

A Short Report of the Activities of the Trust

PARTNERSCHAFT KOTTAR (FEAST)

The trust was formed on 1 July 1998. It was named Partnerschaft Kottar (Feast). The word Partnerschaft means Partnership. Kottar refers to the oldest and historical portion of the town Nagercoil, which is the head-quarters of Kanyakumari district. Kottar is also the name of the Catholic Diocese. The author of the trust having completed his education in foreign countries visualized the possibilities of collaborating with his friends abroad for the development of the poorest of the poor people of this district. He also aimed at getting a place for these poor people in the future history of the district. And so he named the trust so.

The word FEAST stands as abbreviation for 'For Education And Social Transformation' which are the aims and goals of the Trust.

Though the Trust was inaugurated in the year 1998 with such high goal, it remained low in activities due to several other engagements of the author and his companions. It is in the year 2001 that the author decided to really get in to action with the Trust. The application for obtaining FCRA Number was made and the authorization was obtained in April 2002. From then on the activities as per the aims and goals of the Trust were launched.

BASIC PRINCIPLES:

1. No child should be deprived of education for want of financial assistance
2. Every child should have equal opportunity to enjoy its childhood
3. Poverty should have no right or power to divide the family; instead the child and the old belong to the family and to orphanages or homes for the elderly.
4. It should be possible to reach out to the poor without high administrative cost

EDUCATION:

The major focus of the organization is to make education possible for the poorest of the poor in rural villages and to create awareness of the need for education among people who have no value for education.

FISHER CHILDREN:

In this district, Kanyakumari, where most people are literate there survives a people called Fisher folks among whom education was only around 20%. We started to introduce a scholarship programme among these people. The children of widows and the children from destitute families were chosen with the help of village administration. We have tried to find sponsors from foreign countries. Since the demand for sponsorship for education is so high we take only one child from a family, even if the family has 5 or more children. As such one sponsorship is not for one particular child, instead it is for the children of one family, through this one sponsored child.

CHILDREN OF SC/ST COMMUNITIES:

Just like the fisher folks we found low percentage of education among the SC/ST communities and other socially marginalized people. And so we extend our activities

among all these people. At the moment, Dalits, the once untouchables, are the most preferred group of people for all our activities.

Now we are happy to realize that at the moment we are able to cater to over 2500 children from almost all over the district of Kanyakumari. The list of the names of the beneficiaries includes children from all communities and all religions – Christians, Hindus and Muslims. The only criterion for the inclusion is poverty and inability to educate the children.

RECURRING DEPOSITS FOR THE SPONSORED CHILDREN:

The sponsored children are not only helped for the current education. Their future is also envisioned in a small way. From the time a child is sponsored a Recurring Deposit account is opened in the name of the child and each month Rupees 100 is automatically saved in the account which the child will be able to withdraw when he / she completes the education and gets in to regular life.

HIGHER EDUCATION SAVING SCHEME:

We focused on making it possible to have primary education. After ten years of ministry to the poorest of the poor children in the field of primary education we were happy to realize that the numbers of school drop-outs have decreased. Much more encouraging is the fact that the number young students who wanted to continue their studies has increased. It is now a normal feature to see the poor students and their mothers on the look out for opportunities to have some higher education and to get in some job.

And so from the little money we receive from the sponsors for the primary education of the children we initiated another saving scheme to support the higher education of the students. Each child is given a savings account passbook and every time an amount is credited / withdrawn due entry is made. The child is in possession of the book and knows the status of the account. This year we were given the opportunity to experience the joy in the face of the parents and students as they withdrew amounts from this account in order to pay for the higher education of the students who had completed the twelfth standard and went for the higher studies.

EVENING TUITION:

With a view to improve the quality of education to all the poorer children in the villages who may not be able to afford private tuition we are running free tuition centres in 44 villages. There are 115 teachers involved in imparting education to over 4000 children. There is a lot more requests to open new centres.

These tuition centres are meant to help the poor children to do the home work from the schools. The well to do children go for private tuition and the poor children who can not afford to pay for tuition come here. This has become a must for the children in order to fetch good marks in the exams.

SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS AND TO HOMES FOR CHILDREN:

After the Tsunami there had been some move in Germany to support poor institutions in South East Asia. We were able to get some sponsorship for 10 schools. Now this sponsorship has been reduced to three schools.

Besides, in the month of May we receive a lot of requests from the schools and from homes for children for school uniforms and books and other school material for poor

children who do not have any sponsorship. At the beginning of the current school year we had distributed for almost three thousand children from various schools and homes for children. Unfortunately we could not fulfill even 50% of the requests.

HOME FOR THE HOMELESS:

Our next attention is on the homeless. With a view to provide a roof over their head and for the poor children to keep at least their books safe we launched a programme to provide small homes for the poor. In providing houses priority is given to homeless widows.

We have been receiving donations from individuals through our sponsors for building houses for the poor. After completing the houses we inscribe the names of the donors on the wall, make photos together with the beneficiaries and forward it to the donors. In this period of over ten years we have been able to build a little over 300 houses for the poorest of the poor in around 40 villages.

TOILETS:

In coastal villages hygiene is a major problem. While women use open areas in the bushes, which are not much in the coastal villages, men folks use the sea shore to answer the nature's call. This hazard has been one of the major route causes for several types of illnesses and evils. Our organization has taken it as a special task to educate the people on the need for hygiene and for having toilets at home. In our efforts, besides building the small houses with toilets, we have also tried to help hundreds of families with subsidies to build toilets. There is now a great awareness and eagerness among these people to get their own provisions at home.

INCOME GENERATION PROGRAMME:

While providing scholarship for children and homes for the families we also try to make them generators of income for themselves. They should come out of dependency on others. We had tried to give them incentives by providing financial assistance to buy working tools. We also try to create job opportunities for young girls and widows in tailoring centres, coir making centres, providing financial assistance to start some petty shops and handicrafts units. In this effort we also work with other NGOs.

SELF HELP GROUPS FOR WOMEN:

In the first two financial years we were helping people on individual basis and through other NGOs for income generation activities. But now we have organized our beneficiaries in to Self Help Groups. There are 130 groups spread through out the district of Kanyakumari. These women's groups are organized only with the mothers of our sponsored children. Each group has from 15 to 20 women. We encourage them to actively participate in small savings scheme and other financial activities. Active participation of women in these groups empowers women through Micro-credit system. It is also strong fight against unjust system of usury.

MEDICINE AND MEDICAL HELP:

One of the pressing areas of charity has been medical help. It is so difficult to think of answering to all the requests in the area. Yet we had to attend to children with heart

problems and families having one of their members affected with cancer etc. The main reason for the malady is lack medical insurance system in India. For the first time in the financial year 2002 – 2003 we had arranged for open heart surgery for two children in Madras Medical Mission Hospital and for one widow in the same hospital in the following year. They were successful and the survival of the patients, who otherwise would not have survived morally forced us to continue the service to poor. Later, we are arranging for heart procedures to be attended to in several hospitals. We had also helped a few men in orthopedic situations. A few of the youngsters affected by polio sicknesses were helped in different ways from operation to buying three wheelers and motor cycles.

CLOTH AND FOOD TO POOR AND NEEDY:

We have tried to help poorer children who are not yet our sponsor children with school uniforms together with other little financial assistance for education purposes. During festival days we have also tried to reach out with some clothing provisions to the abandoned elders and widows to make their day special. Every year before the schools reopen we try to reach out to poor children who have not received sponsorship with assistance to get school materials. In May and June 2008, at the beginning of the school year we had helped almost 2000 school children with their school uniforms and note books.

FOOD FOR THE FAMILY:

In the year 2004 one Rev. Father Walter Ries, from the diocese of Bamberg, Germany came to us and stayed with us from the beginning of October to the beginning of December. During this period he stay in different parishes and visited the communities.

One of the miseries that affected him most was the pitiable situation of several elderly persons both men and women. He personally encountered several elderly persons who had brought of large families with 5 or 6 children, but in their old age of 70s and later not having the opportunity even for a single meal a day. And so as he was leaving us he appealed to me to try to do some thing for such people.

After long and serious considerations we introduced a programme called Food For the Family. Under this programme an abandoned elderly person or a helpless widow or lonely person would receive from us 10 Kilos of rice and Rupees 100 per month. This help would reach the concerned person without the knowledge of others so that this person's dignity may not be hurt.

When this person dies I try to attend the funeral to make sure that he / she receives a dignified funeral.

We also try to arrange for some medical check-ups periodically. Our dream is to provide such medical facilities once in three months, when provisions would enable us to do so.

A VILLAGE FOR THE LEPERS:

In December 2006 I was given the grace by God to visit a small settlement of lepers adjacent to our town. I was so shocked at seeing their living condition but the spirit joy and confidence of the people took me by surprise. Then they expressed to me that I had been sent to them by God. They wanted that I take steps to provide them a decent living place and to enable them to earn their livelihood by themselves and that they need not have to go for begging.

I did believe their words. God has enabled us to fulfill one of their requests. On 5th November 2008 we were able to give to each of the 15 families a house and open the settlement under the name "JOTHI NAGER". But their second request to provide them with some income generation activities is not yet fulfilled.

TSUNAMI:

A word may be added in the list of our activities about our involvement about Tsunami and the rehabilitation activities.

God was so gracious to me that He brought me the very spot of Tsunami disaster at the very beginning moment but save me without any harm. Being an eye-witness I was also the first coordinator of rehabilitation activities in our district. After 15 days when a capable government official took over the responsibility I withdrew from our diocesan coordination and organized a little help from our organization.

Though we did a little bit of every thing our main contribution was in working in close collaboration with the government in procuring land for reconstructing the lost houses. As the then responsible official even today declares without our cooperation the reconstruction activities would not have started in our area. But with our little help our district has been the first district in the tsunami affected part of the world to complete the reconstruction of the houses. And we have been the only organization that has so worked in close collaboration with the government to procure land for reconstruction. It was appreciated also by several NGOs who spent large amounts to construct in the land we had helped to buy.

PALWADI:

The government of India runs a kind of Kindergarten for poor children from the age of 2 1/2 to 5 years. The children come to the so called centres at 10 A.M. and remain there till 4 P.M They are given free noon meal there and taught some alphabets and rhymes. A spirit to learn is inculcated. While the rich and well-to-do children attend Kindergarten and learn English the poor children are brought here. The main reason to attend these Palwadies is the free noon-meal.

In November 2008 we received some visitors from England. At the same time we also received a request from one of the workers is Palwadi asking for some help to care for these children. And so we visited some of these centres. On seeing the poor and unhealthy conditions our visitors started literally to shed tears.

There are 30 or more children brought together in a small room of about 200 or 300 Square feet room. There is no play material or even space for the children to play. No stools or chairs for the children to sit.

The noon meal is cooked in a corner or so with fire wood and the smoke spread through the room where the children are kept. The children have to breathe the smoke.

The vessels to cook are not the ideal ones. In many places there is no electricity and so there is no fan even to have the air at least moving in the hot and smoking room. After the visit we formed a desire to come forward to help these children / the centres with cooking gas connections. When further help would be available we could fix fans, and then to think of other facilities to care for these poor miserable one.

There are altogether 1359 centres at the moment in the district. Out of these 241 centres have gas connections. We are intending to organize 77 new connections by the end of January 2009. In normal price one connection would cost us around Rs. 5000. (To make it a round sum \$ 100 or 80 Euros)

OUR WEBSITES:

There are three websites regarding our activities among the poor, but none of them is from us. The available ones are created by our sponsor groups from Germany and Italy. The following Websites are now available:

German: www.Zukunft-fuer-kottar.de, www.zms-ev.de
Italian: www.adozioniindia.it

May I hope that from this report you are able to have some idea about our activities among the poorest of the poor in our part of the world. You are always welcome to refer to us for more information or clarification about our selves or about our commitment to the poor.

Wishing you God's choicest blessing for the year 2009,

I remain,

Fr. Jeremias George.