

Sri Lanka – post tsunami reconstruction

mobile libraries



Most libraries in Galle and Hambantota districts were either destroyed or damaged in the tsunami, and rural communities, especially rural students, relied on libraries for access to school books.

In response, City of Melbourne established separate agreements with the City of Galle and the Hambantota Urban Council to establish mobile library services to nearby rural communities.

AWF lent its services to the team to help convert two buses into mobile libraries complete with shelves, seating, fans and computers.

City of Melbourne and the Athenaeum Library worked with local authorities to review the existing book collection, and to ensure the relevance of the mobile libraries well into the future.

Books and funds to purchase new books, including pictorial, education, and general interest books, in both local languages and English, were all generously donated by project partners.

The buses now provide library access to 20,000 people in 17 villages and rural areas across Galle and Hambantota.

“The mobile library is making a real difference in our community. Through the help and support of so many, we can now start to look to the future. Our children have access to better educational material, and I can’t think of a more promised future than what that represents.”

Mr Kalum Seneviratne, Mayor of Galle



Sri Lanka



Country: Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
District: Galle and Hambantota
Capital: Colombo
Area: 65, 610 km²
Population: 20 million
Language: Sinhala and Tamil
Major religions: Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian
Life expectancy: 68 years (men)
75 years (women)
Literacy: 91.6% of population
Main exports: tea, rubber, coconut, textiles, petroleum and gems



Sri Lanka is an island nation in South East Asia, located about 31 kilometers off the southern coast of India. It is a poor, politically and economically unstable nation, which was badly affected by the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which tore through South East Asia in 2004.

Although emergency relief organisations from around the world worked speedily to ensure survivors had access to medical care, shelter and fresh water immediately after the disaster, rebuilding devastated towns left with no roads and little infrastructure, following the initial relief effort, was a much slower process. Many communities basically had to start over.

The City of Galle and Hambantota district were both severely damaged by the tsunami disaster. Thousands of people died, homes, business and livelihoods were ruined and many public facilities were also damaged or destroyed. These districts had limited government and administrative capacity even before the tsunami, and so faced a desperate struggle to cope with its aftermath.

AWF joined the City of Melbourne to help rebuild communities in these districts and to establish long-term sister relationships between Sri Lanka and organisations in Melbourne, in order to enhance the future sustainability of those communities.

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dickwella north school



“We had barely any facilities before, we had just one toilet and didn’t even have enough room for the students to study, most of them had to stand when classes were on. I greatly appreciate the generosity of these donors who have changed the lived of these young and talented students.”

Ven. Dikwelle Dhammawilasa Thera, Dickwella North School Principal

Dickwella North School is located inland, so after the Tsunami hit, the school became a regional centre for students from coastal schools that had been destroyed beyond repair. Already over 75 years old, the run-down school had barely been coping with its existing 420 students before the Tsunami hit, which made accommodating the students from twelve other schools an almost impossible task.

AWF joined the City of Melbourne to assist the school to expand and cope with the new influx of students. We recognised the long-term success of the school depended on the involvement and support of the local community, so our approach to the rebuilding of the Dickwella School was about more than expanding the building.

AWF designed a community workshop led by AWF Project Director Dr Sarath Matararaachchi, a local urban development authority planner and a school teacher, and attended by head subject teachers, the principal, student leaders and parent representatives. The group explored issues faced by the school community and devised a wish list for the future of Dickwella North School.

The overall project was a huge undertaking, since the work needed to cover almost every aspect of school life, from sourcing and delivering office and school equipment, through computer training for teachers, to the construction of new classrooms and toilets.

City of Melbourne project partners: the Sri Lanka Association of Victoria, Definitive Events, Mercer Human Resource Consulting and the Melbourne Athenaeum Library all raised money to pay for the school and its resources.

AWF worked with the local community to construct a new three-storey wing on the existing school site. Completed in March 2007, the new wing now houses a fully equipped science laboratory, an IT centre, an English activity room, a library, principal’s office and teacher’s common room.

The project team’s efforts have positively impacted on the community and helped forge cross-cultural relations between Melbourne and Sri Lanka.