

Braille Without Borders

Quarterly News 2 - 2012

Chichuh!
Malava Mavaku!

This is how people greet each other in Chichuhlonga. After the Republic of Tansalesia, the Malaika Islands and the Kingdom of Nabulai, Chichuhlonga is the fourth fictional country, which is used as the setting for act 1 during the 2012 kanthari course which started on the 1st of July 2012.

Dear friends and supporters of Braille without borders projects in Kerala and India.

It is time for another quarterly report. This time, it was written in Tibet and India. Over the past couple of months, Paul was in Tibet and I was in Kerala.

Tibet (Paul Kronenberg)

1. Communication

The projects in Tibet as well as in India are continuously growing. Because we cannot always be everywhere, our coordinators in Tibet and in Kerala have developed a great information system. Every Friday a weekly report is sent to us in which we are updated on processes, planning, challenges, important changes etc. In this way, we are informed without conveying the feeling to our colleagues that we always have to intervene and decide. This has also resulted in a working environment which is characterised by initiative, proactive and solution-oriented thinking. In addition a flat, almost invisible hierarchy or better non-hierarchy is created. This has always been an important goal for us.

2. Contract extension until 2033

The agreement to use the Pelshong property as a vocational training centre for the blind that was signed in 2004 was extended to the year 2033. This is good news, which was celebrated with a Braille Without Borders Festival on the farm. The local fire brigade had organized and sponsored this feast, and they had taken the opportunity to lavish all the students with gifts. It was a wonderful day and many of the current and also graduate students joined in the celebrations. Nyima Tsering, a famous Tibetan mountaineer, provided several buses to bring all blind students and all BWB colleagues from Lhasa to the farm. It was a great re-union. Some students had not 'seen' each other for years. The entire farm was filled with songs, music, dance and many happy faces. We met many former students who nowadays either study in regular schools, work in their family farms, or run their own medical massage centers. It is great to see that all of them still have a strong connection to BWB.

3. as good as new.

During my time in Tibet, we worked on the renovation and repairs of damage that was caused by the earthquake that had its epi-centre only 200 KM away from our farm in Shigatze. Parts of the farm's kitchen, Sunrooms and





also roads were destroyed. Buildings were (re)-painted, cracks and roads were repaired. The entire infrastructure now looks as good as new. The farm's kitchen could probably be featured in 'beautiful home'-like magazines □

4. Baking in Shigatze

Two of our future bakery trainers are currently being trained in Shanghai by an organization named 'Shanghai Young bakers'. The organization aims to train young orphans and young women from less privileged families in a skilled profession. The best students of the 2012 course will be awarded with a trip to Tibet. They will help our two colleagues to start up the bakery in the vocational training farm.

5. Media

We cannot complain about a lack of media coverage. Many journalists from all over China visit BWB. Because the projects are mainly run by our former graduates, we make sure that the media gets to speak to bright blind BWB representatives such as Nyima, Gyendsen and Kyila.

Kerala (Sabriye Tenberken)

1. The Kanthari curriculum

'Come, enjoy the vision of Chichuhlonga land,
See the opportunity and take it in your hand.
Its up to you to make it into a paradise...'

This is part of the anthem of the newly established Democratic Republic of 'Chichuhlonga'. It is only a small State which became independent from the non-functioning monarchy, the neighboring country of Nabulai, which now has to see how it can survive using its own resources. President William, a progressive-minded tolerant young politician is very idealistic. He wants to build a utopia, a 'Garden of a thousand dreams'. The question is, will he succeed in doing so? He has the support of many NGO's but of course also faces many, chiefly bureaucratic, challenges.

The small country is picturesquely situated on the Babu Lake and is home to the 2012 participants who started their Kanthari adventure in the beginning of July. Their first challenge is to build up their personal planned projects in 'Chichuhlonga'. In this setting they can develop great dreams but at the same time there is always the possibility for mistakes, and we, the „bureaucrats, monarchists, politicians and journalists“ do everything that is in our power to create a realistic picture of the project world they will encounter in the future.

In the second Act, the participants return back to Kerala. They will work with local organizations in order to implement the skills and experience that they have gained and learn more skills through further experience. They work as advisors, ambassadors and partners and help in the formation and implementation of concrete action plans.

In the third Act, the participants will go out and meet the wild, real, world. During a 6-week internship they will have to prove themselves and implement their knowledge in real time and real life situations. Parallel to the 2nd and 3rd act as well as full time in the fourth act the participants will work on their personal projects. During graduation week they will present their projects in writing as well as verbally to an international jury. Jury members from around the globe join this presentation through an online live stream program. The fifth act is initiating their personal projects in their own country or region. It is now time to realize in practice all that was learned in Chichuhlonga, Kerala and internship.



2. Additional training courses at Kanthari

When I met a blind Indian a few years ago, I asked him about the current situation of the blind in India. The young man enthusiastically informed me that blind people have it particularly well in India. After all, blind students do not have to take tests in mathematics and science subjects. It didn't seem to bother him that this means that blind people are therefore excluded from studying several vocations in later life. Apparently he accepted the fact that the sighted society automatically assumes that blind people cannot study any mathematical/science subjects. I was quite shocked and felt a bit helpless. I asked myself whether this „acceptance“ was a general one amongst the blind in India. I also met some who were sick of living lives being excluded from participation in society and who were fortunately ready to make changes.

Chakshumati is a local organization that has taken on the task of helping the blind break out of the limitations that society and even the blind themselves had assumed to be inevitable.

In cooperation with BWB, a ten-day introductory course in mathematics and science was held in our campus. During this course the participants not only learned about mathematics and science, but also some essential ideas that will stick with them for life: if you really want to and believe in yourself, you can! Of course this means that sometimes you have to ignore the 'But' reasons that are often being thrown on your path by others. Many of the 50 participants were introduced to a white cane for the first time in their lives and with the help of the BWB colleagues, they soon were able to explore the campus by themselves. Some even went a step further and applied for the main 7 months Kanthari course. In future it is planned to have more of such courses offered at our campus under the name of “Kanthari Lite“.

3. Participants

We never had such a large number of applicants for the course, but as we have learned from the past we also became more strict in the selection. Finally, after many interviews and internal discussions, we had a group of 20 people. Four of these however decided for personal reasons to wait until next year and to apply again then. The participants must apply with a complete dream project. To do this, they must demonstrate that they have the energy, ethical awareness and vision to realize this goal. In the next quarterly report I can tell more about our current participants and their visions.

4. Alumni

Also in this quarterly report we want to present the work of some Kanthari graduates to you.

-Pynhoi Tang, India

Pynhoi Tang comes from Meghalaya, in the North-East of India. She participated in the first course in 2009. She came with an incredibly positive attitude and described her dream: 'I see a centre for blind and deaf children in a beautiful location with flowers in the most amazing colors, butterflies swishing around, many green trees and singing birds. I see happy children who bounce back and forth on the meadows trying to catch the butterflies...'

I still remember some comments, 'how cute', 'beautiful dream, but..'. Well, I have to admit, she sounded like a young girl that is prompted to write a wish list for Santa Claus. But Paul and I understood from the outset that her speech was an example of an excellent description of a vision.

In April, I travelled to Meghalaya to visit the project and was amazed by what Pynhoi has been able to realize. She



has created a program that goes well beyond her initial dream. In addition to a Center for blind and deaf children, she has also set up a micro-finance group. Out of this bakeries were started and women also started to breed pigs. Therapy groups for mentally disabled women were started and special teams visit villages to educate people that a disability is not the effect of black magic. Further these teams provide medicine for patients who have epilepsy and ensures that the government grants necessary assistance.

I was blown away and said: ' Pynhoi! You have realized your dream many times over!' Pynhoi began to laugh and said: ' oh no, there is still much to do, I still have to plant the flowers.'

Drolma Lhazorn, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, PR China

Drolma has only completed the third grade of the Tibetan/Chinese primary school and after that she could no longer go to school. The reason: she is very short because of a deformation of her bones. .This disease is known as „big bone disease“ or Kashin-Beck -disease. In 2011 when she was only 17 years old, she came to Kanthari with a dream to set up a tea house that is being managed by handicapped people and that serves as a meeting place and platform for people with disabilities. Setting up such a tea house in Lhasa proved to be a very challenging task. As she is a fighter by nature, she started a sewing workshop instead where she already employs 4 women who are all hearing impaired. The women design the products themselves which range from Tibetan style door curtains to Tibetan bags. She has not given up on her tea-house yet. As soon as business brings in sufficient funds, the tea house will also become reality.

Dear friends and supporters,

We would be very happy if you would share this second quarterly report with family, friends or others who are interested.

On behalf of all students, participants and colleagues in Tibet and Kerala, we want to say thank you for your wonderful support!

With very best regards,

Sabriye and Paul

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