

April 2023

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Dear donors,
dear members!

Working together productively with people from other cultures is never easy. Partner organisations are always bound to their own culture groups.

The difficulties start as early as with the interpretation of the term “project”. For us a project is a minutely defined plan with a clear budget. And we inform our donors in detail about what we do.

A project dilemma

On the other side the term “project” often means: We once had an idea, now the money is here and we make the best of it (even if this does not exactly fit in with the original idea). The reason for this is that beneficiaries often do not trust foreign, usually western, NGOs. Because of many bad experiences in the past they only believe in a project when the money is actually available. Unfortunately only then they begin to determine what is really important for the project. For us this is a dilemma: We should not be too obstinate, but we certainly must not disappoint our donors. Finding a good – for IPA preferably quite a strict – line of procedure can lead to a cancellation or a major change of the project. Fortunately we have noticed a learning effect in our partner countries towards a better cooperation.

Pietro Tomasini
Managing Director IPA

Goulfey, North Cameroon / Zurich, Switzerland

Solidarity and transparency

The help of the students at MNG Zurich has arrived in Goulfey. Their savings bank has already saved many families from despair and poverty.

What a difference: Whereas in the past users had charged up to 300% interest, families now pay 7% at their local savings bank. A group of students at the High School of Science and Mathematics in Zurich had planned this project during the corona period and had also found ways to finance it (see the article in the newsletter of July 2022). And the IPA partner in Cameroon realised it.



The executive committee is being trained

The renovation of the already existing building was the easiest part. An executive committee was elected and trained. Everything had to be bought: from ballpoint pens to two

motorbikes which are used to visit and coach customers. Rules, regulations and internal documents were compiled and sent



Information campaigns in Goulfey

to the authorities to be licensed. Their approval arrived surprisingly quickly and unbu-reaucratically. At the moment the small bank has a trading area of roughly ten thousand people – an enormous task to run an information campaign. Under trees and in the shade of walls the population of Goulfey was informed. The impoverished families in the far north of Cameroon were thrilled by what they heard. After only a short time 190



Thanks to her market stall she can feed the family

women and men had registered as members of the bank. They spent their last Francs to pay the fees.

Adapting to local conditions

Today they are the proud owners of a small shop, they cultivate a plot of land, or they

have raised cattle. During its first year of business the small bank has issued credits worth 19.5 million FCFA (almost 30,000 Swiss Francs). The terms usually vary between five and seven months at a monthly interest rate of 0.5833%. These are fair conditions - you can not do better.

The savings bank operates successfully and has already been able to absorb a calamity. At the end of the last rainy season huge water masses which had originated in Central Africa flooded the whole region. For three months Goulfey and its surroundings were



A meeting of one of the sub-groups of the bank

completely isolated. Farmers suffered as much as tradesmen. Nevertheless 126 out of 145 borrowers were able to pay their credits back on time. This was made possible by the good guidance of the bank management and the organisation of its members. They are split up into eight sub-groups each of which has its own management. All the members meet once a week, they help



Students at the MNG Zurich are the basis for the success of the bank

each other and also send their deputies to the regular meetings at the head office of the bank. So they are all in close contact

with “their” bank, solidarity and transparency are guaranteed. “This adaptation to local conditions has led to a big success”, the local partner in Goulfey said. Thanks to the students in Zurich a sound, well-established savings bank has been founded. And with the surplus of the money they collected it will be even enlarged in the future.

Laos

“Never trust a Lao”

Ten years ago, in search of a new partner country, the two IPA managing directors visited Laos. But the promising hopes were shattered even before the first project was started.

For years visitors to Northern Cameroon had felt safe and welcome everywhere. But in February 2013 the situation suddenly changed. The IPA team narrowly escaped an abduction. In the same place where only 18 hours before the team had been working



Fact finding in the school of Kauyod

overtime, a French family was kidnapped by Boko Haram. N. Delavy and P. Tomasini

had to leave the country head over heels. After their return to Switzerland they soon realised that the threat level was so high that visiting Cameroon would probably be impossible for many years to come. This was correct – and unfortunately it still is. We



Only a good partner at first sight

even feared that our cooperation with Cameroon might come to an end. But this was wrong. If you have solid and trustworthy partners, you can, at least for some time, work together without visiting projects personally (even if, admittedly, not visiting projects personally is frustrating). Nevertheless: because of the dangerous situation in Cameroon IPA continued to look for a country where projects could help to solve urgent problems. Finally Laos was recommended to us through a private contact. And so we spent the summer holiday to sound out the situation.



The staffroom of the school in Bankeun

No, it is not a prejudice!

The IPA team gained some insight into the country, visited schools and other sites of possible future projects, and conferred with several potential partners. One of them

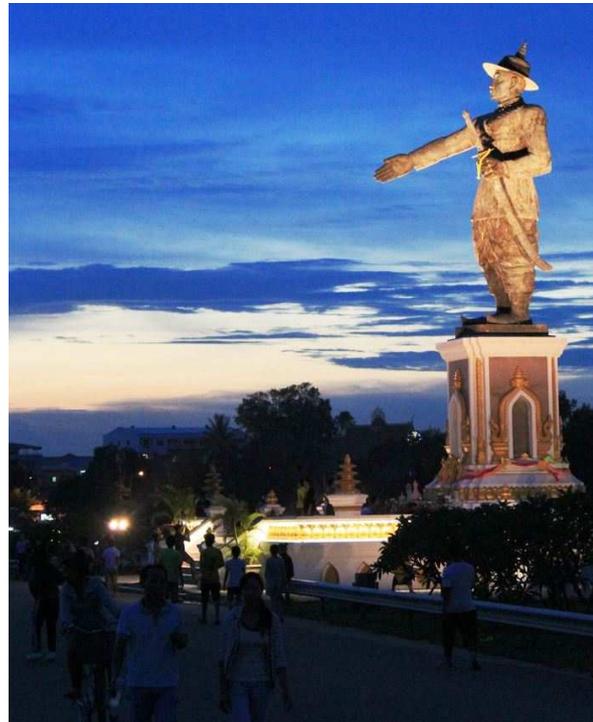
seemed to be perfect. He was extremely well organised, intelligent, spoke several languages, was widely networked and had a likeable personality. The factors of overriding importance also seemed to fit in: internal security, widespread poverty and the commitment of the local population. The next step was clear: in a test project the new partner should confirm the good impression he had made. At that time there was no alternative for us. However, this does not mean that IPA had neglected the safety precautions. We also kept an eye on the further developments. Soon the first strange e-mails arrived in Zurich. Our partner to-be informed us that now at the very beginning he had to open a proper office, otherwise IPA would not be taken seriously in the area. This set off the alarm bells. The first demand was followed by a preliminary cost



For IPA Laos was not a place to gain a foothold

estimate for a small project in a school – and with it a shock. For the simple installation of a neon tube on the ceiling they charged 37 dollars, material cost not included. And this in a country where you can enjoy a rich meal in a restaurant for 2 dollars. The standard answer to our queries was: «Corruption is already included.» That was

the last straw, we immediately terminated our cooperation. „Never trust a Lao“ is obviously not a prejudice. We heard this sentence again and again during our visit, always voiced by Laots. But we did not want



What remained were some interesting insights into a far away country

to believe it, we took it as a little joke. Finally we knew better. Meanwhile tens of thousands of people in Malawi, where we started work a year later, have benefitted from our unfortunate „Laos-experience“.

Hotesh, North Albania

A small campus

It rarely happens that IPA can satisfy all the needs in one particular place. But in Hotesh it was different. The small mountain village in the northeast of Albania profited from a fortunate constellation.

Once upon a time there was a remote village with a run-down school building. There was neither a kindergarten nor a first aid station. The villagers were dejected, many of them began to think of moving. But then IPA renovated the school and the IPA Junior Team enabled the building of an ambulance station (both projects were described in earlier newsletters). But something was still

missing. The teachers had given up their small staffroom so that they had a place to look after the youngest children. You certainly could not call that tiny room with its few old toys a kindergarten! Children could hardly move, illnesses spread quickly. And the teachers no longer had a room where they could work in peace or simply sit down to have a rest. Documents and teaching materials had to be kept at home. School life was a burden indeed. And then things suddenly turned for the better. The authorities of another district refused to allow the con-



Before the project the children were often stressed

struction of a kindergarten which was, in their opinion, too small. Their argument was understandable, but IPA does not have unlimited financial means. And so the money that had been donated by a foundation and which was meant to be spent elsewhere could be transferred to a different project - the one in Hotesh.

Less stress everywhere

Now the construction company of the region was commissioned to erect a new building for the smallest children. Positioned between the school and the first aid station the kindergarten turned the site into a small campus. There are now two rooms and two proper toilets for the children and the house is equipped with a good isolation and wooden floors – ideal for the hard winters in the mountains. „The children are less stressed and more motivated than before“, a kindergarten teacher reported. They particularly enjoy playing „cooking“. After the children had moved into the new building the former staffroom came to life again. With the help of a small additional IPA project it was

renovated, newly furnished and equipped, even with a computer and a beamer which



School, kindergarten and ambulance station - a real small campus

the pupils admiringly call „a huge television set“. Referring to what the kindergarten teacher had said, one of her colleagues added: „Thanks to the new staffroom we also feel



Age-based: The new kindergarten

more relaxed.“ And finally the icing on the cake: a small library with books for children at all levels. „Is anything missing?“ IPA asked at the evaluation meeting. „No, we have



The toddlers enjoy playing with the new toys

really got everything we need“, was the answer. The remote village of Hotesh will survive because life there can continue thanks to the new very necessary infrastructure. This gives IPA a feeling of immense satisfaction.

The Interview

”A country is shaped by its people”

Years ago you sought contact with IPA. How did it all start?

I first got into contact with IPA when, in 2009, I was looking for partner organisations who shared my opinions and ideas. I wondered if we could meet. I was told that Pietro and Nicole would travel to Albania the following month and so we organised a first get-together in Tirana.

Are there any differences in the cooperation with IPA compared to other organisations?

Our three partner organisations are all based in German speaking countries. They each have their own focal points of activity and their own work cultures. For us this is of great value and immensely instructive. IPA is our biggest partner as far as the number of projects and the annual budget are concerned. We are grateful for the big joint contribution we have made to help people in the rural regions of northern Albania.

Have there been any difficult moments during our long-time partnership?

Yes, there have been moments of tension because we work with and for people. I am usually the translator at meetings with IPA and the beneficiaries. This may cause difficult situations because there are cultural differences. In discussions the Swiss argue concisely whereas Albanians talk a great deal, laugh a lot and avoid precise wording because they do not want to hurt anybody. This cultural difference has sometimes influenced the translations and the meetings.

You are working tirelessly for the benefit of other people. Where does this energy come from?

I have now been working for almost 15 years for an organisation called Vizion, dur-

ing the first five years as a volunteer. I like being in contact with people and I believe that human beings are meant to live in groups rather than alone. Therefore we should cooperate.

A lot of well-educated Albanians emigrate. Why is this not really an option for you?

During my years of study I had the chance to make experiences far away from Albania. This made me understand even more clearly how close I am to my parents. Now I have my own family, which strengthens and intensifies the ties with my country. I see the problems of Albania clearly, but I still believe that a country is shaped by its people.



Suela Koçibellin, 40, lives with her two daughters and her partner in Tirana. She is a human rights activist and the head of Vizion. During the last ten years she has - in joint projects with IPA - improved the quality of life for countless children, women and men in times of need.

Preview of forthcoming IPA projects

Frankth, North Albania.

In this mountain village over a hundred children are in danger. Their school is moving. There are cracks in the walls and the floor is sinking. The house has no real foundation. Even a small earthquake would cause a catastrophe. Together with the district authorities IPA is making plans for a new school building.



Ouazzang, North Cameroon.

In very poor African countries vocational schools are rare but important. Only here skilled trades can be learnt, and qualified craftsmen are in demand. But if such a school is short of 10 classrooms and the students have to be taught in straw huts or shanties, it is time to take corrective action. Students at Wohlen High School therefore support the youngsters in Ouazzang with the aim to provide them with a secure professional future.



IPA in a few words

- Swiss organisation for development co-operation
- Founded in 1994, since 2001 known and active under the name IPA (International Project Aid)
- Engaged in transitioning and developing countries with focus on education
- IPA also offers help for self-help, e.g. through projects in the fields of food production and water supply as well as the issuing of credits
- The aspect of the IPA brand is the integration of youth in the implementation of projects. Swiss students get the opportunity to gain formative experiences
- School classes and junior-teams select, plan and execute their projects independently but are supervised by experienced IPA staff
- All projects are inspected by IPA on location and, following completion, are checked once more
- IPA has received the Profax prize in 2005, and in 2007 was named "Swiss Charity of the Year" by Man Investments
- International Project Aid-UK CIO (IPA-UK) registered with the Charities Commission, number 1170012, based in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, is associated with International Project Aid (IPA), Switzerland
- IPA (Switzerland) provides the project evaluation, project management and on-site supervision for IPA-UK, employing local partners to ensure resources are delivered to where they are needed

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