
Yahya Hassan Bajwa

Living Education, Peace Education and Social Projects in Pakistan

Yahya Hassan Bajwa stellt zwei Projekte interreligiös getragener Erziehung in Pakistan vor, die sich maßgeblich auch seiner Initiative verdanken:

- die schulische Arbeit des LivingEducation-Projekts und
- das Dast-e-Shafqat-Zentrum zur Beratung und Unterstützung von unter Gewalt leidenden Frauen.

Er beschreibt als Hintergrund die in Pakistan herrschenden Armut-Strukturen und ein an traditionellen Werten orientiertes patriarchalisches Familienbild, die sich in ihren negativen Auswirkungen für viele Kinder und Frauen wechselseitig verschärfen.

Dass vielen Familien zur Ausbildung der Kinder nur der Weg über islamistisch geleitete Schulen bleibt, die einseitig ideologisch indoktrinieren, ist eine der Herausforderungen, die engagierte Christen und Muslime aus Pakistan und der Schweiz, außerdem auch nicht-religiös geprägte Persönlichkeiten dazu gebracht haben, sich für ein Schulprojekt einzusetzen, das Kindern aus ärmsten Familien in den Außenbezirken von Islamabad Lern- und Ausbildungsmöglichkeiten bietet. Sponsoren spielen für dieses Projekt ebenso eine Rolle wie Freiwillige, die in der Schule mitarbeiten. Hinzu kommen Projekte für Gesunderziehung in ländlichen Gebieten und ein Menschenrechtsbüro für Frauen. Interkultureller Austausch und das Einüben wechselseitigen Verstehens gehören ausdrücklich zum Bildungsprogramm, das von Christen wie von Muslimen wahr genommen wird.

Gewalt gegen Frauen – ohne deren realistische Möglichkeit, sich juristisch in solchen Fällen durchzusetzen – gehört weitgehend noch zum Alltag in Pakistan. Dem stellt sich das Dast-e-Shafqat-Zentrum, das unentgeltlich Frauen und Mädchen Beratung und Unterstützung bietet, die unter häuslicher Gewalt, sexuellem Missbrauch oder unter der Bedrohung eines Ehrenmordes stehen.

Beide Projekte stehen im Austausch mit vergleichbaren Vorhaben in anderen Ländern und bedürfen weiterer nationaler wie internationaler Unterstützung.

Prof. Lähnemann starts the website of the Commission work of PESC with the preamble of the UNESCO Constitution which states:

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

It is our duty to work for this aim. We have to struggle for a new world order, a new vision of a better world today - with equality for all. We have to do it today, not tomorrow – tomorrow it could be already too late!

In many so called Islamic countries political violence, violations of human rights and abuse of public office are the order of the day. How is it possible to make a breakthrough? The only hope lies in **education**. Unfortunately, this is the sector where most of these countries invest the least. What is needed is “**grass-root**” **Democracy** and a tough process which has to be started in the primary school or already in the Kindergarten. Especially Islamic countries – such as Pakistan - have to bring up their youth with a new mind for human rights and political awareness. They have to understand that knowledge is the key for success, prosperity and also Democracy. Unfortunately, in many Third World countries the money goes into the defence budget instead of being invested in the education sector.

Grass root education is needed especially in the poor Islamic countries. An example how it can be achieved is given by LivingEducation (www.LivingEducation.org) – an organization which is helping the poorest and orphan children to attend school free of cost. During our work with the poorest children of Pakistan we understood that very often for a vast majority of the parents and relatives it is impossible to send their children to school. In fact, the parents’ greatest concern is to feed the many hungry mouths in order to let them stay alive. Appropriate education is therefore a luxury for many families whereas it would be an eminent key for the future of their children.

Persistent poverty often leads to the vicious circle we all hear about through the media. Religious fundamentalists are too often the only option for poor parents to feed and teach their children. Many of the religious schools are nourishing the ones in need not only with food. The consequences are well known: The fact of being ideologically influenced in a biased and intolerant way since the very beginning of one’s childhood can result in a man who does not hesitate to use his weaponry to declare his point of view.

Our projects have the aim to offer an alternative way, to provide fresh food, shelter and education at least for the poorest among the children, free from ideological manipulation in order to grant them the opportunity to take their futures in their own hands. According to the preamble in the statutes of September 1st 2001 Living Education is aware that

- The most serious political, economical, ecological, social and ideological problems of our time are in fact global problems
- In our time all nations, ethnic groups and communities are dependent on each other, as to solve these problems jointly
- Common solutions have to be found through communication and mutual understanding if there should be any alternative against violence
- An essential element of communication is education
- Education is to be learnt and experienced
- The possibility of education is to be given to the unprivileged and poor people
- All the people, regardless of sex, ethnic group, religion or political conception have a right to get education.

These aspects – wherein the common solution of problems, the mutual understanding and the right of every human being to get education are emphasized – represent the long-term valid elements for the existence of LivingEducation.

All started 1974 when I was 14 and attending the international boarding school “Institute Montana Zugerberg”. At this age I decided to open a similar school not for the richest but for the poorest. Now, more than 40 years later the first boarding school for girls is functioning since 2004 and today 50 girls are living and studying in the 6th, 7th and 8th grad. This was only possible with the help of professional teams in Pakistan and Switzerland. Our selection criteria for admission are: orphan children or children belonging to poor families. During the first two years almost 80% of the girls were Christians and 20% Muslims - most of them from Kashmir. Our aim is to strengthen religious and cultural tolerance through education and cultural exchange.

We understand us as bridge-builders, and provide education to people regardless of their cultural, ethnic, religious and/or political background. Suffering from a double marginalization, LivingEducation holds special support programs for women and girls.

The projects of LivingEducation are based on the work of volunteers. On a regular basis, professionals and young adults from Switzerland come to Pakistan to volunteer for LivingEducation projects and promote intercultural exchange and mutual understanding. They work together with our Pakistani staff – which is paid.

LivingEducation Projects

LivingEducation runs different school projects in the area of Islamabad, health education projects in rural areas and a Human Rights Office for women. All projects are free of charge and are paid by the initiators and donations.

Girls’ school

Since spring 2004 LivingEducation runs a boarding school for girls outside of Islamabad. Here, girls from poor families - most from rural areas - get the opportunity to attend secular high school from 6th to 8th - planned up to 10th class. They get the opportunity to learn basic computer skills. Regularly volunteers from Switzerland give English classes and promote cultural exchange.

Kindergartens

Kindergartens provide an enabling environment for children where they can learn and build self confidence without pressure and distress before they go to school. LivingEducation aims to introduce such institutions in several parts of the country. Actually, LivingEducation runs two Kindergartens in the area of Islamabad and in Sargodha.

Regular training courses for Kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers are provided by professional volunteers from Switzerland.

Medical Project

In many of the rural areas, people not only lack medical infrastructure, but also basic knowledge about their own possibilities to maintain their health. With first aid and hygienic courses for women given by professional doctors and nurses from Switzerland, Living Education aims to bridge this gap. Free medical checkups are also provided.

Computer school

Worldwide communication is the key to participate in globalization and the sharing of knowledge. As next project this year, Living Education aims to build up a Computer school for men and women in Bhara Kauh, Islamabad, where they can learn basic computer skills.

Social projects for women and Dast-e-Shafqat (Protecting Hand) ¹

Violence against women and particularly domestic violence is widespread in Pakistan. It has its roots in the conviction of many men that women are their property and obliged to fulfill men's needs and wants without question and without fail. In the Pakistani society, a woman normally has a subordinate and dependent position to men.

There is little tolerance for any deviation in the traditional female role.

A high number of girls and women are traded like goods to settle disputes and debts. Every day about four women are murdered for 'honor'. 'Honor killings' are carried out by men who assume that their female family member has in some way contravened social norms or showed immoral behavior and thereby damaged the man's honor. Very often the grounds for such assumptions are weak and a suspicion of unfaithfulness or immoral behavior can lead to murder.

Several laws, especially the Zina Ordinances are extremely discriminatory against girls and women and promote impunity of men who commit crimes against women, such as rape.

Dast-e-Shafqat seeks to support women and girls in such situations and helps to alleviate their suffering.

Dast-e-Shafqat is an information centre for women who are victims of violence and abuse or who are at risk of violence. It provides a safe and peaceful place for distressed women where they can take temporary refuge from all those who seek to harm them.

Dast-e-Shafqat seeks to promote awareness of women's basic rights and is encouraging women to address domestic violence and abuse. All kinds of support are free of charge.

¹ www.dasteshafqat.org.pk

Dast-e-Shafqat provides help for

- Victims of domestic violence
- Victims of sexual abuse, rape, incest or child marriage
- Women and girls under threat of ‘honor killing’
- Women and girls accused of Zina (illicit sexual intercourse)
- Women under threat to their safety as a result of exercising their choice in marriage or divorce

Facilities and Services

- Legal aid
- Medical aid
- Counseling
- Shelter
- Rehabilitation
- Vocational training

Dast-e-Shafqat provides help regardless of religion, status or nationality of the women seeking support.

The organization provides free and easily accessible emergency aid and protection but also seeks to develop middle and long term perspectives for the women concerned. Like in the school projects also here volunteers from Switzerland give a helping hand. The expenses are borne by donations.

Both, staff and functionaries of our team in Europe – some of them Muslim, some Christian and some without any religion - work on voluntary base. Every one equipped with devotion and knowledge and with the dream to finally put an end to the desolation and poverty of many children and their families in Pakistan. We have no copy right and wish that as many people as possible would do the same, and we are willing to share our know-how with anyone who is interested.

Only when we learn to create an understanding for each other and to see ourselves as a part of this worlds’ society, we will be able to cope with the challenges of globalization.