

“Development of Small Schools Facing the Threats of Closing Down”

Prema Karunaratne

Team Mentor: Agneta Wångdahl Flinck

Batch 1

Summary of the project

The “Child Rights, Classroom and School Management” Programme was held in Sweden and Tanzania in 2003 and 2004 with participants from ten different countries. After attending the seminar, participants were advised to undertake a pilot project in order to apply the knowledge acquired in the area of education in their countries.

In our project, we have decided to select a school with very limited resources and poor attendance rates. Therefore, Bentota Primary School in the Western province has been selected. The objectives of the project focus mainly on the following;

- Improving attendance in primary education (Grades one to five)
- Helping the parents and discussing their economical problems.
- Improving school environment and classroom management to enhance children’s education.
- Improving human and material resources.
- Conducting awareness programmes to improving children’s knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- Conducting training programmes for teachers.
- Holding meetings to inform teachers and parents of the basis of child rights.

Impact on the personal and professional levels

Participating in the Child rights, Classroom and School Management programme gave me the opportunity to obtain a great deal of experience in my personal and professional life. I gained knowledge in key concepts of leadership, teamwork, sharing experiences with participants from other countries and learning how to prepare educational presentations. Moreover, I expanded my knowledge of group work, school visits and project implementation in my country. After participating in the seminar, we have gained sound knowledge on child rights, classroom and school management methods and applications. Even though we had some knowledge of child rights in our countries, we benefited enhancing our knowledge of the CRC at the seminar.

Impact on the organizational level

When we considered the CRC and the school management programme prevailing in the education sector in Sri Lanka, we realised that many shortcomings still exist

in the present system. This represented a major challenge we had to face when applying new CRC methods to the system. Problems identified can be included in the following categories:

- Poverty
- Lack of knowledge about child rights of parents and teachers.
- Lack of human and material resources and facilities.
- Unsuitable education environment.
- Lack of knowledgeable teachers.

When we were trying to implement the pilot project in Bentota School, we understood that the main reasons causing children's poor attendance are poverty and ignorance about the importance of education. Even though children are poor, we had to take some strategies to improve the attendance in schools. As a starting point we have decided to create some awareness programmes for parents. We discussed problems preventing them from sending their children to school, such as getting assistance with their day-to-day work and parents not having a vision for their children's future. Parents were taught about the importance of education and the gaining of valuable skills so children can be of effective assistance. Teachers were also facing difficulties with accommodation and transport, overcoming negative attitudes and lack of proper training regarding school curricula and knowledge of child rights. We organized training programmes for teachers to help them gain the knowledge they needed and to overcome their problems.

After working on solving problems and finding solutions through the pilot project, we tried to implement it in the provinces where we were working. We collected data in our organisation on school attendance and human and material resources and we discussed with the heads of the departments about implementing the training and awareness programme for teachers and parents. Funds were allocated for the approval and implementation of the programme. Principals in schools with poor attendance were advised to actively take part in the programme and we instructed them on how to conduct training and awareness programmes for teachers and parents.

Impact on the country level

In the Provincial Council, we discussed the CRC in the Education Progress Review Meeting and at the District Coordinating Committee meetings. Politicians and heads of departments identified the importance of child rights after discussions that took place at the provincial level. We were able to take the CRC methods to a national level. Now they have changed the education curriculum to suit the above needs. Furthermore, they have introduced balanced food programmes for children and training programmes for teachers at the national level.

I believe that the programme we attended in Sweden and Tanzania was very important in enabling us to implement CRC methods in our country.