



# Oru Paanai

*Feeding hungry children in Sri Lanka*

**News from Oru Paanai**

Issue 5: December 2015



[www.orupaanai.org.uk](http://www.orupaanai.org.uk)

## Oru Paanai Newsletter 2015

Warm greetings to all supporters of Oru Paanai, current and future. It gives us much pleasure to present this year's Newsletter, in which we reflect on the past year and cast an eye on what lies ahead.

Much has happened in the past twelve months, and yet little has changed, in Sri Lanka in general, and the north in particular. The flicker of optimism that we felt a year ago has largely been extinguished in the course of the year, as politics has got in the way of development, as often happens in Sri Lanka. Although the new government has made some moves to facilitate reconciliation, the economy of the region remains largely stagnant and the poorer section of society in the region is still unable to obtain gainful employment. Admittedly, the infrastructure like roads and the railway have been restored or even improved, but poverty is still rife. The Northern Provincial Council and the national Tamil political parties are engaged in a political squabble, while the needs of the people still remain unaddressed.

As far as the activities of Oru Paanai are concerned, we continued to support the provision of lunchtime meals to over 44, 000 children at the last count, and our help is still needed, possibly more than ever. OP is now struggling to meet its commitment for a number of reasons. Our regular donor base remains

largely static, and fund raising events are not being supported to the same degree, probably due to compassion fatigue. We are now unable to take on any more new schools, and more stringent criteria are applied to screen new schools which appeal for our help. In fact, we have now reached the stage where we may have to start de-scaling our activities by dropping some of the schools in our programme, as we can no longer afford to support this many schools.

We have been forced to dig deep into our diminishing reserves to keep the Feeding programme running and it is possible that if the current rate of attrition of our funds continues, we may run out of funds before the end of this year. That would be a great tragedy, as the adverse impact on the lives of a very large number of children is incalculable.

Is the situation in the north as bad as it was some 8 years ago when OP was launched? The answer is yes, it is – if anything it is even worse. Even though our work has helped a generation of children, the need for such help is as great as ever. The report written by Tissa Jayatilaka, the Co-Chair of OP -Sri Lanka, which we publish in full in this newsletter, gives a very moving account of how dire the situation is in the Wannai and other poorer parts of the north. Tissa, in his brief visit to the area, had seen for himself how dreadful the situation is. A group of newly appointed Sri Lankan ambassadors and high commissioners who visited the Wannai

area in July 2015, also were deeply moved by the prevailing conditions there and reported their findings to the government.

In brief, then, there is still a huge need for help in the North. We in Oru Paanai are striving to help as much as we can, but without more help from our supporters, we cannot continue our project. This is the time for all good men and true, to ride to the rescue of these hapless children. We are willing to do all we can to keep the OP feeding programme going, even though most of our committee is now on the wrong side of 70, but we need financial support to enable us to continue our work.

Please put your thinking caps on, and consider how you can help OP to continue its work, and ensure that these poor children are provided at least this one meal a day – to many of them it is their only meal for the day.

*Dr.S.V.Devendra, Editor, Oru Paanai*

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### **OP SL Co Chairman Tissa Jayatilaka's report from Jaffna**

From 19 to 21 of January, I undertook my visit up north to see for myself the work done by “Oru Paanai” (OP). On the morning of 20 January, I collected Anusha, the OP Local project lead, and set off for Pallai where we had a meeting scheduled for 8:00 a.m. with principals and teachers associated with Oru Paanai of the Pallai Division / Killinochchi Zone. The meeting was good and useful as there were a few among those present who expressed their views frankly.

I gathered that OP supports a total of 391 schools in the Northern Province. Of the 14 schools in the Pallai Division, 11 receive OP benefits. Those present at the meeting indicated that unlike the support from the government which is not regular, OP support is regular, reliable and assured. It was the consensus that OP does much good and is effective in its assistance to the provision of a nutritious meal for those school children who are supported by it. Students depend on OP. These students are so poor that most of them come to school without breakfast. It is likely that they even go without dinner. Hence the general feeling is that these children get by with only the meal provided by OP.

It was heart warming, though sad, to see the children wolf down their mid-day meal provided by OP. I spoke to the students in the smattering of Tamil I possess and they indicated to me that they liked the food. This was without any prompting by their teachers. In any event, the enthusiasm with which they consumed the food told its own story.

While being appreciative of the support extended by OP, the principals and teachers present also indicated that more money may be needed to sustain the project. They observed that in most of their schools the OP project began in 2010. At that time, the money received was adequate to provide the meal. However, inflation and rising vegetable prices have made the sustainability of the project difficult. In



Children enjoying lunchtime meal

earlier years, some parents of the children volunteered to cook the meals. Now the schools rely on cooks to whom no payment is made in cash or kind. At present, the parents of the children who receive OP benefits have been asked to chip in to pay the cooks something for their time and labour.

I was requested to ask OP for additional funds to meet increased costs arising from higher vegetable prices and costs arising from the need to hire cooks. As we know, quite understandably, that there is no end to the needs of the less well off, I was informed that at present OP supports only students in grades 1 to 9 - as does the government supported food programme. The principals and teachers wondered if the students in grades 10 to 13 may also be included at a future date under OP auspices. During our visit to the Kuravil Tamil

Vidyalam in the Mullaitivu Division, we found that there was a shortage of aluminium plates. The plates were being shared and so one class waited until the students of another class had finished to consume their meal. Here the academic staff members I spoke to said that most of the kids are so very poor that they virtually come to school for the sake of the meal provided by OP. A significant number of these kids, it appears, have neither a father nor mother and are being brought up by relatives who have their own children to provide for! The principal here stretches whatever he receives from OP to feed the students of grades 10 and 11, supplemented by the vegetables he receives from the villagers.

We then visited a resettlement village named 'Thimbili', the location of some of the 'dug out' wells built by OP. This was truly a sad experience. I

saw young widows or women otherwise separated from their husbands (some husbands have left their wives illegally to re-marry and/or 'live with' other women) struggling to eke out an existence under the most difficult of circumstances. And these ladies are quite young, have one or more children and seemed quite vulnerable. It is no surprise that they are being exploited by one and all.

Our next call was to another house in which a dug out well had been built. Here there was a young woman who to me looked 15 or so (Anusha thought she was around 21 and she also told me that women tend to marry early in the Vanni), carrying a baby son aged 2½ years . This was a less harrowing story, for the young lady's husband had gone to the field to tend his land. Both mother and child looked so much happier despite the fact that the house and compound she lived in was much smaller than the two previous locations.

**I was happy to make my first visit to see for myself the work undertaken and executed by OP. But I was deeply saddened by most of what I saw. I have seen much suffering in places like Hambantota and Hakmana in the Southern Province, in Moneragala in the Uva Province and in the slums of Colombo. But here in the districts of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, I saw not only suffering but despair and a sense of deep hopelessness.**

I wish to thank the board of management of OP and Skanda for giving me this opportunity to be associated with this endeavour.

*Tissa Jayatilaka, Co Chairman, OP Sri Lanka*



Children enjoying lunchtime meal

## **OP Fundraising Activities in 2015**

### ***Clinical Society of Sri Lankan Doctors and Dentists (CSSLDD ) Dinner Dance***

The CSSLDD resurrected its Dinner Dance this year to raise funds for Oru Paanai, after a lapse of 3 years. The elegant Royal Nawab Banqueting Suite in Perivale was the venue for the event, which was held on the 11th of July. Over 250 members of the Sri Lankan diaspora were treated first to two lectures delivered by Prof. Swaminathan and Dr. Ana Thevathasan Ph.D., and then a superb meal, followed by several hours of care free dancing to the lively music provided by the dynamic duo, Manju and Ramani. All present agreed that it had been a joyous occasion, which managed to raise nearly £5,000 for OP. The main organisers, Drs. Nandhabalan and Ana Thevathasan deserve our congratulations and gratitude.

### ***Annual Charity Cricket Match for the Dan Muthuveloe Challenge Trophy - 2015***

The Annual Cricket match between Oru Paanai XI and Yarl Cricket Club took place on a beautiful bright sunny day at the West Harrow Cricket grounds on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2015. Oru Paanai Sports Club were in strong form and managed to beat the Yarl CC in a limited over match to reclaim the Dan Muthuveloe challenge trophy. The match was very well attended and the large number present enjoyed the snacks and drinks that were on sale at the grounds and some even bought the OP T-shirts that were also on offer.

There was also a short karaoke session causing a great deal of hilarity and the dinner that followed was a great success. The chief guest, Dr. Indrajit Coomarasamy, presented the trophy to a jubilant OP team. This proved to be yet another very successful, friendly cricket match, raising valuable funds for the charity.



Match in progress



Oru Paanai team with Committee

I wish to thank Mr Mahendran and the members of Yarl Cricket Club for making their cricket ground and its facilities available for this event each year, which is much appreciated.

*Mohan Rajadurai ,Cricket Captain - 2015, Oru Paanai Sports Club*

***Inaugural Charity Badminton Tournament – 2015: Report from the organiser***

ORU PAANAI has embraced the concept of fundraising through sports once again. We started with cricket then cycling and now badminton. The inaugural badminton tournament was held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2015 at the Bushey Grove Leisure Centre in Bushey. The tournament was well supported and a total of 4 teams with 32 players participated. It was a very successful event finishing

within the allocated time. Following the tournament we had a short presentation of trophy, Karaoke, sale of OP T- shirts, chutney's then lunch at the Bushey Scouts Hall. Players Gajan & Sri from Herts Tamil School (TUH) won the challenge trophy donated by Mr Mohan Rajadurai. Chief guests Mr & Mrs Sugunadeva gave away the trophy to the winning players. Around 65 friends of Oru Paanai attended the lunch time event.

On behalf of the Charity I wish to thank the management of Bushey Grove Leisure Centre for providing us the venue free of charge and their support towards this successful tournament. Also I am proud to announce that a tidy sum of £500 was raised towards this worthy charity. I wish to thank: Mr S Yogendra for playing a major role in organising the tournament; Mr Mohan

Rajadurai for the beautiful trophy; Prof and Mrs Swaminathan; Dr Nandhabalan; Dr (Mrs) Jogarajah; Mr Logan Rasiah; Mr F Nagalingam and Dr Mike Easwaran for their valuable support on the day.

*Dr D Anandanesan, Organiser, OP Badminton Tournament*

Visit [www.orupaandai.org.uk](http://www.orupaandai.org.uk) for the latest news, event information and details on how to make donations

## Oru Paanai - Water for Wannai

Oru Paanai has been involved in a new initiative in 2015. In the past 7 years, when we have worked in the Wannai to bring relief and assistance to the people recently resettled in the area, we have found that the scarcity of water has been a major obstacle in resettling the displaced, both in terms of household needs as well as in cultivation. Although most displaced people have been given small pieces of land, most of them did not have their own supply of water. Water for home cultivation was never considered by the authorities to be an important basic need for the people of Wannai. There have been no plans to provide water to peasants who are agricultural manual workers.



## Badminton

*Above: Chief guest and organiser  
Below: Shuttlers at play*



In response to requests from many, OP launched the **OP Water for Wannai** project, with the aim of providing 1000 wells in the next few years, which would have required a major fund raising effort, involving international aid agencies and / or Government grants as well. With this in view a pilot to build 10 wells was carried at an estimated cost of £10,000. Cabinet Minister D. M. Swaminathan pledged his personal support and undertook to facilitate access to the data already in the possession of statutory bodies such as the Water Resources Board, which would be helpful in planning the details of this project.

As we in OP felt that building wells will help the unfortunate people in the Wannai who have suffered so much in the past 35 years and are now trying to rebuild their lives, we agreed to launch the OP – Water for Wells project, with the project leads being Bala Gnanapragasam and Dan Muthuveloe. It was also decided that the funds for the Water for Wannai project would be raised as a separate stream, so that it would not impinge adversely on the fund raising for the main OP Feeding programme. The official launch was at the Clinical Society of Sri Lankan Doctors and Dentists Dinner / Dance

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#### **Oru Paanai**

58 Hungerford Road, Stourbridge,  
West Midlands DY8 3AB  
Registered Charity No. 1136376  
[www.orupaanai.org.uk](http://www.orupaanai.org.uk)  
Email: [secretary@orupaanai.org.uk](mailto:secretary@orupaanai.org.uk)  
Charity number: 1136376

#### **Oru Paanai Sri Lanka**

17 Yahalabedda Road,  
Haputale, Sri Lanka

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on the 11 th of July. Dan spoke briefly on that occasion, outlining the objectives of this pilot project and a booklet outlining our plans was distributed later. There was great enthusiasm amongst those present, and pledges were made for contributions. This was followed by several fund raising initiatives. Paul and Ami David organised a fund raising dinner in their home in Beckenham on the 1st of August which deserves special mention in this regard.

We were able to raise just over £20,000 for the Water for Wannai project.

Dan and Leela Muthuveloe, who were tasked with carrying out the pilot, went over to Sri Lanka from July to September. They travelled widely in the Wannai and connected with local people, assessing the needs and chose the different sites for the wells. In fact, we were able to construct 27 wells of which 6 were bore hole tube wells while the rest were conventional dug-out wells. These wells were constructed in Pallai, Anaivilunthan, Thunnukai, Krishnapuram, Mallavi and Puthukudiyiruppu. Due to the monsoonal rains the pilot was suspended at the end of September.

Once the conditions return to normal, we expect to do 4 more wells with the remaining sum of £7000 in the Water for Wannai bank account and conclude the pilot.

In every sense the pilot and our efforts were successful and several

families in the Wannu are now enjoying the fruits of our labour.

Bala Gnanapragasam from the UK and Charlie David from Australia also visited the Wannu to oversee the work and also to explore fund raising for the future.

On reflection, we realise that the cost of constructing 1,000 wells needs much larger funding particularly from the Government of Sri Lanka and / or NGOs, neither of which is forthcoming at this stage. Furthermore, the project needs an input from volunteers who are in a position to travel to the Wannu and spend months living there to

oversee every stage of the project. As the funding we expected from the government is not available at present, and there are not enough volunteers for supervision, we have decided, very reluctantly, to suspend the project at present. We can resume the project when a source of funding becomes available as the ground work has already been done and work can recommence at short notice.

We thank all the generous donors who have contributed to the Water for Wannu project, as their help has made a huge difference to the lives of many families in the Wannu.

**Well under construction for the Water for Wannu Project**



## OP Batticaloa

OP supported the staging of a Science Exhibition in Batticaloa to the tune of £1,500. Our colleagues in Batticaloa, led by Dr. Arulnithy, requested our help in organising this event, which was held in the Government Teachers Cultural Centre from the 24th to 27th of September. It was organised by Science Navigators, an organisation that promotes science education in Batticaloa.

As OP has not been called upon to support feeding programmes in the east, as the Government of Sri Lanka provides a lunchtime meal to all schoolchildren in the east upto grade 5, OP's help was not needed for this purpose. In the past, we supported the running of remedial classes and it is likely that any help extended to the province in the future will also be in the field of education. The Science Exhibition focussed on staging live science experiments, competitions in innovation and Astronomy. We understand that it was a great success and will enhance the students' interest in learning science related subjects.

## OP Kaithady

OP Kaithady has continued to help the Nuffield School for the Deaf and Blind in many ways this year. There have been many changes at the top in the school, but the need for help in terms of provision of hearing aids as well as medical help in screening children remains as great as before.

Dr. Ranjit Thambyrajah, one of the

driving forces behind OP Kaithady, spent some time in the school in 2015, during which time he helped to screen deaf children, not only from the school itself, but further afield. Children were brought in from Mannar, Bharathipuram in Mullaitivu, Pallai and Chunnakam for screening. In 2016, a visit by an ENT team from the UK is planned for May / June. OP Kaithady is currently looking for an audiologist to join the team and help in screening the children.

## Oru Paanai (Sri Lanka)

The Chairman of the Sri Lanka branch of Oru Paanai, Somasunderam Skandakumar, has assumed duties as the new High Commissioner for Sri Lanka, based in Canberra. We in OP wish to offer him our hearty congratulations on his appointment to this prestigious post and wish him all success in the discharge of his duties. Skanda, as he is known to all his many friends has nominated his close friend Tissa Jayatilaka, the Executive Director of the Fulbright Foundation in Colombo for the past 26 years, to be the acting chairman of OP (SL) with the unanimous approval of OP UK, till his return to Sri Lanka on the completion of his assignment.

Tissa is a very experienced administrator, educator and socio-political commentator, in addition to having been the Secretary of the Tamil Union when Skanda was the President. We are indeed fortunate to have an eminently qualified and

capable person like Tissa to replace Skanda.

Skanda has in the past few years used his considerable skills at fund raising to collect over three million rupees for Oru Paanai in Sri Lanka, tapping into the goodwill of his friends and associates from all ethnic backgrounds. Shortly after assuming duties in Canberra, under the auspices of OP UK, he collected a million rupees which was donated to The Foundation of Goodness, a well known Sri Lankan charity which has in the past supported educational activities in all parts of the country, including the north and the south. A cheque for the one million rupees was handed over to the Foundation of Goodness by Mr. Gurukularajah, the Minister of Education in the Northern Provincial Council, who was on a historic visit to the south in December.

### **Oru Paanai (OP) and the One Child Foundation (OCF)**

OP has been working together with OCF, another charity which is involved in helping the most deprived children in the north. OCF, under the leadership of Mano Manuelpillai, has been involved mainly in sponsoring poor children, some of them orphans, from the islands (Theevaham) mainly. About three years ago, OCF took on the task of funding the OP Feeding programme in most of the schools in the islands. From January 2016, OCF will be funding the OP Feeding in all the schools in the islands. OP is extremely grateful to the OCF for their tremendous help at a time when OP is

struggling to fund all its commitments.

We hope that OP and the OCF can collaborate in this manner for the future and achieve our common objective of providing succour to the most needy children in the north.

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### **We are most grateful to...**

- **Our regular donors**, whose contributions are the bedrock of our fund raising
- **The occasional one-off donors** who have donated large sums, mostly anonymously
- **The organisers of events** like musical concerts giving freely of their time
- **Prof. Swaminathan** who has single-handedly raised more money than any other
- **Chelva Kumaranayagam** and his group of wellwishers from Canberra for their regular contributions
- **Tilly Moorthy** for her initiative in forming an umbrella organisation, Oththulaippu
- **To every one of you** who supports us by coming to our fundraisers like Dinner Dances and concerts



## OP Fund raisers planned for 2016

The following fundraisers are planned for this year, although some are still in the early stages of planning. Please put them in your diaries, as it is not uncommon for different events to clash nowadays, as there are so many events staged by diverse Sri Lankan groups.

### **Antipodean Charity Bicycle Ride :**

Prof. Swaminathan, (right) the most indefatigable fundraiser for OP and OP Committee member, is at it again! He is riding his loyal steed (bicycle), this time from Auckland to Christchurch and back, from the 18th of January. At a time when OP is struggling to raise enough funds, Swami's efforts are all the more valuable to OP. Please support him by donating through the Just Giving website and donations can be made through till the end of February.



### **Classical concert in London**

On 25th June 2016, at Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan a classical keyboard concert by the well known artiste K. Lakshminarayanan from South India is being organised by Prof. Swami (again).

### **OP Committee**

In the past four issues of the OP Newsletter, we have never mentioned the names of any of the members of the OP Committee, as they preferred to keep a low profile. In any case, most of our supporters knew the members of the committee personally, and needed little reminding.

However, in response to requests from many of our newer supporters, we publish the below the names of our current committee members. We hope that more people will be encouraged to become regular contributors to OP, when they recognise that several of their friends and colleagues are OP committee members.

### **OP Committee**

Dr. K. Nandhabalan  
(Chairman)  
Dr. Ranjit Thambirajah  
(Vice Chairman)  
Dr. Dan Muthuveloe  
(Jt. Secretary)  
Dr. S.V.Devendra  
(Jt. Secretary / Editor)  
Dr. N.Rajakumaran  
(Treasurer)

### **Members**

Dr. Leela Muthuveloe  
Mrs. Shyamala Devendra  
Prof. R. Swaminathan  
Mr. Sam Jeyapalan  
Dr. S. Kathirgamanathan  
Dr. Nirmala Subanandan  
Dr. K. Balasubramaniam  
Mrs. Sakuntala Balasubramaniam  
Dr. Deutram Thambapillai  
Dr. N .Srisantharajah

### **OP Financial Position**

OP accounts are audited by A.G.Sarma & Co in Sri Lanka and by Crompton & Co in the UK. The audited accounts for the year 2015 will be available shortly and we will be glad to send a copy to any supporter who wishes to see them.

In the last Newsletter we set a target of £100,000 as our goal to reach for the year. However, we soon realised that in the economically challenging times we live in, it was far too ambitious a target. The reality of the situation is that with the competing demands from so many charities to provide assistance to disadvantaged groups in north and east Sri Lanka, and requests to old boys of schools for help, fund raising has become much more difficult.

We fell far short of our target this year and have had to dip into our reserves to sustain even the feeding programme, which remains our main priority.

We have also started curtailing some of other activities, such as providing help with education and continuing the Water for Wannai programme, even

though those are also very worthy projects in themselves.

**The stark reality is that unless we can raise much more money than we do at present, OP will have to withdraw our support to the 44,000 schoolchildren we feed at present, in stages and possibly even cease our activities altogether, which would be heart wrenching for all of us in Oru Paanai, and a hammer blow to the schools and children we support.**

But when our feeding programme alone costs £50,000 or so each year and the income from the regular donors and the fund raising activities raises only about £25,000 each year, we are forced to draw money from the already meagre reserves we have.

At a rough estimate we have sufficient



funds to continue our feeding programme for only about 9 months at present.

The need for the support we give is as great as ever. Tissa's very moving report on the prevailing situation in the north clearly describes the tragic plight of the destitute children and their families. We, the OP Committee, wish to make a desperate appeal at this stage for more help from all of you, so that we can continue to provide this much needed help, and give them even a glimmer of hope for the future.

### What you can do to help ...

- Become regular monthly contributors to OP, if you are not already doing so
- Increase your contributions if you can afford to do so

*You will find a Response Form enclosed with this newsletter*

- Come along to our Dinner Dance and give generously when you do
- Do sponsored fund raisers, like running half marathons, charity bicycle rides
- Donate money to mark special birthdays / anniversaries, in lieu of presents
- Donate a small percentage of any bonuses . awards you receive to Oru Paanai
- Spread the word about the desperate need for support that prevails at present

**Please take a little time to think how you can help to keep us going. Oru Paanai is a well established charity now, with a tried and tested**

**mechanism for getting across the help to where it is needed most.**

***We hope it would not have to fold up because of a lack of adequate support.***

**Oru Paanai**  
58 Hungerford Road, Stourbridge,  
West Midlands DY8 3AB  
Registered Charity No. 1136376  
[www.orupaana.org.uk](http://www.orupaana.org.uk)  
Email: [secretary@orupaana.org.uk](mailto:secretary@orupaana.org.uk)  
Charity number: 1136376

**Oru Paanai Sri Lanka**  
17 Yahalabedda Road,  
Haputale, Sri Lanka

