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Dear sponsors and friends,

The year 2020 – for all of us as well as for Himalaya Hilfe – was a year of major changes. So much of what we previously had taken for granted was suddenly no longer possible and required a lot of creativity.

Of course, we had been planning months in advance when and in what order and for how long we would stay at the individual projects to visit the sponsored children, adult, nuns and monks, take a look at important documents and to collect and send their letters to you. And, of course, to give them the sponsorship money and your donations. We even would have had four travel companions in March 2020.

By mid-February we decided to cancel the trip for our travel companions, as it, on the one hand, became uncertain for how long there would be flights available to India, Nepal and back to Germany. On the other hand, the information about the few known COVID cases was very unclear. We, Ulli and Sabine, were in India already, and therefore we just waited to see what was still possible.

Then, it went pretty fast with the lockdown – Sikkim, as the first federal state of India, closed its borders at the beginning of March. In Sikkim, we supervise the majority of the projects and individual sponsorships. By Mid-March, the border between Nepal and India was closed and finally air, railway and bus travel within India was completely dispended. Schools, universities, shops, and even banks were forced to close down.

That also affected the monasteries and institutes, who are supported by Himalaya Hilfe. No outsiders were allowed to enter the premises and the buildings. There was a strict curfew in place for all people in the institutes/monasteries, only the ones in charge of procurement and a few others, who had to take care of very urgent business outside, were allowed to leave the premises. And it looked as if it was going to stay like that for a longer period of time.

Therefore, it became clear that our usual procedure had to be postponed indefinitely and we had to come up with some alternatives.

We then asked the persons in charge of the individual projects and groups to collect all the news, letters, documents, and certificate of your sponsored children and adults and to send them to us digitally. That took a lot more effort and, of course, it took much longer than usual when we go there in person. Sometimes, it worked really well, and sometimes not so well.

In September we learned that the post offices in India and Nepal were still not forwarding the mail to Europe, therefore we sent you the letters of your sponsored children and adults via email.



In autumn of 2020, we were still hoping to be able go back to India and Nepal by the end of the year, but then it didn't work out. Whether the spring tour in 2021 is going to take place is still written in the stars.

Therefore, we 'joyfully and effortlessly' opened up the second round of 'Himalaya Hilfe digital'.

During our regular local visits we are able to meet and talk, laugh and drink tea with all participants, and therefore, of course, we are able to learn much more about their present situation. However, by then we had accepted the art of what is possible and had several phone calls with the people in charge. The children and elderly and everybody else at the monasteries and institutes were well and they managed to deal with the situation pretty well, even though it had started to become more and more difficult. Until the month of November all were healthy.

Then, unfortunately, there were four Covid cases in the **Karma Dupgyud Choeling Monastery in Ladakh**. Luckily, those were mild cases, and meanwhile the monks have recovered.

In the **Karma Chagchen Jampaling Nunnery**, currently everything is fine. During the spring of 2020 all the nuns were practicing the Nyungne Fasting, a special meditation practice.

Regarding the **sponsored children and elderly in the camps of Ladakh**, we learned that as a precautionary measure the old people didn't leave the camps. The children had to stay at home, as in Ladakh the schools were closed down, too. A few of the older children who are studying in other parts of India experienced major problems, when they wanted to travel back home. Meanwhile, everybody is waiting to continue with their studies.

The **Rigung School in Ladakh** was also forced to close down. Many of the students are from nomad families and went home to remote areas during their winter holidays. Due to the lockdown those children could not return to Leh. The school organized lessons online, and we received very good information from them, that we would like to pass on in their original wording:

„As you know the schools are closed due to COVID, we have started online classes. It is conducted through WhatsApp mainly through which teachers send videos, audios and documents related to class lecture. The same is also shared through Google Classroom. Classes are also conducted through Zoom App, twice a week.

Students take these classes through mobile phones, many senior students have their personal phones. Few senior students and all junior students use their parent's cell phones. But we also have few students who stay away from mobile network range or from good internet connection. Most of these students have given their relatives phone number who stay within network and internet connection to us. Our teachers call them and update them about the classes and ask them to download materials shared. they then send these to the students. Also, when the students themselves get internet connection (once a week mostly), they download the files from Whatsapp or Google Classroom.

I am happy to inform, that we have also conducted several activities for students like performing yoga, painting competitions etc. I am also glad to tell you that all students have appeared for the exams that we have conducted in August and they have all performed well. We also had several rounds of Parents-Teachers meeting headed by our Principal and discussed about the classes and the methods. Parents have expressed their satisfaction and some have also applauded the fact that our school did not have summer break this time and we were consistent with the classes. Since we are covering less chapters through videos, in order not to burden students with this new method, our teachers are working really hard in this pandemic time and are available round the clock for students.“



The **Ka-Ten Namgyalling Elementary School in Rey/Sikkim** described their situation similarly:

„It was just beginning of the session 2020 where the virus was spread around the world, to that time we started our school and it was running smoothly as usual as earlier. However, there were no problems till mid of march. After that the virus has spread here too in our country. So, the government had decided to close all the schools and our school also closed for one and half month.

Within this pandemic holiday our children face some problems related to studies and not only them. Teachers also too worried about their studies. After one and half month the government announced to do online classes but here in Rey village we have too much network problems as well as parents could not effort to buy smart phone. So, we took a parents meeting about the students regarding the classes. Then, we started home schooling by keeping to follow the guideline, which was given by the government, but the classes was taking place at our own home.

Recently, we finished the half yearly examination and now we are able to give them a quality education.

Here, we used the sponsor money to make the roof of the school courtyard that children can use play in rainy season as well as we can use the space for school functions or any others activities.“

The nuns of the **Chokar Dechan Nunnery in Rumtek/Sikkim**, the monks of the **Dharma Chakra Center in Zimchung/Sikkim**, the **Kayathang Monastery School in Zimchung/Sikkim** and the monks of the **Mindu Tempen Monastery in Rey/Sikkim** conducted many special meditations during the time of the lockdown, culminating in the Wishing Prayer Festival (Mönlam) in December that took place in the new meditation hall of the Dharma Chakra Center – for a period of seven days they all recited wishing prayers. As we have heard, also many people from Rumtek and Rey participated. Usually, during the Mönlam, several thousand nuns, monks and lay people come together in Bodhgaya. As that was not possible this time, it took place ‘decentrally’ and simultaneously in all monasteries under the spiritual guidance of Karmapa Thaye Dorje, and so, of course, also in the monasteries in Ladakh, Tilokpur and in Nepal.

As well as in the **Diwakar Buddhist School in Takdah/Darjeeling** and in the **Diwakar Buddhist Academy (Shedra) in Kalimpong/Darjeeling**. Before the start of the Mönlam, the students underwent their tests, and this time all of them stayed at the institute during the winter holidays. Usually during the holidays, most of the students and monastic students go and visit their parents in the other federal states of India or Nepal or even Bhutan, but that was not possible due to the situation and the restrictions.

The monastic students of the **New Nalanda Tilopa Institute in Tilokpur/Himachal Pradesh** found themselves in the same situation. At present there are only 14 boys in Tilokpur, because several children did not return to the Institute in March 2020 after the winter holidays.

The situation in **Nepal** was and is similar. The **Sharminub Institute** in Raniban is still closed for visitors to prevent infections. This precautionary measure is very understandable, as the health system is rather bad in Nepal.

The **monks of the Raj Maha Vihar Monastery** are still living at the Sharminub Institute. As we reported in our last annual letter, they had been looking forward to finally relocate to their newly built monastery on top of the Swayambu hill in August 2020, what unfortunately was not possible. Though the construction works continued at a slow pace, they could not be completed yet.

In Nepal, public transport was also shut down. Before the lockdown, many people moved back to their home villages and are difficult to get in touch with. Banks were closed, and people are very cautious and they avoid public squares and buildings. The work of Himalaya Hilfe was also affected by that, but we continue to work together with the local people in charge to find good solutions.



These are the news about the work of Himalaya Hilfe in the past few months.

To all of you – many thanks that you also in these turbulent and difficult times so generously donated for the projects and sponsorships and even took on new sponsorships. In 2020, you supported the people in the Himalayas via 1012 project- or individual-bound regular sponsorships and donated a total of 287,222 Euro for sponsorships, projects, and the emergency aid.

Many thanks also to all who are supporting Himalaya Hilfe with their ‘general donations’ and therefore help to make it possible that the sponsorship monies and donations can be distributed by 100 %.

As you know, running costs are compensated for by this kind of donations. And, of course, thanks to everyone who helped us with their energy and knowledge, and to those who recommended Himalaya Hilfe.

This year, we decided to send out the annual letter and the photo page in digital form. Please print them out yourselves, if you prefer to have them on paper. Thank you.

Upon further notice, you can forward us your mail to your sponsored children and adults via email (preferably in PDF-format or as a photo). If you want to have them forwarded in spring, please send them to us by March 20, then we will send them immediately together with the new sponsorship lists to the people in charge of the projects and groups.

Please also let us know, if you changed your name or address, so that you can receive the donation receipts, and hopefully, also soon the original letters from Nepal and India.

We wish you a good, successful and healthy new year and hope to see and meet you all soon somewhere in person,

Your Himalaya Hilfe Team