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Preface – Why Do We Ask Questions?

Why do more than 60 million children and youths do not attend school (UN 2019)? The answer is clear. They are exposed to armed conflicts, climatic and environmental challenges, precarious economic conditions, and child labour. Why are there still no sustainable educational solutions for these children and youths on the move? The answer is more complex. When education providers want to treat and organise everything and everyone equally, they are not oriented towards the basic needs and necessities of people in seemingly invincible life situations. When we take a close look at the cultural and social needs within the individual life situations of children and youths, we come across unexpected resources these special life situations entail for a sustainable future.

We like to ask questions. We enjoy asking Daasanach pastoralists out in the remote and dry savannah of Northern Kenya about their families, livestock, their culture, their living conditions, their dreams, and visions. At the same time, we continuously question the approaches of the Illeret Nomadic Education System (INES) and our role and work in it. Likewise, people like to question us. They want to know whether we act in accordance with the Daasanachs' wishes regarding education. They question how Daasanach women, men, and children envision their future and whether the planned mobile schools will support them in their vision. They ask why a non-governmental organisation like the Benedictine Fathers in Illeret has taken over a service, which is actually a governmental task. The primary question behind all the question remains: who has the right, the responsibility, the capacity, and the will to provide basic education to one of the most marginalized children in the world?

We do not claim to have found the answers to all these questions. Most of the solutions, which we present here, were developed in a long process of trial and error and sure enough, there are other innovative approaches to the education provision of mobile pastoralist. Nonetheless, after several requests from Daasanach pastoralists for an alternative educational system INES was started in 2014 by Father Florian OSB, who has been active as a Benedictine missionary in Kenya since 1984. The vision evolved in long talks with the Daasanach themselves. Daasanach pastoralist children live and shift with their mobile families, support the pastoralist production team, and participate in educational activities in so-called mobile schools with ladders of learning. The long term vision is that Daasanach men and women, who are mobile pastoralists themselves, visit the mobile teacher education programme of INES, gradually building up their school offer of various subject ladders of learning and thus support individualized learning in multi-age and multi-level learning groups.

We have had the incredible privilege to be part of the INES project implementation team from the beginning. We are grateful for the diverse group of partners, supporters, and colleagues, with whom we develop questions and seek answers.

In the course of our work within the INES project, as well as in the process of writing this book, we greatly benefitted from the action research done in India and Germany but most importantly from the intense dialogues with our Kenyan partners, German colleagues, and the RIVER team in India. At this point, we would like to particularly thank Father Florian OSB, the founder of the INES project, who invited us into the project as expatriate co-workers and consultants. We thank Edwin K. Changamu, the devoted pedagogical manager of INES and the small project implementation team of INES. Our thanks also go to Dr. Thomas Müller, associate professor from the University of Würzburg, who supported us in the process of writing this book as well as Sara Schuster for her language support.

Dear reader, we hope that this book will challenge you to remain open to questions and innovations regarding education provision and we hope you will enjoy reading about some of our most precious moments in Northern Kenya.

Introduction

Education provision for mobile pastoralists remains a difficult and emotive issue. Because the children of mobile pastoralist are involved in the economic production from an early age to contribute to their livelihood and because the pastoralist families have to stay on the move to find suitable grasslands and water points, there is hardly any time for the children to regularly attend fixed schools in settlements. With the infrastructure in Northern Kenya and the current school system, Daasanach pastoralist are therefore faced with a difficult choice: The first possibility is they give up their livelihood as mobile pastoralists, settle in a town and send their children to fixed schools. This is only possible if the parents generate an alternative income. The second possibility is to send their children to distant boarding schools where the children eventually lose touch with pastoralism and the sustainable lifestyle of millions of people eventually dies out. The third, and most common, choice is not providing their children access to formal education altogether.

For this reason, this book not only deals with the necessity but also the development of a mobile school system for Daasanach pastoralists in Northern Kenya. The publication gives a practical insight into the INES project of the Benedictine Fathers (Illeret Nomadic Education System), which offers Daasanach pastoralists in Northern Kenya access to alternative basic education through mobile schools, taking into account their livelihood of mobile livestock production. In order to implement this extensive pilot project, an innovative mobile school system with its own local learning material development and a teacher education centre for Daasanach pastoralists is being developed.

As you move through the three parts of this book, you will notice different writing styles and approaches to the title questions. On the one hand, this shift derives from the specialist fields of cultural, psychological and pedagogical studies. On the other hand, we want to provide a practical example of school development cooperation supported by technical literature. At the end of some chapters, we attached personal notes in which we want to share some of our thoughts and the most precious experiences we were able to make.

We would like to invite our readers to start by understanding the living conditions of the mobile Daasanach pastoralists in Northern Kenya (chapter 1) and why education provision for pastoralist groups is difficult (chapter 2). In chapter 3, we present selected international approaches to pastoralist education and outline which lessons the INES project learned from these school development projects. In chapter 4, we summarize the perspectives and dreams of Daasanach women, men and children regarding learning, teaching and schooling, which, we believe, to be fundamental in partnership-oriented development cooperation. If you may, this first part of the book provides the (problem) analysis of this international cooperation project.

In the second part of the book, we want to give an insight into our understanding of development and conceptual plans of the INES project of the Benedictine Fathers Illeret. We shortly approach the term development from a psychological and pedagogical point of view (chapter 5) and challenge the concept, idea and principles of international (development) cooperation (chapter 6). Chapter 7 provides an overview of the INES project, with forces, actors, partners, vision, mission and strategies.

The third part of this book gives a practical insight into the different working fields of INES – mainly learning material development and teacher education – with cross-references to technical literature and related projects. In chapter 8, we provide the pedagogical concept of the mobile school system with its ladders of learning, its Indian origin of the MultiGradeMultiLevel-Methodology and the Kenyan adaption. Chapter 9 focuses on the importance of the cultural context for the development of learning materials. This is exemplified with the Introduction ladder of learning of INES. Chapter 10 describes how learners move independently in the complex arrangement of the Daasanach ladder of learning. In chapter 11, the focus lies on Mathematics and our readers learn how whole subject ladders of learning with its learning materials for several grades are developed, based on the Kenyan curriculum and with regard to the cultural characteristics of the local Daasanach. How the modularized teacher education system works practically with mobile pastoralists is presented in chapter 12. Finally, we invite the readers to close with a brief description of the excellent pedagogical work we believe to see with Daasanach pastoralists, who offer girls and boys in their mobile stock camps access to alternative basic education.