

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The IISE on seventh January, 2009

It doesn't happen very often that one wakes up with the feeling that from now on a new period of life begins. It was around 6:30 in the early morning, a cool soft breeze blew in from the lake. We walked over the freshly paved paths between the still empty buildings, when we were suddenly welcomed by a roar of laughter. The first three participants had arrived and were sitting with coffee and fruit in the sunny auditorium of the IISE. Eric and Julius from Ghana and Hussni from Saudi Arabia, three of them in nice suits and dress shoes. "We've made history!" they shouted, "We're the first participants ever to enter this building!"

For a few days we drove between the IISE campus and the airport ferrying newly arriving participants. Finally, with the arrival of our Tibetan participants Kyila and Gyendsen, we were almost finished. Almost, because four Liberians were lost somewhere on the way between Monrovia and Lagos. Nobody seemed to have seen them at the airport in Lagos. Quite strange, how one could miss four blind persons travelling together by plane. We had concerns that they didn't have enough money for food, lodging or phone calls if they were delayed. But thanks to one of our friends who works at the airline we found them after a 24 hour search. They got a great 'hello' here complete with singing, dancing and African drumming.

So the first IISE course in history began with a little excitement and ended with a celebration. Twenty four persons, young and not so young, from all around the world, of different persuasions and speaking



Khom (Nepal), Pynhoi (India), James and Johnson (Liberia)

different languages came together on this pin point of the planet, the IISE campus in Kerala, South India. While there were difficulties in the beginning we eventually grew into a close knit family that would find it hard to part from one another 11 months later at our graduation.

The Curriculum of the IISE

The curriculum was conceived as a journey in five acts. Everything began with a prologue which was meant to manage possible cultural issues and ease communication and bonding among the participants. The participants agreed, for example that party politics and religious issues would not be discussed outside a formal classroom situation.

The first act; „Tansalesia“

In a case study, a fictitious country called „Tansalesia“, the participants learned how to accomplish a need analysis, how to provide a project plan, to write a project request, to operate fundraising and to actually implement a personal project of their own devising.

The focus of act 2 was „Leadership and Change“

It concerned leadership, styles of leadership and change, becoming acquainted with and managing cultural issues, taboos, etc, social change and the importance of enlightened management leadership in dealing with the new realities of quickly changing societies. As one of several new teaching aids, we attempted to put all this into radio plays.

Focus of the 3rd act was the creation of **three actual future projects** for the IISE:

- a) Preparing a preparatory school for blind children
- b) Creating a research and development centre for innovative technology
- c) Creating a web page for the blind and their members world-wide

The 4th act concerned participant Internships

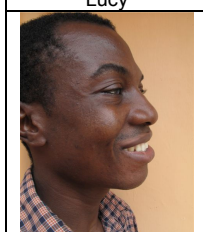
Each participant received an Internship either in a company or an NGO:

Some examples:



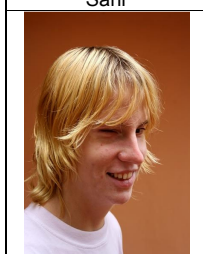
Lucy

- **Lucy** from **Kenya** launched a program to empower and support women working in the company US Technology. This international company is a joint venture of India and the USA, located in Technopark, Trivandrum. Her project was such a big success that after her first internship, she was invited to help another company in Technopark, that produces and exports educational software worldwide. There she empowered approximately 70 women by organizing an interactive workshop experience for them.



Sahr

- **Sahr** from **Sierra Leone** interned in the same company working on an environmental program. He effected several changes, one whereby the employees drink their coffee in the future from washable table-ware and no longer from disposable paper cups and started a weekly digital circular informing employees about environmental matters. The circular reaches over 4000 employees of the company worldwide.



Jessica

- **Jessica** from **Germany** started an assistance-to-self-help project for handicapped citizens in Tamil Nadu, the neighbor state of Kerala.



Kyila

- **Kyila** from **Tibet** and **Yoshimi** from **Japan** were active in Shilong in the extreme northeast of India which takes a four day train journey to reach from Kerala. Kyila organized fundraising for a local school for handicapped children. She canvassed businessmen, companies and banks, collected donations and organized a regular fixed donation for the future of the school. Yoshimi developed a library for the school.



Julius



Yoshimi

- **Mohamed** from **Sierra Leone** and **Julius** from **Ghana** received a request from a relief organization in south Kerala to provide a proposal seeking a new computer center. But their need analysis discovered that there was neither a need nor desire for a computer center from the center's residents. The residents' first wish was to make basic literacy a priority before considering the complexities of computer literacy.



Mohamed

Focus of the 5th act was on the **elaboration of each participant's project plan.**

During the last and final act all participants concerned themselves with the elaboration of their own project in their target countries. In the week before their journey home they presented their projects to external examiners and local guests on four succeeding days. All were impressed with their competence and professionalism in presenting their plans and fielding questions. In a large-scale closing ceremony all participants received a diploma from the Kerala state minister for education and the Maharaja of Travancore. And so twenty graduates, forming the first generation of the IISE, were missioned to begin sixteen exciting new projects in their respective countries around the world.

Future Projects of the Participants 2009: Some Examples

Child Rescue Mission (CRM)

Sahr Yillia, 27, a Sierra Leonean, founded the Child Rescue Mission (CRM) in June of 2009. Sahr is visually impaired. During the 10 years of civil war he experienced and witnessed much cruelty. He hopes to develop medical and psychological support for victims of the war in the areas surrounding Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, especially for youth affected by the civil war and for drug dependent street kids. The CRM 'village' will provide a home for orphans along with an education and work opportunities while offering medical and emotional health care. .

In the summer of 2009 Sahr registered his project with the government and assigned three of his future coworkers in Sierra Leone to begin preparations. Since Sahr's project plan was selected by IISE for top honors, he was given the Anandi Ramachandran Award and a prize of Euro 5,000 and has already invested it in the project's infrastructure.

New Light Resource Centre

Jayne Waitera, 22, from Kenya, founded the New Light Resource Centre. Jayne is visually impaired due to albinism. People with albinism in Kenya and other sub Saharan countries of Africa in particular suffer severe discrimination. The belief that the body parts of an albino can bring wealth and luck is quite common. So their murder and mutilation is frequent. Albinos are often rejected by their parents. Over 70% of them live under the poverty line and have access neither to good education nor health services. Many suffer from skin cancer because of a lack of melanin and low resistance to UV-radiation. With her project New Light Resource Center, Jayne hopes to remove the prejudices, misunderstanding and taboos that surround albinism in her society.

Her goals:

- To empower people with albinism by supporting them in fighting for their rights.
- To break the taboos of albinism and prevent their killing and mutilation.
- To raise awareness and prevention of the factors that causes albinism.



New Light Resource Centre gives hope to Albinos in Kenya.

Jayne won the World Tour Award of 2500 Euros, donated by Theo Schlaghecken, to start her project. Cornelia van der Horst- Tenberken wrote an article about Jayne's life story and her goals, in the magazine NOAH, an information magazine for albino self-help groups, which received a wide and positive response. The German dermatologist Dr. Herbert Kirchesch wants to support her with the production of an inexpensive skin protection cream.

Always Reading Caravan (ARC) in Thailand

Yoshimi Horiuchi, 26, Japanese, will start the Always Reading Caravan (ARC) in Thailand. Yoshimi is a blind woman and in her own words, a „Bookaholic “. In Thailand handicapped children have little access to information or reading material. In addition the general population reads very little. Books are expensive. Especially in the rural areas there are few libraries. By means of a book-caravan Yoshimi wants to bring books to people, to the blind, and handicapped but also to the non-disabled. The library bus will contain Braille books, audio books and printed books, educational toys and games, tactile pictures and material. The caravan will remain in each village for two weeks and visit it six times a year. It will visit schools, hospitals, community centers and houses for children with handicaps. Yoshimi wants to motivate people to build up libraries in their own villages for the ongoing empowerment of young people especially. She plans to arrange for the initial stocks of basic materials and the training of local personnel to manage these learning centers.

Kiki's Kindergarten in Tibet

Kyila, 23, a visually impaired Tibetan woman, has started Kiki, an integrative kindergarten for blind and seeing children in Shigatse, Tibet. In Tibet blindness is seen as a karmic punishment for misdeeds in a previous life or incarnation. Kyila is convinced that if blind and seeing children learn together, they can overcome the existing prejudices that create a gap between the blind and seeing. Kyila is one of the first students of Braille Without Borders in Tibet. She received the Lions Award of 2000 Euros for her concept, donated by the Lions Club of Niedersachsen.

Madagascar Education and Resource Centre for visually Impaired (MERCi)

Holiniaina Rakotoarisoa, 28, visually impaired, from Madagascar

Martin Niry, 34, sighted, from Madagascar

Karin Broske, 28, blind, from Norway

started the Madagascar Education and Resource Centre for visually Impaired (MERCi).

Their goal is to give independence to the blind and visually impaired of Madagascar.

Some of our Speakers and visiting catalysts / Instructors:

- **Sankar Krishnan**, business consultant for many years, world-wide, helped us create the structure of the IISE and assists as a 'navigator'.
- **Mr. Vijayaraghavan**, a well known entrepreneur from Kerala, was a committed jury member for the 1st act and served on the final 'conclusion jury'.

- **Bala Gopal Krishnan**, company owner in Kerala, spoke about Leadership. His motto is: „The biggest danger is not to dream big and fail but to dream small and succeed.“
- **Rick Guidotti**, friend, professional photographer from the USA, created “Positive Exposure “ a campaign for the protection of humans with albinism in Africa and worldwide.
- **Victor und Karo Caran** from Ukraine and Poland, spoke about cultural taboos
- **Theo Schlaghecken**, world traveler, consultant, created a workshop on „Leadership and Change“,
- **Divya Krishnan**, experienced in business management, led a two week course in Finance Control.
- **Rose Mahoney**, American author and journalist, taught a course in journalism focusing on the writing of articles and essays in contemporary English.
- **Navin Ramachandran** is a regular consultant from the very first beginning of the IISE for organizational and economic issues and a general all round supporter and advisor.

Obstacles

We had some obstacles as well. Two Germans left. The training was apparently too intensive for them. A South African was encouraged to leave in view of her issues with respect, or lack of it, towards other participants. Unfortunately, a South American had to return home, when his wife became ill. Co-operation within the team has been a work in progress with the inevitable ups-and-downs that go with any joint effort. But overall, participants and staff have made an honest effort at engagement and have met the hopes and expectations for our inaugural year at IISE.

Graduation

The graduation was a grand local happening. In radiant sunshine our first generation of IISE graduates, in the presence of many local guests and the minister of education for Kerala and the Maharaja of Travancore, received their graduation diplomas and certificates of accomplishment. There were many media, military and police personnel in attendance too which added a certain formal ‘gravitas’ to the proceedings. Present too were our very appreciative friends from the neighboring villages who have whole heartedly adopted and express great pride in ‘their’ Institute.

Concept of the Alumni-Club

All participants of the IISE, upon graduating, become members of the Alumni Club. They form a network of mutual support and have their own website. Their graduation and membership in the Alumni Club seals and creates a bond of commitment to the IISE’s ideals, chief among them: transparency in action, financial integrity, protection of human rights, and respect for nature and the environment implying efforts towards renewable energy.

TIBET

Braille Without Borders in Tibet runs problem-free without our physical presence there. Nyima and Yudon are doing a wonderful job keeping the project running smoothly. In August 2009 we landed once again at the airport in Tibet and enjoyed the long scenic ride to Lhasa: no palm trees of course but the blue waters of the Kyichu, the River of Happiness and its sandy shores, achingly blue skies and views that went on forever. The road had been newly metalled and was very smooth. Strangely enough there was little traffic though August is the peak of the tourist season.

It felt like an awaited home-coming since we hadn’t been to Tibet for a long time. The smells of ‘yak’ butter, juniper smoke from incense burners, temple bells, turning water mills and the cries of ‘wu kuai qian, gormo nga’ (‘only 5 bucks’) struck old chords in our heart and revealed just how deep our roots are.

We approached the school and stood before the large red gate with the two columns, engraved with English and Tibetan letters and the Braille alphabet. We “rang” the big iron Yak-bell „Home, sweet home! “This is the place where we worked and over which we cried and laughed for more than 10 years. The gate opened and we were surrounded by laughing children and smiling colleagues. “Gen Paul la, gen Sabriye la! “ „Who are you, who is this? “, we asked. Names were thrown at us. Names, which we had never heard before. Most of the children and some of the teachers were new. We did not know them, but they seemed to know everything about us. We were surprised, how smoothly and independently the school ran.

Since we began concentrating on the IISE and donation activities, two of our former students at Braille Without Borders, Yudon 23 and Nyima 22, have taken over the main responsibilities. This was in fact the goal we had set ourselves when we started the project in Tibet. Back then, we faced a lot of skepticism. People told us almost daily, ‘Get real’, ‘How can the blind lead the blind?’, ‘The project will collapse the day you go’ Many of those people and several of those NGO’s have since vanished. But the project run by the blind, for the blind, remains today.

The producer of the film „BLINDSIGHT “, our friend Sibyl Robson, visited the project last year. „In my opinion everything runs even better without you! “she said. No one could give us a better compliment than that. And she wasn’t exaggerating. The two young leaders, Nyima and Yudon, have done excellent work. They work full days,

performing a variety of tasks, as well as, and in most cases, better than we 'outsiders' could. They oversee the curriculum, manage the teachers and staff, keep the records, oversee renovations and maintenance, coordinate activities with the farm in Shigatse, discuss problems with attorneys, have meetings with government authorities, escort tourists, train employees of other NGO's in working with the blind, communicate with Chinese and international donors, lecture before international delegations, and lead interviews with local and international media.

And besides all that they teach classes in reading, writing and speaking of Tibetan, Chinese, English and computer, to the primary students at the center in Lhasa.



Nyima and Yudon

"I want to make sure that the project is running well even though Paul and Sabriye aren't in Tibet.", Nyima says. He became a real „manager“ and „Networker“. He is one of the 29 participants at the 2010 IISE program. Yudon remains head of the training program. And with her charm and PR skills, she's great at winning over authority and officialdom, even the tough ones.

The trip to the farm is 230 km and took four and a half hours. Compared to Kerala, that's a fast trip, but it is still arduous and dangerous. When it rains, the mountains slide. Falling rocks block the road, or worse, hit vehicles threading the narrow road between mountain and river. A slightly different problem but one that can be major: scarce toilets in this vast expanse of rock, sand, treeless vistas, the river and wide blue sky.

The training farm in Shigatse began five years ago. It is a training center for the professional training of the blind in the areas of ecological agriculture and ecological cattle breeding. In addition they can choose to be trained in carpet weaving, knitting, kitchen management, compost, cheese and bread production. The land at the vocational training farm hadn't been cultivated before. With organic fertilizers, the creation of arable land, composting and limited use of specific, commercial fertilizers, and irrigation, the land now sustains an average of 70 people. Rye, barley, wheat, sugar beets, oil seeds and potatoes prosper with the extra sunlight at an altitude of nearly 4000 meters. Vegetables, especially 'greens', are cultivated in greenhouses and provide an important supplement to the traditional Tibetan diet and a preventive to some traditional Tibetan ailments.

By the hard work of everyone, the farm has become a small oasis in the middle of the dry, sparse environment of the high Tibetan plateau. Flowers, trees, meadows. Where ever one looks, one now sees the green of trees and the gold of growing grain... in season, of course☺. Slowly the farm has become a tourist attraction and a picnic spot for locals and government officials. Recently, a blind former student of our school in Lhasa has joined the staff as a professional 'dramnye' player. A dramnye is a stringed instrument, a kind of Tibetan guitar. He is currently teaching a half dozen blind students traditional Tibetan music and helping to develop a full fledged music school. Tenzin, the manager of the massage clinic offered a 6 month winter workshop in medical massage.

Beside the trainees there are also a number of our blind children living on the farm, who integrated themselves successfully into the neighboring public primary school and two government middle schools. The primary students reside on the farm, while the middle school students live in student hostels and visit the farm on holidays. These school students bring a wonderful energy and fill the evenings with the sounds, songs and laughter that are typical of Tibetan kids.

The farm is in a way, a little paradise and the partial fulfillment of a dream in progress. Years ago, again and again, people would say to us: „You are crazy, you know nothing about agriculture. Your plans are completely unrealistic. How can you do all that without specialized knowledge?! “And we answered: „We just need a good team of capable native hands who believe in us and our dream. And then we will see...!“ Five years were needed for our vision to become reality thanks to the strong motivation and support of colleagues, a helpful positive attitude on the part of the government and of course, generous sponsors who shared that dream.

The sun shines, horses trot freely over the harvested fields, a boy plays his Tibetan guitar in the garden and blind children sit around the lawns in the shade of trees busy at their homework.

A quiet knocking at the office door „Paleb,Paleb!“ (Bread,bread!). Three broadly smiling Tibetan girls enter. They hand us baskets of warm, fresh fragrant baked bread and crunchy croissants known here as "moon breads". They have just baked this batch in the farm's own bakery. „Life is good", says Mike, through a mouthful of croissant and home-made organic cheese.

We are happy, lucky to be working together with very competent people, able to enjoy the beauty of Tibet, and now to live happily and work in Kerala surrounded by so many motivated and talented people. But wait a minute: Is it really just luck?



Dechen Yudon and Kungsang with skipping ropes.



Fresh bread from the farm's bakery.

We gave ourselves permission to dream. We were determined enough to look beyond the discouraging comments of people who tried to kill our dreams. We did not give up but believed in our project through good times and hard. And most importantly, we knew that we could not create all of this alone. We will never forget those who supported us, believed in us and who helped bring us so far.

THANKS TO YOU,
Sincerely Yours,

Sabriye Tenberken
Paul Kronenberg

Awards

Some of the awards that were received in 2009:

- April: Das Marburger Leuchtfeuer.
- November: A TV award in China: "You bring charm to China Award".
- December: Award from China, one of the 21 most popular foreigners in China over the last 100 years.



IISE Graduates 2009 with the Education Minister of Kerala

You will find more information on our websites:

www.braillewitouthborders.org and www.blinden-zentrum-tibet.de