Noolaham Foundation
Project Report

Project title	Documentation and Archiving of Rare Endangered Documents
Project numbers	NF/PG/2012/0001
Project location	Colombo and Jaffna
Sector	Print Publications Archive and Noolaham Events
Implementing agency and contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Grant Agency and Contribution	US Department of State
Total Budget and Expenditure	US $ 8,860
Start and End date	Start – 5th March 2012 End – 5th March 2013
Responsible Stakeholder/s	Staff and Volunteers of Noolaham Foundation

Summary:

The main goal of the **Documentation and Archiving of Rare Endangered Documents Project** was to document and digitize rare and endangered documents related to the Tamil speaking communities of Sri Lanka. Two workshops were conducted to introduce the importance of documentation and archiving and to provide digitizing training; moreover, sustaining a volunteer pool to carry out future activities was also planned as part of this project. It was funded by the US Department of State

Through this project 660 rare and endangered documents were digitized and made available online through Noolaham Foundation's Digital Library (www.noolaham.org) to the Tamil speaking communities of the entire world. Further, two workshops were conducted by Noolaham Foundation about the importance of documentation and archiving. The project also provided digitizing training to volunteers and other stakeholders as well. During the project period a sustainable volunteer pool was built to carry out future projects. Noolaham Foundation is happy to report that all project goals had been achieved and more projects have been initiated.

Digital libraries are significant as they lower the bar for participation by information producers and collectors. It democratizes the generation and distribution of information. Thus this project supported by US Embassy has enabled Noolaham Foundation to preserve and revitalize culture and knowledge. In a long term perspective, the outcomes of this project will contribute immensely towards fostering knowledge-based development in Sri Lanka.

Introduction and Background:

Documentation and archiving are keys to the knowledge profile of a community. These activities are important information providers to processes that influence the social and economic development of local communities. Documentation and archiving are also influential in the manner in which the histories of local communities are written. The functions of documentation and archiving turn out to be particularly difficult tasks in minority communities which are neglected. Hence a more robust

community-driven approach to documentation and archiving is important. We also feel that such a process is best channeled through the digital media. Hence Noolaham Foundation has decided to maintain documentation and archiving through a digital library that could be accessed by all.

This issue is particularly important for youth within minority communities who struggle to find a channel through which they could productively contribute towards the existential threats facing their communities. It also provides a resource base with which young scholars can embark on important areas of research which can help the development of their communities. Noolaham Foundation is one of the few organizations engaged in documenting and preserving the knowledge base of the Sri Lankan Tamil communities.

The United States provided $8.7 million to support the post-conflict humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka in FY 2013. In the post war situation, the support offered by the US Department of State certainly plays an important role in creating a conducive atmosphere to engage in preservation activities. The U.S. also provides technical assistance/training opportunities to Sri Lanka in many areas including biotechnology, intellectual property rights protection, and cyber security.

Objective/s and Achievements or Results:

Project Goal 1 : Digitizing a minimum of 600 documents

During the project period, Noolaham Foundation has digitized 660 publications related to the Tamil speaking communities of Sri Lanka. These publications include rare magazines and journals which are currently available in only a few collections and books published during early 20th century. The details are included in Appendix 1.

Our volunteers contacted a number of libraries, institutions and individuals to identify rare or endangered documents. Institutions such as St Francis Xavier Major Seminary, Thodarpaham Library, Chunnakam Public Library, Kumarasamy Gurupeedam etc and various individuals including A. Sabaratnam and A. Jesuraja provided access to their collections to carry our digitization. We obtained a number of rare and endangered documents from the Jaffna Public Library and Colombo Tamil Sangam as well.

Other than the publications digitized, we have also obtained a number of publications from various institutions and writers. They will be digitized under the future projects of the Foundation.

Project Goal 2 : Conducting two workshops

First seminar of this project was conducted on 9th September, 2012 in Jaffna. A wide range of people from different spheres of the society were invited to the event. Mr. K. Guruparan (Lecturer, Faculty of Law, University of Jaffna), Dr. J.Arangaraj, S.Seran and S.Sureshkumar addressed the seminar and digitization techniques were introduced. A short film was screened as well. Appendix 4 contains photos taken at this event.

And the second seminar titled 'Panayolai' was held at 'Vinothan Hall' at the 'Colombo Tamil Sangam', Colombo 06 on 03 March 2013. The event commenced at 10.00 a.m. with the welcome address by Mr. Vimalathiththan Vimalanathan and was followed by an address by Mr. T. Mathusoothanan. Thereafter, a short lecture on the topic of 'Documentation and the sharing of

Knowledge' was delivered by Prof. Saba. Jeyarajah. Then Mr. K. Raguparan (Lecturer, Department of Languages, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka) delivered a speech on the topic 'The Documentation related to the Tamil societies of Sri Lanka and the adjacent phases to be adopted'. A discussion on topics related to documentation followed. People from various spheres of society such as architects, media personnel and university students took part in the discussion and presented their views and thoughts. The seminar ended with Mr. Seran Sivananthamoorthy's vote of thanks. Appendix 2 contains photos taken at this event.

Project Goal 3 : Sustaining a volunteer pool

During this project period, the Noolaham Foundation identified more than 20 volunteers who are now contributing towards various projects of the Foundation. A group photo of the volunteers taken at the Tamil Documentation Conference 2013 is included as Appendix 3.

Constrains / Challenges:

- While searching for endangered documents, we came across numerous publications which cannot be classified as endangered, but are very useful information sources. So we collected such publications as well.
- It was identified that we have to reach out towards a wider audience to create awareness about the benefits and opportunities of digital documentation.
- During this project it became apparent that the technology and scanners we had were not suitable to digitize documents which were very fragile.
- One of the most important tasks when scanning precious bound books and old documents was to ensure they were handled in the correct manner.

Suggestion and Recommendation:

- Further projects have to be initiated to digitize collections acquired during this project but could not be digitized. (One such project was initiated with the support of Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust during this project period itself.)
- Noolaham Foundation will have to provide awareness creation through continuous lobbying to facilitate authors and writers to continuously provide support in the collection of documents, to obtain permission and approval from respective contributors, and to seek help from all relevant stakeholders such as press and publishers to digitalize and archive relevant documents

- Noolaham Foundation has to obtain expertise in scanning bound books and old fragile documents that has to be treated with care. (EAP 458 Team [Endangered Archive Project is an initiative of British Library] has provided us with training and a blueprint of their mobile scanning equipment to enable digitizing fragile documents.)

- Noolaham Foundation should find ways to sustain the volunteer pool and use their contribution towards societal benefits.