



First Graduates, first top scores

Kunkep is impatient. The final report cards have still not been released and the officials keep him, Tsering Choerdon and Lama waiting. The three 18year olds are the first pupils of the Sertshang Orphanage Home to complete the 10th grade and receive the official School Leaving Certificate (SLC).

These final exams are taken throughout 8 days in April – a much noticed event in Nepal. For nationwide all pupils have to answer the same questions concurrently during these 8 days.

In a country torn by the aftermath of civil war (1996-2006) and with more than 100 ethnical groups, the SLC has become an important ritual. The currently tensed political situation has led to postponing the publication of the SLC results. Strikes and demonstrations took place almost daily in April and May. The nationwide uproar was caused by political disagreements over the country's constitution – the young republican nation of Nepal is still lacking one. Since three years the issue is being debated and on May, 27, 2012 the third and final deadline passed without any agreement amongst the political parties. Now, re-elections are due for November. Tsering Choerdon is upset, because she already knows what it leads

to: “The current government is incapable of action and nothing will change”, she says.

Cheerful and dedicated Tsering Choerdon is used to strikes and demonstrations, which lately have increasingly affected daily routine. Just before the SLC-exams even their teachers went on strike. They protested against further decline of working conditions for teachers at public schools. Private school teachers expressed their solidarity by joining the strike.

Frequently the children at Sertshang Orphanage Home are informed right in the morning whether class is going to be held or not. If lessons are cancelled they do not cheer. Instead, they study by themselves for a couple of hours. Even the young kids follow this routine, because they too have to attend tests by the end of the school year. In each class, a rating with the top ten pupils is made. Hence, the children take great effort in preparing.

Two months prior to the exams, the common movie-time on Saturdays is intermitted and playing restricted. After dinner, all children keep reading their books until 9 p.m. Seven-year-old Pempa sometimes falls asleep over his books, because he wants to work like the older children do. Some boys

work until midnight. The girls work differently, preferring to get up at half past four in the morning and work until breakfast. The Nepalese school system still relies heavily on memorizing. So from early in the morning the repetitions sound like a many-voiced choir around the Orphanage. Many children have found themselves a place to learn in and there is a whispering of confidence without disturbing one another.

Our school graduates have trained hardest and all three hope for good results. The higher their score, the better their chance to attend a good college. Nepal's educational



system is highly selective. Those who score top results at the SLC are eligible for scholarship. In this way, gifted children with a poor financial background have the chance for a good education, which is very expensive in Nepal. Even more than costs for college, the university fees are highly expensive. Scoring best at university means having the chance to study abroad: renown british and US-american universities have allocated some places for highly gifted students from Nepal. This is, what thoughtful and quiet Kunkep dreams of. He has been one of the best in his school for some years now.

Graduations make headlines

Like Kunkep, more than half a million candidates from all over Nepal have attended the SLC-exam. About 60% of them will pass. This final exam is considered highly important and makes it to the media headlines every year. Recently, some dozen injuries were reported. Attempting to help their children, parents were locked out and hence started to throw stones at security officers.

Strict conditions of examination promise a fair procedure – yet the Nepalese system is far from providing equal chances for everyone. Since training quality in public school is poor, the percentage of attendants from these schools passing the SLC is much lower than that of private school trained pupils. Classes in public schools often exceed 50 pupils with all kinds of supplies lacking, from schoolbooks to light bulbs or windowpanes.

The situation in rural areas is even worse than in cities. Many mountain villages still do not have any schooling and illiteracy amongst the 14year olds is estimated to be just below 50%.

Tsering Choerdon grew up in one of these villages. She is a family member of the Sertshang Orphanage since eight years and remembers the day of her arrival vividly. For the SLC essay, she chose the topic “A day I will never forget”. It was the day, when relatives brought her to the Sertshang Orphanage Home shortly after her mother had died. “I was so afraid, standing in front of all of the children, who were staring at me”, she says. She kept crying the whole night, but soon found out how well meaning everybody was. She liked the way all children helped each other in household tasks. And she was overjoyed to discover that she could finally attend a school.

Scholarships as a reward

Kunkep picked a different topic for his essay, opting for “What characterizes a good teacher”. Kunkep would like to study mathematics or natural sciences. “We have a couple of excellent teachers at our school”, he says and goes on, expressing his expect-

tations. "A good teacher works hard, he is appreciative and does not only know his training subjects, but also knows how to tell some anecdotes to illustrate and make it more fascinating". While waiting for the SLC-score, he trains his own teaching skills, helping the younger boys with their homework, before enjoying a game of basketball with them. Kunkep wants to continue playing basketball at college.

Surprisingly, just before the study term is about to start, their score reports arrive. With a maximum of 100 percent,

Kunkep has scored a great 89,88%, Tsering Choerdon got 87,85% and Lama made it to 75,69%.

With these results, all three of them qualify for enrolling at the much sought after Union Academy. Due to his top score, Kunkep is only charged half the study fees. He is now setting a new goal for himself, aiming to become one of the top three for the admission tests for natural sciences. This would exempt him from study fees. "I already received a good education so far, maybe I can already give something back", he says.

Kathmandu,
spring 2012
Brigitta Niederhauser



Prices for Food and Education rising in Nepal

After winning the elections in 2008, the left-wing parties promised to fundamentally reform the educational system. None of this has been achieved. Due to the desolate state of public schools, every family strives to send their children to a private school if they have a bit of money to spare.

Simple small private schools are now facing the problem of dwindling pupil numbers, because fewer and fewer families can afford paying the school fees. This is mainly due to rapidly increasing prices for food. Nepal belongs to the group of poor countries that suffer from effects of the international food exchange trade. Within a few months, the price for a cheap rice type increased by 30%. A major part of the population has to spend more than 70% of its income on food.

Sertshang Orphanage Association

The association supports the Kathmandu-based orphanage founded by Tibetan medic Tashi Sertshang. All donations flow entirely into the Orphanage project whilst all administrative costs are covered by the members of the association board. The association is registered in Bern, Switzerland, where donations are tax-deductible. Donations to the association's accounts in Germany and Switzerland are also deductible from taxes in these countries.

Sertshang Orphanage Home

Tenzin Kuntschok
P.O. Box 20559 Kimdol
Swoyambunath-15, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 00977-1-428 57 91
Email: s.o.h.nepal@gmail.com

Bank of Kathmandu Ltd.

A/C No. 00730473
ABA No. 159
Sertshang Orphanage Home
A/C No. 070000065301

Verein Sertshang Orphanage Home Schweiz

c/o Brigitta Niederhauser
Hofenstrasse 105, 3033 Wohlen, Schweiz
Tel: 0041 – (0)31 – 822 08 41 (privat)
0041 – (0)31 – 385 12 66 (Büro)
0041 – (0)76 – 524 36 54 (mobil)
Email: brigitta@sertshang-orphanage.org

Konto Verein Sertshang Orphanage Schweiz

Credit Suisse Bern, Kontonr. 71 09 12-81
IBAN CH77 0483 5071 0912 81000
BIC/SWIFT CRESCHZZ30A

Verein Sertshang Orphanage Home Deutschland

c/o Brigitte Schulmeister
Balger-Hauptstrasse 28
76532 Baden-Baden
Tel: 0049-(0)-7221-61879

Konto Verein Sertshang Orphanage Home Deutschland

Volksbank Baden-Baden/Rastatt
Kontonr. 58691003
Bankleitzahl 662 900 00

Verein Sertshang Orphanage Home Österreich

c/o Bettina Kuprian
Himmelhofgasse 92/1/9
1130 Wien, Austria
Tel: 0043 – (0)699 – 11 29 89 96 (privat)
Email: bettina@sertshang-orphanage.org

Konto Verein Sertshang Orphanage Home Österreich

BA-CA Kontonr. 512 618 096 01
Bankleitzahl 12000
IBAN AT10 1200 0512 6180 9601
BIC/SWIFT BKAUATWW

www.sertshang-orphanage.org

The children of the Sertshang Orphanage Home attend a simple private school, too. Due to the support of the Eugen-and-Elisabeth-Schellenberg-Foundation, their education has been improved continuously: in April, the pupils from classes 1 to 6 moved to another school with better-trained educationists.

Within the coming three years, a third of the children will complete primary school. This is a great challenge to the management and the association of Sertshang Orphanage Home, because we feel responsible for the children until they can make a living by themselves. Not all of them will be able to attend college. There is no apprenticeship system in Nepal. Professions like a clerk, electrician, carpenter, tailor, cook or service attendant, require a paid-for training period. Thus the children rely on support from our sponsors.

Personal Sponsorships

Despite the rise in the cost of living, the rates for a sponsorship remain at 40 Swiss Francs / 30 in order to keep the supporting community as big as possible. Partially the massive rise of costs in Nepal was covered by the strong Swiss Franc exchange rate. Yet for tuition fees, purchases, maintenance and expansion of the orphanage, the association depends on personal sponsors and additional donations.

One-time donations

Non-recurring donations bring a lot of joy, too. For instance a good-quality basketball costs 12 Swiss Francs (10). A hula hoop 3 Swiss Francs/2,40 . 20 to 60 Swiss Francs (16 to 45) can help expand the library stock and 150 Swiss Francs (120) can buy a picnic-trip to the countryside for all the kids.

