Mission East

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Eternity Orphan Home in Nepal:
Solving their hunger is no longer the children’s responsibility

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Nepal

– “Why did they take my honest work away from me?”
45-year-old Jeet supported his family as a blacksmith until the conflict closed his small business some years ago. Today, he is working again thanks to a small loan from Mission East and our local partner organisation.

Afghanistan

– Cattle waste helps in the kitchen
Noor Mohammad could not help chuckling to himself when he heard that Mission East wanted to produce energy from cow dung.

Afghanistan

– Understanding the necessity of latrines
In the past, the village of Zarshak experienced high incidence of disease, never understanding the cause.

Mission East

is a Danish international aid organisation. We exist to deliver relief and development assistance to vulnerable communities with a primary focus on Eastern Europe and Asia. Based on Christian values, Mission East aims to support the most vulnerable, making no racial, political or religious distinction between those in need. Mission East currently operates in Afghanistan, Armenia, Nepal and Tajikistan, and we cooperate with local partners in Bulgaria, Romania and Nepal. The assistance offered by Mission East is supported by a range of private and public donors such as the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EU and the United Nations. Mission East has been verified compliant with the People in Aid Code of Good Practice in the management and support of aid personnel.
Reaching out where no one else is

By the time you read this, I will have once again visited Armenia to ensure that in 2009 Mission East has the opportunity to bring even more good to those in need there.

With your help we have accomplished much in the East in 2008. And we have no plans to decrease our assistance to this part of the world, given the current talk of global financial crisis. On the contrary – the need in the East is growing greater and we want to respond.

In those countries where we currently invest our greatest efforts – Afghanistan, Armenia, Nepal and Tajikistan – we are the only Danish aid organization in the areas we work in. Most Danes have never heard of Taloqan in Afghanistan, Armavir in Armenia, Humla in Nepal, or Kulyab in Tajikistan. But in these places, where hundreds of thousands of people are fighting a battle to create and sustain a dignified existence, they are familiar with the help from Mission East and supporters from Europe.

Our desire to carry on in this work grows each time we receive a simple “thank you” for the change we have played a part in creating. And so we continue to strive to save lives in the remote mountains of Nepal. We will remain a major participant in the Danish reconstruction work in Afghanistan. We will continue to work towards preventing the disastrous consequences of floods and earthquakes in oft-forgotten Tajikistan. And the work in Armenia this year may prove to bring significant new opportunities for us – hopefully we will be able to share more about that in an upcoming magazine.

I wish that during my travels in the East I could collect all the grateful smiles of the beneficiaries I meet in a large box and give one to each of you when I return. I wish that each of you could benefit from the warmth that seeing these smiling individuals brings. I am comforted to think that you already know how big a difference your help makes.

Everyday I am pleased to witness that bringing help to those in need is also a matter of the heart. Thank you for never allowing the love in your hearts to grow cold. The change we want to see in the world is only possible if we work together.

Dr. Kim Hartzner,
Managing Director of Mission East
Raj and Radka are newcomers at the orphanage in southwest Nepal.

“You have very pale eyebrows,” says the seven-year-old girl to me, and runs her fingers across her own, which are dark. “And pale skin and light eyes... and light hair,” she continues.

Her eight-year-old brother, who is sitting between us, interrupts:

“I've seen people like you before,” he says calmly and explains that it was before their father died as a result of alcoholism, and their mother died in a traffic accident. “It was in a large garden near our village. They were sitting in the grass having a picnic, and I asked them if they had some food for me. I was very hungry. We had no food at home, and my stomach was really hurting. They gave me 50 rupees (about a half Euro), and then I washed their dishes.”

Raj tells the story as if begging for food is not an unusual memory in his short life. Raj and Radka are the newest children at the orphanage.

“Tell her that our house is very good.”

Seven-year-old Radka loves to skip and giggle with her best friend Alina. Before she arrived at the orphanage, she used all of her energy just trying to survive without her parents. Now, play and school are her first priorities.
orphanage that Mission East cooperates with in Nepal’s Terai region. During the summer, they arrived from another orphanage which could not afford to take care of them when the children lost both their parents a few years back.

“They were very dirty and wore ragged clothes,” says Beena who is the head of the home and is like a mother for all 38 children. She sweeps her hand caringly over Radka’s hair.

“Since coming here, they have both put on weight,” she says happily.

**Now I am SO happy!**
While Beena talks and I try to imagine how the two skinny children could have been any thinner, Radka and Raj pat me gently on the arm – to test whether or not the lack of colour makes the skin feel different.

“They also took a picture when my father died,” Raj says all of a sudden. He doesn’t know exactly who “they” are or why. He has been thinking about the photo I took of him earlier in the day.

“Did you cry when your father died?” I ask. Raj nods.

“Do you still cry?” He shakes their heads: “Now I am happy. SO happy!” He says and stretches his arms out to both sides.

Radka leans in and whispers shyly in her brother’s ear: “Tell her that our house is very good.”

Radka doesn’t like feeling excluded and also finds a few small scratches she wants to show me – although she would rather skip and talk with her best friend Alina than climb one of the many trees surrounding the orphanage.

For the first time in their lives, the siblings are living their lives as the children they are. It is no longer their responsibility to ensure that the hunger that causes a stomach to ache goes away.

A villain with clean drinking water

“When I grow up I want to become a villain,” says Raj while Beena, the interpreter and I look at him with surprise in our eyes.

“A villain …?” we ask him.

“We had no food at home, and my stomach was really hurting.”

Before the children arrived at the orphanage many survived by doing dishes at small hotels in town. There, they worked from early morning to late evening. Their only pay was a little food and maybe some clothing.
He nods and explains that he would like to be an actor and play the role of the guy that the hero chases. Like in the movies they watch when there is a national holiday and they don’t have school. Raj is far from giving the impression of a villain. This is the same boy who has just told us that when he grows up, he hopes to bring clean
water to the village he comes from. The room slowly gets darker and darker until I have trouble seeing the words on my note pad. But no one turns on the light. There is none. About 35 hours a week the power is off throughout the city. Electricity is a scarcity. This applies to all of Nepal.

Instead, we walk out into the courtyard where the rest of the children are sitting together around a candle and welcoming the night with the finest songs. Today’s final hours are spent giving thanks for one more day where hunger and worries no longer fill their lives.

Love and care replace the struggle for survival

Mission East has cooperated with Eternity Orphan Home since the orphanage was established in 2001. Today it is home to 38 boys and girls from the age of 6 to 17. Without Mission East and the Eternity Orphan Home these children would be struggling to survive on the street where orphans risk being used as cheap labour or as a commodity across the borders. Instead of this sad destiny, the children now attend school, get their daily meals, have a safe place to sleep, and receive love and care from each other and the adults running the orphanage.

Recently, three new latrines have been installed at the home instead of the old shed that was in use before.
His face is covered with soot and his clothes are very dirty. This is how 45-year-old Jeet likes it.

On a street corner in southern Nepal, he sits with his son at the small forge, which is his business, his family’s happiness and means of survival. Jeet loves his work as a blacksmith. But about four years ago, the Maoists insisted he close the smithy. They feared that he would create weapons that could be used against them. “I was doing an honest job. Why would they take that away from me?” he questions, and says that the last few years have been painful. He has worked very hard to keep his family alive.

At least the insurgents now let him be. At the orphanage which Mission East cooperates with, some of the children can tell stories of

“Why did they take my honest work away from me?”
how in the past their fathers were kidnapped and forced to make weapons.

About a year ago when the Maoists signed the peace treaty with the King and the government, Jeet got a small loan from Mission East through our local partner organization, so he could start his smithy again. Today, he can again afford to send his children to school, and he even has enough to lend out a little money to others who need help as much as he himself did a year ago. In addition, he teaches his trade to a handful of others, including his own son.

“I love to pass on my trade to other poor people like me, so they too have a chance of survival,” Jeet says.
Healthcare services have received very few resources in Armenia in the past few years. The greatest losers are children with disabilities such as eight-year-old Astghik.

Astghik suffers from a sleep disorder. Her mother told the doctors that the girl often wakes up at night, crying and afraid. She has difficulty concentrating and is very sensitive. She has no desire to eat. The tiniest things make her weep, and her mood is very unstable. Astghik has trouble with her memory, and faces problems staying focused in school. Much of the time she just wants to sit by herself and stare into space.

“Astghik showed several symptoms of epilepsy,” says Managing Director Dr. Kim Hartzner who was present when Astghik was examined at Arabkir children’s hospital with which Mission East works. Together the team decided to carry out electroencephalography –

“It is children like Astghik that keep us going”

“But just one little girl like Astghik can replace the hopeless feeling with a more positive one.”
a technique that measures the electrical activity in the brain. Electroencephalography will show large fluctuations if the doctors are right about Astghik’s preliminary diagnosis. After that she will be referred for a follow-up neurological examination.

**Diagnosis is a big step**

“We are dealing with a country that is unable to help itself and the most vulnerable,” says Kim Hartzner who has lived in Armenia for two years with his family and has therefore experienced many of the healthcare problems first-hand.

“The budget for health is one of the lowest in the country, and some 50 percent of the population are living below the poverty line and cannot afford to pay for medical care on their own. This means that many die due to simple illnesses or are forced to live their entire lives with a disability that can easily be cured or prevented.”

“It makes me so uncomfortable just thinking about it. But just one little girl like Astghik can replace the hopeless feeling with a more positive one. Getting Astghik a diagnosis is a major step forward. It makes it possible for her to get the right medicine and the anxiety and sleepless nights will hopefully no longer be in control of her and her family’s lives. It is children like her that keep us going.”

Children with epilepsy may have difficulties in school because frequent seizures of unconsciousness steal their concentration, even though they only last a few seconds. Astghik is having trouble remembering things and is often inattentive in class.

Eight-year-old Astghik is examined by Dr. Gayane Zakarian, who is a specialist in children’s development.
Noor Mohammad could not help chuckling to himself when he heard that Mission East wanted to produce energy from cow dung. “What a crazy idea, I thought,” says the 50-year-old farmer Noor Mohammad, who did not have high expectations for Mission East’s pilot project. How could his cows’ droppings ever be something of value? Nevertheless, he agreed to be one of the two households in the village that would receive a small biogas plant as a trial for potential replication in future Mission East projects. The biogas plant would turn his farm’s cattle dung into gas that could be used for cooking in the kitchen. “I am poor and have nothing to lose. If it did not work, I could always remove it again.”

This initiative is the first of its kind in the province of Takhar. From the start, the Mission East team was excited to see if they could find the materials they needed locally. In order to operate the plant, they needed a mixing device, a stove, and a few other small components. In the provincial capital they found a shop that could provide the necessary parts.
1. The animal excreta and other organic material are placed in the small tank. From there it is transferred to the bigger tank.

2. The biological reaction happens in the big tank. The methane gas is produced here, in proportion to the surrounding temperature. The warmer the weather, the more gas is produced. The tank in the picture is still under construction. The finished tank has a closed chamber.

3. A pipe transports the gas into the kitchen where a valve by the stove makes it possible to regulate the flow of gas.

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**Could not believe their eyes**

When the plant was finished, they waited two months for the dung to be transformed into energy. At first the gas would not burn. The initial gas was only carbon dioxide, water vapours and other incombustible gases. But little by little methane was produced, which is what causes gas to burn. It was an exciting moment for both the Mission East team and the selected families. Noor Mohammad and the rest of the village could hardly

Now the Mohammad family can boil water and cook their food without having to breathe in the smoke from the firewood every day.

**Biogas helps the environment**

2009 is the “Year of Climate Change” around the world. Themes such as global warming and CO2 emissions will be included on the agenda when the UN’s major climate change conference takes place in Copenhagen in December. In South Asia’s poorest countries biogas projects are very popular, and surveys show that a biogas plant can save up to several tonnes of CO2 in the atmosphere each year.
Thank you in sign language

Mission East hired one of the village’s local masons, Abdul Fatah, to build the two plants. Abdul Fatah is deaf and mute, but there was no doubt that he was glad to learn the new technology that the plants required. With his own sign language, he has expressed that he will build one for himself.

believe their eyes when flames began to rise from the stove. The experiment was a success.

“The new plant has helped us in many ways,” says Noor Mohammad today. “Among other things it saves us money on firewood. Later on we built a latrine, which we have also connected to the biogas plant.

So now when we go use the toilet we are also producing energy.”

“We cooked with tears in our eyes”

“We used to use things like firewood, when we cooked food. But there was always a lot of smoke in the kitchen, and it affected our eyes. We cooked with tears in our eyes,” says Noor Mohammad’s wife Raza Gul, who is more than enthusiastic about the alternative form of energy. “The kitchen also became very dirty because of the firewood,” she adds.

“I am very pleased that we can now use the gas that comes from cow dung. It does not take as long to prepare food as before, and we no longer have tears in our eyes.”

“It is now enjoyable to cook for the family,” says Raza Gul.
Understanding the necessity of latrines

In the past, the village of Zarshak experienced high incidence of disease, never understanding the cause.

By Sunil Bhandari, Water and Sanitation Engineer, Mission East, Afghanistan

Unaware of how to prevent some of the most common illnesses that kept them away from work in the field, members of the community of Zarshak, suffered regularly from preventable illnesses. In 2007 and 2008, Mission East, with support from ECHO, had the opportunity to help the 52 families in the Khash District of the Badakshan province.

The community was excited at the prospect of the village finally being supplied with clean water; however, they had a difficult time understanding why they needed latrines. They were accustomed to going to the open field for defecation, not understanding the associated hygiene risk.

Slowly changing attitudes

The Mission East team decided to initially build a demonstration latrine in the village without pushing strongly for household latrines. During the construction of the demonstration latrine, community contribution was very limited, and people watched curiously rather than participating. Still, the project team carried on with construction in hopes of using this demonstration latrine as a tool for changing community attitudes. This approach proved effective when individuals in the community saw the merits of a hygienic latrine and began to use it.

At present, the village members themselves have built twenty household latrines with assistance from Mission East. This project has seen impressive community participation, including regular cleaning of the facilities. All members of the family are using the latrines and are finding an improvement in their living conditions. Other families who did not receive direct assistance from the project also started building latrines, and three more have been built independently. The community is now planning to provide all remaining households with latrines in the near future, since they now realize the benefit.

Mission East’s water and sanitation project in Zarshak village was successfully completed by the end of 2008. The water supply component consists of two source intakes, a reservoir tank and six tap stands, and the sanitation component succeeded in the construction of a public “demonstration” latrine and twenty household latrines. An important complement to the project was the distribution of hygiene kits, together with delivery of health, hygiene, and sanitation awareness sessions.

Adina Mohamad is a member of the local council and one of the village’s 310 inhabitants who are feeling blessed with good health because of the new hygiene practices they have learned. Besides using the newly built latrines and cleaning their homes regularly, individuals have also learned to cover their water and food and wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.
Last year Mission East extended urgent relief and long-term development aid to more than 350,000 people in Eastern Europe and Asia. Our work is only possible due to the donations that we receive from private individuals and other donors. You can help us to help the needy by making a donation using the donation slip or via Mission East's website www.miseast.org. You can donate an amount of your choice online, using Visa or MasterCard.

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Thank you!