



## Plates are filled for Kelsang and her brothers

Tashi wants to have a knife. A kitchen knife for peeling potatoes together with the kids of the kitchen group, even though he is not yet a member. Four years of age, he has only been living in the Sertshang Orphanage Home (SOH) for some few weeks.

18yr old Nyidup shows him, how to hold potato and knife. The potatoes keep falling from his hands, but he does not give up. He wants to peel potatoes and belong here. Belonging somewhere - for the the first time in his life.

He came to the orphanage together with his 6yr old brother Nyima and his 9yr old sister Kelsang. They came from a small, remote vilage in the mountains of Nepal. Their story is much alike that of other children's in the orphanage. They do not know whether their father is still alive or who he is. Their mother's new partner soon «sold» them as workers and they were accommodated in the village's school. But when the teacher left, nobody took care of them. Such is the account of a social worker, who has known the SOH in many years and brought a number of kids here.

Tashi, Kelsang and Nyima hardly tell anything. They turn their heads away when being

asked about their past. The hardships, they went through, are told about without words. Kelsang, a slim girl, looking like a six year old despite of being nine years of age, always keeps an eye on her brothers, taking care of them like a little mother. Wolfing down their huge portions of food shows that this is the first time, they have enough to eat.

The other newly arrived little children can not get enough either. 6yr old Nyima Dhargyal hardly spoke a word throughout his first weeks here. And that is not, because only one girl can understand his tibetan dialect. To him, everything is new, shoes and socks as much as badminton and TV. The big pair of scissors in the sewing room fascinate him, he spends hours on cutting stripes from leftover pieces of cloth. Sometimes, he takes some school notebooks and pretends to read.

This is one of the things he copied from the older ones, who taught him so much already: morning prayer, playing soccer, washing dishes, the nepalese national anthem and brushing teeth. The older children pass on their skills, they learned themselves, as a matter of course.

Nyima Dhargyal likes sitting an Kunkeps desk and lift his physics book up. The heavy

volume, which Kunkep studies often until late night, is 12cm thick. Sometimes, 19yr old Kunkep draws a formula on a piece of paper, which is then folded up to a paper plane. Highly gifted Kunkep has already passed the first year at college. Once again, he ranks among the best. Not only does he make formulas fly, he also used his scarce free time to support the other five youngsters in preparing for their school leaving certificate (SLC). Unlike the SOH-group from 2012, they have not achieved top results, yet yielded enough points to study at a college of their choosing. They are interested in the hotel business and social work.

#### Waiting for economic growth

Over the recent months, eight little children have entered the orphanage and the same number of youngsters have left. Not all the children in the orphanage are fully orphaned. Some of them still have one parent, who

job position and now resume taking care of their children. With one other girl, her brother now has a family and work and will now take care of his little sister.

To a certain extent, this development mirrors the recent changes in Nepalese society. At first sight, it may seem that there is a bit of an economic growth in Nepal's capital Kathmandu. A lot of housings are being built and an increasing number of cars jams more and more roads.

The little bit of growth only benefits few though. Unlike neighbouring countries, the gross national product only rose slightly. Still, more than 50% of Nepali are below the poverty threshold and on the Human Development Report, the country ranks on no.157. Within the south asian region, only Afghanistan ranks worse.

Inflation and unemployment still soar and corruption increases. Latest polls show that the mood in the country is worsening,

young nation's constitution. With the last deadline passed in spring 2013, autumn will see an election before the constitution can be passed.

With the political situation being unstable, economy stagnates. China has recently invested into Nepal's infrastructure, yet even the schoolbooks state that they - like the Indians - thereby pursue their own agenda. The situation's complexity is described in a surprisingly descriptive way. The teens also understand that it will take quite a while until conditions for the general population will improve. To date, a third of the nepalese children between 5 and 14 years have to work. Like little Monoj, who came to SOH in autumn 2012.

It is striking, how powerful his hands are. In his village out in the mountains, he had to work several hours a day, splitting stones. The little money he earned was handed out to his aunt, who took care of him. Sometimes Monoj misses her, but he would definitely not want to go back. «Later on perhaps», he says. «When I have grown up and can build a proper house for my aunt.»

#### Nyidup's adventure

Nyidup has not forgotten the harsh life in the mountains. He left his village near the chinese border more than eight year ago. Having passed the SLC, he has a three months' holiday before enrolling at a college. One of his relatives visits Kathmandu and will take him along to the village for his holidays. Nyidup will spent a day and a night on the bus and then march for five days. Over the past months, he has saved every rupie, visitors sometimes give to the children. He wants to give the money to his relatives and buy some of the things he knows are needed in the village.

He is excited as if he was to depart to another continent. Monoj asks him, whether he is going to buy a house for his relatives. «Not yet», replies Nyidup.

#### The future ahead and Choegyal Rinpoche's plans

SOH's mentor and son of it's founder Choegyal Rinpoche has returned to Nepal

from a retreat of more than three years in the Tibetan mountains. At the orphanage, he has intensively discussed the orphanage's future with its directorate and the older ones amongst the children.

After completion of elementary school, many orphanages in Nepal hardly take further care of the youngsters. SOH however feels responsible for the children until they have completed an education and they have obtained a job position.

Due to the family-like structure with only few employees in the orphanage, the children have developed a great sense of solidarity and responsibility for each other. Without their active participation, everyday tasks at the SOH could not be coped with. Together with the adolescents, Choegyal Rinpoche has developed plans for social welfare schemes outside the SOH, helping to improve life conditions for people in need. As an initial step, volunteer-tasks during school

Kathmandu  
Frühling 2013  
Brigitta Niederhauser



did not or could not take care of them. In most such cases, contact has been completely terminated. Some few parents got in touch with the orphanage recently, visiting their children regularly. Two mothers found a

despite of several improvements made. The euphoria of the end of the civil war is long over. Frustration and disappointment mount over the quarrelling political parties, who can not come up with a consensus over the



holidays are planned for in homes for the elderly and handicapped as well as in other orphanages.

Furthermore, Choegyal Rinpoche and the teenager have jointly designed long termed



## Association Sertshang Orphanage Home

The association supports the orphanage in Kathmandu, founded by tibetan medic Tashi Sertshang, All donation money goes directly to the orphanage, as all administrative costs are covered by the board of directors. The tax-exempted association is based in Bern, donations to the German and Austrian Associations' accounts can also be deducted from taxes.

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projects for the post-education phase. Having a good education does by no means guarantee a job position. This is not only due to the high level of unemployment - the selections of candidates for many job positions depend mainly on the size of the bribe.

Small enterprise schemes, for instance in the health sector or agriculture, are not only to create employment, but should also provide offers the poorer part of the population can benefit from.

An initial project started already in autumn 2013: In Nowakot, past the outskirts of Kathmandu, Choegyal Rinpoche received a large plot of land suitable for agriculture. Involving local workforce, bio vegetables will be grown there. Initial profits will benefit the orphanage.

As soon as production can be increased, the vegetables will be sold in Kathmandu, where there is a high demand. Profit generated will be paid into the newly founded education trust. Due to college and university fees, education costs at the SOH will rise drastically. On a long-termed perspective, the trust is not only to be financed by sponsors, but also by own sources of income.

## Sponsorships

Despite rising costs, sponsorship fees of 40 Francs ( 30€ will not be raised in 2013, in order to ensure the widest-spread participation of sponsors possible. Some of the rise in costs of living can be compensated by the strong Swiss Franc. For school money, purchases, maintenance and expansion of the orphanage, the association is in need of sponsors and additional donations.

## One-off donations

Donating once can be a great help as well. A football of good quality costs 12 Francs ( 10€, a hola-hoop ring 3 Francs ( 2,40€, a badminton-set is 8 Francs ( 7 ). 20 to 60 Francs ( 16 to 45€ can buy new books for the library and 150 Francs ( 120€ will pay for a trip for the whole school incl. picnic.

