

## Evening schools for young people as a second chance at education

(Community Development Programme, North East India, April, 2020)



*Despite hours of work in the fields, the young people like to come to the evening schools and study in a concentrated manner after sunset - they will benefit from what they have learned for a lifetime. (Gormur, India, 2019)*



### North East India: An unknown poorhouse

**Poverty leads to child labour:** Over the millennia, more than 200 different ethnic groups have settled in the fertile alluvial deposits of the Brahmaputra and the foothills of the Himalayas. The people in northeast India live mostly from their own agriculture or work for low wages on tea plantations, in road construction or in coal mines. The adults are still predominantly illiterate. Their children work in agriculture to support the families. The girls work secretly as tea pickers, the boys in the coal mines, many in various services. This means that school is not enough.

**Vicious cycle of poverty due to poor education:** Despite the basic right to education, also in India at constitutional level since 2009, many young people there grow up without basic schooling. Almost one third does not attend school. Many leave school early to work, look after the family's livestock or look after their younger brothers and sisters. The consequences are serious. Good jobs remain blocked. Lack of knowledge about health care, hygiene or drinking water treatment leads to high infant and maternal mortality. Life income remains low. The possibility to demand legally established rights cannot be used.

*The northeast of India is remote, undeveloped and characterised by hundreds of ethnic groups. It consists of the "Seven Sister States" and lies east of Bangladesh.*



260,000 square kilometres



45 million inhabitants (census 2011)

Sources: Indiasomeday and Wikipedia

**A region without a future?** An example should show the serious structural problems of the region: At the turn of the year 2018/19, reports of a mining



*Instead of doing dangerous work, these children would rather learn and go to school.*



*If the young people get a chance for further education, they are eager to participate.*



### We promote



99 evening schools



5,511 Pupils



693 villagers in education advisory boards



27,555 Family members benefit

accident in the Meghalaya coal belt shook the public worldwide. 15 young people were trapped in a mine by depressing groundwater and could no longer be freed. The adits that had been provisionally driven into the mountains are often poorly secured. There are also hardly any other safety precautions. The mines are illegal because they poison the environment. To a large extent, the miners are children and young people, because they cost less and can force their way through the narrow passages, they are called "rat holes". 80,000 boys work underground there with pickaxes and buckets. School does not take place for these young people.

### Our project

**A second chance at education:** Together with local partners, Childaid Network gets to the root of these problems. Since 2007, we have been setting up evening schools for young people who never went to school or left school early. They receive subsequent access to basic education and thus a second chance for a self-determined future. In 2019, more than 5,000 young people were supported in 99 schools, 249 children under the age of 14 were able to be reintegrated into the regular school system - in 13 years, more than 30,000 young people have been retrospectively alphabetized in total.

**Tailored programme:** Six evenings a week, lessons are held because the young people work during the day. The curricula are aimed at young adults and take into account the demands of life in the village. The teachers come from the same cultural background and speak the same language. They are intensively trained and supervised by supervisors who also accompany and monitor them. We make sure that the teachers are highly motivated, which helps in the learning process, and we make sure that the whole village is involved and that awareness of education changes there.

**Better than state schools:** Since 2015, we have regularly conducted standardized tests that show that our students are making considerable progress in reading, writing and arithmetic. After four years at the latest, they have reliably mastered these basic skills and have also acquired solid practical knowledge. In state schools, only 50% of the children have reached this level after six years. Many of our students can also speak a little English. All have gained self-confidence.

**Extended focus on practical knowledge:** In addition to basic education, we attach great importance to practical knowledge. This includes hygiene and health issues, career guidance and general financial education. We want to enable young people to live self-determined lives and therefore teach many useful things: How do I plant a vegetable garden? How to run a small business? How do I open a bank account? How do I eat a healthy diet? How do I write an application? With these contents we convince even parents who are educationally disadvantaged, who then often (secretly) learn along.

**Children's parliaments for democracy and self-confidence:** In the villages, children unite and elect a prime minister and ministers, such as education, finance and environment. They discuss the problems in the village, learn to



*The pupils proudly show their home-grown organic vegetables.*



*How to use the family budget wisely? Practical exercises convey knowledge and safety.*



*The traditional agriculture no longer feeds the people.*

express their opinions and implement social initiatives in the village. This also increases their self-confidence. Increasingly, they become role models - for younger siblings, but also for the parent generation. Many of them later take over leading positions in the village.

**Vegetable gardens as help for self-help:** We show the young people how vegetable gardens are laid out and cultivated. With the harvest they can provide themselves more healthily or generate income. They use their numeracy skills and learn to calculate. At the same time, they develop a basic understanding of organic cultivation (e.g. worm composting) and an awareness of sustainability and the environment.

**New initiative, improved agriculture:** For a long time now, our students have wanted to be accompanied in the transformation of agriculture to more productive methods and products. We are now training multipliers who can acquire this knowledge in a solid way and then pass it on to the young people in the villages. This is a perspective!

**Project "Bank" for schools:** It is important to us to prepare young people for a self-determined life. This is why we have launched the 'School Bank' project, which explains clearly how the processes in a bank work. In this way, they lose the fear of opening their own small businesses and running them with the support of microcredits.

**Sustainable transformation:** Our goal is to make ourselves obsolete as quickly as possible by implementing sustainable change processes in the village. We sensitize parents to the importance of education. As soon as primary school is up and running, we can retire, usually after four years - we have already successfully bid farewell to over 400 villages.

*"Being illiterate was not what I wanted. So I took advantage of the evening school in my village. I quickly learned to read and will always be grateful for this chance."* Kordan Siangshai



Kordan Siangshai works as a day labourer to support his four younger siblings. His father died when he was just 14 years old. As the eldest son, he has had full responsibility for the family ever since. In 2015, an evening school opened in his village, and Kordan saw this as his great opportunity. The beginning was difficult, because he could not even write his name. He felt inferior to his friends. His teachers motivated and encouraged him. Today Kordan attends school regularly and is one of the best in his class.

## Our plans for 2020 - we ask for your help



*Even if the schools are simply equipped, learning is fun!*

Since 2007, we have invested more than **1,650,000 euros** in evening schools, giving at least **30,000 young people** in over **400 villages** a second chance at education.

**Expanded learning through digitisation:** In order to promote the further education of young people, we use tablets that are rotating from school to school. Videos are installed on these tablets which present possible professions in a clear and detailed way (e.g. beautician, tailor, carpenter, electrician). This motivates the young people to start an apprenticeship with a local company after evening school.

**Future developments:** The "evening schools" project has brought measurable and sustainable success in many areas. However, we are continuously developing the program further. Our focus is increasingly on supporting the holistic development of the villages and improving the quality of state schools. Through accompanying village councils, we intensively involve the village community in the project. They mobilize the young people, organize the lessons and take care of the improvement of the local primary schools. Increasingly, evening schools for literacy are being replaced by programmes to support weak pupils, tutoring programmes and exam preparation.

We would like to thank all donors and supporters who have enabled us to carry out this important program over the last 13 years. With about 25 Euro per pupil per year we have changed the life perspectives of tens of thousands of young people and improved the educational situation in their villages in a sustainable way. Our help is still needed in the remote, mainly mountainous regions of South Asia. Your help goes down well!

*Cynthia Dittmar, Project Coordinator, Childaid Network in April 2020*



