

Newsletter 2014 – 1st quarter

Namaste dear sponsors and supporters. In the common press we find nothing but sorrow and misery, without much sense of perspective. We keep ourselves to bring you some good news, about our accomplishments in that seemingly endless mountain range, called the Himalayas. For the past 15 years already we have been operating as a registered vzw. (association without lucrative purpose). And 15 years of development aid has brought about quite a few accomplishments. Several school buildings, a medical aid post with dental clinic and lab, a footbridge, water works and solar energy, houses for orphaned children and poor people, a playground and sporting grounds. We have supported around 100 students financially and paid for urgent surgeries, as well as a kidney transplant. Sure, it is merely ripples in an ocean of mountains. But these ripples can become waves, right? For us the icing on the cake was the Shree Lali Gurans Primary School in Chitre, being awarded Best Primary School of the Myagdi district !

Urgent need of a new school

Last year we began with the extension and the renovation of a secondary school in the central hills of Nepal. Thanks to financial aid by the province of West Flanders we were able to construct two new nursery classes and a small playground.

In April, during my flying visit to different projects, I was invited to the official opening of a few classes. I contacted the Belgian Kerun association, who had already put up different projects in Nepal, and was happy to find two delegates to accompany me to this event. The warm and grateful reception by the local population and children, and also the school staff, convinced them to participate in this project, which would enable us to extend and renovate the entire school in one go. Two together can make things happen twice as fast. And 130 new sponsors can definitely make a difference. First the classroom walls got a lack paint finish. Then various tables, such as the Nepalese and Roman alphabet, mathematical tables, etc were painted across. The lack paint was the perfect excuse to finally wash the walls, and to keep these nice and clean.

At the back of the compound we built a security wall and a lovely garden for the children. We kept it a surprise for the children and they absolutely loved it. The local community evidently encourages this project and that is very important to us. Now that we have successfully completed the first phase of our project, we have already moved over to the next one. Currently we are working on the extension that will accommodate four new classes, ages 9 to 12. This will enable hundreds of children to attend school without having to climb and descend a steep mountain hill, to make their way to a remote school building, which is no sinecure during the monsoon season. Now there is no more excuse to not send these children to school.

In a next phase we will fully renovate the existing classrooms. All spaces get a new roof, new windows and new doors. The floors need to be levelled and the walls need new rendering, so we can put on a layer of fresh paint. We chose cheerful vivid colours for the interior walls.

The equipment will be renewed and extended as well. We already bought some whiteboards, a storage cupboard and a locker for the teachers. We hope to equip the computer class shortly.

We also intend to pay the necessary attention to quality control. Therefore we invited the British University employee, Barbara Potter, who is associated to the British Help NGO and who will explore the possibilities of offering English speaking teachers a two month homestay in Nepal. One British teacher has already agreed to come in June and July.

To improve the functioning of the school and to provide the required teaching materials we count on individual sponsors. Every little helps !

The Kerun association reports

A personal report by Hedwig Bacquet and Eddy Goemans, chairmen of the Kerun association, on behalf of "Werkgroep Kerun" (work group).

Our training and research center, set up in cooperation with six other Nepalese partners, has been operating for the second consecutive year now. We managed to organise different courses, such as personality development training, resume writing, job interview training. These courses are mainly at the request of other NGOs that operate in the Pokhara region. They are very eager themselves but on their own they do not bring about enough demand. We also managed to offer computer related courses to local government institutions, which was a definite plus. Individuals, even through private schools, are hard to motivate to pay for their own courses, no matter how low the enrolment fee is. Keeping the center cost-effective is precarious. We brought in some extra capital, which should get the institute going. Luckily we managed to sublet part of the building to an investment bank, which will substantially diminish operating costs. To increase efficiency we share the administrative staff. Let us hope this more conventional and commercial way of working will generate much success.

Also deaf children are entitled to education !

We receive many project requests, so many it almost makes us despair. We are forced to refuse many projects for various reasons, but once in a while there is that one project we decide to go for completely. For example, we were asked to help a group of deaf children in the Syangja district, south of Pokhara. Until recently these children attended a regular school, and sat in the back of the class. Later on their families rented a house where the older deaf people taught the younger ones.

After our visit we planned to give these children their own school, of equal quality and with boarding. We applied for and received financial aid from the province of West Flanders. After some initial difficulties with a few people from the school board, who had their eye on the big money from the West, we put together a board with people we could level with and who had realistic expectations. The fact that we waited to redeem our promises was clearly a good idea. Luckily the waiting was limited, as in the end the deaf children needed our support urgently. A local family agreed to give up a piece of land. It lies in between two hairpin curves of a – non-paved and non-asphalted - country road.

On a second piece of land we can build a boarding house. A water source, with non-drinkable water, can be used for the showers and toilets. For drinking water we need to install an electric water purifying system.

Government funding has been applied for.

The second part of this project is certainly equally important: a qualitative interpretation.

Our ultimate goal is equal education for these deaf children !

News from Chitre

We raised a youth club

For many years we are looking to equip sporting and recreational facilities for Chitre's youth. The soccer field was extended according to official standards, as well as the basket and volleyball field. We used steel poles and goals so we no longer had to cut down trees for repairs and maintenance. This year we finally completed the youth club. The main building we had ready, just in time for the annual sporting festival. The Himalayan Youth Club is now its proud owner ! They invited us for the official opening.

Thanks to financial support from the province of West Flanders and the local population and youth, we are now rounding up this project. Left to do is the building of a few annexes for toilets and showers, a changing room and storage space, as well as a special, hinged, metal door, so the podium can be used from the in- and outside.

A new road connects the village to the school and youth club. It is a dug out sandy road, only rideable by jeeps during the dry season and therefore anything but comfortable. But it really facilitates the delivery of goods and the transport of crop excesses for the local population. Also, there is very little traffic on this road (about two trucks, tractors and motors per week) so tourism is not affected. Luckily, as the road offers one of the world's top ten hikes !

Our base camp

We work hard at Chitre's school. Each year, one or two teachers from English speaking countries come and lend us a hand voluntarily. They guarantee the educational aspects of our primary school, and it is for this reason we were voted best primary school of the entire district. Regularly medical volunteers (doctors and dentists) come and check up on our children. We also bought a new electric piano because the Nepalese are very eager to keep up their traditional folk songs. In the meantime the new computers have arrived. We are now looking to get internet access, because in these remote areas the population does not wish to be denied all available knowledge nor lack contact with the world outside.

Last year, nurse Ulrike Peers from Bruges visited our medical aid post, as part of her internship abroad (See report further below). Much to her advantage, Simon Wydall, a London doctor, was there at the same time, to supervise her. He also carried out a thorough investigation of the way we work. This revealed a few problem areas, such as hygiene. The Nepalese hygiene standard is very low but we are now working hard to make sure the medical aid post can continue its exemplary function.

We also invested in new lab material. A portable ECG monitor is high on our wishlist. Unfortunately we do not have enough sponsors for our medical station. Moreover, we need to give priority to free medicine for the poor population, and our local nurse's monthly wage.

In October two dentists visited us and did alternate shifts during our annual two week Dental Camp. As yet they mainly extract teeth but once we get dentists to visit us frequently, we will be able to focus more on dental care.

The force of volunteers

For the people at Himalayan Projects it is truly wonderful to see how professionals and volunteers are willing to spend their time and energy on our projects. Belgian people often do not realise how lucky they actually are. When we arrive back in Belgium, after a long stay in the mountains, the first topic of conversation is often the economic crisis. But saying it is a crisis is sometimes hard to accept, having seen so much poverty and problems in the Himalayas. But luckily many people here are willing to volunteer !

In April 2013 Ulrike Peers, bachelor in nursing, performed her internship at the medical aid station in Chitre. This is her story...

To live and die in Chitre

Also in Chitre, an insignificant village in the Himalayas, people die. A young student, who had only just begun his life. a man in the prime of his life and an older man we knew for the many projects he took part in.

The first boy, Dag Bahadur Pun, who was one of our students at our first primary school, suffered so much... Years ago we arranged for a kidney transplant, thanks to your donations. At the time it was the third successful transplant in Nepal. Now, four years later, at the age of 21, he died anyway, of postoperative complications.

Khim Bahadur Garbuja's daughter died of a heart condition, right after she had started teaching at our school. He gave us a piece of land to build our medical aid station on. Unfortunately he died of the same illness, at the moment when he was telling the town's people that his granddaughter was born.

We also had to say goodbye to Khadka Paija, a silent, good-natured worker. He was always willing to give us a hand. I called him "short one", because he always referred to me as "long one". Not because he thought I was tall - actually, he found my length quite average compared to other "white tourists" - but because of my nose. He died peacefully while napping in the sun, on a mat in front of his house, right next to the path that leads to our school. In Memoriam, as they were all connected to us, here in faraway Belgium.

Our vzw comes into action here as well

Together with different Nepalese organisations we held a benefit in Bruges 24th February, with 3 Nepalese singers performing and with Nepalese finger food. To collect the necessary funding for our projects is of course vital, but we consider sensitization and awareness to be equally important. For this reason we organise activities and workshops in schools, such as at VBS De Leeuw in Zedelgem, GBS De Regenboog in Sint-Michiels and the Sint-Rembert school in Torhout.

In 2013 we attended many festivals with our info and food stand. February 2014 we stood at the 21st Asia Fair & Festival in Wemmel.

Upcoming data: 24th May, FERIA Festival in Ghent; 7th June, world fest at Den Bruul in Leuven (Nepalese snacks !) and 28th June in the Minnewaterpark for Feest in 't Park with information and food. We need your support !