



BAAN DOI Newsletter

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Dear BAAN DOI Friends,

BAAN DOI in the last six months has seen many changes. Graziella Ramponi moved back to Switzerland with her family after living and working in Thailand for almost 11 years and helping to build up BAAN DOI. She will continue to work for BAAN DOI within the BAAN DOI Switzerland association. Sadly, we had to say goodbye, but we wish her the very best in her new start in Switzerland!

A lot has been built and planted on our organic farm. Our water filter system is finished, and the solar pumps installed. The construction site for the new residential building also progressed further. Our intern Marnie Schmidt from Germany, who supported us for three months, will tell you more about her role in the office and involvement in the agricultural project.

Kindernothilfe Austria interviewed one of our older children Tong, who was given the opportunity to travel to Europe as part of the "Development works" campaign. Many of our BAAN DOI children are now young adults and have to make their own decisions about their future lives. In the interview, Tong tells how his life has changed

since BAAN DOI and how he was able to make his passion for cooking his profession.

Air pollution and the corona pandemic led to some restructuring in BAAN DOI. Barbara Meisl explains how we dealt with this unusual situation.

We thank you very much for your valuable support.

Have fun while reading!

Barbara & the BAAN DOI Team





Marnie Schmidt is from Munich and studies biology. She is very interested in sustainable agriculture and did an internship at BAAN DOI for 11 weeks.

In 2016, Marnie did a voluntary social year in Thailand and became familiar with Thai culture and learned the language.

Working at BAAN DOI's Permaculture Farm

By Marnie Schmidt

I met Barbara and the BAAN DOI family for the first time in 2016 during my year volunteering at a primary school in Mae Sai - Thailand. After completing my bachelor's degree in biology, I was drawn back to this place.

When I found out that BAAN DOI started an organic farming project, I really wanted to be part of it, due to my interest in permaculture. This is how the idea for my original six-month internship at BAAN DOI started, which began in January 2020. My duties included working in the office as well as planning and implementing practical tasks in the agricultural project.

Experience Permaculture

There is always a lot to do on the farm. At the beginning of my internship, I mainly helped with collecting and stacking the rice straw that remained from the successful harvest. As well as harvesting weeds and taking care of the bananas. The harvested organic rice is already enough to supply the children's home for the whole year!

Field work is very exhausting, but it is incredibly satisfying to know that all the steps you take result in being able to feed yourself and others - and that it is in harmony with nature! According to the permaculture principles, we try to work as close to nature as possible so that the soil, which is the basis of life, remains fertile and healthy in the long term.

Barbara gave me the opportunity to take part in a two-week permaculture course held by the Thai permaculture teacher Sandot Sukkaew. He has been helping with the planning since the beginning of the BAAN DOI agricultural project. The course at his permaculture farm in Nan was in-

credibly educational for me. I learned how to use simple methods to straighten a field, create a plant bed in permaculture style and produce compost, as well as build a natural water filter, install a solar pump and much more.

In order to ensure a great biodiversity on the field, which means a great variety of flora and fauna, Barbara and I, firstly planned the planting of the ponds and canals. To get an overview of which plants are native to lakes, we talked to local farmers and drove to lakes in the area. Together with the children and volunteers, we sowed seeds and dug plants and tubers around our ponds and in the canals. There will be a lot of sprouting in the next few years.

A roof made of TetraPak

During my internship, a few of the BASEhabitat students came to work for a month on the construction site of the new house at the farm. The house is built mostly from natural materials such as bamboo or clay, but also from recycled materials such as the roof tiles made of TetraPak. To ensure long-term durability of the house, it stands on a concrete foundation and the bamboo is treated before installation. During that time, I was able to help actively with the building of the house and learned many exciting new skills. Working with natural materials is very special because you cannot assume perfect dimensions. You suddenly see a bamboo cane with completely different eyes and examine every subtle curve and twist.



After finishing the roof (left), we moved on building the bamboo construction for the clay walls (right).



During the permaculture course, we straightened the edge of a field ready for planting.

In BAAN DOI

In addition, to helping build the house and work in the field, I was also in the office. I supported the BAAN DOI employees with various tasks, wrote reports, took care of the online presence and did research for the agricultural project. Since the office itself is in the children's home, it is not uncommon to see a small head peek over your desk while working, watching with interested eyes. Playing tag around the office is also part of everyday work. The atmosphere is very relaxed and in the afternoon all employees are sitting together with a chilled coffee and fresh mango.

The children's home is a really nice place. There are many rooms that offer the children the chance to retreat as well as opportunities to develop creatively, be involved in sports or follow their curiosities. In addition to the spacious bedrooms, it includes the sports facilities, the library, the herb and vegetable garden, the chicken coops, the computer room and the beautiful clay houses, which provide space for art, music and yoga. The children live like in a large family and support each other. There is always a lot of laughing, playing, singing and dancing and the child carers ensure a varied program. The children also help a lot in the household, for example cleaning or weeding and they seem diligent to me.

What I am taking with me

Due to the limitations of the corona pandemic, my six-month internship has unfortunately only turned into three months. Three months, which were full of wonderful experiences, exciting impressions and new knowledge. Besides all the happy people, the delicious food and the breath-taking landscape, I had the opportunity to get a lot of insights into the work of an NGO and to be part in developing the permaculture agricultural project. I am very excited to see what the farm will look like in a few years.

Thank you BAAN DOI for this great time!

Thanks to the Kindernothilfe Austria, BAAN DOI has now received the urgently needed tractor for agriculture.

With the support of Rotary Golling Tennengau, the self-sufficient water system with deep wells, solar pumps and a natural filter was installed.

Four BASEhabitat students arrived in February and continued building on the family house for a month.





At the farm we are swimming, fishing and harvesting.

The effects of the corona pandemic has changed a lot of things in Thailand over the recent months.

At BAAN DOI, we focus on prevention and therefore have taken actions that go beyond the restrictions imposed by the Thai government.

In times of Corona

By Barbara Meisl

As of the beginning of May, there were approximately 3000 people in Thailand directly infected by the Corona virus. Fortunately, the outbreak has been limited to certain areas, and the number of new infections reducing every day. The death toll is comparatively low to other countries, and most patients regain their health again.

When the first cases appeared in March, the number of infections was increasing by more than a hundred a day for a while. We could only hope that everything would develop so well. In addition to the risk of infection, the air quality here in northern Thailand was more dangerous to health than I have ever experienced in 12 years.

BAAN DOI orphanage is right on the border to Burma and only 30 km from Laos. Like every summer, we have forest fires in the three countries due to slash-and-burn, which makes air pollution a serious threat to people. For weeks, northern Thailand once again held the highest fine dust pollution worldwide. With a five-week PM 2.5 value (particulate matter) of over 250 up to 1000 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$! Our environment was immersed in thick fog and breathing was very difficult.

These two factors; the spread of the virus in Thailand and the fine dust pollution combined with our claim to offer our children the best protection, led to the decision at BAAN DOI to go into self-quarantine and to stay mainly indoors.

Since the middle of March, no outside people or visitors were allowed in. On March 20, our BAAN DOI employees gathered in the office to discuss the situation again and pack things before we started working from home.

Two weeks later, the Thai government also declared a state of emergency. They closed restaurants and hotels, and introduced a curfew from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. Many provinces, cities and villages were closed, and the school start has been postponed from mid-May to early July.

The social impact of the crisis is catastrophic, millions of people have no jobs and no income, and once again the government's support for citizens is far too low. Many political decisions are unjust and inhumane. People here can only dream of a social system like in Europe, they are and will remain largely on their own, even in an emergency like this.

It is positive to see people helping each other more and many stations where citizens distribute free food for their fellow human beings.

Especially in a crisis like now, we at BAAN DOI are increasingly thinking about the children and families (currently 47 families, 177 people) who find support in our family support program. Therefore, we expanded our support offer.

As a preventative measure, we sent protective masks and hand sanitizers to all families, along with a brochure about how to behave best in the times of Corona.

We gave ten committed families extra grants for horticulture and the purchase of chickens so that they can better take care of themselves and generate a better income. We also offer families the opportunity to request organic rice from our farm, which we grind for them and deliver.



One of our supported families that received material from us to prevent Corona infection (left).

In the meantime, at BAAN DOI we stay at home and make the best out of the situation. Everyone has their role and area of responsibility and the big children help to teach the little ones. We finally have time to cook and bake, play and paint together again ... our home has become really beautiful in the past few weeks, we are tidying up, gardening, renovating and sorting, every room and every corner is getting attention now.

Recently we have been going to our farm twice a week to swim and play music, but also to plant, harvest and catch fish. Due to the storms and rain in the last few days, the air has improved and to our relief we can breathe properly again!

I am very happy that we have taken so many precautionary measures and that all of us at BAAN DOI have remained healthy in this uncertain time. I hope that the situation continues to improve, and that school can start again in early July.



Practicing a language activity with the children.



The children are helping tidying up (first picture) and sewing masks (second picture). We are baking Pizza...

... and buns together.

We made the best out of the situation of being at home constantly.

Because we spent more time together, while cooking, learning, playing and working, our sense of community also became stronger.

Our home received a lot of attention and is even more beautiful than before.





As a cook I will always find a job

By Julia Drazdil-Eder, Kindernothilfe Austria

In October 2019, Tong, one of our older children, was invited to Berlin's "Development works" campaign by Kindernothilfe Germany. The aim of the campaign is to demonstrate the effectiveness of development work, by presenting the positive effects of projects on the lives of individuals.

We were also able to visit the Kindernothilfe Austria in Vienna and exchange ideas with Gottfried Mernyi and the team. Julia Drazdil-Eder wrote the following article after the interview with us:

Tong is almost 20 and lives in Chiang Rai in northern Thailand, where he is training to be a cook. Until recently, he lived in Baan Doi, the children's home on the beautiful mountain. Tong moved to Baan Doi when he was ten years old and at the time stateless. In an interview, Tong and Baan Doi founder Barbara Meisl tell us about how far Tong has come in his life.

His story is a fate like so many other children in the region of Chiang Rai, where the borders of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet. After both of Tong's parents died, he lived with his grandmother in a small village in Myanmar on the river bordering Thailand. But his grandmother soon had to go to prison for drug trafficking and the little boy moved to live with his aunt, on the other side of the river in Thailand. Domestic violence and abuse were commonplace. The village mayor knew how badly Tong was treated and began looking for a safe place for him. "That's how Tong came to us 10 years ago in June 2010," remembers Barbara Meisl, founder and director of Baan Doi, the children's home on the beautiful mountain. What did Tong find there? A new family. And the opportunity to start all over again.

What comes to mind first when you think of Baan Doi, the children's home on the beautiful mountain?

Tong: Baan Doi is my home. I now live in the city and I am training to be a cook there. But I often go back on weekends, as the children's home is my family, here it is warm and beautiful.

Barbara Meisl: Tong often comes back to us. Just like the other four young adults who already moved out. In one year, Tong will be finished with his training and the 12th and last school level - then we will see where he can and wants to live and work.

Why did you choose to work as a cook?

Tong: I've always enjoyed cooking and helped out in the kitchen at the children's home. I also love traditional dance. But I probably can't make money from dancing like that. As a cook I will always be able to find a job.



Tong met some prominent guests in Berlin...

Kindernothilfe has been supporting BAAN DOI since 2012 and helped us to build up BAAN DOI and the infrastructure of the children's home. In addition, they have provided regular financial support for the orphanage, family support program and child and youth protection program. Kindernothilfe Thailand has also financed and offered local employee training.



Most of the children in the children's home are stateless, so they have no citizenship, none of the three surrounding states feel responsible, they are not registered and uninsured. It was similar with Tong. What solutions are there for this?

Tong: I have had a Burmese passport for three years and am now officially registered. It was very exciting; for the first time I flew to Bangkok and collected my visa for Thailand. We also visited my grandmother in Burma, she is no longer in prison.

Barbara Meisl: Half of the nine boys and eleven girls in Baan Doi are stateless. We are actually making ourselves punishable by taking them in, they are illegal here. The Thai state does not feel responsible. Our job is to give them citizenship. We have to investigate the question: where does the child come from? Is there a mid-wife, a mayor, any relatives who can testify where the child was born? The whole thing must be translated into Thai. This process often takes months, or even years. For Tong we were finally successful three years ago and he got Burmese citizenship.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Tong: I will have finished my apprenticeship and will be a cook. I would prefer to live in the countryside - like in Baan Doi. Here the weather is much more pleasant, and the environment is more beautiful. Maybe I can even work on the project here.

Barbara Meisl: We are expanding our children's home with a large piece of land on which we practice sustainable agriculture and are gradually becoming self-sufficient. With fish, chicken and duck farming, fruit, vegetable and rice cultivation, we can get by in the future without having to shop in the market. Most of the vegetables in our markets come from Burma and are full of pesticides. We look after many sick children. It is therefore particularly important that the children eat healthy and organic food. We are currently building a residential house on the property - for those who will be responsible for agriculture here. Our plan is that a few of the young people who have grown up in Baan Doi and have already moved out can do that. Like Tong. We want to give them a home, even as adults.

For someone who is "stateless", the possibility of going traveling and seeing something of the world is not there.

Education and learning a language are no longer options, when one needs to survive.

With our support, Tong's life has had a positive turn of events and with this new opportunities".

Tong appreciates this, and is very grateful for the experiences of the past years and proud of having been in Europe.



Barbara and Tong in front of the Berliner Dom, during their stay in Germany.

Thank you very much



BAAN DOI – Home and
Healing Center for
Children

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