INVEST IN EQUALITY
When I first visited Nepal in early 2009 I never imagined that eight years later I would be writing about my journey to build schools and educate marginalised children in the hills of Nepal and the slums of Kathmandu. I certainly had no idea that my message of education as the most effective tool in the fight against poverty and inequality would resonate with so many or that together we could achieve so much.

The journey has not been easy; we have faced genuine danger and political uncertainty, a global financial crisis, and striking at the very heart of our projects - a tragic natural disaster. However we have persevered and I am very proud of the impact we have had on the lives of children in Nepal.

As we move into our ninth year of operations I remain convinced as ever that education is the key and that lasting sustainable impact is indeed achievable. However it takes the conviction and courage to invest in the long-term impact and not short-term feel good, a commitment to be proactive and to accept rather than delegate responsibility, and a willingness to be judged and measured.

I look back on our achievements with some satisfaction. I am confident to state that the trust and confidence of donors has been well founded and we have provided measurable sustainable impact. We have proven to be an effective force for change and a strong advocate for gender and educational equality.

Our strategy of investing in equal facilities by providing strong and safe school buildings has proved prudent and the recent natural disaster had only minor impact. We had no need to launch a “rebuild Nepal” campaign, allowing us to invest funding in the future rather than correcting errors of the past. However, as in most similar disaster situations it is the uninsured poor who suffer most.

The communities we support have lost much and face new challenges both physical, emotional and economical. Our investment in the welfare and empowerment of rural youth through education remains as vital as ever. In addition, with migration from devastated rural communities to overcrowded Kathmandu increasing strain on already inadequate services and placing more children at risk, our urban outreach program has much to achieve.

I am trusting that the plan laid out in the following pages will encourage you to join me on my journey to motivate teachers, inspire students and provide a safe and nurturing school environment for children full of potential but denied opportunity. I am hoping it will convince you to “Invest in Education, Invest in Equality”.

I. FOREWORD

JOHN MATTHEWS FOUNDER, CHILDREN OF THE MOUNTAIN.
2. OUR IMPACT

SINCE 2009 WE HAVE INVESTED OVER £500,000. WE HAVE BUILT FORTY-FIVE CLASSROOMS ACROSS TEN LOCATIONS. OUR CLASSROOMS PROVIDE LEARNING SPACES FOR SEVEN HUNDRED STUDENTS, WITH THREE HUNDRED ATTENDING OUR TWENTY KINDERGARTENS DAILY.
Access to education however is not enough. We believe that children unable to afford private school fees have a right to equality in the quality of their education and we both advocate for and invest in this cause.

We believe children from marginalised communities should have equal standards of infrastructure, equal teacher capacity, and equal classroom facilities as any child attending a fee paying English medium school in the urban private sector. To achieve our vision we proactively advocate for and invest in Equality of Education. We believe in sustainable solutions, empowering individuals be they teachers or children, and by doing so effect lasting change.

Since 2009 we have built forty-five classrooms across ten locations. Our classrooms provide learning spaces for seven hundred students, with three hundred attending our twenty kindergartens daily.

Moving into the year ahead, while continuing to place importance on safe infrastructure, we intend to shift our focus more into the classroom and implement an ambitious program designed to deliver lasting sustainable equality and opportunity. We will, in cooperation with District Education Offices and the Ministry of Education, build upon the foundations we laid in our unique Kachuua Klubs to expand creative constructive learning to grades 2 and 3 with a particular focus on literacy. We will introduce the concept of ‘HATI labs’ equipped with unique child friendly content rich technology.

We will explore the possibility of implementing grade rather than subject based teaching maximising impact from limited teacher resource, and we will invest in improving English Language proficiency utilising phonics to promote lasting equality of opportunity.
Children of the Mountain is not a disaster relief agency. We planned for the risk of earthquake, and our operations and strategy was unaffected by the earthquake, save for the additional bureaucracy and cost associated with rural educational infrastructure projects.

Pre-Earthquake we had provided six schools [36 classrooms], post Earthquake we have provided nine schools [45 classrooms].

Prior to the 2015 Earthquake, with government funding scarce, many rural schools in Nepal had fallen into disrepair and were poor learning environments. Schools were uninspiring, dismal and dangerous places for children.

In many cases, where support from overseas donors was available, limited funds were stretched and the resulting facilities fell far below acceptable standards of safety.

Following the Earthquake this inherited poor situation contributed to most schools in the Gorkha district collapsing leaving communities with no school buildings at all. In the twenty-month period between April 2015 and December 2016, despite a massive international aid effort, and the presence of many recently incorporated ‘NGO’, little progress on school reconstruction is visible. Many communities, while awaiting support, have erected temporary buildings made from bamboo, mud and tin, optimistically referred to as Transition Learning Centers or “TLC”.

When support arrives, the school buildings at primary school level will be temporary structures with a life span of 3-5 years. High schools may be more permanent but it remains unclear, due to the high cost, when such construction will take place and if indeed the needs of the community and students will be fully addressed. The exception to this dire situation is Tandrang VDC.

**4. EARTHQUAKE IMPACT**

**BUILT STRONG.** NONE OF OUR SCHOOLS WERE IMPACTED HEAVILY BY THE EARTHQUAKE AND SOME SERVED AS SHELTER TO THE COMMUNITY IN THEIR TIME OF NEED.

IN ADDITION SINCE THE EARTHQUAKE WE HAVE MADE MEASURABLE PROGRESS HAVING COMPLETED THREE NEW PRIMARY SCHOOLS.
Since 2009 we have enhanced the quality of learning environments and fostered gender and caste equality in the government sector through providing school buildings, teacher training, learning resources, and improved the support system for early years and primary education.

We have, as an organisation, no ambitions to expand our scope to include other aspects of development such as medical, water or disaster relief. We do have ambitions to be the expert in our field and to deliver lasting measurable impact to the children we support. We have no ambitions to expand operations across the globe. We have ambitions to influence lasting sustainable change in the Nepalese Education sector.

Unlike many organisations, we believe, despite the often prohibitive cost, that investment in infrastructure is an absolutely critical first step to any ambition to improve the quality of education.

A teacher will not be motivated in a dismal cave of a classroom nor a child inspired in a mud and tin shed. We build permanent safe schools.

We support non-fee paying schools, fully or partially aided by government. We do not support fee charging or non-fee charging private schools as we believe they contribute to a two tier education system and increase inequality.

We believe the government should be in partnership not in competition.

We adopt a very proactive hands on approach, providing practical tools and guidance to teachers to create creative and nurturing school environments while supporting the government curriculum.

We proactively promote gender and caste equality in the classroom. Special emphasis is placed on increasing access to education for girls and disadvantaged children such as rural Dalit or urban migrant slum dwellers.

5. FOCUS OF OPERATIONS

WE FOCUS 100% ON NEPAL AND 100% ON EDUCATION.

OPERATIONAL RURAL VERSUS URBAN

We operate in both the rural location of the Ghorka district and the urban Kathmandu City. The challenges we face in Kathmandu and Tandrang are similar but also unique. In Tandrang physical infrastructure is a priority and village politics is a real issue to overcome. However we are the sole NGO operating in the district and we have a ‘captive’ community to support. We have invested in major infrastructure and as such have made an impact. We have credibility and influence.

In the city, we are not supporting a single ‘community’. We are engaging with individual schools in isolation of the others and we are ‘competing’ with other NGOs and service providers. The children we support are limited in number and attend school alongside children beyond our reach. We do not build schools or classrooms, but we do renovate.
6. OUR APPROACH

Our engagement with the schools and community we support is not unconditional. Every school and community we support enters into a written agreement committing to our values based educational programs.
EDUCATION
It is widely accepted that education has a major impact on poverty. Children from marginalised communities are denied the opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty through lack of investment in schools and teachers. We advocate for and make such investment.

EQUALITY
Access to education however is not enough and the education provided must foster equality of opportunity. We believe children from marginalised communities attending public sector schools should have EQUAL school infrastructure, EQUAL teacher capacity and EQUAL classroom facilities as any child attending a fee paying school in the private sector. We proactively advocate for and invest in equality of education.

COMMUNITY
We focus on a One Community holistic approach. All too often government agencies and social investors lack a strategy for effective lasting impact, delegating the use of funds to local agents and disbursing resources widely across multiple programs and locations. Unlike many organisations, who, driven by donor demand, support individual schools geographically isolated, we group schools into ‘cluster communities’. We encourage the participation and co-operation of all schools in a single community to a shared long-term plan. This approach enables sharing of limited resources and the development of and adherence to a common strategy for quality of teaching and measurable impact.

SUSTAINABILITY
Any solution should be sustainable. Government run schools are often deemed too difficult to manage. Teachers employed in the public sector are often deemed lazy or unskilled with little incentive to change. This wrongful perception encourages the funding of costly unsustainable private schools by well meaning but misinformed donors. We promote a unique public-private sector partnership. We, and our service providers, partner with the local community and local Government to utilise existing resources and share knowledge for lasting sustainable impact. We provide educational expertise and 100% of teachers salaries are paid by the government with the community providing additional support.

PARTNERSHIP
Many organisations state that the community must make a contribution to building infrastructure, [20% - 30%]. However, in many cases they do not clarify that this contribution is limited, non-financial, and falls below the published criteria. If possible we use local skilled labor and we always request financial contributions from community and District Education funding. However if such support is not forthcoming and there is a genuine need we will build. We have found that the lack of financial investment at the build stage does not translate to lack of ownership long term, as long as the terms of engagement are set out clearly in advance. We request that the community invests in and supports our post build efforts to enhance the quality of the education provided. The relationship between Children of the Mountain, school management and community is based upon mutual respect, trust, commitment and shared values.
STRONG PRIMARY SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

We believe that investment in a safe secure inspiring learning environment is vital for lasting impact. Trained teachers will not be motivated in dangerous schools and children will not be inspired by dark dismal spaces. However, as highlighted by the recent earthquake such investment should be managed responsibly.

Often limited aid is not directed towards costly infrastructure, but when funds are allocated, they are wholly inadequate. Far too often schools are built poorly placing children at unacceptable risk.

We have always put children first. We have, and never will, place students or teachers at risk. Our strategy is to continue to partner with the government and communities to construct bright, safe, earthquake proof, child-friendly classrooms so all children have a better opportunity to pursue a quality education in an environment conducive to learning.

Our focus is on primary schools or primary blocks attached to secondary schools where there are one hundred or more students. This includes fully fitted kindergartens, creative classrooms, and washrooms. We have no ambitions to build educational facilities beyond grade 5.

PRE SCHOOL CLUBS ‘KACHUUA’

Our kindergartens offer a safe and nurturing environment for children 3 to 5 years old and are designed to foster and support creative learning and child centered teaching at the very beginning of school life. They include brightly painted walls, child friendly furniture, special dual language books and creative educational toys.

Our Early Childhood Development program is designed to enable children to grow up with effective support for their overall development and to be better prepared to make the most of learning opportunities. Our teachers are trained to provide critical opportunities to children for physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. Our school meals encourage parents to bring children to school at an early age and unburden the older siblings from child minding duties.

LITERACY

We place emphasis upon helping first and second grade children read and write familiar words and basic sentences [Nepali & English] with full comprehension and expressing themselves clearly. We work on the principal that a non-threatening, interactive and participatory transaction between children and the learning facilitator is a must in the classroom to ensure learning in children. Children are encouraged to express themselves during periods of independent writing. Spellings that they are not familiar with, are invented by the children based on their knowledge of phonic rules.

ENGLISH

Every parent wants the best for their child. Some are able to afford to send their children to fee paying English medium schools. However many are left behind in schools with no or inadequate English Language teaching. They are at an immediate disadvantage and are unable to compete for limited opportunities. We recognise the challenges faced by rural public sector teachers however equality in the marketplace requires equality in language skills.
WE EMPOWER ACTIVE LEARNERS.

AFTER SCHOOL ‘SANTI’ CLUBS
As an additional level of support, we have ambitions to introduce academic after school clubs in the government schools with the help of local unemployed young women, trained in our pedagogy. These clubs will run after school hours so what children learn in school is further explained and practiced upon till the child demonstrates that she has understood the concept. This approach addresses the issue that most of the five million children enrolled in government schools are either first generation learners or children with no supportive learning environment available to them after school hours. They will also provide clean and safe spaces for children living in difficult slum conditions.

CREATIVE “HATI” LABS
We do not believe in equipping schools with “computer labs” at high school level simply to respond to Teacher, Parent, Government or Donor requests. Schools receive computers with no educational content, no training and in some cases no internet or even electricity! The result is that teenagers learn to type or browse, computers are used by school administration, or sit unused in boxes. However we do believe in the use of technology as an aid to foster a desire to learn and be creative.

Our program combines the use of appropriate environment conscious technology, localised digital learning content, teacher training, monitoring and support to transform the teaching-student learning experience in rural classrooms. Our program uniquely targets primary school level and involves the use of laptops as teacher aids in the classroom across a variety of curriculum subjects.
Women who finish secondary school earn more money, have smaller, healthier families, and are more likely to educate their own children—breaking the cycle of illiteracy in one generation. However, gender discrimination continues to contribute to a child’s lack of access and attendance to education. Our Girls Count! program adopts the following approach:

**Access to and support through education:**
We proactively advocate for an end to gender bias and a change of culture in the school environment. This includes provision of gender specific washrooms, raising awareness of appropriate classroom behavior, support to attend school, and investment in more female teachers.

**Adolescent self esteem:**
We recognize the benefits of a life skills program for adolescents designed to raise their self-confidence and self-esteem, protect them from exploitation, improve learning opportunities, and enabling them to become healthy and productive members of families, communities, and society.

**Protection and empowerment:**
It is generally believed that girls are often discouraged from attending primary schooling, for religious and cultural reasons. Girls are expected to leave school early to marry. With added self-confidence, girls will perhaps feel more empowered to question the cultural concepts that result in discrimination, lack of advancement, and sexual exploitation.

However lasting and meaningful change will take time. In the interim it is important to act to protect girls from unacceptable practices such as sexual aggression and early marriage. Actions include raising awareness of rights and providing support and mentoring.

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**8. GENDER EQUALITY**

**Educating girls and women is widely acknowledged as the most powerful and effective way to address global poverty.**
9. THE YEAR AHEAD

EXPAND EXISTING PROGRAMS
In the coming year we will complete our ongoing infrastructure programs, and expand our creative learning zones.

SUPPORTIVE ‘SANTI’ CLUBS
We will introduce our ‘SANTI’ clubs, designed to provide support to older children who are attending school for the first time or returning after long absence. The clubs will also provide additional assistance after school to students struggling.

CREATIVE ‘HATI’ LABS
We will introduce our ‘HATI’ lab concept to our first school, quickly followed by a roll out to the primary blocks at three high schools. Our program uniquely targets primary school level and involves the use of age appropriate laptops fully loaded with localised digital learning content, as teacher aids across a variety of curriculum subjects.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PHONICS
We do not advocate for English Medium schools. This is a noble long-term objective but our immediate priority is to support Government long-term planning to improve English language teaching and to expand the use of English by children in Nepali Medium schools.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES & UNEDUCATED YOUNG WOMEN

In all locations, we will investigate the opportunities to utilise unemployed locally based young women to run our training programs, kindergartens and after school clubs. In Tandrang, we will sponsor female school leavers to attend a one-year early years teacher-training program @ ECEC, or to attend the government primary teacher training and obtain qualifications. In Kathmandu, we will train uneducated young women from the slums to be Kindergarten Teachers in the Kindergartens we operate in the city.
CHILDREN OF THE MOUNTAIN, DESPITE OUR SUCCESS TO DATE, REMAINS A SMALL ORGANISATION, LACKING THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND PUBLIC PROFILE OF OTHERS.

WE ARE SEEKING SOCIAL INVESTMENT PARTNERS WHO SHARE OUR VISION OF A NEPAL WHERE EVERY CHILD REGARDLESS OF CASTE, CREED OR ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCE IS AFFORDED EQUAL RESPECT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY.

WE REQUIRE RECURRING COMMITTED SUPPORT FROM CORPORATE PARTNERS TO COVER OUR ANNUAL ADMINISTRATIVE OVERHEADS. SUCH SUPPORT WOULD ALLOW US TO PLAN AHEAD, TO BUILD UP OUR IN-HOUSE CAPACITY AND TO MAXIMISE THE SOCIAL RETURN ON THE INVESTMENT WE HAVE MADE TO DATE.

IT WOULD ALLOW US TO ALLOCATE 100% OF FUNDS RAISED ELSEWHERE TO OUR PROGRAMS.
If you wish to invest in equality or have any questions please contact:

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