

Serving the vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka with simple but highly efficient technologies

Suzanna Lipscombe's seventh report for the Malteser International Lent Campaign 2008: "40 Euros for Sri Lanka"

Today, I have been in the Southern Province with two of my colleagues, Kelvin and Lasantha. They are working on the Child Friendly Schools project which involves the participatory selection and design of water and sanitation facilities for 43 schools.

As we walk up to the school, the children are already waiting with anticipation for the mornings events. Today they are taking the next step in the project cycle with the health and hygiene lessons, focusing on household water treatment methods. They arrive equipped with their plastic bottles for the SODIS (Solar Water Disinfection) method, a kettle for boiling, and want to demonstrate the use of the ceramic water filters that had already been supplied to the school. Most schools in Sri Lanka use the dug well as their main source of water, which face a high risk of contamination, and therefore it is vital to run such a hygiene promotion project, particularly with children.

Today's lesson involves the Malteser International health and hygiene promoters, and the school teachers also take part as facilitators. The focus is to get the children involved in a participatory activity to understand how water can become contaminated and how it can be treated to get safe for drinking again.

The lesson begins with a group discussion about how water can become contaminated. The teachers use different picture cards to identify the good and bad practices in the home and around the well. Some onlookers stand outside the classroom – they are also interested in being part of the sessions! And of course they can. The children then take part in a practical session to demonstrate their understanding of the different water treatment methods. One such method is SODIS, which uses the sun's rays to disinfect drinking water. So the children begin to clean out the plastic bottles and follow the instructions to place drinking water in the sun for six hours. They now know that after this period of direct penetration of UV rays the water will be safe to drink. Gayanthika, one of the girls from Grade 10, already knows why it is important to treat the drinking water: "There can be harmful germs in the water so we know it is a good idea to treat it before we drink."

So it's been a busy day for us in Galle! I hope we will be able to continue with these activities in Sri Lanka, as not only is it fun and rewarding to work with children on such water, sanitation and hygiene projects, but it is also important since they are the future generations who will continue to practice what they learn here and share these messages with their families when they go home from school. These messages and the work carried out by Malteser International in Sri Lanka (and elsewhere around the world) is incredibly important and this should be continued not only with the children,

but also with the teachers, schools, Ministry of Health and local partners such as LRWHF to build their capacity so they can sustain the good work for many years to come. This is also true for the RWH project as many more families in the remote rural areas will need such a tank to provide drinking water and alleviate the difficulties they face in finding water. It is a simple, yet highly effective technology that will continue to gain popularity if we maintain this progress and momentum. We have only touched the tip of the iceberg and with your help we will be able to further develop our projects and serve these vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka!