

# Mission EAST

NUMBER 2 / AUTUMN 2008

- 11 Nepal  
– A life saving solution
- 14 Afghanistan  
– First shopkeeper in the village



FOCUS

## Experiencing Armenia



Mission East  
- values in action

# Contents

4-10



## Armenia

– “We are cleaning up a room that has not been cleaned for 17 years”

“I’m more enthusiastic than ever about this work,” says Mission East’s Managing Director Kim Hartzner who has lived in Armenia for the past two years. Now he and his family return home to Denmark. Their memories are full of people and stories from a country where disability still carries a huge stigma.

14



## Afghanistan

– Mohammad – the first ever shopkeeper in his village

In a small wooden shed no bigger than a playhouse sits 40-year-old Mohammad Siddique. When he speaks his words are humble. But the pride in his eyes is unmistakable. He is the first ever shopkeeper in his village.

11-13

## Nepal

– The solution was waiting just around the corner

As long as the villagers of Tumcha can remember they have been drinking the dirty water from the nearest small creek. Only one kilometre away runs the purest spring – but what use is that when you risk your life getting there?



**Front page photo:**  
“To give a child value and make it believe in itself for the first time in life...! That is a strong feeling,” says Kim Hartzner who since the summer of 2006 has lived close to the people Mission East help in Armenia. After two years he and his family are coming home to Denmark.

### Mission East

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 co-operate 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.

### Head Office in Hellerup, Denmark

Managing Director Dr. Kim Hartzner  
Communications Director Jesper Holst  
Journalist Tania Rusbjerg  
Bookkeeper Knud Erik Andersen  
Office Assistant Carina Joy Gates

### Mission East Office in Brussels, Belgium

Operations Director Floris Faber  
Programme Director Ruth Faber  
Finance Director Peter Drummond Smith  
Finance Manager Marianne Le Floch  
Project Support Richard Peppiette  
Desk Officers Saskia de Smet,  
Alex Ramos Peña, Jacques Dailloux  
and John Karren

### Board

Chairman Dr. Thomas Ploug  
Robert Kelley  
Dr. Peter Bernhard  
Birgitte Hagelund  
Bethan Ilett

### Editorial staff

Kim Hartzner  
Tania Rusbjerg

### Production

Rosendahls Bogtrykkeri, Esbjerg

ISSN 0908-2042



# Is it really that easy?

**I have been asked this question many times by friends and acquaintances back home in Denmark during the last two years while I have lived and led Mission East's work in Armenia.**

Is it really as easy as it sometimes seems, when we read in this magazine about one success story after the other. Sadly, the answer is no. It is anything but easy. It is certainly no coincidence when we use the expression to “fight” for the rights of the disabled in Armenia. For it is a struggle to get the people with the power to do something about the problems; to listen - and not least to act.

Many times I have had the urge to just sit in a corner and weep over the indifference I have met here. I have seen mayors who have walked away from our joint meetings. And this despite the fact that hundreds of children and their families live and suffer every-day from poverty and disease in their own area.

So why not just work around the authorities? Because our aid has to be long term. And so there is a need for radical reform of the whole system and for the authorities at all levels to take the lead!

On June 19th an important meeting took place at the town hall in the Armenian region of Armavir, where Mission East is working. We have worked very hard in the past two years to come to the conclusion we reached here. All 80 participants; people from disability organisations, authorities and other relevant parties, supported a plan of action that will ensure that the disabled and their needs will no longer be ignored in this part of the country

The local authorities have now publicly announced their responsibility to follow up on the plan, and they will be held accountable for this by Mission East and our partners – with support from the Armenian community.

For although we rejoice about all the children who have been found and now will get the help they need, we are not satisfied until we see that the aid also has the prospect of helping children who are born in 2010, 2015 and 2020.

With all of my heart I thank you for all your support. It has been of great encouragement in the difficult times over the last two years. Thank you for your continued support in our common fight to make a difference long term.



Kind regards,

Dr. Kim Hartzner,  
Managing Director  
of Mission East



# “We are cleaning up a room, that has not been cleaned for 17 years”

By Tania Maria Lüders  
Rusbjerg, Mission East  
Journalist

Photos: Zaven Khachikian

**“I’m more enthusiastic than ever about this work,” says Mission East’s Managing Director, Kim Hartzner, who has lived in Armenia for the past two years. Now, he and his family are returning home to Denmark. Their memories are full of people and stories from a country where disability still carries a huge stigma.**

They planned to be away for just one year. But as the return date approached, Kim felt that he still had much more to do in Armenia.

“It is really difficult to leave children like Hovannes, Sveta, Arman, Marine and all the others. I have followed them closely for a long time. I have seen how they have grown despite their disabilities. And I am as proud of them and of what they have achieved, as I am when my own sons come home with good grades or beautiful

drawings they have created in kindergarten.”

But not all the memories are as positive. When working with disabled and vulnerable children in Armenia, you must be ready to see and experience things that will stick in your mind for a long time.

## **Disabled daughter tied to bed**

In July, Kim visited Gegharkunik, which is one of the two new regions where Mission East is starting to expand its work. Here he met a family who tied their 16 month



16-months-old Shushannik has stopped walking. Her mother ties her to the bed at night, because she believes it helps her to sleep better. As a result the little girl is now unable to use her legs, because they are not used to bearing the weight of her body. Mission East is now making sure that Shushannik gets the right treatment and that her mother learns more about what is good and bad for her daughter.



In Denmark, the now 14-year-old Teresa would have undergone an operation a long time ago and would now be able to play more actively with her two younger brothers. But Teresa was born in Armenia and instead she sits clamped to a wheelchair, unable to move. “It is probably too late to help her when nothing has been done in the last 12 years,” says Gayane Zakaryan who is a rehabilitation expert at the health centre Mission East works with.

old daughter, Shushannik, to the bed every night and blindfolded her.

“They really believe this helps the little girl to sleep. Not because there is anything wrong with her but just because it is common practice in this area. Instead it delays her motor skills, indeed the whole of her development. Not to mention the psychological trauma the poor child grows up with. It is completely mad. But they don’t know better and no one has ever bothered telling them before,” says Kim, adding,

“Therefore, we have made it our job.”

### 14 years old and can only count to ten

In the same region Kim met 14-year-old Teresa Matevosyan. When she was two years old she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and as severely mentally handicapped. At one point her hip was dislocated but her mother was told that there was nothing to

“These children have experienced defeat after defeat. It feels really good to be able to give them some small victories instead.”



## Changing an entire country’s attitude towards the disabled

“The contrast is so fierce in this part of the world, because the gap between rich and poor, between those who have absolutely nothing and those who have a lot, is so grotesque that you almost can’t bear to live with it,” says Managing Director Kim Hartzner about his past two years in Armenia.

But a lot of people in this country are forced to endure such inequalities every day. They have no choice. These are the people Mission East is trying to help.

Since 1993, we have helped the disabled and socially vulnerable children in the former Soviet Republic. Focusing especially on education and health, Mission East works with clinics and schools and local and national authorities to change attitudes towards the disabled long term.

The work has recently been extended to two new regions in the country, Tavush and Gegharkunik. This means that even more disabled and vulnerable children who were hidden away will be found and will be getting the treatment they need.



Kim Hartzner and Anna Avetisyan from Mission East in Armenia with Vartuhi and her daughter Marine.



do about it. She even says that doctors told her not to take Teresa to rehabilitation. It would only be a 'waste of time' anyway.

Teresa has sat in her wheelchair ever since, unable to move, with recurring pain in her right leg and with

increasing spasms in her muscles.

"In any Western country she would have been offered surgery for her hip, and Teresa would have received offers of rehabilitation," says Kim, who is a trained doctor.

"Instead, she is now chained

to her chair. Her mother puts tissues between her legs because she can't afford diapers. She is 14 years old and does not know the names of different colours, and can only count to ten. At night she often wakes up with nightmares, so she almost never sleeps. It really crushes my heart to see how ignorance has allowed the destruction of Teresa's life. Who knows what she could have achieved if she had only received help in time?

### No wheelchairs in the capital

"Every single case goes straight to the heart. To be able to give a child value and get it to believe in itself for the first time in life...! That is a strong feeling. But the most important thing for me is that we make a difference at national level. I don't want to see a case like

The Hartzner family has developed an especially close relationship with one of the families Mission East is helping. In the picture, Vartuhi in front of her poor home, Dorte and Kim Hartzner and three of their boys, Alexander, Peter Vincent and Philip.



Teresa's again in a few years from now. We can't allow these children's problems to be hidden until they are 14 years old, when treatment is too late."

Therefore, Kim spent much of his time in meetings with mayors, governors and ministers to get the Armenian authorities to engage in the fight for the rights of the disabled.

"Over the last two years, I have felt as if we are in the process of cleaning up a room where there has been no cleaning for the past

17 years. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there is very little that works as it should, especially in the school and the healthcare system where the disabled have been left so terribly in the lurch," says Kim.

"People with physical or mental handicaps are still regarded as lesser human beings. In the capital, you don't see any wheelchairs. Disability is a huge taboo in this country – a problem that very few talk about or do anything about. A problem which most people

believe is better off in a dark corner at home. In Armenia, disabled children are the dirty laundry which no one wants others to see."

### Apres, Hovannes!

If Kim does not lose courage in the middle of all the poverty and injustice, it is because of the hundreds of children who make progress as individuals. "When I see a small Downs

"I don't want to see a case like Teresa's again in a few years from now. We can't allow these children's problems to be hidden until they are 14 years old, when treatment is too late."

## Mary Israelyan

Six-year-old Mary Israelyan can't walk and can only say a few words. As a newborn she developed jaundice, which can be easily treated with blue light. But Mary's mother was unaware of the disease, and the doctors did not react. Mary's condition today is most likely a consequence of the fact that she did not get the care she needed when she was an infant.

"It is an absolutely grotesque situation," says Managing Director Kim Hartzner after his meeting with Mary.

"It is very difficult for me to relate to. In Denmark and other Western countries we don't go around thinking that we must treat ourselves. Of course, we should eat healthy food, exercise and so on.

But otherwise, we expect that a doctor discovers if there is something severely wrong with us or our children, then he will give us the right treatment for it. Down here, a lot of doctors are not qualified enough to do that."

"My own son, Peter Vincent, also developed jaundice when he was an infant – which is a very common thing. He was treated with blue light. It was a perfectly natural reaction from the doctor who was looking after him. In our Western countries, jaundice is as unimportant as a simple infection.

And Peter Vincent hasn't suffered any problems because of it since. But this little girl sat rigid in her wheelchair unable to move. Simply because she has not been given this simple treatment. That could have been my son."



"If Mary had received help earlier, she might have been able to walk by now," says neurologist Artsrun Habokyan, who Mission East works with. In the picture Managing Director Kim Hartzner meets Mary: "When I try to walk with her, she makes active movements to put her feet forward - this is much better than with many other children with cerebral palsy."





Managing Director Kim Hartzner visits the 12-year-old Isahac Tovmasyan, who has cerebral palsy and is mentally handicapped. Isahac suffers from severe epileptic seizures up to five times a day. Yet he has not received any medicine for the last two or three years. Mission East will now ensure that Isahac gets something that alleviates the seizures and makes his muscles relax more. "It is absolutely heartbreaking to think that a boy like Isahac lies on the couch all day long just waiting for the next big seizure. He should be out playing with his peers – even if it is in a wheelchair!"

"In the capital, you don't see any wheelchairs. Disability is a huge taboo in this country."

syndrome child like Hovannes clapping to himself, it touches me deeply. It is so moving to hear Anni (his psychologist) say "apres, Hovannes" ( "well done, Hovannes") and then see him be happy, because he can put two bricks on top of each other. These children have experienced defeat after defeat.

It feels really good to be able to give them some small victories instead."

For Kim, there is no doubt that Mission East is fighting a hard battle in Armenia. But he is convinced that by showing parents, doctors, teachers and authorities that - against all expectations - the children here can have a much better life, we are taking a significant step.

"When you have been there and seen the difference with your own eyes like I have you can only become more eager to help. And I am indeed very eager to help these people," says Kim.



# Arman's new world is full of numbers and colours

**“It was a tremendous feeling of powerlessness that washed over me when I first met ten-year-old Arman and his family and listened to their story. To see how such suffering can destroy an entire family's life... it is hard to witness,” says Kim Hartzner, Managing Director of Mission East.**

Arman was born with his umbilical cord around his neck and almost suffocated. Later he got an inflammation in the navel, and pneumonia. Yet he didn't go to the hospital in the first three months of his life. The family couldn't afford it.

Arman's father left them seven years ago, and now

the five family members live in a one room apartment. All they have is Arman's disability pension and the grandmother's pension with a total income of just 150 euros a month. Not enough to go round, especially with food prices rising rapidly. Arman's mother, Alvard would really like to find a job. But she has



At the Child Development and Rehabilitation Centre Arman receives help from a special educator. Although he is ten years old, he is starting from scratch. He has, for example, never learned to distinguish colours and shapes. It would be unthinkable for a boy in Denmark.



At the Child Development and Rehabilitation Centre Arman receives help for his aggression. "It is wonderful to visit Arman and see him laugh," says Kim Hartzner. "And it is even more fantastic to know that we are able to give him a reason to be happy."

no education, and this makes it very difficult.

### Can't tell blue from green

Alvard has sold some of the household appliances to get the most essential help for her son. But due to lack of treatment, Arman is very aggressive and easily gets into a fight. Both at home and at school he is difficult to handle.

"Probably, no one has ever taken the time to do something for him. No one has taken him seriously, taught him the difference between red, green and yellow and taught him how to count to 1,2,3..."

Because of his behaviour and disability Arman has always been seen as someone incapable of doing anything in life.

"Probably, no one has ever taken the time to do something for him. No one has taken him seriously, taught him the difference between red, green and yellow and taught him how to count to 1,2,3..." says Kim.

"Arman is a victim. A victim of an archaic way of thinking, which has immediately condemned him as a human being. Just because he is not like all the others."

For almost half a year now Arman has been going to the Child Development and Rehabilitation Centre, that Mission East has established. At the centre he is given support by psychologists and

behavioural experts to ease his aggression. And perhaps very soon the ten-year-old will also be able to count and know the difference between the colours. Arman is about to start a new adventure in life.



# The solution was waiting just around the corner

By Alessandra Radaelli,  
Country Director, Nepal

**As long as the villagers of Tumcha can remember they have been drinking dirty water from the nearby small creek. Only one kilometre away runs the purest spring – but what use is that when you risk your life getting there?**

Shanta Debi was a bit shy when I met her by the creek where

she had just arrived to fetch water for her family back home in the village of Tumcha. Other young women had already gathered. They were washing their containers made of brass and then filling them with water from the creek with the help of a small cup.

Shanta Debi told me that she usually comes here to get water.

But even though the water looks clear and fresh, it is the reason why she, her husband, and their five children often lie sick at home with diarrhoea. Every day they have to drink bacteria their bodies can't tolerate. But they have no choice. Without water they will die.

"I can't always boil the water because there is very little

"I can't always boil the water because there is very little firewood."



Each day, Shanta Debi is forced to expose her five children to the risk of getting diarrhoea. She knows that the water makes them sick. But without it they can't survive either.



## Only food for enough for a few months

Mission East started new projects in Nepal in 2007. The districts Humla and Mugu are located in the poor and remote Karnali zone, where children and adults lack everything from clean drinking water to food, medicine and knowledge on how to protect themselves from diseases.

People suffer during the long periods of severe drought. The crops fail and the population only has enough food for very few months of the year. It is not unusual to see children with distended stomachs in the villages.

Mission East provides clean drinking water, irrigation systems and education on improved farming techniques.

Often the villagers have to walk for a whole day or more to reach the nearest doctor. Health problems are therefore a great issue. They don't know how to prevent or treat simple diseases.

Mission East's local partner teaches them how they can help themselves by using basic hygiene rules like washing hands before a meal.



Villagers gather materials to help build the pipe that will provide them with clean drinking water. Actively participating in the project gives villagers a sense of ownership motivating them to maintain the pipe when Mission East is no longer in the area.



Long periods of drought has made it impossible for the population in the area to harvest enough food to last all year long. People are starving and children die from malnutrition. Mission East helps by building irrigation systems and teaching better farming techniques.



A day of bathing and laundry in the district of Mugu.



firewood,” Shanta Debi says. The area is indeed heavily deforested.

### **No chance on their own**

Only one kilometre from Shanta Debi's village is a clean spring that could prevent a lot of cases of diarrhoea if only the villagers had access to it. But the path there is both dangerous and difficult due to the hilly terrain. And therefore parents each day have to expose themselves and their children to the risk of getting a disease that every year kills about 1.8 million children under the age of five around the world.

It is hard to imagine that the solution to this major problem is just around the corner. But on their own they have no chance of making use of the clean spring. They needed help and expertise.

In cooperation with the villagers Mission East is working on installing a pipeline that will lead the clean water directly to the village and protect it from external pollution on the way.

### **More than just a pipe**

During our conversation Shanta Debi started to become more confident and wanted to tell me about her situation.

She told me that she is very eager to get clean drinking water and therefore participates actively when the village collects locally available material such as sand and rocks. Materials that are needed to make the life giving pipe a reality.

Even though they can't build the pipe on their own, people here are very keen to help. To them it is more than a pipe. It is the difference between suffering and joy. Life and death.

Every day, people here are putting themselves at risk of getting a disease that yearly kills about 1.8 million children under the age of five around the world.



When the pipe is finished the women will no longer have to fetch dirty water from the creek. The pipe will be connected to three tap stands; one in each end of the village, and one next to the school.



"I was in debt and my family often had nothing at all to eat," says Mohammad Siddique about the time before the road made him open the very first shop in his village.



By Tania Maria Lüders  
Rusbjerg, Mission East  
Journalist

## Mohammad – the first ever shopkeeper in his village

**In a small wooden shed no bigger than a playhouse sits 40-year-old Mohammad Siddique. When he speaks his words are wrapped in humbleness. But the pride in his eyes is not to be mistaken. He is the first shopkeeper ever in his village.**

Mohammad opened his shop at the beginning of 2007 after struggling to provide for his family as a farm labourer. When Mission East built a road connecting his remote village with the larger city and the market he seized the opportunity to develop his small business. Today he supplies the villagers with things like biscuits, beans, and soap.

The shop, which is only just high enough for him to stand up straight in – although with his head slightly bended – has become the gathering point of the village. The morning we went to speak with Mohammad, a handful of men had already gathered. One of them was studying a small pair of blue plastic shoes, (probably for his daughter) that Mohammad



bought at the market in the bigger town of Taloqan. The rest of the people were taking a small break before going to work.

**How long did it take you to get to the market earlier?**

When there was no road I had to ride the donkey for two days and two nights to get there. I spent two days at the market and the ride home also took me two days. So six days all in all.

**How much time does it take you now?**

Now it takes one-and-a-half hours each way – only three hours.

**What problems did you face because there was no road?**

I used to lose a lot of goods on the way back. Sometimes the donkey would trip and fall on the narrow paths, or floods would sweep my packets away. Sometimes I lost all my goods, sometimes I only lost half.

**How did that affect you?**

It was a very difficult time. I was in debt and my family often had nothing at all to eat.

**How has the road changed your life?**

Today I lose almost no goods when I transport them back to my shop. I'm able to buy and sell more things. My income has increased. I'm no longer in debt and I no longer have to watch my family starve.

**How does the village feel about you opening this shop?**

They are very happy about the road and my shop.

Like most Afghans we met during our visit, Mohammad wasn't used to expressing his feelings with words. But his pleasure was evident as he served his customers.

I couldn't help but think how others in this village might follow his example. In just a year or two. How many small sheds will be situated next to Mohammed's next year because the road has made it possible?

### **"The reason why the road is important to me"**

Kaiwan, who works as an engineer with Mission East and has been in charge of constructing the 62 kilometres of gravel road, felt an extraordinary motivation to start the project:

"When I was a child I lived in a village like the ones in this area. One day when I was five years old I was travelling on the narrow donkey paths with my family. My mother was on a horse while the rest of us was walking next to her. Suddenly the horse tripped on some loose rocks, both fell down the hillside, and my mother landed with the horse on top of her. She was severely hurt. We continued the long journey to the nearest medical centre where she was admitted. 24 hours later she died. I built this road because I never want anyone else to ever have to experience what I did back then."



### **Connecting 60,000 people to the rest of the world**

This spring, Mission East's journalist visited the organisation's work in Afghanistan. Meeting the people we help also became a meeting with both pain and hope. One of the men and women who made an extraordinary impression was Mohammad Siddique, the shopkeeper.

Mohammad Siddique lives at the end of the gravelled road that Mission East has recently built in the poor mountain area of Chaal in Takhar Province. The road has connected 94 villages and more than 60,000 people to the rest of the world for the first time. The road makes it possible for them to get to the hospital, the school and to the market in less than a day. Before, it could take up to a week to walk the narrow paths to get there, and many have lost their lives on the way. Mohammed Siddique's story symbolises the hope and the growth that each day develops for the many people who live in the area as they build on the assistance received from the outside world.

# We need you to help others



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](http://www.miseast.org). You can donate an amount of your choice online, using Visa or MasterCard.

If you live within Europe, you can also make a donation to us by bank transfer for free, as long as the donation is in Euros and you have some form of electronic banking.

**The details of our bank account are:**

**IBAN: DK6130003785046366**

**BIC: DABADKKK**

**Mission East, Skt. Lukas Vej 13,  
DK-2900 Hellerup  
Denmark**

If you would like to make a donation to Mission East but prefer not to do it online, we would be more than happy to receive a cheque from you. With your support, Mission East can continue to transform lives.

**Thank you!**