

HelpAlliance – Helping others to build a new future

Two years after the tsunami the LH organisation takes stock of an exceptional donation campaign

Rita Diop will never forget the little Sri Lankan girl with short black hair. At the inauguration of the new primary school in Kalmunai, which was built with donations from Lufthansa staff, the youngster summoned all her courage and stepped onto the stage. She had written a poem, specially in English, she said, to thank the visitors from Germany. It was called "Today is a happy day". It was a very special moment, the HelpAlliance chairwoman says. She was very moved by it, and it confirmed for her that the HelpAlliance had made the right decision.

The school on the east coast of Sri Lanka is one of twelve projects that the HelpAlliance has been supporting in the regions affected by the tsunami – Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia – since the beginning of 2005. After the disaster, Lufthansa launched a unique aid campaign for the victims and donated 1.05 million euros. The campaign motto: Give the children a future.

In the wake of the tsunami, the telephone in Rita Diop's office didn't stop ringing. "Countless colleagues offered their support. They showed such willingness to help and such sympathy – it was amazing," she recalls. Two years after the natural disaster in the Indian Ocean, the aid organisa-



Fresh start – LHT staff enabled this family to buy fishing equipment.

Photo: private

tion founded by Lufthanses can now take stock of its achievements.

Rita Diop is swift to deflate naive visions and dreams. It's not just a case of donating money, building a school and that's it. Unfortunately, the business of donating is not as simple as that. "Sadly, in the wake of disasters of this nature, you also find black sheep who are eager to cash in on other's generosity and resort to corruption," the 51-year-old Lufthanses says.

HelpAlliance therefore scrutinised every project proposal, established contact with colleagues on the spot, estimated

costs and received official permission from the authorities. "It was a real challenge, suddenly to be in charge of such a wide range of construction projects with unknown partners," says Rita Diop, who joined Lufthansa in 1986 and has been chairwoman of the HelpAlliance since May 2005. "You simply have to abandon the idea of trying to solve all the world's problems in one day," she adds.

Rita Diop describes herself as a pragmatist. "Over the past 20 months, this 'matter of the heart' became a job," she admits. The work was strenuous and sometimes exhausting. Luckily she



New home – Work on a new orphanage in Aceh, Indonesia.

Photo: Kurt Behringer

could always count on the assistance of her colleagues. The advisory committee comprising four Group managers supported the HelpAlliance team during difficult decisions. "The support we received from senior management was absolutely fantastic. Above all, the VP office helped us whenever they possibly could."

Now, in December 2006, the sum of 1.05 million euros donated by Lufthanses from all over the world and the LH management has increased to about 1.07 million euros through interest. The requisite amounts have since been channelled into the individual tsunami projects –

leaving an emergency fund of 100,000 euros. "We will decide over the next few months what will happen to this money," Rita Diop says.

Two years on, things are gradually calming down for the HelpAlliance's tsunami team. Work on the twelve aid projects is now more or less complete. In India, young people are training to become fitters and technicians. Sixty orphans in Indonesia have a new home, and happier times lie ahead for the little dark-haired girl from Sri Lanka. For the past few weeks, she has been regularly attending the school in Kalmunai along with her friends. Stefanie Daschke



Back to school – Pupils and staff prepare for inauguration day at the new primary school in Kalmunai, Sri Lanka.

Photo: private

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Above – Rita Diop visits the site of a new school in Ninthavur, Sri Lanka, with representative of the CELSS organisation. Photo: Horst Ismar