

## Report 2020

The corona pandemic confronted People In Need - Gerhard Baumgard Foundation (PIN) 2020 with special challenges. Like everywhere in the world, Myanmar was also hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the number of infections was lower in absolute terms in Myanmar than in the western world, the deficient and underdeveloped public and private health care system caused the Burmese Ministry of Health to take strict measures. City districts were cordoned off, travel restrictions implemented and airports were closed. School education and kindergarten care was stopped altogether in February 2020 and most kindergartens and schools remained closed for the rest of 2020. Many unskilled and casual workers left the cities for lack of income and returned to their home villages. Tourism collapsed completely and to this day no international flight connections resumed.

After PIN had successfully handed over the program against gender-based violence against women to another donor at the end of 2019, we planned to expand our vocational training activities for girls and young women and to further promote kindergartens in 2020. However, with Covid-19 we were forced to return to Germany at the end of March 2020. For the first time in two decades, I could not visit the projects regularly anymore. Starting Easter 2020 we tried to support and promote our projects from our German home office as good as possible.

During this difficult year we fully relied on working with the Catholic Good Shepherd Sisters (in Germany: Schwestern vom Guten Hirten), who above all look after the well-being of the weakest and neediest. The Sisters primarily focus on the needs of girls and young women.

Our successful cooperation with the Good Shepherd Sisters goes back a long way. From 2005 to 2011 we worked with the Sisters in an education and rehabilitation project in the so-called Golden Triangle between Myanmar, Thailand and China. In the Golden Triangle we built and supported 2 kindergartens with 110 children, a boarding school with 80 school girls and a sewing and handicraft program for 12 girls. Over time, the rehabilitation project for drug users and HIV-affected persons grew to include 14 villages with 2,364 people in 463 households. PIN supported health care, education and vocational training. In addition, we helped the Sisters to run two kindergartens with over 100 children in Yangon from 2006 to 2016.

As a result of this decadelong cooperation with the Sisters we focused on vocational training and empowerment of poor and disadvantaged girls and young women. Forced by the pandemic in 2020 we concentrated on maintaining a minimal program and on emergency help for starving children and families instead of further expanding our training and leadership projects.

### **1. Leadership and Vocational Training Program, Mandalay**

As the pandemic spread more slowly in Myanmar than in the Western world, we were able to complete the 2019/2020 training class in June 2020 with little restrictions. 47 young women successfully completed the 4th class of our 12-month leadership and vocational training program at the Rose Virginie Women Empowerment Center in Mandalay Myothit. The students graduated in sewing, English, computer skills and hairdressing and make-up.



Sewing



Beauty-Class



English Lesson



Computer Course

The program has been managed by the Good Shepherd Sisters since 2006 and is taught by local teachers, professionals and volunteers. In addition to professional training, the Sisters offer training courses and seminars in life skills, empowerment and self-confidence, human rights and human trafficking, gender awareness, drugs, diseases and Health Education through local and international volunteers and experts.

Together with the Good Shepherd Sisters, we had started the leadership and vocational training program for girls and young, endangered women in Yangon. By 2016 some 220 girls had attended the first 10 years of the 12-month program in Yangon. They completed their studies with core skills in English, computer science and tailoring and could also obtain training as a nurse aid or a kindergarten teacher. In 2016 the leadership and professional training program moved to the new Rose Virginie Women Empowerment Center in Mandalay. The four-story building has more space for training and lodging than the buildings in Rangoon. The center in Mandalay offers accommodation for up to 50 young women, classrooms and space for sisters, teachers and volunteers.

In 2017 the German hairstyling company Schwarzkopf donated a small beauty salon for the Mandalay compound. Now, we can offer beauty courses as a subject of the vocational training program. The vocational students can learn haircutting, makeup and skin care. The beauty course is very popular because it gives the students the opportunity to get a long-term employment and a stable income with a relatively short training.

Between 2006 and 2020, 370 young women completed their leadership and professional training in Yangon and Mandalay and received a certificate. In the training the girls acquire self-worth, dignity and self-respect. Most of the students return to their home villages and with their acquired skills the young women contribute to the well-being of their families in their home communities. 370 families benefitted directly from the girls' training and education and many relatives and residents benefit indirectly.

Initially, we wanted to start a large vocational training class in July 2020, but the corona pandemic led to serious restrictions of the program. We had planned for more than 40 female students for the 2020-2021 academic year, however the authorities limited the total number of residents in the center to 30 people. Therefore, the Sisters had to reduce the number of students to 12 tailoring students and 9 hairdressing and make-up students. With a heavy heart, we sent our English and computer science students home and hoped that we could reinvoke them back to Mandalay in January 2021. The selected students were able to continue their sewing training and beauty training until the end of the year.



Hairdressing Class 2019



Make-Up Practise

## 2. Myinttamon Kindergarten for Children Affected by HIV, Mandalay

Unfortunately, the daycare for the children from HIV-affected families was closed by the authorities out of fear of the Covid-19 pandemic. In February 2020, the ministry of health and social welfare ordered the closure of all daycare centers in Mandalay. Even after the three months school holidays, our kindergarten was not allowed to reopen in June 2020 and stayed closed for the rest of 2020.

The children were largely left on their own. As a result of the closure of the kindergarten the children did not get the free lunch which we provided in the kindergarten daily. The kindergarten teachers tried to maintain a regular contact to the children and to provide for the children needs. However, this was made difficult by the frequent curfews, lockdowns of city quarters and the high mobility of the mostly unemployed parents. Still, we managed to occasionally provide children and parents with food and essential hygiene items.



Seven Graduates completing Kindergarten



Graduation Ceremony Kindergarten February 2020

### 3. Emergency Aid for the Poor and Needy in Mandalay

In response to the first Covid-19 infections, the Ministry of Health in Mandalay ordered strict health measures, quarantines and lockdowns. Many breadwinners could no longer work and did not receive any wages and hence, could not support their families. In response to the first and second Corona waves, we distributed two monthly rations for 60 large families each in the slums of Mandalay: rice, oil, onions, potatoes, beans and chilies. We also provided hygiene items, soap, washing powder and toothpaste to around 140 girls in the youth detention center in Mandalay.



Distribution of rice, oil and food items in slums in Mandalay in June and October 2020

### 4. Extension of a Kindergarten in Loikaw

In rural areas, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were initially not felt as severe as in the large cities and in the central lowlands. In Loikaw, in the Kayah Hills, the first Covid-19 cases were detected in late autumn 2020 only.

In Loikaw we could help the Good Shepherd Sisters to build an extension for the local Montessori kindergarten. After the first kindergarten opened in 2016 with 39 children, it quickly grew to 60 children with 6 teachers. It had clearly reached its capacity in 2018/19. As the situation of the Kindergarten was already cramped while some additional 20 children were



on the waiting list to be admitted to the Kindergarten the Sisters asked us to help financing a significant extension to the existing buildings.

PIN donated some €10,000, i.e., 50% of the construction costs for two large classrooms, four new washrooms and toilets, one playground and a small school garden. The extension was completed in May 2020 and could be opened in June 2020, in time for the start of the new school year.



Entrance to the new building



A new classroom

## 5. Construction of a New Kindergarten in Shwe Bo

A couple of years ago, the Sisters of Charity in Shwe Bo asked us for help in finding a donor for a new kindergarten building. We never had worked with the Sisters of Charity which serve a small catholic minority in Shwe Bo. As Shwe Bo's population is majority Buddhist, the catholic Kindergarten is very popular across confessions. Shwe Bo is a town with about 90,000 inhabitants has a famous history as it was the seat of the Burmese kings. The town is located in central dryzone about 110 km northwest of Mandalay. The climate is harsh, very hot in summer and relatively cold in winter with little rain all year round.

The old kindergarten building of the Sisters of Charity could not cope with the demand for good daycare places anymore. The one-story, traditional wooden building was very dark and did not meet the needs of the children. In contrast, the new planned kindergarten will be a bright two-story brick building with new toilets and washrooms and for the first time, a playground. There will be space for 60 children, about double the space as the old building and 5 teachers and two Sisters will look after the children.

After searching for quite a while PIN could identify the "Reiner Meutsch Stiftung - Fly and Help" as a partner and donor for the entire project. We signed a cooperation agreement in November 2021 and the Sisters started the building process soon after. With the support of the whole community, they started to demolish the old building and in December 2020 the new foundation was constructed.

It was an extraordinary situation. Under our cooperation agreement with the Reiner Meutsch Stiftung - Fly and Help we were responsible for the monitoring and ongoing supervision of the construction progress, the arrangement of funding and the continuous information of the German donors. However, for the first time we couldn't observe the construction process on location. The Sisters of Charity did a wonderful job: With the help of the local parish and many friends the building process had a could start and we are optimistic that the Kindergarten can be completed in May 2021 in time for the new academic year.



Demolition of the old building



Building site for the Kindergarten

## 6. Hla Day, Arts and Crafts Shop Yangon

People In Need continues to support the Arts and Crafts Shop Hla Day in Yangon. Hla Day is a not-for-profit company which sells local artisanal products to tourists and Expats living in Myanmar. Hla Day invests its surpluses in the growth of its businesses and its profits will be distributed to employees and to producers and artisans of its local products. Hla Day gives penniless artisans access to a new market, it supports and helps the artisans with creative design and generates income for the artisans.

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, Hla Day sold products of more than 50 socially disadvantaged producers and artisans fighting against disabilities, discrimination, exclusion and poverty. The artisans and producers come from Yangon but also from Rakhine, Chin, Kayah and Shan states and other parts of Myanmar.

Hla Days producers and artisans employ more than 600 workers and craftsmen in their garages and workshops. For around 75% of these workshops, the income from Hla Day is the main source of income and ensures the livelihood of their families.

In addition to offering a marketing platform, Hla Day supports charitable craft and sewing projects and also offers the graduates of our leadership and vocational training program in Mandalay (see No. 1) an attractive job opportunity.

Unfortunately, everything changed early 2020. Hla Day's sales collapsed as tourism stopped completely and many of our expat customers returned to their home countries. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic will not end as quickly as we originally expected and hoped for. But we will try hard to keep Hla Day alive. Hla Day has become the vital center and the main source of income for our staff and for many artisans and producers of Hla Day products.



Artisan with lacquerware



Hla Day's Team

## 7. Challenge for 2021

Unfortunately, the challenges in Myanmar will continue to grow. Notwithstanding of the major challenges posed by Covid-19, on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 the generals and the Tatmandaw (army) seized power with a coup and replaced the elected government under Aung San Suu Kyi with brute force. Hundreds of thousands of Myanmar citizen demonstrated peacefully against the appropriation of power. Unfortunately, it was not long before the military shot and killed unarmed demonstrators and passers-by with unimaginable brutality, and arrested, tortured and imprisoned peaceful citizens.

We will continue to help the Burmese people as much as possible and will channel financial funds into the country to keep the people alive.