

Section I

“The Start of Illukhena Revolution” provided a stable power supply, computers, and considerable supplies, furniture, and infrastructure improvements to the school in the village of Bohandiya, Illukhena. The public school forms the center of the village. Furthermore, the project focuses on education, as we taught the children how to use the newly placed technology, as well as the importance of peace for conflict management.

Our team was divided into two types of members: field researchers and a reporter. Linh Tran, Sherin Varghese and Shashikala Wanigasinghe were field workers, and they went to Sri Lanka to help oversee all implementation stages of this project; Pulkit Diwan stayed in the United States and served as a reporter. Shashikala originally comes from Sri Lanka and therefore, language and communication was not a barrier in the project.

Nonetheless, our project faced several unforeseen circumstances that forced us to make changes to our timeline. For example, we initially overestimated the cost of the supplies. Items purchased in Sri Lanka were considerably less expensive than we anticipated, as the conversion rate was roughly \$1 to 130.14 Sri Lankan Rupees. For example, the solar company Finco sold solar panels to us at two-thousand dollars less than our estimated cost. With more money at hand, we had the ability to make a further difference.

As per our proposal, we installed a solar panel array that provided sufficient energy to supply electricity to the entire school. The solar panels that make up the array are eco-friendly, as they harvest clean and renewable sources of energy without any pollution. In addition, these panels require very low or no future investment and little maintenance. We purchased five computers, and arranged for forty-four new sets of desks and chairs to be constructed from raw wood purchased for the 3rd-grade classroom. Further, we provided school supplies including books, pencils and other stationery items to all 157 school children.

Because of the remaining funds, we were additionally able to add three water filters. Even though the school has a well, the water quality suffers from a high calcium level. In addition, we fixed a pipeline connecting the well and the water filters. We also added a water stand to support the water tank as it provides clean drinking water. We purchased five computer tables and chairs, three radios, a microphone, and an office desk to assist the development of the school. The radio enables the schoolchildren to listen to CDs as part of their education process. We converted a bare room into a computer lab by fixing a new ceiling, repainting the walls, carpeting the floor, setting up a new fan, and adding a new whiteboard and five new power outlets. We also added headphones, a speaker and a printer for the computer lab. Besides these, we fixed three more ceilings in the school, for the 5th-grade classroom, 4th-grade classroom and the office, respectively. Further, we purchased wall fans for each of the five classrooms and wired the fans to run from the solar panel array. These additions to the original proposal the field workers required to stay for four weeks, rather than the projected three, and they gladly volunteered to stay longer.

As part of the project, we had the opportunity to interact with the children and provide them with some basic knowledge on how to use computers. For many, it was their first time using a computer and hence they were quite enthusiastic in learning. We taught them how to start the machines and explained how the machines function. We also provided training on Microsoft Word and Paint as part of this process. Along with the computer education, we conducted basic English lessons for each specific grade. For example, the 1st and 2nd graders were taught alphabetical vocabulary while the 3rd, 4th and 5th graders learned more advanced levels of English, such as building basic sentences and paragraphs.

Despite the favorable financial picture, we did experience unanticipated communication problems between the field researchers and reporter. First, the time difference between Sri Lanka and United States proved to be problematic, in terms of getting updates from the field researchers to the reporter. Second, the village in which the field researchers were working had poor internet access. As a result, the decision process was hindered and communication was not very smooth. For example, we could not communicate effectively while making decisions about both the possibility of extending the project to four weeks, as well as the management of the surplus funds. For days, Pulkit would have no clue about project activities. Yet, we were instead able to capitalize on the need for spontaneity. We made decisions when needed to, keeping in mind our communication limitations. For example, the field researcher compensated for the communication lag by devising a plan to make the extra week as productive as possible in keeping with the project aims.

We are pleased that the entire student body of the school in Illukhena benefited from this project. Our project goal was to empower the school to serve as the central hub for the Illukhena village, particularly with the power of solar energy. Moreover, the investment in computers will assist in raising the standards of

primary education in Illukhena. The introduction of computers to the school curriculum will improve the quality of education and will inspire the children.

For the project to continue beyond the current period, we have donated all our demonstration equipment and educational materials to the school, including peace studies manuals and instruction workbooks for teaching foundational English. The knowledge and resources that we shared with the school need to be used in an effective manner so that all students at the school receive equal opportunities.

Section II

The Peace Studies Course forms the most important aspect of stage two for our project, and best defines our philosophy of peace. We developed the coursework in deliberate opposition to the standard definition of peace as “the absence of war.” Although this is true to a certain extent, such reductive definitions undermine the very essence of peace as defined by our group.

We believe that abstract “peace on earth” may only be approached when inner peace is practiced on a collective scale. Inner peace is realized when the harmonious union of mind, body and spirit is aligned through a purposeful and intentional practice. It is the presence of inner peace that impacts the way we treat one another and translates into peace on earth. This sense of inner peace through practice allows us to realize we are one with all living things, and that our connection to nature and the earth allows us to “feel” connected to the world around us when we intentionally look towards this connection. This theme was our major focus and we see it running throughout our project. As part of the peace studies course, we conducted several story-telling sessions with the children. These stories had meaningful messages about peace in general and taught the children many valuable lessons. We had some team-building activities, which enhanced cooperation and understanding among one another. For example, we conducted a hand painting activity that signifies peace and unity. We also provided each pair of students with a small plant to take care of and as a result it taught them the value of collaboration with one another. In short, our coursework named Peace Studies taught the students to be patient, to share and to be happy.

We tried to achieve peace awareness and the appreciation of the value of education throughout the project. Helping the students in the school in Illukhena brought inner peace to all of us, as it was an act that would be a pathway towards a stronger future. For example, teaching these primary school students was a great experience because we helped to improve their knowledge and access to technology. While teaching, we observed that the students were motivated to be peaceful with others (especially their classmates) and resolve any conflicts that came up. Another perspective on our idea of peace was about sharing and caring within the people around. For example, the students in Illukhena had to share computers and learn together, as there were only 5 computers for the 157 students in the school. This led to a very mature understanding of resource sharing. The children were very keen and enthusiastic to learn, and as a result we witnessed many smiling and happy faces. This project has changed our perspective about peace awareness and the value of education; we realize that the most important thing is the happiness we bring to others through our educational efforts. That’s precisely our understanding of the word ‘peace’. In conclusion, seeing the children progress throughout the project and seeing their energetic and joyful faces definitely paves the way for a brighter future.

“Little happiness comes from helping others and this little happiness has a way bigger impact than we can imagine. For me, that’s the most valuable part of this project.” --- Pulkit Diwan

“This project was valuable to me because it was a great experience for me that I actually got the chance to learn so many great things from the kids and people there about the love within people, friendship, passion and devotion.” --- Linh Tran

“Education is the key to success. To me having not encountered any challenges in receiving a good quality education, this project taught me the value of basic education and how it can have a life-changing effect on kids and their future.” --- Sherin Varghese

“This project was important to me because peace begins with a smile and I got to see so many of them.” --- Shashikala Wanigasinghe

The Start of Illukhena Revolution- A Step Towards its Growth

Illukhena, Sri Lanka

Lake Forest College

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