

Programme Area Summary

Country: Sri Lanka

Programme Area: Mental Health 2005-2010

What is the aim of the programme area?

People with mental Health problems participate actively in society.

Why is VSO working in this particular Programme Area and region?

People with mental health problems are one of the most marginalized groups in Sri Lanka. In 2004, at a VSOSL stakeholder workshop, three main issues were identified which contribute to the marginalisation of people with mental health problems:

- (a) Social discrimination - people with mental health problems are frequently ostracised from society due to ignorance, myths, false beliefs and lack of awareness of their rights.
- (b) Inadequate access to mental health services, resulting in lack of treatment and rehabilitation - mental health services which exist are concentrated in urban areas with little or no services in rural areas, and specialised services for the elderly and children are extremely limited
- (c) Economic barriers - families of people with mental health problems are often poor and are not provided with welfare benefits to address their psychosocial needs. Underpinning all of the above causes is Sri Lanka's out-dated mental health legislation, which is over 100 years old.

Even though Sri Lanka is ranked high (93rd) among developing countries in the Human Development Index (2005), the 20-year-old conflict in the North and East has hindered the continued development of the country and poverty and disadvantage is on the increase. The conflict and the December 2004 Tsunami disaster have had great impact in the mental health of the population especially in the North and East. The conflict has resulted in displacements, deaths, disabilities, abductions, torture, suicide and war widows.

Key beneficiaries and partners

The programme will promote rights-based mental health services at the levels of policy, implementation and pre-service training/education across 6 provinces¹. VSO will develop the capacity of local staff (e.g. nurses, social workers, medical officers working in mental health) and community workers to respond to the needs of those with mental health problems. VSOSL will work with a wide range of government and a few NGO mental health providers in promoting rights-based methodologies. NGO partners will work collaboratively with government institutions to strengthen mental health services and introduce new approaches and models where necessary. VSOSL will support partner organisations to move away from a medical approach to a more social approach and develop a multi disciplinary and a multi sectoral approach to mental health services.

The indirect beneficiaries are the staff trained by the key beneficiaries in each district and province. The ultimate beneficiaries are the people with mental health problems and their families.

Note – April 2007:

Partners in the North & East. – With the deterioration of the security situation in the North and East VSO has temporarily ceased placing volunteers in Jaffna and Batticaloa. However, there is a mental health volunteer placed in Trincomalee (East) until Aug 2007. VSO Sri Lanka continues to support the partners in Jaffna and Batticaloa through sector

¹ Western, Southern, North Western, Uva, North and East, Central.

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group meetings, small grants and publication of training manuals and handbooks and maintains communication with them as far as possible.

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

3 areas of intervention; policy, implementation, pre-service training, all with a view to promoting a 'Rights Based approach'².

- Mental Health Services operate within a policy framework that supports the 'Rights Based' approach
- Mental Health services in 6 provinces are more 'Rights Based'
- Pre-service education of health professionals and non medical support workers in at least 2 institutions promotes a 'Rights Based approach' to treating / caring for people with mental health problems.

Cross cutting with VSOSL Disability Programme Area: both programmes focus on learning disabilities and are based on 'Rights Based' and community approaches. There is the potential for networking between partners and sharing learning between the two programmes. For example, a booklet on Learning Disability written by a volunteer for a mental health partner organisation will be published in English and Tamil and the Sinhala version will be translated and printed by the Disability Programme. All three versions will be available for partners of both programmes.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- The main activities of the programme will include provision of skilled mental health professionals to build capacity and skills within partner organisations and Provision of organisational development capacity-building support to partners.
- The programme size will gradually be increased to 10-12 and maintained at that number for the next year. This is due to the uncertainty of placing volunteers in three key partnerships in the North and East and due to challenges faced in supply and retention of mental health volunteers.

Workshops, training & conferences

- Policy level workshops for mental Health partners.
- Training workshops for partners on specific issues (e.g. challenging behaviours).
- Annual mental health programme review.
- Quarterly mental health sector group meetings for all mental health stakeholders.

Support to national volunteering

- The mental health programme will explore opportunities in National volunteering during the second year of PAP implementation through annual partnership reviews and sector group meetings.

Advocacy and Global Education

- Awareness-raising and advocacy on mental health issues are planned as part of the Programme

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- Exchange visits between partners in Sri Lanka to see good practice; Study tours between partners internationally to exchange good practice and learning, with pre- and post-tour workshops.

² By 'Rights Based' approach to mental health services, VSO Sri Lanka means that mental health services are community based, client- centred, holistic, rehabilitation focused, gender and age sensitive, operating in a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral model")

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Providing grants/ or equipment for partners e.g. small grants fund:

- VSOSL supports partners through the use of small grants for documentation of learning and best practice, publication of training manuals, handbooks in mental health and training workshops.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

The Sri Lanka Mental Health Programme is VSO's only specific mental health programme. Although some International and local NGOs are working in psychosocial care, VSO is one of the few NGOs addressing holistic mental health care and training in Sri Lanka. Over the last 10 years VSO has supported the Ministry of Health to develop a mental health policy, introduce best practice (e.g. horticulture introduced as a therapy for the first time in the largest mental hospital in Sri Lanka, introducing in psychology modules in the first year medical curriculum of a university in Sri Lanka) and community mental health models and establish a more social model of treatment. In the second Partners Roundtable conference organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) held in March 2007, WHO complimented VSO as an organisation that had done exceptional work in developing mental health services in Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Health and the WHO have recognized VSO as key contributor to mental health development in Sri Lanka. The Horticulture therapy project has been recognised in the National mental health Policy as a model of best practice in community mental health.