out before they close the stalls. Following these events the omen in the project joined with another religious group (women religious leaders) CPBR is working with to do an exposure visit in Jaffna to build authentic and natural relationships. The women formed community organising group comprising 12 members (6 from raising woman and 6 from Jaffna 3 villages (Colombuthurai (Christian Tamil) , Navanthurai (Islam Savakkuttu) Hindu, Tamil) .

CPBR feel the women's group have the capacity and potential to do significant work in the ground level. They are already involved in working with war affected and other affected women which widens our possibility to reach these women.

Achievements of the Activity

- Interfaith collaborations with a strong and committed interfaith women leaders group
- Developing very strong relationship with Saila who is war widow and founded" Tarake" association.
<http://n-peace.net/candidate/candidate-1040> . More than 100 war widows are part of her association.

- Formation of a community organising group bringing Jaffna and north central women into one group to collaborate on peacebuilding initiatives

Future areas to be pursued

- Developing the women's capacities on ecological wellbeing and human wellbeing as a mechanism to lead reconciliation initiatives.
- Developing the women's capacities to be the trainers of livelihood skill development for war affected women in north, east and north central provinces.
- Developing a cooperative system to support the interfaith market stalls they are planning to start in many places to sell their products.