

Education project in Zanskar in Northern India



<http://img.jagoinvestor.com/ji/education-loan-india.jpg>

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1. Why choosing this topic?

My interest in India was initially aroused by the famous Bollywood movies. Not just because of the Indian culture, such as architecture, dance, music, traditional Indian cuisine and festivals but also the Indian population, as for instance the ethnic composition and the conflicts seemed very appealing to me. For this reason the joy for talking about developing countries, such as India, in class was quite large. I was excited to learn more about India. Particularly the negative side of India was very touching to me, since poverty, bad living conditions, the role of women and social problems are typical characteristics of developing countries. So I am very grateful to write about the developing country India, however I will reduce myself specifically to the education in the region of Zaskar in Northern India.

2. Current problems in developing countries and general information about India

While developed countries are the industrialized nations which have a well-developed infrastructure and sophisticated technology, developing countries are beginning to build up these capabilities. Generally they are associated with a bad economy and poverty. But actually there is also wealth and luxury in some regions. Nevertheless the majority of the people are usually poor. And this is the main problem which indicates the government being also too poor to do something against it. Low incomes are results of low-skilled jobs in developing countries. This shows again a lack of education which is very essential and an important approach to a positive change in the economic situation. Other characteristics for developing countries apart from poverty are for instance illiteracy, a lack of health care or corruption.

India is a country in southern Asia. Its capital city is New Delhi. As the seventh largest country, India is considered to be the most populous country. It borders with Pakistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma and China. Furthermore, it is surrounded by the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. The Himalayan Mountains separate India from much of the rest of Asia and China. Just south of the Himalayas is the Indo-Gangetic Plain which lies between the Indus and Ganges rivers. On the north-west of India is the Thar Desert. Most of southern India is the Deccan Plateau,

which is mostly rolling hills with many rivers. The plateau is separated from the northern plain by the Vindhya Mountains. The Eastern and Western Ghats are coastal mountains on either side of the plateau [M1].

In India agriculture is still the largest sector, involving about two thirds of the population. India also has a large textile industry. Manufacturing such as machinery and transportation equipment have become major industries [M2].

Official languages of India are, for instance Hindi and Englisch, while Englisch is at the same time the lingua franca in India. At this point I want to point out that in Zanskar the people speak neither fluent hindi nor Englisch. For centuries there is a close social, cultural and religious connection with neighbouring Tibet. The majority of the population is Buddhist, their language is a Tibetan dialect. This shows Zanskar's isolation with the rest of India. Although India is considered to be a newly industrialized country, being the world's seventh largest economy by GDP (Gross National Product) and the fourth largest PPP (Purchasing Power Parity), it faces poverty, illiteracy, corruption and inadequate public health. As a result one can see that the division of wealth is uneven in India.

The main causes of poverty in India are:

- High level of dependence on primitive methods of agriculture
- High illiteracy (about 35% of adult population)
- Protectionist policies pursued until 1991 that prevented high foreign investment

To sum it up with a procentage one can say that 80% of India's population is living in poverty. Not only are there lacks of health care or education but many people are undernourished.

3. Development Aid in India

In order to fight poverty in India one must find aid groups which are active in developing countries and provide people with existential goods to improve their living conditions. Some aid groups work in developing countries in order to provide people with items, such as food, medicine and education, which the developing countries would likely not have access to ptherwise. Other aid groups work in developing nations to protect human rights. So there are many relieves that can improve the situation in India, namely poverty, lack of education, corruption etc. Nevertheless, poverty is difficult to overcome and infinite if one does not especially try to help the developing countries to become self-sufficient in order not to be depending on

external influences. To cross a few hurdles, one has to begin at the bottom and work one's way up. To achieve a successful development of the life situation in India, particularly with regard to people in poor regions, one must start with a special factor to provide further opportunities for a better life.

In my point of view, this special factor has to be education. Education is one of the most important ways to get rid of poverty. No amount of money, as for instance from other countries, will allow people to live securely and independently if they lack basic literacy skills. By educating those who are mired in poverty, India is not only given the access to a better life but also to improve the entire country. So this first step would be a good way for India becoming a financially healthy nation. To enumerate some aid groups there is for instance one, called AID INDIA (Action in Disabilities India) which helps empowering socially disadvantaged and often forgotten sections of Indian society. Another aid group is a coalition of three U.S. organizations which united to fight HIV/AIDS in India.

4. Topographic location of Zaskar

Jammu and Kashmir is located in the northern part of India and is mostly situated in the Himalayan Mountains. It borders with Himachal Pradesh and Punjab to the south, China to the north and east, and Pakistan-administered territories of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan to the west and north-west [M1]. Furthermore, it is divided in three regions: Jammu, the Kashmir valley and Ladakh. Ladakh is also known as „Little Tibet“ because of its remote mountain beauty and Buddhist culture. One of the Himalayan Rivers is called Jhelum River and flows through the Kashmir valley.

The climate in Jammu and Kashmir varies a lot. In the southern around Jammu the climate is mainly monsoonal. In the hot seasons Jammu can reach up to 40°C whilst there is heavy rainfall in July and August.

There are 10,143,700 people living in Jammu and Kashmir. The population density of Jammu and Kashmir is again distributed in three regions. 53,9% live in Kashmir, 43,7% in Jammu and 2,3% live in Ladakh.

Now I will focus on Zaskar which lies in the eastern half of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Zaskar, as a high altitude semi-desert, has got warm and dry summers.

The humidity in the winters is quite high, while the temperatures are extremely cold. The annual January temperature is for instance -20°C. While running water is available because of the recently increasing rainfall the Zaskari houses are not built

for it being too tight for the heavy rainfall. This is not really appropriate for the inhabitants because the rain occurs quite unexpectedly.

The winter period is particularly bad for the inhabitants since it lasts very long and is extremely cold, while the rain sometimes turns to snow.

Furthermore, there is the village called Sani in the Zanskar village and spreads over an area of 700m², at an altitude ranging from 3500m to 7000m above sea level. It is surrounded by mountains from all sides and is cut through by Zanskar River.

While Zanskar's population is considered to be low with 13,849 people in 2006, there are more or less 600 inhabitants in Sani living in 100 houses. Almost everyone in Zanskar practices Tibetan Buddhism and only a few are Muslims. The people there mainly work in the primary sector, such as cattle rearing and farming. In the town of Sani it is mainly the same whilst people work as farmers or cattle breeders.

Moreover, there is a high infant mortality rate in Zanskar.

5. Problems in Zanskar

Developing countries face problems, such as mass poverty, illiteracy, diseases, low status of women or a lack of health care. The most important component of health related to population and socio-economic development is reproductive health. The lack of health care is also a problem in Zanskar. In cases of diseases people hope to be cured of the so called „Oracle“. The Oracle is a faith healer, known as „Amchis“ and goes into a trance so a Tibetan spirit can take over and dispense medical advice. But even if the Oracle particularly succeeds and many people can be cured it is important to mention that „most of the village healers are illiterate and unqualified“ (Eric Campbell, 07/04/2009). Also the geographical location of Zanskar makes the situation any better because of the isolation from the rest of India „by snow for seven months a year“ (Eric Campbell, 07/04/2009). So all people in Zanskar suffer from a lack of health care and therefore, it is not surprising that the infant mortality rate in Zanskar is the worst in the world with some children reaching a maximum age of five. Additionally, the needs of Zanskaris, particularly the education of their children, have not exactly been a high priority for either the national or local Indian authorities.

The geographical location and the isolation make the task to educate children in Zanskar nearly impossible. For that reason, people in Zanskar, as well as in many other poor regions, are in need of foreign aid.

6. Organization Sani Zanskar

As I already mentioned the population in Zanskar is supplied by their traditional Tibetan doctors, the so-called „Amchis“. While Tibetan medicine is very effective, especially in chronic diseases, the Western medicine is better in areas with technical aid or organ replacement of distress.

At this point I want to introduce the organization „Sani Zanskar e.V.“. This organization mainly supports the education and medical care in Sani and Zanskar (Himalaya). Among other things, in collaboration with students of the RWTH Aachen, a hospital was built to energy-independent criteria, which offers medical care and space for a winter school.

The aim of the medical care by Sani Zanskar is to support the population with modern medicine, without weakening their traditional medicine. Their work provides a useful complement to traditional healing practices and promotes sustainability of this project. Therefore the Amchis strengthen their local position by participating in training in areas, such as dentistry and ophthalmology, or hearing aids.

Rainer Lezius, the chairman of this association, visits the village and the hospital and takes care each year. He discusses achievements with the Amchis and plans further use of the hospital. Considering the education in Zanskar one can say that there were schools founded by the private initiative of the „Tibetan Buddhist School Project“ based in Dharamsala. Nevertheless there is a main problem, namely the weather in winter since even these schools are closed more than four months a year. Temperatures are so low that all the teachers leave the valley. This means that almost no one has got the chance to receive post-secondary education, so many people stay uneducated.

With the winter school the team of Sani Zanskar wants to avoid more illiterate people. The first winter school operation in the year 2005 was held in the private „Kanishka Public School“. To teach nearly 60 pupils there were hall windows which warmed up enough space by the sun. If there was no sun the room was traditionally heated with cow dung.

Since this private school did not succeed there was the winter school operation in the zero-energy house built by the team of Sani Zanskar [M4]. In this school or room pupils should learn more than eight months a year. The southern side of the room is fully glazed to exploit the sun's energy [M5]. The requirements for building were that the rooms should be heated exclusively by solar energy and the construction of the building should consist of locally available materials and should also be done in traditional design. While seven architecture students from Aachen in summer 2007 helped with the construction of the house in Sani, it was later transferred to the people of Sani [M6]. As a result this building could already be used as a winter school

in 2007/08 [M7]. What is still remarkable is that this school is the only one in the whole of Zanskar.

With help of the temperature measurements one can see how the rooms of buildings are heated with solar energy alone. The desire to help and support education and medical care for the population in Sani and Zanskar made it possible that there were two societies established in 2004. There is one in Germany and one in local Sani.

The tasks of the organization Sani Zanskar are the placement and support of sponsorship for students and the financing of individual projects for the medical care in the hospital building which was built with the help of the RWTH Aachen in Sani.

7. Evaluation of the organization Sani Zanskar

Since Zanskar is isolated from the rest of India, it is difficult to establish a connection to some places in India. The people in Zanskar are living under deplorable conditions and are still happy among each other, while people in industrialized countries, such as Germany, can not imagine living without all the luxury, as for instance clean water, computers or even cars which they see as a matter of course. The fact that there is no clean or even available water, no infrastructure or a bad education is very sad and terrible.

To see that the people in Zanskar are still happy is very remarkable. That is the reason why I think that it is just great to have an organization, such as Sani Zanskar, which helps the people with medical care or education. The organization started by building a zero-energy house used as a winter school which offers a nice atmosphere. This gives the children the opportunity to continue learning in winter seasons and becoming more educated.

In my point of view this is the best way to help Zanskar improving their living conditions, with the result of having educated people who can build up more schools and hospitals with available trained doctors. Zanskar is already on the way of assuring people a better life since the organization Sani Zanskar started with the education and health of people, to make them more independent from foreign aid. If people get used to foreign help they would expect more and more. That is definitely no solution at all. The organization succeeds in my opinion because they help Zanskaris becoming self-sufficient and learning more in order to have enough educated people having more opportunities as before. I am convinced of this organization since it really knows how to start improving the conditions in Zanskar. To know how the Zanskaris feel and what they really need is the only way knowing how one can help them. In my point of view this was achieved by the organization of Sani Zanskar [M9].

1. Controlled by Pakistan
2. Controlled by India
3. Controlled by China

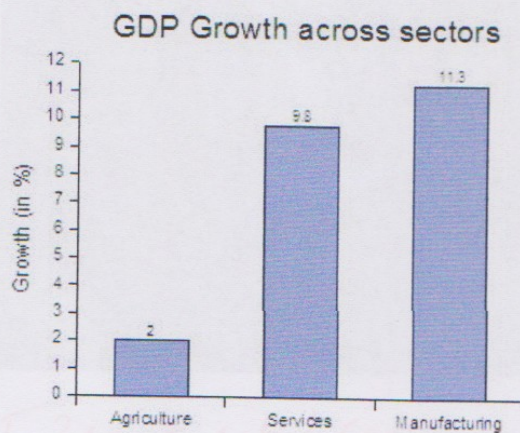
Map of India and surrounding regions, showing major cities, geographical features, and neighboring countries.

http://www.newsline365.com/files/images/2008/11/india-map.jpg

M1

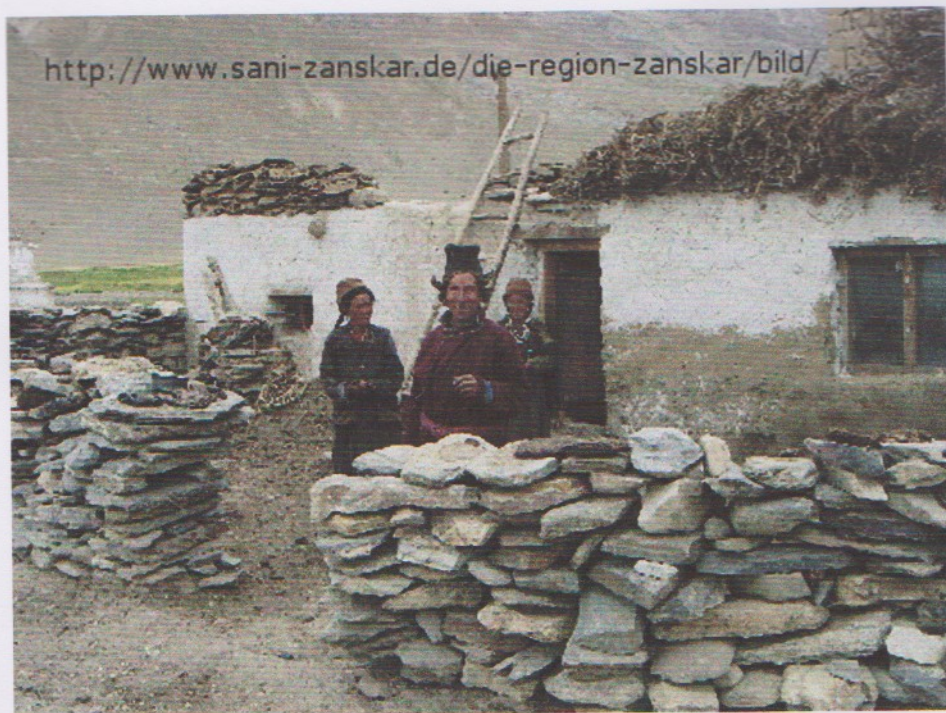


M2



http://indianeconomy.org/wp/wp-content/growth_html_68b06433.jpg

M3



M4



M5



M6



M7



M8



M9 - Children in front of the winter school



M10 – Children in Zanskar on the way to school.



