

Green Settlements Project (Part 2)

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The second part of the "Green Settlements Project" will focus on the following mechanisms, approach and methods that have been drawn up to achieve the desired results to uplift the living standards of the canal bank settlers and at the same time, making the canals productive in terms of social and commercial activities and eradicating diseases.

1. Data pertaining to all necessary information will be collected and collated by those stakeholders who will be personally visiting the areas and speaking with the settlers. The data will then be used to draw up specific plans addressing issues of those areas. Constant monitoring and evaluation will also be done.

2. Since finances will be an essential requirement, the Public Health Department (PHD) of the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) has drawn up a budget, effectively covering all areas in implementing this programme. It is cost-effective and with the participatory approach, the initiative is bound to be taken up by many of the settlers themselves.

3. The Working Group (WG), (already in place), will work in partnership with the settlers. The WG comprises the Municipal Commissioner, Chief MOH, Deputy Chief MOH (environmental health), MOH (epidemiology), Training Manager, Chief PHI, Director - Solid Waste Management, Engineer - Maintenance - Drainage Department, representatives from amongst the settlers, CDC leaders, and representatives from NGOs, UDA, CGR, SLLR&DC, and the Ports Authority. Representa-

tives from the Dehiwela-Mt. Lavinia and the Kotte Municipal Councils will also be co-opted into the Working Group. Through a collective action plan, areas of work will be clearly demarcated thereby preventing replication of the work carried out.

4. The Green Settlements Home project will be linked to other development work of the CMC, particularly the DFID Poverty Reduction programme and the City Development Strategy (CDS) programme. DFID is a British government programme. The DFID will be mobilised to start its activities initially in Dengue and Filariasis prone areas. Its income generating programme, coupled with the proposed community education and other ongoing programmes of the Drainage and Solid Waste Management department in these areas, will enable the settlers to keep their compounds free from breeding mosquitoes. As a collaborative effort, the Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) Drainage demo project will also be located in one of these risk-prone areas. Through DFID support, the settlers will also earn a supplementary family income by investing in and producing home compost, which in turn will minimise kitchen waste. Social mobilisation and mass education of the programmes will generate support from all sections of the community.

5. With the existing mechanisms of the CMC and Private Sector Business Partnership, Green Settlements will be offered to the private sector as an instrument to demonstrate its social responsibility. Also associated will be the Institute for Business Management Council (IBMC) and Alliance Lanka - (both NGOs) and are responsible

for educating the underprivileged communities.

6. Under the current Environmental Management Information System (EMIS) plan, the PHD of the CMC will prepare files and maps to assist in the continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation to assess the progress of the programme and its impact on the canal banks community. Also included is GIS training for CMC officials who have to effectively carry out their functions.

7. This programme, in all its stages, will be documented in order that, as a whole, it can be replicated in other parts of the country by the local bodies of the area.

The focal point will be the St. Sebastian canal located in Colombo 12, in the vicinity of the Supreme Court complex. This canal is linked to the Kelani River and the Beira Lake. Kirulapura in Kirullapone and Udyanapura (along Park Road, Colombo 5) are also links in the canal system. When the rains set in, excess water from the Kelani river flows through St. Sebastian canal and flushes out the Beira Lake to the sea. Currently, water does not flow through St. Sebastian canal, as over the years, surrounding walls have collapsed and it has become a convenient dumping area by the residents living in the vicinity. The Lock Gates are also not functioning. The Land Reclamation and Development Corporation has to ensure that the canals are cleaned annually. The Irrigation Department is also associated with the maintenance of the canals.

The PHD of the CMC has highlighted the problems and thankfully, the Ministry of Urban Development, Housing and Construction has put up a Cabinet Paper seeking funds to clean the St. Sebastian canal and put it to good use. The Mayor of Colombo, Prasanna Gunawardena, has also requested the LR&DC to clean up the canals. Interestingly, the Diyawanna Oya also connects with the canals at the border of the City of Colombo. Excess water from the north of Colombo flows to the Kelani river whilst excess water from the south of Colombo flows to the sea.

Training programmes are under way for children on leadership. These children are motivated to take the lead role in ensuring that the areas in which they live are not polluted. Women and unemployed youth, on the other hand, work during the day to spread the message and keep the environment clean. And with training to take on appropriate trade, economic growth is also becoming a reality. The Institute of Business Management Consultants has funded and conducted thirty training programmes on clean and hygienic living for children and youth living along St. Sebastian canal. They are also advised on rules and regulations and the need to observe them. For exam-

ple, that they should respect road reservation and not encroach, not to tap electricity illegally and desist from breaking the law and withstand the influence of the underworld which is prevalent and strong.

A mid-term evaluation will be done to ascertain the following:

Comparative cost analysis between prevention and treatment of dengue and other vector-borne diseases.

Reduction in the incidence of dengue in addition to taking the number of fatal cases into account.

Percentage of the homes that have complied with the stipulations in respect of keeping their homes and environment clean.

Knowledge acquired and interest shown by the settlers with regard to cleanliness and hygiene.

Attitudes and continuous practice in keeping homes and environment clean.

What is heart-warming, according to Dr. Pradeep Kariyawasam, Chief MOH - CMC, is that the children are full of ideas on how to improve their lot and the youth and women are very enthusiastic. As a matter of fact, some of them see for themselves, the better homes and lifestyles aired on certain TV programmes - which have made a positive contribution. Amazingly, the CMC officials have come across some very intelligent and talented children amongst the settlers and are in the process of seeking better schools to admit such children in order to further their education. Most children attend schools close to their homes and the facilities available are limited.

This project is expected to take around five years to complete the plan of action, aimed at restoring the canals to their former glory. Continuous and concerted activity will be required by all concerned to reap the immense benefits that will accrue not only to the citizens of Colombo but also to all Sri Lankans. Coupled with the thought of peace too, hopefully, sooner than later, it will also be a tremendous boost to tourism and thereby, to the economic growth of the country. Recreational facilities (boat rides, food outlets and parks along the banks), fishing, painting and perhaps even meditating are prospects to look forward to.

To those Sri Lankans who have had a boat ride on the River Thames in London or a boat ride in any other part of the world, the idea of having one in their own country might be something to look forward to and who knows, enterprising entrepreneurs might grab the idea and go for it as it is bound to be commercially viable venture.

Imagine a boat ride on the canal from Colombo 12 to Dehiwela! This then is the vision of Dr. Pradeep Kariyawasam and his dedicated team, and no doubt the idea will certainly begin to germinate in the minds of all who read this article.