

Carin Troll, Germany, April 27th 2020

### **Be part of Sambhali Trust: we act and make a difference!**

It is dark evening and I am sitting in Dev Bagh in the middle of the Indian desert Thar in Rajasthan (approx. 1.5 hours by car near Jodhpur) under the beautiful sky under thousands of shiny stars. My heart is still beating heavily. It's almost a mystical mood with the full moon seeming within reach of my hands.

We have just returned from our first basic-food-distribution. Our heads are full of these experiences, but nobody can talk about them because this ride through desert has touched us so deeply.

We visited the poorest families in their little hamlets. Hamlets with a fire pit and some firewood. There are a couple of blankets hanging on the walls, which are spread out on the floor at night to sleep on. When I entered a hut, my hair was brushed by a toothbrush neatly tucked into the thatched roof until evening use.

Somewhere there are a few goats which can give milk to the children at morning or a dog that guards the night sleep. The heat is everywhere and the storms blow the sand over your body, face and eyes.

Here in rural Rajasthan, the COVID-19 pandemic immediately had an existential impact: The quarry was closed for weeks due to the lockdown. Father of family loses his job; there is no short-time work and no unemployment insurance. The children cannot longer help in the commercial fields, so their low earnings are also lost. Families were deprived of their livelihood overnight.

Sambhali Trust quickly recognized this life-critical situation in the Setrawa desert region and sat down with the local officials. The poorest families were identified by field workers and a mission to provide basic-food-packages was started. A team of foreign and Indian volunteers acquires flour, lentils, sugar, salt, tea and spices every day and packs them in 14-day rations. A food-package costs around 15 € and provides for a family of 5-6 people with the most important basic food for half a month.

Let's look back a couple of weeks ago:

In the middle of January I traveled to India / Rajasthan to support underprivileged children and women as a volunteer. Sambhali Trust welcomed us like a family. In the morning we taught English in government schools - in a completely different way than the Indian school system currently provides. We spread the joy of learning with songs, games, learning videos and workshops. We also met our students on the way to school or in the afternoon on the sunset walk to the dunes. Here, too, we played "English" together and explored the living environment in the middle of the Thar desert. This poverty is very moving because we could not have imagined it before. Our hearts are touched very deep. The children are so heartily, eager to learn and full of laughing and joy.

The rural project SETU from Sambhali Trust has several missions which we want to build up. In the late afternoon we offered additional English lessons for all children and teenagers in the area around our "Dev Bagh" resort. The students walked several kilometers to us right after school. In groups divided according to age, we practiced English dialogues, played educational games or watched motivational movies (e.g. "I am Kalaam", Nelson Mandela) and discussed them in English. In the hour before sunset, our field was transformed into a sport and activity community-ground. We played cricket, volleyball, football, organized races and learned Indian dances with the boys and girls.

With the lockdown, all of this could no longer take place and the Sambhali Trust projects had to be shut down. For us volunteers, one question had to be answered: How do we want to deal personally with the COVID-19 pandemic? Once for sure: in a crisis, you need a family that stands beside you - a family within we care for one another and support each other full of love. In consequence, many European families have recommended for volunteers to travel back home. However, a team of more than ten of us decided to continue supporting the Sambhali Trust missions on site.

Govind Singh Rathore and his (extended) family had welcomed us warmly and non-stop right from the beginning on. With the retreat to self-isolation into Dev Bagh this community was strengthened. We are provided with the latest information at all times, we play and laugh together, we have conversations in up to five languages, we cook together and share the housework, we exercise together and enjoy nature - and we fight together against COVID-19-Pandemic. Side by side, from heart to heart.

We take good care of ourselves and observe the precautions: keep social distance, wear a mask, wash and disinfect hands, do not cough or sneeze at each other. In addition to the basic-food-distribution for 251 families, Sambhali Trust also provides the residents with information about preventive health care and has e.g. soaps distributed to 810 families. The national press reports intensively on our projects.

We have now provided the families with the food-packages for the third time; we are grateful for international support and that we can help personally on site. Every day after lunch, we pack the food-packages together in the resort and send out our daily changing team with good blessings.

At sunset we are waiting for the returners, receive them with disinfectant (insider joke: our joy, our fun cannot be taken away through COVID-19) and spicy masala chai and hear, while sitting in the warm sand, the reports about the gratitude and open hearts of the locals in our area - the friends, families and relatives of our laughing students.

I am grateful to be part of Sambhali Trust: We act and make a difference!  
Fighting against global COVID-19-Pandemic, with connecting our hearts international!