

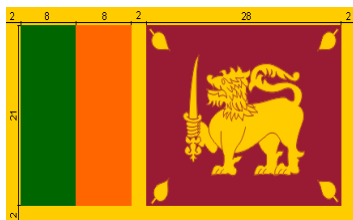


World change
starts with
educated children.

ROOM TO READ'S SRI LANKA REPORT 2005

"Getting children back to school represents perhaps the single most effective remedy in helping them cope with the enormity of the catastrophe that has so radically altered their lives."

– Ted Chaiban, UNICEF Fund Representative in Sri Lanka



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On December 28, 2004, just two days after a tsunami swept across the South Indian Ocean, Room to Read decided to open operations in Sri Lanka to rebuild schools and to continue to help the Sri Lankan community over the long-term. Our original plan was to rebuild approximately 10 preschools in the Ampara district, an area on the Eastern side of the country that was heavily damaged by the tsunami. Our commitment soon grew to 20 schools, but after a trip by our Chief Operating Officer in March 2005, we committed to building 39 schools in 2005 throughout the country.

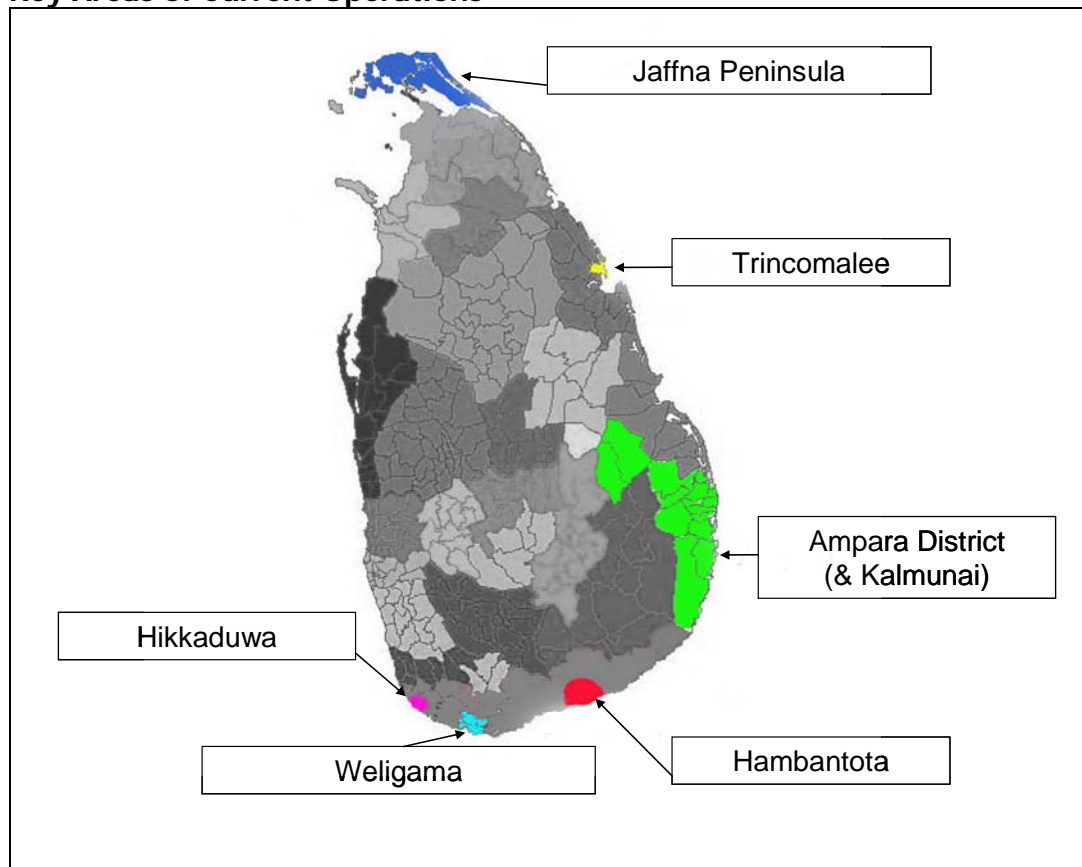
We have accomplished an amazing amount of work in Sri Lanka this year – a tribute to the wonderful generosity of our donors and the dedication and hard work of our Sri Lanka staff. We started construction on all 39 preschools – 20 of which are complete and operational – across the island with over 8 partners; launched our library program with 30 new libraries established in primary and secondary schools in the rural south; and distributed fifty thousand English books donated by Scholastic to 119 schools impacted by the tsunami. In addition, we hired our first Country Director, Suba Sivakumaran, a Sri Lankan woman who was raised in Australia and who studied at the London School of Economics; and a Deputy Country Director, Shyamika Jayasundara, who recently returned to Sri Lanka after studying at the University of Virginia as a Fulbright Scholar.

Room to Read's commitment to Sri Lanka is long-term, and we have plans to expand into new areas of the country and launch new programs for years to come. Our overarching goal is to assist in improving educational opportunities for the neediest children on this beautiful island.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

Room to Read is currently working in 7 key areas within 3 of the major provinces in Sri Lanka. In 2006, we plan to expand into the interior of Sri Lanka, to help communities that may not have been affected by the tsunami, but who also face many educational problems, especially a lack of sufficient educational infrastructure.

Key Areas of Current Operations



PROGRAMMATIC COVERAGE

In 2005, we built 39 preschools and established 30 libraries. Expansion of these programs will continue in 2006. Next year, we also plan to launch our local language publishing and girls' scholarship programs.

School Room:

Our goal for 2005 was to build 39 preschools in tsunami-affected areas of Sri Lanka. We decided to operate in four areas: Jaffna peninsula, Kalladi, Ampara and the Southern Province. Most of the school construction began in late July and early August. Out of the 39 preschool construction projects started, approximately 20 are finished and are operational to date. The remaining 19 preschools are still under construction and will be completed by yearend or in early 2006, depending on the length of the monsoon season.

Room to Read's primary focus in Sri Lanka is on preschool construction. We learned that a great deal of value can be added to the Sri Lankan educational system through the construction of preschools. Access to preschool is proven to make a significant and positive difference in the educational development of young students. In addition, preschools offer an organized learning environment where small children can be left, freeing up parents, grandparents and siblings who would otherwise need to provide 24 hour care. However, since preschools do not fall under the purview of the Ministry of Education, they have to be provided by private entities. In general, preschool teachers are not paid unless the school charges a fee to the children, which is rare. Therefore, the teachers often volunteer their efforts, resulting in a large turnover of staff.



As a result, Room to Read implemented a series of workshops designed to provide teachers with relevant skills and to increase their teaching capacity. We held our first training workshop for 34 of our preschool teachers in the first week of December. It was designed and facilitated by the head of the Early Childhood Department of the Open University. The workshop was conducted in Tamil, one of the local languages of Sri Lanka. The Open University also has a 'model preschool' on their premises, which enables the teachers to get a better understanding for running an effective preschool.

The Room to Read training workshops will focus largely on the Montessori methods of preschool teaching, adapted for a local context. We have also received requests from other non-Room to Read preschools to involve their teachers in the training, and we will attempt to accommodate them in future trainings when possible.

Jaffna (Northern Province) – 13 preschools

We are building 13 preschools in the Point Pedro and Vadamarachchi area. Each school measures 800 square feet, and includes two classrooms, two teacher's offices (which can also be used for storage, and a porch in front. The schools also all include a playground, toilet, well, and a fence – basic features by developed world standards but a vast improvement over the previous facilities. These schools are located in areas that were directly or indirectly affected by the tsunami, which were identified, surveyed and allocated to us by the Tsunami Relief Task Force operating in Jaffna, as well as the Government Assistant Director for Early Childhood Care.



Hambantota (Southern Province) – 3 preschools

We are building 3 pre-schools in partnership with Reachout, a local NGO that is a partnership between Rotaract (a division of Rotary International) and OSC Alumni (a Colombo International School Alumni body). They are, in turn, working through a local NGO in Hambantota. These schools measure about 1,000 square feet and include two classrooms, a drinking water facility, electrical connection, and a playground. Room to Read will also cover one year of the teachers' salaries in each school, which will subsequently be the responsibility of the local NGO (Jana Suwaya Padanama).

Shilpa preschool in Weligama (Southern Province) – 1 preschool



Shilpa preschool was built on private land donated by the Ranaweera family. Mrs. Ranaweera is a trained Montessori preschool teacher who ran her own preschool in the areas with extremely inadequate facilities. The new preschool recently opened and already an estimated 100 children are attending the school. Many of these children were directly impacted by the tsunami.

Ampara (Eastern Province) – 20 preschools

Room to Read is building 20 preschools in partnership with Shiva Charity in tsunami-affected areas in the Ampara District (key locations are Kalmunai, Thirrukovil, and Akkaraipattu). Eighteen of the 20 schools are already complete. The school buildings are 600 square feet and they contain one classroom, a toilet and a playground. Room to Read also contributed the inside furnishings, educational materials and a preschool teacher training workshop. Shiva Charity identified individual donors who will contribute a monthly fee for the upkeep of these schools for their lifetime. The ongoing administration of these schools will be handled by a local NGO called Social Organizations in Networks and Development. There is another local NGO who also helps with teacher training called Social Welfare Organization of Ampara District. Nearly all of these schools are oversubscribed with approximately 50-65 children attending each school.



Lassanagama preschool in Hikkaduwa (Southern Province) – 1 preschool

Lassanagama preschool is located in a village that was newly founded following the tsunami by the Los Encinos Foundation and Jana Tharanama Padanama (a local NGO). The village consists of 25 houses resettled and rebuilt following the tsunami with funding from Los Encinos. The

village has donated the land on which the preschool is built. The preschool measures 1,000 square feet and will be attended by children from the village. It was also be used as a community center for village activities in the evenings.

Kalaimagal Pre-School in Kalladi (Northeastern Province) – 1 preschool



This school was opened in October 2005. It was built in partnership with the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO). Currently there are about 150 students benefiting from the project. The school building is 800 square feet with a porch in front. Room to Read also funded the latrine, drinking water facilities, a playground, furniture, and educational materials.

Reading Room Establishment:

By the end of 2005, Room to Read will have established 30 school libraries in primary and secondary schools in Amabalangoda, Galle, and Weligama in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Our team spent three months completing an extensive needs assessment in the area in order to select the schools in which the libraries were established. In all cases, the school principals contacted Room to Read specifically to request a library. The schools signed an agreement with Room to Read outlining the responsibilities of each party. Our standard library establishment consists of school tables, chairs, shelves, 400 English books donated by Scholastic and 200 Sinhala books (selected and purchased through local publishers) as well as dictionaries, posters, and atlases all purchased locally. In the third week of December we held a three-day library training workshop for the 30 libraries that were established in Weligama. The librarians all speak Sinhala and the workshop was conducted in Sinhala. We hired two consultants from the National Library Association who designed and facilitated the workshop. Additionally, we have identified teaching English as a great need in Sri Lanka and will be looking at ways to design libraries that will promote English literacy along with local language literacy.



Room to Read has also entered into a commitment with Rotary Sri Lanka to establish 25 libraries in the 25 tsunami-affected schools that Rotary is wholly reconstructing. The schools will be complete sometime early in 2006, after which we will install the libraries.

In addition, Room to Read has received about 300,000 books from Scholastic as part of a donation to tsunami-affected areas throughout Sri Lanka. We received the books in collaboration with The Asia Foundation's *Books for Asia* program. Currently, we are in the process of donating 400 books to each of the 177 tsunami affected schools as designated by the government. We have already donated nearly 50,000 books to 119 of these schools and have distributed books to other local NGOs to reach additional schools. This is a large logistical

exercise, done in collaboration with The Asia Foundation as the schools are located throughout the tsunami-affected coastline in Sri Lanka. The greatest benefit of this program has been seeing these books reach children who have lost everything, including their school, to the forces of nature. Reading some of the letters of gratitude from principals, as well as teachers, has been doubly rewarding.

In 2006, Room to Read will continue its book distribution program and identify an additional 175 institutions consisting of children's homes, local NGOs, community centers, tsunami refugee camps and schools located across tsunami affected areas to which to donate the Scholastic books. In total, we hope to have distributed another 70,000–100,000 books by the end of 2006, to carefully selected communities.

FUTURE PLANS

Room to Grow Girls Scholarship

Room to Read Sri Lanka plans to launch the Room to Grow: Girls' Scholarship Program in 2006 with the selection of the first 50 long-term girl scholars. They will receive assistance with schools fees, uniforms, books, stationery, medical care, transportation, and extra tutoring if necessary – essentially all the key ingredients to keeping the girls in school and achieving at a high level.

Local Language Publishing

Room to Read Sri Lanka plans to launch our local language publishing program in 2006 by publishing its first five children's books. They will be sourced from local authors and illustrators and will be tri-lingual in Sinhala, Tamil, and English.



KEY CHALLENGES

Looking forward, there are several key obstacles that our Sri Lanka staff faces in implementing our programs in post-tsunami Sri Lanka and in moving forward with our 2006 plans:

- The escalating political situation, particularly after the November 2005 election, will determine the breadth and depth of any continued or new activities, especially in the Northeast.
- Working with partners who are too small to do the scale of projects that we aim for, with the reporting and transparency standards that Room to Read expects.
- Identifying capable local NGOs in each of the new geographical areas that we plan to enter in the coming months. This will be difficult given the lack of a vibrant, local NGO scene in Sri Lanka. Instead, the country is dominated by large NGOs that crowd out local NGOs expertise and knowledge of grass-roots structures.

ANECDOTES FROM THE FIELD

Our **first account** comes from Munamaple, a village in the southern part of Sri Lanka, where we are building a new preschool and launching our library program. Our team is assisted by Shantha Ranaweera, a local gentleman whose wife is a Montessori-trained preschool teacher. Shantha spends days and nights with Room to Read without a single complaint – essentially he has become an unpaid, full-time member of our team.



In the early hours of each morning Shantha, Chintha, and their four children walk to the school site. Their youngest son, four-year old Kavith, is extremely excited and curious about the new developments taking place. He boasts to his friends (as young boys do), saying that the new pre-school belongs to him. After finishing his school day, Kavith joins the labor team carrying bricks one by one with his little hands to the busy masons. He works just as his father does – no complaints, just doing what he thinks is right.

Chintha's retired parents also help the labor team by cooking. Everyday they prepare lunch for the 10-15 local people who are constructing the new building. Thanks to the help of all three generations of one family, Shilpa preschool is regarded as one of the most beautiful and cost-effective preschools that Room to Read will build this year in Sri Lanka. It has provided hope for a brighter future for many Sri Lankans who have suffered so much in the last year. Most importantly, it shows the spirit of community participation and co-investment that is a cornerstone of every Room to Read project around the world.



In Sinhala *lassana* means beautiful. Our **second anecdote** is indeed a beautiful story of the founding a village in Hikkaduwa Sri Lanka. Lissanagama never appeared on any Sri Lanka maps before December 26, 2004. Lissanagama was founded by a group of people from around the world to help tsunami survivors in Hikkaduwa.

The creation of the village was funded by a Texas rancher, Becky Westbrocke. She adopted the entire village, many of whom were badly affected by the tsunami and struggling to resettle their lives. The Room to Read Sri Lanka office offered to donate the village preschool that will also be used as a community center in the afternoon.

The most beautiful thing about this village is that all the villagers (about 25 families) are actively contributing their labor to build their own homes as well as their neighbors' homes. The first day that our program staff visited the village, all they could see was bare land. They sat with the villagers and

listened to their stories of surviving the tsunami. They shared their pain and sorrow of losing several family members, but they have not lost hope.

There was a 12 year old girl who attended the meeting with her father. Despite losing both her mother and brother in the tsunami, she still dreams of someday becoming a doctor. Upon meeting Suba and the team she quickly asked "Is there going to be a library in the school?" When they said "yes," her eyes began to sparkle with hope and she happily volunteered to help take care of the books.

Today in place of the barren land that our staff visited a few months ago, there lies a blooming village. Already 25 houses are being built, the walls of the preschool have been erected, and joy and hope has touched the lives of the villagers.

SUMMARY

Thank you for helping us to rebuild Sri Lanka and to give the lifelong gift of education to thousands of Sri Lankan children. Your support has enabled us to start strong and think big about helping Sri Lanka with both short-term rebuilding and long-term educational solutions. On behalf of Room to Read and the children of Sri Lanka, we thank you again for your generous support.