

The Start of Illukhena Revolution- A Step Towards its Growth

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Historic Background

In 1983, ethnic tensions rose between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority in the north-eastern part of Sri Lanka. Most of the fighting took place in the north. The conflict also penetrated the heart of Sri Lankan society, with Tamil Tiger rebels carrying out devastating suicide bombings in the capital city of Colombo in the 1990s. The violence killed more than 80,000 people, damaged the economy and harmed the tourism in one of South Asia's potentially most prosperous societies. International concern was raised about the fate of civilians caught up in the conflict zone during the final stages of the war. Some 250,000 Tamil refugees were confined to camps for months; afterwards the government ordered the execution of capturing or surrendering rebels. After more than 25 years of violence the conflict ended in May 2009, when government forces seized the last area controlled by Tamil Tiger rebels. However, recriminations over abuses by both sides continued.

Till 2009, the Sri Lankan government focused primarily on the war affected areas. Therefore, the development of the rest of country became its secondary priority. Since then, the remaining areas and the war affected regions have been recovering from the past loss. One such example of a neglected region is Illukhena.

Statement of Peace

Due to the lack of resources, the quality of some of the basic necessities such as electricity, technology and education in Illukhena has not been able to match up the people's real needs. To date, they are struggling to receive an apt amount of such basic necessities and are unable to find a solution to their poverty. On an average, the income of a typical household in Illukhena is less than two dollars per day. Also, the decreasing global value of the Sri Lankan Rupee creates more problems for the communities in several villages to survive (1\$=130.74 Sri Lankan Rupee approx). This project aims to increase standards of education, power supply and technology that will ensure sustainable development, leading to a better economic and social future of the residents of Illukhena.

The Project

"The Start of Illukhena Revolution" aims to address three basic components. Firstly, it focuses on providing stable power supply to the village of Bohandiya, Illukhena, where solar energy will inspire the villagers to be future leaders of a greener Illukhena. Secondly, it will focus on placing the technology that will channel this renewable energy. Finally, it will focus on education, as we will be teaching the children how to use the newly placed technology and the importance of peace in terms of conflict management.

The heart of this project is a school in Bohandiya called KL/Sambodhiya Primary School. The school has a population of approximately 156 students from grades 1 to grade 5. We will be working with Finco Solar Power Household Systems and Janathakshan to provide electrical supplies. Finco Solar Power Household System is the Renewable and the Alternate Energy Group whose primary objective is to enhance the use of the renewable energy resources in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Janathakshan is a non-governmental organization that has significantly expanded its areas of demonstrating technology based approaches across a number of geographical areas in Sri Lanka and South Asia. The name 'Janathakshan' means 'people's technology.' This will be a fine collaboration, as both these organizations will help us install the solar panels, adding further value to Bohandiya. Moreover, with this collaboration, the panels will be able to power 8 hours of electrical demand on a daily basis.

For the second part of the project, we will be using the generated electricity to power technological appliances. These appliances include laptops, plug points, tube lights and bulbs which will help the school to have a better computer lab. When the solar panels are installed, the computer lab will have plug points in the lab in order to charge not only laptops but also other appliances such as mobile chargers, televisions, radios etc. Hence, this will provide them with the flexibility to use the plug points in whichever way necessary, rather than restricting it to just laptops. Moreover, the laptop is the first initiative that connects them to the rest of the world. Since nowadays, as most things happen on a computers or laptops, we believe this is a great opportunity for the school to dwell on this resource to enhance the abilities of our future generation.

The third part of the project is educating the students of the school. The main initiative is to teach the students how the technology of solar panels function, how technical appliances work, their benefits, and a new course in their school called Peace Studies. The course will consist of several components like conflict management, peace keeping, human rights and international relations that will make them aware about what various global conflicts (including the Sri Lankan Civil War). As a result, they will learn the true value of peace and also the steps to avoid future conflicts. Another aspect of the education part is that we will be helping them develop a better classroom for the school in terms of furniture and other basic school supplies. So, we will provide them with tables, chairs and school supplies for both their classrooms and the 'new' computer lab, enabling the students to enjoy their educational experience in a better way.

Our team is divided into 2 types of members: field workers and reporters. Linh Tran, Sherin Varghese and Shashikala Wanigasinghe will be the field workers, while Pulkit Diwan will be the reporter.

The field workers will be going to Sri Lanka together to help physically and oversee all the stages of this project. Something to note here is that Shashikala originally comes from Sri Lanka and therefore, language and communication should not be a concern when we get there. On the other hand, Pulkit will be staying back, making notes of the progress of the project and be preparing the final report.

Timeline (Summer 2014)

April

- Contact Finco Solar Systems & Janathakshan to provide specific details in regard to installing the solar panels (like desired power output, layout of school, number of consumption hours per day etc).
- Order laptops and other technological equipments required to be part of set up at school, so that it reaches Sri Lanka before departure.
- Contact the school to confirm the exact date of the commencement for the installation of solar panels.

May

- Confirm with Finco Solar Systems if they have the design ready with all the other installation details. Seek help from Janathakshan if needed and keep them informed about our progress.
- Prepare coursework to teach Peace Studies and Working with technology, by having printouts of worksheets and other educational activities.
- Create detailed syllabus of the lectures and assignment of team members' role as teachers.
- Order major stationery items like chalkboard, chalk, whiteboard, markers and board erasers to be collected on our arrival in Sri Lanka.
- Place the order for furniture pieces, so that they can also be ready to be collected on our arrival in Sri Lanka.
- Ask the school for some volunteers that could/would want to help in the setting up of the computer lab in July.

June

- Assemble departure documentation (visas etc).
- Double-check supplies and previous work.
- Send detailed itinerary to school about our daily plan upon arrival.
- Poster preparations for the awareness about the benefits of renewable energy.
- Order other minor stationery items like notebooks, pencils, coloured pens, erasers and sharpeners, in order to receive them before our departure.

July

- Arrival
- Inform the school about your arrival and give them a heads-up for receiving items from us.
- Gather all ordered items at the school, like the major stationery items and furniture pieces.
- Contact Finco Solar Systems & Janathakshan to start installing and supervise installation.
- Start setting up the arrived furniture.
- Start placing all means of technology connected with the solar panels and get them running.
- Place the computer lab along with the help of volunteers provided from the school.
- Send first analysis report to Pulkit.

August

- Start teaching children at the school based on their grade to use the laptops and also carry out procedures of the course named Peace Studies.
- Reach out to the community to explain benefits of sustainable energy, especially the impact of solar energy.
- Send day to day reports to Pulkit for recording and simultaneous analysis of the project.
- Get-together with the teachers and principal of the school for evaluation on the project. Propose to carry out a similar yearly workshop to introduce these concepts to the new students.

Long Term Effect

The long term goal that we, as a team, are aiming to provide is a better and stable future for the present and upcoming generations of Illukhena. "The Start of Illukhena Revolution" is a step towards free power supply to the whole village where the school serves as a great hub for the wonderful resource of solar energy. In order to achieve this, we are providing the school with solar power panels, laptops and other school supplies while educating the children about how to use the modern technology, to improve their knowledge and aspects of the outside world while incorporating the ideology of peace and unity. The installation of solar power panels has many advantages ranging from the environmental factors such as clean and renewable source of energy with little or no cause of pollution to the economical factors. For example, it requires very low future investment and little maintenance. Moreover, the investment in laptops is a guarantee of a positive outlook in terms of standard education. In spite of the free education, recent disruption has caused the level of standard education to drop dramatically. Hence, we feel that the introduction of laptops and other basic school supplies will improve the quality of a promised education and will inspire the Sri Lankan Government to move in the right direction in terms of public education. For the continuation of the project, we will donate all our demonstration equipment and educational materials to the school.