

## Workshop on Communal Harmony for Community Workers

ADEPT conducted a workshop on 10 November 2006 for the Community Support Leaders. 38 young men and women (Community Support and Youth Leaders) covering 17 villages identified as being least developed, participated in the program. The objective of the workshop was to raise awareness of issues that were an impediment to harmony within their community leading to obstacles to their work with the community. The program opened with an introduction to communal harmony followed by a plenary discussion on the concepts of oneness and harmony.



The following issues were identified as factors that exacerbated already existing social and economic inequalities:

**Education:** Education creates a divide between those with education and those without. There were high drop out rates and very few of them went on to finish school. The probable reason elicited was that children were pulled out of school to assist the family in their livelihood. The participants felt that what they learned in schools was of no help in generating incomes. They felt that vocational education was a way out. They suggested that integrating vocational training into school (middle through high school to higher secondary school) would be most helpful and might help quell drop outs.

**Livelihood:** The co-existence of traditional fishing practices with technologically assisted fishing creates differences in attitudes. Traditional livelihoods stalled upward mobility economically or socially. The participants felt transfer of technology and alternative livelihood would be solutions to this problem.

**Economic status:** Along with education and livelihood, economic status formed a vicious cycle that perpetuated inequalities and destabilized harmony. The participants felt that opportunities and resources were almost controlled by economically advanced sections and this led to feelings of dissension, frustration, mistrust and resentment. They suggested that alternatives in education and livelihood would help in easing out the economic inequalities that persisted

**Caste and Religion;** The group was extremely vocal about the fact that communal harmony cannot be addressed as an issue if religion and caste were not discussed. As functionaries that were involved in outreach in community building, they felt their caste was an impediment. They also discussed incidents in their field of work, where they experienced a degree of indifference and in some cases resentment which they attributed to their caste. They said caste differences were more keenly felt than religious differences and this was a barrier to them effectively reaching out to the community. At a larger level, they said this also prevented a cohesive effort in aspects of physical reconstruction.

**Gender:** The participants felt that gender they said was definitely an aspect that needed to be dealt with especially in the post Tsunami context. Emerging support networks, built by ADEPT and others, have successfully resulted in empowerment of women. This has seen a shift in emerging leadership. The participants feel the need for better gender sensitization to facilitate a change that they were finding difficult to cope with.

**Attitudinal differences:** The above issues resulted in deeply entrenched attitudes, which were an impediment to “oneness” in their community. Sensitization, awareness workshops, realization of change would lead to gradual change in attitudes, which would result to a good degree of harmony.

The plenary discussion then shifted to how these differences must be accepted and dealt with in their day to day work towards achieving a feeling of oneness. The participants identified commonalities in their work and how activities can be carried on based on these commonalities to achieve their goals. They identified that the first step came with accepting the differences. What really bonded them were issues that they faced as a community in the process of rebuilding after the Tsunami of 2004. They felt that their activities were bringing about a change in attitudes and opening social spaces, albeit at a snails pace.

The participants then divided into eight working groups who brainstormed on prioritising impediments to their work based on the above issues and working solutions to the issues. In the plenary session that followed representatives from each group came forward to integrate the group work into a single working definition of communal harmony.

The workshop concluded with a reading of verse on communal harmony composed by the working groups.

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