

example of a

**CertiLingua® project documentation**



Humanitarian Aid Work during a  
two-week internship in India



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## 1. Preamble

*“Around the world, 27–30,000 children die every day. That is equivalent to 1 child dying every 3 seconds, 20 children dying every minute, (...) or 10–11 million children dying every year. Over 50 million children died between 2000 and 2005.”<sup>1</sup>*

Millions of people all around the world suffer from poverty. Thousands of humans die every day of hunger or other causes that are related to poverty, above all children.

Globalization has not only led to poverty reduction in many countries like India or China, but has also caused an increase of inequality, a larger gap between rich and poor around the world, especially in developing countries.

The quotation above shows the necessity for developed countries to help developing countries to fight against global challenges such as poverty existing today. One should put into consideration, that there are humans who need our support.

For these reasons, I decided to participate in one of their major projects that especially supports street children.

## 2. Introduction

In 2007, I had the opportunity to visit India and gain intercultural experience during a two-week internship organized by the German organization VIA e.V. (Verein für internationalen und interkulturellen Austausch, *association for international and intercultural exchange*).

### 2.1 My expectations

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/2/causes-of-poverty>, 18.01.2009

Before starting the internship in India, I had several expectations:

First of all I wanted to learn more about the country, its inhabitants and the culture and in that way broaden my horizon. Moreover I expected to improve my language skills, both in English as well as in Hindi which is the official language in India. Furthermore, I wanted to help in a poor country and at the same time experience and find out more about the operation method of an international organization.



After doing some research about aid organizations in Germany that offer internships in foreign countries, I soon realized that VIA e.V. was the best choice.

## 2.2 The organization

VIA which was established in 1992 as a non-profit association has achieved an establishment of international contacts all around the world.

Moreover the organization intends to give Europeans the opportunity to mingle with people living in different countries through assistance in diverse projects, enabling an exchange of different nationalities.

The partner organization in India is *Deepalaya* which was founded in 1976 with only 5 children and 2 teachers. By now it has become the biggest non governmental organization (NGO) and to this date has succeeded in supporting about 40.000 children street children, especially orphans, through organization of schools and different programs. Deepalaya is based in Delhi which is the capital and the second biggest city in India. That is also the place where the projects of VIA are carried out.

In the following, I will deliver insight into the country, its culture and lifestyle and furthermore share my international and intercultural experiences that I gained whilst participating voluntarily in an aid project for street children.

## 3. Arrival in India

After a long flight from Frankfurt to New Delhi, Lisa - whom I met at the airport in Frankfurt - and I were picked up by one of the Indian project leaders who was very hospitable and saluted us with a warm “NAMASTE”.



### 3.1 First impressions

On the way to the project location I had some time to receive an impression of the new country. Before starting the trip I had read that India was rich in cultural diversity, traditions and contradictions which turned out to be right. The big contrast between people was visible at once: on the one hand the poor and disabled beggars suffering from hunger, ordinary people driving small black and yellow auto-rickshaws driving on small mud roads; on the other hand skyscrapers, huge buildings and business men driving expensive cars.

The hot and humid climate, the hectic traffic, the exotic smells and the interesting clothing of the people are my first unforgettable impressions of the country.

## 4. The Street Children Project

### 4.1 Preparation and Planning

We met the members of VIA as well as those of our Indian partner organization and some other organizations from Britain and Spain.

After a warm welcome, the leaders of both organizations provided an insight into the composition and the functioning of the organization. As I did not know much about the operating methods of international organizations before, it was very interesting and informative. After that the team of experienced educators and other project leaders provided basic information on the Street Children Project and informed us about the possibilities of assistance: one could for instance assist in the health or educational program or work in one of the training centres.

Fortunately we had the choice and could choose between those different operational areas depending on personal preferences and abilities.

Two medical students from America for example were especially interested in the medical care programs and eager to participate in those.

As I wanted to establish close contacts to the inhabitants and at the same time help poor children, I decided for the assistance in the partner school or the special educational centres for street children.



All the participants were divided into several groups, each with two professional teachers. My group consisted of four other pupils: Lisa, Camila and Javiera from Madrid, and Robert from Birmingham.

One of the teachers, Mrs. Chandni assigned a task to us: Our group was responsible for the arrangement of the children's freetime. Furthermore, we were expected to help them with their homework.

After the meeting, we all had the opportunity to spend the rest of the day with our groups in order to get to know each other better. In so doing we also had the opportunity to do some sight-seeing, thus gaining an understanding for the Indian lifestyle and culture. After bringing our luggage to the hotel that the organization had hired for all the participants of the project, the girls and I went for a short walk through the area. Communicating with Camila and Javiera was a bit difficult in the beginning as my Spanish skills were not so good at that time, but still we managed to get our messages across, using a mixture of both languages: "Spanglish".

The next day, we were supposed to do some preparatory work in order to know how to behave with the children. Furthermore, it was necessary to think about activities or other ways to entertain the children in their free time.

#### 4.1.1 Target group

The project's target group are street children in New Delhi. Around 150 children living in bad circumstances are supported every year. Most of the children on the streets are between 5 and 17 years old. Approximately 11 million street children live in India, mainly orphans.

As children from poor families lack sufficient means to lead a "normal" life such as aliments, a school education, medical care etc., they see themselves forced to leave their village and try their luck in one of the country's bigger cities like Mumbai or Delhi in search of a job in order to be able to support their parents and little siblings. But in the majority of cases they fail: unfortunately only a few of them find work in hotels or little shops whereas the others still have to battle for their lives, sleeping in parks, bus stations or footpaths and suffering from hunger

and diseases, begging for money or food. As reality forces them to grow up very early and take responsibility for their families, street children do not have a normal childhood. Moreover some of the children are not only excluded from the society but also treated violently by their parents who abuse and mistreat them in many ways. This is another reason for children leaving home very early. Due to the poor living conditions, street children suffer mental-health problems and depression: they know no security, no respect and no acceptance.



#### 4.1.2 Defining the goals

The project aims for an improvement of their lives, promoting and providing qualitative education to the socially and economically deprived children, enabling them to live an independent and dignified life in future.

The major goal is the children's social reintegration: with the aid of diverse programs the project aims for supporting street children effectively with regard to rehabilitation into the society and their families.

The project not only includes accommodation and individual protection but also motivates them to learn a trade, preparing them for a new beginning.

Besides training them for different jobs, the educators set a high value on making them aware of their rights so that they learn how to prevent exploitation.

#### 4.2 Procedure

As I only interned for a short time, I was not able to participate in all the operations. One of the educators was kind and explained the whole program to me: The first step is to communicate with the street children who can be found in different areas of the city. The qualified and experienced educators talk to the children, seeking their confidence. This is very important so that in the end the children accept their help. As most of the children are quite doubtful and insecure at the beginning, this task requires a lot of experience.

Secondly, their basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and safe drinking water are satisfied in the organization's medical centres.

After the important medical checkups the children can start attending training courses in the educational centre. Here, the young children gain access to basic

education. After that they may visit a school for underprivileged children in Delhi which closely cooperates with Deepalaya.



Through further professional training in the special training centres, the children have the opportunity to learn a trade which enables them to successfully reintegrate into the society.

If possible, they are also motivated to return to their families.

#### 4.2.1 Activities

On the third day of my internship, we all started our “real” work in the educational centre where Lisa and I met the children for the first time whereas Robert, Camila and Javiera had worked with them before.

To me, those little children seemed to be very ambitious and interested in their studies. Most of them did not speak English very well, yet it seemed to be their favourite subject.

While trying to communicate with the children I noticed that they behaved very shy and insecure and avoided contact whereas some of them were quite frank with us. Soon I realized that the insecurity and incommunicative behaviour of those children was due to the lack of love, affection and respect in their lives.

After repeating the alphabet we started our program, trying to entertain the children through drawing, painting, singing, and dancing, enabling them to express their creativity freely.

While doing so, I talked to some of them to find out more about their lives and the reasons why they ended up on the streets. For me it was important to strengthen their low self-esteem by showing them how interested I was in them and their lives. This seemed to sustain their self-confidence, it also made them feel more comfortable. As a result we all succeeded in establishing a close relationship to the children within a few days.

That motivated us to work harder and search for new ways to nurture them. We prepared little games that helped them to learn their English vocabulary and even tried to teach them some words in German and Spanish. For a change we also planned a trip to the inner city with some of the children and educators.

While walking through the city, we also got the chance to speak and interact with some construction workers.

I used my Hindi language skills to communicate with the hardly English speaking employees. The discussions gave me some new insight in how they have experienced the fast developing industry. One could feel the highly competitive spirit among the hard-working workers who are dependent on their jobs as it is the only way to earn some money for their families who live far away, in small villages.



## 5. Reflection

### 5.1 India – a Country of Contrast and Culture

During my stay in maybe one of the most interesting countries, I noticed the cultural diversity. Aside from Hindi which is the official language of India, people speak many other languages which I think is amazing. Moreover I discovered that the country is home to many different ethnic groups and religions; the Hindus who are in the majority pray in Hindu temples called *Mandir*.

Interestingly Hindus do not eat beef because they believe that cows are holy animals. Nevertheless, Indian food – despite being spicy – is delicious.

Fortunately, I also had the opportunity to experience one of the popular festivals named “Holi”, the festival of colours, celebrated by Hindus every year: on that day people wearing white clothes throw colours in form of powder or water at each other.

Through these cultural experiences and through interacting with the inhabitants I gained an understanding for their lifestyle and attitude towards life which I think is not only impressive but also exemplary. People living in industrialized countries aspire toward progress, career and wealth whereas people living in developing countries or in emerging nations like India live a simple life and are happy as long they have enough to money to satisfy their basic needs.

These contrasting attitudes can also be found within the country: the country has experienced technological progress and is considered to be one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, the country still suffers from poverty which is one of the current major problems. Further difficulties are illiteracy, infant mortality, child labour and the bad living conditions in the rural areas of the country where the inhabitants have to do without electricity or sufficient drinking water supply.

Due to these big problems, many people move into the big metropolises like Mumbai or New Delhi in search of a better life.



## 6. Evaluation/ Conclusion:

An internship is definitely an ideal way to not only get to understand a country better, but to learn more about different cultures and people whose way of living completely differ from ours.

Participating was definitely one of my greatest experiences that I will never forget. I gained a great amount of knowledge and practical experience from working with international aid organizations that provide assistance to thousands of humans who suffer from poverty in India.

Besides an exciting and challenging experience one is provided to acquire professional friends and contacts on another country and continent. Through the intercultural collaboration I did not only improve my English and Hindi language skills, but also my Spanish skills thanks to my workmates from Spain.

But beside the positive experiences, there have also been some sad moments: it was horrific for me to see how people battle for survival. The visit gave me some perspective on how hard it can be to live in a poor county like India. Compared to them, people in Germany live in luxury.

This experience caused a change in me; it made me see the world from a different point of view. I realized that it is our duty and responsibility to help our fellow human beings to escape poverty since all of us share the same planet.

All in all, it was a great opportunity to gain new skills such as useful organization skills needed to plan projects in cooperation with people from different countries and to gather international, educational and practical experience through close collaboration with a successful aid organization and other pupils from other countries.

The value of an intercultural exchange is beyond words, it is an experience of a lifetime.

