Asia Needs Relevant Education

Just some days ago I joined a philanthropic conference in Singapore organised by Credit Suisse and what I heard made my heart jump. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan (Secretary-General of ASEAN), Professor Kishore Mahbubani (Dean of Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and former President of the UN Security Council) and Christopher MacCormac (Senior Advisor of the Asian Development Bank) discussed the topic of ‘Key Philanthropic Needs in Asia – Opportunities to Shape the Future’. It was obvious that the audience consisting of Asian philanthropists was looking for clues and hints for their next charitable engagement. The panelists were in full agreement and nobody had to read between the lines. Asia needs education and human resource development to bridge the gap between rich and poor and to equalise opportunities. The Secretary-General of ASEAN, who by the way grew up in a poor Muslim community in the South of Thailand and thanks to various scholarships ended up doing his Ph.D. in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, expressed concern about the inequality and the potential threat of social unrest in many ASEAN member states. In his opinion, there is no doubt that ASEAN countries will experience above average growth in the future, but the challenge is to spread the economical benefits of this growth fairly among all social classes. Basic education and relevant higher education such as vocational & technical training seem to be the solution to this challenge. I was ready to jump up and shout to the audience ‘This is exactly what Child’s Dream has been doing since its establishment’, but I kept my seat and my chance of being invited again next year. Sometimes I have to smirk about the fact that expensive think tanks and over engineered research by international aid agencies come to the same conclusions as our humble team of field coordinators.

It is true that education is transforming lives and communities. Most of the beneficiaries in our educational projects represent the first generation of school goers. In our high school and university scholarship programmes we hear often that our students are the first people from their communities to reach this level of education. Since we see education merely as a tool and not the final product, we are extremely happy to see that our alumni are not just transforming their own lives, but also the lives of others. They truly become change makers for their societies.

This would, however, not be possible without our hard working and dedicated team, which is no doubt our biggest strength! A special thanks to the team.

And the team in turn would not be able to implement any projects without the generous support of our donors. Thank you very much for believing in us and our work. Together we truly can transform lives and change societies for the better.

I cannot believe how fast the year has passed. It seems like just yesterday when we were all dressed up in school uniforms enjoying our last year’s Christmas party with the theme ‘Back to School’.

2012 has been a very successful, but incredibly busy year for all of us and we all look forward to a relaxing and refreshing Christmas break.

On behalf of Child’s Dream and its staff, it is my pleasure to wish you a wonderful festive season with lots of memorable moments and a Happy New Year!

Daniel Siegfried
Co-founder
Special Feature

Thomas Brittner
– Head Higher Education

It’s fast approaching 5 years with Child’s Dream... it’s amazing how quickly the time passes, but what’s more amazing are all of the activities, milestones, problems, and solutions crammed into those years!

Child’s Dream seemed the perfect place for me to bring together skills I gained from my Bachelor then Master studies, as well as from real experience travelling, managing, teaching, and coordinating into one role. While what I could contribute to Child’s Dream is what brought me to work here, this is only half of my story; the other half of my story is related to what I have and continue to learn along the journey that has kept me here. As the Head of our Higher Education focus group my work spans across Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, and is therefore varied enough that I am constantly learning new and exciting things so there’s no time for boredom. It is definitely interesting being put into new and challenging positions along the way.

During my time here, I have had a fantastically diverse range of experiences including supervising school construction projects; working in refugee camps; walking barefoot along muddy riverbanks and rice fields to reach isolated schools. I have stood up for migrant children using my rudimentary Thai language - which must have been equal parts information and entertainment for listeners. I've been responsible for budgeting for or buying everything from cows, chickens, and buffalos to electric transformers, school stationary, and motorcycles. I had to winch out our truck stranded in a jungle ‘road’ in Laos. I’ve boated up and down the border of Thailand to visit internally displaced villages in Myanmar. I’ve visited countless education centres such as iron workshops, universities, vocational schools, colleges, organic farms, and training centres. In between all these visits, I’ve attended meetings and conferences, including everyone from governors to entire villages who had never seen a foreigner before. All along the way I have heard bizarre stories from political prisoners to flying monks and have continuously been offered unimaginable foods.

There are many, many more stories to tell, but the difficulty is where to begin. My work has truly been an adventure so far!

- Thomas -
Better learning outcomes through the School Health Programme — the second project phase for our schools in Laos and Cambodia

It all begins with building schools, but, while the buildings themselves provide a safe, secure and conducive environment for learning, very often the children and teachers lack general health knowledge and good hygiene practices. Cleanliness and good hygiene practices are essential in reducing the risk of ill health and infections in children. Indirectly this will also influence the rate of school absenteeism due to sickness.

We have initiated a School Health Programme in 2009 in five schools in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Our health specialist shared with the students and teachers some “best practices” towards cleaner environments and better personal hygiene including garbage disposal, toilet usage and cleanliness, classroom cleaning and tree planting. As it takes time to cultivate good habits, our project teams continue to monitor the schools and provide feedback for further improvements. Students are also encouraged to share their health knowledge with family and friends. At the community level, we hope to establish a network of schools that can influence students, teachers, parents and communities towards better hygiene.

Due to the success in Siem Reap, we extended the outreach of this programme in 2011, to include our schools in Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia and Savannakhet, Laos. We are happy to observe marked improvements in the cleanliness and hygiene of the participating schools and, interestingly, a stronger sense of pride and ownership of the schools by the students. Additionally, we have also supplemented our support with water filtration system projects to increase students’ and communities’ access to clean drinking water.

Political Changes Might Allow Closer Collaboration

Child’s Dream has been supporting the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW), the quasi-exile Ministry of Health, for many years as it addresses the serious health needs in Karen State. Together we are implementing various initiatives to reduce childhood mortality in Eastern Myanmar, which is believed to be among the highest in the world. We support the implementation of a village health worker programme for the prevention of malaria, diarrhea and acute respiratory infection, an immunisation programme and a Vitamin A and deworming programme.

Thanks to the political developments and the increasing support of international aid agencies in Myanmar, the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Myanmar is launching some basic health activities in Karen State. As a result, we urged KDHW to seek dialogue and closer collaboration with the MOH not only to share resources, skills and knowledge, but also to ensure the continuation of their essential health interventions. By the middle of 2013, we hope to have a clearer picture on how KDHW and MOH could work together.

A successful and growing relationship

We were once again awarded a grant of over CHF 100,000 from Credit Suisse Asia-Pacific. This funding was given to us for the construction of educational infrastructure in northern Laos. Our relationship with Credit Suisse dates back to 2005 and has resulted in grants exceeding CHF 600,000 over the years. Credit Suisse has decided that, apart from investing in their own employees, it is their duty to support less privileged communities in South East Asia. Many thanks again for all their trust and support!

A group of 72 Credit Suisse employees flew to Chiang Mai for a team building event in early November. A total of 98 primary school children originating from three Thai boarding houses we built joined this event for one day. We had set up a Mini Olympic competition at the Chiang Mai Zoo where children and bankers had to show their skills and compete in six teams. The group was so large that we hardly all fitted into the group photograph.

A group of 72 Credit Suisse employees flew to Chiang Mai for a team building event in early November. A total of 98 primary school children originating from three Thai boarding houses we built joined this event for one day. We had set up a Mini Olympic competition at the Chiang Mai Zoo where children and bankers had to show their skills and compete in six teams. The group was so large that we hardly all fitted into the group photograph.

Project News
Integration of diversethics Foundation into Child’s Dream!

The board of diversethics Foundation has decided to merge the activities of the foundation with the work of Child’s Dream. diversethics Foundation was established in June 2006 by Marc and Daniel with the purpose of complementing the work of Child’s Dream as Child’s Dream had a purely children related mandate, which did not allow supporting adults or entire communities. However, over the years the work of Child’s Dream has become much more comprehensive and more community development focused. The mandate of Child’s Dream was subsequently adjusted to support communities and adults in need as well. Child’s Dream has higher brand recognition and a much broader and more stable donor base than diversethics Foundation. The integration of diversethics Foundation into the work of Child’s Dream was hence a logical step.

The merger will allow the combined legal entity to achieve significant cost savings and further efficiency improvements. We are excited to be able to serve more communities and beneficiaries in need going forward. The integration will take effect as of 1st January 2013.

Donations in Kind

Many well-intentioned friends, donors and family members often ask us whether they should collect donations in kind (toys, children’s clothes, books, second-hand smart phones, etc.) for us so that we can pass them on to boarding houses, schools or clinics. This is a very noble idea and requires work and engagement that we very much value. Unfortunately, at our end this is very challenging to handle.

If they are sent by post or courier from overseas, prohibitively high Thai customs fees make it too costly for us to accept such donations. Often we could buy new clothes and toys locally with these fees alone!

The only feasible way to do this is to hand-carry such items into Thailand, ideally directly to our office in Chiang Mai. An alternative is to hand-carry them into Bangkok or any other Thai destination and then send them on by Thai post to our office in Chiang Mai. Postage fees in Thailand are not expensive. We do not want to dampen anyone’s enthusiasm and good intentions when collecting such items for our children, but their handling is not as easy as it might seem.

Thank you for your understanding.

Shopping for Christmas

Beat the queues in the shopping malls and shop online! Visit our Child’s Dream online shop. You don’t just shop conveniently but you also make a difference for children in need with your purchases. From greeting cards to our very own cookbook, we have a number of unique presents. (www.childsdream.org/shop)

Contact us
Child’s Dream Foundation
238/3 Wualai Road, T. Haiya, A. Muang
Chiang Mai 50100, Thailand

Tel. + 66 (0) 53 201 811
Fax. + 66 (0) 53 201 812
www.childsdream.org
info@childsdream.org