Prevalence of Mental Health Problems
It has been estimated that nearly 400,000 Sri Lankans, suffer from serious mental illnesses. In addition, about 10% are thought to suffer from other more common mental health problems. The estimated prevalence of depression among the general public varies from 9% to 25%. Sri Lanka appears to have one of the highest suicide and deliberate self-harm rates in the world. In a 1994 study it had the highest rate of female suicide and the second highest rate of male suicide.

Effects of Civil Conflicts
Over the last 35 years Sri Lanka has witnessed political unrest and armed conflicts which have affected all the sectors of the community. A community survey (Somasundaram & Sivayohan, 1994) on the effects of war, found 25% of the population suffered from depression, 27% from anxiety disorder and 14% from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Effects of the 2004 Tsunami
Natural disasters take a heavy toll on the mental health of those affected and can significantly increase the risk of experiencing distress, psychological symptoms and mental disorders. It is estimated that between 30% - 50% of those affected by the tsunami may experience some level of mental distress and/or psychological problems. Between 5 to 10% are likely to develop a recognizable mental disorder such as depression, anxiety, phobias, psychosis and alcohol and substance abuse. There is also substantial evidence that loss of employment and livelihood, particularly sudden loss, very frequently gives rise to anxiety and depressive disorders. In Sri Lanka, about 27,000 to 55,000 persons are likely to develop recognizable mental health problems and will need sustained help over the longer term.

Existing Mental Health Provision
The majority of the mental health resources are concentrated in the Western Province and few major urban cities. Most people have to travel long distances to obtain basic services. Also, most of the patients, who have been
admitted to the large psychiatric hospitals in the Western Province, could leave it basic accommodation and some practical support could be provided. A range of facilities are needed to support this across the Country.

**Development of the New National Mental Health Policy**

In collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, the new Mental Health Policy has been in development since October 2004. The new plan will provide:

- A comprehensive network of community services and additional staff in all districts
- Patients in large hospitals will be moved to a range of new locally based provision wherever possible and all existing staff will be trained
- The Minister of Healthcare and Nutrition has agreed
  - To appoint psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers
  - To consider the creation of psychiatric nurses and support workers
  - A significant increase in staffing in all areas with a substantial increase in nurses and medical officers of mental health.
- The Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, with technical assistance from WHO and in consultation with key stakeholders has developed new mental health legislation for consideration by Parliament.

There was extensive consultation on the Policy through June and the early part of July. A substantial number of organizations and individuals expressed support for the Policy. The final document was ratified by Cabinet on 19th October, 2005.

**Capacity Building**

Across Sri Lanka, 32 new acute wards need to be built. 59 full time staffed homes need to be provided and 120 low support homes (with occasional visits from care staff) need to be made available to move patients out of Angocna, Mulleriyawa and Hendala Hospitals. Nearly 1700 patients have had their needs assessed at these hospitals and nearly all can move into a variety of accommodation in the community.

**THE SURVEY OF PATIENTS IN LARGE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS**

Over 60% of long stay patients just need a place to live and will need minimal support. Provision of this accommodation and support could be a vital role for NGO’s.

There are 276 MOH areas in Sri Lanka and each Medical Officer of Health (MOH) of each area will require a Community Support Centre which will include activities for day care as well as clinics for out patients. In addition, each of the 27 health Districts in Sri Lanka, will be provided with a Resource Centre which will be the focus for training and education and will include library facilities and internet access.

**Human Resources Development**

There is an urgent need for technical assistance, scientific support and sustainable capacity development in the area of curriculum development, teaching methods and course development from International Universities for all staff.