



# **THE BAMBOO SCHOOLS PROJECT in NEPAL**

## **Annual Activity Report**

**2009**

*In 2008, Karuna-Shechen became a partner of Uttam Sanjel, a young Nepalese man dedicated to the education of vulnerable children throughout Nepal and the founder of the "Samata Shiksha Niketan" – "Promote Equity through Education" – project. The project plans to construct a school in each of Nepal's 75 districts. Karuna-Shechen, with the generous help of many benefactors, is partnering with Uttam to build large schools where any child can receive a quality education for a fee low enough for an extremely poor family to afford. The education of its children is essential for the future of Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world where more than 50% of the population is illiterate.*

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Origin of the Project**

The Bamboo Schools Project in Nepal builds schools for vulnerable and destitute children throughout Nepal. These children come from very poor Nepalese or Tibetan families; many have had to survive on the streets or have been forced into child labour. These children do not have the opportunity or the funds to receive an education under the present system. This is especially true for girls who are rarely allowed to attend school. In Nepal more than 50% of the population is illiterate. Having an education, in addition to being personally enriching, will greatly improve their future chances of finding employment and contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty that plagues the country.

Uttam Sanjel began this work by teaching street children to read and write free of charge, and quickly had more students than he could handle. He created his project, "Samata Shiksha Niketan," and began to build schools made of bamboo for all children who wanted a quality education but who could not afford a high fee. These schools are open to all children, with special emphasis on the education of girls.

The choice of bamboo as the construction material is a strategic one. Bamboo is inexpensive and easily available in Nepal. By using this material along with corrugated iron roofs, Uttam's team of qualified workers is able to build a large school in 3 to 4 months, and costs are reduced by 60%. On average, the construction of a bamboo school now costs only 60,000 USD. Uttam's strategy is to begin by building in the districts surrounding the capital and the 20 districts bordering India. He targets cities or urban areas with the highest density of population in each district. In this way a maximum number of children will be able to attend.

**Uttam Sanjel**



"The bamboo schools are a very effective middle way between the good but expensive private schools that few families can afford, and the public government schools where the education provided to children is of poor quality. Bamboo schools are inexpensive and allow all children to get a good education".

## Karuna–Shechen Partners with Uttam

When the Karuna-Shechen team first met Uttam we were immediately impressed by his commitment, objectives, and planning skills (he had already built 4 schools). After visiting his first school, built in 2001, we were struck by the happy and bright faces of the children and the positive difference the school is making in their lives. In the winter of 2008 Karuna-Shechen decided to partner with Uttam to help him achieve his goal of building a school in each district. Our first year of working together has been extremely successful.



*A group of children from the Jorpati School, in Kathmandu, the first school built by Samata Shiksha Niketan.*

**From Dipesh Bade, a 12-year-old student at the Banepa school:**



“Even if you are poor you can be successful in life if you study hard”.

*Dipesh comes from a poor family who cannot buy him the scientific books he longs to study. He sees his education at the bamboo school as the way to a better future and to attain his dream: becoming a scientist.*

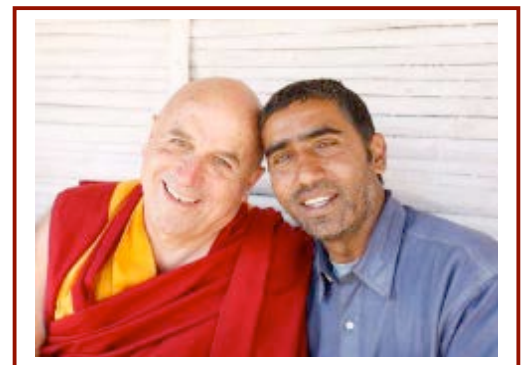
## KARUNA-SHECHEN AND SAMATA SHIKSHA NIKETAN IN 2009

### The Construction of 3 New Schools

In 2009, the partnership between Karuna-Shechen and Uttam made it possible to build two new schools and part of a third. The first school built under the partnership is in **Banepa** (Kavre Palanchok district) and the second in **Kawasowti** (Nawalparasi district). The third school, in **Pokhara** (Kaski district) was begun in October 2009 and will be completed in early 2010.

The **Kawasowti School** was originally planned to educate 1000 children. However, more than 2000 children applied in the first week. To accommodate all these eager children, Uttam designed a rotation system whereby one group attends class from 6 to 11am, and the other group from 11am to 5pm. The school has accordingly been able to accept 3000 students.

There was a delay in the construction of the Pokhara School due to legal difficulties with the owner of the site. We found a better, more suitable location and we are pleased to announce that the construction of the school will be finished in time for the beginning of the 2010 Nepali school year.



*Matthieu Ricard, President of Karuna-Shechen, and Uttam Sanjel*



Construction of the school in Kawasowti



Inauguration of the school in Kawasowti with Uttam Sanjel

Uttam is very satisfied with his partnership with Karuna-Shechen. It has proven to be very productive and has moved us closer to the aim of building one school in each of Nepal's 75 districts. Karuna-Shechen, through the generous and enthusiastic support of its donors, has helped him raise the funds needed for these new schools.

In addition to the schools built in partnership with KS, Uttam himself has raised funds to construct two additional schools in 2009 - one in **Hetauda** (Makwanpur district) and the other in **Narayenghat** (Chitwan district). In just one year he has built three schools with KS as well as these two. This has significantly increased the number of schools that are being built. A total of eight schools are already operational and educate **more than 18 000 children** today.



A group of students and their teacher at the Patan School

## Bamboo schools built by Samata Shiksha Niketan in Nepal 2001-2009

NAME OF THE SCHOOL		YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	NUMBER OF CLASSES	RATIO BOYS / GIRLS
CITY	DISTRICT				
Kathmandu (Jorpati)	KATHMANDU	2001	3500	Kindergarten to class 10	Boys: 25% Girls: 75%
Baktapur	BAKTAPUR	2002	1500	Kindergarten to class 10	Boys: 30% Girls: 70%
Patan	LALITPUR	2003	1500	Kindergarten to class 9	Boys: 40% Girls: 60%
Melamchi	SINDUPALCHOK	2004	1500	Kindergarten to class 9	Boys: 50% Girls: 50%
Banepa	KAVRE PALANCHOK	2009	1500	Kindergarten to class 8	Boys: 45% Girls: 55%
Hetauda	MAKWANPUR	2009	3000	Kindergarten to class 9	Boys: 25% Girls: 75%
Kawasowti	NAWALPARASI	2009	3000	Kindergarten to class 7	Boys: 25% Girls: 75%
Narayenghat	CHITWAN	2009	3000	Kindergarten to class 7	Boys: 40% Girls: 60%
Pokhara	KASKI	2009-2010	<i>Data to be provided after inauguration</i>	<i>Data to be provided after inauguration</i>	<i>Data to be provided after inauguration</i>

## The Bamboo Schools' Students

The students who attend classes at the bamboo schools are ensured of receiving a well balanced and quality education. In addition to Nepali, English language classes are compulsory, thereby providing the children with an increasingly important tool for their future. The bamboo schools are an effective balance between the unaffordable private schools and the government schools that do not provide English classes and where the quality of education and direct supervision is poor.

The teachers are attentive to the students' needs, the classes have a relatively low student to teacher ratio, and the majority of students are eager to learn. They understand the importance of this chance to receive an education. The school day starts with the students reciting the 15 commitments: a set of values to live by. The teachers and staff stress these values to the children in order to help them grow into responsible adults who will contribute to their community.

## The Impact of Education

Uttam is devoted to the students and, with KS, monitors their academic development and environment by visiting each school at least once a month. Our reports indicate that a high percentage of the children are making significant progress both in their education and home life and that this opportunity for education is having a lasting and positive impact on their lives.

The children have gained recognition and respect from their families and communities – who are often completely illiterate themselves – because they are receiving an education. The school provides a safe environment that promotes learning and personal empowerment and keeps the children off the streets and away from the dangers encountered there.

In Nepal, the education of girls is generally considered to be of little importance. While some families save as much as possible to send their sons to a good private school or to the government schools, in general girls are made to stay home and help their mothers. One of the objectives of the Samata Shiksha Niketan project is to make education available to these girls, and this is reflected in the enrolment process, in which the majority of students are girls. The schools provide the girls with the education they would not otherwise receive and, therefore, contribute to narrowing the educational and developmental gap between Nepal's men and women.

A small percentage of children still do not attend school every day. One reason is that occasionally some of the girls are needed to stay home and help their families. The school staff and Uttam spend considerable time talking to these families and explaining how important education is for them and how it will benefit their communities.



*The start of a school day at Baktapur School*

### THE FIFTEEN COMMITMENTS

*These commitments are repeated by the children in each school at the start of each day.*

1. I never tell a lie
2. I never steal
3. I love the younger ones
4. I respect the older ones
5. I never abuse drugs
6. The greatest religion is social service
7. The greatest enemy is anger
8. The greatest power is peace
9. Human beings are the caste of man
10. Water is our life; I preserve it
11. There may be a mistake; do not tell a lie
12. I always respect my teachers and parents
13. I behave friendly to all
14. I love nature
15. I will never kill another



*Girls enrolled in the bamboo school in Patan*

## PERSPECTIVES FOR 2010

### At Least 3 New Schools Will Be Built

Uttam's team normally builds an entire bamboo school in 3 to 4 months. Construction is halted during the monsoon season, but it is still possible to build at least three schools a year. As we are trying to reach the goal of a school in every district, Uttam and KS are increasing this number when circumstances and donations allow, as in 2009.

The Pokhara School being now finished, three new bamboo schools are planned for 2010. This and any additional construction will depend on donations, favourable building circumstances, and cooperation from the authorities. We will also build a college in the Jorpati School, in Kathmandu, in order to provide students with the higher- grade classes 11 and 12. These are the final two years needed before students can take the national school exam and earn what is known as the "School Leaving Certificate".

### A Pilot Health and Sanitation Project in the Kathmandu Bamboo School

In 2010 with the help of one of its partners, Karuna-Shechen will initiate a health and sanitation project in the Jorpati (Kathmandu) Bamboo School.

The pilot project is two-fold: 1) Build additional toilets and access to safe water for the school children. This is of paramount importance both for the health of the individual as well as providing training in good sanitary practices that can also be applied at home. 2) Conduct medical and dental camps in the school to monitor the children's health and, if necessary, refer them to the Shechen Clinic for additional medical help. Health education classes on hygiene and good health practices will be given to the children and their parents. We will take the opportunity of these sessions to raise awareness about the benefits of receiving a quality education and how it can increase the children's future contributions to their families and community.

### The story of Sarita Lama, a 17-year-old student at the Jorpati school



*Sarita Lama's story is an example of how the bamboo schools give girls the chance for an education and a better life. Although Sarita had tuberculosis her family made her work in a carpet factory. After the school staff intervened her parents agreed to give her a chance for a education. Her marks are now always above 90%, and she hopes to become a nurse. She wants to learn more about the medical situation in Nepal and contribute to its improvement.*



Student at the Patan School



## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

### FUNDS ARE NEEDED TO CONSTRUCT THREE NEW BAMBOO SCHOOLS:

- Karuna-Shechen plans to help Samata Shiksha Niketan attain its goal - to build one bamboo school in each of Nepal's 75 districts. We are **raising funds to build three new bamboo schools.**
- **The cost for the construction of one bamboo school is now approximately \$68,500 USD.** Costs per school vary slightly depending on the distance between the construction site and the capital. The costs of transportation of the materials and the construction team often raise the price for schools in more remote districts. Prices for building materials are also increasing.

**We welcome you to join us in supporting these schools**

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