25 years reaching the most vulnerable

“We can see a huge difference in our village since we had clean water and latrines.”


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“We can now transport aid to Armenia in apparently unlimited quantities, BY SHIP.”

Read about the first major relief operation in the 1990’s.

Page 16

“Now we are producing our own eggs, we do not need to buy them. This has given us better nutrition.”

Momasulo Khodyaeva, Tajikistan

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Mission East supports vulnerable people and helps local communities strengthen and organise themselves.

We provide emergency relief and long-term development assistance based on Christian values and help people in need regardless of their race, religion or political views. Mission East operates directly or through local partners in Afghanistan, Armenia, Burma/Myanmar, Iraq, Nepal, North Korea, Syria and Tajikistan. Mission East is supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the EU and the UN. We have been verified compliant with the People in Aid Code of Good Practice and have committed ourselves to the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS).
Dear reader,
When I look at the photographs from 25 years of work at Mission East, one particular image stands out. It is a photograph of a girl called Helena. I met her for the first time when she was a small child living in an orphanage in Armenia where the children were running around like ghosts in the dark. The staff did not even know their names.

Helena had a speech impediment. Perhaps she also had a minor mental disability. She had been rejected, as all children with disorders were likely to be in those days. We helped stimulate her through play and a meaningful school education. Ten years later I saw her in a supermarket where she worked as a helping hand, placing goods on shelves and servicing customers. She gave me a huge smile!

ARMENIA’S DARK YEARS
This magazine is a testimony to the work that Mission East has carried out for the past 25 years, helping people like Helena. We could not have done this work without the tremendous support of private donors, associations, organisations and states. Much has happened since we distributed emergency relief to Armenian orphanages during the ‘dark years’ of the war with Azerbaijan. During the past 25 years, we have witnessed huge progress in world development. Child mortality is decreasing, education levels are rising. More and more people are gaining access to clean water and decent livelihoods. But we are also facing new challenges: Climate change will lead to more natural disasters. Population growth – especially in Africa south of the Sahara – will increase the risk of conflict. The Middle East has descended into a spiral of violence, and nobody knows how it will end. In all these cases, human beings will be caught up in unbearable situations where they feel let down, cast aside and alone.

By giving human beings faith in themselves we enable them to rebuild their own societies.”

ROOM FOR HOPE
At Mission East, we have made it our business to reach these people. We provide them with an opportunity to survive – by giving them water, food or the chance to make a living. These actions are an expression of love and hope. Yes, we are helping millions of people, but the hope that we give to the individual makes all the difference. I see it among displaced children in Iraq; They receive emergency relief, but at the Mission East centres, they are also able to play and learn under peaceful circumstances. These children who just a few months previously saw their parents be killed, are given the opportunity to be children once again – thanks to the care and comfort they receive.

THE SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE
In these situations, aid becomes sustainable. We cannot save the world by doing it all. But by giving human beings faith in themselves we enable them to rebuild their own societies. I believe in this kind of development work.

HELP WHERE IT IS RIGHT
Mission East aims to reach the most vulnerable people in the world’s trouble spots, but we also work in places that do not get much media attention. Tajikistan is a good example. We have worked here for almost 20 years to help people secure their livelihoods and handle the recurring natural disasters. We should not aim to be in ‘cool’ locations, but in the right ones.

SEE YOU IN 25 YEARS
In 1991, the Iron Curtain and the shadows it had cast over Europe was the driving force in our work. Today, it is the war in the Middle East and climate change that shape the world – and the areas where Mission East works. Then as now, our focus remains the most vulnerable people. I hope that I will meet the children we are helping in Iraq in 10, 20 or 25 years, and that they will give me a huge smile.

A very big thank you to all the people whose support and backing made this work possible!

Kind regards,
Kim Hartzner
Kulob, Tajikistan, 2015. Conditions for children with disabilities in Tajikistan are very similar to those in Armenia: a disability is considered shameful, and children are hidden away with little access to treatment. As in Armenia, Mission East tracks down children and gives them access to rehabilitation. This girl has a congenital spinal deformity and is being trained to sit upright at a centre in Kulob in Southern Tajikistan. Photo: Muyassar Odinaev.

Armenia, 1996. Kim Hartzner met Helena (pictured left) for the first time when she was a little girl, hidden away from the outside world in an Armenian orphanage. Janet Davies-Jones of Mission East is on the right. Photo: Mission East.
"Aid is our life passion!"

It started in a garage in the Danish town of Birkerød. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, René and Kim Hartzner sent food, medicine and hospital equipment to poor people in Eastern Europe. Today, Mission East has grown into a quite large aid organisation, specialising in emergency relief and long-term development in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The enthusiasm is unchanged.

René and Kim Hartzner founded Mission East as a spontaneous reaction to the situation in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. From the family’s garage in Birkerød – and, later, from a larger storage facility - they sent truckloads of food, medicine and hospital equipment. They even flew entire emergency hospitals eastwards on large transport aircraft.

Today, the work has expanded to several countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Thousands of people are benefiting from emergency relief as well as long-term development aid. The family business has become an international aid organisation with offices in Copenhagen, Berlin and Brussels and hundreds of dedicated staff members in eight countries.

DEDICATED TO THE CAUSE

We meet the two committed men at the Mission East office in Hellerup north of Copenhagen. The atmosphere is loaded with the energy that still runs through father and son. When asked where all that energy comes from, Kim Hartzner replied: “It is more than a job. It is a life passion. We just did the things that appealed to us and seemed fun. It was very satisfactory to help the churches behind the Iron Curtain. Churches that had previously been oppressed could now help their own population.”

René Hartzner readily gives credit to the staff that gradually joined the organisation: “We hired some very capable people. And as it often happens, one capable person attracted other capable employees. I had the advantage compared to Kim that I had no children living at home. And my wife Ruth was very dedicated to the cause.”

The two men have been a team since the organisation was founded in November 1991. At the time, René received startup support from the government, and for the first few months, Kim was volunteering. Today, their roles have been reversed: Kim is managing director, René is an active senior citizen.

GOOD SOVIET CONNECTIONS

The life project Mission East became a jigsaw puzzle, uniting René’s business acumen and Kim’s medical background.

For nearly 30 years, René Hartzner worked as an international manager in one of the world’s largest grain companies. His job was to buy grain in North and South America, charter ships and export the grain to Denmark and onwards to countries in Eastern Europe. One day he became unemployed, but he still had good contacts in the then Soviet Union. Two travel agencies hired him as a tour leader for religious and cultural trips to Russia.

“On the very first trip we visited a free church on the outskirts of St Petersburg. The local mayor supported the social work of the churches and promised that the church would get a large, partially built centre near one of the metro stations if it could obtain medicine, particularly for elderly patients suffering from diabetes.”

MEDICINE FOR TWO MILLION KRONER

“On my way home from St Petersburg, I couldn’t stop thinking: ‘If I could get the medicine, I could help the church and the city.’ I told people at my church about the situation, and one of the...
church leaders worked in a pharmaceutical company that produces diabetes medicine. Very soon, I had received diabetes medicine in big drums. It was valued at two million Danish kroner. We delivered it on a trip with young people from the Karlslunde Beach Church and got a fantastic reception,” René Hartzner recalled. “On our way home on the bus I told Kim: ‘This is very time-consuming. Either I must continue doing this full time, or I have to stop now.’ Kim looked at me and said: ‘Dad, you must continue full time, and I am with you from day one.’ That’s how it began.”

Kim Hartzner remembers that day on the bus: “I told dad: ‘You are already working full time with emergency aid; you just need to call it something. How about Mission East? It is a mission in the East, and we are working through the church, aren’t we?’ That settled it as far as the name was concerned.”

**SHAKY, BUT GREAT START**
Kim is a medical doctor, but dedicated four months to working as a volunteer, contacting companies and asking for donations for the work in the East. Churches collected funds for transportation, companies donated food and medicine, and hospitals donated equipment. “We stocked our storage facility in mum’s and dad’s garage and took off in vans. Then I moved to Hjørring and started working as a doctor. After five days of work, I had my first holiday to take emergency aid to Ukraine. I had a major accident and returned in an ambulance plane. I was hospitalised in Hjørring, and it took several months before I had worked there for more days than I had been on sick leave or holiday,” Kim Hartzner said with a smile. “It was a shaky, but fantastic, start,” René Hartzner recalled. “People did not know us; we had just started. But things went like the clappers.”

**FIVE HOSPITALS SENT BY AIR AND SEA**
A year after the start – in October 1992 – Mission East sent large aeroplanes with aid from Denmark to Armenia. The small aid organisation had received five of 40 mobile emergency hospitals that were meant to be used during a nuclear war. But now, the Cold War had been cancelled. “The hospitals were packed into large cardboard boxes in hospital basements and at schools. They had operating theatres and lots of equipment,” René Hartzner recalled. “We gave two of them to the worst imaginable prisons in Moscow,”

“We gave two of the hospitals to the worst imaginable prisons in Moscow”
René Hartzner, founder of Mission East.

Mission East got off to a flying start, but Kim Hartzner’s involvement in Eastern Europe began many years before that. “My father was traveling behind the Iron Curtain as early as 1968. I was nine years old and pestered him to take me along, but of course he didn’t. When he came home, he showed us photographs of persecuted Christians, their faces, scarves and a culture...”
so different from ours. They were suppressed and persecuted but also had tremendous spirit, and they were willing to risk their lives and personal safety. It was madly exciting! Their stories and destinies started it all for me.”

BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN AT 15
When Kim was 15, he traveled to Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary with his cousin. “It was a different world behind the Iron Curtain; you felt something heavy, a subdued atmosphere among people,” he said.

“I used every opportunity to travel to Eastern Europe. Later, I smuggled bibles to the churches. I also smuggled out information about the plight of Christians behind the Iron Curtain, where the authorities raided churches and imprisoned church leaders. That was probably the most dangerous bit. Once I was standing in a train station in Romania with some sensitive documents in my pocket. It was the last train station before the Hungarian border. I was so nervous that I couldn’t control myself, and the customs officers could easily have spotted me. But on the train heading towards the border, I shared a compartment with a diplomat’s son from Congo, and he told so many funny jokes in wonderful French that I was laughing my head off all the way. When the customs officers came to search our luggage, I wasn’t nervous anymore. And when they had finished, I managed to place the documents in the already searched suitcase before the officers started a body search. What luck! Or divine intervention ...”

AID FROM CHURCH TO CHURCH
When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, René and Kim Hartzner both had a strong network among the churches in the East and in the West. “It seemed completely natural to establish ties between the two networks and organise emergency aid to the poor in the East,” Kim Hartzner said.

“We were based in my house in Birkerød and wrote letters to all our friends asking for support,” René Hartzner added. “I also applied for startup support from the municipality and got 5000 kroner per month for three years. We applied for permission to keep medicine in my house, and were allowed to do so. Kim contacted a number of pharmaceutical companies, and you cannot imagine how much hospital equipment, food and medicine we received during that period!”

“I was so nervous that I couldn’t control myself, and the customs officers could easily have spotted me.”

Kim Hartzner, Managing Director in Mission East.

THE PIECES FIT

“This brings us back to the life passion: How does one avoid being totally overwhelmed by the enormous needs everywhere?”

“When things look bleak, it is tempting to say: ‘It is so terrible that so many are displaced because of Islamic State!’ You can say that a hundred times without making any difference. But you can also say: ‘We can do something! We can help and change people’s lives! The truth is that every Dane can do a lot for every person in need out there.”

This is exactly what René and Kim Hartzner, their staff and many supporters in Denmark and abroad have done for the past 25 years.
Kulob, Tajikistan, 1998. Single mothers and families with three or more children were among the beneficiaries of Mission East food aid in the wake of the Tajik civil war. A basic principle of Mission East’s work is always to support the most vulnerable. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen.

25 years in the world’s trouble spots

Mission East was founded as a reaction to the needs of people in Eastern Europe after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Today, we still work in the former Eastern Bloc, but the conflicts in and around the Middle East are playing an ever larger role in our work. Read this selection of episodes from Mission East’s 25-year history of helping the world’s poorest people.

Looking back 1991-2016

Mission East
Overview

The 25-year history of Mission East has been documented by thousands of photographs, reports and testimonies from volunteers, staff members, partners, supporters and, not least, the people that our work is all about: Those who get support to lift themselves out of poverty. We can never tell the full story at once, but on the following pages we have selected some of the important highlights of our history.

Father and son, René and Kim Hartzner, found Mission East as a reaction to the distress in Eastern Europe. René is seen here (to the right) with Niels Carsten Hansen, a volunteer from the church Karlsunde Strandkirke.

Mission East starts working in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan by supplying food aid to tens of thousands of impoverished people, following a bloody civil war. Soup kitchens for the needy are established in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Mission East sends shipments of emergency relief to war-torn Armenia. Countries like Ukraine and Albania also begin to receive aid.

Mission East embarks on a determined effort to support children with disabilities in Armenia.

The UN asks Mission East to be in charge of a camp for 10,000 refugees from Kosovo in the Albanian town of Körce. In November, René Hartzner is replaced by his son Kim as managing director of the organisation.
Mission East helps firefighters at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in Ukraine improve their security.

The 'Denmark' Hospital opens in Sisian in Southern Armenia.

Sixty-six children who suffer from various ailments following the Chernobyl disaster attend a summer camp on the Crimean Peninsula, hosted by the Evangelical Church in Ukraine. The Mission East office moves to Sankt Lukas Vej 13 in Hellerup north of Copenhagen.

Mission East distributes food rations to 40,000 destitute people in Mongolia where a severe drought has killed millions of animals.

In October, Mission East conducts a needs assessment among internally displaced persons in war-torn Afghanistan. That same winter, the organisation starts distributing emergency relief.

Mission East hires local people in Afghanistan to rebuild the country. One project is to build five kilometres of road to take the emergency relief further.
Mission East prepares to work in **Northern Iraq** where Iraqi Kurds returning home after the fall of Saddam Hussein are in dire need of support.

The world’s largest humanitarian fund, the **Global Fund**, selects Mission East to run a programme for the prevention and combating of **AIDS in Armenia** until 2015.

The world’s largest humanitarian fund, the **Global Fund**, selects Mission East to run a programme for the prevention and combating of **AIDS in Armenia** until 2015.

Following the **Haiti earthquake** and the **floods in Pakistan**, Mission East provides emergency relief outside its usual cooperation countries – through its partner organisations.

Mission East gains access to **North Korea**. During the following years, more than 50,000 malnourished children in kindergartens, nurseries and orphanages receive **food aid** from Mission East.

A massive **earthquake** strikes **Nepal**, causing thousands of deaths. Mission East is already working in the country and is able to provide early emergency relief in the wake of the disaster.

Mission East intensifies its work in **war-torn Iraq**. In its jubilee year, the organisation is also looking ahead towards new horizons and challenges.

Mission East celebrates its 25-year **Jubilee** at a reception in Copenhagen November 18, 2016.
Managing Director Kim Hartzner moves to Armenia with his family for two years to lead Mission East’s country office.

North Korea is ravaged by devastating floods that makes more than 200,000 people homeless. Mission East helps 511 families rebuild their homes.

The television weather presenter Mikael Jarnvig becomes Mission East’s first ambassador. He wishes to focus on the overlooked crises that are often ignored by the media.

Mission East decides to support the victims of the civil war in Syria. A new programme is established to support the vulnerable Mara people in western Burma/Myanmar. Mission East opens an office in Berlin.

The efforts to support people with disabilities are replicated in Tajikistan where the attitude towards such people is still dominated by the Soviet era contempt for physical and mental vulnerability.

Mission East returns to Northern Iraq where hundreds and thousands of people are in severe distress because of the devastation caused by Islamic State.

Mission East opens an office in Berlin.
These are the countries Mission East has operated in during the last 25 years

- Mission East’s present countries of operation
- Countries where Mission East works through partners
- Mission East’s previous countries of operation
- Countries where Mission East has previously been working through local partners
Armenia 1992

In 1988, an armed conflict broke out over the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. As the six-year conflict reached its climax, the newly founded aid organisation Mission East decided to send emergency relief to the area.

On 17 October 1992, the founder of Mission East, René Hartzner, was standing at Værløse Air Base with a group of volunteers, getting ready to fly a mobile emergency hospital to Armenia on a Russian Ilyshin transport aircraft. This was the culmination of weeks of preparation and the biggest operation in Mission East’s one-year history. The aid was intended for a hospital for patients wounded during the bloody conflict with Azerbaijan. At 20:15, the aircraft took off for Armenia with a cargo of 35 tons of hospital equipment from Næstved Hospital.

A CONFLICT IGNORED
The transport on this autumn day marked the beginning of a long-term relief operation for war-torn and impoverished Armenia. While the world’s attention was focused on the bloody conflict in former Yugoslavia, the war between the two former Soviet republics, Armenia and Azerbaijan, attracted few headlines. But under the leadership of René Hartzner, Mission East dedicated a lot of its work to help the small Eastern nation. From their office in Birkerød, René and Kim Hartzner gathered a team of volunteers around them to collect food, clothes and hospital equipment to the impoverished populations of Russia, Ukraine, Albania and Armenia.

FROSTY OPERATING THEATRES
The help was much needed. The war against Azerbaijan created a deficit of all basic necessities. Shop shelves were empty, and the daily bread ration – the main staple of the Armenian diet – was as low as 250 grams. There were reports of people killing each other outside food stores. There was also a lack of petrol, and Armenian families had to get through the freezing Armenian winter without any heating in their homes. Even in hospital operating theatres the temperatures were freezing, and the UN warned that thousands could die from hunger and cold.

AID BY SHIP
At first, Mission East planned to establish an air bridge with emergency aid from Denmark to Armenia. But as Azerbaijan was blocking fuel imports to Armenia, just seven litres of petrol cost a whole month’s salary. Another solution had to be found. The Mission East newsletter from April 1993 brought the following news: “Through contacts in Canada, a unique opportunity has presented itself: We can now transport aid to Armenia in apparently unlimited quantities, BY SHIP.” Armenia is landlocked, so the route went via Spain to Georgia, and from there by train to Yerevan. In April 1993, Mission East shipped the first 15 containers with clothes, food and hospital equipment.

“While the world’s attention was focused on the bloody conflict in former Yugoslavia, the war between the two former Soviet republics, Armenia and Azerbaijan, attracted few headlines.”

“Warm socks from Helga
Mission East sent hospital equipment and other emergency aid to

MISSION EAST | JUBILEE MAGAZINE 25 YEARS
Armenia several times, by sea as well as by air. A former school in the town Sisian south of Yerevan became the site of the 'Denmark' hospital, which is still operating today. The aid also went to villages, refugee camps, old people’s homes and orphanages. The Nubarashen Orphanage No 11 received several shipments of aid. The Filip School on the Danish island of Amager collected food, and senior citizen Helga Pedersen from Holbæk knitted warm sweaters, socks and caps for the children. Several children at the orphanage had suffered brain damage, and it was here that Mission started its work for people with disabilities which you can read more about on pages 26-29.

Kim Hartzner went to Armenia to receive the aid shipment and distribute the goods. He wrote about the capital Yerevan in May 1993:

“A ghost town with access to electricity 3-4 hours a day. The inhabitants must use torches to find their way home at night – if they dare go outside. The city is plagued by ferocious dogs who look as if they have not eaten for months. One dark evening I emptied my adrenalin supply when three hungry dogs jumped out from behind a street corner.”

In Stepanakert – the main town of Nagorno-Karabakh – the situation was even worse: “Stepanakert seems like a step into the inner court of death. MOST of the houses have either been shot to pieces or show traces of two years of intensive missile attacks. Last year, its inhabitants spent nine months in underground shelters, and the wounded were operated on by candlelight in the basement underneath the city’s cramped hospital.”

Houses were shot to pieces

Værløse, Denmark, 1992. In October, a Russian Ilyshin transport aircraft flew a whole emergency hospital from Næstved, Denmark, to Sisian in war-torn Armenia. Photo: Mission East.

Copenhagen, Denmark, 1993. The original intention was to establish an air corridor for emergency aid from Denmark to Armenia, but due to exceedingly high fuel costs, Mission East decided to transport the aid by sea to Georgia and from there by train to Yerevan. Photo: Mission East.
What is an emergency hospital?

During the Cold War, the Danish state decided to establish 50 emergency hospitals in schools and other public buildings around the country if war should break out. When the Cold War ended in 1991, organisations could apply to have them, and Mission East got five. Three were sent to Russia, one to Albania and one to Armenia where it became the foundation of the still existing hospital called Denmark. An ‘emergency hospital’ weighed between 25 and 43 tons and took up approximately 350 cubic metres of space. It contained complete equipment for treating 200 patients: Beds, nursing equipment, an operating theatre, laboratory, diagnostic equipment, kitchen and office supplies. Its value in 1992 was estimated at 30 million Danish kroner.

What is the conflict about?

Nagorno-Karabakh is a territory in Azerbaijan with a predominantly Armenian population. It measures 4,400 square kilometres. As republics were formed in the early days of the Soviet Union, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin made it part of Azerbaijan. In 1988, the territory’s population wanted to secede from Azerbaijan and join Armenia. That same year, war broke out over the territory. It claimed almost 30,000 lives before a ceasefire was agreed upon in 1994. The territory has remained under Armenian control since then. On 2 April 2016, fighting erupted once again, and soldiers on both sides were killed. Both sides accuse each other of starting the fighting.
Kapan, Armenia, 1994. A father cannot conceal his joy when he receives a parcel with ten kilos of food from Mission East. Photo: Jan Jørgensen.

Sisian, Armenia, 1994. En route to the southern town of Kapan, the convoy of aid trucks drove past Sisian, site of the Central Hospital Denmark established by Mission East. Photo: Jan Jørgensen.

Yerevan, Armenia, 1994. When the volunteers from Mission East opened the door of the Iljushin-79 aircraft carrying 45 tons of humanitarian aid from Denmark, they were met by this old lady, working to clean the airport runway by hand. Photo: Jan Jørgensen.

David-Beg, Kapan District, Armenia, 1994. Ensuring that the aid reaches the beneficiaries is a key principle of Mission East. Here, then Operations Director (now Managing Director) Kim Hartzner participates in a food distribution during the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh. Photo: Jan Jørgensen.

Kapan, Armenia, 1994. In the town of Kapan, not far from the border with Azerbaijan, René Hartzner hands over a food parcel to a local beneficiary. The woman to the left is Knarik Chalabian who owned the flat where Mission East had its first office in Yerevan. Photo: Jan Jørgensen.
Kulob District, 1999. In the spring of 1999, about 100 Tajik families became self-sufficient with eggs as Mission East gave them chickens. This was the beginning of long term development aid to the country. Photo: Mission East.
Central Asia’s ‘forgotten’ country

Mission East has worked in Tajikistan, the poorest of the former Soviet republics, since 1997. In the early days, the organisation distributed food aid to tens of thousands of vulnerable locals. Later, the focus shifted to long term development projects.

When Kenneth Whitelaw got off the plane in the Tajik capital Dushanbe in August 1997, he immediately understood that something was wrong. The luggage had already been dumped on the landing strip, and soon, the plane took off again. The locals advised him to leave, as it turned out that fighting between rival gangs had erupted the previous night. This brought back unpleasant memories of the civil war that had ravaged the country for the previous five years.

If Kenneth had known that the unrest would break out at that particular time, he would probably have postponed his arrival, and Mission East’s work in the poorest of the former Soviet republics might have been significantly delayed. Instead he chose to stay and create the foundations for a Mission East presence in the country that has now entered its twentieth year.

On his way from the airport, Kenneth had to cross the ‘front line’ in Dushanbe on foot, because the taxi driver refused to continue due to the fighting. Then he mostly had to stay indoors for a couple of weeks, as the UN said that it was too dangerous to go out. But gradually, peace descended on the capital, and he started working.

When Kenneth, whose surname is now Whitelaw-Jones, reflects on his early days in Tajikistan, he obviously remembers the poverty and looming violence. But his strongest memories are the country’s beauty and the generosity of the local population.

“On his way from the airport, Kenneth had to cross the ‘front line’ in Dushanbe on foot”

"EVEN IN SOVIET TIMES WE HAD NOTHING"

During the pioneering days, it was the need for emergency food aid that drove Mission East’s work. According to the UN, Tajikistan found itself in a “continuing, almost chronic, emergency situation”. Half of the country’s children were malnourished, and a family described the lot of the Tajiks as follows: “We are a forgotten people – even in Soviet times we had nothing, and now it is getting worse and worse.”

“EVEN IN SOVIET TIMES WE HAD NOTHING”

The first shipment of aid consisted of 29 containers with 471...
tons of food which was distributed to tens of thousands of vulnerable people in the southern province of Kulob. They each received a parcel of 15.8 kilos that contained rice, flower, cooking oil and other foodstuffs.

The needs were enormous. In 1997, a large proportion of the Tajik population was forced to its knees following the Soviet collapse and the ensuing civil war. Poverty in rural areas was so serious that many families had to sell their animals to buy bread for their children who were sleeping on dirt floors. They often did not go to school because they had no clothes to wear.

Mission East was cooperating closely with local communities to ensure that the food aid reached those who needed it most. Staff members were also present during distributions of food parcels, creating a lot of trust among local people – and a very low percentage of waste.

**TOMATOES AND EGGS ON THE MENU**

The food distributions continued for several years. Mission East helped a large group of very poor Tajiks get through some tough times in the late 1990s. It also quite soon became clear that more long-term development aid was necessary to reduce people’s dependence on food parcels. From 1999, tomatoes and eggs were added to the menu in some Tajik homes. About 60 rural families who were already Mission East food aid beneficiaries, were given 100 tomato plants each. Some of the produce they used in their households, some they sold at the local market.

In the spring of 1999, Momasulo Khodyaeva, a widow with six children from the village of Choktemur, became the proud owner of a small group of hens. More than 100 other families did the same. She told the Mission East magazine: “Now we are producing our own eggs, we do not need to buy them. This has given us better nutrition. There are a lot of calories in eggs, which is good, as we can only afford red meat once a year.”

Momasulo Khodyaeva, a widow with six children from the village of Choktemur

**DIED FROM DIRTY DRINKING WATER**

In the late 1990s, Mission East pioneered water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Tajikistan. Two thirds of the population lacked access to clean drinking water, and several thousand children died every year from dirty drinking water. In a school in Khalaikhumb, Southern Tajikistan, Mission East is teaching children to uphold a proper standard of hygiene, including washing their hands, to avoid infectious diseases. Photo: Muyassar Odinaev.
Hospitality is paramount

In Tajik, hospitality is called mehmonnavozii and forms an important part of the way the Tajiks see themselves. Guests – invited as well as uninvited – get the best seat opposite the door and are treated to tea, sweets and up to several meals, no matter what time of day. A Tajik explanation for this hospitality is that Abraham – known as Ibrahim in Islamic tradition – was famed for his great hospitality. Consequently, the poverty of many families is a source of shame because they cannot treat their guests as proper tradition dictates.

Today, Mission East continues to run water and sanitation projects in Tajikistan. In 2015, 2,000 people got new toilets, either in their home or village. Although the country has become more stable than during the dramatic years in the 1990s, it is still one of the world’s poorest. The way Kenneth Whitelaw-Jones, who now works for the European Development Bank, sees it, it has been difficult for Tajikistan to find its place in the global economy. However, tens of thousands of Tajiks can thank Mission East for making their lives just a bit easier during hard times. And to this day, people with disabilities still benefit from the support they receive.

“I met some fantastic people, and I think that they gave me at least as much as I gave them.”

Kenneth Whitelaw-Jones, Mission East

Kenneth Whitelaw-Jones hopes that he made at least a little difference back in the 1990s: “I consider it a great privilege to have taken part in this work during my formative years. I met some fantastic people, and I think that they gave me at least as much as I gave them.”

Water borne infectious diseases. As part of a project in Southern Tajikistan, 20 villages received clean drinking water and hygienic latrines to reduce the prevalence of diseases.

Langaro, Tajikistan, 2016. These women have been educated by Mission East to be advocates for better hygiene in their village, and they now carry their message from door to door.

Photo: Vibeke Hauge Førrisdahl.

Darvaz District, Tajikistan, 2015. The table is laid for the guests to mark the festival of Id-i-Kurban, which celebrates the prophet Abraham.

Photo: Muyassar Odinaev.
Improving agricultural production is a key activity of Mission East in our programmes of rural development. Here, a Tajik farmer sows seeds on a slope. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen

A local boy at a distribution point. Food aid targeted the most vulnerable, including families with many children. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen

Ensuring that the marginalised access assistance is a key tenet of Mission East. Here, a lady with a disability is helped by her children to transport food parcels during a distribution in Tajikistan in 1998. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen

Beneficiaries carry home the food parcels they have just received. During the years 1997-2001, Mission East carried out large-scale distributions of food aid to vulnerable population groups in the Kulob District. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen
Kulob District, Tajikistan, 1998. A girl does the dishes in a dirty canal. Providing clean water and teaching new hygiene standards to the population of rural Tajikistan dramatically reduces child mortality from 25 percent to a bit more than 0 percent. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen

Kulob District, Tajikistan, 1998. Tajikistan is the poorest nation in Central Asia, with over 80 per cent of the population living in poverty. Since its 1991 independence, Tajikistan has been plagued by massive unemployment, rampant hyperinflation and corruption. People in the area still remember Mission East for these distributions in the late 1990s. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen

Kulob District, Tajikistan, 1998. A beneficiary child watches the distribution of food aid in southwestern Tajikistan. People in the area still remember Mission East for these distributions in the late 1990s. Photo: Peter Hove Olesen
During the 1990s, Mission East distributed food and warm clothes to Armenian orphanages, including Nubarashen 11. But the Soviet attitude towards disability made lives at the orphanages miserable. Jane and Dennis Loze decided to change that.

“The teachers were like prison guards”
On a freezing cold Saturday morning in 1998, Dennis and Jane Loze visited Nubarashen 11 – an orphanage for children with ‘mental problems’ on the outskirts of the Armenian capital Yerevan. Later, Dennis described the visit in his autobiography:

“As we entered the building, the coldness just hit you. It wasn’t just the temperature that was cold, the whole building was so severe and bare and so quiet, were there any children? We walked down along a stone corridor and through double doors into a large room with long tables and benches, sat on these benches were children aged from 7 to mid/late teens, approx. 150 in total. Everything was so quiet, not a whisper, walking between the tables were 4-5 adults wrapped up against the cold who seemed to be warders or even prison guards, again no smiles. We had brought peroskies, which were meat or potatoes in a pastry, a typical Armenian food, apples and what fruit we could find. The children ate so fast and all the crumbs were not missed, but again in total silence as the ‘guards’ looked on.”

A LIFE WITHOUT LAUGHTER
Dennis Loze used to work as a physiotherapist for several English football clubs, including Arsenal. During a trip to Armenia with some English football players who wanted to teach the sport to local refugee children, he felt compelled to return to the country and stay there for an extended period. Dennis got a job as a physiotherapist with the Armenian Football Association, and a couple of months later he returned with his wife Jane and their 12-year old daughter, Morgana.

During their stay, they got in touch with a group of Red Cross volunteers. Together with them, they paid their first visit to Nubarashen 11. For years, Mission East and other organisations had sent food and winter clothes to the orphanage, but the needs were still considerable. As Dennis and Jane Loze felt this winter’s morning, it was more than just food and clothes that were lacking. These children had an overwhelming need to be seen – to be allowed to laugh and play and be stimulated, as children do in order to grow up and become well-functioning human beings.

HOW COULD THEY HELP THE CHILDREN?
Saturday after Saturday, Dennis and Jane visited the orphanage, and their visits became the highlight of the week – for them and the children as well. Not only were the children happy to eat varied food, they were ecstatic that adults were showing an interest in them. Dennis and Jane began to become emotionally involved in the children. They continued working during the week, but their thoughts were constantly with the children, and they wondered how they could spend more time at Nubarashen 11? The transport issue and the difficult Armenian language were both insurmountable obstacles.

The solution presented itself on a Sunday when Jane met Peter and Jikke Drummond-Smith in a Christian group organised through Morgana’s school. Today, Peter is Mission East’s operational director in Brussels, but at the time he was the organisation’s country director for Armenia. Jane told the couple about her experiences at Nubarashen 11.

Labelled as defective
In the Soviet Union, persons with disabilities were considered defective. Rather than educating children with special needs on their own terms, they were locked up in institutions like Nubarashen 11. The science on disability was called ‘defectology’, and the attitude was that children with ‘defects’ could never learn anything. Historically, persons with disabilities have also been considered defective in Denmark. Until 1962, it was legal to forcibly sterilize persons with intellectual disability in Denmark.

It wasn’t just the temperature that was cold, the whole building was so severe and bare and so quiet”

Dennis Loze, Mission East.
Peter and Jikke were aware of the problems, but had not been able to come up with a solution. To Jane’s surprise and delight they suggested that Jane and Dennis develop a programme for the Nubarashen children. Mission East offered to pay for transport costs and an interpreter.

**PUNISHED IF THEY TALKED**

Jane and Dennis began to visit the orphanage three afternoons every week. In the afternoon, the teachers were supposed to help the children do their homework. The reality was different: the children were sitting silently on the floor, and if they dared make a sound, they were hit by older children who were assigned to keep an eye on them. The teachers were drinking coffee in an adjacent room.

Jane and Dennis got acquainted with the subject of play therapy and started to practice it. They noticed that they have become more lively, interested and willing to make an effort. They have also learnt some practical skills. They can tell the time, they know their birthday and they can carry out simple tasks, such as tying their shoe laces,” Dennis told the Mission East Magazine at the time.

**FALSE DIAGNOSES**

Apart from the common activiti- es, they also found out what was wrong with each child. This enabled them to target their tuition better. The result of their survey was a surprise: More than 85 per cent of the children at Nubarashen 11 did not have a mental disability at all. Jane looked up their families to find out what had happened. It turned out that the parents had obtained false diagnoses for their children to get access to the orphanage. The children came from such poor families that their parents could not feed them.

As time went by, Jane and Dennis became increasingly attached to the children who began to open up to them and show their emotions. The staff, however, were very unsatisfied. The work of the couple demonstrated how incapable they were themselves. In particular, the relationship with the director gradually deteriorated, and finally, Jane and Dennis very reluctantly had to stop working at Nubarashen.

**OUT OF THE DARK**

In Armenia, Mission East cooperates with the local disability organisations, Arabkir and Bridge of Hope. Together, we run several centres for the development and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. The staff visit families in poor villages and find children with disabilities who are hidden from the outside world. They then start treating them and organise support groups for their parents in order to break the taboos. Schools and teacher training colleges focus on the integration of children with disabilities. Moreover, Bridge of Hope has managed to influence changes in Armenian disability legislation.

Many staff members and members of Bridge of Hope have a disability themselves or are the parents of children with disabilities. In 2014, Bridge of Hope received the UNESCO international prize for promoting inclusive education.

This article is partly based on Dennis Loze’s book ‘Arsenal to Armenia’, Trafford Publishing 2008.
Tavush Region, Armenia, 2015. In the poorest areas of Armenia, the serious issue of understimulated children remains. Andranik, a two-year old, sits on his grandfather’s lap outside the shed the family lives in. Andranik and his two sisters, Zina and Lilo, have grown up in such desperate poverty that it has affected their physical and mental health. Photo: Mission East

"We cannot bear injustice any longer!"

Since 2000, 25-year old Arevik has taken part in training and advocacy work organised by Mission East and Bridge of Hope. Now she works for Bridge of Hope. She says about her involvement:

"I have always had this disability, it is part of me just like the colour of my skin. I speak for human rights and dignity together with hundreds of my contemporaries. We cannot bear injustice and inequality any longer. We have to demand our right to education, work and participation in society as equal citizens."


Penjakent, Tajikistan, 2015. Following the success of the work on disability issues in Armenia, Mission East has embarked on a similar effort in another former Soviet republic: Tajikistan. Thirteen-year old Manizha has cerebral palsy – she is undergoing physical training at a rehabilitation centre in Penjakent. Photo: Muyassar Odinaev
Food aid for a country on its knees

In October 2001, US and British Forces invaded Afghanistan and deposed the Taliban regime from power. This opened the door for international aid to the severely tested Afghan population, and Mission East started providing food aid that same winter.
“Three of Fatima’s children died last winter. Will the three others survive this one?” Ruth Dyer of Mission East asked this question in October 2001 during a visit to war torn Afghanistan. That same month, allied forces had deposed the Taliban regime from power. The conflict had displaced millions of people from their villages, and a humanitarian disaster was looming.

**LOST THREE CHILDREN**

Ryth Dyer met Fatima in a refugee camp in northern Afghanistan in October 2001. Conditions in the camp were unbearable: The families lived in tents made from light bamboo mats and plastic, which offered little protection from the wind.

"Fatima helplessly watched her three children die last winter,” she wrote.

**LIFE EXPECTANCY: 41 YEARS**

Fatima and hundreds of others that Ruth Dyer met that autumn had spent 20 years in a country at war. There was a serious lack of clean water and decent roads, and the average life expectancy was 41 years. Based on Ruth Dyer’s report in the autumn of 2001, Mission East carried out a major food distribution. 18,000 beneficiaries received a parcel containing 10 kilos of food every month for three months.

Many lives were saved that winter, but it soon became obvious that new ways of thinking were necessary. A lot of Afghans did not like depending on what they considered charity, and Mission East started handing out food aid in exchange for work towards rebuilding roads and water systems. Seed, fertilizer and agricultural equipment was also distributed to enable the population to grow food for itself. A project involving beehives ensured that women in rural areas could earn a living and feed their families.

The troubles of Afghanistan are not over. Mission East continues to assist the country through a major aid programme that makes lives change for the better, one family at a time.
Taloqan, Afghanistan, 2004. For several years, Mission East has supported hygiene teams in northern Afghanistan. Female specialists offer health and hygiene training to other women. Three of the women are shown here with team leader Dr. Hafiz. Photo: Mission East

Afghanistan, 2001. The displaced lived in tents with walls made from simple bamboo mats that offered no protection from the wind. Photo: Ruth Dyer
Afghanistan today

She feeds her children by selling jam

Many families in Afghanistan go to bed hungry. Mission East is training women to support themselves and their families.

Sayerah, a 35-year old Afghan woman, remembers with horror the time before she started her own small business. “It was so awful and scary. My husband is a day labourer, but often there was no work, and it was difficult for us to get just one decent meal a day for our nine children,” she says. Sayerah could only dream of winter clothes and other necessities.

HIGH CHILD MORTALITY
Sayerah lives with her family in Badakhshan in Northern Afghanistan. Life in the high mountains is tough: Bitterly cold winters, scorching hot summers, recurring natural disasters and conflicts that force people away. Most women must endure more than a handful of child births, and many children do not survive their first year. The high child mortality rate is caused by water borne diseases and poor nutrition. Mission East is therefore working in the area to establish water systems, organize hygiene education and secure a livelihood for the families.

AN EFFICIENT WAY OF SELF SUFFICIENCY
To be able to support her family, Sayerah joined one of Mission East’s food groups. The women are trained to process food and to establish their own small businesses. The method has proved efficient in providing a livelihood for poor families in the mountains. When the women have received some training and start-up help, they show a lot of drive and enthusiasm for selling the food products they make. This provides them with funds to support their families.

50 GLASSES OF PRESERVE PER WEEK
“When the project started, I wondered what I could gain from it. How would I be able to start a business without any capital? But Mission East helped me with the business plan and gave us some raw materials, we could start out with,” Sayerah says. She now produces about 50 glasses of pickled vegetables, tomato sauce and cherry preserve per week. Her husband sells them at local markets and to buyers. The family makes about 100 Euro per month from this business which enables Sayerah’s nine children to eat proper meals every day. “I can also buy winter clothes for my children, schooling and a few cosmetics for myself. I thank Mission East and Denmark for helping poor people like us,” she concludes.

Afghanistan, 2009. In the food groups, the women learn to preserve food in a secure and efficient way, which will make it last through the winter.

Photo: Mission East
Clean water and disaster awareness are lifesavers in Nepal

Since 2006, Mission East has worked to develop remote mountain communities in western Nepal. The poverty-stricken population has found new opportunities and hope for the future. A permanent presence in the country also enables Mission East to respond quickly to disaster situations.

Just before noon on Saturday 25 April 2015, Nepal was struck by the worst earthquake for decades. Within a few seconds, entire villages and centuries-old buildings were turned into rubble by the powerful tremors, measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale. More than 8,700 people lost their lives, and 2.8 million became homeless.

During the first few hours after the earthquake, Mission East staff in Kathmandu, Copenhagen and Brussels had already taken action: They needed to check out the affected areas, raise money, and buy hygiene kits and tarpaulins. They had to coordinate the relief effort with the UN and local authorities. A week after the devastating earthquake, Mission East, together with partner organisations and local volunteers, distributed the first tarpaulins, hygiene kits and jerrycans to families in the severely affected Sindhupalchowk District.

Two factors enabled Mission East to respond quickly to the earthquake in Nepal: A long-standing presence in the country and a close partnership with the experienced emergency aid organisation, Medair, through the Integral Alliance. Medair’s expertise in quick emergency response and Mission East’s in-depth knowledge of Nepalese local communities made it possible for the two organisations to help 8,480 families with shelter and protection against disease, thanks to tarpaulins, water purifying tablets and latrines.

“When we approached the village, we saw traces of diarrhea on the footpaths, and there were flies everywhere.”

Graeme Grover, Mission East.

A TOUGH LIFE
Mission East has worked in Nepal through partners since 1997 with an emphasis on agricultural development and education. The organisation was aware that the population in the remote mountain areas in the western part of the country were living tough and isolated lives in extreme poverty. In December 2006, a small Mission East team traveled to the village of Dhaikot on a mountain slope in the Mugu District near Karnali to find out how Mission East could help. The journey was taken on foot and lasted several days. The small expedition encountered horrifying conditions.

“When we approached the village, we saw traces of diarrhea on the footpaths, and there were flies everywhere.” Graeme Glover of Mission East said. It turned out that the population did not have enough food for the whole year, and the children were visibly thin.
malnourished and suffered from intestinal worms.

One little girl in particular attracted Graeme’s attention. “Despite the cold temperatures, she had bare feet. Her nose was running. From her harsh manner towards others, and the harsh way she was treated herself, I could see that life was bad for her. Her parents were not alive anymore, and she lived with her grandparents who quite obviously did not want her. At their advanced age, they had sufficient problems feeding themselves,” he said.

**DIARRHEA COST LIVES**

Wherever Mission East staff went, they met others in similar situations as the little girl: Poor, malnourished children who suffered from constant diarrhea and other simple illnesses that could be treated or prevented. But the local population did not know how to do this, and almost ten per cent of the children died before the age of five.

Mission East decided to establish projects in the Humla and Mugu Districts focusing on health and hygiene. The villagers were taught how dangerous it was to leave
human feces in the fields and on footpaths instead of in latrines. They were taught to wash their hands after going to the latrine. And systems for clean drinking water were established, meaning that children and adults no longer had to drink from dirty streams that were also used by cows and goats.

Soon, child mortality dropped dramatically, and the previously unwell villagers became more energetic. “We can see a huge difference in our village since we had clean water and latrines. Before, there was a lot of diarrhea, fever and disease, but now there is much less of that,” Kahlha Bahadur Padara, a social worker in Duli village, said in 2010. Previously, the village had lost at least eight or ten children per year, but since the introduction of clean drinking water eight months earlier, not one single child had died.

AVOID THE RUBBLE!
Another big problem in the mountains of Nepal are recurring natural disasters like earthquakes, floods and mud slides. While they are rarely as devastating as the major earthquake in 2015, they do cost hundreds of lives every year. They also ruin houses and crops. In an area where people depend 100 per cent on the crops they can grow themselves, one ruined harvest may prove fatal.

With the right knowledge, the worst consequences of disasters are preventable. Houses need not be built on slopes where there is considerable risk of mud slides. And if disaster occurs, one needs to react in the most sensible way possible. If there is an earthquake, hurrying outside as most people would is not necessarily the smartest thing to do. A lot of rubble can hit you before you reach safety. Instead, one should seek shelter under a table or another stable object to avoid being crushed underneath a collapsed building.

SAFE CLASSROOMS
To spread this knowledge around the villages, Mission East has established disaster management groups. Members receive first aid training and in turn they train the rest of the village. Local school children are also trained as they are the future:

“For example, we have now realised that our blackboards were standing in our classrooms without being secured. Now we have fastened them to the walls, making our classrooms safer,” Bharat Bam, a tenth grader from Shanighat and chairman of the school’s youth club, said. He received training in disaster management in 2014.

But back to the earthquake in 2015. Western Nepal where Mission East carries out its work, was scarcely affected. The districts around the capital Kathmandu were, and many people lost their lives. After focusing on securing immediate survival, Mission East has started raising awareness of disaster preparedness in the affected areas to better equip the population to deal with future earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Everyone can contribute
The population of Nepalese villages live very separate lives. Mostly, women are confined to their homes. People from the lowest caste, known as Dalits, do not socialise with people from higher castes. And people with disabilities are considered worthless and are often ignored – even by their own families. All Mission East projects pay a lot of attention to involving everyone from the village. When Dalits, single women and persons with disabilities participate in reading groups and disaster committees, villagers quickly learn to cooperate across the divides that have existed for hundreds of years.
Now Pundor has time for her homework

"My mother has changed a lot since she joined the reading group," 13-year old Pundor Lama said. She is the daughter of Tungja Lama who has participated in one of Mission East’s reading groups for women in the area. Apart from numbers and letters, Tungja has learnt about the rights of herself and her daughter. Tungja is now more aware of her daughter’s homework and gives her more time to study. “Before, I had to help cooking, doing laundry and tending the fields. Now my mother tells me to read instead,” Pundor said and continued: “My teacher says that I have improved a lot, and he is very happy about my progress. I like going to school, I especially enjoy physics,” she said with a smile. Pundor dreams of studying to become a nurse in Kathmandu. “Then I can return to the mountains and help people,” she said.
Food for North Korea’s children

For the past five years, Mission East has been the only Danish organisation to provide aid to poor and isolated North Korea.

Mission East started working in North Korea in 2011 – at a time when one fourth of the country’s 24 million inhabitants were threatened by hunger following a failed harvest earlier that year. The authorities had lowered the ration of rice per adult to 150 grams per day – equaling 400 calories which only covers one fifth of the daily need.

The food crisis severely affected the children of the country’s orphanages and nurseries. Half of the children examined by Mission East were moderately malnourished, the other half severely malnourished:

“During my 20 years of delivering aid I have never seen anything like this,” managing director Kim Hartzner said.

The authorities are very cooperative, and it was a joy to feel the gratitude of the population.”

Kim Hartzner, Managing Director, Mission East.

COOPERATIVE AUTHORITIES

The following four years, Mission East gave regular support to three orphanages in the southern province of Hwanghae. Kim Hartzner had the opportunity to see for himself that the aid was making a difference. When he returned to one of the orphanages in 2015, he was met by children who looked well-fed and healthy and happily played with toys donated by Mission East.

“Aid does help – even in the world’s most closed country. The authorities are very cooperative, and it was a joy to feel the gratitude of the population. This inspires us to continue,” Kim Hartzner said in 2015.

That same year, Mission East delivered the last shipment of emergency food aid to North Korean children, at least for the time being. As is often the case, emergency relief was replaced by long-term projects. Mission East has started a pilot project involving 400 vulnerable families and 350 school children in Sepo County, Kangwon Province by giving them access to clean water and hygiene promotion activities. This way the organisation can contribute to a future without water shortage and health issues for North Korea’s children.
North Korea, 2011. In some areas of North Korea access to clean water is scarce. Mission East is now working on promoting access to clean water and hygiene for vulnerable families.

Photo: Mission East

North Korea, 2012. Li and Kim and their daughters had lived in a tent for two months after the floods of 2012 when they received cement from Mission East. This enabled them to complete the restoration of the walls and floors of their house.

Photo: Mission East
Construction aid to 511 families

When huge floods ravaged North Korea in the summer of 2012 in the wake of a typhoon, Mrs Kim and her family had to escape from their house in the middle of the night. Subsequently, they lived in a tent for several months, but thanks to building materials supplied by Mission East they were able to move back into a restored house in 2013. Mission East has helped 511 North Korean families rebuild their homes after the floods. The organisation also built new water systems in cooperation with the local authorities – to replace those that were destroyed during the natural disaster.
Men were gathered and executed. Women were raped. And young girls were sold as sex slaves to the fighters of the terrorist movement. Islamic State created horror everywhere, and the population fled in a hurry. A major humanitarian disaster had begun. Today, more than three million Iraqis are uprooted and displaced from their homes.

“They grabbed my daughter before my very eyes. I begged them to leave her alone, but the IS commander said no,” a woman told Mission East managing director Kim Hartzner during a distribution of humanitarian aid.

“From a distance we could see that IS separated women and men and then shot all the men,” a father said and continued: “IS captured my uncle and 70 family members. Only two survived. They were witnesses to the IS executions of all the others.”

Mission East started delivering aid in August 2014, and has since then helped more than 57,000 people with water, food, shelter, hygiene kits, cooking gear, heaters for the cold winters and air coolers for the unbearably hot summers. It is not the first time that Mission East is present in Iraq. After the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Mission East helped the Kurds who were returning to Dohuk in Northern Iraq.

In 2014, the work also began in the area around Dohuk.
where families had escaped to the Kurdish mountains in such large numbers that less than half of them found a place in the UN camps for IDPs. The rest had to settle for stairways, thin tents and half-completed concrete buildings that were completely exposed to the winter cold, snow and wind. Ancient cultures are threatened with extinction. At a church service on 23 August 2014, the patriarchs of four ancient churches met to assess the dangers against a church that has existed on the Nineveh Plains for 1,700 years, making it the oldest in the world. Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II made an urgent appeal to the West for help: “We do not want our people to be uprooted,” he told Mission East Managing Director Kim Hartzner after the service.

UN: IS-TEROR IS GENOCIDE
However, it soon turned out that the small Kurdish people, the Yezidis, were the hardest hit. The displaced Christians can rely on relatively strong networks, but the Yezidi families are often completely left to themselves.

Mission East gained access to Sinjar Mountain in March 2015. Thousands of Yezidis had sought refuge here when Islamic State occupied their main city, Sinjar, and hunted them up the mountain. Men were gathered and shot. Women were captured and

Who are the Yezidis?
The Yezidis are a Kurdish minority who live in the mountainous areas of Northern Iraq and also in Georgia, Armenia and Syria. Some have emigrated to Europe. Around the world, there are 1.5-2 million, of which 100,000 live in Europe. The Yezidi religion is monotheistic and is believed to be more than 4,000 years old. The group is also called Ezidi or Yazidi.

Dahuk, Iraq, 2014. Mission East has carried out several distributions of winter clothes to internally displaced Iraqis, making it easier for them to cope with the cold winters.

Photo: Peter Eilertsen.

Christians in Iraq
Several church communities exist in Iraq. The largest groups belong to the Assyrian and Armenian congregations. When Saddam Hussein was overthrown in 2003, and during the subsequent conflicts, many Christians fled the country. In 1987, there were 1.4 million Christians in Iraq, today there are less than 450,000. Many churches have been attacked with car bombs, and in several places, Christians have been forced to convert to Islam.
abducted. Pregnant women, elderly people and persons with disabilities were left to die on their way up the barren mountain. The survivors went without food or drink for days before an escape corridor was established. Thousands chose to go further, but 1,600 families remained on the mountain hoping to return to their homes. They still live in tents or makeshift huts on the mountains, surviving on aid from, among others, Mission East and its local partner, Humanity. “When IS attacked us, we knew that they would kill us so we had to get away in a hurry,” said Azid, a father of eight children who survives for the second year thanks to the help from Mission East and others. “IS told people that they had to convert to Islam or die. Some converted but were killed anyway,” he said.

UN reports call the brutal IS attacks against the Yezidis for “genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

Mission East helps everyone regardless of ethnicity, religion or political opinions. So it came natural to assist the displaced Sunni Arabs in the Kirkuk area in 2015, when they started to flee IS-controlled areas in ever larger numbers. These fleeing families also told countless horror stories about Islamic State and how they take hostage even those who share their creed. “We had a choice: Die or escape!” Haseem said. He has a disability and had to flee across minefields on his crutches.

**RAYS OF HOPE**

As rays of hope amidst unbearable tragedies, Mission East has founded a number of ‘psychosocial centres.’ The gruesome violence leaves the tormented population deeply traumatized. But at the six Mission East centres, children and young women are welcomed by friendly staff who introduce them to everyday life.

At the centres, children can play, draw, play music, do drama and learn reading, writing and arithmetic. Young women can safely share their experiences with trained advisors and also learn needlework, IT, music, hairdressing, Arabic and English.

“Children have a unique opportunity to attend the centre. There is nothing like this in Sinjar,” the children’s mothers said in an independent evaluation report about the work of Mission East on Sinjar Mountain. “I had started to read but had forgotten everything, because I had not been to school for a year,” a little boy said and added: “When you opened the centre, I got my knowledge back.”

**RECONSTRUCTION IS THE NEXT STEP**

Mission East will also assist the displaced once they return to their villages and houses after the war. If all goes well, the returnees will get help to repair and rebuild their houses and villages and receive support to resume farming, beekeeping and trade. “The IS rampage has destroyed the infrastructure, including the water and electricity supply. They ruined the houses and stole all the inventory from the schools,” a mayor from a liberated town near Sinjar told Kim Hartzner.

Sinjar City itself has been completely devastated. The same scenario undoubtedly awaits once Mosul has been liberated. That is why emergency aid and development aid must go hand in hand. Emergency relief for the displaced is only the beginning of an effort to create order from chaos, rebuild local communities and give the population renewed hope for the future.

**Mission East returns to Iraq**

Mission East has previously worked in Iraq. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraqi Kurds began to return to Dohuk in Northern Iraq. Mission East helped them rebuild houses, re-establish infrastructure and supported their efforts to feed themselves. Mission East worked in the country until January 2006 and then reopened an office as a response to the humanitarian crisis that began in 2014.
There is obvious chemistry. When Abdullah Said teaches Arabic writing to boys and girls of kindergarten age, everyone is smiling and laughing. Learning should be fun, and it is when he is taking care of three- to five-year-old kids at the Mission East Child Friendly Space at Nazrawa Camp.

For the last couple of years, the life of the 21-year-old IT student has been anything but fun. Twice he has had to flee from Islamic State, but now he is part of a team of six ‘educators’ who are working part-time at the child centre. They teach and play with the children, and they are themselves displaced from their homes due to the conflict in Iraq.

**THE STREETS EMPTIED**

In 2014, Abdullah Said was a student in the major city of Mosul when it was occupied by Islamic State. “They came suddenly,” he recalled. “We were having lessons when a curfew was announced. We heard the sound of mortar fire, and the streets emptied. After a couple of days, many students decided to leave town. We heard that Daesh (Arabic acronym for IS) were getting nearer.”

Luckily for Abdullah, most IS fighters were on the right bank of the Tigris River while he was on the left bank. So, he managed to get away – initially to Erbil, the main city of the Kurdistan region, and later to his home village in Dibis district near the city of Kirkuk. It took him three days to get home. Later, he had to flee again – this time with his family – when IS came perilously close to Dibis: “We were in danger and wanted to get to a safer place,” he explained.

Abdullah now lives at Nazrawa Camp with his family. His father is dead, and as the oldest of seven siblings he carries a particular responsibility. This also means that he is used to taking care of smaller children, and this is evident when he handles the children at the centre with a combination of friendly humour and authority.

“We heard the sound of mortar fire, and the streets emptied.”

**STUDYING IN KIRKUK**

Being responsible for his family may also be part of the explanation why Abdullah really wants to achieve something in his life. He was able to transfer his IT studies from Mosul to an educational establishment in Kirkuk where he studies every weekend. In less than a year, he will finish his education.

This also means that he will not return to Mosul, even if it should be liberated. He is eagerly following developments in the city where he started his studies, but for him, the future lies somewhere else – preferably with a base in his home village.

The present is shared between his studies in Kirkuk and his life in Nazrawa Camp. An important part of that life is his work as an educator at the child centre: “I like working with kids,” Abdullah Said said with a smile – and you believe him.
Why we support Mission East

Mission East can support hundreds of thousands of people all over the world because of contributions from a broad range of companies, clubs, churches, associations and individuals. But why support Mission East? We have asked some of our regular donors.

“Mission East puts its heart into its work and its everyday decisions. When I receive the Mission East magazine, I put everything else aside to see which projects they are working on. It makes you happy when you see that the population in a country like Afghanistan is participating in constructing roads, setting up water pipelines and digging wells. In this manner, they can relate to the support they receive from outside, as they themselves have worked hard to complete the project. These more long-term projects are so important to create cohesion in the population.”

By Svend Løbner
Journalist
“We support Mission East, because your work is efficient. We know Kim Hartzner and find him a very trustworthy person. And we appreciate the link between Christianity and social work.”
Mie and Simon Grønne-Gram

“It is a pleasure to support Mission East. You are doing a fantastic job. I tell everyone that the money is spent in the right way. The support reaches the small, local communities, so it makes a difference, and local people get a new start.”
Tove Østerby, Struer

“We support you, because you do good work, it’s as simple as that. At the school where I work, we have a professional pancake bakery. Twice a year, we make pancakes in support of Mission East. The youngsters love it! And we usually collect 25,000-30,000 kroner every time.”
Finn Højland, Holbæk

“We think that you are doing a fantastic job. The support gets there, and you help people in a very professional manner. Your hearts beat for the weak, and you help them right where they are.”
Mirjam and Bent Rasmussen, Randers

You act very quickly, and Kim Hartzner is often the first man on the spot and the last one to leave the most difficult areas. He is very visible, e.g. on TV2 News, and he demonstrates credibility and involvement. It means a lot that not a lot is spent on administration. I have visited the office in Hellerup, and I was quite surprised that they were working in such humble surroundings in rented office space. This fact also told me that outward appearance is not so important, but that the first priority is the human being in need.
Karin and Kristian Hansen, Vorbasse

We know from experience that when we support people through Mission East, the money does not end up in the wrong pockets, but reaches the people it is intended to help.”
Agnete Ethridge, chairperson, Sæby Church café
What will aid work be like in 25 years? Mission East has interviewed two Danish futurologists, each with their own point-of-view. One of them believes in self-help via the internet and new technology, the other predicts that there will be more speed and flexibility in aid. Both, however, agree that aid organisations will be needed in the future.

Futurologists:

Fast, hitech aid can prevent future conflicts
Bhotechaur, Nepal, 2015. When distributing aid, it is important to know the local culture. After the earthquake in Nepal in April 2015, Bandana Shrestha of Mission East ensured that poor widows and marginalised Dalits also had access to relief. Photo: Line Højland

It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. Nevertheless, two futurologists are attempting to do so. In this article, they talk about big global trends, requiring a quick and flexible response combining expertise, cultural understanding and new technology. One thing is clear: Aid organisations like Mission East will still be needed in 25 years.

**MORE PEACE OR MORE WARS**
The two futurologists have different views of the future. Klaus Mogensen from the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies believes that there will be fewer wars, and fewer poor and sick people in the future. He refers to statistics that show that the world today is more peaceful than it has been for the past 100 years. Marianne Levinsen of the Centre for Future Studies predicts more wars. She notes that the distribution of power in the world is unstable and that no major powers want to become involved in regional conflicts which will therefore tend to escalate.

"Generally speaking, fewer people are starving than ever before. Many diseases that previously led to disasters have been eradicated."

*Klaus Mogensen, Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies.*

But both researchers agree that aid organisations like Mission East will still be relevant, especially if there is a need to respond quickly, adapt to changing conditions, understand the local culture, help people to help themselves and prove that aid works. People have seen enough images of hungry children; they want positive stories about real change.

**FEWER WAR DEATHS**
So how will the world look in 25 years? “Generally, there is more peace in the world now than ever before,” Klaus Mogensen said. He noted that “statistics show that the number of deaths around the world has fallen over the past 100 years. At present, there is war in and around Syria, and many people are dying, but it is still nothing compared to what we have seen earlier. I am thinking of the Second World War, the Korean War and the recurring conflicts in Africa and other places.”

He added: “Generally speaking, fewer people are starving than ever before. Many diseases that previously led to disasters have been eradicated. Even though there are many poor people in the world, there are less than there were 50-60 years ago, even just 20 years ago. New technology helps many poor people escape poverty. Many of the causes of war – famine, disease, extreme poverty – are little by little being eradicated.”

**MORE PEOPLE IN NEED**
Marianne Levinsen is less optimistic: “I see a world of many more conflicts and many more interests, because no major powers are really calling the shots anymore. Instead, many different actors want to have power, and many nations and subgroups within nations demand that their rights and interests are respected.”

She does, however, admit that
“more and more people in developing countries are escaping poverty” and that “the global middle class is growing at an explosive rate.” “But right now, we are living in times of change, and we do not really know how the world’s leaders will share power between them,” she said and added that “over the next 10-15 years I expect more refugees and more people in need because of conflicts.”

Marianne Levinsen, Centre for Future Studies

Over the next 10-15 years I expect more refugees and more people in need because of conflicts.

A NEED FOR MORE EMERGENCY AID
This means that there will still be a need for major aid operations, Marianne Levinsen believes. “When states withdraw or stay out of conflicts, the people who are persecuted or displaced are extremely dependent on the interest of others in their situation. Otherwise, they will be left to themselves,” she said and specifically mentioned Afghanistan where Mission East works.

“There is no doubt that a country like Afghanistan will need aid for many years to come. It has been at war for years, and this does not look like stopping any time soon. The civilian population will still be subjected to failed policies, corruption and poverty. He imagines that aid can be brought directly to families in distress by drones. Today, drones are already used to find and detonate landmines, so why not use them to deliver aid? This requires an alliance with big technology firms so that the enemy is not able to ruin the relief effort by attacking it with its own drones.

“It will be hitech against hitech in the future,” he predicts.

INTERNET ACCESS EMPOWERS PEOPLE
The risk of unrest and war is lower, if the difference between rich and poor is smaller. In this sense, emergency relief and long-term development aid are inextricably connected. In Klaus Mogensen’s opinion, it is important that aid organisations involve and empower people in developing countries:

“You should help people help themselves. Internet access would be of enormous benefit to a lot of people. If tablets with solar chargers are placed in poor areas, the children teach themselves how to use them. In fact, they become so proficient that they can hack them after six months!

When poor people get access to resources on the internet and to markets where they can sell electronic services or arts and crafts or other stuff, a wealth of opportunity opens up to them,” he says and mentions techno-

logical aid to small farms as a means for developing countries to feed their own citizens.

The problem is not lack of food; the problem is that we don’t distribute it properly.

Klaus Mogensen, Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies

WE CAN FEED TWICE AS MANY
Klaus Mogensen stresses that there must still be food and medicine for everyone. “But the problem is not lack of food; the problem is that we don’t distribute it properly. War and conflicts prevent emergency aid from reaching its destination. If we can distribute food better, we can feed almost twice as many people as there are in the world today.”

While Klaus Mogensen is focusing on technology, Marianne Levin-
sen considers aid in a broader perspective. “Flexibility and a willingness to change are decisive factors. We cannot predict exactly what will happen and where it will happen. A relief organisation must have a cultural understanding and approach. You need to spend time familiarising yourself with conditions in the place you are operating in. You need to focus on culture, history and traditions in the specific country to be able to make a positive contribution.”

POLITICIANS SHOULD REMOVE DEBT AND TRADE BARRIERS
Finally, Klaus Mogensen has some advice for western politicians: “Instead of giving aid, you could reduce developing countries’ debt to the western world. For each euro developing countries receive...
in aid, they must repay five Euros or more as debt repayment. This is just untenable!"

"Flexibility and a willingness to change are decisive factors. We cannot predict exactly what will happen and where it will happen."

Marianne Levinsen, Centre for Future Studies

Trade barriers should also be removed, he believes: "It is hard for Africa to export to Europe because we have barriers for food imports to protect our agricultural sector. If we removed those trade barriers, it would do a lot more good than direct aid. So remove debt and barriers instead of giving them money that they have to pay back as debt repayments."

The ball is in play. It is difficult to predict the future, but with their respective views on current megatrends, the futurologists have given us a few pointers.

Klaus Mogensen from the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies conducts research on the possibilities of technology, culture, future ways of life, consumer trends and media.

Marianne Levinsen from the Centre for Future Studies specialises in globalisation, developments in society, the labour market, consumer patterns, and young people.