

**PEOPLE IN NEED**  
**GERHARD BAUMGARD STIFTUNG**

**Report 2009: "Digging deeper ..."**

"Every day I learn some more, the more I learn, the less I know about before; the less I know, the more I want to look around ..."

After five years Burma still fascinates and grips me, a country frozen in time. It is a country with utter poverty and rampant corruption where bribes are declared to be a sign of respect. It is a country where one is only allowed to see what the junta wants foreigners to see, not allowing one to travel to the areas where the savage repression continues. With the biggest question of all remaining unanswered, how can a people so repressed be so happy?

Maybe the answer lies hidden in the darkness of poverty, ignorance and underdevelopment. Villages have no electricity, the only one television set is operated by batteries or a generator and a single copy of the government newspaper may be available. TV and newspaper will only show the government's propaganda with benevolent generals opening schools, hospitals and bridges and talking about economic achievements and developments. When I travel the dirt roads of Burma I see children herding the cattle, while the fathers cut the vast paddy fields by hand and the mothers 'voluntarily' repair the defunct road system or build railway lines. The children with their cows and buffaloes enviously watch the few kids who are given opportunity and money to visit primary schools. And everybody takes the will and the arbitrariness of the military rulers as god-given and for granted such as in the Dark Middle Ages of feudal rule.

Again and again, I ask myself are the children better off if we try to break this cycle of ignorance, poverty and lack of education? Or do we make them unhappy by showing them opportunities of a better life and a brighter future which might not materialize under the despotic rule of the military? As you all know we decided to fight on and celebrate every small and modest dent we might be able to poke into the armor of this totalitarian monster.

**I. PEOPLE IN NEED Activities 2009**

The year 2009 did not start well. PEOPLE IN NEED (PIN) had just finished two big buildings for the Buddhist Ye Lai Monastery in Yangon which takes care of HIV/AIDS patients when the Military Intelligence together with the Ministry of Health closed the monastery down. All 24 patients, including 8 children, and their helping relatives were kicked out with nowhere to go. The fabricated reason was "this monastery is political"; all because one member of the opposition party NLD (National League of Democracy) provided ARV (anti-retroviral) medicines to 3 patients occasionally. The new buildings stayed empty under 24 hour surveillance by the Special Branch, Burma's Secret Police; all 2009 we were not allowed to visit the monastery.

Over the last twelve months we tried every possible means to support the abbot to re-open the monastery for HIV/AIDS patients. We tried to motivate more powerful (VIP) monks to assume responsibility for the monastery and to protect the patients from government harassment. However, we had to realize soon that nobody was willing to touch this 'hot potato' and to get involved. We even sent a friend to the Health Minister personally to

(\*): A Czech charity with almost identical name "People In Need (CZ)" also works in Myanmar. PEOPLE IN NEED – GERHARD BAUMGARD STIFTUNG (Germany) and People in Need (CZ) are not related and operate independently.

present the case; unfortunately to no avail. Only in December some signs of relaxation of the ban were to be seen. Up to 15 HIV/AIDS infected men were allowed to stay in the monastery up to a maximum of 7 days. The children and women are still not allowed to return to the Monastery; we accommodate 10 women and 4 children in a small private house nearby, unknown to the authorities.

### **New Buildings at Ye Lai Monastery**



**40x30 ft. for Buddhist Monk HIV-Patients**



**60x30 ft. for Secular HIV-Patients**

Another incident shows the unpredictable and erratic behavior of the government authorities. In December 2009 the Township Health Office ordered all nurse aid trainees of the Muslim Free Hospital in Yangon to be dismissed. Four of the girls from our vocational training program run by the Good Shepherd Sisters (see below) were also dismissed without reason. The Muslim Free Hospital was founded in 1937 as a Muslim Charity and offers free medical treatment to the poor and is considered the center of excellence for the education of nurse aids. With Burma's Health System ranking second worst in the world (World Health Organization) this is another blow to the provision of adequate medical care to the impoverished population. We struggle to find an alternative for the training of the four nurse aid trainees whose skills are urgently needed in the rural areas and villages of Burma.

## **II. Dealing with Cyclone Nargis After-Effects**

Much of the year 2009, we were busy dealing with the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. As you might remember, Cyclone Nargis swept through Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Delta in May 2008, killing at least 140,000 people, destroying 450,000 houses and leaving 2.4 million destitute. At the end of November 2009 even an UN official report admitted that more than 1,000,000 people still live in makeshift shelters as their houses were destroyed or severely damaged. The UN will only be able to fund 17,800 new family houses which should accommodate around 100,000 cyclone victims; for the remaining 900,000 people the prospects are dim. In stark contrast the Junta leader General Than Shwe addressed the public on Independence Day (04.01.2010): "... the nation was hit hard by Cyclone "Nargis". However, rescue, rehabilitation, reconstruction and regional development tasks could be launched promptly and effectively in the storm-hit areas. Now, the living standard of the survivors is far better than that previously, thus reflecting the consolidated unity and brilliant performances of the government, the people and the Tatmadaw (i.e. Military)."

During the Cyclone many children lost their parents, brothers and relatives; the houses and schools were destroyed and many families were left unable to support the education of

their children. In 2009, People In Need continued to help local organizations to deal with the many new orphans and children who were unable to continue their school education. PIN helped to arrange the funding of a Youth Education Center in Hinthadda for the Diocese in Pathein opened in May 2009:



Opening of the 'Pope Benedict XVI' Education Training Center, Hinthadda

In addition, we helped to build two Education Centers with boarding houses for 25 Nargis orphans in Kanaungsu (Ayeyarwady Division) and for 60 girls in Pathein (Ayeyarwady Division), both run by the Catholic St. Francis Xavier Sisters,



Kanaungsu (opened)



Magyikone Kyaiklat, Pathein (under construction)

and a girls' orphanage in Myaungtaga close to Yangon for 50 girls from Nargis affected villages, run by the Catholic Franciscan Missionaries of Mary opened in November 2009.



Myaungtaga Girls' Orphanage

As in 2008, we helped the Diocese of Pathein to obtain funding for the continuing education and accommodation of 700 boys and girls. Almost 2 years after the Cyclone these children cannot continue their education in their home villages in the cyclone-affected areas as the schools have not been rebuilt or their parents or relatives are unable to support their children as a consequence of the cyclone. The number of children in need of support only decreased little: in 2008, 800 children needed support from the Diocese, in 2009 the number decreased to 700 children.

In addition, we now seek funding for a new building at a Catholic girls orphanage in Pathein. Before the cyclone the orphanage took care of 35 girls in an old colonial house in the center of Pathein; after the Cyclone the number of orphan girls increased dramatically. By December 93 girls aged 3 to 24 live in the same colonial house as the 35 girls before; the living conditions are disastrous and the girls urgently need a new second building.



Pathein Girl Orphanage, Colonial House



Girl Orphans

### III. Orphans in Myanmar

Having been confronted with the situation of the orphans in the Ayeyarwady Delta, PIN looked closer into the situation of orphans across the country. Due to low life expectancy, bad medical care, high birthrates, lack of education, HIV/AIDS and drug abuse the number of orphans or children with single parents is appallingly high all across Burma. With little help available the number of street children and child workers is skyrocketing. As the government strictly prohibits any adoption by foreigners the involvement of international organization into issues related to orphans is very sensitive and difficult.

In 2009 we explored the possibilities to establish a foster parent program for orphans, i.e. foster parents for children who had lost their parents and could not live with relatives. PIN would favor such a project over a traditional orphans' home as we strongly believe that orphans can develop their full potential when growing up in a family with brothers and sisters.

In Kachin State, in the north of Burma, we found a positive reception as this thinking is very much embedded in the tribal culture of the Kachin ethnic minority. Traditionally, families assumed responsibility for the orphans of their own tribe (there are six different tribes) and welcomed them in their families. However, with the deteriorating living conditions and erosion of extended family units this moral obligation largely disappeared in recent years.



With the active support of all Christian churches under the leadership of the Baptist Church we intend to revive this social tradition. However, up to now we got stuck with the concrete implementation of such a program because of the lack of qualified staff and the huge distance; Myitkyina is more than 1,500 km north of Yangon. Non-daily flights are available at high cost and the cheap train or bus ride takes 3 days. Our challenge is that a foster parent program does not only require a careful matching of foster parents and orphans but also requires a rigid monitoring of parents and potential financial support to the foster families. We do not want to see children being accepted by foster parents as a source of cheap labor or simply to get financial support through the project.

As an alternative we first want to establish 'children homes' where up to 8 orphans live in a house with a 'mother' and form a virtual family with 'brothers and sisters'. With the help of a local NGO we want to establish 2 homes in residential areas of Myitkyina as a start. For us, it is important that such homes are fully integrated into the local community and that the orphans do not live in a closed compound. They should attend the regular school, be able to welcome and visit their friends and not being labeled orphans. If the current politically tense situation in the ethnic-minority states does not deteriorate further we should be able to start the project in the first half of 2010.

We identified one orphanage in Dukha Taung Township of Myitkyina which comes very close to our vision of a children home. In this orphanage, organized by the Baptist Church, one single lady with the support of a single cook has assumed the role of a 'mother' to 16 orphans. The 'mother', who has finished her education at the Baptist Theological College, devotes her life to caring for 12 boys and 4 girls between five and fourteen years. She struggles to fill the mother role for 16 children of a similar age group and she urgently needs help by an additional educated 'mother' plus a new building to for the second 'family'.



**Dukha Taung Orphanage, Myitkyina**



**Boy and Girl Orphans at Dukha Taung**

Close to Myitkyina we want to help the Catholic Bishop to establish and find funding for a Farm Field Education and Training Center (Mading Farm, Waimaw) for the agricultural training of the older orphans of his big 272 children orphanage in Myitkyina. At the same time the Farm Field Training Center should produce rice, vegetables and meat to meet the huge food requirements of the orphanage. Every month the 272 orphans need 2.9 tons of rice alone.



Mading Farm, Waimaw: Farm Field Education and Training Center

In Mandalay, we try to help an Anglican orphanage which accommodates 37 boys from the very remote area of Nagaland in the farthest North-west of Burma. The villages are dirt-poor without any functioning infrastructure and no education other than some primary schools. Although some of the children do have single parents they do not have any possibility to receive further education in their villages and found a temporary home and care with the Anglican Church in Mandalay. However, the Anglican Church members cannot raise enough money to pay for the food, clothing and education of the children. We hope that our friends of St. Luke in the Fields Church in New York may be able to support them financially.



Nationalities Orphanage, Mandalay



Boys with Anglican Church Members

#### IV. Ongoing Projects

##### 1. Nursery for Poor Children, Yangon

Four years ago PIN with the help of the Catholic Good Shepherd Sisters started a nursery in Downtown Yangon for 25 -30 children. Mostly, the children come from one of the poorest Yangon neighborhoods: Dala Township across the Yangon River from Yangon Downtown. After most of Dala had been devastated by the Cyclone in 2008 the demand for the nursery increased dramatically. The Sisters were overrun by new applications to join the Downtown nursery. With the support of the Episcopal parish of St. Luke in the Field in New York we doubled the capacity of the nursery. With the new extension building we now have 72 children between 3 and 6 years of age attending the nursery which is managed by four



trained and licensed nursery teachers. The children are mostly from Buddhist and Hindu families with only a handful of Christian and Muslim children. Their parents work as unskilled workers in the General Hospital close by. The nursery charges a fee of US\$ 0.5 per month and provides breakfast and lunch and clothing for the children. In 2009, we started to charge this small monthly fee of US\$ 0.5 to incentivize and stabilize the daily attendance of the children. Only parents who can afford the modest fee have to pay it. The monthly fee comes with our promise that we will support the parents to register their children at the age of 5 or 6 at a government pre-school (private schools are strictly prohibited in Burma). The school directors of the more prestigious schools ask a registration fee of up to US\$ 400 per child as “cash present”.



Christmas Party 2009 at Yangon Nursery



Christmas Party 2009: Children with Parents

**2. Dala Branch of Yangon Nursery for Poor Children**

In June 2009 we stopped the financial support for the branch of the Yangon Nursery in Dala Township itself. Although we would have loved to continue the project for about 60 children, the township authorities did not allow PIN to visit the nursery anymore. The authorities do not appreciate international support at all and do not want foreigners to witness the appalling living conditions of the children and families across the river. The Sisters continue to run the nursery in a depilated building of the governmental USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association). We have not given up completed and continue discussions with the township authorities to go to back to Dala with an own nursery building.



Nursery Yangon: Dala Branch



Dilapidated Nursery Building (Dala)

**3. Vocational Training and Leadership Program for Young Women**

Since 2006, PIN manages a vocational training program for 15-20 young women from different parts of Myanmar in Yangon. The day-by-day operation of the program is handled

by the Good Shepherd Sisters. It is a twelve-month program and comprises theoretical and practical training of professional skills, English language classes, and leadership formation. The girls live together in an own building in the Convent's compound and attend their theoretical and practical training at private education centers in Yangon.

The third one-year program for 18 girls ended successfully in August 2009. The 2008/2009 program included 6 Buddhist girls from the Ayeyarwady Delta who lost parents and homes during Cyclone Nargis plus 12 educated girls from other villages of Burma. In contrast to our normal requirement of a high-school education these 6 girls from Delta only had a primary school education. It was an exciting experience to combine this very diverse group of girls. After some initial difficulties for the cyclone-traumatized girls the group grew together marvelously and all girls lived together happily. The Buddhist girls even wanted to attend the Catholic Church every morning as they loved the singing. Due to their low school education the girls from the Delta attended sewing and hair dressing classes (6); the training classes for the other 12 girls were accounting (5), nurse aid (5) and nursery teacher (2). In August 2008 the 18 girls graduated from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Batch of the program and returned to their home towns and villages.

In September 2009 we started the 4<sup>th</sup> twelve-month program. This time we admitted 15 girls from Ayeyarwady and Bago Division (South), Mandalay Division (Central), Kayah and Shan State (East), and Kachin State (North). Their outside education classes are sewing (3), nurse aid (4), nursery teacher and accounting or English (5), accounting and English (3). Again, the girls live in their own house in the Convent Compound; they take care of their own daily live, including shopping and cooking. During weekends they join the Sisters for social work at the General Hospital and in the poor neighborhoods of Yangon.



Batch #3: Graduation Ceremony



Batch #4: Christmas 2009

#### 4. Rehabilitation Program in Eastern Shan State

For the fifth year PIN supports a rehabilitation and education project for hill-tribes in Eastern Shan State, close to the border of Myanmar and Thailand (the so-called 'Golden Triangle'). The project for the Akha Hill-tribe had been started by Catholic nuns in 2001 as a rehabilitation project for drug users and villagers with HIV/AIDS. Historically, the villagers sold their daughters into prostitution to Thailand and took the money to buy and smoke opium. Many of the villagers were drug-addicted, HIV-positive and worst of all the young generation was gone – the boys did not stay long after the girls had left. PIN finances the running cost of the project and arranged financing for buildings and water supply.



Over the years the project coverage has grown from 6 villages to 19 villages with 864 households comprising 3,464 villagers of which 1,077 are younger than 18 years. 4 Sisters, 13 project staff and 9 volunteers take care of

- two nurseries with 98 children,



**Nursery I: The Youngest Ones**



**Playground**



**Nursery II: Children and Teachers**



**Playground**

- a personal hygiene and food program for more than 50 children between 3 and 13 years of age
- supplemental school education for 70 pupils of primary, middle, and high school,
- a boarding house with 58 girls attending primary, middle or high school,



**Boarding House for Girls**



**Girls Departing for School**

- a clinic with an experienced full-time nurse, who treats minor diseases and refers patients for further treatment to hospitals in Tachileik (Myanmar) and in Maesai (Thailand),
- a counseling and support program for HIV/Aids patients who now receive free HIV-medicines from Tachileik Hospital,
- seminars and workshops for drug users, HIV-AIDS patients on health topics and for villagers on community development topics. More than 4,500 participants attend annually,
- a twelve-month vocational training program (sewing and handicrafts) for 11 girls living in a separate boarding house at the compound,
- a sewing and handicraft workshop to generate income opportunities for women and girls in the surrounding villages.



**Sewing Training and Workshop**

In addition, PIN supports 14 high-school students from the surrounding villages who attend High-Schools in other cities of Myanmar; PIN pays for boarding and school fees.

## **V. Outlook 2010**

In 2010 we want to arrange financing for the orphan-related projects mentioned above:

1. New Building for the Girls Orphanage in Pathein; estimated construction cost: US\$ 85,000
2. New Building for Dukha Taung Orphanage (Children Home) in Myitkyina; estimated construction cost: US\$ 40,000
3. Setting up the Farm Field Education and Training Center, Waimaw (Myitkyina): estimated cost: US\$ 135,000
4. Support for the Nationalities Orphanage, Mandalay; annual operating cost: US\$ 20,000 annually.

Most international donors, residing outside of Burma, prefer to fund buildings and do shy away from assuming operating expenses as they cannot control and monitor the expenses easily. PIN fills this gap and enables projects of local organizations by financing operating expenses; we advise and supervise the local project management and monitor the projects. PIN also welcomes small donations as a contribution to the operating costs of its projects. To give you a feel about how far even a small contribution can, here are some ballpark numbers for the cost of raising and education children in Burma.

The annual all-in costs per child in our projects are:

Nursery, without boarding, 12 months: US\$ 120 per child  
Pre-School, with boarding, 10 months: US\$ 300 per child  
Primary School, with boarding, 10 months: US\$ 350 per child  
Middle School with boarding, 10 months: US\$ 450 per child  
High School, with boarding, 10 months: US\$ 550 per child

Average annual cost in an orphanage: US\$ 500 per child

Vocational Training, with boarding, 12 months: US\$700 per trainee (depending on the training subject)



Nursery Boy

**Important Note:**

Given the hostility of the Burmese Military Junta to foreign donations we do not want to endanger the safety of our Burmese beneficiaries by putting PIN's projects on the internet. Please do not put this report on the internet or in print publications without taking out all references to names and locations of our Burmese partners and helpers.

Yangon, January 2010

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PEOPLE IN NEED – GERHARD BAUMGARD STIFTUNG is a registered charity in the State of Hesse (Germany) which is monitored by the State Board of Control. PIN is authorized to issue donation receipts which are tax-deductible in Germany.



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